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NOVELS BY KATHY ACKER, SYLVIA PLATH, AND TONI MORRISON IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAUMA STUDIES

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Наталија (Саша) Стевановић

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Abstract:	The doctoral thesis titled *Novels by Kathy Acker, Sylvia Plath, and Toni Morrison in the Context of Trauma Studies* is focused on analyzing narrative representation of trauma in *Blood and Guts in High School*, *The Bell Jar*, and *Beloved*, which, in the authors' attempts to bridge the assumed unrepresentability of trauma, employ features inherent to writing practices in trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical fiction; in turn, this blending of the features transcends the boundaries dividing genres and therefore in these novels narrative representation of trauma goes beyond genre delineations. In reading these novels and their narrative representation of trauma, theoretical framework primarily relies on studies done in the realm of literary trauma studies, which inherently implies its connection to trauma studies, thus allowing for a creation of a pluralistic theoretical framework informed by psychoanalytical, literary, and narrative theories. Narrative representation of trauma is examined by investigating which narrative and fictional features are conveyed in order to incorporate trauma's fragmentariness, unpredictability, belatedness, and immediacy. Narrative strategies and techniques are also analyzed, and the analytical process is approached by investigating employment of repetition, focalization, thought report, narrative dissociation, atemporal ordering or non-linear narrative as well as gapping, which not only narratively represent trauma, but also mimic the effects of trauma. Traumatic events and responses to traumatic events whose narrative representation is analyzed are also connected to the contextual structure of the narratives, in terms of their historical and temporal location. Oeuvres and literary aspirations of the authors are outlined in order to offer a pluralistic approach to analyzing the novels they wrote, as trauma and its narrative representation cannot be divorced from the societal, cultural, temporal, nor autobiographical contexts in which it was done. Our theoretical framework is based on the studies written by trauma theorists, such as Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk; literary trauma theorists including Michelle Balaev, Laurie Vickroy, Roger Luckhurst; and other studies written on postmodernism and postmodernist fiction, autobiographical fiction, as well as narrative theory.
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Подаци о докторској дисертацији

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Наслов:	*Романи Кети Екер, Силвије Плат и Тони Морисон у контексту студија трауме*
Резиме:	Докторска дисертација под називом *Романи Кети Екер, Силвије Плат и Тони Морисон у контексту студија трауме* се бави анализом наративног представљања трауме у романима *Крв и изнутрице у средњој школи*, *Под стакленим звоном* и *Вољена* чије ауторке, ради превазилажења немогућности представљања трауме, користе карактеристике својствене писању у фикцији о трауми, постмодернистичкој фикцији и аутобиографској фикцији; заузврат, представљање трауме у овим романима превазилази жанровска органичења. Приликом читања ових романа и њиховог наративног представљања трауме, теоријски оквир се првенствено ослања на студије књижевне трауме, што аутоматски подразумева њихову везу са студијама трауме, и на тај начин омогућава стварање плуралистичког теоријског оквира, који укључује психоаналитичке, књижевне и наративне теорије. Наративно представљање трауме се испитује истраживањем наративних и фикционалних карактеристика које се користе како би се представила фрагментираност трауме, њена непредвидивост, закаснела манифестација и непосредност. Такође се анализирају и наративне стратегије и технике, а аналитичком процесу се приступа истраживањем употребе понављања, фокализације, преношењем мисли, наративне дисоцијације, атемпоралног уређења или нелинеарне нарације, као и остављања празнина, које не само да наративно представљају трауму, већ и имитирају њене ефекте. Трауматски догађаји и одговори на трауматске догађаје чије наративно представљање је анализирано су такође повезани са контекстуалном структуром наратива, у смислу њихове историјске и временске локације. Опуси и књижевне аспирације ауторки су описане како би се понудио плуралистички приступ њиховим романима, јер се траума и њено наративно представљање не могу одвојити од друштвеног, културолошког, временског, ни аутобиографског контекста у коме су настале. Наш теоријски оквир се ослања на студије које су написали теоретичари трауме, попут Сигмунда Фројда, Кети Керут, Бесела ван дер Колка; теоретичара књижевне трауме, попут Мишел Балаве, Лори Викрој и Роцера Лукхурста; као и других студија о постмодернизму и постмодернистичкој фикцији, аутобиографској фикцији, и наративној теорији.
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you live in every word I say.

To my Dad – love is a thread that can never be severed;
your shadow is always next to mine.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The dissertation titled *Novels by Kathy Acker, Sylvia Plath, and Toni Morrison in the Context of Trauma Studies* aims to investigate how trauma studies, that is, literary trauma studies can be applied to reading these novels and their narrative representation of trauma; we also aim to investigate the features of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, as well as autobiographical fiction or autofiction which enable the representation of the assumed unrepresentability of trauma, of its inherent unpredictability, fragmentariness, cyclical nature, and atemporality. Essentially, we start with the broadest framework of trauma studies, which is influenced by both psychology and literature, and we narrow it down to literary trauma studies, which is the main theoretical foundation of this thesis. Our theoretical framework is thus pluralistic; first of all, investigation of trauma studies and its postulates provides us with understanding and definitions of trauma, traumatic events, and responses to traumatic events, which essentially contributes to the psychoanalytical aspect of this thesis. Next, a structured breakdown of literary trauma studies provides us with the methodological background for investigating the narrative representation of trauma, analyzing which features of the three types of fiction mentioned above enable it, as well as narrative strategies and techniques employed to portray them, which is in turn connected to postulates of narrative theory. Our main guiding hypothesis is that in portraying trauma these novels do not abide by the conventions of one particular genre, but rather that in representing trauma, traumatic events, and responses to traumatic events they use features which are inherent in trauma fiction (e.g., mimicking "aspects of traumatic experiences" (Vickroy 2015: xi)), postmodernist fiction (such as conveying "a fractured view of self" (Vickroy 2015: 5)), and autobiographical fiction (such as transferring personal experience of the authors to "fictional characters in an invented situation" with a "fictional outcome" (Pascal 2016: 165)), which employed together represent the attempt to find new ways of representing trauma, and the uncertainty which is its inherent characteristic. In displaying this oscillation between genres, these novels manage to convey the concept of trauma which is unable to pinpoint and represent in one traditional way.

Additional hypotheses we aim to investigate are the following:

1. Contextual factors influence the portrayal of trauma; geographical location, societal contexts, as well as temporal location influence both the authors' compulsion to write about certain traumatic events, as well as the way the narrative about trauma is shaped;

2. Trauma's inherent fluctuation, fragmentariness, and uncertainty influence how narrative is shaped, and thus its representation goes beyond the genre limitations; these novels do not employ features of one genre to represent trauma, but rather borrow from features of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical fiction, thus creating an amalgamation of genres which we term postmodernist trauma fiction;

3. These novels succeed in portraying traumatic events and responses to traumatic events with the help of narrative strategies and techniques, thus overcoming the traditional understanding of the concept of trauma as unrepresentable.

Now, we would like to offer a brief summary of the existing research in this area, as well as our contribution to the overall discussion before discussing the methodological and structural aspects of this dissertation. Despite deceptive simplicity contained in the concept of *trauma*, its inherent duality had been a subject of investigation in separate fields of study which eventually started to overlap. Initially understood as a physical wound, as something that happens to a person that results in a visible aftermath, in time the meaning of trauma began to accrue a more psychological dimension. As societies developed and upheavals started to imply clashes between people belonging to one culture, as well as between those belonging to different cultures, and the wounds on the body became interconnected with the effects on the minds of the wounded people, the psychological realm began influencing the understanding of the concept of trauma. Wars, revolutions, inhumane treatment of those deemed as others (compared to the cultures wielding immense political power) implied the investigation of purely psychological effects of trauma. Nevertheless, time and research have shown that the body and the mind cannot be divorced – the effects on one are always felt on the other. Eventually, the investigation of trauma revisited its dual nature. This change in the understanding of the concept of trauma (which we investigate in a more structured and detailed way in section 2.1) inspired the formation of trauma studies, which focused more closely on the psychological aspect of trauma, and especially in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust. The rise of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a diagnostic tool in the 1980s initiated a surge of interest in more psychoanalytical and clinical ways of approaching the concept of trauma. It also initiated the interest in investigating the symptomatology of trauma, how trauma impacts the nervous system, as well as its impact on both the mind and the body and the creation of memories connected to the traumatic event. Soon after, in the 1990s, researchers and critics started writing about the importance of bearing witness to traumatic

events via literary works. Those early studies on literature about trauma primarily used clinical approach and clinical terms when analyzing life testimonies made in the aftermath of trauma, and instigated the rise of importance in understanding and witnessing those traumatic events people could have no other knowledge of, apart from the written evidence. It also initiated investigations regarding the notion of the inheritance of traumatic knowledge in subsequent generations of victimized people.

Then, at the turn of the century and the onset of the new millennium, proponents of literary trauma studies started honing their approach, and while still being based on the clinical and psychoanalytical approaches and terminology, literary trauma studies developed a new set of ideas, primarily regarding the narrative possibilities of the representation of trauma, ways to bridge its inherent unrepresentabilty, along with narrative approaches and strategies which could facilitate the narrative representation of trauma, as well as all of its discontinuities, fragmentariness, belatedness, atemporality, and its cyclical nature. In the words of Geoffrey Hartman, as a "specifically literary endeavor" trauma studies explored "the relation of words and wounds"; thus, the specific approach that is literary trauma studies investigated literary "verbalization" of the pain caused by trauma, as this verbalization was a basis for "making the wound perceivable and the silence audible" (Hartman 2003: 259).

These shifts and reworkings of the understanding of trauma have inspired our dissertation. We have decided to put *Trauma Studies* instead of *Literary Trauma Studies* in the title because literary trauma studies developed with the help of the concepts stemming from trauma studies, and is inspired by the concepts trauma studies investigates. Another reason is the fact that we want to combine the methodologies of the psychoanalytical approach trauma studies implies with the narrative approach inherent in literary trauma studies, thus incorporating the dual nature of the understanding of trauma, that is, its clinical nature as well as its narrative representation. We have also decided to investigate these novels as narratives which do not belong to one particular genre, that is, to provide textual evidence for our claim that due to the fact that the novels portray trauma and its unpredictable nature, they inherently possess features of more than one genre in order to be able to convey trauma in the narrative. For that purpose, we investigate which features of trauma fiction enable the narrative representation of trauma in these novels. We also do the same with features of postmodernist fiction, as postmodernist tendencies in writing convey unpredictability and fragmentariness which go hand in hand with the representation of trauma. Finally, we also investigate features

of autobiographical fiction or autofiction, in order to show that there is a direct connection to reliving an experience by creating a fictional narrative about it. With this in mind, we offer our methodological approach in this dissertation as well as the structural outline of the segments and sections in it.

Our methodological approach is eclectic, considering the fact that we use methods and approaches from studies written on trauma studies, literary trauma studies, narrative theory, and areas of psychological theory; in order to support our main guiding thread that these novels succeed in bridging the assumed inherent narrative unrepresentability of trauma, we employ studies in the fields of narrative theory, psychoanalytical investigations, as well as cultural and historical research. For the meaning of trauma, we include studies written by Herbert Page (*Injuries of the Spine and Spinal Cord,* 1883), Sigmund Freud (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* 1920), as well as Michel Foucault's *Lectures at the Collège de France 1973 – 1974* (2006). For the overview of trauma studies, we include studies written by proponents of both traditional and pluralistic models of trauma; representatives of the traditional model are those who claim that trauma is inherently unrepresentable (Cathy Caruth) and subjective (Sigmund Freud) or formally recognized and spurred by unconscious meaning (Richard B. Ulman and Doris Brothers), whereas proponents of the pluralistic model (Kalí Tal, Stef Craps) extend that understanding of trauma and include its importance for the "fabric of social relations" (Stevens 2016: 6). The explanation of traumatic events deepens the differences between the traditional and the pluralistic model, but at the same time showcases the necessity for employing both approaches in order to understand traumatic events as something that happens unexpectedly, is initially incomprehensible, but eventually becomes available through re-experience, re-examination of the symptoms and connection with the societal context (Bessel van der Kolk, Cathy Caruth, Stef Craps). For the typology of traumatic events and responses to traumatic events we primarily rely on studies which belong to clinical psychology, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience (Ronald M. Doctor and Frank N. Shiromoto's *Trauma and Traumatic Stress Disorders* (2010), Bessel A. van der Kolk et al.'s *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (2007), as well as American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM* 5) (2013), along with cultural studies written about slavery, racism, and patriarchy (by bell hooks, Ron Eyerman, George M. Fredrickson, among others).

Our main theoretical framework of literary trauma studies examines the importance of life testimony (Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub), fallacies of the traditional model of trauma and the fact that trauma poses "a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge" (Luckhurst 2008: 79), which can be overcome by using narrative strategies and techniques which help mimic the "forms and symptoms of trauma (Whitehead 2004: 3). The most important studies which guide this segment are Michelle Balaev's *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* (2012), Laurie Vickroy's *Reading Trauma Narratives: The Contemporary Novel and the Psychology of Oppression* (2015), as well as studies written by Roger Luckhurst, Dominick LaCapra, and Anne Whitehead. We also include studies written on postmodernism and postmodernist fiction (Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon) as well as autobiographical writings and autofiction (Leigh Gilmore, Roy Pascal, Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, among others).

The section dedicated to the critical analysis of the novels thus relies on the previously established framework; our main points of analysis are three novels - *Blood and Guts in High School* (originally published in 1984) by Kathy Acker, *The Bell Jar* (originally published in 1963) by Sylvia Plath, and *Beloved* (originally published in 1987) by Toni Morrison. We have selected these novels because each of them approaches representation of trauma in a specific way, and we aim to investigate those particular nuances in this segment dedicated to the critical analysis of the novels. In this analytical segment, the studies we refer to, apart from the ones outlined in the theoretical framework, are written by researchers whose publications rely on investigating main themes in the authors' literary career and their oeuvre. Thus, for the section about Kathy Acker and her novel, we employ insights provided by Nicola Pitchford in *Tactical Readings: Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter* (2002), Margaret Henderson in *Kathy Acker: Punk Writer* (2021), and Susan E. Hawkins in "All in the Family: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*" (2004), among others. For the section about Sylvia Plath, we refer to Marjorie G. Perloff's "'A Ritual for Being Born Twice': Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*" (1972), Rosi Smith's "Seeing Through the Bell Jar: Distorted Female Identity in Cold War America" (2008), and Jo Gill's *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath* (2008). Finally, for the section dedicated to Toni Morrison and her novel, we combine Morrison's own essays and conversations, as well as studies written by Missy Dehn Kubitschek *Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion* (1998), and essays compiled in *Toni Morrison's* Beloved*: A Casebook* (1999). Needless to say, these are only some of the studies, compilations of essays and articles we refer to in our analytical segment.

Following the outlined background, aims, and methodology, this dissertation is divided into four main segments. The first, or the introductory segment, is dedicated to outlining the subjects this dissertation covers, aims and additional hypotheses are offered, methods employed, and a brief background of the examined topic is covered. The second segment is dedicated to outlining our theoretical framework; after offering the meaning of the concept of trauma, we introduce trauma studies as a groundwork for our main theoretical framework, or literary trauma studies. The other sections of this theoretical segment are dedicated to providing definitions and typology of traumatic events (*psychological*; *sociological* or patriarchy, racism, and slavery; as well as *physical* or childhood abuse and incest, infanticide, rape, and abortion), as well as definitions and typology of responses to traumatic events (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, dissociation, self-mutilation, and suicidal attempts). The theory which guides our later analytical part is outlined in literary trauma studies section, supported by a sub-section explaining the contextual relevance of place. What follows are sections dedicated to main features apparent in trauma fiction, features of postmodernist fiction and its thematic parallels with trauma fiction, as well as autobiographical fiction and its features' parallels with features of trauma fiction. We complete this segment by explaining narrative strategies and techniques, and by outlining the main ones which we use for our later analysis of the novels' narrative representation of trauma (repetition, focalization, thought report, narrative dissociation, (a)temporal ordering or (non-)linear narrative, and gapping). Our third and main segment is dedicated to the critical analysis of trauma narratives, which consists of a closer inspection of relevant aspects of the novels we analyze – we cover, respectively, the background of the authors' literary careers, the novels' plots; we also contextualize the novels in regards to their plots' geographical and temporal location, as well as the relevance of the periods they were written in and about; we also offer readings of these novels as postmodernist trauma fiction, where we investigate which features of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, as well as autobiographical or autofiction enable their narrative representation of trauma. Each of these separate sections is then dedicated to narrative representation of traumatic events and responses to traumatic events present in respective novels. We complete this segment by offering some concluding remarks about the analysis of these novels. The final segment is the conclusion of our discussion in which we offer discussion on the things we have covered, the limitations we encountered, as well as the possible trajectories for further research. In the next segment, we would like to offer theoretical framework of this dissertation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – INTRODUCTION

This part outlines the main premises regarding the critical concepts, ideas, and theories the analysis of the novels is based on. First and foremost, we provide the meaning of the term trauma, and then introduce the field of trauma studies. These two sections offer theoretical explanations, as well as the discussion of the contestation among different theorists in the field of trauma studies. Following this section, we provide definitions and the typology of traumatic events (psychological, sociological, and physical) as well as typology of responses to traumatic events. Then we turn to the main pillar of this dissertation, which is contained in the section of literary trauma studies. After providing the theoretical foundation of literary trauma studies, we explain the importance of contextual relevance of place for the analytical application of literary trauma studies. Afterwards, we provide the introduction of trauma fiction, as well as postmodernist and autobiographical features and their thematic parallels with trauma fiction. This theoretical part is finalized with the outline of narrative strategies and techniques used in the portrayal of trauma in trauma fiction.

2.1 TRAUMA – MEANING

Our theoretical foundation takes trauma as its starting point. Understanding trauma as a concept is necessary in order to provide further theoretical support for the continuation of our discussion. Thus, this section is dedicated to dissecting the meaning of the term trauma. We begin with its general meaning and transition into the meaning the concept has obtained through time; we also focus on explaining the ways in which its meaning bears significance for the contextual field of trauma studies. Essentially, we show that its initial meaning dealt with something palpable, visible, and that it evolved into portraying something rather complicated to situate.

The evolution of the meaning of the concept of trauma is apparent in this quote by Robert Eaglestone:

> Trauma means first a wound, then, after Freud, a psychic wound, and has since accumulated an array of meanings: the consequence of the destruction of a society (the collective trauma of the Holocaust, a paradigmatic example); an individual's response to a terrible event; each human's psychic sense of loss (Eaglestone 2020: 287).

The etymological roots of the word trauma lie within the Greek language; the Greek word *τραύμα* means "wound" or "injury". The meaning of the word has changed throughout

the years, as Eaglestone himself claims in the quote above. In the late 1600s, its usage predominantly revolved around pathology, whereas from the 1890s onward, it has accrued more of a psychological meaning, primarily owing to psychoanalysis. The pathological lens through which trauma is observed refers to trauma in the medical context, the physical manifestations of which are apparent in bodily injury. On the other hand, its psychological meaning is more obscure and it refers to an emotional or mental response following a rather distressing event. Sometimes, (more often than not), these two responses overlap. However, the shift from trauma's pathological meaning to the psychological one was an extended process, and we explore that in the following paragraphs.

The rise of interest in the pathological meaning of the concept of trauma started in 1883, when Herbert Page, a British surgeon, published a study *Injuries of the Spine and Spinal Cord*[1]. Page also investigated other studies done at the time, and, drawing from them, came to the conclusion that the overwhelming emotions people who suffer from railroad accidents experienced were due to the "*nervous shock*" (1883: 101). Building on these previous insights into the malady which afflicted those who did not only exhibit the physical symptoms of an injury, but also some forms of distress and emotional turmoil, Paul Oppenheim in the 1880s, in a series of lectures, proposed a term "traumatic neurosis", defining it as a "distinct disease entity", ascribing its symptoms to "undetectable organic changes in the brain" (Leys 2000: 3). This was a starting point which connected the pathological and the psychological meaning of trauma.

Nevertheless, transitioning from the physical to the psychological understanding of trauma was still an extended process. This process was influenced by a myriad of factors, and we look at Michel Foucault's series of lectures, *Lectures at the Collège de France 1973 – 1974*, in order to find reasons behind it. Foucault starts his discussion with an emphasis on railroad accidents, which brought about the discourse on trauma, but at the same time this discourse was not enough to provide support to those patients who did not exhibit outward symptoms, or did not have any visible physical injury. Therefore, their claims of being injured were doubted until only later, when trauma was ascribed psychological meaning.

[1] The full title is *Injuries of the Spine and Spinal Cord: Without Apparent Mechanical Lesion, and Nervous Shock, in Their Surgical and Medico-Legal Aspects*. As a surgeon to the London and North Western Railway Company, Herbert Page undertook the task of discussing the consequences of the injuries "received in railway collisions" (Page 1883: vii). In this study, he was heavily inspired by John Erichsen, a British physician, who talked about the "concussion of the spine" in railroad accidents in the 1860s (Leys 2000: 3).

Jean-Martin Charcot, a French neurologist and a contemporary of Sigmund Freud, contributed greatly to the shift in the meaning of trauma, primarily its psychological meaning.[2] During the time Charcot assumed the position of the head of the hysteria-epilepsy department and started working on hypnosis, numerous accidents occurred both at work and on the railway. However, among the patients "who were paying" and those who were "receiving aid at the hospital", appeared a new category of patients whose symptoms deemed them unfit to receive aid at the hospital (Foucault 2006: 313). Essentially, during that time, there was no place for the treatment or the acceptance of those patients unclassifiable by the available diagnostic tools (and those were scarce). That time saw the appearance of those insured patients with disorders such as "paralysis, anesthesia, spasms, pains, convulsion", but no existing illness could be ascribed to them (Ibid. 314). As a result, the problem of whether such patients should even be called patients, as they were covered by insurance or "malingerers (simulateurs)" arose (Ibid. 314). Foucault concludes that eventually, Charcot proposed a solution by developing the concept of trauma, which he defined as:

> a violent event […] which provokes a sort of discrete, localized hypnotic state, but which sometimes lasts for a long time, so that, following the trauma, a certain idea enters the individual's head, inscribes itself in his cortex, and acts like a sort of permanent injunction (2006: 317).

This was thus a pivotal point at which a tentative solution was reached and a difference settled between hysterics (hysteria being the only mental ailment acknowledged at the time) and those people who suffered from a different type of mental trauma. Charcot's definition of trauma is, in its essence, similar to that proposed by Freud later on; however, the definitions themselves were developed under different circumstances.

Sigmund Freud, a lauded (and concomitantly notorious) Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, after a long process of abandoning and engaging in different processes of investigating trauma, laid the foundations of understanding trauma as we know it today in the aftermath of the First World War. In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* essay published in 1920, Freud writes about a condition which follows "severe mechanical shock, train crashes, and other life threatening accidents", mentioning that it has long been identified and described (possibly referring to the studies mentioned in some of the previous paragraphs), and says that this condition has come to be known as "'traumatic neurosis'" (Freud 2003a: 50).

[2] Foucault sees Charcot's work at Pitié-Salpêtrière University Hospital in the 1870s as "'the great maneuvers of hysteria'" (2006: 308).

Freud refers to the "terrible war that has only just ended" which "gave rise to a great many such disorders"; however, the rise in number of those overwhelming disorders at least resulted in bringing to an end the temptation to attribute them to "organic impairment of the nervous system brought about by mechanical force", as they were previously attributed to the damage which stemmed from a physical wound, not a psychological one (Ibid.).[3] He postulates that when it comes to "ordinary traumatic neurosis", there are two features which are discernible, the first one being that the "key causative element appeared to lie in the surprise factor, the *fright* experienced by the victim" and the second is the "fact that if any physical wound or injury was suffered at the same time, this generally inhibited the development of the neurosis" (Ibid.). He then proceeds to explain the difference between fright, dread, and fear; as for fright, he emphasizes the element of surprise: "it describes the state that possesses us when we find ourselves plunged into danger without being prepared for it" (Ibid. 51).

Subsuming all these notions, he proposes a term "*traumatic*" in order to "describe those excitations from outside that are strong enough to break through the protective barrier" (Freud 2003a: 68). He claims that an event such as "external trauma" will without a doubt "provoke a massive disturbance in the organism's energy system, and mobilize all available defense mechanisms"; in the process, the pleasure principle is rendered unable to prevent the psychic apparatus from "being flooded by large quanta of stimulation" (Ibid.). As a result, a challenge of asserting control over the stimuli presents itself, in order to "psychically annex the quanta of stimulation that have burst in, and then proceed to dispose of them" (Ibid. 69). Essentially, something traumatic is a disturbance in the psyche of a person, something that a person's psyche cannot assimilate.[4] Those traumatic instances are essentially traumatic experiences or events which happen to a person, or, rather, which overwhelm a person and eventually result

[3] In a line akin to the conclusions reached by Charcot, Freud explains that the clinical picture which is a result of traumatic neurosis is rather similar to that of hysteria due to a large number of "similar motor symptoms"; however, it generally goes beyond symptoms of hysteria in terms of "subjective suffering" survivors display (Freud 2003: 50).

[4] To reiterate, Freud's proposal of this type of notion of trauma has not been without controversy. Nicole A. Sütterlin in her essay "History of Trauma Theory" in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, delves deeper into the reasons behind it. Prior to Freud's theory, Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud's fellow student at the Salpêtrière in 1888 and Jean-Martin Charcot's student, in his 1889 dissertation *L'automatisme psychologique* (1889) developed "an elaborate model of the psyche", a few years ahead of Freud (Sütterlin 2020: 12). Janet based his findings on the clinical observation of somnambulism, amnesia, "split" or "dual personality", including other "seemingly hysteria-related phenomena", and consequently identified "the mechanism of *dissociation* as the process by which the mind 'splits off", an event that is so violent or shocking that it cannot be integrated ('synthesized') into consciousness" (Ibid. 12/13). Nevertheless, due to the rise of psychoanalysis proposed by Freud, Janet's importance was put aside and forgotten.

in trauma. In essence, these postulates of trauma theory proposed by Freud are the groundwork upon which trauma studies is based.

Before we explore traumatic events, their definitions and typology, as well as responses to them, we lay foundations of trauma studies, as a discipline which is focused on the study of traumatic events.

2.2 TRAUMA STUDIES – A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Sigmund Freud's (and his predecessors' legacy) initiated a need for establishing a scientific discipline which would provide enough contextual and theoretical background in order to understand why and how something is perceived as traumatic. Thus, trauma studies emerged with the aim of exploring trauma and discourse surrounding it, resulting from the representation of certain events such as ruptures, breaches, and deviations from the ordinary. Trauma studies is an interdisciplinary field, which has been impacted by numerous subject areas:

> Epistemological shifts in which historians, cultural theorists, and others unraveled these biomedical and psychiatric meanings of trauma have led to a rich and robust body of work exploring, for example, history and memory (e.g., Caruth 1995; LaCapra 2001), narrative and its limits (e.g., Scarry 1985; Caruth 1996), memorialization (e.g., Sturken 1997, 2007; LaCapra 1998), cultural representations of trauma (e.g., Kaplan 2005), and genealogies of trauma (e.g., Leys 2000; Orr 2006) (Casper and Wertheimer 2016: 3).

Without these contributions, it would be difficult to frame trauma studies as either belonging to the humanities or social sciences; however, despite numerous attempts at framing trauma studies as belonging to either, some difficulties arise. These difficulties primarily stem from the fact that trauma studies lacks structural coherence, especially when compared to other interdisciplinary areas such as "disability studies, American studies, and gender studies" (Casper and Wertheimer 2016: 4). Nevertheless, this is precisely the advantage of trauma studies – its fluidity of established boundaries and scope of interest. Still, if we need to pinpoint the "conceptual heart" of trauma studies, it would be "a set of centripetal tensions", tensions varying between "the everyday and the extreme, between individual identity and collective experience, between history and the present, between experience and representation, between facts and memory, and between the 'clinical' and the 'cultural'" (Ibid.).

Trauma studies thus focuses on investigating trauma, not only as "a condition of broken bodies and shattered minds", but also as "a cultural object" (Casper and Wertheimer 2016: 3).

And this trauma comes in the aftermath of traumatic events (which are defined and elaborated on in the following sections). Trauma studies' aim is to reveal the processes "by which things that happen are denoted as trauma" without divorcing those experiences from their cultural, historical, and individual contexts (Ibid.). Trauma studies emerged in the early 1990s as an attempt to construct "an ethical response to forms of human suffering and their cultural and artistic representation" (Andermahr 2016: 1). Trauma studies was born out of "the confluence between deconstructive and psychoanalytic criticism and the study of Holocaust literature", and its mission from the very start was to "bear witness to traumatic histories in such a way as to attend to the suffering of the other" (Ibid.).

The central concerns of the field of trauma studies are "(p)sychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities" (Balaev 2018: 360). There is a certain link which connects the experiences of individuals as well as cultural groups when it comes to trauma, especially because our "conceptions of self" are inevitably "determined and interpreted within cultural histories and contexts" (Vickroy 2002: 25). Therefore, it is impossible to dissect an individual's trauma without interpolating it in the surrounding societal responses and attitudes toward a traumatic event. Homi Bhabha emphasizes the fact that the "recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions"; it is precisely in that displacement that "the borders between home and world become confused" and as a result, "the private and the public become part of each other" (1994: 9). Essentially, the purpose of trauma studies is to investigate trauma both in terms of individual and collective experiences, as well as the overlap between the two. What additionally informs trauma studies are frameworks such as "poststructural, sociocultural, and postcolonial theory", which essentially lay the groundwork for the basis of criticism that "interprets representations of an extreme experience and its effects upon identity and memory" (Balaev 2018: 360). Trauma studies aims to investigate the "severely disruptive experience", and also to explore the kind of impact trauma has in literature and society by analyzing its "psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance" (Ibid.).

The development of trauma studies was, as previously stated, initiated in the 1990s (in the aftermath of accepting Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder by American Psychiatric Association as a diagnostic tool), and at the time, trauma studies heavily relied on Freudian theory in order to develop a model of trauma which would imagine extreme experiences which challenge "the limits of language" and rupture meaning (Balaev 2018: 360). According to this

initial model of trauma, suffering is "unrepresentable" (the understanding of the traditional model of trauma studies); immediately following was the pluralistic model of understanding trauma which suggested that "assumed unspeakability" is *only one* of the many responses to an extreme event rather than a "defining feature" (Ibid.). It is necessary to differentiate between the two models, and their most prominent proponents, and we attempt to do so in the following paragraphs.

Cathy Caruth, the most notable proponent of the traditional model of trauma studies, is lauded as one of the trailblazers for the rise of interest in trauma studies. However, upon closer inspection of her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* originally published in 1996, the theory she posed was essentially a detailed summary and explanation of Freud's investigations in the field of trauma. Nevertheless, her importance lies not so much in the fact that she proposed a new theory, but that she renewed interest in Freud's studies and re-introduced serious discussion regarding the importance of trauma within the analysis of literary and art works. In essence, her importance should not be disregarded.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth reiterates Freud and says, referring to his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that the term "trauma" is understood as:

> […] a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind […] the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that […] 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. […] trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on (1996: 3/4).

Herein lies Caruth's significance for the development of the field of trauma studies. She recognizes that trauma seems to be "much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche"; trauma is actually "a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (1996: 4). Attempts at addressing this wound in the mind are confronted with narrative challenges, with the inherent inability to put the feelings following the traumatic event in words. In the traditional model of trauma, traumatic events are seen as extreme experiences which pose numerous challenges, and which entail delayed, and oftentimes uncontrolled, reactions (Ibid. 11).

However, as is shown in the previous section, the definition of trauma has gone through multiple revisions, essentially due to the changes in the psychological, medical, and sociological fields of study. Numerous contributions to the field of trauma studies have:

> […] brought the study of trauma firmly within the purview of the humanities and social sciences, recognizing and naming "trauma" not only as a condition of broken bodies and shattered minds, but also and primarily as a cultural object. In these framings, "trauma" is a product of history and politics, subject to reinterpretation, contestation, and intervention (Casper and Wertheimer 2016: 3).

The phrase "cultural object" from the quote above is, indubitably, one which this dissertation aims to dissect, and investigate in terms of its importance within another field of study, literary trauma studies, relevant for the later analytical segment. Neither trauma studies nor literary trauma studies are divorced from the cultural, sociological, historical, and geographical aspects, but are, actually, informed by them. All of these aspects are considered within the pluralistic model of trauma, and we discuss the understanding of trauma studies within that model in the following paragraphs.

Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, as representatives of the pluralistic model of trauma, take it upon themselves to offer an overview of trauma studies and its prominence. They claim that trauma studies as "an area of cultural investigation" prides itself on "its explicit commitment to ethics, which sets it apart from the poststructuralist criticism of the 1970s and early 1980s in which it has its roots" (Craps and Buelens 2008: 1). This poststructuralist criticism was accused of irrelevance or indifference to the "real-world" issues such as history, politics, and ethics because of its "predominantly epistemological focus", and was forgotten around the mid-1980s by "overtly historicist or culturalist approaches" which included "new historicism, cultural materialism, cultural studies, and various types of advocacy criticism" (Ibid.). They thus regard the appearance of trauma studies as "the reinvention in an ethical guise of this much maligned textualism" (Ibid.).

This limited engagement surrounding trauma studies is something which prompted certain critics, primarily postcolonially oriented, to engage in the discussion which they hoped would generate interest in including other contexts for understanding trauma, primarily those surrounding experiences of marginal groups. However, despite trauma studies' numerous insights into a connection between mental anguish and cultural representation, postcolonial critics claim that the cross-cultural engagement of trauma theory has not been fulfilled, this being the main criticism aimed at the traditional model of trauma studies. There is a necessity

for abandoning Eurocentric views when dealing with trauma studies, as those views are rather circumscribing, and do not take into account other nation's understanding of what can be traumatic, as well as social contexts which may bring about the said trauma. Instead of abandoning the Eurocentric approach to trauma studies altogether, however, we should attempt to specify which aspects of it are problematic and insufficient for accompanying trauma studies dealing with other nations and minorities. In order for trauma studies to stay true to its "ethical aspirations", it must give recognition to suffering of the people who are not geographically connected to the West, as well as to marginalized groups (Craps 2013: 48). Otherwise, due to the "uncritical cross-cultural application of psychological concept developed in the West", trauma studies may amount to a form of cultural Imperialism (Ibid.).

All these discussions show that trauma studies is a "still-evolving product" of ideas and movements in the twentieth century, and that the process toward the height of the pluralistic, interdisciplinary model involves "structural functionalism, psychoanalysis and its interlocutors, postmodernism and poststructuralism" as well as "the constellation of theories/methods/interventions known as 'identity politics,' the turn to affect, critical body studies, critical race theory, and the new materialism" (Casper and Wertheimer 2016: 4). It took many decades, and a lot of epistemological framing and reframing of trauma studies for it to be regarded as a field of humanities and social sciences; however, the main aim of this still-evolving field has remained - to reveal "the processes by which things that happen are denoted as trauma" (Ibid. 3). The engagement pertaining to trauma studies should be both material and immaterial, "concerned with individual and intersubjective experience", and also grounded in "the fabric of social relations" (Stevens 2016: 19). Now that the main aspects of trauma studies have been established, we introduce the concept of traumatic events as severely disruptive experiences.

2.3 TRAUMATIC EVENTS – DEFINING THE CONCEPT

This section is dedicated to defining the concept of traumatic events, the ones which both trauma studies and literary trauma studies we discuss later engage with, albeit with different approaches. When it comes to traumatic events (or traumatic experiences; the two terms are used interchangeably in this dissertation when the need arises), we return, yet again, to Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in order to understand them. In his essay, Freud says that one of the most important notions about a traumatic event is that it "repeatedly forces itself on the patient", even during sleep; what surrounds it is a deep impression on the

survivor, and the fact that they are "psychically fixated on the trauma" (2003a: 51). Freud also notes that those people who suffer from traumatic neurosis (as they referred to the disarray of psyche and emotions during the 1920s) are not as "preoccupied in their *waking* life with memories of their misadventure", but rather are "at pains *not* to think of it" (Ibid.). In an essay published earlier, in 1914, *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through*, Freud claims that a memory usually "cannot be retrieved at all" in the case of one or a group of extremely important experiences, essentially those which happen at an early stage of childhood (2003b: 35). Those experiences, traumatic or otherwise, are experienced at the time without understanding, and they are only "*subsequently* understood and interpreted" (Ibid.). He reiterates that the patient is unable to remember the repressed, but is rather forced to "*repeat*" the repressed as a present experience, instead of remembering that as something which happened in the past (Freud 2003a: 56).

This is in line with temporality, an aspect we connect to the fact that an event is only understood as traumatic *after* the fact, via symptoms and flashback, as well as a delay of understanding (Luckhurst 2008: 5). This period during which the effects of a traumatic event are not obvious is called "*latency*" (Caruth 1996: 17). When, as Caruth says, Freud uses the term "*latency*", or "the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent", he is not referring to the period of forgetting that happens after the accident, but rather to the fact that the survivor was "never fully conscious during the accident itself" and the person gets away, "'apparently unharmed'" (Ibid.). This leads Caruth to conclude that the "fact of latency" seems to consist not in forgetting the reality, but in an "inherent latency" within the experience; the experience is not only repeated after forgetting, but this forgetting is the prerequisite for experiencing the event at all (Ibid.). And this "inherent latency" of the event "paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness" (Ibid.). It is deemed necessary to forget the event in order to later become aware of it. Also, this "'compulsion to repeat'" (Freud 2003a: 57), as Freud terms the incessant return of the repressed, is something which Freud accentuates, because, as he claims, the psychoanalysts must:

> […] free ourselves of the mistaken idea that in combating the resistances within a patient we are dealing with resistance on the part of the 'unconscious'. The unconscious, that is, the 'repressed', offers no resistance whatever to the endeavors of the therapy; indeed it has but a single aim itself, and that is to escape the oppressive forces bearing down on it, and either break through to consciousness, or else find release in some form of real action. The resistance that manifests itself in the course of treatment derives from the same higher levels and systems of the psyche that effected the repression in the first place (2003a: 57).

Caruth emphasizes that recognizing traumatic experience as a "paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival" comes as a result of the fact that catastrophic experiences involve incomprehensibility (1996: 58). Trauma is fundamentally an "overwhelming experience" of such sudden or catastrophic events, and the response to the said events occurs in the "often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Ibid. 11). Thus, the belatedness and the incomprehensibility of a traumatic event overwhelm the survivors and render them unable to control their reactions which are oftentimes the result of the deeper resistance on the part of the psyche.

Unlike Freud and the followers of his theory, Richard B. Ulman and Doris Brothers assert that they do not follow a "relativistic definition of trauma", according to which an experience or event is deemed traumatic "simply on the basis of a personal and subjective assessment" (1988: 4). They claim that accepting such a definition would lead to labeling any occurrence as traumatic, and only accept incest, rape, and combat as traumatic events. Traumatic experiences should be, according to them, regarded as such only if they are formally recognized as such. They say that the self is "the person's center of mental activity for organizing the meaning of experience" or knowledge, and that "a serious disturbance or interference in its ability to function constitutes a trauma" (Ibid. 7). When this sense of self is undermined or challenged, the unconscious meaning taken on by an occurrence may be experienced as the "traumatic shattering of self" (Ibid. 7). However, by reducing the types of traumatic events, they rather curb what can be considered traumatic, which can be harmful to survivors. This definition is also Eurocentric as they only take into account those events primarily affecting Western people, and not those events which happen in the rest of the world, and which are also intrinsically traumatic. A Eurocentric approach completely disregards the consequences of colonialism, imperialism, and their practices.

Ulman and Brothers conclude that their theory of trauma as the "pathological alteration of self-experiences" which is caused by unconscious meaning stems from their conception of psychoanalysis as a "hermeneutic science of mental action and meaning" (1988: 295). Freud sees traumatic neurosis as a breach through a protective barrier, that is, coming from the outside and rendering a person unable to make sense of those excitations and trying to repress them, but they keep reappearing. In the study by Ulman and Brothers, trauma is seen as the pathological alteration of self-experiences which is caused by unconscious meaning. Any occurrence that takes an unconscious meaning which shatters organizational processes of the

self is deemed traumatic. Freud asserts that excitations are coming *from the outside*, thereby affecting a person; Ulman and Brothers claim that they come *from the inside*, spurred by unconscious meaning, but not from the subjective meaning generated by the victim.

On the other hand, the pluralistic definition of trauma, which avoids a Eurocentric approach, labels occurrences as traumatic based on the personal and subjective assessment, and it also includes other factors upon which a claim is made that one has undergone a traumatic event. It is necessary to possess background knowledge about the "physical, social, and political circumstances" in which "potentially traumatic events occur" as it can provide contextual information in order to evaluate psychological reactions such as "re-experiencing symptoms" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 243). In order to unveil the reasons behind symptoms such as "avoidance or hypervigilance" which manifest differently for different types of traumatic events, one must consider "the nature of the event and its interaction with gender, race, class, and culture" (Ibid. 244). In the clinical context, identifying complex relationships between "symptom content, initial symptom onset, and external cues associated with the symptoms" are investigated, and "careful examinations of the individual's demographic characteristics" are performed (Ibid. 244).

Stef Craps also follows this pluralistic definition of trauma and widens the perspectives around it. His claim is that if we only focus on the level of the individual psyche, without questioning "the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse, such as racism, economic domination, or political oppression" (2013: 50), we reach a pathological society where conditions which should be treated are not, where real sources of problems are not addressed, and where survivors are not treated as they should be. There is a tendency to focus more on psychological recovery from trauma than on transforming those structures which enabled traumatizing in the first place. In this failure of situating problems within a historical context, there is a tendency to privilege psychological recovery rather than the transfiguration of "a wounding political, social, or economic system", as a result of not taking collective action toward fundamental change (Ibid.). Insofar as it negates the need for taking collective action towards systemic change, the hegemonic trauma discourse can be seen to serve as a "political palliative to the socially disempowered" (Ibid.).

Another pluralistic understanding of traumatic events, which does not divorce individuals from their societal circumstances, is offered by Kalí Tal, who states that an individual is traumatized by a life-threatening event that "displaces his or her preconceived

notions about the world", and that trauma "is enacted in a liminal state, outside of the bounds of 'normal' human experience, and the subject is radically ungrounded" (1996: 15). When it comes to the concept of liminality, or being in-between, it is said that it comes from the word "limen", which means "threshold", and the sense of "the liminal as an interstitial or in-between space", a threshold area, distinguishes the term from the more definite word "limit" to which it is related (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 117). The importance of the liminal lies in its usefulness for describing an "'in-between'" space in which cultural changes may occur (Ibid.). Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* says that we encounter certain moments of transit in which "space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1994: 1). When people are faced with traumatic events, how they cope depends to a great extent on the factors such as societal, historical, and political. The feeling of being "ungrounded", in the words of Tal (1996: 15), can disturb an individual's ability to come to terms with their traumatic experiences; if they find stability in the circumstances surrounding them, their coping mechanisms may prove to be constructive and helpful.

In her essay published almost a decade after *Unclaimed Experience*, titled "Trauma and Experience", Cathy Caruth begins to employ more of a pluralistic as well as a multidisciplinary understanding of traumatic events, which would include disciplines like psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and literature, and which converge on the study of trauma by engaging with disruptions and gaps of a traumatic experience. In this essay, she reiterates the fact that there is a general consensus on the fact that after an overwhelming event, there is a response, which can sometimes be delayed. This response takes the form of "repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors", as well as numbing which "may have begun during or after the experience", and also "increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (Caruth 2003: 193). However, she claims that therein lies a paradox; the pathology which stems as a result cannot be defined by the event itself, nor by the distortion of the event (Ibid.). Rather, pathology arises from the structure of its experience or reception which happens belatedly. Being traumatized entails being possessed by an image or event, which leaves the traumatic symptom unable to be interpreted as a distortion of reality, or as the unconscious meaning of the reality (Ibid.). The inherent paradox of a traumatic experience, "beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves", suggests the paradox that the "most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that

immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (Caruth 1996: 91/92). In the next section, we offer typology of traumatic events and responses to them.

2.3.1 TYPOLOGY OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Essentially, when we talk about the typology of traumatic events, we have to consider the broadest classification, regarding the source of a traumatic event. In that sense, we can talk about psychological, physical, and sociological traumatic events. When it comes to this classification, we bear in mind the origin of the traumatic event, as well as the type of impact it has on an individual. The difference lies in the instigator of the traumatic event (if it is another person or a group of people, whether the traumatic event has an impact solely on the psyche of an individual, or on their body as well). We dissect each of the three types in order to closely inspect how a traumatic event is perceived, as well as which aspects of survivors it affects (their psyche, their existence as members of society, or their bodies). However, we should note that there is no clear-cut distinction between traumatic events at their core; despite the initial instigator of these traumatic events, the consequences overlap, and they affect both the survivors' bodies as well as their minds. Also, the sources of traumatic events are interconnected; for example, sociological traumatic events enable the situations in which physical traumatic events can occur, and consequently, both sociological and physical traumatic events are essentially psychological traumatic events, as neither the psyche nor the body remain unaffected by them. We also comment on the importance these traumatic events have for the field of trauma studies.

2.3.1.1 Psychological Traumatic Events

When dealing with psychological traumatic events, most analysts take the definition of the German-American psychiatrist, Erich Lindemann, as a starting point. Lindemann considers psychological trauma as a "bereavement or the sudden cessation of social interaction" (1944: 141). In the following parts, where we discuss sociological and physical traumatic events, we notice a pattern. A vast majority of those traumatic events leave bereavement in their wake or assume a rupture or disruption in social interactions; oftentimes, they do both. Which is why we use *psychological traumatic events* as a hypernym for different types of traumatic events, as most of them are intertwined and exclude the effects on neither the body nor the psyche. In addition, they do not leave interactions between those affected by traumatic events and people surrounding them undisturbed. Regardless of the type of a traumatic event, cerebral sites which conduct emotions are impacted, and this impact may range from "modifying the configuration

of such sites" to "rupturing neuronal connections" (Malabou 2012: xviii). The majority of traumatic events, despite the presence of physical trauma or the absence of it, include shock, strong psychological stress, or acute anxiety, and always impact "the *affective* brain – this unrecognized part of the psyche" (Ibid.).

2.3.1.2 Sociological Traumatic Events

Sociological traumatic events are also perceived as collective trauma, Holocaust and slavery being one of the most commonly mentioned in studies on trauma. Collective trauma is essentially "the psychological effect shared by individuals in a community, and its broader scope, an entire society" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 73), which supports our claim that they also fall within the scope of psychological traumatic events. Owing to the fact that collective trauma is a pain which individual "radiates onto the community due to the (traumatic event) that can influence cultural norms and mass action", collective responses are necessary (Ibid.). If trauma reactions are normalized within a community, and a community in turn does not ostracize the traumatized individuals, the healing process is eased. Normalization of trauma reactions and acknowledgment of multiple losses enhances the long-term healing process (Ibid.).

Overwhelming social experiences can be and usually are "indelibly etched" in the memories of a community, and, as a result, enforce a "cascade of disturbances" which can dysregulate their psychological and biological systems (van der Kolk 2007: 560). Cultural or sociological trauma is a memory publicly accepted and recognized by relevant community, and it evokes an event or a situation "a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions" (Smelser 2004: 44). Social trauma results from what "political, economic, and institutional power does to people", as well as "how those forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems" (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997: ix). We offer explanations on the concepts of patriarchy, racism, and slavery.

2.3.1.2.1 Patriarchy

Trauma studies' investigation of patriarchy as both a traumatic and traumatizing experience opens discussion on how patriarchal ideology affects people who conform, or are forced to conform, to its practices. bell hooks tackles the topic of patriarchy by saying that under patriarchy, everyone has to either follow or respect "the cultural norm of male identity"

which entails “power, prestige, privilege, and prerogative as over and against the gender class women” (2015: 138). The foundation of patriarchy is the oppression of women, in its essence (hooks 2015: 140). Within the patriarchal nuclear family, everyone depends on the male; this oppressive atmosphere instills a sense of hierarchy of power in children, and, as a result, mother is rendered powerless (Ibid. 141). According to hooks, men also focus on women in general in a disparaging way, driven by the patriarchal forces, and, as a result, American women are brainwashed into accepting white, male supremacy, which in turn maintains racial and sexual imperialism (Ibid. 164):

> Men are encouraged to phobically focus on women as their ENEMY so that they will blindly allow other forces—the truly powerful de-humanizing elements in American life—to strip them daily of their humanity. The select group of patriarchal women (who support and uphold patriarchal ideology) and patriarchal men who shape American capitalism have in fact made sexism into a commodity that they can sell while at the same time brainwashing men to feel that personal identity, worth and value, can be obtained through the oppression of women, and that is the ultimate weapon by which patriarchs keep men in states of submission (hooks 2015: 158).

Patriarchy involves “systematic constructs of oppression, injustice, and trauma” (Atkinson 2017: 154). In a similar vein Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* claims that patriarchy takes family as its “chief institution”, and maintains prototypical and prescribed roles for its members; patriarchy is inevitably intertwined with society, which supports its identity (2000: 33). Patriarchy does not affect women only at the level of prescribed roles, but also at the level of their life choices, education being one of them. The educational institutions within patriarchy operate at the level of division between “masculine” and “feminine” subject matter, where the humanities and marginal social sciences are assigned to women, and science and technology, business and engineering to men (Ibid. 43). When women exhibit artistic aspirations, these are considered “marketable” for the preparation for marriage. However, despite the prescribed roles, discrimination and undermining of the female sex, *force* is not a word which describes patriarchy:

> We are not accustomed to associate patriarchy with force. So perfect is its system of socialization, so complete the general ascent to its values, so long and so universally has it prevailed in human society, that it seems to require violent implementation. Customarily, we view its brutalities in the past as exotic or “primitive” custom. Those of the present are regarded as the product of individual deviance, confined to pathological or exceptional behavior, and without general import. And yet, just as under other total ideologies (racism and colonialism are somewhat analogous in this respect), control in patriarchal society would be

> imperfect, even inoperable, unless it has the rule of force to rely upon, both in emergencies and as an ever-present instrument of intimidation (Millet 2000: 43).

2.3.1.2.2 Racism

Racism, or practices adjacent to racism, existed well before the twentieth or even the late nineteenth century; prejudice and discrimination, which are shaped by the ideologies of differences between human groups, have a history which can be traced back to the late Middle Ages. However, racist principles were not completely codified as laws enforced by the state until the emergence of "'overtly racist regimes'" during the past century (Fredrickson 2002: 101). Those regimes proclaimed that there is an inherent difference between the dominant group and the one that is being subordinated or eliminated which is permanent and unbridgeable; this proclamation justified the abuse and discrimination that the subordinate groups suffered through (Ibid.).

The traumatic impact of racism and other forms of "ongoing oppression cannot be adequately understood either in terms of the basic concepts and distinctions" (Craps 2013b: 31). Both structural trauma and racism are historically locatable; however, racism is not related to a particular event "with a before and after" (Craps 2013b: 32). The main problem with trauma studies reaching the status of a globalized discipline is the fact that "racially based forms of trauma historically rooted in the global systems of slavery and colonialism" pose a challenge to "the Eurocentric model of trauma as a single overwhelming event" (Andermahr 2016: 2). Precisely because of that, trauma studies needs to investigate these forms of trauma in order to broaden the perspectives on what constitutes as a traumatic event (Ibid.).

2.3.1.2.3 Slavery

Slavery, which is one of colonialist practices, involves more than "theft and the loss of freedom in forced labor"; it also entails a horrible historical wound transmitted through the stories of the survivors, and accepted as a mark in transgenerational trauma (Eyerman 2004: 96). The trauma of slavery is not merely an institution or an experience, but a collective memory, remembrance which impacts the identity-formation of not only a community, but people as well (Ibid.). The difference between an individual and collective trauma is that the second one is mediated through "various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory" (Eyerman 2003: 1). Trauma of slavery involves "forced servitude" and "nearly complete subordination", making it also traumatic in retrospect:

> Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory, one that signified and distinguished a "race", a people, or a community depending on the level of abstraction and point of view being put forward […] If slavery was traumatic for this generation, it was so in retrospect, mediated through recollection and reflection, and, for some black leaders and intellectuals, tinged a bit of some strategic, practical, and political interest (Eyerman 2004 61/62).

Judith Lewis Herman in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* differentiates between two outcomes of trauma; when the victim is "rendered helpless by overwhelming force", and when the force is that of nature, it is a disaster, and when it is that of human beings, it is an atrocity (Herman 2015: 33). David Lloyd in his *Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?* (2000) builds his focus on the trauma of the postcolonial subject on this quote and says that this description suits the effects and mechanisms of colonization and the practice of slavery as well, which are seen in "the overwhelming technological, military and economic power of the colonizer" who uses "violence and programmatically excessive atrocities" in order to put down "resistance to intrusion", and commit "the deliberate destruction of the symbolic and practical resources of whole populations" (Lloyd 2000: 214). When observing the colonized and the enslaved people, as well as the after-effects of colonization and slavery, there is a pattern of the identical psychological effects of trauma on individuals and societies at large (Ibid.). Black people have been systematically traumatized, ever since the start of the practice of slavery, and it can be considered as an experience which did not only affect individual identities, but a culture as a whole. As the cultural identity usually depends on the past, the way a person who identifies as a member of a certain culture feels, depends on the way the members of that culture were treated. If the past bears the history of discrimination, pain, and marginalization, it will be difficult to find a place for oneself in the present, without the experience being tainted by the traumatizing past. As Stuart Hall claims, identity is a "'production'", and its formation is a process which is never complete, and depends as much on the internal factors of a person, as it does on the external (1990: 222). Upon instances of massive upheavals, a culture may be incapable of offering protection to its members, of regulating emotions and providing identity and support (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 403). The cultural aspects which surround the practice of slavery are significant in formation of the identity of black people. And as those aspects during the practice of slavery do not provide support in terms of cultural defense mechanisms, individuals are left to their own devices to achieve emotional control, and many of them fail to do so (Ibid.).

There is an instance of transference of trauma of slavery to later generations, stemming from the memory of those who lived through it and shared their stories. Slavery thus difffers from other types of traumatic experiences, primarily in that it does not refer to a "wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual", but to a "dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (Eyerman 2003: 2). Trauma studies aims to investigate that wound of a group of people, and bring forward discussion pertaining to it.

2.3.1.3 Physical Traumatic Events

There is no official definition of physical traumatic events and the reason stems from the fact that apart from affecting the body of the survivors, they also impact their psyche, which leads us back to the previously established point of subsuming them under the concept of psychological traumatic events. Physical traumatic events entail a disruption of bodily integrity, as well as physical wounding or mistreatment. Hence, we can talk about the duality of physical traumatic experiences. For the purpose of this dissertation, there is a need to discuss specific traumatic events which are present in the novels we analyze, and which have a detrimental effect on both the body and the mind. Which is why the physical traumatic events we talk about are childhood abuse and incest, infanticide, rape, and abortion.

2.3.1.3.1 Childhood Abuse and Incest

Childhood abuse as a traumatic event is something that affects children under the age of eighteen, who are exposed to abuse or neglect by a person fulfilling the role of a parent, or a caregiver; the types of abuse which may occur range from physical, sexual, emotional to neglect (Williams 2019: 4). A general understanding of abuse is "the commission of harmful acts to children, while neglect refers to the *omission* of necessary care"; neglect usually occurs when a parent or a caregiver fails to provide necessities such as "food, shelter, and medical care" to the child (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 64). In *Child Abuse Sourcebook*, sections have been taken from "Definition of Child Abuse and Neglect"; it states that in 2016, Child Welfare Information Gateway, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) defined child abuse as any type of failure on behalf of the person in charge of the wellbeing of the child to act properly, which results in "death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm" (as cited in Williams 2019: 8). In DSM V child sexual abuse is defined as "any sexual act" involving a child which is done in order to provide sexual gratification to a parent, caregiver,

or other individual in charge of the child's well-being (APA 2013: 718). Sexual abuse entails "fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, and indecent exposure" (Ibid.). Sexual abuse also includes "noncontact exploitation of a child by a parent or caregiver—for example, forcing, tricking, enticing, threatening, or pressuring a child to participate in acts for the sexual gratification of others, without direct physical contact between child and abuser" (Ibid.).

In the case of severe childhood abuse, a child's "psychological coping response" is often to "distance, or dissociate" from the traumatic event, as if they were "watching it from afar in a clinical and unfeeling manner" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 27). This particular response to traumatic events is explained in the next section dealing with responses to traumatic events. Trauma studies is a field which extensively contributes to investigation of childhood abuse, in terms of investigating long-term effects such abuse can have on an individual. The investigation can range from inspecting the effects on identity formation, ability to narrate the traumatic experience, as well as development of disorders impacting brain, memory, body, and interpersonal relationships.

Incest is a type of both physical and psychological abuse which generally falls under the category of child abuse and neglect, primarily sexual abuse. Sexual abuse assumes activities done by a parent or a caretaker, which involve "fondling the child's genitals, sexual penetration, oral sex, rape, indecent exposure, incest, and the exploitation of child through the production of child pornography or prostitution" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 58). Long-term effects of incest include "trouble distinguishing between danger and safety" which in turn provides pathways for trauma studies to investigate how the "imprint of past trauma" is shown (van der Kolk 2015: 114). Mostly, it consists of "distorted perceptions of information coming from the outside"; it also has an impact on the organism itself as it has a problem "knowing how to feel safe" (Ibid.). Trauma studies also investigates the systemic structures enabling such abuse, as well as familial structures which can both perpetuate or exacerbate the effects of incest.

2.3.1.3.2 Infanticide

Infanticide stands for killing of a newborn baby or an infant under one year of age. In the United States of America, killing of a child is considered a homicide regardless of the age of the child. Infanticide happens due to either population control, gender selection, or by young, single women who survived rape or incestuous relations, as well as those who became impregnated and then left to their own devices (Smith 2004: 107). Infanticide can occur due to

multiple factors. Maternal infanticide (when a mother murders her own child) in particular can be seen as a consequence of detrimental effects of social structures, primarily within the context of domineering patriarchal social structures (Atkinson 2017: 2). Such domineering patriarchal social structures often involve other restrictive practices, for example, racism. There is a different approach to infanticide and understanding of it when it happens under the restrictive forces of racial practices. In the context of slavery, in particular, infanticide belongs to "the history of black women's response to the forms of motherhood forced upon them by the institutions of slavery and the slave trade"; in such a context, infanticide is "*less repugnant* than other options" (Forter 2014: 82). As we have already emphasized, traumatic events are not occurring in a void, but are rather influenced by the surrounding societal factors. Thus, theory of trauma can incorporate both the understanding of individual perspectives on infanticide, for example, and its connection to societal structures which destabilize an individual and force them to commit such an unthinkable act of violence.

2.3.1.3.3 Rape

Rape is a form of physical abuse, which can be understood as a physically experienced traumatic event, as well as an act of interpersonal violence. Rape is a disturbingly traumatic act of violence done against another person, which shatters both mental and bodily integrity and leaves the survivor deeply disturbed. What follows the experience are "(c)onstraint, suddenness, helplessness, humiliation", as well as "threat of one's life" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 220). This event does not affect the survivor only on the physical level, in terms of scars and injuries, fear of intimacy, but also on the psychological level, when the survivor experiences feelings of "self-blame, anger, revenge, and degradation" (Ibid.). In the aftermath of rape, survivors are often caught in a loop of never-ending questions as to what led to this act of violence, and if they could have done something in order to prevent it, misplacing the blame and accountability.

We also mention "interracial rape", which is not only deeply misogynistic at its core, but also a racial practice (Smith 2004: 108). Interracial rape is the case which involves perpetrators and victims of "different racial or ethnic descent"; this is particularly important when regarding the history of "intense race conflict and racial discrimination" ongoing during slavery and "postbellum culture" (Ibid.). This racialization of rape is an extension of historical tendency to consider rape primarily as a crime which involves assaulting a person of lower power relation. For example, the rape of African-American, as well as lower-class women,

used to be registered as an offence only in rare cases, and only as a consideration of damage to the "property":

> Due to the legal status of slaves as chattel and property, the sexual violation of enslaved black women remained largely without legal retribution. To the contrary, during times of slavery the sexual violation of enslaved black women by their white owners became accepted as an institutionalized means of reproducing the slavers' property. The term *interracial rape* thus not only foregrounds the incongruence between acts of sexual violence, on the one hand, and the dominant narratives of rape cultures generate, on the other. It also underlines how ideas about gender, race, and class keep monitoring the perception and interpretation of actual sexual violence (Smith 2004: 109).

Investigation of rape within the field of trauma studies offers insights into the way rape survivors cope with this breach of bodily integrity. Trauma studies investigates the paradoxical condition in which suppression of memories and thoughts on rape provoke even more unwanted memories – a form of repetition compulsion (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 222). Re-traumatization is another aspect which interests trauma studies – how experiencing "the same traumatic impact as suffered in the past" can invoke the same feeling of helplessness and symptoms experienced in the initial traumatic event (Ibid. 224). Re-traumatization may be caused by triggers which bring the survivor back to the moment they experienced this violation. It may also be caused by interpersonal interactions if the survivor finds lack of support and understanding. In essence, a lack of safety and support for the survivor may cause them to re-live the traumatic experience and feel the same lack of hopelessness and danger.

2.3.1.3.4 Abortion

Apart from its understanding as a willful termination of pregnancy, an official definition of abortion is difficult to find. In *Encyclopedia of Rape*, the editor cites James Mohr, who terms it as "intentional termination of gestation by any means and at any time during pregnancy from conception to full term (viii)" (Smith 2004: 2). Legalization of abortion in the United States of America occurred in 1973 by the Supreme Court. However, prior to it and until the 1960s, rape victims were not allowed to get an abortion. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, abortion laws in the United States held that the fetus did not become a human being until after quickening, "sometime during the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, when a pregnant woman first sensed movement in her womb" (Ibid.). Done willingly or because a woman felt forced to undergo such a procedure, abortion impacts the psyche of the woman. Trauma studies helps investigate those who are prone to "vulnerability to psychopathology" following abortion (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2015: 144).

Now that we have established the typology of traumatic experiences which we encounter in the novels we analyze in this dissertation, we turn to responses following traumatic events.

2.3.2 TYPOLOGY OF RESPONSES TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Traumatic events do not only disrupt memory, but identity as well (Luckhurst 2008: 1). There is a cluster of symptoms pertaining to the process of going through a traumatic event and its aftermath:

> Aside from myriad physical symptoms, trauma disrupts memory, and therefore identity, in peculiar ways. The first cluster of symptoms relate to the ways in which 'the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced' – through intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original. Weirdly, the second set of symptoms suggests the complete opposite: 'persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma' that can range from avoidance of thoughts or feelings related to the event to a general sense of emotional numbing to the total absence of recall of the significant event. A third set of symptoms points to 'increased arousal', including loss of temper control, hyper-vigilance or 'exaggerated startle response'. Symptoms can come on acutely, persist chronically, or, in another strange effect, appear belatedly, months or years after the precipitating event (American Psychiatric Association 2000: 467-8) (Luckhurst 2008: 1).

Discourse surrounding responses to traumatic events should incorporate a wide range of responses which may depend on the individual, societal factors, as well as the stage of a person's life when the traumatic event occurred. There are certain instances when survivors of traumatic events do not develop any apparent issues pertaining to their mental health. However, this only means that it is necessary to carefully observe a traumatized person, and be on the lookout for any telltale signs of the following symptoms:

> Numbing, denial, and constriction of personality functioning […] This numbness may be the result of confrontation with discrepancies that present an indigestible amount of data. It involves unconscious concentration on available data processing schemas and a rapid construction, combining, and testing of combinations to deal with the overwhelming discrepancies. A person who appears stunned and immobile to the outside observer may be processing data, calculating relationships, and working to build novel and manageable structures to deal with information overflow (van der Kolk 1987: 96).

Despite the human capacity to survive and adapt, traumatic experiences can "alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present"

(van der Kolk et al. 2007: 4). A traumatic experience can alter a person, and there is a certain fixation on trauma, as survivors seem to not be able to overcome the memory of trauma, nor subside it into their daily lives. This "tyranny of the past" interferes with an individual's ability to pay attention to both "new and familiar situations"; as a result, when people constantly concentrate, but at the same time, selectively, on the reminders of their traumatic past, there comes a certain "fixation on trauma" (Ibid.).

One of the most important studies, which we repeatedly reference in this dissertation is Michelle Balaev's *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*. She contrasts the traditional and pluralistic models of investigating trauma, and considers the traditional model of investigating trauma as "an inherently unintegrated event that pathologically fragments the self" rather reductive, and she investigates a new model which views trauma and the process of remembering within a framework which emphasizes the differences in responses to extreme experiences, as well as the immense importance of involving contextual factors when determining the importance of the event (2012: xi). This multiplicity of responses is necessary to consider when it comes to investigating responses to a traumatic event. And this is also something important for our discussion, as it is noticeable that in the three novels we chose, there are different responses to trauma, impacted not only by the contextual, but also personal factors of the survivors. This dissertation also deals with investigating how the process of remembering is portrayed in the three novels, different responses to trauma that we see in the novels, as well as contextual factors and how they impact the processes of remembering and responding to a traumatic event.

One of the aspects of the traditional model is claiming that traumatic experience is not properly registered in memory, and thus can never be normally incorporated into consciousness, which then leads to "a fragmented sense of self and producing a type of memory with pathological symptoms in which the experience is inaccessibly frozen and unrepresentable" (Balaev 2012: xiii). As a result, feelings following a traumatic experience are only felt through "a recollection, never as a direct response to the event" (Ibid.). However, Balaev asserts that the fact that people react differently to traumatic events, even on the neurobiological level, challenges the traditional model; the difficulty of speaking about traumatic instances does not necessarily stem from "the intrinsic quality of trauma to defy all representation", but is also influenced by "variable factors" such as "individual, social, and cultural" which "influence the remembrance and narration of the experience" (Ibid. 10).

Despite the restraints and fallacies of the traditional model of trauma, the fact remains that a traumatic event is fundamentally an event we do not experience as it happens, but subsequently (Freud's and Caruth's notion of belatedness). The temporal distance from the traumatic event to the manifestation of symptoms is inherent in the belatedness of trauma itself. Caruth, for example, focuses on responses to traumatic events, relying on Freud's findings. She claims that, considering the fact that by "*fright*" Freud indicated "the traumatic effect of not having been prepared in time", the trauma consists of "*waking into consciousness*" which is identified with the process of reliving the trauma (Caruth 1996: 64). Basically, when one thinks of a traumatic event, one tries to comprehend how they survived. And when they are unable to do so, trauma occurs. Trauma stems not from the fact that one confronted death, but rather that they survived "*without knowing it*"; the recurring flashbacks then consist of the "incomprehensibility of one's own survival" (Ibid.). Essentially, what Caruth proposes is that what is traumatic is actually the *reliving* of trauma once one becomes aware of it.

In the pluralistic model, trauma is approached from numerous sources and it is not considered unrepresentable; rather, it involves "pathological responses", as well as those responses which are not necessarily pathological (Balaev 2012: xiii). This model is also useful for our dissertation as it does not only focus on pathological responses, but also other responses to a traumatic event, not as something unrepresentable, but as something which has to be analyzed from multiple points of view. Those points of view are not restricted to "past essentialist notions of identity, experience, and remembering found within the traditional model because it conceptualizes memory differently" (Ibid. xiii/xiv):

> The pluralistic model entertains a view of remembering as a fluid and selective process of interpretation, rather than only as a literal, veridical recall. Remembering therefore can be influenced by multiple internal and external factors, such as individual personality traits, family history, culture, geographic location, place, and historical period that shape the meaning of an experience. These contextual factors, especially society, cultural values, and landscape are interacting and influencing the process of remembering. This view of memory has many repercussions in terms not only of how one understands the process of remembering, but also how experience is interpreted and accorded value (Balaev 2012: xiv).

The pluralistic model proposes that the meaning of a traumatic event can be "determined by a remembering process" which is open to "alteration", as memories are revised over time, and in each instance of their remembrance (Balaev 2012: xiv). If we suggest that a traumatic experience is "conceived as an imaginative process of recollection", a process which is constantly in creation and reshaping, influenced by both individual traits and social contexts,

what should be taken into account are contextual factors, which influence not only the experience, but also the act of remembering (Ibid.). Balaev claims that if we are to consider remembering "as an active process of constructions", we can formulate trauma beyond the concept of a "pathologically fixed memory and unrepresentable experience" (Ibid.). Balaev argues that trauma is shaped by contextual factors, such as cultural values and narratives, which in turn render it mutable and transitional instead of a merely "dissociated" or "wordless" event which causes pathology (Ibid. xiv/xv). The next segments explore the most common responses to traumatic events and their connection to trauma theory. It should be noted, however, that these responses rarely occur isolated; rather, most of them are amalgamated, and then we talk about a cluster of symptoms.

2.3.2.1 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, as its name states, is a dysregulation of responses resulting in heightened sensitivity and vulnerability following a traumatic experience. As a model, it is used to explain the effects of traumatic stress based on *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.* It is also used as a framework which explains "the full range of symptoms to account for long-term effects and treatment course of those who are survivors of traumatic events" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 207). Symptoms of PTSD primarily include pathologies of memory, which range from amnesia of parts or whole traumatic experience to dissociation. Even though PTSD entails lapses of memory, it may also include "intruding memories and unbidden repetitive images" pertaining to traumatic events (van der Kolk 1987: 191). When these intrusions of the involuntary memories of the events happen, that manifests as a "compulsive need" to talk about those violent events (Ibid.). This urge to re-experience "the strong affects and somatic sensations" is invoked by trauma into one's life experience; whereas some trauma survivors may withdraw into a "shell of self-imposed exile" (Ibid.). Without the establishment of PTSD as a diagnostic category, there would be no trauma theory. The symptoms which could not be explained otherwise led to establishing PTSD as a diagnostic tool, and thus initiated an interest into investigating the varying responses of survivors in the aftermath of traumatic events.

2.3.2.2 Depression

Depression is one of the most common, and also most discussed reactions to traumatic events. Apart from PTSD, depression is also associated with "trauma without physical injury" (O'Brien 2000: 284). It arises as a consequence of the inability to confront the painful feelings

(Smith 2004: 153). Symptoms of depression may include "difficulty thinking or concentrating, a lack of interest in activities that were formerly pleasurable, and feelings of hopelessness and emptiness" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 25). In the case of clinical depression, diagnosed people should receive proper treatment, otherwise, they may be prone to suicide attempts (Ibid.). Depression which follows trauma may involve "preoccupation with thoughts of the incident as a prominent feature" (O'Brien 2000: 155).

> (D)epression represents an unconscious attempt to psychically cope with unbearable psychic pain following severe traumatisation: dissociative states, a chronic psychic state of shock, a disappearance of emotions, an emptying of the self and the object relationships, as well as a disappearance of the psyche in the body (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2015: xxxix).

Depression is understood either as severe sadness or mental illness. It is marked by sadness, guilt, withdrawal, emotional as well as physical changes. Majority of those responses are linked to reliving traumatic experiences. How depression presents itself after a traumatic event is reminiscent of the fact that "depression has no known origin"; diagnosis is available only when investigating the relationship in "time, the course, and perhaps the symptom content" (O'Brien 2000: 24). Depression may range from chronic, but "mild" forms such as dysthymia (long-lasting, but not debilitating) to disabling major depression, which is triggered either by stress or trauma (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 94/95). Major depression is one of the most serious and frequent forms of depression, which affects all aspects of an individual's life. Symptoms pertaining to major depression include sleep issues, low motivation, suicidal thoughts, loneliness, lack of appetite, and even physical pain. Women are more prone to suffering from depression than men (Ibid.). Rise of interest in trauma studies contributed to a great extent to labeling depression as a debilitating effect in the aftermath of traumatic events. Prior to Sigmund Freud's proposal of psychoanalysis, depressed people were forced to succumb to electroconvulsive treatments in order to alleviate the symptoms. It took many epistemological changes for a more humane treatment of depressed people to emerge. Primarily, the success of Freud's psychoanalysis during and in the aftermath of the First World War, and the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers, solidified the importance of abandoning electroconvulsive therapy, and tracing symptoms in the unconscious portion of the mind through the process of allowing the patient to verbally express what happened to them.

2.3.2.3 Dissociation

Dissociation is "a state within a state in which the person's perception of reality is altered", but the person usually stays in contact with the traumatic experience within this duality (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 27). This is a coping mechanism that many people use in stressful or extremely stressful situations. Dissociation is one of the most investigated coping mechanisms, and it occurs when "the self dissociates from its emotions, fantasies, thoughts in an extreme way"; the self "'flees'" into a different state of mind, but on the surface it is not apparent (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2015: 148). Trauma studies investigates how people deal with dissociation, how it manifests, and how they "integrate the traumatic into their selves and identities" (Ibid.). Dissociation becomes abnormal when it is chronic and prevents people from processing, remembering, or resolving difficult situations in their lives. It is inherent in some people, but for most individuals, it is a coping device intended to handle traumatic events and situations that would otherwise "overwhelm the individual and make functioning difficult" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 104/105). Dissociation is not abnormal in and of itself, but it is a rather common coping mechanism. It involves disruptions in memory, identity, or consciousness, oftentimes understood as a coping mechanism following a traumatic event. The gaps are reminiscent of the ones which trauma studies investigates, the gaps in our memory, as well as the gaps in our narration of traumatic events. It is "inherent" in some people, but it becomes abnormal when it is chronic, preventing emotional processing and normal functioning (Ibid.). Some of the forms of dissociation are the following:

> […] taken from Steinberg (2001), with examples of how people characterize them:
> 1. detachment from one's self or one's sense of his or her body. People might characterize the experience as "floating" out of their body, or looking down on themselves in the room, or watching themselves in a traumatic situation as if "in a movie."
> 2. feelings of unreality; being there but feeling detached and observing the traumatic event like it is unreal
> 3. numbing of emotions. A feeling of being numb, of not reacting to what is going on, of being there but not emotionally, like a "robot" or acting automatically without thought
> 4. sharpening of one's senses and slowing of time such that time seems to stand still, every detail is clear and vivid, and one's thoughts might be racing and speeded up
> 5. changes in one's perception of the environment and quickening of thoughts where everything is unreal, distorted, and sometimes "in a fog." Often only parts of the environment that signal escape or safety are present.
> 6. reliving memories, such as "my life flashed before me" or forgotten memories suddenly appear in the situation (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 105)

There are several distinctions between normal dissociation and abnormal or dysfunctional dissociation. Normal dissociation is brief and conscious ("'tuning out'" while driving) (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 105). Some abnormal forms, such as dissociative identity disorder (DID), involve frequent, unconscious disruptions and alarming symptoms like flashbacks or fragmented memories (Ibid.). Dissociative disorders are followed by anxiety and distress, whereas unaffected people try to "dull or numb" their emotions under stress (Ibid.).

2.3.2.4 Self-Mutilation

Self-mutilation is usually a response to "social isolation and fear" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 189). Research proposes that there is a great sample of abused children, as well as adults who suffered childhood abuse, who engage in "head banging, self-biting, self-burning, and self-cutting" (Ibid. 189). Non-suicidal self-injury disorder is defined as a process through which an individual inflicts "shallow, yet painful injuries to the surface of his or her body" (APA 2013: 924). A person usually does that in order to reduce negative emotions, such as "tension, anxiety, sadness, or self-reproach", and in some cases, does that as a way of self-punishment, in order to feel immediate relief (Ibid. 804). Self-harm is seen as a coping mechanism which often involves dissociation, or helps a person "mentally remove" oneself from the unbearable situation, due to some unresolved emotional discomfort (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 64). It is necessary to investigate the type of traumas those prone to self-mutilation experienced. Also, investigation pertains to what other symptoms follow this response to the events. Trauma studies helps in placing these responses within contextual factors, and investigates what sort of environment such people have, the presence or absence of support, and whether they feel inclined to accept the offered support. It also investigates whether self-mutilation can evolve into an even more serious problem, which would be suicidal tendencies. Essentially, self-mutilation can occur at any developmental stage, and at any point when an individual does not see an alternative to the overwhelming emotions they feel at once.

2.3.2.5 Suicidal Attempts

Suicidal attempts may involve deliberate acts of taking one's own life, and they usually happen because of prolonged depression, confusion, as well as a loss of meaning in life. They may also be one of the symptoms incorporated in the plethora of those exhibited by PTSD sufferers, among other things. Warning signs which indicate a possible suicide attempt include:

- threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to guns, pills, or other means

> • talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
> • exhibiting feelings of hopelessness
> • exhibiting feelings of rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge • acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
> • expressing feelings of being trapped, like there is no way out • increasing alcohol or drug use • withdrawal from friends, family, and society
> • evincing feelings of anxiety, agitation
> • experiencing dramatic mood changes • expressions of a lack of reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 260).

Traumatized victims may feel prone to suicide for no apparent reasons to people around them. Suicidal acts, however, are one of the attempts to "protect the self-system, no matter how much they now seem to threaten it" (van der Kolk 2015: 231). A suicidal attempt may occur either as a delayed response to a traumatic event, or immediately following it. Even though it may seem destructive, suicidal people see it as a way of protecting themselves from the onset of a rush of emotions, or a lack of emotional response whatsoever. Either way, it is necessary to find the root cause which initiated such behavior, and offer help before it escalates.

The following point we introduce is another important theoretical framework guiding the later analytical part of this dissertation – literary trauma studies. As we have established so far, psychological trauma, as well as the debates between its representability or (un)representability in language guide the field of trauma studies. However, in order to further investigate the processes surrounding the narrative shaping of a traumatic experience, we must look at the impact of trauma in literature and society. Thus, we claim that the complex "psychological and social factors that influence the self's comprehension" of a traumatic experience which is shaped by language are one of the main concerns of literary trauma studies (Balaev 2018: 360). Investigation of the texts describing trauma offers insights into "the ways that identity, the unconscious, and remembering are influenced by extreme events" (Ibid.). In the following section then, we elaborate on the concept of literary trauma studies.

2.4 LITERARY TRAUMA STUDIES

In this section, we discuss how the idea that "traumatic experience challenges the limits of language, fragments the psyche, and even ruptures meaning altogether" has changed and informed the development of both trauma studies and literary trauma studies (Balaev 2018: 360). We follow Geoffrey Hartman's propositions leading to the importance of literary trauma theory. He says that in the 1990s, there was a general consensus where we could see a gradual rise in the interest in trauma theory, the consensus being that the knowledge of trauma is composed of two contradictory elements; one is the traumatic event, "registered rather than experienced", and the other is a memory of the event, in the form of a "perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche" (1995: 537). Hartman, by referencing certain literary works, and evoking Freud and Lacan, comes to a conclusion that there is a certain *real*[5] they both tried to reach in their psychological investigations, a *real* pertaining to the truth of a traumatic event. Hartman sees this *real* as an event or a feeling we cannot directly access, unless through symptoms or repeated imagery; it is as elusive as it is hidden (Ibid.). And then he suggests that literary knowledge "finds this 'real', identifies with it, and can even bring it back" (Ibid.). To elaborate on this, we may claim that one only gains a meaningful identity once one is "inscribed in the symbolic order", which essentially means that one is given a name, or one's "actions and assertions of identity can only signify in the terms of an agreed upon network of signification" (Nicol 2009: 8). However, entering the symbolic order "separates us from 'the real' (our bodily drives)", and thus "everyday life is essentially virtual as everything real is made recognizable and meaningful by language and the codes of the symbolic order" (Ibid.). Hartman then claims that in the 1990s both in the field of literary studies and public health, a new awareness arose, which pertained to "more *listening*, more *hearing* of words within words, and a greater openness to *testimony*"; both in psychological and literary field, we started "*receiving*" the story, by listening to testimonies and interpreting them (1995: 541).

Hartman followed the line of thought previously established by Shoshana Felman, an American literary critic, and Dori Laub, an Israeli-American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. Their study, as they

[5] According to Jacques Lacan and his ideas in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the *real* is intricately tied to the notions of the impossible and the subject's journey toward satisfaction. Lacan frames the *real* "as the impossible" (1998: 167). The *real* is to be distinguished from the field of the pleasure principle, in the studies done by Freud, as it operates outside the sexualized economy, introducing "something new, which is precisely the impossible" (Ibid.).

claim, was a result of mutual respect and interest in texts, films, and books created in the aftermath of the Second World War, which is a trauma they deem "the watershed of our times", trauma which is not an event "encapsulated in the past" but a history which is essentially "*not over*" (1992: xiv). Although trauma returns in life, the reality of it continuously eludes the survivor who "lives in its grip and unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments" (Ibid. 69). Despite the unavoidable reality of the traumatic event, the fact remains that it happened outside the "parameters of 'normal' reality", including causality, sequence, place, and time (this temporal, or rather, atemporal aspect of a traumatic experience is one of the notions which guides our analytical segment) (Ibid. 69). Thus, they perceive trauma as:

> […] an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during, and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of 'otherness', a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completions, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor, indeed, is not truly in touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both (Felman and Laub 1992: 69).

Another important concept Felman and Laub propose (and which aligns with Hartman's understanding of the 1990s as the period in which there was more "openness to *testimony*" (Hartman 1995: 541), as mentioned above), is their concept of a *life testimony*. They define it as "a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*" (1992: 2). This articulation is reminiscent of their goal of establishing a relationship between art and culture on the one hand, and the "conscious or unconscious witnessing of historical events" on the other (Ibid. xx). Those historical events are oftentimes imbued with traumatic meaning, and literature and art can be used as a mode of witnessing or accessing reality, or the real, as Hartman claims. Literature helps us revise, theorize, and understand historical events and reality surrounding them. By using literary texts, we are offered a glimpse into something we may generally have no access to. The following quote explains the function of the life testimony in greater detail:

> What the testimony does not offer is, however, a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial […] Testimony is, in other words, a discursive *practice,* as opposed to a pure *theory*. To testify – to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one's own speech as material

> evidence for truth – is to accomplish a *speech act*, rather than to simply formulate a statement. As a performative speech act, testimony in effect addresses what in history is *action* that exceeds any substantialized significance, and what in happenings is *impact* that dynamically explores any conceptual reifications and any constative delimitations (Felman and Laub 1992: 5).

Essentially, testimonies serve the purpose of explaining actions in history and their impact on individuals as evidence for truth. The essence of life testimonies is thus both (auto)biographical and historical, because life testimony can be a testimony of life from a different perspective, and with a different point of analysis. Within testimony, we can find "the political dimension of oppression and the ethical dimension of resistance", which are indivisible from the historical occurrence (Felman and Laub 1992: 12). If we consider narrative as a "verbal act that functions as a historiographical report", history is then "the establishment of the facts of the past through their narrativization" (Ibid. 93). Through literature, we are offered a glimpse into a testimony which does not only "duplicate" or "record" events, but makes history available to "the imaginative act whose historical unavailability" has prompted a certain event (Ibid. 108). Thus, the purpose of literary testimony is to "open up in that belated witness", or the reader in this case, "the imaginative capability of perceiving history – what is happening to others – *in one's own body*, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement" (Ibid. 108). A search for this belated witness, we tentatively claim, brought literary trauma studies to the forefront of investigating trauma conveyed in narrative; sometimes data and archives are not enough to represent the enormity of a traumatic event, and that is when we use literature to build knowledge, or bridge the gaps in our knowledge, about history we were not a part of.

Following Felman and Laub's study, in 1996, the aforementioned Kalí Tal wrote *Worlds of hurt: Reading the literatures of trauma*. This was an important further step toward incorporating the literature of trauma survivors into the general discussion on trauma. It was inspired by the consequences not only of the Second World War, but also the Vietnam War. Tal talks, however, about those testimonies of real-life traumatized people, not in particular characters in trauma fiction. She claims that accurate representation of trauma "can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception" (1996: 15). As far as textual representations are concerned, she mentions literary, visual, oral, those "mediated by language" which do not have "the impact of the traumatic experience" (Ibid.). Despite not having the same impact, sometimes they are the only way we can approach a traumatic experience. Essentially, when one is not privy to the

truth of one's own existence and one's society, literary works help. Combined with the findings of psychoanalysis, the interdisciplinary field of literary trauma studies serves the purpose of analyzing the unavailability of the truth which literary works bear:

> Psychoanalysis, in this way, profoundly rethinks and radically renews the very concept of the testimony, by submitting, and by recognizing for the first time in the history of culture, that one does not have to *possess* or *own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker. […] The testimony will thereby be understood, in other words, not as a mode of *statement of*, but rather as a mode of *access to*, that truth (Felman and Laub 1992: 15/16).

In a sense, this is why literature can be regarded as a therapeutic process. It may also be regarded as a *talking cure*[6], because not only by talking, but also by writing about a traumatic event, our own or others', we reach the truth behind it. The act of verbalizing one's trauma can help us seek the truth behind reality, to investigate "the state of being *stricken, wounded* by reality", and at the same time try and emerge from the "paralysis of this state", to engage with reality in order to overcome it and advance with one's life (Felman and Laub 1992: 28). In all three novels we chose for the corpus of this dissertation, there is something so traumatic (incest, rape, existence, slavery) which has to be overcome, and literary works serve the purpose of bringing forth the wound and working through it by writing about it. To understand the event, we must reach the "woundedness" it left in its wake, and from within it, the reality of it becomes accessible (Ibid.). This is the inaccessibility which Cathy Caruth talks about, as well as Freud. The traumatic event is not available to consciousness as it happens; it is necessary for some time to pass for a person to be able to work through it, and, eventually, overcome it. This inaccessibility is one of the aspects discussed in the traditional model of trauma.

According to the traditional literary criticism of trauma, trauma "inherently produces a temporal gap and a pathologically fragmented self", which is an evocation of Freud's understanding of trauma as a breach through our protective shields (Balaev 2012: 6). In that sense, it is a timeless void, which shatters identity, and produces a lack of knowledge regarding

[6] Talking cure is a term Josef Breuer's patient, Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim) introduced when referring to her therapeutic sessions with Breuer, and the term Sigmund Freud and Breuer himself elaborate on in *Studies on Hysteria* originally published in 1957; what it is essentially is the fact that when Anna O. was talking about her traumatic events, despite being in irritable mood previously, the verbal expression helped her alleviate some of the debilitating symptoms of her hysteria, making her appear calmer and more rational (Freud and Breuer 1957: 29).

the event and the inability to narrate it. Because a traumatic event is never properly experienced or registered as a memory, it is never normally incorporated into consciousness and this leads to a "fractured pathological self and memory" (Ibid.). The traditional model of trauma theory poses that trauma is a "prelinguistic event", which "invades" the mind with surprising ferocity, rendering language unable to code it (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 1). Because of such an unspeakable experience, the only response to representation is achieved through "abreaction", or the emotional release which an individual experiences after going through a traumatic event which caused initial repression as well as suppression (Ibid.). This re-experience of the traumatic event brings forward emotions experienced when the event happened for the first time and it can contribute a great deal to understanding how the event affected the survivor, and also explain the behavior of the survivor which resulted from trauma. According to this model of trauma, in order to bring the traumatic event to fore and thus closer to understanding, there is a necessity for abreaction through "narrative recall" (Balaev 2012: 6). However, there are issues since the remembrance of trauma is only approximate, never definite knowledge of it. The traumatic memory disturbs consciousness, and identity and memory are divided, so the only solution to allow the individual to understand the traumatic event, and perhaps, reconcile with it in the process, comes through the attempt at narration (Ibid.). Initial repression keeps information out of consciousness, and suppression "consciously keeps information out of awareness" which in turn leaves individuals feeling as if they are reliving a particular traumatic event as well as experiencing "the same or similar physical and emotional reactions" they felt when the trauma occurred (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 1). The aforementioned abreaction is present in the literary expression of trauma because it often shows how the protagonist views the self before and after a traumatic event, which depends upon the type of traumatic event as well as "the available narrative formulations and social values that are provided by the protagonist's society in the world of the novel" (Balaev 2012: 38).

However, there is a thread of criticism aimed at the traditional model of trauma, which assumes that narrativization of trauma may lead to a betrayal of traumatic memory (due to its assumption pertaining to inherent inability of survivors to properly narrate it), and, consequently, to the unspeakability of trauma. If we take this criticism further, we may even say that the traditional model presupposes that this unrepresentability may hinder traumatized people from expressing what happened to them, as they may not be believed due to their being traumatized. This "unsayability" of trauma has been opposed by Judith Herman from the mid-1990s, as she views narrative as "an empowering and effective therapeutic method" (Visser

2016: 13). Herman opposes this traditional stance and claims that narrative is something empowering for trauma victims, as well as therapeutic. There are even more critics who follow this line of thought, and they are proponents of the pluralistic model of trauma (for example Michelle Balaev, Dominick LaCapra, Laurie Vickroy).

Michelle Balaev asserts that the shift in literary trauma theory, that is, the pluralistic model of trauma, involves a "set of critical practices that place more focus on the particular social components and cultural contexts of traumatic experience" (Balaev 2014: 3). Followers of this model explore how and why traumatic experience is represented in literature by "combining psychoanalytic theory with postcolonial theory or cultural studies" (Ibid.). Essentially, we have to take contextual and cultural aspects into account when analyzing literary trauma fiction, or any type of literary works centering around representations of trauma. Indeed, trauma causes "a disruption and reorientation of consciousness", however, the kinds of values "attached" to the traumatic, and in general, any experience, are influenced by factors pertaining to individuals and culture (factors prone to change over time) (Ibid. 4). This revisionist approach to literary trauma studies is challenging the idea of the inability of knowledge and claiming of the past, either by an individual or society, and this approach "elucidates" other values of trauma in terms of "psychological, linguistic and social mechanisms" (Ibid. 4). Essentially, instead of perceiving trauma as something that is unable to be expressed in its totality, the revisionist or the pluralistic approach proposes using psychology, language, as well as interaction in order to communicate trauma and come to terms with it.

It is precisely this relationship between culture and trauma which requires explanations of historical and cultural contexts of literary works, as well as the contexts surrounding traumatic events they depict. Trauma does not occur in an acultural void, but is rather imbued with historical and cultural influences, and this is equally true for literary works. One of this dissertation's aims is to dissect those influences and contexts, and investigate relationships between various influences which cause trauma, much in the line of the general approach of literary trauma studies. Psychology focuses on the "psychic traces left on the individual by a traumatic event", and literary trauma studies focuses on "cultural and social dimensions of trauma", as well as on the processes of cultural mediation (Davis and Meretoja 2020: 4). Supporters of the pluralistic theory propose trauma narratives, evocative of life testimonies, as the exemplary objects of inquiry wherein investigation of the relationship between an

individual, culture, and trauma is done. Trauma narratives are "personalized responses" to emerging awareness of the "catastrophic effects of wars, poverty, colonization, and domestic abuse on the individual psyche" (Vickroy 2002: x). It is necessary to take into account the geographical and temporal setting of the novel, as well as autobiographical and historical information about the writers, as they may explicate the writers' personalized responses to the era they were writing in and writing about. Trauma narratives focus on "cultural, sociopolitical, and psychological causes and contexts of trauma" (Ibid. xii). After all, literature of trauma is defined by the identity of the author, and at its center, it holds "the reconstruction and recuperation of the traumatic experience", but is also engaged in dialogue with the writings of non-traumatized authors (Tal 1996: 17).

Even when authors of trauma narratives are not directly traumatized by an event, their identity is important when it comes to considering literary works in the field of literary trauma studies. It is necessary to underline here whether trauma narratives contain some autobiographical aspects, whether they are purely fictional, or whether they are written from a perspective of an author who belongs to a subsequent generation of those who were traumatized, and whose traumas they write about. In the last case, we talk about *postmemory*, or "the acquired memory of those, particularly intimates, not directly experiencing an event such as the Holocaust or slavery – those who relive what others have lived" (LaCapra 2014: xx). The aspect which connects all these trauma narratives is the question of how trauma can be narrated.

The understanding of our ability to narrate trauma has gone through some major revisions. In Cathy Caruth's understanding of trauma, for example, trauma escapes narrative formulation, as it is only experienced in "belated repetition" (Whitehead 2004: 5). An individual cannot recount the traumatic experience when they want, and it haunts them until it belatedly returns to be experienced for the first time. If there is even a slight possibility for a narrativization of trauma, Whitehead reiterates Caruth's claim that it should be presented in a literary form deviating from both linear and temporal sequence (Ibid. 6). Also, the "inherent latency of trauma" pertaining to the period when no obvious effects appear can be perceived in "broken or fragmented quality of testimonial narratives" which require new ways of reading and understanding (Ibid. 7).

Following this, we have Roger Luckhurst's reminder that traumatic events were initially regarded as "outside the range of normal human experience", or a *gap* between "impact

and understanding, influx and assimilation" (Luckhurst 2008: 79). He goes on to say that the relationship between trauma which presents as a disruption and the ensuing attempts at translating or assimilating this disturbance is "a fundamental tension between interruption and flow, blockage and movement" (Ibid.). What trauma poses, then, is a "challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge" as in its shock impact trauma is "anti-narrative", but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to "explicate the trauma" (Ibid.). We can understand literary works in this dissertation as retrospective narratives, either applying first-person or third-person focalization (this narrative strategy is explained later), whose aim is to explicate the trauma, to find a way in the narrative in which the gap between impact and understanding is overcome. And herein lies the inherent contradiction when it comes to trauma narratives – "culture rehearses or restages narratives that attempt to animate and explicate trauma that has been formulated as something that exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge" (Ibid.). In essence, despite the fact that trauma is generally perceived as something beyond words, trauma narratives demonstrate that culture continuously provides a fruitful ground for explanation and meaning-making of trauma. All the visual and written stories featuring trauma as their main subject, play around with "narrative time, disrupting linearity, suspending logical causation, running out of temporal sequence" or they work "backwards towards the inaugurating traumatic event" and even play "with belated revelations that retrospectively rewrite narrative significance" (Ibid. 80). In essence, all of these approaches are supposed to render the unpredictability of traumatic knowledge; a traumatic event is not linear, despite its suddenness; knowledge about it does not happen at once, but rather comes in increments, in fragmented memories or triggers which illuminate understanding which initially eludes the survivor; it is everything but logical, and many factors have to be included in order to understand why it was inevitable, or rather, why it inevitably happened. In trauma fiction, this can be achieved with the aid of narrative strategies and techniques employed to show the difficulties of presenting the elusive nature of traumatic knowledge, and some of them are explained in later segments.

In order to narrate something which exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge, original approaches to conceptualizing trauma are needed, and it is also necessary to shift attention from what is remembered of the past events to how and why it is remembered (Whitehead 2004: 3). We also investigate the *what* is remembered in the dissertation, but the more pressing question is *how* that *what* is represented in the novels, as well as *why* such an event in particular was the one that caused trauma. Novelists engage in this approach to writing

about trauma by using narrative strategies and techniques which help mimic the "forms and symptoms" of trauma, and, as a result, temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection (Ibid.). Those techniques are employed in certain trauma narratives, and the following segments deal with their explanations. Before delving into that, however, we should mention the concept of place, the one which assists with contextually framing a piece of literary work which literary trauma studies focuses on.

2.4.1.1 Literary Trauma Studies and the Contextual Relevance of Place

One of the most important aspects which literary trauma studies focuses on is the concept of place, or the geographical location where a traumatic event was experienced, its aftereffects felt, and life continued. It provides a "conceptual framework in which emotional responses occur" (Balaev 2012: xv). It is, according to Balaev, "the silent second character", because "geographic location, cultural influence, and historical moment" merge in order to present how trauma affects not only the individual, but also the community (Ibid.). Her pluralistic model of trauma expands the notion of trauma by examining in what ways context, place, and society in particular, shape the experience, memory, and narrative of trauma in literature, with those particular contexts becoming meaning-making sites (Ibid. xiv/xv). This meaning-making site influences "the emotional texture, cognitive codification, and narrative form of the event, rather than standing solely as a backdrop screen for the action of the plot" (Ibid. xv). The meaning is created and reached with the help of these contexts, which situate the characters, their circumstances, as well as their traumas, and in turn allow us to read testimonies as pluralistic narratives which are not divorced from the contexts which influenced their creation.

In order to properly represent a traumatic event when it comes to literature portraying trauma, it is necessary to focus on "the medium of place", as it holds "both the performance and projection of values" (Balaev 2012: 120). When investigating the concept of place within the larger framework of trauma, one situates human life "within larger machinations of meaning and action" (Ibid.). There is no understanding of trauma without understanding all the contexts which enabled it to happen, and place is one of the key factors. This is in line with the pluralistic model of trauma, which not only takes into account the subjective feeling of a survivor, but also the contextual factors which enabled such emotional responses. Talking about a traumatic event and analyzing it against the backdrop of any field necessitates involving the place where such events happened:

> The places of traumatic experience and moments of remembering are significant indicators in describing the value of trauma in a novel because a geographic place contains personal and cultural directives that influence the expression of loss, pain, belonging, and healing. The physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience (Balaev 2012: 38).

In the case of this dissertation, as is investigated in the analytical section, it is extremely important to emphasize the fact that the geographical location where these traumatic events are unfolding is the United States of America; however, the time period in which these events are unfolding is different in all three novels analyzed, and that is important to contrast. Geographical location affects the value of trauma for the characters, and responses to extreme events are "experienced and narrated" differently due to "individual variants and temporal specificities"; narrative "asserts the specificity of trauma" while at the same time offering textual evidence that the protagonist is "a representative cultural figure" (Balaev 2012: 54). In one novel, the period is the time of President Reagan's rule, in the second it is the aftermath of the Second World War, and in the third the aftermath of slavery. The three women whose lives we follow and dissect are all American, but they belong to different social strata and races, and they also experience different types of trauma, but at the same time so painfully similar, according to the sociocultural contexts which enable them. This challenges the traditional model of understanding trauma, which does not allow for the acknowledgment of different reactions to similar traumatic events.

What impacts the ability to talk about trauma involves different factors, from individual, to social and cultural. The difficulty with speaking about traumatic events does not only stem from the "intrinsic quality of trauma to defy all representation", but also from other factors, such as "individual, social, and cultural factors that influence the remembrance and narration of the experience" (Balaev 2012: 10). Hence the need to place these factors within a contextual space, and to analyze them against such a backdrop. This is why we introduce the concept of place, in order to dissect all the different levels of contexts we might come across. Another proof for the necessity of contextual factors is the following quote, which shows how an individual's experience of trauma cannot be divorced from the overall cultural factors:

> The traumatized protagonist in fiction brings into awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural ideologies. Trauma in fiction provides a picture of the individual who suffers, but paints it in such a way as to suggest that this protagonist is an "everyperson" figure.

> […] The experience of suffering, no matter how private the experience, is situated in relation to the context of a culture that ascribes different value to the experience and to the individual's feelings about the experience. […] A central thematic dynamic in novels that describe suffering is thus located in the representation of the individual experience of trauma that necessarily oscillates between private and public meanings, between personal and social paradigms (Balaev 2012: 17).

There are certain ways in which contextual factors of trauma are expressed in novels. Some of them include "protagonist's culture, social class, nation, gender, ethnicity, family, and relation to a particular place" (Balaev 2012: 38). As we have already emphasized in the previous paragraphs, place is extremely important in the pluralistic framework of trauma as it is "a multifaceted medium that portrays the value of trauma" (Ibid.). Now that we have established importance of the concept of place for the field of literary trauma studies, we turn to trauma fiction, which is the backbone of our analysis.

2.4.2 TRAUMA FICTION – MAIN FEATURES

This section is dedicated to providing key characteristics of the literary trauma studies' main point of interest – trauma fiction. Trauma fiction is a rather novel approach to writing, and originally it was not a genre per se, as some time had to pass in order for it to establish its main features, which we discuss in this section. The emergence of trauma narratives occurred in the last thirty years, primarily due to numerous societal conditions involving "war, sexual and physical assaults, poverty, and colonization" (Vickroy 2015: 1). The writers of such narratives, be it fiction or nonfiction, perceive trauma as an "indicator of social injustice or oppression and as the ultimate cost of destructive sociocultural institutions" (Ibid.). What these narratives do is "contextualize trauma for readers by embedding them in scenarios of social and historical significance" (Ibid.). The past decades have seen a rising connection between mental illness and societal conditions, such as "fractures of late capitalist society" (Sim 2001: 133). Thus, it is no wonder that experiments pertaining to linguistic representation of disorders of the mind as well as the unstable cultural frameworks coincide. This links trauma fiction directly to the tendencies of postmodernist fiction, which are apparent in portraying "temporal disorder, involuntary impersonation of other voices (or pastiche), fragmentation, looseness of association, paranoia and the creation of vicious circles", which we explain in the next section (Ibid.). A recurrent aspect we refer to in this dissertation is this oscillation, this *bleeding into* the fissures which divide genres, and a creation of an amalgamation that is difficult to pinpoint, but the one that still provides us with a context for analyzing the novels we chose.

The importance of trauma fiction primarily lies in the fact that it offers a glimpse into the life testimonies of traumatized people; it is an "evocation of suffering" which helps us "cultivate an understanding of another" (Balaev 2012: xix). Psychology accomplishes a similar goal, and the difference between psychology and literature is purely in methodology, whereas interpretation binds them. Another difference lies in the fact that they use different strategies in order to reach understanding of human experience which trauma causes. In a psychoanalytic process, a client is investigated by taking into account all the factors which may have caused them trauma. Literature is no different, as we also have to investigate a plethora of factors which led to reading about individuals and their lives molded by their traumatic experiences. In literary works, "artistic interpretation of consciousness" is offered, and the aim is to draw attention to "areas of human experience that might be overlooked or denied in society" (Ibid.). Essentially, what psychological frameworks share with trauma fiction is an "investigation of the situational and social variables shaping the experience of trauma survivors", and these

frameworks help with revealing “emotional, social, and cognitive implications of trauma” (Vickroy 2015: x).

What trauma fiction does is provide scenarios which “confront readers with subjective endurance in the face of crisis and conflict, representing how defensive responses are created out of many types of wounding” (Vickroy 2015: xi). These texts are story worlds in which characters, with their thought processes, willingness or unwillingness (ability or inability) to disclose information about their traumatizing experiences exist and offer a leeway for readers to create a psychological evaluation, much like a psychoanalytic process, of the characters and their experience. And the best way to do so is by having the novels follow, or rather, mimic, “aspects of traumatic experiences”, for example: “fragmented thoughts or a dissociated outlook” (Ibid.). Trauma in the novels we analyze in this dissertation is, among other things, “an indicator of social injustice or oppression”, and “the ultimate cost of destructive sociocultural institutions”; by examining details of traumatic experiences, these writers unveil the effects, detrimental in their power, of social forces on individuals, which in turn “warp or immobilize” characters emotionally, as well as “perpetuate legacies of fear and destruction” (Ibid.). The writers’ goal is to also illustrate the characters’ difficulties in “social and personal relational contexts” and focus in particular on the traumatic circumstances of “objectification and its devastating effects on individual personality” (Ibid.). All the while, the goal of trauma writers is the ability to offer a connection of “individual traumas with social oppression” (Ibid. 180). Herein lies their importance, because it is precisely these fictional narratives that we are able to use as textual evidence of trauma, the societal conditions in which it occurred, and underline the differences and the similarities in the way the texts deal with the same, or similar traumatic instances.

Trauma fiction aims to recover the gap in understanding and knowledge of history, to discover the unspeakable aspects of it, inaccessible in any other way. There is an ongoing effort of historical engagement, which, as its purpose, has the goal of “returning to voice the marginalised and the oppressed”, ways to explore trauma and engage in political involvement (de Groot 2010: 149). The novels in this dissertation are pure examples of how narratives about trauma engage in “political rewriting”, outline “the traumas of the past”, rescue “the marginalized” and give voice to “those who were silenced” (Ibid. 150). Trauma theory claims that “the confusions of the present are the result of terrible events in the past”, those events which continue to “have impact precisely because their power has been denied” (Byerman

2005: 9). Which is essentially why, when writing about history, psychological dimension should be taken into account. Contemporary trauma narratives share with trauma narratives the fact that they both attest to "tremendous loss and survival", and they both "describe the psychological and social effects of suffering", but they also "tell of the erasure of such history" (Ibid. 3).

When it comes to those testimonies written from a personal lens, we invoke autobiographical testimonies, and we delve into explanation pertaining to them in one of the following sections. In order to write a text which assumes the position of a testimony, writers have to immerse themselves in the context which enabled the experience they are writing about, be it from a personal experience, or from a point of a person witnessing a certain experience. Which is why this dissertation excludes neither (auto)biographical, nor historical contexts, nor the contexts within which the texts were written (postmodernist) because in order to get a correct picture of the text, we need to take into account the surrounding frames of reference. Especially with trauma, we have to understand why certain things in the texts are considered traumatic, as they may not be perceived as debilitatingly traumatic from today's point of view. Thus, we place the texts within contexts and we reach a fulfilling reading of their importance:

> […] how issues of biography and history are neither simply represented nor simply reflected, but are reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text. In order to gain insight into the significance and impact of the context on the text, the empirical context needs not just to be *known*, but to be *read*; to be read in conjunction with, and as part of, the reading of the text. […] *contextualization of the text* […] the political, historical, and biographical realities with which the texts are dynamically involved and within which their particular creative possibilities are themselves inscribed (Felman and Laub 1992 xiv/xv).

In the following section, we focus on the features of postmodernist fiction which are important for the representation of trauma, or those that are shared between trauma fiction and postmodernist fiction. Postmodernist context is necessary in order to understand the reframing of narratives which happened during that period frame, which inevitably impacted the shaping of trauma fiction as well.

2.4.2.1 Postmodernist Fiction - Main Features and Thematic Parallels with Trauma Fiction

If we use the adjective "postmodern", we are talking about both the "particular period in literary and perhaps cultural history which begins in the 1950s and continues until the 1990s" as well as "a set of aesthetic styles and principles which characterize literary production in this

period" (Nicol 2009: 2). "Postmodernity" as a term refers to "the way the world has changed" in the aforementioned period due to the developments in the "political, social, economic, and media spheres"; and, finally, "postmodernist" implies a "set of ideas developed from philosophy and theory and related to aesthetic production" (Ibid.). For the purposes of this dissertation, we use the term "postmodernism", as it both refers to the period in which the novels we discuss are written, as well as the aesthetic and literary practices which appeared during that period.[7]

> Postmodernism is not post modern, whatever that might mean, but post modernism; it does not come *after the present* (a solecism), but after the *modernist movement*. Thus the term "postmodernism," if we take it literally enough, *à la lettre*, signifies a poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future. […]
>
> Postmodernism is the posterity of modernism (McHale 2004: 5).

It would be too confining to claim that postmodernist fiction is a genre; it would also be problematic to claim that it is a "historical label" (Nicol 2009: xvi). Rather, it would be better to state that it is a "particular 'aesthetic' – a sensibility, a set of principles, or a value-system which unites specific currents in the writing of the latter half of the twentieth century" (Ibid.). The concept *postmodernist fiction* is not a genre, but rather a conglomerate between different aesthetical and theoretical practices which go beyond genre. What postmodernist fiction suggests is to "re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history" in order to "open it up to the present" (Hutcheon 2000: 834). Within postmodernism, "history and fiction exchange places, history becoming fictional and fiction becoming 'true' history", rewriting the real world – however, that is the essence of the question within postmodernist fiction – "real, compared to what"? (McHale 2004: 96). This is something which trauma fiction also endeavors to achieve. It aims to open trauma up to a belated witness, as there is no other way to learn about trauma apart from the textual records of it. Postmodernist fiction also poses questions regarding the interaction of history and fiction; questions about "the nature of identity and subjectivity", or about "reference and representation", as well as "intertextual nature of the

[7] A general consensus regarding postmodernism pertains to the fact that it is a term difficult to pinpoint. If we aim to observe the origin of the term, we have to mention the fact that it was originally coined in the 1940s in order to "identify a reaction against the Modern movement in architecture"; however, the first widespread usage of the term began in the 1950s by those cultural critics who wanted to describe a "'new sensibility' in literature" which assumed rejection of modernist "attitudes and techniques" or "adapted and extended them" (Nicol 2009: 1). This new sensibility refers to crossing the boundaries of "class, gender, race" which could be "fertile ground for the construction of empathy – ties that would promote recognition of common commitment" (hooks 1994: 36). Within this context, a number of similar, but essentially distinct terms appeared.

past" (Hutcheon 2004: 117). Linda Hutcheon proposes points of "significant overlap of theory with aesthetic practice" which she terms "a 'poetics' of postmodernism", and she claims that this term would constitute both the postmodern culture and discourses connected to it (Ibid. ix). Postmodernism is "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political"; its contradictions stem from the late capitalist society, however, they are manifest in "the important postmodern concept of 'the presence of the past'" (Ibid. 4). Postmodernism is not "a nostalgic return; it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society, a recalling of a critically shared vocabulary of architectural forms" (Ibid. 4). Thus, there is an instance of critical reworking of the past in postmodernism, instead of a return to it (Ibid. 4).

> Postmodern novels raise a number of specific issues regarding the interaction of historiography and fiction that deserve more detailed study: issues surrounding the nature of identity and subjectivity; the question of reference and representation; the intertextual nature of the past; and the ideological implications of writing about history (Hutcheon 2000: 841).

Another important notion regarding postmodernism, in particular as a philosophical movement, is a "form of skepticism", with reference to "authority, received wisdom, cultural and political norms" (Sim 2001: 3). In this way, postmodernism seeks to undermine the tendency of other philosophical theories which claim to be "in possession of ultimate truth, or criteria for determining what counts as ultimate truth" (Ibid.). The novels we analyze in this dissertation reverse the authority as they were written by those and about those who were not considered as valid authorities at the time they were writing. In the eighteenth century the main concern was for lies and falsity, but then it became "a postmodern concern for the multiplicity and dispersion of truth(s); truth(s) relative to the specificity of place and culture" (Hutcheon 2000: 833). Thus, we have an inherent questioning of most postulates in postmodernism, and not only questioning, but also revision and proposal of new insights. This is connected to another notion connected to postmodernism – productiveness. Postmodernism provides a productive context where there are new interpretations, new or revised research, "criticism and refinements of the construct itself", as well as "counter-proposals, refutations, polemics" (McHale 2004: 5). It is not merely a "chronological division" but it is also an "organized system – a poetics" (Ibid.). This is extremely relevant for our discussion regarding trauma fiction. Owing to these postmodernist tendencies, trauma fiction, the rise of which coincides with postmodernism, allows for a myriad of truths to come to foreground, truths about one's trauma, from one's own point of view, or from a point of view of those who were witnesses to trauma.

Some postmodernist features are contradiction, discontinuity, fictional instead of real, unpleasure instead of pleasure, inclusiveness (McHale 2004: 7). In postmodernism, we also notice a movement from posing epistemological to posing ontological questions (Ibid. 9/10). These ontological attitudes postmodernist writers display come to our attention "only through the foregrounding of ontological concerns" (Ibid. 27). Postmodernism surrounds the period of transition from modern culture during the atrocities of the Second World War, which discouraged the Western faith in "rationality, morality, modernization, and human progress" – and this development is obvious in some of the autobiographical texts in the aftermath of the war (Thiemann 2019: 779). The autobiographical texts of the second half of the twentieth century were immensely affected by "a widely recognized crisis of representation" (Ibid. 783). Essentially, ontological concerns apparent in postmodernism are inevitable when it comes to the narrative representation of one's own life. This narrative representation also faces certain crisis, and features inherent in postmodernism allow for greater liberty in literary renditions.

Postmodernism refuses to follow any structure or respect boundaries; the most important boundaries crossed in postmodernism, are those between fiction and non-fiction, as well as between art and life. As we have mentioned already, this crossing of the boundaries is something which guides both our theoretical and analytical segments. For Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism aims not to "supply reality", but to "invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented"; thus, postmodernism puts forward the "unpresentable in presentation itself" (1984: 81).[8] One of the main paradoxes of postmodernism is "the coexistence of an obsession with trauma" and the sense that trauma has lost its "disruptive edge"; postmodernism is "precisely what remains after the wounding of the referential and metahistorical claims of the other moments" (Rothberg 2000: 186). The postmodern text is a form of engagement between a narrative voice and the implied reader (Hutcheon 2004: 10). In postmodernism, history is not forgotten, but rather rewritten, and we get a discursive nature of reality – collective and individual. Accessibility to the past we get is "conditioned by textuality", as we can only know past through texts pertaining to it; social practices and

[8] It is necessary to comment here on the thread which connects Lyotard's *unpresentable* with the term *unrepresentable* which we use in this dissertation. Essentially, Lyotard's notion is referring to the subversion in the representation of those aspects generally ignored in the grand narratives, those societal aspects which have been utterly disregarded in the representation prior to the rise of postmodernism; essentially, the marginalized aspects of societies. This coincides with the aspect of unrepresentability, which essentially subsumes that which cannot be depicted in an easy way, as narrative cohesion is unable to encompass it. With the rise of postmodernism, however, both the unpresentable, that is, aspects previously disregarded, and unrepresentable, instances which had no appropriate narrative tools to be represented, find a new epistemology, a revised set of both ethical and aesthetic tools of representation.

structures from the past can also be read as texts themselves (Ibid. 16). We read history as a text, and there is no other way in postmodernism to know about past apart from reading the texts depicting it. However, postmodernist fiction does not only aim to re-write or re-present the past in fiction, but also to "open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (Ibid. 110). Strategies and techniques used in postmodernist fiction highlight how history is constructed, which in turn emphasizes the fact that representation is at the same time an act of interpretation, shaped by the inevitable act of engagement between present and past.

In postmodern times "new practices play with the conventions of autobiographical writing and display a self-referential dimension in their complex structures, metafictional comments or intertextual references" (Vandevoorde 2019: 608). When we use the term "fictionality", we refer to the condition of being "fictional", of being "constructed, narrated, mediated" (Nicol 2009: xvii). Fiction presumes framing of the represented world, and fictionality in particular involves "a concern with the relationship between the language and represented world of fiction with the real world outside" (Ibid.). This concern in particular preoccupies postmodern writers; which is why postmodernist writing is mostly posed against realist writing, because in realism, "the question of fictionality is generally ignored or suppressed" (Ibid.). However, we should emphasize that fictionality is not a category or a genre, but rather a "communicative strategy" (Walsh 2007: 7).

Despite the fact that postmodern literature "avoids psychological realism", there is still an instance of postmodernist trauma fiction, as purely postmodernist texts are more "parodistic and playful", but when informed with trauma narratives, they aim to "depict psychological extremes honestly" (Vickroy 2015: 5). We should mention here that postmodernist trauma fiction has not been established as a genre per se yet, which is why our usage of this term to refer to the novels we analyze in this dissertation, which employ features of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and, as we discuss in the next section, autobiographical fiction, is our contribution to reading the novels in a revised analytical way. Nevertheless, as we emphasize throughout this dissertation, this term is not supposed to confine them within strict genre conventions, but rather to show their ability to transgress those boundaries due to approaches employed to narratively represent trauma. Returning to our discussion, what is also revised from the characterization in modernist characters when it comes to postmodernist characters is that they are "less cognizant, more opaque to interpretation"; unlikely to have relations to their past, and even themselves, or to "consider moral or philosophical implications" (Hoffmann

433–34).[9] However, such disconnection from the past and from ethics is something evocative of "defensive patterns of trauma victims"; if enough textual evidence is provided, these notions could be interpreted as signs of trauma (Vickroy 2015: 5). Both postmodernist and trauma narratives share a view of "the self as fragmented and lacking continuity" and those traumatic identity breakdowns in turn "produce in survivors destructive or avoidant personality traits and cognition" (Ibid. 134). Thus, both postmodernist and trauma writers believe in "multiple, conflicting environmental influences, which undermine notions of a stable and consistent identity", and thus, fragmented narrative comes as a natural extension (Ibid. 5). The difference in fragmentation between the two is the following:

> Postmodern narrative typically conveys a fractured view of self, blown about by forces beyond one's control, living outside chronology, and disconnected from the past. In a trauma narrative fragmentation is psychologically debilitating; painful, humiliating experiences and attempts to cope disconnect individuals from the past, from significant others, and from a strong sense of self. Traumatic fragmentation is punitive in ways that other types of postmodern personality fragmenting are not. One can play several roles in life without dire repercussions, but psychologically, it is difficult for most people to live with the cognitive dissonance brought on by wounding (Vickroy 2015: 5).

Postmodern intertextuality displays desires to "close the gap between past and present" and "rewrite the past in a new context" (Hutcheon 2000: 842). Postmodernist fiction and trauma fiction share the tendency pertaining to bringing narrative techniques to their limit – trauma fiction essentially emerges from postmodernist fiction. Trauma fiction aims to overcome the formal boundaries surrounding narrative and thus convey "the damaging and distorting impact of the traumatic event" (Whitehead 2004: 82). There is a certain overlapping of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and postcolonial fiction when it comes to concerns with "the recovery of memory and the acknowledgment of the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" (Ibid.). Essentially, by acknowledging the previously repressed, it gives them voice.

Postmodernist and trauma fiction both share skepticism towards the uses of power and the discourses employing it, both use similar storytelling techniques (fragmentation and unstable meanings), both have inconclusive endings or repeating cycles, and they both reject traditional ideologies (Vickroy 2015: 4). The difference lies merely in the fact that trauma texts focus on psychological and social dilemmas more than postmodernist texts do, however, that is why, when both of them are employed, we reach a more conclusive understanding (or maybe,

[9] Quote taken from Vickroy 2015: 5.

such understanding eludes us) of the truth of a traumatic event (Ibid.). Both postmodernist fiction and trauma fiction use narratives which display "gaps, uncertainties, dissociations" and vivid details of enduring and surviving traumatic experiences (Ibid. 3). Shifting focalization is a common theme in both postmodernist and trauma fiction, because by employing different focalizing points, what is highlighted are characters' innermost thoughts, desires, and relationships (Ibid. 3). Thus, we call this combination postmodernist trauma fiction, that which goes beyond genre, but which employs both traditions in postmodernist writing as well as trauma fiction. Both postmodernist and trauma fiction are literary witnesses to "social and personal fragmentation", even though in trauma fiction, "the most painful and alienating causes and consequences" are shown (Ibid. 4).

Postmodernism inspired contemporary writers to make a more direct link between the psyche of the characters and their social conditions than modernists. By doing that, they offer readers an outlook into the characters' experience by employing "multiple and split narrative strategies and perspectives" (Vickroy 2015: 3). Despite the fact that trauma is a phenomenon present since the inception of humanity, trauma literature is considered a contemporary genre, as it "demonstrates knowledge of psychological processes" and also includes "literary elements and figurative language reflecting the causes and consequences of traumatic reactions" (Ibid.).

The narrative strategies of postmodernist fiction are employed in other genres as well, and in turn, those genres affect postmodernist fiction. This is essentially the essence of postmodernism – fluidity of established borders, dismantling of the said borders, as well as skirting the edge of the representable, or unrepresentable, playing with the temporal sequence. And in turn, all of those are informed by the cultural circumstances which are mostly focused on trauma. Before we discuss the traumatic events in these novels and how they are represented, we first talk about the features which autobiographical and trauma fiction share first.

2.4.2.2 Autobiographical Fiction – Main Features and Thematic Parallels with Trauma Fiction

The etymological meaning of the word autobiography stems from three Greek words: *αὐτός* which means "self", *βίος* which means "life" and *γράφω* which means "to write"; taking into account these three words, the meaning of the word autobiography signifies "self life

writing" (Smith and Watson 2001: 1).[10] What characterizes an autobiographical text is the "identity between the author of the text, the narrator of the story, and the character that is being told about" (Missinne 2019b: 464). Autobiography is not formally determined as a genre by a set of "formal elements" but by a rhetorical setting in which a person "places herself or himself within testimonial contexts" (Gilmore 2023: 3). This absence of formal elements situates it within the practices of writing in postmodernism: testimonial contexts are reminiscent of trauma narratives. There is more on this in the following paragraphs.

First, a distinction has to be made between life writing, life narrative, and autobiography. Life writing is a general term for writing of "diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject", and such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or with explicit self-references to the writer (Smith and Watson 2001: 3). Life narrative[11] is a narrower term and it includes "many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography" (Ibid.). Autobiography as a term references "particular practice of life narrative that emerged in the Enlightenment and has become canonical in the West" (Ibid.). We should note that the meaning and the form of autobiographical writings have changed throughout time, and in particular with rising tendencies of postmodernism. Postmodernism invoked greater concern with depicting inner nature, "mental confusion, chaos", as well as contemplative aspects (Balaev 2012: 22). This indirectly contributed to the rise of authors who ached to portray their inner turmoil and instead of portrayal of the outward landscape, focused on the inner one.

Life narratives and fiction should not be confused, as a life narrative is not a novel, but a nonfictional rendition of a person's life. However, both life narratives and the novel, which we sometimes call fictional rendition, share features we ascribe to "fictional writing", such as plot, dialogue, setting, characterization (Smith and Watson 2001: 7). And there is also a tendency of blurring the lines between life narratives and narration when focalization is from the first-person (Ibid.). Another thing differentiating novels and autobiographical texts is

[10] This term was first used in a preface to a collection of poems written by an eighteenth-century working-class writer Ann Yearsley; however, most critics "still cite Robert Southey's anglicizing of the three Greek words in 1809 as the first use of the term in English" (Smith and Watson 2001: 2).

[11] Also, a distinction should be made between life narrative and biography, even though they both narrate lives. In biography, scholars of other people's lives "document and interpret those lives from a point of view external to the subject" and in life narratives people write about their own lives, be it in second- or third-person, offering simultaneously "externalized and internal points of view" (Smith and Watson 2001: 4/5). The aspect of time is also important when it comes to differentiating between biography and life narrative. For a biographer, "the death of the subject is not definitive", as it can be written during or after the death of the person who is the subject matter (Ibid. 5), whereas life narratives end with the author's life. They can only be published while the author is still alive or after their death.

"temporal distinction" as novels do not abide historical time – their narratives can be temporally located at any point in the past, present, or future, which is something the texts we chose for analysis do as well (Ibid. 9). Life narrators, on the other hand, have to "anchor their narratives in their own temporal, geographical, and cultural milieux" (Ibid. 9). The novels chosen for this dissertation are anchored in a certain temporal, geographical, and cultural context, in a similar vein to life narratives.

> Our working definition of autobiographical or life narrative, rather than specifying its rules as a genre or form, understands it as a historically situated practice of self-representation. In such texts, narrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory (Smith and Watson 2001: 14).

The connection of time and space is an important part of investigation of autobiographical texts. In autobiographical texts, authors make structural sense of their own past, and by engaging with time and space, we come to a conclusion that the autobiographical self "moves on the border between the past and the present; therefore, autobiographical texts will always enable conclusions pertaining to the time of their composition" (Fleig 2019: 413). Writers of autobiographical texts also reach certain conclusions about traumatic events, as in autobiographical texts "lacunae are formed, the experience is stored in fragments and is intrusively repeated through so-called triggers– swamping with unwanted memories, flashbacks, nightmares" (Holdenried 2019: 424). Sometimes autobiographical narratives are read as historical documents, in order to find evidence for the analysis of "historical movements or events or persons", and this point of view in a way equates autobiographical narrating and history writing (Smith and Watson 2001: 10). However, we cannot reduce life narratives to historical records, because even though they may contain "facts", they are not "factual history about a particular time, person, or event", as they offer "subjective 'truth' rather than 'fact'" (Ibid.).

Many questions are posed in autobiography, mostly by the authors themselves, maybe belatedly, maybe at the right time. This questioning goes well with "postmodernism's performance of questioning" (Ashely, Gilmore, and Peters 1994: 3). Initially written by "(mainly) white, presumably heterosexual, elite men", there has been an ongoing process of involving autobiographical writing in "the cultural production of a politics of identity", which maintains "identity hierarchies through its reproduction of class, sexuality, race, and gender as terms of 'difference' in a social field of power" (Ibid. 5). However, in recent appearance of autobiography and autobiographical fiction by women, we can see that disturbance of power

levels, which is something inherent in postmodernism. The voice is given to those who were previously denied it, and the power structure is disintegrating.

We need "acts of personal remembering" which are "fundamentally social and collective" (Smith and Watson 2001: 20). They cannot be divorced from the social context and community, and sometimes, they offer just enough information in order to paint a picture of a certain time or event which would have otherwise remained inaccessible. In life narratives which deal with some traumatic events, narrators struggle to find ways of telling about suffering that "defies language and understanding; they struggle to reassemble memories so dreadful they must be repressed for human beings to survive and function in life" (Ibid. 22). When it comes to such narratives, the problems stem from "recalling and recreating a past life" which requires organizing "the inescapable but often disabling force of memory and negotiating its fragmentary intrusions with increasing, if partial, understanding" (Ibid. 22).[12] However, it is precisely autobiographical writing which can help those who suffer from recurring memories of traumatic events. By speaking or writing about trauma, narrators find words to voice the previously unspeakable, a process which may be deemed cathartic (Ibid. 22). Also, the testimonial process which writers engage in by writing about trauma which happened to them sets in motion "a testimonial process similar in nature to the psychoanalytic process" which provides a way to overcome "the victims' entrapment in trauma repetition" (Felman and Laub 1992: 70).

Autobiography can also be considered a "historical source" in it that it allows the readers to "reach through the text to the factual context behind it" (Depkat 2019: 281). Such a perspective presumes that fact means "factual accuracy of the autobiographical narrative and its faithfulness to historical reality as it actually was" (Ibid.). Postmodernism contributes to this aspect in autobiography, due to its denial of referentiality, which challenges "the traditional notion of autobiography as a 'truthful' representation of the author's life", as, from a postmodern perspective, writing an "'objective' or 'authentic' account of one's life is pointless" (Thiemann 2019: 784). Autobiography is considered as an "interplay, a collision, between past and present", it serves the purpose of both revealing the present and recovering the past (Pascal 2016: 11). Another reason why we can consider autobiographies or

[12] The authors of the study invoke one slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* by Harriet A. Jacobs, which was published in 1861. During that time, supporters of the institution of slavery were trying their hardest to debunk the "authenticity of narratives about life in the slave system" (Smith and Watson 2001: 29). These narratives were accused of being "fictionalized", on the one hand, and on the other, abolitionists helped fugitive slaves rearrange their narratives and publish them (Ibid. 30).

autobiographical texts as historical sources is the fact that by analyzing them, we can notice narrative strategies as well as cultural contexts which create "coherence, linearity, and meaning from the actual incoherence of a lived life"; at the same time, the way these narratives are created offers a glimpse into the "social norms and expectations of a given time regarding acceptable lives and stories about them" (Depkat 2019: 284). Hence, the need to differentiate between fiction and fictitiousness in autobiographical writings arises:

> While 'fiction' is an aesthetic category that refers to the poetic dynamics of telling a *good story*, 'fictitiousness' means pure fiction – conscious fabrication and outright lies. Autobiographical fiction, therefore, remains tied to a notion of truth, although this *truth* cannot be objective truth but subjective truthfulness, to the service of which all fictionalization in autobiography is put. In the end, the debate about fact and fiction is one about which kinds of truth we can expect in autobiography (Depkat 2019: 284).

Until the 1960s, autobiographies were categorized as a form of "historiographical writing", as texts which convey true or "at least 'truthful'" reports of a person's life (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019: 1). Those life reports were primarily written by a person whose life they reported, so they were considered "'authentic' descriptions of what had really happened" (Ibid.). However, since the 1980s, there has been a shift in the approach regarding fiction in autobiographical writings, and it primarily started with the rising prominence of postmodernist writers, who involved more and more of fiction into autobiographical writings. In 1977, Serge Dubrovsky coined the term *autofiction*, a term he used to describe his book published that year, *Fils*. There is a general consensus among researchers that autofiction is caused by "the insufficiency of human memory" (Ibid. 2). There is no possibility that a person can recall all aspects of their life; and thus, a need for introducing fiction into life writing, or autobiographical writing, came into being.

Autofiction is the French term for autobiographical fiction, or "fictional narrative in the first-person mode" (Smith and Watson 2001: 186). There is a certain difficulty in placing a firm boundary between the notions of fiction and autobiography, as the reader approaches an autobiographical text with "the expectation that the protagonist is a person living in the experiential world, not a fictional character, and that the narrative will be a transparent, truthful view of that world" (Ibid.). However, by looking at the autofiction by Roland Barthes titled *Roland Barthes* (1975), we can see that there is no "definitive truth about the past self" which may be available (Ibid.). Some authors feel compelled to write a narrative which necessitates transferring their personal experience to "fictional characters in an invented situation and

impose on it a fictional outcome" (Pascal 2016: 165). In certain cases of autobiographical writings, there are parallels to be drawn between the author and the fictional characters; however, those parallels are inferred rather than blatantly obvious.

> The referential "real" assumed to be "outside" a text cannot be written; the subject is inescapably an unstable fiction; and the autobiography-fiction boundary remains illusory. While autobiographical storytelling employs fictional tactics and genres, however, autofiction uses textual markers that signal a deliberate, often ironic, interplay between the two modes (Smith and Watson 2001: 186).

Autofiction stands in the liminal position between autobiography, literature, as well as life. Serge Dubrovsky criticized the fact that autobiographies in the 1970s were only written by well-established personalities; however, the dismantling of established authorities regarding writing in postmodernism initiated appearance of autobiographical texts from minority groups, such as "illness narratives, coming-out narratives, narratives of migration and exile, trauma narratives, diaries and blogs, biographical entries on social media sites, graphic memoirs, witness narratives, and so on" (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019: 5). The difference between autobiography and fiction is that "an autobiographical text posits this identity between writer, narrator and protagonist" while in fictional works "we generally have to discern between the author and the narrator" (Missinne 2019a: 222). Narrative approaches in writing autobiography or autofiction are thus dedicated to constructing and representing the self of the author (Löschnigg 2019: 103).

> The term 'fictional autobiography' is used with different and confusing meanings, which often overlap with 'autobiographical novel' or 'autofiction'. In a restricted sense, a fictional autobiography is a narrative which simulates an autobiographical discourse without any suggestion of identity between the narrator/protagonist and the author of the book. It imitates the conventions of an autobiography. […] One could say that a fictional autobiography and an autobiographical novel are both novels, yet in the first case the autobiographical character of the text refers to the representational frame of it; the story recounts somebody's life and tells about the psychological, social and moral development of the protagonist. In the second case, the autobiographical aspect concerns the content of the story, which is to a larger or lesser degree referentially bound to the life of the author (Vandevoorde 2019: 603).

The paradox of autofiction is the fact that the text is both regarded as fictional and autobiographical, and it serves as a point of exploration regarding the question "where the boundary lies between novels and autobiographies, between fictionality and factuality" (Gronemann 2019: 241). We also draw this line in this dissertation, which is why we take into account autobiographical aspects of the authors and historical contexts in which they wrote

them. Autobiographical novel is when "the resemblances between author and protagonist are not explicitly indicated in the text and are merely presumed by the reader", this also leaves autobiographical writers with sufficient freedom to disguise the story of their life (Missinne 2019b: 467). The difference between autobiographical novels and autofiction is that autofiction is "a special kind of fictional narration in which the protagonist who bears the name of the author exists in an evidently fictional world" (Ibid. 468-469). An autobiographical novel is a sort of the opposite of fictional autobiography; in autobiographical novels, the author uses fictional form, or the novel, "by presenting a more or less autobiographical content" and in fictional autobiographies, the author "uses an autobiographical frame for the presentation of an invented story" (Ibid. 469). The difference also lies in focalization – in fictional autobiographies we get a first-person focalization, whereas in autobiographical novels, it is either first-person or third-person.

The rise of autobiography is related to trauma, and it became apparent in the 1990s. The boom in memoir centering on trauma in those years happened due to the fact that autobiography offered "the unity of identity across time, interpreting life in its totality", which was a great reorganizing opportunity for trauma narratives, primarily considered too fragmented or unrepresentable (Luckhurst 2008: 118). Memoir, even though it came into prominence long before autobiography, was not discarded, but came to be understood as "a lowlier form, an incomplete and fragmentary slice of a life, a hybrid of history and personal narrative, uncertainly locating experience between self and others" (Ibid.). The "trauma memoir" is even more distanced from what could be perceived as an autobiographical ideal, as its focus must be on "precisely that moment which escapes self-apprehension" (Ibid.). However, "the traumatic instant" cannot be experienced precisely, as trauma "both distends the subject and bursts the bounds of what constitutes 'experience'"; in some extreme cases, the trauma memoir centers on what "has been forgotten and only belatedly recovered: a life narrative in which the main interest lies in this very process of analeptic revision" (Ibid.). The trauma memoir "recounts a discordance, a circling around a shattering event, from which self-knowledge arrives late, if at all, and with an uncomfortable awareness of the frangibility of the self" (Ibid. 118/119). The goal is to reach a narrative in which "self-representation and the representation of trauma coincide" (Gilmore 2023: 143).

When it comes to talking about trauma, we always have to place it within a historical framework, as it "always exists within complicated histories that combine harm and pleasure,

along with less inflected dimensions of everyday life" (Gilmore 2023: 31). By placing personal history of trauma within a collective history, cultural memory must be revised as it possesses "'recovered' or 'repressed' memories" as well as "memories of minoritized trauma like racial and sexual violence" (Ibid. 31/32). The act of recollection always assumes incorporating intensity of "(the unprecedented, the unassimilable, if not the catastrophic) into lives and life narratives that allow them no room" (Ibid. 32). All the while, while constructing a story, there is an intermingling of the fictional and the verifiable. This intermingling creates a "threshold between fiction and autobiography, and an entry point for the text into a category that expands upon the generic limits of both" (Ibid. 126). Trauma entails disruption of "coherence, linearity and meaning" due to the omnipresence of suffering; however, the survivor still struggles to produce a narrative because, without a coherent self-narrative, "we are literally lost to ourselves and to others" (Jensen 2016: 14). Specific function of fictive, rather than literal form in post-traumatic narratives is that "it must be only in the realm of imagination that meaning can be ascribed to acts of violent emotional or physical incursion" (Ibid.). Autobiographical fiction offers a "form of reflection in the upside down epistemology of trauma, when the very nature of facts, figures, memories and meaning are in question" (Ibid.).

The genre of autobiography presupposes a "rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial contexts" (Gilmore 2023: 3). When it comes to representation of trauma, there is an (albeit disputable, as we have previously established) consensus that trauma is the unrepresentable, which in turn asserts 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" (Ibid. 6). But, concurrently, despite the impossibility of the language about trauma, language itself is what can help heal the survivor of trauma (Ibid. 6). The paradox of trauma in autobiography is that it aims to represent something which is essentially unrepresentable. The unrepresentability aspect is present in the involvement in a fate which "cannot be known, cannot be told" but can only be repeated - this is a therapeutic process of "constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of *re-externalizing the event"* (Felman and Laub 1992: 69). This re-externalization of the event occurs and takes effect merely when one is available to "articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside" (Ibid.). Fictionalized accounts of one's own life tend to be externalizations of trauma, and are therapeutic to an extent.

We need to explain why the novels, or fictional renditions of autobiographical texts, are useful not only when talking about life, but also about trauma. The key lies in the "narrative devices" – they help the author write about events which did not happen right in front of the protagonist, they have the freedom to hypothesize or explain events, to reveal the thoughts and motives of other characters, to offer descriptions of other characters, and shift in the temporal line of the events (Missinne 2019b: 466). These devices, which we refer to as strategies and techniques, help bridge the notion of unrepresentabilty, atemporality and recollection which can be found in all the types of fiction we have enumerated so far; the three novels we analyze are investigated against a backdrop of the theory reached when taking into account all that we have said so far. What we hope to accomplish is to prove that all of these novels represent trauma in their own specific way, but also that all of them are informed by practices shared between trauma, postmodernist, and autobiographical fiction. In essence, the novels we analyze in this dissertation attempt to dissect the fragmented narrative of a girl who knew nothing but pain and abuse in the realm where the wounding real-world and the snippets of her mental landscape intersect (in the case of *Blood and Guts in High School*); to investigate the oppressive force of patriarchy and the general confusion following the disastrous Second World War (in the case of *The Bell Jar*); and to open up the history of oppression and slavery (in the case of *Beloved*). The following section investigates narrative strategies and techniques, as well as approaches to talking about trauma, which are present in narratives about trauma and are in turn informed by practices in trauma, postmodernist, and autobiographical fiction.

2.4.2.3 Narrative Strategies and Techniques in Fiction Portraying Trauma

This section is dedicated to narrative strategies and techniques used for portraying trauma in fiction. We have already established the definition of traumatic events in one of the previous sections, and in this one we focus on how they are represented in literary works, that is, which narrative strategies and techniques are employed in order to translate traumatic events into words. We mention both traumatic events which happen in real life, as well as those we notice in literary renditions pertaining to different historical eras. The importance of literary renditions of traumatic events lies in the fact that they offer insights into the phenomenon of trauma by "allegorizing the therapeutic process of putting traumatic experience into words" (Vickroy 2015: 13). Literary works offer readers "facsimiles of the misuses of power that create the traumas and defended mentalities of survivors" while also highlighting "how humanity tries to evade the psychological consequences of objectifying individuals" (Ibid.). This process has

been facilitated by narrative theory, primarily in regards to trauma fiction, which involves "(d)eploying familiar literary elements" and thus constructs trauma experience through "prototypically imagined situations and symptoms, metaphorical dreams, and death imagery" (Ibid. 20). Narrative styles employed reproduce aspects of a traumatic experience, including "fragmentation of thoughts, a dissociative outlook, and decontextualized visualizations" (Ibid. 20).

> Narrative theory has produced methods to help readers look at the storytelling features and interpretative possibilities of trauma literature. These methods include showing how characters' cognitions, emotions, and behavior are shaped by wounding; how unrecognized memory and its effects emerge in the narrative; and the evidence of defenses that suggests characters' mental states (Vickroy 2015: 20).

This narrative theory has reorganized its methods during the rise of interest in portraying trauma in fiction, which coincides with postmodernism. In late-modern (or postmodern) American novels, we see a tendency of trauma representation employing the following narrative innovations, which convey a diversity of extreme emotional states:

> […] landscape imagery, temporal fissures, silence, or narrative omission including the withholding of graphic, visceral details. The text may exhibit a nonlinear plot or disruptive temporal sequences to emphasize mental confusion, chaos, or contemplation as a response to the experience. The strategy of narrative omission that produces a silence may create a "gap" in time, allowing the reader to imagine what might or could have happened to the protagonist, thereby complicating the value and effects of the experience (Balaev 2012: 22).

When it comes to narrative strategies serving the purpose of opening up the fictional character's mind to the reader, narrative theorists have enumerated "thought reports, social aspects of mind, focalizations" (Vickroy 2015: x). When we talk about narrative strategies, we have to emphasize the fact that they are wider than narrative techniques. We employ them as way of shaping the overall narrative, the story which would be linear, or fragmented; within them, we employ narrative techniques as practical ways in which the narrative is delivered, and these techniques serve the purpose of showing what is happening instead of telling outright. The goal of these narrative strategies and techniques is to "draw readers in" and allow them to develop "mental models of the characters and ascribe mental states and lived experience to the characters"; they also invoke readers' "perceptual and ethical frameworks", and suggest ways to "assess characters' behaviors in relation to these frameworks and to authors' rhetorical frameworks" (Ibid.). Some of these strategies and techniques are used in order to make aspects of fictional characters' minds available to readers which are not available otherwise. This

dissertation investigates specific types of narrative techniques or literary devices that are present in the novels and how they interact, bringing psychoanalytical investigation of the characters together with investigating aspects of postmodernist trauma fiction[13] in order to be able to read these novels as testimonies of trauma.

What narrative strategies (or narrative techniques) concerning representation of trauma in postmodernist trauma fiction try to divulge is "the question of perpetrator trauma and guilt; repetition and fragmented chronology; fragmented subjectivity, and its relationship with inscribed narration; further challenges to the insistence on sudden or punctual trauma; and a blurring of the lines between autobiography, history and fiction" (Gibbs 2014: 77). The narrative techniques trauma literature employs can be connected to postmodernist tendencies in writing. Some of the narrative techniques which are, we claim, common for both trauma and postmodernist fiction are "(b)ack-broke sentences", or "*invertebrate* sentences, rambling, apparently interminable, shape-shifting constructions" (McHale 2004: 155). Then, a narrative strategy which may also be present is "interweaving of different registers" which essentially produces the effect of "*heteroglossia*, plurality of discourses", the so called "*polyphony* of voices" (Ibid. 166). When traumatic events are portrayed in literary works, apart from the graphic details of their impact on the body (or the lack of description whatsoever, not making the event any less graphic), they are mostly described in terms of how they affect the survivor as they happen. Coping mechanisms of the survivors during and in the aftermath of the traumatic event are also explained, and the narrative pertaining to their thought processes on the physical assault is also present. Different traumatic events necessitate different approaches to narrating them, and sometimes there is a certain overlap in their descriptions. This mostly stems from the fact that what traumatic events have in common boils down to feelings which are overwhelming, and oftentimes difficult to pinpoint.

Literary renditions are thus necessary in order to provide an insight into human responses to stress, which is obvious through narrators' and protagonists' "words and their motivations by way of defensive coping strategies" (Vickroy 2015: 33). Those responses are the same responses which are identified by psychoanalysts and clinicians, and they portray human personality in terms of "characters' split selves, dissociations, constricted emotions, distrust of others, and reduced capacity to love" (Ibid.). Another common response to trauma

[13] After establishing the theoretical aspects of different types of fiction in the previous segments, we proceed to use the term postmodernist trauma fiction as an umbrella term covering the features of trauma, postmodernist, and autobiographical fiction, when referring to the novels we analyze in this dissertation.

both apparent in real-life individuals as well as in literary characters is “an uneasy relationship between past and present”, which is apparent in “repression, splitting of the self between past and present”, “silence about the past”, “feelings of alienation”, and “being haunted by the past” (Ibid. 24). This relationship between the past and the present can also be portrayed by alternating between talking about past events either by assuming narrative from the point of view of the younger version of the character which is contrasted with the mature version who belatedly “recognizes painful details” (Ibid. 43). Ruminations about the past may also be triggered by some similar events, personalities, and even words uttered by other characters.

In literary representations of certain traumatic events, for example, incest, child abuse, rape, the events are not explicitly stated as such, but they are rather inferred from the words and actions of the characters. They can be portrayed by, once again, using different focalizing points, and by following the characterization process through which the readers learn about the characters and their relationships. In some literary works, characters themselves are not aware of the wrongness of certain events, and this can be investigated through dialogues, flashbacks and memories, as well as characters’ thought processes. Sometimes, instead of naming a traumatic event outright, a narrative is created around it, and the circumstances preceding it or following it are described. Responses of the survivors are also a telltale sign of what happened, and their behavior and coping mechanisms are investigated and explained.

Literary representation of child abuse, for example, may take numerous forms, but the narrative strategy writers mostly rely on is focalization. If a writer approaches discussing this type of traumatic events, they may choose to do so by focusing on a certain focalizing perspective. If the story is told from a focalizing point of the abused child, the language may be limited depending on the child’s narrative abilities. Thus, it may involve confusion, sentences which convey the events surrounding the abuse without portraying the abuse in an explicit way. On the other hand, if the text is approached from the focalizing point of an omnipresent narrator, the abuse can be portrayed in visceral details. Whichever approach is chosen the point is to locate “the defensive mechanisms” by which a child survives abuse (Vickroy 2015: 179). This approach, of course, is not limited to solely portraying child abuse, but also other types of traumatic events.

Discussing sociological traumatic events, for example, either from a perspective of an individual or a community can be both a healing process as well as a process which defies forgetting, and thus prevents the horrible events from happening again. Approaches to

discussing such traumatic events may differ, and they depend on the narrative strategies and focalizing points the writers choose to approach the topic with. Writers may choose to focus on an individual and their story, or they may choose to weave a narrative stemming from numerous individuals affected by the same traumatic event. Difficulties which may arise when writing about sociological traumatic events are connected to recovering history, due to "faulty memory" and the "common propensity" to repress painful or unpleasant knowledge (Vickroy 2015: 39).

Responses to traumatic events also include belatedness and amnesia. They are just some of the symptoms of, for example, PTSD, and they can be represented through certain narrative strategies and techniques. They involve "fragmented narratives characterised by analepses; digressions, diversions and prevarications in narrative trajectory; and dispersal or fragmenting of narrating personae" (Gibbs 2014: 17). Now, we undertake the task of providing explanations regarding some of the most common narrative strategies and techniques we may encounter when reading postmodernist trauma fiction.

2.4.2.3.1 Repetition

The most recognizable narrative strategy, which can also function as a narrative technique, in postmodernist trauma fiction is repetition, one of the "retardatory devices" in storytelling (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 499). It "mimics the effects of trauma" due to its suggestion of the "insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (Whitehead 2004: 86). Repetition is "inherently ambivalent", and it lies "suspended between trauma and catharsis"; the negative aspect of repetition is when it replays the past as if it were present, and when it remains "caught within trauma's paralyzing influence" (Ibid.). When repetition is employed, "a single past episode is narrated more than once", and in this repeating narrative, characters are affected by an episodic appearance instead of a whole memory, which is usually too horrible to bear (Gibbs 2014: 54). This repeating narrative is a telltale sign of a trauma text, and it also assumes the process of a psychoanalytic approach, or the talking cure. Repetition may consist of "reiteration of almost identical scenes that nevertheless contradict each other without the reader being able to evaluate the reality of any version" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 499). The ensuing paradox in traumatic recollection is that despite the fact that its re-enactments are "disturbingly literal and precise", they remain "largely unavailable to conscious recall and control" (Whitehead 2004: 140). Another paradox is the omnipresence of traumatic events in nightmares and flashbacks, but at the same time

"amnesia" (Ibid.). Herein lies the key paradox of the knowledge of trauma; one of its elements is the traumatic event, "registered rather than experienced", and the other is "a kind of memory of the event", which takes the form of "a perpetual troping of it by the split or dissociated psyche" (Ibid. 162). Thus, the employment of repetition in a narrative can serve to illustrate how the survivor lives in the grip of trauma, and "unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments" (Felman and Laub 1992: 69). In that way, we do not only get reminders of past trauma, but we as readers experience constant reminders of the unescapable presence of trauma and its repetition.

2.4.2.3.2 Focalization

Another extremely important narrative strategy is focalization, or the "constant alternating between first- and third-person (or, respectively, autodiegetic and heterodiegetic) narrating voice" (Gibbs 2014: 79). Alan Palmer in *Fictional Minds* discusses focalization (previously known as the "point of view") and characterization. He claims that the reading of texts is influenced by readers' "pre-existing cultural and literary stereotypes" (2004: 2). Reading fiction means being offered a "presentation of fictional mental functioning" (Ibid. 5). Focalization essentially offers "various means of regulating, selecting, and channeling" information in the narrative, in particular how events are seen from "somebody's point of view, no matter how subjective or fallible this point of view might turn out to be" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 173). While reading these novels, we are essentially allowed an entry into the minds of the protagonists, their innermost thoughts and feelings. However, focalization is the one which allows us mediated or unmediated access to those memories and feelings. Depending on it, we either get direct access to the thoughts, from a first-person focalization, or third-person focalization when we have a narrator who conveys the mental functioning of protagonists. The workings of fictional minds are available via "characters' actions" (Palmer 2004: 11). The narrative also regulates available information by choosing "a particular perspective" which may range from "an omniscient point of view" to "the limited focalization of a character" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 322).

Focalization is essentially "the perspective, angle of vision, or point of view from which events are related" (Palmer 2004: 48). We use focalization in order to explore in minute details the methods used by narrators when introducing a character's mind and thought processes. Palmer invokes Gerard Genette's typology of focalization:

> *zero focalization* occurs in the traditional novel of the omniscient narrator where the events are not focalized through a single character but are clearly focalized through the narrator; *internal focalization* occurs when the events are, in general, focalized through a single character or characters in turn; and *external focalization* occurs when descriptions are limited to characters' external behavior (in what is called behaviorist narrative) (1980, 189–90) (2004: 48).

Third-person focalization sounds more confident than the first-person because "gaps in our awareness of ourselves can affect our perceptions of our behavior" (Palmer 2004: 125). First-person focalization is mostly limited by a character's personality, their recollection of a traumatic event, as well as their ability, or lack of one, to talk about it. Fundamentally, focalization is a matter of "creating and managing windows into the narrative world" as well as regulating, guiding, and manipulating "readers' imaginary perception" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 175). Different narrative windows offer different perspectives, and allow readers to construct a story, understand characters, and also ascribe certain personality traits to those characters. Focalization is thus seen as a "foundational process both in storytelling and in story-understanding", as a "secondary filter restricting the representation of already existing narrative facts" (Ibid.). And thus focalization either eases the grasping of the story, or makes the process difficult, because different focalizations mean different disclosure or obstruction of things and thoughts.

2.4.2.3.3 Thought Report

Thought report is, in a nutshell, "the presentation of characters' thoughts in the narrator's discourse" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 603). It is the most versatile approach to narrative, as it is suitable for presenting "all areas of the mind, including inner speech" (Ibid.). Some thought reports provide an insight into the "narrator's positive linking role in presenting character's social engaged mental functioning" (Palmer 2004: 16). Thought reports are usually described as character focalization, but it is actually the narrator "who sees what the character is seeing (or not seeing)"; narrators report mental processes "the character is not aware of, or only dimly aware of" (Ibid. 51). One of the most useful ways of thought reports is an approach toward "narrators' presentations of the whole mind that focuses on both states of mind and inner speech and that acknowledges the indispensable" (Ibid. 76). Functions of thought reports are the following, and they can represent, among other things:

> - a variety of mental events including inner speech, perceptions, sensations, *emotions, visual images, memories, imaginings, attention, mood, visions, and dreams […];

- a character's thoughts as mental action (for example: 'She decided to walk');
- the mental causal network behind behaviour which includes motives, intentions, and reasons for *action […];
- what the character does not know about his or her mental functioning and sometimes does not wish to know (for example: 'Jane would not admit to herself that she looked rather dumpy'), a technique which is particularly significant in the context of motives and intentions;
- latent states of mind such as attitudes, judgments, evaluations, beliefs, skills, knowledge, character traits, tendencies of thought, intellect, *desires, and the Freudian unconscious […];
- constructions of character in which thought report regularly shades imperceptibly into characterisation and the creation of personality, allowing the reader to link the present thoughts of the character with earlier judgments and hypotheses regarding that character and to predict the future course of the narrative (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 604).

The majority of these functions are used in order to "illustrate the ability of thought report to link the thought processes of individual characters to their environment" and consequently "demonstrate in very concrete and specific ways the social and active nature of thought as mental functioning" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 604). With the help of thought reports, narrators are able to offer a link between the character's mind and the way it operates in "social and physical" contexts (Ibid.).

2.4.2.3.4 Narrative Dissociation

Some of the narrative strategies expressing dissociation following traumatic events are "disjunction of time through the use of repetition and negation; imagistic scenes of violence that lack emotional description; syntactical subversion and rearrangement; atemporality; and doubled consciousness or point of view" (Balaev 2012: xvi). Certain novels use different narrative techniques in order to show that an extreme experience can "elicit a disruption in perception or a transformation of consciousness that illuminates the dynamics of memory and identity" (Ibid.). One of those strategies is narrative dissociation:

> Dissociation in the narrative, or narrative dissociation, defines the literary representation of an altered state of consciousness that disrupts and reorients a character's perceptions (Balaev 2012: xvi).

Narrative dissociation is similar to stream of consciousness, however, it differs in a sense that stream of consciousness is "a special mode of narration that undertakes to capture the full spectrum of the *continuous flow* of a character's mental process" and in this sense "perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations (Abrams 180, italics mine)" (Balaev 2012: xvii). Narrative

dissociation is a type of stream of consciousness, and what the two share is an attempt to "express how the mind works and the relation between internal and external realities" (Ibid.). But narrative dissociation differs in that it emphasizes the "difference rather than sameness of thoughts and perceptions", and instead of a "continuous flow or association of thoughts" we have "a cacophony of feelings and perceptions that produces a disjunction, which is often portrayed as a doubling" (Ibid.). This process of doubling occurs when the traumatic past is contrasted with the present in order to "portray the character's emotional struggle", and it can also offer an "alternate reality or point of view" which is simultaneous with the reality that is happening, all in order to exhibit "the character's imaginative effort to remove himself from the present moment of harm" (Ibid.). In its essence, narrative dissociation aims to use the process of doubling in order to show the process of feeling becoming "dis-associated rather than associated"; and the result is depicting emotional experiences not only in terms of "the physical environment, but also in relation to particular landscapes and communities" (Ibid.).

2.4.2.3.5 (A)Temporal Ordering / (Non-)Linear Narrative

Temporal ordering is usually perceived in the relationship and articulation between "events in the story (fabula)" and "their arrangement in the discourse (sjuzhet)" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 591). In certain cases, particularly in postmodernist trauma fiction as we will show in the following sections, the chronological order in which events happen does not coincide with the chronological order in which they are narrated. In such cases, readers reconstitute "chronological sequence in which events supposedly occurred" (Ibid.):

> These anachronies (Genette's term) or chronological deviations may be divided into three broad types: analepsis, prolepsis, and co-occurrence (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 591).

It is important to dissect these anachronies and place them in order of occurrence in the readers' minds in order to come to an understanding regarding the ways events transpired. It is also necessary to position certain events in relation to others, and to "assess the significance of that positioning as regards choices of perspective, turning points of plot, narratorial priorities, aesthetic effects, and differences between expectation and realization" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 591). Atemporal ordering usually coincides with non-linear narrative. These narrative techniques are employed in order to show "the multiple sites of tension that arise within the protagonist and highlight the personal and cultural spheres of action that inform the emotional experience" (Balaev 2012: xvi). In certain cases, interruptive or nonlinear narrative is employed in order to convey "(t)he lack of cohesion and the disturbance of previous

formulations of self and reality" (Ibid.). In particular, "a temporally disjointed narrative highlights the struggle of the protagonist to identify the meaning and purpose of an experience" (Ibid.).

The difference between the order of the storytelling and the chronology of the events in the story has to be underlined. The order of the storytelling is not chronological because "time past repeatedly overwhelms time present" (Vickroy 2015: 104). In the cases of trauma narratives, in which trauma is debilitatingly felt, there is "no linear progression but rather a sense that the past catches up to and destroys the present and future", and it does that by replaying the events in characters' minds, or, in the case of repetitive narration (which is connected to the earlier established concept of repetition), "the effects of obsessive and repetitive replaying of particularly harrowing moments and feelings that become part of the characters' personalities" are created (Ibid.).

Analepsis is a literary device in a narrative, also called a *literary flashback*, which entails a "narrative reversion to previous events" (Dupriez 1991: 189). This is present in all three novels discussed in this dissertation, and critics usually refer to it as a temporally non-linear plot. Analepsis signals "the retrospective evocation of an event" and it may differ based on its placement: "internal", if it is within the main narrative, "external", if it is pre-narrative; it can also be "mixed or overlapping" when it is either prior or it continues into the main narrative (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 591). It can also take two main forms: "homodiegetic" when it creates "a jump in time along sequences of events involving the same character and within the same plotline" as well as "heterodiegetic" in which case it "jumps to a different plotline" (Ibid.).

2.4.2.3.6 Gapping

In terms of detailing the accounts surrounding an event in a narrative, certain events cannot be narrated completely, and there are certain gaps in the text which render readers unable to interpret the narrative, as they do not possess sufficient information. When there is an occurrence of a "gappy text", readers assume "a variety of cognitive abilities in combination with a large amount of linguistic, social, and cultural information", in order to mentally overcome the gaps in narrative knowledge and complete "perceived patterns, making sense of them in context" (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 193). Fundamentally, reading a narrative is a "dynamic set of mental processes" where past information is "continually related to current understanding and hypotheses about future information", and thus gaps in the text are filled

(Ibid. 485). These gaps are seen as ellipsis, or "an omission of information which readers can normally compensate for by inferences" (Ibid. 383).

> Gaps in the discourse leave gaps in the narrative world; some of these gaps are judged less important by "*narrators and/or readers — Sternberg's (1985) 'blanks', Prince's 'unnarratable'— than others […]. Sternberg distinguishes between permanent gaps in the discourse (which create permanent gaps — an obvious source of indeterminacy — in the narrative world) and temporary gaps in the discourse, which affect readers' (re)construction of the narrative world during the process of reading, first at the point in the telling/ reading at which the omitted data occur and then again at the later point where the omitted data are revealed (Sternberg 1978) (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 241).

Gapping, as well as other narrative strategies, is usually combined with other approaches to narrative structure. For example, even though the narrator of the fictional account is "responsible for determining what is withheld and what sequence of information is given in", it is usually the focalizer's perspective which controls how much information is available to be told and how; due to the fact that the focalizer is the character whose "perceptions and conceptions about the narrative world" the readers have insight into (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 241). In such cases when the readers employ their mental processes in order to understand a text, we talk about concretization, or the "mental process of filling a text's gaps, also referred to as blanks, lacunae, indeterminacies" (Ibid. 82).

All the narrative strategies and techniques we have mentioned have been chosen due to their relevance for the creation of trauma fiction. The point is to identify how "a narrator is being presented to readers" as well as how "the narrator's characteristics are related to trauma" (Vickroy 2015: 35). Apart from portraying trauma and commenting on strategies which facilitate the process of filling in the gaps in narrative knowledge, these strategies and techniques help in order to investigate how novels provide "social commentary or ethical insights" that are measured "against the protagonists' perspectives" (Ibid.). However, we do not claim that the novels we analyze in this dissertation offer social commentary per se, or ethical insights, but rather that by reading the characters' thought reports, or reading the narrators insight into their lives, we are able to construct an idea about what kind of conditions they are living in, as well as the societal circumstances surrounding them. We can also infer autobiographical aspects about the authors themselves, or aspects of their society they choose to represent. The next section is dedicated to analyzing the three novels – *Blood and Guts in High School, The Bell Jar,* and *Beloved* within the presented theoretical framework.

3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TRAUMA NARRATIVES - INTRODUCTION

The following section is dedicated to providing textual and theoretical evidence in order to support our claim that *Blood and Guts in High School*, *The Bell Jar*, and *Beloved* possess traits of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical or autofiction; essentially, we aim to provide evidence that the three novels exhibit genre instability stemming from the blending of the elements of the three previously mentioned genres, which further stems from the fact that the authors attempt to narratively portray trauma, and its unpredictable, fragmented quality, which in the traditional understanding of the concept of trauma is deemed unrepresentable. We have decided, for the purposes of this dissertation, namely practical ones, to refer to this blending using the term *postmodernist trauma fiction*. We further aim to explore how that genre instability is portrayed and the unrepresentable quality of trauma is bridged by investigating narrative representation of traumatic events and responses to traumatic events in these novels.

With the enlisted aims in mind, we separate the following analytical segment in three sections, each of which is dedicated to individual novels. Regarding the structural outline of these individual sections, we start with brief introductions regarding the novels, followed with introductions which outline the most significant aspects of the authors' biographies, their relevance in literary circles, as well as the main topics they tackled in their works. Following this, we offer a summary of the plots of these novels in terms of their most important themes. Then, we contextualize the novels – by offering historical and temporal contexts of the plots, we make parallels with time periods and geographic locations they were situated as well as written in, and comment on the importance of those contexts for the narrative portrayal of trauma. Then, we turn to the novels themselves, and explain how and why they can be regarded as postmodernist trauma fiction, which is the term we ascribed to these novels and which encompasses their possessing the traits of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical or autofiction; in this section, we investigate which of the traits of these genres the novels possess. The final two sections in each of the sections pertaining to individual novels are dedicated to dissecting the ways narrative deals with representation of traumatic events and responses to traumatic events, respectively. We attempt to follow traumatic events and responses to traumatic events as listed in the theoretical part, and we investigate which of them are present in the novels, and their narrative representation. These postmodernist trauma fiction novels tell a story of trauma and mirror its effects, which is obvious in the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression exhibited in these narratives, as well as dissociation,

both narrative and physical. Narrating traumatic events is facilitated through the use of narrative strategies and techniques, which help explore the depths of mental wounds, probe the extent of healing, and provide the skeleton of the story on which the tissue, muscles, and skin in the shape of words explaining trauma can be attached.

Our analysis will attempt to show that trauma is not located in a single event; rather, we will use Geoffrey Hartman's advice and clear away the textual inferences, as the wound is "occulted by literary devices that must be cleared away as if they were defensive structures" (Hartman 2003: 267). And that is important because traumatic events possess "temporality, its double and redoubled blow" (Ibid.). Apart from the "trigger event" which may occur long after "the originative event" there are also "retroactive shocks" which complicate "any monocausal picture of that 'first happening'" (Ibid.). The sense that "trauma demarcates time" and produces "a breach in its homogenous course" induces a "*myth of temporal location*" which is a "haunting idea that there was one irremediable event, or one discovery, which turned – over-turned – the mind" (Ibid. 267/268). Essentially, the traumatic event does not happen only once, it comes in flashbacks (retroactive shocks) and thus this temporality adds to the elusive nature of pinpointing the exactness of trauma.

In this section, we combine both the understanding of the traditional model of trauma and the pluralistic model of trauma. According to the traditional model, as already established, in order to bring a traumatic event closer to understanding, there is a need for abreaction, the emotional release experienced after re-experiencing a traumatic event (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 1) through "narrative recall" (Balaev 2012: 6). However, in order to bridge the unrepresentability of traumatic memories, we employ the pluralistic model of trauma, which involves using narrative strategies and techniques which mimic the effects of trauma (Whitehead 2004: 3), in particular, in order to help us encompass the "broken or fragmented quality of testimonial narratives" which comes with the "inherent latency of trauma" (Ibid. 7). The aim is to investigate the collaborative nature of narrative strategies and techniques in representation of trauma. We start with Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*.

3.1 *BLOOD AND GUTS IN HIGH SCHOOL* BY KATHY ACKER

Kathy Acker's transgressive and fearless approach to breaching literary taboos and representing content usually avoided by authors is most prominent in her novel *Blood and Guts in High School*. While it rose Acker to prominence, at the same time it solidified her notorious reputation of an author who adamantly refuses to avoid even the grittiest aspects of trauma impact. The existing body of analysis regarding Acker's oeuvre predominantly focuses on postmodernist tendencies in her writing, feminist concerns she attempted to address by writing about female characters and their struggles in a capitalist society, as well as transgressions apparent in her writing which employs the *avant-garde* while bearing notions of sensationalism – shock value instead of literary aestheticism. In our discussion, we do address postmodernist features of her writing, and we focus on one specific female character, but our approach differs in that it investigates features of her writing as a notion of *representing trauma*. We read *Blood and Guts in High School* as a body of trauma text, a life testimony informed with postmodernist features of writing narratives, as well as autobiographical instances which are apparent in the novel. We claim that the novel is an exemplary postmodernist trauma fiction, and the entire analysis in the following sections is supposed to provide us with an understanding of how trauma is narrated, that is, how it is narratively represented, what aspects of postmodernist and autobiographical instances are employed, and how they facilitate or enable the representation of trauma. Acker's writing in the novel shifts between the unrepresentable and representable, it conveys the insecurity and fragmentation stemming from the traumatic impact, and it oscillates between straightforwardness and inability to verbally pinpoint the exact traumatic moment which evades understanding. The novel thus fluctuates between genres, the same way its portrayal of trauma fluctuates between understanding and obscurity. Before analyzing the novel and its portrayal of trauma, however, we offer contextual information regarding Kathy Acker, primarily relating to her unique writing style, the themes she explored, as well as literary and societal influences which helped shape her oeuvre.

3.1.1 INTRODUCTION – KATHY ACKER, AN "*AVANT-GARDE*" WRITER

Kathy Acker (1947-1997) remains one of the most obscure as well as one of the most prominent postmodernist American writers and playwrights, whose belated recognition was initiated by retrospectively analyzing her oeuvre against postmodernist background. Her literary legacy includes nine novels, a few novellas, essays, as well as poems, and her works primarily tackle themes of childhood trauma, female sexuality, rebellion, and transgression of

boundaries, societal as well as personal. Writing in the 1970s and the 1980s, marked by the presidency of Jimmy Carter (from 1977 to 1981) and Ronald Reagan (from 1981 to 1989), she predominantly focused on "breaking apart the apparently stable subject constructed by the rational, paternal rhetoric of conservatism"; thus her writing exudes "contradiction among the utterances of authority", and it also aims to "challenge rationalism, the reigning logic of capitalism" (Pitchford 2002: 17). Her writing is an attempt at dismantling those structures which surround rationalism, conservatism, and capitalism, and illuminate the difficult truths hidden behind layers of apparent stability, which has to do both with the society she was writing in, as well as with the topics her works tackled, and we attempt to offer explanations as to how and why in the following paragraphs.

All of the aforementioned *isms* were prevalent during the 1980s in the United States, and the rise of the postmodernist approach to writing enabled Acker to both criticize and embody the individual overcome by the oppressive atmosphere which hindered personal authority and subjectivity. Her fiction is thus "aesthetically outrageous, unrepentantly political, and singularly offensive", and the repeating themes in her oeuvre revolve around scenes of "sadistic violence, rape, incest, masochistic pain, and sexual abjection of every sort" (Hawkins 2004: 637).[14] The themes in her works obey no boundaries, neither literary, nor moral, as she unapologetically represented all those aspects surrounding and shaping an individual's life which are difficult to portray, and even more difficult to come to terms with. In order to do so, she employed an *avant-garde* style of writing, which is imbued with literary experimentation, usage of plagiarism, intertextuality and "pornographic pastiche", all of which eventually rendered her rather notorious (Henke 2008: 91). A recurring theme in her novels is trauma, oftentimes visceral and impenitent, intended to rouse the readers from complacency. The notoriety she experienced while alive followed her even in death, and it is mostly related to the unwillingness of the general readership to embrace the fact that sometimes crude, cruel representation of trauma is the most apt way to draw attention to difficult subjects.

It is inevitable to connect the political context in which she wrote with the way her writing and the themes she dealt with developed. In a way, we can claim that her novels are a "political analysis", informed by "a national and international critique of late capital", and in

[14] Julia Kristeva defines the abject as "perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (Kristeva 1982: 15) Essentially, the abject disturbs identity and order, does not respect any boundaries or rules, and it is our reaction to the aspects of our existence which remind us of our fragility and boundaries between us and the other.

them she used "the distortions of family structure as a micromodel for the discursive and actual asymmetries within this larger political frame" (Hawkins 2004: 639). 1970s and 1980s faced decline in the belief of the protective power of a typical, nuclear family, which was the main stronghold for the upkeep of the morale in the aftermath of the Second World War. At the time when Acker was writing, the disturbances in the United States' political system stemming from the constant need to advance capitalism caused disturbances of the family structure as well. Rising feminist tendencies, punk culture, underground movements which oftentimes involved the usage of drugs, all influenced families, and that inherently caused distortions which in turn diminished the belief in families as sources of stability.

Acker's writing was influenced by radical movements in the last three decades of the twentieth century, in particular the women's liberation movement and punk culture; apart from them, French poststructuralism and postmodernism also influenced the *avant-garde* in her writing, obvious in her usage of "the vernacular and ethos of her punk subculture" (Henderson 2021, "Kathy Acker"). Thus, the myriad of innovations which these movements implied are apparent in Acker's writing, and render it innovative for the time in which she wrote, due to the extreme nature of the themes she conveyed in a manner which bears delineation of limitations imposed on narrative structures. She blended two modes, namely "(high and low culture)", which Fredric Jameson claims begin to "fold back into one another" in postmodernism (Jameson 1997: 152).[15] There is a deliberate attempt to destroy the boundaries between those two cultures, and allow elements of one to seep into another and create a fragmentary prose dissuaded of restrictions regarding considerations of high and low literature. This type of narrative allowed her to center the "punk girl" in her novels, which was a powerful way to "locate and focus on women's position" in the late capitalist society (Henderson 2021: 11).

> By the early 1970s America's imperial power, self-image and structure were troubled by internal and external forces — regardless of President Nixon's attempts to consign upheaval to "the sixties" (Carroll ix)— a destabilisation that continued throughout the 1970s via the war in Cambodia, the Watergate scandal, the OPEC oil embargo, the defeat in Vietnam, and the Iran Hostage crisis. As Chafe claims, "The 1970s thus became a period of transition— marked by confusion, frustration, and an overwhelming feeling that America had lost its direction" (412). […] A major part of this transition in the United States was the breakup of the postwar liberal consensus (Kaufman 25) and the attendant rise of the New Right as a political force, which mobilised evangelical Christians and a broader politics of

[15] We investigate these instances of the blending of these two cultures in Acker's novel in one of the following sections.

> resentment resulting from the perceived excesses of 1960s radicalism (Chafe 423–424) (Henderson 2021: 31).

Considering the fact that the political situation in the United States, as well as in the rest of the world was in transition during that period, both political and cultural, imbued with destabilization in all areas of society, it is no wonder that writers of the time attempted to find ways to incorporate that instability into their literary works. Oftentimes, that instability did not translate into political works, but rather into literary works which handled other themes which were nevertheless still informed by the entire cultural framework they were written in. Acker was no different, but what additionally contributed to the complexity of her work was the fact that not only did she incorporate the cultural instability into her writing, but also instances of her own life. She claimed that "her art rather than her life was central" and "the image she may have presented was an act, a mere textual representation" (Moran 2000: 137). However, it is rather difficult to separate her life from her art, as she did not only write texts, she also tried to re-inscribe herself through characters who bear uncanny similarities to her own, rather traumatic, life. A life marred with the knowledge of her mother's suicide, attempts at finding her position in a society through numerous jobs, abortions, and eventually cancer diagnosis, the condition she tried to treat with natural remedies. Her art is centered around her own life, in some ways directly, and in other ways it is inferred rather than obviously stated, and we will comment on it in one of the following sections. The main features of her novels assume "literary parody, assumed identities, self-confessed plagiarism and pseudonymous writing", and these features are used as her way of questioning the extent to which "individual authors are always the authoritative producers of texts" (Ibid. 140).

Another important notion regarding her works is blatant appropriation of her male predecessors, male writers who primarily introduced male characters. In her writing, subversion of "the patriarchal assumptions of the Western canon" is apparent (Moran 2000: 140). Her texts extensively borrow male characters from canon works (such as Don Quixote), and interpolate them in a new narrative setting, where clear boundaries are not assigned; the identities of her characters are never clear-cut, they traverse the boundaries between sex, time, and personality traits. She rejected stability not only in terms of creating her characters, but also regarding the narrative built around them. In her writing, she rejected "almost all the conventional means" by which readers of her work can follow a text; she did that by not respecting conventional narrative structures, plot, and, as was mentioned, identities of her

characters (Moran 2000: 141). This pastiche[16] in Acker's writing creates a blend of borrowed styles, appropriated characters and plots, while at the same time it subverts the existing canon of predominantly male literature, and, in that subversion, opens pathways for a creation of a fragmented narrative surrounding female characters. Jameson claims that pastiche is a "blank parody", a product of "a now global culture" which allows for the imitation of "dead styles" and a speech masked through the voices "stored up in the imaginary museum" of the past (Jameson 1997: 17/18). Essentially, we can claim that Acker used various discursive practices or "dead styles" (Ibid. 18) which did not belong to the traditional concept of creating a narrative in order to create a possibility of "a feminine subject capable of resisting patriarchal power, however temporarily" (Hawkins 2004: 640). If we adopt Acker's assertion that "any stable identity is illusory", we get a notion of a character who moves among different discursive practices, who assumes different gendered identities in order to assemble a semblance of existence; which is something that we encounter in trauma victims and trauma writing as well (Ibid.). Traumatized identities are constantly in the process of fluidity, borders are distorted, and stability is difficult to re-establish. Her act of postmodernist approach to writing is evocative of a traumatized person's narrative:

> The sheer aggressiveness of Acker's texts— their amplification of anger and pain— aims for a visceral impact on the reader to shock us out of any post-1960s complacency or withdrawal. Acker writes a deliberately stupid and antiliterary prose, her fragments roughly sutured together make a brutal, minimalist, and 'amateurish' novelistic form. Sordid motifs from high, mass, and everyday culture course through her narratives, while her punk girl heroines are hopelessly pathological, trapped in a schlock horror film. Collectively, these produce a form of writing ideal for a radical woman writer in the closing decades of the American twentieth century— the novel as a punk feminist assemblage, and a unique form of feminist experimentation— a feminist minor literature (Henderson 2021: 34).

The reason why the critics claim that her work was informed by her own life is the fact that, with variations, the narrative she followed in almost all of her plotlines is centered around a girl from a middle class family, whose mother is absent or dead, whose father or stepfather is utterly sadistic; she escapes this abusive environment only to find herself in a world of "prostitution, crime, and poverty", and eventually becomes a writer (Moran 2000: 144). We may claim that this is a master plot from which Acker borrows in order to create narratives which focus on different aspects of a character's life, but all of which inevitably deal with some version of trauma; most of these traumatic instances, however, are actually fictionalized aspects

[16] Fredric Jameson sees pastiche as "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" (Jameson 1997: 17).

of Acker's own life. In *Blood and Guts in High School*, the plot-line is also about a girl where the narrative centers (and breaks) around a girl named Janey, who is ten-years-old at the beginning of the novel, whose mother "had died when Janey was a year old", and who depends on her father for everything, regarding him as "boyfriend, brother, sister, money, amusement, and father" (Acker 2017: 7). Thus, *Blood and Guts in High School* is an amalgamation of literary experiments and plagiarized prose fragments, which in turn provides a "convincing simulacrum" of both "sexual trauma and obsessive-compulsive patterns" of post-traumatic repetition and fragmentation (Henke 2008: 92). In the following sections, we focus on analyzing *Blood and Guts in High School* against the theoretical framework of literary trauma studies that we have established in the previous sections, and investigate to what extent this novel possesses the traits of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, as well as autobiographical fiction, which may render it as a writing beyond genre. Before we delve into that, however, we focus on the plot of the novel, as well as political and cultural settings in which it was written and the way that setting mirrors the one in the novel itself.

3.1.2 *BLOOD AND GUTS IN HIGH SCHOOL* – THE PLOT

Blood and Guts in High School, written in the 1970s but published in 1984, marked Acker's position as a writer, both politically and structurally, and it was a starting point of her blatant and serious use of plagiarism, or rather, "a self-conscious appropriation of others' texts" (Hawkins 2004: 638). What is indicative of her plagiarism is her attempt to subsume others' texts into her own, and create a narrative that is outrageously provocative, but at the same time, offers both political and social commentary by juxtaposing borrowed textual fragments with her own stylistic interventions. Thus, her writing is "free-associative, deliberately "clumsy and slapdash", without any apparent effort to hide the fact that she was crudely borrowing fragments of others' narratives (Nicol 2009: 159). In that way, she was further fragmenting the already fragmented narrative, and *Blood and Guts in High School* is no different. The novel is an embodiment of a "postmodern inferno", one plagued with attempts at breaking through "dreams, drugs, incessant fucking, criminality" (Hawkins 2004: 638). Composed of three parts, *Inside high school, Outside high school,* and *A journey to the end of the night*, the story follows the protagonist of the novel, Janey Smith, a ten-year-old girl, who is in an incestuous relationship with her father, Johnny, who abandons her when he decides to start a relationship with another woman. Janey is thus pressured into leaving Merida, Mexico and moving to New York, where she finds herself entangled in a web of criminality, sexual deviancy, and utter loss as to how she should live her life. Her life in New York is marked by her entanglement with a

street gang, The Scorpions, her attempts at finding a stable job while working at a bakery, her rape, abortions, cancer diagnosis, and eventual death at the age of fourteen. All the while, she is constantly betrayed by the men she encounters, and eventually she is kidnapped and taken to Mister Linker, who is a Persian slave-trader, and who teaches her how to become a prostitute. Towards the end of the novel, Janey meets Jean Genet, and she weaves a semblance of a play about their meeting and subsequent friendship, as well as their trip to Tangiers. Despite this outline of a plot which seemingly follows a thread of events, the novel is anything but linear, and the events which happen to Janey happen with no apparent order, and her understanding and overcoming of them happens belatedly, if at all. This is all reminiscent of postmodernist trauma fiction, the traits of which we have established earlier, and we offer the reading of the novel as such; however, before that, the cultural and temporal setting of the novel, as well as the time it was written in, are outlined.

3.1.3 *BLOOD AND GUTS IN HIGH SCHOOL* – CONTEXTUALIZING THE NARRATIVE

As a narrative, *Blood and Guts in High School* may be situated in a historical void, as its main themes are rather timeless. However, the text itself grounds us and provides the readers with the cultural and temporal context. The readers are afforded certain specific contextual information, such as "President Carter is the pillar of American society" (Acker 2017: 119), which instantly positions the period in which Acker was writing the novel as the period from 1977 to 1981. In this semblance of a bildungsroman narrative, or a coming-of-age story, we can perceive the titular setting of high school as "a trope for America's psyche", its culture, and "national policy"; this is as much a setting in which traumatic events happen (Hawkins 2004: 643). Apparently passing mentions scattered throughout the narrative, when combined, allow us to locate the circumstances which situate the plot and guide it. We may even claim that *Blood and Guts in High School* is a palimpsest of the plethora of crises in the 1970s and 1980s – from neoliberalism, to gender wars initiated with the rise of second-wave feminism, and imperial violence.

As we have already established in the section *Literary Trauma Studies and the Contextual Relevance of Place*, without understanding the contexts which enabled trauma, there is no understanding of trauma itself. Whenever the fragmented narrative disorients the reader, Acker uses quasi-casual remarks to ground the narrative in a particular geographical location, that is, America:

> Once upon a time there was a materialistic society one of the results of this materialism was a 'sexual revolution'. Since the materialistic society had succeeded in separating sex from every possible feeling, all you girls can now go spread your legs as much as you want 'cause it's sooo easy to fuck it's sooo easy to be a robot it's sooo easy not to feel. Sex in America is S&M. This is the glorification of S&M and slavery and prison (Acker: 2017: 99).

This passage does not only serve the purpose of locating the narrative, but also criticizes America's growing capitalism and patriarchal oppression, comparing the societal situation of the time to sadism and masochism, as well as prison and slavery, drawing from the past harms which still linger in the society. In her choice of blatantly exposing these drawbacks of a self-proclaimed democratic society, Acker used the lucid moments in Janey's story to offer a fragment of a narrative which situates Janey within certain cultural practices which enable not only her, but also trauma of other women. This is evocative of Acker's distaste for both fascism and neoliberalism, as "political figures like Nixon, Reagan, and Thatcher are pilloried and parodied in almost every book", and one of the main endeavors in her fiction was to initiate discussion about "capitalism, colonialism, empowerment, and sex-positivity" (McBride 2022: xix/xx). Her sarcastic and scathing commentary, her creation of caricatures inspired by these political figures were actually her way of criticizing them. She pushed the boundaries of description to its utmost, attempting to use sarcastic comments in order to show her distaste and uproot the problematizing aspects of those who have unlimited political power.

We have already mentioned that the concept of a geographical location is extremely important when situating the narrative (in section 2.4.1.1), because, in the process of investigating the concept of place, we also situate human life "within larger machinations of meaning and action" (Balaev 2012: 120). For this reason, the character of Janey, an orphaned survivor of an incestuous relationship, has to be analyzed against the backdrop of a society which considers nuclear families, consisting of a father, a mother, and children, as one of the main pillars of a stable society and a stable family, and which does not particularly cater to the needs of those outside of the prescribed realm. Consequently, Janey is trying her best to survive in such a society:

> I didn't have enough food, so I started working in a hippy bakery.
> It was 1977.
> Working for money is the omnipresent fact of American life. […]
> I am nobody because I work. I have to pretend I like the customers and love giving them cookies no matter how they treat me (Acker 2017: 37).

This excerpt does not only provide us with a geographical location, but also with a specific year. It seems that Acker occasionally decided to frame the plot and specify a period in time. It is akin to stopping the current of a fragmented, dissociated narrative, and suddenly we have a picture, like a still or a close-up in a film, where Janey, now a Lousy Mindless Salesgirl, works because the situation in America requires people to do mindless jobs, but also to not make demands. This experience of suffering is intricately connected to the context of a culture that "ascribes different value to the experience", as well as to the individual's feelings regarding that experience (Balaev 2012: 17). Despite being only one representative, Janey stands for a whole generation of workers who had to endure torturous jobs and receive meager salaries, all because "working for money" is the fact of the state in America, a comment on consumerism and erasure of individuation, as Janey no longer has a name behind the counter, but merely becomes a Lousy Mindless Salesgirl. This moniker strips Janey of any semblance of identity, and positions her in line with other people from low social status who are merely considered as tools in the society's mechanisms, tools to attain more capital.

In the second part, Janey is outside of high school and she "becomes a woman" despite being barely a teenager, and we have a description of "*Slums of New York City*" where a "racially mixed group of people live", including welfare and lower-middle class "Puerto Ricans, mainly families, a few white students, a few white artists", and in the "nicer parts of the slums: Ukrainian and Polish families" (Acker 2017: 56). Acker painted the picture in the novel reminiscent of the New York slums in her time; poor people lived there and struggled, and in the novel one of the landlords "burned down his building so he could collect the insurance money", killing people who lived there in the process; in the end, he sold "the charred lot for lots of money to McDonald's, a multinational fast food concern" and this is "how poor people become transformed into hamburger meat" (Ibid.). This is a comment on the late twentieth century capitalism and consumerism; what mattered was the capital and it did not matter what had to be sacrificed in order to obtain it. The following quote portrays Janey's emotional state about the overall societal situation, about American society which she lives in, which is further understood as a "conceptual framework in which emotional responses occur" (Balaev 2012: xv):

> The society in which I'm living is totally fucked-up. I don't know what to do. I'm just one person and I'm not very good at anything. I don't want to live in hell my whole life. If I knew how this society got so fucked-up, if we all knew, maybe we'd have a way of destroying hell (Acker 2017: 66).

Such a society is something which is difficult to represent, as the general feeling these excerpts paint is the one of unease, where everything is hellish and utterly disorienting. However, merely using Janey to state that would probably not invoke as oppressive feeling as Acker intended. Which is why Acker relied on other ways to contextualize her narrative apart from the outright comments about the society as it was. And she did that by not only dissecting the society she wrote about, but also the bodies which bore the brunt of the surrounding politics.

As has already been mentioned, Acker's prose is extremely crude, and oftentimes pornographic, with drawings of phalluses and vulvas, as well as naked bodies of both men and women spanning across pages and interrupting the narrative which additionally contributes to painting the overall feeling of unease and unpredictability. Nicola Pitchford in her study *Tactical Readings – Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter*, claims that this was Acker's attempt at challenging the second-wave feminism of the time in which she wrote. She did that by appropriating pornography, which was her way of indirectly but blatantly commenting on the anti-pornography stance feminists at the time advocated for. Anti-pornography feminism rejected the existing regime of "sexual representation" entirely, as it saw it as "inherently masculine and therefore inimical to women's interest" (Pitchford 2002: 153). Due to a certain level of success of the women's movements in the 1970s America, there were attempts by "ever-voracious capitalism to expand and diversify" its "erotic commodities" by providing feminists with another way of "self-realization" (Ibid. 18). Subverting those predominantly masculine traits in sexual representation offered both a social commentary as well as a revision of the established ways of representing female sexuality. However, anti-pornography feminists asserted that regardless of who read these "explicit representations of female sexuality" it still led them to believe that porn was "always oppressive to women" (Ibid. 18). Those anti-pornography proponents could not see anything liberating or political in using this primarily masculine way of representation in the scope of female writers.

However, Acker opted for "recontextualizations of obscene images" which suggested "the varied political ends to which representations can be employed" (Pitchford 2002: 19). Instead of shying away from pornographic representation in her novels, Acker challenged and appropriated it in order to make a statement. She appropriated pornography in order to challenge the consensus that pornography provided "the ideal focus" as sexuality was the "primary site at which women enter representation", which oftentimes was a sole or entire aspect of women's identity represented (Ibid. 162). This was a troubling aspect of American

society and its culture, and because of Acker's attempt at subverting pornography and using it to show that sexuality was not a commodity, but rather something inherent in women as well, she managed to create a stronghold from which women may be regarded and understood in a different context. This is connected to an "essentialist moment in Acker's writing" in which she did not only use autobiographical elements, but also frequently represented acute "*bodily* desires" as "absolutely fundamental to her characters' social experience" in order to find "a language that can break free of existing codes to express those desires" (Ibid. 67). Her characters are in a society which attempts to show their body, and especially female body as something to be used and then discarded, as is apparent in the character of Janey and her treatment by the men she encounters. Thus, Acker's attempts to situate the body as a political site of pain, trauma, politics, displayed vulnerability and activism by not shying away from different representations. The importance of Acker's writing can be contributed to the fact that she applied patriarchal standards of the time, but while applying them, she subverted them and used them for illuminating the importance of female representation in the way which was previously regarded degrading for women and was used primarily by male authors. Which makes her choice to use pornographic elements both a political and a social commentary. In the next section, we dissect the ways in which *Blood and Guts in High School* can be read as postmodernist trauma fiction.

3.1.4 READING *BLOOD AND GUTS IN HIGH SCHOOL* AS POSTMODERNIST TRAUMA FICTION

As we have established in the *Trauma Fiction – Main Features* section, the main aspect of trauma fiction is its ability to invite the readers "to see over the edge" of their own lives in order to "cultivate an understanding of another" (Balaev 2012: xix). When we read trauma fiction, we read life testimonies of traumatized people, and we dissect the narrative in order to find textual evidence of the human experience which led to a traumatizing reality. Precisely for this reason, we can claim that *Blood and Guts in High School* is an exemplary trauma fiction – reading *Blood and Guts in High School* is akin to reading Janey's life, as the text mirrors Janey's experience in the span of her entire, albeit short, life. There have been numerous studies of *Blood and Guts in High School*, and most of them ascribe the disruption of linearity and the fragmentation of narrative to schizophrenic symptoms; however, apart from bearing the notions of postmodernist writing which are akin to a schizophrenic split and disruption of a narrative, we also claim that the text actually exhibits symptoms of trauma, that it is a "*traumatic* mode of discourse", which is replete with "manifestations of hyperarousal, intrusion, and

constriction" all of which define the traumatic experience (Zaikowski 2010: 204). We may also regard Acker as one of the pioneers of postmodernist trauma fiction in the United States, as very few novelists before her had so nakedly represented "psychological damage, abuse, and masochism"; she made trauma central in her writing long before the subject of trauma became a regular occurrence in fiction, or a subject of serious literary criticism (Mc Bride 2022: xviii). *Blood and Guts in High School* is thus a fruitful narrative where notions of trauma fiction and postmodernist fiction can be investigated, along with autofictional instances which Acker mercilessly weaved into the character of Janey, which we tackle later in this segment.

We are reading this testimony of Janey's life as a "discursive *practice*", in the words of Felman and Laub, in order to reach the truth behind her trauma (Felman and Laub 1992: 5). This discursive practice creates a narrative of Janey's life; Acker's usage of narrative strategies and certain approaches to writing a text, allows us to read *Blood and Guts in High School* as an act of "imaginative capability" of creating a story of a life which is usually afforded only by means of "one's own immediate physical involvement" (Ibid. 108). This is a hallmark of life narratives marked by trauma, and this discursive practice, indicative of postmodernist trauma fiction, is interspersed with textual breakdown, "instantaneous shifts in generic, compositional, and narrative points of view; interpolations of various texts" (Hawkins 2004: 644). The narrative is composed of texts appropriated from Nathaniel Hawthorne, Jean Genet, Erica Jong, excerpts from Janey's own diary, as well as her translation from Persian to English, explicit drawings, fragmented fairytales, rudimentary plays, angry, dissociated voices, crude poems – all of them converge and constitute pillars for the main narrative of Janey's life. This "pastiche structure" of the novel involves existing texts, and contributes to the "narrator's identity" which constantly shifts – "from male to female, omniscient to autobiographically confessional, literary to pornographic" (Pitchford 2002: 72). To reiterate what we already defined, pastiche is used in Acker's novel in order to imitate "dead styles" and in turn mask the traumatic speech of Janey through the voices "stored up in the imaginary museum" of the past (Jameson 1997: 17/18). This is the instance of postmodernist practices in writing which, as we have established, convey "fragmentation" in a narrative in order to come to terms with humiliating experiences or at least cope with them (Vickroy 2015: 5). Both identity and narrative are impacted by trauma, and their fragmentation needs to be investigated in order to find the source of trauma. Which is why, when reading the novel, we need to carefully interpret the repetitions, inputs from other texts, seemingly nonsensical sentences, in order to reach a semblance of a conclusion as to what exactly caused the trauma which narrative centers around.

Consistent with our earlier discussion, fragmentation of narrative and time which is indicative of trauma is obvious in the novel as the narrative begins in the present and "moves back toward ancient myth, dead languages, and unfamiliar alphabets" which are mentioned in the previous paragraphs (Hendin 2004: 72). The traumas Janey went through, such as an incestuous relationship with her father, abandonment, rapes, abortions, are all instances which are central in postmodernist trauma fiction. Its aim is to scatter traumatic instances throughout the text, and force readers to gather inferences as to what is the onset of trauma. The trauma is the one which is usually difficult to convey in traditional narratives, and the advantage of postmodernist trauma fiction is the fact that it gives voice to the marginalized, to the ones who are lost and disconnected, and it also offers a narrative structure which can bear the brunt of a traumatic experience, while at the same time not dulling its intensity. Janey is an example of such a character on the margins of existence in a society which disregards her and the likes of her:

> You exist in this darkness. Rebels. Creeps. Outcasts. Loners. People who hate everybody. People who feel uneasy around everybody. People who know everyone hates them. People who hate being tied down, restricted, constricted, and huge whirling snakes. The snakes climb around your neck and arms. The woman who's the mother of snakes takes you in.
> You feel very uneasy. You take a step. You don't know what to do cause there's nothing, 'cause there's not even nothing (Acker 2017: 55).

Reading the quote above while perceiving this "you" as directed to traumatized people conveys a feeling of isolation due to being traumatized. The people who have lived through trauma feel isolated, and they often interpret other people's behavior through the prism of their own experience, which is the uneasy feeling mentioned in the quote. The aftermath of trauma is the period of adjustment, a period when people try to find their bearing and take small steps towards stepping out of the darkness which is trauma. However, that is oftentimes hindered by the general feeling that they have nothing, that there is no place for them in this world, as they have been ostracized, left on the margins of existence. This marginalization is also apparent in one play within the novel, titled *In Egypt, the end*, where Mr Knockwurst (a plump, German sausage; other characters in this play have reductionist names, namely in terms of their phallic association – Mr Fuckface, Mr Blowjob), claims: "They're all Janeys. They're all perverts, transsexuals, criminals, and women. We'll have to think of a plan to exterminate them and get a new breed of workers" (Acker 2017: 136). Those earlier mentioned "rebels", "creeps", "outcasts" are marginalized people mentioned in this quote, and Janey is forcibly thrust into this category. Due to their being disregarded by the general population reduced to primarily

masculine traits, as is seen in the names above, the marginalized are essentially cannon fodder, an expendable part of American society, whose usefulness is waning, and thus they are stripped of any individuality, any purpose or value. Janey's existence is dissected, just like her body is in a disturbing part when Janey informs us of her utter annihilation by unknown men:

> Hotel men dressed in white and black come in and want to hurt me. They cut away parts of me. I call for the hotel head. He explains that my bedroom used to be the men's toilet. I understand.
> My cunt used to be a man's toilet (Acker 2017: 36).

This is a disturbing reminder that women must function "within a phallic economy" which may be "codified through different discursive systems", but in the end, the consequence is still female oppression (Hawkins 2004: 655). Janey even mentions the fact that the men "cut away" parts of her, which invokes an image of a female body being dissected by men for no other purpose but because they are able to, because they are the ones in power. People who are on the margins of a society are only regarded in terms of their usefulness for the maintenance of the societal order. They are essentially disempowered people "offered on the market both as bodies to be consumed and as easily targeted consumers" (Pitchford 2002: 71). Postmodernist trauma fiction provides a narrative structure for the generalization of this "commodification of identity"; histories of "oppression and ongoing struggles for self-representation get lost in postmodernist capital's reduction of all identity differences" (Ibid.). Acker's insistence on highlighting those aspects in the character of Janey, as the example of the utmost erasure of identity, is intricately connecting trauma with the general oppression in a society unequipped to handle the fragile victims of trauma.

Trauma fiction's goal is, among other things, to portray how instances of objectification have a traumatic effect on individuals, and how the effects of those traumatic experiences "warp or immobilize" characters emotionally (Vickroy 2015: xi). The way Janey is treated bears similarities to objectification, when she reduces a part of her body to an object. What is considered as trauma is a "violent intrusion" and a sense of "utter objectification" which serves to annihilate the person as a subject or agent (Lloyd 2000: 214). While doing so, she also objectifies herself, and we can see the effects of the patriarchal legacies in the American society and its practices. Objectification of people is so ingrained in Janey as she does not see any other model in her surroundings. Consequently, she objectifies herself, she sees herself through the perspective of others. And it is painful, as it is apparent in the narrative that she is feeling

betrayed and lost. The trauma of objectification and disregard is like an open wound, and frustration can be felt in the words:

> Your conception of who you are has always, at least partially, depended on how the people around you behaved towards you. You sense the people around you aren't right: what you did, your need, you weren't defying them to defy them, it was your need, was OK. You don't know. How can you know anything? How can you know anything? You begin to go crazy (Acker 2017: 67/68).

This quote shows that Janey has primarily regarded herself through the prism of others' behavior towards her. However, with the foreknowledge bestowed to us by reading about Janey and how she was completely disregarded by others, we have to mention that neglect plays a huge part in how the narrative is unravelling. One of the main points of trauma fiction is that it "underscores the role of neglect in prompting survivors' traumas" which in turn leads the survivor to "seeking and destroying different kinds of love" and as a consequence, "survivors are left without love or the recognition necessary to feel alive and needed" (Vickroy 2015: 132). In the case of lack of love in alternative sources, the narrator is left empty, in "a kind of emotional death" (Ibid.). Janey is thus an unreliable narrator, as it is evident from the text that her thoughts, behavior, and feelings are not easily understood. She cannot narrate them in a reliable way, because she is not certain about them. That instability translates to other parts of her narration, and the readers are forced to question everything Janey says, as her perspective is confounded and unreliable, and so is her narrative. Janey's narrative conveys her almost desperate search for love, but in all the wrong places. She wants to feel loved, and needed, because the initial refusal of her father to fulfil his role, and his abuse of Janey which she was not even aware of, being young as she was, leaves her stranded in a situation where she needs external acknowledgement. Janey dispassionately informs us that: "Daddy no longer loved me. That was it. I was desperate to find the love he had taken away from me" (Acker 2017: 31). When children experience emotional neglect, they become avoidant; if they "learn how to organize their behavior effectively under ordinary conditions", they still remain unable to "communicate or interpret emotional signals" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 186). Janey, however, can regulate neither her emotions nor her behavior. She concedes her desperate need for love, not provided by her father, and she attempts to find a semblance of emotional stability embodied in abusive men.

We have already underlined the importance of autobiographical aspects for Acker's novels, and this novel also contains some autobiographical elements, which is a trait we have

ascribed earlier to the blending of genres we termed postmodernist trauma fiction. Sometimes authors weave a narrative around personal experiences, but invent a situation, use fictional characters in order to create a fictional outcome (Pascal 2016: 165). Knowing the facts about Acker's life, regarding her family situation, her life which was defined by sex, drugs, and deviant behavior, we may claim that she used Janey as a foil in order to be able to create a narrative which would provide a context for traumatic instances in her own life. We do not possess explicit references to Acker herself, apart from what we already know about her life. But certain comments in the novel bear a need to make a parallel with her life. For example, when she writes:

> Writers create what they do out of their own frightful agony and blood and mushed-up guts and horrible mixed-up insides. The more they are in touch with their insides the better they create. […] don't get into the writer's personal life thinking if you like the books you'll like the writer. A writer's personal life is horrible and lonely. Writers are queer so keep away from them. […]
> for the criminals, the agony of being rejected
> and yet I will keep on being rejected, because I
> will live only by my dreams
> for those who being dreamers in this
> fucked-up society must be unhappy criminals,
>
> the lonely, the royal fuck (Acker 2017: 100).

Even though Nathaniel Hawthorne is referenced in this paragraph, we notice that there is a thin line between what are ascribed as his and what as Acker's own thoughts. Acker was quite vocal when it came to the act of writing, and for her, "(p)olitical, economic and moral forces are major determiners of meanings and values in a society" (Acker 1997: 4). She followed this by saying that when she wrote, or when she used words, she was "always taking part in the constructing of the political, economic, and moral community" in which her discourse was taking place (Ibid.). Her own thoughts, her own attitudes, are included in her writing, because otherwise, she would not be able to find her voice. Thus she invoked other writers, primarily male ones, because "Why did I have to find my own voice, and where was it? I hated my fathers."[17] In the novel, her own words are often interspersed with Janey's, so we are oftentimes confused as to who is actually talking. One of the paragraphs which interrupts the narrative, with words ascribed to Erica Jong says: "I WRITE BOOKS THAT TALK TO YOU ABOUT THE AGONY OF AMERICAN LIFE, HOW WE ALL SUFFER, THE GROWING PAIN THAT MORE AND MORE OF US ARE GOING TO FEEL" (Acker 2017: 125). This part

[17] Quote taken from Jason McBride's *Eat Your Mind* 2022: xvii.

sounds as if Acker was deliberately, or maybe subconsciously, trying to blur the lines between the words she ascribed to Erica Jong, Janey, and herself, to the point where the identity behind the "I" in the text is questioned. This is followed by an abrupt shift in focalization which centers around disoriented Janey: "'I is now she. She, Janey. Shit, Janey, shit. I'm glad someone's explaining President Carter to me. Why do I write this down?" (Acker 2017: 126). Acker's "recursive use of her real life", as well as "boundary-blurring" is a form of autofiction, as she used her personal life to "pattern her fiction" and explore "how identity is manufactured, distorted, and effaced" (McBride 2022: xx):

Martina Sciolino claims that Acker is "not an autobiographer but an autoplagiarist", as she took the phrase "'life story' literally – as a literary term" (1990: 440). There are repeated references in *Blood and Guts in High School* which bear disturbing resemblances to traumatic events in Acker's own life, such as "rape by the stepfather, suicide of the mother, work in a sex show" (Sciolino 1990: 440). As we have already established, narrators "selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling" (Smith and Watson 2001: 14). This is apparent in Acker's attempt to blend autobiographical inferences almost overtly into the text, and present them as something Janey herself went through. By doing that, a testimony of Janey's life is created, and traumatic instances of Acker's own life are also negotiated in order to reach a semblance of understanding (Ibid. 21). Janey has no mother from the onset of the novel, she is raped by not only her father, but other men as well. She also works as a prostitute. In *Blood and Guts in High School* we have something we can understand as an authorial comment: "If the author here lends her 'culture' to the amorous subject, in exchange the amorous subject affords her the innocence of its image-repertoire, indifferent to the proprieties of knowledge" (Acker 2017: 28). Lending "her culture" might refer to the disturbing aspects of Acker's life, primarily relating to "amorous" aspects of it; those aspects are blurred with the presumed "innocence" which stems from the fact that Acker merged her identity with a girl who is supposed to be innocent. However, their traumas intertwine, and thus this lending as well as exchange take place.

When it comes to autobiographical inferences in the text, they always "enable conclusions pertaining to the time of their composition", as well as to the author's life itself (Holdenried 2019: 413). This is an instance of something we mentioned when we talked about parallels between autobiographical and trauma fiction. Writing about trauma can be a healing process, and Acker probably used a fictional narrative to come to terms with some instances of

her life which she would not have forced herself to face otherwise. There is a thin line dividing Janey's and Acker's own life, and Acker's experience with abortions, and eventual cancer, which Janey also goes through, could have been an authorial intervention in order to offer a slice of life, an understanding of her experiences. A notion of Acker's prose is the constant act of dissembling, exaggerating, fabricating, mythologizing, shaping, and reshaping facts of her own life (McBride 2022: xx). Acker's own life was marred with traumas, its "unique twists and turns", but it also "illuminated certain general aspects of sexual politics", as well as "the tyranny of the nuclear family, the blind spots of culture, and the slipperiness of subjectivity" (Ibid. xxi). The act of writing could have been a cathartic process of facing traumas and overcoming them in the process. Trauma narratives are known for centering on experiences which were initially forgotten "and only belatedly recovered" (Luckhurst 2008: 118). *Blood and Guts in High School* could have been her way of reaching the truth about her own trauma. However, the outcome is not fictional – both Janey and Acker eventually died of cancer. In the next section, we look closely at how traumatic events are represented in the novel, and which narrative strategies and techniques are used in order to enable their representation.

3.1.4.1 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events and Responses to Traumatic Events in *Blood and Guts in High School* - Introduction

What complicates narration of traumatic events is that in their essence, they are considered unrepresentable, a remnant of the traditional understanding of trauma, as we have analyzed in the theoretical section. Traumatic events are scars in the psyche as well as on the body, and finding expressions which emulate even a portion of the pain they cause is an extremely difficult process. *Blood and Guts in High School* is imbued with traumatic instances, and majority of them are deemed unrepresentable, as the fact that they even happened in the first place is inconceivable. Nevertheless, traumatic events do occur, and what enables the readers to learn about them as well as responses to them in this particular narrative is the usage of narrative strategies and techniques employed in postmodernist trauma fiction, filtered through the character of Janey.

This filtering, or a window "into the narrative world" of Janey is done through multiple focalizing points (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 175). Shifting focalization is reminiscent of the instability in the aftermath of trauma, and combined with narrative dissociation, further fragmentation of words and thought processes is conveyed. Most of the key traumatic events in Janey's life are narrated in the third person, her perspective is only provided in forms of her

thoughts, as if Janey has no authorial say in describing the events in her own life. Acker also uses narrative dissociation and repetition in order to convey postmodernist, cyclical repetition of traumatic fragments. We gather inferences about Janey and her character through different focalizing points; however, those points of view are mostly stemming from her own disorganized psyche, or a stray voice from her subconsciousness which has somehow managed to break through in order to be heard. Janey is a girl who exhibits disturbing emotional maturity at some points, and is in some cases reduced to a babbling infant howling her pain and pleading for someone to love her. The narrative is presented in an atemporal manner, in a non-linear rendition of Janey's story, but is constantly interrupted with flashbacks, disembodied voices, and repetitions. Constant shifts between coherent sentences and crude remarks leave the readers baffled as to who is actually talking, whether it is Janey or some dissociated part of her. The entire narrative is unreliable, unpredictable, and it seems as if its main goal is to reach complete annihilation, as the serene landscapes overtake the narrative, and bring Janey to the end of her journey. We also have to emphasize once again that, without taking into account whether the narrative is told in first or third-person, the narrator in the novel is utterly unreliable.

The narrative and the way it is presented in this novel is utterly confounding, and it is rather difficult to separate specific narrative strategies which are employed for specific traumatic events or specific responses to traumatic events, as there is oftentimes more than one strategy employed and more than one traumatic event or response described at the same time. However, for the sake of this dissertation, we attempt to separate the representation of traumatic events in two subsections; mainly, the narrative representation of sociological traumatic events which enable physical traumatic events, and we deal with their narrative representation in the second section. The reason we decided against offering a section regarding the representation of psychological traumatic events is because it would be redundant; all traumatic events are in their essence psychological, as we have emphasized numerous times throughout this dissertation. As for the narrative representation of responses to traumatic events, we analyze the narrative representation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and dissociation. In the end, we offer concluding remarks on the sections dealing with narrative representation in *Blood and Guts in High School*.

3.1.4.1.1 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events in *Blood and Guts in High School*

3.1.4.1.1.1 Narrative Representation of Sociological Traumatic Events in *Blood and Guts in High School*

Our main endeavor in this section is to investigate how certain traumatic events are represented in *Blood and Guts in High School*, that is, how the narrative is shaped in order to represent them. We have decided to offer the representation of sociological traumatic events first, as they are the ones which create harmful contexts which in turn enable physical traumatic events. The first traumatic event we investigate is the instance of patriarchy, or rather patriarchal oppression as a traumatic event. As we have mentioned, we have three sections in the novel; *Inside* and *Outside of high school*, as well as *A journey to the end of the night*. In all three of these sections, we have one prominent male figure, which serves as a father figure for Janey. However, the term "father figure" should be taken tentatively. In the first section, we have the actual father, who abuses Janey by having an incestuous relationship with her. In the second, we have Mister Linker, a Persian slave trader. In the third, we have Jean Genet's presence embedded in the narrative. They are there as representatives of the repressive patriarchal society, who exert their masculine power in a domineering and harmful way, which further serves the purpose of physically or mentally shaping the trajectory of Janey's life. Even though Janey innocently wants a man to take care of her, all of the men she encounters, in particular these three, serve as tools of patriarchy, which betray and eventually traumatize Janey. Traumatic events centering around Janey's relationship with her father are analyzed in greater details in section 3.1.4.1.1.2, so in this section, we focus on the other two representatives of the patriarchal society.

The second representative of the patriarchal society, as we have mentioned above, is Mister Linker. We learn about him from an omniscient narrator, who informs us about the trajectory of Mister Linker's life up until that point. He was born "on the Iranian streets", escaped poverty, and entered "University to study with Carl Jung" (Acker 2017: 64). This omniscient narrator describes Mister Linker as a materialist, who also happens to be a lobotomist. He is highly educated and eloquent, he also quotes Shakespeare and in one particular instance, an excerpt from *Hamlet*. Having all of these characteristics in mind, we may claim that Mister Linker is an embodiment of the fulfilled American dream, that he went from rags to riches, but at the same time, he is also the embodiment of all the things which cause Janey trauma – patriarchy, capitalism, chauvinism. His presence in the narrative further

employs the traumatic instance of patriarchal influence which crosses races and societal positions, as well as further complicates the marginalization which comes from being a woman. His own wife "had been driven crazy and then locked up for life in a New York State Sanatorium", and after being freed of his wife, he added white slavery to "his lobotomy and summer resort operations" (Ibid. 65). Janey is taken as a white slave under Mister Linker's rule, lives in a locked room, and is taught how to become "a whore" (Ibid. 65). All of Mister Linker's businesses are lucrative, and he does not care what he uses in order to accumulate capital, even if it entails (ab)using women. This instance of reverse slavery under patriarchal rule by a non-white man is a criticism on behalf of Acker, as the ones in power mirror the behavior of the ones who oppressed them as soon as they assume the same position of power. Mister Linker is thus an embodiment of patriarchal values, the American dream, a lobotomist, all of the practices which are used to subdue and traumatize women. He even claims that "disease and mental instability cause health", as the men who have "taken the most extreme risks, who have done what may have disgusted other people or what other people have condemned are the men who have advanced our civilization" (Ibid. 64). From this quote we can infer that he is an apologist of all detrimental aspects of societal progression; the harmful consequences are necessary to achieve progress.

This advancement of civilization locks Janey in a room with nothing to do but wait for a Persian slave trader to teach her how to become "a whore". The narrative offers no detailed explanation about how Janey underwent this process, and the only insight into Janey's thoughts on the matter is offered in the following quote:

> How can I tell the difference between sanity and insanity? You think in a locked room there's sanity and insanity? Anyway I don't know if there are any children anymore. Maybe they went out of fashion (Acker 2017: 96).

This deliberate omission of the details about the process of "teaching" is an attempt at allowing the readers to fill in the narrative gap with their presumptions. Because it is implicitly understood that Janey underwent numerous bodily humiliations, that she was probably raped, violated, forced to do things she had no say in further illuminates the traumatic absence of implied activities. However, during the period spent in a locked cell, Janey teaches herself Persian and after that the narrative is too fragmented, as Janey both talks about her and Hester Prynne from *The Scarlet Letter*, converging their traumas, thoughts, and voices. It is the only repose she gets from the fact that she is "too bruised" and "too scared", as, at that point, "in *The Scarlet Letter* and in my life politics don't disappear but take place inside my body" (Acker

2017: 97). A narrative strategy which allows Acker to present this state of Janey's mind is narrative dissociation. Across the pages written about the time Janey spent in the locked cell, without the mention of the cell itself, "a cacophony of feelings and perceptions" is present, and it produces a "disjunction" portrayed as "doubling" used to both convey Janey's emotional struggle, and also an "imaginative effort" to remove herself from the present moment of harm (Balaev 2012: xvii). She both talks about herself and Hester when she says: "I'm locked in a room and I can't get out" (Acker 2017: 95). It seems that she cannot differentiate between herself and Hester, until pain strikes her and she is cruelly brought to the present moment: "My body aches and aches and I remember who I am" (Ibid. 98). Her captivity is "mediated by the composition of a 'book report'" on *The Scarlet Letter*, and by reinterpreting this American classic as "postmodern auto/biography", Acker reinstated Hester as "a mirror image of historical victimization" (Henke 2008: 101), thus drawing parallels between Janey's and Hester's abuse in the hands of men.

Another representative of the patriarchal values is, albeit unexpectedly, Jean Genet. In the novel, there are numerous instances which allude to the fact that Genet is a homosexual, so according to the textual references to marginalized people Janey identifies with, the readers would expect Genet to become someone Janey can rely on. However, by the end of the third section of the novel, these expectations are not met, and their relationship further consolidates Janey's traumatic encounters with other representatives of the oppressive patriarchal society. Her meeting Genet moves the narrative to Egypt, and *In Egypt, the end*, is written like a screenplay. We learn about their meeting from an excerpt from her diary during her time in Tangier. She sees him while she is sitting in a café with her friend. Their relationship is described in scenes which convey their conversations. The entirety of their relationship is interspersed with appearances of other representatives of the patriarchal society. At the very end of this play, Genet's presence is important because, despite knowing that Janey is going to die of cancer, he abandons her, merely handing "Janey some money" and telling her "to take care of herself. He has to go away to see a production of one of his plays. She dies" (Acker 2017: 140). Even at the very end of her life, she is abandoned by yet another man who she trusted. The gap left which surrounds two simple words "She dies" implies that despite the simplicity of that phrase, there is so much untold about her process of dying, about the pain she must have felt, the fear and uncertainty as she had to face death alone. This gap is evocative of the earlier consideration of trauma as unrepresentable, as something too horrible to be uttered, or transferred into words. A narrative that was imbued with various aspects of Janey, different

levels of maturity she exhibited, scraps of thoughts and emotions searing the pages with intensity are in the end non-existent. It is as if the pain of numerous prior abandonments, the fear of impending death, solitude which is now palpable, steal her voice and tear her words the way her life is torn from her abused body.

However, their relationship prior to his abandonment does instigate some further events, because in scene four, we have Janey who is in "*gaol in Alexandria for stealing two copies of* Funeral Rites *and hash from Genet*" (Acker 2017: 133). This act of stealing a novel might be an indirect comment on the fact that Acker herself was accused of stealing other people's works and inserting them in her own. In this scene, there are four judges, a Gaoler, and President Carter, the perfect example of postmodern pastiche which we have already mentioned. This pastiche is connected to the fact that she set the story in America and made parallels with the Puritan society Hester Prynne, the main character in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), as well as Nathaniel Hawthorne, the author, lived in. These parallels were used to show how the mentality of the American society had not changed since the time of the Puritans, and Janey's identification with Hester shows the disturbing reality – societal conditions, even two centuries later, still traumatize women. Acker's decision to incorporate *The Scarlet Letter* may be read as her attempt to comment more broadly on this tendency in American society. It also invokes another traumatizing aspect of history regarding the Salem's witch trials, which coincides with the period of Puritan America. In Janey's America, there are no witches, but the society is still "fucked up" and treats women as sub-human. The judges accuse Janey without asking her what her crime is, and their accusations are uncannily similar to patronizing remarks men say to women:

> **Judge 1**: You're a woman.
> **Judge 2:** You whine and snivel. You don't stand up for yourself. You act like you do totally to please other people. You're a piece of shit. You're not real.
> **Judge 3:** You're a whore a thief a liar a smelly fish a money dribbler an egotistic snob.
> **Judge 4**: You have every vice in the world.
> etc. (Acker 2017: 133).

We perceive these judges as representatives of the patriarchal society. To their chorus of voices, and to Janey's line "I have a right to be happy", President Carter adds his own comments about how women have no rights to be happy, how everything is lies, and how women should learn "to be proud of lies and materialism and hidings and discrepancies" (Acker 2017: 133). The Gaoler finishes this scene by saying "I love you, Janey, when I beat you up" (Ibid. 134). We

understand this line as if it is spoken by her actual father. This traumatic insertion of myriads of voices which are all male shows that Janey is not only tried for stealing, but also for being a woman. This is also reminiscent of the period of Puritan America, when women were accused of being witches without definite proof, as well as of *The Scarlet Letter*, when Hester was accused of adultery. In *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*, there is an explanation regarding the period of the seventeenth century, when "women's inherent wickedness" was emphasized (Reis 1997: 2). Accused women were "damned if they did and damned if they didn't"; if they confessed to "witchcraft charges", their admissions would be proof against them, and if they denied, "their very intractability, construed as the refusal to admit to sin more generally" would indelibly mark them as "sinners and hence allies of the devil" (Ibid. 5). Thus, the connotations around Salem convey the picture of a "metaphor for hysterical persecution, unfounded accusations, and confessions that have no reasonable explanations" (Ibid. 10). Centuries later, Janey is faced with the same predicament, when she is accused without being offered a chance to defend herself, when she has to confess to a crime while simultaneously being accused not of the crime, but of the fact of her female nature. President Carter's comment further contextualizes this trauma of being a woman in American society. We may claim that this is a traumatic repetition of sexist and derogatory tropes throughout the novel, which are now embodied in particular individuals from the patriarchal society. In Janey's disarrayed and traumatized state of mind, which further fragments as the narrative progresses, the main causes or instigators of her trauma take different shapes. That is a case of the recursive nature of trauma, which returns in unexpected ways, and when the survivors least expect it.

Despite Janey's attempt to move from the site of trauma, first her childhood home, then America, she cannot move away from the trauma itself, as it is imbedded deeply into her psyche, as well as in the men surrounding her. Dissociated voices that reappear in the narrative are embodied in characters in a play, and in *Scene three*, we have a few characters who talk to Janey, or rather, spew insults about women:

> **Sahih**: All she does is weep, Mr Knockwurst. You should get rid of her. We might be animals, but at least we know to keep our feelings locked in us. Women are worse than animals, Mr Knockwurst. They don't understand what's happening as we do.
> **Janey**: For 2000 years you've had the nerve to tell women who we are. We use your words; we eat your food. Every way we get money has to be a crime. We are plagiarists, liars, and criminals.

> **Sahih**: I know what's discontenting her, Mr Knockwurst. It's always the same thing with women. She's living with that rebellious homosexual and she's horny.
> […]
> **Janey**: I don't have anywhere to sleep. I have to work as hard as possible so I can get enough fame then money to get away from here so I can become alive.
> **Boss**: Tell them to shut up. Women are not allowed to talk.
> **Sahih** (*to Janey*): You have to understand that you're stupid. And you'll never be able to make enough money to get away by working.
> **Boss**: Unless she spreads her legs (Acker 2017: 132).[18]

Janey is there as a representative of all American women, a broken girl who tries to put her trauma into words. However, the representatives of patriarchy heed her no mind. Rather, they speak over her, utterly ignore her pleas, and the only time they talk directly to her is when they describe her as stupid. They compare women to animals, something similar in a quote we analyzed earlier. When the ones who are regarded as authority in a society disregard the lives of minorities, they inherently cause them trauma. To force someone to remain silent, to reduce them to bodily needs and basic functions, is not only discriminatory, but also directly annihilating. As a result, Janey feels as if she is mute, as she tries to voice her discontent, but it is utterly ignored and misunderstood. Janey's silence is a result of harmful tendencies in oppressive societies which force victims to internalize the blame and remain silent, as they are left with a belief that their pain has no relevance for the society in general (Tal 1996: 124). Her silence is indicative of a narrative strategy which is supposed to show her emotional suffering and confusion (Balaev 2012: 60). They twist her words and allege that the only reason she is rebelling is that she is "horny' despite Janey's desperate explanation that she is trying her best only to survive. Janey rages about injustice, identifies herself with the outlaws, with those outside of the accepted societal circles, probably because of her own societal status. She is aware of the fact that they are disregarded and treated as something that should be forgotten. And the representatives of the society which discriminate against them tell them to "shut up and stay nonexistent and don't act like the freak you are"; if they do, "maybe in two years we'll notice you and tell you our neurotic problems 'cause we have lots of neurotic problems, but don't ever expect to be invited to one of our parties" (Acker 2017: 95). They advise her to "stay

[18] It is interesting that Acker named one of the characters, and the only one who directly talks to her, albeit in a derogatory way, Sahih. In earlier parts of the novel, Janey learns Persian or Farsi by scribbling words and translating them in her diary. Sahih is one of the Persian characters, but his name originates from Arabic word صحيح, which means "authentic" or "correct". Here Acker's intertextual tendencies come forward; by giving a Persian character an Arabic name, which is also reminiscent of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, a collection of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, she indirectly references postcolonial imbalances in power.

nonexistent" because by voicing her discontent, she reminds them of the fact of her life, and they do not want to be reminded of the fact that she even exists.

A recurrent concept present in the narrative is the notion of slavery, which we have mentioned in one of the paragraphs above when we discussed Mister Linker. In segments dispersed throughout the novel, Janey refers to herself as a slave, despite being white. This notion of slavery is intricately connected to the domineering patriarchal influence surrounding Janey. She states "Women aren't just slaves. They are whatever their men want them to be. They are made, created by men. They are nothing without men" (Acker 2017: 130). Janey is making a generalized statement about the state of affairs in her country. The oppressive patriarchal society makes and remakes women to their own liking. She even reiterates their harmful rhetoric by saying that women are "nothing" without men. Janey further specifies this situation and narrows down narrative perspective by writing "Janey's slave poem" (Ibid. 111), where she questions her existence, and enumerates her duties as a slave. In particular, she talks about "(b)ody slavery" and "(m)ind slavery", which she regards as "networks" that "become history and culture (if they work) and as such, turn against me and take away time and space. They tell me what to do" (Ibid. 111). The choice of words implies structures which are so interconnected that in turn they infiltrate both the individual's mind and body, rendering them unable to feel any sort of agency, which is intricately connected to the postulates of slavery. Janey attempts to voice her discontent, by saying: "I don't want to be a slave, I don't want to be a whore, I don't want to be lonely and without love for the rest of my long life. I've got to find out how I got so fucked up" (Ibid. 69). However, her own voice is not enough, so she merges with the heroine of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester, and through interconnected focalization widens the perspective of being a slave to the level of a whole society:

> The government, the big multinational businessmen, the scholars and teachers, and the cops are the people who maintain the roads. The scientists, philosophers, and artists are the people who build the roads. Everyone's a slave (Acker 2017: 94).

By focusing on the traumatized body, the novel conveys the fact that the bodies of the subjects in the texts "too take on varied meanings across space and time and inflect the meanings of other experiences" (Pitchford 2002: 51). Acker subsumed the experiences of being traumatized, enslaved, delineating the borders between time and space, as well as different female bodies who went through similar experiences. By doing so, she encapsulated Janey's experience of living in the twentieth century America, of living in the clutches of the domineering patriarchal society which transports their harmful rhetoric and constricting practices through decades of

oppression and submission. Janey embodies the painful rhetoric, which gives her no repose from the pain, and in the end, she is not saved. The entire society suffers due to the situation which is conveyed as a simple statement – "Everyone's a slave". Acker refused to separate art and politics in her writing (Ibid. 78). By placing fragments of "'high' culture next to 'low' culture scraps" she succeeded in showing how "remarkably *similar* they are", and thus, she achieved in showing that "the discourses of exploitation" transcend the boundaries of time (Ibid. 78). In the next section we focus on the narrative representation of physical traumatic events, which are enabled by the sociological traumatic events we have analyzed in this section.

3.1.4.1.1.2 Narrative Representation of Physical Traumatic Events in *Blood and Guts in High School*

One of the physical traumatic events which has most detrimentally impacted Janey's life is the incestuous relationship with her father. Incest is intricately connected to the notion of childhood abuse, as it mostly occurs when children are extremely young, defenseless, and utterly unable to differentiate between right and wrong in their relationship with their parents – it is necessary for them to grow up and then, by belatedly remembering their childhood, understand the instances of that relationship and how it shaped them into the type of people they became. Incest has marked Janey since her earliest childhood, as with her mother absent, her father could completely control the way their relationship would develop. There is not enough textual evidence in the novel about the earlier stages of Janey's childhood abuse, apart from a summary of her life up to the moment the narrative starts. Thus, we claim that Janey has been traumatized since her earliest childhood by her father, who eventually tried "to get rid of Janey" so he could spend time with another woman (Acker 2017: 7). This is stated matter-of-factly, in third-person, which further provides more insight into their incestuous relationship.

It seems that his decision to abandon Janey triggered something in her, as there is usually a trigger which initiates a narrative about trauma. Thus, this fear of abandonment on behalf of her abusive father, even though she does not use such an adjective when describing him, triggers an array of traumatic memories and traumatized narrative, which enumerates traumatic events in Janey's life. It also initiates Janey's retrospective analysis of their relationship, and we become aware that this relationship does not only traumatize her mind, but also her body, as a dispassionate voice informs us that Janey "fucks him even though it hurts her like hell 'cause of her Pelvic Inflammatory Disease" (Acker 2017: 10). Incest is a

misnomer, as it implies "mutuality", and a better term would be "father rape" (Brownmiller 1975: 281). Susan Brownmiller claims that father rape is not "the universal or uncompromising taboo" as fervently claimed by psychologists and anthropologists, as the taboo against father rape is superseded by an older taboo, namely, that "the absolute dictatorship of father rule" is not to be disturbed by any outside interference (Ibid.). This father rule is the underlying assumption in regards to the oppressive patriarchal control, which does not exhibit its power only on the surface level of societal relations, but which has infiltrated homes and provided fathers with leverage when it comes to interpersonal relationships. Janey's father is the patriarch in the house, and his life, his mood, his whims are all the things Janey has to be aware of and respect. However, it does not include mutual understanding, as Janey's father abuses her and grooms her into an obedient daughter and a sex object, who he can take advantage of and discard at his preference. In this instance, it is important to re-emphasize how traumatic events are interconnected, how the nature of their origin is never one-dimensional, but rather multicausal.

Due to such circumstances marking the onset of her life, Janey yearns for love; however, her yearning is futile – love constantly eludes her. Without it, she experiences emotional death due to the fact that she is neither loved nor needed, but rather used and discarded at the convenience of men she entrusts herself at. She says:

> 'One of the most destructive forces in the world is love. For the following reason: The world is a conglomeration of objects, no, of events and the approaching of events towards objects, therefore of becoming stases static stagnant, of all that is unreal. You get in the world, you get your daily life your routine doesn't matter if you're rich poor legal illegal, you begin to believe what doesn't change is real, and love comes along and shows all these unchangeable for ever fixtures to be flimsy paper bits. Love can tear anything to shreds (Acker 2017: 124/125)

The only semblance of love Janey has ever known has been misplaced, misunderstood, and as a result, became destructive and traumatizing. The previous quote embodies her traumatic experience of being deprived of love her entire life. We read this excerpt, and the entire narrative as well, with the foreknowledge that Janey was abused as a child by the person who was supposed to be her main supporter, provider of safety and understanding. Referred to as "non-accidental trauma", child abuse is "intentional infliction of pain, injury or humiliation on a child" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 185). The fact that her father abandons her after annihilating her personality formation, further renders her unable to properly understand love and both its ruinous and healing aspects. For her, love is traumatizing, destructive, and

agonizing. In a poem which interrupts the main narrative, there is a stanza: “if you had loved me I could have gotten one more day” (Acker 2017: 113). This “you” may refer to her father, but also to anyone she has ever encountered who granted her nothing more than pain. Her entire narrative is marred with the traumatic experience of denied love, non-existent affection, and the ensuing pain.

When describing the impact of childhood abuse and incest on Janey and her narrative, we reiterate the dual nature of their origin. Apart from terming childhood abuse and incest as physical traumatic events, we also investigate how they invade and shape Janey’s mind, and later responses and behavior. In particular, one psychological traumatic event they imply is abandonment. Every single traumatic event possesses this dual nature, as it affects the psyche and the body as well. However, in this particular instance when Janey is abandoned by her father for another woman, a father who is supposed to take care of her and support her, puts a permanent scar on Janey’s psyche and inevitably determines how her life is going to develop, as well as how she is going to respond to events in her life, as we explore in the section dedicated to the representation of responses to traumatic events (sections 3.1.4.1.2.1 and 3.1.4.1.2.2). Janey’s thoughts about her and her father’s relationship betray confusion and a depressive state, as well as a fear of abandonment; this fear, and the ensuing feelings surrounding that fear are a direct impact on Janey’s psyche as a first-person narrator introduces us to the summary of their conversation prior to their separation:

> Once we were safe inside our kitchen, we rehashed all the times he had wanted to be close to me and I had refused; all the times I had driven him away when he loved me; all the times he had rejected my timid advances of sex, and all the times I had cut him dead, I had told him I would never care about him; how the slightest rejection from me or affair had made him turn away from me and seek someone else; how I reacted to his hurting me so badly by looking for someone more stable; how hurt causes increasing hurt; how our mutual fantasy that he adored me and I was just hanging on to him for the money actually concealed the reality that he had stuck to me all these years cause I didn't ask too much of him, especially emotionally. In this way a fantasy reveals reality: *Reality* is just the underlying fantasy, a fantasy that reveals need. I have an unlimited need of him. I explained all my lousy characteristics: my irritability, my bossiness, my ambition in the world, my PRIDE (Acker 2017: 20).

Despite the fact that being a parent should naturally come with love, protection, both emotional and financial stability, this conversation between Janey and her father, or rather, a summary of all the things which happened between them resembles a dysfunctional relationship between a formerly love-struck pair, and in no way does it bear any resemblance to a conversation which

should transpire between a father and his daughter. What is inferred is that Janey is accused of clinging to her father for different kinds of support, as well as of rejecting his sexual advances. However, the greatest fear which is implied is that of abandonment, as she outright says: "I have an unlimited need of him" in the quote above. This disturbing excerpt paints Janey as a dependent person, and the one who is to blame for the downfall of their relationship, because "the slightest rejection from me or affair had made him turn away from me and seek someone else" (Acker 2017: 20). Expressions she uses implicitly show that she has been brainwashed into accepting her non-existent blame.

This initial physical traumatic event which affected Janey's body as well as her mind determined the other physical encounters with men in her life. There was no one to talk to Janey about dangers of unprotected sexual encounters, such as sexually transmitted diseases (and PID was sexually transmitted to her by her father initially), or unwanted pregnancy. However, the underlying assumption is that it is too early for Janey to know about that, as she has not entered puberty yet – she is still a child. As a consequence, the first time she slept with someone other than her father, she got pregnant. Being a child herself, she does not even consider a notion of becoming a mother, but decides to go through the ordeal of abortion. She is extremely lucid when she narrates the abortion. She recalls lines of women of different ages, who had to sign a form, at the end of which it stated that "she gave the doctor the right to do whatever he wanted and if she ended up dead, it wasn't his fault" (Acker 2017: 32). Abortion is a risky procedure, and the fact that the doctors are renouncing accountability of potentially harming their patients should be a warning sing. But Janey, in a polyphonic voice which merges her own words with that of other women in line for abortion, dispassionately remarks: "We had given ourselves up to men before" (Ibid.). This further contends that there is no aspect of women's lives which has not been influenced by men, and that women, even as young as Janey, are aware of it. Then the process of abortion is given from a polyphonic perspective:

> My factory line was ushered into a pale green room. In the large white room fifty more girls started to sign forms and give up their one-hundred ninety stolen, begged-for, and borrowed dollars. […]
> It's all up to you girls. You have to be strong. Shape up. You're a modern woman. These are the days of post-women's liberation. Well, what are you going to do? You've grown up by now and you have to take care of yourself. No one's going to help you. You're the only one.
> Well, I couldn't help it, I just LOVE to fuck, he was SO cute, it was worth it.
> We girls knew everything there was to know without having to say a word and we knew we had put ourselves here and we were all in this together.

> An abortion is a simple procedure. It is almost painless. Even if it isn't painless, it takes only five minutes. If you MUST have it, weak, stupid things that you are, we can put you to sleep (Acker 2017: 32).

The girls and women who are waiting for an abortion are described as a "factory line", stripping them of any identity and conveying them as faceless bodies, without a comment about why they want to get an abortion. The price is clearly stated as "one-hundred ninety" dollars, but the women who are there are of no defined age, race; the only thing about them worth conveying is the collective fault they have accepted, because it states "we knew we had put ourselves here". This "post-women's liberation" probably refers to second-wave feminism. A reproachful tone underlines the words in this paragraph. Reading between the lines, the implication is that women are to blame for asking for emancipation, and now they must suffer the consequences. They are told that "they're grown up now", and the connotation of this phrase seems to be that they should not expect help, but rely on themselves. However, what should be implied by this accusatory disembodied voice is that pregnancy entails men as well, but they are not mentioned here. Women are the ones who have to undergo this painful procedure, and they have to "shape up". What is also not told here is how Janey feels, what her thoughts are – that gap is covered with the shared fear and confusion. In this case, these gaps, or ellipsis, are a deliberate "omission of information" due to the traumatic notion of what is happening (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 383). It seems that the inevitable trauma of abortion, the forceful intrusion into her body which is going to happen silences Janey, and she identifies with other women going through this ordeal.

In this "grotesque representation of surgical abortion" the female body becomes an instrument, "a blank page inscribed with seminal outpourings that colonize the womb/territory and implant a seed that must be violently uprooted" (Henke 2008: 101). In turn, any unwanted traces of this coupling are erased "in an act of physical violence which simulates the medicalization of torture" (Ibid.). This is yet another instance which traumatizes Janey, as she has no control over what is happening to her body. She merely has to concede it as a fact and let traumatic intrusion happen. She is bereft of agency, and her questions are left unanswered:

> They strapped my ankles and wrists to this black slab. When I asked the huge blonde anaesthesia nurse if there was any chance I'd react badly to the anaesthesia, she told the other huge blonde nurse I was a health food freak. After that I didn't ask them anything and I did exactly what they told me (Acker 2017: 33).

The only reference to the aftermath of the procedure present before the narrative jumps to a different topic is "Blood was coming out between my legs" (Acker 2017: 33). No explanation

is offered as to why she is bleeding; whether it is because the abortion was successful, or whether it is because it was not, and the hemorrhaging is a side effect. The gaps in the narrative are the gaps in Janey's mind as traumatic events are too pressing and too real to allow the person to gain a proper understanding in the immediate aftermath. This gapping method is another narrative strategy used to leave readers in the dark as to what exactly happened. Or perhaps, it is left out because it was too painful to voice it. The traumatic instance of abortion leaves her bloodied, empty and in pain, stranded in a dark space of her thoughts and fears. As we have repeated numerous times, the extreme nature of a traumatic event poses a narrative problem, but the authorial choices of Acker allow us to infer unsaid aspects of the experience. The choice to render Janey mute about her experience is another way that unrepresentability can be bridged and narrated in a way. Instead of Janey's words, we have silence. Instead of the detailed description of the procedure, we have blood as the only mentioned consequence. This plunges readers into the traumatic event itself, as the decision to not put it into exact words is a decision regarding the ability to invoke the feeling of unpredictability of a traumatic event, even when Janey is about to commit to it willingly. Rather, the fragmented nature of describing the event urges the readers to gather textual evidence and compile a glimmer of comprehension. That does not render it any less traumatic, and disembodied narrative with gaps and silences mirrors Janey's body which is mutilated by a surgical intervention and muted with the effects of anesthesia.

Interrupting the narrative, Janey addresses the readers directly and tells them that describing her abortions "is the only real way" she can tell about "pain and fear", as her "unstoppable drive for sexual love" made her know pain and fear (Acker 2017: 34). We can infer from this that her perception of love is skewed – she says "sexual love" instead of "love", which implies that she considers sexual encounters as the only ways she can feel a fragment of fondness she yearns for. In a rare lucid moment in her narrative, she remembers her second abortion which happened two months after her first, and in a composed, dispassionate way, describes a difference between "menstrual extraction" and "abortion", explaining that he man who performed the second abortion on her was not a "certified" doctor (Ibid.). Following her abortion, she suffers from another Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, but when she goes to see the same doctor, he said "it wasn't his fault", and that he had never heard of Janey (Ibid. 35). She is denied care, and that leaves both her body and mind traumatized.

Before the final part of the novel, there is a short segment titled *Cancer*. This segment is the shortest and the most coherent one in the second part of the novel, at least in terms of proper punctuation. Janey is described from the perspective of a third-person narrator as a trailblazer in her family, and in particular as the first one to have cancer. In this segment, it is stated that Janey has finally proven herself and shown her skills in terms of knowing how to "make impotent men hard, give blow and rim jobs, tease […] make a man feel secure, desirable, and wild" (Acker 2017: 116). But it is at that moment that the Persian slave trader discovers Janey has cancer and abandons her despite her urgent pleas. Yet again, Janey is bereft and alone; she has to come to terms with a fact that she has cancer, and also that she has no one to talk to about it. Thus, the thought process conveys how she feels:

> Having cancer is like having a baby. If you're a woman and you can't have a baby 'cause you're starving poor or 'cause no man wants anything to do with you or 'cause you're lonely and miserable and frightened and totally insane, you might as well get cancer. You can feel your lump, and you nurse, knowing it will always get bigger. It eats you, and, gradually, you learn, as all good mothers learn, to love yourself.
> Janey was learning to love herself. Everything was shooting out of her body like an orgasming volcano. All the pain and misery she had been feeling, crime and terror on the streets had come out. She was no longer totally impotent and passive about her lousy situation. Now she could do something about the pain in the world: she could die (Acker 2017: 116).

Cancer is a bodily trauma which is unpredictable, as there is no way one can control its appearance or not; according to Acker who also experienced cancer, it is your own body betraying you, leaving you only with hope that the time will be patient with you, that you have another month, another year, before death claims you. It is unpredictable and cruel, and people who get diagnosed with cancer are left wondering if there was something they could have done in order to prevent it. Janey is betrayed by her own body the way she has been betrayed by others her entire life. Up until that moment, her body has been abused by others; she has been raped, impregnated, beaten, gone through abortions, used in order to satisfy men's diabolical desires. However, the fact that her own body turns itself against her is completely unpredictable, as it is not something she expected – physical trauma has always been inflicted on her from the outside. Now her body is the onset, a poisoned core which reminds her that her time is running out. Cancer diagnosis is traumatic in its unpredictability, as the future "is no longer a tale to be written but instead may seem more like a rapidly unfolding nightmare" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 278). Janey fantasizes about dying, but realizes that "there's no need to kill yourself if you've got cancer" (Acker 2017: 116). The fact that she is reconciled

with the fact that she is going to die is extremely disturbing, but it merely reflects the fact that her life has been so traumatic, that making amends with the fact that you are nearing your death is considered heartbreaking, yet Janey explains it as logical. However, this clinical detachment apparent in her narrative may also be understood as deliberate dissociation on her part – as if she is abandoning her body and regarding it as something that is not her, but a curious object she has to describe to readers. And another implication in the quote above is that Janey can do something about her life and the pain she experienced – "she could die". In her traumatized state, Janey seems to talk to someone, as she is talking in first-person, directing her thoughts in hope that someone will hear her, someone will comfort her:

> 'I've got cancer. Cancer is the outward condition of the condition of being screwed-up. I am such a total mess, that is: a priori askew to the world/the nature of things/therefore: myself, askew to myself, that I will never live without pain. I can't help but do everything wrong (Acker 2017: 123).

From this quote we can infer that she perceives cancer as the utmost level of physical deprivation. As we have already mentioned before, repeated trauma in adult life "erodes the structure of the personality already formed", but repeated trauma in childhood "forms and deforms the personality" (Herman 2015: 96). However, due to childhood trauma, not only Janey's psyche and personality, but also her body is deformed. Cancer is "the outward condition of the condition of being screwed-up", in the words of Janey. The fact that after all the traumatic instances of her life, cancer, as the embodiment of amassed trauma, is the one which eventually brings her to the end of her life is the physical aspect of suppressed and ignored outward and inward trauma Janey has gone through. Her words "I can't help but do everything wrong" (Acker 2017: 123) imply that Janey is tired, angry, and helpless. She could not control the abnormal events in her life, she could not control what happened to her mind nor her body, and as the utmost annihilation due to trauma, her body succumbs to abnormal cells, and eventually, she dies.

3.1.4.1.2 Narrative Representation of Responses to Traumatic Events in *Blood and Guts in High School*

3.1.4.1.2.1 Narrative Representation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in *Blood and Guts in High School*

One of the responses to numerous traumatic events in Janey's life is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and she exhibits its classic symptoms such as flashbacks and vividly recurring nightmares, as well as aggressive outbursts or post-traumatic dissociation; it also includes

"obsessive repetitions; psychic fragmentation and dysphoria (the opposite of euphoria), flatness of mood, numbing, and anhedonia (loss of sensation and enjoyment); as well as disinterest, distrust, self-hatred, and the shame of corporeal abjection" (Henke 2008: 98). As we have already established, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is the most common response to traumatic events in that it subsumes all the usual responses; it is not clear-cut, it does not manifest in one response, but rather different ones.

We are eased into her disarrayed mind, or rather, we are plunged into it because there is no coherent approach to any of the scenes in the novel, which adds to the overall fragmentation following Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. When talking to her father about the possible separation, the whole conversation is overridden with repetition and interruption of capitalized sentences. On a few pages, we have the same paragraph which starts with "A few hours later they woke up" (Acker 2017: 21), and each of these paragraphs is interrupted by a capitalized sentence which conveys the fact that Janey dissociates during their conversation, and the moment she returns to it, the same paragraph is repeated, as if some time is lost in her dissociation and she has to ground herself in that exact moment, but due to trauma of their impending separation, she can only repeat the same scene until it becomes real. Those capitalized sentences which precede the repetition are the following:

> LASHES MAKE ME NO LONGER MYSELF (Acker 2017: 20).
> LASHES, AS IF THE WORLD, BY ITS VERY NATURE, HATES ME (Acker 2017: 21).
> CAUSE OF LASHES: THE SURGE OF SUFFERING IN THE SOUL CORRPUTS THE SOUL" (Acker 2017: 21).
> I AM NOT ME" (Acker 2017: 22).
> TINY SOUNDS, BUT SOUNDS …. OPEN DARK DITCHES IN THE FACE" (Acker 2017: 23).
> MAKE MORE FIERCE AND MAKE SEXUALITY STRONGER. THIS IS THE TIME FOR ALL PRISONERS TO RUN WILD. YOU ARE THE BLACK ANNOUNCERS OF OUR DEATH" (Acker 2017: 23).
> ANNOUUNCE THE RUINS PROFOUND OF THE CHRISTS WITHIN (US). OF SOME BELIEF CHERISHED WHICH FATE CURSES, THESE *LASHES* BLOODY SOUND THEIR CRACKLINGS OF A LOAF OF BREAD WHICH IN THE VERY OVEN DOOR BURNS US UP (Acker 2017: 24).
> TURN THE EYES AS IF I SEE SOME HOPE (Acker 2017: 28).
> TURN MY EYES INSANE, WHILE BEING CORRUPTS ITSELF, AS A POOL OF SHAME, IN THAT HOPE (Acker 2017: 29);
> PLEASE
> ME NO LONGER MYSELF (Acker 2017: 31).

If we converge all of these sentences, we have a semblance of a narrative which is interrupted by the paragraphs explaining Janey's incestuous relationship with her father. The repetition of the words "me", "myself", and "I" invokes a disturbing notion that Janey's identity is disintegrating, that she is punished by lashes, hated by the world, and going insane. Alternation between repetition and fragmentation in the narrative, as the sentences above do not appear one after another, invokes a depiction of a psychological breakdown as well as a cyclical nature of trauma which returns to haunt her. Phrases which invoke suffering, such as "ditches", "burning", "cracking" of the lashes against bloodied skin conjure an oppressive feeling of violence. Even when the sentences are aligned in this way, they still evoke chaos, suffering, and violence, urgency to run away, but at the same time inability to do so. In this chaos of pain, Janey is disintegrating, and she is no longer herself. Some dissociated part of Janey, which is disjointed from her psyche when the fear of abandonment from her father awakens, tells us a story we would not be able to see if we did not compile these sentences, and in that case, from fragmented segments, we get a coherent cry for help, but it is unanswered as it is unuttered – the entire cry for help is happening inside her mind, as she cannot utter it out loud, so the narrative only conveys her thought process. She finds escapism in dreams from that pain and harsh reality:

> Dear dreams,
> You are the only thing that matters. You are my hope and I live for and in you. You are rawness and wildness, the colours, the scents, passion, events appearing. You are the things I live for. Please take me over.
> Dreams cause the vision world to break loose our consciousness.
> Dreams by themselves aren't enough to destroy the blanket of dullness.
> The dreams we allow to destroy us cause us to be visions/see the vision world (Acker 2017: 36/37).

One of the symptoms of PTSD are "recurrent dreams" which stand as "symbolic representations of the shattering and faulty restoration of fantasmagorical meaning structures" (Ulman and Brothers 1988: 3). Cathy Caruth claims that dreams "bear witness to a survival that exceeds the very claims and consciousness of the one who endures it" (Caruth 1996: 60). However, even Janey is aware of the fact that dreams "by themselves aren't enough to destroy the blanket of dullness" (Acker 2017: 36/37), as they rather destroy her in turn. This is apparent in her psychic fragmentation, which is one of the symptoms of PTSD. In the novel, this fragmentation is most blatantly present on two pages of infantile drawings and childish handwriting. Repetition of the words "puke", "shit", "stink", and the incessant "I"s are interrupted by "etiolates from revolutionary self-assertion to infantile, invalid, or senescent

'crawling'" (Henke 2008: 102). This type of narrative betrays the disorganized state of Janey's mind, which reverts to an infantile stage in order to avoid being subjected to the brunt and immediacy of trauma. However, another reason she cannot completely withdraw into her childhood self is because she started experiencing traumatic events since her earliest childhood. Thus, despite the atemporal narrative which forcibly takes readers to her early childhood and then returns them to present time, there is no particular structural nor semantic difference in her words – she displays disturbing verbal articulation for someone who is supposed to be a child. Hence, these reversions to childish babbling are merely traumatic intrusions of her mind which is unable to articulate her pain properly, and also unable to protect Janey by reverting to an infantile state of mind – that state is traumatized as well. Traumatic repetition is apparent in a part where she is rejected by rebels who she earlier identified with after escaping from a prison with Genet. The following is repeated twice: "Please, tell me if the world is horrible and if my life is horrible and if there is no use trying to change, or if there is anything else. Is desire OK?" (Acker 2017: 138). She resigns herself to the futility of living, and it is difficult to read, because she no longer begs or pleads, she asks. And in turn, she is kicked out of the city by the rebels.

Throughout the novel, we have emotionally heightened narrative, which further supports the fact that her emotions are dysregulated, her anger is misplaced, as she does not exhibit it in an outward manner, but rather against herself. We read this behavior as a symptom of PTSD and dissociation as well as depression, but it is also reminiscent of the symptoms of borderline personality disorder, as impulsive behavior, distrust, emotional instability, depression, irritability, and substance abuse are indicative of a disorder characterized by "inner chaos, mood changes, raging", as well as "instability and disorganization in the self image" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 41/42). Capitalized words betray the inner chaos within Janey: "A TOTAL FLAME BURNING/ ITSELF UP/ BLOOD AND FEAR AND GUTS/ MY VISION" (Acker 2017: 113). She continues by saying that this "is my vision of agony", that she is "howling about nothing, howling about nothing; / driven up against the wall to break" (Ibid.). Her vision is fragmented and filled with pain, both past and present. This onslaught of negative emotions and inability to escape painful thoughts are all symptoms of PTSD which also implies re-traumatization by repetition of the negative images of the traumatic past. Janey is enveloped in the chaos of recurring nightmarish landscape which prevents her from removing herself from the painful present spoiled by an even more painful past; she is stuck in a loop of

never-ending flashbacks, images of blood and guts burned onto her retina, agony which is viscerally felt and impossible to voice despite the words Janey's narrative burns into the pages.

3.1.4.1.2.2 Narrative Representation of Dissociation in *Blood and Guts in High School*

Janey's dissociation is most obvious in the segments of the novel which narrate her conversations as well as encounters with her father. Acker uses instances of a narrative shaped into scenes from a play, which can be a way of allowing both Janey's and her father's voice to be heard verbatim. In one scene-like conversation, Janey voices her despair and uncertainty, and her father remains distant, he disregards her complaints and can provide neither comfort nor security. Bearing in mind that Janey is a girl, younger than ten, the failure of her primary caregiver, in this case her father, to dissuade her fears is utterly traumatic. Their conversation is constantly interrupted by drawings of sex scenes, and reproductive organs, which reinforce the image of Janey's disarray of thoughts, as the trauma of incest is too immediate, the abandonment is inevitable, and Janey can only repeat their conversations and try to find some sort of hope for their relationship. After they separate and Janey moves to New York, they have a phone conversation, her father attempts to apologize, and Janey jokingly comments that she considers him a UBH, "An Unnecessarily Brutal Horror", and she also says that she has decided to sue her father "for a thousand American dollars for child abuse" (Acker 2017: 31). The words which Janey utters in this conversation sound light, but the underlying meaning is terrifying – she is aware that what her father put her through is child abuse, but their conversation seems as if she merely wants to state that, and joke about it, as her previous attempts at communicating her father's wrongdoings have been completely ignored and eventually silenced. But at the end of this conversation, four capitalized words betray her inner state: "PLEASE / ME NO LONGER MYSELF" (Ibid.). Through her thoughts, which are interspersed throughout the text and combined, the report on her mental state is formed, and it is obvious that she has come to a realization that her father has actually abandoned her, and that by joking, she has given him a leeway to bear no consequences for everything he did to her. The end of that part of the narrative states that "Mr Smith puts Janey in school in New York City to make sure she doesn't return to Merida" (Ibid.). Whenever Janey is unable to voice something, an omnipresent narrator interrupts the narrative and states certain facts such as this one. Bereft and alone, Janey joins a street gang, the Scorpions, who are also "a wild bunch of kids" and she is scared (Ibid.). Those other kids are also from "broken families", "poverty", trying to escape "their misery" (Ibid. 32). However, this period of time marks the

onset of Janey's dissociation, as the trauma of abandonment and desperate search for some protection affects her mind and behavior. In an analeptic intrusion in the narrative, Janey informs the readers that:

> Yesterday I remembered three times when my former boyfriend fucked me. Maybe he's still my boyfriend. I never knew if he was my boyfriend. I've been fucking him for eight months on and off since I was twelve. Mostly off. He doesn't fuck so well 'cause he's eighty years old and 'cause he's a writer. I think most writers are crazy 'cause they sit in their rooms all the time and scribble down stuff no one wants to read and they don't fuck. Anyway this guy can fuck me when he beats me up and then he can only fuck me once for five minutes (Acker 2017: 58)

The phrases "maybe" and "anyway" convey Janey's distancing from the abuse she is clearly suffering at the hands of a man old enough to be her grandfather. At this point, she is still coherent while conveying what is happening; however, as the narrative progresses, she starts dissociating, and it becomes increasingly difficult to follow what is happening. The salient aspect of sexual abuse is the fact that it is not always "a threat or accompanied by danger or violence", but can be more of an "ordeal resulting in years of abuse rather than a single traumatic event" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 207). In Janey's case, sexual abuse is both a permanent feature as well as a series of traumatic, violent events. In such cases, sexual abuse entails both violence committed upon the body of a victim, as well as a psychological abuse which is inevitable when confronted with those who remind the victim of the initial traumatic event. Under these circumstances, protective systems of the mind come to the foreground, and attempt to distance the consciousness from what is happening right in front of it, and the victim is in turn distanced from the event, albeit temporarily. Dissociation can also be exhibited in the narrative, and in *Blood and Guts in High School*, there is an instance of a "hyperaroused narrative" which spreads across nine pages, and it is "consumed by manic, agitated dialogue between a disembodied chorus of voices, which can neither stop speaking, nor stop interrupting each other" (Zaikowski 2010: 204/205). What is obvious in these pages is "intense anger", usage of capitalization which "stamps the anger", which is in turn characteristic of "traumatic hyperarousal" and "traumatic agitation" (Ibid. 205). It is also a sign of narrative dissociation, which follows Janey's own dissociated state of mind. She claims: "I'm not sure what I care about and if I'm a real person" (Acker 2017: 59).

> It is unclear who these voices belong to— they may represent dissociated parts of Janey, or a dialogue between Janey and her current lover, Jean Genet; at one point, the speech turns into a biting first-person critique of society, ostensibly issued by writer Erica Jong. All of these characteristics make for a text whose heart is beating

> quickly, whose frantic and outraged mind does not know where or how to focus—there is simply too much for it to attend to. This section of text, […] is so overridden with sexuality, violence, and identity crises that it cannot be present for any kind of coherent, shared narrative with external reality. Though Janey is apparently in Tangier with Jean Genet at this time in her life, having been liberated from sex slavery and having discovered that she has cancer, we hear nothing of these objective facts of the story for nine pages (Zaikowski 2010: 205).

We read this as narrative dissociation, a conglomerate of voices, emotions, facts, and thoughts which weave together a narrative that burns the pages with its intensity and is almost viscerally felt when read. There is an increasing amount of capitalized words and entire sentences, which embody Janey's confusion and dissociation, such as: "I'M ALONE. THE SHIT WITH DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN CRAZY AND SANE. DOES ANYONE KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING?" (Acker 2017: 100). In the span of these nine pages, President Carter is also mentioned, and one of the voices says: "I didn't want to fall in love with him because I didn't want to put something in my life, but he was screwing me so GOOD and beating me up that I knew I was going to fall in love with him" (Ibid. 122/123). Janey's love, as all of these voices are intricately tied to her psyche and her emotions, is equated with violence due to previous traumas. There is no repose from the pain, as we also have two more pages of hyperaroused narrative, in which the words "DEFIANCE" and "BLOOD AND FEAR AND GUTS" are spanning across the pages, and are followed by Janey's comment: "The only thing I want is freedom" (Ibid. 113). Apart from the pain of the past traumas, at that moment Janey is also being betrayed by her body which disintegrates from cancer, the same way her narrative disintegrates from trauma; thus, the vision she attempts to articulate "proves more defiant than redemptive" (Henke 2008: 103):

> You, the thing you called 'you', was a ball turning and turning in the blackness only the blackness wasn't something - like 'black' - and it wasn't nothingness 'cause nothingness was somethingness. The whole thing turns up into a ball, the ball's ephemeral, and where are you? Your self is a ball turning and turning as it's being thrown from one hand to the other hand and every time the ball turns over you feel all your characteristics, your identities, slip around so you go crazy. When the ball doesn't turn, you feel stable (Acker 2017: 55).

Traumatic representation is not tied to a singular language and occasionally Acker uses other languages to shift the narrative and provide a different representation of traumatic responses. In this novel, Persian is used, and its clipped syntax is deliberate as it portrays the unpredictable quality of traumatic responses, for which sometimes language of the character does not possess appropriate expressions, or maybe it is used as a repose from a continuously

disarrayed narrative. Janey teaches herself to write Persian poetry, and in the narrative, it is translated into "a stilted Latinate poetic that gradually deteriorates into the semiotic language of hysterical iteration" (Henke 2008: 101). In one of the lines, she writes "The biggest pain in the world is feeling but sharper is the pain of itself" (Acker 2017: 87). This is evocative of Caruth's "paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival" (Caruth 1996: 58), as Janey consistently goes through destructive events, but by going through them, she is actually trying to live, to find an anchor in reality in which the pain she feels actually reminds her that she is alive. Nevertheless, her narrative dissociates and she is also dissociating from herself. For example, after an abortion, she says: "I decided that if I got pregnant again, I'd stick a broken hanger up my cunt… I didn't care if I died as long as the baby died. […] I was still desperate to fuck" (Acker 2017: 34). Her self-destructive behavior is a sign of an early, as well as ongoing, trauma. Due to the fact that the whole narrative revolves around her being disregarded, the fact that she starts emulating that type of behavior towards herself reveals the cyclical nature, as well as a recursive quality of trauma.

Postmodern blending of the media is merged with the fragmentation in the narrative with two illustrated dream maps, and an illustration of a fairytale interrupting the narrative. In dream maps we have certain sentences which invoke Janey's experience, such as: "The nightmare I had when my father tried to fuck me" (Acker 2017: 48) and "I'm only freaky cause I'm holding on. Real compassion is Baba forcing me to confront this 'freakiness'. B hurt me. I hurt. I hurt. Rejection does occur in this world" (Ibid. 51). This is also present in the segment after finding out that she has cancer, when there is a rise in suicidal thoughts. Until the section in the part titled "Cancer", there are pages upon pages of repetitive words, of denial, of poems, including "*Janey's slave poem*", and her thoughts which come to the surface, such as "If you have no mind to live for do you want to live"? (Ibid. 110). These thoughts reappear in the fifth scene of the play *In Egypt, the end*, where she says "I don't want to commit suicide anymore, like I used to; I want to go through death. How can I go through death? (Ibid. 134). She invokes the character of Death who she asks why her life is "a miserable shit-pit and why suffering exists", to which Death replies: "I'm not your gaoler. Only living humans are gaolers" (Ibid. 134). In this narrative, even death is indifferent to her suffering, and she finds no repose in anything.

At the end of this part of the narrative and before a segment titled *THE WORLD* Janey dies, abandoned yet again. At the very end of the novel, on one page we have a serene

illustration with the caption "So we create the world in our own image" (Acker 2017: 164). On the other page, signifying the end of the novel, a serene landscape of doves cooing softly and flying over Janey's grave "in the grey Saba Pacha cemetery in Luxor" ends the traumatic trajectory of her life as well as her narrative (Ibid. 165). However, the ending which informs us that "many other Janeys were born and these Janeys covered the earth" invokes the notion that suffering does not end with Janey's death, that there will be many other girls who will go through the same ordeals as Janey did (Ibid. 165).

3.1.4.2 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events and Responses to Traumatic Events in *Blood and Guts in High School* – Concluding Remarks

As we have emphasized numerous times, most sections of the novel are utterly incoherent, both in the meaning-making sense, as well as in a structural way. Capitalized words, sentences, even entire paragraphs, disembodied narrators, are dispersed throughout the text without any apparent order, breaks, or even formal punctuation. There are no borders between sentences or paragraphs, which is a textual reminder of Janey's own fragmentation, apparent in the continuous stream of focalizing points filtered through first, second, and third-person narration. In such instance, we read the narrative as a textual evidence that Janey, or her dissociated parts which assume different identities, are directing their ire at someone, and from the content of her scattered thoughts we may guess that it is directed at the society which allows people to live in awful societal conditions, conditions which render individuals brainwashed by capitalism and easy fixes to such an extent that some important things, like love, are discarded, which in turn heralds the rest of the population's descent into madness. A conglomerate of voices embodies this pain by saying: "THIS'S NOT ANGER / THIS IS NOT ANY EMOTION IT IS LIVING AT THE EDGE, AT EVERY EDGE, MIGHT AS WELL HATE EVERYBODY" (Acker 2017: 121).

In order to summarize this part, we would like to say that Acker used almost every narrative strategy and technique available to represent that which is unrepresentable. Her endeavor in this novel was to push the limits of narrative representation, and create a narrative so viscerally felt in every disembodied voice, every capitalized sentence and phrase. Traumatic events are understood only because narrative strategies and techniques managed their immediacy, and at the same time, their belatedness. Fragmentation, thought reports, narrative dissociation, enabled Acker to offer a character so overcome by pain and fear, a child who was plunged into a world with no support system. Janey is characterized as a rebel, as a girl on the

threshold of adulthood who never managed to cross it – death claimed her before she even had a chance at becoming an adult.

3.2 *THE BELL JAR* BY SYLVIA PLATH

Sylvia Plath's gut-wrenching portrayal of psychological distress and societal pressures on women living in the 1950s America solidified her position as one of the twentieth century's poets whose poems were dissected in order to illuminate both personal struggles and artistic creativity. Additionally, her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, also stands as a testament to her candid portrayal of the effects of trauma, combined with semi-autobiographical elements and overall impact of the societal climate she both lived and wrote in. The existing body of literary criticism primarily regards *The Bell Jar* as a semi-autobiographical rumination on the life in the 1950s America, focusing on the parallels between the lives of Esther Greenwood, the main character, and Sylvia Plath herself. In this dissertation, we extend the existing analysis, and attempt to explain how the novel is actually a *fictionalized* account of some segments of Plath's life, which deepens the connection between autobiography, semi-autobiography, and autofiction. This is in turn connected to the tendency in both autofiction and trauma fiction where certain traumatic events have to be fictionalized in order for the author to be able to come to terms with their reality. The novelty of our approach also lies in the fact that we ascribe the fragmentation in the narrative not only to trauma, but also to postmodernist techniques in writing, which facilitate the representation of the unrepresentable, and which offer no conclusive endings or answers which may arise while reading the novel. Thus, by combining the aspects of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autofiction, we analyze *The Bell Jar* as a type of writing which bears features of all three genres, while it simultaneously exists as a novel whose genre is not specified, but which we describe as postmodernist trauma fiction for the purposes of this dissertation. The fragmentation and confusion which stem from traumatic events and responses to them which are omnipresent in the novel are ascribed to the quality of this novel which goes beyond genre, and our analysis attempts to show that. Prior to focusing on the analysis of the novel itself, we attempt to provide some information regarding Sylvia Plath's artistic aspirations, as well as socio-cultural conditions which both influenced and shaped her oeuvre.

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION – SYLVIA PLATH, A "CONFESSIONAL POET"

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) is probably one of the most discussed American poets and authors, and the interest in her work has not waned since the middle of the twentieth century when she was most prolific. Questions raised regarding the topics she tackled are inspired by the academic interest, as well as by the fact that her writing was mostly written in confessional mode. Born in 1932 to scholarly parents who both taught at universities, her life was marked

by numerous academic and literary achievements, which were rather staggering considering the fact that she lived at the time when women were at the crossroads of existence; celebrated for their contributions during the Second World War, but also hindered by societal circumstances in the aftermath of it. She committed suicide in 1963, at the age of thirty, and her literary career had spanned seven years prior to it. She wrote more than two hundred poems, created nonfiction works, short stories, a radio play, and her journals and letters have been published as well. To this day, she is primarily praised for her ingenuity as a poet, and the most famous volume of her poetry, *Ariel*, was published posthumously. A great number of both published and unpublished poems marked her life, and in turn, her literary genius was indelibly shaped by her personal struggles, which were most explicitly fictionalized in *The Bell Jar*, her only novel. Depression, divorce, financial struggles, and care for her two children led to her suicide when she took many sleeping pills and "allowed herself to be consumed by the fumes from the gas oven" (Bloom 2001: 13). The only novel she published, *The Bell Jar*, initially under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas, is the work we analyze in this dissertation.

Her poetry, as we have already stated, is termed "confessional", but it also illuminates "woman's psyche as it is shaped by a patriarchal culture" (Bundtzen 2001: 23). Plath's rise as a writer coincided with the emergence of confessional poetry which produced "a set of conventions for personal self-revelation" (Nelson 2013: 32). This confessional mode of poetry operated in "postwar, Cold War, suburban America" (Gill 2008: 21). The reason why Plath is dubbed confessional is due to the fact that most instances in her work reflect the things which happened in her own life. Her artistic aspirations also coincided with the fact that in confessional poetry, "*too* private aspects of selfhood" were explored, and domestic life was dissected in order to reveal how it affected autonomy and personality (Nelson 2013: 43). Confessional poets' aim was to illuminate those aspects of their lives which were not a topic they would consider tackling in any other situation. Akin to the confessional mode, Plath's oeuvre portrays urgency to reveal those aspects of suburban life deemed "'shameful'", as well as transgressive and extreme according to the norms of "white, middle-class, heterosexual society" (Ibid. 34). The main topics in her work revolve around "indictment of patriarchy" as well as "consequence of the pressures on wives, mothers and women writers" during the 1950s America (Gill 2008: 12). That was the time of privacy, but the confessional mode "undermined the sanctity of home and deflated the value of privacy by attending to its deprivation" (Nelson 2013: 38). Despite obvious constant parallels between her life and her art, it is necessary to distinguish between the two, and appreciate her body of work for its artistic quality. However,

it is possible to do both as this novel would probably not have been written if it had not been for the events in her own life which profoundly inspired the plot.

In a famous and often cited essay by Roland Barthes published in 1977, *The Death of the Author*, Barthes states that as soon as "a fact is *narrated*" no longer as a function but as "the very practice of the symbol itself" a disconnection occurs, the author "enters into his own death" and "writing begins" (142). He states that the author is "thought to *nourish* the book", to exist before it (Ibid. 145). However, he also claims that to "give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text" (Ibid. 147). In essence, interpolating the text and its author, according to Barthes, may lead to a problem when actually reading the text and understanding it. Another essay which supports this theory is "The Intentional Fallacy" by W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, who claim that the intention of the author is "neither available nor desirable as a standard" for judging and understanding a literary work, as a meaning of the text should be derived from the text itself, not from external factors (1946: 486). However, when it comes to narratives about trauma, biographical aspects of the author are important to include, but only to that extent which helps the analysis of the work, without speculations regarding the intentions of the author (and in that regard our dissertation supports the idea of avoiding intentional fallacy). Furthermore, Plath's interference in the text is more than symbolic; it is a testament to the traumas she and other women living in the 1950s America had to endure and thus we attempt to remain respectful towards the author's life, but at the same time use autobiographical interferences as guiding threads throughout the text.

We are going to discuss in depth the autobiographical instance in *The Bell Jar* later in this segment. First, we need to outline the plot of the novel. Thus, the next section is dedicated to the plot of *The Bell Jar*, with main themes described and some contextual cues provided before we delve deeper into the contextual importance of the novel, as well as the parallels with the context in which Sylvia Plath wrote and published *The Bell Jar*.

3.2.2 *THE BELL JAR* – THE PLOT

The plot of the novel follows a young woman in her twenties, Esther Greenwood, who lives in the 1950s America and whose life is shaped by the norms and expectations regarding women in the society she lives in. Essentially, the novel follows Esther's transformation from a young, ambitious woman who tries to escape the shackles of a constricting society, to a woman smothered by expectations. The inability to meet the imposed expectations and reconcile with them due to her own aspirations eventually initiates her mental breakdown and

leads to her being institutionalized. We follow the plot of the novel which primarily revolves around two themes. In the first part of the novel, the events centered around Esther's life which eventually lead to her psychological distortion, suicide attempts and institutionalization are narrated; the second part is dedicated to the path to her "symbolic rebirth" as a potentially functional member of a society (Bonds 1990: 49). Essentially, the novel follows her struggle for identity in the society which has predetermined standards for female behavior. Her encounters with other people, both men and women, serve to solidify her continuous experience of being adrift, of trying to find stability in a society which does not allow questioning of the standards which are offered to women.

Throughout the novel, there is a constant reminder that Esther has to choose a path in her life while living with the debilitating fact that the society has certain demands she has to fulfill. Primarily, the era Esther lives in, 1950s America, was a historical era in which women were explicitly, and also in other overt ways, told that there was a necessity for their "enactment of a biological imperative", and it was also an era when deviance was treated with suspicion due to "specific socio-political conditions" which were "inextricable from Esther's personal search for a viable image of herself" (Smith 2008: 34). The plot thus heavily relies on the female body, as it moves from "physical sickness (the ptomaine poisoning)", to her mental illness, and the physical sickness culminates in Esther's hemorrhage due to the loss of her virginity (Perloff 1972: 520). We tentatively propose the following claim – all illness is trauma, and it is "of the same spectrum" - mental or physical disease is "an index to the human inability to cope with an unlivable situation" (Ibid. 520/521). Essentially, both physical and mental illness entail certain changes on the body of the affected person; as we discussed in the previous segment, cancer is one of physical illnesses which is traumatic, because it implies the uncertainty of the continuation of life. Mental illness is also traumatic because it affects higher aspects of the brain which become convoluted, or disturbed, and this instability causes trauma. Mental or physical traumas are thus not divorced from one another, as we have already outlined when we talked about traumatic events. The boundaries between mental and physical pain oftentimes blur, and the pain is experienced with one's whole being.

The overall atmosphere of the plot of the novel is Esther's disengagement from "the whirl of activity around her" and confusion about her future path (Smith 2008: 35). After returning from New York, where she encountered many women and many men, and some of those encounters were rather traumatic, she meets her mother and goes back to their house in

the suburbs. Rejection from a summer writing course initiates her spiraling into depression, and, after a traumatic encounter with a negligent psychiatrist, she is drawn to attempt suicide. After hospitalization and treatment, she starts her path toward recovery and takes control of her body by being scheduled for diaphragm fitting and eventually losing her virginity, which, despite the signs of her agency, is another traumatic occurrence. The novel ends on a note which critics analyze differently; appearing before the board of doctors, she is to be deemed fit or unfit to be released. In the next section, we further connect the traumatic events Esther goes through with the societal conditions in which they occur.

3.2.3 *THE BELL JAR* - CONTEXTUALIZING THE NARRATIVE

It is difficult to divorce the plot of *The Bell Jar* from the historical context in which it was written because the plot itself is situated in the very same historical period. Plath chose to introduce readers to the period in which she lived and in which those incidents which happened to Esther happened to herself as well; it is as if the two lives, the one of Plath and the one of Esther merge into one life, and this is the reason why we claim that this novel contains autobiographical or autofictional elements, as there is a myriad of instances where the text itself belies the need to make parallels. However, we leave the discussion of these autobiographical aspects for the next section.

Esther Greenwood, who is introduced by her maiden name even though we later learn that she gave birth and got married, starts the novel by situating the readers in a “sultry summer" when the Rosenbergs were electrocuted, and she didn’t know what she was doing in New York (Plath 2013: 1). Thus, we cannot read *The Bell Jar* as a novel in a historical or a temporal void because the Rosenbergs, Ethel and Julius, who were charged as traitors and eventually executed due to their involvement with the Cold War practices in America, were electrocuted in 1953 and the execution was performed in the United States, in the New York’s execution chamber. We have Esther who is located in the same city, and she is lost as to what she is doing at that very place and time.

The mention of the Rosenbergs necessitates discussion about the Cold War, as they were accused of espionage and siding with the Soviet Union, in particular, for selling the United States’ atomic secrets (Gill 2008: 24). The overall climate of the era was shaped, both implicitly and overtly, by the looming presence of the Cold War, which is the name for “the overt military standoff and global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union from 1947 to 1991” (Hamilton and Phillips 2014: 3). The main link which connects the end of the war and

the Cold War regime which came in its aftermath is the fact of "the USA's development and use of the atomic bomb" (Gill 2008: 24).[19] The internal factors of the societal context were also influenced by the external threats on the American stability. The main "threat" came from communism, which was feared to be infiltrating the homes of the American citizens and their society. It is the postwar period which inspired Plath's writing and shaped cultural context in which she wrote *The Bell Jar*.[20] In that time of oppressiveness, there was also an omnipresent purging of anyone "potentially under suspicion" – people were continuously encouraged to report any "'un-American'" behavior in their neighbors and colleagues (Ibid. 25). Thus, the mention of the Rosenbergs from the onset of the novel invokes the oppressive atmosphere which is felt in the rest of the narrative as well.

In this harsh atmosphere of constant fear of infiltration, surveillance, and negative influence on the democratic society, the only safety was to be found in a nuclear family, which was to be a source of stability. These are also the years in which Plath began publishing, the years which were characterized by "uncertainty, menace and an all-embracing culture of surveillance" (Gill 2008: 26). The structure of a nuclear family - father, mother, and children - was the last stronghold against the communist infiltration, or at least that was the claim being promoted by the American government. Not only did the society face ideological shifts in its political and cultural, as well as educational spheres, but also cultural shifts, which were primarily related to the structure of the American architectural organization and its family life.[21] There was an ongoing move to the suburbs, primarily due to rising birth rates, and the role of the "instigators of morality" befell women, who were supposed to maintain "national virtue" by tending to their husbands and children, staying at home, dedicating themselves to the role of a housewife and avoiding employment, despite the rising tendency to offer women

[19] The traumatic experience of the Second World War still lingered in the society and the people, who were trying to rebuild their economy. The United States did not enter the Second World War until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, where the United States' main base was located. As a result, the United States decided to drop two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, cities in Japan, and they claimed that it was necessary as there was a fear "of the number of casualties (American and Japanese) likely to be caused by a conventional ground attack" (Gill 2008: 24).

[20] More on the historical background on the novel can be found in the following paper: Stevanović, Natalija. "The Traumatic Process of Adapting to Life in 1950s America - Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *Teme*, vol. XLVIII, no. 2, July 2024, pp. 515-28. doi:10.22190/TEME230929029S.

[21] These were the times of appearances; on the surface-level, even women had the chance at education, employment, but the underlying expectation was that women were not going to pursue those "trivial" trajectories, as their main role was that of a housewife. These cultural shifts rendered themselves useful when it came to maintaining patriarchal pressure, which meant men worked, provided for their families and protected them. But at the same time, men had access to higher education, should they be willing, they had chances at climbing a social ladder and maintaining powerful positions. It was expected and encouraged that men reach their full potential. And it was also expected that women follow and support them in that endeavor, while not following suit at the same time.

job positions (Ibid. 27).[22] In the novel, Plath portrays Esther's incredulity about winning a scholarship, ascribing it to something that can only happen in America as a girl who "lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can't afford a magazine" actually gets "a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there" and goes to New York (Plath 2013: 2). The tone of this part betrays surprise, as if women should be grateful for getting such an opportunity when they should focus on finding a man and having children, especially women who are not from the city. Thus, women were faced with "contradictory messages during the 1950s" as some "experienced the opportunity to choose public and professional identities", however, the Cold War "shaped an overarching consensus about the strategic importance of women's devotion to home and family" (Hamilton and Phillips 2014: 21). Plath deliberately attempted to portray how the family in Esther's case was not a traditional one. Her father has been dead for years, her brother is barely mentioned, and her mother:

> […] wasn't much help. My mother had taught shorthand and typing to support us ever since my father died, and secretly she hated it and hated him for dying and leaving no money because he didn't trust life insurance salesmen. She was always on me to learn shorthand after college (Plath 2013: 36).

Perhaps we can understand Plath's decision regarding writing about a non-conventional family at the time when nuclear family was a center of stability as a discussion on how the disturbance in the family structure allows for a disturbance on the functioning on the level of society. And perhaps that is the reason Esther does not want stability, as we analyze later, as she did not have one in her own family. The available images of women surrounding her are different, and she cannot identify with any of them. Plath deliberately confronts those types of women in her novel, and pushes them to extremes. Her mother is a widow and she is the only provider of the income in their family; Philomena Guinea, who finances Esther also went to an asylum and became a famous writer; Doctor Nolan is a successful psychiatrist, but Esther exhibits surprise when she finds out that her second psychiatrist is a woman, because she: "didn't think they had woman psychiatrists" (Plath 2013: 179); on the other hand, we have Mrs Willard who is like a rug, "flatten(ed) out underneath" her husband's feet (Ibid. 80), and Dodo Conway, who raised six children, "on the verge of a seventh", who is "the talk of the neighborhood" and who "interested me in spite of myself" (Ibid. 112). This is a deliberate comment on the situation in a society which aspires to be conventional, to have its citizens

[22] This flight to the suburbs was racially segregated, though, as even affluent African Americans faced discrimination when attempting to purchase a house in the suburbs, as there was a fear of racial mixing, which in turn ensured that "the postwar flight to the suburbs would be racially stratified" (Hamilton and Phillips, 2014: 15).

follow a pre-determined standard of both behavior and familial relations – cultural homogeneity is difficult to achieve, and deviations are unavoidable.

It is plausible that the fact that Plath was writing at the time when feminism was in its early stages influenced her in a rather constricting way, along with the other historical circumstances at the time. What is particularly interesting about Sylvia Plath's writing is the fact that she was writing between the first two waves of feminism, which is apparent in her writing in the way her oeuvre "anticipates many of the issues and ideas that women in subsequent decades were to pursue" but what she was lacking in her own time was "the cultural, political and aesthetic framework" which could have provided her with better options to articulate those ideas (Gill 2008: 15). Nevertheless, in that particular societal atmosphere, and from that particular viewpoint, Plath created an emotionally charged narrative which would not have been the same without the overall atmosphere of the time. The value of trauma portrayal in the novel is intrinsically connected to the societal milieu, and paints a personalized response embedded in the character of Esther.

Life at the time when Plath was writing was very private, and women did not talk to one another about their problems and their uncertainties. Women tried to adjust to "their role and suffered or ignored the problem that has no name" (Friedan 1979: 21). Friedan attempts to assign a name to that problem, as she calls the image to which women at the time were trying to conform "the feminine mystique", which was in discrepancy with "the reality of our lives as women", and as a result women faced "schizophrenic split" (Ibid. 7). We can understand *The Bell Jar* as a representation of "the individual experience of trauma", which is inevitably connected to a relationship between "private and public meanings, between personal and social paradigms" (Balaev 2012: 17). Esther's family is disrupted by the death of her father, and we may claim that her insistence on pursuing a career stems from the fact that she wanted to avoid the life of unpredictability her mother suffered for herself, in order to be able to fit in the society which did not particularly cater to those outside of the established norm. Something similar Plath addressed when she wrote a scene in which Esther is talking to her suitor, Buddy Willard, and reminisces their conversation when she asked what would happen if she "wanted to live in the country and the city both?" to which Buddy answered that she had "the perfect set-up of a true neurotic" (Plath 2013: 89). This is the split Friedan refers to, this wish to have both when you can really choose neither.

As is obvious from previous paragraphs, women in the 1950s lived with private discontents. They were not expected nor supposed to voice them because the society painted the picture that their life was perfect, so the underlying assumption was that there was nothing to complain about. Therefore, we may claim that such a period shaped identities, and not only in favorable ways. Living in a certain culture presumes accepting the creeds of that culture. When one does, one is able to live a content life. However, when one finds the societal structures unfit to cater to their personality, they face challenges. Occasionally, when there is a split between the outward appearances and private discontents, traumatic instances occur. Which is precisely what Plath attempted to show with the character of Esther. Esther is aware that something is inherently wrong in the options provided to her by the society she lives in, but those things which would offer her fulfillment are in stark contrast with what is, albeit tacitly, expected from her:

> This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's, but I knew that's what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself (Plath 2013: 80).

Essentially, everything around Esther forces her in a way to step into a social mould and live a life determined by it. However, something within her being repudiates this life as it appears to her as not as fulfilling nor befitting a young woman with "fifteen years of straight A's". And thus, trauma occurs. All of these facts were made to present the life of the American housewife as the one to be craved. Consumerism eased her life, and it was used as a distraction from the underlying dissatisfaction which may arise because of her position. However, there was little to be done with the damage to mental health this caused women. There was an "ignorance about general health" which automatically assumed that "information about mental health would have been correspondingly scant – and correspondingly inaccurate" (Wagner-Martin 2003: 42). The treatment of mental health available at the time was less than humane, and we attempt to show that in one of the following sections. Which leads us to discussing how *The Bell Jar* can be read as postmodernist trauma fiction.

3.2.4 READING *THE BELL JAR* AS POSTMODERNIST TRAUMA FICTION

The Bell Jar is a life testimony of a traumatized woman whose "private psychosis" is to a great extent connected to her "larger social situation", as she lives in a society "whose guidelines for women she can neither accept nor reject" (Perloff 1972: 511). Esther is unable

to appropriate the identities offered to her, and the whole process is quite traumatic which leads to eventual fractures in her psyche, attempted suicide, and admittance to a psychiatric ward. For Esther, there is neither a satisfactory nor a fulfilling way to commit to any of the paths proffered identities offer. Esther faces failure to "interpellate" which arises from "contradictory influences blurring the image to which she was to conform" (Smith 2008: 41). This entire novel is an attempt at narrating and at the same time illuminating the contexts and experiences which traumatize Esther. What assists in the creation of this trauma narrative is the usage of postmodernist tendencies in writing, which are rather implicit than explicitly used, as well as instances of autobiographical fiction or autofiction, which we explain in the following passages.

We should begin with explaining the title of the novel itself, as it suggests the oppressive atmosphere we encounter from the very first page. A bell jar is a curved structure, similar to a glass bell, most commonly used in laboratories, as it creates a vacuum and provides an environment inside which experiments are performed, and occasionally, specimens kept. When looking from the inside of the bell jar, "all images would be distorted or made grotesque as in a hall of mirrors", and if a person finds themselves trapped underneath it, they would be unable to recognize themselves or "would be conscious only of a deformed self", with a possibility of more than one reflection (Smith 2008: 49). Due to the curvature, the image straight ahead "would always be the most distorted and those in peripheral vision the least" (Ibid.). The most common understanding of the symbolism of the bell jar in the novel is as a metaphor for mental illness. This symbolism also implies external observation, as well as constant monitoring and judgement by external agents (Ibid. 50). However, despite the fact that the narrative portrays oppression Esther feels under the bell jar we claim that the bell jar is actually *protecting* her, that the visions surrounding her are only distorted because they are considered as such by the patriarchal society in which she lives. The closer she gets to "sanity", the more she renounces all the possibilities which were distorted while she was under the bell jar. Perhaps the bell jar is actually shielding her from the uniform identity she would be forced to assume in order to be a functional member of a society. We may also claim that the bell jar is the embodiment of all of her traumas, but at the same time, while distorting her vision, it enables her to see all the distortions considered as such by the 1950s American society. She is under extreme scrutiny, but while under the bell jar, she maintains a semblance of identity, before the bell jar lifts and she is ushered into the society, and the only way she can become a part of it is by discarding all distortions and allowing traumas to completely reduce her to a

functional member of a society, which may sound paradoxical. When the bell jar lifts, it is similar to a specimen being taken out of a jar filled with formaldehyde. It is inspected, dissected, and repaired. The fact remains that after her stay in a psychiatric ward, where both her mental and bodily integrity are disrupted, the bell jar starts lifting, which implies the ease of the oppressive atmosphere, but at the same time heralds her entrance into the society as a functional member of it, as a member who does not second-guess herself, but rather willingly accepts the norms of her culture.

Another understanding of the bell jar is that it is reminiscent "of the process of suburban living", where despite firm nuclear family units, personal space "was very much on display" (Smith 2008: 50). But also, while she is under the bell jar, she is under the scrutiny of the others, whose goal is to lift the bell jar and reveal a perfect, model woman. If she remained under it, she would be plagued by her trauma, but she would still be herself. It has been emphasized throughout this dissertation that akin to a psychological evaluation, social instances have to be considered when analyzing trauma narratives. Rosi Smith emphasizes that "(m)oulding women to their biological function" could further contribute to fracturing of women's identity, and that "disruptive influences were masculine aspirations, designated as concentration on career, dominance, and intellectual self-discovery" (Smith 2008: 40). However, what is actually disruptive and leads to traumatization are not those "masculine" influences, but rather the tensions which emanate from the fact that women are seemingly able to choose their path, but the threat which comes with it is that they will fail in one of the prescribed roles of a woman. This central tension is rooted in the society which "had been permitted, even mandated, to monitor, arrest, and punish deviance and unconventionality" (Smith 2008: 36). Culture is viewed as a protective system of values, which gives support to its members and the loss of which can be detrimental for individuals (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 400). In a healthy societal environment, an individual can thrive and be resilient in cases of stressful experiences, due to the fact that the culture provides social support and offers individuals a sort of stability in times of upheaval (Ibid.). However, if an individual does not fit, and is stigmatized for one reason or another, it is difficult for such an individual to have a sense of her or his own identity, and a way to cope with traumatic experiences which may befall her or him (Ibid. 401). *The Bell Jar* portrays that in seemingly casual comments throughout the text, in which it is apparent that Esther is aware of the societal circumstances surrounding her, but also unable to be proactive about her choices, as the society provides her with tools which are essentially fit to be useful only to men. These instances help us reach

conclusions about Esther's character and help us understand how her personality matches, or rather, deviates from the prescribed roles of her society.

This life testimony of Esther exhibits postmodernist tendencies, and that is most blatantly obvious in the way narrative breaks around her. Throughout the novel, Esther voices her concerns regarding her distancing from herself, as well as from the activities of her own body, as if control is slipping through her fingers, the same way the pen in her hands disobeys her:

> But when I took up my pen, my hand made big, jerky letters like those of a child, and the lines sloped down the page from left to right almost diagonally, as if they were loops of string lying on the paper, and someone had come along and blown them askew (Plath 2013: 125).

This is reminiscent of her scattered memories, scattered thoughts; her dissociation bleeds into the narrative and visually represents the scattered contents of her mind. Esther struggles to "find narratives that articulate the female experience or female precursors who prove it is possible to do so" (Kratz 2019: 90). This in turn alienates her from the language she tries to use to express herself, even when she attempts to write a letter to Doreen, as seen in the quote above. In a letter which she intends to send to Doreen, her narrative fragments, even visually, and she loses authorship as if she were "a female character in a male-authored novel, playing at hegemonic social scripts that usher her towards stifling, domestic destiny" (Ibid.). Fragmented narrative is a natural extension of the undermining of "a stable and consistent identity" (Vickroy 2015: 5). Esther is alienated from the language which gives her expression, and in turn, alienated from her own life. Alienation is indivisible from trauma, as a person who is divided from her own life, who becomes but its passive observer, can feel extremely unmoored and thus miserable.

Esther's inability to choose among options offered to her, as they are incompatible, is also reminiscent of traumatic fracturing, which is translated into postmodernist fragmentation of her narrative. She is overwhelmed by all the expectations of the patriarchal society she lives in, and at the same time, betrayed by them, as societies, at their core, have to offer their members options which would protect them instead of overwhelm them by "stressful experiences" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 25). In the often quoted excerpt from the novel, which encapsulates Esther's inability to choose and inherent trauma which comes with indecision, Esther stands in front of a fig tree:

> I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig-tree in the story.
> From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and off-beat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out.
> I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig-tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose (Plath 2013: 73).

These mutually exclusive choices fracture Esther's identity, leaving her traumatized, lost, and alienated from her society, but, most detrimentally, from herself. Thus she encounters herself in a process which offers women a "bewildering variety of seeming possibilities" which in turn render choice itself impossible (Perloff 1972: 515). These options she sees before herself are options exclusive from the "simplistic idealization(s) of femininity", which dissociate "intellectual exploration" from their existence (Smith 2008: 34). This causes a psychic fragmentation in Esther, and the images of femininity embodied in women Esther encounters do not provide her with other options, or at least, not with options she considers viable for herself. This is another postmodernist concern where ontological questions are posed (McHale 2004: 9/10). In the atmosphere of "paranoia and surveillance", identity cannot be formed as it is "ideologically constrained" and female ambition pathologized (Smith 2008: 35). When culture enforces splitting of the aspects of an identity and renders them mutually exclusive, an individual is left traumatized. Thus, we may claim that "contradiction and neurosis can be said to be built into the structures of her society" (Ibid.). However, that is also apparent in her narrative. Consistent contradictions are encapsulated in Esther's thoughts while standing in front of a metaphorical fig tree:

> I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet (Plath 2013: 73).

One of the postmodernist instances in trauma fiction is the existence of inconclusive endings, as in trauma fiction, "even if pain is ameliorated, and the individual is in a stronger, more self-aware position, some tensions remain" (Vickroy 2015: 4). We have such an inconclusive ending in *The Bell Jar*. We are not certain whether Esther's discharge from the psychiatric ward is going to be better for her, whether she is healed or whether she is going to go back to being institutionalized again. "The eyes and the faces all turned themselves towards

me, and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room" (Plath 2013: 234). Some may perceive this ending as optimistic – she is deemed mentally well enough to be released from the clutches of the psychiatric institution. However, the phrases chosen in the ending sentence contribute to our insecurity regarding the ending of the novel. Esther says "guiding myself *by them*, as by a magical thread", which implies lack of agency. This circulation of the notion of scrutiny or of control, or of underlying assumption that the women at the time chose certain steps with awareness of being monitored, of being controlled, is evident in this line. The choice of words could have been different, this phrase "by them" could have been omitted. But we may claim that this was Plath's authorial decision. It is as if she wanted to leave readers conflicted, to have them pondering about the meaning of that sentence, to question themselves if the ending of the novel is really hopeful, or if that particular sentence is the harbinger of control that Esther will never escape. Even though Esther is seemingly better, more self-aware, the tension as to how the trajectory of her life is to be developed remains open. We have an open, or inconclusive ending, proving that *The Bell Jar* can indeed be read as a trauma fiction with postmodernist tendencies. In the theoretical section, we established that both trauma and postmodernist fiction have inconclusive endings (Vickroy 2015: 4). Nevertheless, by combining postmodernist fragmentation in the narrative with trauma fiction's focus on psychological and social dilemmas (as ascertained in section 2.4.2.1), we are offered a possibility to understand the story itself (Ibid.). That understanding does not assume definite truths, however; the readers are thus forced to accept the fact that *The Bell Jar* does not offer a clear ending, but rather a possibility to widen the readers' perspective and their ideas regarding the future that awaits Esther. This unmoors not only the narrative, but also the readers and their own expectations regarding the narrative's development.

Apart from not offering definite truths regarding the endings of the stories, from a postmodernist perspective it is also "pointless" to write a purely autobiographical account of one's life (Thiemann 2019: 784). Which is why it is necessary to include fiction, albeit to varying degrees. Plath thus writes autofiction which is "tied to a notion of truth", or rather "subjective truthfulness", while at the same time creating a narrative which is about trauma (Depkat 2019: 284). Those aspects of truthfulness are connected to the real events which happened to her in her own life, but rather than writing a pure autobiographical account of it, she fictionalized it, and thus created the narrative which overcame the strict confines of autobiographical writing. As we have established in the section 2.4.2.2, sometimes authors transfer their personal experience to fictional characters "in an invented situation and impose

on it a fictional outcome" (Pascal 2016: 165). However, what complicates *The Bell Jar* as both an autobiography and autobiographical fiction is the fact that many of the things which happen to Esther happened to Plath as well. Even in the novel itself, there is a part where Esther considers writing a story about herself. In her mind, she sees herself "sitting on the breezeway, surrounded by two white clapboard walls", and she is "small as a doll in a doll's house" (Plath 2013: 116). With a "feeling of tenderness" which fills her heart, she decides to name her heroine Elaine, who would be her "only in disguise" (Ibid.). This is like an embedded micro narrative, akin to a layering of different aspects of Plath, fictionalized within fictionalized. It seems as if Plath is trying to both dissuade and persuade the readers that this is a story about herself, as there are "six letters" in all three names – Esther, Elaine, and Sylvia (Ibid.). Still, it would be a "disservice to Plath's ingenuity as a writer" to see the novel she wrote merely as an image of her life (Gill 2008: 13). However, considering the fact that some of the aspects of Plath's life are familiar, and that there is more than one overlap in the novel and Plath's life, there is a need to investigate to what extent those events are similar, and why those particular events were introduced.

Additionally, we read the novel as a meditation on and of "Plath's past experiences" in order to discuss a life of not only one individual, but also to paint a "broader picture of cultural and ideological life in 1950s white America" (Gill 2008: 75). Which is why we claim that *The Bell Jar* is not an autobiography, but rather an autobiographical fiction or autofiction, as it captures something significant for trauma fiction, which is "precisely that moment which escapes self-apprehension" (Luckhurst 2008: 118). And the therapeutic process of "*re-externalizing the event*" helps in articulating and transmitting the story of one's trauma (Felman and Laub 1992: 68). This is the main advantage of trauma narratives; when one 's "unconscious testimony" becomes naturalized with evidence, one gains an access to the "truth" of traumatic occurrence (Ibid. 15). By externalizing the evidence of a writer's trauma in a fictionalized shroud, writers come to terms with it, and read the truth of their own trauma in a different light. Fictionalizing distances one from the harmful effects, and the aesthetic distance allows them to rationally dissect all the aspects of that experience without being overwhelmed.

When it comes to autobiographical instances in the novel, we may claim that "through the fictionalization of her own fight to find identity", Plath managed to evoke Esther experiencing the "historical crisis within her psyche" (Smith 2008: 53). The fracture of the true essence of Esther's personality comes from the fact that it was formed "under the ideological

compulsion to contain profound contradiction under the glossy veneer of polished glass" (Ibid. 54). The authorial choice of Plath to write a fictionalized account rather than to write a strictly autobiographical narrative probably had to do with the effect she was hoping to achieve. It could be that she wanted to offer a broader comment on the process of entering "adult womanhood in Cold War America" (Ibid. 35). The process which offers women a "bewildering variety of seeming possibilities that choice itself becomes all but impossible" (Perloff 1972: 515). Unfortunately, a story of only one person's experience of a culture as traumatic is unlikely to reach the desired effect and actually illuminate the struggle and consequent reverberations. Therefore, it is necessary to make the story sound as plausible as possible, while fictionalizing it to a certain extent, to include seemingly unimportant instances so that when they accumulate, it is impossible to turn a blind eye and recognition becomes imminent.

There are instances in which the events in the novel directly parallel the events in Plath's life. The episode of Esther's spiraling into depression after she was informed that she was not accepted into the summer school and her subsequent attempt at overdosing on and killing herself with sleeping pills parallel the events in Plath's life. In 1953, Plath became extremely depressed after finding out that she had not been accepted in Frank O'Connor's summer school writing course at Harvard. Similar to Esther, she left a note to her mother stating that she would return the following day from a walk, hid in the basement and overdosed on pills, only to be heard three days later "moaning, found semiconscious, revived, and hospitalized" (Bloom 2001: 12). She was twenty at the time. Autofiction is known for enabling writers to use "deliberate, often ironic, interplay" between autobiography and fiction (Smith and Watson 2001: 186). By using the pathway of her own life in order to create a narrative of Esther's, Plath complicates the autobiographical instances in the novel, and ironically detaches herself from her own traumatic past in order to create a fictionalized narrative. Also, it may be that Plath included a fictionalized parallel to her own life events because they were only "belatedly recovered"; she had probably repressed those instances of her life, and when they returned, she entered the process of "analeptic revision" (Luckhurst 2008: 118). Thus, she engaged in unearthing past events, which were traumatic, and possibly shameful, in order to come to terms with them and revise them from both temporal and aesthetic distance. Enveloping them in a fictional shroud, she achieved a balance between aesthetic portrayal and distancing, and at the same time, revival of the painful past. Using her own memories and translating them into a traumatic narrative, she attempted to ascribe meaning to "violent emotional or physical incursion" which would have otherwise remained in the realm of

imagination (Jensen 2016: 14). With this in mind, we turn to the ways the narrative in *The Bell Jar* represents both traumatic events and responses to traumatic events.

3.2.4.1 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events and Responses to Traumatic Events in *The Bell Jar* -Introduction

The Bell Jar, as already established in the previous section, is a postmodernist trauma fiction, in which the story of Esther's life is a form of a retrospective narrative, told by an older Esther who recollects her life in her early twenties. In her narrative, she constantly shifts between different past events, in a seemingly chronological order, but upon closer inspection, it becomes obvious that those past instances are not exactly chronologically aligned, as there are episodes from different periods in the past which disturb a coherent outline of the events. Fragmentation is present in the narrative in the way that chronology is interrupted, especially when Esther recalls her childhood, the happiness she felt, with an abrupt integration of other memories, such as her father's death. Her suicide attempts, traumatic as well as potentially healing encounters with other people are also narrated, in most cases as an afterthought, or a stray memory triggered by her thread of reflection. Throughout the novel, we are faced with Esther's inability to properly narrate her trauma which is another instance of the unrepresentability of trauma. This novel does not offer a story with a clear ending, but rather a life testimony imbued with the ongoing and persistent effects of the aftermath of traumatic experiences.

Even though the story is focalized through a first-person narrator, there are instances when Esther retells the past events of her life as if they happened to another person, which can be connected to dissociation, and which is transported into the narrative with the help of a strategy known as narrative dissociation. Thus, her narrative displays traumatic symptoms of her psychological distress. Also, despite the focalization centered on the voice of the traumatized, we cannot claim that we get a reliable narrative. Esther is an unreliable narrator, as her mental state, even some time later, distorts her perception and prevents her from disclosing other details about her life. In particular, we have sudden shifts between extremely astute, ironic observations and numbness, detachment, which renders her narrative disputable and leaves the readers baffled as to what is actually real in her narrative. Thus, both traumatic events as well as responses to traumatic events are narrated with the help of various narrative strategies, as one strategy alone would not be able to convey the entirety of the complex emotions and thoughts which are a reflection of trauma impact. Atemporal ordering or a

disrupted timeline is apparent in the flashbacks in her narrative, in particular to her childhood, which she claims was the last time she felt happy. Occasionally, through flashbacks to very traumatic experiences, she uses abrupt shifts to past or jumbled recollections, which fail to present the real extent of the trauma. We may even claim that the whole narrative is actually a flashback, or an analeptic revision. All of these techniques are used in order to help the readers immerse themselves in Esther's traumatized and traumatizing psyche.

As emphasized previously, psychological traumatic events subsume both sociological and physical traumatic events as, regardless of the nature of a traumatic event, both the body and the mind of the survivor are affected. Thus, this further contends that trauma is not something which is easy to dissect, but which has to be carefully considered in terms of the surrounding contexts. As far as the representation of responses to traumatic events is concerned, we offer an analysis of narrative representation of depression which is in the novel merged with dissociation, self-mutilation which is connected to Esther's suicidal attempts. In the following sections, we attempt to offer a separate overview of sociological and physical traumatic events as narrated in *The Bell Jar*.

3.2.4.1.1. Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events in *The Bell Jar*

3.2.4.1.1.1 Narrative Representation of Sociological Traumatic Events in *The Bell Jar*

We have dedicated the section "The Bell Jar" - *Contextualizing the Narrative* to explaining the societal conditions in which Plath wrote *The Bell Jar*. What is implied is that the societal circumstances were predominantly affected by the aftermath of the war, as well as on enabling men to pursue their aspirations. Essentially, the whole system was designed in order to cater to men's needs and their ambitions. Due to such atmosphere, most of the traumatic events which happen to Esther are in one way or another connected to men, and enabled by the patriarchal society, which both encourages and enables the way men act towards women. In a literary flashback, or an analepsis, Esther recalls an event from the past while lying in bed with Constantin, a simultaneous interpreter. She remembers Buddy Willard's mother, Mrs. Willard, and her "braiding a rug out of strips of wool from Mr Willard's old suits" (Plath 2013: 80). Mrs. Willard then used it as a new kitchen mat, and this memory spirals into Esther's thinking process in which she compares the kitchen matt to the life of a married woman. She says that despite a man's process of wooing a woman prior to marriage, as soon

as the wedding service ends, he would want the woman to "flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs Willard's kitchen mat" (Ibid.). Another flashback to that time was when Buddy told her "in a sinister, knowing way", that "after I had children I would feel differently, I wouldn't want to write poems anymore" (Ibid. 81). And that forces her to spiral into a thinking process about the fact that maybe it is true that "when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterwards you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state" (Ibid. 81). Plath's comparison of marriage to slavery stems from the omnipresent oppressive atmosphere at the time, and further deepens the split Esther feels because of her reluctance to get married, and at the same time her underlying wish to remain a poet. This is in line with what we established in the section "The Bell Jar" - *Contextualizing the Narrative* – her inability to establish a fulfilling identity is due to the overall societal context surrounding her. Her own experience of trauma, as well as her own sense of identity, are affected by the relationship between "personal and social paradigms" (Balaev 2012: 17), which are shaped by the patriarchal context of prescribed identities, to which she cannot conform, unless willing to completely sever some aspects of herself and abandon certain aspirations which guide her life. The fact that these flashbacks and ensuing thoughts happen during the time she spends with Constantin signals her dissociation, her not being completely present at the present moment (we explain how dissociation is narrated in one of the later sections). Her thought process encompasses scattered thoughts, which seem to collide and then spiral into different directions, but all of which essentially deal with the traumatizing influence of patriarchal rhetoric, and the resulting negative effects on Esther.

The most recurring embodiment of patriarchal influence in the novel is the presence of Buddy Willard. Esther is introduced to certain traumatic events in her life, in particular, the process of giving birth, by Buddy, whose decisions to introduce Esther to certain aspects which later prove traumatic for her come from his entitlement as a man who acts as a teacher, and decides whether or not Esther is ready to learn certain things about life. In one instance, he takes Esther to witness the procedure of a woman giving birth. He studies to become a doctor, and his colleague who is going to perform the delivery tells Esther: "'You oughtn't to see this. […] You'll never want to have a baby if you do. They oughtn't to let women watch. It'll be the end of human race" (Plath 2013: 61). Judging from his words, it is obvious that even this man is aware that it is a traumatic process, but he still ascertains that women should be kept in the dark about the truth of their own bodies, until the moment comes that they give birth; an unspoken assumption is that it would be too late for them to change their mind then. When

Esther sees the table upon which the woman is going to give birth, it looks to her as an "awful torture table", and they stand by the windows, where they have "a perfect view" (Ibid.). Esther is told that the woman is drugged so that this drug-induced state "would make her forget she'd had any pain and that when she swore and groaned she really didn't know what she was doing because she was in a kind of twilight sleep" (Ibid.). Esther thinks that "it sounded like the sort of drug a man would invent" because before her was a woman "in terrible pain", who would probably go through pregnancy again, and "that long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again" (Ibid. 62). Esther's thought process reveals that she is trying to comprehend the situation in which women should have agency, but are bereft of it. She participates as an audience member in an event in which a woman is unable to do anything, as she is strapped to the table, where she lies suspended in a "doorless and windowless corridor of pain" without any possibility of complaining, as she is under the influence of medicine. However, the medicine is not there to help her, as Esther tells us that the woman is groaning and definitely still feeling pain, but so that she could be left without agency, completely surrendered to the hands of the doctors, who are the only ones who can ease her agony. Knowing that this is a retrospective narrative, and also being aware of the fact that the Esther who is narrating has already experienced giving birth, these thoughts in her mind could be a belated realization about the true nature of the traumatic process of giving birth.

Another instance when Buddy Willard makes a decision about Esther and their relationship is when he says, since they were going to marry, at least according to his plan, it is time Esther saw him naked. Narrative dissociation is employed in order to convey Esther's thoughts at that moment: "Then he just stood there in front of me and I kept on staring at him. The only thing I could think of was turkey neck and turkey gizzards and I felt very depressed" (Plath 2013: 64). At that moment she is dissociating again, because there is a lack of agency on her part, as she did not want to see him, but Buddy deemed it necessary. Bodily violation does not necessarily have to include direct contact with the body of the victim; sometimes making a decision about the victim's participation in a certain act is more than traumatic enough. Her thoughts during this act of being forced to watch a man naked bring forward her conversations with her mother and grandmother about how "a fine, clean boy Buddy Willard was", a kind "a girl should stay fine and clean for" (Ibid.). So she accepts this because she is taught to do so. This cleanliness implies virginity, and it also implies lack of agency on Esther's part. If Buddy decides that she should see him naked, she must do so, as she is taught that she

must obey the men around her. Buddy acts as a privileged representative of patriarchy, and that is obvious in his behavior towards Esther. When he is sick, Esther is manipulated into visiting him. He asks her: "'How would you like to be Mrs Buddy Willard?'" (Ibid. 88). Instead of saying "Mrs Esther Willard", he outright says "Mrs Buddy Willard", as he, albeit implicitly, asks her about the possibility of renouncing her name and surname, and thus her identity. She thinks about laughing and about the fact that such a question posed in the past would have "bowled" her over (Ibid. 88). When she informs him that she is never going to get married, Buddy cheerfully tells her that she is crazy and that she will change her mind (Ibid. 89). He refuses to be dissuaded, and her thoughts are no longer present until the end of their conversation.

Throughout her life, Esther is implicitly and explicitly taught to accept men's advances and their behavior. Their disregard of Esther's own thoughts is something which renders her unable to react and be proactive in encounters with men. However, Esther seems to have internalized these values which makes her look down on those who are not like her, and she emulates them in her behavior, for example when she calls a black person a "negro" and kicks him, or when she is experiencing homophobia towards Joan and Deebee. Her inability to act defiantly towards men of her own race makes her act in a harsh way towards those of lower status, in particular when she is physically violent towards a black man: "I drew my foot back and gave him a sharp, hard kick on the calf of the leg" (Plath 2013: 175). Maybe it is her insecurity, or maybe it is the fact that she never had to live like those outside of her social circle, as she lived a suburban life with no fear of financial struggles, so she shows no compassion for them, and even distances herself. When she finds out about Joan's lesbianism, the internalized homophobia and abhorrence of deviancy rise to the surface in Esther, "in spite of my old, ingrained dislike, Joan fascinated me" (Ibid. 209).

Joan is a stark reminder of everything she tries to move from her consciousness into obscurity. However, they were close enough "so that her thoughts and feelings seemed a wry, black image of my own" (Plath 2013: 210). It seems that Plath's decision to include Joan's character in the story is because she wanted to offer Esther's counterpart, as even Esther remarks that "Joan was the beaming double of my old best self, specially designed to follow and torment me" (Ibid. 197). Joan is not timid, she is not as constrained as Esther, she is brave enough to embrace tenderness even if it comes from being with a woman, and she refuses Buddy Willard's advances. And ultimately, she is successful in committing suicide; it is as if

Joan is Esther's carbon copy, a remnant and a reminder of what Esther could have been, of something she decided to remove from herself and reject it.

> Sometimes I wondered if I had made Joan up. Other times I wondered if she would continue to pop in at every crisis of my life to remind me of what I had been, and what I had been through, and carry on her own separate but similar crisis under my nose (Plath 2013: 210).

In a society where deviancy is abhorred, Esther seems to have internalized those values, and emulates them towards Joan, who is openly exhibiting her deviant behavior, without fear of repercussions. When Joan tells her that she likes her, Esther is harsh: "'That's tough, Joan, […] Because I don't like you. You make me puke, if you want to know.'" (Plath 2013: 211). Esther uses the rhetoric of the patriarchal society in which one form of male power is exhibited in "enforcing heterosexuality on women" (Rich 1980: 640). For her, there is no other type of love apart from the one between a man and a woman, and she is repulsed by being singled out by Joan as a person she is interested in. She is refusing probably the only comfort she could find. After Joan commits suicide, by hanging, similar to Esther's first attempt, Esther attends her funeral, and "all during the simple funeral service I wondered what I thought I was burying" (Ibid. 232). As she stares down at the grave, "I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am" (Ibid. 233). This is evocative of the scene where she swims and her heart is like "a dull motor" in her ears (Ibid. 152), and here, the heart gains agency, and it brags: "I am, I am, I am". When this line was written previously, there were no commas, just a continuous stream of a strange utterance she could not comprehend. Now, it seems that her body is reminding her that she is still alive, that the part of her which she could not accept, nor integrate, died with Joan. Joan is the embodiment of everything Esther could not accept about herself, of all the deviancy she tried to suppress her entire life; a reminder of Buddy, of the time spent in the asylum, of the warmth she rejected when she shunned Joan's advances. In particular, the fact that they were at the same mental institution is a stark reminder that the outcome is not always the same; Joan could not overcome her own mental disarray, and she was successful in her suicide. And as Esther stands above the gaping hole in the ground, her heart bragging that she is still there, her words betray a sense that she thinks that with Joan's death, she lost something. Perhaps it as a promise of warm, female love she previously harshly rejected, or maybe someone who saw her at her worst and was still there for her; or even something she herself could have become. Esther is unable to understand what it is exactly, which is why she is left wondering.

3.2.4.1.1.2 Narrative Representation of Physical Traumatic Events in *The Bell Jar*

Physical traumatic events are often immediately followed by numbness as an initial response to bodily violation. They entail the paradox of traumatic experiences – "most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it" (Caruth 1996: 91/92). Rape as a violation of bodily integrity and dismissal of the victim's refusal to participate in a sexual act is one of the physical traumatic events which directly impacts Esther's body, but which only belatedly returns to her as a traumatic experience. However, in the narrative, there are as little details as possible when describing this act of violation, in particular Esther's thought in the process. When Marco attempts to rape her, the event is narrated with a mixture of narrative dissociation and gapping. She thinks: "'It's happening […] It's happening. If I just lie here and do nothing it will happen.'" (Plath 2013: 104). The implication here is the notion that she expected it to happen, that it was but a matter of time. "The ground soared and struck me with a soft shock" (Ibid.); her choice of words betrays lack of agency – she is a puppet in Marco's hands, she does not even decide to fall down, but rather, the ground has more agency at that moment than her. Also, shock is not coursing through her body, as she rather ascribes shock to the impact with the ground, not as something she herself feels. She does not say what is actually happening, as the immediacy of the traumatic event renders her unable to voice it, so the only description about the event we have stems from the description of her surroundings. Rape victims are stunned in the process of body violation, and there is no appropriate or inappropriate way to react in that moment; most victims just wait for it to be over. Esther informs us that "The dust cleared, and I had a full view of the battle" (Ibid. 105). This passage is filled with gaps, as if her thoughts cannot fathom what is happening to her, as it is too traumatic, even from a retrospective narrative. The whole violation is described with insinuations, and we are unable to see in the text whether Marco succeeded in sexually assaulting her, or if he only attempted to do so before she managed to smash Marco's nose. This display of agency on Esther's part makes Marco give up on further attempts at raping her, and he angrily utters that women are "sluts"; "'Yes or no, it is all the same.'" (Ibid. 105). In Marco's chauvinistic mind, women are reduced to "sluts"; it does not matter if they accept men's advances or refuse them, the derogatory term lingers in the air like a guillotine ready to descend and mark women whenever men are not content with their behavior. Esther begins to understand a simple truth about men: "I began to see why woman-haters could make such fools of women. Woman-haters were like gods: invulnerable and chock-full of power. They descended, and then they disappeared. You could never catch one" (Ibid. 103). In Esther's

mind, men are invulnerable, and the fact that this invulnerability assumes inherent ability to wound women and do to them what they please is traumatizing. However, due to the overwhelming feelings in the aftermath of rape, Esther decides not to wash off "two diagonal lines of dried blood" on her cheeks (Ibid. 108). She considers them "touching" and "rather spectacular", like "the relic of a dead lover" (Ibid. 108), or a stark reminder that she managed to survive the attempted rape. In the decision to leave the blood on her cheeks, she shows agency, a reminder that she managed to hurt the body that attempted to hurt her, during the event which was intended to subordinate her to Marco's desire.

Esther lives at the time when virginity was something to be preserved until marriage, to be bestowed to a man a woman chooses to spend her life with. However, her inner being rebels about it and she makes a decision to lose her virginity, approaching the process as a daunting task that nevertheless has to be completed. In that course of action, she displays pro-activity and she tries to rationalize her choice:

> I felt the first man I slept with must be intelligent, so I would respect him. Irwin was a full professor at twenty-six and had the pale, hairless skin of a boy genius. I also needed somebody quite experienced to make up for my lack of it, and Irwin's ladies reassured me on this head. Then, to be on the safe side, I wanted somebody I didn't know and wouldn't go on knowing – a kind of impersonal, priestlike official, as in the tales of tribal rites (Plath 2013: 218).

This is her ritual of becoming a woman, as her notion of virginity became corrupted when she found out that Buddy Willard, who was supposed to marry her, did not respect the unsaid agreement about purity of them both and slept with another woman, so her virginity "weighed like a millstone" around her neck (Plath 2013: 218). The ritual is something which is in her mind evocative of a Christian tradition, as she compares Irwin to a "priestlike official" and immediately follows by mentioning "tribal rites" as the carnal nature of the process of losing virginity is at the same time a holy aspect of union, but also a bloody ordeal where a woman's body goes through a rite of passage. However, this ritual, albeit overthought, quickly turns into a nightmare as she realizes it hurts her, and gets Irwin's dismissive comment that "'Sometimes it hurts.'" (Ibid.). The whole process of her losing virginity is not described; there is a gap in the narrative and Esther only says "After a while", implying that the process of stripping her of her virginity happened, but apart from the initial pain, Esther resorts to not conveying any other thoughts or feelings (Ibid.). And when she starts bleeding, Irwin continues to be dismissive and tells her "'Oh, that often happens […] 'You'll be all right.'" (Ibid. 219). Her bodily trauma is described as blood seeping in-between her legs, being soaked up by towels,

and the indifference of Irwin who shows no concern. However, she hemorrhages heavily, and ends up in a hospital, and then continues to be dismissed when the doctor tells her that she is "one in a million" to whom it happens because of the diaphragm (Ibid. 223). The absence of detailed descriptions regarding Esther's thoughts and feelings on the entire ordeal stems from the fact that traumatic experiences are stored in the body "as a perpetual 'now'", and the "reflective process of assigning meaning to experience" by remembering it may be hindered (Jensen 2016: 14). Despite her not conveying any thoughts which would show that she understood that event as traumatic as it was happening, her body becomes a site of trauma, as it bleeds and becomes a gaping wound.

Esther's inability to comply with the demands of her patriarchal society is akin to deviancy which was extremely discouraged, and even punished. Doctor Gordon, upon their first encounter, asks her "'Suppose you try and tell me what you think is wrong.'" (Plath 2013: 124). He does not deign her with respect, as the "suppose you try" implies that he considers her unable to explain her problem, and he merely wants her to try to tell him about it, but does not expect much from her. Esther's thought process is apparent when we read the following: "That made it sound as if nothing was *really* wrong, I only *thought* it was wrong" (Ibid.). Esther spirals into depression, and her encounters with Doctor Gordon offer her no help, mostly due to the fact that the psychiatrist himself remains detached and pays no particular attention neither to Esther nor her symptoms. So her mother informs her that she is to receive "some shock treatments" at his private clinic (Ibid. 130). ECT is one of the patriarchal "technological quick fixes" at the time, as the society of 1950s America "regarded mental illness, criminality, and homosexuality as soluble by the application of electricity" (Smith 2008: 36). Her initial curiosity turns into confusion and fear as electro-convulsive therapy[23] is administered on her, and she is left wondering: "what terrible thing it was that I had done" (Plath 2013: 138). Having this in mind, in Esther's case ECT was administered without Doctor Gordon consulting with her beforehand. The whole procedure is described by Esther in an emotionally detached style, with gaps as to how she actually feels or thinks. This is due to the fact that traumatic events pose narrative challenges, as in its shock impact trauma is "anti-narrative" (Luckhurst 2008: 79).

[23] Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) was administered to mentally ill people before psychotherapy was accepted as a proper way to initiate a conversation with a traumatized person, or a person who experienced a mental breakdown. ECT is a form of therapy "used with excessive, severe, and often psychotic forms of depression"; however, the consequences may lead to "brain damage and memory loss" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 168).

Esther initially attempts to trust a subsequent, female psychiatrist, Doctor Nolan, but when she also decides to eventually submit Esther to ECT after days spent in an asylum, Esther feels betrayed, and she thinks: "I loved her, I had given her my trust on a platter and told her everything, and she had promised, faithfully, to warn me ahead of time if ever I had to have another shock treatment" (Plath 2013: 203). The second time she undergoes ECT, the whole ordeal is also described in an emotionally detached way, and the only semblance of description we have as to how she felt during the procedure is: "And she set something on my tongue and in panic I bit down, and darkness wiped me out like chalk on a blackboard" (Ibid. 205). ECT is present as a culmination of her physical trauma, due to deviancy. Even though Esther's thoughts are told from a first-person perspective, this perspective on the whole ordeal is fragmented, as Esther provides only a fraction of the procedure, but she leaves us in the dark as to how she felt during the procedure as well. That may be due to the fact that it was a traumatizing event, something her mind decided to erase. Trauma is not selective, but it is reductive; and the memory of trauma oftentimes is not a willing act, but rather a subconscious decision to erase certain fragments of the event from memory, in order to be able to move on. It is only after she wakes up following the procedure that she thinks that all "the heat and fear had purged itself" and she feels at peace; the bell jar "hung, suspended" and she "was open to the circulating air" (Ibid. 206). In the section *Reading "*The Bell Jar" *as Postmodernist Fiction*, we discussed the possibility of the bell jar as a protective shield between Esther and the oppressive society. However, after electroconvulsive therapy, she is one step closer to being out of the bell jar, as the "circulating air" is something she feels. Our understanding is that this means that she feels as if she is one step closer to silencing the deviant thoughts in her mind, embodied in the curvature of the bell jar, and that the closer she is to complacency, the more the bell jar lifts and allows her to be shaped by the society it initially shielded her from. The psychotherapeutical approach is supposed to be supportive, to include "personal validation through acknowledging the reality of symptoms" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 546). However, psychiatrists do not offer any particular support for the healing of Esther's symptoms. Doctor Gordon outright dismisses her and her pain, and he resorts to ECT immediately. Doctor Nolan initially promises Esther that they would talk about everything that would transpire, but her decision to commit Esther to ECT despite knowing that Esther was traumatized by it further consolidates Esther's belief that she cannot trust those who are supposed to help her, and it traumatizes her even further.

3.2.4.1.2 Narrative Representation of Responses to Traumatic Events in *The Bell Jar*

3.2.4.1.2.1 Narrative Representation of Depression and Dissociation in *The Bell Jar*

We have already established that depression is characterized by "difficulty thinking or concentrating, a lack of interest in activities that were formerly pleasurable, and feelings of hopelessness and emptiness" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 25). In the novel, Esther's depression and dissociation are intricately connected and narrated, and we attempt to explain how in this section. Esther's identity is fractured, and her self-image is unstable. This is a problem we encounter when dealing with novels focalized through first-person narrator primarily, and with heavy autobiographical inputs. We mostly learn about Esther through her own thoughts about herself, and through her conversations with others. At the onset of her depression, while staying in New York, she goes to a photoshoot and is asked a seemingly simple question: "'What do you have in mind after you graduate?'" (Plath 2013: 30). However, this question makes her spiral into self-doubt as she reminisces about the time she had the answer to the question ready. But at that moment, she just dissociates, hears herself say "'I don't really know'", and the minute those words leave her lips, she "knew it was true", which shocks her to her core (Ibid.). The fact that she belatedly and at the same time suddenly, realizes the fact that she has no idea how to continue her life is something she did not expect. As a result, the "emotional trauma of her internship" leaves her feeling alienated not only from herself, but also from her own language, the one she found comfort in (Kratz 2019: 96). Even the sight of German words, those "dense, black, barbed-wire letters" makes her mind "shut like a clam" (Plath 2013: 31).

At the end of her stay in New York and after Marco attempts to rape her, she decides to discard all her clothes and feed them to the darkness: "flutteringly, like a loved one's ashes, the gray scraps were ferried off, to settle here, there, exactly where I would never know, in the dark heart of New York" (Plath 2013: 107). She hopes that if she discards her clothes, she can forget everything that happened to her during her stay in New York. However, her nightmare merely begins, as her return from New York marks the onset of her depression and her traumatic relieving of the consequences of traumatic events.

Thus, understanding Esther's personality comes with difficulties due to the intrusive effect of her trauma. She changes from an ambitious young woman into a depressed individual

and that change is gradual, as we follow it through the narrative, with the help of her thoughts and other people's comments about her. Thus, we follow a change one undergoes due to the trauma effect. One of the instances of postmodernist trauma fiction is the "fragmentation of approaches" when it comes to the nature of a character's thoughts in terms of "their motives, intensions, and resulting behavior and action" (Palmer 2004: 12). When narration is done from a first-person focalization, it is necessary to gather inferences about focalizer's "mental dimension" with the help of the information they intake and how they process it (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 56). In the case of Esther, the underlying assumption is that her whole personality is affected by the fact that she is traumatized, and that her sense of self is shaken and unstable. Thus, we perceive Esther as "inadequate" if we consider her thoughts about herself, and she herself states: "The trouble was, I had been inadequate all along, I simply hadn't thought about it" (Plath 2013: 72). Esther's self-descriptions change based on her mental state. Before depression, she shows desire for limitless potential. She says: "The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters" (Ibid.). Esther does not choose from all or between; she wants to absorb all of the options presented to her and thus she would become whole. She says that one of the reasons she never wanted to marry was because the "last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from"; instead, she "wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the coloured arrows from a Fourth of July rocket" (Ibid. 79). This desire for limitless potential is snuffed by her eventual depressive state, and dissociation which occurs as well. She becomes obsessed with her mental state, and "everything I had ever read about mad people stuck in my mind, while everything else flew out" (Ibid. 149). This tunnel vision in her case occurs because of her mental disarray, and once treasured and useful facts are obliterated in order to provide space for her current mental state, which is imbued with thoughts about madness.

One of the most symbolic episodes which coincides with her depression is the metaphor of the bell jar, which happens unexpectedly, almost obsessively, and which is repeated throughout the novel. Also, the traumatic episodes in her life are narrated multiple times, such as her suicide attempts or the electroconvulsive therapy she underwent, which is symptomatic of the way traumatized people relive painful events. Her depression which is a result of all the traumas she faced is blatantly obvious in the thought reports throughout the novel, especially during her dissociative episodes and mental breakdowns. She informs the readers that she had not washed her dirty clothes, nor her hair for three weeks, and that she "hadn't slept for seven

nights" (Plath 2013: 122). She dissociates so often that there are entire hours which pass before she manages to ground herself in reality again; at one point, the "room blued into view, and I wondered where the night had gone" (Ibid. 118). Even though she has not moved, time does not stand still but passes her by, which she only belatedly understands, when the room "blued into view". It seems that she is also dissociated from her sight, as she does not say that she saw how the color of the room changed, but rather that it "blued into view", as if it obtained a life of its own and materialized in front of Esther, without her showing any sort of agency, not even in terms of looking. Dissociation happens when a person is trying to handle a traumatic event that would otherwise overwhelm them (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 104/105), but Esther seems to not function at all; she just lets the time pass her by.

A famous novelist, Philomena Guinea, takes an interest in Esther's case, as she "at the peak of her career", had been "in an asylum as well", and read about Esther in a Boston paper (Plath 2013: 177). She drives Esther to a private hospital, and Esther thinks that she knows she "should be grateful to Mrs Guinea, only I couldn't feel a thing" (Ibid. 178). Her depression leads to emotional numbness, and her thoughts betray a fear that wherever she may go, she "would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air" (Ibid. 178). Her thoughts are preoccupied with the image of the bell jar, as, while driving to the private hospital, the "air of the bell jar wadded round me and I couldn't stir" (Ibid. 178). Repetition is obvious in traumatic intrusions, in particular with the recurring image of the bell jar, which shows the cyclical nature of her depression. Also, she is consistently using the images of suffocation and drowning. The repetition of the images of the foul air beneath the bell jar leads us back to our discussion of its symbolism. The notion we get from these two quotes is that Esther is unable to move, that she feels stifled; she is overwhelmed due to everything that happened to her. The fact that the bell jar seems to be impenetrable signifies that she cannot escape it. Her own oppressive thoughts merge with her unfulfilled potential, and transform into molecules of air which hit the bell jar and ricochet back to her, as something stifling and sour, and a reminder that she cannot do anything about it. Even though there is a possibility of the bell jar being lifted in the future, she expresses her thoughts on the futility of it all; she would still feel its lingering presence as a constant reminder of her inability to lift it. But, as we ascertained earlier, this bell jar might actually be protecting her, enabling her to see the real picture of her situation. However, she repudiates it, and regards the dome as a place with sour air which suffocates and oppresses her.

Esther has attempts at socialization, but there is no real connection. She cannot connect with her mother, her friends, random people she encounters. She withdraws and only politely participates in conversations, due to propriety, but there is avoidance of friendships, relationships, which appear as risks she is not willing to take. As we have already mentioned in section 2.3, traumatic events usually cause a rupture in social interaction, an inability to connect to other people due to one's own rupture in the mind. It is usually the "degree of public acknowledgement and support" for a traumatic event which may be "a significant positive factor", or its absence may be "an additional vulnerability or stressor", and even a second trauma (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 465). Exacerbated by her depression, she is unable to find any comfort in other people. This culminates during her stay at the psychiatric ward, when her thoughts betray what she cannot say out loud: "I hated these visits, because I kept feeling the visitors measuring my fat and stringy hair against what I had been and what they wanted me to be, and I knew they went away utterly confounded" (Plath 2013: 195). This occurs when there is an emotional withdrawal due to trauma, when "a minor comment" may trigger "an excessive withdrawal and nonresponsiveness" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 112). This also conveys the fact that she ascribes to certain people her own perception of herself, and that in the glances they cast at her, or due to the absence of comments on her appearance, they actually regard her in a negative way, because she is unable to perceive herself in any other light but unfavorable. Rather than being faced with how other people perceive her, she resorts to withdrawing from any social interaction, and remains silent.

Eventually, she is released from the mental institution, and her mother tells her that they will forget everything that happened like a bad dream. Esther repeats "A bad dream" and "To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream" (Plath 2013: 227). This is evocative of the nature of traumatic events; for a traumatized person, they have "no beginning, no ending, no before, no during, and no after", but rather, a traumatized person "remains entrapped" between the "core" of traumatic reality" and "the fatedness of its reenactments" (Felman and Laub 1992: 62). Esther's words convey the fact that she is aware of her inability to overcome her traumatizing reality by merely remembering it as a bad dream, as for her, trauma is the permanent now, it is happening even in its aftermath. It also becomes obvious when she recounts everything that she should have forgotten, every single traumatic instance in a flashback enumeration, which is reminiscent of the cyclical nature of trauma:

> the cadavers and Doreen and the story of the fig-tree and Marco's diamond and the sailor on the Common and Doctor Gordon's wall-eyed nurse and the broken thermometers and the negro with his two kinds of beans and the twenty pounds I gained on insulin and the rock that bulged between sky and sea like a grey skull.
> Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind snow, should numb and cover them.
> But they were part of me. They were my landscape (Plath 2013: 227).

When she thinks about her future, she sees the ensuing years "spaced along a road in the form of telephone poles, threaded together by wires"; she is able to count "nineteen telephone poles, and then the wires dangled into space, and try as I would, I couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth" (Plath 2013: 118). Taking into account the fact that Esther is nineteen at the time this retrospective narrative takes place, the previous quote conveys her uncertainty about the future, her inability to imagine herself freed of her mental state which shackles her to that present moment of pain, rendering her unable to move; not only physically, as we have shown in one of the previous paragraphs, but also mentally. There is a constant repetition of the wires, as in this quote, or wires on the letters of German language, grates reminiscent of the prison cells – those repetitions are supposed to invoke the oppressive feeling of being tied to the present moment, of being imprisoned by her own thoughts. Her future is dissolving right as she attempts to imagine it, and her plans about the future "started leaping through my head, like a family of scatty rabbits" (Ibid.), disorganized and incoherent. This part is similar to the one about the fig tree, but as this is the point at which she spirals further into depression, the narrative is disintegrated.

On the next page, there is a complete narrative dissociation, shifting from the thoughts about books, to letters. When she tries to read a word she sees written as a string of letters, it sounds like "a heavy wooden object falling downstairs, boomp, boomp, boomp, step after step" (Plath 2013: 119). This rambling is due to her psychological fragmentation, which coincides with the fragmentation of words in front of her. The repetition of the onomatopoeic sound further consolidates the fact that words are nonsensical to her, that her mind is unable to commit to even the simple act of reading, and it only repeats dull sounds, which further enervates her. She hides under a mattress and that is followed by a severed narrative, which culminates in a string of letters spanning across the middle of the page. There is a constant repetition of images ahead of her, but never within her reach, which may be connected to her depressive state and insecurity about her future. She says: "I saw the days of the year stretching ahead like a series of bright, white boxes, and separating one box from another was sleep, like a black shade" (Ibid. 123). This follows her thoughts about the futility of washing her hair or clothes because

it “seemed silly” (Ibid. 123). This is an analepsis to her thought processes prior to meeting Doctor Gordon. But as soon as she meets him, her depression deepens, and she thinks about how she is scared, as if she “were being stuffed farther and farther into a black, airless sack with no way out” (Ibid. 123). This repetition of images of suffocating is connected to her depressive state, as she finds herself in a state where she is unable to confront her painful feelings (Smith 2004: 153), and at the same time, those feelings are still present, and they constantly return to haunt her. Symptoms of depression are generally exhibited as apprehension, withdrawal from other people, changes in sleep patterns, and lethargy or agitation (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 94). Her descriptions of her state and her surroundings constantly evoke black color, shades, wires, sacks, and boxes. It sounds as if she is suspended in time and place, bound by her body and her mind which confine her in a well of darkness, with glimpses of a possible future unknown and distant, sequestered in white boxes she is unable to open. Also, this is reminiscent of her feelings about being under the bell jar, where the only thing which reminds her of the passing of time are blissful instances of oblivion which occur when she sleeps.

Intrusive thoughts are constantly repeated in the narrative, rendering her focalizing point distorted due to distortion of her own reality, which further elicits distancing in the narrative. Her thought reports exhibit unfiltered despair and confusion, and her emotional numbness is apparent in narrative dissociation. Broken memories and constant flashbacks further support the atemporality of a traumatized narrative. Dismembered voices which haunt her mind constantly remind her of all of her failures, and add to her overall traumatized state:

> I summoned my little chorus of voices.
> *Doesn’t your work interest you, Esther?*
> *You know, Esther, you’ve got the perfect set-up of a true neurotic.*
> *You’ll never get anywhere like that, you’ll never get anywhere like that, you’ll never get anywhere like that* (Plath 2013: 141).

We can infer a lot about a narrator’s mental state from how willing or able they are “to talk about past and present feelings or to represent others” (Vickroy 2015: 133). If the narrator is “focused on immediate experience”, and offers “little explanation of past influences, suggesting repression or avoidant omissions”, we can reach a conclusion that they are emotionally separated from their own past and trauma (Ibid.). This repetition of the same phrase “*you’ll never get anywhere like that*” (Plath 2013: 41) serves to further consolidate her traumatized state of mind, as it is a reminder of her greatest fear. Even though we have asserted

that this is a retrospective narrative, from the point of view of a much older Esther, the feeling we get when reading the novel, the narrative strategies and techniques employed, convey the immediacy of trauma. Towards the end, the chapters are becoming shorter, her retelling of that time seems disintegrated and fragmented the way she must have felt when it was happening. It conveys the urgency at narrating everything that happened, as if the older Esther who narrates is impatient to just complete the daunting task of conveying that time. Even though the belated understanding is present, the narrative strategies and techniques employed actually exhibit trauma as if it is happening right at the moment it is narrated, as if the effects and the aftermath come immediately, and not from a belated perspective, and with the foreknowledge that sheds light onto the dormant aspects of traumatic events and their responses.

One of the instances in which Esther's mental deterioration and dissociation are obvious is in her relationship to her reflection and her self-image when compared to others, which "changes as the novel progresses and each step towards greater or lesser self-recognition corresponds to an increase or decrease in her mental alienation" (Smith 2008: 48). She says "I couldn't see the point of getting up. I had nothing to look forward to" (Plath 2013: 113). After her suicide attempt with the pills, and after she wakes up, she asks for a mirror. They initially refuse to give it to her "'Because you don't look very pretty.'" (Ibid. 168). But when they give her:

> At first I didn't see what the trouble was. It wasn't a mirror at all, but a picture.
> You couldn't tell whether the person in the picture was a man or a woman, because their hair was shaved off and sprouted in bristly chicken-feather tufts all over their head. One side of the person's face was purple, and bulged out in a shapeless way, shading to green along the edges, and then to a sallow yellow. The person's mouth was pale brown, with a rose-coloured sore at either corner. […]
> I smiled.
> The mouth in the mirror cracked into a grin" (Plath 2013: 168).

This passage narratively conveys depersonalization, which is one of disorders associated with dissociation. In the cases of depersonalization, a person has a sudden sense of being "outside one's self", and the accompanying feeling is the one of a "distortion of body image" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 106). Staring at her reflection, Esther becomes a depersonalized observer of her own mirror image; she sees someone who is grotesquely misshapen, with various colors of bruises, wounds, and sores, someone of unknown gender, whose mouth moves on its own volition when Esther smiles. She smashes the mirror, hoping that the action would destroy the evidence of her inability to recognize herself. When she later sees an article about her attempted

suicide, in the photo she sees “policemen lifting a long, limp blanket roll with a featureless cabagge head into the back of an ambulance” (Plath 2013: 192). In this case as well, her mind refuses to recognize the body in the photo as her own, but rather perceives it as “featureless”, “long”, and “limp”, a body lifted and taken away. Due to the remnant pain following her unsuccessful suicide attempt, Esther distances from everything that reminds her of it. Her mind distorts her body, regarding it as a completely different person with unrecognizable features. Owing to the fact that we view everything from Esther’s perception of others and of her own life, which was at the time marred by depression, we get a distorted picture of everything. She is disconnected from her own image, her own face, her own body. Her own body becomes a site of trauma, an embodiment of trauma she externalizes and dissociates from, and the narrative mirrors that dissociation, as well as her own descriptions of her mind and her body.

This is a recurring notion in the novel, as even from the onset of Esther’s narrative, before her depression, there are distorted images of her own reflection. At one instance, a mirror reflects “a big, smudgy-eyed Chinese woman staring idiotically” back at her (Plath 2013: 17). She describes herself in an unfavorable way, and even compares herself to a person belonging to another race; all of this is an attempt to distance herself from her body which is a constant reminder of her trauma, a palpable entity that is her own, but at the same time something she wishes to have nothing with. Esther’s narrative conveys the fact that she perceives her body as something apart from herself, which is obvious in the way her reflection constantly reminds her of someone different. When she takes the gilt compact and a side mirror, “The face that peered back at me seemed to be peering from the grating of a prison cell after a prolonged beating” (Ibid. 98). There is a repetition of prison imagery, of grates, and prisons, further emphasizing the feeling of imprisonment within her distorted state of mind. On a train back home from New York, after her rape, “The face in the mirror looked like a sick Indian” (Ibid. 108), once again conveying attempts at distancing from who she is not only in a physical sense, but also in a deeper, social sense of her existence. When she talks to a nurse who tries to convince her to get out of bed, her thoughts are unfiltered. She wants to tell the nurse that if something were wrong with her body “it would be fine, I would rather have anything wrong with my body than something wrong with my head" (Ibid. 176). However, her body suffers as well due to the impact of her mental disintegration. Both her body and her mind are one traumatized and traumatizing whole, which is dissected and mentally discarded whenever Esther attempts to make sense of what is happening to her. In the following section, we analyze the way Esther’s attempts at bodily annihilation are narrated.

3.2.4.1.2.2 Narrative Representation of Self-Mutilation and Suicidal Attempts in *The Bell Jar*

For traumatized individuals, self-mutilation is "a defensive strategy to gain self-control" because physical pain "trumps" psychological pain, at least for a short while (Vickroy 2015: 175). This is reminiscent of depersonalization we analyzed in the previous paragraph. In one of her attempts at self-mutilation, she moves in front of a mirror, and upon seeing her reflection she dissociates, and there is an instant shift in the narrative where Esther describes herself in third-person: "the person in the mirror was paralysed and too stupid to do a thing" (Plath 2013: 142). Her narrative is dissociated at the same time she starts dissociating. This spurs her into action, and she actually lifts her right hand, "like a guillotine", and cuts the calf of her leg (Ibid.). Initially, she is numb, but eventually she feels "a small, deep thrill" when blood blossoms in the cut (Ibid.). Self-mutilation is an attempt to "mentally remove" oneself from an unbearable situation (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 64). It is also an attempt in the case of Esther to show some agency within the paralyzing influence of her depression and suffocating thoughts. In the quote above, Esther describes herself as a person who is "paralysed and stupid" (Plath 2013: 142), and who cannot do anything; self-mutilation provides her with a skewed sense of agency, a need for self-annihilation due to being unable to come to terms with who she has become, which is apparent in the thrill she feels after making herself bleed.

Esther continuously distances herself from what happened with the usage of a scant narrative, devoid of emotional baggage; this is conveyed with the usage of narrative dissociation, and focalization which conveys her narrative in third person. She describes herself as an outside observer, and this narrative dissociation is most blatantly present during her self-harm. She locks herself in the bathroom, fills the tub with warm water, and takes razors. She compares her photo to a photo of a dead girl before she cuts her calf, and "It matched, mouth for mouth, nose for nose; the only difference she perceives is in the eyes, as the "eyes in the snapshot were open, and those in the newspaper photograph were closed" (Plath 2013: 141). However, she has an unnerving feeling that "if the dead girl's eyes were to be thumbed wide, they would look out at me with the same dead, black, vacant expression as the eyes in the snapshot" (Ibid.). According to her, her eyes in the photo are devoid of any light, any sign that there is a living, breathing entity they belong to. These words convey the state of being stricken, of being suspended in the body which breathes on its own, but at the same time, that body houses a soul and a mind which exhibit spiritual annihilation, inability to feel or even be present in the moment. However, when she is about to start cutting herself, her thoughts spiral; her

depersonalization is obvious in the way she describes her skin and her pulse as something that exists outside of her own body, as an entity of its own:

> But when it came right down to it, the skin of my wrist looked so white and defenceless that I couldn't do it. It was as if what I wanted to kill wasn't in the skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under my thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret, and a whole lot harder to get at (Plath 2013: 142).

Trauma is, as previously emphasized, something that cannot be assimilated by a person's psyche as it happens. In Plath's narrative, and in particular in the quote above, that something is what Esther "wanted to kill", something "deeper, more secret, and a whole lot harder to get at". The overall situation surrounding Esther is overwhelming, and her attempt at reaching that poisoned core through the skin of her wrists is committed out of desperation. However, even in her disarrayed mind, her thoughts convey the fact that she is aware that the core of her trauma cannot be reached through her body, that it cannot be removed by drawing blood. It is a secret kept from her as well, and the entire novel is essentially an attempt at retrospective narrative, at employment of different narrative strategies and techniques which would hopefully converge and help Esther reach the truth of her trauma, and albeit belatedly, attempt to pinpoint it.

Her suicide attempts are one of the only instances Esther takes action and allows herself to have a decision about her body; however, this is merely a desperate attempt at action rather than a conscious decision. Death seems to her as "a simple, unpolluted truth, incorruptible by fantasy and expectation" (Smith 2008: 52). Despite the fact that suicide seems to be a complete self-annihilation, for Esther it is a "realm where she can act rather than observe", where the only judge of her success or failure is Esther herself (Ibid.). In one fragmented episode in Esther's narrative, Esther starts the segment by simply stating: "That morning I had tried to hang myself" (Plath 2013: 152). This statement shapes the rest of this section, because when Esther joins her friend and two boys on a beach, the narrative of what they are doing is interrupted by disturbing flashbacks to her suicide attempt, then to her volunteering in a hospital, then her visit to the graveyard, and eventually, her final suicide attempt. The entirety of the thirteenth chapter is told in urgency, and the flashbacks and time lapses are more abrupt. She talks about death in a casual manner, asking one of the boys: "'If you were going to kill yourself, how would you do it?'" (Ibid. 150). Then they set out to swim, and despite the onslaught of her suicidal thoughts, her body keeps on fighting, and she listens to her heartbeat, "like a dull motor" in her ears: "I am I am I am" (Ibid. 152).

Then it seems as if the narrative is physically transported to her house, where she walks "about with the silk cord dangling from my neck like a yellow cat's tail and finding no place to fasten it" (Plath 2013: 152). Instances of gallows humor are Plath's attempt at narrating the suicide attempt in a light-hearted manner, which indicates emotional detachment Esther feels at that moment. When she fails at finding a place to hang the cord from, she sits on her mother's bed and tries "pulling the cord tight"; however, each time she does that, she can feel "a rushing" in her ears and "a flush of blood" in her face (Ibid.). Her narrative regarding her suicide attempts is dissociated from the experience herself, as she methodically lists all the things she did in order to prepare herself for suicide, such as buying "paperbacks on abnormal psychology" so that she would "know about my case to end it in the proper way" (Ibid. 153). Her shifting thought reports, the repetition of suicidal thoughts interspersed with scathing and self-derogatory commentary, all of those have to be understood with a fact in mind that this is a much older Esther reminiscing her past. Due to the fact that she is afforded knowledge about what happened, the authorial decision to leave some of the episodes in the dark, with gaps in the narrative, is to be interpreted with the fact that even years later, those moments still haunt her. Her past is a living thing, residing in her mind, only afforded life because she narrated it.

Before her final attempt at killing herself, she visits her father's grave, thinking about how she neglected him all those years. When she thinks back to his death, she remembers that she "had never cried", so at that moment, she lays her face "to the smooth face of the marble" and howls her loss "into the cold salt rain" (Plath 2013: 161). After that, she decides to commit her first, almost successful, suicide attempt by descending into the basement, and calmly narrating how she prepared.

> Wrapping my black coat round me like my own sweet shadow, I unscrewed the bottle of pills and started taking them swiftly, between gulps of water, one by one by one. […]
> The silence drew off, baring the pebbles and shells and all the tatty wreckage of my life. Then at the rim of vision, it gathered itself, and in one sweeping tide, rushed me to sleep (Plath 2013: 163).

Suicide is an utmost attempt at protecting the "self-system", despite the paradox it entails (van der Kolk 2015: 231). She takes the pills "swiftly", which both implies the urgency of leaving the pain behind, as well as the fact that she has to drink the pills before she changes her mind. The silence she experiences is a welcome shift from the ongoing noise in her head stemming from various intruding disembodied voices reminding her of the things in her life which are unbearable. This silence creates a dam between the wreckage of her life and the chaos it brings

with itself. In this quote, a complete surrender on behalf of Esther is obvious in the phrases she uses. She was "rushed to sleep" by the silence, and it covers her like a shield which protects her from the onslaught of unwanted thoughts and memories. Her comparison of a possible death to sleep implies that she expects it to be less painful than her life at the time. She craves oblivion, a recourse from the accusatory voices reminding her of her failure to live. This hole in her basement is a place which she imagined previously when she was thinking about being in a sack, in shadows and darkness. But this time, the darkness surrounding her is not hostile – it is welcoming. In the previous section, we mentioned the part where she sees her future as a series of "bright, white boxes" separated by "sleep, like a black shade" (Plath 2013: 123). Comparing it to this part where her suicide attempt is narrated, we can regard that quote as a premonition, where that welcoming oblivion promised by sleep is now her "sweet shadow" of approaching death (Ibid. 163). That approaching death is woven into her black coat, shielding her from the rest of the world and allowing her to take the pills before "red and blue lights began to flash" before her eyes, which are the colors of the ambulance. However, this time oblivion rather than ambulance is signaled by those lights and she lays down, welcoming the repose sleep brings with it.

3.2.4.2 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events and Responses to Traumatic Events in *The Bell Jar* – Concluding Remarks

In the previous sections we attempted to explain the way traumatic events and responses to traumatic events are narrated in *The Bell Jar*. We ascertained that some of the key traumatic events in Esther's life are mentioned in passing, almost clinically devoid of offering any emotions felt during them, such as Marco's assault on her, or when she was hemorrhaging after the loss of her virginity and the events which transpired after she was admitted to a hospital because of it. It seems that when she talks about them, they are not explored in full, showing attempts at repression and avoidance which is typical for trauma survivors. In particular, when she enters the room where her future is to be decided after time in the asylum, the ending is too abrupt, leaving the readers unable to know what actually happened afterwards. Also, prior to her entering the room with the board of doctors, she describes how she dresses, wearing something "old", something "new", but then she reminds herself that she "wasn't getting married", and thinks about the necessity of a ritual after being "patched, retreaded, and approved for the road" (Plath 2013: 233). Here the pressure she felt about getting married and also escaping the oppressive atmosphere of the bell jar converge, and she describes it as another

path that is unknown. This suggests that trauma is never resolved in a clear way, but that it is rather cyclical and open-ended.

The cyclical nature of trauma is also apparent in the inherent inability Esther exhibits in regards to her attempts at voicing her trauma properly, in her scrambling for words which would succeed in conveying at least a portion of the pain she experiences. In such cases, it is necessary to regard other ways that trauma is conveyed, and in Esther's case, it is apparent in the descriptions of her physical sensations, primarily her feeling of suffocating, her standing frozen in front of a metaphorical fig tree, or her description of feeling cold. Trauma is oftentimes conveyed in somatic representation, as the wound in the mind almost always affects the body as well, and both the body and the mind feel the brunt of it. Also, when she is unable to write, it is reminiscent of the unrepresentability of trauma; despite not intending to write about trauma, she is unable to write about anything at all. The fact that her handwriting changed during her depressive episode is another instance of trauma effect, which conveys the feeling of distortion, distortion of her own perspective as well as of the disarray between her voluntary movements and her body's control. The highlight of postmodernist trauma fiction is the open-ending – at the end of the novel, we are not certain if Esther actually recovered, or what awaits her in the future. There is a possibility that the bell jar is going to descend again, as she even mentions that possibility, wherever she may be in the future.

In essence, despite the difficulties of representing trauma, Plath showed that these difficulties can be bridged with different narrative structures. The unpredictability and the inherent difficulty of narrating trauma are bridged in this narrative with the employment of an unreliable narrator, as well as the strategies of thought process and narrative dissociation, which are scattered throughout the novel. Fragmentation of thoughts, scenes interrupted with sudden flashbacks and repetitions, all of them contribute to the creation of this postmodernist trauma fiction. Reading this narrative which is at times chaotic and in other instances utterly devastating, allows us to imagine the life of a nineteen-year-old Esther, narrated by an older Esther; nevertheless, the trauma this life testimony conveys remains indelibly etched in the words in the novel, the same way it is a permanent scar in Esther's mind and body. That scar has faded in time, but even in its process of flattening and aligning with the surrounding tissue, it has not disappeared.

3.3 *BELOVED* BY TONI MORRISON

Beloved stands as a monumental piece from the pen of a literary genius, which Toni Morrison undoubtedly is. Its harrowing portrayal of trauma, excessive brutality from the hands of racist upholders of the institution of slavery, and gut-wrenching portrayal of loss and ensuing trauma solidified its position as a seminal trauma narrative in the twentieth century. Despite being thoroughly dissected from numerous theoretical approaches, *Beloved* still permits further divulgence of unspeakable atrocities, both physical and mental wounds, as well as the aftermath of trauma which offers no repose from the past. The existing research regarding *Beloved* focuses on investigating African-American experience in the novel, which was thoroughly shaped by the racist paradigms underlying the institution of slavery. The presence of Beloved has been analyzed in terms of magical realism, and the proponents of such an approach have regarded Beloved as a supernatural entity in the narrative, allowing for a deeper divulgence of hidden, painful events of the past which a more realistic narrative would not be able to convey. Many critics have also investigated postmodernist tendencies in the novel, both in the structural and narrative sense, and connected it to the transmission of transgenerational or intergenerational trauma. Our research does refer to the previous ones; however, in our analysis, we primarily focus on trauma studies, that is, literary trauma studies. Our main concern is to deepen the existing analysis on the nature of trauma in the novel and offer a more specific, closer reading of the ways trauma is narrated in *Beloved*. We also connect the way the narrative is shaped to postmodernist fiction, as well as investigate which aspects of autobiographical or autofictional writing are present in the novel, and how they influence the narrative. The novelty of our approach stems from the fact that we attempt to show how trauma studies and literary trauma studies are fruitful frameworks for analyzing the narrative built around the character of Sethe, while at the same time providing us with enough textual evidence to connect the way trauma impacts the narrative with the sociological climate of the time the novel was both set and written in. In the same way we have shown for *Blood and Guts in High School* and *The Bell Jar*, we also analyze *Beloved*'s fluctuation between genres of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, as well as autobiographical or autofiction, in order to offer evidence of its belonging to postmodernist trauma fiction, the name of the fluid conglomeration of genres we identified as fit for these three novels. Before delving into the analysis of the novel itself, we provide an overview of Morrison's literary importance, as well as an exploration of the socio-cultural milieu which shaped her approach to literary representation of black people's plight.

3.3.1 INTRODUCTION – TONI MORRISON, "BLACK, WOMAN, AND AMERICAN"

Toni Morrison (1931-2019, real name Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison), is a renowned author known for her immense contribution to narratives about the ordeals of African-American people, and the first African-American woman to win a Nobel Prize in literature. Ever since her first novel *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970, Morrison has commanded immense interest, both literary and critical, and numerous studies have been written about her oeuvre and about her contribution to the literary world. Her job as an editor for a publishing company, *Random House*, helped "shape the tradition of African American literature", and her editing work also brought her into contact with the "materials that she later used as imaginative starting points for her novels" (Kubitschek 1998: 4). Morrison began publishing "just after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s", which was a time when black women authors experienced "intense pressure to write about certain kinds of characters and plots" (Ibid. 7). African-American readers at the time wanted novels which either focused on "good role models" or the ones which focused on "whites' victimization of blacks" (Ibid. 7).

However, Morrison's novels oftentimes transcended these constricting demands imposed on black female writers. Her novels are about everyday black people, and albeit informed by real people, they are not typical, as she took her plots to extremes, and introduced political implications dressed in aesthetic (un)pleasantries. Her practice for language was, in her own words, "a search for and deliberate posture of vulnerability to those aspects of Afro-American culture" which could inform and position her work (Morrison 1988: 162). And although all of her novels deal with "African American characters and communities", they do not take away from the universal message, that is, the focus on a certain group of people in them does not prevent them from "communicating things that are true of all human beings to readers of many different backgrounds" (Kubitschek 1998: 10). The themes her novels deal with are undeniably human, despite the imposed differences due to race, societal position, or gender. She delineated these limitations and wrote prose which portrayed those aspects of human life that are difficult to put into words; her prose profoundly impacts the readers to this day. However, she still attempted to address the "unspeakable thing" that is "race" (Morrison 1988: 126), in order to bridge the attempt at the historical erasure of the atrocities black people, who were persecuted for centuries, endured, and who were then told that "there is no such thing as 'race'":

> In trying to understand the relationship between "race" and culture […] It always seemed to me that the people who invented the hierarchy of "race" when it was convenient for them ought not to be the ones to explain it away, now that it does not suit their purposes for it to exist. But there *is* culture and both gender and "race" inform and are informed by it. Afro-American culture exists, and though it is clear (and becoming clearer) how it has responded to Western culture, the instances where and means by which it has shaped Western culture are poorly recognized or understood (Morrison 1988: 126).

The three terms which best describe Morrison are "*black, woman,* and *American*", and these terms also situate her work in a literary context (Kubitschek 1998: 13). For Morrison herself, what makes a work "black" is its language: "its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked, and unmasking language" (Morrison 1988: 136). She employed such a language in her oeuvre, and her trilogy, that is, her three novels, *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1988), are most blatantly connected in terms of "the temporal and spatial locus"; *Beloved* is set during the 1870s in the "rural area outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, with flashbacks to plantations in Kentucky"; *Jazz* in the 1920s, with flashbacks to "the Reconstruction Era of the 1870s"; and *Paradise* is set in a small-town in Ruby, but the memories are from the "political failure of Reconstruction" (Tally 2007: 75). Morrison's body of work has largely contributed to shedding the light onto the traumatic history of enslavement which lasted for over two centuries, and the struggle for at least a semblance of authorial existence and individuation amidst the general atmosphere of subordination and silencing. She employed a type of language which attempted to separate her work from the previous works written about black people, and thus created a new narrative space where African American history and experiences could be portrayed. However, her own authorial struggle is derived from the stories written a century before her own novels were published.

In the nineteenth century, a majority of black literary works consisted of "slave narratives", or "true stories of slaves' escapes to free states or countries" which were published by "white abolitionists to educate whites about the evils of slavery" (Kubitschek 1998: 14). Henry Louis Gates and Charles T. Davis as editors of *The Slave's Narrative* define slave narratives as the "written and dictated testimonies of the enslavement of black human beings" (1985: xii). However, the authorial right was not claimed by the people whose stories were told, but rather by white editors. There is a need in the slave narratives to offer truthful accounts, and the writer or the narrator "must not artistically shape his memory" in order to offer "the trustworthiness of his narrative" (Kocić Stanković 2024: 396). Even though Morrison revisited

slave narratives in *Beloved*, this trustworthiness is subordinated to artistic re-shaping of a painful, traumatic legacy of slavery. That legacy is translated into a fictionalized, fragmented story as we explain later. The difficulty which stems from constructing a narrative of slavery "in the absence of written records" is also a difficulty in "moving from disparate memories", which remain "unorganized" to actually creating a narrative which can "tell a story" (Campbell 1996: 143). As we explain later, in the next section, Morrison attempted to incorporate a story of one fugitive, a former slave mother, with other fragments of stories of enslaved people. Another revision of the slave narratives in *Beloved* is Morrison's decision to offer authorial freedom to a former slave, to let her speak for herself, and not have her story filtered through a white person's perspective. Morrison herself claimed in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" that "at least two generations of scholars" were dedicated to breaking silence, finding lost things, by disentangling "knowledge from the apparatus of control", in particular by investigating American slave narratives (Morrison 1988: 132/133). And unlike in the slave narratives, where other people spoke instead of the enslaved people, she stated that it was no longer "acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine for us" (Ibid. 133), because:

> We are the subjects of our own narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience, and, in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, "other". We are choices. And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the "raceless" one with which we are, all of us, most familiar (Morrison 1988: 133).

In *Beloved*, there is an attempt to explain how identity itself is not only racialized, but also gendered, and that makes it even harder for black women to pursue their true self (Ibid.) Patricia Hill Collins, in her *Black Feminist Thought* (2002) claims that black women are always treated as others in white patriarchal society. In order to justify slavery, as is the case with any other system of oppression, there is a need for ideology, which refers to "the body of ideas reflecting the interests of a group of people" and which in turn implies "racist and sexist ideologies" aimed at discrimination of a marginal group of people (Collins 2002: 5).[24] This reductionist tendency is translated into literary works as well, as there is a proclivity in literature to portray black women through negative stereotypes, as "mammies", "jezebels", "breeder

[24] This perception of black women as others is such due to the fact that the Other with a capital "O" is the one in whose gaze subjects gain identity. This invokes Jacques Lacan, who in his seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, states that what we understand as the Other is "the locus in which is situated the chain of signifier" which governs the subject or the other, or "the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear" (1998: 203). In the gaze imagined by the subject "in the field of the Other" is the gaze which surprises the subject and reduces them to shame, "since this is the feeling he regards as the most dominant" (Lacan 1998: 84).

women", "Black prostitutes", which justifies, or at least tries to justify, their political, social, and economic exploitation, and which further entails physical and racial discrimination (Ibid.).

There is a general consensus among critics that black literature has a double role: to expose the mistreatment and silencing done by white people, and also allow the truth about black people's trauma to be brought to light. Morrison deemed that writing had to be political; especially writing about black people, which inherently encompasses writing about black women:

> Morrison: I think all good art has always been political. None of the best writing, the best thoughts have been anything other than that. […] Black people who are writing must concentrate on the political plight of Black people (Childress and Morrison 1994: 3).

Even in *Beloved*, Morrison attempted to emphasize the importance of political engagement. She said that the purpose of introducing the spirit was to keep the reader "preoccupied with the nature of the incredible spirit world" while at the same time being "supplied a controlled diet of the incredible political world" (Morrison 1988: 161). While introducing a story imbued with supernatural elements, Morrison's novel at the same time forcefully imports a real, visceral pain which stems from the surrounding societal conditions, which in essence incorporates the political plight of black people. And while some of her other works do not contain supernatural elements, they still possess an indelible political interference in the existence of the people whose stories they convey. Therefore, Morrison's oeuvre is both shaped by her identity as a black woman writer, and by those circumstances she encountered in both her authorial and political paths. She created literary works which are to this day testaments of certain aspects of black people's lives, carved out of the historical patchwork, and embodied in literary works of art. However, written in different years or about different periods, all of them contain threads of traumatic instances present in black people's lives. The next part outlines the main aspects of the plot of *Beloved*, one of those literary artworks, before we turn to the contexts surrounding both the plot as well as the period in which Morrison wrote the novel.

3.3.2 *BELOVED* – THE PLOT

Beloved remains one of the most studied and analyzed novels Morrison wrote. Morrison intended the novel to give "some inner consciousness and humanity to the historical record of atrocities inflicted against African and African-American people as a consequence of

institutional slavery" (Luckhurst 2008: 90). However, it also became known as a literary testament to the trauma the enslaved people endured. She succeeded in creating a narrative imbued with the scars of the past, swallowed words which somehow manage to be heard through layers of pain, and love which transcends the boundaries between the living and the dead. The novel is a fictionalized account of the case of a slave Margaret Garner, who "escaped her Kentucky owner in 1856 to 'freedom' across the Ohio River" but who afterwards "cut the throat of her best loved daughter at the prospect of their capture and return to slavery" (Ibid.).[25] *Beloved* follows a similar story with the main female character Sethe, a slave who manages to escape the plantation when pregnant with her fourth child in order to rejoin her other three children. However, we do not learn about the escape until later in the novel, nor about the events which had transpired before it. We as readers belatedly become witnesses to Sethe's escape, her giving birth on her way to freedom, the atrocities which prompted her escape, as well as the act of infanticide; but this belatedness does not erase the immediacy with which we as readers are exposed to the immediate pain of Sethe's life; although we initially do not know why, we can feel the pain from the very first sentence of the novel. Morrison wanted the readers to be "snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign" just as the slaves "were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense" (Morrison 1988: 161). The way the novel opens shows that slavery is not behind the characters, but "the past literally haunts the present" (Kubitschek 1998: 115). That is represented in the shape of a ghost which haunts the house Sethe and her daughter Denver live in, after Sethe's mother-in-law dies, and her two sons run away from the house and the haunting presence of the ghost. The re-appearance of Beloved in the body of a young woman mitigates a surge of painful memories for Sethe, and she is torn between an urge to repress them, and a visceral, self-flagellating need to remember them.

There are three formal parts in the novel, but the story is not told in a linear manner; rather, all these three parts of the novel converge in the end to reach a semblance of the truth behind the trauma which plagues the pages and the lives of the characters, and which is embodied first in the ghost of Beloved, and then in the shape of a young woman, Beloved. Even the timeline in the novel is not linear, as the story goes back and forth between the present

[25] The idea for plot of the novel occurred to Morrison when, as she said, she was obsessed by "two or three little fragments of stories" that she heard from different places (Naylor and Morrison 1994: 206). In a news clipping published in 1851, she read about Margaret Garner who escaped from Kentucky with her four children, but, when they tried to take her back, "She succeeded in killing one; she tried to kill two others. She hit them in the head with a shovel and they were wounded but they didn't die" (Ibid. 206/207).

and the past. The structure of the novel exemplifies "severe discordance of plot", as the time frame encompasses "the narrative present (1874)", as well as the time of Sethe's infanticide "thirteen years previously (1861)", with memories going back to 1855 (Luckhurst 2008: 92). Each part of the three parts in the novel starts with a two-word sentence that describes the house, and which contains a number 124. It was a deliberate act on Morrison's part:

> In beginning *Beloved* with numerals rather than spelled out numbers, it was my intention to give the house an identity separate from the street or even the city; to name it the way "Sweet Home" was named; the way plantations were named, but not with nouns or "proper" names – with numbers instead because numbers have no adjectives, no posture of coziness or grandeur […] Numbers here constitute an address, a thrilling enough prospect for slaves who had owned nothing, least of all an address. And although the numbers, unlike words, can have no modifiers, I give these an adverb – spiteful (there are two other modifiers of 124). The address therefore is personalized, but personalized by its own activity, not the pasted-on desire for personality (Morrison 1988: 160).

The modifiers which Morrison mentioned are combined with the number of the house and they start each of the three segments in the novel in the following way: "124 WAS SPITEFUL" (Morrison 2007: 3); "124 WAS LOUD" (Ibid. 199); and "124 WAS QUIET" (Ibid. 281). This combination of a number with an adjective describes what is happening in the house, and what the ensuing part of the novel is going to focus on explaining. At first, it is spiteful because Sethe is trying to keep the past at bay, and the past, embodied in the shape of a baby ghost, is rebelling, it wants to come forth. Then, it is loud; conveying the turmoil in Sethe which occurs when the ghost reappears as a young woman and the surge of memories initiated both by Beloved and Paul D. And finally, 124 was quiet, because past begins to overwhelm Sethe, as she disintegrates. Thus, the plot relies on the appearance of Beloved as "an eruption of the past and the repressed unconscious", and as both a catalyst and a disruption "necessary for healing" (Krumholz 1992: 397). With this in mind, we turn to the next section in order to explain the contexts surrounding the plot of the novel, as well as the period in which Morrison wrote it.

3.3.3 *BELOVED* – CONTEXTUALIZING THE NARRATIVE

As we have outlined earlier for both *Blood and Guts in High School* and *The Bell Jar*, it is important to locate the narrative of the novel both historically and temporally, due to the fact that the past of the characters is equated with the past of the American nation. And in this particular case, we have an additional fact that the characters are African-American, an unjustly marginalized and terrorized group of people whose plight is directly connected to the American soil, where racist paradigms and derogatory attitude of the white people shaped the trajectory

of their lives, oppression, and eventual liberation. The position of the African-American people embodied in the characters showcases how they are often "caught between an unresolved, tainted past and wanting to endure into the future" (Vickroy 2015: 72). This transition and this traumatizing liminal position is also present in the period the plot is set in. *Beloved* is temporally set after the Civil War and emancipation, during the period of national history known as the Reconstruction (1870-90). On the very first page of the novel, we have the number of the house, 124[26], then the year 1873, "the gray and white house on Bluestone Road" in Cincinnati, in the US state of Ohio (Morrison 2007: 3). These historical and geographical facts help the readers situate the plot of the novel; these specific details, however, stand opposed to "the equally concrete absences evident in the story", that is, "the missing ancestors and the missing descendants" (Pérez-Torres 1999: 181). Thus, readers are placed in a space which floats "somewhere between an absent past and an absent future" (Ibid.). These absences are connected to the transitional nature of the period, where past hurts were still present in the very absence of people, and present pain was still being processed and inflicted. The spanning thread which influenced this transition was racism, and Morrison herself stated the importance of dealing with racism in her novels, because, according to her, racism was institutionalized:

> Everybody remembers the first time they were taught that part of the human race was Other. That's a trauma. It's as though I told you that your left hand is not part of your body.
> How to breach those things? There is a very, very serious problem of education and leadership. But we don't have the structure for the education we need. Nobody has done it. Black literature is taught as sociology, as tolerance, not as a serious, rigorous art form (Angelo and Morrison 1994: 258).

Essentially, the trauma of racism is a historical wound, a "collective memory", as we have already discussed in section 2.3.1.2.2. The trauma of racism is also "the severe fragmentation of the self" (Morrison 1988: 141). The quote above portrays the urgency of working through that trauma, of gathering fragments of collective memory in order to overcome the barrier between what happened before and what happened after, and to broaden the perspective in order to create a narrative around a traumatic event (Andermahr 2015: 2), so that there is a possibility of reaching the core of trauma, working through it, and hopefully, understanding it.

[26] The house number, although a fact which can be overlooked, is 124. Maybe it is just a random number, but it could have been 123 as well. It would, perhaps, mean going to a large extent to find a hidden meaning, as numerous studies written on *Beloved* have not referenced this, but this number may not be a random number, but rather Morrison's intention to show that a number is missing, that is, number three. Sethe has four children, and her third child is dead, that is, Beloved. The fact that number three is missing, or deliberately omitted, could be another textual inference to the fact that the third child is missing from Sethe's life.

According to Morrison, as exemplified in the quote above, "black literature" should be taught as a "serious, rigorous art form" which can be another way of bridging the gap between what is known and what is not about the trauma of racism (Angelo and Morrison 1994: 258). *Beloved* is thus an attempt at challenging the readers to rethink the relationship "between the postmodern and the marginal", to retrace "the distinct threads of the historically marginal" which informs the "patterns and politics of postmodern culture" (Pérez-Torres 1999: 181). It is also addressing the trauma of dissecting the body of a person solely because of the fact that they belong to a different race. This questioning of trauma, suspended between "absence and presence" in turn forces "a reassessment" of what the term "American" actually evokes (Ibid.). And this further contends a necessity of teaching "black literature" as an art form that is not only about "tolerance", but also about the trauma of racist paradigms (Angelo and Morrison 1994: 258). This is also something Morrison addressed in her collection of essays titled *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* in which she said that the literature of the United States, like its history, "represents commentary on the transformation of biological, ideological, and metaphysical concepts of racial difference" (Morrison 1993: 65). However, an additional concern and subject matter present is "the private imagination interacting with the external world it inhabits" (Ibid. 65/66). Thus, black literature is concerned not only with the overall societal situation and the history of racism, but also with the individual conception of what that means and how it is translated into the literary realm.

Morrison's endeavor in writing underlines our earlier established point about the importance of the geographical place and historical site and the impact the two have on character development and understanding of their situation. Mainly, Morrison does that by integrating historical situations "through character's thought reports", which we deal with in the later section, and this positions the characters "in relation to their environments and their memories and private lives" (Vickroy 2015: 69). The act of Sethe's infanticide is "an act of agency performed in the context of a dominative history by *this particular person* at *this particular* moment in time and in *this* geographical location" (Forter 2014: 82). Morrison's choice to place a particular frame of historical and societal environment around Sethe's story is an insistence on "the impossibility of judging an action without reference to the terms of its enactment – the wrongness of assuming a transhistorical ethic outside a particular historical moment" (Rushdy 1999: 47). In order to understand the wounds Sethe lives with, we have to explain the cultural and historical circumstances which enabled such wounds to occur in the first place. Morrison attempted to inhabit "the discontinuities of her history" and to locate as

well as discover "her creative historical projects in those discontinuities" (McBride 2007: 169). Those discontinuities are akin to the unspoken parts of traumatic experiences, which have to be represented in order to be understood.

> Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks are still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other thing (Morrison 2007: 212).

Stamp Paid's thoughts and sensations place us in the midst of the time and place in which the events are transpiring in the novel. The atrocities committed upon black people are enumerated, and the horrible atmosphere is exacerbated with the description of the smell of blood and burning flesh. Even if people are not witnessing what is happening, the smell seeps into different neighborhoods and makes an indelible mark of the remnants and presence of trauma. As we have already mentioned, Morrison was inspired by a story about Margaret Garner.

The fact that Morrison chose to use the genre of a nineteenth-century slave narrative in the twentieth century needs to be explained. In the nineteenth century, white abolitionists published slave narratives in order to "show the cruelties of slavery as an institution and to demonstrate the intellectual and moral worthiness of individual African Americans who had escaped it" (Kubitschek 1998: 131). The societal context in which those slave narratives were published was different from the context when *Beloved* was published, as many social conditions changed in the span of 150 years; and also due to the fact that slave narratives were most often ghost-written by abolitionists conveying lives of actual slaves who managed to escape. On the other hand, *Beloved* is fiction. Morrison's writing focuses on "nuance, detail, consistency" as well as "declarations of feelings" in order to enable the readers to "work through layers of distortion" toward "a truer understanding of the former slave's perspective" (Gates and Davis 1985: 43). Her concern with "the relation between the individual and the community" as well as with "the domain of the unspeakable, the unrepresentable, the awesome and awful", allowed Morrison to present the "unrepresentable horrors" as well as "the psychic and ontological fragmenting that disrupts her characters"; in turn, she pushed the boundaries of narrative representation in order to allocate a way to represent that which is deemed unrepresentable (Conner 2000: 50).

As a fictionalized revision of the slave narrative, *Beloved* indirectly comments on the "dominant political moments" of the previous two decades, and in particular, on how "racially specific experience" was ignored, and "sexist structures" were perpetrated by the fact that black women were ignored by black nationalist movements (Kubitschek 1998: 133). This also implied black women's subordination to both black and white men, and this subordination invoked liminality, as the existence of black women was the one located between the world of white men, as well as the world of black men. They did not belong to either the dominant, nor the subordinate culture of the time, they were "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1991: 95). Their behavior was usually passive and humble, as they had to obey the instructors, and accept the punishment without complaints. In other words, they were reduced "to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope" (Ibid.). Or, as Sethe is described in a reductionist manner in the novel, "property that reproduced itself without cost" (Morrison 2007: 269). This utter disregard of black women is trauma, a "severely disruptive experience" (Balaev 2018: 360), which inevitably marks their lives, behavior, as well as their attitude to themselves and others. Morrison's choice to focus on one particular woman's trauma, who is also a mother, is thus an attempt to connect "a retelling or 'rememory' of the absent slave narratives" with an "'unspeakable' discourse of maternal subjectivity" (Campbell 1996: 145).

Homi Bhabha explains that in Morrison's *Beloved* "the past of slavery and its murderous rituals of possession and self-possession" were represented so that the novel would "project a contemporary fable of a woman's history" which is simultaneously "the narrative of an affective, historic memory of an emergent public sphere of men and women alike" (Bhabha 1994: 5). Thus, Morrison created a life testimony that juxtaposed and at the same time intertwined a period of utter disregard of people with the societal circumstances she lived in, in order to offer a broader comment on the timelessness of trauma, of scars in the psyche as well as on the body which remain despite delineations of the borders between different periods of human history. She also achieved in portraying the "traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Ibid. 11). Thus, by writing the story of a former slave, who is also a woman, in the era when black women were still not properly included in the feminist discourse, she engaged in rhetorical strategizing, and she also offered a commentary on traumatization which has not waned for an entire century. Morrison's

"black literary texts" thus become an "important thread tying together the complicated realms of politics and aesthetics" (Pérez-Torres 1999: 180).

3.3.4 READING *BELOVED* AS POSTMODERNIST TRAUMA FICTION

One of the most notable aspects of Morrison's fiction is the fact that it immerses readers and provides perspectives on "the flawed thinking and behavior of the traumatized that develop from a psychology of fear driving individuals and society" (Vickroy 2015: 66). Reading her novels is akin to establishing a psychological report of a mentally wounded client; by using carefully chosen sentences, narrative devices which either allow us or discourage us from entering the minds of the characters, she "cognitively and emotionally" reconstructs the "psychological and environmental complexities that create and perpetuate trauma" (Ibid.). Her fiction is significant when it comes to the creation of trauma fiction, as her texts introduce "painful experiences" which engage readers and allow them to learn more about the characters who, "while worthy of sympathy, also behave in destructive, complicit, or disturbingly irrational ways" (Ibid. 67). However, her fiction primarily revolves around the experiences of black people in the United States, either in the immediate aftermath of slavery, or in the period spanning decades after slavery was abolished. The trauma portrayed in her fiction is not merely a trauma of the formerly enslaved people, but also a myriad of complex cultural and societal hindrances which essentially shape an individual's personality. One of the main endeavors in her fiction is the attempt to show how "social and historical progress is obstructed" due to the fact that individuals are "locked, cognitively and emotionally, into static defensive patterns" (Ibid. 67). She also attempted to show how trauma becomes a "part of everyday life" as well as "normalized in particular social structures and practices intended to keep people silent and ineffectual" (Ibid. 67). In essence, *Beloved* is a life testimony of a life affected by trauma and inability to properly voice it due to living in a society which does not provide structures for showing agency about one's own life.

The character of Beloved is, in Morrison's own words, both "a spirit", Sethe's "child returned to her from the dead" but also "another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh", a survivor from "the true, factual slave ship" that speaks "a traumatized language" of her own experience as a child on the ship, but also as a child of Sethe (Darling and Morrison 1994: 247). Morrison claimed that the readers can find factual evidence in the text of both experiences of "death and the Middle Passage", as the gap between "Africa and Afro-America and the gap

between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present" does not exist (Ibid.).

> It's bridged for us by our assuming responsibility for people no one's ever assumed responsibility for. They are those that died en route. Nobody knows their names, and nobody thinks about them. In addition to that, they never survived in the lore; there are no songs or dances or tales of these people. The people who arrived—there is lore about them. But nothing survives about…. that.
> I suspect the reason is that it was not possible to survive on certain levels and dwell on it. People who did dwell on it, it probably killed them, and the people who did not dwell on it probably went forward. They tried to make a life. I think Afro-Americans in rushing away from slavery, which was important to do—it meant rushing out of bondage into freedom—also rushed away from the slaves because it was painful to dwell there, and they may have abandoned some responsibilities in so doing. [...]
> There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember (Darling and Morrison 1994: 247/248).

Morrison succeeded in resurrecting one of the "anonymous victims" of history through the character of Beloved (Rushdy 1999: 47). Her endeavor in writing *Beloved* is evocative of Caruth's study *Unclaimed Experience*; essentially, there is a need to permit "*history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not" (Caruth 1996: 11). In an attempt to flee the memories, but also people who "died en route" – unknown, unclaimed, forgotten, Morrison refused to let the past become forgotten; she understood the need of "remembering", but at the same time allowing the process of remembering to be digestible, instead of "destructive" (Darling and Morrison 1994: 247/248). If these stories remained untold, they would continue to be "hauntingly unresolved" (Luckhurst 2008: 94). And Morrison felt compelled to bring forward the trauma of those people whose descendants tried to abandon them in the past, because the hurt which came from remembering them would render them unable to move forward. Thus, the character of Beloved can be understood as "a real being, and memory as a force so vital as to be a person - a selfish, greedy, insatiable adolescent who would totally overtake its parent's life" (Steiner 2007: 516). Bhabha contends that Beloved's words are broken, like "the lynched people with broken necks; disembodied, like the dead children who lost their ribbons (Bhabha 1994: 17). And "despite their lost syntax and their fragmented presence", Beloved's words do manage to convey the past trauma (Ibid.). The fragmentariness which stems from trauma, both personal and inherited, which is transferred through generations via postmemory or rememory, is the one which goes in hand with the postmodernist

fragmentariness, with the inability to gather the threads of the unraveling life, which is disintegrating in the face of the inability to overcome the traumatic past, to embrace it and live a life without its tendrils spreading into every single aspect of a traumatized person's life. Felman and Laub claim that literature of testimony, or testimony of trauma, is not simply "a statement", but "a performative *engagement* between consciousness and history"; it is also "a struggling act of readjustment" between "the integrative scope" of words and "the unintegrated impact of event" (1992: 114). Thus, *Beloved* suggests the importance of "fictional narrative" for the "trauma paradigm", as it demonstrates the capacity of the novel form to "bend the rules of history, causation and representation in order to bring into presence" this occluded traumatic violence (Luckhurst 2008: 97). For the purpose of telling both "her personal and communal histories", Morrison uses memory as "a document", and she specifically "makes use of the notion of 'rememory'", in order to articulate "the individual collective past of slavery", and by using "the reincarnate spirit of the dead", she authenticates her own story (McBride 2007: 168). Thus, by merging fragments of various memories, she creates a testament to the event which should not be forgotten, no matter how painful.

The ongoing approach to narrative when it comes to Morrison is her insistence on reporting information "piecemeal, through competing viewpoints and claims on truth" which in a way establishes "a shifting rhetorical and ethical relation among author, characters, and readers" (Vickroy 2015: 74). This is a feature of trauma narratives, particularly postmodernist trauma fiction because, as we have previously established, readers are left to meander through the text and find textual evidence which would in turn help them come to a semblance of a conclusion regarding the truth behind the characters' mindset and their motives. *Beloved* contains a plethora of narrative modes, "from omniscient storytelling to choral chanting"; it is also a conflation of "feminist and postmodern aesthetic concerns" (Steiner 2007: 516/517). By exploring the "loss and the imaginative expansion of those who experience it", *Beloved* serves as a testimony of trauma (Ibid. 521). Trauma which cannot be erased by time, but which can only be known through fragments of memories, attempts at narration, and lingering thoughts which are difficult to voice. The novel invokes "a historical mentality" which is still present but "only as a vestigial ache, a sense of dim horror and injustice like that of the Holocaust for those who did not live through it", it brings forward "the painful dialectics of loss and memory, of repression and the imaginative opening to love" (Ibid. 515). This life testimony centered around one woman's trauma thus sheds light onto a historical wound which would not have been known otherwise, despite a plethora of historical documents. Fictionalizing one's pain

leads towards a possibility of historical healing, of addressing the hurt, the societal circumstances which enabled it, and hopefully, offers a way to subsume the pain intrinsic to it, and work through it.

What makes *Beloved* a "paradigmatic" postmodernist trauma fiction is the absence of a linear narrative, trauma embodied in both a ghost and a cryptogenic young woman, as well as scattered instances of transgenerational transmission of trauma (Luckhurst 2008: 91). Thus, due to the fragmentariness of both the structure of the narrative, as well as of the memories which are present in the episodic instances throughout the novel, we have a presence of both postmodernist and trauma fiction's notions of unrepresentability and atemporality, invoking its quality as a writing beyond genres, as well as recollection which happens without an apparent order, and a belated understanding of trauma. In the end, there is a postmodernist notion of an inconclusive ending, as there is a continuous reminder that this is not a story to pass on.

> Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away (Morrison 2007: 323).

Beloved "cannot be laid to rest" (Luckhurst 2008: 94); in the end, Beloved is left as a stray piece of memory floating in the subconsciousness; too painful to remember, too powerful to forget. She embodies that recurrent quality of trauma, which implies the possibility of returning; she is a trauma which has not been worked through. The fact that "they don't know her name" invokes the painful quality of trauma that cannot be named, because that would imply remembering, and with remembering the omnipresent pain attached to memories resurfaces as well. Thus, the readers are left to wonder if the fact that Beloved returned from the dead was for nothing, if it was futile, as she "is not claimed" (Morrison 2007: 323). There is also an underlying assumption that Beloved will return again when a possibility of utter annihilation of what she stands for, that is, the trauma of all those slaves who were also unclaimed, threatens to happen again. Trauma needs not to only be remembered, but also worked through, and the fact that Beloved is "disremembered" does not mean she is forgotten. Morrison gave the murdered victim of history "*voice*", she succeeded in resurrecting "the unjustly" killed and allowed the murdered daughter to have a "renewed historical life" embedded in the narrative surrounding her mother's life (Rushdy 1999: 61).

In the autobiographical fiction section, we have mentioned that we need "acts of personal remembering" which are "fundamentally social and collective" (Smith and Watson 2001: 20/21). We may claim that *Beloved* is precisely that – a collective memory about a social aspect which is embodied in a narrative of one character, through personal remembering. It is not Morrison herself who remembers, but she rather uses her protagonist as a foil of her knowledge of the past harms and certain details about a real woman who served as an inspiration for the character of Sethe. *Beloved* is thus an act of personal remembering, that is, Sethe's.

When it comes to autobiographical elements in Morrison's fiction, and in particular *Beloved*, we have to mention postmemory. In an interview in 1985, Morrison said that it was difficult for her "to select those qualities that are genuinely autobiographical" because the act of writing is the act of "re-doing the past as well as throwing it into relief" and what makes someone write something is "something in the past that is haunting, that is not explained or wasn't clear so that you are almost constantly rediscovering the past" (Jones, Vinson, and Morrison 1994: 171). Thus, the autobiographical aspect observed in *Beloved* can be said to stem from the fact that Morrison was drawing from postmemory as a vessel where the historical trauma of African-Americans is stored. She also lived at the time when racial inequality was a traumatic, looming reality, so it is not difficult to understand that she drew parallels between her own life as well. Thus, Morrison is both a participant and a theorist of "this black aesthetic of remembering", and her novel provides a pathway for "the understanding of the ways that any given artistic work negotiates between these cultural/historical worlds it inhabits" (Rushdy 1999: 38). As it is, the autobiographical can be represented in the novel not dealing with explicitly autobiographical events, as a novelist can "evoke events out of his personal range", can voice "the inexpressed thoughts of other", and can "reconstruct conversations which memory could not possibly retain" (Pascal 1959: 136). Thus, the novel's main character, if described in third person, can avoid the restrictions, and "can be described from all sides" (Ibid.). Hence, we claim that *Beloved* is a fictional work, an example of postmodernist trauma fiction, which, despite being focused on the events surrounding one fictional character, still conveys a story about both individual and collective traumas of racism and slavery.

In that way, Morrison widened her particular personal range of experience which to certain extent paralleled Sethe's, and applied narrative structures to it, so that she could create a fictional account which portrays a traumatic life from an omniscient point of view. She also

claimed that she was “geared toward the past” as for her “it is living history” (Jones, Vinson, and Morrison 1994: 171). As Homi Bhabha claims, remembering is “never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection”, but rather “a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 1994: 63). Thus, when one decides to remember the painful past and put it into words, it leads them to “a meditation on the experience of dispossession and dislocation” which is both psychic and social, and this mediation “speaks to the condition of the marginalized, the alienated, those who have to live under the surveillance” (Ibid.). Essentially, Morrison gathered dismembered or fragmented aspects of a traumatic past in order to create a fictionalized account of a collective trauma, which remains as a reality, reality of marginalized people who suffered through a collective trauma – people whose origin she shared as well, and thus, their trauma was lodged in her mind and body as well. And in such cases, we have to, once again, talk about postmemory, or the memory of those not directly affected by a traumatic instance.

The notion of postmemory initiated a production of a plethora of trauma texts, primarily because the descendants of the directly traumatized felt the need to talk about those experiences as the transmission of traumatic memories is omnipresent. This notion is connected to another, that is, the notion of transgenerational trauma, which implies “legacies of violence” which are difficult “to recount or event to remember” and which hold “an unrelenting grip on memory” and yet are deemed “unspeakable” (Schwab 2010: 1). Works of fiction conveying transgenerational trauma are written when, as Gabriele Schwab claims, memories “are passed on from generation to generation, most immediately through stories told or written” (Ibid. 51). Violent histories generate “psychic deformations” which are passed “from generation to generation”, rendering it as a recurring notion which defies forgetting, but at the same time bears the difficulty of narration (Ibid. 3). Thus Morrison, as a subsequent generation of enslaved people inherited the “damages of violent histories” which “hibernate in the unconscious” and were later “transmitted to the next generation like an undetected disease” (Ibid. 3). This makes *Beloved* an embodiment of trauma passed on in generations, a postmemory “(that is, the acquired memory of those, particularly intimates, not directly experiencing an event such as the Holocaust or slavery-those who relive what others have lived)” (LaCapra 2014: xx). The violence and the pain which surround those painful memories are indelibly etched in the psyche of not only survivors, but also those who stand as belated witnesses. The understanding of past trauma for them stems from the foreknowledge and belated understanding of the events as well as the contexts which enabled them. Thus, the past

also becomes their present, and it is present as a constant reminder of the pain they will also transfer to the subsequent generation. We may claim that Morrison, akin to the writers of autofictional narratives, "moves on the border between the past and the present" (Holdenried 2019: 413). The past which was something she carried as a descendant of traumatized people, but at the same time someone who had a different perspective stemming from the present in which she lived, with temporal distance from the past harms, simultaneous with the inherited knowledge and additional insights, which is why her authorial voice was inevitable in this testimony. In the next sections we focus on the narrative representation of traumatic events and responses to traumatic events in *Beloved*, as well as the narrative strategies which enable such representation.

3.3.4.1 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events and Responses to Traumatic Events in *Beloved* - Introduction

What characterizes Morrison's writing is the presence of "varying narrative perspectives", which move from one "character's consciousness to another's" (Vickroy 2015: 71). Those "thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (Morrison 2007: 235), permeate the house and intersect the thoughts surrounding the house, but they are isolated, the same way the women are. The perspectives embedded in the novel contain various pieces of information, some of them scant, some of them detailed, and some are either reliable or unreliable, which depends on the person whose perspective we are provided an insight into. This enables us to follow a fragmentary story, fragmented due to trauma, and gather narrative pieces from different perspectives, in order to reach a conclusive, or at least, a semblance of a conclusive picture of the character's life. At the same time, this fragmentariness may hinder us from reaching a conclusion, as it may lead us towards an open ending, which expands into numerous potential trajectories. These shifting points are "also filtered through a free indirect discourse style that places readers in the characters' minds while revealing the characters' flaws and contradictions through descriptions and juxtapositions" (Vickroy 2015: 71). However, even these flows and contradictions need to be taken into account, as their presence in the narrative also influences the way it is shaped.

These shifting points are evocative of narrative dissociation, which provides readers with the ability to assume a distanced position and in turn critically examine all available focalizations. As we have already mentioned, the "belated temporality of trauma" and the elusive nature of the "shattering experience" are in turn related to the "repetition involving a

period of latency" (LaCapra 2014: 81). This repetition is also apparent in recursive flashbacks, which interrupt the narrative and cause its atemporality. This atemporality is apparent in the nonlinear narrative which starts in medias res, when all the traumatic events are already in the past, and the life testimony which starts to unfold before the readers is the one which encounters Sethe in a house haunted by a ghost, full of "a baby's venom" (Morrison 2007: 3). This is all reminiscent of a process of coming to terms with the *real* of the trauma, the truth hidden behind layers of narrative strategies, intrusions, deviations, and seemingly incoherent thought processes. That *real* is "the unspeakable history of slavery" (Campbell 1996: 143), which is also connected to the unspeakable history of the characters who have to live in the aftermath of it. The aim is to connect the scattered threads, inferences in the text which help us read the truth behind trauma and attempt to understand it.

3.3.4.1.1 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events in *Beloved*

3.3.4.1.1.1 Narrative Representation of Sociological Traumatic Events in *Beloved*

The representation of sociological traumatic events in *Beloved* is intrinsically connected to the representation of bodily humiliation African-Americans, and especially black women, were forced to endure during the period of slavery. Bodily humiliation does not necessarily have to involve a physical contact; it can also stem from a fact that a physical body is dissected, regarded as a commodity, or analyzed against the will of the individual being scrutinized. Most of the experiences Sethe lives through involve an underlying, but nevertheless, still present acts of humiliation due to her being a black woman, as well as a slave. Traumatic events are narrated in *Beloved* through abrupt shifts in focalization, occasionally so abrupt that it is difficult to discern whose perspective we are reading the narrative from; thought processes and flashbacks are also difficult to place in terms of their origin. These shifts and the overall fragmentation in the narrative are initiated by the appearance of Beloved, the ghost daughter, who "thrives on the past", and whose "need for stories is as insatiable as memory itself" (Steiner 2007: 516).

During her life at the plantation, Sethe experienced the most brutal events which stemmed from the fact that racism and slavery combined were the most prominent social traumatic events. However, they are embodied most obviously in the character of schoolteacher, who is the initiator of the majority of traumatic events Sethe goes through, as the humiliations she was subjected to physically and mentally. One of the flashbacks to Sethe's

past, when she remembers about the schoolteacher, is narrated in the third-person, and is abruptly interrupted with the first-person narrative and Sethe talking directly to Beloved. It is not a conversation per se, but rather a thought report, transported directly from Sethe's mind into Beloved's, as if the memory is too painful to utter aloud. It is obvious in the way the narrative shifts from the description of Sethe returning from work as her "mind was busy with the things she could forget"; immediately following is Sethe talking directly to Beloved in her mind, as it is clear that it is difficult for Sethe to say the words out loud because she thinks: "Thank God I don't have to rememory or say a thing because you know it. All. You know I never would a left you. Never" (Morrison 2007: 226). This initiates a traumatic flashback to a memory Sethe never told anyone about, but her thought process reports it verbatim. She remembers overhearing the schoolteacher teaching his pupils and asking: "Which one are you doing?" to which one of the pupils said Sethe's name; she was confused until schoolteacher explained: "'No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right.'" (Ibid. 228). Even though Sethe did not understand the meaning of the word "characteristic" until Mrs. Garner, the owner of the plantation explained, when the understanding dawned on her, she realized the extent of the schoolteacher's racism and it brought her shame. At that moment, all the times the schoolteacher measured her with a string and asked questions finally made sense – she was nothing more than a curious creature in his eyes, the one which possesses animal qualities and some human ones. This degrading behavior toward Sethe, this blatant racism is nothing but hate, hate which Frantz Fanon claims is not inborn, as "it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being", and those who hate have to show it "in appropriate actions and behavior" (Fanon 1986: 53). This practice of racism is underlined with hatred, and Sethe is subjected to humiliation which stems from the schoolteacher's prejudice towards black people, and his dismissal of the pain he is forcing on Sethe in the process. His words and actions are laced with animosity, and he is only one representative of a generation of people whose hateful attitude traumatized generations of people based on the perception and claim that they belonged to a different race.

The schoolteacher is the epitome of the practices of both slavery and racism, and he is the one who pushed Sethe into extreme experiences of those practices. He arrived to the plantation so that he would "put things in order". What he did instead was that he "punched the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight" (Morrison 2007: 11). This is reminiscent of dissociation which we discuss later; a person's soul is reflected in their eyes, but in the case of Sethe, her eyes bear a vacant expression, depicting

how the ordeals she went through disrupted her very essence. This portrays the overwhelming quality of racism as a traumatic practice; it is not a simple event "with a before and after" (Craps 2013b: 32). Rather, racism shapes individuals to such an extent that they can never return to what they used to be. The vacant expression in Sethe's eyes embodies the consequences of an event "indelibly etched" in both a community and individual members (van der Kolk 2007: 560).

In such a climate of oppression, it is not only one's individuality that is endangered, but also the aspects of a person's life which are intricately connected to other members of the same community. For example, the thought process strategy provides us with an insight into Sethe's thoughts on motherhood amidst slavery and oppression, primarily regarding her own mother. She talks to Denver and Beloved about it, and her thoughts are imbedded in the conversation. She remembers how her mother had a mark; "on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin" and that is how Sethe recognized her mother after she had been hanged (Morrison 2007: 72). The words following that memory disturb Sethe because "she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross" (Ibid. 73). Other fragments of memory join this one, and she remembers Nan telling her how her mother had been raped by white men on the crew and she had thrown all the babies off the ship, but to Sethe, "she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around" (Ibid. 74). Thus Beloved's question forces Sethe to bring forward the fragments of memory from obscurity. Sethe remembers being told that she was loved by her mother, and that the other children "were a result of institutionalized rape" (Campbell 1996: 146). Thus these narrative strategies and techniques converge and tell us more about the trauma which continues, the one which deprives mothers of the complete right to love and protect their children, and even to claim them as their own. This is an example of repetition compulsion defined by Freud, in which the survivors relive painful memories in order to allow their psyche to attempt to process traumatic events. Another quality is the belatedness of trauma, which implies that the understanding of an event comes only later, but it does not imply complete rationalization. This is also an instance of an overlap between trauma and transgenerational trauma. Sethe is a victim of trauma, who lives with "the scars of memory", that is "gaps, amnesia, distortion, revision" and "intrusive flashbacks", but she is also a victim of "transgenerational trauma" which comes to her "secondhand" (Schwab 2010: 14). Sethe is living through the same trauma her mother lived through, and that is something that her

children will inherit as well. This inheritance of memories is most obviously present when Beloved hums a song and Sethe immediately recalls "the click – the settling of pieces into places designed and made especially for them", her children; she tells Beloved that she had made that song up and sang it to her children, who are the only ones who know it, to which Beloved replies: "I know it" (Morrison 2007: 207). Besides the onslaught of traumatic memories being transmitted from one traumatized generation to another, what is also transmitted are the memories of love, of intimate moments shared between mothers and their children.

This relationship between a mother and a child is one of the "recurrent tropes" of novels dealing with African-American experience, as slavery is an institution "attempting to render meaningless" that connection between a mother and a child (Rushdy 1999: 46). It is apparent that slavery "traumatizes *women* by way of a kind of surplus violence" which "not only robs them of self-ownership" and physically brutalizes them, "but *also* soils and degrades their self-conception by compelling them to be mothers while thwarting their efforts at maternal love" (Forter 2014: 79). Being subjected to the traumas of slavery and racism hinders Sethe from being a mother she aspires to be. Sethe serves as a way to underline a connection between "a collective and personal experience" (Balaev 2012: 21). This connection illuminates the overlooked aspects of such experiences, and provides the readers with a better understanding of trauma which transcends the personal and becomes collective. Available aspects of motherhood in such oppressive conditions are thwarted, and in slavery, "protecting a child may involve killing her; love means loss; fostering means destroying" (Steiner 2007: 515) because "Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (Morrison 2007: 155). Slavery in the South of the United States of America spanned across two centuries, and it is "a perfect study of rape in all its complexities, for the black woman's sexual integrity was deliberately crushed in order that slavery might profitably endure" (Brownmiller 1975: 153). And not only was their sexual integrity affected, but most importantly, their entire bodily integrity and all the implications which came with it. This notion of the power white people wield is something incomprehensible, and through Denver's focalization, her understanding of her mother's thoughts on it and her reaction are narrated:

> That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty

> *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her that was clean (Morrison 2007: 295/296).

Sethe is controlled as a woman, as a mother, and it is extremely traumatizing because slavery, racism, and rape were all a combination which together created an "institutional crime", or "part and parcel of the white man's subjugation of a people for economic and psychological gain" (Brownmiller 1975: 153). However, she is adamant at keeping her children safe. The "clean" she is referring to probably means untainted, unaffected by the horrible repression, violation, and traumatization in the hands of the slave owners. She could not show agency when it came to protecting herself, but when her children's safety is concerned, "she could never let it happen" (Morrison 2007: 295). The way Sethe survives is by trying to keep thoughts about white people at bay, however, their impact on her life is way too strong for her to keep the memories about their violation buried in a dark corner of her mind. They drained her "mother's milk", "(d)ivided her back into plant life", "(d)riven her fat-bellied into the woods" (Morrison 2007: 222). When she was younger, she hoped that "for every schoolteacher there would be an Amy", a white girl who saved her while she was on the run, that "for every pupil there was a Garner, or Bodwin, or even a sheriff, whose touch at her elbow was gentle and who looked away when she nursed" (Ibid.). Her encounters with white people vary between extremely hostile and relatively decent. However, despite the fact that the owners of the plantation, the Garners, were kind towards her, they were still slave owners; Amy, the girl who helped her was a white girl who was discarded by her own society and could understand to extent the predicament of Sethe, but she still used racist rhetoric. The society Sethe lives in is imbued with racist paradigms to such an extent, that even a modicum of decency means a lot to Sethe. Nevertheless, she tries to suppress all the memories of both horrible and somewhat pleasant encounters with the white people; and, in time, she managed to bury "all recollection of them" (Ibid.). However, suppression does not entail oblivion – buried memories keep resurfacing in the testimony of Sethe's life.

3.3.4.1.1.2 Narrative Representation of Physical Traumatic Events in *Beloved*

In *Beloved*, trauma is "an inextinguishable link between past and present", and this past is "so fully present that it drives current action" (Vickroy 2015: 103). We may claim that a particular instance of the past which drives the plot in the novel is embodied in the character of Beloved, whose re-appearance initiates both a surge of suppressed memories as well as attempts to reconcile the past and the present in order to be able to move forward. Apart from

Beloved, a stark physical reminder of Sethe's traumatic past is a scar on her back, like "the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display" (Morrison 2007: 21). In a dialogue between Sethe and Paul D, she explains to him how she got the horrendous scar on her back. The whole conversation is a reminder of how black women were not only raped, but also physically violated, their bodily integrity shattered with some acts slave owners regarded as necessary. Trauma is present in both the body and the mind; the body reacts to the painful memories of the past as does the mind. And oftentimes, the body bears the scars of the traumatic memory, both mental and physical, making trauma physiological (van der Kolk 2015: 88).

> "After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still."
> "They used cowhide on you?"
> "And they took my milk."
> "They beat you and you was pregnant?"
> "And they took my milk!" (Morrison 2007: 19/20).

Despite the fact that Sethe also informs Paul D about the lashing she endured, her words still attempt to convey a more pressing violation for her - the fact that the white people took her milk. This constant repetition evokes the feeling that this was something even more shattering for Sethe, as milk was something her body produced in order to feed her children, but it was taken without consent, in a despicable act of disrupting bodily integrity. Representation of bodily humiliation is one of a "representing aspects of traumatic experience" in trauma narratives, and it makes the experience more visceral for the readers (Vickroy 2015: 166). This depiction of bodily humiliation mostly comes from rape, or any sort of disrespect of bodily autonomy. Depriving her of the only bodily autonomy available, of her right to feed her children, is an utter disregard of women by men, especially white men who secured themselves with all necessary institutional "rights" to own a black woman. We learn about that through Sethe's words which convey her indignation. In their dialogue, Paul D is incredulous, as he tries to confirm that he heard her correctly and that the slave owners really did use cowhide and beat her while she was pregnant. But Sethe reminds him of another bodily violation, which not only affected her, but her children as well – the act of stealing her milk. However, this act of bodily violation is not something that is sequestered in the past; she mentions the scar on her back which was made when the white people beat her, but she adds that it "grows there still" (Morrison 2007: 20). Despite the fact that scars are something that should become less visible

in time, Sethe's scar still grows and spreads; this symbolizes the fact that her pain is not in the past, that the hurt of the violation was not overcome, and that as long as she lives, the scar will grow and the pain will remain.

Paul D serves as an instigator for the narrative recall of Sethe's memories. He discovers that she committed infanticide, and when he confronts her and asks her about it, she simply tells him: "'I stopped him […] I took and put my babies where they'd be safe.'" (Morrison 2007: 193). His thought process reveals that in his head, Sethe is a contradiction, as this "Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw" (Ibid.). He offers her no chance to explain, nor does he ask about her reasons, but accuses her by saying: "'Your love is too thick,'" (Ibid.), to which Sethe replies: "'Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all.'" (Ibid. 194). This is telling of Sethe's character, who is aware of her deeds, but who adamantly refuses to agree with others who may see it as anything else but an act of love. When Paul D and Sethe discuss her reasons, he says: "'You got two feet, Sethe, not four,'", and at that moment, "a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" (Ibid. 194). What he says reminds her of the time when Schoolteacher told his nephews to separate Sethe's human and animal traits, and she is wounded, because Paul D shows no understanding. However, despite the attempts at characterizing Sethe as a mother whose love is too thick, we can see that it is seen as such:

> only in the sense that the institution of slavery diminishes the effectiveness of the black mother's devotion to the point where her daughter's likely fate is a repetition of her own soiling; hence slavery *requires* an "excess" of love in the form of a violence that robs the slaveholder of the opportunity to perform that soiling. […] It affirms the value of *infanticidal love* as one kind of ethical response to a system that thwarts black women's conventionally maternal, ordinarily protective love. "Too thick" love is, in this sense, nothing less than the tragic yet ethically efficacious residue of slavery's brutal effort at curtailment (Forter 2014: 80)

Herein lies the historical essence of Sethe's trauma. The institution of slavery assumed "conditions by which a certain maternality gets historically reproduced" (Forter 2014: 82). Thus, infanticide is an act of agency Sethe was deprived of, a skewed attempt at performing her role as a mother, which meant protecting her children; skewed due to the external circumstances which offered her no other way of being a mother. In the context of slavery, black women were deemed fit or unfit solely on their ability to produce healthy offspring, which was "crucial to the planter economy after the African slave trade was banned in 1807" (Brownmiller 1975: 154). There was an utter disregard of how they took care of their children, as long as their children could continue working on the plantations and replacing their parents

when they became too old to work. Sethe's husband, Halle, arranges to continue working instead of his mother, Baby Suggs, but the years at the plantation make her wonder what "does a sixty-odd-year-old slavewoman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for?" (Morrison 2007: 166). Years of slavery, years of her children being taken away from her render her unable to imagine a future where she could be free. On plantations, children were disregarded, as black women also had to nurse white children, and Sethe reminisces that the "little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none" (Ibid. 236). Slavery is closely connected to institutionalized rape, as there was no regard as to how the babies were actually made (Brownmiller 1975: 156), as long as the process of maintaining the plantation was left undisturbed.

As we have already established, infanticide in the context of slavery has to be taken rather differently, as it can be perceived by mothers as something which is a response to the horrible institution of slavery, and something that Forter claims they see as "*less repugnant* than other options" (Forter 2014: 82). It takes a while for the narrative to offer us the truth behind Sethe's infanticide, and it is not told outright, but we rather have to gather inferences from focalizing points or thought reports of different characters. It is akin to gathering the fragments of a broken memory in order to be able to glue the pieces together and create a coherent narrative. It is known that Beloved is dead, as she is present as a ghost from the very first page of the novel, and we also have Sethe's flashbacks to the grave with a single word *Beloved*, for which she had to sell her body, "Ten minutes for seven letters", while the son of the engraver watched them "rutting among the headstones" (Morrison 2007: 5). The engraver essentially raped Sethe in order to engrave the letters and except the "rutting among the headstones", we have no other description of the act of rape (Ibid.). Sethe dissociates at that moment, her self "flees" into a different state, which happens when a victim cannot physically remove herself from a traumatic situation, so she tries to dissociate emotionally (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2015: 148).

Due to the non-linear narrative in the novel, or the atemporal ordering of the sequence of events, there is a need to employ analepsis or literary flashbacks, in order to compile various "narrative reversions to previous events" (Dupriez 1991: 189). Morrison initially only provides the contents of the act of infanticide filtered through the focalization of the "four horsemen", that is "schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher, and a sheriff" (Morrison 2007: 174), whose detached and racist language introduces us to the horror of what they encounter.

Focalization filtered through their perspective is imbued with degrading and animalistic language, to the point it sounds as if we are reading about animals, not human beings:

> Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere—in the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare at—the old nigger boy, still mewing, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arc of its mother's swing (Morrison 2007: 175).

They did not even recognize Sethe whom they had tortured and beat before her escape, whereas Sethe not only recognizes them by the hat the schoolteacher wears, but also immediately knows that their appearance is probably going to imply harming her children. They are completely emotionally detached from the horrible scene, and the only thought going through the schoolteacher's head is the fact that "there was nothing there to claim" (Morrison 2007: 175). The words "she simply swung the baby" imply the lack of understanding for such an act, and the absence of feelings connected to being responsible for it. The schoolteacher concludes that he has had enough of "nigger eyes", and looking at the traumatized and overwhelmed Sethe, his thought process betrays the racist discourse because he thinks that she did that as a result of "a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (Ibid. 177). The use of these degrading, derogatory words is an authorial choice by Morrison, which was probably made in order to further emphasize the reductionist, slave owners' rhetoric. The thoughts conveyed in this segment are utterly emotionally detached from the event transpiring in front of their eyes; they regard it as a curious case of an odd behavior of a slave, which, due to their preconceived notions of black people, is something ingrained in slaves' nature. In their eyes, she "swung", "missed", "tried to connect a second time" (Ibid. 175). – there are no feelings or deeper musings on what they are looking at. It sounds as a detachment from the scene, not because they are overwhelmed by the sheer heartbreak of it, but rather because they feel nothing but slight inconvenience because their plans at reclaiming the fugitive slave were foiled.

In the aftermath, Sethe is silent, voiceless, and according to Judith Herman, it happens when "sensory and emotional experiences" become disconnected from "the social domain of language and memory"; this is an internal mechanism of dissociation (whose narrative representation we analyze in section 3.3.4.1.2.2) by which traumatized people are "silenced" (Herman 2015: 239). She refuses to let go of Denver, who she nurses, and who took "her

mother's milk along with the blood of her sister" (Morrison 2007: 179). This silence continues when she is escorted by the sheriff to the cart that is going to take her to prison, with Denver in her arms. The cart takes her away, and the dried blood made her dress "stiff, like rigor mortis" (Ibid. 180). A traumatic event is followed by silence, because for the victim, in this case, both the victim and the perpetrator, the immediacy renders her unable to say anything, merely follow instructions. The time Sethe spent in prison is never narrated in the novel, so we assume that the absence of description means that trauma erased parts of Sethe's memory due to the immediacy of trauma. This gap in the narrative does not provide relief, because the description of Sethe's dress as "stiff, like rigor mortis" invokes the fact that Sethe carried her daughter's death on her, that even her dress serves as a reminder of what she did. However, there is no narration of Sethe's thoughts in that part of the narrative, as the most "direct seeing of a violent event" occurs as "an absolute inability to know it" (Caruth 1996: 91/92). Sethe is stuck in the immediacy of what happened and unable to give voice to her emotions; the narrative is also muted, it provides us with no clues as to how Sethe feels, or what she is thinking about. The emotions are detached from the narrative the same way Sethe is detached from both herself and her surroundings at that moment.

When the previous description of infanticide from the focalizing perspective of white people is juxtaposed with Stamp Paid's thoughts on the incident, which he does not share with Paul D, we are confronted with a completely different perspective, because it comes from a man who is also oppressed. In his ruminations on that day, we are offered a different perspective of Sethe hawk-like, how she "flew, snatching up her children", how she "collected them every which way" in a frantic attempt to save them from harm (Morrison 2007: 185). He tells Paul D that Sethe did love her children, she was just trying to "out-hurt the hurter" (Ibid. 276), in the only way she knew, which was claiming her children and sending them to death, because even death is better than the life which awaited them at the plantation. When comparing the way these two scenes are told, the schoolteacher's perspective is devoid of any emotion, merely recalling murder – "But now she had gone wild" (Ibid. 176); Stamp Paid's narrative is emotionally heightened, and he describes the act of a mother desperately trying to protect her children – "a pretty little slavegirl had recognized a hat, and split to the woodshed to kill her children" (Ibid. 186). There are a lot of gaps in this story, untold things, unspoken because they are so painful, gaps which nevertheless speak louder than the words conveying thoughts of the schoolteacher. The unspeakable quality of painful memories which, even omitted, still convey pain in the absences and empty spots in the narrative.

Sethe bears her memories and scars as acts of defiance. She tried to escape, she committed infanticide, because she could not bear to be held under the thumb of her oppressors. And most importantly, she chose to continue to love and accept love despite all her past traumas: "All she wanted was to go on. As she had. Alone with her daughter in a haunted house she managed every damn thing" (Morrison 2007: 114). Despite her traumatic past, she still tries to build a proper future with her daughter. They are alone, left by her sons, and her mother-in-law who died, without neighbors they can talk to. Sethe as a traumatized person can focus on one thing, and that is continuing to live despite the past that desperately tries to drag her back to the pain and uncertainty. The house they live in is haunted, not only by the ghost, but also by the fact that every desolate nook and cranny contains a figment of the past memories, memories which cannot be erased, but which, together with the ghost of Beloved, become a living, breathing thing Sethe tries to suppress in order to continue her life. The haunted house is a physical reminder of her past, of unresolved memories, and the pain which pulses on her back, the scar which branches out and continues to grow.

3.3.4.1.2 Narrative Representation of Responses to Traumatic Events in *Beloved*

3.3.4.1.2.1 Narrative Representation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in *Beloved*

From the onset of the novel, it is obvious that Sethe avoids talking about her past or even thinking about it. We find out that "every mention of her past life hurt", everything in her past was "painful or lost", and even "unspeakable"; however, even without talking about it, or having someone to talk to, "the hurt was always there – like a tender place in the corner of her mouth that the bit left" (Morrison 2007: 69). Sethe's narrative exhibits all the symptoms of a PTSD avoidance to talk about or think about the past hurt, which includes "flashback episodes, memories, somatic (body) sensations, and nightmares" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 203). This somatic response is akin to a phantom pain of a severed limb; the limb is no longer there, but the hurt remains, not direct, but it is still experienced intensely. The "bit" that she is referring to is a metal piece slave owners used to subjugate the enslaved people, by stuffing a piece which was either a harness or a bridle into a black person's mouth. It was not only painful, but it also prevented them from speaking, crying, eating, even breathing properly. Sethe remembers her mother; in the thought process she transfers to Beloved, she informs her that her mother had: "had the bit so many times she smiled. When she wasn't smiling she smiled, and I never saw her own smile" (Morrison 2007: 240). Her memories of her mother are spoiled

as even the physical aspect of her mother in her mind is skewed, because she cannot recall her smile, as she only remembers the grotesque sneer marring her mother's face due to the physical torture she underwent. Reminders of the past are thus unrepresentable for Sethe, not only in the traditional approach to understanding trauma, but also because in the past, she was prevented from talking about the hurt that was happening:

> She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind. […] Then something. The plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. […] Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her – remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys (Morrison 2007: 6/7).

Even though she is at pains not to think about her traumatic past, there is always something that invokes a memory of that time. Avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma can range from avoidance of thoughts or feelings which are related to the event, to a "general sense of emotional numbing to the total absence of recall of the significant event" (Luckhurst 2008: 1). The fact that she remembers "the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys" is her way of subconsciously protecting herself. Sethe lives with the symptoms of PTSD, which appear as a result of "a failure of time to heal all wounds" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 7). Despite the temporal distance from the traumatic past, Sethe is unable to integrate the "memory of trauma" and accept it as something that is a fragment of her own "personal past"; thus, this memory exists "independently of previous schemata (i.e. it is dissociated)" (Ibid.). Even Sethe is aware of this disarray within her, as she says that: "Other people went crazy, why couldn't she? Other people's brains stopped, turned around and went on to something new, which is what must have happened to Halle" (Morrison 2007: 83). Sethe's memories of her past traumas are unpredictable, they appear without any apparent reason, they interrupt her everyday life, and bruise her psyche with intensity that is felt for a long time. She is trying to focus on "immediate experience", something which does not necessitate her emotional involvement, and the narrative follows her dissociation in that it offers "little explanation of past influences", which further suggests "repression or avoidant omissions" (Vickroy 2015: 133), and it leaves readers with potential narrative gaps to fill in with their assumptions as to what she is so desperately trying to suppress, trying to answer questions regarding the boys and their crimes, as well as Sethe's involvement in all of it. When traumatized people with PTSD replay trauma, even

unwillingly, it "leads to sensitization; with every replay of the trauma, there is an increasing level of distress" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 8). Violent resurfacing of painful memories is one of the symptoms of PTSD, when memories, often unprovoked, come rushing forward to the present moment and state of mind, rendering the survivor unable to function properly. There is a deliberate avoidance of that resurfacing, painful resistance and attempt to keep the past at bay. And when such memories manage to resurface it "shamed her" because she remembers the trees rather than "the boys" hanging from their branches, dead and faceless in her memory.

She spends every waking hour trying to repress the memories of her painful past, and that is the "'better life'" she believed Denver and she were living, which "was simply not that other one" (Morrison 2007: 51). And when Paul D appears, out of "that other one", the past comes flooding back. Which is why the narrative betrays Sethe's reluctance to confide in him; she struggles to disgorge some of the painful fragments of the past, as despite the fact that Paul D was the first person in a while to talk to Sethe, her avoidance at discussing past memories betrays her traumatization. The past is still a painful presence lingering in silences between words she utters. When Sethe finds out that Halle, her husband, actually knew about her abuse from the schoolteacher and his nephews, we have a sudden switch in focalization, which unhindered, shows her thoughts about that:

> Just once, could it say, No thank you? I just ate and can't hold another bite? I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up. I am still full of that, God damn it, I can't go back and add more. Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft—hiding close by—the one place he thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at all. And not stopping them—looking and letting it happen. But my greedy brain says, Oh thanks, I'd love more—so I add more. And no sooner than I do, there is no stopping. There is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind. And as far as he is concerned, the world may as well know it. And if he was that broken then, then he is also and certainly dead now. And if Paul D saw him and could not save or comfort him because the iron bit was in his mouth, then there is still more that Paul D could tell me and my brain would go right ahead and take it and never say, No thank you. I don't want to know or have to remember that. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow, about Denver, about Beloved, about age and sickness not to speak of love (Morrison 2007: 83).

In section 2.3, we have mentioned that Freud asserted that a traumatic event is known for "repeatedly" forcing itself on the survivor, and the survivor is in turn "at pains *not* to think of it" (Freud 2003a: 51). Sethe's thoughts "I am still full of that, God damn it, I can't go back and

add one more" as well as "my brain would go right ahead and take I and never say and never say, No thank you. I don't want to know or have to remember that" (Morrison 2007: 83), illustrate Sethe's constant fight to keep traumatic intrusions at bay. This monologue clearly depicts her utter tiredness of having to keep a mental dam between her past and her present, as well as the pain when some unbidden memories come forth. She describes her brain as "greedy", because as soon as one memory resurfaces, her brain says "Oh thanks, I'd love more", so she adds more memories until she is flooded by them and the pain becomes too much to bear (Ibid. 83). She thinks of her brain as a separate entity which is doomed to accept all and every past memory despite the pain that would bring Sethe, especially the newly acquired knowledge that her husband was present when her debasement occurred. Sethe's thoughts are laced with utter betrayal and pain; her own husband did nothing to protect her. At the same time, a belated realization that Halle is actually dead stuns her and her words are increasingly incoherent. Her previous reply to Paul D after he informed her about the fact that Halle had known all along was: "'He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?'" (Ibid. 81). This repetition of the same two words serves to convey Sethe's incredulity, hurt, and betrayal. She cannot believe that her own husband witnessed her cruel debasement and showed no agency, that he did not hold the perpetrators accountable. The feeling of betrayal is another emotion which leads to re-traumatization. Sethe's insistence on repeating "he saw" shows that she thought that she was alone when such traumatic thing happened to her. She wants to avoid the topic of Halle, but when it eventually reaches the point of no return, she has no choice but to let painful thoughts overwhelm her. When it comes to Sethe, we see her withdrawal, her attempt and struggle not to think about what happened to her.

Rememory is a recurrent expression in the novel, an expression which carries with it an entire meaning which could not be voiced otherwise. For Sethe, rememory is "an individual experience" which "hangs around as a 'picture' that can enter another's rememory" or the part of the brain which "rememories" and in turn "complicate(s) consciousness and identity" (Rody 1995: 101). For her, rememory stands for an "amalgam of *memory* and the verb *to remember*" as if "the faculty were too active and too compulsively repetitive to submit to a mere abstract noun" (Steiner 2007: 516). In a conversation with Denver, she explains her understanding of rememory, which is a mental picture indelibly etched into a mind, which stays there long after the event the memory is about is over, and never goes away:

> "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened."
> "Can other people see it?" asked Denver.
> "Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away" (Morrison 2007: 43).

We have already established that traumatic experience, and the weight of the memory of it can spoil "appreciation of the present" (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 4). This can be connected to the concept of rememory as Sethe sees it, especially in the part where she says that "It's never going away" (Morrison 2007: 43). Her past is always there, haunting her, influencing her feelings about the present which she tries to build with her remaining daughter, but still tied to "the place where it happened" (Ibid.). A mental thread connects Sethe's mind where that memory is stored and the place which the memory is connected to. It is lurking in the subconscious part of Sethe's mind, and she is painfully aware of it, through constant pains at trying to keep it in the past. This pattern of "negative or pessimistic thoughts", as well as the "inability to express emotions and cope with different situations" points to "vulnerability" to PTSD symptoms (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 206). However, with the appearance of Paul D, she understands that he "was adding something to her life – something she wanted to count on but was scared to" (Morrison 2007: 112). This is connected to the "hypervigilance" which stems from PTSD, as Sethe is constantly on guard to keep traumatic intrusions from the past away from her present life (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 203). At the same time, his rememory and hers combine, and his bear "new pictures and old rememories that broke her heart" (Morrison 2007: 112). The ruptures and empty spaces in rememories are the missing pieces in a puzzle, and Paul D's rememories fill those blank spaces with events she did not or could not remember:

> Paul D dig it up, gave her back her body, kissed her divided back, stirred her rememory and brought her more news: of clabber, of iron, of roosters' smiling, but when he heard *her* news, he counted her feet and didn't even say goodbye (Morrison 2007: 222).

She is grateful to Paul D for making her remember and confront her past; but at the same time, she blames him for it, and also for not understanding the reasons behind her act of killing her child. It would be difficult to understand Sethe without being introduced to her thoughts, which is why thought processes are of extreme value when conveying what thoughts are coursing through Sethe's mind. Her thoughts exhibit the inherent paradox between the need to know about the past and the need to keep it away: "There will never be a day, she thought, when Halle will knock on the door. Not knowing it was hard; knowing it was harder" (Morrison 2007: 112). When Paul D tells her the truth about Halle, the empty space in her heart, "a space sometimes colored with righteous resentment at what could have been his cowardice, or stupidity or bad luck" the empty space of "no definite news" fills with a "brand-new sorrow" (Ibid.). There are gaps in her memory, as there are gaps in her knowledge of the past. Paul D's appearance fills those gaps of "no definite news" with new pain and she now replaces the ignorance regarding her husband's whereabouts with the fact that he is dead. This "brand-new sorrow" is now another "intruding" image which exacerbates the symptoms of her PTSD (van der Kolk 1987: 191). Paul D heals her and wounds her at the same time. Despite her not being willing to openly talk about the past, her mind acts as an entity of its own and displays symptoms of PTSD, one of which is the "compulsive need" to recount past violent events (Ibid.). The discrepancy between recounting the past events and suppressing them further traumatizes Sethe, and her thoughts, rather than her words, convey the split which occurs because of that.

3.3.4.1.2.2 Narrative Representation of Dissociation in *Beloved*

In the last sentence of the previous section we mentioned the split that exists within Sethe. Such a split is a common occurrence in traumatized people who live with constant reminders of past trauma, while they simultaneously have to continue their lives as if the past is not a lingering presence in their every waking moment. However, the split may become a serious mental condition due to the overpowering presence of trauma, and in such cases, we talk about dissociation. Essentially, dissociation is an act of fleeing into a different state of mind, without that being apparent on the surface (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2015: 148). It may range from a temporary dissociation, which lasts a couple of seconds, to a prolonged dissociation when the person is unable to return to the present reality easily. In the case of Sethe, she dissociates as a way of retreating or escaping her traumatic reality, at least mentally. In the novel, this state of mind is conveyed with the help of narrative dissociation. It is also helpful

when portraying how Sethe's dissociation coincides with her creating a mind space where she can talk to Beloved without any hindrance. In this mind space, there are voices we recognize as Sethe's and Beloved's, as if they exist in a disintegrated sphere of a narrative where they can communicate:

> You rememory me?
> Yes. I remember you.
> You never forgot me?
> Your face is mine.
> Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now (Morrison 2007: 254).

The fact that Sethe asks Beloved if she rememories her instead of remembering her is conveying Sethe's need to ascertain that Beloved's mental images of their connection coincide with Sethe's; that Beloved, through rememory, can understand what Sethe did and why she did it, and hopefully feel all the things Sethe never had the opportunity to tell her. In their shared mental space, where their rememories overlap, Beloved is "safe", because no one can pry Beloved out of Sethe's mind. Despite the fact that Sethe's rememories are mostly connected to her traumatic past, there is also a space filled with love for her daughter. "Your face is mine" conveys the fact that Beloved is always a part of Sethe, the same way Sweet Home is; however, this part of Sethe's body and mind is the one filled with love and sacrifice.

In the midst of the second part of the novel, we have a completely disintegrated narrative, a chorus of voices which use Beloved as their vessel for expressing their pain and trauma. Across five pages, a string of words with no punctuation marks spans and conveys the complete disintegration in the face of trauma. Certain parts seem as if Beloved is right at the center of the traumatic event, as if she is transported from Sethe's mind space into a mind space of a slave on a ship where she is "always crouching the man on my face is dead his face is not mine" (Morrison 2007: 248). Sentences are scattered, and the only semblance of different trains of thoughts are the paragraphs separating them. "I am not separate from her", as if Beloved is the pain Sethe bears and the mark from the past she can never erase as "All of it is now it is always now" (Ibid.). What is always now is trauma which is never over, which is atemporal and constantly present, pouring from one traumatized black body into another. In the section where narrative dissociation filtered through Beloved's focalization is present, it is suggested that "she recalls the Middle Passage, that she carries a vast ancestral memory and thus is the ghost of many more than one lost soul" (Rody 1995: 115). That is also apparent in one part of this disintegrated narrative where Beloved informs us through a polyphonic

perspective that “the iron circle is around our neck she does not have sharp earrings in her ears or around basket she goes in the water with my face” (Morrison 2017 250/251). Her psyche is the storage of the emotional burden “she carries as a symbolic compression of innumerable forgotten people into one miraculously resurrected personality” and she also embodies “a fearful claim of the past upon the present”, the past which yearns to be recognized by, and “even possess, the living” (Rody 1995: 104). Thus, it is symbolic that Beloved’s presence is initially in the shape of a ghost, haunting the living, forcing them to remember and preventing them from healing unless addressing all the previous hurts and accepting them as scarred tissue that forever remains on the wounded psyche. Beloved is the embodiment of the recurring quality of trauma, the reality of which, as Felman and Laub claim, constantly eludes the survivor who “lives in its grip” and “unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments” (1992: 69). This trauma is never over and is always now; it is unimportant how far in the past the memory reaches, it is still constantly present in the mind and the body, and it is something that cannot be escaped.

Certain traumatic events are too much for a coherent narrative recall, and in such cases, narrative dissociation is employed in order to convey the deepest thoughts which occurred as the event was happening, without understanding the present moment, which only comes belatedly. It is also used to bridge that inability to convey thoughts which are not coherent in a way which would present them as understandable. Sethe’s perspective about her act of infanticide is filtered through narrative dissociation. Any other narrative strategy, for example different focalization, would have conveyed the situation, as we have discussed when talking about the schoolteacher’s perspective as well as Stamp Paid’s, but narrative dissociation overwhelms the readers, and metaphorically places them in that shed with Sethe. The fact that Morrison chose this approach in order to finally introduce us to how Sethe felt when she took her children to the shed is understood as an attempt to convey emotionally heightened narrative, bursting with pain and fear. We are overcome with the immediacy of Sethe’s trauma, with the urgency she feels at that moment. What she tells Paul D is “I couldn’t let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher. That was out” (Morrison 2007: 192), which is composed and lucid, but narrative dissociation betrays inner turmoil:

> No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe (Morrison 2007: 192).

In that moment, all of Sethe's past traumas surge forward, creating a storm of emotions within her. This thought process is completely fragmented, just as the parts of her are embodied in her children who she tries to gather in order to keep them safe, the parts of her "that were precious and fine and beautiful". Her thoughts are filled with love for her children, but at the same time with terror about what awaits them. In that moment, the narrative betrays that Sethe's immediate reaction is to find a way to save her children, and this need warps into a belief that she is actually going to keep them safe. This distortion of emotions stems from the years of systemic abuse, traumatization, degradation, and control Sethe went through. This is the point when her pain and hurt culminate, and result in an act committed out of an extreme need to protect her children, which she cannot do in any other way but send them to a place where they cannot be claimed, hurt, or traumatized as she was.

By the end of the novel, we witness Sethe's literal disintegration, and her narrative, which becomes dissociated, also conveys that. This disintegration is a painful afterthought in the midst of the narrative, which shows how the past consumes her, as she has not found a language to effectively counteract "the intolerance and violation" of the past; despite her attempts at agency, she becomes a "subject to the tyranny of history" (Pérez-Torres 1999: 191). Her entire life, she had relied on the possibility of keeping the past where it belongs, but Beloved, an embodiment of that past, overwhelms her, and becomes a "manifestation of history – a living and usurping power, one that controls and subsumes her, one for which she does not have a contesting language" (Ibid. 190). Beloved "ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (Morrison 2007: 295). This bodily disintegration of Sethe, and the pouring of her life and vitality into Beloved is witnessed by Denver, and through her focalizing point, the readers come to a realization at the same time Denver does that Sethe is essentially punishing herself for the past, as "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw" she used to kill her daughter with, and Beloved "was making her pay for it" (Ibid.). The mutilation of Sethe's body in the shape of her losing weight and disintegrating is due to the fact that Sethe believes that she deserves punishment, despite all the things she kept telling herself and others around her. The scar on her back is a reminder of the abuse she suffered at the hands of the oppressors, but her physical disintegration in the hands of Beloved is a willing act of abandoning her body, of punishing it for still holding a life while she would gladly offer it to Beloved, replace her beating heart with Beloved's still one. Beloved demands Sethe's attention, the same way the indigestible past intrudes her present, and those demands "can only be met by way of a total maternal self-sacrifice (death)" (Forter

2014: 84). This is another authorial choice on Morrison's behalf, because depiction of bodily disintegration emphasizes the extent of the impact of trauma. It seems as though "Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out" (Morrison 2007: 297). In this context, we not only see Beloved as an externalization of Sethe's trauma, but also as an embodiment of her guilt. By having a visual description of Sethe's body disintegrating, the narrative structure follows the process of trauma's effect not only on the psyche, but also on the body, because the pain of trauma is not localized, it is omnipresent.

In this segment of the narrative, Sethe is beyond words, she is merely living in order to sustain Beloved. Denver witnesses that, and her belated understanding of her mother's actions dawns on her, not suddenly, but in increments, in thoughts which come forth as she regards her mother and her sister. She realizes that her mother never forgave herself for what she did, and she never forgot that the slave-owners were the ones who drove her to such an act. Denver's thoughts are intertwined with Sethe's; all of a sudden, we are confronted with an unfiltered thought process about infanticide, which still burns vividly in Sethe's mind:

> what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hands; to hold her face so her head would stay on; to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored body, plump and sweet with life […] That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. […] *She* might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter.
> And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper" (Morrison 2007: 295/296).

This is akin to a transgenerational transmission of traumatic memories. Those memories bleed into Denver's mind, as if Sethe was talking into her mind, conveying all the hurt and the pain she could never voice directly, but which she had to nevertheless live with. This pouring of traumatic memories from Sethe's into Denver's mind is a notion of processing transgenerational trauma, which is always "mediated through intensely private individual histories" (Schwab 2010: 13). She divulges her harmful secrets in hopes of offering her daughter a possibility of healing by learning about the past and attempting to overcome it. In order to connect a private traumatic past to the collective traumatic past there needs to be a way to address "actual violence in the past", in order to offer a chance to mourn; unless that happens, "a negative fixation on past trauma" remains active (Ibid. 29). Sethe dissociates in the realm where her thoughts are the only reality present, and her body is bearing the brunt of this

dissociation. Beloved is an instigator of Sethe's dissociation, because her presence initiates "forgotten memories" and "feelings of unreality" (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 104/105), but also Sethe's distancing from her body and leaving it behind.

In section 3.3.3 we mentioned slave narratives, which Morrison was inspired by, and we emphasized how *Beloved* is a fictionalized revision of a slave narrative. Having in mind that slave narratives were "testimonies of the enslavement" of black people (Gates and Davis 1985: xii), we draw a parallel and claim that *Beloved* is a testimony of Sethe, a black woman, formerly enslaved, but still shackled by the past. It is not only a testimony of her enslavement, but also of its aftermath. The paragraph above is reminiscent of something a formerly enslaved person would say, and it is as if Sethe is standing in front of a person being able to write down her most private thoughts, and we as readers become belated witnesses, and Sethe's testimony becomes "*addressed* to others, the witness, from within the solitude" of Sethe's own stance (Felman and Laub 1992: 3). *Beloved* is a *fictionalized* slave narrative, because only with the help of aesthetic distancing fiction offers could the innermost thoughts be conveyed. These thoughts of Sethe convey her emotions as well as somatic sensations as she was holding her daughter in her arms, holding her so close that she could feel "the death spasms" coursing through Beloved's body, so that Sethe could feel them instead of her. She is trying to keep her daughter's body together as life seeps out of it, and Sethe is trying to comfort herself with the thoughts that no one is going to put her daughter through the horrible dehumanization she had to endure. This dissociation is present because it is an "extreme form of psychic splitting" which helps Sethe "sustain" her life (Schwab 2010: 20). Her thoughts convey what her words cannot; she could not follow Beloved before, because her other children needed her, but now she can; "I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy" (Morrison 2007: 241). Sethe is ready to abandon her life, to sleep like the drowned people Beloved referenced in her thoughts, to leave the pain and the hurt behind, and find mercy in death.

3.3.4.2 Narrative Representation of Traumatic Events and Responses to Traumatic Events in *Beloved* – Concluding Remarks

This novel conveys a life testimony of Sethe, but by narrating all the traumatic instances and her responses to them, it also reminds us that "This is not a story to pass on" (Morrison 2007: 324). The story is narrated with differing focalizations, fragmented inferences, flashbacks, and intrusive memories. Initially a ghost-like and then a physical embodiment of trauma in the shape of Beloved urges the story to be told, to go to the onset of trauma, and

dissect all of its painful memories and scars which remain on the bodies. Not only does the narrative portray traumatic breakdowns Sethe experiences, but it also conveys the painful dissociation which comes as a result of confronting those memories; the memories then spiral into a stream of rememories and flashbacks which demand to be felt and narrated. Sethe exhibits an attempt at imposing "constricting structures" regarding her refusal to dwell on past painful memories, but that only brings "temporary relief" and still limits her ability to "live, connect, and feel fully" (Vickroy 2015: 134). Unable to forget, forced to remember, Sethe is torn between attempting to uproot herself from her painful past, and finding a space in her present life where she could continue to live. This disarray at the core of her being is translated into the narrative which is torn between startling realizations, heartbreaking memories, and lingering love for which she is punished because that love lacks someone to be bestowed upon.

After Sethe goes through the painful process of relieving all of her past trauma, all of the memories she has spent her whole life attempting to bury where they cannot hurt her, she is confronted with the opportunity to live her life anew. Paul D tells her: "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (Morrison 2007: 322). He reminds her that "'You your best thing, Sethe. You are.'", to which she repeats "'Me? Me?'" (Ibid.). This ending of Sethe's story is not conclusive; we do not know whether she managed to accept the fact that she deserves her future, as the gaps fill her repeated words and her narrative abruptly ends. But hope lingers in the open part of the narrative; maybe, eventually, Sethe is going to continue living, despite her past pain. The absence of a conclusive ending offers that possibility.

Throughout this section, we have emphasized that *Beloved* is a fictionalized account of one formerly enslaved woman, a life testimony whose fictional quality provides a fruitful ground for a creation of a narrative which encompasses a connection between racism, slavery, and collective trauma, as well as political activism. Drawing on the tradition of slave narratives, which we have defined in section number 3.3.1 as testimonies of enslaved people who were ghostwritten by white people, Morrison managed to convey a testimony or a life narrative of a formerly enslaved woman, but she fictionalized it and thus provided a story which is told from the immediate perspective of a black woman, without being shaped by the influence of her oppressors. Thus, by fictionalizing the story of one woman's experience of racism and slavery as well as ensuing traumas, she succeeded in creating a narrative which is both a story of one person's experience of trauma that is collective, as well as a political writing which intends to

draw attention to the traumatizing consequences and the difficulties which may arise when narrating a traumatized life and traumatizing societal conditions.

4. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TRAUMA NARRATIVES – CONCLUDING REMARKS

Essentially, we allowed literary trauma studies to guide our analysis in terms of connecting the main aspects of it with the way we read these novels as well as the way the narratives are shaped in order to represent trauma. What we hopefully managed to achieve in the previous segment of our dissertation is to offer the reading of these novels, to explain the way trauma is represented in them, and to analyze the overall narrative structure and thematic organization around the representation of trauma.

Introductions which were dedicated to the overview of the authors and their oeuvre allowed us to pinpoint the particular topics they dealt with and were interested in, which we later connected to the way they represented trauma in particular novels. In the case of Kathy Acker, she was adamant that her social criticism should be apparent in her literary works. Thus, her criticism of consumerism, patriarchy, capitalism inspired the creation of the narrative around Janey, who becomes a victim of those societal practices which inherently cause the traumas we read about. Sylvia Plath lived at the time when patriarchy was a debilitating experience for women hoping to reach a fulfilling life, when the society around them ignored women's existential crisis in favor of "more pressing" issues, such as the aftermath of the Second World War, threats of communism, and attempts to eliminate any form of deviancy from the established norm. This atmosphere is what Esther faces in the novel, and what exacerbates her attempts at coping with her traumas without a suitable, structural support. Toni Morrison's oeuvre is, as we showed by referring to her interviews and essays, extremely political, imbued with the necessity to remember the past in order to unveil the detrimental effects of racism, slavery, which do not remain buried, but are transmitted through generations. In the character of Sethe, she revised and fictionalized the slave narratives, and offered a narrative space where Sethe's traumatic past and traumatizing present filled with rememories can be narrated.

Regarding contextualization of the narratives, we have shown that these novels do not exist in a temporal or geographical void; rather, they are tied to the societal streaks, historical streaks, as well as geographical ones. We have offered textual proof that Kathy Acker consistently, throughout the whole novel, referred to the United States of America, by mentioning it explicitly, and painting a picture of the America Janey lives in which is disturbingly similar to the one Acker herself lived in. She also invoked real, historical figures

in order to further consolidate the fact that the narrative of trauma we read is embedded in a certain social milieu. Sylvia Plath did the same by mentioning the Rosenbergs from the very first line of her novel, invoking an oppressive atmosphere of the 1950s America; her other comments regarding the life of women at the time also highlighted the societal and situational circumstances in which her narrative was located. Toni Morrison offered the readers the number of the house, 124, which is located in a specific street, in a specific city, and a specific state in the United States of America; albeit fictionalized, the location remains a site of traumatic remnants of the past, and those remnants are concentric circles pulsing within and around the house, carrying the resonating pain that imbues the narrative.

The respective sections in which we offered reading of the novels as postmodernist trauma fiction showed that all three of these novels, due to their portrayal of trauma, convey genre instability, which stems from the fact that the authors had to employ features of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical or autofiction in order to bridge the difficulties encountered when attempting to narratively represent the unpredictable, fragmentary nature of trauma. Trauma is unpredictable in its immediacy, in the victim's inability to narrate the trauma due to its shock-impact. Postmodernist practices in writing fiction enabled the authors to convey that unrepresentabilty by employing shifting focalizations, allowing gaps to fill the spaces in the narrative where the characters have been left voiceless because trauma was too immediate; dissociations in the narrative as well as in the characters testified to the uncertainty which they experienced when trauma was overwhelming. Instances of autobiographical fiction or autofiction helped us capture those exact moments which escape "self-apprehension" (Luckhurst 2008: 118) by employing narratives which were either retrospective, in Esther's case, or real-time narratives, in the cases of Janey and Sethe, whose traumas were divulged as they were experiencing them, or revealing them. Thus, this autofictional aspect offered the relived experience, the temporal aspect of trauma which is not assignable to any particular point in time, but is rather constantly present, because there is a direct connection between the recurring quality of trauma and the experience of autobiographical writers – they relive that experience by writing about it. In section number 2.4, we discussed the omnipresence of trauma for the survivors. According to Felman and Laub, and as established in the section, for a trauma survivor, life is not shaped by the memories of the past, but by an event "that could not and did not proceed to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure" (Felman and Laub 1992: 69). Thus, we may claim that these three novels we analyzed are narrative embodiments of trauma; the testimonies we follow are not totalized

accounts of the characters (albeit Janey's narrative ends with her death); we have open endings, which we ascribed to the postmodernist feature in writing. The ending of their testimonies does not offer any closure; Janey dies, but the last sentence in the novel signifies more Janeys being born; Esther is on the path towards uncertain future; and "Beloved" is the final word in the novel, which signifies Beloved's presence being suspended between the past and the future, which is never over.

When it comes to a particular investigation of narrative representation of trauma, we employed our analysis combined with the narrative strategies and techniques whose usage is apparent in the novels. Because of them, we were able to discern particular ways of approaching narrative about trauma. For example, shifting focalization is employed on purpose in order to either distance us as the readers from the reality of trauma and the characters' feelings about it or offer a more immediate witnessing due to conveying trauma in a way which places us from the point of view of a traumatized character. Employing unreliable narrators is supposed to dissuade us from reaching definitive conclusions or assumptions regarding the trauma of the characters – once again reminiscent of the postmodernist practices in writing about trauma. Gapping is employed on purpose, because it is supposed to portray the immediacy of trauma and its inherent inability to be voiced when it is happening, and thus we overcome the gaps with our own inferences. Repetition is supposed to evoke the repetition compulsion of Freud when the victims keep repeating something traumatic because they cannot seem to understand it; also, it is supposed to evoke the recurring quality of trauma, which is never in the past, never buried, but continues to return in flashbacks, dreams, sudden memories, or mental images (rememories). Atemporal or non-linear narrative outline is supposed to confound us, and distance us from the trauma itself; we are supposed to read the text carefully and gather inferences in order to reach our conclusion about why something is considered traumatic when it is not immediately apparent; rather, we have to follow the narrative and mentally arrange the chronology which was disrupted by the trauma impact. Narrative dissociation is supposed to evoke feelings of unease and dissociation; it also eases us into a disarrayed mind confused because of trauma, rendering the text unable to coherently and in a structured way convey the words and the thoughts of the characters, but to mimic the effects of trauma – which we already explained is one of the main goals of trauma narratives. Thought process was useful when the characters would not or could not say something outright, so we read about their thoughts on what was happening to them and garnered deeper information regarding their process of thinking about traumatic events, or about their traumatizing present.

What we conclude is that despite the characters' utterly different positions in life, their traumas are represented in a rather similar way; despite the format of the novels, the strategies and techniques employed are similar, although they are employed in a different way and for different purposes; either to ease us into the story, or keep us distanced from it on purpose. We would like to underline the importance of placing these three novels, with their inherent differences in terms of themes and societal circumstances placed around the characters, next to one another, not only in terms of analyzing different ways of narratively portraying trauma, but also for the overall importance in the field of literary trauma studies:

> This speaking and this listening – a speaking and a listening *from the site of trauma* – does not rely, I would suggest, on what we simply know of each other, but on what we don't yet know of our own traumatic past. In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves (Caruth 1991: 11).

This quote from Cathy Caruth is taken as a connecting thread between the tissue of these three novels in a sense that despite different cultural backgrounds of the characters present in the novels, what is shared among the female characters are the debilitating effects of traumatic experiences. The female characters in these novels, albeit of different age, cultural, and educational backgrounds, share vulnerability due to the circumstances outside of their control. This vulnerability is brought to the foreground in this dissertation, and investigating and analyzing the characters' responses and coping mechanisms as a result of traumatic events helps create a link which spans across cultures, race, age, education, and social background. This link is something we hope illuminates the need for the cross-cultural investigation of trauma and its impact. The existing research has mostly focused on the individual experience of trauma, confined in a structural cage which provides one-dimensional understanding of trauma impact. Hopefully, this dissertation contributes to a slightly under-investigated cross-cultural, as well as cross-temporal examination as these novels were written in the same century, but as our investigation showed, even mere decades separating the publishing dates of the novels convey different and at the same time debilitatingly similar aspects of trauma and its representation, urgency which is placed on different aspects, as well as an ability to narrate traumatic experiences which is heavily dependent on the personality of the characters we investigate.

5. CONCLUSION

Before we offer the most important concluding remarks pertaining to our dissertation, we should emphasize the limitations we encountered while researching the relevant literature. One of the limitations of our research is scarcity of available literature; trauma studies is a developing field which offers potential for further exploration and re-examination of the existing postulates (and historically, the field has already undergone one major change in regards of the traditional and the pluralistic approach to understanding trauma), and literary trauma studies which developed from trauma studies' insights remains a still emerging field, while studies written on it date back to mere three decades ago. However, we undertook the task of gathering literature written by the most prominent representatives in the fields of both trauma studies and literary trauma studies, as well as narrative theory, in order to bridge the lack in research and offer a concise yet theoretically substantiated framework which we used for our critical analysis of the novels. Thus, by approaching our research in a pluralistic and eclectic way, we attempted to overcome the existing gaps and hopefully, contribute to further branching out of other theories which could impact the developmental path of both trauma studies and literary trauma studies.

Nevertheless, we would like to outline what we did manage to achieve with the theoretical framework we used. Our first additional hypothesis was that contextual factors influence the portrayal of trauma, and that contexts in which a novel was written have to be taken into account together with the authors' primary endeavors in writing about certain topics. We have shown that this is indeed the case, because the authors' lives, their aspirations in writing, and their personal and social situations were extremely important for the topics they chose and the way they represented them. Acker's position as an *avant-garde* writer, famous for her punk aesthetics and her defiant attitude towards the stifling capitalistic, consumerist, and patriarchal society placed her in a marginal position, akin to postmodernist writers, who placed emphasis on the unrepresented and unpresentable (Lyotard's notions) aspects of a society, of those themes which are difficult to represent and even more difficult to accept by the oppressive society which demands conformity. Acker stripped away the layers of a standardized approach to literary representation of the disturbing aspects of a society, and by creating a character of Janey, she included traumatizing aspects such a character could face when living in the American society in the second half of the twentieth century. Patriarchal influence on writing was subverted by her using the patriarchal rhetoric and shaping it in such a way as to accommodate the representation of a life of a young girl abandoned at the margins

of society, traumatized, without any structural support. In that way, Acker also problematized the importance of the nuclear family and the overall familial relations which are supposed to be a protective system for children. Sylvia Plath made direct parallels between her life and the life of her character, Esther. By placing Esther's narrative in the 1950s America, she managed to invoke the oppressive atmosphere of a standardized behavior from the level of a family structure, expectations from women who lived in the atmosphere of surveillance at the level of society. By emphasizing women's importance for the maintenance of the societal order, representatives of the patriarchal society managed to reduce their role on a grand scheme of societal structure. Women were supposed to accept the order of things, and not deviate from the prescribed behavior; Esther's traumas are thus intricately connected to the society in which she lives, which does not cater to her needs belonging to the realm outside of the expected future of a happy housewife. Plath's life was surrounded and shaped by the same societal influences, and her proximity to such traumatizing aspects of a self-proclaimed democratic society helped her in shaping a narrative around Esther's life. Toni Morrison's writing was complicated by her dual aspect: that of a black woman in a society still imbued with practices and principles of racism, as dangerous as they were seemingly overt, and that of a subsequent generation of people who were unjustly enslaved and depraved of a chance at a proper life. By fictionalizing some aspects of slave narratives, she created a story of Sethe, narratively stuck in the past, in the aftermath of the Reconstruction era. However, racist practices in the society which tried to erase its horrible history of enslavement, while at the same time trying to erase the concept of race, inspired Morrison to write a narrative about a woman whose very existence is traumatic; her past, her present, and her future are determined by the practices and representatives of a society which perceives her as a body to be controlled, subdued, and deprived of the aspects which are necessary for her to function as a human being.

Our next working hypothesis was that the nature of trauma which consists of its inherent fluctuation, fragmentariness, and uncertainty influences the way the narrative is shaped; due to the fact that there is no traditional way of representing trauma, we claimed that these novels employ features of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical fiction in order to bridge those limitations imposed by the nature of trauma. The blend of these features allowed the novels to convey trauma by employing textual breakdowns, shifts in narrative points of view, interpolations of various texts (Hawkins 2004: 644). This is because neither trauma nor narrative about it is straightforward, but rather convoluted, which stems from the shock impact of the immediacy of trauma, and belatedness which is conveyed in the fact that these novels

employ retrospective narratives, narratives which take place years after the traumatic events, as well as abreaction, or the emotional release experienced by individuals after going through a traumatic event which caused the initial repression and suppression (Doctor and Shiromoto 2010: 1). Thus, we read about Janey whose life is a continuous exposure to abuse she experienced as a child, or about Esther who narrates her past from a position of an older individual who retrospectively narrates her trauma, or about Sethe, who tries to suppress her painful past until she is forced to relive it with the appearance of Beloved. The aspect of trauma fiction apparent in these novels is the attempt to return the voice to "the marginalized and the oppressed" (de Groot 2010: 149) which is combined with the postmodernist practices of finding the threads of "the historically marginal" which inform the "patterns and politics of postmodern culture" (Pérez-Torres 1999: 181). In turn, we managed to provide evidence that the usage of autobiographical or autofictional features, combined with the previously mentioned aspects of trauma and postmodernist fiction, succeeded in creating the acts of personal remembering which are "fundamentally social and collective" (Smith and Watson 2001: 21), which created rhetorical settings where characters could be placed within "testimonial contexts" (Gilmore 2023: 3), and the readers could learn about their trauma. The instability stemming from trauma was narratively represented in the novels by employing temporal disorder both in the narrative structure as well as relating to the way the characters remember their past – in fragments, without an apparent order of their appearance, but rather in a non-linear way which depends on the triggers they experience in their present life, or the sudden urgency to talk about something they want to overcome by putting it into words. In *Blood and Guts in High School* one narrator is not enough, so Acker employed a polyphonic, pastiche structure in order to convey the immediacy of Janey's trauma. Plath conveyed Esther's dissociated state of mind by creating a narrative imbued with narrative revision of past trauma, of distancing from reality and the language Esther uses. *Beloved* conveys the vicious circles of trauma repetition, of postmemory and rememory, which disables the coherent narrative and conveys the autobiographical feature of moving on the border between the past and the present.

Our third hypothesis was related to the fact that we expect these novels to be successful in portraying traumatic events and responses to traumatic events with the help of narrative strategies and techniques, and in this dissertation, we offered textual evidence of this. For example, we showed that the unrepresentability of trauma is bridged with shifting focalization; when the female characters we analyzed are unable to narrate what happens or what happened to them, the narrative employs a different focalization. In *Blood and Guts in High School* and

Beloved we have authors employing these varying focalizing points in order to offer a possibility of overcoming the constraints of a traditional first-person or third-person narration, because when the narrator is filtered through a first-person perspective, the narration is unreliable, and third-person narration, despite expectations, is not omnipresent, but rather fragmented and obscure, reminiscent of the nature of trauma. In *The Bell Jar*, first-person focalization of an unreliable narrator is present, which prevents us from gathering understanding from different points, thus we are confined within that particular mind-frame of a person reminiscing about her past trauma. However, that limitation is bridged by employing strategies of thought process and narrative dissociation, and we reach conclusions about the narrators' traumatized state by employing the psychoanalytic approach because in this case, a narrative approach is not sufficient. Silences and vacant points in the narrative have not dissuaded us from inferring conclusions about the fact of trauma, rather, they have contributed to our understanding because in its immediacy, trauma is anti-narrative, bearing notions of the traditional understanding of trauma. Narrative dissociation mimics the effects of trauma because it is not coherent, and it also conveys the dissociation of the characters who are unable to comprehend what is happening to them, so their scattered sensations, thoughts, and emotions convey what they cannot narrate.

Descriptions of somatic sensations are also another textual contribution to conveying a traumatized state which affects not only the mind, but the body as well, and in that case, we talk about evidence of the dual nature of trauma. The fact that the narratives are atemporal also contributes to our reading the narratives as traumatized life testimonies, because understanding of trauma does not happen in a linear, coherent way, but it rather takes time for the characters to understand something as traumatic, and textual interferences both dissuade us and help us in trying to make sense of the scattered remains of traumatic memories. The fact that certain aspects of traumatic experiences are mentioned in passing conveys repression and avoidance of thinking about trauma, because thinking about it might bring about even deeper, secondary traumatization, which leads to PTSD, for example. These narrative strategies and techniques contribute to the acts of personal remembering, evoking the traumatic mode of discourse. This leads us to confirming that we have been successful in offering theoretical and analytical proofs which in turn fulfill our main aim of this dissertation – we managed to prove that by employing features belonging to genres of trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical fiction, supported by the psychoanalytical aspect of trauma studies, methodological aspects of literary trauma studies, and narrative approach of narrative theory, these novels succeeded in

finding new ways of representing trauma, its assumed unrepresentability, fragmentariness, sudden and unexpected nature, as well as belatedness. Now, we want to reiterate the importance of investigating these aspects for the fields of trauma studies and literary trauma studies.

From Freud to Caruth and Craps, understanding of trauma has been shaped, re-shaped, and criticized. To this day, it remains a point of conflation between theorists who debate about its (a)temporality, belatedness, and presence in representations. This thesis aimed to shed light on those discussions and offer an approach which would take all the warring sides into account, contrast them, and let them exist in a dialogue which would lead to a leveled approach to investigating trauma. An aspect of our dissertation which provided another innovative approach is the fact that we did not approach literary trauma studies in a one-dimensional way, but we rather took all available aspects, and used them for our analysis, such as traditional model and pluralistic model of trauma, understanding of trauma as unrepresentable, but at the same time offering ways to show how it is represented. Another contribution to research we hoped to achieve stems from the issue with the analysis of the novels, due to the fact that they have been analyzed in a constricting way; that is, most of them have been analyzed within the scope of one particular genre, and the consequence of that are that certain aspects of the novels have not been addressed because those aspects do not belong to the genre they have been assigned to. Thus, our focus was to explicate the quality of the novels which goes beyond genre, but which at the same time belongs to the features apparent in trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical or autofiction – or, as we termed it, delineation of genre borders – postmodernist trauma fiction.

There are other possible trajectories in which investigation of these novels could develop, and we have partially included some of them in our research, and some require a different theoretical framework. For example, good theoretical frameworks or lenses for reading these novels could be feminist or postcolonial studies, but our focus was more on a narrative analysis with the help of literary trauma studies, and we used that lens to show that these texts could be read in that way. We decided against using feminist and race studies because numerous researchers have read the novels in that way and thus our original contribution is reading these novels as traumatized narratives informed by practices in trauma fiction, postmodernist fiction, and autobiographical or autofictional writing. All the while, we have been explicitly interested in how the authors translated trauma into the narrative. Cultural studies could have also been a useful background for analyzing these novels as well, primarily

because we emphasized the contextual relevance for the creation of these novels. Even in our discussion, we investigated societal structures and race; however, we did not focus on class or systems of power explicitly, rather, they were implied. In our dissertation, we were only interested in how the narrative representation of trauma was influenced by the culture in which it was written in, and how the authors' belonging to American culture affected their writing about trauma. Another useful theory for analysis of these novels could be reading them through the lens of memory studies. However, if we chose that theoretical lens, we would not have focused on discussing narrative representation of trauma, but rather on the way the past is remembered with the help of memory. That could complicate the pure narrative representation of trauma, because in that case we would not have focused on how trauma is represented in the text, but rather on how the memory of the past influences that representation. Memory implies the shifting nature of remembrance, due to both internal and external factors, and even though we did address that aspect in terms of analyzing how different people remember the same event, we did so in the context of focusing on both the immediacy as well as belatedness of trauma. This in turn implied investigating how trauma's unrepresentability is bridged with narrative intervention; memory of traumatic events is indeed variable, but we were interested not solely in the changes themselves, but primarily in their narrative representation.

Finally, we want to emphasize that despite the limitations of available literature pertaining to our theoretical framework, scarcity of analysis of those aspects we wanted to discuss in this dissertation, we managed to compile a comprehensive approach to the analysis of the narrative representation of trauma in these novels. Despite the inherent difficulties in narrating, analyzing, and explaining trauma, the eclectic approach we used provided us with sufficient guiding threads to offer our reading, along with re-contextualization of the existing readings of these novels. Hopefully, this dissertation will prove to be an additional, missing link between these three novels, as well as in the field of understanding the narrative representation of trauma.

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Author's biography

Natalija Stevanović was born in 1992 in Niš, Serbia. She completed her Undergraduate studies (GPA 8.90) in 2015 and Master studies in 2017 (GPA 10) at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš; she also completed her Doctoral studies of Philology (GPA 9.67) in 2025 at the same Faculty. Additionally, she obtained a certificate for the continuation of psychotherapeutic education after completing Psychotherapeutic Propaedeutic program (2024) at the College of Social Work (currently Academy for Human Development).

She is currently working as a research assistant at the Centre for Foreign Languages, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, where she teaches English language. She is a member of Serbian Association for Anglo-American Studies and Central European Association for Canadian Studies.

Her research is primarily focused on investigating literary representation of trauma, in North American literature in particular. However, her current research is focused on widening the scope of her investigation, and include literature written in other cultures as well (primarily East Asian), and investigate their traumatic histories and narrative representation (in Sino-Japanese literature, in particular). In the future, she also aims to deepen her existing knowledge of psychology and literature, and their possible combinations.

ИЗЈАВА О АУТОРСТВУ

Изјављујем да је докторска дисертација, под насловом

Novels by Kathy Acker, Sylvia Plath, and Toni Morrison in the Context of Trauma Studies

која је одбрањена на **Филозофском** факултету Универзитета у Нишу:

- резултат сопственог истраживачког рада;
- да ову дисертацију, ни у целини, нити у деловима, нисам пријављивао/ла на другим факултетима, нити универзитетима;
- да нисам повредио/ла ауторска права, нити злоупотребио/ла интелектуалну својину других лица.

Дозвољавам да се објаве моји лични подаци, који су у вези са ауторством и добијањем академског звања доктора наука, као што су име и презиме, година и место рођења и датум одбране рада, и то у каталогу Библиотеке, Дигиталном репозиторијуму Универзитета у Нишу, као и у публикацијама Универзитета у Нишу.

У Нишу, 2025 године.

Потпис аутора дисертације:

Наталија

Наталија С. Стевановић

ИЗЈАВА О ИСТОВЕТНОСТИ ШТАМПАНОГ И ЕЛЕКТРОНСКОГ ОБЛИКА ДОКТОРСКЕ ДИСЕРТАЦИЈЕ

Наслов дисертације:

Novels by Kathy Acker, Sylvia Plath, and Toni Morrison in the Context of Trauma Studies

Изјављујем да је електронски облик моје докторске дисертације, коју сам предао/ла за уношење у **Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Нишу,** истоветан штампаном облику.

У Нишу, 2025. године .

Потпис аутора дисертације:

Наталија С. Стевановић

ИЗЈАВА О КОРИШЋЕЊУ

Овлашћујем Универзитетску библиотеку „Никола Тесла“ да у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Нишу унесе моју докторску дисертацију, под насловом:

Novels by Kathy Acker, Sylvia Plath, and Toni Morrison in the Context of Trauma Studies

Дисертацију са свим прилозима предао/ла сам у електронском облику, погодном за трајно архивирање.

Моју докторску дисертацију, унету у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Нишу, могу користити сви који поштују одредбе садржане у одабраном типу лиценце Креативне заједнице (Creative Commons), за коју сам се одлучио/ла.

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У Нишу, 2025. године.

Потпис аутора дисертације:

Наталија С. Стевановић