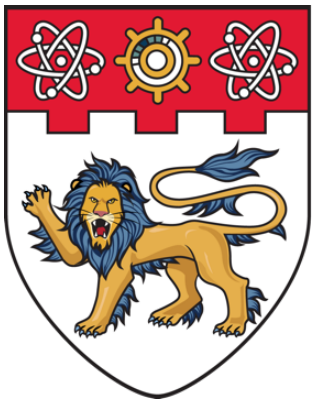

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY
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Narratives Speak

Storytelling, Witnessing, and Literary Trauma Studies

NICOLE ONG SIHUI
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

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NARRATIVES SPEAK
STORYTELLING, WITNESSING, AND LITERARY TRAUMA STUDIES

NICOLE ONG SIHUI

School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
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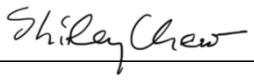
Signed: 

Name: Professor Shirley Chew
Date: 4 August 2020

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For my Father
Author, Finisher,
my favourite Storyteller

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SUMMARY

Recent literary trauma scholarship has conceded that the 'classic' trauma model, founded upon a Freudian-Lacanian approach to trauma and language, has plateaued in its usefulness. Whilst literary trauma critics have since developed more pluralistic definitions of trauma in an attempt to extend this model, this thesis looks, instead, to reconfigure the model's poststructuralist definition of language. It argues for a way of reading language that returns more closely to a literary approach: thinking of language as something that *creates* rather than something that names.

Unlike the 'classic' trauma model, which assumes that a victim has to articulate her trauma in order for her experience to be understood, the approach advanced here, firstly, opens up a way for critics to bear witness to the stories about trauma that have been created by and told circuitously through various literary forms. As such, it has the potential to explore the issues within literary trauma discourse that have remained outside the 'classic' model's reach, because of the difficulty of naming these experiences explicitly. Secondly, as examining literary form emphasises the way a reader co-creates the meaning of a story, this approach pays attention to how literary texts create the reader-witness. It recognises that nuanced trauma discourse is derived not only from writers telling good stories about trauma, but also has as much to do with how a reader-witness interprets and listens to these narratives. This approach thus challenges critics to examine the ways in which their reading and witnessing have supported, or hindered, the emergence of stories of trauma, and explore more ethical ways to read literary trauma texts.

To demonstrate the extent to which this approach can be applied to different narratives, I examine post-war trauma narratives set in three contexts (Europe/America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia), at varying points between 1945–2009, each corresponding with a different stage of the trauma-healing process. I explore how examining literary form makes it possible for a reader to engage each text in context and identify the specific role that surfaces for her as reader-witness. In a larger scope of literary trauma discourse, this approach provides the grounds for further investigation into the crucial role that reading as witnessing plays in healing a community in a range of contexts and stages in the aftermath of trauma.

I. Introduction

In 1995, Cathy Caruth gathered a group of thinkers from the humanities and collated their conceptions about trauma in the short anthology, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. It was a surprising method of exploration for a subject of such weight. After all, the concept of trauma—Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in particular—was relatively new to the Euro-American academy, having only been recognised by the American Psychiatric Association as a medical condition in 1980. One could be critical of an approach that uses literature, film and poetry, the more "subjective" of the arts, to substantiate the hypothesising of a scientific and medical phenomenon, or, at the very least, extend certain scepticism towards taking the conclusions of this approach as legitimate facts about trauma. Given the uncertainties relating to the subject, a scientific journal or textbook, which is premised upon 'proper' medical research, would surely offer more definite conclusions. Analyses from the arts, which rely on subjective inference and interpretation as their mode of investigation, could surely only provide insightful speculation about the subject at most.

Yet, in spite of the detractors of her approach, Caruth's interdisciplinary compilation has played a significant role in catalysing the surge of interest in the study of trauma. Her approach of intersecting literature with psychoanalytical theory has been especially significant. In the opening paragraphs of *Unclaimed Experience*, another seminal text in literary trauma studies, Caruth speculates upon why Freud "turns to literature to describe traumatic experience" (3). She argues that "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" and "it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory precisely meet" (3). She then details how Freud finds a poetic representation in the literary text, *La Gerusalemme Liberata* (Jerusalem Delivered), for the unexplainable 'war wounds' of returning soldiers. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, after his exposition about the curiousness of these soldiers' involuntary and repeated actions, Freud allocates some five sentences to the story of Tancred. Tancred duels and kills an enemy soldier, when he does not recognise that she is actually his beloved, Clorinda. After her burial and in his grief, he stabs a tall tree in a magic forest with his sword, only to see blood gushing

out from the tree. As it turns out, Clorinda's soul is trapped in that very tree and Tancred now hears her voice lamenting that he has wounded her again.

Presumably believing the parallels between the story and his psychological observations are obvious enough for his readers, Freud does not offer any further comment on the tale, and moves on to another aspect of his argument. It is Caruth who, years later, takes the liberty to fill in the blanks. She argues that for Freud, "the actions of Tancred, wounding his beloved in a battle and then, unknowingly, seemingly by chance, wounding her again", represent "the experience of a trauma [repeating] itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (2). The repetition in the story "dramatises" "the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (2). Caruth then proceeds to build on Freud's literary reading and uses the imagery in the story to offer a further hypothesis about the nature of trauma. She focuses on the 'wound' of the tree and interprets trauma in terms of the now reputable conception of a "moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound" (4). For Caruth, the traumatic experience is not only repeating the act that causes torment, but one that forces the traumatised to relive the very act that wounds them the first time.

Despite the similarity in both Freud's and Caruth's approaches in turning to literature to further their investigation on trauma, there is a marked difference in the way it features in their respective analyses. For Freud, the content of the literary story appears to serve only supplementary functions of coalescing his prior points and giving his readers, perhaps, a visual representation of the rather abstract psychological observations he makes. Caruth, however, takes the role that literature plays a step further. In her analysis of Tasso's *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, she reverses the hierarchy between literature and trauma theory present in Freud's essay. Rather than using the story as a subsidiary of a theoretical point, she allows it to inform her theorising about the nature of trauma instead. The figurative here gives shape to 'fact'; the multiple interpretations that come forth from the enigmatic nature of symbol and story is an opportunity for her to consider and reframe the subject of trauma. The reversing of this hierarchy is a subtle but keen distinction from Freud's work, one that clearly reveals how Caruth sees something of value in literature. She has observed something about its form and language, which not only supports theoretical claims but contributes substantially to the shaping of this discourse as well. Since Caruth frames

trauma as a paradox that "simultaneously defies and demands our witness" (5), literary language, which "defies, even as it claims our understanding" (5), forms a natural starting point for her investigation of trauma. With its self-consciousness about its inability to grasp and define, and its potential to evoke multiplicity of meaning, literature tells its own story about trauma. And Caruth makes an admirable attempt to listen.

Following suit, several of Caruth's contemporaries have based their engagement with literary trauma studies on the premise that literature is able to "add something, or speak something, that theory cannot say" about trauma (Whitehead 4). Shoshana Felman argues that literature provides a means of reading that does not aim to "solve or *answer* the enigmatic question of the text" but to "investigate its structure; not so much to name and make *explicit* the ambiguity of the text, but to understand the necessity and the rhetorical functioning of the textual ambiguity" (119). Her approach of reading lends itself especially well to trauma fiction, as she traces the "essential incompleteness" in a fictive system of meaning (Sun et al 1). By drawing attention to the gaps and ambiguities in a text, Felman demonstrates how a literary reading creates a space for the "unreadable" ("Turning" 142), a way of acknowledging that which lies outside of knowledge without reducing it to something that is known.

Similarly, Geoffrey Hartman, acknowledging that trauma is a kind of "negative moment in experience" (*On Traumatic Knowledge* 537), argues that literary knowledge can identify with and "even bring it back" into cognitive experience (540). As something that "seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche", trauma can only manifest itself as "a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a *perpetual troping* of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche" (537, emphasis mine). As it eludes the individual's cognitive grasp, presenting its effects only through the "rhythmic return" of traumatic memory, "any general description or modeling of trauma" "risks being figurative itself" (537). For Hartman, figurative language and its exploration of the "disjunction between experiencing (phenomenal and empirical) and understanding (thoughtful naming, in which words replace things, or their images)" provides an obvious intersection for fruitful investigation on trauma (540). As it examines this disjunction, it gives us a clearer understanding of how various aspects of literature—reference, subjectivity, and narration—can relate to mental functioning (*Reading* 291). In this way, literary knowledge does not seek "premature knowledge" of trauma but dwells on

understanding the nature of these "disturbances of language and mind" more thoroughly (*Reading* 292).

Likewise, defining trauma as "the feelings of absence, of rupture, and of the loss of representation" that "all emerge from the real failure of the empathic dyad at the time of traumatisation and the resulting failure to preserve an empathic tie even with oneself" (991), Dori Laub, with Daniel Podell, argue that art—literature, music and sculpture (998)—can begin to reforge the connection between a traumatised person's inner and outer experience. The "empty spaces, silences and omissions" within art often offer indirect ways of pointing to "the psychological loci that habour the deepest effects of the trauma—those which are the most personal and particular to the individual" (993). The art attempts to externalise the fragmented sense of self, and create "a structure or presence" that can be witnessed by another, confirming "the reality of the traumatic event" (993).

Though varying in the degrees and aspects of how the literary can speak to traumatic experience, Caruth, Felman, Hartman, and Laub see literature has the means to let trauma speak for itself, both in content and form. It moves beyond a clinical approach, which gives the experts the "last word" on their patient's story (Hartman 541), and a purely historical approach, which overlooks the emotive reality of a victim's experience (Laub, "Bearing Witness" 62). As Adorono writes, despite how "barbaric" it is to aestheticise human suffering, especially after Auschwitz, "[i]t is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it" (34). Auschwitz may have created a "radical chasm between the signifier and the signified" (Nosthoff), one that will never be fully overcome by writing or aesthetic means in general. But for Adorno, and indeed these literary trauma theorists, it is, perhaps, in the intersection between literature and trauma that we potentially find an ethical approach of regarding trauma victims and survivors, one that explores how they can represent their experiences on their terms. In this light, literary trauma studies have since emerged as a field of study that investigates how literature—poetry, novels, memoirs, amongst others—speaks to the trauma of individuals and communities whose senses of self and world have erupted from the onset of devastating events.

Criticism of Trauma Theory in Literary Trauma Studies

Now, nearly twenty-five years after Caruth's initial arguments, critics like Gert Buelens, Michael Rothberg and Michelle Balaev have contributed to significant collections, such as *The Future of Trauma Theory* and *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma*, scrutinising the way literary trauma studies have evolved. Arguably, Caruth and the other theorists had offered what was at the time an up-to-date, compelling approach of intersecting literature and trauma, one that convincingly addressed the era's postmodern, poststructuralist list of anxieties. However, as these critics recurrently observe, the initially nuanced and complex intersection between literature and trauma theory has been distilled into a somewhat reductive model. Represented by Leigh Gilmore here, they highlight that

> something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet, at the same time language about trauma is theorised as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma. (6)

Consequently, this "consensus" and informal legitimising of this model of trauma has directed literary trauma studies to focus on the nature of the suffering that a trauma *victim*, one who acts out her trauma without moving towards healing, endures, and the role that literature plays in representing this paradox.

In a bid, perhaps, to maintain the ethical approach of the original theorists, the first wave of literary trauma critics has preferred to acknowledge trauma's unspeakability in their engagement with trauma narratives.[1] Whilst illuminating analyses regarding the tensions and struggle that a trauma survivor faces have emerged as a result of this "classical trauma theory" (xii), to borrow Rothberg's term, the effectiveness of conceptualising trauma as a paradox of the unspeakable has reached a plateau. Their fear of unethically speaking for trauma victims and survivors has ironically led them to stop short of exploring how a victim can overcome the paradox to become a trauma *survivor*, one who is in the process of working through her trauma, moving towards healing, and reintegrating back into society. By merely attending to literary trauma studies through the framework of this paradox, an

[1] I explore this trend in greater detail in Chapter 4.

investigation into trauma unhelpfully returns, as it tends to be with paradoxes, back to the start, without engaging meaningfully in the ethical work of trauma restoration.

If the first wave of literary trauma critics used the model to address *what* trauma is, the emerging second wave of critics, as mentioned above, are endeavouring to dismantle the model in order to ask more incisive questions regarding *who* conceptualises, *how*, and *out of which location* we conceptualise trauma theory, in an attempt to move literary trauma studies beyond the paradox of unspeakability. Rather than taking for granted that the 'classic' model of trauma universally applies to all traumatised subjects, they expose the assumptions that undergird this seemingly ahistorical approach. They demonstrate that it, too, is dependent on and subject to the particularities of the context of its origin. In fact, in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, Michelle Balaev goes as far as to insinuate that the allure of the 'classic' trauma model was simply because it was a product of the times, a coupling of the then fashionable "[Freudian] neurological theories regarding the processes of the mind and memory together with the [Lacanian] semiotic theories regarding the processes of language, associations and symbolisation" (2). This outlining of the academic trends that influenced the origins of the 'classic' trauma model compels critics to consider that, had literary trauma theory emerged during another time, when other psychological theories and semiotic conceptions of language were prevalent, it may well have begun in a very different form. By reframing this model as a temporal product and a fortuitous intersection of popular trends, Balaev removes the illusion that it is an impermeable conduit upholding an essential truth about the inherent nature of trauma and examines the components that constitute its construction.

Balaev begins by highlighting one of the key assumptions in using the 'classic' model as the basis for literary trauma analysis: it presupposes that the Freudian definition of trauma is the only definition of trauma. Yet if theorists change the starting point, "if the psychological basis of trauma is re-examined", and define trauma as something other than a "pre-linguistic event that universally causes dissociation", "then the classic model fails to fit the laws of structural and post-structural linguistics" (2). As a result, something other than conceiving trauma as an unrepresentable event in language will be able to emerge. Balaev is particularly critical of the assumed causality between a traumatic event and "a dissociative consciousness wherein the truth of the past is hidden" (5). She argues that defaulting to trauma as a "deferred,

recurrent wounding" removes "determinate value from the experience" and "agency from the survivor", because it "[disregards] a survivor's knowledge of the experience and the self, which restricts trauma's variability and ignores the diverse values that change over time" (6). As such, Balaev advocates for a "pluralistic model of trauma" where critics consider other models instead of the "classical definition of trauma that asserts an unrepresentable and pathological universalism" (4). These models "[emphasise] not only the harm caused by a traumatic experience" (6) but are also "more likely to acknowledge both the neurobiological and social contexts of experience, response, and narratives, as well as the possibilities that language can convey the variable meanings of trauma" (7). Her insistence upon including a social, political and economic contextualisation in literary trauma analysis potentially allows the causes and "meaning" of a victim's trauma to be "locatable rather than permanently lost" (8). Unlike Caruth's Freudian-Lacanian model, which seemingly locks a victim in unbreakable silence, the optimism of Balaev's pluralistic model lies in viewing the relationship between the traumatic experience and the victim as something that can evolve over time.

Elsewhere, Michael Rothberg similarly debunks a common assumption that our theorising about trauma occurs in an objective, universal space. He outlines that trauma in our modern context is often caused by "a system of violence that is neither sudden nor accidental: exploitation in an age of globalised neo-liberal capitalism" (xiv). Here, Rothberg argues that this specific context, of which the Euro-American academy is a part, is one that will not only inevitably influence the way we will perceive and interpret the issues at hand, but could end up being complicit in the perpetuation of trauma. Stef Craps further develops Rothberg's claim and highlights another assumption in using the Freudian-Lacanian model as a basis of analysis for all traumas. As a model of Eurocentric origins, it presupposes a universality where all cultures relate to language in the same way. Craps highlights that this is, of course, not the case, and purporting the 'classic' trauma model as the only one "marginalise[s] or ignore[s] traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures" (46), where speaking about pain may not be their preferred method of healthy grieving. With this observation, Craps questions the effectiveness of assuming that the Freudian 'talking cure' is applicable in and beneficial to all contexts.

What we can see here in the reaction against the 'classic' model is a call for diversity in our approach towards theorising trauma. In their own ways, Balaev, Craps

and Rothberg represent thinkers who have recognised the potentially reductive and damaging consequences of assuming that there is a universal model that can regard trauma victims and survivors across a range of historical, cultural and social contexts. When this 'universal' approach has come from a largely Eurocentric, globalised, capitalist worldview, it raises questions about whom we fail to bear witness to when we use this framework and, perhaps, more importantly, whom we might further wound in the process.

Criticism of Literary Analysis in Literary Trauma Studies

This dismantling of the 'classic' trauma model then begs several questions regarding the role of literature in literary trauma studies. Caruth and the other trauma theorists' initial intersection between trauma studies and literary studies had begun with *two* key assumptions from two different fields: trauma as something that "simultaneously defies and demands our witness" and literature as "language that defies, even as it claims our understanding" (*Unclaimed* 3). However, if, as Balaev insists, it is not a given that the starting point of literary trauma studies begins with trauma being unknowable, should this not necessarily alter the role that literature plays as well? Can we still take for granted that our literary analysis ought to be based upon the poststructuralist definition of language? There are certainly similar concerns about assuming a universal approach to reading literature as there are about assuming a universal approach to trauma theory. For example, which stories do we silence by applying a particular conception of language to all forms of stories? These questions are notably missing from Balaev's reassessment and the present evaluation of literary trauma studies. Whilst theorists have rightfully interrogated the assumptions and framework with which they regard trauma, the same scrutiny has not yet been applied to examining the assumptions, premises and trends of literary analysis in this field. For this reason, I return to where Caruth began—the intersection between literature and trauma studies—to examine the role we have given, and need to give, literature in this process of thinking about trauma.

One of the earliest examples of the reliance on a poststructuralist conception of language to engage the discourse of pain can be found in Elaine Scarry's influential 1985 work, *The Body in Pain*. Scarry sets up her fundamental premise about the relationship between language and pain by recalling Virginia Woolf's words,

> The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.[2] (4)

Using these words, Scarry builds on what she interprets as a grievance about the lack of language to describe even the simplest of pains and posits that "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learnt" (4). In order to cope with this absence of a suitable language to describe pain, she explains how people have come to adopt an informal set of scales in an attempt to communicate their plight. Although imprecise and vague, a temporal scale, for instance, helps a patient explain if her pain is constant or intermittent, and a thermal scale if it is searing or throbbing or something in between (8). A diagnosis of a patient's pain will thus rely on a certain amount of educated guesswork on her physician's part, as her doctor tries to match her descriptions with the possible corresponding causes. Understandably, with this framework, it is commonly assumed that the more articulate the patient can be about her pain, the more accurately she can be diagnosed.

Scarry's anxiety over the limitations of language to describe pain reflects a fundamental tenet of poststructuralist thinking. Whilst the attempt to articulate pain especially foregrounds language's difficulty to be precise in naming that to which it refers, poststructuralism posits that this gap between language and what it attempts to name is present in every instance of using words. As Ferdinand Saussure argues, language is a system of signs, where, at its most basic, a word (the signifier) is an "arbitrary" sign that points our attention to a mental concept (the signified) (964); the signifier is but a substitute for the signified. As such, implicit in the use of language is a distance from the thing to which it refers, since "nothing is ever fully present in signs […] because to use signs at all entails that [one's] meaning is always somehow dispersed, divided and never quite at one with itself" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 112). Spearheaded by Jacques Derrida, poststructuralists then take this concept a step further to argue that since the only way to know a signified is through language itself, the signified is always already mediated by language. The system of language is thus not a dalliance "simply between signifier and signified, but between what are already two

[2] Woolf, Virginia. "On Being Ill." *Collected Essays Volume 4*. Harcourt, 1967, pp. 194.

signs, the one designating the other" (Derrida, "White Mythology" 13). Where the notion of a signified creates an impression that there is a final end point that could eventually give meaning to the system of signifiers, a system of endless signifiers ensures a "circular" process (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 111), where one always "has to reckon with a definite absence" (Derrida, "White Mythology" 42). Or, as Lacan puts it, language "manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing" (104). Given that the invisibility and the private nature of pain make it even more difficult to construct a shared frame of reference, the endeavour to describe pain in language is rendered all the more futile.

Although Scarry explores how having limited language for pain affects individuals in various spheres of society with great insight in *The Body in Pain*, her focus on the limitations of language to name pain has received sceptical responses. Susannah Mintz highlights that Scarry's perception of physical pain—as "a radically private experience whose sensations, wholly unavailable to language" (5)—is the very thing that prevents her from finding a language for pain. Mintz's fundamental contention lies with the fact that Scarry interprets Woolf's "language" that has run dry in too specific a manner: the language of pain is assumed to be one that has "to name rather than to narrate" (5), and therefore, pain has no choice but to be "inexpressible" (5). Elsewhere, Ann Jurecic concurs that "Scarry [wants] the impossible: for language to be so precise that it provides a form of cognitive control over pain, giving the person in pain authority over the embodied experience" (53). But this logic drives Scarry's inquiry into a dead end, because by "[sidelining] the intricacies and impressions of narrative in favour of a language that, in naming objects, would verify reality and guarantee knowledge" (Mintz 5), she has no choice but to find "language insufficient because it cannot reliably identify what pain feels like" (5). For Mintz, this approach only ends up distracting from the main issue at hand: in finding language "insufficient", theorists tend to slip inevitably into a discussion about their "anxiety about the ambiguity of language", rather than working to find a language for this "elusive quality in pain" (5).

One need not look too far for evidence to support Mintz's argument. Arguably, the assumption that the purpose of language is to name trauma has helped to maintain the paradox of trauma of which Gilmore is so critical.[3] The informal canonical

[3] See Page 5 of this thesis.

approach of making sense of PTSD has been to frame a traumatic event as one that defies comprehension and escapes language. In her inability to narrate this event, the traumatised individual is thus perceived to be isolated and locked in silence, both away from herself and from others. She has little choice but to have her experience documented based on the physical symptoms that others can observe and name. She is described as 'acting out' when she demonstrates symptoms of PTSD by experiencing uncontrolled repetitions of this event when unconsciously triggered, because "in acting out, […] it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene" (LaCapra, *Writing History* 21). But if she learns how to manage these symptoms, she is described as 'working through' and learning to survive her PTSD. For classic trauma therapy, the process of 'working through' tends to be focused on assisting the individual to find language, however fragmented, to narrate her story in the hope of bridging her back to herself and her society.

These labels that name the stages of trauma are useful insofar as they help critics understand that there are different phases that a survivor experiences when they have PTSD. But in the process of naming, trauma theory also runs the risk of demarcating them as two separate realities. 'Acting out' and 'working through' are then two separate worlds, independent of each other. This creates the assumption that a person is *either* acting out *or* working through their trauma, and that a person is never in between states, or doing both at the same time. On top of that, in thinking of language as a tool for naming and categorising, we always run the risk of not being precise enough, or of having a blind spot as to what needs to be named. For example, there has not yet been a name for the process of moving from 'acting out' to 'working through'. A common, unspoken assumption is that it should happen linearly, which is not often true to the actual process. When the movement between these two states does not fit the neat, linear structure that we have assumed for it, their post-traumatic stress then appears even more unrepresentable and incomprehensible. In this light, it is questionable whether we are adept enough in this process of naming to use it as our sole method for deriving a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of trauma, especially since the traumatic experience and its consequences are both exceptionally difficult to pinpoint. If literary trauma critics continue to perceive that the purpose of language is to speak directly to trauma, our reading of trauma texts will be limited to the obvious: what the text has succeeded in, or failed to, explicitly say.

In response to Scarry's conception of language, rather than concluding that pain is indescribable, Mintz borrows a claim from Martha Stoddard Holmes to argue that what is needed is "a wider range of relationships between pain and language" (Holmes 133). Here, Mintz's evaluation of Scarry's claim captures the frustration in Woolf's complaint about the language of pain more closely. Woolf begins by providing a comparison between the subject of love and pain. She laments that since the subject of love has already had numerous great writers wrestling with it, even the "merest schoolgirl" has an easy enough access to a wide range of forms to help her express herself. But this is not the case with the subject of pain. Although she certainly acknowledges that "language at once runs dry" when one attempts to describe pain, if we follow the logic of her specific comparison, her quibble does not seem to be so much about the limitations of language to describe pain as the fact that there have not yet been enough writers who have given the subject sufficient attention so that there can be varied means of speaking about pain. After all, the rich and figurative works of Shakespeare and Keats by no means offer a literal explanation for what love is, certainly not in the way that Scarry wants language to account for what pain is. What they, and innumerable other writers, have provided their readers are a range of forms to demonstrate the multifaceted feelings and experiences of love. In a similar way one digs a new well when an old one has dried up (if we nudge Woolf's metaphor to its completion), rather than continuing to seek to locate language that *names* pain, there is a need for contemporary literary writers to conceptualise pain through the "intricacies and impressions of narrative" (Mintz 5) in an attempt to widen our understanding of what having 'language' for pain might mean.

Whilst there is certainly validity in Mintz's claim that writers can expand the forms which we use to speak to the experience of pain and trauma, I argue that the onus also lies with literary trauma critics to expand the ways we approach them. After all, a range of narrative forms will do very little to enrich our vocabulary to speak about trauma if critics maintain an overt preoccupation with what language is unable to name in these texts. Instead, it is also important that readers adopt an approach to language that enables them to apprehend what these different forms are communicating about pain, a way of speaking to the language of form, and receiving the implicit story. There is a need, in other words, for a return to a more literary approach to reading.

Without a literary approach, it will be challenging for second wave literary trauma critics to dismantle the 'classic' model beyond a certain point. Take, for instance, Stef Craps' reading of *The Memory of Love* in his article "Beyond Eurocentricism" in *The Future of Trauma Theory*. Like Balaev and Rothberg, Craps outlines the limitations of "[taking] for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity" (46). He recognises that the singular conception of trauma being "an experience that exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge" (50), is not necessarily useful when it comes to reading "traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures" (46). He is then critical of the assumption that traumatic experiences "can only be adequately represented through the use of experimental, modernist textual strategies" in order to foreground "a failure of narrative" (50). For Craps, the informal canonising of the modernist, fragmented form of writing trauma continues to perpetuate the perception that trauma is unspeakable.

From the way he establishes his argument, Craps appears to assert that the form of the literary text shapes the way in which trauma is conceptualised. Hence, an over-reliance on a particular form to speak about trauma has led to a skewed sense of what it means to be traumatised and how one can work through it. In order to expand these definitions, like Mintz, Craps seeks to explore speaking about them through other narrative forms and strategies. He analyses a text that he calls,

> a fine example of literary realism, which does not derive its haunting power from the conversion of unspeakable suffering in broken, traumatised speech, but rather from its acknowledgement of the existence of vast silent spaces of unknown, ongoing suffering in the face of which narrative therapy […] is an inadequate response. (57).

By framing Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* in this way, Craps' readers are primed to read a *literary* analysis of this text, one that demonstrates how the realist novel differs from the "avant-garde experimentation" of conventional trauma fiction, and how its form can offer literary trauma theorists a more inclusive way of defining and thinking about the traumatic experience.

However, whilst he recognises the need to alter the starting point of trauma theory, Craps does not explore alternate ways of how language might represent trauma. He merely examines the novel for *what it names*, rather than exploring *how* it tells its story, confining his exploration of trauma, still, to what can be explicitly

spoken. In *The Memory of Love*, a British doctor, Adrian Lockhart, attempts to use Western talk therapy to treat the Sierra Leoneans survivors of the nation's civil war in 2001. He soon realises his therapies are often met with suspicion and outright rejection because he fails to understand the cultural context and traditions of this community. For Craps, "the novel's critique of the application of Western therapeutic models in the Sierra Leonean context crystallises in a dialogue between Adrian and Attila, one of the few local psychiatrists to remain in the country" (52). He cites an episode in which Attila curtly tells Adrian about the flaw in his perception of trauma therapy,[4] and makes the following analysis,

> Attila's key objection is that the assumption underlying Western notions of trauma recovery that the patient is to be returned to a state of normality through psychotherapy ignores the reality of life in Sierra Leone, one of the poorest countries in the world. Living conditions there are still extremely hard now that the war has ended. For most Sierra Leoneans, the 'normal' experience is one of oppression, deprivation, and upheaval: freedom, affluence, and stability—the Western standard of normality—are actually the exception rather than the rule. "You call it a disorder … we call it *life*"" (53)

Much of Craps' analysis of the text takes on a similar style, that is, one that cites evidence of the novel's key ideas and that provides additional contextual explanation to buff up his readers' sense of the possible reasons behind the characters' words. For instance, Craps explains that "the reality of life in Sierra Leone" is characterised by "oppression, deprivation, and upheaval", a stark contrast to the "freedom, affluence, and stability" that is the Western definition of 'normal' (53). By doing so, one presumes that Craps' filling in of the context behind the words in Forna's text is for the purpose of helping readers understand that Adrian has imposed a restoration therapy that unknowingly hinges deeply on a Western cultural context (trauma as a single event) in order to succeed, and is not relevant to the form of trauma (trauma as a continuous way of life) that the Sierra Leoneans face. And it certainly is not unhelpful

[4] The relevant portion of the dialogue from Forma's novel is as follows,

> "When I ask you what you expect to achieve for these men, you say you want to return them to normality. So then I must ask you, whose normality? Yours? Mine? So they can put on a suit and sit in an air-conditioned office? You think that will ever happen?"
> "No," says Adrian, feeling under attack. "But therapy can help them to cope with their experiences of war."
> "This is their reality. And who is going to come and give the people who live *here* therapy to cope with this?" asks Attila and waves a hand at the view. "You call it a disorder, my friend. We call it *life*." (Forna 319–320)

that he does so; we do see the extent of Adrian's misconception and recognise why his form of therapy initially fails.

Yet, in his choice to use information about the cultural context of Sierra Leone and the West to lead readers to the conclusions about the text's main message, rather than analysing the language and narrative structure that the text employs to convey this message,[5] there is little about Craps' analysis that can be counted as literary. In *How to Read Literature and Why*, Terry Eagleton illustrates a non-literary approach to literature by describing an imaginary conversation that a group of students have about *Wuthering Heights*. He depicts these students bantering about the nature of its key characters: an assertive Student C declaring that "Heathcliff's not a mystic, he's a brute", only to be rebuffed by Student B's, "at least he's not a wimp like Edgar Linton", only to quickly be undercut by Student A's, "Sure, Linton's a bit spineless, but he treats Catherine a lot better than Heathcliff does" (Eagleton, *How to Read* 1). Of this, sadly, probable conversation between these students, Eagleton highlights that "the problem is that if someone who had never heard of *Wuthering Heights* were to listen in on this discussion, they would find nothing to suggest that it was about a novel" (2). In other words, the attention to its *form* as a novel—the way in which the story world is constructed, and how language has been used to create its effect on the reader—is secondary and effaced, and the literary text is relegated to being a means of reporting information. Eagleton's quibble here serves as a yardstick to assess a piece of writing for its literary engagement. For in not speaking about a text in such a way that draws attention to its status as fiction, one reveals an intention of using one's chosen text not so much for its literary qualities, but for a, perhaps, 'functional' purpose of using the text's thematic message to support a larger claim.

If one applies Eagleton's yardstick here, it is difficult to find any indication that Craps is engaging with a novel at all; he may well have been recounting and

[5] Arguably, Craps could have considered these two portions of the dialogue—Attila's assertive questioning about the definition of normality, "so then I must ask you, whose normality? Yours? Mine?", and the juxtaposition between Adrian's view of trauma as a "disorder" and Attila's assertion that it is "a life" (Forna 320)—to arrive at a similar point regarding Adrian's cultural unawareness. Attila's short, quick fire questions, "whose normality? Yours? Mine?", are delivered in quick succession, shattering Adrian's preconceived notions about the world. The layering of "normality" with pronouns like "yours?" and "mine?" removes "normality" from existing as a lofty universal standard, brings the concept down to the personal and renders it as something that is subjectively possessed. Adrian feels "under attack" and rightly so; his world is about to dissolve as Attila's words shape a new world for him against his will. By thinking of the word "normality", which he had previously assumed was a generic 'truth', in conjunction with these pronouns, Adrian has no choice but see that his perception of the world is only one version of it. Attila pushes the point further, demonstrating that what Adrian sees as a "disorder", a temporal state that presumes an initial 'order' to which one can revert to, is seen by the Sierra Leoneans as "life", something ongoing, continuous, and difficult to define. The contrast between the length of time that could span a "disorder" and that spans "life" helps the reader understand the extent of Adrian's 'misdiagnosis'. If his therapies are only primed to cure what he perceives as a short term and reversible situation, when the wounds for the Sierra Leoneans have run and will continue to run for much longer than that, it is no wonder that his methods fail.

explaining the significance of a conversation between two trauma field workers in Sierra Leone. Of an article that aimed to demonstrate that the form of the realist novel can expand our concepts of trauma beyond the fact that it is unspeakable, one anticipates, perhaps, an explanation of how its features can help critics acknowledge that "the existence of vast silent spaces of unknown, ongoing suffering" renders the talking cure "an inadequate response" (Craps 57), or how the experience of reading a realist text differs from reading an avant-garde one, and how these various forms of literary texts can influence readers' impressions of what it means to be traumatised. Instead, one receives in his analysis something that is little more than a summary of the novel's turning points. For Craps, the value of the realist trauma novel appears to be its capacity to make overt claims about what is beneficial or flawed about trauma restoration, that the reader can then catalogue. His call for his readers to apprehend more realist trauma fiction in order to conceptualise trauma restoration beyond the 'classic' model is thus plausibly imprecise; what he advocates is really the need to read *more widely* about how trauma can be treated.

This approach to literary texts raises several issues. Craps' method of reading only works in this case because *The Memory of Love* overtly portrays the failures of Western talk therapy and affirms local practices of healing. But if critics are to mine realist trauma fiction for approaches to trauma restoration that differ from the 'classic' model, what are they to do with texts that do not specifically address these issues? How are readers to engage with literary texts in which trauma is subtle, underlying, or almost invisible, or when issues relating to trauma are not explicitly named? Whilst Craps does make an attempt to advance literary trauma studies by moving beyond Eurocentric representations of trauma, his reading of a text for what it explicitly names limits his exploration of trauma and its related issues to what can already be spoken. It renders little opportunity to explore if literary texts can, in their own way and through their own language, offer more inclusive and nuanced contributions to trauma theory.

Craps is not alone in his approach to reading literary trauma texts. The anthology, *The Future of Trauma Theory*, in which his article is published include others that also explored the development of trauma theory in relation to literature.[6]

[6] See Stef Craps' "Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age", Nouri Gana's "Trauma Ties: Chiasmus and Community in Lebanese Civil War Literature", Sam Durrant's "Undoing Sovereignty: Towards a Theory of Critical Mourning", Lyndsey Stonebridge's "That Which You Are Denying Us: Refugees, Rights and Writing in Arendt", and "Future Shock" by Roger Luckhurst. Of these six articles, only Durrant and Luckhurst's perform literary analysis.

More than half of them similarly use the content of trauma fiction merely as textual evidence to validate and substantiate the applicability of various trauma theories, rendering their analyses no different from the articles that intersected trauma theory with the disciplines of philosophy, history, psychology, and political science. In identifying this trend, my intention here is not to claim that examining a narrative's form is the only approach to read literary trauma texts. Rather, it is to explore the distinct contribution that this literary approach can bring to literary trauma studies. For if the phasing out of literary analysis is acceptable to those who represent the forefront of this field, the title of this anthology foreshadows that the future of trauma theory brings with it a future of literary absence. This begs the question of whether anything will be lost if literary analysis, a practice once fundamentally fused to what constituted the study of literature, eventually disappears from literary trauma studies altogether.

Reading Literarily: The Creation of a Reader-Witness

Rather than fixating on the difficulty of expressing the traumatic experience in words, what is needed is a change in the purpose we have given language in literary trauma studies. The former approach expects that language ought to able to explain and justify, and attends to literary texts with questions that seek out how a text might give a causal explanation for what trauma is, or why it is difficult to overcome. And, as aforementioned, analysis from this approach tends to lead to the inevitable conclusion that trauma is but an impenetrable silence. Therefore, I argue that reframing the purpose of language has the potential to speak to an experience that is decidedly not linear. Instead of trying to use language, this slippery and imprecise form, to name, this thesis circles back, in part, to where Caruth, Felman, Hartman, and Laub began, and argues that a more useful starting point is to think of language as something that *creates*. This is to ask of a text about trauma: *what has language created in response to this traumatic experience, how has it done so, and to what effect?*

The very premise of literary analysis, that which distinguishes itself from the other humanities and social sciences, is precisely its awareness that language is not a neutral means of communication. As Eagleton puts it, fiction texts are "in a sense less deluded than other forms of discourse because they implicitly acknowledge their own rhetorical status" and do not try to "pass themselves off as unquestionable truth" (*Literary Theory* 126). Rather, it recognises literature's status as fiction—something

invented, something *imaginary*— a labour in and of language to create a textual world. In acknowledging then, that "a literary work is a piece of verbal art, a product of deliberate crafting, shaping, or making by its author", a "man-made object", "the basic question of the formal approach is: 'how is it made?'" (Herman, Manfred, Jahn 180).

Following the conversation that he imagines the students having, Eagleton explores the kind of questions that would have returned their treatment of the novel to a literary approach. He writes,

> nothing is said about the techniques by which the novel builds up its characters. Nobody raises the question of what attitudes the book itself takes up towards these figures. Are its judgements always consistent, or might they be ambiguous? What about the novel's imagery, symbolism and narrative structure? Do they reinforce what we feel about its characters, or do they undercut it? (Eagleton, *How to Read* 2)

For Eagleton, engaging a text in a literary manner is not merely to discuss one's opinions of the text's characters, or "go straight for what the poem or novel says" (2). Rather, it is to know that "what is said is to be taken in terms of how it is said", where "the content is inseparable from the language in which it is presented" (3). Essentially, reading literarily is an approach that pays attention to the text's *form*, and explain how its various components have worked together to create that impression the reader eventually has of the text.

In literary analysis, the concept of 'form' is typically used to refer to the various components, the "techniques, methods, and procedures" that are used to construct the meaning of a text (Herman et al 181). David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan further divide the components of a text into two categories. On the one hand, "forms of content" refer to elements that pertain to the text's forms of expression, "the language as manifested in the styles and utterances occurring in a work", that develop the plot, "a narrative's action, characters, locations and themes or ideas" (181). A reader might examine elements such as the novel's "imagery, symbolism", "tone, mood, pace, genre, syntax, grammar, texture, rhythm, narrative structure, punctuation, ambiguity" to look for patterns in the text (Eagleton, *How to Read* 2). These patterns highlight portions of the text that "are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so" (Iser 1527), potentially revealing an implicit story beneath the text's explicit one that can either reinforce or contradict what appears to be the text's main thematic concerns. On the other hand, "forms of

structure" examine "the total set of relations between the elements of a work as a whole, between the whole and its parts" (Herman et al 181). A reader might consider "the relations between the 'natural' (logical, temporal, and causal) order and connections of mimetic elements, especially states and events (the narrated), and the order and connections of their textual presentation, i.e. their narration" (181). This brief overview of the tools for literary analysis is by no means exhaustive, and summarises only some of the main components that a reader has at hand to explore how a text has been constructed. Arguably, the "more extended and more thorough descriptions of form" that the reader has at her disposal (Sontag, *Against Interpretation* 12), the more she can examine the implicit story of a narrative. It provides a reader with the means to move beyond merely reinstating the paradox of trauma's relationship with language, and reinforcing a trauma victim's (in)ability to name her traumatic experiences. Instead, this approach to reading has the capacity to bear witness to the circuitous story that literary form tells. It opens up a way for readers to explore the stories of trauma that cannot be explicitly told and draws attention to the issues that have remained neglected within literary trauma discourse due to their underrepresentation.

However, whilst the ongoing and avid inquiries into what constitutes the components and strategies of a text occupy the labour of narrative theorists, it is not this thesis's primary concern to present an all-encompassing list of narrative techniques, redefine a way of conceptualising narratives, or insist upon the use of a specific narrative theory with which to analyse literary trauma texts. Literary texts vary so much in both content and form, and in their exploration of trauma and the narrative strategies they employ to represent these experiences, that it would be reductive to impose only a single method of reading onto them. For example, some texts are *mimetic* narratives and "attempt to depict the world of our experience in a recognisable manner" (Richardson 5). Others are *antimimetic* narratives and "contravene the presuppositions of nonfictional narratives, violate mimetic expectations and the practices of realism, and defy the conventions of existing, established genres" (5). And others still are *unnatural* narratives and "[interact] with a sustained mimetic framework or trajectory" (7) in order to "[point] to the fictionality of the narrative and [destroy] the mimetic illusion" (6). These formal differences implicitly guide a reader "to adopt a position in relation to the text", and engage it from this specific vantage point (Iser 1527), inevitably influencing her to pay attention

to certain aspects of a text's form over others. For instance, as mimetic narratives attempt to "construct entirely realistic narratives of events that could occur" (Richardson 10), a reader who finds herself positioned within the world of the text might examine the narrative strategies that are at work to create this believable reality. But tools like "a standard story grammar" (30), which presumes a certain temporal coherence, for instance, are unlikely to be relevant for a reader who examines an unnatural narrative. She may find herself in a textual world "where temporal reference is deliberately sabotaged" (Genette 35), in the narrative's explicit attempt to "transgress and invert mimetic norms" (Richardson 166), and would want to explore how the writer employs other narrative techniques to create this disruption.

The multiplicity of approaches that literary analysis invites only increases when we consider how individualised a reader's response is to a particular text. Jean-Paul Sartre goes as far as to say that "the literary object has *no other substance* than the reader's subjectivity" (1203, emphasis mine), as "[n]othing is accomplished if the reader […] does not invent it" (1202). In other words, whilst the gaps in a text do guide a reader towards certain perspectives and patterns (Iser 1527), a reader herself comprises multiple factors that influence the effect the text has on her, the patterns she identifies, and the kind of connections she makes, and so on. As Sabine Sielke puts it, "the questions we bring to our inquiries into literary texts […] are motivated, meditated, and framed by our present concerns" (6), which are far too varied across readers to produce a singular textual description. Even with the same literary tools, and a similar understanding of the general principle of literary analysis, readers will "use the same concepts differently" to examine a text, and ultimately "produce a different description" of what they read (Bal, *Narratology* 4). Between the infinite "collection of signs" that a text puts forth and the multiple ways a reader can "unite them" (Sartre 1203), the subjectivity of reading makes these variations inevitable. In this way, as the form of a trauma narrative both positions the reader to engage with it in a particular way and is dependent on her to co-create its story, it does more than tell a story circuitously of trauma. It is simultaneously creating a story about the process of reading, and the ways in which a reader's engagement with the text supports or hinders the emergence of stories of trauma.

The subjectivity of reading literary trauma texts is precisely that with which this thesis is concerned. Whilst I retain the original trauma theorists' literary approach towards trauma narratives, I attempt to move beyond them in terms of my examination

of what literary form is able to create. Where Caruth, Felman, and Hartman primarily offered sophisticated poststructuralist readings of "the text's failure to constitute itself as a unified and closed meaning" (Sun et al 7), and thus drew attention to how literary form is a prime site for creating nuanced portrayals of the unknowability of trauma, I explore the potential that reading literary form has to construct more nuanced witnesses of trauma narratives in a range of different contexts. Taking Laub's conceptualisation of an ethical witness—one who chooses to be "a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event", and whose witnessing helps a victim transform a traumatic experience from "an overwhelming shock" to a "known event" ("Bearing Witness" 57)—as a point of departure, I examine how his work can be adapted to address what it means to be an ethical reader-witness of narratives, and what being "a participant and a co-owner" of a narrative world of trauma can accomplish in helping a community heal from trauma. Namely, where Laub asserted that a witness ought to be "the *blank screen* on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" ("Bearing Witness" 57, emphasis mine), I argue that, on the contrary, it is crucial that a reader-witness is cognisant of the frameworks and the process whereby she bears witness to a trauma narrative. As the text cannot rebut a reader's misinterpretation, in the way a patient can contradict a therapist if the latter has misunderstood her, it becomes the reader-witness's responsibility to recognise the process whereby she derives her conclusions. In so doing, she acknowledges that her interpretation of a text is dependent upon certain biases and variables, and is but *one* possibility of interpreting the narrative. In the larger scope of literary trauma discourse, this approach provides the grounds for further investigation into the role that reading and interpreting trauma narratives plays in speaking to the issues that beset a community in the aftermath of collective trauma.

Critical Inquiry and Scope of Thesis

Literary trauma studies began with Caruth, Felman, Hartman, and Laub's innovative approach of using poststructuralist readings of literary texts to shape more nuanced forms of Freudian trauma theory. Over the years, however, its acclaim has ironically influenced critics to revert to Freud's approach of perceiving literature as being supplementary to theory. Generally speaking, instead of adopting their approach to thinking about trauma, critics have simply distilled their insights into a 'classic' model outlining the paradox of trauma restoration. By using the model as the

predominant lens through which to read trauma texts, they demonstrated how literary texts only emphasise the unspeakability of trauma. This sidelining of a literary approach has persisted in recent scholarship, even as there have been notable attempts to extend the 'classic' trauma model by tweaking the Freudian assumptions of trauma theory upon which the original theorists based their investigations. But these attempts have omitted critically examining (1) the assumption that literature merely plays a supplementary role to trauma theory, and, as a result, (2) the poststructuralist assumptions of language that Caruth and the other theorists initially used. As I have demonstrated in my reading of Craps' work, this only continues to facilitate the difficulty of speaking about trauma beyond what is already nameable.

In this thesis, I return to Caruth's initial approach to literature as a point of departure and examine how the forms of literary trauma texts are able to "add something, or speak something, that theory cannot say" about trauma (Whitehead 4), and speak to various critical issues that presently beset trauma theory. But, unlike the original literary trauma theorists, I do not begin my investigation with poststructuralist assumption that language can only create spaces of absence. Instead, I examine the stories language has created about both trauma and the reader-witness in each of the texts in the chapters that follow to explore the ways literature can speak to trauma theory. I demonstrate that this is not merely for the sake of novelty, but a necessary one, to accommodate the way world history and trauma studies have evolved over the years.

Having originated from Eurocentric theories, trauma theory has, understandably, largely focused on the Holocaust and Eurocentric texts, and often neglected and under-represented other traumatic experiences. Yet, the twentieth century was a time of tremendous global violence; the narratives of devastation did not stop with the Holocaust and Eurocentric texts. The repercussions of World War II lasted long after on the other side of the world, in Asia, similarly afflicting a generation with traumatic memories of the horrors they had witnessed. Furthermore, as the end of World War II brought about the dissolution of the European empires, the violence that erupted as these former colonies in Asia transitioned into newly independent nations, has moved into the twenty-first century. The chaos of the dissolution, however, gave rise to the new literatures from these former colonies in the 1950s and 1960s. Postcolonial writers gave voice to their own experiences of trauma, often employing innovative and experimental narrative strategies to do so. This body

of work, known generally as postcolonial literatures,[7] thus referred not only to texts dealing with post-independence issues, but work that shaped a new way of reading and thinking about textual representations of violence. With this established awareness of different cultural and historical contexts of trauma, with these new voices to listen to, the time for imposing a 'universal' theory of trauma, especially one that claims the unspeakability of trauma, is long over. Instead, a relevant critical theory about trauma requires an approach that listens to these voices from the ground up, accommodates the multiplicity of traumatic experiences found in these stories, and discerns coherent conceptions of trauma from them.

Postcolonial trauma theory is certainly not new to the academy.[8] But my research aims to extend the scope of literature in enacting and articulating these experiences of trauma by rethinking the way they are *read*. I begin with the premise that literary form is not homologous: different forms tell different stories. As such, it is an apt vehicle to embody the different complexities of trauma experiences. It is in examining how these texts have been constructed, within their specific cultural and contextual framework, that a reader allows them to give voice to these complexities, and shape a more nuanced conception of trauma theory. To demonstrate the viability and relevance of my approach, I examine post-war trauma narratives of various forms, that are set in three different contexts (Europe/America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia), at varying points between 1945–2009, each corresponding with a different stage of the trauma-healing process (transmission of survivor's memories to the next generation, listening to the testimony of a victim, bearing witness to the silence of a victim). This deliberate range and variety serve to demonstrate the scope that a literary approach can apprehend, and its usefulness in addressing the specificity of each context of trauma. Each chapter takes the following lines of inquiry: How do different kinds of literary representations of trauma tell their stories? How does the literary text

[7] See Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, New York, Oxford U.P., 1995, and John McLeod's *Beginning Postcolonialism*, Manchester U.P., 2000.

[8] In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Franz Fanon draws attention to the specific economic and psychological consequences that the Algerians suffered as a result of imperialism, which culminated in the Algerian War. In Chapter 5, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders", Fanon writes, "After the two great world wars, there is no lack of publications on the mental pathology of soldiers taking part in action and civilians who are victims of evacuations and bombardments" (202). However, Fanon provides case studies of the medical and mental disorders experienced by the Algerians to resist simplistically comparing the suffering of the Algerian War to that of the World Wars. He states, "The hitherto unemphasized characteristics of certain psychiatric descriptions here given confirm, if confirmation were necessary, that this colonial war is singular even in the pathology that it gives rise to" (202). The case studies explore the contextual and cultural specificities of the Algerian war that give rise to certain manifestations of trauma, namely that which result from the effects of colonial oppression (235). For more recent works, see Sam Durrant's *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*, State University of New York Press, 2003, and Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism*, edited by Sonya Andermahr, MDPI, 2016.

then speak to issues about trauma in the context that it represents? How does a reader-witness's specific role in each text influence the way she co-creates meaning about trauma? In this way, I demonstrate how a reader-witness moves trauma narratives beyond the paradox of unspeakability at each stage of the trauma-healing process.

In Chapter 2, I examine texts that deal with the aftermath of the Holocaust. The 'classic' trauma model was crucial in identifying the struggle that many survivors experienced. It felt impossible to speak about their trauma in a way that could be understood, yet, paradoxically, needing to do so in order to heal. But as the last of the survivors are passing on, the concerns of Holocaust studies, too, have evolved. The pressing matter of whether survivors' memoirs are sufficient to preserve Holocaust memories for future generations has demanded critical attention. In this transition, the 'classic' model, which already falls short in conceptualising *how* survivors can overcome this paradox of unspeakability, is even more limited in speaking to the transmission of narrative memory. Here, I argue that reading Holocaust memoirs as a reader-witness circumvents this gap inherent in the 'classic' model. It offers the means to (1) explore the message that memoirs are attempting to transmit and how they do so; (2) examine the process whereby readers derive the perceived meaning of a text; (3) reflect on the role of the reader in shaping and contributing to a future collective Holocaust memory. The texts I have chosen focus chiefly on memoirs that explicitly aim to pass their experience on to the next generation, Olga Lengyel's *Five Chimneys*, Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive*, and Elie Wiesel's iconic *Night*. I demonstrate how approaching these texts literarily enables them to transmit an affective message that says more beyond the silence of their pain.

In the second half of the chapter, I examine the narratives of the second generation of Holocaust survivors to explore how they have received their parents' stories. For example, bearing in mind that the second generation's ability to be witnesses is often jeopardised by the fact that they, too, struggle with various degrees of trauma, having been raised by traumatised parents and haunted by a past that they never experienced, what has been lost in the process of bearing witness? How do the forms of the second-generation narratives shape a particular version of Holocaust memory, and what are their implications? I examine Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* and Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge* to explore the impact of narrativising and bearing witness to the Holocaust through these struggles. By comparing a graphic novel and a series of retrospective-reflective essays, I demonstrate how various forms

are needed to transmit different aspects of the past. Ultimately, it is the reader-witness who plays the crucial role of drawing out what these forms are communicating and, in her articulation of their effects, shaping how the Holocaust is remembered.

In Chapter 3, I move beyond the world of post-war Europe and into post-war Southeast Asia. Here, the fault-lines in assuming that the 'classic' model universally speaks to trauma become especially obvious. Compared to how this model laid the foundations for complex discourse regarding the traumas of Holocaust survivors, various circumstantial factors have rendered the model, to a large extent, ineffective for highlighting the plight of the women who survived the Pacific War. In particular, the narratives of the women who were raped during the Pacific War are barely in its nascent stages of emerging. As a result, the injustice of their rape has gone unwitnessed for nearly seventy-five years, and the discourse in literary trauma studies regarding their suffering remains minimal. What is needed, therefore, is an approach to reading that witnesses the text's representation of trauma on its own terms. I explore three novels from the Singapore-Malaysia region of Southeast Asia, Jing-Jing Lee's *How We Disappeared*, Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists*, and Vyvyane Loh's *Breaking the Tongue* that speak to why the stories of female rape victims from the Pacific War have been so unrepresented. I demonstrate how analysing each novel's narrative strategies reveals the stories of these marginalised women, and expands literary trauma studies' discourse on what it means to bear witness to a trauma survivor.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I move my discussion to South Asia to explore the consequences of violence following the dissolution of the British empire. For survivors of the Sri Lankan civil war, many stories of trauma have still been left in silence. In this context, the 'classic' model's prescription of trauma restoration has not always been relevant. The Freudian 'talking cure' rests upon an assumption that the permissibility to speak about one's experiences is a given right. But it does not accommodate communities where speaking about and responding to one's traumatic experiences in speech almost certainly leads to social ostracising, imprisonment or even a death sentence. How then do the traumatised subjects of these cultures find a way to work through their experiences? What form of trauma restoration therapies would be suitable for them? What role does language and contemporary literature play in responding to these situations? I examine Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* to explore how fiction offers alternate ways of conceptualising trauma restoration. Set in

the Sri Lankan civil war, infamous for the disappearing of civilians who attempted to speak out against the injustices, the novel resists having its characters verbalise their traumatic experiences. Instead, it uses the aesthetics of sculpture and nature to imagine how the characters use non-linguistic means to ‘speak’ and testify to their pain. These various narrative strategies develop the language of silence, and shape what is presumed to be an impenetrable void into a valid form of expression. In doing so, the novel attempts to negotiate the uneasy balance between bearing witness to and not speaking for the silenced.

II. Narratives of Collective Memory: Transmitting the Holocaust from Survivor to Second-Generation Memoirs

"[T]he witness attempts desperately to extend 'I write, therefore I am' to 'I write, therefore the Holocaust was.'" — James Young

Over the last seventy-five years, the survivor generation has played a critical role in keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive in social, political, and academic discourse. Beginning in the immediate aftermath of World War II, survivors testified at the Nuremberg Trial and shed light on "inadequately known events" of "the modalities of genocide and the deportation" (Wieviorka 24). Their testimonies accounted for the groups of people who were victims of the Holocaust and aided in the persecution of the Nazi perpetrators. Survivors also took to publishing their experiences in written memoirs, adamant that their suffering should not be forgotten. Olga Lengyel, for instance, writes in *Five Chimneys*, one of the first eyewitness memoirs published right after World War II in 1947, that she was driven to survive the concentration camp so that she could report "what I saw with my own eyes", in order to ensure that the Holocaust "must never be allowed to happen again!" (89). Detailed accounts like Lengyel's offered valuable contributions to uncovering the mechanisms of the concentration camps, resulting in survivors' memoirs being given "the status of an archival document" (Wieviorka 24). They became instrumental for the building of a comprehensive Holocaust archive, and the curation of memorial museums and other commemorative initiatives. These memoirs have since, directly or otherwise, shaped new frameworks of inquiry in history, philosophy, and literature (Eaglestone, "Holocaust Testimony" 126), expanded trauma theories and practices, and spurred the invention of "new instruments to record and express what happened" in history (Hartman 1). Harnessing the power of living memory of suffering effectively, the survivor generation has endeavoured to shape a world that is committed to preventing the recurrence of an atrocity like the Holocaust.

But as the dwindling number of survivors[9] at the annual commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz reminds us, the twenty-first century world is on the cusp of losing access to a living memory of the Holocaust. As such, survivor memoirs are no

[9] There were fewer than 200 survivors present at the 75th anniversary in 2020, a sharp decline from the 1,500 at the 60th in 2005 (Berendt, "At Auschwitz"). It is expected to decrease even more drastically in the coming years, as many of them, now in their mid-90s, are unlikely to be able to attend the subsequent commemoration events.

longer simply valued for offering insight into the operations of the Nazi concentration camps. Rather, they have become an important means of "[affirming] the writer's existence", ensuring that the voices of these survivors continue to be heard in "their literary existence afterwards" (Young 38). Published ten years after Lengyel's *Five Chimneys* in 1957, Elie Wiesel is emphatic about his responsibility to speak of the horrors he witnessed and survived,

> [I]t is clear: [the survivor's] duty is to bear witness for the dead and the living. He has no right to deprive a future generation of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would not only be dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time. ("Preface to the New Translation" 13)

For Wiesel, not speaking—and hence failing to transmit a sense of cultural identity and heritage to future generations—is synonymous with being a perpetrator of genocide himself, an inaction tantamount to the worst of evils. His memoir, thus, becomes a way to stand in for him in his absence. This deep-seated desire to be remembered is also present in Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive, A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, published in 2001, more than 40 years after *Night*. When there is still no space given to her Holocaust stories at a dinner conversation with her contemporaries, Klüger despairs that without having the chance to speak, her "childhood falls into a black hole" (93). Her memoir, then, becomes a recourse against the threat of being forgotten, a way to validate the worth of her existence. The thread through these three memoirs, written years apart, is indicative of a general persistence among survivors to transmit their experiences for posterity.

This impending transition from living memory to narrative memory, however, has been riddled with much anxiety, especially for those concerned with the transmission of Holocaust memory. At its root, the anxiety of this transition comes from having to bear witness to *text*, and not people, and the uncertain consequences of doing so. More precisely, it begs the question as to whether written narratives can keep the memory of the Holocaust "before our eyes" with the necessary effectiveness that a post-survivor world will require (Wieviorka 24). For even though the survivor generation has charged the world with "the injunction to remember" (Rosenfeld 82), and worked to lead by example the implementation of this process—that is, "the inscription, transmission and reception of historical memory" (82)—has not been straightforward. On the one hand, the perennial threat of erasing the Holocaust has

nonetheless persisted despite the thousands who have testified. It has taken on various forms, ranging from casual ignorance and indifference[10] to various distortions of Holocaust memory,[11] to blatant Holocaust denial,[12] to escalating anti-Semitic attacks in the United States in recent years.[13] On the other hand, the memory of the Holocaust has been deliberately evoked and weaponised "by competing memory agents that manipulate the past and construct conflicting memories in the service of rival ideologies and political interests" (Gutwein 36),[14] or "in the service of our psychological needs or narrow partisan interests" (Hoffman 170). Certain anti-Semitic groups, for instance, have 'remembered' the Holocaust for the sole purpose of encouraging the further genocide of Jews or the destruction of Israel (Gerstenfeld 37). And when these distorted versions of the Holocaust narrative are solidified "alongside intentional and planned activities of social and political agencies" to advance various political agendas (Ofer 71), this memory of the past becomes a tool to shape a violent future.

These claims, along with the escalation in anti-Semitic violence, are sobering reminders that the survivors' fears of the Holocaust being forgotten in their absence, and the consequences of its erasure, are not merely paranoid whims of a 'hypersensitive' generation, or concerns that only inundate a historical past. In fact, with the increasing general ignorance and indifference towards the Holocaust coinciding with the rise of anti-Semitic violence, one cannot help but observe a disturbing echo of the past reverberating in the present. It speaks to what the survivors have always known: the line between the rhetoric of anti-Semitic sentiment and the reality of anti-Semitic violence has always been very fine, made indistinguishable by

[10] Recent studies reveal alarming trends regarding the general public's awareness of the basic facts of the Holocaust. Pew Research Center polled 10, 971 US adults in 2019 ("What Americans Know About the Holocaust"). They found that only 45% of the American adults and 38% of teens interviewed knew that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Another study conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany found that 66% of the 1,350 millennials they interviewed did not know what Auschwitz is (Zauzmer, "Holocaust Study").

[11] Gerstenfeld identifies as many as nine forms of distorting Holocaust memory, including "Holocaust Depreciation", which minimises the severity of the Holocaust (40), overtly "Obliterating the Holocaust Memory" by destroying memorials and disrupting commemoration ceremonies (49), and the "Universalization" of the Holocaust, which "manifests itself in the growing use of language that relates to the industrial-scale destruction of the Jews in World War II […], yet is used for a large number of purposes that have no connection to this genocide" (50).

[12] The three main claims challenge (a) the number of Jews that were actually murdered, (b) the gas chambers and crematoria's capacity to 'manage' killing that many Jews, (c) the notion that the death of the victims were a result of genocidal intent and were not merely the result of other war-related events (Lang 157).

[13] Marc Santora notes, "toxic political rhetoric and attacks directed at groups of peoples—using language to dehumanize them—that were once considered taboo have become common across the world's democracies" ("75 Years After Auschwitz Liberation").

[14] For instance, the seemingly benign narrative that encouraged "emotional identification with the victims" in Israel's version of Holocaust collective memory became "a means of cementing Zionist ethos in the struggle for statehood" (Gutwein 37). As "the lesson of 'never again' became the cornerstone of the Israeli ethos of independence" (37), that is, "to never again become a victim unable to fight against its enemy" (Ofer 83), it opened the way for the Israeli government to adopt a militarism ideology and "justify the negation and suppression of its 'other': the ultra-Orthodox, Oriental Jews, and Israeli-Arabs" (Gutwein 38).

the absence of any attempt to curtail its voice. As they have reminded us, with their advocacy to "never forget" their suffering, the persistence of these dissenting narratives requires consistent effort to, at the very least, be kept at bay. But, with the remaining Holocaust survivors passing away against a chilling backdrop of resurging anti-Semitic sentiments, this is a vigilance that has already begun to wane.

With these complications linked to the transmission of Holocaust memory already occurring *during* the survivor generation's lifetime, it calls into question whether memoirs have the capacity to "create the contiguity necessary to extend the experience into the present, to engage the reader or listener in its re-enactment" (Aarons and Berger 44). After all, they are already once removed from the event, and "giving language to any experience is […] the sure knowledge that the reality, the final measure of the loss is loss itself, an absence of what once existed" (43). They are merely representations of the event, susceptible, as Primo Levi identifies, to becoming stale relics of the past. Whilst the ability to reread memoirs "keeps memories fresh and alive in the same manner in which a muscle that is often used remains efficient",

> it is also true that a memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallised, perfected, adorned, which installs itself in the place of the raw memory and grows at its expense. (Levi 11–12)

Without the immediacy, authority and affective import that comes with listening to one who speaks from living memory in a witness's present, memoirs are at the mercy of their readers' interpretation. As Levi points out, the way a memoir is read can potentially exacerbate the distance between the Holocaust and its present readership. In light of these issues, this chapter explores the way in which the transmission of Holocaust memories can take place through memoirs. I outline the main approaches that historians and critics have undertaken thus far and trace the implications they have had in shaping a cultural memory of the Holocaust. In response to the approach that foregrounds the unspeakability of the Holocaust, I explore how reading memoirs for their narrative strategies enables the transmission of meaning that goes beyond the silence of trauma.

Trauma and the Complications of Narrative Transmission

In *Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, James Young posits that "what is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how

events are remembered depends in turn on the texts now giving them form" (1). In other words, the way each narrative is framed, *and* the framework that a reader uses to approach these texts are both crucial to how the Holocaust will be remembered in the future. Young presumably grounds his claim on the premise that reading cannot take place without a reader first having a pre-existing framework whereby she approaches a text. It is that which determines the meaning she ascribes to a text, and the purpose of her reading. A reader who, for instance, reads a memoir to find out 'what happened' to the writer, will derive a very different meaning compared to a reader who reads to explore how the memoir represents women. As Judith Butler highlights, a framework is not a neutral structure of organising information. Rather, it is something that "tends to function, even in a minimalist form, as an editorial embellishment of the image", leading to "an interpretative conclusion about the deed itself" (Butler 8). Extrapolating this to Holocaust narratives, Young argues that the frameworks that are applied to Holocaust texts, whether subconsciously or otherwise, will inevitably foreground certain elements and obscure others. They determine which texts, and which aspects *within* each text, receive attention. If these frameworks continue to be collectively employed by a majority of readers, the places of emphasis will eventually shape what the Holocaust 'means'. Young's logic echoes Jean-François Lyotard's assertion: the predominant narrative that comes to represent an event is not assembled neutrally. Lyotard's critical questions, "Who decides the conditions of truth?" (29), "Who has the right to decide for society? Who is the subject whose prescriptions are norms for those they obligate?" (30), draw attention to the fact that 'truth' is shaped when a dominant group arrives at a consensus on a particular matter. What is remembered is thus a version of the event that represents the ideologies and agendas of the dominant group, at the expense of others. Hence, for Young, addressing the question "what will we remember of the Holocaust?" can only be answered by developing an intentional awareness of the frameworks being used to interpret Holocaust narratives, the "plurality of meanings" that they generate, and the consequences they have "outside the text" (Young 4). This critical practice not only evaluates if the version of the Holocaust that is in present memory is the result of particular biases, it also potentially highlights the aspects of the event that have been obscured by the predominant approaches.

In the immediate post-war years, both historians and literary critics read Holocaust memoirs "to unravel its myths and tropes in order to excavate the 'historical

actuality' of events" (5). The prevalence of this approach can be attributed to two factors: first, as aforementioned, the many survivors' insistence that their memoirs "deliver documentary evidence of specific events", that their words do not "merely point to" or "stand for" the Holocaust, but "are testimonial proof" of the atrocity (10); second, the writers' earnest plea that their words be remembered. From as early as the first few published Holocaust memoirs, in fact, the writers' explicit intention of having their work read, remembered, and passed on has been one of the recurring features in survivor narratives. In *Five Chimneys*, for instance, Lengyel is so convinced of the power of her eyewitness account, she closes her memoir with the confident flourish, "after perusing this account that any will still doubt, I cannot believe" (225). Here, she reveals her conviction that a faithful documentation of the systematic torture of the Jews, and the processes by which the Nazis executed impossible deeds of evil, will presumably speak for itself and act as a deterrent against any future atrocity.

Given the specific call of survivor testimonies, the approach to read Holocaust memoirs for historical evidence was an especially useful response in the immediate aftermath of the war. To begin with, this approach acknowledged the veracity of survivors' accounts. By framing these memoirs as texts that supplemented official historical records in providing evidence for the mechanisations of the Final Solution, it deliberately looked for correspondence between the survivors' words and the historical event. In doing so, it resisted the prominent Derridean notion that "there is nothing outside the text" and guarded against overly textual and deconstructionist interpretations, which, at their extreme, threatened to "include the hypothetical possibility that events and texts never existed outside each other and that all meanings of events created in different representations are only relative" (Young 3). The need to avoid this line of thinking was paramount, for, as Young notes, "if Holocaust narrative is nothing but a system of signs merely referring to other signs, then where are the events themselves?" (3). Approaching these texts with the assumption that they corresponded with real world events became a way to limit the burgeoning of narratives of Holocaust denial and transmit the survivor's experience as authentically as possible.

In time, however, the development of trauma theory exposed several problematic assumptions upon which this simplistic conception of narrative transmission was based. First, it assumes that what a survivor remembers is accurate (memory is infallible); second, what she remembers is able to be articulated in words

(language is sufficient to convey experience); third, what she articulates will be received as she intended (reading is a transparent process). But, as memory studies have consistently demonstrated, "the mind does not record experience with complete objectivity or faithfulness" (Goodwin 12). The past "cannot be recalled totally" and "evades complete recapture, especially as it recedes further back in time" (12). These gaps of memory are markedly heightened when a person suffers from trauma. Laub highlights that for many Holocaust survivors, the trauma of their experience makes it difficult for their "human cognitive capacity to perceive and to assimilate the totality of what was really happening at the time" ("Truth and Testimony" 69). As they have suffered an assault that "precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction" ("Bearing Witness" 57). This makes it difficult for them to account for various aspects of their experience that they have not been able to process.

Even a memoir like Lengyel's, exceptional in its detailed documentation of the events of Auschwitz, is not exempt from the gaps that result from the memoirist's trauma. As that which is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4), trauma is not often explicitly addressed in a survivor's narrative. It may not even be something of which she is conscious, especially if she has not yet worked through her suffering at the time of writing, as appears to be the case with Lengyel. Instead, traces of survivor's trauma are embedded in the narrative form and the structure of the text's content, subtly influencing the memoirist's attempt to transmit her experiences through narrative. There are at least two such moments in *Five Chimneys*, anomalies in the mostly factual report that Lengyel creates of her time at Auschwitz, that reveal she has not understood herself to the extent that the lucid content of her memoir suggests.

Lengyel takes great pains to present herself as a reliable witness, adopting a factual tone and structuring her memoir by events that occurred rather than any thematic organisation (Jeges 237). She begins her memoir with a lament, "*Mea culpa*, my fault, *mea maxima culpa*! I cannot acquit myself of the charge that I am, in part, responsible for the destruction of my own parents and of my two young sons" (Lengyel 11). Her unflinching and forceful confession creates an impression of herself as someone deeply committed to testifying to the horrors of Auschwitz, even if it

means naming the most difficult and humiliating pain that she had to endure. Her willingness to expose even her shame creates an implicit expectation that she intends to hide nothing from her reader; the contents that follow, it is to be assumed, will be presented in as straightforward and upfront a manner.

Lengyel does deliver, meticulously describing the events leading up to her imprisonment, and then, the moment of her trauma. She explains that upon arrival at Auschwitz, she is tricked by what she observes at the gates of the camp. She recounts this moment with a combination of sentences that describe her external world and her corresponding internal thoughts, "The doctors were to stand by in a separate row with their instrument bags. That was rather reassuring […] it meant the sick would receive medical attention", "Four or five ambulances drove up. These would transport the ailing […] another good sign" (23). The swift interchange between what she observes and what she thinks reveals her ability to make quick, logical deductions. This is a woman who, prior to Auschwitz, is clearly able to articulate the processes of her inner world. In fact, to reflect the speed with which she is processing all this information, she leaves it to the reader to fill in the blanks to catch up with her train of thought. We infer that when she sees the ambulance, she believes that it signifies healthcare. In wanting to protect her children, she rationally decides she ought to put them in the line that leads to the vehicles. Her conviction is further sealed by an explanation "from an S.S. officer who assured us that the aged would remain in charge of the children" (24), which leads her to assume that "naturally that the able-bodied adults would have to work, but that the old and very young would be cared for" (24). And in wanting to spare her older son from "labors that might prove too arduous for him" (24), she insists that he is not yet twelve and persuades her mother to join the children.

However, the swiftness of her thought processing is punctuated with rhetorical questions. She exclaims, "how could we know that all this was window-dressing to maintain order among the deportees with a minimum of armed force?" (23), "how could I have known? I had spared them from hard work, but I had condemned Arvad and my mother to death in the gas chambers" (24). In disrupting her sensible processing, they signify the rupture in her formerly orderly world. These rhetorical questions sprung in hindsight embody her utter incomprehension of the extreme injustice of this 'playing field', one that has caused her logic to fail her because what she sees no longer corresponds with the usual attributed meaning. This world of the Third Reich is so perverse that even the most foundational of logical premises on

which she was basing her decisions, the common decencies that she takes for granted, is not impervious to mendacity. Sincere expressions now belie point-blank lies, and basic entities that form the building blocks of society have been turned on its head for the sole purpose of deceiving people to their death. Now, as she enters Auschwitz, all she is left with is an 'obvious' answer that is in no way a solution to her question, "we could not have known" (23). Auschwitz was constructed entirely by an unknown rulebook, one to which the prisoners were not privy. And the price she pays to discover this knowledge is the lives of her mother and children.

The repetition of these rhetorical questions also signals the dissolution of her inward clarity. Where she had been able to process information swiftly before, she is unable to move past this point of being so outrageously deceived to such disastrous consequences. In tracing the pattern of her rhetorical questions, there is a subtle shift in how the reader fills in the gaps of the narrative of Lengyel's inner world here. Previously, the gaps lay between her observations and deductions, and we were merely filling in the means whereby she moved from the first point to the next. She was clearly in control of her internal processing. But here, the rhetorical questions reflect that Lengyel has not yet reached the point of being able to make objective observations about this aspect of Auschwitz. In her grief, she can, understandably, only react emotionally and repeat her disbelief. Significantly, she cannot say more about her loss. After she realises her 'mistake', she records that she "could not utter a single word in my desperation" nor "remember anything about the rest of that day" (42). Instead, she can only repeat the events that happened,

> Right after the arrival! When they put him aside? My Lord! I put my little boy on the left side. With my stupid love, I told the truth that he was not yet twelve years old. I wanted to spare him from the forced labor, and with this I killed him! (42)

Her trauma exceeds the "existing mental structures" that she would have ordinarily used to "make sense" of "current and familiar experiences" (van Alphen 37). As a result, the memories of this event have to be "stored differently" and are unavailable "for retrieval under ordinary conditions" (37). She is unable to say more beyond stating what she feels, either to reflect about how this event makes her feel or how she has been changed by it, to offer a coherent narrative about the interiority of her experience. Without being able to construct a frame of reference to help her process inwardly, the trauma of what happened can only stay with her and continue to trap her

in her guilt. It is the reader who, in observing this pattern in Lengyel's inner world, now has the task of filling in this gap to deduce about what is happening internally to her.

Even as the rest of her memoir regathers its eloquence in factually recounting her time in Auschwitz, outlining the process of admission, the daily routines, Dr Mengele's vile experiments, among others, Lengyel's trauma, and her inability to explain her inner world, surfaces in two other instances. The first leads to detrimental consequences, as her trauma jeopardises her attempt to warn the other women in the camp of Nazi deception. The sight of new female inmates arriving at the gates triggers her trauma of how her misjudgement of the Nazis led her son to his untimely death, and she tries to warn them, "tell them that your son is over twelve …" (Lengyel 100). But when the women ask "why?" as they wait in line to be sorted, pressing her for a reason for her advice, she cannot explain. The reader, at a distance from her experience, knows how crucial it is that the women discover what Lengyel herself needed to know upon her own arrival: they, too, have been submerged into a world where the former societal structures no longer apply. That is, rather than young children being shown more mercy, they will be the first to be slaughtered. But without the process of inward reflection, which transform experiences into "retrieved memories" that are "shaped into a form in which [survivors] believe they can be understood by their listeners" (Bigsby 12), Lengyel does not have the distance from her trauma to articulate this reason to herself, much less the other women. Instead, all her trauma allows her to do is tell them what *not* to do, and not *why*, and this impedes them from understanding the value of what she says. They dismiss her as a "dirty woman" who "must be mad" (Lengyel 100), and "so the same tragedies were repeated", as the mothers claimed their children were younger than they were, and "unwittingly sent them to the gas chamber" (100). The cost of Lengyel not being able to express the interiority of her traumatic experience is a transmission of incomplete information that causes a repetition of her original pain.

The frustration of needing to explain things of the interior world but not being able to do so persists during her imprisonment. When she is sexually assaulted by a male prisoner, Tadek, it is only silent "tears running down [her] cheeks" that bear witness to the pain that she experiences inside her. Her account is brief,

> I felt his arm around my waist. His other hand touched me and began to fondle my breast. My world fell to pieces again. I had already told him

> what had happened to me—that I had lost my family! *Could he not understand how I felt*? I wanted to be friends with the human being in him, not with his lust. (60, emphasis mine)

Her indignant cry here reveals two important assumptions: first, in giving a factual account of what she had endured—the loss of her family—she assumes that her feelings about what she has suffered ought to be obvious; second, these feelings are so self-explanatory that they ought to elicit only one appropriate response to her (that is, kindness). They are so central to her sense of self that she cannot comprehend how another person cannot see it. But the transparency of these feelings is precisely what is not present here because what she has endured is so beyond the realms of normal human experience that we cannot presume at all to understand what she has suffered. My point here is neither to argue that the sexual assault is a consequence of her inability to articulate her feelings properly, nor make the naïve claim that Tadek would not have assaulted her if he had understood her feelings. Rather, it is to demonstrate that she narrativises the anguish of the assault as stemming from Tadek's failure to understand and respect the feelings of her interior world. What she wants to communicate and have understood about her pain is so intense and so necessary that when it fails, it shatters her world a second time.

Through this reading of *Five Chimneys*, I have attempted to demonstrate the limitations of merely documenting the factual 'truth' of events during the Holocaust. Its focus on ascertaining the external experiences of *what* the survivor lived through has neglected an equally important truth of the inward experience of *how* they lived through it, that is, the narrative testifying to the significance of the event on her shattered interiority and sense of self. As a result, what has been less articulated is the story of the internal suffering and trauma that survivors endured and continued to endure after the war. But, as my reading has illustrated, the story of what happened in Lengyel's inner world is one that she *does* want witnessed and respected, even if she cannot communicate it precisely because of her trauma. Knowledge of this substance is crucial, as it explicates what an atrocity like the Holocaust destroys in a person, how it does so, and why it is utterly reprehensible. It bears witness to the humanness of the victims and survivors, and acknowledges the full cost of what they suffered under a regime that made every concerted effort to disavow them as human. The gaps in Lengyel's memoir demonstrate a need for an approach—indeed, a witness—that does not write off the consequences of traumatic memory, but that can find a way to listen

to the things that cannot yet be said, and validate that which cannot yet be seen, even to the survivor herself.

But even as trauma theory began to move the focus beyond the external events of the Holocaust and recognised the need to bear witness to the interiority of the survivors, there were other problems to consider. In the memoirs that were published soon after the war, memoirists began to realise that they lacked the language to communicate the trauma of their inner worlds. Unlike the confidence that Lengyel expressed in her ability to articulate her experiences (225), Wiesel self-consciously problematises the act of putting his catastrophic experiences into language. Writing ten years after *Five Chimneys* was published, in the preface to *Night*, he confesses that he is "painfully aware of [his] limitations", having "many things to say", but "did not have the words to say them" (Wiesel, "Preface" 7). Language "became an obstacle" ("Preface" 7), because the Holocaust perverted normative human experiences to such an extreme that there was no known way of using words to capture it aptly. Prior to the Holocaust, certain words, like "hunger—thirst—fear—transport—selection—fire—chimney", all had "an intrinsic meaning" ("Preface" 7). Within collective human experience, there was a general consensus as to what these words signified. But these words "meant something else" ("Preface" 7) after the Holocaust, having been used in a way that was hitherto alien: to facilitate the systematic destruction of an entire race. Having been perverted with inhumane associations, the language that existed before the Holocaust now "seemed meager, pale, lifeless" ("Preface" 7) to describe "life in the camps [that] in all its aspects had no precedent" (van Alphen 34). If Wiesel were to merely use these words, his readers, having never experienced the concentrations camps for themselves, would only impose their pre-Holocaust definitions of these words onto his experience.

As a result of the absence of survivors' language for their trauma, two reading approaches emerged. The first was as Wiesel anticipated. When memoirs were read at face value, readers tended to use their own known experiences to fill the void of their understanding. In Levi's words, they were "prone to assimilate [the Holocaust experience] to those "related" ones, as if the hunger at Auschwitz were the same as that of someone who has skipped a meal" (128). But this form of identification is an "illicit 'grasping' and 'assimilation' of Holocaust survivor testimony" (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 28), as it dilutes the suffering unique to the circumstances of the Holocaust. Eva Hoffman warns that mistaking this sort of "facile 'identification'" for

"serious imaginative engagement" has widespread consequences on the cultural memory of the Holocaust (171). She writes,

> [t]he sheer quantity of productions around this atrocity, the familiarization of horror through the reiteration of images and formulaic phrases, makes it available for increasingly glib perceptions and representations. Our contemporary culture sweeps up difficult ideas with great ease and churns them into something smooth and palatable. […] For the millions of visitors wending their way each year through sites of calamity—the Holocaust museums, the concentration camps, the former slave quarters—the possibilities for easy sentiment are all too readily available. (171)

If witnesses continue to "familiarize the Holocaust's meaning by absorbing them into the framework of our own mundane miseries" (171), Hoffman cautions that rather than closing the gap between witnesses in the present and the events of the past, these trivialised versions make it even easier to dissipate the atrocity of the Holocaust in time.

The second reading approach developed in response to the first. In a bid to avoid 'easy identification' with the Holocaust survivors and risk trivialising their suffering, trauma critic, Naomi Mandel, notes that the most ethical response to the intangibility and inaccessibility of the survivors' trauma was to describe it as "unspeakable" ("Rethinking" 9). She explains, "evoking language's limits is often invested with an ethical injunction" (6), "one directed not at the object of speech but at the speaker: don't speak the unspeakable, for to do so is to violate the integrity of historical truth, to desecrate the memory of the victims, to perpetuate the survivor's pain" (209). With this approach, "the limits of language, of representation, of comprehension, and of thought" "is wielded to simultaneously assert the compelling fact of historical victimisation and to safeguard the inviolability of the victim's (or victims') pain, simultaneously articulating the *presence* of suffering and the *absence* of its voice" (9). Over time, this has led to a convenient argument that 'since there appears to be no language for it, language is therefore insufficient to account for the trauma of the Holocaust'.

Yet, in light of the survivors' desire to pass on memories of their suffering to the next generation, this second approach, whilst its intentions are noble, falls short as well. Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* highlights the

detrimental consequences of using 'silence' as an ethical approach to bearing witness. Written more than 50 years after *Five Chimneys,* her memoir takes on a distinctly different tone from Lengyel's. Whilst also narrating the factual events that led to her imprisonment and survival in Auschwitz, with the distance in time, Klüger is able to juxtapose these recollections with her reflections about the interiority of her experience. For instance, after she recounts her traumatic experience in the cattle car to Auschwitz, she admits, "I have just described an unforgettable moment in my life, and yet I hardly ever get the chance to speak of it. It doesn't fit the framework of social discourse" (Klüger 93). She pointedly states,

> after I had written this, while in Germany, I visited friends and we talked about claustrophobia. People mentioned incidents where they had gotten stuck and described feelings of panic or near panic. […] And meanwhile I had this transport to Auschwitz on my mind, but didn't contribute it, because if I had, it would have effectively shut up the rest of the company. They would have been bothered, troubled, sympathetic, and thoroughly uncomfortable. There would have been no further discussion of the way space affects us, which had been our subject. They would have resented me as a spoilsport. It had been an occasion for reminiscing, but there are limits. And so my childhood falls into a black hole. (93)

Whilst not actively resisted or shut down, Klüger intuits an unspoken but clearly demarcated line that dictates when and where it is socially appropriate for her to speak honestly about her past. As her experience of claustrophobia is undeniably unlike her contemporaries' accounts—given that theirs are unlikely to be layered with torture and coercion—she assumes it would be selfish for her to "reminisce" about it. By contributing an experience that is not easily identified with, she imagines that not only will her contemporaries not know how to respond, they would deem her a "spoilsport" for bringing a halt to the conversation. Poignantly, the ease with which she foresees what will happen if she were to speak indicates that this is a response with which she is familiar.

One could argue that since the survivors' experiences are not commonly shared ones, her contemporaries simply cannot be expected to know how to respond appropriately. Yet, it does not negate the fact that the silence of her listeners, who do not even attempt to engage her when she does try to speak, perpetuates a cycle of

deeper silence. After all, the problem here is not that Klüger does not have the words to describe her experience—she is clearly able to reflect about the cattle car ride with an interiority that is not present in Lengyel's memoirs. But, as she demonstrates, her repeated experience of not being engaged eventually dissuades her from sharing altogether. As a result, these accounts of deep suffering continue to remain unfamiliar to general society and outside of the space of known human experience. In all likelihood, this will continue to guarantee the absence of a framework for bearing witness to survivors of the Holocaust.

Klüger's reflections add another layer of complexity to the process of narrative transmission. It is not merely, as my reading of *Five Chimneys* demonstrates, that traumatic memory creates gaps in a memoirist's account, or, as Wiesel agitates over, that it is difficult to find the right language even if a survivor wanted to speak to this trauma. The success of narrative transmission depends also on whether there are witnesses to receive these stories. In the absence of proper witnesses, Klüger's cattle car experience is thrice isolated: first by the fact that it is not a commonly shared experience, especially given that many of the survivors would have passed on by the early 2000s, and the fact that she is not in the company of other Holocaust survivors; second by the fact that there is an unspoken awareness that society would prefer not to listen to her disturbing Holocaust memories; finally by her choice to yield to this silent expectation and *not* share it. Thus, for Klüger, her memoir becomes a significant voice by which she reclaims a space to speak freely about her experience and to have it included in societal discourse. As she offers her reflections about the evening, she is free to insert her story into the conversation as she would have wanted to speak of it in person, and place a story of the Holocaust side by side with an ordinary and commonplace social event. Her memoir becomes a space for her story to be included as part of human experience, her narrative holding the impossible in inextricable tension—how the everyday can exist alongside the incomprehensible, how a self can negotiate between two irreconcilable extremes that are trying to be consolidated in one mind and one memory. In doing so, her memoir performs the very thing she longs for: it creates a narrative structure that includes her experience that was previously excluded. Its narrative form implicitly reveals a hope that even if she was not able to have her ideal witnesses in her lifetime, a reader who recognises its significance will offer her an ethical gesture of belated acknowledgement of the suffering that she has endured.

In this comparison between memoirs, I have briefly traced how the development of Holocaust memoirs has influenced the various approaches in which narrative transmission has taken place over the years. A historian's approach was relevant in the years right after the war, as memoirs like Lengyel's offered explicit descriptions about the events that happened at Auschwitz and aided in the pursuit of justice for victims of the Third Reich. This approach, however, shaped a collective memory of the Holocaust that focused more on its external events, rather than the interiority of the survivors' trauma. As survivors' memoirs began to be more self-conscious about their need to articulate interior experiences, trauma theory offered a way to include that which had previously been neglected. But when these writers also expressed the difficulties of communicating their experiences in language, readers tended to perform a reading of interiority either by over-identifying or deducing that trauma was unspeakable.

Respecting the "limits of representation" may have been an ethical approach at one point in time (Mandel, "Rethinking" 13), when witnesses did not yet have the knowledge of the way the Holocaust had turned the world on its head, and when survivors needed more time to make sense of their own experiences in order to give their witnesses that information. But, as Ernst van Alphen explains,

> Sometimes there are situations or events—and the Holocaust is prototypical for such situations—that are the occasion of "experiences" that cannot be expressed in the terms that language (or, more broadly, the symbolic order) offers *at the moment*. […] Representation is not a static, timeless phenomenon, of which the (im)possibilities are fixed once and forever. For every language user, representation is a historically and culturally specific phenomenon. Discourses, whether literary, artistic or not, are changeable and transformable. (26)

As memoirists like Klüger have demonstrated, the claim that the Holocaust is unspeakable is no longer sufficient. The increase in knowledge of the Holocaust coupled with the distance in time from the event have helped some survivors discover a framework that once eluded them, to make sense of their traumas belatedly. If the voluminous number of memoirs published since the end of World War II is any indication of their attempts to speak, and the transition from live to narrative memory renders their words all we have of their experiences, literary trauma critics must find an approach to read these memoirs in a way that listens to the survivors' voices.

The Dissolution of the Jewish World and its Reconstruction in *Night*

In this section, I return to the central problem that Elie Wiesel faced, in terms of finding the right language to communicate his experiences. Wiesel's experience of the dissolution of his world is right at the core of meaning making. Decades later, on his last visit to the grounds of Auschwitz and Auschwitz Birkenau for a documentary, *Auschwitz Death Camp*, he explains that the trauma of experiencing such a perversion of humanity never quite allowed him to recover a sense of interior coherence, "In those times, it was human to be inhuman. I have seen so many things in my life. I still don't grasp it. It must have some meaning. *What does it mean?*" (emphasis mine). One of the searches for meaning is, as I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden propose in *The Meaning of Meaning*, to determine "the place of anything in a system" (186). Or, as van Alphen puts it,

> We experience events not as isolated happenings […] We experience events from the perspective of narrative frameworks in terms of which these events can be understood as meaningful. When somebody has passed a final exam, the meaning of this event is derived from an anticipation of the events that are expected to follow: further study, jobs, a career. When somebody dies, it is a dreadful event, exactly because all expectation of coming events is now closed off. Death gets its negative meaning from this lack of a narrative framework that makes it possible to anticipate future events. From a narrative point of view, it is exactly this impossibility of activating a narrative framework as an anticipation of coming events that characterizes Holocaust experiences" (33).

In the light of the above, Wiesel's words suggest that the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust, at least in part, lies in his inability to understand how it fits within the known spectrum of human experience, or, perhaps more precisely, his identity as a human being. In order to determine the significance of any event to oneself, to the "I", one has to assume that the "I" exists and is acknowledged as human. Thereafter, events that occur become known and acquire their meaning in relation to the self, first in terms of the individual's narrative (how the individual catalogues this event in relation to the other events in his or her life), and second in terms of the individual's cultural context (the value that society places on the particular event). In other words,

they become part of the 'human experience' because they happened *to* a human being. But when the assumption of the "I", the affirmation of one's existence as a human being, is no longer the starting point of one's experience—when "it was human to be inhuman"—the attempt to find the meaning of the event in relation to the self becomes a paradox: how can the experience of not being regarded as human be part of the human experience; how does an experience designed to erase one's identity be significant to one's identity? How does one begin to narrativise an event that does not begin with "I" when the very structure of narratives of self is to begin with "I"?

As Wiesel reflects on how the pre-Holocaust definitions of words are now irrelevant, he realises that the only way to communicate the extent of the suffering he endured is to "invent a new language" to "rehabilitate and transform words betrayed and perverted by the enemy" ("Preface" 7), and demonstrate the layers of new meaning that the words came to bear to the prisoners in Auschwitz. His memoir becomes a way of reasserting that which was denied to him in the camp, an attempt to legitimise his past in language and reconstruct the self that was at the cusp of being extinguished. In this section, I, as reader, work alongside Wiesel's intent to discover a "new language" to articulate his suffering in Auschwitz and explore how to bear witness to his memoir, *Night*, in a way that draws attention to the story of his trauma. I perform more thoroughly what I had begun to demonstrate in my reading of Lengyel's *Five Chimneys* and Klüger's *Still Alive*, that is, an examination of the tracing and analysis of textual patterns, and an exploration of the construction of narrative form.

As a result of historians' wariness of "the potential displacement of hard history by its novelistic versions", there has tended to be a stigma against the "perceived softness in [the] literary reconstruction" of the Holocaust (Young 6). The 'fictionality' required in constructing a narrative appears to give it a propensity to distort the accurate facts of the event. However, without diminishing the value of reading memoirs to discover the historical actuality of Holocaust events, I argue that a literary approach supplements our reading of memoirs by preserving the affective import of the trauma survivors experienced. An examination of the narrative strategies of the memoirs—the way in which they convey the survivors' emotive experience, and how they create their emotive effects on the reader—makes it possible for a reader-witness to apprehend *different* truths about the reality of their imprisonment. As James Goodwin highlights, in writing memoirs,

> the autobiographer commonly uses the same techniques of fiction and drama to reshape personal experience into meaningful narrative. In rendering places and people from the past, even when it is possible to revisit them, the autobiographer often applies imaginative and metaphoric coloration in order to bring them to life. When, as in many cases, conversation cannot be recalled in detail, the autobiographer creates dialogue to recreate the actuality of the past. (12–13)

The hasty conclusion that this "coloration" causes the narrative to be 'false' or 'inaccurate' overlooks other valuable qualities that the survivors' written experience provides. The inescapable fact that "memory reconstructs and recreates" (12) provides testimony for another kind of, albeit less quantifiable but no less valid, truth. On the one hand, it calls attention to "the inevitable variance in perceiving and representing these facts, witness by witness, language by language, culture by culture" (Young 32), the different modes and methods that survivors have relied on to make sense of their experience, and the narrative mechanisms that can be employed to heal from extreme suffering (I return to this point later in the discussion). On the other, an approach that examines the construction of these memoirs can also bring to the surface what *has not* been able to be reconstructed and articulated. As a reader reads with "an eye to gaps, shifts, breaks, and ruptures" of the text (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 40), they become privy to the parts of the experience that, perhaps, require the presence of a witness to be belatedly constructed: the story of the survivors' interiority, the story of their trauma.

In the following section, I analyse the narrative components of Wiesel's memoir—the sequence in which he conveys the series of events that led to his imprisonment in Auschwitz, the representation of the location and characters, the narrative point of view, and various configurations of language and imagery. Where other critics argue that *Night* typically depicts Wiesel's "loss of faith in the face of evidence that God can do or will do nothing to prevent the Holocaust" (Schwarz 230), and conclude that "in the felt absence of divine justice or compassion, silence becomes the agency of an immune, murderous power that permanently transforms the narrator" (Seidman 1), I argue that the affective import of his memoir's form allows readers to bear witness to a far more complex portrayal of the effect of trauma on his faith. In other words, the "new language" that Wiesel creates comes through, in part, with the reader's reception of the effect of his words and how they shape the way she perceives

the meaning of its contents. By articulating as reader, as critic, what the text has created, she contributes to shaping a more comprehensive collective memory of the Holocaust and serves as a means of transmitting them onto the next generation of readers.

Wiesel's memoir *Night* depicts his traumatic imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps, Auschwitz and Buchenwald, as a 15-year-old boy, and traces the events that shatter his Orthodox Jewish childhood. In order to convey his traversal towards an extreme crisis that is tantamount to the absolute perversion of his known world, Wiesel marks the time leading up to and in the concentration camps by reference to significant Jewish festivals. The first event—the rounding up of his community into the first of the ghettos—begins around Passover in April 1944. Subsequently, the rest of his experiences in 1944 is marked by Shavuot in May, Rosh Hashanah in early September, and Yom Kippur in late September. As a young devout Jew, a boy who even went beyond the usual expressions of religious piety to explore *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism), his celebration of these festivals normally would have been both a tangible expression and reinforcement of a faith central to his identity and worldview. Traditionally, these annual festivals are celebrated through feasts 'divinely' commissioned in meticulous instruction in the Torah, a time for both "agricultural thanksgiving" to thank God for his provision, and "a recitation of [the Jews'] sacred history" (Burge 25). The major festivals especially, which require the Jewish men to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem, are mandated in the Torah (25), and "call up some aspect of Israel's "Great Story" of redemption" (73): Israel's liberation from Egypt (Passover), God's covenant with Israel as His chosen people on Mount Sinai (Shavuot), and Israel's survival in the desert for 40 years (Sukkot). Together with the other festivals (the High Holy Days and the minor feasts), they punctuate the Jewish calendar year in a steady rhythm and form a pulse that kept the Jewish collective identity alive, "a primary way to express covenant renewal, as the people sat at table with God to reaffirm the bonds of obligation and kinship" (Juengst 77). However, in *Night*, references to the festivals serve a far more tragic purpose. They become a reference point for Wiesel's former world, and heighten the contrast between what they were supposed to signify or how they were supposed to be celebrated, and the horrific torture to which the Jews are subjected in the concentration camps. While the Holocaust is indisputably a crime against humanity in general, the utter disparity between his past and present offers his readers a more nuanced

apprehension of how the Holocaust was traumatic, specifically, for a young man of staunch Jewish faith.

Passover & Shavuot: Observing a World Turned on Its Head

Night begins with the distortion of Passover. Although not the first festival of the Jewish or Gregorian New Year, Passover is the first feast on record that the ancient Israelites had together as a community. This simple meal was originally eaten the night before God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (*The Complete Tanakh* Exod. 12.11), on the evening that God 'passed over' the homes of the Israelites to kill only the firstborn sons of the Egyptian homes during the tenth plague (Exod. 12.21–27). This demonstration of God's power frightened the Egyptians and led to them chasing the Israelites out of their country (Exod. 12.29–32). The Israelites finally emerged as a free people (Exod. 12.40–41, 50), on their way to the Promised Land that God swore to give them as Abraham's offspring over 400 years ago (Gen. 15.13–16). Passover is ritually commemorated every year with the eating of unleavened bread (along with an unblemished one-year-old male lamb and bitter herbs) (Exod. 12.14–17), as a symbol of remembrance for the way God liberated the ancient Israelites and led them out of Egypt so quickly that they did not even have time to make bread with yeast, which would otherwise have required the bread to rise overnight before being ready to eat (Exod. 12:39).

However, in *Night*, Passover in 1944 is a cruel reversal of the spirit behind this first feast. Rather than waiting in suspense for their liberation from their oppressors like their ancestors, the Jews in Sighet helplessly witness the invasion of German troops in their city. Wiesel portrays Passover as being underscored by thick fear of their oppressors,

> My mother was busy in the kitchen. The synagogues were no longer open. People gathered in private homes: no need to provoke the Germans. […] We drank, we ate, we sang. The Bible commands us to rejoice during the eight days of celebration, but our hearts were not in it. We wished the holiday would end so as not to have to pretend. (*Night* 10)

The first thing the Germans disrupt is the Jews' ability to worship freely and meaningfully, foreshadowing the way they usurp God as the defining authority over the Jews in the time to come. Hence, the eating of the unleavened bread becomes

particularly incongruous on this Passover. Rather than commemorating the speed with which God delivers their Jewish ancestors, it appears to signify an empty promise as the Jews can only helplessly witness the rapid dissolution of their known world. On the seventh day of Passover, after "the Germans arrested the leaders of the Jewish community", "everything happened very quickly. The race toward death had begun" (10). No longer in control of their own lives, the Jews are now forced onto the fast-track towards captivity in the ghettos and eventually in Auschwitz. Furthermore, unlike the way Egyptians piled gold onto the Israelites after the very first Passover, as a desperate bribe to leave quickly (*The Complete Tanakh* Exod. 12.35–36), Wiesel's family is robbed of theirs. He recalls that "the Hungarian police burst into every Jewish home in town: a Jew was henceforth forbidden to own gold, jewelry, or any valuables" (Wiesel, *Night* 10–11). In handing their family heirlooms over to the authorities, the symbols of their heritage and legacy are stolen and mark the way the events during this Passover are at work to erase the traces of their existence from history.

Yet, amidst this period of enormous upheaval, the preparation of food and the eating of meals with the family, both during the ordinary days and on critical Jewish occasions, remain a firm constant. The image of his mother "being busy in the kitchen" (10) becomes a sight that Eliezer can count on despite the tumultuous changes that summer. When they first receive word about their deportation, Eliezer sees the women get to work immediately, "boiling eggs, roasting meat, preparing cakes" (15). When they reach the first ghetto, he recalls that "despite her fatigue, my mother began to prepare a meal" (20). In the face of such uncertainty, the women respond by performing the most commonplace of tasks for obvious reasons: they need to sustain their families. The consistency of their food preparation becomes a way of meeting the community's deeper hunger for normalcy, a way of preserving a sense of stability despite their increasingly troubling circumstances.

Furthermore, their persistence in eating the Passover meal, even though they "wished the holiday would end so that they did not have to pretend" (10), and, later, their observance of the Sabbath by sitting down "to the traditional Friday night meal" (21), even though they eat in silence the evening before being deported, reflect an unassailable commitment to their belief and hope in God for salvation. In his study of the relationship between food and memory, anthropologist Jon Holtzman posits that food is "such a powerful and diffuse locus of memory" because "the sensuality of

eating transmits powerful mnemonic cues, principally through smells and tastes" (373). By consuming the same meal from the first Passover night especially, the act of remembering is not merely restricted to being a cognitive activity—potentially distant and removed from them. Instead, the past is affectively and viscerally brought into the present, enabling the Jews' physical bodies to re-live the sensations that their ancestors would have experienced on that first night as they waited for God to liberate them. This physical re-enactment of the past reminds them of their tangible need for God, God's subsequent ability to meet them above and beyond their expectations, and, thus, His worthiness of their continued devotion and faith. And in the circumstances of 1944, God's deliverance is once again a literal necessity, not mere spiritual sentiment, and the Wiesels' partaking of Passover becomes an expression of a deep-seated longing to experience a miracle again in their time.

However, the reference to the next feast, Shavuot, only accentuates the dissolution of their world. Shavuot, meaning 'oaths', commemorates the day seven weeks after Passover when God gave the Israelites the ten commandments on Mount Sinai: the blueprint of what would constitute a civilised Jewish society. The giving of the law and the people's acceptance of it marked the covenant between God and His people, where He would protect and provide for them if they lived by His ordinances (Zeligs 174–176). After the Israelites were liberated from Egypt and were making their way through the desert to the Promised Land of Canaan, God honoured His part of the covenant by providing them with "bread", or *manna*, that fell from the sky (*The Complete Tanakh* Exod. 16.4; 14; 15). The Israelites were instructed to collect as much as they needed for the day but not to keep any of it overnight, as it would spoil (Exod. 16.17–20). However, on the sixth day of the week, the eve of the Sabbath, they were to gather a double portion. No manna would fall on the Sabbath day itself, the stipulated day of rest, to teach the Israelites to trust God for his provision (Exod. 16.22–26). Shavuot is significantly celebrated as a Sabbath, where the Jews offer two loaves of leavened bread to God in remembrance of the double portion of manna that God provided for them in the desert so they would not have to gather food on the Sabbath day (Witty 159). Significantly,

> manna was provided in the absence of anything else. The Israelites were accustomed to deriving their food from crops and animals raised in accordance with the normal functions of the physical cosmos. Their nourishment was the result of certain predictable interactions involving

> soil, seed, sun, and reproduction. […] The Exodus from Egypt changed all that. The normal methods of obtaining food were no longer available. The mercy of God was clearly the only escape from starvation. (Post and Turner 57)

In feeding his people "with a *bread that they did not know* […] a mystery" (55), God used manna as a "surface manifestation of substance beyond" (55), as a sign that reinforced that they had been "the recipients of God's hospitality, the guests of God who have been fed by God's own hand" (Juengst 29). As such, the provision of food—particularly bread—is fundamental to the Jewish sense of identity and religious heritage. The presence and partaking of food during the feast of Shavuot thus evokes a powerful reminder of their faith: they belong to a chosen people who have a history of being nourished by miraculous provision.

But this is a festival Eliezer's family is not able to celebrate because their hometown-turned-ghetto is liquidated and the Jews are transported out to Auschwitz two weeks before Shavuot. They are chased out of their homes with derogatory commands from the Hungarian police, "Faster! Faster! Move, you lazy good-for-nothings!" (Wiesel, *Night* 19), and with inordinate violence, as the police "used their rifle butts, their clubs to indiscriminately strike old men and women, children and cripples" (16). They are no longer under laws designed to promote the welfare of their relationship with God and community, but are cascaded into a world governed by utter lawlessness, one that would only escalate in the concentration camps. Furthermore, before his expulsion from the ghetto, Eliezer glimpses a "platter of dough waiting to be baked" on the table of one of the emptied houses (20), hauntingly signifying the two loaves that will not be baked for Shavuot that year and foreshadowing the absence of rest or provision during their imprisonment. He also sees a "half-finished bowl of soup" in that same kitchen (20), a bitter foretaste of how the Jews will have less than half of what they need to eat. And as "Saturday, the day of rest, was the day chosen for [their] expulsion" (21), the authorities also force the Jews to violate the Sabbath, an offence tantamount to a death sentence for the orthodox Jew. The perverse use of the synagogue as a holding station prior to the Jews' deportation to Auschwitz also forces them to participate in its defilement; when they were "forbidden to go outside, people relieved themselves in a corner" (22). Trapped within it, and by their ethnic and religious heritage, they are a 'chosen' people once again, this time not for salvation but for torture. The synagogue, the holy place of transaction between God and his chosen

people, is ironically referred to as a "railroad station: baggage and tears" (22), one that does not transport them any closer to heaven but is hauntingly indistinguishable from the platform where they will begin their infamous cattle car journeys to Auschwitz. Rather than celebrating Passover and Shavuot as two of the three annual feasts that require the Jewish men to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem to present themselves before God, their journey here is not one to the Holy land, but to hell.

Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur

The contrast between the religious significance of eating food during the Jewish festivals and the horrific reality that the boy, Eliezer, is plunged into becomes a way for the reader to appreciate the depth of the traumatic evisceration that the Holocaust brings to the Jewish world. As the feasts of Passover and Shavuot have demonstrated, bread has a threefold significance. First, it is "food that makes subsistence possible" (Frunză 48), and the literal means by which an individual is kept alive. Secondly, it is seen as "a gift or power from God" (48), a supernatural sign that affirms a Jewish person's identity as one whom God has chosen to protect and provide for. Third, it is "an element in the symbolism that structures community ties" (48), a key feature in the ritual by which the Jewish community reaffirm their collective identity and become one people. However, in the Nazi concentration camps, as the men are fed just enough to be constantly starving, steadily dispossessing them of their physical and psychological strength, the second and third layers of rich meaning that bread has come to symbolise for the Jews are also steadily stripped away and overwritten with something far more sinister.

Between Shavuot and the next key feast, Rosh Hashanah,[15] the absence of bread—and, thereby, God's supernatural provision—causes a steady loss of Eliezer's belief in God as the central organising force of his life. The consistency of eating around the table with family is usurped by the consistent *need* to eat. For Eliezer, "the bread, the soup—those were my entire life" (Wiesel, *Night* 52). He is reduced to being "nothing but a body. Perhaps even less: a famished stomach. The stomach alone was measuring time" (52): "in the mornings: black coffee. At midday: soup […] at six o'clock in the afternoon: roll call. Followed by bread with something" (43). His conditions reduce him to this singular need, forcing him to be completely dependent

[15] Roughly a period of three and a half to four months.

on the Nazis' timetable instead of the substance of his faith to survive. This re-orientating of his sense of time, a symbol of the means by which he gets his bearings, signals his inevitable and non-consensual transfer of his submission to God to the dehumanising power of his captors.

The men's constant hunger becomes so consuming that it eats away at other parts of their humanity. Now in such short supply, food becomes the equivalent of unparalleled power and the gateway to inhumane exploitation. Eliezer's tent leader, a man with "an assassin's face, fleshy lips, hands resembling wolf's paws", "liked children" and "had bread brought for them, some soup and margarine" to groom them for sexual assault (48). Eliezer then explains this behaviour in parentheses, "([i]n fact, this affection was not entirely altruistic; there existed here a veritable traffic of children among homosexuals, I learned later)" (48). The chilling portrayal of the description of food for the children at the fore, and the grotesque exploitation of their vulnerability relegated to a side note, demonstrates the extent to which his starvation has desensitised him. Eliezer simply has no capacity to be appalled by or contest the depravity around him, he only has eyes for food. And what becomes even more troubling is the fact that without food, the men are steadily reduced to being similarly predatory themselves. During an air raid, the prisoners are commanded to stay in their blocks, with the knowledge that the SS will shoot anyone found outside. However, on one occasion, the men saw that

> [n]ext to the kitchen, two cauldrons of hot, steaming soup had been left untended. Two cauldrons of soup! Smack in the middle of the road, two cauldrons of soup with no one to guard them! A royal feast going to waste! Supreme temptation! Hundreds of eyes were looking at them, shining with desire. Two lambs with hundreds of wolves lying in wait for them. Two lambs without a shepherd, free for the taking. But who would dare? (59)

Here the exclamations, a string of hyperboles, sounding almost comic and exaggerated in their enthusiasm. Given how Wiesel "refused to touch" the soup despite how "terribly hungry" he was on his first day (42), we know it must be unpalatable. But tragically, there is nothing overdone or ironic about the description of the soup being a "royal feast" and "supreme temptation!". Instead, Eliezer's words depict the men's reality: they are so starved that they covet and cherish even swill. The description of the men as "hundreds of eyes … hundreds of wolves", no longer human, "shining with

desire" for the soup echo the description of the sexual predator, completely governed by his basest instincts to the point of perversion, and unleash the predatory nature the men will have towards food. It becomes, in their eyes, something to be hunted down and kill for. The comparison is troubling, as one instinctively wants to begin justifying the differences between the sexual predator and these men who could potentially kill to eat. The former's depravity is a choice, an exercise of his autonomy, whereas the Jewish men are subjected to torture that destroys their rational cognition against their will. The point of origin of this depravity makes, of course, all the difference in culpability, but the similarity in description confronts the reader with the troubling reality that the Holocaust *did* create versions of men who did unthinkable things to survive, something that Eliezer will later experience. To deny that is to undermine the appalling violence and psychological trauma inflicted on the inmates that preceded the erosion of their ethical consciousness.

To further illustrate this point, given the state of the men's hunger, perhaps the most astonishing thing is how much time is spent merely *looking* at the cauldrons of soup. Had they been animals, and truly savage, the soup would have long since been devoured. But, as Eliezer explains simply, "[f]ear was greater than hunger" (59), one so deep that it restrains even a consuming starvation. Even when a man sneaks out of the block, "crawling snakelike in the direction of the cauldrons" (59), it does not give the others courage to do so. Instead, they live vicariously, "hundreds of men were crawling with him, scraping their bodies with his on the stone" (59). The animal imagery here is unmistakeably poignant. If the reader is tempted to feel pity that the men have to behave like an animal to get food, the crueller fact is that they would have been more likely to be fed had they been animals and not Jewish men. Their fear forces them to be human enough to not give in to their instincts and satisfy their hunger, but their hunger constantly consumes them with their basest need. It is an unconscionable tension to which they are subjected, its brutality comparable only to the way it is dissipated with the expected gunshot to the man's back, just when he reaches the rim of the cauldron. The gunshot forces him to "thrust his head toward the still steaming liquid", so that he dies with his face "stained by the soup" but no longer alive to savour it (60). The ironic nature of the man's death characterises the pointlessness and cruelty of the entire episode, a microcosm of the men's trauma and psychological destruction in Auschwitz.

The Nazis' assertion of absolute power over the Jewish men is not met without a fight. Under these tyrannical circumstances, the act of eating becomes a small gesture of defiance. After he sees a man shout, "'Long live liberty! My curse on Germany! My curse! My —'" just before he dies by hanging for stealing during an air raid (62), Eliezer finds that "the soup tasted better than ever" that evening (63). He almost relishes his soup, as he is filled with the satisfaction of witnessing someone 'fight' back. Eating keeps him alive for another day, a gratifying act of resistance against the Nazis who want him dead. However, this scene is juxtaposed with one where he witnesses a young boy, along with two adults, hanged for sabotage of the electric plant. Whilst the two men died instantly, the child is not heavy enough to pull down on the noose to break his neck and has to suffocate to death slowly. As the men are forced to watch him suffer, Eliezer hears one man asking,

> 'For God's sake, where is God?'
> And from within me, I heard a voice answer:
> 'Where He is? This is where—hanging here from this gallows …'
> That night, the soup tasted of corpses." (64–65)

The revulsion that Eliezer experiences after he witnesses this particular hanging is so pervasive that it even appears to defile his food, symbolically decimating his attempt to use the act of eating as a form of resistance. The trauma of Auschwitz reveals itself in part here: just as Eliezer dares to think he has found the tiniest way to preserve his sense of self within this system, and rewrite the act of eating into a form of defiance against his captors, this event catches him in a double bind. Now, if he eats to 'celebrate' his own survival after witnessing an event so vile, it would be as morally foul as consuming soup made out of the dead bodies of the Holocaust.

Given how strongly he feels about eating being dishonouring of the dead, had Eliezer really been in a position to assert his autonomy, he could have chosen not to eat. His act of rejecting food from the Nazis could then still have been a form of protest, his way of refusing to be complicit with those who committed this atrocity. That way, bearing witness to the death of this young boy, the more humane thing to do, would have taken precedence over making a statement about his imprisonment. He would have been able to preserve a small sense of his moral code and his autonomy to choose. However, regardless of how badly it 'tastes' to do so, he cannot help but eat "the soup [that] tasted of corpses" and stomach the gruesome deaths of his people without protest (65). In his deep starvation, he simply has no capacity to choose

otherwise. The second event exposes the extent to which his rewritten meaning of eating is just an illusion. Eating was, as it had always meant in Auschwitz, the sole means of his survival, and one of the things he would do, even at the cost of his moral code. And as he receives his sustenance from the ones who perpetrate this inhumanity, eating further reinforces the prevailing and indelible narrative of how dependent he is on his captors for his survival. This second event shatters whatever notions he had about finding a way to preserve his sense of self in Auschwitz. The stripping of his autonomy is so thorough that he does not even get to pretend that he has the ability to determine the meaning of his own actions in his mind, as the conditions that his captors have created confront him with the emptiness of his attempted narrative almost immediately. He is a prisoner of a system that he will never succeed in overthrowing. The first of what food used to symbolise, that which "makes subsistence possible" (Frunză 48), an affirmation of his identity as one of God's chosen people, is undermined here and is now paradoxically a consumption of death: the death of his autonomous self.

By Rosh Hashanah (the Day of Remembrance, also the head of the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the second symbol that food represented, "a gift or power from God" (48), is also erased. The first of the High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah, the "Day of Remembrance" was "understood in terms of memory in Jewish tradition" (Harris 51). That is, it is a time for *both* God and the Jews to remember "creation, human deeds, the covenant with the ancestors, the Israelites following God in the wilderness, and the present community" (49). On the one hand, the liturgical ritual implores God to remember the covenant He made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai,

> The Covenant was made in the past but it is of the present and is to continue into the future. God is called upon to remember Israel because the one that God "does not remember has no existence". Asking God to remember is, therefore, Israel's plea for existence, because Israel's existence depends on God. (54)

Significantly, the Hebraic word for 'remember', *zakhor*, also means "to begin an action" or "to proceed to do something" (51). The imploring of God to remember the covenant is also thus the implicit hope that, in doing so, He will continue to uphold the protection and provision that He promised them. On the other hand, as the Jews recall their own history and the way they would have perished if not for God's miraculous

provision, it is also expected that they would be moved to repentance and obedience in the future (55). As the traditional liturgy rehearses the past in the events of "Creation, the Binding of Isaac, the Sinai Assembly, Prophetic Words, and the Destruction of the Temple", speak to the present "Ten Days of Penitence and Bending to God's Will", and look forward to "Judgement Day, the Ingathering of Israel, and the Revival of the Dead" (51–52), it evokes the continuity of the Jewish faith through its ability to connect time and space.

But by this point in the year, to Eliezer, God is just as ineffectual as a boy who cannot even shorten his own suffering by dying by the noose. Their prayers for deliverance have been in vain; God's inability to save them literally causes them to be burnt out of existence. As the prisoners recite the liturgy in the camp, Eliezer's inward recollection of his religious history is interlaced with a bitter and furious narrative about the suffering of his present day,

> Why, but why would I bless Him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves? Because He kept six crematoria working day and night, including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in His great might, He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many other factories of death? How could I say to Him: Blessed be Thou, Almighty, Master of the Universe, who chose us among all the nations to be tortured day and night, to watch as our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? Praised be Thy Holy Name, for having chosen us to be slaughtered on Thine altar? (Wiesel, *Night* 67)

Unlike the original liturgy that links the past, present, and future, Eliezer's rewriting of the creation story does not connect the past and present to the future. He can only link his past to his present. As God has appeared to create only things that are determined to extinguish him and everyone he knows, he no longer has a framework whereby he can write his story in a way that enables the continuance of the faith and the people. To Eliezer, God, appearing to have forgotten His people, in fact, even appearing to be complicit in ensuring that His people are forgotten and erased, means that his sense of self is twice lost: first with not being seen as a human being by the Nazis, and second, by not being seen as worthy to be saved by God.

Hence, ten days after Rosh Hashanah, on Yom Kippur, the day designated to the collective asking of forgiveness through fasting, Eliezer refuses to participate in

the ritual. Although Yom Kippur is celebrated as the Sabbath of Sabbaths, a day that usually forbids fasting, on this holiest day, fasting is perceived as an act of worship where the Jews "simulate [their] own deaths in order to reawaken the spiritual self", and "focus on the transcendent values that guide [their] lives, rather than the material pleasures that, as ironic as it sounds, seem to consume [them]—including the visceral pleasures associated with eating" (Ryan 30). The posture of physical vulnerability that it incites "is an act of humility" to remember their need for God (17), as they wait on His mercy to be included in the Book of Life (Ross 191). The reality of their situation on this Yom Kippur is tragically ironic, as, in their excruciating starvation, there is nothing about his current predicament that is a simulation for death. And in feeling death so keenly, Eliezer is not driven towards God. Rather, the "visceral pleasures associated with eating" *is* what consumes him. In full disappointment of God, he refuses to fast. He writes,

> As I swallowed my ration of soup, I turned that act into a symbol of rebellion, of protest against Him. And I nibbled on my crust of bread. Deep inside me, I felt a great void opening. (Wiesel, *Night* 69)

In a final gesture of defiance and autonomy that he manages to scrounge for himself, eating consumes his belief in a just God, one who allegedly has the power to save him. Once again, the bread comes to him not as an act of grace but at insurmountable cost. Rather than reminding him of his religious history, and of God's divine provision as a source of strength, it only reinforces that God—once the centre of his world—is now dead. His final assertion of his self leaves him a shell of a person.

The Missing Sukkot, Hanukkah, Tu B'Shvat, Purim

Significantly, even though he continues to be a prisoner for another seven more months before being fully released, Eliezer makes no more references to any Jewish holiday or festival after Yom Kippur. His abandonment of the Jewish calendar cycle, one in which "the organizing center of the calendar is the mighty acts of God: Passover, Sinai, and the journey to the Promised Land" so that the story of salvation is retold and remembered within each cycle (Burge 22), reflects his rejection of a narrative orientated around God. By marking time with the Gregorian calendar instead, he leaves out Sukkot (the Festival of Booths) that would have been in October, Hanukkah (the Festival of Lights) in December, Tu B'Shvat (the New Year of the Trees) in the following January, and Purim (the Festival of Lots) in the

following February. All four festivals have to do with the celebration of life against the odds of the harsh natural elements and persecution. If naming the festivals previously accentuated how traumatically distorted his present is from his past, *not* naming them in the latter half of his memoir signifies the complete obliteration of any resemblance or tie his former life has with his present one. Their absence also signals the collapse of his psyche, as these markers of his past no longer hold any meaning or have any relevance in this traumatic world in which Wiesel finds himself. Instead, the three things that food would have symbolised in the Jewish culture is completely rewritten by the end of the memoir. Having already been subverted to signify the loss of the self and the death of God, it will lose its significance as "an element of the ritual life of the Jewish community" (Frunză 48). Rather, in their starvation, food becomes the very thing that turns the community against each other, even to the extent of sons killing their fathers just to eat their bread. The collapse of the final symbol, the most pivotal centre of their customs, reflect the extent of the Nazis' assault at the very heart of Jewish collective identity.

The absence of Sukkot and Hanukkah are intensely poignant: these two festivals being focused especially on celebrating the miracles that God performed for the Jews in their history. Sukkot, the final, "the most important and the most popular" pilgrimage festival (Juengst 79), celebrates the way God preserved the Israelites in their desert wandering whilst they dwelt in tents. The Israelites were commanded to "live in 'booths' or *sukkoth* during the celebration" (Burge 70), temporary shelters made from "wild branches of olive, myrtle, palm and other leafy trees" (70). As they "retell the story of desert life and the temptations and victories found there" (72), and by simulating the tents that the Israelites lived in during their time in the wilderness, the future generations of Jews would remember how God brought their ancestors out of Egypt (*The Complete Tanakh* Lev. 23:43). Since this festival coincided with the "formal end of the harvest year, it was also a time of celebration and revelry" as the people thanked God for the year's harvest (Burge 72). However, far from being protected and sheltered in their version of "booths", their blocks in the concentration camp, the winter upon them this Sukkot is brutal. They are ill-equipped for the harsh elements, "from the first hours of dawn, a glacial wind lashed us like a whip" (Wiesel, *Night* 70), mimicking the violent physical and emotional beatings that they constantly receive from the soldiers. The veterans' ironic taunt, "Now you'll really get a taste of camp!" (77), only accentuates his plight. In place of the feast, they consume only

suffering. The absent reference to this festival doubles the distance between his present world and his past. Now, it does not even exist in spoken memory, as though the promises of the past are so irrelevant they have long since been forgotten.

Subsequently, his reference to that period of Hanukkah as "Christmas and New Year", signals that this new world is one bereft of any light of hope in his world. Hanukkah commemorates the success of the Jewish resistance in overthrowing a near decade of anti-Semitism rule in 165 BC. The Greek ruler Antiochus IV had outlawed Jewish rituals, burnt the Holy scrolls and banned the Jewish festivals, and culminated his oppression of the Jews by desecrating their temple with the sacrifice of a pig on the holy altar (Burge 89). After the Maccabees recaptured the temple, and wanted to cleanse and rededicate it to God, they knew they had to let the menorah burn with holy oil for eight days (90). There was only enough oil for one day, but God miraculously allowed the oil to burn for eight (91). The festival remembers God's faithfulness in leading them to victory (Witty 359), the light symbolising a preservation of a sacred way of life.

However, in this final section of the memoir, the last vestige of a humane and recognisable world disappears. The already emaciated men are forced to evacuate Buna under unconscionable circumstances, in the thick of winter, without food for days, and running for fear of being shot by the SS if they "could not sustain the pace" (Wiesel, *Night* 85). These conditions render them incapable of emotion for each other, as "sons abandoned the remains of their fathers without a tear" (92). The desensitisation towards their own kin escalates in the following scene, when a German labourer throws the men a piece of bread during one of the stops the train makes. The men's predatory nature hinted at in the earlier parts of the memoir is realised in its entirety here, and the men go to "battle" over a few crumbs, "hurling themselves against each other, trampling, tearing at, and mauling each other. Beasts of prey unleashed, animal hate in their eyes. An extraordinary vitality possessed them, sharpening their teeth and nails" (101). The comparison of the men to animals is no longer a figure of speech, the viciousness of their actions not just rhetoric, when their need to eat finally overwhelms the light of human consciousness. As Eliezer witnesses an old man seize a piece of bread, he sees

> His eyes lit up, a smile, like a grimace, illuminated his ashen face. And was immediately extinguished. A shadow had lain down beside him. And this shadow threw itself over him, stunned by the blows, the old

> man was crying: "Meir, my little Meir! Don't you recognize me … You're killing your father … I have bread … for you too … for you too …" (101)

The metonymy of the human figure as "a shadow" both fittingly depicts the extent to which the man is now so diminished that he is only a trace of a person and the way he darkens the old man's delight. Ominously, a shadow is only cast when something solid comes in the way of a source of light. In this case, the only solid and substantial thing left is a tiny crust of bread, its presence darkening the last of their humanity beyond recognition. The incongruity between the size of the 'solid object'—barely a mouthful—and the extent of the darkness it calls up is completely illogical, but serves to illustrate the way the men have been broken down by their circumstances to the point of senselessness. If the reader's shock compounds when she realises that it is the old man's son, not a stranger, who beats him to death for the bread, it only reveals her assumption that certain ties are sacred enough to be untouched by this darkness. But she is quickly proven wrong. After the old man is beaten by his son,

> [h]e collapsed. But his fist was still clutching a small crust. But the other threw himself on him. The old man mumbled something, groaned, and died. Nobody cared. His son searched him, took the crust of bread, and began to devour it. He didn't get far. Two men had been watching him. They jumped him. Others joined in. When they withdrew, there were two dead bodies next to me, the father and the son. (101–102)

For one of the most devastating portrayal of the effects of the Holocaust in *Night*, Wiesel only offers a 'simple', factual recount of the event. But there is nothing simple about it. The short, purely descriptive passage contains the incident in a handful of sentences, indicating that it was over and done with in an instant. And this is possibly what is so shocking about it: committing an act of such magnitude—a son killing his father, two men killing the son, just for a piece of bread—takes no time at all, and is absent of any anguished deliberation that one would expect over the finality of taking another man's, much less one's father's, life. More incomprehensibly, "nobody cared". Their circumstances have rendered them completely desensitised to death; there is nothing the men will not do to preserve their own lives anymore.

Eliezer himself is not exempt from the dissolution of his own ethical conscience. His initially strong bond with his father steadily erodes over the year that

they spend in the various concentration camps. Throughout the memoir, Wiesel uses a symbol of the tree to depict the way he perceives his father as time passes. An iconic symbol in Jewish religion and culture, the Tree of Life speaks to the Jewish people's ability to 'bear fruit', create life, and ensure the continuity of its people (Waskow 17). Nature "is not inert" and "is presumed to have a longevity sufficiently extensive for it to survive both the tragedy and its protagonists" (Bardenstein 156). Trees are so valued in Jewish culture that a minor festival, Tu B'Shvat, is designated to celebrate the New Year of fruit-bearing trees every year (Ravnitsky 69). Aptly, when father and son first arrive in Auschwitz after the harrowing train ride from Sighet, Eliezer remarks that "we were withered trees in the heart of the desert" (Wiesel, *Night* 37). Although far from life-giving, there is solidarity in that description. Given that trees grow deep roots and are not easily shaken or disposed of, this symbol suitably coincides with how adamant Eliezer is not to be separated from his father when they first arrive (35). In keeping company with each other, he is hopeful that they would survive the drought of oppression. However, as the violence and starvation set in, and when Eliezer sees his father beaten by an SS guard for the first time, he recoils from defending his father. Afraid to be beaten as well, he only observes from a distance, "my father simply doubled over under the blows, but then he seemed to break in two like an old tree struck by lightning" (54). The "withered" tree, now broken, points to his father's subsequent deterioration. By the time the pair are evacuated from Buna and arrive in Buchenwald, Eliezer has little patience with his dying father. His father's "eyes were watery, his face the color of dead leaves" (107). Yet, he has no capacity to grieve.

In the last days of his incarceration, Eliezer sees his father as little more than dead weight. He resents the emotional energy it takes to coax a man who had "become childlike: weak, frightened, vulnerable" to live (105), energy that he could use to 'fight for [his] own survival, to take care of [himself] (106), and the fact that keeping his father alive deprives him of having "two rations of bread, two rations of soup" (111). Despite the shame and guilt he feels immediately after these thoughts, they are not enough to respond to his father calling for him in the middle of the night. Significantly, on the morning that would have been Tu B'Shvat in 1945,[16] "at dawn on January 29", Eliezer realises that his father has died during the night when he wakes

[16] See Jewish calendar: https://www.hebcal.com/hebcal/?year=1945;v=1;month=x;yt=G;nh=on;nx=on;vis=on;set=on;c=off

up and sees another man lying on his father's cot. He confesses that, "no prayers were said over his tomb. No candle lit in his memory" and only feels the liberty of being "free at last!" from the burden of caring for his father (112). In sharp contrast to the festival that they would have celebrated, the Feast of Fruits that signified new life and continuity, Eliezer's father is not granted the chance to 'live on' even in his son's memory. Eliezer's use of the Gregorian calendar here, rather than naming the festival that would have occurred on the day of his father's death, is a pointed incapacity to remember anything more than his present needs. Without the reference, he does not need to see the irony of the day of his father's death, and remember the promises of the past, and feel the depth of the betrayal and grieve over feeling God's abandonment. He can eat the bread that he has in hand in peace.

By the end of his imprisonment, food does not recall the kindred ties of a shared, collective identity. Food only recalls the self now, "with only one desire: to eat" (113). It is the new god that he is enslaved to, "our first act as free men was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. That's all we thought about. No thought of revenge, or of parents. Only of bread" (115). But it is not a god he serves without cost. The act of eating is now associated with guilt and shame, abandonment, and death, things that will continue to consume him for the rest of his life. It is a limited god, sustaining Eliezer only enough to open his eyes to the new world in which he must exist, "from the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. That look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me" (115). Everything that has happened in the entire year is distilled down to one thing, "that look in his eyes", a product of what his eyes have had to witness. Even the thing that testifies to the horrors of the Holocaust is nothing 'substantial', a memory, but something with the power to haunt him for the rest of his life.

The Word, The Bread, The Memory

In 1986, nearly 30 years after *Night* was published, Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace prize. He began his Nobel Lecture with a story, a Hasidic legend, about a great Rabbi who tried to quicken the Messiah's coming to save humanity from their immense suffering (Wiesel, "Noble Lecture" 139). As his punishment for interfering with history, the Rabbi, Besht, and his servant are both banished and have their religious knowledge erased from their memories. They forget all the litanies, how to pray, and every narrative form that could help the Besht "work a miracle" (139). As

the Besht implores his servant to remember, the servant cries that he too has forgotten everything, "except the alphabet" (140). But this is enough to save them. The Besht is overjoyed and exclaims, "Then what are you waiting for? Begin reciting the alphabet, and I shall repeat after you" (140). As they recite "at first in whispers, then more loudly, the Hebrew equivalent of the ABCs", "the Besht ultimately regained his memory and thus his powers" (140).

It is not difficult to see why this hopeful Hasidic legend resonates so powerfully with Wiesel. Just when it appears that the Rabbi and his servant have lost absolutely everything, they are saved, unexpectedly, by the most meagre and basic components of their existence. By the end of *Night*, the boy Eliezer is truly bereft of everything. It is no wonder that the last significant Jewish holiday of the year, Purim, goes unmentioned in *Night.* Purim, the holiday that marks the miraculous subversion of a holocaust during Queen Esther's time is completely irrelevant to the Holocaust in World War II. The absent story leaves in its wake a void that testifies to the way everything that Eliezer knows has been burnt up: his family, his faith in God, his belief in kinship and community, the religious frameworks through which he used to understand the world, and his sense of identity. The memoir ends abruptly, with no indication of how Eliezer will move forward from his experience, or that there will be any tangible continuation of this story.

Except, that is, we must remember that what we read in *Night* is a collection of words published nearly fifteen years after his liberation in 1958. The memoir, a belated creation of his 1944 experience, testifies not just to what he survived in the concentration camps but also reveals what has survived *with him* in the fourteen years after it. Although the boy Eliezer may have felt at the time that he had rejected his entire Jewish frame of reference and was determined to forget everything he knew about God, what proves to be left in his memory, what refuses to be burnt away, is not just—as he presumes when he looks in the mirror—the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust, but the most essential alphabet of his Jewish heritage, the Word of his childhood.

The fact that the first half of the memoir is written with reference to the Jewish calendar demonstrates that it is *not* a framework that Wiesel was able to forget completely. Instead, it becomes the cornerstone of the narrative structure of his memoir, that which he uses to rebuild a mental landscape that had almost been destroyed. Paradoxically, he has to remember it—the origins of his past—in order for

him to communicate how it was destroyed and testify to what he suffered at Nazi hands. Yet, critically, it is a framework that is, and has to be, only evoked in part. The narrative of the traditional Jewish festivals is no longer sufficient to contain the experiences that he endured during the concentration camps. The Holocaust's violent disruption of that narrative prevents him from using it directly, or in as straightforward a manner as he could prior to the events in 1944–1945 to account for his identity. Instead, what he shapes, and what his reader-witness brings to the surface as she traces his memoir in light of its artistry and literary form, is a new appropriation of this traditional framework. With it, he is able to account for how the concepts that once shaped his innermost being, which would have meant one thing in the past, now inevitably incorporate layers of new meaning. It is an old language reinvented, and made new.

Like the Word that taught him the first significance of bread, the Word that reminded him of his religious heritage whenever he ate bread, Wiesel uses words to inscribe a new layer of meaning that bread has after the Holocaust. After the Holocaust, the eating of the bread in the present must come to symbolise the divine provision that they first received *and* the traumatic absence of that provision in the six years of the Holocaust. By telling his story through an old symbol, one that evokes the origins of Jewish culture, Wiesel asserts that the Jews' ancient past, their primary way of knowing themselves and their identity, cannot be remembered separately from what they suffered in the Holocaust. Their origin story must be altered, so to speak, because, unlike the ancient Israelites, they are no longer the same people who knew what it meant to be unequivocally rescued from evil. Given the fact that the Holocaust does, in a way, become an origin story for the future generations of the survivors—it will always be in their history and part of their identity—Wiesel's altered symbol of bread in *Night* becomes a way of passing the memory of their collective past on, a way for future generations to reckon with both the cost and miracle of their existence. After all, the fact that they are able to eat bread in remembrance of the ones who died, conscious of the fact that the bread now means something more than what it used to in the traditional narrative, demonstrates that they are no longer eating as scavengers for their lives. They survived, and the ability to remember is also a sign that they are moving forward. As Wiesel says in his Nobel lecture, "memory served and saved Besht, and if anything can, it is memory that will save humanity" (140).

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"The origin of a story is always an absence" — Jonathan Safran Foer

The Second Generation Remembers

As though performing the gesture of receiving his father's memoir, Wiesel's son, Elisha Wiesel, writes the afterword, *My Father's Message* in the Commemoration edition of *Night*. The juxtaposition of the survivor's story with his son's response to that story fosters an impression of continuity from one generation to the next. The content, however, of Elisha Wiesel's afterword complicates this assumption. He opens by recalling his father speaking about his own death and pointing out that, when he dies, Elisha will find "specific instructions", ones pertaining to "all the things that need to be taken care of, all the things I want you to know" (117). But Elisha admits that no matter how thoroughly he looks, he cannot find them (117). The message intended becomes a message deflected, a sense of unfinished business. Elisha has instead to turn to the stories that shaped his father's life to imagine what this message could be, "I look for his message in the weekly Torah readings […] and I find him there. I see him in the great figures of Jewish history who fired his imagination" (117). Just as these stories provided ways for his father to bridge the various chasms of his thought life, they help Elisha manage his father's missing final words.

This search for the missing story plays an inordinate role in shaping both the social and personal identity of the second generation. As the children of those who survived the Holocaust, they have a specific and predetermined social identity, that is, the social role they were required to play in their community (Larson 59). They are to be both recipients and transmitters of their parents' impossible stories. But like the letter that Elisha cannot find, this story of their parents' past constantly eludes them. As Marianne Hirsch points out, it is not their own past that the second generation is trying to recall, but that of the "experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images and behaviors among which they grew up" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 205). Furthermore, as the survivors struggle with and act out their trauma after the Holocaust, the stories they 'tell' their children about their experiences are not coherent narratives of a "processed, mastered past" (Hoffman 34). Rather, they transmit their stories through "a chaos of emotion that emerged from their words" (9). The second generation thus, being once removed

from their parents' experiences, and receiving their stories only in affective fragments, find themselves in search of stories that they know exist but cannot quite grasp.

In order to ensure these stories are transmitted to future generations "who did not hear or receive testimony directly from the survivor" (Slodounik 37), the second generation has to find ways to "[adapt] what is heard into another narrative" (39). As Elisha discovers, borrowing from literature provides the second generation with a starting point to give order and "narrative shape to the surviving fragments of an irretrievable past" (Hirsch, "Postmemories in Exile" 666). The "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" ("Generation" 205) in these existing forms aid them in bridging the chasm between their present and a past that they can only know in part. These "sets of meanings, symbols" in literary fictions provide scripts that the second generation can use to begin putting their experiences into words, find identification with similar characters and discover a shared language to "recognize and converse with each other with a sense of mutual belonging" (Hoffman 28).

Significantly, even as Elisha Wiesel does his best to pore over the stories in which he might find his father, he cannot help but choose ones into which there is a place to project himself too. He writes,

> I see myself together with my father in the Akedah, the Binding of Isaac, a story, perhaps *the* story, of a father and son. As Isaac's life hangs in the balance while his father and God test each other, so too does mine. Abraham is a man who has seen entire cities destroyed by a judging God. And as he binds his own son, he contemplates the end of his line. My father sees his whole world consumed by flames. He cannot contemplate bringing another Jewish child into being. Can you feel my fate hang in the balance as Man and God judge each other and all of Creation? Up on the mountain, the knife is raised. And down in the darkness of the valley that is a survivor's life, my father decides I will not exist. (Elisha Wiesel, 118)

If only because his whole life has been shaped by the keen awareness that his very existence was, like Isaac's, on the cusp of being extinguished, and because the raised knife of his father's traumatic past constantly threatens to wound his present, Elisha's close reading of the account on Mount Moriah reflects an inadvertent impulse to also be seen. Even as he bears witness to his father's "whole world consumed by flames" (118), he implores his reader to bear witness to *him*. "Can *you* feel my fate hang in the

balance", he asks, as he grapples with the precariousness of his own existence. His cry for a witness, and his search for a narrative form that can accommodate his story as well as his father's, reflects a need to make sense of who he is and have his life held together by something more coherent than the wounds of his father's past.

Elisha's reading of this scene on Mount Moriah exemplifies how the elusiveness of their parents' stories is not the only thing that complicates the second generation's attempt to fulfil their social responsibility. Alan Berger reminds the reader that even as the second generation attempts to bear witness to their parents' past, they are also the ones "most intimately" experiencing the Holocaust's "continuing effects" (45). As a consequence of being parented by survivors who were still psychologically trapped in their concentration camps, many of the second generation in turn internalised the marks of their parents' trauma in their psyches. Some experienced the affective import of their parents' stories so viscerally, they relived the trauma of their parents' memories as though it was their own (Hirsch, "Generation" 215). For others, as the "children of those directly affected by collective trauma", they struggled with inheriting the story of "a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive" (211). The fact that their parents *did* survive conferred deep value and heroic attributes to them, which bred a sense of their own insignificance and inferiority by comparison. They have to grow up struggling with the notion that "their own experience could never measure up to the size and import of their parents' ordeals, to the looming power of the Holocaust" (Hoffman 69). Moreover, as many of the second generation grew up with stories about their siblings who died in the Holocaust, they were also haunted by "the consciousness that [their] own existence may well be a form of compensation for unspeakable loss" (Hirsch, "Generation" 211). As a result of growing up "dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth, or one's consciousness", they have to struggle with having their "own stories and experience displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation" (205). The overwhelming nature of fulfilling their social role comes at the cost of a diminished personal identity, and a loss of "their distinctiveness from others, their uniqueness, their individuality" (Raburu 95). As a result, what often emerges alongside the second generation's search for their parents' stories is a deep-seated need to discover their own identity apart from being witnesses, and even victims, of their parents' trauma.

This attempt to bear witness to their parents without working through their own psychological struggles has significant consequences on the transmission of Holocaust stories. Dominick LaCapra explains that when the past is rewritten with an unconscious bias towards "present interests, needs, and values", we tend to "awaken the dead in order to interrogate them about problems of interest to us" (*Representing* 32–33). This creates a form of collective memory that pays "little interest in past contexts for their own sake" (33), and "[induces] narcissistic obliteration of the other as other" (34). In other words, the second generation's implicit agenda of searching for their own identity as they bear witness to their parents' stories. Rather than representations that attempt to foreground the otherness of the trauma their parents' experienced, and to understand the impact of the atrocity on the survivors themselves, these second-generation narratives will transmit stories that say more about their writers' struggle to live as children of survivors. The trauma of the survivors could end up being reworked, in other words, for the purpose of amplifying the second generation's struggles.

It is inevitable that there will be some measure of difference between survivors' and the second generation's representations of the Holocaust. As the second generation "live at a further temporal and spatial remove from that decimated world" (Hirsch, "Postmemories in Exile" 662), they cannot lay claim to having the same experiences of suffering as their parents did during the Holocaust. But if their narratives will always be, simultaneously, "a recapitulation of the parents' experience and a telling of how the *Shoah* is viewed as an orienting event by the children of survivors" (Hoffman 46), they have to consider how they can "carry their stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to [themselves]" (Hirsch, "Generation" 203). The ability to do so with self-conscious attention to how their psychological inheritance may interfere with their witnessing, as opposed to being unconscious of its impact, will be crucial in shaping a Holocaust collective memory that does not inadvertently displace survivors' experiences.

The second section of this chapter compares the autobiographies of two second-generation authors, Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* and Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge*, and their attempts to narrativise the stories that were initially transmitted through their parents' trauma, as well as testify to their own history. Unlike the survivors' memoirs, which represent the Holocaust as an event, these two texts depict the survivors' history through the process that the writers underwent in

learning how to bear witness to this history. Spiegelman transmits his father's Holocaust stories through a self-referential narrative about his persona, Artie, who tries to document *his* father Vladek's Holocaust experiences for a book that would eventually become *The Complete Maus*. This process spans the course of several years, as the older man's Holocaust experience emerges in fits and starts, amidst the events of the family's daily life. Through this portrayal, Spiegelman illustrates how the second generation do not bear witness in a vacuum and problematises how Artie's issues with his father continually interfere with his ability to be an objective witness. In a similar fashion, Hoffman intersperses stories about her parents' Holocaust experience amidst her self-professed "extended essay, or series of reflections" (xii), that explores "the broader psychological, moral, and philosophical implications of the 'second-generation' story" (xiii). She traces her progress from perceiving the world through her parents' fragmented stories about the Holocaust, to developing her own nuanced perceptions of the war through a wider historical lens and empathetic imagination. As she moves to shed the identity of victimhood, she attempts to apply what she has learnt from her own past to read the traumas in contemporary times. The title of Hoffman's text comes from "Gerontion" by T.S. Eliot, a poem reflecting on Europe's struggle to recover after World War I. The line itself, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" depicts Eliot's scepticism over the grace that can be given in the wake of learning about the brutal devastation inflicted by the perpetrators of war. But, here, Hoffman's omission of the second half of Eliot's line, "what forgiveness?", could also be said to intimate the spirit of her work, namely her openness to coming to a different conclusion after undertaking a carefully wrought reflection about the traumatic past that she inherited. In a sense, this process of working through how to bear witness to a traumatic past that is not theirs, that they have only experienced at a remove, *is* the 'event' that marks the second generation. Their 'experience' of the Holocaust has been through their continual need to respond to the Holocaust as witness, a work that, as both texts imply, has often taken a lifetime to accomplish.

Though the content of the autobiographies is important, as they thematise and testify to the various ways that the second generation has attempted to bear witness, for both authors their texts are not merely a record of their stories. They are also a means of working through the very experience they are representing. As children of survivors, the psychological effects from inheriting stories of the past through their

parents' trauma have often rendered them too close to the Holocaust to be effective witnesses. Fittingly, as ones who have personally experienced how the form of story significantly impacts the way it is received, they attempt to create new literary forms that can give them a critical distance from their own past. Spiegelman's comic and Hoffman's series of essays are precisely explorations in how they can perform a reconstruction of their own stories in a way that does not transmit their inherited pain, but bears witness to their own and their parents' histories. Hence, in the discussion that follows, I explain how the content of both texts outline the central struggles that the personas are attempting to work through, before demonstrating how their very forms are potential answers to the question of which their texts are in search. I illustrate how *braiding* in the comics form reveals an implicit narrative about how Artie eventually finds some measure of resolution in his relationship with his father and in his search for his own identity. I also demonstrate how Hoffman focalises and braids her own narrative in a way that takes her reader through her thought processes, creating the very form that would have been beneficial for her as a young adult. By tracing the insights that she has gleaned over an extensive passage of time, Hoffman creates a work that delivers an encompassing perspective. However, the literary form that her concluding chapter takes reveals that even the most methodical witness is not without her own blind spot and needs a community of other witnesses to account for the disjunctures in her narrative. In this way, the distinctive forms of both texts are a crucial part of their larger story, with wider implications on the shape of the future collective memory of the Holocaust.

A Past that Does Not Pass

Both *The Complete Maus* and *After Such Knowledge* begin by portraying the way the childhood of the second generation is inextricably shaped by their parents' traumatic experiences during the Holocaust. The struggle to establish their identities cannot be understood apart from acknowledging the unique circumstances that distinguish them from the childhood of non-Holocaust survivors. In *The Complete Maus*, an edition that combines his two volumes—*My Father Bleeds History* and *And Here My Troubles Began*—into one book, Spiegelman offers, by way of a foreword, a two-paged sequence of a typical day in his childhood to set the tone of his comic. The comic opens with a two-paged sequence of ten- or eleven-year old Artie roller skating with his friends on the streets of Rego Park, New York. The first panel presents a

wide-shot of a street as the three Jewish boys (represented as mice) race past various houses. An automated sprinkler waters the garden of the house on the left side of the panel, whilst an American man (represented as a dog) mows his lawn on the right. It presents an idyllic image of suburbia, filled with activity, people of different ethnicities living domestic lives peacefully. When Artie trips and falls, and his friends leave him on the pavement, he goes home crying. This familiar scene of childhood play is juxtaposed, however, with his father's jarring response when he returns home sniffling. Vladek, in their front yard, sawing a piece of wood, sees his son and calls out to him to help him (see Fig. 1). The close up of father and son facing each other in the

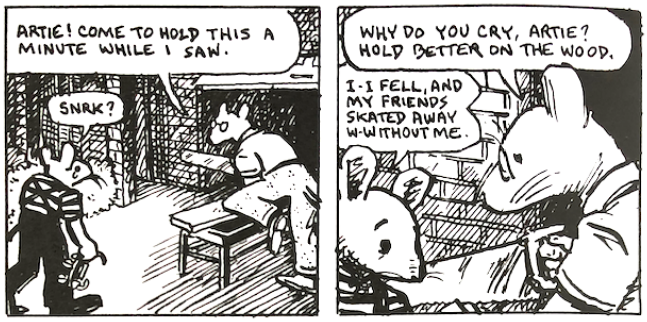

Fig. 1 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 6

following frame conveys a fairly tender moment, as Vladek's focus is on Artie's woebegone face. He appears here to be a gentle father, asking after his son, whilst engaging him in a household chore. No crisis, it would seem, is big enough to disrupt the normality at home.

However, the visual text accompanying the words conveys a contrasting story. Looking ahead, the saw that separates father and son, which looks like it is being driven into Artie, depicts the ominous undertones and the unspoken tension in their relationship. Spiegelman's artistic direction here echoes Elisha Wiesel's notion of the raised knife of the past, and Hoffman's ruminations about the way her parents' memories, in the form of "fragmentary phrases", "lodged themselves in [her] mind like shards" (11). The saw suggests that the relational close proximity that Artie has to Vladek as his father's son positions him to be wounded by the memories of his father's past. Any version of healthy attachment that he should have been able to form with his father is impossible, as what will always stand between them are extensions of Vladek's past painfully piercing into Artie's present. Furthermore, the frame of the comic contains them closely, conveying that, since he is his father's son, he will never be able to escape from this dynamic. The dual way readers can interpret the picture of

the saw between father and son—first as Vladek in mid-saw of the wood, and second as Vladek in mid-saw of Artie—deftly represents the way ordinary household moments can be transformed at any time into a traumatic trigger of the past. In representing this dynamic visually, Spiegelman portrays the way the unexpected looms quietly behind every encounter with a survivor parent.

True enough, in the next panel, the close up of Vladek's startled face signals a disruption of the moment between father and son (see Fig. 2). Artie is cut out of the

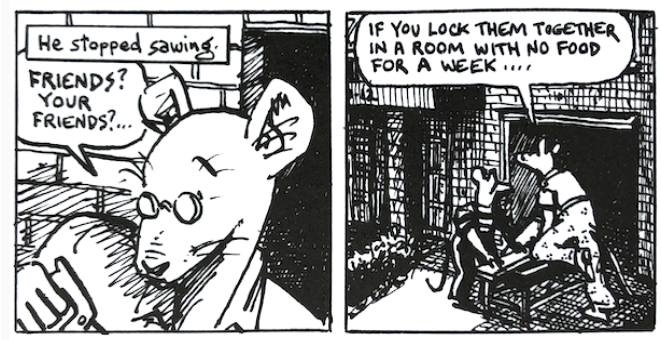

Fig. 2 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 6

frame, indicating that Vladek can no longer 'see' Artie and is instead consumed with his own reaction to Artie's words. Just as the reader begins to speculate if he is filled with indignation that Artie's friends could be so callous to his son, the fourth panel quickly dispels that possibility. We now see a long shot of father and son working on the wood, the wide angle overlooking the suburban house priming the reader to expect Vladek to give Artie some form of paternal advice or universal principle to help him understand the bigger picture. Instead Vladek says, shockingly, "If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week …" (*Maus* 6). It is a setting incongruous with this conversation in which it takes place: it is difficult to imagine the kind of maniacal savagery of men fighting over bread that Wiesel describes in *Night* happening in suburbia, after a child has just been hurt by his friends. Without prior knowledge of the conditions of Auschwitz to which the prisoners were subjected, Vladek appears extreme and even a bit unhinged to use such a graphic example to teach his child that the notion of friendship is an illusion. It is only because the reader has some foreknowledge of the conditions of Auschwitz that we can empathise with and normalise Vladek's unusual response.

But this type of objective and coherent understanding of the Holocaust is not something to which Artie would have been privy as a child. The fact that he does not speak in the last two panels points to a few things: with Vladek's larger-than-life past

constantly overshadowing them, Artie has to put aside his own experiences to accommodate his father's. Vladek does not give Artie a chance to speak, and to be seen. His response misses the point about comforting his son as a parent, but he uses it as an opportunity to highlight a past that is always trying to make itself seen. Finally, Artie's silence simply reflects how much he does not know how to respond to or connect with the unexpected and dislocated fragments of Vladek's traumatic past. As Vladek's speech bubble hangs over the top of the entire frame of an 'idyllic' image of father and son spending time together, the reader gets a sense that this startling narrative constantly looms over Artie's childhood. Its presence is the only thing that disrupts and warps this otherwise stereotypical depiction of normalcy. But this is precisely Artie's version of normalcy. Vladek's traumatic memories are no respecter of space and time and jab into his son's childhood like a rough-toothed saw and prevent a smooth continuity of their relationship.

Finally, the extreme long shot of the standalone final panel is emptied of other people (see Fig. 3), static in contrast to the movement and activity of suburban life in

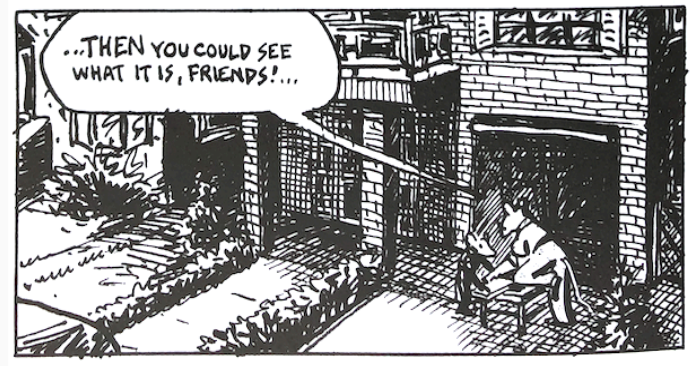

Fig. 3 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 6

the first panel that opens this sequence. As *Maus* opens with Vladek's memories frozen in time, isolating the Spiegelmans from the other families on the street, father from son, and Vladek from his present, the comic deftly adumbrates the struggles that adult Artie will face as he attempts to make sense of his identity as a second-generation Holocaust survivor. The second generation starts underfoot, as they originate from a place of pervasive uncertainty and instability, overshadowed by their parents' traumatic past.

Hoffman conveys similar themes in the first three chapters of *After Such Knowledge.* In order to introduce her readers to the fragmented world into which she was born, she begins her text by employing a narrative strategy similar to that of Elie Wiesel's in *Night.* Like Wiesel, she appropriates aspects of the Torah to demonstrate

the extent to which her reality has fallen away from the original blessings promised to the Jews. Befitting the fact that she was born in Poland in 1945, "the site of the Second World War's greatest ravages" (Hoffman 3), she begins her text with, "In the beginning was the war. […] For me, the world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from the war" (3). By appropriating the Torah's first line, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (*The Complete Tanakh* Gen. 1:1), Hoffman portrays a world turned on its head. As epic as it was when God created the world from nothing, so is the magnitude of destruction that the war created as it left a "torn, ravaged world" with nothing (4). No aspect of society is whole: from the outer landscape of the country—the "injured bodies of war veterans" (3), the "orphaned children" (3), the "community in mourning" that greeted her in the synagogue on Jewish high holidays (3), the "ruined cities" (4)—to the inner psyches of its people—her parents' past "kept erupting in flashes of imagery; in abrupt, fragmented phrases; in repetitious, broken refrains", "in the sounds of nightmares, the idiom of sighs and illness and the acute aches that were the legacy of the damp attic and of the conditions my parents endured during their hiding" (10). It is so complete that the story of her birth is not depicted as a new beginning or a fresh start, but a mere continuation of the story about the war's far-reaching damage.

In order to make sense of the "indigestibility" and the "inassimilable character" about the world that existed before her (11), Hoffman explains that she "transformed the felt traces of a historical event into a kind of story about the basic elements and shape of the world, a childish mythos or fable" (5), a "half awful reality, half wondrous fairy tale" (12). This narrative convention gives her a structure and language by which she can deposit the incomprehensible effects of trauma from her parents' fragmented stories. If reality is chaotic, "disconnected units of narration" (12), then a fairy tale, which divides the world into simplistic binary opposites, creates a black-and-white world that give her a sense of order. On the one hand, evil was equated with Germany. Its "brutal power" (14) shaped "a universe of *absolute* forces and *absolute* unreason, a world in which *ultimate* things happened without cause or motive, where life was saved or lost routinely and through reflex movement" (12, emphasis mine). The totalising language she uses to describe evil reflects the emphatic certainty that was transmitted to her of its nature. This clear identification of evil necessitates there to be an equally emphatic identification of its binary opposite. Against this landscape, on the other hand, "good was closely equated with suffering" (13), where "every

survivor has lived through a mythical trial, an epic, an odyssey" (12) against this evil. The fairy tale form helps her establish a sense of purpose in this binary world—that is, it offers her a way to locate herself in relation to this tale. To identify on the side of 'good', she does her best to "discard everything" the Germans stood for, "proclaim the utter wrongness of their vile work" (14), and "perform impossible psychic tasks", which included, "above all, to rescue the parents […] and to keep rescuing them from their grief and mourning, from death" (63). Whilst she may not have been one of those who suffered this evil directly, she can carve out an identity for herself as being the one who helps the 'good' people.

However, this simplistic frame is not enough to contain the deep complexities of the post-Holocaust reality, especially the toll it takes on the second generation. By framing her world as a fairy tale, her world remains permanently locked in a perennial fight for her parents' survival against evil. This repetition of "undoing the past, again and again" requires

> a more than Penelope-like devotion, a more than Sisyphean labor; for this boulder not only keeps rolling down the hill, it can never be rolled up in the first place. A more than Orphic danger, for to look back in this case is to be dragged into Hades yourself. And yet, the children keep trying, are compelled to keep trying: For how can you leave your parents in a state of half-death, how can you not try to bring them out of an inferno? (63)

By comparing her labour to epic tasks—Penelope's 20-year faithfulness, the endless punishment that Sisyphus was condemned to, the finality of Orpheus' fatal glance—Hoffman conveys the overwhelming strain that she feels. It is one that potentially dwarfs every other aspect of her life. And yet, even using the stories of these mythical trials is insufficient to contain what the second generation has to suffer. Theirs is "a more than" even the greatest known literary accounts of suffering; it requires more than these literary worlds and examples to make sense of. For, whilst the Greek classics may have served to give her emotions a name and a scale, and a point of reference for others to understand her pain, they cannot do more by way of helping her out of her predicament. They can only offer a foregone conclusion. Sisyphus never finds a way to beat Zeus' curse. Orpheus always looks back. And rather than being able to find an alternative way to put off her unwanted suitors, Penelope has to keep waiting for Odysseus to return. As a character in her 'fairy tale', shaped by the

narratives of her parents' stories, Hoffman can only interpret herself as a passive character in a predetermined role. She can only be on the receiving end of her parents' trauma, where "the fragmentary phrases lodged themselves in my mind like shards, like the deadly needles I remember from certain fairy tales, which pricked your flesh and could never be extracted again" (11). The wounds from the past constantly intrude upon the present, keeping them fresh and giving them endless reason to reinforce their identities as victims.

If the second generation wants to move forward, to "free themselves of their Sisyphean burden" (73), Hoffman suggests that they need to find a new narrative form that helps them "face the realities of their inheritance *as* realities" (74), that engages in "full imaginative confrontation with the past" (73), so that "the past need no longer live on within their psyches and bodies; that it is indeed the past" (74). Just as the Jewish origin story in the Torah is insufficient to help Wiesel make sense of his life, Hoffman recognises that merely rehashing the stories of her parents' trauma will not be enough to help her make sense of her world. Instead, she needs to find ways to distinguish herself from them. She demonstrates this elegantly by only mimicking Wiesel's form *in part.* Although she begins the text by appropriating the Torah, her opening line, "In the beginning was the war" also closely invokes John 1:1–3 from the New Testament, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God […] Through him all things were made". By using an allusion from the book that comes after the Torah—one that purports a different way of experiencing faith—she makes the point that she will not solely draw from the sources and references of her parents' generation. Rather, she will have to find one that both connects to and deviates from theirs, to bear witness to them *and* reflect her own experiences as a second-generation survivor. Hence, unlike the silence that Wiesel's memoir ends with, and the absence of language from which her world began, her text will attempt to construct a narrative that speaks life back into this devastated world.

Spiegelman's opening sequence and Hoffman's initial three chapters set the tone of both texts. Artie's childhood is presented through the focal point of young Artie, so that the reader experiences the effect that his father's dismissal had on him more directly. As the reader turns the page, she immediately sees the opening sequence of Artie, in his thirties, visiting Vladek. Visually the little distance between both time frames suggests that the text speaks from the position of someone whose wounds from childhood have been carried into adulthood. In contrast, Hoffman's

childhood is focalised through an adult reflecting on her past. She begins already having established a certain distance between her present and her past, and consciously intends to further construct her position as witness. The texts' respective starting points gesture towards the differences in the journeys of the two personas, with Artie's proving to be far more tumultuous than Hoffman's.

In Search of the "I"

In *The Complete Maus*, Artie exemplifies the struggle to bear witness without having yet worked through his own issues with his father. As a result, his need to have his voice heard, and his own pain witnessed, continually interferes with his intent to be present to Vladek. Spiegelman embeds this tension into the very form of the comic. To begin with, the comics panels, which "fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments" (McCloud 68), visually convey Spiegelman's recognition that his rendition of his father's story is punctuated by gaps of memory, translation, and his own understanding. He juxtaposes two timelines alongside each other to depict the whole process in which Vladek's story comes to light: Artie with his father in the 1970s, asking him questions about his past, and, once Vladek begins telling his story, a visual narrative of the older man's war experiences in the 1940s. Vladek's story is thus fragmented, not just by the individual panels, but also by Artie's interruptions and deviations. In *MetaMaus,* a compilation of Spiegelman's reflections regarding the creation of *The Complete Maus*, he explains his decision to intersperse Vladek's Holocaust experiences in the 1940s with Artie's storyline in the 1970s,

> Visibly juxtaposing pasts and presents allowed there to be a continual kind of flashing back and forth that wouldn't feel like a total flashback to an ersatz reconstruction of the past. Telling a story as if I was the invisible hand that allowed Vladek to make a comic about Auschwitz would have been so fraudulent. It's the fraudulence that informs a lot of the Holocaust comics that have come since. One doesn't want to give a counterfeit experience; better to give the problematics of reconstructing that experience. (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 208)

This framing device draws attention to the fact that the story has been deliberately constructed, and is not, in any way, supposed to be passed off as a seamless story. It reflects the care he takes to respect the integrity of his father's narrative. By

foregrounding his awareness of the inevitable gaps that come from attempting to represent his father's story, he avoids usurping his father's voice or making an audacious claim that his narrative offers a complete account of his father's experiences.

At the same time, however, the self-consciousness of the comics form also underlines the fact that *The Complete Maus* is just as much Spiegelman's story. As his illustrations are his own visual interpretation of his father's words, it foregrounds his presence as creator of this narrative, the one who shapes how his reader will interpret the events he depicts. He explores this concept through a complex self-reflexive scene in the comic, when he traces how even as Artie constructs his book "to memorialize the father and to record family history" (Gordon 54), he also uses the creative licence it gives him "to expose the father and to triumph over him through art" (54). In the opening pages of *Maus I*, Artie shares his plans to create a comic about his father's Holocaust experience and persuades Vladek to speak about his past. Vladek consents, and begins candidly by telling him how he ended his relationship with his girlfriend of four years, Lucia, in order to marry Artie's mother, Anja. The men then have a disagreement about whether Artie should include this information in his book. As Vladek tells him to leave it out, because it has "nothing to do with Hitler, with the Holocaust" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 25), Artie pleads with him, "I want to tell *your* story, the way it really happened" (*Maus* 25). In the following panels, when Vladek insists that it is not "proper" or "respectful" to do so, Artie promises his father that he will not mention it (*Maus* 25). However, Spiegelman's visual presentation of the panels complicates Artie's words (see Fig. 4). On the one hand, the left panel depicts Vladek

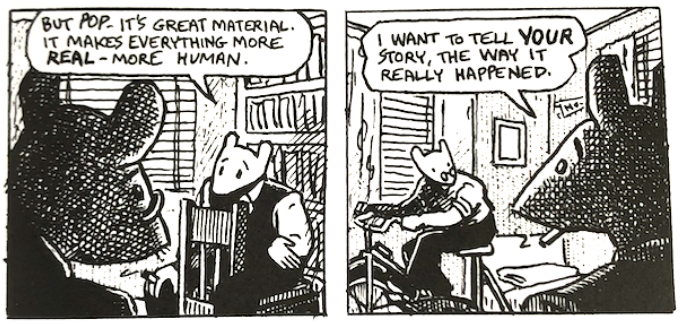

Fig. 4 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 25

through an over-the-shoulder shot, keeping his body and half his face out of full view. This reflects the way he is trying to keep his story half concealed and within his control. On the other, the right panel presents the scene with an almost symmetrical shot-reverse-shot that now frames Artie in an over-the-shoulder shot, exposing Vladek

on his exercise bicycle. This visual depiction of Artie cornering Vladek, forcing him into full view, reflects his insistence on bringing his father's story to light to suit his agenda. It is now Artie who is partially obscured, suggesting that he, too, is half concealing the truth. Coupled with the fact that Spiegelman *does* include Lucia and Vladek's story into this narrative, it is clear that Artie has no intention to honour Vladek's wishes. Unlike the composition of Figure 1, which portrays father and son closely connected through the pain of the past, the over-the-shoulder shots in Figure 4 further accentuate the distance between them. As the frame positions Artie at the furthest corner of the room, it suggests that his wilful disregard of his father's preferences is an attempt to define himself as his own person. The juxtaposition of the two frames also creates a mirror image, as though Artie will now try to assume his father's position as the more dominant one in their relationship. The fade-to-black signals that this is the closing panel of this sequence—rendering both characters in silhouette (see Fig. 5), it appears to make it final that Artie has the last word on this

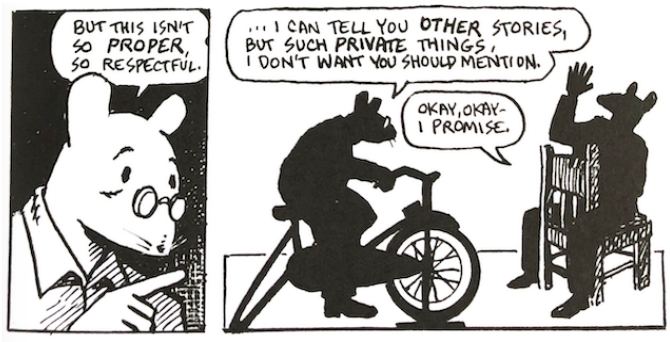

Fig. 5 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 25

narrative. As the illustrations influence the reader's interpretation of the dynamic between father and son, Spiegelman reveals that, like Artie, he has the narrative power to shape his own version of Vladek's story. And, if this exchange was reflective of a conversation between Spiegelman and *his* father, he has, in fact, already done so.

However, the illustrations are also a way for Spiegelman to create distance between himself and his persona. Whilst Artie may have chosen his own interests over his father's wishes, and appears to have successfully distanced himself from feeling an emotional obligation to his father, Spiegelman uses visual techniques to offer a more critical view of Artie's decision. The darkening of both Vladek and Artie takes on symbolic significance here. It suggests that Artie's approach of seizing control over the narrative is not one that will give him clarity. Rather, it will continue to leave the shadow of the past looming over father and son. In fact, the silhouette makes Vladek

look two-dimensional, on a static exercise bicycle that goes nowhere. It foreshadows that dismissing his father's wishes will do very little to advance his story or develop Artie's understanding of Vladek, contrary to his claims that it will serve to enhance his story.

As Artie discovers, it becomes increasingly difficult to control Vladek according to his creative preferences, and keep himself at a distance from his father. Artie's unresolved issues of the pain that are caused by the person his father is, as a result of his past, is re-triggered when Vladek becomes the reason his writing project cannot go the way he planned. As Artie probes deeper into his father's past, the gaps in Vladek's memories of the Holocaust become apparent. By the end of *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History,* Artie has managed to document his father's journey from the time his parents met all the way to their transportation to the gates of Auschwitz. As a play on the title, the gates are depicted in the first and only full-page bleed in the comic. Harriet Earle writes, "Bleeds are, by their nature, violent. The image's domination of the page is striking and demands the reader's complete attention. The absence of frames on the page edges removes any sense of constriction or confinement—the image has total control of the page" (49). The bleed emphasises the way Auschwitz defies all boundaries of the known world and bludgeons Vladek with a psychic wound that never heals, continually oozing with the effects of trauma.

Yet, as the reader turns the page, expecting to see what lies beyond the gates in 1944, the comic returns to the 1970s. Vladek explains that this was where he was separated from Anja, as "they pushed men one way, women to the other way" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 160). At this point, Artie reasserts the request he has been making throughout the chapters about wanting to have his mother's diaries for her story,[17] "this is where Mom's diaries will be *especially* useful. They'll give me some idea of what she went through while you were apart" (*Maus* 160). Up to this point, Vladek has been able to get away with speaking for her because he has been with her for most of the journey. But as Artie insists that he will help him look for the diaries, Vladek finally admits, after months of deflecting his son's request and changing the subject, "these notebooks, and other really nice things of mother … one time I had a very bad day … and all of these I *destroyed*" (*Maus* 160).

[17] See Pages 86 and 95 of *The Complete Maus.*

Unlike the exchange on the exercise bicycle (see Fig. 5), Vladek is now not cast in shadow (see Fig. 6). He brings this truth to light, freeing himself from the

Fig. 6 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 160

shame of his past. This moment of vulnerability could have potentially been a moment of connection between father and son, as they both reckoned with and accepted the painful consequences of Vladek having endured the Holocaust only to lose his beloved wife to suicide. But Artie, once again too embroiled with how his father's actions have cost *him* something important, cannot see this. He remains cast in shadow, unable to move beyond the pain of the past to recognise the significance of this moment. The over-the-shoulder shot returns in this scene, reinforcing that Vladek is once again subjected to being scrutinised through Artie's point of view. Significantly, the juxtaposition of Vladek's confession with the full-page bleed of the Auschwitz gates suggests that Artie equates what his father has done as tantamount to the Nazi's genocide of the Jews. He screams, "you *burned* them?" (*Maus* 161), invoking an explicit reference to the burning of the Jews in the ovens, "God DAMN You! You-you murderer! How the hell could you do such a thing!!" (*Maus* 161). This comparison is, of course, absurd, reinforcing the extent to which his unresolved issues with his father prevent him from empathising with why Vladek did burn his wife's diaries. Moreover, this misappropriated Holocaust reference draws attention to the fact that this scene of Artie's rage has disrupted him, and the reader, from finding out what lay beyond the gates of Auschwitz for his father in 1944. There is only *his* skewed version of Vladek to 'witness'.

As Artie's rage continues over a few panels, the viewing angle shifts slightly each time and creates a stilted flow that depicts Artie's deep agitation. Eventually, by the end of his tirade, the angle has rotated 180-degrees and the reader now sees Artie is back on the left side of the page (see bottom right panel in Fig. 7), presenting him from the same angle as when he first started the conversation (see top left panel in Fig.

Fig. 7 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 161

6). By coming full circle, the viewing angle highlights how completely inconsolable Artie is at not being able to find out what happened to his mother behind the Auschwitz gates. To him, Vladek has not only 'murdered' Anja's voice but has also killed Artie's opportunity to enter into his mother's world, and erased a part of his identity. He is only able to reel his rage back in when Vladek reasserts his paternal authority, telling Artie, "To your *father* you yell in this way?" (*Maus* 161). As he re-establishes a hint of his dominance over his son, Artie, conditioned to be submissive, remembers himself.

Artie's extreme emotional response testifies to the extent to which he is not yet healed of the childhood wounds inflicted by his father. He is unable to interpret his father's actions independently of how they affect him, perceiving them still as a saw (see Fig. 1) that personally attacks him, rather than as a consequence of the older man's trauma. His anger persists even though Vladek explains that "after the tragedy with mother, I was so depressed then, I didn't know if I'm coming or I'm going" (*Maus* 161). Although Artie does apologise for his outburst and exchanges pleasantries before he leaves, he does not mean what he says. The final panel reveals Artie's last word on the matter, "Murderer" (*Maus* 161). The unframed final panel emphasises the extent of his rage, so overwhelming that it is uncontainable (see Fig. 8). He turns his

back on his father and walks off the page, not at all at peace with the gaps he will have in his narrative. Volume 1 ends, both with Vladek's Auschwitz story unfinished, and the tension between father and son unresolved.

Fig. 8 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 161

In contrast to Artie's tumultuous attempt to bear witness to his father, Hoffman narrates *After Such Knowledge* with well-regulated pace. She focalises her observations as a witness of her generation, stepping back from the history that she herself lived through, and assesses it with critical distance. According to Hoffman, who included a brief account of Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* in her text (189), it was not at all uncommon for many of the second generation to respond as Artie did. Unlike those who reacted to their parents' overwhelming past with "excessive empathy", others, like Artie, chose to "arm themselves with anger or cold detachment" in order to "assert their own rights over those of their elders, no matter how hurtful the consequences" (96). Resentful of the burden of inheriting a traumatic past, their aggression was a way of separating themselves from their parents' overwhelming dominance. Yet, even though they appeared more independent than their peers who "subjugated their own needs to those of the parents" (96), the choice to detach and assert *because* of the pain reveals that they were still inadvertently defined by "the powerful psychic inheritance" of their parents' past (xiv).

As much as she recognises that this form of detachment is "a self-preserving defense against the dangers of subjugation" (96), Hoffman cautions against the inability to move beyond this state. She traces a troubling cultural response that has sprung from the second generation's perpetual narration of the Holocaust through "the politics of identity, and of trauma" (169), and the way it stops short, like Artie's reaction at the end of *Maus I*, at nursing resentment towards the survivor parent. As a result of wallowing in this state of victimhood, Hoffman observes,

> In the last interval of the twentieth century, in a great swing of the cultural pendulum, the victimized or oppressed position began to be

> seen as a more noble and morally credible location for "identity" than the position of power and privilege; and both individuals and groups rushed in to lay claim to histories of calamity and victimization. (169)

For Hoffman, this fixation on being a victim transmits an unacceptable message that the Holocaust—and the pain and suffering of the survivors—is at the world's disposal to exploit for personal gain. It has also bred an indecent strand of "competitive politics of trauma" (178), where traumas that have taken place in places like Rwanda, Cambodia and Vietnam are viewed as less significant than "the most total project of extermination" that was the Shoah (178). Moreover, the narrative of perpetual victimhood does not help the second generation carve out an identity for themselves that distinguishes them from the pain of their parents' past.

For this reason, Hoffman recognises the responsibility that the second generation has in working through their childhood trauma. She writes, "How we interpret the implications of our primary narrative, how we translate psychic information into information about the world, matters more than for ourselves" (103); it will have everything to do how future generations remember this event. They are "the hinge generation", ultimately responsible for deciding whether the "received, transferred knowledge of events is transmuted into history, or into myth" (xv), whether the events "remain arrested and fixed at the point of trauma" or are "transformed into new sets of relations with the world" (103). Or, as Earle says, when the second generation come to terms with the fact that "the traumata of parents have been transmitted to the children", it is then "for the child to reconcile the experience of the parents with their own experiences in such a way as to make sense of it and to use this knowledge to find their place within their own family and heritage" (116).

Hence, Hoffman endeavours to discard an identity of victimhood, not by wilfully rejecting her parents' past, but by critically thinking through her inherited assumptions of it. This is evident from the way she structures her text. The strategic titles of each chapter chart a linear path, and reflect her endeavour to find a way through these issues. The seven chapters each "roughly [corresponds] to the chronological trajectory of the second generation" (Hoffman xiv). The first three chapters ("From Event to Fable", "From Fable to Psyche", and "From Psyche to Narrative") outline her early attempts at dealing with the overpowering presence of her parents' past. As aforementioned, Hoffman discusses how she received the post-Holocaust world as a kind of fairy tale, one that became a frightening lived reality that

haunted her well into early adulthood. The detailed sketch of this 'fairy tale' world offers a compelling picture of how her parents' narrative shaped her corresponding identity as an inadvertent victim of suffering. It is this narrative that she intentionally works through in the second half of the book, both in content and in form. As the latter chapters ("From Narrative to Morality", "From Morality to Memory", "From Memory to the Past", and "From the Past to the Present") recount her increasing awareness for a nuanced script to narrate the past and shape a healthy post-victim identity, she does not merely state what the script ought to comprise. Instead, she demonstrates the process whereby she derives that script. In each chapter, she contextualises episodes of her "own family's story" and her personal experiences (xii) within a larger historical narrative, one drawn from years of research into the "personal testimony, memoirs, and fiction produced by children of survivors, as well as survivors themselves; psychanalytic case studies, historical documentation, and the hefty corpus of cultural theory and philosophical speculation" (xiii). The juxtaposition of both narratives helps her interrogate the assumptions and underpinnings of the stories she inherited, and fill in the gaps of knowledge of the narrative that was transmitted to her in childhood. At the same time, it also gives her the means to speak to the aspects that the wider historical narratives have overlooked about the second generation's experience.

Significantly, this approach deviates from "most scholarly works", which "emphasize either the psychocultural or the sociopolitical aspects" of the Holocaust (xiii). But it is a form that more authentically reflects the tension which the second generation have to work through. For them, "such categories of explanation" "are not easily distinguishable as forms of experience" (xiii). A purely psychocultural work that rehashes the narrative of trauma would offer an incomplete depiction of the other factors that shape the second generation's history, whilst a purely socio-political narrative that fails to capture the intimate truths of individual suffering would be disingenuous. But, as she negotiates between these two narratives, responding in "retrospective reflection" with her own critical commentaries, empathetic imaginings, and accounts of adult experiences and so on, she creates a third narrative form. It is one that negotiates the best distance to situate her unique position as a second-generation witness. As Hoffman herself puts it, "Stand too close to the horror, and you get fixation, paralysis, engulfment; stand too far, and you get voyeurism or forgetting. Distance matters" (177). The continual return to her parents' story only to distance herself from it potentially models how the second generation can integrate two

conflicting endeavours: transmit the survivors' stories responsibly, as well as develop an identity that is not beleaguered by the weight of their parents' past.

Having recognised the limitations of her childhood perceptions of the war, one of Hoffman's key undertakings in this text is her re-examination of the binary between good (her parents) and evil (the Germans) through which she used to bear witness to her parents' past in her early years. In performing retrospective reflection, she describes first the nature of the issue that she needs to work through, reflects on the reasons behind its existence, and then, through historical contextualisation, explores the possible ways in which she can reframe her initial understanding of the situation. The self-consciousness of this process provides her with the means to construct herself as a more nuanced witness. She begins with an admission of her own limitations, acknowledging that "certain traces of the past cannot be easily dissolved" (125), and her personal difficulty of overcoming the "childhood prohibition on tampering with received versions of family stories" (142). The inclusion of her personal sentiments reveal her awareness that her past does come with biases, and will inevitably influence the way she handles the task of

> unfreezing myths that have been left intact on both sides, and of unpacking stereotypes so sharply engraved on our minds as to seemingly stand for acceptable truths; of addressing aspects of our own histories that have been so untouchable as to have the force of intellectual taboos; and of admitting the prohibited perspective of the other into the area of permissible thought. (144)

Here, the intangible mental constructs that she aims to tackle, "myths", "stereotypes", "histories", "perspective", have been framed with language used to describe totalising, states of tangible, physical structures, "intact", "engraved", "untouchable", and "prohibited". She knows, in no uncertain terms, how absolutely these modes of thinking have formed the cornerstones of her childhood world. The work it will take to destroy something so resolutely whole, to erase the indelible, to touch the forbidden, and cross the clearly demarcated line between "prohibited" and "permissible" may not be actual physical labour, but the intellectual rigour it will take to reshape the mental constructs upon which one's world is built is no less arduous.

Hoffman then proceeds to explore the reasons behind the binary thinking she has grown up with. She recognises that whilst the "nearly absolute" gulf between the victim and perpetrator of crime is instigated first by "the perpetrator's utter failure to

recognize the humanity of the victim" (111), maintaining the gulf is a way for the survivors to exert their autonomy. By portraying the Germans as the inhuman "demonic force of the universe" in their stories (14), Jewish survivors have a foil against which they can emphasise their virtues and celebrate how they overcame the cruelty they suffered. However, Hoffman deliberately resists this approach in her text if, perhaps, to avoid the irony of using the strategy of the perpetrators of the Holocaust in the first place. As understandable as the impulse is to vilify the perpetrators of war, to do so without end, to never move on from doing so, does not end up distinguishing the differences between both parties; it accentuates how they are similar. After all, the Holocaust was the consequence in extremis of the vilification of the Jews that 'only' began in rhetoric—in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and in the onslaught of Nazi propaganda, for instance. There would be a certain blindness in her reflection if she thought vilifying her German contemporaries, simply because it came from her point of view, could not also lead to detrimental consequences, not unlike the very ones that shattered her parents. Instead, she works to recognise the humanity of her German contemporaries. In doing so, she deliberately changes the direction that the conventional fairy tale would have taken. Rather than continually reinforcing "most dramatic examples imaginable of 'us' and 'them'" (105), she embarks on a journey to learn about the 'villain'.

As she dialogues and engages with memoirs, novels, films and psychological studies by and about her German contemporaries, these narratives shape the other's world into something more three dimensional. The gulf reduces to the point where she realises their worlds bear striking similarities and parallels to her own, especially in terms of the "psychic predicament" (118) of growing up in a household that is grappling with "the aftermath of historical crime" (120). Whilst not identical, their worlds are now close enough for Hoffman to exercise her empathetic imagination and consider the struggles that her German contemporaries experienced in the earlier years of their life. For example, in response to the memoir, *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?*, she contemplates,

> Could I possibly sympathize with Sabina Reichel's exquisite discomfort and belated pangs of conscience for her father's—for her father's generation's—actions? I wasn't sure I should even be asked to do so. And yet, after some reflection, and almost to my own surprise, the answer came quite clearly: Yes, I could. I could see the difficulties

> of having even a minor Nazi for a father. I could imagine the dismay of learning you are the inheritor of a tainted, an abhorrent history. If I had failed to admit this, I thought, I would be guilty of a willful failure of the imagination, or rather, a dogmatic refusal to alter my ideas in the light of what I could newly imagine. (118)

Rather than keeping the other as a caricature, Hoffman connects with the elements of emotions in the memoir: Reichel's "discomfort", "pangs of conscience", "difficulties", and "dismay". She fleshes her out as a person, with recognisable, human responses. At the same time, Hoffman maintains the distance between both worlds and does not barrel into completely identifying with her German contemporaries. She foregrounds that she "cannot pretend to enter fully into—have intuitive empathy for—the dilemmas of the postwar generation" or "easily penetrate its felt content or subsequent transformations" (118). It is through the language she uses to present the information about Reichel that Hoffman reflects her intent to be a responsible witness. She does not focalise her narrative from Reichel's point of view. Statements like, 'She experienced difficulties …' or 'She felt dismay …', would have insinuated that she had a level of authority and certainty over Reichel's experiences. Rather, she presents this information as *her* reflections, inclusive of her thought processes and related questions. She writes, "I could see the difficulties of …" and "I could imagine the dismay …" (118). By keeping the "I" at the forefront of her contemplations, Hoffman makes it clear that she is only spectating, looking in to this other world, and not speaking for the other. To do so would have reduced her German contemporaries in another way, as she subsumes them under her authorial control.

Yet, this process of developing a more nuanced posture of witnessing is not as straightforward as simply humanising the previously two-dimensional world of a German counterpart. Hoffman has to hold her attempts to witness in tandem with how it affects her identity as the child of a Holocaust survivor. In other words, this distance she maintains also serves another purpose. It keeps her from sympathising too much with the other at the cost of sidelining the witnessing of *her* own history. Whilst she considers her sympathies for her German contemporaries, she makes it a point to convey that she is not merely a passive recipient of the effects of their narratives. In being presented with Reichel's story, rather than declaring 'I see the difficulties …' and 'I imagine the dismay …', she writes, "I *could* see …" and "I *could* imagine …" (118, emphasis mine). The modal verb "could" indicates that there is a possibility that

she might enter into the other's world, *without* automatically being compelled and committed to doing so. Whilst she has the capacity to "see" and "imagine", she also has the autonomy to make that conscious choice to do so.

The self-consciousness over her own process is further critical in preventing her from building her identity on her ability to feel sympathy for her German contemporaries. To do so would have simply reconstructed the old binary that her parents imposed—Germans are villains/Jews are victims—into another: Germans were children of the perpetrators of crimes against humanity, and Jews are heroes for overcoming their own pain and bearing witness to their vivid accounts of suffering. The problem with such a binary relationship is that it ultimately still concedes that her identity is determined by who the Germans are. It is not to say that no part of her identity will be a result of their influence—as Hoffman herself admits, they *are* her "true historical counterpoint" (118) and will always have some bearing on who she is—but they do not have to be the only determining factor of who she is. To circumvent this, she juxtaposes the sympathies she has for her German contemporaries with an exploration of her struggles during this process of learning about them. She confesses to the initial lure of appearing the evolved Jew, and her attempt to "speak from some perfectly free, 'impartial' position" during a discussion about whether the third generation should take on the guilt for what their grandparents' generation had done (129). Hoffman recalls positing that they should not, since the Holocaust is at such a distance to them as World War I was to her, an event for which she felt no expectation to assume responsibility (129). However, she cannot dispel the recognition that "in my overcoming I had gone a step too far" (129),

> But truth to tell, I was not, in my attempt to be entirely 'objective,' entirely honest either. For would I want to reprieve the new generation of Germans of all moral answerability—or at least embarrassment—for their country's history quite so easily? (129)

And this is not a question for which Hoffman provides a straightforward answer, as she meanders into further contemplation about the lingering implications and influence of one's cultural past. But in portraying the many inflexions of the "I"—from wanting to assert an ideal self and betraying what she felt in order to do so, to being affected by another's reaction to this proffered self, to questioning if the ideal self is really who she wants to be in the first place—she reveals *her* own humanness in this process of becoming a witness. For as flattering as the impression of being objective might

appear to be, the two-dimensional portrayal of herself only ends up reducing her struggles. And, as she realises, this neglects the responsibility that she has towards future generations: modelling a posture of critical inquiry and reflection that could stave off constructing unhelpful absolutes about the self and other. With this juxtaposition of what she witnesses (her German contemporaries' struggles) and what she experiences as she witnesses, she humanises the second generation of *both* Germans and Jews. She creates a narrative form where both perspectives can co-exist.

In its final product, *After Such Knowledge* is a form that models a careful, considered, intelligent approach whereby one can shape a new sense of self. In Hoffman's case, the very act of text-making is self-making, as she intentionally reconstructs herself as witness. The content of her text deftly showcases *what* she witnesses: the new perspectives that she discovers, giving her reader a thorough glimpse into the far-reaching historical movements, and key global issues that the second generation had to work through. At the same time, the form of her text reflects *how* she witnesses: self-consciously balancing the tension between recognising why her parents held certain views and establishing her own positions of these issues. This gives her reader insight into a history of another sort, an exemplification of how the second generation worked through their identity. For Hoffman, the ability to narrativise history in a way that recognises the humanness in all the relevant players is part of the second generation's legacy. As ones with both a lived reality of the past and sufficient distance from it, they can turn a felt past into a story of the past. In doing so, they offer the third generation a present that is not rooted in old wounds, along with the tools to examine the stories that they, too, have passed on to their children.

Narrative Transmission and the Reader-Witness

Thus far, I have demonstrated that Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* depicts a son's struggling attempt to bear witness to his father's Holocaust experiences without having first worked through his longstanding issues with his father, whilst Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge* more adroitly conveys how the second generation can possibly and with some success transmit their parents' stories. Whilst the contents of their texts have transmitted aspects of their parents' stories and offered insightful glimpses into a range of second-generation experiences, in both readings, I have also touched on how the form of their texts tells an implicit story about their roles as witnesses. If the content of their work is how these writers bear witness to their parents' past, the

reader's attention to the form of these texts is how we bear witness to *them* as second-generation witnesses, and shape how they are remembered.

Given how *Maus I* ended, critics have conventionally gone on to read *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale—And Here My Troubles Began* as though it moves towards a similar conclusion. Even though Artie does succeed in listening to most of his father's story, the critical consensus is that he is ultimately unable to free himself from the haunting presence of his father's past and find a satisfying outcome in his search for his own identity. At the end of *Maus II*, Spiegelman depicts Artie standing by his father's bed as Vladek nears the end of his life (see Fig. 13). Vladek's last speech act is to say "I'm tired from talking, Richieu, and it's enough stories for now" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 296), leading critics to notice "that Vladek calls Artie by his dead son's name, essentially, and ironically, erasing his second son" (Sweet Wong 107). Artie thus tends to be read as being "multiply murdered—textually and orally—(Anja's lack of a suicide note, Vladek's destruction of Anja's diaries, and Vladek addressing him by his dead brother's name)", and "no more a survivor than Vladek and Anja" (107). Furthermore, Spiegelman's signature under the Vladek and Anja's tombstone, with the years in which he wrote the two books, "1978–1991", have led critics to the interpretation that despite having authorial control over his text, he, too, lies dead with them (Bosmajian 13). As Andrew Gordon writes, "If the first volume of *Maus* ends with Artie calling his father a murderer, the second ends with him symbolically murdered by his father and lying in his parents' grave" (60). Or, as Hillary Chute puts it, "by placing his signature directly below his parents' grave—indeed, in the space of the ground below—Spiegelman figures himself as buried by his parents' history" (356). With this interpretation, Spiegelman shares Artie's fate in that his endeavour to "write himself into a family from whose founding trauma he was absent" appears to be futile (Elmwood 691). The second generation appear only able to resign themselves to the fact that they can never truly live as their own person.

However, these interpretations undercut the open-endedness that the comics form affords the text, especially in light of the variety of ways there are for readers to make meaning from the comic. Comics differ from other narrative forms "in their amount of reader control over the construction of the narrative itself" (Earle 23). As Scott McCloud points out, "Every act committed to paper by the comic artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice. An equal partner in crime known as the reader" (68). It is the reader who uses "his own imagination all the time to fill in the gaps"

between the panels (Tabachnick 39), and "mentally construct[s] a continuous, unified reality" (McCloud 68). In this way, unlike Artie, who tries desperately to control how his father's narrative takes shape, Spiegelman, by choosing the comics form to depict his father's story, surrenders an element of *his* control over his narrative to a reader, who may read the form against its explicit content. But it is through this process that a story of how the second generation can come to terms with their past potentially comes to the surface. In this way, the text performs an implicit message. In a similar way that a reader-witness brings a different ending to Spiegelman's story, as she imagines how Artie might find closure to his past, it is in accepting the elements of the past that they cannot control that enables the second generation to transmit the stories of the past effectively.

In his ground-breaking work, *The System of Comics*, Thierry Groensteen takes the possibility of reader participation one step further. He argues that "within the page multiframe that constitutes a complete comic, every panel exists, potentially if not actually, in relation with each of the others" (146). Hence, he suggests that panels cannot only be linked sequentially, or synchronically, on the page, with narrative meaning found by connecting "panels on the surface of the same page" (147). Instead, panels, or more specifically recurring "images in the panels", "can be linked in *series* (continuous or discontinuous) through non-narrative correspondences" (Beaty and Nguyen ix, emphasis mine), that is, "by a system of iconic, plastic, or semantic correspondences" (Groensteen 147). Groensteen terms this diachronic way of making meaning *braiding*, a means of finding the relation between similar images on different pages, recognising "in each new term of a series a recollection or an echo of an anterior term" (147). In other words, the reader pulls together images that would not have been viewed simultaneously and establishes a narrative thread through them (Groensteen 148). For Groensteen, the narrative derived from braiding is a "supplementary relation that is never indispensable to the conduct and intelligibility of the story" (147), but is "like an addition that the text secretes beyond its surface" (146). It adds more depth and nuance to the explicit story of the text.

Using Groensteen's approach to reading comics, it becomes possible to unearth an underlying narrative arc that speaks to the developments in Artie's inner world. To begin with, the two encounters between father and son in *Maus I*, previously analysed in this chapter, bear a visual similarity. They are both framed using a distinctive over-the-shoulder shot, a technique that deviates from Spiegelman's usual style of depicting

his characters and the action through mid to wide shots. In the first sequence (see Fig.4), the over-the-shoulder shot, coupled with the shot-reverse-shot, reflects the way Artie perceives himself in a power struggle with his father, both vying for control as to how to frame the story. The second sequence features an over-the-shoulder shot, also coupled with the shot-reverse-shot. This takes place within four asymmetrical panels that offers no visual sense of order, as Artie explodes at Vladek for burning his mother's diaries when he realises how little he can actually control. The juxtaposition of these two sequences reveal that the over-the-shoulder shot is used to frame critical shifts in the unspoken dynamic between father and son. Between the first and second sequence, Artie moves from concealing his intentions from Vladek, still trapped in a kind of automatic outward deference to his father, to telling his father how he really feels for the first time. Although the latter scene is more of an emotional explosion than a well-regulated response, it marks the beginning of Artie's ability to assert himself with his father as he attempts to voice his opinion rather than either lying or staying silent to maintain the illusion of deference.

The awareness of this visual pattern makes it possible for the reader to connect a third conversation, also framed by an over-the-shoulder shot, to these two scenes. This time, it takes place between Artie and his therapist and depicts Artie finally speaking honestly about the conflicting feelings he has for his father. When read in relation to the other two, this third scene proves to be a key turning point in his relationship with his father. Following the success of the first volume of *Maus I*, Spiegelman opens *Maus II* by depicting how overwhelmed Artie feels by all the media attention. He draws his namesake steadily shrinking from adult Artie to a child-sized Artie in his chair as interviewers, producers and journalists pelt him with questions. In order to cope with the stress, Artie visits Pavel, his therapist, to talk about how the success of *Maus I* has given him writer's block. It is significant that Spiegelman depicts Pavel speaking to the child-Artie in this sequence (see Fig. 10) as though addressing the 10- or 11-year-old boy who fell over whilst skating in Rego Park thirty years ago. It suggests that a part of him has remained trapped as a hurt child who has never healed from the wound caused by the 'saw' of Vladek's trauma (see Fig. 2).

As a result of growing up with a father whose suffering caused him to undermine his son continually, Artie spends most of his life never being able to own his experiences. It becomes a reflex for him to dismiss them as being less legitimate than his father's 'more important' Holocaust experiences, where he feels that "no

matter what I accomplish, it doesn't seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 204). At the same time, he resents this comparison and being told that "I couldn't do anything as well as he could" (*Maus* 204). It is not surprising, therefore, in light of his comic's success, he is now stuck. On the one hand, the success of his comic clearly proves that he has moved on from being the hapless child that his father claimed he is and can now prove his father wrong. On the other, he cannot fully embrace his success, instinctively expecting the pattern of being dismissed to repeat itself again. The visual composition of the scene accentuates his tension, as the viewing angle shifts from Pavel's right to left shoulder and back to his right again, reflecting the way Artie is in conversation with two sides of himself and cannot decide how to frame his situation (see Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 204

However, despite the visual disorder that the multiple viewing angles creates, the fragmentation of the scene—and of Artie's mind—is not the only story here. McCloud reminds the reader that "by creating a sequence with two or more images, we are endowing them with a single overriding identity, and forcing the viewer to consider them as a whole […] a single organism" (73). In other words, a scene that appears to amplify Artie's confusion, when examined as a whole, reveals an increasing sense of clarity and order in his inner world. If panels 1 and 2 of Fig. 10 are seen as a set, it looks as though Pavel has created a space in the middle for Artie's feelings to take centre stage. Although the viewing angle of the over-the-shoulder shot that frames Artie switches, it never stops focusing on the fact that Artie is on the chair. Coupled with the fact that the entire dialogue is framed *without* any shot-reverse-shots, which would have focused some of the attention back on Pavel, this sequence

highlights an uncharacteristic lack of defensiveness and control over the narrative on Artie's part. Instead of deflecting his gaze from himself and turning elsewhere to find resolution (see Fig. 4 and Fig. 6—the over-the-shoulder is of Artie putting his father on the spot to agree to expose his past for his book, and of Artie taking him to task for destroying his mother's diaries respectively), he finally turns the frame on himself for self-examination from all angles and gives Pavel the authority to scrutinise him. By staying still and confronting his truth, Artie finally allows someone to speak to that hurt inner child who needs to hear that his experiences are valid too. The dialogue bubbles flow seamlessly from one panel to the next, pointing to an emerging narrative order and coherence.

Significantly, when Artie is finally given room to be seen and heard, this creates a space for him to consider other perspectives about his father. When viewed as a set, Panels 3 and 4 reverse the order of how the characters are positioned: it looks like Artie is the one who gives Pavel 'centre stage' to speak. Pavel points out that Artie was never in Auschwitz, "you were in Rego Park" (*Maus* 204), highlighting the illogicality of comparing himself to his father in the first place. With this statement, Pavel gives Artie the psychological distance he needs from his father to recognise that they are two separate people, and that Vladek is an individual whose actions are independent of what they say about Artie. "Maybe your father needed to show that he was always right, that he could always survive", he says, "because he felt guilty about surviving" (*Maus* 204). In other words, Pavel offers another way that Artie can narrate his past: Vladek's behaviour was not a direct or personal attack on Artie, or the result of Artie's inadequacies and incompetence, it was simply a product of his own wounds. Even though Panel 4 returns to the same framing position as Panel 1, Artie is not in the same 'place' as he was four panels ago in terms of how he viewed his father. To Pavel's insightful observation about Vladek's behaviour, Artie replies thoughtfully, "maybe" (*Maus* 204), clearly considering it.

By braiding these three pivotal conversations, reading them in relation to each other, the reader is able to see a clear linear trajectory in Artie's development of his sense of self. Not only do the over-the-shoulder shots speak to his progress in and of themselves, Spiegelman uses the recurring motif of movement in the panels that follow immediately after all three sequences to reinforce his growth. After Artie lies to his father about respecting his privacy in the first sequence, Vladek and Artie are portrayed as static figures, in silhouette (see Fig. 5). But after Artie tells his father off for burning his mother's diaries in the second sequence, he is depicted walking away furiously (see Fig. 8). He is no longer in silhouette, nor frozen to his chair. The shift from being stationary to walking, albeit away from Vladek, marks his change from engaging his father without any transparency to verbalising the difficult feelings that he has spent his life suppressing. Finally, after Artie finally confronts how he truly feels about his father's overshadowing presence in his life in the third sequence, he is depicted walking home after his session with Pavel in three panels, transforming from little Artie back to adult Artie (see Fig. 10). The walk from the left to the right page

Fig. 10 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 207

visually represents the way Artie is no longer stuck, both with his writing and in terms of how he feels about his father. He manages to find a solution to overcome his writer's block, deciding to "show the tin shop" to avoid drawing the drill press (*Maus* 207), and 'walks' right into the next page, where he continues telling Vladek's story. Significantly, he enters into the rest of Vladek's story as an adult, demonstrating how he no longer writes out of the place of the wounded child. In accepting why his father was unable to 'see' and validate him as a child, the act of writing this book becomes less about finding himself in his father's story, or about competing with his father to have his voice heard.

In *Maus II*, Vladek's story finally comes to the fore whilst the underlying narrative about Artie's search for his identity recedes. Artie's growth and his increasing acceptance of Vladek are especially pronounced in sequences that echo situations from *Maus I*. When Vladek offers him an olive branch by way of making available a box of old photographs, Artie initially thinks his father has found Anja's diaries. But when it turns out not to be what he hopes for, Artie's response is measured and well-adjusted. If there is any trace of disappointment, we do not see it. Visually, the panels flow with textbook continuity, in a classic moment-to-moment transition, reflecting the ordinariness of this moment (see Fig. 11). Artie remembers to thank his

Fig. 11 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 273

father and engages in conversation with him about the photographs with interest. Furthermore, in the final chapter of *Maus II*, there is a visual echo of Figure 1, where the panel is composed in such a way that an object appears to come between them. This time, instead of a saw, it is the picture of his "ghost-brother", Richieu, on the wall, depicted for the first time since Artie brings it up at the start of Chapter 1 of Volume 2, "I didn't think about him much when I was growing up … he was mainly a large, blurry photograph hanging in my parents' bedroom" (*Maus* 175). The picture is off-centre, framed in such a way that it appears to be the first thing in Vladek's eye line, even though he is looking at Artie (see Fig. 12). The panel reflects the way his father has never lost sight of his first child, causing Artie to have "sibling rivalry with a snapshot" (*Maus* 175), always competing against the "perfect" memory of his

Fig. 12 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 288

brother. Yet, unlike the image of the saw connecting them, it is only Vladek who overlaps with the picture of Richieu. Artie is now able to stand apart from his father's past, whilst at the same time taking the initiative to maintain his connection with his father.

Braiding the three over-the-shoulder sequences creates a narrative arc of Artie's character that opens up an alternative interpretation of the final panels of *Maus II*. If the three sequences portray Artie evolving from being sedentary on the chair, to storming off in a tantrum, to walking into adulthood, they show Vladek regressing from his exercise bike, to a chair, and to his bed. Time has given Artie the ability to establish his sense of self, but has started to dissolve Vladek's. He shows signs of dementia as he forgets that Artie had arranged to see him; it is the past that increasingly fixates at the fore of his mind. When Artie asks him to finish the rest of his story, he says, "The war, yah, this I still remember" (*Maus* 288), narrates the rest of his story with ease, before finally closing his eyes, and the book, by addressing Artie as Richieu (*Maus* 296).

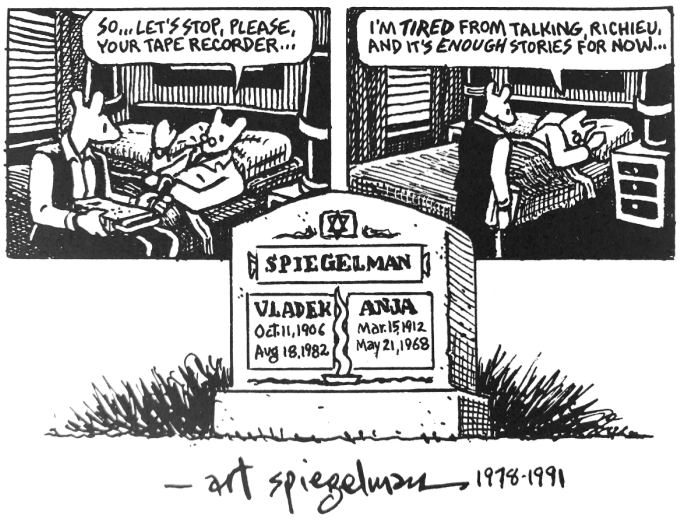

Fig. 13 — Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* 296

In the final panel, we see an echo of the over-the-shoulder shot again, but this time through a wide shot (see Fig. 13). As it is with the other sequences, this shot signals yet another shift in the dynamic between father and son. From blatantly erasing his father's wishes, to relinquishing the need to control the narrative, to accepting the limited space that he will always have in his father's story, Artie now allows his father the last word. Significantly, this is not a self-effacing gesture, as it was in his childhood. The wide shot contains them both in the frame, instead of partially obscuring one of them, and portrays that he has finally found a way to co-exist with Vladek. In this book, they have both had their say: Vladek with his words about his past, and Artie with his visual representation and narrative structuring of Vladek's story. As Artie now stands over Vladek's bed looking at his father, the final panel reminds the reader that in Vladek's death, he will permanently take over the position of control of his father's narrative and have the ability to manipulate Vladek's words in whatever manner he chooses. Yet, he uses that control not to create a triumphant ending for himself, finally suturing himself into his father's story, but to acknowledge the depth of the loss his father never recovers from. Vladek is drawn surrounded by emptiness—the left side of the bed where Anja should be, the words that reinforce all the bedtime stories he did not get to read to his dead firstborn, and the struggle he has had in being fully present to his second-born because of his traumatic past. In response, having finally accepted his place in this story, Artie stands as a silent witness and bears witness to his father without fear that he will be effaced as he does so. Where critics have read Spiegelman's signature under his parents' tombstone as a sign of his dying with them, they overlook the fact that there is a timestamp next to his name: the years it took to write his book. Arguably, what he lays to rest is the period of conflict in struggling with how to make sense of his identity. The period of struggle now has an end date, it is something he can call the past.

It is in the interplay between the comics' content and form that Spiegelman truly weaves a complex story about a survivor's experience in Auschwitz, the struggles of growing up as a child of a Holocaust survivor, and the problematic nature of narrative transmission. The comics form gives the reader the ability to co-create meaning. As a reader-witness, she is the one who braids and traces and interprets and offers conclusions about Artie's character development. The process reflects the idea of how crucial a witness is in helping the second generation work through their experiences, one of the key benefits lying in being seen and observed, something they

were sorely missing as children. The act of reader response parallels the benefit of externalising their inner experiences to a witness, and having their experience reflected back to them. Yet, at the same time, the open-endedness of the comic resists permanent closure. It essentially keeps Artie's identity in flux, never quite certain, because it depends on how the reader interprets his text. It is almost an inordinate amount of power to hand over to readers. But this is precisely what both the Holocaust and second generation narratives are subject to. Artie's identity will continue to be (re)written by future readers; the identity of the second generation will be shaped by the way future generations treat the material of the past. The many interpretations that arise from the same text emphasise how influential a witness is in shaping the outcome of a traumatised person's testimony. At the same time, it also reflects that even as there is an end to his book, these questions and struggles with his past will never be fully resolved. This open-endedness prevents readers from being fully certain of their interpretation, and prevents them from asserting who Artie should be, effectively replacing Vladek's perception of Artie with their own. It facilitates a certain light-handed approach to witnessing, engaging with but not clutching onto the person one listens to, and not imposing too much of ourselves into it. This tension between the reader and the text suggests that if there is anything *The Complete Maus* can hope to achieve, it is in making the reader more conscious about how she reads.

The reader's participation in *After Such Knowledge* takes a different but no less critical pathway. Unlike Artie, who enters the text before he has begun to heal from his childhood wounds, the implied author in Hoffman's text begins her narrative having already worked through a significant portion of her past. The manner in which she dismantles the binary between the Germans and the Jews provides the blueprint by which she works through other significant components of her lived experience: her perceptions, for example, of the Poles, Americans and Israelis, her use and scrutiny of various key words (including 'trauma', 'moral', 'ethics') that are crucial to her response as a second-generation witness, and her critique of the approaches the second generation have taken to create a collective memory of the Holocaust thus far. Through the chapters, her intentional contextualisation of the history she has lived through helps her identify the changes that these successive events bring to her perspective of the Holocaust story. By the end of the six chapters, she is able to say,

> How long it has taken me to unravel and then braid together its raveled, knotted, cut, and fragmented threads until I could distinguish shadows

> from realities and fable from history […] Sixty years later, I think, and after all that can be done has been done, it may also be time to turn away, gently, to let this go. (Hoffman 233)

The 'braiding' that the reader-witness does in *The Complete Maus*, to posit that a possible way for Artie to find closure is through accepting—not resenting—his past, is something that Hoffman's implied author has already in a sense sought to do for herself. Her text may have outlined how messy the process was for her, but the linear trajectory of her chapters demonstrates that at the point of writing this book, she has already found a largely coherent way to translate the transmitted felt pain of trauma into story.

Having spent six chapters creating a "longer and wider lens" to view the landscape of the world she is born into (197), Hoffman moves into the final chapter ready to discard the image of "the perpetually damaged patient" and adopt "the position of analyst and interpreter" (196). She argues that using retrospective reflection to engage her past has given her the means to bear witness to the survivors of other traumas so that they can move through their pain as well. She writes,

> it may be that the model of the good analyst—in the multiple senses of that word—offers a fruitful paradigm for thinking about terrible histories that are so close to us, but yet are not ours. It behooves us, with utmost care and compassion, to use our vantage point outside the traumatic history itself in order to bring to it interpretations that may not be available to the victims; and perhaps, even, in our thinking and analysis, to move beyond the point of trauma itself. (196)

In her final chapter, she thus applies her approach of "unfreezing" the past on the traumatic event that bracketed the end of peacetime in the twentieth century: 9/11. In America's attempt to process this terrorist attack, Hoffman notices yet another binary resurfacing. She observes that some Americans, the ones "who pride themselves on politics of conscience rather than raw emotion or national self-interest" (258), curiously framed themselves as being deserving of that act of terror. They concluded that if the Arab world "[hates] us so much, that means we must be hateful" (258), and identified themselves as the ruthless aggressor who needed to be put in check. The Muslims, as the Other, then came to "stand for the oppressed and the archetypal victims" (263). Among other problematic consequences, this binary significantly altered the public opinion of the Jews. Bearing in mind Zionism in Israel, so many in

the Muslim world "consider Jews to be the archenemy" and "the local imperialists", they were considered, too, "oppressors and the villains" of this story (262).

Hoffman makes her case against binary thinking clear here, demonstrating that it will always require someone to fill the role of 'villain' and thereby instigating a perennial conflict. Moreover, the designations of 'victim' and 'villain' are dependent upon public opinion, susceptible to change with the turn of events. The Jews, having fallen out of the American public's favour, now had to contend with being the new antagonists, moving from being "symbolically untouchable" (262)—the 'noble' survivors of the Holocaust—to being the target of anti-Semitic discrimination again. For Hoffman, this loose sense of justice that binary thinking facilitates is unacceptable. If only those who are perceived as victims are deserving of justice, it misses the point that all people should be regarded without prejudice, according "to the same standards of basic dignity and responsibility" (264), and not only if the public happens to identify with their story. For Hoffman, using retrospective reflection provides a more nuanced apprehension of all groups involved in a collective trauma.

Yet, as much as she expresses these intentions in the content of her work, the form of that her narrative raises the question as to whether she is able to perform them completely. Whilst she critiques the mainstream narrativising of 9/11 for encouraging a blind alliance with those whom society perceives as victims at the time, arguing that "exclusive compassion for one person—or tribe—can lead to injustice towards those outside the sphere of our immediate attachments" (264), she lapses into a similar mistake when she sidelines the stories that her own interests do not entirely touch: the stories of the Muslims in the Arab world. Unlike the way she enters into the perspectives of her German contemporaries earlier in the text, she does not contextualise how 9/11 would have factored into the larger history of her Muslim contemporaries. Granted, Hoffman does admit that there are certain stories that she can only grasp "abstractly" rather than "palpably" (249). And for a narrative that intends to work through her own issues on the subject, this is more than understandable. But it does become problematic if this is the sole framework through which she reads public traumas that come after the Holocaust. It certainly offers one view of history, but is, by no means, the only view of the event.

What is notably missing from a text that has critically and adroitly made a case for how narratives change over time, highlighting "the statute of limitations on the great cataclysms of the twentieth century is running out", and that "the lines of

meaning drawn out of the past cannot retain their strength as a scaffolding for present significance" (243), is Hoffman's lapses in self-examination in her attempt to engage contemporary traumas. She does not, for instance, explore how the exclusion of these non-Jewish stories can be attributed in part to the nature of retrospective reflection, or the limitations of imposing one method of bearing witness, which may have worked brilliantly in one context, onto another, especially when one's position as witness has changed in these other circumstances. In the first six chapters, Hoffman used a wider historical context to read her *personal stories*, in order to give herself more critical distance from these lived experiences. Her starting point and agenda were markedly subjective, and the coherent narrative that she forms about the second generation's larger historical context is a valuable by-product of her personal working through. In her reading of 9/11, however, Hoffman attempts to use a similar strategy of reflecting through these issues whilst reversing her point of comparison. Here, she examines a public trauma through a framework that is skewed towards focalising events from the personal 'I'. As a result, her reading of this event is limited by the scope of her empathy and personal interests in its related issues. Without foregrounding these aspects of her approach, the writer who has spent the length of her book speaking against the limitations of binaries inadvertently establishes her own by the end of her text. As retrospective reflection trumps other forms of narrativising the past for her, Hoffman's own critique implicitly privileges highlighting the plight of the Jews over the other players in the collective trauma of 9/11.

By resurrecting the framework from childhood, the form of Hoffman's text suggests that even 'after such knowledge', after a lifetime of learning and unlearning, of braiding through her past and considering the Holocaust from various angles, each time in the light of a new movement in her own and in world history, the experience, perhaps even trauma, of being born into a persecuted race is too deeply etched to be removed completely. It is not to say that this negates the validity of her text or her years of working through these issues, nor does this observation minimise the severity of rising anti-Semitism in the aftermath of 9/11. Rather, it points to the fact that even the most thorough and introspective of witnesses has an inevitable blind spot. But if Eliot posited, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?", sceptically challenging the possibility of a reconciliatory way forward, the omission of the last two words from Hoffman's title leaves her conclusion open-ended. What *is* there after amassing all this knowledge about the past if it is not to remove its marks completely? And this answer,

perhaps, is the ongoing work that Hoffman leaves to the reader, as she does what the writer cannot, and evaluates the effect and impact of her text with a bit more distance from these issues.

The Generations After

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the significant way literary form contributes to the telling of each writer's story. Unlike history, "which establishes, ascertains, and analyses historical facts, events, and larger historical trends" (Slodounik 37), the form of their stories makes it possible for a reader to "focus on the ways in which ordinary, individual actors in historical events process, remember, and share their experiences with later generations" (37). And the reader-witness explores the specificities of each text's effects, she "accepts that every Holocaust writer has a 'different story' to tell, not because what happened to so many others was intrinsically 'different,' but because *how* victims and survivors have grasped and related their experiences comprises the actual core of 'their story'" (Young 38–39). The study of the form of these memoirs thus acknowledges the value of a single life, and the contribution that a single story can make to the larger Holocaust narrative. In a way, memoirs record more than a family's personal history, but are a part of each generation's larger history and the written means by which they pursued a sense of healing.

But, as these slightly different narratives of history also emphasise, the past will always be reread in a way that is relevant to one's present-day interests. Bearing witness to narratives of the past always transforms it in some way. Hence, as Spiegelman and Hoffman have suggested, a responsible way of engaging in this process is to be aware of one's own biases and constantly return to tweak one's lenses to find the right distance from which to bear witness. Their journey exemplifies how a reader could approach her own witnessing of texts about the Holocaust. As the responsibility of bearing witness of these narratives passes onto her, who reads them through her own biases, all she can hope to do is participate with critical discernment in the narrative transmission of Holocaust memories. The reader-witness's self-consciousness does not remove her biases, and the blind spots that come with them, but it does remind her that her reading is but a version of what could be transmitted. Her ability to account for the way her version deviates from narratives of the past keeps her continually in touch with former versions, recognising that they, too, have

offered critical perspectives of the event. Each version contributes a fragment that eventually provides a more holistic apprehension of the whole. In this way, the collective memory of the Holocaust is not only about what people generally remember about the event, but can become a memory that has been collectively reconstructed.

III. Narratives of Hidden Victims: Listening to Stories of Wartime Rape in Southeast Asia

There's the story, then there's the real story,
then there's the story of how the story came to be told.
Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too.
—Margaret Atwood

In this present time, the majority of the Euro-American world no longer disputes the moral and ethical imperative to bear witness to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. The focus of Holocaust studies has thus shifted away from discussing the need for willing witnesses and, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, has centred on ascertaining the best approach to apprehend survivors' testimonies. However, the same cannot be said for the discussion in literary trauma studies pertaining to certain victims of the Pacific War on the other side of the world. For some of these victims, their accounts of suffering have been so firmly submerged in nascent stages of societal awareness that it is only through fiction that they are brought to public attention.

Published more than 50 years after the Pacific War, Nora Okja Keller's breakthrough novel, *Comfort Woman* (1997), was one of the first to unveil the war atrocity of sexual slavery conducted by the Japanese military. In an interview, Keller remarks, "when I was writing the novel, I would type in 'Comfort Woman/Women' in the internet search engines and would only get things like 'home making' back" (Lee and Keller 155). In order to give voice to these marginalised women, her novel not only portrays the extent of their suffering, it also explores the reasons why their stories have gone unwitnessed for all these years. Notably, it highlights the extent to which an unethical 'witness' has the capacity to stymie a trauma victim's narrative from being heard. When Akiko escapes a comfort camp in Korea, establishments where the Japanese army imprisoned young local girls and forced them to provide sexual services for their soldiers, she is brought by a villager to a Christian missionary house in Pyongyang. However, rather than finding a place of refuge, Akiko catches the attention of a sexual predator, an American missionary, Richard Bradley, who believes she is a former prostitute. Here, Keller subverts the tired trope of the white, American missionary saving the 'disgraced' woman of colour by demonstrating how the imbalanced power dynamic gives the man the capacity to abuse and further suppress an already ravaged woman. Characterised by his speech that regularly quotes scripture

verbatim, Bradley claims it is his God-given opportunity to give Akiko a new life by marrying her and taking her to America with him after the war. Yet, presented through Akiko's first-person point of view, the novel reveals that she is able to read his body language, which mirrors "the lust, dark, and heavy and animal" (Keller 146) of the Japanese soldiers who raped her. Bradley's pious sounding words are only a means to manipulate the circumstances so that he can act on his lust for her. He 'sanitises' her with Christian rituals—like baptism and marriage—not out of a sincere belief that it will better her life but so that, once married, he can have sex with her without the judgement of his Christian community (106). Far from saving her from her past, the sex that he has with her—which the novel implicitly portrays as marital rape—only triggers her to relive the rapes she suffers in the comfort camp (106, 146).

Keller's chilling portrayal of Akiko and Bradley's relationship gives readers a glimpse as to why these stories have been left out of much of history. As Atwood alludes to in the quotation above, and as Keller demonstrates in her novel, it is power rather than truth that determines whether a story comes to the fore. In the novel, Bradley's position of authority in this English-speaking religious institution, as a charismatic, white American missionary, gives him the agency to construct a story about her without any accountability. He peddles the fiction that she was a former prostitute without clarifying the truth with her, simply because it serves his constructed role as her 'saviour'. Even though Akiko knows that Bradley is spinning a blatant misconception of who she is to the Mission for his selfish purposes, "he wanted me—a young girl—not for his God but for himself" (95), as the young girl dependent on the Mission for her survival, her inability to speak English gives her little recourse to counter him. Hence, it is his warped reconstruction of Akiko's actions that becomes widely accepted by his community and allows him to get away with being a perpetrator of abuse.

Moreover, the trauma that Akiko sustains as a victim of rape makes it especially difficult for her to push back against this abuse of power. In the novel, readers are privy to Akiko's inner thoughts and recognise how far her "real story" is from Bradley's assumptions. But as she is deeply traumatised from her experiences, Akiko does not have the capacity to prove that she was not a prostitute but a victim of rape, much less expose Bradley for his fraudulent spirituality. To borrow from Mieke Bal, it is challenging for Akiko to re-experience her trauma as a narrative because

> rape itself cannot be visualised, because rape makes the victim invisible. It does that literally—the perpetrator first covers her—and then figuratively—the rape destroys her self-image, her subjectivity, which is temporarily narcotized, definitely changed, and often destroyed. Finally, rape cannot be visualized because the experience is, physically as well as psychologically, *inner*. Rape takes place inside. In this sense, rape is by definition "imagined"; it can only exist as experience and as memory, as *image* translated into signs, never adequately objectifiable. ("The Story of W" 44–45)

As an essentially "inner" experience, the identification and prosecution of rape places a specific demand on the importance of the spoken word as compared to other crimes. It is one so formidable that "even in the twenty-first century, the narrative forms at our disposal strain to entirely capture the experience of sexual trauma, particularly if the speaker means to be heard and believed" (Miller 226). As feminist theorist, Lynn Higgins, argues, rape is "a special kind of crime in relation to narrative" (307). She highlights that it

> differs from other violent crimes in the kind of alibis it permits. To prove his innocence, someone suspected of murder must show he himself was elsewhere or that the murder was committed by another person. He can rarely claim that no crime occurred. Murder is not a crime whose noncommission can be narrated. Rape, on the other hand, can be discursively transformed into another kind of story. This is exactly the sort of thing that happens when rape is rewritten retrospectively into "persuasion," "seduction," or even "romance". […] A rape defence case can rest on the claim that what occurred was not a rape and so the question is not *who committed the crime*, but *whether a crime occurred at all*. (307)

The absence of "other types of corroborative evidence, especially that which can be rendered visually—both literally with the exhibition of a physical wound or image and metaphorically as in the recreation of the event"—renders a rape victim's testimony her sole means of fighting for justice (Coundouriotis 366). In other words, if she hopes it "will be understood and respected by external authorities" (Miller 238), it is no longer simply about *reflecting* her traumatic experience and covering "the bare reportage of the event" (228). Instead, her rape narrative is burdened with a dual

necessity of being both "accusation", which proves the absence of consent, and "evidence of the nature of the harm done" (Coundouriotis 366), to *persuade* her listener of the justice that is owed to her. Her narrative thus has to "recreate the emotional intensity of the experience itself: the terror, the pain, the shock, the paralysis, the effects on relationships, and the victims' subsequent everyday life" in order to bridge the gap between what escapes the eye and the hidden suffering of rape victims (Miller 238).

The mental acuity required to produce such a narrative becomes even more impossible for a victim who is also traumatised from being raped. As many trauma theorists argue, trauma is precisely the condition that impedes an individual's ability to narrativise her experiences. In *The Body Keeps Score*, Bessel van der Kolk explains that normal memories are formed when the brain's "two memory systems—rational and emotional—collaborate to produce an integrated response" of the event (ch. 11). As a result, a person is able to narrativise her emotional reaction to an event into a story with a logical "beginning, a middle, and an end" (ch. 12). And, as new memories are created, the brain continually shapes and reshapes these units of stories into one overarching narrative that forms a "flow of self-experience" for the individual (ch. 11). Aptly, the etymological roots from the Latin "narrare"—to "tell, relate, explain", "to make acquainted with"—and "gnarus"—"knowing"—indicate that to narrate is to do more than neutrally describe a series of events. Rather, it is a way to give coherence and meaning to disparate fragments, and *know* them. Hence, the way in which both individual memories and the overarching collective flow are narrativised determines how a person 'reads' herself and understands who she is as a result of what she has experienced. As narrative theorists, Dan McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Leiblich, put it, "The I tells a story of the self, and that story becomes part of the Me" (3). In contrast, when a person experiences trauma, "the frontal lobe shuts down, including […] the region necessary to put feelings into words" and "the emotional brain, which is not under conscious control and cannot communicate in words, takes over" (van der Kolk ch. 11). As a result, "the imprints of traumatic experience are organized not as coherent logical narratives but in fragmented sensory and emotional traces: images, sounds, and physical sensations" (ch. 11), which impede a person's ability to "recall the sequence of events or other vital details of their experience" (ch. 11). As the "different sensations that entered the brain at the time of the trauma are not properly assembled into a story, a piece of autobiography" (ch. 12), a traumatised

person cannot entirely 'own' that memory and, by extension, be in possession of her sense of self.

In addition to these challenges, Keller's novel also demonstrates that Bradley's story is able to gain traction because of the absence of societal support for women like Akiko. If Akiko wanted to convince Bradley that she was a victim of rape, she would have needed to have someone else to work through her dissociation with her, develop an awareness of what the rapes have cost her, and acquire the vocabulary powerful enough to articulate the damage she has suffered. Not only was this psychological framework unavailable in the post-war years—trauma theory in its nascent stages in the 1950s—it would have been an astronomical enough task for Akiko to have received any external support from her community at all. She was, like many comfort women from Korea were, "raised in [an] impoverished [family] and inadequately schooled" (Naoko 28). As a result, she is sold to the Japanese army to pay for her eldest sister's dowry (Keller 18), a commodity without a voice from the start, even to her own family. Furthermore, even though her psychological state prevents her from being her own advocate, the social taboo of being raped was so immense that it would have automatically cast her as a sexually promiscuous woman and a disgrace to her family. As a result, many women have chosen to stay silent rather than report the crime. In a study about the comfort women's PTSD after the war, Sung et al found that

> not only have former comfort women hidden themselves, but the society surrounding them has also declined to uncover this historical war crime. Their shame regarding their past and the social stigma attached to the victims of rape have constituted additional traumas for these women. Consequently, they have lived forgotten lives, being isolated within society for the 60 years since the end of the war. (161)

This social taboo is what Bradley exploits in order to maintain his reputation as a religious man. When Akiko screams in public about the truth of what happened to her in the comfort house, he manipulates her by saying, "Think of how [our daughter] would feel, knowing that her mother was a prostitute. […] I ask that you protect our daughter, with your silence, from that shame" (Keller 196). Aside from the fact that his erroneous assumptions about her past already suppress the truth of her story, Bradley implicitly exploits the "collectivist culture" (Ha 1117) of Akiko's society in an attempt to keep her under control. In his study on cultures, Francis Ha explains that unlike individualist cultures—which tend to prioritise personal happiness over group

harmony—collectivist cultures, "including most East Asian countries", place a strong emphasis on "gaining the approval of in-group others" (1117). In a collectivist culture, social bonds and relationships are determined according to whether one is held in high esteem or in disgrace. An individual is conditioned to feel proud if she believes she is regarded with respect and approval, and shame if she feels that the group's approval is "withheld" (1117). Ha goes on to explain that the need for in-group harmony and secure relational bonds is so strong, that people in collectivist cultures are more likely to sacrifice their own happiness in order to maintain the approval of their community (1118). Given that rape is often taboo in these cultures, which tend to be strongly patriarchal, a woman who has been raped is likely to be perceived, and to perceive herself, as disgracing her father or her husband. Far from being a crime for which to seek justice and redress, in the event that the rape was discovered, many families were complicit in covering up the crime. They chose, instead, to disown their daughters rather than be rejected by their larger community. Hence, Bradley evokes society's judgemental view of prostitutes to remind Akiko that her 'humiliating' past could jeopardise her family and banks on the fact that Akiko's concern for her daughter's welfare will trump any desire to tell the truth.

Akiko's silence comes from the potent combination of her trauma preventing her from speaking, her limited language restricting her from crafting a persuasive narrative to counter Bradley's assumptions, and the deep societal stigma and rejection she would have faced if she spoke about what had happened to her. The fact that she is so deeply isolated and unable to be her own advocate makes it possible for Bradley to take advantage of her effortlessly. Without the capacity or the platform to speak, the more Bradley can spin his version without being contested, the more it is sanctioned as 'the Story', the official version of events. Between what he wilfully chooses to leave out (to serve his own agenda), and what he does not know he leaves out (the truth about Akiko's past), he creates a story that is only a reflection of his worldview and insidious design.

Gaps in Literary Trauma Studies

If "the discourse of a society bears the imprint of its power structure" (Lee, S. 138), Keller's *Comfort Woman* epitomises the way literature has the ability to speak back to individual agendas and various societal pressures that seek to suppress rape victims' narratives. It challenges the perception that the comfort women are "shameful

signs of an unclean historical record" that need to be erased (Coundouriotis 385), and aims to make their stories visible to provide a more accurate depiction of historical events. For Emma Miller, literature's long history of providing alternative voices to dominant social scripts and "bringing the suffering of victims to public attention" comes from its ability to create empathy (228). By employing narrative strategies and techniques,

> [l]iterary authors have thus attempted to convey the particularity of the event, to engage the reader with the characters so that they feel something personal for them, that this is no longer something that happens to other people, in some other place but something happening widely, repeatedly to your neighbour, your colleague, your friend, your sister, your brother—to you—now. (228)

As literary narratives experiment with forms that can bring an experience of rape closer to third party witnesses and challenge the assumptions of social scripts, they complement trauma theory by providing effective ways for victims to tell their stories. For Marinella Rodi-Risberg, these different forms of storytelling, "if received by readers as media of cultural memory and if widely read", are powerful tools to "[transform] readers' perceptions of reality" (117), "[restore] the survivors' point of view to the historical record alongside that of the other voices" to establish a "richer and fuller archive" of history (Coundouriotis 385).

However, even as literary trauma studies aim to let "other" perspectives and "marginal voices to enter into the conversation" on various issues (Silke 6), it, too, is not exempt from creating its own lacunae. As Sabine Silke points out, the extent of "otherness" that literary texts can include is "channelled and limited by the institutional frames in which they appeared" (6). The worldviews, biases, and theoretical frameworks that shape the context in which they are read decide which stories of the marginalised are witnessed, and which are left out. In terms of literary trauma discourse, the 'classic' trauma model has played a crucial role in determining which narratives of suffering receive attention. Despite the fact that the model's conceptions of trauma are shaped primarily as a response to the trauma of the Holocaust, the first wave of Eurocentric trauma theory considered it "the classic expression of trauma" (Cheyette 192). Taken as the "dominant trauma discourse" (192), or the universal framework by which to read other collective traumas, this model encouraged critics to privilege trauma narratives that fit its framework or skew

their readings towards this definition of trauma. But as Susannah Radstone points out, "not all trauma victims are constructed equally" (85). By imposing this model without considering the context from which the trauma victim speaks, trauma theorists "[run] the risk of erasing essential differences between traumatic experiences, differences of historical context and geopolitical location, as well the specificities of individual experiences that can be lost in a diagnosis that finds the same symptoms everywhere" (Griffiths 194). More pertinently, it risks excluding the traumas that do not necessarily align with the model's schemata.

Unsurprisingly, the specific context and variables of the Holocaust that have shaped the 'classic' trauma model is not a given in every instance of collective trauma. Irene Visser highlights that "Holocaust trauma studies engage with a more clearly definable period of history, and a clearer historical sense of victims, perpetrators, and responsibility" (9). These neat categories tidily reinforce early Freudian trauma theory's "exclusive focus on the event-based model of trauma" (9). With this consensus on the identifiable perpetrators and victims, there is no dispute over the fact that one party has instigated an event of injustice on another. The event-based model can then examine how the trauma occurred and the extent of the damage that has been conferred onto the victim. As per the 'classic' model, trauma theorists might then identify how the "unexpected occurrence" of this event plays a "causal role" in "[triggering] the necessity of the repetition mechanism of the originary trauma" in the victims (Yusin 241), and creates an "interminable compulsion to return to the effective accident or event in traumatic nightmares and flashbacks" (242). But not every context of trauma has a clear "historical sense of victims, perpetrators, and responsibility" (Visser 9). In circumstances where a victim has yet to be identified, the model is ineffectual. It does not have the capacity to unearth the true victims of trauma and oppression, who are rendered invisible by existing power structures of these societies.

For this reason, both feminist and postcolonial critics have converged in their criticism of the event-based aspect of the model. They argue that the overemphasis on the Holocaust as the dominant reference point for trauma creates a bias about the "type of life event [that is] likely to make one psychologically traumatized" (Watters ch. 1) and, more specifically, overlooks *structural* traumas. These are experiences that are "not a momentary intrusion on everyday life, but rather *a way of life*, a permanent state of things" (Yusin 239), namely the "systemic abuses" that "perpetuate second-class citizenship" for women in a patriarchal society (Griffiths 181), or the "sustained and

long processes of the trauma of colonialism" (Visser 9). As Keller's novel demonstrates, societal ignorance and prejudice against victims of sexual abuse, coupled with the insidious agenda of white male authority, are precisely the factors that prevent women from being seen as a victim. And as long as the model is dependent on society first acknowledging its trauma victims before it can bear witness to them, it will be limited in its ability to bring to the surface the stories that are truly hidden.

The 'classic' model's oversight of the structural traumas of patriarchy and colonisation has inevitably rendered male- and Eurocentric stories more visible in literary trauma studies.[18] Its dual bias makes the stories about the Pacific War that feature women of colour particularly susceptible to being overlooked, marginalising them both by their gender and race. Relying on this trauma model, as it stands, to read trauma narratives thus only perpetuates the discrimination against them that has been present since the aftermath of the War.[19] Moreover, as exemplified by the treatment of the comfort women issue in recent years, in the event that the stories of women eventually do surface in literary trauma discourse, the model's Eurocentric biases have continued to "[marginalize] non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work" (Craps and Beulens 2), and tended to feature only the stories that pertain to Western interests.

In view of Japan's blatant denial of their crimes, the comfort women's community's refusal to acknowledge their suffering, the silence imposed by their own trauma, *and* the neglect of their stories by any relevant trauma discourse, there is little wonder that the plight of comfort women from South Korea has taken all these years to surface. It has taken time for more novelists to follow Keller's suit, to help raise the

[18] It is worth noting that even though the Holocaust is often central to trauma theory, it is often also biased towards male-centric Holocaust experiences. It was not until the 1990s that feminist historians and academics argued that the "real story" of the Holocaust also had to include female experiences. As Marlene Heinemann points out, "even the most impartial and sensitive male survivor will be unable to provide an insider's picture of women's experiences in Nazi camps, since male and female prisoners were segregated in separate camps" (3). Feminist Holocaust researchers, like Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, Carol Rittner, John K. Roth and Lilian Kremer, have since provided information and stories about the specific traumas that women faced in the concentration camps—such as sexual assault and rape, pregnancy, abortions, filicide, menstruation, among others—in order to transmit a more comprehensive Holocaust experience for posterity. Moreover, it must be noted that there is still a limited representation of stories of the suffering of the queer victims and the gypsies in the camps. With gaps of knowledge even for the very context that it was designed to bear witness, the 'classic' model is even more limited in its capacity to bear witness to trauma narratives in other non-Holocaust related contexts.

[19] In Yuki Tanaka's research on the redress for comfort women after the war, he observes a stark difference in the Allied troops' support of the Dutch comfort women and the Southeast-Asian ones. As Tanaka writes, the rape of these women as a serious war crime was "clearly lacking in the mind of the Allied forces", possibly because the majority of the victims "were Asians and were therefore neither white women nor civilians of the Allied nations" (87). Whilst the Dutch forces "prosecuted Japanese officers for the crime of forcing Dutch girls and women into prostitution", they "did not even bother to investigate most cases in which Indonesian women were victimized" (Tanaka 87).

profile of this issue in popular attention through their work.[20] It has also taken time for the South Korean society to recognise the need for redress when a woman has been a victim of a sexual crime,[21] as rape has "historically been constructed as a crime not against a person, but against property (belonging to the fraternity of fathers, brothers, husbands)" in this conservative society (Tal 155). When these two threads eventually converged more than fifty years after the war, feminists and human rights activists were able to put pressure on the government to acknowledge that these women were victims who deserved redress. To date, silence, at least, has been broken on the issue insofar as South Korea has pressured Japan for an apology for the war abuses of its women.[22]

However, whilst the plight of former comfort women from South Korea may have become globally visible, the comfort women and other victims of wartime rape from Southeast-Asian countries, like Singapore and Malaysia, have been given little or no attention at all. This is due, in part, to how the "recent upsurge" in the comfort women movement in South Korea quickly became 'adopted' "as an American concern" (Schultermandl 73), when it revealed that there had been Korean-American women who were formerly enslaved. The 'Americanized' movement of redress thus placed "emphasis on the U.S. government's role as political liberator and legal meditator in the matter of ongoing negotiations between Japan and the surviving comfort women who sue for financial compensation", effectively aligning itself with "discourses that portray America as the "defender of the free world" (74). As the suffering of former comfort women has become largely "absorbed by U.S. mainstream cultural discourse" (74), only important insofar as it serves as a vehicle for American

[20] See also *A Gesture Life* (1999) by Chang-Rae Lee, *Daughters of the Dragon* (2014) by William Andrews, *White Chrysanthemum* (2018) by Mary Lynn Bracht.

[21] The women's movement emerged in the 1980s, when the Sixth Republic of South Korea allowed the country to stabilise into a liberal democracy. Activists published oral testimonies from former comfort women (see *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women* (1996), by Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, edited by Keith Howard) to raise awareness of this issue.

[22] Although Japan agreed to fund the foundation established by the Government of the Republic of Korea, to "[recover] the honour and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women" ("Full Text Joint Announcement"), the 2015 announcement contains no acknowledgement of the role Japan played in coercing these women into sexual slavery in the first place. The phrasing of the first paragraph carefully elides an admission of responsibility, only stating, "The *issue* of comfort women, with an *involvement* of the Japanese military authorities at that time, was a grave affront to the honour and dignity of large numbers of women", before offering the Prime Minister's "sincere apologies and remorse" to the comfort women ("Full Text Joint Announcement", emphasis mine). The difference between the Japanese stating their "involvement" in, implying their mere participation in and not their instigation of, this "issue", a term that neutralises the absolute violation of these women, was not lost on the victims. As a result of their protests, the South Korean government dissolved the foundation in July 2019, "insisting the 2015 deal did not hold Japan sufficiently accountable for its past abuses" ("Seoul Dissolves Japan Fund"). Japan remains unsupportive of their decision, calling the South Korean's liquidation of the foundation "problematic" ("Seoul Dissolves Japan Fund"). Putting aside the thorny undertones of both countries using the trauma of the former comfort women for political expediency and nationalistic agendas, it is unlikely that the remaining comfort women, now in their 90s, will receive just reparation in their life time.

concerns, this has shaped a version of their story that ignored the suffering of the comfort women who had nothing to do with America.

But the stories of former comfort women from South Korea do not speak for the victims in other parts of Southeast Asia. And as the women in these countries fall through the gaps of the 'classic' trauma model—being suppressed by structural traumas of *both* patriarchy and colonisation, and as their societies are not inclined to regard the rape experiences of their women as a war crime that deserves recompense[23]—their stories continue to be left out of literary trauma discourse. Hence, if trauma theorists want the role of being "gatekeepers at the border of what is acknowledged as trauma" and determine "for whom, when, where, and in what circumstances are particular texts read or experienced as trauma texts" and "which events, experiences and texts are to be classed as trauma and which are to be excluded from this category" (Radstone 85), they need to "critique Western complacency in dealing with non-Western testimony" (Craps and Buelens 5), and critically ask "whose stories are not being empathized with" as a result of their framework (Radstone 85). To that end, in the following discussion, I explore how literature has the potential to portray the stories of those who have fallen through the gaps in trauma theory. I analyse three novels—Jing-Jing Lee's *How We Disappeared* (2019), Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012), and Vyvyane Loh's *Breaking the Tongue* (2004)—which feature women who were either incarcerated as comfort women or victims of military rape in Singapore and Malaya during the Pacific War. All three novels thematise, in varying degrees, the difficult process of bearing witness to a victim of rape, challenge several assumptions of the 'classic' trauma model and reflect a need for a more inclusive framework to bear witness to victims whose contexts fall outside its scope. In *How We Disappeared*, Lee juxtaposes three narratives of differing perspectives to demonstrate the extent to which the structural trauma of patriarchy silences a victim of rape, and the consequences this silence has on her larger community. As these narratives intersect, the novel demonstrates how a willing

[23] Granted, the number of comfort women from these countries are negligible compared to that other nations. After all, formal records about the war often list only women from China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam as those who were taken as comfort women (Naoko 19). In contrast, ethnic Chinese and Indians from Singapore and Malaya appear only in less 'official' documentation, such as the "memoirs of former soldiers" (19). However, historian Kumagai Naoko also posits that the official documents do not accurately reflect the number of these comfort women. In his research, he outlines the various circumstances incited the unofficial taking of women in Southeast Asia. Many instances of sexual violence by military personnel "took place outside of any official system of registration or comfort stations, in the form of abduction, temporary detainment and rape, impressment, and so forth" (19). These women "who were used, de facto, as comfort women" "probably existed in large numbers in Southeast-Asian and Pacific theaters of war" (19). But since "few soldiers involved in such incidents confessed to their participation" (20), there is very little information about the number or identities of these victims.

witness, even if he is a 12-year-old boy, can help a victim overcome the mental barriers that keep her from testifying. In *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Tan adds to the complexity of this process by portraying that it is not simply a rape victim's environment that impedes her testimony, but also the witness herself. Through the juxtaposition of three narratives from different time frames, the novel considers how to bear witness to the comfort women who did not survive the war, especially when her only witness struggles to reconstruct the past because of her survivor's guilt. Finally, Loh's *Breaking the Tongue* portrays how the victim, her witness, *and* the reader all share the responsibility of enabling a victim's trauma narrative to be seen. The bilingual interaction between a female Chinese rape victim and her male, anglophile witness gives Loh the means to portray the limitations of using a Eurocentric worldview to bear witness to the trauma of non-Western victims. Rather, it is only when the witness adopts a culturally sensitive way of engaging the victim that he is able to empower and give voice to her suffering.

As I evaluate the different types of witnesses that affect the reception of the women's stories, and the gaps within the stories themselves, I argue that it is in analysing the novels' narrative strategies that the reader-witness has a better grasp of the contexts that shape the characters' trauma. As postcolonial critic Ato Quayson observes, the rhetoric and structure of literary texts are often "sidestepped" for the novel's content, "the psychoanalysis of character or the detailing of the psychoanalytic relations between characters" for instance, "as if to take psychoanalysis as a superior form of illumination" (758). Yet, to do so "[ignores] the degree to which its categories get transformed in context with literary texts" (758). Literature, for Quayson, is a "variegated series of thresholds and levels"—"characterization, chronology and sequence, metaphor, the represented spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the literary universe and its implicit or explicit ethical dimension"—"which interactively determine the production of the social within it" (770). They collectively work together to make the novel's content "visible as an object of analysis in the first place" (700). Hence, as I foreground the flaws and limitations of the women's witnesses, and the way the content of these novels deal with the difficulties of speaking about rape, my literary analysis explores how their narrative strategies can circumvent these contextual difficulties of speaking about rape and bear witness to a hidden victim's story nonetheless.

The Gaps in Societal Scripts in *How We Disappeared*

Literary trauma theorists have long since argued that the act of telling stories about "the catastrophes that beset us—both individual and collective" can be "crucial tools for recovery" (Pederson 97). At its best, "storytelling is an essentially human act that enables all of us to make sense of our lives and to feel integrated as members of a community" (Phelps 55). For the trauma victim, a story can "ground the survivor's identity or self" (McKinney 271). It is a means by which she can pull together the fragments of memories and pain that have made her other to herself. As she tells her story and comes to recognise that "part of who I am is the trauma I remember and the trauma story I may tell" (271), she returns to a more coherent sense of self. The more survivors "speak words for themselves in their own voices" and draw attention to the justice that has yet to be administered to them or their loved ones, they have the opportunity to "put back together shattered selves, families and societies" (Phelps 55). As these stories furnish the details that have been previously overlooked or omitted, they can "[enable] people to be vindicated, in that the false stories told about them or their loved ones can be corrected" (55). In this way, as Kelly McKinney puts it, individual stories that are "performed and communicated in a social context" have the "power to counter totalizing collective historical narratives" that presently exclude them (271).

Given that trauma is precisely that which removes one's ability to speak of that experience coherently, trauma restoration is often conceptualised as the rebuilding of an individual's narrative capabilities in curative therapy. Here, a "knowledgeable expert" listens to an "inarticulate victim" tell her story (Craps and Buelens 4). As an 'objective therapist', the listener is perceived as someone emptied of his own agenda or bias that would influence the victim to shape her narrative in a particular way. He is merely "the *blank screen* on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (Laub, "Bearing Witness" 57, emphasis mine). By "showing empathy" as he listens, "a reaction that supposedly obviates any need for critical self-reflection *regarding his or her own implication in ongoing practices of oppression and denial*" (Craps and Buelens 4–5, emphasis mine), the disinterested listener is thus assumed to be unobtrusive in this whole process. In this way, the model appears to prioritise the victim's psychological healing. It is her narrative that is important here, her story told in *her* way and with *her* voice. In the cocoon of the therapist's controlled and safe

office, the only barrier that appears to stand in the way of a survivor having her story heard is her own wounded psyche.

As persuasive as this argument is, and as needful as it is for victims to construct their traumatic experiences into narrative, this version of trauma restoration does not provide the complete picture regarding what it takes to bring a hidden story into full view. The 'classic' model relies on a reductive and unrealistic assumption that a trauma narrative has the privilege of emerging in a psychological vacuum. It does not account for the non-psychological factors that can also impede a victim's narrative from being heard, such as

> the composition of the community of trauma survivors; the nature of the trauma inflicted upon the members of the community; the composition of the community of perpetrators; the relationship between the communities of victims and perpetrators; and the contemporary social, political, and cultural location of the community of survivors. (Tal 17)

If a trauma narrative has to be "performed and communicated in a social context" in order to facilitate the victim's re-integration back to her society after the traumatic event (McKinney 271), it is crucial to consider that not all listeners of this narrative will be a professional, educated therapist. Rather, they come with varying degrees of trauma awareness, their own worldviews, and agendas. Depending on the pre-existing worldviews of her listeners, the outcome between a victim's ability to reconstruct her story and society's *acceptance* of it is not a foregone conclusion.[24] A trauma survivor can find herself needing to speak her truth against prevailing societal scripts that blatantly contradict her story, a process that could be traumatic in and of itself.

This is the reality that Jing-Jing Lee explores in *How We Disappeared*. The novel ventures into one of the little-known periods of history and explores the factors that have impeded the emergence of a former Singaporean comfort woman's story. Lee interweaves three storylines: the first, Wang Di's present-day struggles as an

[24] During a parliamentary session in September 2016, Kim Bok Dong—the first victim to report her wartime enslavement as a sex worker in 1992—argued that Japan's apology was "not sincere because some Japanese leaders continued to deny the women were forced to work in brothels […] It's not about money. They're still saying we went there because we wanted to" ("Fight Until the End"). It is clear from this example that the road to a survivor's full recovery comprises more than restoring her psychological wellbeing. Kim's ability to tell her story was not sufficient healing for her. Instead, as a victim of crime, Kim required the representatives of her perpetrators to demonstrate *their acknowledgement of her trauma* by delivering adequate redress for what she experienced. Their competing narrative of the event, however, denied the validity of what she has suffered and prevented her from receiving what she needed. Her state of trauma was not just caused by the psychological wounding that she suffered, but is also perpetuated by her society's predominant "sociocultural, narrative act of constructing traumatic experiences" (Visser 15).

elderly widow; the second, her first-person recollection of her wartime experiences; the third, set in the same time frame as the first, twelve-year old Kevin's discovery of a family secret that eventually leads him to connect with the elderly woman. By juxtaposing Wang Di's past with an account of her present-day realities, Lee explores the extent to which a patriarchal society prevents a rape victim from receiving the healing she needs, and the long-lasting damage that this unresolved trauma causes. At the same time, as Lee intersects these two storylines with a seemingly out-of-place third narrative, the novel attempts to perform a disruption of the traumatic pattern that has scripted Wang Di's past. In this way, the novel considers "the role of voice and how the victim's identity and subject position factor into the availability of a receptive audience and the language with which to frame the totality of the trauma" (Griffiths 188). It enacts a literary process of "remembering against these […] cultural forces that do not validate the experiences" of these women (188), and endeavours to contribute a new script to the prevailing societal narrative regarding female victims of wartime rape.

Scripted by Patriarchy

Lee uses the trope of the 'mad old woman', or 'Cardboard Auntie', to characterise her protagonist, Wang Di, an elderly former comfort woman, to draw attention to the traumatic ramifications of living as a rape victim in a patriarchal society. In Singapore, a 'Cardboard Auntie' (or 'Cardboard Uncle' if referring to an elderly man) is someone who collects unwanted cardboard and other scrap materials to sell. A laborious job for a pittance, it tends to be taken up by an impoverished elderly person of the lowest socio-economic stratum as a last resort for income. Given the demographic of women who have tended to take on the work, the 'Cardboard Auntie' has also become a stereotype for a commonly seen but isolated figure in the Singaporean heartlands, usually avoided by the public on account of her perceived antisocial behaviour. Wang Di's neighbours ostracise her and refer to her as "one of those … not quite right" in the head, since she appears to be "talking to herself!" whilst she goes about her work (Lee 214). They label her as the local mad woman, a two-dimensional type that prevents her from being known as a person.

But rather than the superficial treatment that society usually accords this figure, Lee's novel 'gives flesh' to her by imagining the events that led up to her isolated present. The hardship of Wang Di's present-day narrative as a Cardboard Auntie is juxtaposed with portions of the novel's second narrative, giving the reader a glimpse

into how the structural trauma of her past has shaped her present. The second narrative features Wang Di's first-person account as a young girl growing up in her father's house. There, his patriarchal narrative scripts her identity, determining the value of her life based on how she can best serve the family's needs. He refuses to give her an education, insisting that they "need her at home" (28), to look after her two younger brothers. They are the 'valuable' ones through whom, her father proclaims, "his family name would, thankfully, continue" (276). Beyond this function, "in the words of my parents during their most desperate (poorest) moments" (276), she is "useless. Disposable" (276). Confined to her father's house, Wang Di knows no other world and internalises this patriarchal narrative as the script for her own identity. She parrots her father's views and refuses an education when offered one. From a young age, she has been conditioned to make choices that would secure his approval so that she can feel a sense of belonging in her own home. However, the novel makes it clear that her father's views are in no way beneficial to her. It is his insistence on keeping Wang Di in his house to serve her family that results in her capture into sexual slavery when the Japanese soldiers invade their village. Furthermore, this compulsion to appease him at all costs only forms a deep-seated pattern of trauma that has her continually sacrificing her wellbeing for societal approval as an adult.

First, shaped by her father's narrative, her identity is then scripted by her perpetrator's narrative. The 'comfort home' is a space perverted far beyond any recognisable resemblance to its name, as the girls are raped over forty times a day. The girls are instructed to "collect the tickets from each soldier" (156), as though attendants of a side show attraction, before their bodies are used for the entertainment of the soldiers and raped. The three years in sexual slavery compounds Wang Di's already denigrated sense of self. She reasons,

> I was as unworthy as my parents had always suggested. That I would have been better born as a boy. Everything that I had done up until my capture—helping around the house, working at the market, was all to do with righting the wrong of my birth. Now that I was here, I wasn't even nothing. Less than. (172)

Wang Di's thoughts are filled with self-flagellating accusation. She is certain that "with what *I had done* and what *I was now used to*", she will "never go home, not anymore" because "my parents would never have me back" (201, emphasis mine). The scripts of deeply ingrained blame and shame weigh more heavily than the fact that she

is a victim of a crime. Having been faulted from her birth for things out of her control, she reflexively perceives her plight of being a victim of rape as yet another instance of how she will be a disappointment for bringing shame to her family.

Tragically, at the same time, the extent of her perceived failure triggers her other equally instinctive reaction to 'right her wrong'. Wang Di's deep-seated impulse to win her family's validation keeps her from asserting her own agency by either taking her own life in the comfort house or by telling her story when she returns home. Just as she chooses to forgo her education to receive her father's approval, she bears "the rapes, the unforeseeable beatings, the humiliation of never having a choice when they told me to sit up, open wide, lie down and shut up" (277). She holds onto the lie that the comfort house matron peddles—that by working at the house, she "might give [her] family some relief in the way of much-needed cash for food or medicine" (267). Wang Di also complies with the culture of silence that her family imposes upon her when her past as a comfort woman jeopardises their social standing in the community. Her return incites a lot of "talk" "about what [she] had been doing during the war", as people "whispered among themselves whenever they saw me" (274) and "gossiped" about how she had been "living with the Japanese" (273) "for the money", "for a husband" and "an easy life" (256). Society writes her narrative for her, assuming she willingly cohabited with the Japanese rather than being a victim of slavery, and denies her the chance to offer her version of what she suffered. To mitigate the damage to their reputation, her mother forbids her from speaking to anyone about how she was raped, "especially your future husband, no matter how kind you think he is" (279). Having known no other reality apart from the ones scripted for her by patriarchal society and her perpetrators, and fuelled by a deeply rooted need to belong to her family, her complicity is automatic by this point in her life.

The backstory that Lee provides for her character portrays how Wang Di is "imbricated in a social network colored by insidious trauma" (Pederson 108). By demonstrating how deeply embedded "the sources of structural trauma are […] in the social fabric" (108), the novel depicts how easily "individuals might be harmed by them without knowing the source of that harm" (108). As the causes of their trauma remain invisible to society at large, it is difficult for these women to find respite from their suffering. Rather than helping her, Wang Di's society typecasts her as the local 'crazy' Cardboard Auntie. Their response is symptomatic of how women's trauma "has been read and misread within the context of patriarchy" and mislabelled as

"madness" or female hysteria (Griffiths 184). Stemming from early psychoanalytic theory's failure to recognise the legitimacy of patriarchal systematic abuse,[25] "the label *hysteria* itself connects pathology to the uterus, and […] demonstrates the ways the female body is read to conform to a patriarchal narrative that relies on its diminished value" (182), Griffiths explains. As women's bodies were assumed to be predisposed to "inherent instability or corruption" (182), there was little impetus to explore the deeper reasons for her seemingly irrational behaviour. But this is precisely the gap that Lee uses her novel to speak to.

Changing the Script

Having established the structural trauma and societal factors that silence Wang Di, the novel then imagines how she could have overcome these obstacles to tell her story in a predominantly patriarchal and conservative culture. Remaining true to the fact that Singapore's national archive "has no oral history interviews from comfort women" (Blackburn, "The Comfort Women of Singapore"), the novel does not reconstruct Wang Di's experiences as an official oral history testimony. Instead, it reveals that her story has been able to emerge because it is eventually witnessed by a 12-year-old boy. The third narrative of the novel features Kevin's seemingly unrelated story of dealing with his grandmother's passing. He discovers some old letters that she had written, which reveal that she is not his biological grandmother. Her unsent letters were addressed to Kevin's biological grandfather, confessing that she had found his child (Kevin's father) in the wreckage of the Japanese soldiers' mass massacre of their *kampong* and raised him as her own. This third narrative eventually connects with the first (Wang Di's present as an elderly woman) when Kevin discovers that Wang Di was his biological grandfather's second wife. He befriends her and eventually becomes the one to whom Wang Di finally speaks about her experiences during the war. The second narrative, which features Wang Di's past, is thus framed as Kevin's transcription of her oral testimony that she shares with him. By using a boy as her unexpected witness, the novel offers a framework for how to create a trauma narrative

[25] In the controversial *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*, Jeffrey Masson claims that although Freud initially believed women when they reported rape or sodomy, and traced the presence of an involuntary sexual assault in their childhood at the root of many of his female patients' hysteria (Freud, "Aetiology of Hysteria" 200), he reversed his position nearly two years later. Whether he did so because he sincerely believed it, or to avoid being alienated by his colleagues for making an unthinkable claim that "childhood sexual abuse occurred much more often than previously recognized and in middle-class homes" (Griffiths 182), we cannot be certain. But Freud's recantation, and his development of the Oedipal complex to replace seduction theory, would have repercussions on women's mental health issues for the next century.

in societies that are still not ready to listen them in an official or public capacity. It highlights that alternative forms of bearing witness are crucial, and portrays the importance of informal social networks and ground-up initiatives.

When Kevin discovers that his biological grandfather, Wang Di's late husband, Soon Wei, had recorded his war experience in the national archive before he died, he encourages Wang Di to record her story as well. She agrees but makes a request, "I don't want to speak to a stranger. […] I only want you to do the recording" (Lee 335). The staff at the archives are unaccommodating, however, and dismissive of this arrangement, "You see, it all has to be done by a professional. Someone trained to do this type of thing. The interviews will be held in a room with specialized equipment. They can't just allow *anyone* to do it … How old are you anyway?" (335). Ironically, despite their professional set-up, the staff reveals how ill-equipped the archives are in being able to bear witness to the former comfort woman. There are no existing provisions for women like Wang Di who want to give their testimony. Instead, the general assumptions made about the people who come to give their testimony overlook the specific form of suffering that Wang Di has had to endure, and how difficult it is to speak to a stranger about the most intimate pain of her life. In so doing, they inevitably continue to perpetuate her silence and exclude her story from being witnessed in an official capacity. As such, without being able to speak for herself, the only documentation of Wang Di's suffering as a comfort woman is an oblique reference in her husband's testimony:

> I remember listening to the news on the radio and hearing about [the war crimes trial]. My wife—my new wife—switched it off. She had suffered during the war as well and didn't want to be reminded of what had happened. To her. At the time, I thought she was right. Why dwell on the past? […] But I am here now. It's been many years but I remember everything. (330)

Ironically, of course, her husband's testimony in the archives does not "remember everything" and certainly does not account for her experiences as a comfort woman. As the novel exposes the gaps in official narratives, it demonstrates that without another form of bearing witness, some stories, especially ones about rape victims, will inevitably only be "recorded in histories in passing or in footnotes" (Coundouriotis 375).

To fill the gap, the novel creates an alternate space for Wang Di to tell her story. She speaks to Kevin at her own dining table, using "two chairs that we could comfortably sit in for a long time" (Lee 336), an intimate and homely setting that helps her feel safe. They take place "every other day of the June holiday", after Kevin's remedial classes so that he "would have time to do [his] school work" (336). Significantly, these sessions are done amidst the bustle of everyday life and are not depicted as being particularly momentous events. In fact, it is a little incongruous, almost humorous, that Kevin weighs the time he has for Wang Di's testimony in relation to his holiday homework, given its significance to Singaporean history. But perhaps this is where the novel makes its point. Kevin's matter-of-fact regard for her testimony and the ease with which he slides it into his schedule reflect the way these stories can become a part of the everyday of the next generation, such that bearing witness to painful parts of history needs no longer be something out of the ordinary. Even when Kevin tries to be professional, and "spent all that evening coming up with questions to ask Wang Di Ah Por", he does not need to use them beyond the initial question, "What happened at the end of 1941?" (335). Indeed "all [he] had to do was show up and sit across from her and press the red button on the recorder" (336). In this way, the novel conveys that the value of the witnesses' ability to create an environment of safety can supersede the technicalities and 'skills' of collecting testimony, especially if to possess these things comes at the expense of forgetting the very real consequences of being a trauma survivor.

Furthermore, rather than hindering his ability to be an ideal witness, Kevin's age becomes an asset to this process. It is, perhaps, the combination of Wang Di's mindfulness that she is speaking to a child and the limitations of Kevin's vocabulary at his age, that lends the account of her time at the comfort house a certain simplicity. Her descriptions of rape are devoid of graphic detail, or what Coundouriotis calls a "mechanical definition" of her assaults. That is, Kevin does not describe her rape with "an explicit account of penetration and a high degree of specificity of anatomical detail" (Coundouriotis 367), implying that Wang Di avoided these details as she speaks to him. In fact, she only gives an account of the first few times she is raped. She uses euphemisms, "the sound of him as he *rutted* on top of me" (Lee 138), "being bent and *held down into submission*" (155), "One soldier *would be done*, would be *withdrawing* from me when the next man barged in, making impatient gestures while undressing himself" (155), "there was *little reprieve*, especially in the first week"

(155), "most of them […] *climbed on top of me* without even shedding their boots" (169, emphases mine). Whilst these euphemisms give the reader a sense of the violence, frequency and humiliation of the continual rapes, they do not provide a full visualisation of what happened. The descriptions are presented in piecemeal fragments, snippets rather than a continual narrative.

This approach is mutually beneficial to both Kevin, the witness, and to Wang Di herself. On the one hand, the euphemisms mitigate the risk of the second-hand trauma of listening to such a testimony, especially as her witness is a child. On the other hand, it enables Wang Di to make "reference to the assault without elaboration" (Coundouriotis 368), and speak without "the pain of having to relive such experience in the telling of it" (Naoko 127). As many rape victims "do not perceive elaborate narrations of rape as conducive to their healing process" (Krimmer 83), this approach minimises the extent to which Wang Di has to relive the trauma of her experience. At the same time, bearing in mind the ease with which rape narratives can "reproduce a spectacle of violence or victimization" (Hesford 193), inadvertently "casting viewers into voyeuristic roles" (194), the brevity of her testimony is also self-protective. It prevents her account from being "potentially pornographic" and exploitative of her suffering (Coundouriotis 372). This "conceptual definition of rape" offers a "testimony that is less graphic and addresses the psychological damage done by the crime" (367), by providing "ample detail about the peripheral circumstances surrounding their rape" (368). Given that, for many victims, the damage and pain from being raped itself "are less relevant than the psychological harm they experienced" (368), this approach acknowledges that the damage of rape is not merely the moment of non-consensual penetration, but the extent of injury it does to "the whole person and the dignity of the victim" (367).

In the novel, Wang Di's deepest pain is not the physical brokenness that she experiences—even though she suffers irreparable physical damage to her body. Instead, it is the isolation she experiences from her community that causes her mental health to deteriorate after the War. In his research, historian Kevin Blackburn explores the importance of informal social networks in facilitating the recovery of Pacific War veterans. He observes that their ability to talk about their experiences in "their regular social interaction in day-to-day institutions, such as the family, community neighbourhood groups, as well as veterans' associations" (Blackburn, "Recalling" 234), reduced the duration and impact of their PTSD. These informal social networks

are especially important in Asian countries, where "the study and impact of PTSD in memory and the recollection of the past by people who lived through it is not as developed as in Western countries" (236), and, as a result, did not yet have organised institutional platforms—such as the repatriation hospitals and veterans' associations that soldiers from Western countries were able to have access to after the Pacific War. Asian veterans, especially, had to rely on "existing social networks", like family or neighbourhood communities, for a "supportive and caring context" (236). As Blackburn writes, "with the security of the group that the individual belongs, traumatic experiences tend to be placed in perspective, which enables the individual to not be overwhelmed" (250), and eventually narrate their experiences in the Pacific War "as if they were bystanders or eyewitnesses rather than participants" (232). Individual veterans who were not unable to find this support within their communities were less likely to assimilate back into the normality of post-war life.

For civilians of war, especially female victims of rape, these informal social networks were even more difficult to come by. Blackburn notes that this form of collective support is only possible if a victim's experiences are aligned with the memories "the community wants to remember the past by" (243). However,

> if the individual is remembering experiences that are at variance with those of the community that he or she belongs to, there is a sense of alienation […]. The very social networks of the community that provide people with support and care which are crucial in easing memories of trauma can be ruthless in suppressing personal memories that do not fit into those accepted by the group" (250).

Given the way her conservative community refuse to acknowledge her experience, and the vehemence with which they silence her, the only script available to Wang Di is one without words. Her trauma manifests in her hallucinations of the other girls whom she left behind in the comfort house when she escaped (Lee 256). She also sees, at times, flashes of the son she bore as a result of being raped, whom the novel hints she abandoned in order to have a chance of assimilating back into society after the war (218). The combination of her lack of closure and guilt from leaving her friends and child draws her into dialogue with them, to seize a reality that she could not have. These 'dialogues' are especially poignant when the reader sees that these hallucinations are the only ones to whom she can speak about her past, given how she

has been conditioned to keep silent about her suffering. But without knowledge of her past, her incomprehensible behaviour only leads to further isolation.

The novel's focus on illustrating the consequences of rape gives voice to the truth of her suffering. To counter the reductive conclusion that she is merely 'crazy', her backstory offers precisely what her society needs in order to understand the reasons for her behaviour. As her narratives reveal, it is her unresolved trauma from being raped coupled with the pain of being ostracised from her community that catalyses her practice of hoarding. She admits, "It was the neighbours. Their whispers and looks that did it, made her habit creep back into her bones like pain from an old break" (257), thinking "it might keep [her] safe somehow" (202). Over the years, the items she collects line the walls of her flat, "soon, there would be enough even to block out the windows and she wouldn't have to hear the voices of other people" (259). Pushed out of society, her suffering can only manifest behind closed doors, the physical clutter in her house reflecting the immense debris that is her shattered inner world. The *absence* of contrast here between past and present is where the novel makes its point: society has made no progress in bearing witness to these stories of deep injustice. Instead, the very people who deem her unfit to be part of 'civilised' society are the ones who are complicit in perpetuating her suffering.

In contrast, the space that Kevin creates for Wang Di proves to be curative. The strong Chinese cultural expectations that come with their age gap shapes Kevin's automatic posture of deference toward her. Wang Di uses both Mandarin and Hokkien to tell her story, which Kevin "didn't always understand" (336). He accepts immediately that "these were the parts I would have to work out afterward, by playing the tapes over and asking my mother" (336). Here, he respects Wang Di's preferred way of telling *her* story and assumes that it is his responsibility to do the work of understanding her. Kevin also has to be mindful of how he speaks to Wang Di. When he notices that she begins to tidy her flat the more she is able to tell her story,

> I wanted to say something, the way my mother tells me 'good job!' whenever I figure out the answer to a difficult question all on my own. I thought it would be strange though, to say something like that to someone five times my own age. So what I said instead was, 'I like your rug' when I saw that she had brought home a new-ish looking carpet and laid it out where the boxes used to be, in a heap. […] All she did when I said those things was smile and nod. (337)

He does not come across as patronising, preserving her dignity whilst acknowledging the progress that she has made. Soon Kevin notices more progress, as "the boxes and things shoved up against the wall vanished from her home" (337). The simple act of having someone listen to her with this respect and kindness helps her overcome her need to hoard for self-protection.

As she tells the relatively unknown story of comfort women from Singapore through the well-known trope of the Cardboard Auntie, and portrays Wang Di's 'madness' as the result of "prolonged exposure to trauma" from "living under patriarchy" (Griffiths 186), Lee pushes her readers' discomfort to its limits. She challenges them to take a second look at what they think they already know. Not only does she demonstrate how important stories of a country's history can be so easily hidden in plain sight, she reveals the extent to which those who merely spectate without really listening can be complicit in perpetuating deep suffering. At the same time, by using a narrative strategy that focuses on the damaging consequences of rape, the novel itself performs how these narratives can be spoken about and brought to public consciousness. As it bypasses the need for speaking about the taboo of the sexual experience, the discomfort of visual confrontations of sex (perceived as a private matter in a conservative society) in the public sphere, the novel is able to move the conversation beyond whispers.

The Wounded Witness in *The Garden of Evening Mists*

Whilst not the most sophisticated narrative, *How We Disappeared* serves the purpose of portraying the long-lasting impact of structural trauma on rape victims and illustrating how bearing witness to their suffering is a powerful process that can facilitate their healing. To make her point, Lee portrays witnessing as a simple endeavour. Wang Di appears to have no trouble recollecting her past, and all Kevin needs is diligence and deference to be an effective witness; there is no indication, even self-reflexively, that there could be gaps in Kevin's translation of her testimony. Beyond appearing in 'fragments' by being interspersed between her own and Kevin's present-day narratives, Wang Di's first-person testimony is coherent and comprehensive. Whilst understandable in the context of the novel's thematic concerns, this 'complete' depiction of Wang Di's story is precisely where something is missing from Lee's story, a gap around which Tan Twan Eng constructs *The Garden of Evening Mists*. Rather than the 'ideal' form of witnessing that Lee portrays, Tan

foregrounds how the realities of a victim's silence (particularly when she has died), and a witness's questionable memory and personal trauma makes this process a far more complex endeavour.

Tan's novel considers how to bear witness to the many comfort women who died in the comfort houses. Two sisters, Yun Ling and Yun Hong, were imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp in Malaysia during the Pacific War. The former is made to work in the mines, whilst the latter is forced to be a comfort woman. Only Yun Ling manages to escape and survive the camp at the end of the war, and she spends the decades after struggling to find an adequate way to honour her sister's life. But as she takes on the responsibility that comes with being the only one with a living memory of Yun Hong's suffering in the camp, Yun Ling's survivor's guilt complicates her ability to be an effective witness. In order to tell her sister's story, Yun Ling has to balance the fine line between speaking of, and not for, Yun Hong's pain. As Susan Sontag puts it, "No 'we' should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain" (*Regarding the Pain* 6). Despite the fact that the women may have suffered together, as Sara Ahmed puts it, "pain does not produce a homogenous group of bodies who are together in their pain" (31). Rather than considering "the other's pain as my pain" (35), a gesture that involves the violence of overwriting the other's experience with one's own assumptions, an ethical witness has to bear witness to a pain that she knows she cannot claim as her own (35). She has to be "affected by that which one cannot know or feel" (30). But this ability to be comfortable with the boundary between where the I ends and the other begins is precisely what Yun Ling struggles with. Her unresolved trauma from her own experiences in the camp, coupled with her survivor's guilt and shame, remains inextricably intertwined with her memories of her sister, and she struggles to separate self from other. The overwhelming pain that she spends her life trying not to confront seeps through into the story of the other that she is trying to tell, and inadvertently becomes the frame through which she bears witness to her sister.

To convey the complexity of Yun Ling's attempt to bear witness to her sister, the novel tells her story by interweaving three narratives that are each set in a different time period. Unlike the largely self-contained nature of the three narratives from *How We Disappeared*, each of *these* three narratives are rife with gaps and underline the novel's thematic content regarding Yun Ling's inability to find closure to her past. The first, framed through an omniscient narrator, focuses on present-day Yun Ling, now a

retired judge in her sixties grappling with the onset of aphasia. She has returned to Yugiri, Cameron Highlands to meet Tatsuji, a Japanese historian researching the *ukiyo-e* of Nakamura Aritomo, the gardener to whom she was formerly apprenticed and from whom she inherited these woodblock prints. At night, she attempts to preserve her memories in writing, as she realises "there are fragments of my life that I do not want to lose, if only because I still have not found the knot to tie them up with" (Tan 33). Her endeavour to remember her past sets the premise for the second narrative, which is framed as the older Yun Ling's first-person recollections of her post-war years. Yun Ling's testimony is full of unanswered questions, with little direct inward analysis of her past. This suggests that she still has not been able to make coherent meaning of the events she recalls, namely her experiences with the two Japanese aesthetic expressions that Aritomo exposes her to: gardening and the *horimono*, nor worked through the trauma of what she suffered after all these years. Instead, it is the reader who has to see the patterns of trauma she repeats and recognise the survivor's guilt she carries with her through the way she engages with these aesthetic expressions. Finally, it is only embedded within the second narrative, as part of a conversation between Aritomo and Yun Ling, that the third narrative reveals Yun Ling's time in the internment camp and Yun Hong's suffering as a comfort woman. As each of the three different narratives rely on the other two to fill the gaps they contain, the novel portrays that a 'successful' act of bearing witness to great pain is not marked by an event that happens in a single moment. Rather, it is an ongoing process, in which a witness's apparent deviations are crucial parts of the story.

The Gaps of Self-Awareness

As she begins her memoir, the older Yun Ling portrays her younger self as being driven, rather than overwhelmed, by her pain. She is consumed with a frenetic desire to find where Yun Hong was buried, choosing to work in the War Crimes Tribunal for the sole purpose of "looking for information that would help me find my camp" (210). When that fails, she subjects herself to being an apprentice to a Japanese gardener so that she can eventually create a memorial to Yun Hong, using her sister's favourite artistic construct and expression, a Japanese garden. These pursuits are not without a cost, as both these tasks trigger her own traumatic memories. Whilst poring over records she finds at the War Crimes Tribunal, she feels that she cannot "go on reading the documents when [she] remembered the fear and pain [she] had gone

through" (211). As she learns gardening skills from Aritomo, she admits that "his orders brought me back to the time when I had been a slave for the Japanese army" (96) and has visceral reactions to her flashbacks. Yet, she "[pushes] herself to continue", reading the documents in search "for that one thing [she] was looking for" (211), and remaining adamant about the importance of creating the garden. Although using the culture of her perpetrators in order to remember her sister is puzzling to those around her, even to Aritomo himself (56), Yun Ling reasons to them (and herself) that it is a noble gesture. Her suffering is negligible compared to the fact that her sister "lies in an unmarked grave" (59), and deserving of a more dignified means to commemorate her life.

The aesthetic principles of Japanese gardening appear especially suited for this task of 'righting a wrong'. Rather than being the natural consequence of growing "with as little human assistance—or interference—as possible" (23), the Japanese garden is a labour in the art of framing. Its effect of "emptiness" and tranquillity is the result of careful construction. During her first visit to Yugiri, she is drawn to "a gap in the hedge, through which a solitary mountain peak in the distance could be seen" (61). When she sees this image, "so perfectly framed by the leaves", her mind is "momentarily stilled" (61). She recalls the principle behind this technique,

> "A tea master horrified his pupils by planting a hedge in his garden, blocking the view of the Inland Sea for which his school was famous," I said, half to myself. "He left only a gap in the hedge and set a basin before it. Anyone drinking from it would have to bend down and look at the sea through the hole […] The effect of seeing the view is much more powerful than if the sea has not been obstructed." (61–62)

As the skills of Japanese gardening would afford her the ability to frame the landscape and create remarkable scenes of beauty, the garden appears to be the perfect way for her to reframe the memory of her sister's life. Its peace and tranquillity would re-associate Yun Hong's life with beauty, a truer testament to the value of her life, and prevent the Japanese soldiers' unconscionable abuse of her body from being the last word on her life. Moreover, the act of creating an actual Japanese garden in the midst of a Malayan landscape reads as a triumphant statement against their Japanese captors. Her ability to repurpose aspects of their culture in her local context is both a refusal to forget the undeniable Japanese presence that once stained Malaysia's history, and, by using elements of their culture for her own benefit, a celebration that she is no longer

dominated by them. As she labours, she tries to convince herself that working on the garden will help her internalise her new reality, telling herself that "it's different now", "I'm no longer a prisoner of the Japs, I'm free, free. And I'm alive" (97). Compared to her forced imprisonment and subservience, she tells herself that her freedom is marked by her *choice* to put herself under the tutelage of a Japanese man.

But as she works on the garden, Yun Ling finds an unexpected, and initially unwelcomed, witness in Aritomo. He is the one who first points out that her intentions for building the garden are not purely altruistic, "Your old life, too, is gone. You are here, borrowing from your sister's dreams, searching for what you have lost" (153). This is a truth that becomes more apparent through their subsequent interactions. Although she never explicitly states the reason, the recurring motif of 'gaps' in her memoir ironically reveals the very thing in her past that she is both trying to hide and atone for. When Aritomo elicits more of Yun Ling's wartime experiences out of her, her descriptions of key moments in her imprisonment suggest that she is drawn to this specific gardening technique for other reasons. Significantly, this conversation takes place as the pair walk to a nearby mountain, a break from their work in the garden. Symbolically reflecting a gap in the narrative that she has been peddling about using the garden to honour her sister, this moment provides a striking glimpse into the past that alters the landscape of the present. As she describes the setting of the internment camp, Yun Ling tells Aritomo, "From the kitchen window I could look out to the hut where Yun Hong was held. Five times a day a line of Japanese men could be seen outside, waiting their turn" (267). She also describes how she managed to sneak near the hut when the soldiers were occupied elsewhere, "I walked around to the back and peered into a barred window. Through the dimness I could make out beds, partitioned by flimsy bamboo screens" (268). At this window, she finds a way to speak to Yun Hong, and the pair continue to meet there covertly throughout their imprisonment. The uncanny parallel between the window frame and the hole cut in the hedge in the garden signal that the few glimpses of what she sees through the window will be profoundly affective.

First, it is by the window where she learns of the great sacrifice that Yun Hong makes, choosing not to kill herself so that Yun Ling will not be made to replace her (270). Out of her remorse for what her sister has to suffer, she tries valiantly to make life marginally easier for her. But her attempt to steal food for Yun Hong gets her caught, and her fingers chopped off (271). The enduring mark she bears on her body

constantly reminds her of how she fell short, a shame that leads her to cover her hand with a glove in the years after the war. Second, it is also by the window where she promises Yun Hong that she will flee if she has the chance, torn between not wanting to leave her but also knowing that this promise is one of the few comforts that she can give her sister. Whilst she privately resolves this tension by thinking she will come back to rescue Yun Hong, she is once more made helpless when she finds out that "none of the prisoners will live" when the war ends (277). Furthermore, the secrecy of the camp's location prevents her from finding her way back and exhuming Yun Hong's body to give her a proper burial. Third, it is by the window where they deliberately "never spoke about what the Japanese were making her do" (269), that Yun Ling sees the bruises on her sister's face. She listens to her sister "distract herself—and me—by talking about the gardens in Kyoto we had visited" (269), while unable to do anything more to alleviate Yun Hong's pain. On the one occasion that they do allude to the fact that Yun Hong is raped daily, her sister makes her promise never to speak of it to anyone. But Yun Ling is unable to keep even this promise, since she tells Aritomo what happened to them in the camp (283).

These three exchanges by the window bear certain similarities. Each encounter with Yun Hong reinforces that Yun Ling's freedom comes at the cost of her sister's painful sacrifice. Out of this debt, she keeps trying to find ways to repay her sister. Yet, her efforts are ultimately futile and leave her saddled with even more guilt. This new insight into Yun Ling's past gives the reader another frame by which to interpret Yun Ling's post-war actions. Contrary to the narrative that Yun Ling tells herself and others, her act of building the garden for Yun Hong does not stem from trying to overcome her loss. Rather, it arises from a wound that still festers, as it becomes apparent that the repetitions of having failed her sister has created a pattern of trauma in Yun Ling's psyche. Despite her attempts to honour Yun Hong, it conditions her to make choices that continually sabotage her efforts.

This context of Yun Ling's past offers another reason why Yun Ling is drawn to the hole in the hedge during her first trip to Yugiri. Not only does she admire the art form, she is subconsciously attracted to a form that bears an uncanny resemblance to the place where she experienced the most guilt. Its underlying draw can be read as her desire to reframe *her* failures by the window frame into something more beautiful: the garden becomes her way of atoning for the other ways she failed her sister. At the same time, it is a form that is especially primed to fail in pursuit of the task.

Significantly, the glimpses of beauty in the garden that come through the frame in the hedge requires one to be in a contrived position to see it. It is not a view that can be sustained, as Yun Ling herself feels the "tranquillity in me drained away when I straightened up" (61). In other words, she chooses a form that is not, as she expects, able to give her the permanence that she wants. As Aritomo explains to her, despite the seeming control that the gardener has in framing the landscape, the technique of framing Japanese gardens, *shakkei*, or Borrowed Scenery, requires the gardener to "[take] elements and views from outside a garden and [make] them integral to his creation" (34). In other words, it requires a certain amount of surrender to uncontrollable external elements. He says,

> There were four ways of doing it […]: *Enshaku*—distant borrowing—took in the mountains and the hills; *Rinshaku* used the features from a neighbour's property; *Fushaku* took from the terrain; and *Gyoshaku* brought in the clouds, the wind and the rain. (149)

By paying attention to the "distance, scale, and space" of these disparate elements (98), the gardener can then manipulate them to create an illusion of the unified world of the garden. But, at the same time, he has to acknowledge that the garden is at the mercy of its surroundings: the clouds could cover the mountain, the neighbour could change the landscape of his home, the terrain could shift, and the rain may not come. As a space, therefore, the garden is imbued with a distinctively elusive and ambiguous quality, "a sense of uncertainty, of tension and possibility" (98), never quite as fixed as the picture it appears to look. The endless work required to construct and maintain a garden renders it quite far from the ideal form of a memorial that she initially envisions. The fact that she is not quite able to identify this, projecting only what she hopes the garden can give her, signals the way her trauma continually jeopardises the memory of her sister that she intends to frame. It ends up making her foreground the story of her guilt instead.

This pattern of trauma is also evident in her controversial choice to open up to Aritomo, a witness who, in reinstating hints of the wartime power dynamic and triggering her PTSD, simultaneously aids and deflects her working through. The effects of Aritomo's witnessing is subtly demonstrated through the circuitous way Yun Ling frames her memory of the internment camp. It is not framed as direct recall, as it is with her post-war memories, but as what, upon her return to the Cameron Highlands after her retirement, she recalls having told Aritomo during her first visit to Yugiri in

the 1950s. Given that the reliability of her direct recall is already complicated by the onset of aphasia *and* the sheer amount of time that has passed—she herself admits that she "cannot recall with certainty what has taken place" because she had spent "most of [her] life trying to forget" (309)—the additional narrative layer creates even more distance between the reader and Yun Ling's original experience. Twice removed from Yun Ling's original experience, and three times removed from Yun Hong's trauma as a comfort woman, this narrative structure creates ambiguity in terms of how Yun Ling relates to her memories of the war. On the one hand, since Yun Ling was not selected to become a comfort woman, this narrative strategy can be read as Yun Ling's resistance towards laying claim to an experience that was not hers to live through. As Ahmed writes, bearing witness to another's pain is to be "moved by what does not belong to me" (31). To do so ethically is thus to "act about that which I cannot know, rather than act insofar as I know" (31). Without being a first-hand eyewitness of her sister's suffering, it is only authentic that she emphasises that what she has observed has come from a distance.

On the other hand, when read in the context of Aritomo and Yun Ling's unfolding relationship, this narrative strategy also suggests that choosing to open up to him facilitates the distance between her and Yun Hong. It suggests that he has become so entwined with her memories of her sister, that the memory of telling him about the camp has overwritten her direct recall of her experience. His less than ideal response as her witness contributes to this complexity. Unbeknownst to Yun Ling, Aritomo is somewhat connected to the internment camp she was imprisoned in. As he realises this after listening to her story, his own internal conflict prevents him from being a neutral witness. Rather than helping her work through her pain, he responds to her testimony by trying to tell *his* own story on top of hers. He requests to create a *horimono*—a Japanese-styled tattoo—that would, quite literally, cover the top half of her back (284), and her scars from the torture she suffered in the camp (287). Her consent, despite her misgivings and the fact that he does not disclose why he wants to do so reflects their problematic dynamic. It hints at the uneven power dynamic between the couple, as she is embroiled in both a teacher-apprentice and a romantic relationship with him, and perhaps unable to assert herself. Yet her active consent also hints, at the same time, that there is something about this controversial choice that appeals to her, even if she does not yet know why.

As a result of this complex dynamic, her story is able to surface but not without re-enacting her perceived failure. Significantly, Aritomo creates the *horimono* during the monsoon, once again, during a gap in their routine, as the torrential rain makes it impossible for them to work in the garden (284). Ominously, as Yun Ling consents to this controversial request, she observes that "the mountains, the jungle, the garden, all disappeared into the rain" (284), a signal of how the *horimono* potentially sidelines her endeavour to creating the memorial for Yun Hong. To begin with, given the history of the Occupation, there is the obvious problematic connotation of a Japanese man indelibly marking the skin of a Chinese woman. The mode of this art form requires an intrusiveness that echoes the violation of a woman's body in rape. Yun Ling writes, "he stretched the skin on my shoulder and pushed the needles into me" (294). Steven Connor's *The Book of Skin* makes this even more explicit, as he explains that the act of tattooing "plays with the knowledge that the skin has been penetrated, since the technique of tattooing in fact requires pigment to be injected beneath the surface of the skin" (63). By framing the *horimono* as a parallel to being raped, something that Yun Ling was spared from during the war, it is almost as though Yun Ling subconsciously submits herself to a similar form of subjugation that her sister had to endure. It appears to mark a significant regression for the character, as she acts out the pattern of trauma as a means to punish herself for failing her sister. Where she had been fervent in her hatred of the Japanese for torturing her during the war, and in her resentment of Aritomo's authority before she started working in the garden, she now seems to have lost her own voice. Instead, she complies and "left it all up to him" to decide what to put on her back. Whilst he does put symbols of significant landmarks, and cultural references that are important to her on her back—Majuba Tea Estate that her friend Magnus owns, the internment camp, and the legend of Hou Yi—it is *his* version of her story that is left on her back, not hers. He says, "I will put in the ideas I have accumulated over the years, the things you should remember when designing a garden" (Tan 288), "arcane, inexplicable symbols have been sewn in the tattoos, symbols I have never been able to decipher" (335), even appropriating aspects of Chinese culture into Japanese, the figures "dressed not in Chinese clothes, but Japanese" (336). As Connor puts it, after being tattooed, "the body flaunts the surface that it has taken into itself as a secondary interiority" (63). Rather than being liberated from the internment camp and the authority of the Japanese, it is his culture and his voice that she imbibes into her skin—a potential sign that beneath the mask of fighting

for justice lay a deeper conviction that what she deserves, or what would seem like fitting justice for her, is the inevitable conclusion of succumbing her body to being used by the Japanese.

Yet, even though the choice to be tattooed appears to signal the disintegration of Yun Ling's voice, the novel does not yield so straightforward a reading. As Connor elucidates, a tattoo is

> an ambivalent play between injury and self-defence. Once marked, the skin can never again recapture its infantile immaculacy and clarity. But the very permanence of the blemish-ornament can then make it a guarantee of continuity, or pre-emption of assault from the outside, as well as an imaginary stay against the wearing, sagging and wrinkling of the skin in the process of aging. A tattoo is for life, indeed: it is both a lethal assault upon the skin, and a means of cryogenic survival. (63–64)

Although being tattooed involves a wounding, or, in fact, an acting out of former wounds, as Yun Ling submits herself to be exploited for another's agenda, the *horimono* also plays a significant role in her ability to move forward from her own pain. She says, "I felt my skin was being taken apart, line by line, stitch by stitch" (Tan 294), something that makes gaps in her skin, not just for blood to escape her body, but, according to Aritomo, "also the thoughts hidden inside that person" (299). As he tattoos her, he probes her for the truth of what she did in the camp, to which Yun Ling finally admits, "I did whatever was required for me to live. […] I gave information to Fumio. I told him who was planning to escape. I told him who was constructing a radio, where it was hidden" (299). As a result, she admits, "I still received my share of beatings, but I got better rations. I got medicines. Yun Hong found out. She begged me to stop. I refused" (299). It is as though the pain on the surface of her skin from being tattooed calls up the deep emotional pain that Yun Ling suffered. The process of being tattooed here parallels her process of coming to terms with the 'new' person that the war shaped her to be. As her skin is being reshaped into something else, her coming to terms with what she did during the war similarly transforms her, since, as Sara Ahmed puts it, "the very words we then use to tell the story of our pain also work to reshape our bodies, creating new impressions" (25). In other words, the person that Yun Ling has tried to portray herself on the surface, perhaps the person that she wanted to be—honourable and unrelenting in her search for justice—is not the story of who she is. But as she stretches out her narrative and

includes these previously hidden elements that also comprise who she is— the shame of her perceived betrayal, her helplessness, shrewdness, loyalty, and intensity of her survival instincts—she begins to accept her own story. This process eventually leads her to admit, "I left her […] I left Yun Hong there" (Tan 299). It is at this point that the reader sees a possible explanation for Yun Ling's constant deflection of her sister's story. Telling Yun Hong's story will mean having to come to terms with the shame of abandoning her sister to their Japanese captors, something that she could not yet bear to confront up to this point. She chooses instead to relive the guilt repeatedly, rather than learning to accept what has happened.

Inasmuch as the *horimono* facilitates the surfacing of a hidden piece of her story, and creates a permanent testimony to a piece of history that the Japanese soldiers attempted to bury, it remains Aritomo's version of her story. The "blank rectangle" that he leaves in the middle of Yun Ling's *horimono*, as "a *horoshi* will always leave a section of the *horimono* empty, as a symbol that it is never finished, never perfect" (327), can be read as symbolising the way a witness's retelling of a victim's story is not, and cannot, be her whole story. As a frame, on its own, it testifies to an emptiness and draws attention more to itself as a display of Aritomo's artistic abilities and secrets than to Yun Ling's story and Yun Hong's. Aritomo's limitations as her witness stops short at bringing her story fully to light, just as his sudden disappearance after finishing the *horimono* cuts short her process of working through the past. The pain of losing her lover and witness suspends her endeavours of working through her trauma, as she chooses to throw herself into her career. Suspends, that is, until she comes to write her memoir nearly forty years later. Moreover, the *horimono* is also an indelible mark that brands her as an outsider to her own people and is something that she must keep hidden if she is to remain respected. She writes, "I was rising up the ranks of the judiciary—just a rumour of something like this would have ruined my career" (339). To preserve her reputation, she does not have any other lovers after Aritomo, confining herself to "years of solitude" because of "the care I have had to take in my dressing so that no one could ever see what lay on my skin" (339). For all the potential good it seems to have done for her, the subsequent years of isolation only creates another prison for her, one that threatens to swallow hers and Yun Hong's story whole completely. In fact, her momentary decision to preserve the *horimono* appears to seal this in for good.

The Stories in The Gaps

It is only by bringing her story out of isolation and back into her community that Yun Ling is finally able to create the frame that bears witness to both her pain and her sister's story at the same time. Her decision to preserve the *horimono*[26] requires her to allow Tatsuji, a Japanese academic who is an expert on Aritomo's various art forms, to examine it. Tatsuji, who is familiar with both of Aritomo's 'narratives'—Yugiri and Yun Ling's *horimono*—is able to "stand outside" and "look in" to observe the patterns she is too close to see (337). As he "circles the symbols of a lantern, then draws a line connecting it to the other objects, to the place where the garden's views are situated, until he comes to the last item, a stone Buddha in a bed of ferns", "[a] rectangle appears, fixed inside the boundaries of Yugiri" (337). He tells Yun Ling,

> "If drawn to scale matching your *horimono*, I suspect this—" Tatsuji indicates the shape he has created on the graph paper, "—would fit into the untattooed space on your back. The lines of your *horimono* would probably join up with the markers and the paths in Yugiri here, on this paper." (337)

Here, Tatsuji uses one narrative form to frame another, and reads them both in context with his speculations about Aritomo's history with Golden Lily (a secret Japanese operation to steal the loot from the countries they conquered during the war). If he is to be believed, his interpretation of Yun Ling's tattoo surfaces a possible hidden truth: the location of the internment camp that Yun Ling and her sister were held.

Without the *horimono*, Yun Ling would not have been able to discover this. It is here, on the skin of Yun Ling's body that the *horimono* finally becomes what Ahmed calls "a good scar" (202). Even as it brings healing, it is a covering over that "always exposes the injury", calling to attention the way "our bodies have been shaped by their injuries" even as they "persist in the healing or stitching of the present" (Ahmed 202). In other words, a "good scar reminds us that recovering from injustice cannot be about covering over the injuries, which are […] signs of an unjust contact between our bodies and others" (202), as Yun Ling temporarily does by hiding her past away. Now, she recognises that not hiding her *horimono* away, and bringing her story to the fore becomes a vital part to her closure. She finally realises that even if the two rectangles of her life form a map, she "[does] not want to look for the camp or the

[26] A process of removing the skin upon which the *horimono* is inked, to preserve the art form after its owner's demise (Tan 116).

mine anymore" because "locating where [Yun Hong] was buried will not ease my guilt or undo what has been done" (Tan 342). She recognises that bearing witness to her sister is not about "feeling the other's pain" and imbibing aspects of Yun Hong's suffering in her own life, or trying to be reconciled to her. Rather, it is "learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation" (Ahmed 39). She is finally able to leave the past in the past.

Significantly, between preserving her *horimono* and leaving it to a museum or retaining Yugiri, Yun Ling chooses the latter, the form that is not static or that is observed from afar, but the one that requires constant work to keep it intact to commemorate her sister. Practically speaking, the elusive qualities of the garden complicate its effectiveness in functioning as a memorial for Yun Hong. Since every aspect "has been thought out and shaped and built" (Tan 23), its highly-constructed nature requires it to be constantly maintained. In fact, when Yun Ling returns to Yugiri after her retirement, the garden has become overgrown and lost its shape (183). As Tatsuji remarks, "Gardens change over time, Judge Teoh. Their original designs are lost; erased by wind and rain. The gardens Aritomo-sensei made no longer exist in their original forms" (118). But by choosing the garden, a space that a gardener must return to in order to maintain it, Yun Ling brings the memory of her sister constantly into the present. Her story is not a static relic of the past, but a very present part of Yun Ling's world today. The garden is constantly reshaped according to the elements in the present, being adapted to the present whilst maintaining its original intention. It is this need to continually attend to Yun Hong's memorial that potentially enables her sister's story to survive even her death. There is a key difference between the garden she helps Aritomo with and the garden that she now puts up in Yun Hong's honour. She writes,

> I will ensure that Yugiri will remain. For my sister. When the garden is ready, I will open it to the public. *I will put up a plaque by the Pavilion of Heaven, describing Yun Hong's life*. […] It is right that Yun Hong will be remembered as I gradually forget and, in time, become forgotten. (347, emphasis mine)

While the garden was previously a space where she goes to forget, the plaque brings to the fore all the things that she wanted once to keep hidden. Having told her story, and embraced the part that she played in Yun Hong's life, she is now able to recognise that she plays the supporting role in her sister's story. She eventually becomes the part of

Yun Hong's story that is edited out so that the focus on her sister's past remains at the fore.

Where a lesser novel might have privileged one form of bearing witness over another, *The Garden of Evening Mists* finds a place for plural forms of testifying: the form that honours the other, the form that speaks to acting out, and the form that involves input from another. In doing so, it emphasises that rather than a clinical session in a psychotherapist's office, the process of bearing witness to another is very much a meandering and complex one. Rather than disparaging the parts of the witness's pain and acting out that appears to 'contaminate' the integrity of the victim's story, the novel suggests that it *is* still a legitimate and indispensable part of the story of how trauma is worked through in community. It is not something that should be done away with quickly, or seen as a kind of waywardness from the original goal. Rather, it is a way *to* the goal of testifying. By foregrounding the inevitable gaps that are in any story at a given time, *The Garden of Evening Mists* does not pretend to be a novel with a narrative structure that holds a 'complete' story together. Instead, Tan creates a narrative with a certain fluidity, one that is shaped by its continuous movement *into* the gaps of its own story, potentially transforming them into frames through which we can see glimpses of that which was previously hidden. In the continual telling of stories, by different people, at different points of history, the things that are initially hidden do not necessarily have to remain so. Different aspects of a story may simply need to be told at different seasons of time, as the conditions of society evolve to accommodate them.

***Breaking the Tongue*, A Question of Language**

In the last section of this chapter, I explore how a reader-witness of these literary texts can also potentially stifle the stories of these women, particularly when she reads a text through her cultural framework, rather than allowing the context of the story to shape her interpretations. This tendency is pertinent in the reading of non-Western trauma fiction, especially if a reader assumes that the concepts of the Western-originated trauma model can be "unproblematically exported to non-Western contexts" (Craps and Buelens 3), and imposes them on these texts. In her research, Griffiths traces the prevalence of this approach to early feminist trauma studies, where "early foundational research involving traumatic experience and response focuses on white, predominantly middle-class women" (184), and was unequivocally assumed to

be relevant to women of colour. However, as I have demonstrated, female victims of rape from the Pacific War are located in specific contexts that significantly shape the transmission and reception of their experiences. These women are not merely beleaguered by the structural trauma of patriarchy, but implicated by factors, such as "[n]on-Western networks of power, history, knowledge, culture, and society", that affect the specificities of "local culture(s), the political, the empirical, the national, the conceptual, the lived, and so forth" (Yusin 247). A reading approach that imposes the 'classic' model of trauma fiction in non-Western contexts, and overlooks how the "cultural specificities of lived experience" contribute to an individual's trauma (239), will inadvertently marginalise and diminish the extent of the trauma of women of colour. Furthermore, in expecting trauma restoration to take a particular form, this reading approach potentially undermines the narrative strategies that non-Western writers use to imagine stories of healing that would be relevant to a particular local context.

Vyvyane Loh's *Breaking the Tongue* offers its readers a compelling narrative strategy to express the testimony of a woman who was a rape victim of Japanese soldiers. The novel follows the events that led up to the Fall of Singapore during the Pacific War, and offers its version of history by weaving together three narratives that feature the oft-unrecorded experiences of civilians of war. The novel's protagonist, Claude Lim, raised an Anglophile and taught to despise his ethnic Chinese vernacular and culture, is confronted with an identity crisis as he witnesses the impending dissolution of the British colony and surrender of Singapore to Japan. The two other narratives act as pivot points for his character development. On the one hand, the colonial and racist arrogance of Jack Winchester, Claude's peer and a British expatriate, stirs up his resentment for the colonial caste system and compels him to recognise the illusion of the narrative of British superiority. On the other hand, the patriotic exploits of Han Ling-li, Claude's newfound friend and a Singaporean Chinese spy who colludes with the British army in an attempt to resist the Japanese invasion, cultivates his sense of nationalism. The turning point of Claude's character development takes place in the final chapter of the novel, when the spirit of Ling-li appears to him and testifies to her repeated torture, rape, and eventual murder by the Japanese soldiers. Loh frames Ling-li's testimony through a series of visions, which requires Claude to accept the validity of the Chinese spiritual worldview that he had been raised to despise. When Claude finally acquiesces, he is able to 'see' the scenes

of Ling-li's torture and rape. The pair dialogue in both English and Chinese, as a blindfolded Ling-li describes her experience to Claude, and Claude completes her testimony by furnishing her with the details about her captors that she is unable to see (Loh 396–401). Together, they reconstruct the event to prevent the Japanese soldiers from hiding behind their anonymity for their crimes. By framing Ling-li's testimony through a traditional Chinese spiritual encounter, along with a dual-language, dialogic narrative strategy, Loh uses her novel to reclaim the stories of both the linguistic heritage of a formerly colonised country and the unwitnessed women of the war. The intertwining of Claude's newfound acceptance of his ethnic roots with the transmission of Ling-li's story proffers a hopeful reimagining of a postcolonial Singaporean vernacular, where to speak the language of home is to remember the stories of those who have been neglected and abused.

For literary critic, Sally McWilliams, Loh's narrative strategy succeeds in constructing a "counter-narrative of resistance to male-domination, privilege, xenophobia, and militaristic nationalism" (154). She reads the ending of Loh's novel through the 'classic' trauma model and argues that the dual-language of Ling-li's testimony "[denies] the English-only reader direct access to both sides of the hybridized narration of this trauma" (156). McWilliams writes, "While we hope that Ling-li will tell us her story, we quickly realize that the act of translation falls to Claude alone. His contributions, however, do not enact our desire for a definitive translation of Ling-li's words" (156). Ling-li's indecipherable words thus apparently "disallows [English-only readers] control over the female body and her story of corporeal pain and resistance" (157). As such, for McWilliams, Loh's novel is one that "honors her female character's death by positioning the retelling as a feminist site of linguistic and material possibility" (157), making a classic case for how feminist trauma theory can shed a long overdue spotlight on female-centric trauma.

The logic behind McWilliams' intention to prevent Ling-li's story from being appropriated is conceivably valid. However, I argue that this reading overlooks other more significant concerns at the heart of Loh's work. First, it keeps a significant portion of Ling-li's narrative unknowable, when this privilege of being known is precisely what her story has not yet had access to. The novel pointedly highlights what a battle it is to have even her close friend Claude to listen to her, much more her larger community, her colonial oppressors, or her perpetrators. Not remaining hidden is the very thing she is fighting for. Arguably, even if readers were to interpret Ling-li's

words, the slipperiness of translation ensures that there will always already be something lost, as no summary in either language will be able to account for her full testimony. The need to resist understanding the Chinese portions to safeguard against appropriating Ling-li's narrative simply runs a risk of further silencing her.

Second, it sidelines Loh's attempt to search for an alternate way of speaking trauma in the novel's post-war, postcolonial context. Crucially, Ling-li does not use a self-invented language or code to testify to her rapes, but the most widely spoken language: Mandarin. It is one in which she is most fluent, one that helps her communicate her sexual assault with least difficulty. By leaving some parts of her testimony without Claude's English translation, the novel suggests that there are certain aspects of her experience that can only be adequately expressed in the language of her culture. Hence, even if English-only readers have an "incomplete comprehension of her final hours" (157), it is specious to argue that the point is not to understand her. This claim inadvertently resurrects a British colonial framework that implicitly advances an assumption that unless a text is made accessible for the consumption of English-only readers, it is not important. Rather than recognising that it is the English-only readers who are limited, this claim aestheticises the entire language into a symbol for the "difficulty of knowing" trauma (157). Ironically, this gesture makes it easy for English-only speakers to control her testimony by keeping it at a distance from them, in the way that Jack, the Englishman who befriends Claude and Ling-li, can "afford to close his eyes" and "return to his country" to forget the things "he did not see" (Loh 398). It sanctions a passive witness who does not need to learn the language in order to receive Ling-li's trauma testimony on its own terms.

In contrast, a culturally-sensitive reading of the Mandarin components of Ling-li's testimony, and the fact that she appears to Claude in a vision, demonstrate how Loh constructs an empowering voice for marginalised Singaporean Chinese woman. For Ling-li's Chinese-speaking community, speaking a language that "has no strict sense of tense" shapes a world where the boundaries between past and present, life and death, are far more permeable (397). As such, the community would perceive these visions as the prerogative of the dead, a way to ask the living to help them achieve their unfinished business. As Ling-li's uncle, Hong-Seng, explains to Claude, "Look, dream like this can only mean one thing—she needs your help. You better see what trouble she's in. Next time, you go through the bush, you walk right through and find out" (393). Hong-Seng's astonishment is not with the fact that Claude has these

visions, suggesting that they are not an unusual occurrence in this culture. Rather, he is disapproving that Claude does not acquiesce to Ling-li's request. He says, "this not good, what you did in dream" (392), explaining that Claude's gesture disrespects the spirit's request. For this culture, the reverence for and the act of honouring the dead takes precedence over any inconvenience or discomfort that the living might experience in doing so.

If a reader-witness takes the text on its terms, Ling-li is not an apparition of Claude's imagination nor, as a Western-centric literary trauma critic might claim, an extension of Claude's PTSD.[27] Rather, as she appears to him in these visions, in "short flashes of illumination" that occur "unexpectedly, unpredictably" (389), she is wholly other, a spirit of her physical self who brings him to witness the last few moments of her life so that she can reclaim the ending of her story. Without her return, the Japanese soldiers would have had the last word: she would have merely been worth nothing more than a body to be raped, killed, disposed of, and forgotten. But, in these visions, as the first soldier "throws off his trousers and sits on top of her thighs" (399), Ling-li is able to cut the soldiers off from narrating this moment with their "jeering and laughter" by providing the first untranslated portion of her testimony (399). In straightforward, matter-of-fact prose, her voice transforms what the Japanese soldiers would have otherwise framed as a triumph of power and dominance into a moment of deep anguish from the victim's perspective. She describes the tumultuous emotions and thoughts that she experienced, "我知道将发生什么, 而且早就知道, 然而当事情发生的时候, 我依然期望出现奇迹. 当我感到他压在我身上时, 我知道我应该放弃所有希望 (*I knew what was going to happen, I'd long since known, but when things started to happen, I still expected a miracle. When I felt him hold my body down, I knew I ought to abandon all hope*)" (399).[28] In order to cope with being savagely violated, she then harnesses all her energy into keeping herself from leaking the British government's secrets, even though, "在我内心深处, 我知道这些名字对他们

[27] Claude's visions do arrive after his week-long imprisonment and torture by the Japanese soldiers, *and* curiously echo a traumatic encounter he had as a child in Haw Par Villa, a Singaporean theme park based on the seven circles of hell that Claude's grandmother takes him to, to teach him about his Chinese heritage. There, she shows him an exhibition of a man getting his tongue cut out as punishment, which subsequently causes Claude to have nightmares. As trauma psychotherapist, Peter Levine, writes, "Central to Freud's concept of repetition compulsion was his observation that people continue to put themselves in situations strangely reminiscent of an original trauma in order to learn new solutions" (181). These visions could plausibly be Claude's psyche recasting his memories to help him rewrite the helplessness that he initially felt in those moments of trauma so that he can overcome them.

[28] Translations (and any mistakes) are mine, unless the text appears in quotation marks, which indicate that they are from the novel.

来说无关紧要。我是一个中国人, 然而在他们眼里我仅仅是一只动物 (*at my core, I knew that the names did not matter to them. I am Chinese, however, in their eyes, merely an animal*)" (399). The incongruence between what she knows and what she wants to believe is uncharacteristic of her, conveying her deep revulsion for the situation she is trapped in and her desperation to escape, even as all her efforts are futile. Her range of emotions makes it impossible to forget that she is a person, and resists the soldiers' attempt to dehumanise her completely.

As she moves on to testify to being raped, Ling-li offers an unflinching account of the soldiers' crimes. She relies primarily on the simplest sentence structure, devoid of the embellishments of adjectives and adverbs, to list what the soldiers did to her. The main subject of her sentences simply begins with "他" (he), followed by a description of his action. For example, she tells Claude, "他将我翻转, 强奸我" ("*he turned me over and sodomized me*") (399), and "在整段强奸过程中他不断地用手打我" (*the whole time he was raping me, he never stopped hitting me with his fists*) (400). This prevalent sentence structure of her testimony makes it clear that the active subject of these rapes are the soldiers, and that she is only the 'object' onto whom these acts are being done. The unconscionable disparity of power renders even her attempt to fight back futile. When a soldier forces his penis into her mouth, "当我咬下它的时候, 我想著每一个我绝不能说出的名字" (*as I bit down on it, I thought of every single name I was not able to say*), as an act of defiance to spite them (400). But the repercussions of her wilfulness and strength are lethal. She is violently beaten and strangled, before a soldier chops her genitals apart with his knife (400). Coupled with the already spare prose, Mandarin, where each character is one syllable, gives her words a swift rhythm. The contrast between the sheer volume of violence in these 'simple' words and the speed with which they are spoken reinforce her determination to bring the abject injustice that she has suffered to light.

But in order to reclaim her dignity as a human being, and counteract the injustice of the soldiers getting away with their crimes, Ling-li requires Claude's partnership to rewrite this moment of her history. She engages him in dialogue, compelling him to help her in a way that he could not when she was still alive,

> "As you can see, I was blindfolded and gagged. They did not want me to see their faces and to speak. […] I will tell you, and you will witness it, but you will also tell me what I want to know—their faces, height,

> distinguishing features. Every bit to erase their anonymity," she instructs steadily … (398)

Without Claude's help in furnishing her with the details to put faces to the men who abused her, her testimony remains incomplete. However, even as he offers these descriptions, Claude is hardly the composed witness. Unlike Lee's Kevin in *How We Disappeared*, who does not have any apparent trouble taking in Wang Di's story, Claude embodies the very real difficulty of listening to narratives of trauma. Portraying himself in the second person, he writes, "you force yourself to speak" (399), "you take a deep breath and wonder how long you can go on" (400). And even though he tries to "take on her unfailing steadiness" (400), he is constantly overwhelmed. His voice "breaking" (399), "swallowing hard to evade the emotions that are swarming through you" (398), "unravelling, spinning out of control" (400), and eventually "crying and shaking" as he sees "the knife flash again and again, the blade cutting through Ling-li's flesh" (401). In contrast, throughout Ling-li's testimony, Claude notes, "she hides nothing, not even her own humiliation. It is the way, you suppose, of generals" (399). In fact, she is the one who accommodates him, as she "instructs steadily when she senses you are ready" (398) and exhorts him when he wavers, ""勇气 (courage)", she tells you" (399). There is a hint of the absurdity of the situation, as the victim of heinous torture has to advocate for her own justice and coach her witness through this process. Even Claude recognises that his weakness is something to be "angry at" (399). But it is significant that Ling-li, the victim who endures unthinkable torture, is portrayed as the one taking the lead with this testimony. Loh makes an effective point here: for a society that is so unwilling and ill-equipped to listen to rape narratives, much is demanded of women who want justice for their suffering and for their narratives remembered in history.

Yet, before we judge Claude too harshly for being inadequate, the second-person perspective aligns the reader with his point of view and implicitly suggests that he or she is just as liable to respond as he does. Ling-li is, as it were, speaking to the reader, and Claude's responses are a mirror for his or hers. Here, the novel challenges the reader's level of commitment to her, especially when the most explicit depictions of violence are rendered in Chinese sans translation. Juxtaposed with English narration, the Chinese text visually conveys how a trauma narrative, which depicts the worlds of torture and suffering that victims are consigned to, is like another language

that needs to be learnt to be understood. Is Ling-li's story important enough for the English-only reader to make the effort to decipher the Chinese parts of her testimony, especially when the extent of violence enacted upon her will prove to be graphic and disturbing? Can the reader, as Claude eventually does when Ling-li reminds him that "你是我的证人 (*you are my witness*)" (401), rally and choose to continue being a responsible co-creator of her story?

Significantly, the ending of the text depends on the reader's interpretation of these visions. In the final scene of the novel, Claude has a vision of himself cutting out his tongue,

> No miraculous new tongue will sprout in the old one's place, no regeneration of what has been lost. Only a muteness—at best, a stunted form of speech, that will make children laugh and tease you mercilessly. No matter. You will laugh along, knowing that they will not be contaminated by that old tongue. (404–405)

If the reader-witness sanitises what Claude sees into an 'acceptable' framework of Western trauma theory, she inevitably denies both Ling-li the autonomy to speak her truth and Claude his growth in becoming a witness to another's pain. Reading this last scene as a symptom of Claude's PTSD, for instance, leaves his healing unresolved. He would have only gathered the courage to face his fears, listen to Ling-li's testimony, only to be triggered into a flashback of what he feared most as a child. The narrative would end up being about Claude's failure to work through his trauma effectively, and Ling-li's testimony only serving as a plot device to tell the story of a young man who is ultimately wrecked by World War II.

But if a reader-witness reads the visions in context, and recognises that in certain cultures, an individual's psyche cannot be isolated from "a variety of religious and cultural beliefs as well as the ecological and social world" (Watters ch. 1), she discovers a narrative that enables Claude's transformation from spectator to witness. Claude's final vision marks his commitment to 'speak' his ethnic language and tell Ling-li's story, and seals his departure from his colonised self. Here, the double entendre of "tongue" suggests that the loss of his physical organ symbolises the death of his English-only language that emerged from his upbringing as an Anglophile. Without the convenience of having his tongue to speak, he will not be at risk of tainting either Ling-li's testimony or Singapore's future generations with the language

of his former colonised worldview. Left only with the seemingly "nonsense syllables" of his severed tongue and unable to speak, he turns to the written word to discover "another language" (405), "the building blocks of new speech" (404) to record his, and Ling-li's, history. Claude will be able to "resurrect her" and "outwrite death" (405), ensuring that Ling-li's story is acknowledged as a piece of Singapore's history in its postcolonial future. This self-reflexive gesture to Loh's own new literary form in *Breaking the Tongue* reinforces that through written narratives, women like Ling-li can have their stories recorded. By leaving the ending in the reader-witness's hands, the novel makes its point that it will then be in how these stories are witnessed that determine if these stories are eventually heard.

In a country like Singapore, whose post-war historical narrative tends to focus largely on its endeavour to create its postcolonial identity and establish itself as a strong independent nation, a novel like *Breaking the Tongue* is especially needful. Singapore's post-war, postcolonial agenda centred on creating a new nation out of immigrants from a range of ethnic backgrounds. In order to do so, "Singapore sought to impose a unified, and unifying national story" of how "disparate emigrants were forged into an embryonic nation by common wartime suffering" (Blackburn and Hack 9). Given that "nationalist imaginaries tend to be built on narratives of national superiority" (Helms 614), where men fight to protect their women from "the ultimate threat posed by the (men of the) Other" (616), stories about wartime rape are often excluded from these narratives. As Elissa Helms insightfully explains, "female rape survivors [are] a threat to the male-identified nation, for their rape could expose the failure of "their" men to protect and defend them" (616). As a result, the postcolonial female victims of rape became triply marginalised—first by their perpetrator's refusal to apologise; second, by the local patriarchal culture of shame that suppresses their voices; third, by the nationalistic priority to establish a post-war identity as a strong, independent nation. Loh's novel together with those by Tan and Lee thus create a space not just to explore these hidden stories, but also for readers to reflect on how to bear witness to unfamiliar trauma texts. It is not to say that our attempts will be perfect, but the absence of a concerted effort to engage them guarantees that these trauma narratives will be continually kept out of conversation with the dominant narratives of history. And if these alternative narratives are never seen, the prevalent social scripts have no chance of becoming more inclusive.

IV. Narratives of Silence: Re-Imagining Trauma Restoration in *Anil's Ghost*

"There is something in us, as storytellers and as listeners to stories, that demands the redemptive act, that demands that what falls at least be offered the chance to be restored." — Flannery O'Connor

In *Trauma Fiction,* Anne Whitehead outlines the primary paradox that typically characterises trauma theory's relationship with its object of study, trauma fiction. She writes, "If trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction" (Whitehead 3)? Like many first-wave trauma theorists, Whitehead begins her inquiry with the assumption that trauma is characterised by unspeakability and cannot be 'spoken' or represented in language. This starting point inevitably prompts crucial questions about the efficacy of trauma fiction, whose essential task is to represent trauma. For instance, given that fiction constitutes worlds constructed entirely by words, how does trauma fiction attend to an experience that is thought fundamentally incapable of being represented language? And if literary trauma critics were to use language to explain the trauma in these fictional texts, effectively transforming these unrepresentable experiences into spoken ones, would they then not be *speaking for*, or even effacing an experience that is not theirs to explain?

In order to avoid the unethical implications of writing about trauma, Whitehead and other literary trauma critics have analysed the ways in which trauma fiction and its language portray trauma as unspeakable. Naomi Mandel observes this tendency especially in the critical responses to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a well-known 1987 postmodern novel about the traumatic consequences that arise when Sethe, an African-American slave, murders her baby daughter in an attempt to save her from being captured into slavery. Mandel notes that critics often characterise the trauma of Sethe's choice by unknowability ("I Made the Ink" 606–607),[29] and highlight "the complicity of language in atrocity by evoking language's limits, and investing these limits with a strong sense of ethics" (605).

[29] In particular, Mandel refers to
(1) James Phelan's "Toward a Reader-Response Criticism: The Difficult, the Stubborn, and the Ending of *Beloved*." *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 38, no. 3 & 4, 1993, pp. 709–728.
(2) Mark Ledbetter's *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative.* Palgrave Macmillan, 1996.
(3) Roger Sale's "American Novels, 1987." *Massachusetts Review*, vol. 29, no.1, 1988, pp. 71–86.
(4) Jean Wyatt's "Giving Body to the World: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 108, no. 3, 1993, pp. 474–488.

Whilst acknowledging these critics' intentions, Mandel argues that the rhetoric of the unspeakable, "reiterating the paradoxes of language and silence, the unspeakable and speech, narrative and trauma, rememory and forgetting", is just as unethical as speaking for victims, and is "not an acceptable response to a history of atrocity" (608). Speaking only about the difficulty of speaking "[maintains] an uneasy equilibrium between two uncomfortable choices"—maintaining their silence or speaking the unspeakable—"while denying the problematic implications of either" (608). And as Mandel rightly points out, the characters in *Beloved* "have no such refuge and no such privilege" of escaping the difficult questions with clever rhetoric (608). Instead, they have to find a way to "survive both their past and their future" (608).

In terms of highlighting one of the shortfalls of the 'classic' trauma model, Mandel is unequivocally on point. The two options available to a witness, to either speak for a trauma victim or preserve her silence, are underpinned by the same assumption that the silence of the traumatised is absolute. Hence, neither of these options tangibly explore how a victim might break her own silence and emerge from her isolation. As Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson point out in *Traumatic Affect*, this approach "reached its theoretical limit" "in the experience of the body", especially on "specific bodies, and in particular on those bodies most ignored, maligned and exploited" (7). By writing trauma into silence, critics further condemn those whose marginalisation in society has already denied them redress, making it even more difficult for their stories to be heard or to explore how they can recover from their suffering.

In response, Mandel offers an alternative approach in her reading of *Beloved*. She asserts that to break through their traumatic silence, "[the characters] *must speak the unspeakable*" and "face the disturbing consequences of their complicit actions" ("I Made the Ink" 608, emphasis mine). She offers a bold interpretation of one of the opening scenes, where Sethe buys and inscribes a tombstone for her dead daughter, to demonstrate how they may do so. To begin with, Mandel notes that the name on the tombstone, "Beloved", is not the baby's given name. And "since all Sethe's other children do have names, and Denver refers to the baby's "given name", she deduces that the reader not knowing the name of Sethe's third child is "the result not of the child being nameless but rather of a general reluctance or refusal, on the part of the novel's characters and narrator, to speak it" (587). She then points out that Sethe

acknowledges the purchasing and inscribing of the tombstone is an expression of the "powerful […] way [she] loved [her daughter]" (587). She writes,

> As the murdered baby's given name is replaced by "the way" Sethe loved her, Sethe speaks the unspeakable: she does not name that which has no name, but rather replaces an existing name silenced by a community's reluctance to utter it with an expression of her (Sethe's) personal response to this silencing. (587)

For Mandel, the circuitous way in which Sethe evokes the memory of her daughter offers an alternative way of speaking her story, one that potentially circumvents the problem of a trauma victim being unable to name her pain directly.

Whilst there is value in Mandel's call to move our thinking of trauma beyond the paradox of narrating the unnarratable, and even though she admirably demonstrates how novels can and "must speak the unspeakable" (608), two points in her argument are problematic. Mandel draws attention to the first of these points herself when she acknowledges that, in using language to speak circuitously to her trauma, Sethe will still be complicit with the consequences of speaking, "since she is the one replacing and effacing her murdered daughter with the word on the tombstone" (589). As Sethe uses language to create signs for the silence, to point to the silence, she risks the signs being commemorated instead of her daughter. And by referring to her daughter as 'Beloved' (rather than her given name), Sethe obscures her daughter's identity and thereby becomes complicit in hiding a part of her child's story.

The second problematic point in Mandel's analysis is her assertion that the characters of *Beloved* "must speak the unspeakable" in order to survive (608), without considering the context that makes, or would make, it possible for the characters to speak. This omission implies Mandel's assumption that Sethe always had the right conditions in which to vocalise her unspeakable pain, and it is simply for a lack of trying—or even by choice—that Sethe does not immediately do so. However, Sethe's eventual ability to articulate the story of killing her child is conditioned by certain favourable circumstances. For instance, as Sethe's encounter with the spirit of her dead daughter, Beloved, happens 18 years after she kills her child, she has had the benefit of distance in time from that initial traumatic event. Moreover, after she kills her child and is imprisoned, her former slave owner loses interest in her. Upon her release, Sethe is no longer a hunted woman, a situation that affords her the agency she needs to buy a tombstone for her child and mourn her freely. Both of these factors are

crucial to the space that Morrison creates for Sethe to grapple with the trauma of killing her child. In the diegesis, they establish an external world that is stable enough to bring the tumult of Sethe's internal world to the fore safely.

But these factors are not present for every trauma survivor. Some may be in situations that make it physically dangerous to vocalise their trauma, while others may simply not have had the benefit of sufficient distance from the traumatic experience—spatial, temporal or affective—to cope with its impact. Without foregrounding these factors, Mandel appears to take for granted that every context is conducive for speaking about one's trauma and does not acknowledge that, in certain circumstances, it may simply not yet be the right *time* to speak. This is particularly pertinent to novels that deal with victims struggling in the immediate aftermath of their traumatic encounter, where speaking too soon about their experiences could well re-traumatise them again, or whose chaotic external world prevents them from speaking without risking their lives. Thus, although Mandel's prescription that all victims must speak the unspeakable may be useful in theory, the conception that it is the only legitimate means of healing can be counterproductive to their restoration.

Although her response to *Beloved* differs from the typical literary responses to the novel, Mandel's resistance to a rhetoric of silence is still very much in line with the 'classic' trauma model. Without moving beyond the binary where speaking (here synonymous with healing) is privileged over silence (here synonymous with trauma), Mandel is bound to think of silence/trauma *only* as an antithesis of healing/speaking. In this model, all silence is effectively reduced to an impenetrable abyss that must be overcome, whilst the act of speaking, or inscribing one's trauma into language, is always privileged as something sought after. But whether this conception is theoretically sound is questionable. In *The Language of Silence,* Leslie Kane poetically elucidates some of the many meanings and functions that silence bears,

> the dumb silence of apathy, the sober silence of solemnity, the fertile silence of awareness, the active silence of perception, the baffled silence of confusion, the uneasy silence of impasse, the muzzled silence of outrage, the expectant silence of waiting, the reproachful silence of censure, the tacit silence of approval, the vituperative silence of menace, the peaceful silence of communion, and the irrevocable silence of death … (15)

Even though these silences "illustrate by their unspoken response to speech that experiences exist for which we lack the word" (15), Kane highlights that they are not typically conflated to mean the same thing. Likewise, within the discourse of literary trauma theory, the silence of the traumatised person does not unequivocally point to the absence of a voice. Indeed, acknowledging that silence may have many meanings is precisely what the 'classic' conception of trauma renders unrecognisable; the simple binary of 'speaking is good/silence is bad' does not account for the fact that *not all silence of a traumatised person is traumatic silence*, and, mutatis mutandis, not all silence is something detrimental to be overcome. In other words, the conventional reading of silence prevents us from acknowledging that, in specific contexts, some silences could be *speaking silences* that are necessary for healing and restoration.

Silence Speaks

The development of the theory of silence in psychoanalytic discourse offers literary trauma theorists a useful model to expand their framework of silence. Psychoanalysts commonly agree that the tendency to privilege speech over silence is rooted in Freud's research on the value of the *talking cure* (Arlow 44, Gale and Sanchez 205, Knutson and Kristiansen 3). In his 1926 essay, Freud observes that whilst a medical doctor has a range of tools at his disposal to treat his patients, between a patient and his therapist, "nothing takes place […] except that they talk to each other" ("The Question" 186). Freud cautions his readers not to despise the apparent simplicity of this 'cure', as after a period of talking, a patient is likely to "show signs of unmistakable relief and relaxation" ("The Question" 186). For Freud, a word "is a powerful instrument", "the means by which we convey our feelings to one another, our method of influencing other people" ("The Question" 187). Hence, the 'classic' model often views "silence on the part of the patient" as "the natural enemy of the therapeutic process" (Arlow 44). As a result, a patient's silence signalled a "resistance to recollection and verbalisation, and genetically in the tendency to repress or censor the thoughts, wishes, or other tendencies derived from the sexual drives" (Arlow 45). Notably, even in early psychoanalytic theory, silence was not associated with emptiness. Despite being initially framed as an undesirable element in therapy, silence was already implicitly recognised as a tacit form of communication, even if a limited one that only 'voiced out' a patient's reluctance to be forthcoming about certain feelings that could facilitate her healing.

Subsequently, Jacob Arlow's pivotal reflections explicitly expand the voice that silence has. He explains,

> In any prolonged and empathic human interrelationship in which a great and many affective situations have been shared in common, it is possible for the verbalised aspects of communication to be reduced to a minimum, to representation by small signals, and finally to expression by silences. Such silences may have the positive communicative significance that the absence of a symbol may have in cybernetic systems. Technically, they must be treated as a form of communication. (50)

Here, Arlow analyses the way silence comes to stand in for speech between two people in a familiar relationship. In this gradual evolution of communication in a relationship, silence and speech have the ability to be interchangeable; one is able to voluntarily choose one or the other to communicate one's intent. And if one's recipient is familiar enough with the context of the silence—she has sufficient information about preceding events, relevant cultural codes, expected behaviour of that particular circumstance and so on—she is likely to be able to 'read' the silence and intelligently ascribe some meaning to it. Or, to borrow Harald Knutson's and Aslaug Kristiansen's words,

> silence can only be grasped with an adequate level of precision when context is considered, for context is the map on which the phenomenon will be understood. The manifestation of silence in and of itself is so rich and has so many 'voices' that context is crucial to its understanding. By reducing the universe of contexts and focusing on the few probable ones, the level of precision for understanding silence is heightened. (4–5)

Hence, contrary to Mandel's proposition that the only ethical or palliative response to traumatic silence is to speak of it, however circuitously, Knutson and Kristiansen's taxonomy points out that language can first serve a more efficacious function for the observer. It can make plain the *context* surrounding the traumatised person's silence.[30]

[30] This is not to say that context of a survivor's silence is always readily available or accessible. As Knutson and Kristiansen remind us, in order for silence to be communicable, it has to be seen "as a function of context, ethnic-cultural factors, idiosyncratic forms of expression and role management" (4). Without a proper grasp of the varied and multi-layered factors that constitute its context, especially in a cross-cultural setting (4), that silence becomes incomprehensible. To add to the difficulty of this process, traumatic silence compromises an individual's ability to offer the necessary information to the singularity of her context. If the individual is neither silent by choice nor able to explain her own silence even to herself, a witness's challenge lies

As silence becomes more contextualised to a trauma survivor's circumstance, especially when a witness can identify the points of contrast between the survivor's actions before and after the silence, the purpose and function of that silence becomes clearer. In this way, a more expansive conception of silence lets the reader interpret and understand it in a way that might better preserve the singularity of the survivor's traumatic experience. Conceptualising silence as something that 'speaks for itself' would make it possible for literary trauma critics to perceive it in more imaginative and complex ways, and to avoid the act of effacement that comes from turning all silences into static examples of language and narration.

While in Morrison's *Beloved* time and space afford Sethe the ability to address her traumatic experiences, the characters in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* do not share the same privilege. Instead, they are situated in the thick of the Sri Lankan civil war—a war infamous for the fact that it forced a minority group, the Tamils, as well as many of the Sinhalese themselves, into implacable silence. In the context of this conflict, the characters' traumas remain too raw and their external world too volatile for them to talk about their pain safely; indeed, these figures have no choice but to remain in silence to survive. The stark contrast between the world of *Anil's Ghost* and that which Sethe inhabits is marked, highlighting the fact that no two traumatic contexts are the same and underscoring the need for a more nuanced treatment of silence in theories of trauma recovery and restoration.

In 1983, the longstanding tension between the Sinhalese (who were predominantly Buddhist) and Tamils (who were predominantly Hindu) in Sri Lanka had reached its peak. For decades, the Sinhalese had "resented what they saw as British favouritism to the Tamils under colonial rule" (Turner and Webb 83), where colonial policies "privileged a Tamil 'minority' at the expense of a Sinhalese 'majority'" (McGonegal 89). When Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) finally attained independence, the Sinhalese-led government adopted a series of policies[31] that elevated the status of the Sinhalese but oppressed the Tamil minority. As the human

in gathering sufficient information about the trauma survivor's context without being able to elicit direct answers from the survivor herself. However, a witness's identification of an incomprehensible silence is already a starting point in and of itself. It signifies that there is enough of a known context to recognise an absence where there could or should be speech. The gathering of more context and information would then give that silence a more precise shape and a boundary to exist within.

[31] The "Sinhala Only" language movement, the 1972 national constitution that facilitated "a redistribution of benefits in favour of the Sinhalese" and "a government-sponsored Sinhalese resettlement program" (McGonegal 90). This became a form of linguistic imperialism, as Tamils were identified by the way they could not pronounce certain syllables in Sinhalese.

rights scholars and art historians, Caroline Turner and John Webb, wrote, the Tamils "had long protested against the laws that effectively discriminated against them in respect of entry to higher education and public service" (83). Their protests ultimately transformed into a violent uprising in 1983, when the armed Tamil national resistance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), killed thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers (83). The state responded violently, and reacted with "acts of genocide against ordinary Tamil citizens" (McGonegal 90), catalysing an "endless cycle of violence and more violence" between the state and the LTTE (90). In this conflict, the "vehemence of these two nationalisms" and their "incompatibility and unwillingness to compromise" (90) ensnared them in a conflict that would eventually claim over 100,000 civilian lives by its end in 2009.

With this state of violence as its backdrop, *Anil's Ghost* focuses on the impact of the war on the Sri Lankan civilians. Sri Lanka is described as a "fearful nation", where the act of demonstrating "public sorrow" against the war was unthinkable (Ondaatje 25). Fathers were afraid to protest their children's deaths, as "there was a chance they might stay alive if you did not cause trouble" or in case "another family member would be killed" (52). In this state of civil war, language—typically a means of creating and demonstrating a shared sense of identity and belonging within families—is now the thing that could further destroy them. As a result, in order to safeguard each other, the Sri Lankans' self-enforced and self-protective silences require them to appear as though they have turned against themselves, to remain in a state of passivity as though indifferent strangers. This subversion of the family caused extreme trauma, a "scarring psychosis" in the country (52), as the loss of the familiar created deep pockets of silence, spaces now emptied of language and its attendant bonds.

The violent context of this civil war, coupled with the various stages of trauma in which these characters find themselves, make it untenable for them to speak. But through its primary focaliser, Anil, the novel explores the importance of context for apprehending and understanding silence. Anil discovers that, far from saying nothing through their silence, these figures' non-verbal gestures constitute another form of speaking. As she develops a greater appreciation of the context in which these silent characters live, Anil (and the reader) learns how to decode the language of, say, their touch. In this way, Ondaatje's novel demonstrates fiction's capacity to do more than merely represent trauma as unspeakable. It also reveals the way in which language and

the language of silence may be used to trace the different realities, cultural contexts, and worlds of trauma, and expand our ability to listen to silence.

Tears and Touch: Shaping a Witness Who sees

Through Anil, the novel first thematises the difficult process of bearing witness to incomprehensible silences. A Sri Lankan woman in her thirties, Anil has spent most of her adulthood living and working in the West as a forensic scientist. She carries herself aloofly, proud that "she could close down too" whenever she meets an unforthcoming person (28). For Anil, silence is a choice and a romanticised form of power and control, a defence mechanism to protect herself from feeling rejected. However, as she returns to Sri Lanka as part of a United Nations' Human Rights Investigation to examine the increasing number of civilian deaths in this civil war, she is thrust into a context in which silence is the result and consequence of different causes. Her own 'silence' is juxtaposed with other kinds of silences in this text: the silence of survival (Sarath), the silence of a political death (Sailor), and the silence of trauma (Ananda and Lakma). For someone who perceives of herself as being in control and as being professionally the one unearthing the secrets of the dead, Anil now meets an impenetrable and frustrating silence that refuses to yield to her investigations.

Initially, Anil insists on imposing her pre-existing frameworks of silence onto Sri Lankan culture, an approach that impedes her ability to recognise the precarious context in which the Sri Lankan civilians are forced to exist. During an excavation at her first dig site, Anil and Sarath discover four skeletons. They name them "TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SAILOR" (51). Anil observes that the first three are bodies from the sixth century, but the bones of Sailor, the fourth body, "were still held together by dried ligaments, partially burned" (50). Immediately deducing that Sailor's death was a recent one, she attempts to persuade Sarath of her theory, by using her geological knowledge,

> *Listen* […] there are traces of lead all over him. But there is no lead in this cave where we found him, the soil samples show none. Do you see? […] This is no ordinary murder or burial. They buried him, then later moved him to an older gravesite. (51)

Despite Anil's reasoning, Sarath's responses to her theory are deliberately non-committal, ("burying a body and then moving it is not necessarily a crime") and

evasive ("a murder … Do you mean any murder … or do you mean political murder?") (51). Anil cannot understand why he is being deliberately obtuse and sceptical in the face of such clear evidence of the body's relocation. Frustrated, she repeats her points "firmly", hoping to elicit Sarath's agreement, "this is a recent skeleton […] it was buried no more than four to six years ago. What's it doing here? […] I have to show you something … *this thing. Listen* ..." (52). But Sarath deflects her questions once more.

In this exchange, Anil not only demonstrates her forensic competence but also the extent of the moral responsibility she feels towards her work. The repetition of her forthright and direct questions reveals the way she, as a scientist, is used to making the pursuit of objective proof the priority, especially given the potential injustice of this situation. However, Anil does not realise the contextual difference between working in the West and in a country beleaguered by civil war. She cannot understand why Sarath refuses to acknowledge the merit of her logical hypothesis. Sarath, who immediately recognises the danger in what they have discovered, tries to dissuade Anil from pushing forward her conclusions by his subtle digressions, perhaps hoping that she will pick up on his caution without his having to spell it out. In a country where fear is a "national disease", that infects and blights the normal way of doing things, where even being "six hours away from Colombo" still makes him speak in whispers to be safe from the authorities who might be listening (52), Sarath knows that certain spoken words could cost them both their lives. But Anil's repeated "*Listen*" as she tries to persuade Sarath about her theory only highlights her own deafness. She is the one not listening to what he is *not* saying: using explicit language to speak to injustice will not work in this country. In order to construct stories about death and pain in this silent context, Anil must reconstruct the way she gathers and presents her data. The purpose of the journey she undertakes will be as much about learning a new language as it is about discovering the truth of the skeleton Sailor's story.

After this episode, Anil's story reaches its turning point when she is forced to work with a man completely incomprehensible to her. As Anil and Sarath endeavour to identify the skeleton, Sarath's former mentor, Palipana, refers them to an artificer who is said to be capable of recreating the unknown figure's face from its skull. Palipana explains that the artificer, Ananda, used to be one of the most renowned professionals in the country, someone who performed the sacred rites of the Nētra Mangala and painted the eyes of 40-feet-tall Buddha statues. His role was of

incomparable importance, since the Buddhists believe that "without the eyes there is not just blindness, there is nothing. There is no existence. The artificer brings to life sight and truth and presence" (95). As a man who is capable of creating such a world, it seems apt that he will be the one to shed light upon Sailor's identity. But Anil is disconcerted to discover that, after "a tragedy in his life", he now "works in the gem pits" and is such a heavy drinker that "it is not safe to be with him underground" (104). Ananda symbolically moves from working at great heights, atop a ladder, giving Buddha his eyes, to spending the majority of his time in darkness underground. The reason for the loss of his ability to work 'in the light' as a conduit for spiritual insight remains a mystery, and he now only causes his co-workers to go 'blindly' into this project, uncertain if they can trust him to deliver an effective outcome. The fact that both Ananda and Anil cannot communicate in the same language adds to her wariness of him. His silence prevents her from using her preferred strategy of communicating—interrogating him about his work methods, as she tried to do with Sarath to understand what he is trying to accomplish—and adds to her frustration.

Now with two silent mysteries to decode—that of Sailor the skeleton and Ananda—Anil begins to rely on her eyes more than her words to find her answers. For the forensic scientist, Sailor proves to be the less complex mystery of the two. She describes her initial examination of the skeleton as "her reading of [Sailor's] bones" (173), as though the figure is an 'open book' with an easily discernible narrative. Her knowledge of the body and its functions gives her a thorough understanding of the causality between external activity and its subsequent effects on the body. She recognises, for instance, that the "agility" of the skeleton's "pelvis, trunk and legs" indicates a "swivel of a man on a trampoline" (174). Her highly-trained eye is able to identify how this man's pelvis differs from the norm—it is hypermobile and more agile than usual—and to infer the movement that is likely to have shaped his bones in this particular way. As she steps back from her initial, emotion-laden response to the injustice of Sailor's murder and forward into her position as a scientist, Anil establishes the necessary distance to see what Sailor's body, without words, is telling her.

Anil eventually begins to transfer these skills of observation onto the other subject of mystery: Ananda. As she watches him sculpt Sailor's possible face, the narrative style shifts to reflect the scientific and objective manner in which she observed Sailor's bones,

> He had marked several pins with red paint to represent the various thickness of the flesh over the bone, and then placed a thin layer of plasticine on the skull, thinning or thickening it according to the marks on the pins. Eventually he would press finer layers of rubber eraser onto the clay to build the face. Collaged this way with various household objects it would look like a five-and-dime monster. […] When Ananda could go no further with the skull's reconstruction, he took it all apart, breaking up the clay. Strangely. It seemed like a waste of time to her. But early the next morning he would know the precise thickness and texture to return to and could re-create the previous day's work in twenty minutes. (163–167)

In order to reflect the foreignness of Ananda's silent process, the prose in the above passage is generally free of figurative language. The partially sculpted face is not compared to something human, or anthropomorphised into something it is not. Instead, the only metaphorical gesture compares the emerging face to a "five-and-dime monster" (163), which does little to make it more comprehensible. Figurative language typically juxtaposes something known with something unknown, so that the characteristics of the known provides a frame through which the unknown can be demystified. In this instance, the figurative comparison only succeeds in emphasising the extent to which Ananda's process is unknowable, both to Anil and the reader. This unlikely metaphor suggests Anil's dissociation. She witnesses in the sculpting process something so foreign that almost nothing in her broader epistemology, her wider frame of reference, can be likened to the scene. Yet, Anil's precise and objective observations outlines the boundaries of Ananda's silence as carefully as possible. In so doing, Anil begins to see precisely what she does not know.

Anil's first experience of Ananda's silence is the result of the language barrier that divides them. Although their uncommunicativeness is not intentional, Anil's mute interaction with Ananda illustrates three key principles for bearing witness to another's traumatic silence in an ethical manner.[32] First, since Anil and Ananda literally do not speak the same language, Anil must rely on cues rather than words to understand him. It is in this same way that witnesses expand their capacity to "read" a trauma survivor—by paying attention not just to what the victim says but the manner

[32] See Dori Laub. "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Routledge, 1992, pp. 80–92.

in which he or she says it. Non-verbal language is, after all, a critical part of a victim's narrative, testifying at times to the aspects that he or she struggles to express in words. Second, since Anil has no pre-existing frame of reference with which to conceptualise Ananda's working methods, she must observe his movements and their patterns carefully to make sense of his actions. The narrative style thus reflects Ananda's resistance to Anil's linguistic organisation of his work—his will that she should not 'speak for' his process or impute her meaning into the sculpted head. After all, Anil has no way of knowing what his work is. Her posture of deference to Ananda illustrates the way in which a deferential encounter with the trauma victim's inner world is a way to meet him on his own terms. Third, without the ability to communicate verbally, Anil cannot urge Ananda to do things according to her schedule—to stop "wasting time", for instance, in making, breaking up and remaking the face. Instead, she must let him go through the process of creation on his own terms and at his own pace. This illustrates the principles in which witnesses should respect the nature of the process and the time a victim requires to work through his or her trauma and not uncritically prescribe a recovery method or restoration schedule.

As it happens, Anil's inability to take control of Ananda's work is fortunate, as Ananda is trapped in a circuitous bout of traumatic silence. As Debra Jackson succinctly explains, such a silence may reflect a trap in which the temporal discontinuity of past and present must be resolved,

> When a traumatic event occurs, the full realisation of its impact is not immediately accessible. Instead, there is a period of latency between the time of the traumatising event and the full emotional impact of the event. This belatedness […] traps the survivor in a cycle of repetitions and re-enactments that make the traumatic event contemporaneous with the present. (206–207)

Ananda's sculpting—which consists of compulsive, repetitive acts of making and breaking up the face—testifies to the nature of his traumatic silence, which hides in plain sight. Tasked with collaborating with the artificer, Anil adopts the position of the observant witness, and tries to overcome the language barrier that divides her and Ananda. And it is this very turn of events that affords Ananda the potential to transform his traumatic silence into what may be called a 'speaking silence'.

Having taken a step back so that she can make thorough, objective observations of Ananda's conduct, Anil then moves closer to the situation by asking

questions—questions through which she seeks to fill in her missing contextual knowledge. When Ananda finally completes his protracted sculpting process, Anil discovers his achievement: he has created a head so well-crafted that it "was not just how someone possibly looked" but a real and recognisable identity—"a specific person" (Ondaatje 180). As Anil reflects, "It revealed a distinct personality, as real as the head of Sarath" (180) She identifies an aura of peacefulness in the face, "a serenity in the face she did not see too often these days. There was no tension. A face comfortable with itself" (180). It is evident to Anil that Ananda possesses the skill and potential to deliver what Anil requires: a lifelike representation of Sailor's would-be face that they could use to identify his body. But her lack of knowledge of Ananda's background limits her from realising that which Sarath immediately understands: the peacefulness of the face is precisely "the trouble" with it and not something to commend (108). When Sarath objects to the sculpture, Anil reacts with newfound curiosity and assertiveness. In this context, her willingness to ask Sarath "What do you mean?" (180) marks a change; she is no longer the "[closed] down" woman Sarath met at the start (28). Rather than being uninterested in what Sarath has to say, Anil is now willing to immerse herself in the difficulties of this new space, and is now committed to understanding the nuances of Sri Lankan culture. Sarath responds to Anil's request, explaining that, in the last few years, the Sri Lankan civilians had "seen so many heads stuck on poles here" that they had become commonplace; nevertheless, families would care for these heads, often taking them home in their arms, "wrapping them in their shirts or just cradling them" (180). As Anil learns, however, Ananda did not have the "privilege" of retrieving the head of his wife, Sirissa; she had "simply disappeared and there was no sighting or evidence of [her] existence or [her] death" (180). After three years, Sarath explains, Ananda "still hasn't found her. He was not always like this. The head he has made is therefore peaceful" (180). As it turns out, then, the sculpted head is not just a reflection of his artificer's skills, it is also a work that reflects his heart's deepest needs.

Anil's willingness to include Sarath in her investigation opens her eyes to 'see' something that was not previously apparent to her. Even though the sculpted head is not the truth that Anil looks for—the face of the man who could be Sailor—she sees something in it that is significant: it is a face representing the ones who have disappeared. When Anil learns of Ananda's story, she is affected deeply and before long, she "began weeping" (180). The objective gaze of Anil, the scientist, is replaced

here with a different kind of scopic regime, one defined by a kind of imploring blindness. As Jacques Derrida wrote of this kind of vision in *Memoirs of the Blind*, to see in this way has always been a part of the eye's destiny,

> Deep down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep. For at the very moment they veil sight, tears would unveil what is proper to the eye. […] The blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes, would be the gaze veiled by tears. It neither sees nor does not see: it is indifferent to its blurred vision. It implores: first of all in order to know from where these tears stream down and from whose eyes they come to well up. From where and from whom this mourning or these tears of joy? (126-127)

While Anil's objective gaze makes it possible for her to apprehend her subjects at a distance and remain an outsider, partly indifferent to the ramifications of the civil war, her tears now signify an emotional response: Anil has allowed the story to touch her. Significantly, when Ananda sees Anil's tears, he responds in a silent but meaningful way, "creas[ing] away the pain around her eye along with her tears' wetness [and] knead[ing] the skin of that imploded tension of weeping as if hers too was a face being sculpted" (183). If the cold, impervious gaze of the forensic scientist is seen through eyes that are, as Derrida writes of sculptures, "always closed", "walled up", or "turned inward, more dead than alive, scared stiff, more than the eyes of masks', then Anil's tears represent the instant in which these "dead eyes" crack open and connect her with her humanness (*Memoirs* 126–127). The intimacy of Ananda's touch "sculpts" her into life, alerting her to the life— not the death—before her. In seeing the world beyond her own experience and witnessing the pain of another, Anil finally recognises that "it was not a reconstruction of Sailor's face they were looking at" but a face of Ananda's grief (Ondaatje 180).

Repetition and Touch: Shaping a Narrative that Speaks

In *Anil's Ghost*, the trope of touch underlines the importance of 'seeing' the hidden story that is not immediately obvious to the gaze. And unlike the gaze, touch requires a certain closeness with the subject. As a forensic scientist, Anil's discoveries are born of her scopic observations. However, it is not only visual observation that gives Anil new insight into the subjects of her inquiries. When Anil observes Sailor's heel bones and left leg, which was "broken badly in two places", she recognises

something unforeseen about Sailor, who she had previously considered an active, working man. Sailor's bone characteristics indicate "an alternate profile completely, a man static and sedentary" (174). Initially, Anil does not have enough contextual knowledge to make sense of this inconsistency— this particular "silence" in Sailor's story. But, quite by chance, Anil soon notices Ananda squatting while he works. She asks to touch his heel to test her hunch that Sailor may have worked in a similar posture. In response, Ananda tells Sarath that "he got used to squatting in the gem mines" where he worked (175). This is just the piece of information Anil needs. She is able to conclude that "under his flesh", Ananda has the same "strictures on the ankle bones of the skeleton" as Sailor, which in turn indicates that, like Ananda, "Sailor worked in one of the mines" (176). Here, Anil's precise observations about the effects of crouching on Sailor's body are guided by the tactile data collected by her hands, unravelling part of the mystery of Sailor. If distant observation lets Anil identify signifiers with unknown signifieds, then it is the intimacy of touch that narrows the meaning of these signs to only a few logical possibilities. Having thus "filled in the blanks", Anil tells Sarath "we have a story about him, you see" (176). He was "a man who was active, an acrobat almost, then he was injured and had to work in a mine" (176). Sailor's silence thus 'speaks' when Anil's touch confirms what her eyes have already suspected, and makes it possible for her to 'hear' an account of his story.

Although Anil decodes Sailor's silence, the notable exclusion of her own working conclusions about Ananda's silence shifts the responsibility of listening to him to the reader. Having only information about Ananda from Anil's point of view, the reader has the challenge of piecing together a narrative about him from the handful of observations that Anil has left.[33] First, Anil has watched Ananda enough to notice specific repetitions in his behaviour; second, these repetitions have enabled him to produce a beautiful work of art; third, the very beauty of this creation has ironically tormented him, leading to his suicide attempt. As discrete narrative points, none of these observations can yield any significant meaning. But as these observations are lined up next to one another, the specific combination of these external actions and

[33] A thorough examination of Ananda's trauma tends to be lacking in the general scholarship of *Anil's Ghost*. Critics usually note that Ananda's grief over the disappearance of his wife, Sirissa, prevents him from sculpting an "objective image" (Babcock 72), even though he "has affected some kind of closure on Sirissa's death through the physical sculpting of her face" (Burrows 176). Moreover, the connection between the completed sculpture and his attempted suicide is often left unexplored, and often read as a subplot of Anil's character development (Chakravorty 545). Exploring the interiority of Ananda's trauma is a way of returning the concerns of the text to a "localized postcolonial perspective" (Burrows 165), to "listen closely and respectfully to the situated knowledges of Sri Lanka and to the ongoing traumas of its citizens" (165).

pieces of information gives a shape to what Ananda cannot say. In doing so, Ananda's silence becomes one that can "[speak] for something that is arguably as real as anything else we know, even if it can be located only by carving out a void within what is being said" (Budick and Iser xii). His silence is no longer an infinite, unexplainable chasm, but is sutured together through the links that connect these otherwise disparate observations.

The gathering of information via touch proves to be as crucial for Ananda as it is for Anil. Unable to comprehend the disappearance of his wife, Ananda remains blinded to the full causality and narrative of his internal chaos. In their research about trauma restoration through clay therapy, Cornelia Elbrecht and Liz R. Antcliff argue that "it is not the gravity of the event that defines trauma, but the level of experienced helplessness" (21). For Elbrecht and Antcliff, trauma is a situation that renders an individual so helpless that her central nervous system remains in fight-or-flight mode, and is thus "thwarted" from being "switched off" (21). In this context, the traumatised person's helplessness is so overwhelming that her body perceives the threat as ongoing. As a result, her body locks itself into perpetual survival mode and experiences "hyper arousal, hyper vigilance, and emotional and somatic numbing" repeatedly (21), especially when triggered by subsequent events that recall the initial helplessness. Elbercht and Antcliff's research provides a lens through which to analyse Ananda. When tasked with sculpting the face of a murdered man from his skeletal remains so that his identity may be traced, Ananda is triggered to 'see' the pain and helplessness of his own loss again. The magnitude of his pain impedes his ability to sculpt objectively, blurring the line between his and Sailor's family's loss.

If his commission to sculpt is a traumatic trigger, the process of sculpting is arguably what brings him closer to his restoration. For Elbrecht and Antcliff, trauma restoration is not so much about "remembering what happened" (22), as it is about enabling the body to find a way to complete the thwarted fight-or-flight impulse. As they propose, a successful completion of the fight-or-flight response "resets the structures within the brain", establishing a process in which "individuals can move from survival to living" (22). Given that, as they write, "hands driven by the innate memory are more concerned with creating and recreating implicit memories rather than the recall of specific trauma events" (24), Elbrecht and Antcliff conclude that working with clay has the potential to help the traumatised person "complete unfinished action cycles that were interrupted through dissociation during the

traumatic event" (24). Moreover, through actions like sculpting and manipulating clay, traumatised individuals "discover physical impulses and options that they had abandoned for the sake of survival during the trauma" (24). In other words, this tactile process lets them convey what has not been completely expressed during the traumatic situation, and "what happened [to the traumatised] is *told by the hands* through the present moment experience of touch in the Clay Field, rather than through cognitive recall of memories" (24, emphasis mine). For Ananda, who is denied even the ability to "cradle" the beheaded skull of his wife (Ondaatje 180), his repeated sculpting of a head becomes his way of 'speaking' about the insurmountable difficulty of not having closure about her whereabouts. The extent of his helplessness manifests itself in his sculpture, which reflects the fact that his wife is always out of his grasp. In shaping her face, he re-enacts the multiple times in which he appears to come close to finding her; in breaking up her face, he re-enacts the times his hopes have been dashed.

If touch is a way for a witness to see, it is also a way for a trauma survivor to speak. Significantly, each of Ananda's attempts to sculpt is not a pointless repetition that leaves him stuck in the same place from which he started. He could always "recreate the previous day's work in twenty minutes" (163), could proceed onwards from that point before destroying his work again. He does not engage in merely the blind repetition of *acting out* one's trauma, where one is, as LaCapra notes, "performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop" (*Writing History* 21). Rather, Ananda's repetitions, each with a difference, constitutes a process of *working through* his trauma. The process echoes the Freudian 'talking cure', in which, as Hanna Pickard notes, patients are encouraged to "re-live the trauma in the presence of the therapist, who actively encourages and helps them to put the experience into words" so as to "promote the elaboration and temporal contextualisation of the trauma memory" (5). In every attempt to tell the story, even minor additions to the same narrative are an advancement towards something more complete. By externalising the story, Pickard writes, and by "creating a clear, coherent, and temporally ordered narrative of the traumatic event", patients are thought to better recognise how their memories may be "integrated into [their] life story" (5). As Ananda's hands speak for him, they also form a clearer picture of his loss. In sculpting the face, his hands become like those of someone who cannot see. For, as Derrida writes, the hand of a blind man "feels its

way, it gropes, it caresses as much as it inscribes, trusting in the memory of signs and supplementing sight" (*Memoirs* 3). The haptic sensation of a hand caressing clay, beholding what it touches, 'speaks' of the wife whose loss Ananda cannot bear, according him a way of tenderly apprehending her memory. There is a comfort in this manner of speaking, as the time it takes to sculpt a face also lets Ananda get used to thinking of her, helping him to honour her memory without turning away in guilt or despair. This finally steadies him enough so that he can confront the truth of his loss.

Although the practice of sculpting steadies Ananda's emotions, it is notable that trauma victims often resist working through their grief. As LaCapra writes,

> in working through the past in a manner that enables survival or a reengagement in life, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past. One's bond with the dead […] may invest trauma with value and makes its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound. (*Writing History* 21–22)

Ananda's achievement of narrative closure, which occurs when he completes the "unfinished action cycles that were interrupted through dissociation during the traumatic event" (Elbrecht and Antcliff 24), comes at a large cost to him. As he crystallises his narrative and gives shape to his void, Ananda inevitably also has to acknowledge that his wife is lost to him. His completed sculpture, which recreates a three-dimensional presence of his lost wife, constitutes the closest thing to her real presence, the closest thing to bringing her back to life. Yet, the verisimilitude of this art form, which is *almost* lifelike, only reinforces what it certainly is not: the real face of his wife. The crushing comprehension of what he sees proves too much for him to handle, and he tries to take his life that very evening.

Like the anomalous, tell-tale signs on Sailor's bones that need the eye of a trained forensic scientist to identify their presence and meaning, both Ananda's silent sculpting and his suicide attempt could only have been 'heard' in the presence of a witness. Anil finds him "trying with what energy he had left to stab himself in the throat" (Ondaatje 191), a haunting image of his traumatic silence that struggles to cry out. Her presence as his witness literally saves his life, as she applies pressure to the wound. Whilst she does so, she notices that "his eyes were wide open" and "seemed to be swallowing everything"; he was not wearing his spectacles, "he couldn't see" (193). She quickly puts them back on his face, allowing his eyes to focus on her, and

"suddenly […] he seemed to be back with her, among the living" (193). Like the therapist who, through listening to the repetitions of a patient's story, notices recurring patterns and themes that the patient is not able to see (Pickard 5), Anil gives his sight back when she puts his spectacles back on his face. Portraying Ananda as a trauma survivor who has seen too much pain, the novel suggests that the touch of a witness is what keeps a survivor grounded in the present and not overwhelmed by the past. Significantly, in the last chapter, titled "Distance", the novel reveals that Ananda manages to return back to his vocation as a painter of Buddha's eyes, now able to be the conduit through which others can receive their sight.

Redemptive Touch: The Voice of One Who Can Speak Again

Elsewhere in the novel, Ondaatje not only astutely demonstrates how "silence can have different meanings" (Knutson and Kristiansen 4), he also progressively imagines an alternative way in which a witness can circumvent an incomprehensible silence. When Anil and Sarath bring Sailor's skull to Palipana, a now-blind epigraphist who was Sarath's former mentor, they meet his niece, Lakma, who had "seen her parents killed" during the civil war (Ondaatje 103). In this section of the novel, the focaliser switches from Anil to Palipana. He is the one who describes that the shock of witnessing their death

> touched everything within her, driving both her verbal and her motor abilities into infancy. […] She wanted nothing more to invade her. She lay hidden there for over a month, silent, non-reacting, physically forced from her room to exercises in sunlight. The nightmares continued for Lakma, who was unable to deal with the possible danger around her. (103)

The use of the word "touched" is poignant here, as it usually signifies a gentle gesture that signifies human connection. But the ironic way it is used to describe the trauma inflicted on a young girl demonstrates the extent to which the war has been a disease, that even a word that should have been used to indicate the presence of something life-giving is now blighted to mean something that affects extreme destruction. The trauma upturns Lakma's world completely and mutates it into a world completely unliveable for her. In the face of Lakma's trauma "driving" her with great speed and full control into a state of regression, Palipana "wished more than anything to deliver her from the inflicted isolation" (104).

Deviating from the conventional way of bearing witness to a trauma survivor, Palipana does not investigate the context of Lakma's silence or encourage her to speak. Instead, he reverses the notion of the talking cure, where he—the witness to her trauma—does the speaking. Palipana customises an education for her through "mnemonic skills of alphabet and phrasing" and "weaved into her presence his conversation about wars and medieval *slokas* and Pali texts and language" (104). Significantly, the word "weaved" connotes a delicate art, an action that is at once methodical and repetitive, yet personal and intimate, as the weaver takes time to pull disparate threads together to form a coherent piece of cloth. Like the way in which the repetition of the weaver's touch creates his tapestry, Palipana's words take on a tactile effect to redeem the way that Lakma has been ravaged by pain. Even though he is an academic who had been "turned gracelessly out of the establishment" for allegedly falsifying his research (103), and whose research was discredited because "they were a fiction" (81), the novel suggests that there is a place for "fiction" in trauma restoration. The creative way in which "he blended fragments of stories so they became a landscape" (105) creates a protective world in which she could see herself continuing to exist. As such, "it did not matter if she could not distinguish between his version and the truth. She was safe, finally" (105). Language is not used here, as in Western talk therapy, to construct the truth of the past and directly speak the story of one's pain but as a way to create a world for a new future.

As his words fill up her devastated psychical space, Lakma's 'cure' takes the form of listening to, and being touched by, his stories. She never speaks again, but she does commemorate a man who historical records would have forgotten, and in a way that is meaningful to both of them. She recalls his lesson that "only stone and rock could hold one person's loss and another's beauty forever", and "cut one of his phrases into the rock, one of the first things he had said to her, which she had held on to like a raft in her years of fear" so that "in the last days of his life, he was accompanied by the great generous noise of her work as if she were speaking out loud. Just the sentence" that he placed his hand over and 'read' before he died (107). The novel never states what this "yard long sentence" is, suggesting that, in this instance, the words are not the point of her restoration. Rather, the fact that Lakma is able to customise a 'language' specifically of sound and touch for Palipana, out of gratitude for this blind epigraphist, demonstrates that she is no longer the same traumatised girl living in fear of the world. As his legacy of how he saved her is carved into the

immutable and natural world that he spent his life studying, this not only indicates that she has found her own way to 'speak'. It also testifies to the validity of his form of research and redeems the disgraced epigraphist, whose work was removed from the official records and condemned to remain disappeared. Her 'voice' speaks to him in a way he can receive, in a way that *touches* him.

Is this all just fiction? Too wishful? Perhaps. Whilst this claim about language's relationship with pain can certainly be touted as being a fictitious daydream, one that reduces the complexity of the struggle of trauma, perhaps this is precisely a role that contemporary fiction can play as writers and thinkers attempt to expand the ways in which we speak about pain. By imagining 'unrealistic' ways in which their characters' trauma might be restored, it also speaks to the very real desire that those in pain have of wanting to find a way to work through it and of having hope that it is possible. Sara Horowitz says it well when she argues that "fictionality frees [writers] from adhering to a certain kind of exactitude and fidelity" (2). In not being bound by the rules and conventions of the 'real world', this pushing of boundaries and exploring new ways of seeing permits the "[attainment] of a different kind of exactitude" (2). The world we read about may not be real, but the perspectives that we return with certainly are. In this way, *Anil's Ghost* suggests that thinking of silence as a language is difficult not because it is an untenable form of communication, but because the reader may not have learnt how to *listen* to it.

Restorative Touch: The Voice for One Who Sees

By the end of *Anil's Ghost*, it becomes clear that it is not Anil who is the primary witness to the novel's depiction of the Sri Lankan civil war, but its reader. Notably, Anil never sees Ananda again after he leaves for the hospital and does not know of his recovery after their one encounter. Neither does she witness Lakma's beautiful commemoration of Palipana. Instead, it is the reader who is privy to these fragments and to whom the novel passes the responsibility of bearing witness to these characters. In the closing chapter of the novel, "Distance", the focaliser changes from Anil's limited third person perspective to that of an omniscient third person. We now bear witness to Ananda's story without Anil. Significantly, the chapter begins by describing a 120-foot-high statue that had once towered over the Buduruvagala field, a region of "desperate farming", for generations (Ondaatje 295). Its godlike presence is dramatically reinforced through the way "the rising sun would first colour the heads of

the Bodhisattvas and the solitary Buddha, and move […] onto the human forms that walked on bare running feet towards the sacred statues" (295). In being the first to receive the morning light, the statue symbolically represents the way it is a figure of enlightenment and omniscience over the people beneath it. At such a distance from the ground, it has the ability to see things from a bird's-eye view. It is further described as having an enduring presence in this space, giving a "permanence to brief lives" (295), something that has stood above human conflict and is impervious to time. In having been present to bear witness to the disparate stories of the lives beneath it, the statue becomes a focal point, the consistent thread, by which all these lives can be connected. It becomes a symbol of something that holds all the fragments in place, a romantic image that suggests that amidst all these differences, something godlike can hold them all together and keep them united as one Sri Lanka. In many ways, the statue reflects the reader's position in this novel. Up to this point, *Anil's Ghost* has yet to weave all the fragments of stories together. The various loose ends of the novel—Sarath's death, Sirissa's disappearance, Ananda's unresolved trauma, the sudden end to Anil's story when she steals Sarath's body out of the UN compound—have all been held together by its reader. Our godlike position of seeming omniscience over the events of the narrative appeals to an instinct to find a framework that adequately contains all the pieces together.

But the opening paragraph of the final chapter is immediately juxtaposed with an account of thieves who explode the statue, and "pried the stomach open with metal rods but found no treasure" (296). This would-be symbol of a unifying idea is unceremoniously smashed, not even for a lofty "political act or an act perpetrated by one belief against another", but for a desperate, primal need to "find a solution for hunger or a way to get out of disintegrating lives" (296). There is nothing romantic about this statue coming up short in providing food for the people. It is exposed for what it is: a figure unmoved by the suffering of the country and blind to the dead that lie before it. In this light, the novel cautions the attempt to establish a grand narrative that takes away the attention from the very real human suffering of the war. Much like how the sculpted head confronts Ananda with the truth of his situation, but gives him no tools with how he can cope with it, a narrative of meaning alone is not enough to help the traumatised survive.

Instead, the gift of the Buddha is in its destruction. The toppled head had "never felt a human shadow" whilst it had "seen the wars and offered peace or irony to

those dying under it", unconcerned about which it gave. But now, it lies on the ground, face to face with the traumatised men and women, the hollows of its chiselled eyes "holding rain so [they] could lean down and drink from it, as if a food, a wealth" (300). With "its one hundred chips and splinters of stone", the imperfection of the fallen god is able to do more to serve its people. It offers them "food" by giving them a chance to rebuild their lives for themselves from the ground up. Their employment to restore the statue literally saves the lives of the local men and women because "it was safer to be seen working for a project like this", so that they would not be "pulled into the army" or "rounded up as a suspect" (297). Furthermore, being in touch with the ground—literally, in the collecting of stones and digging of a mud trench to anchor the statue—makes it possible for them to unearth the buried secrets of the war. The workers "were finding dead bodies daily, not even buried, in the adjoining fields" around the statue (297), giving the local families a chance to identify and bury their dead. If healing is to take place in this country, the novel suggests it is not from a top-down saviour from on high—or the meaning making from a third-party witness—but from the community's own ways of mending itself from the ground. The devastation of this war is so great that it shatters the pre-existing forms or narratives that used to hold them in place. Even the most godlike thing is on the ground, broken, like its people. Hence, their restoration takes place in a manner most suited for their context; from their specific brokenness emerges a new way to make sense of the world, one that incorporates its wounds into its story.

At this point in the novel, the events are focalised from Ananda's point of view. Whilst he organises his team to rebuild a new, plastic, body of the broken statue, "Ananda had spent most of his time on the head" (298). In contrast to the former head that he sculpted perfectly, Ananda chooses not to "homogenise the stone" or "blend the face into a unit" but to leave the "quilted" face as it was (298), and to work "on the composure and the qualities of the face" (298). Along with the subtle reference to his more regulated drinking now, the reader sees also a second hint that Ananda has made some progress in healing from the trauma of his loss. Quite unlike the compulsive repetition of sculpting to produce a perfect head, he chooses not to erase the evidence of damage on the statue's face, leaving traces of the cracks, perhaps able now to accept the imperfections on the face of an old ideal. Significantly, Ananda "did not create or invent faces anymore" (299). His decision to move away from creating perfect works of art and, instead, piece together something that is broken suggests that

he has made peace with the imperfections of his own reality. He attempts not to erase his pain, but to find a way to live with it. Much like the statue that comprises both new and old stone, the narrator's subtle reference to his past actions within the description of his 'new' self reflects the way he is indelibly marked by that traumatic event.

The closing scene of the novel depicts Ananda 'restored to the heights' of his work. Ananda is commissioned to perform the Nētra Mangala rites on another Buddha statue. In being restored, it has the potential to revert back to being thought of as 'all seeing'. The narrative that we write, having listened to the speaking silence, always risks being the final word on the matter, in spite of the cracks that reside within it. Even Ananda feels that moment of "seduction" as he sees the world from the head of the statue (303). The omniscience is overwhelming,

> And now with human sight he was seeing all the fibres of natural history around him. He could witness the smallest approach of a bird, every flick of its wing, or a hundred-mile storm coming down off the mountains near Gonagola and skirting to the plains. He could feel each current of wind, every lattice-like green shadow created by cloud. There was a girl moving in the forest. […] The birds drove towards gaps within the trees! They flew through the shelves of heat currents. The tiniest of hearts in them beating exhausted and fast, the way Sirissa had died in the story he invented for her in the vacuum of her disappearance. A small brave heart. In the heights she loved and in the dark she feared. (303)

Yet, the novel also draws attention to the statue's limitations. It "would be able to witness figures only from a great distance" (302), a fixed gaze that "would always look north" (303). Whilst there is a place for a 'bird's-eye' view of the world, a place for coherence and plenitude, it is not the only view of the world there is. But, significantly, it is not sight or speech that has the final word on this novel. Instead, Ananda turns from the allure of this omniscience when "he felt the boy's concerned hand on his. This sweet touch from the world" (303). A silent and non-verbal form of communication keeps Ananda tethered to his community, a gesture that transcends language in its ability to restore.

Similarly, the reader is reminded by the novel's lingering touches not to be misguided by the assumption that she has grasped the stories of the characters or its represented world of trauma completely. *Anil's Ghost* deliberately resists giving

permanent closure to its fictive world. In its final chapter, it introduces new details that open up more questions: how did Ananda manage to recover from his suicide attempt? Is the "girl moving in the forest" who one thinks it is? If it is, what has become of her? Moreover, it is also worth remembering that Anil and Sarath may have named the dead bodies that they found "TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SAILOR" (51), generic names from a children's ditty that are "representative of all the lost voices" (56), and worked hard to discover Sailor's story in an effort to bring justice to the victims of the civil war. Yet, the novel omits the other four names from the rest of the ditty. The present absence of "RICH MAN, POOR MAN, BEGGAR MAN, THIEF" speak to the names that have not been given to the bodies that are not yet found, the stories that have yet to be told. Hence, even as *Anil's Ghost* exemplifies how contemporary trauma fiction can invent and imagine new ways to think and speak about trauma, it reminds her that this fictive representation has, like touch, offered knowledge about the world of trauma that is "always partial", "always leaves more to be desired" (Mackendrick 52). By leaving some things just out of the reader's grasp, the novel makes it difficult for her to form a prescriptive conclusion regarding how storytelling can bring restoration to cultures that have suffered extensive violence and trauma. Rather, it imparts only a certainty of the many unresolved stories of pain that have yet to find closure, and a notion that a reader-witness's responsibility lies not only in the careful apprehension of stories of trauma, but in a continual return to these worlds to listen to the unheard silences.

V. Conclusion

This thesis began by re-examining the 'classic' trauma model. Based on a Freudian approach to trauma and a poststructuralist approach to language, it gave literary trauma critics a way to make sense of the tenuous relationship between trauma and language. The model highlighted, in particular, the difficulties that Holocaust survivors faced as they worked through their trauma. But as the needs of trauma survivors have evolved in time, and with the increasing emergence of literary texts about other global traumas, literary trauma studies have had to look beyond the 'classic' trauma model to address the issues that beset a range of trauma survivors in the twenty-first century.

Instead of examining ways of bearing witness to a trauma survivor, I explored the potential contribution that reading trauma narratives can make to a community's restoration in the aftermath of collective trauma. Hence, whilst critics have modified the 'classic' model by using more pluralistic definitions of trauma, I reconfigured it by reading language in a way that returns more closely to a literary approach: as something that creates rather than something that names. This attention to the story told through literary form and techniques enables narratives to speak circuitously, providing them with a language to speak to various aspects of surviving trauma that were out of the 'classic' model's reach. With this approach to reading, or 'bearing witness' to a text, I explored how a reader's interpretation of a trauma narrative could speak to the various challenges that its textual world attempts to represent. I examined the narratives of three collective traumas, each situated at a different stage of the restoration process: (1) survivors attempting to have their stories remembered by the next generation; (2) victims attempting to have their stories acknowledged by society for the first time; (3) victims attempting to grapple with their own trauma for the first time. Each context thus featured a different challenge for the reader, as she considers how her reading can help transmit stories of trauma to the next generation, unearth hidden stories of trauma, and listen to stories of silence respectively. This comparison made it possible for me to underscore the different needs that victims and survivors have at various points of their restoration journey, and the versatility required of a reader who attempts to bear witness to trauma narratives.

I began, in Chapter 2, with one of the most developed areas of literary trauma studies: the Holocaust. Although the 'classic' trauma model has provided a means to

understand the struggle that many survivors experienced after the Holocaust, it has stopped short of providing them with the language they need to transmit their experiences to the next generation. I explored the various ways that literary form has conveyed aspects of survivors' experiences in Auschwitz that they were, perhaps, unable to articulate directly. In *Five Chimneys*, I analysed the gaps in Lengyel's narrative and highlighted the story of her trauma. In *Still Alive*, I traced how Klüger uses juxtaposition to include her experiences, which have been silenced in societal discourse, into narrative form. In *Night*, I explored how, in order to resonate with a specific group of witnesses—his Jewish descendants and larger community—Wiesel traces his time in Auschwitz through an appropriated form of the Jewish religious calendar. Through its differences to the original, he emphasises how the Holocaust utterly devastated his former world. Yet, by framing the event through a modified version of the Jewish calendar, Wiesel makes his point that the Holocaust is as central and significant to Jewish collective memory as the rituals are to the Jewish faith. These references that are deeply embedded in the collective Jewish memory become a way to regather a fragmented community, and reconstruct their shared history for their future generations. Through my analysis, I demonstrated how a reader's engagement with the literary forms of memoirs co-creates the new language that survivors were looking for to speak about the horrors of the Holocaust. Her articulation of a memoir's narrative strategies facilitates the process of shaping and transmitting collective memory. Moreover, her engagement with the affective import of these memoirs also becomes a way of preserving the otherness of the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust. It ensures that "the relationship of the present with horrific pasts" does not become "ritualised into familiar historical narratives" or a "self-contained or alien entity", and cultivates "a sense of a shared world between the reader and these extraordinary, extreme and otherwise exterior events" (Carter-White 288).

In the next section of the chapter, I examined the way the memoirs' intended audience, the second generation of the Holocaust survivors, responded to their parents' fears over their experiences being forgotten. These texts thematised the struggles of witnessing, as their writers grappled with the burden of preserving their parents' experiences without speaking for them, *and* carving out an identity that is not solely defined by their parents' past. But like the survivors, these second-generation writers found in literary form a new language to balance the specific tensions of witnessing. As I have shown, *The Complete Maus* foregrounds how a witness's perception of the

past is not something cast in stone. The comics form left the ending deliberately open-ended and is ambiguous about whether Artie finds closure from his father's past. In doing so, it performs Spiegelman's awareness that his narrative of his father's past may never be fixed, because he, as witness, is always changing. As readers posit different ways of reading the comic's conclusion, the comic also self-reflexively highlights how critical readers' interpretations of texts are in shaping the meaning that is transmitted to future generations. But, as my reading of *After Such Knowledge* portrayed, every witness, no matter how self-conscious and thoughtful, is likely to have a blind spot. By tracing the literary form of Hoffman's text, I demonstrated how she relapses into a form of binary thinking in her reading of the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York city, when she privileges the stories of the Jews over that of the Muslims in the Arab world. The shift in form from her otherwise carefully wrought reflections about the Holocaust flags up the fact that there are certain frameworks that are too indelible to erase. Part of the witness's responsibility, thus, is to work continually towards being aware of the frameworks by which she reads, and the way her own responses influence the way the event is received in turn.

If there is the one thing that a literary approach offers literary trauma studies, it is its self-consciousness that stories cannot tell the whole truth. They, too, have their own gaps; there is no one definitive story that speaks for all. Instead, there is a need for many stories, and witnesses who read these stories alongside each other, to address the blind spots in each narrative's version of the world. This notion that a story is never complete, and is always in the process of being told, creates a useful tension when paired with the inherently more prescriptive nature of trauma theory. The gaps in each story, the silences that cannot be fully explained, resist "turning readers and viewers into voyeurs and arrogant or commiserate spectators and appropriators of other people's traumas" (Rodi-Risberg 114). Far from leading readers to be complacent with their readings of trauma, these gaps continually remind them that their interpretations may inadvertently render other stories invisible, and of how much more there is still to listen to.

In Chapter 3, I moved my investigation to Asia to compare the development of literary trauma discourse of Southeast-Asian victims to their European counterparts of World War II. In the early stages of literary trauma studies, the 'classic' trauma model was imposed on trauma narratives regardless of whether it was contextually relevant. But as the model was unable to identify those who are structurally oppressed by their

society's power dynamics, this approach was inadvertently complicit in perpetuating the silence of already marginalised victims. Hence, as female victims in a patriarchal society, as people of colour in a largely Eurocentric literary trauma discourse, the doubly silenced stories of former comfort women and women who were raped by the Japanese soldiers during the Pacific War have had little attention. I explored how three fiction writers use their literary forms to bear witness to the stories of these women to a society that has little interest in listening to their narratives. Bearing in mind that "trauma occurs on a relational spectrum" and "is impossible to divorce it from context, whether personal or collective" (Druker 2), I argued that exploring the novels' narrative strategies was a way of resisting the imposition of irrelevant trauma theories onto a text. Stories, after all, provide glimpses into culture. They reveal how a particular society perceives the purpose of language, the function of community, and the factors that shape their identity. I aimed to take the novels on their terms, and draw out nuanced representations of trauma that were relevant to the context of the world that they were portraying.

In reading Lee's depiction of a former comfort woman in *How We Disappeared*, I demonstrated that illustrating the consequences of rape and using a 12-year-old boy as a focaliser were strategic attempts to change the perception of a society that views rape as a mark of shame on a woman rather than a crime. Next, I explored how Tan's *The Garden of Evening Mists* creates a layered narrative that reflects a witness's difficulty in telling a former comfort woman's story due to her own trauma and shame. By framing the story through the witness's acting out and working through of her own pain, the novel develops a language through its narrative form to speak about a process that is by no means linear. Lastly, in my analysis of Loh's *Breaking the Tongue*, I outlined the detrimental consequences of reading a Southeast-Asian text through Eurocentric trauma theory and explored how analysing literary form is a way to listen to the stories that Southeast-Asian writers are attempting to represent. I demonstrated how Loh's dual-language conclusion attempts to create a new narrative strategy that includes the suffering of these women into the nation's history.

These fictive works have used innovative narrative strategies to draw attention to these stories in a community that has long since rendered them invisible. But in order to shape a more inclusive societal narrative, as this chapter has demonstrated, the way in which a reader bears witness to these stories is just as critical. As Miller writes,

"To understand people, their motivations, their pain, and their violence, we must pay attention to the world in which they exist, a world that literature both reflects and affects" (238). When a reader engages these stories on their terms, they become windows into a hidden world that speak to the gaps in the dominant societal narratives and reveal injustices and suffering that have been unaccounted for. She can play a crucial role in being a conduit between these literary texts and her community at large, as her critical responses are a potential means of reshaping the predominant societal responses to these issues.

In Chapter 4, I moved to explore the traumas that resulted as a consequence of the dissolution of the British Empire after World War II. In particular, I explored how the 'classic' trauma model's Freudian 'talking cure' is inadequate for conceptualising restoration in the context of the Sri Lankan civil war. For the victims in this culture, where speaking about their traumas could literally cost them their lives and the lives of their loved ones, they have had to remain silent about their pain. But, I argued that silence does not necessarily mean the traumatised victim is not speaking. I analysed the literary form of *Anil's Ghost* and highlighted how the novel's fictive qualities stretches its reader's imagination in terms of how silence can speak. My reading offered a glimpse into how a careful engagement with literature has the potential to shape more culturally and contextually sensitive trauma restoration theories. But if a reader-witness intends to read stories "with the hope of making a difference to social practice" (Lee, S. 138), *Anil's Ghost* is a reminder that her responsibility has to extend past the end of the novel. In bearing witness to trauma narratives, "there is of course no patient whose relief can confirm for us the value of the story we construct or justify the diminution of the force of trauma's affront to human comprehension" (Kacandes 67). A casual reader may thus examine the novel's literary form simply to appreciate its craft, or accept the ambiguity of Lakma's isolation from her community in its conclusion. But for a reader-witness, who bears witness to the effects of language and the truths these narrative worlds try to reveal, the endeavour to re-integrate the isolated figures that these characters represent back into their community remains an ongoing work.

In choosing these stories to which to bear witness, there have been many others that I have had to exclude. But this approach has been an attempt to position the reader as witness in a vital way, to reflect on how she listens to narratives speak, in order to widen the scope in terms of speaking across countries and cultures of human suffering.

As more writers represent traumatic experiences around the globe, creating "a new world, a world that is unique, individual; and responds to a world", "through acts of imagination, through language that feels inevitable, through vivid forms", the worlds that they share are largely "unknown or mis-known by still more people, confined in *their* worlds (Sontag, "At the Same Time" 211). If it is the work of writers to bring readers closer to worlds of trauma, worlds in trauma, it is reader-witnesses' careful engagement with these narratives that determine whether the voices in these worlds remain merely textual representations or become ways of speaking that alleviate suffering. At their hand, literature and literary studies do not have to be removed from worlds of pain, but stories, and the reading of stories, can open ways of healing to communities recovering from some of the worst devastations in history.

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