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Wounds and Words

Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction

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Lettre

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[transcript]

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Introduction

Towards a Reconceptualization of Trauma

> "I had no one to love me; or to make me respected, to enable me to acquire respect. I was an egg dropped on the sand; a pauper by nature, hunted from family to family, who belonged to nobody – and nobody cared for me."
> (MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, THE WRONGS OF WOMAN)

> "Years pile up in front of me: the sign on the door saying KEEP OUT. THIS MEANS YOU!"
> (TREZZA AZZOPARDI, THE HIDING PLACE)

In Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798)*,* Jemima – an unwanted, abandoned, and mistreated child – compares herself to an "egg dropped on the sand" (95) to express the experience of growing up motherless, without affection and care, in an environment that failed to provide even the most basic sense of security and familial or social acceptance and support. Like Jemima, Dolores, the protagonist-narrator of Trezza Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* (2000), is a child victimized by multiple traumas and rejected by family and society. After she is injured in a fire as a baby, Dolores's childhood is dominated by physical and emotional violence and stigmatization: her father, a frantically superstitious man, interprets her disfigured hand as the devil's imprint, while her sisters regard her as a despicable "cripple." The novels by Wollstonecraft and Azzopardi both emphasize the powerful and persistent impact of childhood trauma and the pressing need of trauma victims to make sense of and come to terms with their harrowing past. Like a number of Romantic and postmodern novels, *The Wrongs of Woman* and *The Hiding Place* focus on traumatic childhood experiences in the familial context and explore in detail the trauma victim's later quest for meaning and recovery. These texts are profoundly concerned with the complex psychology of their protagonists and the proc-

ess of narrating the traumatic past, investigating whether or not and to what extent it is possible to heal wounds by expressing them in words.

I use these glimpses into Wollstonecraft's and Azzopardi's novels as a point of departure to call attention to the discrepancies between two uses of the concept "trauma": one at play in "trauma fiction" (a term that Anne Whitehead investigates in *Trauma Fiction*), and the other operating in important paradigms of literary and cultural theory. The meaning of trauma in a text such as *The Hiding Place*, which emphasizes an individual's suffering and explores the nuances of traumatic and posttraumatic psychology, contrasts with the general, (often problematically) expansive meanings the term has acquired in leading currents of literary trauma studies.

One of the most influential theorizations of trauma in the humanities is that of Cathy Caruth.[1] Her *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) offers a number of crucial insights for literary trauma studies. For example, it explores how representations of trauma can facilitate understanding by enacting a collapse of meaning and how trauma, which challenges conventional forms of narrative, might, paradoxically, be expressed through the failure of words, through the breakdown of language. However, *Unclaimed Experience* also exemplifies the inflationary uses of the term trauma in literary studies. In Caruth's approach, the meaning of the term is broadened to such an extent that the distinction between traumatized and non-traumatized individuals and between victims and perpetrators seems to dissolve;[2] in the process, history becomes, essentially, a "history of trauma" (18). For Caruth, trauma figures as a metaphor for the general limitations of language and representation and for the notion of history as characterized by "indirect referentiality" (18).

Caruth's generalized approach contrasts sharply with the embodied approach of literary texts such as *The Wrongs of Woman* and *The Hiding Place*. Taken together,

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1   The theorists who laid the groundwork for trauma studies in the humanities (especially Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, and Dominick LaCapra) still function as leading figures in the field in the sense that current trauma critics continue to anchor their work in the older work. Even though the study of trauma has flourished since the mid-1990s, it is difficult to identify recent studies that hold the status of key publications in the field. One exception is the work of Michael Rothberg, particularly *Traumatic Realism* (2000) and *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), although Rothberg plays a leading role more in the field of Holocaust and memory studies than in trauma studies.

2   For example, in the introduction to *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth reinterprets Freud's reading of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in such a way that the figure of Tancred (who wounds his beloved Clorinda twice, as if unknowingly) comes to represent the trauma victim *par excellence*, while Clorinda (the wounded) is marginalized (see *Unclaimed* 2-5). A detailed discussion of Caruth's trauma theory can be found in my first chapter.

these two approaches reveal tensions between the concrete and abstract dimensions of trauma, between the real and the metaphorical, the documentary and the tropological, as well as between the psychological and the cultural. While most literary trauma texts enact these tensions (although, in many ways, Wollstonecraft's and Azzopardi's novels gesture more towards the concrete), I contend that the theoretical trajectory that Caruth initiates overemphasizes the abstract aspects of trauma.[3] She pushes her attempt to reveal the fundamental significance and ubiquitous presence of trauma in the present age so far that the concept of trauma is "dilute[d] and generalize[d]" (Leys 305), hollowed out to such an extent that it loses its explanatory force and approaches cliché. In literary theory, the clinical concept of trauma has been reduced to a cultural trope for postmodern attitudes to language and history; as a result, it has increasingly faced the danger of becoming meaningless.

In the face of this danger, then, should literary critics abandon the concept? Has this complex and contested concept become an empty signifier on its journey from medicine, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry to literary studies? Should critics attempt to coin new terms and concepts to replace "trauma"? I propose that it is far more fruitful to re-evaluate and reconceptualize the term rather than to abandon it altogether. Terms such as "crisis," "conflict," or "shock," for example, could serve as substitutes, but none is as rich and powerful as "trauma" – as long as we disentangle its strands of meaning rather than use it uncritically to characterize too many phenomena. Moreover, the continual flourishing of the field of trauma studies testifies to the ongoing importance of the concept and reinforces the idea that we should not proclaim the end of trauma studies but rather seek for continuities and new beginnings.[4] As Kate Douglas and William Whitlock wrote in 2009, it would be problematic to "characteris[e] trauma as a *fin de siècle* preoccupation that was, perhaps, on the edge of running its course and becoming '*fin*'"; indeed, many of the issues raised by trauma critics in the 1990s "remain sharp and relevant in discussions about life narrative and trauma now" (2).

The present study explores new as well as marginalized directions within literary trauma studies in three main ways. First, I extend the discussion of trauma back in time and bring into dialogue postmodern and Romantic trauma novels. Surpris-

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3 For a similar criticism, see Ruth Leys' *Trauma* and Wulf Kansteiner's "Menschheits-trauma, Holocausttrauma, kulturelles Trauma."

4 Some recent examples include Jennifer Griffiths' *Traumatic Possessions* (2010), Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué's *Between the Urge to Know and the Need to Deny* (2011), the recently launched *Journal of Literary and Trauma Studies*, the continuously active Centre for Literature and Trauma at Ghent University, and the considerable number of research clusters and centres related to trauma and memory (see Craps, *LITRA*). There is also a trend towards diversification within the field; more and more research is being done, for example, in the area of postcolonial trauma studies.

ingly little has been written on trauma in Romantic fiction in particular and in pre-twentieth-century literature in general.[5] The investigation of trauma in texts of the Romantic period (a period that is crucial in the history of psychiatry), in combination with postmodern trauma writing, is one important way in which I explore some largely uncharted territory. Second, I focus on literary approaches to childhood and family trauma, that is, on individual, personal traumas – an area that has received far less scholarly attention than historical and collective traumas. In a number of studies, the Holocaust, as Ruth Leys emphasizes, "in effect stands in for trauma generally" (16).[6] However, as Geoffrey Hartman wrote in 1995, "[t]rauma study's radical aspect comes to the fore less in its emphasis on acts of violence like war and genocide than when it draws attention to 'familiar' violence such as rape, and the abuse of women and children" ("Traumatic Knowledge" 546). Even though some recent publications in the field function as correctives to the one-sided focus on historical traumas,[7] I suggest that Hartman's assertion still holds true in a number of ways and that this "radical aspect" represented by literary approaches to individual domestic traumas still deserves more attention. In line with this view, I also place particular emphasis on trauma texts by women writers. Last, I pursue an interdisciplinary trajectory, combining literary and cultural trauma theory with psychological and psychiatric trauma discourses. While there seems to be a consensus that "[n]o disciplinary economy can exclusively account for the traumatic" (Herrero and Baelo-Allué 12), I believe that an interdisciplinary approach to trauma fiction can be pushed further than is usually done in the field. Pursuing a more radically interdisciplinary approach is a third important way in which this study seeks to fill a gap in literary trauma studies.

All three pillars of my framework lay the groundwork for a non-universalizing approach to trauma fiction. In particular, examining trauma fiction through the lens

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5   Among the few existing investigations of trauma and Romanticism by Tilottama Rajan, Diane Long Hoeveler, and Mary Jacobus, all of which place considerable emphasis on biographical and psychoanalytical perspectives, the work of Rajan is particularly relevant to the present study (for example her 2010 study *Romantic Narrative*). A few titles to mention regarding trauma in pre-twentieth-century literature other than Romanticism are Jill Matus' *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (2009) and Thomas Anderson's *Performing Early Modern Trauma* (2006).

6   The Holocaust indeed plays a pervasive role in the works of a considerable number of well-known studies on trauma in the humanities, including Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies* (1991), Saul Friedlander's *Probing the Limits of Representation* (1992), Felman and Laub's *Testimony* (1992), LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust* (1994), and Rothberg's *Traumatic Realism* (2000).

7   See for example Deborah Horvitz's *Literary Trauma* (2000) and Griffiths' *Traumatic Possessions* (2010).

of both literary studies and psychology and psychiatry, which offer highly differentiated and continuously evolving analyses of trauma, reveals fresh perspectives on trauma writing. Similarly, the focus on childhood and family trauma facilitates a reorientation towards specific rather than overly tropological and abstract dimensions of trauma. This reorientation is important because emphasizing the collective and cultural dimensions of trauma has contributed to the flourishing of inflationary approaches in literary studies. Finally, by foregrounding historical perspectives – trauma in the Romantic period versus trauma in postmodernity – I want to challenge the view that the phenomenon of trauma emerged only in the twentieth century and counteract the problematic tendency to conflate the experience of trauma with the experience of postmodernity.

The three elements that constitute the basis of my trajectory – the comparison of Romantic and postmodern texts, the focus on childhood and family trauma, and the interdisciplinary approach to trauma fiction – require further explanation. First of all, the aim of exploring trauma narratives from two historical periods is to bring into relief the specificities of each period's trauma writing as well as the contextual meanings and cultural significance of trauma more clearly than a focus on one period allows. Moreover, as my analyses attempt to show, many of the central issues in contemporary debates about trauma are relevant to both Romantic and postmodern texts, but comparing how these issues play out in texts of the two periods reveals intriguing parallels and thought-provoking differences. I want to let contemporary trauma discourses speak to Romantic trauma novels and, at the same time, explore what texts preceding the theorization and discursivisation of trauma can bring to current theoretical debates.

The significance of comparing Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction rests on two interrelated assumptions: that trauma is not just a phenomenon of the twentieth century and, more specifically, that using the notion of trauma in relation to the Romantic period is justified. Postmodernity has made notions such as "trauma culture" and "wound culture" prominent (see for example Kaplan's *Trauma Culture*), yet what is at stake here, as Wulf Kansteiner rightly points out, is less the historical question about the *occurrence* of traumatic events and more the different *awareness* of trauma that distinguishes the twentieth century from earlier centuries (109); twentieth-century mass media has played a vital role in generating and perpetuating this awareness.[8] The widespread notion of trauma as the hallmark of the postmodern age is no doubt crucial for understanding postmodern trauma writing

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8   As Chris Brewin observes, the dramatic shift in attitudes toward trauma is contingent on "the sheer amount of exposure through the media to the realities of the war, the Holocaust, childhood abuse, and other telling examples of horror and cruelty." Acting as a platform for the public staging of personal suffering, the media has also vitally contributed to the emergence of a "victim culture" (*Posttraumatic* 221-22).

and its cultural meanings, but we need to remain alert to the dangers of pushing this notion too far. The idea that there is something inherently postmodern about trauma risks blurring the line between a general (post-structuralist) awareness of the limitations of language, representation, and memory and the experience of trauma in a more specific sense, which involves particularly severe and destabilizing crises of language, representation, and memory. Hence, if we broaden the critical perspective to trauma to include an earlier culture, the blind spots of current perspectives of trauma, immersed in an ongoing "trauma boom," become more distinctly visible.

The Romantic texts that I investigate in this study date from the late 1780s to the late 1830s; that is, they span the entire Romantic period, although the core texts were written between 1798 and 1819. The postmodern novels that I focus on were published between 1990 and 2010. Thus, given that the origin of postmodern fiction tends to be located roughly in the 1950s-60s (see McHale 12-25), these novels are examples of late postmodern fiction. I want to emphasize, however, that I employ the terms "Romantic" and "postmodern" not merely as period designations; rather, I use these terms more specifically, to convey particular thematic and formal features that are characteristic of the novels of each period in their approach to trauma. The concepts of Romantic trauma fiction and of postmodern trauma fiction hence require further explanation.

First of all, how can the notion of "Romantic trauma" be conceptualized? In the Romantic period, psychological trauma was not yet an official psychiatric concept; of course, Romanticism precedes any explicit discursive theorization of trauma. Nevertheless, the *idea* of trauma, I argue, is present in a considerable number of Romantic literary texts. In other words, a number of Romantic texts are profoundly concerned with psychological patterns of experience and response that later trauma theory responds to. The novels of Mary Wollstonecraft, her husband William Godwin, and their daughter Mary Shelley investigated in this study revolve around individual experiences that are severely distressing, painful, and/or shocking and explore in depth the complex and persistent effects of those experiences. Significantly, the novels repeatedly refer to the harmful impact of these experiences using the key term "wound." This image of mental or psychological injury connects, through the etymological roots of the term "trauma," to later notions of psychological trauma. Trauma is borrowed from ancient Greek and originally denotes "a violent injury from an external cause that breached the body's integrity" (Brette 1800), in other words, a "wound." By transferring the notion of wound from the physical to the psychological realm, from the body to the mind, these Romantic writers implicitly expressed an idea that has been elaborated only considerably later in theoretical frameworks. I use the term Romantic trauma fiction, then, to refer to a kind of Romantic fiction that reflects the period's profound interest in psychology and

growing fascination with the disrupted or "wounded mind" (*The Wrongs of Woman* 74).[9]

My notion of Romantic trauma fiction also hinges on the Romantic reconceptualization of identity as crucially shaped by the past and by one's memory of the past (see Ferguson's "Romantic Memory"). These novels feature narrators who strive to understand how their past and their memories affect their present sense of self. In their representations of the depths of the mind, Romantic trauma novels repeatedly include elements of the Gothic, often to express a fascination with the pathological as ultimately uncontrollable. These texts foreground the "themes of excess and transgression, margins and limits" that Gary Kelly identifies as characteristic of an important strand of Romantic fiction, represented mainly by Gothic novels and "novels of passion" (*English Fiction* 185). The "limits" that Romantic trauma novels – many of which indeed combine features of the Gothic with a psychology of the passions – are concerned with include limits of the self and subjectivity, but also, in the words of Kelly, "limits moral, ethical and existential" (184). Furthermore, these novels' explorations of trauma and pain, of suffering and existential crises, also involve political dimensions, especially in, for example, *The Wrongs of Woman,* which examines trauma in connection with gender and family politics. Finally, Romantic trauma fiction problematizes and investigates limits also in connection with language and narrative, with writing and literature, expressing a critical awareness of the potentials and the limitations of (self-)narration and communication at several levels of the text.

Postmodern trauma fiction, as Whitehead maintains, "emerges out of postmodernist fiction and shares its tendency to bring conventional narrative techniques to their limit" (*Trauma Fiction* 82). This urge to test the boundaries and limitations of narrative is one important point where postmodern fiction intersects with trauma fiction. Hence, the kind of postmodernism under investigation here is a postmodern writing that is heavily self-reflexive and that persistently challenges and problematizes processes of narration and representation. Another crucial intersection between postmodern fiction and trauma fiction is the emphasis on a particularly complex and conflicted relationship with the past, including the sense that any access to the past is exceedingly difficult and that processes of remembering are fraught with instabilities and tensions. This crisis of memory has led to an obsession with memory; "[i]n the face of mounting amnesia, there is an urgent need to consciously establish meaningful connections with the past" (*Trauma Fiction* 82). As a result, postmodern fiction is, according to Whitehead, part of a larger "memory project" – and so is

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9   One of the few literary critics who also explicitly calls attention to the proximity between "trauma" and "wound" is Hartman (see "Trauma").

trauma fiction (82).[10] Postmodern trauma novels, moreover, represent a strand of postmodernism that is less playful and more critical and political or, in Edward Larrissy's terms, less "ludic" and more "sceptical" (8). My reading of postmodern trauma fiction is in line with Linda Hutcheon's view of the postmodern as fundamentally political, as challenging grand narratives and cultural assumptions (see *The Politics of Postmodernism*). It is especially through its concern with the marginal and the repressed, with silenced or forgotten histories, that trauma writing tends to be profoundly political, often giving a voice to the oppressed and calling attention to wounds that have been hidden under the grand narratives of history and to pain and suffering that has been ignored.[11] It is partly due to this political and ethical commitment that postmodern trauma fiction does not push narrative experimentations as far as the seminal works of postmodern fiction, such as texts by Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and Kurt Vonnegut. Trauma fiction, as Michael Rothberg argues, tends to retain a certain commitment to the real and, ultimately, "cannot free itself from the claims of mimesis," that is, from concerns with referentiality and the demands of documentation and testimony (*Traumatic Realism* 140).[12] As Rothberg further asserts, "[t]he abyss at the heart of trauma entails not only the exile of the real but also its existence" (140). Hence, trauma fiction, as Jean-Michel Ganteau puts it, tends to trouble and challenge realism, but realism "remains vestigial even while it is being subverted" (34). Discussions of the negotiation of postmodernist and (new kinds of) realist strategies of narration and representation in the face of trauma are relevant to, for example, Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place*, which is profoundly self-reflexive and challenges processes of remembering, narration, and representation, while still expressing a strong concern

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10 Similarly, Susannah Radstone argues that the obsession with memory in the context of both trauma and postmodernism should be seen as interrelated: "Trauma theory is associated with the 'turn to memory' in history as well as in the humanities more generally. Postmodernism's problematizations of grand narratives, objectivity, universality and totality prompted a turn to memory's partial, local and subjective narratives" (81).

11 As Whitehead emphasizes, this "acknowledgment of the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" also reveals that trauma fiction tends to share important concerns with postcolonialism (*Trauma Fiction* 82).

12 Rothberg sums up this idea as follows: "Traumatic realist texts, however, search for a form of documentation beyond direct reference and coherent narrative but do not fully abandon the possibility for some kind of reference and some kind of narrative" (*Traumatic Realism* 101). It needs to be emphasized that Rothberg's notion of "traumatic realism" refers primarily to representations of the Holocaust. Yet some of his discussions regarding trauma and realism also have a more general relevance, reaching beyond the context of the Holocaust.

with the real in the way the text records and documents the bleak realities of family trauma.

The narrative strategies and experimentations of postmodern trauma fiction provide an interesting counterpoint to Romantic literary techniques used to represent trauma, pushing further, for example, the conscious attention to language, narrative, and narration that characterizes Romantic trauma fiction. The dialogue between Romantic and postmodern trauma writing becomes even more meaningful in connection with the second pillar of my framework, the thematic focus on childhood and family trauma. Childhood and the family were crucial topoi in the sociocultural fabric at the turn of both the nineteenth- and twenty-first centuries. As is often noted, the Romantic age is characterized by an increasingly strong interest in childhood. In fact, this interest precipitated the "birth of the child" in the sense that, as Jeroen Jansz and Peter van Drunen point out, children were no longer regarded as small adults; instead, they acquired a "social identity" and a "social status of their own" (*Child-Rearing* 46-49). The specificities of the child's psyche, its mental and cognitive topology and developmental processes, became the subject of much investigation. This fascination with childhood is reflected in many texts of the time – including those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth, and William Blake as prominent examples – testifying to the "rise of a child-centered British culture" (Richardson, *Literature* 24-25). The novels of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley are firmly embedded in this "child-centered culture," expressing a deep interest in childhood and in the complex relations between child self and adult self. It is in the works of this family of writers that the Romantic concerns with the family, family politics, and education manifests themselves with particular consistency and intensity.[13] As Julie Carlson writes in *England's First Family of Writers*, it is "striking the degree to which this family's writings address the topic of family" (4).

Likewise, in postmodern fiction, childhood and the family emerge as key issues, albeit with a somewhat different focus. As has often been noted, in the last decades of the twentieth century, personal traumas experienced in childhood and within the family, such as sexual abuse, incest, and domestic violence, have emerged as prominent themes in fiction.[14] This development can be seen in connection with the formulation of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a diagnostic category within the field of psychiatry; PTSD was incorporated into the *Diagnostic and Sta-*

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13 According to Kelly, the "changing nature and role of the family and the 'domestic affections' (including childhood and the role of women)" are among the main issues explored in Romantic fiction (*English Fiction* 11).

14 See for example Roger Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question* and Gillian Harkins' *Everybody's Family Romance*.

tistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1980.[15] The category is broad, subsuming different traumatic experiences under one general diagnosis, but its inclusion has resulted in increased attention to sexual and domestic traumas. The women's movement also significantly contributed to increasing public awareness of "the reality of violence against children and women" and of how widespread such violence is (Farrell, *Post-Traumatic* 15). It is within this cultural climate that a considerable number of novels dealing with child and gender-specific trauma have begun to appear. For example, *The Hiding Place* dramatizes how six sisters and their mother are victimized by a tyrannical and abusive father. Such a pessimistic view of childhood as a period of profound suffering rather than innocent happiness and the disillusioning vision of the family as a cradle of trauma rather than a safe haven of domestic peace dominate both Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction.

In trauma fiction, childhood trauma and family trauma are often closely interrelated. The latter term, however, requires more detailed definition: I use the term family trauma, first of all, to denote individual traumatic experiences that happen within the context of the family. At the same time, the term is also meant to express how the whole family may be affected by an individual's trauma and how, in particular, interpersonal trauma within a family tends to shatter the group's sense of safety and stability as well as damage the bonds of the familial community. The texts discussed in this study all suggest in different ways that child-parent as well as sibling relationships tend to be the source of particularly powerful and injurious traumas; the texts highlight the damage that results when these relationships are disrupted by violence, abuse, and incest or are terminated by separation, loss, and death, implying that an individual is crucially shaped by his or her familial environment.

In both Romanticism and postmodernism, the concern with childhood and the family can also be understood as part of a general cultural interest in subjectivity, self-narration, and life writing. The Romantic age witnessed a surge in different forms of life writing: Rousseau's *Confessions*, Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and Godwin's notorious biography *The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* are some prominent examples.[16]

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15 The DSM is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and revised and updated periodically. The inclusion of PTSD as a psychiatric disorder in the third version of the DSM (i.e., the DSM-III) marks a crucial moment in the history of trauma; it can be seen as the moment when the phenomenon of trauma was first widely and officially recognized by the medical and psychiatric professions.

16 As Eugene Stelzig asserts, autobiography, which began to emerge in the middle of the eighteenth century, "is indeed a distinctive romantic genre as well as a mode of self-knowledge" (224). According to Stelzig, the end of the eighteenth century witnessed an "explosion of the genre in Europe" (224).

Indeed, individual life-stories play a pivotal role in Romantic trauma fiction at both the thematic and structural levels: these texts revolve around processes of self-narration and often follow the structure of a fictional autobiography, memoir, or confession. The last decades of the twentieth century can similarly be seen as a period crucially concerned with life writing. As Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir observes, a major trend in postmodern writing has been to explore the intersections of autobiography and fiction, and theorists have produced a flood of investigations of life writing (1). The fascination with individual life-stories manifests itself in different genres of life writing. According to Roger Luckhurst, the late 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by a "memoir boom" (*Trauma Question* 88), while Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that the late twentieth century was an age of testimony (see *Testimony*). In the Romantic and postmodern periods, then, the individual with his or her personal story and individual background takes centre stage in a number of fictional and non-fictional writings. The texts discussed in this study all foreground processes of self-narration, some of them blurring the boundaries between fictional and autobiographical writing in complex ways. While I read these explorations of self-narration as part of a culture of life writing, my primary focus is to investigate how a given text explores processes of narrating the self and trauma rather than how it reflects the author's own life. In other words, the main focus of my readings is on the textual enactments of life writing about trauma – I read the biographical dimension of texts concerned with self-narration and trauma as merely an additional layer.

Autodiegetic narration, which is the prevalent narrative form in the present study's corpus of texts, puts special emphasis not only on the individual's life-story, but also on the individual's psychology. These types of narratives tend to render with particular immediacy the processes of experiencing, remembering, and narrating trauma. This inherently psychological narrative frame brings me to the third cornerstone of my framework: an interdisciplinary approach to trauma fiction. The idea that trauma is a subject that calls for interdisciplinarity is, of course, not new; it can be traced back to Caruth's seminal 1995 collection of essays *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, which represents the beginnings of literary trauma studies.[17] Yet while literary critics after Caruth (e.g., Whitehead, Laurie Vickroy, and Deborah

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17 In the introduction to *Trauma*, Caruth writes that "psychoanalysis and medically oriented psychiatry, sociology, history and even literature all seem to be called upon" to explain the seemingly inexplicable phenomenon of trauma ("Trauma and Experience" 4). The framework of *Unclaimed Experience*, however, is far less interdisciplinary. While Caruth, in an endnote, postulates that "we should look at what [contemporary psychiatry and early psychoanalysis] can learn from each other" (131), her discussion of trauma throughout *Unclaimed Experience* relies heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis, while moving away from psychiatric approaches.

Horvitz) occasionally include references to trauma psychology, there seems to be a tendency to rely on a small selection of standard works and/or a few of Freud's ideas about trauma – with Caruth repeatedly functioning as the (unquestioned) mediator. However, studies that engage more fully in a dialogue between the disciplines and strive to take into account recent trends and findings in the field of traumatic stress studies are still a desideratum. In an effort to move in this direction, I want to show how psychology and psychiatry can significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of literary psychologies of trauma, especially regarding identity, memory, childhood, and the body, as well as trauma and narrative, notably, the interrelations between narrative, working through, and recovery. Psychoanalysis, which tends to be the main psychological framework in literary trauma studies, will be included as a point of reference where relevant; however, I draw on the insights of the wider and rich field of clinical-psychological and psychiatric traumatic stress studies, with the aim of broadening the perspective on trauma psychology.

In order to contextualize my interdisciplinary approach, a short overview of the range of current notions of trauma is apposite. Within the current proliferation of trauma concepts, one could sketch a continuum spanning the two poles of trauma mentioned earlier: the concrete and individual on one end and the abstract and general on the other. The psychiatric notion of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with its rigid categorization of traumatic events and its clearly defined symptomatology, can be situated at the individual end of this continuum, followed by other, more open-ended clinical-psychological, psychiatric, and psychoanalytical conceptualizations of trauma. Further along the virtual continuum of trauma, socio-cultural perspectives shift the emphasis of trauma from individuals to collectives. These theories argue that trauma damages the social fabric in similar ways to how it harms individual psyches.[18] Moving further towards the pole of the abstract and metaphorical, the concept of trauma crosses the line from being the diagnosis of a collective in a state of profound crisis to being a symptom of a general cultural condition, characterized by an increasing awareness of the limitations of language, representation, and history. At this end of the trans-disciplinary continuum, which is exemplified in Caruth's work, trauma becomes a cultural trope representing postmodernity.

In this study, I explore the interrelations and tensions between different points on this schematic trauma continuum, positioning myself on a via media between the extremes of the rigid frame of the DSM on the one hand and the looseness of some cultural approaches on the other, while keeping in sight the whole spectrum. The definition that I use as a starting point is that of trauma as a profoundly distressing, painful, or shocking experience that affects the individual so deeply as to cause a

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18 A seminal article in this context is for example Kai Erikson's "Notes on Trauma and Community."

disruption in, injury to, or breach within the structures of the mind and the psyche and that, as a result, may have a persistent impact on an individual, especially regarding his or her relation to identity, memory, and the social environment.[19] Even though the psychology of trauma is a key focal point, my interdisciplinary methodology does not follow a case-study approach, nor does it pursue an approach that focuses exclusively on the psychological and concrete dimensions of trauma to the exclusion of abstract, metaphorical, and cultural dimensions. Rather, my aim is to rebalance the emphasis between these two poles by paying particular attention to the pole that tends to be underemphasized and undervalued in literary studies. This revaluation of the often-marginalized pole of trauma will generate new insights into the relationship between the psychological and the literary, between the individual and the cultural. While the gulf between the two poles can (probably) never be fully bridged, the continuum of trauma concepts never reduced to a common denominator, it is precisely the complex dynamics produced at the intersections that are particularly intriguing objects of investigation.

At this point, I want to emphasize that interdisciplinarity is crucial not only in the analysis of postmodern texts but also when reading Romantic trauma fiction. The Romantic-period scientific culture was shaped by vivid exchanges across disciplinary boundaries, and Romantic trauma fiction can be seen as symptomatic of a more general "age of introspection" (Faas 57), a time that was characterized by a flourishing of psychological discourses and the emergence of psychiatry as a discipline. The mental sciences of the time began to devote attention to the pathologies of the mind, and this fascination with the unconscious, irrational, and pathological sides of the psyche, as well as the urge to explore these in depth, is also strongly reflected in the literature of the time. Authors like Godwin and Shelley saw themselves as "mental anatomists," recording in their novels, with much detail and psychological interest, the fictitious life-stories of human beings suffering from mental disorders (see Brewer's *The Mental Anatomies*). The recurring theme of experiences and emotions that "wound" the mind and psyche can, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter One, be read in relation to the psychological and psychiatric discourses of the time. In other words, Romantic-period mental sciences are crucial for understanding the general framework within which the idea of trauma emerged in literary texts of the time. Even so, the psychiatry, psychology, and philosophy of the time lacked plausible concepts and theories to explain many issues regarding mental disorders. As Robert Brown observes, while the Romantic period was marked by a profound interest in the pathological aspects of the mind and the "non-

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19 This working definition is influenced by Brewin, who identifies the idea of trauma as a "very distressing incident" causing "some kind of internal breach or damage to existing mental structures" as a central consensual notion within traumatic stress studies (*Post-traumatic* 5).

rationality of the depths and privacy of the human self," these issues were "neither successfully examined nor plausibly explained by the mind-doctors" (362). Thus, as Brown continues, "[i]t was left to writers of fiction and poetry in the period to describe and exhibit these aspects, and to much later psychiatrists and psychologists to try to give plausible explanations" (362). Hence, a dialogue with contemporary trauma discourses, which introduces a terminology and conceptology that was not yet available to the Romantics, offers additional insights into Romantic literary psychologies of trauma, and it helps to reveal more distinctly the characteristics of Romantic trauma in contrast to postmodern trauma.

This general framework of a dialogue between Romantic and postmodern as well as literary and psychological discourses is also reflected in the structure of the present study. Bringing into dialogue late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century mental sciences and contemporary psychology and psychiatry, as well as literary trauma theory and psychological trauma discourses, Chapter One provides the theoretical framework for the subsequent discussion of trauma fiction. However, rather than sketching a comprehensive chronological history of trauma theory,[20] I focus on a number of key issues particularly relevant to my corpus of texts, which consists of a selection of Romantic and postmodern novels that deal with childhood and family trauma. The remaining six chapters, devoted to the analysis of these trauma texts, proceed chronologically, while also being structured dialogically around thematic connections: Chapters Two to Four each focus on one Romantic trauma novel, while Chapters Five to Seven are each centred on a postmodern one – and the three texts in each section are arranged in chronological order. At the same time, the study develops powerful thematic resonances between the three 'pairs' of Romantic and postmodern novels. The first of these six chapters investigates Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) and the last one Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* (2000), both of which explore the effects that severe disruptions in the family (such as physical violence and emotional abuse) can have on individuals. Gender perspectives on trauma are a crucial concern in my readings of these two novels, which emphasize the female trauma victims' experiences of being stigmatized, excluded from society, and cruelly separated from a child or a sibling by an abusive husband or father. Dealing with the earliest and most recent texts of my corpus, these two chapters, figuratively speaking, constitute the outer pillars of the arch spanning from late-eighteenth-century to early-twenty-first-century trauma fiction. The second Romantic chapter focuses on Godwin's *Mandeville* (1817) and the second postmodern chapter on Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* (1996). What links these texts is that, as children, the protagonists in each witnessed the murder of their par-

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20 For an excellent discussion of important cornerstones in the history of trauma theory, including Freud, Pierre Janet, Sándor Ferenczi, Bessel van der Kolk, and Caruth, see Leys' *Trauma*.

ents. In both novels, the topoi of death and mourning, the protagonist's excessive fixation on his sister, and the interrelations between the individual and the collective as well as the private and the political are central concerns. Finally, the two middle chapters investigate Romantic and postmodern representations of incestuous father-daughter relationships in Shelley's *Mathilda* (1819) and Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991). In both texts, the trauma of incest leads to a complex and seemingly irresolvable identity crisis. These two texts, which form the structural core of this study, are also the two that are the most performative and that express the bleakest and least reconciliatory views on trauma within the Romantic and postmodern section respectively.

While these thematic connections invite the comparison of Romantic and postmodern voices, the aim is also to explore in depth the particularities of each trauma novel. For example, the study looks at the detailed fictional self-analysis centred on the posttraumatic obsession with revenge in *Mandeville*, the investigation of trauma and identity through a complex poetics of intertextuality in *Mathilda*, and the interrogation of the ethics of witnessing in *Fugitive Pieces*. In each chapter, the discussion of the central novel will also be contextualized using a selection of other thematically relevant trauma novels by the same author or from the same period.

It may, perhaps, seem surprising that the three Romantic novels are from one family of English writers (Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley), while the three postmodern ones are by three authors from different cultural backgrounds: Smiley is American, Michaels is Canadian, and Azzopardi is Welsh. However, the rationale behind this variety is that with Romantic fiction, which has so far hardly been explored in the light of trauma, it seems particularly fruitful to drive pegs into the ground in a clearly defined territory, while postmodern trauma fiction, as a far more established area of research, invites branching out. Moreover, the works by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley, which share central concerns and premises, provide a particularly fruitful area of investigation regarding trauma in general and childhood and family trauma in particular. Revolving around troubled childhoods and disruptive family environments, their writings are steeped in educational theory and philosophy that emphasizes the profoundly formative impact of experiences and environments. These writers not only have a shared personal background as a family but also a shared intellectual background regarding a number of the seminal thinkers they engage with in their texts, including John Locke, David Hartley, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Erasmus Darwin. The structural arrangement of putting the three chapters on Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley next to each other is, then, one important way in which I aim at doing justice to the complex web of textual and biographical connections among these three writers. At the same time, the two-part structure linking Romantic and postmodern fiction in a dialogue will, furthermore, help illuminate the role trauma plays in each period and bring out the characteristics of Romantic versus postmodern trauma.

In examining the psychologies and poetics as well as the politics and ethics of trauma fiction, a number of key questions arise and constitute central concerns throughout this study: How do literary works represent and enact trauma? How do they approach the unthinkable, express the unspeakable, and depict the unrepresentable? How do they conceptualize the impact of trauma and depict posttraumatic suffering? What shapes and functions does trauma take on in different literary texts? How does it figure as a semantic and as a structural category? In what ways do these texts self-reflexively thematize the meanings of writing (about) trauma? What historical constants and vicissitudes can we map out if we investigate the specificities of Romantic and of postmodern representations of trauma? What cultural and social concerns and anxieties are expressed in these texts? – Investigating these and related questions, I read Romantic and postmodern trauma novels as part of the cultural imaginary, with their negotiations of trauma and its multiple meanings reflecting back on the culture within which they were written. Trauma narratives constitute important points of intersection between several discourses, where issues such as subjectivity and identity, memory, life writing, the body, as well as mental health and mental illness are negotiated. They are also sites for working out gender and family politics as well as social issues. Moreover, images and semantic clusters that reappear time and again in both literary and theoretical languages of trauma – trauma as a gap, hole, or rupture; as a wound or injury; as a mark, brand, or inscription; as a *Fremdkörper* (foreign body) or contamination; as a ghost or sense of haunting – are heavy with psychological, social, and cultural implications, implications that will be explored further in individual chapters.[21]

Thematizing extremes of the human experience and exposing readers to existential crises, struggles for survival, and quests for reconstitution and recovery, trauma novels encourage us to reflect critically on the phenomenon of trauma, its reasons, effects, and contexts. They also invite us to identify emotionally with trauma victims (particularly in autodiegetic narratives like *The Hiding Place*), thereby confronting us anew with the foundations of our lives and selves.[22] Trauma texts "engage readers' empathy and critical faculties" (Vickroy 225) and raise crucial questions about processes of communication, transmission, and reception as well as about witnessing and testimony. They call for a critical reflection on how to respond to the wound of another, how to listen to another's pain, how to receive and

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21 On recurrent tropes and images of trauma, see Bettina Rabelhofer's "Trauma, Erinnern, Erzählen."

22 For a discussion of this aspect of trauma fiction, see Vickroy: "Trauma also has meaning in that it is indicative of basic life issues such as the relation between life and death; the meaning and quality of existence; physical and psychological survival; how people understand and cope with loss and self-diminishment; and the nature of bonds and disconnections among people" (221).

react to stories of suffering – and these questions operate at the level of characters, at the level of the text as a whole, at the level of reader response, and finally, at the level of scholarly investigation by literary critics examining and writing about trauma texts and their reception.[23] Like Susannah Radstone, I think of trauma studies in the humanities as "practicing a kind of tertiary witnessing, setting itself the task of bearing witness to culture's extensions of witnessing through media indulging the visual arts, literature and film, as well as through the practices of historians" (64). Finding appropriate and ethically responsible ways of performing this mode of "tertiary witnessing" is a crucial goal for anyone, like me, working in the field of literary trauma studies. Caruth's appeal that we should remain alert to the "irreducible specificity of traumatic stories" and avoid turning them all into "versions of the same story" or "reduce them to clichés" ("Preface" vii) is an imperative that remains valid.

The three principal pillars of my framework represent my attempt to respond to this imperative, my attempt to pursue with renewed vigour the ethical commitment that was one of the foundational impulses of trauma studies but has, in the meantime, sometimes threatened to dissolve into the background.[24] The comparison of Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction, the focus on childhood and family trauma, and the interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies and psychology and psychiatry all (in different ways) function as means of counteracting universalizing approaches to trauma. In other words, these three key aspects of this study's trajectory, which all enact a move away from Caruthian approaches and towards still-marginalized directions in the field, express my aim to return to one of Caruth's initial and still important demands: the demand of reading trauma stories in their individual and irreducible specificity and not as "clichés." At the interface of Romantic and postmodern and of literary, psychological, and theoretical "topologies of trauma" (Belau and Ramadanovic), I want to explore, from various

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23 The ethics of reading trauma have been conceptualized in different ways, ranging from views of the reader as a surrogate victim suffering from "vicarious or secondary trauma" (see Kaplan 39-41; Caruth, *Unclaimed*) to notions of the reader as an "attentive secondary witness," who should be neither too close nor too distant from the experience of trauma (LaCapra, *Writing History* 78).

24 Luckhurst similarly points to the discrepancy between a turn to ethics as a driving force in the emergence of trauma studies and subsequent practices within literary trauma studies: "Trauma theory tries to turn criticism back towards being an ethical, responsible, purposive discourse, listening to the wounds of the other. But if it is truly to do this, this point of convergence also needs to be the start of a divergence, of an opening out of theory to wider contexts" ("Mixing Memory" 506). For a recent publication in the field that forcefully argues for the importance of ethics to trauma studies, see Herrero and Allué's *Between the Urge to Know and the Need to Deny*.

angles and with repeated attention to ethical questions, the complex interrelations between trauma and narrative, between wounds and words.

Chapter One: Theorizing Trauma

Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds

> "[T]he subject of trauma attracts passionate advocacy and passionate skepticism in a quite disproportionate measure."
>
> (CHRIS BREWIN, *POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER*)

> "Trauma has become a paradigm because it has been turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood that have saturated Western cultural life."
>
> (ROGER LUCKHURST, *THE TRAUMA QUESTION*)

Any attempt to define and theorize "trauma" involves a struggle to make sense of the confusing array of current conceptualizations of trauma, ranging from PTSD to cultural trauma. Any attempt to write a history of trauma faces further challenges in trying to find a way through the jungle-like complexity of the historiography of psychiatry. Roy Porter and Mark Micale emphasize the highly controversial nature of the history of psychiatry and conclude that "it has thus far proved impossible to produce anything like an enduring, comprehensive, authoritative history" (6).[1] Within the contested field of psychiatry, trauma is, in turn, a particularly controversial subject. The history of trauma is a history of repeated gaps and ruptures, with cyclical periods of attention and neglect, of fascination and rejection (van der Kolk,

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1 According to Micale and Porter, the reasons why it is and has been especially difficult for the discipline of psychiatry to find a common ground for its history are that its "disciplinary origins lie scattered in a multitude of areas of past activity and inquiry" and that its subject matter has often been heavily politicized (5).

"Preface" xi). The amnesia and dissociations typically produced by trauma are, in this sense, also crucial characteristics of the psychiatric history of trauma.[2]

Originally situated in the domain of medicine and then psychology, the study of trauma has, over the last few decades, become relevant in literary and cultural studies. Indeed, as trauma has become a prominent topos in life writing[3] and fiction, trauma studies has emerged as a new field within the humanities. Landmark publications in the field in the 1990s, such as Cathy Caruth's essay collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and her monograph *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), were rapidly followed by a number of studies on trauma in fiction, non-fiction, film, and culture. As Laurie Vickroy emphasizes, the growing attention devoted to trauma in academic discourses is closely intertwined with its rising recognition in general and media discourses (2). Both trauma and memory have emerged as key cultural categories and concerns: Roger Luckhurst identifies trauma as an "exemplary conceptual knot" in contemporary networks of knowledge (*Trauma Question* 14), while Anne Whitehead speaks of a "memory boom," diagnosing widespread "cultural obsessions" with both individual and collective memory (*Memory* 1-2). The obsessions with memory and with trauma reinforce each other; a mania for memory is particularly likely to arise at moments of crisis, at times when memory comes to be felt as fragile and threatened – a frequent after-effect of trauma.

The concept of trauma has departed from its original disciplinary ground and crossed boundaries between various fields and discourses; as a result, it has become increasingly, even notoriously, complex and slippery. Like many trauma critics, Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué conceptualize trauma as inherently "open and undecidable," asserting that we should never think of trauma as a "stable and immobile notion[]" ("Between the Urge" 12-13). The aim of this chapter, then, is to construct a theoretical and historical framework for investigating Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction, always remaining alert to the slipperiness of trauma definitions. First, I discuss the key concerns of literary trauma studies and outline

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2 Ruth Leys also emphasizes the strangely cyclical nature of the history of trauma in her justification of the approach she chose in *Trauma*: "The linear approaches that had been attempted in the past did not and could not do justice to what I saw as the structural repetitions that have characterized the successive theorizations of psychic trauma, the tendency for certain theoretical and indeed empirical difficulties and tensions to surface again and again at different historical moments or cruxes" (Leys and Goldman 657).

3 On life writing, see for example Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography*. Smith and Watson define the term "life writing" as follows: "An overarching term used for a variety of nonfictional modes of writing that claim to engage the shaping of someone's life" (197). "Life writing" is, thus, used in a more inclusive sense than "autobiography." On life writing and trauma, see Roger Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question*, especially chapter 3.

relevant developments in the field. Examining what I see as the main limitations of influential theoretical approaches, I explore further what interdisciplinarity can bring to the study of trauma in literature. The second, longer part of the chapter is devoted to psychological and psychiatric perspectives. After a short overview of the history of trauma, the chapter proceeds to a more focused historical contextualization of trauma. To shed light on my corpus of texts, I investigate relevant contexts of Romantic-period psychiatry and psychology on the one hand and contemporary traumatic stress studies on the other. The primary goal of this overview is to frame the dialogue between Romantic and postmodern literary voices speaking about childhood and family trauma with a dialogue between related psychological and psychiatric discourses from both periods. Throughout, I aim not at *closing* the gap between disciplines and time periods but at *bridging* that gap; the idea is to listen for resonances and dissonances in order to do justice to the subject of trauma, whose inherent openness calls for a crossing of boundaries.

TRAUMA IN LITERARY STUDIES

Why does literary trauma writing matter? – In answering this question, it is crucial to emphasize that, as Vickroy asserts, "literary and imaginative approaches [to trauma] provide a necessary supplement to historical and psychological studies" (221). The literary imagination, with its ability to fictionalize and symbolize, can create a space in which experiences that appear to defy understanding and verbalization, that concern existential dimensions of the human condition – especially threatening experiences of vulnerability or mortality – can be explored from multiple perspectives. Literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma, which is often personalized and contextualized, fictionalized and historicized, as well as psychologized and metaphorized at the same time. Literary approaches to trauma, then, have the potential to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand and critical reflection on the other.

These texts also serve important socio-cultural and political functions. The contribution of trauma writers, as Vickroy stresses, is not only to "mak[e] terrifying, alien experiences more understandable and accessible" (222) but also to provide a means of "witnessing or testifying for the history and experience of historically marginalized people" (221). In a similar vein, Whitehead emphasizes that trauma fiction often thematizes "the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" (*Trauma Fiction* 82). The same may be said of much testimonial and life writing. Yet trauma

novels and "limit-cases,"[4] which explore self-narration and self-representation in the face of trauma within fictional and literary structures, allow authors to experiment with self-reflexivity in ways that non-fictional trauma writing may not permit, thus enabling writers to explore different perspectives on writing trauma and writing the self. Furthermore, as Hubert Zapf argues, literary trauma writing enables specific functions and effects that hinge on its fictionality:

[Twentieth-century trauma narratives] remain connected, at least in principle, to a long tradition of literary representations of 'other people's pain', whose ethical implications are tied to their fictional status and to the fact that the other people and their fates whose pain the reader is witnessing or sharing are the fates of imaginary people in a depragmatized and meta-discursive space of textuality, which however may paradoxically enhance its communicational intensity and its signifying power towards a collectively experienced historical reality. (166)

According to Zapf, then, literary trauma texts may have a particular impact on readers precisely because they operate in an imaginary and textual realm. While the specific functions of trauma fiction may, of course, vary from text to text depending on each text's depiction of individual trauma history, socio-cultural context, and political agenda, literary trauma writing is an important form of engagement with trauma that stands alongside psychological and historical approaches as well as non-fictional trauma narratives.

Literary trauma texts often expose and work with the essential paradox that characterizes trauma narratives in general: the attempt to communicate that which resists ordinary processes of remembering and narrating, of representation and comprehension. Trauma narratives raise important questions about the possibility of verbalizing the unspeakable, narrating the unnarratable, and making sense of the incomprehensible. Trauma, as Luckhurst puts it, "issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge" (*Trauma Question* 79) or, more generally, a challenge to language, narrative, and understanding. Most trauma texts, in one way or another, point to the "narrative/anti-narrative tension at the core of trauma," that is, to the tensions between "narrative *possibility*" and "*impossibility*" (80, 83). The texts explored in this study negotiate these tensions, placing varying degrees of emphasis on the potentials or limitations of language and narration in relation to trauma.

Literary trauma writing performs a complex balancing act regarding the (un)-speakability, (un)narratability, and (in)comprehensibility of trauma, and trauma

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4   Leigh Gilmore defines "limit-cases" as "contemporary self-representational texts about trauma [that] reveal and test the limits of autobiography" (*Limits* 14). Calling attention to the porous generic boundaries of much recent trauma writing, Gilmore asserts that "[t]he limits tell us what the genre alone cannot" (10).

theory displays an equally strong concern for the interrelations between wounds and words, between wounds and signification. These interrelations, however, have been theorized in significantly different ways. Caruth's highly influential publications *Trauma* and *Unclaimed Experience* initiated a paradigm of theorizing trauma marked by scepticism towards narration. Caruth allows for the possibility of trauma being transformed into a narrative that tries to make sense of the incomprehensible but claims that such a narrative is likely to distort the "truth" of trauma and weaken its impact:

[T]he transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own, and other's knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall. ("Recapturing" 153)

For Caruth, it is crucial that cultural representations preserve the full force of trauma, especially its incomprehensibility: "The danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much" (154). According to Caruth, trauma demands a mode of representation that textually *performs* trauma and its incomprehensibility through, for example, gaps and silences, the repeated breakdown of language, and the collapse of understanding (see "Recapturing" 153-55; *Unclaimed* 115).[5] Similarly, Geoffrey Hartman emphasizes how words are inadequate or even fail in the face of trauma, but he also grants that "[l]iterary verbalization, however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible" ("Trauma" 259). Whitehead and Vickroy also explore how trauma narratives do not merely represent but also perform trauma, that is, how they "incorporate the rhythms, processes and uncertainties of trauma within [their] consciousness and structures" (Vickroy xiv). Yet these critics' main focus differs from Caruth's in that they place less emphasis on the incomprehensible and unspeakable aspects of trauma. What they both highlight is that trauma narratives do have the potential to represent traumatic experiences and to illuminate the complexities of trauma, at least to some extent. They acknowledge that trauma resists being fully remembered, represented, and grasped, but they also assert that writers have, in fact, found means to represent trauma in

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5   Leys goes as far as to claim that Caruth defines the "truth of trauma" as an "incomprehensible event that defies all representation" so that trauma "in its literality, muteness and unavailability becomes a sacred object or 'icon'" to such an extent "that it would be a 'sacrilege' to misappropriate or tamper with [it] in any way" (*Genealogy* 253, 269). While I generally agree with Leys' critical reading of Caruth, I find that, in this respect, she tends to overstate and somewhat misrepresent Caruth's arguments.

fiction in a way that conveys these challenges and, at the same time, facilitates understanding.

Trauma theory that focuses on narrative impossibility rather than possibility, in Luckhurst's terminology, tends to be critical not only of the idea of integrating and understanding trauma but also of healing and recovery. In other words, anti-narrative theorizations of trauma tend to be "anti-therapeutic." In *Unclaimed Experience,* Caruth conspicuously marginalizes the topos of recovery, focusing on what she describes as "the new mode of reading and listening that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand" (9). Her readings of both theoretical and literary texts are centred on this "new mode," a mode defined by aporias and incomprehensibility, by fragmentation and acting out. In a fatalistic gesture that recalls Shoshana Felman's approach to trauma in *Testimony*,[6] Caruth highlights how trauma victims may pass on their trauma to others. Moreover, throughout the text, Caruth emphasizes repetition as a crucial feature of trauma writing, one that expresses ideas of compulsion and acting out, of being caught up in endless cycles of suffering, and of a fatalistic sense of doom. From a metaperspective, the text of *Unclaimed Experience* itself performs the fixation on a "repetition compulsion" by expressing again and again the idea that repetition compulsion is one of *the* determining features of trauma. Hence, neither the trauma narratives Caruth chooses to discuss nor her theoretical narrative seem to allow for languages and visions of integration and healing. Whitehead reads Caruth's trauma theory in a similar way when she observes that Caruth "articulates concerns that the traumatic 'cure' implies a dilution of the experience into the reassuring terms of therapy" and concludes that "[t]here is, then, a distinct tendency in recent theorizations of trauma towards an anti-therapeutic stance, a scepticism regarding the inherent value of telling one's story" (*Memory* 116-17).[7]

The rejection of narration and recovery and the one-sided focus on the crises caused by trauma is problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, theorizations

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6   In chapter one of *Testimony*, Felman discusses several interlinked levels of testimony: the videotaped testimonies of Holocaust survivors, her students' reactions to them, her own testimony as a teacher, the students' written responses and, finally, her chapter ("Education and Crisis" 1-56). Evoking the trope of contamination, Felman collapses the distinctions between victims and witnesses and readers/viewers of trauma (as well as between first- and second-hand experiences of trauma) to an extent that seems ethically problematic.

7   Another theorist who, like Caruth, discusses trauma especially in relation to narrative impossibility is Jean-François Lyotard. As Luckhurst writes, based on *Heidegger and 'the Jews,'* for Lyotard, trauma can "only be an aporia in narrative, and any narrative temporalization is an unethical act" (*Trauma Question* 81).

with too narrow an emphasis on how trauma *disrupts* and *hinders* narration risk overlooking the fact that trauma also has a strong tendency to *produce* narration. As Luckhurst stresses, "[i]n its shock impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma" (*Trauma Question* 79). Furthermore, a radically anti-narrative and anti-therapeutic stance produces ethical problems. It is problematic for trauma theory to insist on the preservation of the "truth" and full force of trauma while ignoring trauma victims' needs, especially their need for narration and desire for integration and recovery. While many literary trauma texts emphasize the characteristic tension between the urge to verbalize and narrate the trauma and the struggle to find a language to do so, trauma theory has tended to focus too narrowly on the latter. Historian Dominick LaCapra's criticism of Caruth's position regarding acting out, working through, and recovery is apposite here.[8] LaCapra claims that a response to trauma (in historiography, theory, or narrative) that narrowly focuses on "symptomatic acting out and the repetition compulsion" or even becomes "compulsively fixated" on the crisis caused by trauma is in danger of "intentionally or unintentionally [...] aggravat[ing] trauma" (*Representing* 193). Trauma criticism that reads like "traumatic writing or posttraumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma" may push the intention of "keeping faith with trauma" too far and, as a result, risks perpetuating trauma (*Writing History* 23). However, LaCapra, like Caruth, also adopts a critical attitude towards the reverse approach to trauma, that is, towards what he terms a "fetishistic narrative" determined by "an imaginary, illusory hope for totalization, full closure, and redemptive meaning" (*Representing* 192-93). In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, he criticizes trauma narratives for "prematurely (re)turning to the pleasure principle, harmonizing events, and often recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios" (78). What LaCapra finds problematic, however, is the simplistic and value-laden binary that Caruth implicitly constructs in her theorization of trauma writing: narratives characterized by the "phantasm of total mastery, full ego identity, definitive closure," which Caruth rejects, versus writing marked by "endless mutability, fragmentation, melancholia, aporias, irrecoverable residues or exclusions" (*Writing History* 71), which is the main focus of her readings. LaCapra postulates that there is a kind of

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8   Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis define "acting-out" as "action in which the subject, in the grip of his unconscious wishes and fantasies, relives these in the present," while "working-through" "is to be taken to be a sort of psychical work which allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements and to free himself from the grip of mechanisms of repetition" (4, 488). LaCapra, who takes these terms "away from a narrowly therapeutic framework," sees "acting out" as the posttraumatic state of being "haunted or possessed by the past," while "working through" enables the subject to break out of the tyranny of the past (*Representing* 210; *Writing History* 21-22).

trauma narrative that exists between these two poles, that acknowledges the tensions between narrative impossibility and possibility and between acting out and working through.

To some extent, a shift in focus within trauma studies has occurred since the 1990s: some studies after Caruth and Felman have engaged with narration and recovery with less scepticism. For example, in *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction* (2000), Deborah Horvitz's readings of women's trauma writings identify "the protagonists' varying capacities to use art, especially narrative, as a method of 'working through' or healing from trauma" as a recurrent trope (18). Horvitz ends her study with a powerful credo about the positive potential of narrating trauma, which significantly departs from Caruth's and Felman's pessimistic philosophies:

As I hope my study illustrates, power lies in the capacity to find or *create* individual, personal meaning from a traumatized and tortured past. If traumatic events are not repressed, they can be *used*: victims remember and imagine stories to be repeated and passed on. That is, when the stories of the past are consciously recognized, the cycle of violence can end, because the *narratives*, not the sadomachism or the trauma, are repeated and passed on. (134)

Horvitz here distances herself from Felman's and Caruth's idea that narrating trauma tends to transmit it through a kind of contamination or contagion. Another case in point is Vickroy's *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002). Although survival cannot be equated with recovery, Vickroy's emphasis on survival does initiate a theoretical trajectory that moves beyond an exclusive focus on crisis, suffering, and acting out. Likewise, Ann Kaplan, in *Trauma Culture* (2005), distances herself from "Caruth's insistence on the 'unspeakability' and 'unrepresentability' of trauma" and asserts that "telling stories about trauma […] may partly achieve a certain 'working through' for the victim" and also "permit a kind of emphatic 'sharing' that moves us forward, if only by inches" (37). A more recent example is Jennifer Griffiths' *Traumatic Possessions* (2010), which explores processes of recovering from trauma and reconstituting the self, with a focus on the role of the body. While blind spots regarding the potential of narration and the importance of recovery persist in some strands of trauma theory, for critics like Horvitz, Vickroy, Kaplan, and Griffiths, literary trauma writing and the topoi of recovery and healing are not mutually exclusive.

In my analysis of literary trauma writing, I want to push this trajectory and the exploration of narration and recovery even further in several respects. One important way of further overcoming trauma theory's limitations regarding narration and recovery is to turn to psychological and psychiatric approaches to trauma. In particular, studies of traumatic stress have much to say to literary scholars' investigations of trauma writing. Indeed, processes of verbalization and narration have a

fundamentally different status and value in these studies than in Caruthian trauma theory. Traumatic stress studies, as I will show later in this chapter, force literary critics to rethink their assumptions regarding trauma and narrative, especially because, like literary trauma narratives, the studies deal directly with questions of how trauma can be integrated into a narrative, whether or not narrating trauma can be a way of working through trauma, and so forth – while they are, perhaps not surprisingly, hardly concerned with ensuring a "fidelity to trauma" (LaCapra, *Writing History* 22). Moreover, the comparison of trauma narratives from different time periods will cast new light on issues of recovery, especially because Romantic and postmodern trauma novels tend to approach recovery in rather different ways. Teasing out the complex relations between wounds and words and between speaking about the wound and healing is a core concern in my readings of all my chosen texts; broadly speaking, postmodern explorations of processes of recovery or partial recovery contrast with Romantic scepticism, ambivalence, and (in some cases) radical rejections of recovery.

In addition to the highly critical attitude towards narration and recovery prominent in literary trauma studies, there are other problematic aspects in the trauma theories of influential literary scholars. While clinical psychology and psychiatry use trauma as a distinct category of human experience for the diagnosis of mental, emotional, and physical health problems, literary studies tend to use trauma as a metaphor for diagnosing general characteristics of literature and culture. In other words, literary and cultural studies tend to argue for the pervasiveness of trauma, and this essential difference in perspective has far-reaching consequences. Once again, Caruth's trauma theory is a crucial point of reference. Caruth uses trauma to characterize a specific notion of history that has arisen in the postmodern age. She reconceptualizes history as, essentially, a "history of trauma" and as a history determined by "indirect referentiality" (*Unclaimed* 18): "Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, as precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not" (*Unclaimed* 11). With this kind of universalizing gesture, Caruth repeatedly conflates history and trauma.[9] From an equally general perspective, albeit with a somewhat different focus, Hartman explores how trauma studies can inform the study of literary texts: "What is the relevance of trauma theory for reading, or practical criticism? [...] In short, we gain a clearer view of the relation of literature to mental functioning in several key areas, including reference, subjectivity and narration" ("Traumatic Knowledge" 547). Caruth uses trauma to illustrate allegedly universal characteristics of history; Hartman turns to trauma to discuss general issues of literature and

9   For a very similar criticism of Caruth, see for example Greg Forter: "She speaks at times [...] as if history and trauma were synonymous" (281).

literary study – both approaches exemplify how literary scholars engage in a cultural diagnostics centred on the notion of trauma. A more recent example of such an approach is found in Valentina Adami's *Trauma Studies and Literature* (2008), which foregrounds structural parallels between postmodernity and trauma:

In our postmodern and post-Holocaust era, disorder is an integral part of life, meaning and coherence are systematically undermined, and reality is unstable. Recognizing the analogies between the postmodern condition, the structure of traumatic experiences, and that of literary texts may help us clarify the symbolic processes of signification that organize knowledge both in the individual's mind and in literary texts. (7)

While several of the analogies that Adami identifies are persuasive as such, her discussion repeatedly pushes these analogies so far as to collapse necessary distinctions. For example, while the experience of trauma intrinsically involves problems of memory and communication, not all problems of memory or communication necessarily involve trauma (Kansteiner, "Genealogie" 118). A memory crisis, an identity crisis, and an awareness of the limitations of language and communication have different meanings and intensities in different contexts – and trauma is not always the cause of them.

What Caruth's, Hartman's, and Adami's approaches have in common is that they voice – in somewhat different keys – the question of what trauma as a figure of thought, an image, or a metaphor can reveal about literature, culture, and history, respectively;[10] however, they remain silent on the question's logical and necessary counterpart: What can literary and cultural discourses reveal about trauma? It is only by taking into account both perspectives that we can do justice to the complex interrelations between trauma and literature as well as trauma and culture, and we also need both perspectives to investigate the manifold functions of trauma narratives. A one-sided approach that does not raise the latter question risks ignoring many layers of meaning; such a trajectory often results, as mentioned in the introduction, in a vague, universalizing conception of trauma, where the term is instrumentalized and used in such inflationary ways that almost anything qualifies as trauma. Wulf Kansteiner is right to point out that Caruth's generalizing approach has serious implications:

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10 In this context, it should be mentioned that literary and cultural trauma theory emerged mainly from the deconstructionist school at Yale. As Luckhurst notes, "deconstruction, particularly in its American Yale School version, redirected its concerns with reference, representation, and the limits of knowledge, to the problem of trauma" ("Mixing Memory" 497).

Da sie sich nicht damit zufrieden gibt, die Grenzen des Wissens über vergangene Ereignisse katastrophaler Ausmasses zu erkunden, und stattdessen die vorgeblichen traumatischen Komponenten in allen Geschichtsdarstellungen betont, hat sie Traumata in eine alltägliche Erfahrung verwandelt. In ihrer Vorstellung sind wir alle Opfer und Überlebende des Traumas der Grenzen sprachlicher Abbildung. ("Genealogie" 117)

In other words, Caruth uses (or abuses, in Kansteiner's view) trauma to illustrate a specific notion about history and the limitations of language and representability.[11] Equating the suffering of trauma victims with the "traumatic" aspects of all human communication, Caruth both aestheticizes and structuralizes trauma. The roots of this "structural metaphor of trauma" can, in part, be traced back to the psychoanalytical notion of structural trauma, but Caruth uses this psychoanalytic legacy in an expansive way so that trauma becomes a pervasive "cultural metaphor" that "encompasses all of human history and culture" (Kansteiner, "Testing" 113).[12] On the continuum of trauma concepts, her approach can be situated at the pole of the abstract, tropological, and metaphorical; it is problematically devoid of any historical specificity, blurring the distinction between historical and structural trauma. One of the main dangers of this kind of structuralizing approach, according to Greg Forter, is that "the 'structuralization' of history itself" can be "a way of evading historical responsibility" (281). If trauma is not connected to specific traumatogenic events and circumstances (i.e., specific experiences at the level of the individual or specific historical events or conditions at the level of the collective) and instead treated as something inherent in the structures of human experience in general, trauma discourse risks losing its power to call for individual and political responsibility and action regarding various wrongs and traumatizing conditions.[13]

Hence, while the emergence of trauma studies in the humanities has often been seen in connection with the ethical turn,[14] the increasingly generalized usage of the

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11 On the problematic implications of using trauma as the foundation for general theories of representation and signification, see also Susannah Radstone's "Trauma Studies."

12 Kansteiner paraphrases the psychoanalytical notion of structural trauma as a concept capturing the "ontogenetic challenges of childhood and adolescence that all members of our species have to master" ("Testing" 114).

13 For an excellent discussion of structural versus historical trauma, see LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.

14 In his 1995 article "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," Hartman, like others, explicitly establishes a connection between the emergence of literary trauma studies and the ethical turn in the humanities: "Trauma studies provide a more natural transition to a 'real' world often falsely split off that of the university, as if the one were activist and engaged and the other self-absorbed and detached. There is an opening that leads from trauma studies to public, especially mental health issues, an opening with ethical, cultur-

term has, as Kansteiner stresses, resulted in a tendency to abandon "die historische und moralische Präzision […] deren Förderung das Konzept ursprünglich gedient hatte" ("Genealogie" 109). In contrast, many literary texts on trauma (and all of my chosen texts) explore what trauma signifies for an individual at least as much as they explore what trauma signifies for a culture or a cultural condition. These Romantic and postmodern novels, with their detailed explorations of specific traumatic incidents and their effects on individuals, call for approaches that do justice to trauma as a life-shattering experience and do not reduce it to a universal human condition. These texts ask for approaches that revalue and rethink the importance of ethics in the practice of trauma studies. A few recent publications in literary trauma studies do acknowledge the need for a more profound engagement with ethical concerns.[15] As Herrero and Baelo-Allué assert, "[t]rauma and ethics are two terms inextricably linked. In fact, it is difficult to deal with trauma without taking into account the relevance of ethical criticism" ("Introduction" 9). These approaches return to one of the founding impulses of trauma studies; however, at the same time, they reconceptualize it and push the commitment to ethics further, thereby functioning as a corrective to one of the problematic developments in the field. My readings of trauma novels are also intended to contribute to this renewed attention to ethical concerns. Novels such as *Fugitive Pieces* and *The Hiding Place* are deeply concerned with trauma and ethics, exploring issues of guilt, the relations between victims and perpetrators, as well as the ethical complexities of narrating and sharing trauma.

In addition, I contend that psychological and psychiatric trauma discourses can help literary critics counteract the tendency to adopt generalizing approaches. Traumatic stress studies strive to define the boundaries between traumatic and nontraumatic stressors as well as between healthy coping strategies and symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. With the exception of some psychoanalytical approaches, psychological trauma discourses refrain from structuralizing trauma,[16] valuing the specificity of traumatic experiences and offering detailed and differentiated analyses of the complex short- and long-term effects of different kinds of

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al, and religious implications" (544). On trauma studies and the ethical turn, see also Stef Craps' *Trauma and Ethics in the Novels of Graham Swift*.

15　See especially Herrero and Baelo-Allué's essay collection *Between the Urge to Know and the Need to Deny* (2011), as well as Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sontag's collection *Other People's Pain* (2011).

16　To some extent, expansive tendencies can also be observed in the empirical, historical model of trauma in psychological and psychiatric discourses, notably through the construction of intergenerational trauma reaching out to the third generation, but, as Kansteiner highlights, there is still a crucial "difference in scale" ("Testing" 113). For a more detailed discussion of the intergenerational transmission of trauma see Chapter Six.

trauma. The fictional texts discussed in this study share some of the concerns of these kinds of psychological studies, including a focus on intrapersonal processes, on the dynamics and crises of memory and identity, and on how trauma victims (re)construct their life-stories around or above the black hole of trauma. Hence, a two-pronged, interdisciplinary approach to reading fictional trauma narratives may help to bridge the gap between literary and certain theoretical trajectories, allowing us to redefine trauma less as a general cultural condition and more as a specific – if multi-faceted and complex – aspect of human experience.

While the main focus in my corpus of texts is individual rather than collective trauma, several of them also thematize the intersections between individual and collective aspects. Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*, for example, signals time and again that individual trauma cannot be separated from its collective dimensions, constructing the personal as inherently political. Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, moreover, explores in what ways historical trauma can affect a community and in what ways a traumatized individual interacts with different cultural communities. In trauma theory, collective dimensions of trauma have also received increasing attention in recent years. Consequently, it is important to discuss how collective dimensions of trauma have been theorized. Generally speaking, the tendency to structuralize and universalize trauma has been particularly prominent in treatments of the collective aspects of trauma. Some literary scholars have attempted to (re)introduce empirical and historical dimensions into their discussions of collective trauma, but they often seem to remain caught up in the structural paradigm popularized by Caruth. Kaplan, for example, discusses "trauma culture" in a manner unlike Caruth: she is not interested in the allegedly traumatic elements inherent in all communication, representation, and history but in the "cultural politics" of specific traumas such as colonialism, World War II, and 9/11.[17] Yet she allows a Caruthian gesture of generalization to enter through the backdoor when she claims that media consumers, readers of stories, or viewers of films about trauma often suffer from "vicarious or secondary trauma" (21, 39). Kaplan even maintains that "most people encounter trauma through the media" and, as a result, proposes to focus on "so-called 'mediatized trauma'" (2),[18] evading the question of whether or not the term

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17 A critical and perceptive discussion of trauma in the context of 9/11 can be found in Marc Redfield's "Virtual Trauma." Redfield coins the term "virtual trauma" to capture how much this "cultural trauma" emerged as a "trauma of mediation and transmission" that revolved around a "hypermediated event" which developed its full force mainly through the pervasive media coverage and the "general commemorative frenzy" following the event itself (56-57, 61). On this subject also see Redfield's *The Rhetoric of Terror*.

18 A few years before Kaplan, Hartman (in his 2003 article) briefly discussed the idea of media consumers being traumatized by the flood of images of trauma: "A secondary traumatization threatens the bystander who views mechanically transmitted pictures of

"trauma" is still justified in this context.[19] It is through the lens of such a universalizing approach to trauma that Kaplan diagnoses "entire cultures or nations" as suffering from the impact of trauma (1). Kirby Farrell in *Post-Traumatic Culture* similarly argues that trauma and "posttraumatic *themes*" permeate whole cultures (7). His notion of a posttraumatic culture is based on the belief that "we are creatures susceptible to infectious fear and arousal" and on the assumption that "contagiousness" is a "significant quality of post-traumatic stress" (12):

Because of our capacity for suggestibility, post-traumatic stress can be seen as a category of experience that mediates between a specific individual's injury and a group or even a culture. […] In cultural applications, then, it is useful to see post-traumatic experience as a sort of critically responsive interface between people. (12)

As Kansteiner rightly points out, Farrell defines trauma "both empirically-historically as well as structurally" and thus, like Kaplan, exemplifies the tendency to "interpret[] more and more aspects of human existence under the sign of trauma" ("Testing" 117). Both critics put the focus on what should be termed "cultural trauma" rather than "collective trauma."

Approaches to collective dimensions of trauma that are less universalizing and more historically oriented can be found in the field of sociology. The sociologist Kai Erikson was one of the first to explore in depth how trauma can affect communities. In his seminal article "Notes on Trauma and Community" (1995), he discusses how trauma can disrupt and damage a community but also hold the community together: "So communal trauma, let's say, can take two forms, either alone or in combination: damage to the tissues that hold human groups intact, and the creation of social climates, communal moods, that come to dominate a group's spirit"

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violence and sorrow from all over the world" ("Trauma" 258). At the same time, Hartman speculates that the "routinization of shock" produced by the media may not always lead to "post-traumatic stress" but can instead have the effect of "desensitization" (269). Yet even though Hartman's perspective is in some ways more critical than Kaplan's, the use of the term "post-traumatic stress" in the context of media consumers is still a problematically broad application of the notion of trauma. For a detailed and perceptive criticism of the idea that media and film can produce trauma see Kansteiner's "Genealogie" 129-33.

19 The notion of vicarious trauma was first discussed in the context of psychiatry, in terms of the psychiatrist's response to his or her patient's trauma (see for example Laub's "Bearing Witness"). However, as Modlinger and Sonntag rightly assert, while this notion may be appropriate to the study of psychiatric listening, "it becomes ethically problematic when transferred imprudently and without distinction to literature and literary and cultural criticism" ("Other People's Pain" 8).

(190). Examining several incidents of historical trauma – including a devastating flood in Buffalo Creek, a mountain hollow in West Virginia – Erikson explores the complex dynamics of "traumatized communities." Other sociologists, for example Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, have also investigated the impact of historical traumatic events on collectives and communities, often in connection with the textures and ruptures of "collective memory." In *Frames of Remembrance* (1994), Irwin-Zarecka argues that traumatic experience is a common catalyst of "communities of memory." Although "it is often the victims of traumas who most immediately and most 'naturally' bond together," Irwin-Zarecka also emphasizes that for the construction of memory communities, "personal relevance of the traumatic memory" can be more important than "personal witness to the trauma" (49-50). Because the meaning ascribed to an historical event (not the actual event and its witnesses) defines communities of memory, their boundaries can shift considerably over time (48). Like Caruth, Kaplan, and Farrell, then, Erikson and Irwin-Zarecka investigate collective dimensions of trauma – but with fundamental differences. The discrepancy between them reveals once more that the parameters of individual versus collective do not necessarily coincide with the two poles on the continuum of trauma concepts: these sociological approaches investigate collective aspects of trauma in empirical, historical, and, thus, specific and concrete rather than structural and abstract terms. Here, interdisciplinary perspectives can help us (re)assess recent developments in the field regarding collective dimensions of trauma.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to build the framework for an interdisciplinary study of my corpus of Romantic and postmodern trauma novels by bringing into dialogue the voices of literary trauma writing, literary trauma studies, and psychological and psychiatric studies. As I have tried to signal in the preceding pages, it is precisely the juxtaposition of literary trauma theory with psychology and psychiatry that allows us to see the problematic aspects of influential theorizations of trauma and allows for a rethinking of the field's basic tenets. The idea is not to treat traumatic stress studies as the master discourse that can answer all questions and resolve the cruxes of literary trauma writing. Rather, the purpose of the dialogue is to discover what a listening across disciplinary boundaries, what a mutual listening to the various kinds of testimonies in different disciplines has to offer – in the same spirit as Hartman's original characterization of the general impulse behind literary trauma studies: "There is more *listening*, more *hearing* of words within words, and a greater openness to *testimony*" ("Traumatic Knowledge" 541).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRAUMA:
A SHORT INTRODUCTION

In order to contextualize key notions from Romantic-period and contemporary mental sciences, a short overview of the history of trauma is apposite. Historical investigations of trauma are usually structured as a chronological series of milestone events that attracted particular attention to the phenomenon of trauma and as a succession of physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists who engaged in significant ways with the traumas resulting from these events. Commonly, the milestone these studies begin with is John Erichsen's diagnosis in the 1860s of a condition caused by railway accidents known as "concussion of the spine" or "railway spine." While Erichsen held that "disturbance to the nervous system might be physically produced in railway accidents," succeeding investigations of railway spine symptoms shifted the focus from organic and pathoanatomical to more psychological and psychosomatic explanations (Brown, "Posttraumatic" 502). Trauma here emerges as a product of the railway age; it is commonly associated with the rise of "technological and statistical society that can generate, multiply and quantify the 'shocks' of modern life" (Luckhurst, *Trauma Question* 19). Trauma's aetiological roots, then, are sunk in similar soil to those of Romanticism: industrialization. The emergence of Romanticism was fuelled by the wave of industrialization several decades earlier; the Romantics criticized the societal transformations and value shifts driven by the industrial revolution. Thomas Pfau implicitly calls attention to these connections when he diagnoses the period between 1800 and 1815 as a time where "trauma" was the dominant "mood," concerned with the "traumatic shock of economic, political and cultural modernity" (17). Yet, as Pfau also acknowledges, his discussion of trauma favours a "trans-individual and structural-discursive" conception (21), which differs considerably from the notion of "railway spine," which identified the concrete impact of a specific "shock" of modern technology on individual subjects. The appearance of the notion of "railway spine" is a seminal moment in the history of psychological trauma; however, as Esther Fischer-Homberger asserts, it was not until later in the century that the term "traumatic neurosis" came into use ("Railway Spine" 98). A crucial example is the 1889 study *Die traumatischen Neurosen* by German neurologist Herman Oppenheim, which focused mainly on changes in the central nervous system of railway spine sufferers (van der Kolk, "History" 20).

Pierre Janet, Jean-Martin Charcot, and Sigmund Freud, who explored hysteria and located its roots in childhood sexual trauma, are the next key figures in the history of trauma.[20] With these theorists, the focus of trauma theory shifted to the pri-

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20 For an overview of how Charcot, Janet, and Freud investigated trauma and hysteria, see for example Bessel van der Kolk's "History."

vate and domestic realm, the sphere of the family. However, as Adami notes, general "interest in trauma declined" at the beginning of the twentieth century (9). It seems that another historical event, one that affected society on a larger scale, was needed to reawaken interest in the phenomenon of trauma: the First World War, with its trench warfare, where the horrors of war reached a previously unimaginable intensity. The sufferings of a significant number of soldiers were diagnosed as "shell shock," a condition that was first thought to be a physical affliction caused by exploding shells but that gradually came to be reinterpreted as a psychological affliction (Brown, "Posttraumatic" 505). The evolving notion of "shell shock" also had a considerable impact on Freud's theoretical link between hysteria and sexual childhood trauma. As Harold Merskey stresses, during and after the war, so many individuals suffered from symptoms closely resembling "hysteria" that it became impossible to locate its cause chiefly in childhood sexual experiences and to see "hysteria" as an illness of women only (493).[21]

After the First World War, however, the study of trauma was again neglected until the outbreak of the Second World War; the considerable number of individuals suffering from either battle neurosis or concentration camp syndrome generated renewed attention (Merskey 494).[22] The Holocaust has since played a pivotal role in the discussion of trauma, to the extent that it often figures, in the words of Whitehead, as "a universal trope for traumatic history" or even as "a universal cipher of suffering" (*Memory* 151).[23] The Vietnam War was the next milestone event that significantly contributed to a growing awareness of traumatic stress and its profound impact on individuals; it played a pivotal role in convincing the medical and psychiatric professions to officially recognize the effects of trauma. By 1980, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was incorporated into the main psychiatric handbook, the DSM, which triggered a wave – an "explosion," according to Bessel van der Kolk (" History" 31) – of publications on the subject. Finally, the False Memory Debate in America in the 1990s brought to the fore, for the first time since Freud's theory of hysteria, issues of childhood, sexual, and family trauma, which were now, under the influence of the feminist movement, heavily politicized and discussed on a larger scale.

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21 In this context, see also Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he discusses dreams in relation to traumatic neuroses and war neuroses.

22 According to van der Kolk, much of the work of psychiatrists who were active during WWI was largely forgotten by the time WWII broke out, an important exception being the work of Abram Kardiner, which proved influential "for the remainder of the 20th century" ("History" 26).

23 For a perceptive criticism of rhetorics of "singularity" and "uniqueness" regarding the Holocaust, see Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*.

This sequence of events is, in a nutshell, the common framework of historical conceptualizations trauma. The synopsis is relevant both as general background and as an illustration of the marginal position children's and women's traumas have occupied in the field in relation to historical traumas. In general, historical events, notably war and genocide, have been the major drivers of the study of traumatic stress; it has taken much longer for the significance of individual, private traumas to be widely acknowledged. As Edward Brown asserts, while the impact of deeply distressing experiences has always been recognized, specific concepts and theories emerged only when traumatic injury involved "social conflict over the responsibility of corporations and nations," as was the case with victims of railway accidents or shell-shocked soldiers ("Posttraumatic" 501, 507). Between 1895 and 1974, as Fischer-Homberger stresses, the investigation of trauma focused almost exclusively on its impact on white men, while male violence towards women and children was generally neglected ("Medizingeschichte" 290). Concepts like "rape trauma syndrome" (first described in 1974), "battered woman syndrome," and "abused child syndrome" (which were identified soon after) paved the way for a gradual shift in thinking (291), a shift that is also reflected in the literary discourses on trauma. Through its thematic focus on childhood and family trauma, this study aims to contribute to raising awareness about these long-neglected types of trauma and signals that further attention to children's and women's traumatic experiences is a political and ethical necessity.

To a large extent, the inclusion or exclusion of certain kinds of trauma in scientific, public, and literary discourses is a political issue. From a political perspective, however, a different dimension of generalizations in relation to trauma comes into view: while the generalizations prominent in the work of Caruth and others are problematic in the way they turn trauma into an omnipresent metaphor for a cultural condition, some generalizations regarding trauma are politically necessary. A rhetoric of singularity, which validates only a limited number of specific kinds of experiences as traumatic, is politically and ethically dangerous. In this respect, a certain level of generalization – "inclusiveness" might be the more appropriate term – is required to prevent trauma discourses from perpetuating a "hierarchy of suffering" (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 9). Indeed, it took some time for existing hierarchies of suffering to be recognized, especially those between the Holocaust and other genocides, between 9/11 and other historical events with wide-ranging collective effects, and between trauma in a non-domestic versus domestic context. The acknowledgment that domestic traumas like sexual abuse can cause symptoms similar to those caused by experiences of war was a seminal moment in trauma history, made official by the inclusion of PTSD as a psychiatric category in the DSM-III in 1980. Interestingly, the founding figures of literary and cultural trauma theory initially pursued a non-inclusive approach and focused almost exclusively on trauma in the context of the Holocaust (e.g., Caruth, Langer, Laub, Felman, Hartman, and LaCapra) –

and used this specific type of traumatic experience as the basis on which to establish their notions of the inherently traumatic nature of culture, history, postmodernity, and so forth. It is here that the complex and paradoxical relation of trauma to the rhetoric of generality versus singularity manifests itself *par excellence*.

While the historical outline of trauma sketched above constitutes a significant point of reference for my analysis, I want to depart from this traditional trajectory and relate a version of the history of trauma that is tailored to my corpus of texts. Bearing in mind that there seems to be a general consensus about starting the history of psychic trauma with Erichsen's "railway spine," I shift the starting point backwards in time in order to contextualize Romantic trauma fiction within the mental sciences of the period. The flourishing field of contemporary traumatic stress studies constitutes the second main point of focus.

Trauma psychology is not only important for contextualizing postmodern trauma novels; it also serves as a crucial reference point for a fuller understanding of Romantic trauma fiction. While Romantic-period discourses allow us to understand the novels' conceptualizations of trauma within the context of contemporary views on mental illness, trauma psychology offers important insights into Romantic literary psychologies of trauma for which the mental sciences of the time did not yet have the vocabulary and conceptual framework. As William Brewer rightly emphasizes, although writers like Godwin and Shelley wanted to make contributions to the "science of man" in their "psychological fiction," believing that "the mind can be observed, anatomized, and experimented with," we should not forget that "many of its 'enigmas' cannot be explained by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philosophy and science" (19-25). Consequently, I choose an approach to Romantic trauma writing that is essentially two-pronged, and thus, in the terminology of Peter van Drunen and Jeroen Jansz, neither purely "historicist" nor "presentist" ("Introduction" 4). My approach is "historicist" in the way it anchors Romantic trauma novels in their historical background; at the same time, I strive to make elements of what van Drunen and Jansz derogatorily label "presentism" fruitful – not by uncritically superimposing a mindset of the present on texts of the past but by being consciously and self-reflexively anachronistic in order to reveal resonances between the two.[24]

The dialogue between contemporary trauma psychology and Romantic-period psychological and psychiatric discourses in fact reveals a surprising overlap of cen-

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24 In this respect, my approach bears a certain resemblance to the methodology Alan Richardson uses in *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*. In the introduction, Richardson writes: "I have become convinced that informed comparison with models, findings, and controversies from the present are needed to help bring certain Romantic-era developments and debates into focus. It is less a matter of insisting on resemblance than of listening for resonance" (3).

tral concerns. Such concerns, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, include the following: how and why strong affects and experiences with exceedingly high levels of emotion can lead to mental illness; how body and mind are interrelated in the genesis and pathology of psychic disorders; in what ways characteristics of individuals and environments influence the genesis and the course of mental disorders, recovery processes, and so forth. As this recurrence, or perhaps even continuity, of concerns suggests, it would be problematic to position contemporary psychiatry as the master discourse holding all the answers about mental illness or trauma. As Porter asserts in *A Social History of Madness*, "even today we possess no rational consensus upon the nature of mental illness": "Madness has been and remains an elusive thing" (8). Porter wrote this in 1987, but even now, more than twenty years later, his statement has not lost its validity, despite continuous and impressive advances in the field. From this perspective, we may well assume that Romantic-period and contemporary discourses can illuminate each other and help elucidate the mental topographies of Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction.

One last introductory point regarding my approach to trauma and psychology is required. Given that "Sigmund Freud remains at the centre of psychological approaches to Romanticism" (Wilson 420), it is important that I clarify what the status of Freud and psychoanalysis is within my theoretical framework. While I agree with Joel Faflak (whose investigation of Romantic poetry and Freudian psychoanalysis in *Romantic Psychoanalysis* is one important example here) and others that Freud's writings, in some ways, remain a significant theoretical point of reference, I draw on a larger, richer, and more current body of psychological and psychiatric studies of trauma, giving space to voices that are not usually heard in literary criticism and showing what directions the investigation of traumatic stress has taken since Freud. This diverse, flourishing field is inspiring in its contemporariness, currency, and highly dynamic nature. Importantly, traumatic stress studies have developed conceptions of trauma considerably and, on the whole, moved away from Freudian psychoanalysis. As Luckhurst emphasizes, there is a remarkable "disjunction between the emphasis on Freud in cultural theories and the complete absence of any psychoanalytic influence on contemporary psychiatric definitions of trauma. Whatever one thinks of the steady wane of the influence of Freud on psychiatry, this situation has at least to be acknowledged – yet rarely is in cultural and literary theory" ("Mixing Memory" 504).[25] In addition, psychological approaches to trauma

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25 On the need to rethink the status of psychoanalysis for literary studies, see also Richardson, who critiques the value of psychoanalysis to cognitive and neuroscientific approaches, maintaining that the psychoanalytical (and post-structuralist) assumptions "currently underwriting much work in literary studies are wearing thin and need, at least, to be supplemented by new models and theories" ("Cognitive" 533).

other than psychoanalytical ones are more in line with my general theoretical disagreement with approaches that generalize and structuralize trauma, especially given that Freud can, in fact, be seen as the initiator of structural perspectives on trauma.[26] Thus, while cross-references to Freud's writing and theorizations of trauma will be provided where relevant, the historical and theoretical framing of Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction that I undertake primarily relies on Romantic psychology and psychiatry on the one hand and on contemporary traumatic stress studies on the other.

A STAGE OF TRANSITION: ROMANTIC-PERIOD MENTAL SCIENCES

The trauma novels of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley were written during an important period of transition in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, one characterized by significant expansions as well as considerable changes and advances. In the eighteenth century, as Michael Stone emphasizes, the study of the mind was shaped by the interlacing of philosophy and psychology, and "[i]t was not until the nineteenth century that the two disciplines were teased apart, with psychology more allied with physiology" (54). There was, in the words of James Goodwin, a "shift from a philosophy of the mind to a science of the mind" (49).[27] This trend towards scientification and specialization was contingent on the "advent of medical specialism," which was "a phenomenon of the nineteenth century" (Shorter 1). Despite the development of more specialized mental *sciences*, however, the exchange across

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26 As Forter emphasizes, there is a significant shift from Freud's early trauma writing, where he shows a concern with the specificity of trauma, to his late trauma writing, which "seeks instead to make ungendered human misery at once historically inexplicable (that is, insusceptible of historical analysis) and ontologically ineradicable" (269).

27 Philosophical speculation was increasingly complemented and/or replaced by physiological research and experimental study; the "Scientific Method" rapidly gained influence, driven by a "passion for measurement" and aimed at a more objective and systematic analysis of the human brain and consciousness (O'Boyle 148). Another example to mention in this context is the work of Franz Gall, a German physiologist dedicated to the study of the brain, who asserted that "the differences in the size of the cortical organs might be determined by examining the shape of the head" (O'Boyle 155). The idea that measurements of head size and shape could be related to underlying cortical structures and brain functions was quickly popularized and developed as "phrenology." Phrenology, as Cherie O'Boyle observes, "for those living in the 19th-century era of scientific progress […] seems like science" (155).

disciplinary boundaries remained important. While psychology gradually freed itself from its status as a branch of philosophy, different schools of philosophy continued to have a powerful impact on the different strands of psychology and psychiatry (Weckowicz and Liebel-Weckowicz 108). These lines of influence across disciplinary boundaries ran not in unilateral but in bilateral ways: "[A] distinctively international scientific culture [...] seeped readily into the philosophical and literary discourses of the age" (Richardson, *British Romanticism* 7). This kind of interdisciplinarity is important to keep in mind when studying trauma novels by writers like Godwin, whose "intellectual milieu in the 1790s situates him as an intimate of medical men" (Monsam 110). As Brewer emphasizes, Godwin as well as Shelley displayed a strong interest in texts concerned with the science of the mind, including those by John Locke, David Hartley, and Robert Burton (23-26). Unlike today, scientific texts were accessible to readers beyond a narrow circle of specialists; medical texts were, as Peter Logan highlights, "accessible to any well-educated reader" (11).

Besides the flourishing of psychological discourses in general, one important development in the field of the mental sciences is crucial to consider as a context for Romantic trauma narratives: the development of psychiatry. It was not until the Romantic period that the field of psychiatry began to establish itself as a discipline:

Before the end of the eighteenth century, there was no such thing as psychiatry. Although individual doctors had occupied themselves with the care of the insane and had written manuals about it since the time of the ancient Greeks, psychiatry did not then exist as a discipline to which a group of physicians devoted themselves with a common sense of identity. (Shorter 1)

Edward Shorter here locates the birth of psychiatry and its increasing institutionalization in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[28] Historians of psychiatry generally agree that this era was characterized by a new and particularly strong interest in pathological forms of the human mind and psyche, which came to be fundamentally reconceptualized. As Ruud Abma highlights, "it was only from the late eighteenth century onward that insanity became a medical issue" (94). In other words, the Romantic period was when the vocabulary of mental disease, of mental *illness*, was introduced into discourses about insanity.

This reconceptualization of insanity in medical terms had far-reaching implications, representing a move away from the classicist notion of madness as outlined by Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*:

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28 On the institutionalization of psychiatry, see also Porter: "In all the advanced nations, psychiatry gained a public face (if little prestige and much distrust) after 1800, and psychiatrists found public employment in universities, especially in Germany, and in asylums" (*Madness* 153).

For classicism, madness in its ultimate form is man in his immediate relation to his animality, without other reference, without any recourse. [...] at this extreme point, madness was less than ever linked to medicine; nor could it be linked to the domain of correction. Unchained animality could be mastered only by *discipline* and *brutalizing*. (75)

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourses of insanity, the prevailing view was that "in losing his reason, the essence of his humanity, the madman had lost his claims to be treated as a human being" (Scull 86).[29] It was only during the Romantic period that the "ontological status" of the madman moved from animality to humanity; after this shift, the lunatic "remained in essence a man; a man lacking in self-restraint and order, but a man for all that" (Scull 87). Released from notions of animality, mental disorders were reconceptualized as treatable and curable; mind doctors began to dedicate themselves to an evolving therapeutic project. The conceptual shift from madness to mental illness and from the madman as a beast to the madman as a human being went hand in hand.

In the process, the mind of the madman became increasingly worthy of investigation, at least in some branches of the newly emerging field of psychiatry. Porter describes this "psychological turn" that occurred in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century (*Madness* 127): "This emerging model of madness as a psychological condition pointed to an alternative target for psychiatric enquiry: rather than the organs of the body, the doctor had to address the patient's psyche, as evidenced by his behaviour" (129). Dedicated to psychological analysis and increasingly interested in treatment and therapy, physicians and alienists of the time started to explore the causes of mental disorders and attempted to classify different types of disorders systematically. In the course of this development, severe forms of mental illness as well as milder forms of mental disturbance gained increasing attention. This shift was closely connected to the belief that "the madman does not constitute a separate category from the sane individual," but that, as Allan Ingram emphasizes, "[h]is mind, rather, stands towards one end of a spectrum of human minds, sharing many of the mental features and processes of other minds, and sharing, too, their uniqueness" (61).

The shift to more fluid boundaries between sanity and insanity that the transition from classicist to Romantic views of madness precipitated is reflected in the Romantic trauma novels discussed in this study: these texts are concerned not only with madness in a narrow sense but also with a range of manifestations of the

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29 Andrew Scull asserts that in this period, "the lunatic occupied a wholly unenviable ontological status"; he illustrates this ontological status by quoting Richard Mead's assertion in 1751 that there is "no disease more to be dreaded than madness" and Samuel Johnson's statement in 1753 that madness brought "the mighty reasoners of the earth, below even the insects that crawl upon it" (58).

pathological. The protagonist-narrators in Wollstonecraft's, Godwin's, and Shelley's novels are all traumatized in one way or another and suffer from different mental disturbances; however, the severity of the disruptions of their "wounded mind," in Wollstonecraft's words (74), varies considerably. For example, the eponymous narrator of Godwin's *Mandeville* and Beatrice in Shelley's *Valperga* suffer from severe fits of madness, while Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman* displays a number of posttraumatic symptoms but only momentarily seems on the verge of madness proper. Shelley's *Mathilda*, moreover, explores disorders that present a number of mental and bodily symptoms but that, for the most part, cause no radical breakdown of cognitive and intellectual capacities. These texts, then, resonate with the idea that the "difference between the sane and the mad is not qualitative but quantitative" (Faubert 88) – an idea which, as Michelle Faubert also points out, is encapsulated in the following statement by asylum keeper Thomas Bakewell: "[L]et it be observed in this place, that perhaps every human being possesses the seeds of this disease, and that it is possible to excite it in every individual" (*Domestic Guide* 25).

The conviction that the mentally ill are human beings whose mental disruptions merit systematic psychological observation underlies the emergence of case histories as an important method and genre in the field in several European countries. The Frenchman Philippe Pinel, who was widely read and influential at the time, "described in great detail and with great compassion the personal histories of the mentally ill" (Stone 62). A particularly noteworthy example from the German context is Christian Spiess' *Biographien der Wahnsinnigen* (1796), containing "10 extensive case histories, each 30 to 70 pages long – the first detailed accounts of individual patients to have appeared in the literature," which demonstrate how "the tenets of both Enlightenment and Romanticism – close observation of, and sympathetic interest in, the individual – were united" (Stone 56). In addition, British mental scientists such as Thomas Arnold, William Perfect, and Joseph Mason Cox wrote case histories of their patients (see Hunter and Macalpine 468-71, 502, 594). Important figures in the field, such as Erasmus Darwin and Alexander Crichton, explicitly emphasized the importance of psychological observation and close analysis in their writings, thereby enacting a shift not only towards perceiving the mentally ill as human beings but also, at least to some extent, towards engaging with them as individuals. As Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine emphasize, "Darwin was one of the first medical men who tried to take a serious interest in his patients' minds and discover how they came to feel, think and act" (547). Similarly, Gerold Sedlmayr asserts that the practice of case studies "involves an acknowledgment not only of the uniqueness of each case, but also of the respective patient as a distinct (human) subject" (53).

This awakening clinical gaze, with its attention to patients, their symptoms and reactions, their individuality and life-stories, constitutes an important context for

Godwin's and Shelley's texts. In the 1832 preface to *Fleetwood*, where he gives an account of the composition of *Caleb Williams*, Godwin highlights the idea that psychological exploration is at the heart of his fictional writing: he states that he is dedicated to "the analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind," using his "metaphysical dissecting knife" (*Fleetwood* 10). As Brewer rightly suggests, Godwin's poetical credo resonates powerfully with Thomas Reid's philosophy concerning the importance of "dissecting" the mind: "All that we know of the body, is owing to anatomical dissection and observation, and it must be by an anatomy of the mind that we can discover its powers and principles" ("Inquiry" 431). Similar to Romantic-era case studies, a literary text like *Mandeville* examines in detail the dynamics of the disrupted psyche, with the view of contributing to a science of the mind.[30]

Yet I contend that Romantic trauma novels like *Mandeville* engage more fully with the subjectivity of the mentally ill than Romantic-era psychiatry. It is crucial that the author's "dissecting knife" operates in the background rather than the foreground. In first-person narratives like *Mandeville*, the psychiatrist's close scrutiny of the patient is refigured as a literary performance of self-scrutiny; the detailed description of a patient's current state and his or her biographical story (an element typical of case studies) is translated into the fictional self-narration of a mentally disturbed individual. In this way, literary texts push the shift to humanity and individuality, the interest in an individual's psyche and his or her life-story, to a different level: the subject with a disrupted mind is given a voice and permission to tell his or her story. Godwin's and Shelley's protagonist-narrators Mandeville and Mathilda are given room to tell their own life-stories and to perform the anatomy of their minds – without the mediating or controlling presence of a heterodiegetic or authorial narrator-figure. While the analytical, anatomizing gaze does remain present at the level of the implied author, it is nonetheless important that these texts are

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30 In Freud's works and therapeutic practices, which circle around the patient's narration and the analyst's re-scripting of the patient's narrative, the two traditions outlined above – psychiatric case studies and literary psycho-analyses – seem to converge in an interplay of the scientific gaze and the literary imagination. Freud often turned to literature to illustrate and support his theories, discussing, for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*Interpretation* I 261-66) as well as German novelist Wilhelm Jensen's story *Gradiva* in his essay "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*." Moreover, in *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud meditates that it "strikes [him] as strange" that his early case histories "should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science" (160). By comparing his case histories to literary texts, Freud, in the words of Faflak, "marks psychoanalysis as a seismic confrontation between the reason of philosophy and the phantasy of literature and the literary" (*Romantic Psychoanalysis* 7).

constructed around the illusion that readers are getting an internal rather than external picture of the disrupted mind. Through fictional acts of "dissecting," then, these literary trauma narratives not only endorse the belief that the life-stories and psychological characteristics of mentally unstable subjects matter, but they also push the emphasis on individual subjectivity further than the emerging psychiatric discourses and the genre of case studies. *The Wrongs of Woman*, which has a particularly complex narrative structure, provides a combination of external and internal perspectives, but through its long sections of first-person narration, the text, like *Mandeville* and *Mathilda*, dramatizes processes of self-narration and self-analysis.

In order to further substantiate the claim that Romantic-period literary texts take contemporaneous psychiatric trends to a different level, I want to discuss in detail two issues: language and the status of childhood. In *The Madhouse of Language*, Ingram discusses Foucault's exploration of classical-era concepts of madness in terms of two major theses: "that madness during the age of reason was subjected to an increasingly rigorous physical confinement, and that what madness had to say for itself was effectively reduced to silence" (5). Like Porter, Ingram emphasizes that Foucault's "great confinement" thesis needs to be relativized: the term "great" suggests much higher numbers than historians have been able to prove.[31] Nevertheless, Ingram supports Foucault's "linguistic repression" thesis: "While the religiously inspired madman or woman, or the witty fool, of earlier periods was granted a privileged role within the social discourse of sanity, a more rational age heard nothing but the threat of impending 'unreason' in the unrecognised logic of the mad" (6). It is hardly surprising that at a time when madmen where denied the ontological status of human beings and the curability of their conditions was doubted, there was little motivation to listen to their words. In addition, as Ingram argues, the urge to restrain and silence the mad was also caused by "a very real fear of the terrifying proximity of insanity" and the "pressing need to distinguish between sane and insane" (12).

Did the Romantic-period emphasis on the mental and psychological in the aetiology and treatment of mental illness result in an increased interest in the language of the mad? To some extent, mind doctors who wrote case studies drew on what the mad themselves had to say, and the approach known as moral management – an approach to mental disorders that rejected cruelty and physical restraint in favour of a re-education of the patient in the spirit of moral discipline, philanthropy, and kindness (see Scull 89-90) – also relied, in part, on the use of language in the interaction with the mentally ill. As Faubert highlights, because moral treatment focused on the mind rather than the body, it entailed the "recognition that the psychologist and the

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31 Porter judges Foucault's thesis of the "great confinement" of the mad as follows: "Though there is a certain plausibility in Foucault's interpretation, it is simplistic and over-generalized" (*Madness* 93).

patient could and should communicate" (83). Nevertheless, as Ingram cautions us, echoing Foucault's claims expressed in *Madness and Civilization*, the emergence of a "language of psychiatry" did not necessarily give a voice to madness; it often took the form of a "monologue of reason about madness" (16).[32] While moral treatment was generally celebrated for its humaneness and kindness, it is important to emphasize that the moral manager defined himself as a figure of authority, regarding his authority over the patient as "an essential aspect of his ability to treat him effectively" (Faubert 111). Sedlmayr similarly discusses the practice of the moral manager critically: "[T]he doctor-as-artist (re)creates a new human being out of the ruins to which madness has reduced him or her, and he does so by manipulating his patient" (52). As a result, in moral treatment, the physician primarily wielded the tool of language (in this case, to teach moral lessons); the treatment did not encourage the use of language as a medium for the patient's self-expression. While moral management placed more emphasis on the communication between physician and patient than most earlier and contemporary approaches to mental illness,[33] like case histories, it too was more concerned with the specialist's language than with the individual patient's language. In giving individuals with mental disorders a voice (even if only imaginatively), then, literary trauma narratives choose a more radical path. Even though moral managers advocated an egalitarian view, stressing "commonalities with the insane" (Faubert 88), it is in the fictional arena of literary texts, far more than in psychiatric discourses, that the language of the mentally ill was explored.

Another important area where literary texts of the period carry the logic of contemporary psychiatric trends further concerns the role of childhood. As early as 1764, Thomas Reid, in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, voiced a powerful plea for including childhood in studies of the "anatomy of the mind":

Could we obtain a distinct and full history of all that hath passed in the mind of a child from the beginning of life and sensation, till it grows up to the use of reason; how its infant faculties began to work, and how they brought forth and ripened all the various notions, opinions and sentiments, which we find in ourselves when we come to be capable of reflection; this

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32 Ingram explains the process of how psychiatry may silence the mad as follows: "The self-confidence of the professionals generated a new rhetoric for the expounding of theories about madness and its cure, but, in doing so, also helped to silence the spoken evidence of what the mad could have to say for themselves" (17).

33 According to Faubert, an important development of Romantic-period psychology was that it began to break up into several distinct approaches: "Romanticism, I contend, was synchronous with the reification of the discipline of psychology, which saw the field fragment into various schools, like moral management, nerve theory, and phrenology" (29).

would be a treasure of natural history, which would probably give more light into the human faculties, than all the systems of philosophers about them since the beginning of the world. (433)

This belief was endorsed by important Romantic-period scientists of the mind such as Alexander Crichton, who argued that a full understanding of the pathology of the human mind requires studying it in a state of sanity from childhood on. The mental scientist, he argued in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement* (1798), "should also be able to take a calm and clear view of every cause which tends to affect the healthy operations of mind, and to trace their effects. He should be able to go back to childhood, and see how the mind is modelled by instruction" (561).[34] Yet for both Reid and Crichton, the analysis of childhood is an activity to be pursued by mental scientists mainly with regard to their own mind, that is, as a study in self-observation and retrospective self-scrutiny – which they describe as a rather difficult undertaking. In their trauma narratives, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley put the psychological ideal of analysing childhood into practice: childhood figures as one of the main pillars in the aetiology of the pathological mind; Maria, Mandeville, and Mathilda all devote considerable attention to their childhood. Indeed, in Mandeville's case, the act of retrospectively analyzing childhood experiences is extensive and detailed, meandering over hundreds of pages. Here again, the literary discourse endorses a few key ideas more fully than the psychiatric discourse with which it resonates.

While it is essential to situate Romantic trauma writing within the specific context of Romantic psychiatry, it is also important to explore more general psychological and cultural discourses of the era, especially relating to the Romantic "birth of childhood." At the same time as Romantic writers were exploring their fascination of childhood and methods for representing the child's psyche, pedagogical and psychological discourses also began to focus on the child, redefining childhood as a distinct and special phase in the human life-cycle (van Drunen and Jansz, "Child-Rearing" 46-55). As Richardson emphasizes, the idea of an "extended, protected" and "educative" childhood became prominent during the Romantic period ("End of Childhood" 179). The child "took on a virtually unprecedented significance," and "[e]ducation was one of the most hotly contested and frequently discussed topics of what is often called the Romantic age" (Richardson, *Literature* 9, 2).[35] It was in the

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34 According to Fritz Breithaupt, similar ideas regarding the long-term impact of childhood begin to emerge in Germany around the same time, notably in the writings of Joachim Heinrich Campe and of Karl Philipp Moritz, whom he discusses as an early representative of empirical psychology (85-86).

35 Richardson's *Literature, Romanticism and Education* offers a detailed discussion of Romantic-period notions of the child and childhood, debates between important educational

"spirit of the Enlightenment" that an increasing number of "secular treatises about child-rearing" began to appear, and from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of childhood, as expressed in his 1762 treatise *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, became highly influential (van Drunen and Jansz, "Child-Rearing" 50). Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley were profoundly interested in thinkers such as Locke, Hartley, and Rousseau and in issues of education in general, and they believed that a subject's experiences and environment had a deeply formative impact on his or her personality. The emphasis on childhood in their texts, then, needs to be understood in connection with more general discourses of education. A crucial example in this context is the prison guard Jemima in *The Wrongs of Woman*, a character whose psychology Wollstonecraft portrays especially through Jemima's detailed account of her bleak childhood. Jemima's discussion of her childhood and her ensuing life-story of hardship and social adversity are in line with a powerful assertion voiced by medical practitioner James Parkinson a few years after the novel's publication: "On the treatment the child receives from his parents, during the infantine stages of his life, will, perhaps, depend much of the misery or happiness he may experience, not only in his passage through this, but through the other stages of his existence" (616). Jemima's life-story dramatizes such a close, seemingly inevitable causal connection between her childhood experiences of motherlessness and homelessness and the suffering that followed.

The characterization of Jemima also exemplifies which aspects of Romantic-period approaches to the child are foregrounded in trauma novels of the time. As Richardson emphasizes, the "Romantic child" is an "overdetermined construction" and somewhat incoherent:

[T]he Romantics, particularly Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, and De Quincey, succeeded at popularizing an image of the child which was no less powerful for being somewhat incoherent, intermingling the sentimentalism of eighteenth-century verse, the transcendentalism of Vaughan, a Lockean emphasis on the child's malleability, and a Rousseauvian faith in original innocence and 'natural' principles of growth. ("End of Childhood" 171-72)

Wollstonecraft's, Godwin's, and Shelley's trauma fiction resonates mainly with Locke's developmental model, but it also reveals a Blakean emphasis on "the child's implication in a social net of oppressive discourses" (Richardson 181); in this way, the texts largely avoid idealizing, sentimentalizing, and transcendentalizing the child. As an important counterpoint to Wordsworth's celebrations of child-

thinkers of the time, controversies about schooling, as well as trends in the emerging field of children's literature.

hood,[36] the investigation of trauma narratives brings into focus another side of Romanticism and childhood: its dark face, its horrors and tragedies. Literary depictions of childhood trauma thus illustrate, from a different angle, the pivotal position childhood assumed both in the cultural imaginary and the socio-cultural fabric of the Romantic period. These texts offer an extensive study of childhood in the light of education in general and of the severely disruptive impact of harrowing childhood experiences in particular.

Related to the pivotal role of childhood on the one hand and to the emphasis on self-narration and self-analysis on the other, there are also important overlaps between Romantic-period literary and psychological discourses relating to conceptualizations of memory. Whitehead highlights that in the Enlightenment and the Romantic period, there was a shift from a static "'retrieval' model" of memory to a "'textual' model," that is, to a more dynamic and "a more temporal, narrative conception" of memory (*Memory* 50-51). As Whitehead further emphasizes, there is a close connection between this paradigm shift in memory discourses and the flourishing of a "literature of the self" and "self-reflection" in the early nineteenth century (82-83). "Romantic memory," according to Frances Ferguson, is an individualized form of memory intimately connected to the self and "a sense of individual continuity over time" (509). It is more than a mere recording of past events; it crucially involves reflection and self-examination, that is, "the ability to see oneself in one's own past actions, to be able to recognize one's action most vividly in a redescription" (533). Ferguson convincingly connects the emergence of Romantic memory, whose roots she traces back to Locke, with literature, especially the genre of the novel (509-10). In the trauma novels of the period, Romantic memory (i.e., the re-examination and rewriting of the past in the light of later experience and reflection) is a prominent element in the literary enactment of self-analysis and self-narration – and it remains prominent in much post-Romantic trauma fiction.[37] Interestingly, Fritz Breithaupt in "The Invention of Trauma in German Romanticism" discusses the phenomenon that Ferguson labels Romantic memory under the heading of trauma. He argues that through the emergence of memory as retrospective analysis, the idea of trauma is invented as an important structure for conceptualizing the self. According to Breithaupt, the psychological forms of self-remembering and self-narration that become prominent at the time strive to "establish an institu-

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36 Richardson argues along similar lines in *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*: "Godwin advances an explicitly anti-transcendental conception of childhood which contrasts starkly with that of Wordsworth" (108).

37 As both Ferguson and Whitehead emphasize, the Romantic notion of memory is not confined to the period of Romanticism but "was carried forward into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and became central to a key strand of the 'late-modern' discourse of memory" (Whitehead, *Memory* 83).

tion of the self that can monitor the past, repeat it, and thereby turn the past wounding and weakening into strength" (83). Drawing on texts by Karl Philipp Moritz, he assigns "trauma" an inherently positive and empowering function for the self: "Trauma is invented where it is needed, where it holds a promise. This promise, as we will see, is the promise to turn weakness into strength" (77). While Breithaupt's approach is thought-provoking, it is crucial to see that he conceptualizes trauma not as a specific psychological phenomenon but rather as a general conceptual structure for thinking about selfhood. In his approach, trauma signifies little more than psychological retrospection and remembering as a form of repeating the past: "Trauma (that is, repetition) is what enables one to become oneself" (99). Moreover, trauma is figured as something the subject *resorts* to or even instrumentalizes when in need of a source of strength, while in Romantic trauma fiction, trauma functions as something that the subject is *forced* to cope with. Hence, Breithaupt's notion of trauma as a teleological structure of repetition differs fundamentally from the notion of mental wounding as involving compulsive and destructive forces that I focus on. In the following subsection, I will attempt to provide a different perspective on the idea that trauma was "invented" in Romanticism.

As we have seen so far, Romantic trauma novels engage with the psychological and psychiatric discourses of their time in multiple ways. These texts participate in Romantic psychology's focus on childhood as well as its conceptualization of memory as closely connected to identity and self-reflection; they resonate with Romantic psychiatry in their strong interest in the pathologies of the psyche and their emphasis on the fluid boundaries between sanity and insanity. However, as I have repeatedly signalled, psychological and literary discourses do not necessarily write parallel histories: the literary psychologies performed by Romantic trauma fiction move beyond contemporary psychiatry in their powerful emphasis on the language, the individuality, and the life-stories, especially the early life-stories, of mentally unstable subjects.

THE PATHOLOGICAL NOW AND THEN: ROMANTIC PSYCHIATRY AND TRAUMATIC STRESS STUDIES

In *A Social History of Madness*, Porter calls attention to the contingent nature of the meaning of mental illness:

[T]he language, ideas and associations surrounding mental illness do not have scientific meanings fixed for all time, but are better viewed as 'resources' which can be variously used by various parties for various purposes. What is mental and what is physical, what is mad and what is bad, are not fixed points but culture-relative. (10)

In other words, psychiatric theories and concepts are not timeless constants; they are cultural constructs that depend on cultural-historical frames of reference (Baer, "Geschichte" 43), and they, in turn, reveal a lot about the culture and society in which they emerge. As psychiatry started to establish itself as a discipline in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, nosology became increasingly important, that is, there were a number of attempts to classify mental disorders. Early classification systems were far less standardized than those found today in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM),[38] published by the American Psychiatric Association, and its European equivalent, the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD), and some terms have undergone significant changes of meaning.[39] However, I am not concerned here with translating Romantic-period nosologies into contemporary terminology; rather, I want to outline the central ideas and concerns of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century mental sciences that can be related to the figure of the mental wound in Romantic literature as well as to contemporary notions of the psychopathology of trauma. After discussing the general conceptual framework relating to trauma in both periods, I will investigate a few particularly contentious areas: the interrelations between the physical and the psychological, moral and ethical questions of guilt and responsibility, as well as debates about nature versus nurture or genes versus environment.

In the age of Romanticism, the concept of trauma did not yet exist in psychological and psychiatric discourses. This is not to say, however, that the term "trauma" did not exist at all: Fischer-Homberger quotes a number of German medical handbooks from the 1730s to the 1830s where the term trauma, used synonymously with the Latin term *vulnus*, denotes a physical wound, involving an injury to the skin, and thus remains situated in the realm of surgery ("Medizingeschichte" 263; "Haut" 58-59). The same use of the term can be found in English handbooks, including John Barrow's *Dictionarium Medicum Universale* (1749).[40] It is not until

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38 As Sedlmayr observes, Romantic-era psychiatry can be characterized by a general "aetiological confusion" (58) because older nosologies were being questioned while new ones were difficult to establish (see 36-40, 58-59).

39 Rolf Baer emphasizes the difficulty of relating the nosological units of individual mind doctors to late-twentieth-century diagnostic units, stressing that the same terms (e.g., "melancholia") had several meanings that differ considerably from their contemporary meanings ("Entwicklung" 11). Foucault also highlights the broadness of the term "melancholia": "At the end of the eighteenth century, all forms of madness without delirium, but characterized by inertia, by despair, by a sort of dull stupour, would be readily classified as melancholia" (124).

40 Barrow's dictionary contains an entry for "trauma" that defers to *vulnus*, defined as "a wound, or a recent and bloody solution of the union of a soft part, by a hard and sharp body in motion pressed against it, or resisting it."

roughly the middle of the nineteenth century that injury of the skin no longer appears as a defining characteristic of trauma and that the notion of an interior rather than exterior wound – though still an essentially physical one – starts to appear ("Haut" 60). Prior to the medical establishment, the literary imagination of the Romantic period, with its recurring image of a wound of the mind, dissociated the idea of a wound from physical injury. Romantic trauma novels display early figurations of the concept of psychic trauma, which in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries become, by definition, disconnected from external and visible traces. The term "wound" in the sense of a mental wound appears in many Romantic trauma narratives, including not only *The Wrongs of Woman*, *Mandeville*, and *Mathilda* but also Wollstonecraft's *Mary*, Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Godwin's *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*, and Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *The Last Man*, and *Falkner*.

While several of these texts use the term "wound" in relation to the mind, some of them also use it in reference to the heart. Mathilda emphasizes how profoundly she suffers from her "wounded heart," lamenting that her "heart was bleeding from its death's wound" (44-45). In *St Leon*, the narrator sorrowfully meditates: "My family was blasted; my wife was struck to the heart, and no mortal skill could restore the wound she had suffered" (191). Another example is found in Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, where one of Montague's letters contains the following passage: "I found your heart wounded – and into those festering wounds I infused a venom – curse not my memory – *We meet no more*" (217). In *Falkner*, the narrator first refers to the "rankling wounds of Falkner's mind" (31) but later also uses the image of the wounded "heart": "He spoke in disjointed sentences – a cold dew stood on his brow – and Elizabeth, who knew that a mysterious wound rankled in his heart, more painful than any physical injury, was eager to calm him" (73). There are, thus, certain differences among and within individual texts regarding the extent to which the "wound" is conceptualized as a *mental* and/or as an *emotional* injury.

How, then, does this idea of a mental or emotional wound, which is so prominent in literary discourses, relate to discourses of Romantic psychology and psychiatry? In psychological discourses, associationism (a theory based on the tenet that the fundamental principle structuring mental processes is the association of ideas) constitutes an important context for these literary psychologies of the wound. According to Richardson, most educational writers of the period "begin from associationist premises which render early experience and education all important" (*Literature* 52). As has repeatedly been emphasized, Wollstonecraft and Godwin were both "working from associationist premises" (12), and Shelley was, in turn, exposed to associationism through her parents. Important associationist ideas – such as the openness of the mind and the crucial impact of childhood experiences and education – constitute a general framework for understanding these writers' literary trauma narratives. This framework, constructed on the formative role of experiences

and the environment, helps explain why these writers focus on the impact of particularly intense and painful emotional experiences and emphasize the possibility that adverse life events can have a powerful impact on an individual – a central idea that later trauma theory responds to.

In addition to associationist psychology, Romantic-era psychiatry provides a discursive context for understanding literary psychologies of the wounded mind and heart. It is important to note, first of all, that a number of Romantic-period aetiologies categorize powerful emotions caused by particularly distressing experiences as one important source of mental illness. In *Zoonomia* (1796), Erasmus Darwin summarizes the three main causes of madness as follows:

Madness is sometimes produced by bodily pain, particularly I believe of a diseased liver, like convulsion and epilepsy; at other times it is caused by very painful ideas occasioned by external circumstances, as of grief or disappointment; but the most frequent cause of insanity arises from the pain of some imaginary or mistaken idea. (158)

Darwin's second cause of madness, ideas arising from "external circumstances," is the one most closely related to trauma. Another revealing source is physician and medical statistician William Black's *A Dissertation on Insanity* (1810), which includes "*A Table of the Causes of Insanity* of about one third of the Patients admitted into Bedlam" (646). Resembling Darwin's discussion, Black's table lists a number of different physical and psychical causes. It is remarkable, however, that the number of cases of insanity caused by "Misfortunes, Troubles, Disappointments, Griefs" by far exceeds all the other categories (e.g., "Fevers," "Childbed," "Family and Hereditary"). The idea that intensely negative emotions can trigger mental disorders underlies this category – and it is this idea that serves as a general framework for the notion of a mental or psychic wound. Literary trauma writing, then, may be said to choose a more specific focus for mental illness than these early psychiatric aetiologies: while Black's and Darwin's lists of the causes of mental disorders imply a general concern with the impact of adverse experiences, Godwin's, Wollstonecraft's, and Shelley's literary texts revolve around the effects of especially powerful, distressing, and painful experiences.

Like Darwin and Black, William Perfect, physician and owner of a private madhouse, compiled a list of the causes of madness. His list of non-hereditary causes includes "Child-birth, Fevers, Anxiety, excessive Grief, Frights, Intenseness of Study, irregular Living, or strong or ungoverned Passions," as well as "chronical congestions, occasioned by gluttony or idleness'" (2-3). This aetiological list reflects more closely the modern idea of trauma, both through the phrase "excessive Grief" and through its emphasis on "Anxiety" and "Frights." Moreover, Perfect's list calls attention to another widespread Romantic-era psychological notion: "the

passions." In *Observations on Insanity* (1782-86), asylum owner Thomas Arnold describes the dynamics of a mind disrupted by a powerful passion as follows:

In this species of Insanity some One Passion is in full, and complete possession of the mind; triumphs in the slavery, or desolation, of reason; and even exercises a despotic authority over all the other affections, which are rarely permitted to exert themselves but in the aid, or to appear but in the train, of this master passion. (471)

According to Hunter and Macalpine, the passions were a key element in Romantic-period views on mental illness: "[I]t was generally accepted that 'the passions' played an important part in causing disease" (552). Both Crichton and Pinel, for example, emphasize the impact of the passions in their writings. Pinel's foregrounding of "an ungovernable ambition for fame, power of glory" as a prime example of a "violent, but unfortunate passion" (607) is reflected and refigured in different ways in literary texts such as Godwin's *St Leon* and Shelley's *Frankenstein*, both of which feature protagonist-narrators whose powerful ambitions increasingly dominate their minds and lives, alienating them from their fellow human beings and resulting in their psychological disintegration and social decline. More generally, the notion of the passions is relevant to Romantic trauma novels insofar as these texts repeatedly depict how particularly violent, distressing, or shocking experiences cause or significantly contribute to the development of an ungovernable passion. A prime example is Godwin's *Mandeville*, which, influenced by Joanna Baillie's *Plays on the Passions*, repeatedly draws on the terminology of the passions and depicts the protagonist-narrator's maddening passions as connected to his traumatic childhood experiences. This kind of dialogue between the psychiatric and the literary discourses of the time raises interesting questions about the causal relationships between traumatic experiences, the passions, and the psychopathological.

In Romantic-period psychological and psychiatric discourses, then, a threefold context emerges as framing the psychology of the "wounded mind" or "wounded heart": a powerful emphasis on the formative role of environmental factors (expressed especially by associationist psychology), the psychiatric idea that adverse life experiences can cause mental disorders, and the idea that the passions have a pathological dimension. While these ideas are important to a psychology of trauma, a specific psychiatric concept, focusing on the effects of exceedingly distressing or shocking experiences and discussing these under the label of trauma, was developed only quite a bit later. And while the notion of psychological trauma first became prominent through thinkers such as Janet, Charcot, and Freud, it is important to stress that it took even longer for the psychopathology caused by traumatic stress to be officially recognized by the psychiatric professions and enshrined as a diagnostic concept.

How can this delay be explained? Logan asserts, "[i]nterpreting psychological disorders had always presented a major difficulty for the physician because of the indefiniteness of their signs" (20), and in the case of posttraumatic symptoms, the boundaries between normal and pathological reactions tend to be particularly fluid. Chris Brewin emphasizes that the mental disorder now classified as PTSD "is not a qualitatively distinct response to extreme stress but reflects the upper end of a stress-response continuum" and further specifies that "[i]t is not the symptoms themselves, but rather their frequency, their persistence, their intensity, and their failure to become more benign with time that define the disorder" (*Posttraumatic* 42). In other words, the boundaries between a normal coping reaction and a mental disorder are here marked by a difference in degree and length rather than quality, which might be one reason why psychiatric discourses did not develop a diagnostic concept based on traumatic stress earlier. In this context, it is also crucial to note that, as recent epidemiological studies reveal, "the majority of people will experience a traumatic event at some point in their lifetime; however, only a minority of individuals will develop PTSD symptoms severe enough to meet criteria for a diagnosis" (Afifi et al. 108). Why a specific traumatic event leads to pathological and persistent symptoms in some individuals while others are able to cope more easily remains a pressing question for traumatic stress studies.

What, then, characterizes the official psychiatric category of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder? The current version of the DSM, the DSM-IV-TR,[41] defines PTSD in terms of three elements: the traumatic incident, the individual's immediate response, and the subsequent pathology (463, 468). Criterion A1 (stressor) defines the kinds of events that can be classified as "traumatic," namely, "an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self and others" (467). Criterion A2 (subjective emotional response) specifies that the event must also have been experienced with "intense fear, helplessness, or horror" to qualify as traumatic. The fact that the DSM-IV defines the traumatic event both through the objective characteristics of the event and through the subjective reactions to it points to an essential paradox inherent in conceptualizations of trauma: while "trauma" refers to an external event, it seems that it, paradoxically, cannot be adequately defined through the inherent structures of that event; it gains its meaning from the individual response a given event produces. Yet the history of the DSM alerts us to the difficulties of defining trauma and approaching precisely this paradox. The changes in the DSM's definition of PTSD from the DSM-III (1980) to the DSM-IV (1994) reveal a shift from an event-based to a more

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41 The fourth edition of the DSM, the DSM-IV, appeared in 1994 and was republished with a text revision in 2000 as DSM-IV-TR. Unless specified otherwise, I draw on the revised version but I will, for the sake of simplicity, use the term "DSM-IV" for subsequent references.

response-based notion of trauma, the latter constituting "a more psychological definition of a traumatic event" (Brewin, *Posttraumatic* 8). To be precise, the experts of the American Psychiatric Association originally assumed that PTSD was a normal reaction to extraordinarily stressful life-events, to which most people would react with similar symptoms.[42] However, this assumption had to be abandoned, which is why in the DSM-IV, the A2 criterion regarding subjective emotional responses was added. Yet the proposed changes to the definition of PTSD for the DSM-5, scheduled to appear in 2013, shift the emphasis back in the opposite direction. The APA work group has omitted the A2 criterion in the currently proposed definition, adding instead more specifications to the A1 criterion regarding events that qualify as "traumatic."[43] These shifts back and forth between more event-based and more response-based definitions illustrate that the aetiology of PTSD has been and still is a contentious subject. The most pressing question raised by the proposed DSM-5 definition is, indeed, whether or not it is justified to base the distinction between traumatic and non-traumatic events exclusively on the specific nature of the event itself without also taking into account the individual's subjective responses. Literary trauma texts tend to offer different answers to this question than the forthcoming DSM; they often put particular emphasis on the individual's specific reactions, feelings, and thoughts in response to a traumatic experience.

What the DSM-IV and DSM-5 definitions still have in common is the conceptualization of what constitutes the core feature of a traumatic event: an intense confrontation with one's own or someone else's vulnerability and mortality. As manifold as the faces of trauma may be, they mostly share one underlying characteristic – they involve a powerful "threat to life" (Brewin, *Posttraumatic* 48). For the sake of terminological clarity, it is important to emphasize that psychiatric and clinical languages use the term "trauma" to denote the *event* that is experienced as highly

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42 The DSM-III introduces the concept of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder as follows: "The essential feature of this disorder is the development of characteristic symptoms following a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience (i.e., outside the range of such common experiences as simple bereavement, chronic illness, business losses, and marital conflict). The stressor producing this syndrome would be markedly distressing to almost anyone, and is usually experienced with intense fear, terror or helplessness" (247).

43 The work group's justification for omitting the A2 criterion simply reads: "DSM-IV A2 criterion has no utility" ("G 03 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder"). One of the particularly noteworthy changes regarding the A1 criterion is that the DSM-IV phrase "threat to the physical integrity" is replaced by "actual or threatened sexual violation," which signals an increasing awareness of sexual traumas in the field of psychiatry. The site "G 03 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" (a sub-site of "DSM-5 Development") contains an overview of all the proposed changes to the PTSD definition and the rationale behind them.

distressing, painful, or shocking; the *effect* of this event, the complex and lasting impact it may have on an individual, is described in terms of "posttraumatic" symptoms and classified in terms of the diagnostic category PTSD. Whether or not the experience of trauma does, indeed, lead to PTSD strongly depends on a number of factors, including the individual's predispositions, the specific context of exposure, and the posttraumatic environment. PTSD, as van der Kolk highlights, is the "result of a complex interrelationship among psychological, biological and social processes" ("Preface" xi). The DSM-IV distinguishes between three main symptom clusters of PTSD, which can be subsumed under the headings of "reexperienc[ing]," "avoidance," and "arousal" (468). Each cluster (listed as "diagnostic criteria" B-D) comprises several specific symptoms. The persistent re-experiencing of trauma, for example, can manifest itself in recurrent "intrusions" (intrusive memories or flashbacks of the event), nightmares, as well as in strong emotional or physical reactions to anything that resembles the traumatic event (464, 468). The "avoidance" cluster comprises different ways of evading stimuli associated with the trauma, often combined with psychic numbing, while "arousal" refers to various symptoms of anxiety or hyperarousal (464, 468). The symptoms of all three clusters can vary in severity and frequency, and they can occur in different combinations, but a diagnosis of PTSD requires several symptoms of each category to manifest and persist longer than one month. Hence, the clinical definition reinforces the aspect of temporality in demarcating the boundary between normal and pathological reactions to traumatic stress.

The psychiatric concept of PTSD is not only situated at the intersection of the normal and the pathological, but it also challenges distinctions between the physical and the psychological. According to Fischer-Homberger, a full understanding of trauma and its psychophysical effects requires abandoning conventional dichotomies like body-psyche, exogenetic-endogenetic, and so forth ("Medizingeschichte" 293). The current debate about which clustering of mental disorders is most appropriate for the DSM-5's entry for PTSD illustrates the complex position of this disorder. As the respective APA work group emphasizes, opinions are divided about whether PTSD should be classified as an anxiety disorder (as in the DSM-III and DSM-IV), an internalizing disorder, or a stress-related fear circuitry disorder (see Friedman et al.) – each option weights the psychological and neurophysiological aspects of the disorder differently.[44] It would seem, then, that both the genesis and symptomatology of PTSD challenge distinctions between the physical and the psychological. Recent studies investigating the aetiology of PTSD have, according to

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44 The solution proposed by the work group is to base the definition of PTSD less on symptom description and more on aetiology, thus making PTSD one psychiatric concept in a new cluster of disorders labelled "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" (Friedman et al. 741).

Brewin, faced the "uncertainty about whether [their findings] should be interpreted as showing the effects of a vulnerability that is psychological or biological or both" (*Posttraumatic* 50). Moreover, the symptomatology of PTSD, as outlined by the DSM, shows that the disorder manifests itself heavily in both physical and psychological ways. Beyond that, even the discussion of individual posttraumatic symptoms suggests that the distinction between the two cannot be upheld. The specificity of trauma memory, for example, can be explained equally well in terms of cognitive structures or neurophysiological processes.[45] Trauma memories, especially intrusive memories, also tend to be so powerful that they involve an intense mental *and* bodily experience, making trauma victims feel as if they were literally reliving the past in the present (Ehlers and Clark 334).

These contemporary discussions about the psychological and the physiological resonate with Romantic psychiatry and some of its central concerns. Porter even argues that the question of mind versus body in the discourse on madness can be traced back as far as Greek antiquity and has persisted throughout the history of psychiatry: "The inheritors of the Greek legacy – and in the end that means us – never resolved the Sphinx' riddle of the divide between the psychological and the somatic theories of madness" (*Social History* 13). A significant manifestation of this riddle appears in the psychiatric debates of early-nineteenth-century Germany. Psychiatric historiography conventionally conceptualizes this period in terms of the debates between the so-called *Psychiker*, who advocated a psychogenic view of mental illness (i.e., they claimed that mental disorders originated from the psyche or the soul), and the *Somatiker*, who located the causes for mental illness primarily in the body (Stone 75).[46] While the *Somatiker*, who researched the biology of the brain and the heritability of mental illness, can be regarded as pioneers of biological psychiatry, the *Psychiker* advocated introspection and psychological approaches to mental illness (Weckowicz and Liebel-Weckowicz 126). It is important to note that "fierce theoretical controversies between rival organic and psychological camps" dominated the scene mainly in German psychiatry, which, in contrast to France or Britain, "was chiefly associated with the universities and their research mentality" (Porter, *Madness* 139). In other words, in France and Britain, positions were less polarized, and, as we have seen, English mental scientists like Darwin, Black, and Perfect combined psychological and somatic factors in their lists of the causes of insanity. Nevertheless, the position of the *Psychiker,* often also labelled "Romantic

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45 For a cognitive approach to PTSD, see Anke Ehlers and David Clark; on the neurobiology of PTSD, see Steven Southwick et al.

46 It should be noted, however, that overly rigid distinctions between the *Psychiker* and *Somatiker* have repeatedly been challenged in recent years. Among others, Udo Benzenhöfer and Michael Kutzer convincingly show that there are more overlaps between these two strands of early psychiatry than has commonly been argued.

psychiatrists," functions as an interesting point of reference for Romantic trauma narratives. The *Psychiker* propagated an "individual-centered psychology" (Stone 75) and were heavily influenced by the philosophical atmosphere of the time, which was "permeated by interest in the irrational" and by the "preoccupation with matters pertaining to the *individual*, such as dreams, sexuality, and hidden desires (for which the term unconscious came into use)" (Stone 72). In this respect, they share central concerns with the psychological frameworks of Romantic trauma fiction.

Interestingly, while the agendas of the *Psychiker* and *Somatiker* differed significantly, leading figures of both camps, as Michael Kutzer emphasizes, advocated a holistic view of human beings, including the idea that body and mind are closely interrelated in manifold ways (35). According to Richardson, in Romantic-era Britain, dualist and anti-dualist models of the mind and mind-body interactions also co-existed: "Anti-dualist psychologies grounding the mind in the body and seeking to account for the pervasiveness of mind-body interaction, in fact represented the cutting edge of Romantic-era scientific and medical thought" (*British Romanticism* 132).[47] The interrelatedness of body and mind is a crucial recurring topos in the novels of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley (as well as an important parallel to postmodern trauma novels). These texts suggest that in the experience of trauma and posttraumatic suffering, distinctions between physical and mental injury as well as bodily and emotional pain are difficult to uphold. The central topos that emerges in this corpus of texts is that of a wound cutting deeply into both body and mind, cutting across both spheres and through the boundaries between the two. The narrator of Shelley's short story "The Mourner" – which, similar to her novella *Mathilda*, explores death and pathological mourning within a complex father-daughter relationship – paradigmatically describes the trauma victim's suffering as "so great as to confuse the boundary between physical and mental sensation" (89).

Conceptualizations of the interrelations between the physical and the psychological have further implications in the context of mental illness. As mentioned earlier, studying the mind of the mentally ill became important in Britain during the Romantic period, and this practice often implied a belief in the curability of mental disorders. The flipside of this view, however, is that emphasizing the mental over the physical tends to place the burden of responsibility for mental illness on the individual: an individual can more easily be held accountable if the source of a mental disorder is located in the emotional or moral realm rather than in the body. Thus, the debates within the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century mental sciences ex-

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47 Richardson is especially interested in the anti-dualist notion of the "brain-mind," which became increasingly prominent in the course of the Romantic period. Richardson's *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* provides a detailed discussion of Romantic-period brain science and its complex intersections with the literary discourses of the time.

emplify the tensions between moral and medical theories of mental illness[48] – tensions that have a long heritage. The question of whether we should interpret "madness as badness" or "as sickness" already concerned the ancient Greeks (Porter, *Social History* 13). The moralizing trajectory of Romantic psychiatry is particularly prominent in the writings of one of the most famous German *Psychiker*, Johann Christian August Heinroth, who unequivocally took a moral and religious stance. Heinroth's psychogenic theories closely associate mental illness with sin, "attributing madness to passions arising from guilty and sinful behaviour" (Weckowicz and Liebel-Weckowicz 142). Heinroth's approach exemplifies how madness, in Foucault's words, can become part of a scientific territory occupied by both "psychology and morality," being conceptualized as "*the psychological effect of a moral fault*" and identified with "a new content of guilt, of moral sanction, of just punishment" (158).

Because of their tendency to "confound […] moral degeneration and madness" (Marx 20), the works of *Psychiker* such as Heinroth are considered controversial in the history of psychiatry. However, the question of morality is even harder to assess within the moral management approach popular in Britain and France. As Faubert emphasizes, opinions are divided about whether the attribute "moral" should, in this context, be understood the way we understand it today, whether it had moralistic or even religious connotations, or whether it primarily denoted an approach focused on the mind rather than the body (80-82). A moralistic slant can certainly be identified in its central goal of re-educating the patient to apply self-restraint and self-control (see Scull 90). Moreover, the line between a potentially beneficial attempt to assign more responsibility to the patient in an effort to cure illness and the problematic act of morally judging and even blaming an individual for a mental disorder is difficult to draw. In contrast to Heinroth, whose moralistic trajectory has been subjected to much negative criticism, both by his contemporaries and by later generations of psychiatrists,[49] moral treatment tends to be celebrated by historians of psychiatry for its progressiveness. Yet Scull warns us that moral treatment has its progressive *and* repressive sides (80-81), and Faubert describes the figure of the moral manager as "Janus-faced" and ambiguous, "a liberator and democrat, and a tyrant" (111). This ambiguity, as we will see, is also reflected in the literary texts of the time.

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48 One important example here is the distinction common in Enlightenment Britain between "moral" madness, where "delusional ideas arose in the mind, and by definition remained within the moral province of the individual" as opposed to "real" madness, where "the sufferer was the passive recipient of body-based sickness" (Laffey 377).

49 Otto Marx, for example, maintains that Heinroth's writings "had been a true disservice to psychological research which already had a bad reputation among physicians" (20). Yet this exceedingly negative judgment has been relativized to some extent by some more recent critics. See for example Heinz Schott and Rainer Tölle as well as Luc Cauwenbergh.

Romantic trauma novels in fact raise questions about the interrelations between psychology, mental illness, and morality in several ways. Many of these texts foreground guilt, depicting traumatized individuals as figures burdened with a strong sense of guilt. Trauma and guilt seem so closely connected in the sufferings of characters like Mathilda, Falkner, and St Leon that, in the context of the novels, we may even speak of a trauma of guilt. With these texts, boundaries between moral guilt and a subjective sense of guilt become blurred; rigid categories of victim versus perpetrator often cannot be upheld. The novella *Mathilda*, for example, calls attention to the complexity of guilt in the context of trauma by showing how much Mathilda struggles to assess her own position regarding victimization, complicity, and guilt, oscillating between defining herself as the object and the subject of incestuous desires. While Mathilda tends to internalize moralistic views, the text as a whole suggests that her deeply distressing experiences rather than her moral weaknesses and sins account for her psychopathology. A text like *Mathilda*, hence, departs from moralistic perspectives that regard the individual as morally responsible for his or her mental disorder; its agenda seems to be to explore the disturbed psyche and its complex dynamics, not to evaluate moral guilt. This example illustrates that the Romantic vision of mental illness, which may be said to span an array of more or less overtly moralistic perspectives, is complexly reflected and refracted in Romantic literary psychologies.

The moralistic views on mental disorders that Romantic-period theorists of the mind explicitly or implicitly express may seem highly problematic and clearly outdated to contemporary readers. However, clashes between "moral" and "medical" theories are apparent and significant throughout the history of trauma: the controversies surrounding hysteria and shell shock and the False Memory Debate reveal a cyclical revival of moralistic arguments in the shape of recurring tendencies to question the genuineness of a trauma or posttraumatic suffering and to locate the disorder within the individual's sphere of responsibility. The debates between theories of exogenetic and endogenetic trauma crucially involve questions of responsibility (Fischer-Homberger, "Medizingeschichte" 279-85). In the controversy around shell shock, opinion was divided on whether to assign primary responsibility for the soldiers' symptoms to the atrocities of the war or to explain them through internal factors – as "war hysteria" with a psychic aetiology ("Medizingeschichte" 280-81) or even as an act of malingering. Freud's notorious shift in position in his approach to hysteria is another case in point. In his 1896 paper, "The Aetiology of Hysteria," he maintained that the origins of hysteria can be ascribed to childhood trauma in the form of unwanted sexual assaults.[50] However, Freud abandoned this theory, often

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50 In "The Aetiology of Hysteria," Freud concludes his discussion with the following statement: "Whatever case and whatever symptom we take as our point of departure, in the end we infallibly come to the field of sexual experience" (199).

called "seduction theory," soon afterwards and claimed that infantile sexuality and sexual fantasies rather than an actual trauma were the sources of hysteria.[51] Many of these issues reappeared in the 1990s in the False Memory Debate, a heated controversy about recovered memories versus false memories of childhood trauma (mainly sexual abuse). The clash between the two opposing positions caused a violent debate about whether abuse victims needed support in their re-confrontation with the past or whether falsely accused parents needed to be protected against the dangerous or even wilful imaginings of their own children.[52] The issues of female trauma, simulation, and suggestibility in the context of hysteria and the False Memory Debate suggest that vestiges of the tension between "madness as sickness" and "madness as badness" (Porter, *Social History* 13) can be traced up to the twentieth century.

Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* is one of a number of postmodern novels that respond to and engage with this debate in manifold ways. Smiley's novel problematizes issues of blame and guilt by highlighting the decidedly negative and disparaging response female trauma victims are exposed to after the revelation of incestuous sexual abuse. The novel further complicates issues of guilt by representing the first-person narrator Ginny – like Godwin's Mandeville – not only as a trauma victim but also as a scheming would-be murderer. Hence, Smiley's novel exemplifies that postmodern trauma novels, like their Romantic predecessors, tend to create spaces of moral and ethical complexity, instability, and uncertainty.

Any discussion of theoretical and/or cultural approaches to trauma reveals that "[i]t is hard to escape the conclusion that the subject of trauma attracts passionate advocacy and passionate skepticism in a quite disproportionate measure" (Brewin, *Posttraumatic* 15). As Brewin further emphasizes, "[i]n no other area of mental health are the debates so public or so bitter, or the scientific credibility of experienced and committed practitioners impugned in such a forthright manner" (15). Are the debates surrounding trauma so violent because trauma always, in some way, in-

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51 Freud explicitly states this shift in position, which he had first announced in a letter to Fliess in 1897, in "My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses" and in "An Autobiographical Study." In the latter text, he writes: "I was at last obliged to recognize that these scenes of seduction had never taken place, and that they were only phantasies which my patients had made up" (34). On Freud's much-discussed theoretical shift and its impact see for example van der Kolk's "The History of Trauma" 24-25. Van der Kolk asserts that "[t]he acceptance of psychoanalytic theory went hand in hand with a total lack of research on the effects of real traumatic events on children's lives. From 1895 until very recently, no studies were conducted on the effects of childhood sexual trauma" (26).

52 On the False Memory Debate, see for example Brewin's *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*, chapter 7.

volves a violation of boundaries (Fischer-Homberger, "Medizingeschichte" 261)? According to Fischer-Homberger, a traumatic situation also typically unsettles and disrupts boundaries insofar as that which violates ("das Verletzende") is perceived as foreign and yet, simultaneously, as almost inseparable from the self. Because of this tension, trauma raises particularly pressing questions regarding cause and effect as well as responsibility and guilt, which, as the example of shell shock demonstrates, are often intertwined with political and economic issues (280).

The complexity of issues of causality in the context of trauma manifests itself not only in the intricate entanglement of hurt and guilt but also in a significantly different context, namely, in current debates about gene-environment interaction in relation to traumatic stress and PTSD. Assessing the impact of genetic factors and environmental factors continues to present a considerable challenge for trauma researchers. Tracie Afifi et al. offer an overview of the current state of affairs in the field, reporting that PTSD symptoms seem to be "moderately heritable," and, more strikingly, that even the exposure to certain kinds of traumatic events (notably "assaultive trauma," i.e., robbery, being held captive, being beaten up, sexual assault, and so forth) "has been found to have a heritable basis" – through genetic factors that increase the risk of being exposed to certain kinds of environments (103-04, 110).[53] However, they repeatedly emphasize that the present understanding of genetic and environmental factors remains "limited" in a number of areas. They argue that further research is needed that investigates the *interaction* between genes and environment rather than focusing on one of the two factors only and that integrates different approaches (notably, behavioural genetics and molecular genetics) in order to overcome current limitations in the field (104, 108). Only through such new directions in research, the authors conclude, will it be possible to "deepen our understanding of the complex links among genes, brain, cognition, emotion, and the environment" (110).

The complexity of causal relationships manifests itself in a particularly striking way in the debates among researchers who explore correlations between the traumatic event itself and PTSD. For example, Matthew Friedman et al. argue that the traumatic event(s), the "stressor(s)," should be regarded as the key factor in the aetiology of PTSD: "Some would like to base most diagnoses, even PTSD, upon genetic, developmental, and personality differences, although data suggest that the severity and frequency of trauma exposure is the most important variable" (738). In

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53 As Afifi et al. specify, "[t]he gene-environment correlation estimates the degree to which individuals are exposed to certain environments as a function of their genes" (103). Murray Stein et al. express the same idea as follows: "Genetic factors can influence the risk of exposure to some forms of trauma, perhaps through individual differences in personality that influence environmental choices" (1675).

contrast, Afifi et al. hypothesize that, due to genetic factors, PTSD symptoms might also be produced by a stressor that is *not* necessarily traumatic:

Given that PTSD symptoms are heritable, the question arises as to whether PTSD symptoms are the products of gene-environment interactions, whereby trauma exposure activates the genes involved in producing PTSD symptoms. It may also be the case that such genes interact with lesser (non-traumatic) stressors to yield symptoms similar to those of PTSD. (107)

In this aetiological model, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder would, paradoxically, not necessarily be tied to trauma. If further data should corroborate this thesis, it will have important implications for the way we think about trauma.

The current debates about the causal relationships between internal and external factors in the psychopathology of traumatic stress resonate with negotiations of nature versus nurture in trauma fiction and also refer back to Romantic-era concerns about mental illness. A key example in this context is the way Godwin uses and reconceptualizes Baillie's theory of the passions in *Mandeville*. His text is ambiguous about whether Mandeville's condition should be regarded as mainly the effect of, in Baillie's terminology, "terrible tyrants" and "disturbers of the human breast" that are nourished from within or of external "enemies" in the form of traumatic experiences and distressing circumstances ("Introductory Discourse" 95, 91, 103). This example further illustrates that Romantic-period and contemporary discourses on psychology and mental illness have a number of central concerns in common, concerns that have continued to reappear in new shapes and contexts. Why do powerful emotions and overwhelming experiences have such a powerful and lasting impact on some individuals? How crucial is the environment for the genesis of mental disorders? What mental and physical factors are involved, and how are they interrelated? Where should the final moral responsibility for such mental disorders be located? What kind of ethical responses do pathological reactions to traumatic stress require? The trauma narratives told by Romantic and postmodern literary texts, narratives that the following chapters explore in depth and in further dialogue with trauma psychology and theory, will provide polyphonic answers to these questions.

TRAUMATIC STRESS STUDIES: A FEW KEY AREAS

Contemporary traumatic stress studies have plenty of insights to bring to a dialogue between literary, psychological, and theoretical voices. Although specific concepts and issues will be explored in detail in the chapters on individual trauma novels, some areas of the field are important to discuss as general background. For one, although the diagnostic concept of PTSD outlined in the DSM acts as the official

point of reference in the field, research has provided numerous specific and additional – and sometimes diverging – insights.[54] The inclusion of PTSD in the diagnostic canon was aimed at promoting a general awareness of the effects of trauma, encompassing different kinds of traumatic experiences and highlighting the parallels between the posttraumatic reactions of different types of survivors. Since then, much research on traumatic stress has followed a trajectory of specialization: many studies explore PTSD in one specific group of trauma survivors, defined, for example, along the parameters of type of traumatic experience, age, gender, or national and cultural context. Within this body of research, there are some areas that are particularly relevant to the investigation of novels on childhood and family trauma.

One key area is the relatively young field of child trauma studies. Traumatic childhood experiences, as is often emphasized, tend to have a particularly severe impact, leaving scars that cut deep into the psyche as well as the body. In the words of Judith Herman, "[r]epeated trauma in adult life erodes the structure of the personality already formed, but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality" (*Recovery* 96). The psyche and brain of children are particularly vulnerable to traumatic and chronic stressors.[55] As John Fairbank et al. report, recent research in the field of child traumatic stress studies has found that exposure to trauma in childhood tends to result in a range of consequences: trauma has a "dramatic impact on the development of children," including their "emotional, social, and cognitive growth," and it leads to poorer physical health, problems with school performance, low IQ, and so forth (239). Yet, as Markus Landolt cautions us, further research is needed to examine which findings on PTSD apply only to adults, only to children, or equally to both (*Psychotraumatologie* 57, 70). In other words, traumatic stress in children has been a relatively neglected field, partly because of the difficulties of developing adequate research methods.[56] Moreover, some trauma

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54 It should also be emphasized that the DSM does not function as an unquestioned psychiatric master discourse; it too has been subjected to repeated criticism. Among others, Kansteiner critically remarks that "the APA is certainly not a disinterested party": "By administering the flow of patients and experts and constructing a compelling, efficient, and affordable description of the population's mental health, the organization exerts control over a significant cultural and economic infrastructure" ("Testing" 102).

55 According to Robert Pynoos, Alan Steinberg, and Armen Goenjian, research has long neglected the crucial fact that – besides seriously affecting personality formation – childhood trauma can also result in various developmental disturbances (331-58).

56 There are obvious practical difficulties in assessing the epidemiology of PTSD in children that was caused by trauma in the familial context: children's difficulties in judging the traumatic events adequately, double bind situations, the lack of witnesses, and so forth. On the problems faced by the field of child traumatic stress epidemiology, see Fairbank et al. 229 and Landolt 12.

experts argue that there are also socio-political explanations for why it has taken particularly long for childhood trauma and its impact on mental health to be generally recognized: traumatic experiences that happen in childhood and in the contained, supposedly safe, or even nearly sacred space of the nuclear family seem even more socially unspeakable and taboo than other traumas. Accepting the unacceptable, long buried in the silence of shame or hidden in the blindness of unbelief, is an ongoing process. However, while the studies of PTSD in adults still far outnumber those of PTSD in children, researchers have recognized that PTSD in children needs to be investigated in its own right.[57] An important indication of the increasing attention that PTSD in children is receiving in the field of psychiatry is that the DSM-5 will, according to the current proposal, feature a specific diagnostic category called "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Preschool Children." According to Charles Zeanah, the rationale behind adding this diagnostic category is to do justice to "age-related manifestations" of the disorder (1).[58]

Besides child trauma studies, another related area that is particularly relevant as a context for novels on childhood and family trauma is research on what has come to be called "complex PTSD." As Fairbank et al. write, "[t]ypically, complex trauma exposure involves the simultaneous or sequential occurrence of child maltreatment, including psychological maltreatment, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and domestic violence that is chronic, and that begins in early childhood and occurs within the primary caregiving system" (231). Thus, this research revolves around the idea that childhood traumas occurring in the interpersonal, familial sphere and over a lengthy period of time are likely to produce a symptomatology whose severity and complexity far exceed the frame of PTSD. Herman, who introduced the notion of complex trauma to describe the results of prolonged or chronic exposure to interpersonal stress, maintains that such forms of traumatization severely disrupt an individual's perception of self and others and shake personal systems of meaning, leaving deep marks in the shape of lasting identity crises and ruptured relationships (*Recovery* 119-21). The typical constellation of symptoms further includes self-injury, suicidal tendencies, amnesia, various forms of somatization, and, especially in cases of childhood trauma, dissociative disorders (van der Kolk, "Adaptation" 202-03; Maercker 12).[59] However, it remains to be seen if and

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57 As Friedman, Patricia Resick, and Terence Keane emphasize, the field of traumatic stress studies has recently witnessed a turn to a more "developmental perspective," based on increasing evidence that "[e]ach age group appears to respond differently to exposure to traumatic events" ("Key Questions" 549).

58 Zeanah also provides an overview of the research that has been done recently on PTSD in preschool children and school-age children ("Proposal").

59 "Dissociation" denotes experiences of depersonalization and derealization, i.e., states in which individuals perceive the reality of their self and of their environment in abnormal

how "complex PTSD," which is acknowledged as an important part of clinical reality but currently not included as a diagnostic subcategory in the DSM-IV, will feature in the DSM-5.

Childhood trauma and complex trauma have also emerged as pressing concerns in mental health research in relation to the long-term impact of these types of trauma exposure. As Fairbank et al. emphasize, "[s]tudies have identified childhood trauma and adversity as a major risk factor for many serious mental and physical health problems" (239). One key study in this area is the well-known ACE study ("The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study"), which advertises itself as "the largest scientific research study of its kind, analyzing the relationship between multiple categories of childhood trauma (ACEs), and health and behavioral outcomes later in life" (see Anda and Felitti). This study, which draws on an impressively large sample of 17,000 adult participants, seeks to corroborate the thesis that traumatic childhood experiences are "a common pathway to social, emotional, and cognitive impairments that lead to increased risk of unhealthy behaviors, risk of violence or revictimization, disease, disability and premature mortality" (Anda and Brown 4). Findings so far include a strong, graded relationship between the number of ACEs and increased risk for alcoholism, drug abuse, smoking, poor physical health, depression, and suicide (see Felitti et al.). Pursing a perspective that encompasses the whole lifespan, this research group continuously reveals and documents further facets of the multiple long-term effects of childhood trauma.

Novels featuring childhood and family trauma explore the complex short- and long-term impact of trauma exposure in multiple ways. For one, the child's perspective on childhood trauma is at the heart of several postmodern and contemporary novels, including Ian McEwan's *Cement Garden,* Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Clare Sembrook's *Hide and Seek*, and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Yet many novels on childhood trauma, and definitely the majority of texts in the present study's corpus, explore childhood trauma both from the child's perspective and from the retrospective view of the grown-up survivor. These texts are, thus, profoundly concerned with the idea that childhood trauma, as documented from a medical perspective by the ACE study, tends to reach far and deeply into adulthood. With their focus on the protagonists' severe and often chronic exposure to interpersonal trauma and on their intricate and persistent web of symptoms, the texts resonate with notions of "complex trauma" and "complex PTSD." Two very different but equally relevant examples in this context are Shelley's *Mathilda*, which records in detail Mathilda's reaction to incest and a series of traumatic losses, and Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place*, where the protagonist Dolores experiences her familial environment as a minefield of physical and emo-

ways (Herman, *Recovery* 109). A very common manifestation of dissociation is the experience of a split between body and consciousness (102-03).

tional violence. Disrupted and fragmented selves and identity crises that determine the life of an individual long after the traumatic experience(s) are central topoi in these trauma novels.

One aspect of the long-term impact of trauma that has emerged as a particularly pressing concern in both literary and psychiatric discourses is how trauma affects memory. Much research on traumatic stress investigates the complexities of remembering and forgetting trauma, and PTSD, as Brewin stresses, is "often described as a disorder of memory" ("Remembering" 116). While the workings and processes of traumatic memory and the nature of trauma memories in contrast to ordinary memories have been a matter of controversy for over a century (van der Kolk, " Memory" 279), it is generally recognized that trauma survivors experience two kinds of memory phenomena: flashbacks of the traumatic past and the lack of conscious recall. Flashbacks or intrusive memories, often called "intrusions," are an especially common manifestation of remembering trauma. Intrusions can be described as images and other sensory impressions that appear suddenly and involuntarily, with striking intensity and immediacy, making trauma survivors feel as if they were re-experiencing the traumatic event (Ehlers and Clark 324).[60] In contrast, amnesia denotes the difficulty or inability of intentionally recalling memories of a traumatic event; it refers to a "loss of memory" that, as Ronald Comer stresses, cannot be explained in terms of ordinary processes of forgetting and is "not caused by organic factors" but by the effects of traumatic stress (177). Some trauma specialists maintain that intrusions and amnesia are caused by specific forms of encoding and processing, arguing that, unlike ordinary memories, trauma-related memories tend to resist being integrated into the existing structures of autobiographical memory (van der Kolk, "Memory" 282). As Anke Ehlers and David Clark assert, trauma memory is "poorly elaborated and inadequately integrated into its context in time, place, subsequent and previous information and other autobiographical memories" (325). As a result, victims often cannot recall traumatic experiences intentionally, although the experiences continue to haunt them through sudden, uncontrolled intrusions. It should be noted, however, that there is no agreement about whether or not traumatic memory differs fundamentally from other types of memory. Brewin, for example, postulates that "[f]urther research is needed to find out what, if anything, is unique about memories associated with trauma" and concludes that "[i]t seems fairest at present to conclude that traumatic memory is *unusual* rather than *special*, and becomes increasingly unusual with greater severity of PTSD" ("Remembering" 123, 127).

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60 See also Brewin, who describes intrusions as "memories characterized as being triggered spontaneously by exposure to trauma cues, as being fragmented, as containing prominent perceptual features, and as involving an intense reliving of the event in the present" ("Remembering" 116).

The nature of traumatic memory – be it "unusual" or "special" – is a recurring theme in literary representations of trauma. Wollstonecraft's Maria, Godwin's Mandeville, and Shelley's Mathilda all experience different kinds of intrusive memories or flashbacks. Through the depiction of these memories, the texts express how profoundly the past holds the traumatized protagonists in thrall. *The Wrongs of Woman* stages these memories in a Gothic mode, thereby giving them an uncanny quality, while *Mandeville* represents intrusions of the protagonist's main childhood trauma, in combination with previous amnesia, as at the heart of a violent fit of madness. In postmodern trauma novels, disruptions of memory are emphasized even more as one of the most powerful repercussions of trauma. Besides exploring memory phenomena such as intrusions and amnesia, *A Thousand Acres* and *The Hiding Place* – similar to other recent trauma novels such as Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Helen Dunmore's *Talking to the Dead* – frame the protagonist-narrators' quest to cope with the traumatic past as a struggle to confront and deal with the complexities of remembering trauma. These literary explorations of trauma memory, as will be investigated further in subsequent chapters, engage in different ways in a dialogue with contemporary psychiatric discourses. Smiley's novel participates in the 1990s False Memory Debate, while also exploring the notion of trauma and body memory; Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* is concerned with the contentious idea of intergenerational transmission of trauma memory and, at the same time, develops an idiosyncratic philosophy of interpersonal memory sharing; and Azzopardi's novel both thematically and structurally revolves around the often-emphasized interrelations between processes of remembering, narrating, and working through trauma. As this brief overview indicates, different aspects of traumatic memory, in addition to the specificities of childhood trauma and severe forms of interpersonal trauma, will be core concerns in the subsequent dialogue between literary and psychological voices on trauma.

HEALING THE WOUNDS: PSYCHIC INJURY AND WAYS TO RECOVERY

One final general issue that requires attention concerns recovery. The dynamics of fragmentation and restoration, disintegration and reintegration, disruption and healing are prominent topoi in most literary texts on trauma, and they are negotiated in different ways at the levels of plot, text, and narration. What are possible ways and means of surviving and confronting a traumatic past and of overcoming a trauma-related crisis? How can the wounds of trauma survivors be healed? How do different individuals experience processes of working through and recovery? Is recovery after shattering life-events even possible? Can experiencing the extremities of hu-

man existence and confronting the dark abyss of the psyche possibly give birth to something positive? Trauma novels explore these and related issues with varying degrees of optimism and pessimism. Most novels in one way or another evoke therapeutic or self-therapeutic scenarios and are profoundly concerned with the (im)possibility of recovery. Postmodern trauma novels in particular tend to stage trauma survivors' individual quests for recovery in much detail. While recovery, as discussed earlier, long had a neglected status in literary trauma studies, its status in the field of psychiatry is fundamentally different; it is, in fact, situated at the very core of the psychiatric discipline. As Porter writes, "[p]sychiatry has typically pursued twin goals: gaining a scientific grasp of mental illness, and healing the mentally ill" (*Madness* 183). I now want to explore how traumatic stress research and Romantic psychiatry pursue the second of these "twin goals." Contemporary psychiatry provides detailed investigations not only of the psychopathology and more general symptomatology of trauma but also of the psychology of recovery, treatment methods, and therapeutics, thereby constituting a pertinent background for literary negotiations of recovery. Examining how Romantic psychiatry engaged with questions of treatment and therapy is also important for understanding the approaches Romantic trauma novels take to healing and recovery within their historical framework.

A significant aspect of Romantic-era psychiatry is the institutional context of the asylums for the mad, which underwent a significant transformation roughly during the time of the Romantic period. As the discipline of psychiatry established itself, the purpose of asylums was fundamentally redefined: "During the 'cult of curability' in the nineteenth century, asylums for the insane in western countries were transformed into therapeutic institutions" (Abma 99). Before the nineteenth century, asylums had mainly served the purpose of custody and confinement rather than cure.[61] In the English national consciousness, Bethlehem Hospital, also called Bethlem Hospital or simply Bedlam, played an especially important role. On the one hand, as Ingram asserts, Bethlehem can be seen as the embodiment of traditional attitudes to madness, that is, "restraint, confinement, evacuative remedies and a dynasty of secretive physicians in the Monro family" (44). On the other hand, Bethlehem was also the place where madness could be viewed as a public spectacle; it thus, as Porter highlights, shaped views about madness: "And largely because Bethlem housed the only collection of mad-people in the nation, it achieved a sort of concentrated notoriety; it became an epitome of all that people fantasized about madness itself" (*Manacles* 123).[62] In terms of numbers, however, private asylums

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61 On seventeenth- and eighteenth-century asylums, see Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, especially chapter 2.

62 For a good discussion of the significance of Bethlehem Hospital, see also Porter's *Madness* 70-75.

were, in fact, more important; around the year 1800, the mad were still mostly housed in private asylums, in institutions "operating for profit within the marked economy in what was frankly termed the 'trade in lunacy'" (Porter, *Madness* 95). The reputation of these private asylums, which were known for their secrecy and "discreet silences," was generally bad, remaining "tainted with accusations of neglect and corruption" throughout the century (Porter, *Manacles* 137, 148).

The general reputation of and changes to the institution of the asylum are pertinent to discussions of Romantic trauma novels. The pre-nineteenth-century asylum and the discourses on private asylums and their corrupt practices and abuses serve as important contexts for *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Mandeville*. Both novels foreground the protagonists' experiences at an asylum and depict these institutions in a critical light. Given that the bad reputation of asylums tends to be associated with a pre-Romantic age, this criticism might seem surprising. And, indeed, passing the *Act for Regulating Private Madhouses* in 1774 was a landmark event in the history of the private asylum: private asylums became licensed, and the practice of confinement based on a medical certification was introduced (Porter, *Manacles* 152). However, as Porter states, "how far the 1774 Act provided real safeguards is hard to say" (152). Faubert also emphasizes that, around the turn of the century, asylums still attracted a lot of negative attention; public discourse "framed the asylum-keeper as a sadist who preyed on some of the most helpless members of society" (76). It is, then, probably no coincidence that the "first major parliamentary inquiries into madhouses" were undertaken in 1807 and 1815 (Faubert 76). These historical parameters indicate that some of the negative aspects of eighteenth-century asylums persisted into the early nineteenth century. Hence, the conditions that the inmates of asylums were exposed to was a concern not only at the time Wollstonecraft was writing *The Wrongs of Woman* but also when Godwin was writing *Mandeville* – which was, after all, only shortly after the second parliamentary inquiry. Even though *Mandeville* is set in the seventeenth century, its criticism may not be directed exclusively at the asylums of an earlier period.

Even though the conditions in some asylums seem to have remained bad well into the first decades of the nineteenth century, there were, nevertheless, fundamental efforts to reform or even revolutionize the institution. Probably the most famous of these reformers is Pinel, who advocated "individualized moral treatment in place of routine coercion by hunger and cold, chains and stripes, and the formidable bleedings and physicking of older times" (Hunter and Macalpine 603). In other words, Pinel "abolished brutal repression and replaced it by a humanitarian medical approach" (603). His treatise entitled *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mental, ou la manie* (1801) was translated into several languages and "proved highly influential" (Porter, *Madness* 132). According to Hunter and Macalpine, his treatment ideas "found an echo in the minds and hearts of all who were concerned with social and humanitarian reforms and there were many in early nineteenth cen-

tury England" (603).[63] Around the same time, moral treatment developed in Britain; it was made famous through the York Retreat, an asylum that opened in 1796 and was founded by William Tuke, a Quaker. As in France, moral therapy was "justified in England on the twin grounds of humanity and efficacy" (Porter, *Greatest Benefit* 498).[64] Counting on the beneficial effects of "kindness, reason and humanity," moral therapists transformed the madhouse from an institution of confinement to something like a "reform school" (Porter, *Manacles* 19).

Many of these reformers spread a message of optimism with regard to the curability of mental disorders and the effectiveness of their treatment methods. As Porter asserts, "the decades around 1800 brought surging faith in the efficacy of personal treatment in sheltered asylum environments" (*Madness* 102). The moral managers, those who believed that the sufferer's "moral and psychological faculties needed to be rekindled" and that psychiatry should try to foster "inner self-control" and "reanimate reason or conscience" (*Madness* 105), advocated this kind of optimism most strongly: "[I]n the late eighteenth century the most confident of those specializing in handling the mad were not the somatists but the proto-psychiatrists, those practicing the arts to be dubbed 'moral medicine', 'moral management' and 'moral therapy'" (Porter, *Manacles* 187). Tuke is a prime example in this respect: his patient statistics suggest the efficacy of his methods (Scull 130). Other asylum keepers who claimed high cure rates were Thomas Arnold, William Perfect, and Thomas Bakewell (see *Manacles* 147). As these examples illustrate, the Romantic period was a time of increasing optimism in the treatability and curability of mental disorders.[65]

How, then, do literary trauma narratives of the time respond to the emergence of moral treatment and its therapeutic optimism? Both *Mandeville* and *Mathilda* can

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63 Porter summarizes Pinel's approach as follows: "Pinel embraced the progressive thinking of the Enlightenment. If insanity was a mental disorder, it had to be relieved through mental approaches. Physical restraint was at best an irrelevance, at worst a lazy expedient and an irritant. Treatment must penetrate to the psyche" (*Madness* 105).

64 Scull emphasizes that although Tuke was the one to make moral management known in England, this was clearly not an "isolated achievement"; among the progenitors of moral treatment are William Pargeter, John Ferriar, and Joseph Mason Cox (81). Moreover, an important and well-known early precursor of moral treatment was William Battie, whose 1758 text *A Treatise on Madness* was, as Ingram notes, based on an "attitude towards madness that embraced both openness and humane concern for the welfare of patients" (45).

65 One factor that must have contributed to this climate of optimism was the case of George III. Francis Willis' handling of George III's first bout of madness "brought the management of madness to the very centre of national consciousness" (Ingram 5), and, as Porter asserts, "the recovery of the 'mad king' bred optimism" (*Madness* 129).

be said to reflect on moral treatment in complex ways. First of all, even though *Mandeville* deals with issues of asylum treatment, the novel explores the approach of moral management only in a private, domestic context – and so does *Mathilda*. Mandeville's sister Henrietta and Mathilda's friend and companion in her self-imposed exile, the poet Woodville, can be read as different versions of a moral manager. However, while moral management and institutions such as the York Retreat were celebrated as "symbol[s] of progress" (Porter, *Greatest Benefit* 497), these literary texts represent moral treatment in an ambiguous light. Interestingly, in the case of both Mandeville and Mathilda, the treatment is not successful.

A further difference is that these literary versions of moral treatment put more emphasis on language and narration. What role language played in moral treatment, though, is difficult to assess. Faubert identifies a partial turn to communication and interaction in the relationship between patient and moral manager (83), while Porter more pessimistically asserts that "even the advocates of 'moral therapy' [...] were not interested in listening to what the mad had to say for themselves, or in direct, person-to-person verbal communication" (*Social History* 34). If we look at some of the relevant sources, we find references to talking not only in Tuke's works but also in, for example, the works of William Saunders Hallaran, the owner of a private asylum. In his 1813 *Description of the Retreat*, Tuke stresses the importance of "treating the patient as much in the manner of a rational being, as the state of his mind will possibly allow" and claims that this is a crucial point to be observed in "conversation[s] with the patients" (690). Three years earlier, Hallaran praised the beneficial effects of conversation:

I have in consequence made it a special point on my review days, to converse for a few minutes with each patient. [...] The mental exertion employed amongst the convalescents by this species of address is very remarkable, and the advantages flowing from it are almost incredible. (655)

Some moral managers thus used verbal interaction as one means of strengthening patients' mental faculties. Yet it is important to understand that the primary goal behind this practice was re-educating the patient in self-restraint. Moral treatment was based on "a deliberate system of persuasion and influence, centred around the moral authority of the doctor, and located in a well-organized institution" (Abma 96). To solidify their authority, some moral managers relied on the power of words; others, notably Francis Willis and William Pargeter, relied more on the power of their eyes.[66] According to T. Rechlin, the "psychological" and "moral" treatment

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66 In *Observations on Maniacal Disorders* (1792), Pargeter describes a number of attempts at managing the patient by catching his or her eyes (538-40). This practice resembles that of Willis, who famously practiced it on George III. Willis, as Porter highlights, was "re-

methods generally pursued empathic treatment styles, but they offered no individual psychotherapy (130). Hence, it seems that moral treatment relied on language in the sense of *conversation* intended to re-educate the patient, not in the sense of an actual therapy based on verbal *self-expression*.

Through the way they imagine victims speaking and/or writing for themselves, Romantic trauma novels explore the therapeutic potential of language further than contemporary psychiatric discourses. However, the novels not only give those suffering from mental disturbances a voice for telling their personal histories and individual tragedies, but they also investigate in detail the therapeutic power of oral and written self-expression. In foregrounding this kind of (self-)narration, which is also at the heart of many postmodern trauma novels, Romantic trauma novels move beyond the therapeutic project of Romantic-era psychiatry, while they also explore issues that were to become crucial in both psychoanalysis and contemporary trauma therapy, notably, the interrelations between trauma, self-narration, and recovery, which were first articulated by Freud and his contemporary Pierre Janet.[67] In this context, Faflak's notion of "Romantic psychoanalysis" is relevant.[68] The "scene of Romantic psychoanalysis" that Faflak focuses on is the "metaphorical and seemingly *un*clinical terrain of poetry" (*Romantic Psychoanalysis* 5). With Tilottama Rajan, he reads Romanticism as a body of literature "involved in the restless process of self-examination" and highlights how a number of canonical Romantic poems feature subjects who "spend a lot of time talking to themselves and to others about the trauma of who they are" and who struggle to "make sense of this subjectivity" (8). In the present study, I want to identify other scenes of psychoanalysis and argue that Romantic trauma fiction also tends to revolve around a "psycho-analytical" frame. The "anxiety about articulating a language of the psyche that resists articulation," in Faflak's words (6), runs as a central concern through texts such as Godwin's *Mandeville*.

Trauma, psychological analysis, therapy, and narration also intersect in contemporary trauma psychiatry, which investigates these intersections extensively and from a range of new angles. There seems to be general agreement that trauma ther-

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nowned for a piercing stare which imposed mastery, and many mad doctors at this time learned a trick or two from actors and Mesmerists" (*Greatest Benefit* 496).

67 The "talking cure" famously advocated by Freud relies heavily on the beneficial effects of oral self-expression in a therapeutic framework. One of Freud's core ideas was that "free association," that is, the patient's spontaneous rather than rigidly guided verbal expression, should enable the uncovering of unconscious, repressed material and help unearth a buried trauma (see for example *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*).

68 As is often noted, Coleridge is credited with the first use of the term "psycho-analytical" in an 1805 entry in his notebooks. For a more detailed discussion of this first usage of the term see Faflak's *Romantic Psychoanalysis* 31-32.

apy revolves around two basic approaches: exposure therapy and cognitive therapy.[69] Stacey Welch and Barbara Rothbaum summarize the present state of the practice: "It is widely thought that two main factors are necessary to treat PTSD successfully through psychosocial therapies: habituation to aversive stimuli, achieved by some kind of exposure to the traumatic or avoided stimuli […] and cognitive reappraisal of the traumatic experiences" (475). Exposure therapy is based on the idea that (repeated) confrontation with the trauma is vital to recovery, while cognitive therapy aims at reorganizing the patient's cognitive structures that have been affected by trauma, that is, to overcome posttraumatic patterns of negative perceptions and destructive thoughts.[70] Depending on the individual patient, his or her current life situation, and the severity of PTSD, these psychotherapeutic methods are combined with pharmacotherapy, hypnotherapy (Maercker 31), or with other therapeutic formats like family therapy and group therapy (Comer 144). According to Comer, a combination of approaches is common, "as no one of them successfully reduces all symptoms" (144).

Exposure therapy, which occupies a key position in the field, is also the type of trauma therapy most relevant to the study of literary texts. Essentially, exposure techniques fall into two categories: "in vivo exposure" and "imaginal exposure." In vivo exposure refers to a direct and physical form of confrontation with the trauma, as in, for example, a return to the site of trauma or exposure to closely related situations and objects. Imaginal exposure, also called "in sensu exposure," refers to a confrontation that takes place in the patient's mind, in the sphere of memory and imagination rather than in material reality (Rothbaum and Foa 494-96). However, no matter how patients are re-exposed to their traumatic experiences – through physical confrontation, verbal confrontation (talking or writing about the trauma), or visual confrontation (painting and drawing the traumatic scene) – the idea is that through a controlled re-experiencing of the traumatic event, with temporal and spatial distance and under the guidance of a therapist, the trauma should gradually lose its overwhelming and threatening power.

Verbalization and narration are at the heart of many types of exposure therapy. According to numerous psychiatrists, the act of putting the traumatic past into words and creating a narrative is of crucial importance to processes of recovery.[71]

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69 See for example Andreas Maercker's *Therapie der Posttraumatischen Belastungsstörungen* 28-32 and Brewin's *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* 180.

70 According to Ehlers and Clark, typical negative thoughts observed in trauma victims are, for example, "Nowhere is safe," "I attract disaster," "My life will never be the same again," or "It was my fault." Such negative appraisals, in turn, produce negative emotions, thereby exacerbating the destructive impact of trauma (322-23).

71 An extensive overview of different treatments of PTSD is the collection *Effective Treatments for PTSD*, edited by Edna Foa, Terence Keane, and Matthew Friedman. A number

Repeated as often as necessary, narrative exposure is meant to enable patients who are compulsively absorbed by their trauma to put their experiences into context, that is, to integrate them into autobiographical memory, into their life-stories. In other words, the interrelations between narration and recovery are closely connected to the specificities of traumatic memory. Trauma memories, in contrast to other types of memories, are not only typically de-contextualized and disconnected from other autobiographical memories, but they also tend to be largely non-verbal. As van der Kolk asserts, trauma memories "may have no verbal […] component whatsoever"; they are mainly organized on "somatosensory or iconic levels" ("Memory" 287). The visual and sensory quality of trauma memories, in combination with their striking vividness, intensity, and strong "'here and now' quality," often precipitates a state of "speechless terror" (Ehlers and Clark 327): trauma victims find themselves at a loss for words to describe what happened. This crisis of language goes hand in hand with a crisis of time perception. Trauma memories cause the distinction between past and present to collapse and, thereby, produce a different sense of time, a sense of being "frozen in time" (Ehlers and Clark 334). As a result, individuals suffering from PTSD often do not experience trauma memories as graspable connections to their past. Rather, these memories possess a perplexing, elusive, or haunting quality and make trauma victims feel locked up in the past. "To undo this entrapment," Laub claims, a narrative needs to be constructed about the traumatic past ("Bearing Witness" 69). In a similar vein, van der Kolk states that people seem to be unable to live with experiences that have no meaning to them ("Memory" 269) and asserts that an essential step to recovery is "the integration of the alien, the unacceptable, the terrifying, and the incomprehensible; the trauma must be 'personalized' as an integrated aspect of one's personal history" ("Preface" xvi). In other words, trauma memory needs to be transformed into narrative memory so that the spectres of the past can be tamed and become part of the individual's life-story.

The process of confronting and (re)integrating the traumatic past through narrative can happen in oral or written form; the exposure to trauma through cycles of speaking, listening, and writing, in which patient and therapist collaborate to script and rescript the survivor's life-story around the trauma, often forms the foundation of trauma therapy.[72] In other words, different forms of self-narration and/or life

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of survey articles in this collection show that narrative techniques are widely used in the treatment of children and adults and in both acute interventions and the treatment of chronic PTSD.

72 "Narrative exposure therapy," for example, is based on a combination of oral and written narration. Starting with a rough "lifeline" that chronicles major positive and negative life-events in chronological order, patient and therapist step by step produce a "complete written document of his biography" (Onyut et al.). In the more famous testimony method, the starting point is the patient's eyewitness account, which is recorded and turned into a

writing are central aspects of trauma therapy. According to Herman, therapy should provide an environment where trauma victims can speak about their distressing experiences and be heard: "The therapist plays the role of a witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak of the unspeakable" (*Recovery* 175). As is often observed, many trauma victims are torn between the urge to talk and a powerful sense of speechlessness – and to relieve this agony is a crucial objective of a number of therapeutic practices. Yet in an increasing number of trauma therapies, the verbalization and narrativization of trauma happens through the act of writing rather than speaking – or through a combination of the two. One reason for this could be that the medium of writing allows for the creation of more concretely visible and tangible forms of narrative than oral speech. Furthermore, the elements of ordering, contextualization, and integration probably play, due to the inherent characteristics of written discourse, a more prominent role in writing about trauma than in speaking about it. Consequently, writing can help trauma victims regain a sense of control over their lives. As Michèle Crossley puts it, psychotherapy and narrative both help patients overcome the "threat of chaos, of meaninglessness" produced by trauma and help them to reconstruct a meaningful self and life (57, 62).

Processes of narrating the self and trauma, as well as their potentials and limitations in aiding recovery, are at the core of much trauma fiction. Locked up in the asylum-prison, Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman* strives to ease her agony and reconfront her past by writing her memoirs for her lost daughter; Mandeville is torn between the urge and the inability to talk about his traumatic past and, finally, turns to written self-narration; *Fugitive Pieces* explores the functions of different forms of narrating trauma; and *The Hiding Place* is structured around the protagonist-narrator's life-story and quest for recovery. These literary scenarios reflect, in complex ways, the therapeutic scenarios mapped out in psychiatric discourses. One aspect regarding the processes of self-narration and recovery that the literary trauma narratives emphasize in particular is the dynamics between writer and reader or teller and listener. *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Fugitive Pieces* are two examples of trauma novels that foreground the specific situational frame of the narrative, the re-

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transcript, on which patient and therapist work together to produce a written testimony (see Herman 181-83; Turner, McFarlane, and van der Kolk 552). In the more recently developed "Integrative Testimonial Method" by Christine Knaevelsrud, Maria Böttche, and Philipp Kuwert, the process of writing is even more important. The central idea is to write a "Lebenstagebuch" (which literally translates as "life diary") and to share this diary with a therapist – not in person, however, but exclusively in the virtual, anonymous space of the internet. The diary is written at home, in the individual's familiar environment. The essence of the Integrative Testimonial Method is, similar to the testimony method, a therapeutic form of life writing.

lation between narrator and addressee, the context, space, and time of narration, and so forth.

What these texts signal, then, is that recovering from trauma tends to have important interpersonal dimensions. They resonate with Herman's claim that recovery is a process of several stages, and learning to tell the "story of the trauma" serves as an important part of individuals' more general challenge of "rebuilding" their life (*Recovery* 175, 195). In conceptualizing the process of recovery in three stages – "establishment of safety," "remembrance and mourning," and "reconnection with ordinary life" (155) – Herman makes clear that the significance of interpersonal, social dimensions should not be underestimated. She stresses that in later stages of trauma therapy, the patient requires support and guidance in the process of social reintegration. To overcome isolation and "engage more actively in the world," to "reconnect with others" and build new relationships is essential to recovery and to the process of moving from a life determined by the shadows of the past to one facing the future (196-207). In contrast to Herman's conceptualization of recovery, research on trauma therapy tends to emphasize intrapersonal processes over interpersonal and social ones. Yet, as Welch and Rothbaum observe, new treatments that capitalize on "social support, including group therapy, family or couple therapy" (469) are demonstrating results and beginning to gain credibility. In literary trauma writing, the interpersonal aspects of trauma have tended to receive considerable attention: most Romantic and postmodern trauma novels foreground the interpersonal factors affecting the protagonists' pre-, peri- and posttraumatic lives. These texts call attention to how strongly the environment influences the subjective meanings that trauma takes on for the individual, while also exploring in detail how trauma survivors try to connect to their fellow human beings – in spite of or precisely through their traumatic past. For Dolores in *The Hiding Place* and for Ginny in *A Thousand Acres*, for example, their changing relationships with their sisters, who are also their fellow victims, play a vital role in the way they experience, remember, and retrospectively confront their traumatic past. In *Fugitive Pieces*, trauma is even depicted as capable of leading not only to processes of personal growth but also to particularly intense and fulfilling relationships.

In literary discourses, as we will see in more detail in the following chapters, trauma takes on a number of shapes and meanings, many of which differ in nature or emphasis from their meanings in trauma's home disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis. The aim of a dialogue between literary and psychological discourses is not to collapse their differences, not to construct parallel histories, but to reveal the dynamics of their intersecting histories. Being a fundamentally different way of organizing knowledge and interpreting the world than psychology, with its roots in medicine, biology, and empiricism, literature tends to produce what Wolfgang Iser terms gaps and indeterminacy (*Prospecting*) and to raise questions, challenge assumptions, and destabilize certainties. In multiple

ways, literature engages with the scientific discourses of its day, but it has the freedom to draw on these selectively, to escape or challenge scientific positions, to remain in between or beyond them. Transcending the laws of the empirical and factual and exploring the realm of the imaginary and textual, literature has the potential to elucidate the human psyche from different perspectives – and these specifically literary perspectives can be brought into relief by drawing on the background of scientific discourses. What I have attempted in this chapter, however, is not only to show the importance of contextualizing Romantic and postmodern trauma novels within the mental sciences of their time but also to demonstrate how the psychiatric discourses of two historical periods can mutually illuminate each other, especially because they negotiate a series of similar concerns in different ways.

Moreover, the field of contemporary traumatic stress studies also provides a crucial theoretical counterpart to literary trauma theory in my approach to trauma fiction. It is precisely because of the inherent tensions between these disciplines that an interdisciplinary dialogue is fruitful – and this applies especially to a notoriously slippery, complex, and controversial subject such as trauma. More specifically, as outlined above, an interdisciplinary approach constitutes a crucial pillar of my theoretical trajectory for several reasons: exploring trauma through the lens of psychiatry and psychology allows me to move away from the paradigm of literary and cultural studies that conceptualizes trauma in metaphorical and aestheticized as well as abstract and ahistorical terms. Indeed, the corpus of Romantic and postmodern trauma texts I have chosen for this study, with their emphasis on individual psychological trauma in childhood and the family, calls for an approach that focuses not on structural and cultural trauma but on the personal, specific, and concrete dimensions of trauma – and it is with regard to these dimensions of literary trauma writing that trauma psychology has a lot to bring to literary studies. Psychological and psychiatric approaches to trauma also complement literary trauma theory in important ways because they offer significant perspectives on areas the field has unconsciously eclipsed or consciously excluded, including processes of narration, recovery, and healing. In the following chapters, the dialogue across periods and disciplines is continued and deepened in multiple ways. I investigate in detail the specificities of individual literary voices on trauma and also explore recurring concerns, themes, and frames, with the overall aim of revealing the shapes, textures, and meanings of wounds and words in the Romantic and postmodern literary and cultural imagination.

Chapter Two: The "Wounded Mind"

Feminism, Trauma, and Self-Narration

in Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*

> "Virtue flies from a house divided against itself –
> and a whole legion of devils take up their residence
> there."
> (MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, *A VINDICATION OF THE
> RIGHTS OF WOMAN*)

> "We are all the creatures of education."
> (MARY HAYS, *MEMOIRS OF EMMA COURTNEY*)

Near the end of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798), Maria asserts, "I exclaim against the laws which throw the whole weight of the yoke on the weaker shoulders" (171), protesting vehemently against the "rigid laws which enslave women" and the reigning "false morality" that makes "all the virtue of women consist in chastity, submission, and the forgiveness of injuries" (171). Maria's written defence against her tyrannical husband Venables' charge of adultery abounds with such powerful political statements; it is a feminist manifesto, denouncing the array of wrongs done to women and proclaiming the right of women to free themselves from the yoke of male oppression. Given the feminist awareness expressed throughout Wollstonecraft's unfinished, posthumously published novel,[1] it is not surprising that its politics has received considerable scholarly attention. Feminist but also biographical approaches to Wollstonecraft's novel constitute the dominant paradigms; as Claudia Johnson states, most critics read *The Wrongs of*

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1 In his preface to *The Wrongs of Woman*, Godwin emphasizes that the work is a fragment and that Wollstonecraft, who died from complications after childbirth, was "far from considering [it] finished" ("Preface" 66). On Godwin's editing of Wollstonecraft's works see Tilottama Rajan's "Framing the Corpus."

Woman "either as an extension of her biography or as a fictionalization of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" ("Wollstonecraft's Novels" 189).[2]

In this chapter, I draw on these readings of *The Wrongs of Woman* but also pursue a different trajectory, bringing into focus a theme that is crucial to the novel and its feminist politics but that has so far received virtually no attention: the theme of trauma. Constructed as a series of interlaced life-stories of suffering, the novel depicts a bleak vision of the nuclear family as dominated by ruptured relationships. Participating in the Romantic fascination with suffering and disruptions of the psyche, *The Wrongs of Woman* foregrounds women's and children's traumatic experiences and the impact of these psychic injuries as well as processes of narrating, sharing, and transmitting trauma. Mediating between the individual and the collective, between a psychology of the "wounded mind" and a political analysis of women's oppression, trauma, as I will show, plays a central role in the novel's feminist vision, but it also transcends and disrupts this vision in several ways. Both the interrelations and the tensions between trauma and feminist politics are, then, crucial for an understanding of the politics and psychologies of trauma in *The Wrongs of Woman*.

The novel displays a significant tension between its persistent emphasis on scenes of women's and children's traumatic experiences and its powerful gesture towards controlling the impact of trauma, towards transforming the posttraumatic into a source of resistance and power. These seemingly contradictory impulses can, however, both be seen as part of the text's feminist politics, which combines a vehement accusation of male cruelty and patriarchal tyranny with a vision of women's potential for resistance. Yet the novel also signals that trauma and the posttraumatic are not fully contained within the text's two-pronged feminist vision: Maria's life-story reveals trauma to have a force of its own, which repeatedly breaks forth with striking power. In these moments, trauma seems to override the feminist trajectory and develop its own dynamics. Eruptions of the traumatic manifest themselves in several key scenes, embedded in a cluster of images circling around visions, dreams, and nightmares as well as in a number of the text's narrative, structural, and linguistic characteristics.

The novel's representation of the friction between attempts at healing the wounds of the past and the uncontrollable, persistent powers of the pathological will also be discussed in the light of psychological and psychiatric perspectives; trauma theory will help reveal that *The Wrongs of Woman* reinforces the dynamics of trauma and resistance, recovery, and growth through a sustained contrast of the

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2   Among the studies one could mention here are Barbara Taylor's *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, Gary Kelly's *Revolutionary Feminism*, Anna Wilson's *Persuasive Fictions*, Maria Falco's *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, and Julie Carlson's *England's First Family of Writers*.

verbal and the visual. Throughout the novel, speaking and listening, words and narratives are associated with attempts at connecting with others as well as processes of working through, while the visual appears in connection with posttraumatic suffering, emphasizing the forces of trauma and the lasting crises it produces. At the same time, these themes – the psychopathological as uncontrollable and isolated suffering versus shared suffering – also relate to the novel's general response to contemporary discourses within the mental sciences. The novel can be read as enacting the shift from an eighteenth-century to a Romantic approach to madness. It moves beyond the Enlightenment fear of madness and the instability of reason to express a Romantic fascination with the complexity of the disrupted mind and a readiness to allow proximity to and interaction with suffering and mental illness. This chapter, then, reads Wollstonecraft's novel both as a negotiation of Romantic-period responses to mental disturbances and as a nuanced exploration of the potentials and the limitations of language and narration in the face of trauma.

WRONGED AND WOUNDED WOMEN:
FEMALE TRAUMA AND FEMINIST POLITICS

The Wrongs of Woman contains a striking number of stories of women wronged by their fathers, husbands, families, and/or society. Many of these "wrongs" – whose paramount importance to the text is encapsulated in the title – are of such a painful, disruptive, and emotionally overwhelming nature that they invite a reading in the light of trauma. Not only are the female protagonists, Maria and Jemima, victims of multiple traumas, but their narratives also include a series of further narratives of women's suffering, of their emotional and physical injuries. These life-stories are scattered throughout the text and embedded in an episodic and dialogic structure that produces powerful resonances among the individual stories. The sheer number of these narratives – about twenty-five – and the many parallels between them contribute to the sense that the novel collapses the distinction between the private and the political; *The Wrongs of Woman* as a whole echoes the tone of a treatise, while the individual stories carry undertones of case studies. Contextualizing individual psychological portrayals of disrupted lives within larger socio-political structures of oppression and violence, the novel embeds its psychology of trauma in an extended vision of "gender trouble" (in Judith Butler's terminology) and "family trouble."

   The Wrongs of Woman, then, displays a distinct generic hybridity, which has been emphasized by a number of critics. As Johnson notes, "[a]ll of [Wollstonecraft's] works are of a piece in their very diversity, blending overlapping discourses of education, political commentary, travel literature, autobiography, moral philosophy, and fiction" ("Wollstonecraft's Novels" 189). The blending of different genres

is even expressed in the double title *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria*. The first half of the title emphasizes the text's general implications and political dimensions, while the second half puts the fictional heroine centre stage, with the conjunction "or" providing the – rather unstable – connection between the two. The title, in fact, performs in a nutshell the joining together of fiction and politics characteristic of the Jacobin novel. As Anna Wilson emphasizes, *The Wrongs of Woman* is profoundly influenced by the "intense politicization of the novel in the 1790s" and can be read as "the last jacobin novel published" (31).[3] Indeed, in the preface to *The Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft explicitly claims that her text – which she labels a "novel" – is based on a political agenda and is, as a result, much more than "the abortion of a distempered fancy, or the strong delineations of a wounded heart" (67). Her "main object," she continues, is "the desire of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society" (67). The personal here fuses with the political in multiple ways. As Diane Hoeveler asserts, *The Wrongs of Woman* is an attempt to "merge deeply felt personal experiences of pain – wounding, a series of psychic trauma – with a more just social, legal, and political agenda for women" (388). According to Gary Kelly, the text's autobiographical resonances function as a way of expressing political ideas with "greater rhetorical force" and as a means of "convey[ing] a sense of autobiographical authenticity and hence authority" ("Introduction" xxviii).[4] Elizabeth Dolan takes this idea even further by reading Wollstonecraft's merging of personal experiences and political vision as an "ethnographic" project: "Offering the reader autobiographical resonances, Wollstonecraft becomes a participant observer, and ethnographer who situates her own experience within the social structures or culture she describes" (196). In this reading, the voice of personal experience becomes the voice of political authority.

From a political perspective, *The Wrongs of Woman* pursues the goal of "making women's suffering visible" (Dolan 199), and it does so by means of an analytical gaze that scans society across its different classes. This socially panoramic gesture manifests itself in the choice of the two female protagonists: while Jemima's life-story chronicles the sufferings of a female servant faced with a series of adversities that toss her around the lower regions of society, Maria's story illustrates the misfortunes and misery of a woman much better positioned in society. The shorter

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3   For a more extensive discussion of *The Wrongs of Woman* in relation to the Jacobin novel, see for example Kelly's *Revolutionary Feminism*.

4   According to Rajan, Godwin's memoirs of Wollstonecraft also significantly contributed to the view that her life and her writings are closely interrelated. As Rajan puts it, Godwin "read[s] Wollstonecraft's texts as part of her life" (2) and represents her as "the archetype of those Jacobin women (such as Mary Hays) who lived fiction and ideas as life, while rethinking life through fiction" ("Framing" 517).

portrayals of women that are dispersed throughout Jemima's and Maria's narratives as inset tales also cut across different social classes.[5] What all these stories have in common, however, is the dark depiction of lovers, husbands, and parents characterized by irresponsibility and callousness, by abusiveness and cruelty. Parent-child and marital relationships are poisoned by indifference, hatred, or greed; at the same time, they are lacking in care, warmth, and affection. While the life-stories scattered throughout the novel do not explore in detail the impact of these traumas experienced in the family or marriage, their dense texture nevertheless conveys their devastating, often fatal consequences. And each story – as short as it may be – reinforces the significance of the preceding and succeeding ones and contributes to the overall picture of a society in which women's and children's traumas are omnipresent. This case-study architecture, so to speak, forms the cornerstone of the text's feminist politics.

It is through its eponymous heroine Maria that *The Wrongs of Woman* articulates its critique of patriarchy most explicitly and forcefully. Maria is not only the woman wronged and wounded by men *par excellence*, but she also functions as the mouthpiece of the author's feminist politics.[6] Barbara Taylor identifies Maria, like Jemima, as an example of the "polemical constructs" typical of the Jacobin novel; she is a figure "whose feminist ideals arise at the extremes of female experience" (236). Indeed, the novel stages Maria's marriage to Venables, a gambler and an unfaithful and ruthless husband, as generating a domestic space that is increasingly determined by extremities of suffering. When Venables forces her to wring money from her uncle and even attempts to prostitute her to his friend, Maria decides to escape from the prison of marriage. Living her life in secrecy, Maria is soon discovered by her tyrannical husband, who, as a particularly drastic step, cruelly separates her from her child and imprisons her in an asylum. In depicting Maria's imprison-

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5   The servant class is represented, for example, by the girl who is impregnated by the same tradesman that Jemima desires; when he expels her from his house, the girl faces such an unbearable situation that she commits suicide (104). Another example is the country girl who is seduced and abandoned by Venables and subsequently forced into prostitution and driven into death (133). The narratives of Maria's first and second landladies (both emotionally, physically, and financially abused by their husbands) and the stories of Maria's sisters (with their desolate and lonely lives as governesses, which eventually lead to the decline and death of the younger of the two) are some of the most striking examples of disrupted female existence further up the social ladder.

6   Kelly also points out the different layers of meaning and allusion that the name of the eponymous heroine might contain: "Maria's name could allude to other historical prisoners of sex, such as Mary Queen of Scots and Marie Roland, victims of their own sensibility and Revolutionary anti-feminism; Maria could also stand for her author" (*Revolutionary Feminism* 209).

ment in a madhouse, the text combines a feminist critique with a critique of mental institutions, engaging with two burning issues of the time. As Roy Porter emphasizes in *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, throughout the eighteenth century, the reputation of private asylums was tainted by accusations of corrupt practices. He asserts that "[e]arly on the prime grievance was wrong confinement. It became almost proverbial that keepers were sharks, and the sane were improperly sequestered in private asylums" (148).[7] Through such institutions, an actual "trade in lunacy" flourished, and abusive practices were hidden beneath the "business of preserving discreet silences" (137, 142). Maria, then, is a victim both of her husband's ruthlessness and the corrupt system of mental institutions.[8] Being locked up in the asylum marks the moment she experiences most powerfully her helpless subjection to her husband's tyranny.

The text clearly conveys that Maria's traumatic experiences and the female suffering she witnesses constitute the basis of her growing feminist awareness. Accordingly, Wollstonecraft has Maria express herself in increasingly powerful and polemical terms in her account of her husband's abuses. Maria uses a rhetoric of animality ("I was hunted, like an infected beast" 157), criminality ("I was hunted like a felon" 152) and, echoing a recurring trope in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, slavery ("the rigid laws which enslave women" 171). It is at this point that, through the harsh criticism of English marriage law, "which allowed men to abuse, rob, rape and neglect their wives" (Dolan 199), the text's coupling of trauma and feminist politics culminates. Not only does it highlight the pervasiveness and the severity of injuries that women suffer at the hands of men, *The Wrongs of Woman* also calls attention to the way in which these injuries are, in fact, sanctioned by the legal system, which defends the institution of marriage at all costs, thereby making it almost impossible for female trauma victims to separate from their oppressors – their abusive, tyrannical husbands.

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7   Porter observes that while the *Act for Regulating Private Madhouses* (1774), through which private madhouses finally became licensed, constituted a "legislative landmark," it is doubtful to what extent this Act actually "provided real safeguards" (*Manacles* 152).

8   While the text certainly calls attention to the corruption within private asylums, it should also be noted that, as Kelly asserts, "by the standards of the time, the madhouse in which Maria is confined seems unusually well run and safe" ("Notes" 188).

DISRUPTED FAMILIES AND HOMELESSNESS:
A FEMINIST VIEW OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

While women's traumatic experiences are depicted throughout *The Wrongs of Woman* and are a significant part of its feminist politics, it is crucial to note the extent to which the novel also highlights childhood trauma. Wollstonecraft has all three of her protagonists, Maria, Jemima, and Henry Darnford (who is also imprisoned in the asylum and later becomes Maria's lover), begin their narratives with an account of their childhood and familial background. In their life histories, childhood functions not merely as the first chapter of their narratives but as the genesis of the individual's character. Influenced by associationist philosophy, the belief that childhood experiences have a deeply formative effect was prominent at the time. As Alan Richardson emphasizes, "nearly every important writer on education in Wollstonecraft's time" subscribed to the idea that "childhood was the crucial period for the formation of individuals" ("Mary Wollstonecraft" 24), an idea that also plays a pivotal role in the writings of her husband Godwin and her daughter Mary Shelley.[9] Wollstonecraft's profound interest in childhood and education permeates several of her works, notably *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, *Original Stories* (a book written for children),[10] and, in different ways, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *The Wrongs of Woman*.

The vision of childhood outlined in *The Wrongs of Woman* is not one of a blissful time of innocence and joy but one of intense struggle and misery. The most extensive and, simultaneously, the most harrowing depiction of childhood in the novel is Jemima's account of her early life. Jemima records how her father "began to hate, as well as despise" her even before she was born (92), how her mother died a few days after her birth, and how she was looked after by the cheapest nurse available. Lack of care and affection emerge as the determining factors in her life from infancy on. As Jemima puts it, "[t]he chicken has a wing to shelter under; but I had no bosom to nestle in, no kindred warmth to foster me" (92). When Jemima's father

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9 This emphasis on the formative power of education was also a typical characteristic of the Jacobin novel. As Richardson writes, "the radical or 'Jacobin' novel of the 1790s offers a fleshed-out version of the Lockean constructivist approach, showing in vivid detail how, as Mary Hays writes in *Emma Courtney*, 'We are all the creatures of education'" (*British Romanticism* 96).

10 As Richardson stresses, *Original Stories* is significantly influenced by Rousseau's *Émile*, which in the late eighteenth century was almost as influential as Locke's *Some Thoughts on Education* ("Mary Wollstonecraft" 28-29). For a detailed discussion of how Wollstonecraft's philosophy of education relates to the ideas of other educational thinkers of her time, see Richardson's *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*.

marries again, her stepmother's house, which might have functioned as a substitute home for her, turns out to be a locus of enslavement. Neglected, beaten, and forced to work "with the servility of a slave" for the "darling of the house" (93), Jemima incessantly serves her stepsister's every need.

Jemima not only anticipates Maria's rhetoric of slavery, but she also uses animal comparisons extensively to convey the degrading and dehumanizing treatment she suffered at the hands of her stepmother: "I was the filching cat, the ravenous dog, the dumb brute, who must bear all" (95). Under the reign of this female tyrant, Jemima is systematically stigmatized as a "bastard" and an embodiment of vice, first within her family and then within the larger social frame: "I was sent to the neighbouring shops with Glutton, Liar or Thief, written on my forehead" (95). Jemima's narrative here emphatically illustrates the psychosocial dynamics of stigmatization processes. As Jemima conjectures, her stepmother's malice made it almost impossible for her stepsister to love her, deprived her of the little affection her father might have had left for her and created an insuperable barrier between her and her social environment.

Wollstonecraft has Jemima record all of these harrowing experiences in a forthright and graphic way, in the mode of "documentary realism" (Jones 211). Her focus is more on the events and less on her subjective responses, and unlike Maria's narrative, Jemima's is almost entirely devoid of the trope of trauma as the unspeakable. Yet the text suggests that her sober, unruffled way of narrating her traumatic past is a result of the intensity of her suffering, and it reveals just how much Jemima was hardened by her victimization. The way in which the narrator introduces Jemima is telling: "An insulated being, from the misfortune of her birth, she despised and preyed on the society by which she had been oppressed, and loved not her fellow-creatures, because she had never been beloved" (75). Evoking a clear cause-effect model, the text resonates powerfully with the psychological and sociological ideas that Wollstonecraft expresses in *A Vindication*, where she repeatedly stresses the formative role of the environment. Her belief in the profound impact of the individual's immediate social environment leads her conclude, rather pessimistically, that "men of the greatest abilities have seldom had sufficient strength to rise above the surrounding atmosphere" (111). Furthermore, *A Vindication* explicitly identifies infancy as the defining stage of character formation. Criticizing how ignorant mothers bring up their children, Wollstonecraft stresses the powerful impact education has on young children. She asserts, "so early do they catch a character, that the base of the moral character, experience leads to infer, is fixed before their seventh year" (262). The narrator's brief synopsis of Jemima's biography encapsulates these and related ideas from *A Vindication*, thereby exemplifying the "politicization of childhood" that Richardson associates with the 1790s (*Literature* 126).

It is not only the extradiegetic narrator, however, who identifies Jemima as a victim profoundly shaped by her multiple childhood traumas; Wollstonecraft has

Jemima herself interpret her life-story along similar lines. Jemima repeatedly interrupts her sober and rather unemotional narrative with short interludes of retrospective, critical analysis of her life and development. In such moments of self-analysis, Jemima highlights how she "detested mankind, and abhorred [her]self" (97). In other words, Wollstonecraft has Jemima diagnose herself as suffering from a persistent estrangement from her fellow beings and a profound sense of self-alienation, both typical long-term effects of childhood trauma (Herman, *Recovery* 119-21). In retrospect, Jemima claims, more specifically, that the sense of homelessness – "for a home I never knew" (93) – and the lack of maternal affection that determined her existence from the very beginning inevitably shaped the course of her life:

Now I look back, I cannot help attributing the greater part of my misery, to the misfortune of having been thrown into the world without the grand support of life – a mother's affection. I had no one to love me; or to make me respected, to enable me to acquire respect. I was an egg dropped on the sand. (95)

In this passage, Jemima conceptualizes the lack of maternal love – rather than the absence of a parent's or caregiver's affection in general – as the origin of the misery of her life. The untimely loss of her mother emerges as the primary trauma that, henceforth, overshadows her existence. The novel, thus, represents the mother as the child's first and foremost connection to the world and ascribes paramount importance to traumatic childhood experiences, demonstrating how Jemima's childhood trauma exposes her to a lasting condition of vulnerability.

The theme of mother-daughter relationships runs throughout *The Wrongs of Woman*. In Jemima's case, the crucial impact of maternal affection – or rather the lack thereof – is emphasized through the radical failure of her two potential substitute mothers to provide this affection: Jemima's nurse, whose heart is so hardened that "the office of a mother did not awaken the tenderness of a woman" (92), and Jemima's stepmother, who epitomizes the distortion and perversion of motherhood and maternal duty. Moreover, this theme is played out in a number of inset tales of women's lives, which similarly testify to the devastating effects of unhealthy mother-child relationships. Jemima outlines several women's stories that are "thematically linked, each depicting a different sort of violation of the relationship between mothers and daughters" (Dolan 203). *The Wrongs of Woman* thus echoes Wollstonecraft's grim exclamation in *A Vindication*, "how many children are absolutely murdered by the ignorance of women!" (262). But how is this negative portrayal of mother figures to be explained? On the one hand, it exemplifies that, despite her powerful depiction of male tyranny and oppression, Wollstonecraft refrains from idealizing her sex. On the other hand, the charge directed at women in general and mothers in particular may also be interpreted as an indirect accusation

of men.[11] *The Wrongs of Woman* implies what *A Vindication* argues explicitly, namely, that the male-dominated educational system is corrupted to such an extent that it renders women incapable of fulfilling their role as nurturing, caring mothers. Through its powerful critique of both fathers and mothers, Wollstonecraft's texts call for the acknowledgement of parental responsibility and the child's right to protection.[12]

The topos of unhealthy and destructive parent-child relationships also plays a prominent role in both Maria's and Darnford's accounts of their childhood. Darnford's few sentences about his family background are revealing, portraying both mother and father as incapable of parental affection: "He was fond of the turf, she of the card-table. I, and two or three other children since dead, were kept at home till we became intolerable" (85). The fact that Darnford does not seem to remember the precise number of his siblings is as disturbing as the implication that his parents, who "had a visible dislike to each other," perceived their children as wearisome burdens (85). Although Darnford, the only man in the trio of sufferers in the asylum-prison, is depicted as having an equally dreary childhood, the novel suggests that it was easier for Darnford than for the two women to move into adulthood; rather than being confined to a claustrophobic domestic space or lost in the social underworld, he made free use of the liberties made possible by his inheritance and seized the opportunities for travel that military life offered. The consequences of childhood trauma are, in other words, depicted as less severe in his case than in Jemima's and Maria's.

Maria's story of her childhood expresses a powerful critique of patriarchal authority, portraying her father and her eldest brother as tyrants. Maria describes her father as a "man of war" who, after leaving the navy, imposes a military-style system of command and control, of "absolute authority" and "passive obedience," on the private, domestic sphere (111). Favoured by his parents over the other siblings, her eldest brother Robert assumes the role of "deputy tyrant," taking "a peculiar

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11 For a similar reading of Wollstonecraft's negative and highly critical depiction of women, see for example Taylor's *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*. Discussing the alleged paradoxes in Wollstonecraft's feminist thought and what has been labelled her "anti-womanism," Taylor argues that Wollstonecraft perceived the negative qualities of women as "men's handiwork," representing women as "the debilitated products of male tyranny" (16). Yet Taylor acknowledges that it is impossible to resolve all the tensions in Wollstonecraft's feminist thought, emphasizing that "all her life Wollstonecraft was to display strongly ambivalent attitudes towards women" (18).

12 As Charlene Bunnell emphasizes, the notion of parental accountability become prominent during the Romantic period, and Wollstonecraft played an active role in the educational discourses propagating this idea ("Parents and Children").

pleasure in tormenting and humbling" her (111, 114).[13] The pain caused by the numerous emotional injuries inflicted on her by her tyrannical father and brother was, as Maria implies, exacerbated by the lack of maternal affection: having elected Robert as her "darling," Maria's mother "might be said not to love the rest of her children" (111-12).[14] It is important to note, however, that Maria largely refrains from criticizing her mother; instead, she represents her as another victim of her father: "[I]t is necessary to notice, that it [the father's tyranny] undermined my mother's health; and that her temper, continually irritated by domestic bickering, became intolerably peevish" (114). Moreover, as in Jemima's case, Maria's potential substitute mother, her father's mistress, whom he takes into the house soon after his wife's death, tyrannizes the children once their care is entrusted to her. Maria's childhood is marked by emotional rather than physical violence, exemplifying how much psychical injuries can shatter a child's stability and wellbeing. Her life-story also resonates with psychologists' claim that early traumas tend to increase the risk of experiencing further traumas (see Comer 141). The novel emphasizes how ardently Maria desires to escape her unbearable family situation, her home that has never felt like home, and, as a result, blindly rushes into a marriage with the young squire Venables. As Maria highlights, "[h]ad my home been more comfortable, or my previous acquaintance more numerous, I should not probably have been so eager to open my heart to new affections" (115).[15] Like Jemima, Maria here explicitly establishes a connection between the adversities of her childhood and the traumatic experiences of her adulthood; in the attempt to escape parental tyranny, she exposes herself to another form of oppression, marital tyranny. Like Jemima, Maria is

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13 Echoing important points of criticism articulated in *A Vindication*, Maria also stresses the unjust system of education reigning in their family, where education was reserved for boys and denied to girls: "Such indeed is the force of prejudice, that what was called spirit and wit in him, was cruelly repressed as forwardness in me" (112). Later on, she records that, in the home of her father's mistress, her books are taken away from her, "on the pretext that they made [her] idle" (121).

14 Maria's family constellation closely resembles Mary's in Wollstonecraft's *Mary*: Mary's mother is indifferent and neglectful, caring only about her dogs and cards, and she suffers not only from poor health, but, like her children, from the violence of her husband, who is "very tyrannical and passionate" and "very easily irritated when inebriated" (8). It should also be emphasized that the depiction of the father's "drunken violence" and the "uncaring mother" resonates with Wollstonecraft's own childhood (Taylor 5).

15 The novel also highlights Maria's longing for a healthy parent-child relationship through her attempt to find a substitute father in her uncle, whom she labels her "more than father!" (138) and "the dear parent of [her] mind" (155). In fact, her claim that she felt "widowed by the death of [her] uncle" (159) suggests that he simultaneously functions as a substitute for her heartless father and her tyrannical husband.

scarred for life by childhood trauma and remains particularly vulnerable to further traumatization.

The theme of a sad, disturbing childhood is not only developed through Maria's retrospective life-story but also present throughout the text in relation to the uncertain fate of her daughter, whom Venables cruelly snatched away. Jemima's harrowing story reminds Maria of all the dangers that a helpless, unprotected child might be exposed to:

Thinking of Jemima's peculiar fate and her own, she was led to consider the oppressed state of women, and to lament that she had given birth to a daughter. Sleep fled from her eyelids, while she dwelt on the wretchedness of unprotected infancy, till sympathy with Jemima changed to agony, when it seemed probable that her own babe might even now be in the very state she so forcibly described. (107)

As this passage illustrates, Maria is terrified by the idea of her daughter's present and future sufferings. Recollecting her own loveless home and Jemima's deeply disturbing experiences of both emotional and physical homelessness, Maria is agonized by the impossibility of providing a loving and safe home for her child. Thus, trauma is present in the text not only as a dreary reality documented by various experiential trauma narratives but also as powerful threat, evoked by Maria's fear of her daughter's potential sufferings.

The Wrongs of Woman, then, exposes the bleak state of the nuclear family in Romantic-era England, depicting gender and family politics as closely interrelated. The novel not only contains a powerful accusation of patriarchal oppression, but it also offers critiques of education and family relationships. Incapable, unloving mothers or stepmothers are as much part of this critical vision as violent, tyrannical fathers. The novel illustrates how women may internalize male violence and abusiveness to such an extent that they, in turn, victimize other women, triggering cycles of injury, abuse, and violence. *The Wrongs of Woman* repeatedly highlights the crucial importance of the mother and the devastating effects of a lack of maternal affection. More generally, the novel offers, especially through the female protagonists Maria and Jemima, a testimony of the crucial importance of childhood and the lasting, formative effects of emotional injuries suffered from infancy to adolescence. Foregrounding the powerful after-effects of growing up in a home devoid of affection, the novel repeatedly suggests a close connection between childhood trauma and women's later traumas as well as between disrupted parent-child relationships and disturbed marital relationships. In *The Wrongs of Woman*, the family figures as the site of multiple traumas.

THE BOND OF SHARED SUFFERING

While the pervasiveness of women's and children's traumas across different social classes constitutes an important element of the feminist critique expressed in *The Wrongs of Woman*, the novel also displays a tendency to keep trauma contained, to keep its force within limits. On the whole, *The Wrongs of Woman* refrains from depicting women as weak and indulging in their misery; instead, it emphasizes their resistance, emotional strength, and resourcefulness – another element of the novel's feminist politics. Rather than representing women who suffer from the lasting effects of trauma as shattered and paralyzed subjects, the novel depicts, in the words of Julie Carlson, "women whose reactions to suffering are dignified" (39). The novel, as Daniella Mallinick similarly asserts, abounds with "displays of mental strength in the face of domestic or social adversity" (20), which are dramatized in different ways through the two female protagonists, Maria and Jemima.

In her memoirs, Maria reports how, at the discovery of her husband's severe breach of faith (i.e., attempting to prostitute her to a friend), she decided to take action and fight for herself rather than submissively endure his tyranny. And Jemima, while deeply marked and hardened by her traumas, is depicted as not entirely broken either. Her life-story is constructed as an illustration of resourcefulness, chronicling how she fights her way through "the desert of human society" (100) as a washerwoman, thief, prostitute, and so forth. Though Jemima does come perilously close to committing suicide once, she persists and adapts to the most harrowing circumstances. It is significant too that the female protagonists are also depicted as physically strong. The narrator describes Maria as having a "well-proportioned, and even almost voluptuous figure" (89), and Jemima's "firm, deliberate step" also indicates (though less explicitly) physical strength (71). Moreover, the theme of women's capacity for resistance and adaptation is taken up in some of the shorter portrayals of women, but not always to positive effect. For example, Maria's first landlady asserts that "when a woman was once married, she must bear every thing" (100), and Maria characterizes her as "of the true Russian breed of wives," who through passive endurance and submission yields blindly to the yoke of her despotic husband. While this portrait exemplifies a negative dimension of adaptation – submissive acceptance of the status quo – Jemima's and Maria's resourcefulness is depicted in a far more positive light; it functions not only as tool for survival, but also as a potential catalyst for change.

In terms of coping strategies, *The Wrongs of Woman* repeatedly mentions the distracting and uplifting powers of literature and music. Carlson's assertion that "[t]he only bright spots in any of the women's personal stories involve moments of reading or literary converse" (32) is telling in this context. Jemima records how, as a child, she was deeply fascinated by a ballad singer in the streets and how, later,

she developed a passion for literature, especially through her master's literary conversations with his friends (100-01). Similarly, Maria describes books and literary society as well as theatre as important sources of pleasure and diversion within a dreary existence. Locked up in the asylum-prison, she perceives the few books that Jemima secretly brings her as a "mine of treasure" (78).

While the novel represents literature as a survival tool, it also suggests that, in the hands of these women, narrative can forge emotional bonds and facilitate personal and political change. During her first encounters with Maria, Jemima is depicted as wavering between "interest and suspicion" (75), between longing for interchange with another human being and profound misanthropy. Yet Wollstonecraft has Jemima gradually overcome her distrust until she finally confides her tale to Maria and Darnford. The novel here evokes the healing powers of narration in the context of trauma. It is important to emphasize, however, that in Jemima's case, narration does not take the form of solitary self-expression and self-therapy. The novel makes clear that Jemima's type of self-narration is not primarily expressive and cathartic – unlike the narration of the eponymous heroine of Wollstonecraft's 1788 novel *Mary: A Fiction*, who tries to cope with a series of traumatic losses by writing "a rhapsody on sensibility" and a series of fragments in the "little book that was now her only confident" (49). Furthermore, in contrast to many postmodern trauma novels, the primary importance of narration for Jemima does not lie in the act of shaping her traumatic past into a coherent narrative or in the search for lost memories as well as for words to embody those memories; rather, what seems to matter most for Jemima is telling her tale in front of an audience, that is, finding a kind, understanding, and sympathetic listener.

Through Jemima, then, *The Wrongs of Woman* demonstrates that autobiographical remembering is not a solitary and secluded activity but one that vitally depends on communication and social interaction. As social psychologists Harald Welzer and Hans Markowitsch assert, autobiographical narratives are, while intimately related to the individual and the self, also strongly embedded in interpersonal relationships, in societal and cultural frames (64, 69).[16] In *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*, Welzer shows how the individual is involved in a continuous process of synthesizing and synchronizing, striving to make his or her stories, beliefs, and feelings about the past compatible with others' narratives of the past as well as their feelings and judgments. *The Wrongs of Woman* shows that for an outcast like Jemima, who has always suffered from a lack of positive social interaction, it is particularly important to find somebody who will not only listen to her narrative but

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16 The social and cultural foundations of individual memory have, of course, been emphasized by many memory theorists from Maurice Halbwachs to Aleida Assmann. For recent investigations of collective and cultural dimensions of memory in relation to literature and culture see for example Michael Frank and Gabriele Rippl's *Arbeit am Gedächtnis*.

also believe and accept it. At the end of her narrative, which resembles "the popular eighteenth-century criminal biography" (Kelly, "Notes" 193), Jemima expresses her ardent desire for understanding and sympathy through an implicit appeal to her listeners: "Who ever acknowledged me to be a fellow creature?" (107). And when Maria takes her hand as a gesture of sympathy, her response is equally telling: "Jemima, more overcome by kindness than she had ever been by cruelty, hastened out of the room to conceal her emotions" (107). This scene demonstrates how much it means for Jemima to find an empathetic listener. Furthermore, this key moment, an experience of fellowship for Jemima, can also be read as a moment of recognition: through Maria's gesture, Jemima seems to recognize her trauma as trauma, to recognize her lack of interpersonal connections as a deprivation rather than as a mere fact, as something that, if it could have been avoided, would have significantly altered the course of her life.

Taking this theme of interpersonal connections further, I argue that what enables Jemima to overcome her alienation from all human interaction is her entry into what Iwona Irwin-Zarecka calls a "community of suffering" (*Frames of Remembrance*). While Irwin-Zarecka primarily uses the term to refer to larger collectives bound together by historical traumas, *The Wrongs of Woman* stages the emergence of a smaller, more intimate "community of suffering." What connects Jemima, Maria, and Darnford is their awareness that they have all undergone hardship and that they are all entrapped in the enclosed, heterotopic space of the asylum – Maria and Darnford as prisoners and Jemima as a prison guard without alternative options for employment. In this community of suffering, the bond created by shared affliction (and even more through the process of sharing affliction) transcends differences of social class. Within the community, Jemima acquires the status of a fellow-sufferer and, thus, of an equal to her social superiors. The narrator highlights the crucial importance of this sense of community for Jemima: "She seemed indeed to breathe more freely; the cloud of suspicion cleared away from her brow; she felt herself, for once in her life, treated like a fellow-creature" (91). Within the shelter of the community, Jemima finds a space where she can speak and be heard: "And Jemima, after again controlling the passage, was so softened by the air of confidence which breathed around her, that she voluntarily began an account of herself" (91).

In its depiction of trauma victims connecting with each other, *The Wrongs of Woman* echoes Rousseau's ideas about the importance of sharing suffering. As Dolan emphasizes, "[f]or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, learning to bear suffering and learning to see the suffering of others were essential elements in the education of a human being"; in fact, according to his philosophy, it is by sharing each other's sufferings that "human beings know each other" and "begin to understand one another's

subjectivity" (11).[17] Using Rousseau as a starting point, Dolan reads *The Wrongs of Woman* as an example of how women writers of the time "articulate models of seeing therapeutically that move the individual from a sense of isolated suffering to forms of healing social interaction or expression" (16). While Dolan is right to highlight the novel's emphasis on "social interaction" rather than solitary suffering, I interpret the novel less as a testimonial to the importance of "seeing suffering," as Dolan suggests, and more as a testimony to the importance of *telling* suffering. *The Wrongs of Woman* especially emphasizes language and narrative, thereby focusing on a more interactive, responsive medium than the unilateral gaze. The visual, as I will discuss later in this chapter, is here mainly associated with solitary suffering and the intrusiveness of the traumatic past, while the verbal provides a space of interaction.

The novel also highlights the trauma victim's desire for verbal reciprocity through its repeated emphasis on the importance of the addressee. Like a number of Romantic novels – for example, Mme de Staël's *Corinne*, Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy*, and Shelley's *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein* – *The Wrongs of Woman* highlights individuals' powerful need to have an addressee who is either physically or imaginatively present during the act of self-narration. All the stories of suffering in Wollstonecraft's novel are told to or written for a specific listener or reader, and it is the sufferer's hope for a sympathetic and responsive addressee and the longing for a reciprocal relationship that form the basis for a community of suffering. Narration, then, is evoked as a means of connecting with others and a possible pathway to recovery. The novel illustrates, to speak with Elaine Scarry, "the passage of pain into speech," that is, the process of verbalizing injuries (here, mainly emotional injuries) that "enables pain to enter into a realm of shared discourse" (9).

FINDING A MISSION: FEMALE RESILIENCE AND RESOURCEFULNESS

The dynamics of this community of suffering in the asylum-prison also demonstrate how the "personal relevance of the traumatic memory" (Irwin-Zarecka 49) plays a central role in forging bonds among sufferers. Maria's account of how her child was snatched away strikes a chord in Jemima, who (until then) seems frozen in her "misanthropy of despair" (75): the idea of a daughter deprived of maternal affection touches the core of Jemima's own traumatic past. In turn, Jemima's story deeply af-

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17 Rousseau discusses the importance of learning to cope with one's own and others' sufferings in his 1762 novel *Émile*. The narrator asserts: "To bear pain is his first and most useful lesson" (49).

fects Maria because it conjures up visions of her lost daughter's fate. Hence, "[i]n each case, the infant daughter is the catalyst to personal transformation and female bonding" (Conger, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 163). In the words of Johnson, "Jemima and Maria repair their injuries in their relations to one another and in their joint relation to Maria's daughter" ("Wollstonecraft's Novels" 206). The novel suggests throughout that the bond between these two women is more powerful, lasting, and valuable than the romantic bond that forms between Maria and Darnford.

Not only do Jemima and Maria emotionally connect with each other, but they also help each other use their psychological resources. In the language of contemporary traumatic stress studies, Jemima and Maria embody (albeit to a different extent) "resilience," that is, the capacity to adapt to or recover from adverse experiences and to resist the negative effects of stressors. According to Stephen Lepore and Tracey Revenson, "resilience, in the broadest sense, refers to dynamic processes that lead to adaptive outcomes in the face of adversity" (28-29). These processes, as Lepore and Revenson further point out, include "reconfiguration" or "transformation": individuals "reconfigure their thoughts, beliefs and behaviors to adjust to ongoing and changing demands" (27). Wollstonecraft depicts both female protagonists as "resilient" and shows them undergoing processes of "reconfiguration" or even "posttraumatic growth." The notion of "posttraumatic growth" revolves around the idea that the crisis caused by trauma may act as a catalyst for personal growth, leading, for example, to "individual development, personal benefits, new life priorities, a deepened sense of meaning, or a deepened sense of connection with others" (Maercker and Zoellner 334).[18] Both Maria and Jemima try to transform their traumatic past into sources of personal development; they do not remain passively caught up in cycles of suffering. The novel stages their struggle to move from the position of helpless victim to active survivor.

A stronger sense of connection with other sufferers and "finding a mission" are essential aspects of trauma victims' processes of recovery and personal development (Maercker 30). The sense of having a personal mission helps victims perceive new meaning in their future and, as a result, reactivate their emotional resources. This applies to Jemima and Maria when they embrace the mission of helping each other: Maria vows to prove to Jemima that she "merit[s] a better fate" (108), while Jemima "determine[s] to alleviate all in her power, without hazarding the loss of her place, the sufferings of a wretched mother" (73). *The Wrongs of Woman* makes clear that this relationship differs significantly from the homoerotic attachment be-

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18 According to Lepore and Revenson, while resistance and recovery are forms of resilience that imply the "maintaining or returning to normal functioning," reconfiguration, as a third form of resilience, includes change and transformation. In contrast to "posttraumatic growth," however, which is conceptualized as purely positive, reconfiguration may include both positive and negative aspects of change (27).

tween Mary and Ann in Wollstonecraft's earlier text *Mary*. In contrast to Mary and Ann's "romantic friendship" (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 53), the relationship between Maria and Jemima is built on female solidarity and a sense of community. It is also interesting to see that, in moments of doubt, each forcibly appeals to the other's sense of responsibility. Jemima insists, "on you it depends to reconcile me with the human race" (166), while Maria exclaims in an urgent, slightly manipulative tone of voice: "With your heart, and such dreadful experience, can you lend your aid to deprive my babe of a mother's tenderness, a mother's care?" (108). Hence, the two women mutually reinforce each other's sense of duty and responsibility. Furthermore, the relationship between Maria and Jemima also carries undertones of a mother-daughter relationship. Maria's farewell words to Jemima, who leaves to gather information on Maria's daughter, consist of an emotional "Adieu" and a "God bless you!" – which, as the narrator states, "seemed to include a maternal benediction" (109). The text suggests that this relationship might offer consolation and comfort to both women, functioning as a substitute relationship for Jemima, who has never had a mother, and for Maria, who has lost her daughter. The novel's emphasis on the idea that women gain strength by helping other women is an important feminist statement that resonates throughout the text.

The Wrongs of Woman implies, however, that Maria's sense of mission goes beyond Jemima. In fact, I want to show that Wollstonecraft constructs a threefold sense of mission for Maria: to assist Jemima in moving on to a better life, to rescue her own daughter from a helpless existence, and to fight against the oppression of the female sex in general. The common denominator in these three goals is female bonding – connecting with and helping other women. The second aspect, Maria's desire to help her lost daughter, is one of the main forces driving her to write her memoirs. She opens them with an appeal to her child and a description of her main purpose in writing these memoirs:

Addressing these memoirs to you, my child, uncertain whether I shall ever have an opportunity of instructing you, many observations will probably flow from my heart, which only a mother – a mother schooled in misery, could make. […]
From my narrative, my dear girl, you may gather the instruction, the counsel, which is meant rather to exercise than influence your mind. (110-11)

Maria here emphasizes the didactic, educative function of her memoirs: they are intended as a guide for her daughter, preparing her for the challenges of a hostile, male-dominated world. Once again highlighting the importance of maternal support, the novel signals that Maria views these memoirs as a means of partially fulfilling her role as a mother, if not in person then at least in her mind. Wollstonecraft has Maria envision the sphere of writing and reading as a substitute for the domestic

sphere of home and the family.[19] Maria's occasional short addresses to her child remind readers of the text's didactic intention, of how the episodes are meant to function as warnings.[20] Furthermore, Maria hopes that her narrative will simultaneously serve a memorializing and self-vindicating function; she attempts to ensure that she stays alive in her daughter's memory and preventing her daughter from preserving a distorted image of her: "[I]t is necessary, my dearest child, that you should know the character of your father, to prevent your despising your mother" (115). The aim of creating a bond with her lost daughter as a loving, caring, and responsible mother is, then, at the heart of Maria's memoirs.

Maria's memoirs, however, serve a double function. It is crucial that her first impulse to write originates from the intolerableness of her distress and her hope that writing might function as a space of escape:

The books she had obtained, were soon devoured, by one who had no other resources to escape from sorrow, and the feverish dreams of ideal wretchedness or felicity, which equally weaken the intoxicated sensibility. Writing was then the only alternative, and she wrote some rhapsodies descriptive of the state of her mind; but the events of her past life pressing on her, she resolved circumstantially to relate them, with the sentiments that experience, and more matured reason, would naturally suggest. They might perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the tyranny, her mother knew not how to avoid. (75)

As this passage reveals, the didactic function of her memoirs is only Maria's second thought. Although the urge to teach, as the narrator highlights, "gave life to her diction" and inspired her to such an extent that "her soul flowed into it" (75), her initial

19 As Dolan emphasizes, Maria's memoirs to her child parallel Wollstonecraft's unfinished primer for her child entitled *Lessons*, which uses an epistolary format (204). A further parallel can be identified between the educative motivation of Maria's memoirs and Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*: "Maria records her narrative on paper with the hope that her daughter will 'gain instruction' from it [...] just as Wollstonecraft wrote *Original Stories* for her pupils, the Kingsborough girls" (Dolan 204). In all three texts, education is closely tied to processes of writing and reading.

20 Based on the memoirs' emphasis on education and their characterization as a textual substitute for a mother, Leigh Matthews situates *The Wrongs of Woman* in the generic context of conduct or advice books: "The memoirs are an active appropriation by Wollstonecraft of the very popular conduct and advice books of the period, which were often written to orphaned girls and which, like Maria's narrative, were meant to constitute textual presences to replace the absent mother" (95). Labelling Maria's memoirs a "Revolutionary feminist conduct book," Kelly also acknowledges this generic context (*Revolutionary Feminism* 212), which once again demonstrates Wollstonecraft's profound interest in education.

motivation was to find an outlet at a moment of profound despair and emotional turmoil. In fact, she initially writes "rhapsodies," an expressive and emotional form of writing, instead of narratives. Maria, then, first turns to writing because of her need to find a means of coping with the burden of her painful past.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the trauma victim's urge to verbalize the past and to (re)construct it as a narrative is a recurrent topos in both Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction, and it resonates with the findings of contemporary psychologists and psychiatrists. Processes of verbalization and narration play key roles in exposure therapy and cognitive therapy, two prominent therapeutic approaches to PTSD. As David Johnson, Mooli Lahad, and Amber Gray emphasize, "[t]he use of journaling, writing and storytelling are common narrative techniques" that are currently used with increasing frequency and variety (480-81). The main goals of such processes of "restorying" are "the detailed and repeated exposure to traumatic information," which is supposed to help victims reintegrate their traumatic experiences into their life-stories, as well as "the modification of maladaptive beliefs about events, behaviors, or symptoms" (Brewin, *Posttraumatic* 193). Numerous clinical studies have shown that trauma victims tend to feel that the process of retrospectively retelling or rewriting the past helps them regain a sense of control over their lives and selves.

From a metaperspective, then, Maria's writing of her memoirs, which she primarily perceives as a means of fulfilling her maternal mission, can also be read as an attempt at self-therapy or "scriptotherapy," in the terminology of Suzette Henke, an attempt at writing through the "events of her past life pressing on her" (Wollstonecraft 75). Indeed, elements of re-confronting and remembering her past, as well as of reviewing and reassessing that past, appear in her memoirs. Maria both pieces together fragments of her autobiographical past (including "almost obliterated impressions") into a life-story spanning early childhood to the present and reevaluates the wounds and wrongs she has suffered in the light of "experience and more matured reason" (75). Her impulse to ease the burden of the past through writing parallels, to some extent, the impulses of the heroine in *Mary*, who regularly vents her emotions by writing short, impulsive, and expressive fragments. However, there is a crucial difference: while Mary writes, in the words of Syndy Conger "intensely introspective, non-assertive and diffuse reflections" (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 164), Maria quickly abandons her "rhapsodies" and begins to write with a specific addressee and purpose in mind. In other words, Mary's writing mainly remains in the mode of acting out, while Maria's contains elements of both acting out and working through. Once again, the novel stages the act of self-narration as a potential means of recovery.

Maria's third mission, to fight not only for Jemima and for her daughter's future but also for women in general, is intimately connected to her discovery of feminist ideas. The growth of Maria's feminist consciousness is signalled by the increase in

the number of general statements about the state of women she makes in her memoirs, which culminates in her written address to the court in chapter 17.[21] Maria's text suggests throughout that she is not only pleading her own case but also the case of women in general. The novel is here in line with Terry Eagleton's claim that one has to fight for one's humanity precisely in the place where that "humanity is wounded and refused" ("Nationalism" 24). Wounded repeatedly in her womanhood, Maria fights against injustice and tyranny precisely from her position as a woman. Functioning as the mouthpiece for the author's feminist ideas, Maria uses a powerful rhetoric ("I claim"; "I appeal to"; "I will not"; "I declare") to protest against the "false morality" directed at women and against the law "made by the strong to oppress the weak" (173). In this highly political and polemic paper, Wollstonecraft has Maria talk about the wrongs and wounds that she has suffered in a much more determined, resolute, and self-assured tone of voice than in large sections of her memoirs. The novel presents her paper, which reads like a feminist manifesto, as the culmination of Maria's mission to use her resources to help all women. Through the depiction of Maria's gradual adoption of a feminist mission, *The Wrongs of Woman* illustrates Kirby Farrell's claim that the patterns of interpretation applied to traumatic injuries determine the weight and the effects of those injuries: "the interpretation of injury" is "affected by shifting frames of reference" and by "cultural values" (*Post-Traumatic* 12). Trauma, according to Farrell, may be invoked as "a cry of protest as well as distress and a tool grasped in hopes of some redress" (24). Once Maria begins to notice the striking similarities between individual women's lives, she no longer perceives herself and her suffering as an exception – she is one among many who have shared a similar fate. This recognition gives her the courage to voice her "cry of protest" publicly. The novel, then, depicts an important instance of "reconfiguration" and posttraumatic growth. Through Maria, it traces the process from "the declamation of sentimental self-absorption into the rhetoric of radical social protest" (Conger, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 161). Maria's ability to adopt an empowering rhetoric and to shift her frame of interpretation suggests that traumatic injury can lead to a heightened political awareness and, eventually, become a source of power and action. The act of telling and sharing stories of suffering has, then, powerful psychological *and* political dimensions.[22]

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21 As Kelly emphasizes, due to the legal situation at the time, such a written document is the only way for Maria to make herself heard in court: "[S]he could not appear in court in her own behalf, since, according to the law at that time, her legal 'personality' was 'covered' by that of her husband, that is, a husband was empowered to speak for his wife in any matter concerning the law" ("Notes" 207).

22 Virginia Sapiro argues that *The Wrongs of Woman* anticipates the political strategy that came to be called "consciousness-raising" in the 1960s: "In the nineteenth century and even more, in the late twentieth century, one of the most powerful means by which femi-

An important motif connected to Maria's acting and reacting against the pervasive oppression she encounters is that of anger and indignation. Right from the second paragraph of chapter one, the narrator stresses that Maria's despair and "keen sense of anguish" are interrupted by moments of acute anger in which "a whirlwind of rage and indignation roused her torpid pulse" (69). Moreover, when writing her memoirs, she is repeatedly seized by fits of fury: "But I must have done – on this subject, my indignation continually runs away with me" (141). She also openly displays her indignation for her husband's despotic actions on several occasions; for example, she labels him an "oppressor" and a "tyrant" in her court document. In contrast to Mary in *Mary* and to Shelley's heroine in *Mathilda*, Maria is a female trauma victim who strives to transform the destructive power of her suffering into fuel for political change instead of remaining absorbed in her misery.

Farrell's description of the different patterns of response to trauma is helpful in thinking about these female characters: "There are three principal modes of coping with traumatic stress: social adaptation and relearning, depressive withdrawal or numbing, and impulsive force (berserking)" (*Post-Traumatic* 7). Jemima, whose narrative testifies to her ability to adapt to and fight through different adversities, exemplifies the first mode of responding to trauma: her past can be characterized as a continuous cycle of affliction and adaptation; her present, determined by her relationship with Maria, is staged as a process of "relearning."[23] While *Mathilda,* and to a lesser extent *Mary,* portray the second mode through their heroines, *The Wrongs of Woman* depicts the third mode through Maria. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, Mathilda's response to her traumatic experiences is determined by a melancholic withdrawal from the world and a near-obsessive absorption with her grief and pain. Wollstonecraft's Mary remains more connected to others and, to some extent, also pursues a mission (mainly a mission of charity) but she also displays a strong tendency to lose herself in solitary suffering and depression. As Conger observes, "the idea of social activism never occurs to Mary" (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 161).[24] In con-

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nism as ideology and practice developed was through the process of women sharing their common personal stories. […] In Wollstonecraft's writing we see the glimmerings of the idea of a political practice that later became instrumental in the development of feminist politics" (43).

23 Yet Jemima's story depicts one striking incident that can be read as "berserking": the moment she convinces a tradesman to turn out the girl that is pregnant with his child and, thus, becomes partly responsible for her suicide. Jemima describes how, through all her suffering, she "became a wolf," a "monster" that turned on an innocent fellow-sufferer (104). In retrospect, she represents her fatal act of selfishness as an act of mad fury and frenzy.

24 Mary's sense of mission is centred on nursing her sick friend Ann and, later, her lover Henry, who eventually dies in her arms. As a loving nurse and a nurse/lover and as a

trast, Maria's passionate struggle for her freedom from the prison of marriage and her battle against the oppressive legal system illustrate that she acts with "impulsive force" rather than "depressive withdrawal."

However, Farrell's term "berserking" carries connotations of uncontrollability, ferocity, and "beastlike" frenzy (*Berserk Style* viii, 1-2), which seem at odds with Maria's determined pursuit of a threefold mission. Yet the notion of "berserking" is relevant to male reactions to Maria's anger and self-determined actions. The male figures in *The Wrongs of Woman* perceive Maria's uninhibited expression of female will and anger as a threat. Consequently, patriarchal discourse categorizes Maria's anger – rendered more threatening through her insistence on her feelings and her rights – as madness. In the words of Leigh Matthews, "it is precisely Maria's daring to express her anger and her indignation about her experiences of injustice in a patriarchal culture that results in that culture labelling her as insane; she does not take refuge in madness but is, rather, labelled as mad because of her active disdain for patriarchal authority" (88). Locking her up in a private asylum, Venables stigmatizes Maria as mad. He claims that she suffers from a hereditary malady and warns the guard that she has irregular "fits" and recurring "paroxysm[s] of frenzy" (72) that render her particularly "mischievous" (72). Venables here misrepresents Maria's acts of justified indignation as mad anger, as going berserk.

In its depiction of how Venables constructs Maria's "madness," the text evokes notions about madness prominent at the time, especially the idea that the mentally ill may at times appear deceptively sane. In *Observations on Madness and Melancholy*, John Haslam writes:

[I]nsane people will often, for a short time, conduct themselves, both in conversation and behaviour, with such propriety, that they appear to have the just exercise and direction of their faculties: but let the examiner protract the discourse until the favourite subject shall have got afloat in the mad man's brain, and he will be convinced of the hastiness of his decision. (47-48)

Hence, Wollstonecraft has Venables deliberately instrumentalize and exploit a shift in the discourses on madness that occurred as psychiatry became increasingly professionalized, namely, the "conviction that insanity could be fearsomely latent, biding its time, and visible only to the expert diagnostic gaze of the alienist" (Porter, *Manacles* 35). This historical context might explain why Jemima initially reacts

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charitable benefactress to the poor, Mary's virtues are mainly "self-sacrificial," as Conger rightly asserts (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 161). Thus, they differ significantly from Maria's fighting for women's rights. Furthermore, like Mathilda, Mary is, in the end, absorbed with the idea of death, with "that world *where there is neither marrying*, nor giving in marriage," and where her only "gleam of joy" and hope seems to reside (62).

with suspicion to Maria's appearance of sanity. And yet it is striking that the judge corroborates Venables' assessment, even more because, in his verdict, he denounces Maria's "violation of the marriage vow" as proof of her insanity (174). Here, Wollstonecraft is responding critically to contemporary ideas about anger's proximity to madness, as expressed, for example, by Haslam: "There is so great a resemblance between anger and violent madness, that there is nothing which could more probably have led to the adoption of the term" (*Observations* 4).[25] Instead of supporting the idea of a "great [...] resemblance," *The Wrongs of Woman* insists on the crucial importance of distinguishing between the two. The text stages a clash of perspectives on female anger: while the patriarchal viewpoint condemns her conduct as madness and as a type of "berserking," the novel's feminist vision suggests that Maria uses "impulsive force" in a positive and productive way as a means of fighting for her own and women's rights. What both perspectives have in common, however, is that they ascribe to the female subject considerable vigour and force. It is fitting, then, that besides being denounced as madness, Maria's escape from the marital bond is also conceived as a kind of revolutionary act. The judge emphasizes the importance of fighting the "French principles" that Maria's case allegedly exemplifies (174), and Maria herself declares: "Marriage has bastilled me for life" (154). With this analogy between the storming of the Bastille and Maria's breaking out of her domestic prison, the novel underlines the force and threatening potential of her actions.

Thus, *The Wrongs of Woman* emphasizes women's strength, resilience, and resourcefulness, especially by highlighting how the two female protagonists adopt a personal mission and fight actively – or even angrily – for specific goals. The novel repeatedly shows the empowering potential of a clear aim or goal; in Maria's words, "[n]othing calms the mind like a fixed purpose" (145). *The Wrongs of Woman* suggests that these female characters fight against being absorbed and destroyed by their traumatic past, by the many wounds inflicted on them by tyrannical fathers and husbands as well as callous mothers and substitute mothers. In other words, the novel stresses the presence of trauma, revealing the injuries many children and women suffer in the domestic space of the family, while at the same time – through its emphasis on oral and written self-narration, female bonding, and the adoption of a sense of mission – it represents the protagonists' responses to their traumas as a way of highlighting female power.

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25 Haslam investigates the etymological roots of the term "madness" as follows: "The word is originally Gothic, and meant anger, rage, [...] (Mod). It is true that we have now converted the o, into a, and write the word mad: but mod was anciently employed" (*Observations* 3).

MADNESS AND THE SUBLIME

Does *The Wrongs of Woman* indeed stage a process of recovering from trauma? Does it show how its protagonists overcome the crises caused by trauma and, as Conger contends, "forget their past in their struggle for liberation" (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 163)? I want to suggest that despite the persistent emphasis on trauma victims' strength and resilience, the forces of trauma break forth a number of times throughout the narrative. The uncontrollable, uncontainable, and pathological dimensions of trauma mainly manifest themselves through Maria, who is portrayed as decidedly more vulnerable than Jemima.[26] Wollstonecraft's depiction of the uncontrollability of the pathological, moreover, also needs to be contextualized within eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century discourses on mental illness.

A key issue in this context is the novel's setting and the protagonist-narrator's response to it. Although the focus of the narrative is on childhood and family trauma, the action is not set in a domestic space but in the secluded cell of a private asylum. The novel's opening paragraph immediately focuses on this "mansion of despair," which is contrasted with the "abodes of horror" that typically feature in Gothic fiction: "castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind" (69). This emphatic contrasting of Gothic castles, "formed of such stuff as dreams are made of," with the real horror that pervades Maria's asylum-prison, marks a departure from Gothic conventions and sets the scene for the ensuing dramas of family trauma.[27] As Anne Mellor observes, "[t]he true horror of Wollstonecraft's story is that the terrors previously identified with the supernatural manifestations of the Gothic romance or the 'astonishment' of the romantic sublime literally exist within the average domestic household in England" ("Righting" 419). Furthermore, while Gothic fiction is typically characterized by ambivalent emotions – "[t]hreats are spiced with thrills, terrors with delights, horrors with pleasures" (Botting 9) – the opening of *The Wrongs of Woman* evokes threats, terrors, and horrors that lack elevating, thrilling impulses.[28] From the beginning, trauma overwrites the Gothic.

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26 Janet Todd also calls attention to this difference in vulnerability and asserts that Jemima embodies "excessive reason," while Maria embodies "excessive sensibility" ("Reason and Sensibility" 19).

27 It is interesting to note that Wollstonecraft's depiction of the asylum is, to some extent, motivated by a desire for authenticity. As Kelly asserts, "to achieve accuracy in her novel's madhouse scenes Wollstonecraft visited Bedlam Hospital in February 1797 with Godwin and Johnson" (*Revolutionary Feminism* 211).

28 In a similar vein, Mallinick argues that Wollstonecraft seems particularly "interested in the fact that – for the great majority of human beings – most terrifying encounters have

Even more than Maria's response to the asylum, the text highlights her response to madness itself. As the narrator stresses, the sound and sight of madness deeply affect Maria. She does not experience the lunatics' "groans and shrieks" moderated and "modulated by a romantic fancy"; rather, she feels them with painful intensity, as "tones of misery as carry a dreadful certainty directly to the heart" (69). When encountering a madman face-to-face, Maria "shrunk back with more horror and affright than if she had stumbled over a mangled corpse" (77). The text here evokes the horror of madness, the fear of the vulnerability of reason that, as Michel Foucault outlines in *Madness and Civilization*, dominated the classical period. According to Foucault, the classical period was a time when the prevailing approach to madness was that of confinement, of attempting to establish clear boundaries between madness and reason:

During the classical period, madness was shown, but on the other side of bars; if present, it was at a distance, under the eyes of reason that no longer felt any relation to it and that would not compromise itself by too close a resemblance. Madness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed. (70)

Maria's reaction of shrinking back with horror from the inmates at the asylum may reflect these attitudes of the eighteenth century, an age that, as Allan Ingram and Michelle Faubert highlight, "found the idea of insanity compelling, the reality of insanity terrifying" (7).

However, a closer look at Maria's response to madness reveals that the text performs a clear departure from the typical eighteenth-century practices of shunning the mad, and as the phenomenon of Bethlehem demonstrated, staging madness as a spectacle, "putting the Other on display in a human zoo or freak show" (Porter, *Madness* 70).[29] *The Wrongs of Woman* enacts a different kind of encounter with madness. Forced to observe the madmen from her claustrophobic cell, Maria watches them face to face, as if she were one of them, rather than from the safe distance of a visitor. It is this proximity, the position of a profoundly involved rather than detached viewer, that transforms madness from a spectacle and "visual entertainment" (Ingram 76) into an intense emotional experience; boundaries between self and other threaten to collapse. Confronted with the sights and sounds of madness around her, Maria begins to meditate on the fragility of reason: "[W]e fearfully ask on what ground we ourselves stand" (76).

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no sublime effect"; in fact, Mallinick reads the novel as a critical response to the Burkean sublime (4).

29 For a discussion of Bethlehem hospital, see Porter's *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, 121-29.

Maria's encounter with madness is represented as an awe-inspiring experience, associated explicitly with the sublime:

What is the view of the fallen column, the mouldering arch, of the most exquisite workmanship, when compared with this living memento of the fragility, the instability, of reason, and the wild luxuriancy of noxious passions? Enthusiasm turned adrift, like some rich stream overflowing its banks, rushes forward with destructive velocity, inspiring a sublime concentration of thought. (76)

The experience of encountering a mind disrupted by madness, "the most terrific of ruins," is compared to the effect of an earthquake, which "throws all the elements of thought and imagination into confusion, makes contemplation giddy" (76). With Richardson, I read Maria's response to madness as an instance of a "disturbing, negative sublime" (*Neural Sublime* 28). This kind of sublime, which Richardson calls the "neural sublime," describes the overwhelming impact that the encounter with a "mental breakdown" or "cognitive collapse" can have on a subject: "[T]he subject is left not marvelling at the power of Reason but rather stunned by the capacity and complexity of the human brain" (29). Maria's experience of the neural sublime demonstrates that *The Wrongs of Woman* departs from an Enlightenment horror of madness and, instead, exhibits a Romantic fascination with mental illness as revealing the dark, pathological dimensions of the mind and the labyrinthine depths of the brain.

Maria not only embodies a Romantic fascination with the complexity and disruptions of the mind but also a Romantic tendency to allow proximity to madness rather than maintain a strict distance from it. When the "lovely maniac" is brought to an adjacent chamber, Maria is thrilled by the sound of the lunatic's voice, by her singing "the pathetic ballad of old Robin Gray, with the most heartmelting pauses and falls" (80). She perceives her "exquisitely sweet and passionately wild" song as beautiful and dignified and experiences, as Dolan puts it, a momentary "sentimental identification" with the singer (202). Interestingly, the act of mentally connecting with the madwoman happens through listening rather than seeing – which ties in with the novel's overall emphasis on the verbal over the visual in creating emotional bonds. However, this sense of connection does not last; the song soon breaks off abruptly and a "torrent of unconnected exclamations and questions" interspersed with "[horrid] fits of laughter" bursts forth (80). While this unexpected outburst leaves Maria shocked and deeply disturbed, what prevails for her is not a sense of horror but a profound feeling of sympathy for the woman's condition. One of the first subjects of the mini-portraits of wronged women, the "lovely maniac" stands in marked contrast to the majority of women figures in the novel, who exhibit strength and resourcefulness. She is the embodiment of the broken woman, whose sufferings have destroyed her reason. Meditating on her fate, Maria sorrowfully reflects:

"Woman, fragile flower! why were you suffered to adorn a world exposed to the inroad of such stormy elements?" (80). Through her feeling of connection to the "lovely maniac" and her mingled reaction of awe and sympathy, Maria embodies a decidedly Romantic response to madness.

In addition, *The Wrongs of Woman* expresses a Romantic approach to madness at the textual level, putting readers into close proximity with the experience of mental illness. While Maria is not depicted as mad in the narrow sense that the protagonist-narrator in Godwin's *Mandeville* is mad, the novel signals clearly that Maria is pushed to the verge of madness by the circumstances of her imprisonment and the impact of trauma. In the opening paragraphs, the narrator describes Maria's state as follows:

Surprise, astonishment, that bordered on distraction, seemed to have suspended her faculties, till, waking by degrees to a keen sense of anguish, a whirlwind of rage and indignation roused her torpid pulse. One recollection with frightful velocity following another, threatened to fire her brain, and make her a fit companion for the terrific inhabitants. (68)

The narrator suggests a certain likeness between Maria, with her severe traumas that threaten to overthrow her reason, and the shrieking, raging madmen in the asylum. Moreover, by highlighting Maria's identification with the "lovely maniac" and the extent to which she is affected by her story and the dreadful sound of her suffering, the text also invites us to reflect on the similarities between these two characters and implies that the boundaries between sanity and madness may be fluid. In the approach that the text narratively enacts overall, Maria's mental disturbance alerts us to the vulnerability of the human mind, which Maria herself perceives as awe-inspiring.

The novel, then, expresses the shift from watching madness from a distance to engaging with it face to face. It registers the crucial transition from eighteenth-century to Romantic discourses on the mind by repeatedly signalling the importance of interacting with suffering and mental illness rather than merely watching them from a distance. Thus, the text narratively enacts the paradigm shift that happened at the time, which was driven by the emergence of new psychiatric approaches and asylum politics. As Porter emphasizes, in connection with revolutionary ideals and their "socio-political optimism," "[p]rogressives wished to sweep away the relics of the ancien régime madhouse. As citadels of repression, mindless coercion, and hopeless confinement, benighted bastilles like Bethlem must be purged" (*Madness* 107). The novel performs the cultural shift away from *confining* madness to *allowing contact* with the disrupted mind by fostering the reader's close engagement with an individual's mental disturbances and suffering. The text plays with readers' fascination with the psychopathological, while also encouraging our willingness to try to understand, sympathize, or even identify with victims of disrupted minds.

THE PERSISTENCE OF TRAUMA

The novel offers detailed insight into Maria's "wounded mind" (74), conveying the powerful impact of her traumatic experiences. Throughout the novel, there are repeated indications that the forces and after-effects of trauma refuse to be controlled, that they transcend the text's feminist trajectory. It is especially through Maria's complex psychology that the text expresses a profound interest in and fascination with the unconscious, uncontrollable, and pathological effects of trauma. In the opening sequence of the novel, Maria is depicted as almost being driven mad by the rapid succession of painful memories that rush down on her: "[O]ne recollection with frightful velocity following another, threatened to fire her brain" (69). Maria is here shown to suffer from the "intrusive memories" typically observed in trauma victims that appear with striking immediacy and intensity and are beyond the individual's control (Ehlers and Clark 324). The narrative also literalizes the metaphor of being haunted by the past: "The retreating shadows of former sorrows rushed back in a gloomy train, and seemed to be pictured on the walls of her prison, magnified by the state of mind in which they were viewed" (69). The image of Maria's memories being projected onto the prison wall, enlarged in size and heightened in intensity, also foregrounds the primarily visual nature of trauma memory, a phenomenon that contemporary trauma psychologists such as van der Kolk have described (see "Intrusive Past"). The most striking examples of the novel's depiction of sensual (especially visual) memories are Maria's intrusive memories of her abducted daughter: "Her infant's image was continually floating on Maria's sight. [...] She heard her speaking half cooing, and felt the little twinkling fingers on her burning bosom" (69). In contrast to the dark, nightmarish intrusions of her painful past, however, the visions of her child have a dreamlike quality, in the mode of Freudian wish-fulfilment (see *Interpretation* II 550-72), giving her the illusion of seeing, hearing, and feeling her lost child. Both kinds of intrusions introduce a cluster of motifs around visions, dreams, and nightmares that occur throughout the novel and dominate a number of moments related to trauma.

While the opening section of the novel is haunted by Maria's traumatic past and suffused with the gloomy atmosphere of the madhouse, it should also be acknowledged that, according to the narrator, the climax of Maria's crisis is over after two days: "After being two days the prey of impetuous, varying emotions, Maria began to reflect more calmly on her present situation, for she actually had been rendered incapable of sober reflection" (69-70). Maria had been "stunned by an unexpected blow," that is, by her husband taking away her daughter and locking her up in the asylum, but she then begins to "endeavour [...] to brace her mind to fortitude" (70). Maria's effort to "brace her mind" is the first instance in the novel of a woman striving to resist. However, what I have not addressed so far is that there are a num-

ber of powerful moments when the narrative signals how difficult it is for the female heroine to fight against the destructive forces of her past. In other words, the feminist emphasis on women's resourcefulness and resilience is repeatedly undercut by eruptions of the power of trauma. Both the diegetic narrative and Maria's hypodiegetic retrospective narrative record such moments of intense posttraumatic crisis.

Despite Maria's attempt to conquer her tumultuous emotions, she is, as the narrator reports, still far from emotionally and mentally stable: "Indulged sorrow, she perceived, must blunt or sharpen the faculties to the two opposite extremes; producing stupidity, the moping melancholy of indolence; or the restless activity of a disturbed imagination. She sunk into one state, after being fatigued by the other" (73). Wollstonecraft has Maria experience an uncontrollable fluctuation of mental states, oscillating between melancholy and restlessness, between what contemporary psychiatry calls "numbing" and "hyperarousal" (DSM-IV 464, 468). This passage suggests that Maria's struggles to regain mental stability and emotional balance often do not succeed. Furthermore, the emotional damage of her past continually manifests itself in nightmares and recurring dreams, which are today recognized as among the most common symptoms trauma victims suffer from (Barrett 2). The "petrified figures" of the madmen in the asylum haunt Maria so relentlessly in her dreams that they "made her wish to sleep no more" (77). She also repeatedly dreams of her child and, in her memoirs, describes her recurring nightmares of her husband. The novel's emphasis on Maria's dreams illustrates that, as Deirdre Barrett asserts, dreams "constitute a unique window on trauma and its effects" (1), revealing how much the individual is affected by the traumatic past. Maria's nightmares of her husband, furthermore, exemplify Barrett's claim that this "window is not clear, however, but prismatic, showing us a changed version of events that is frequently distorted" (1). Maria describes her nightmares of Venables as follows: "I seldom closed my eyes without being haunted by Mr Venables' image, who seemed to assume terrific or hateful forms to torment me, wherever I turned. – Sometimes a wild cat, roaring bull, or hideous assassin" (158). It is precisely through mechanisms of distortion that this dream imagery conveys Venables' repulsive and brutish features and intimates the extent of Maria's fear. Throughout, the novel signals that in the realm of dreams, the horrors of the past reappear with particular force, thereby evoking the Freudian idea that the ego cannot control and censor dreams the way it can conscious thoughts (see *Interpretation* II 608). Time and again, the novel stages eruptions of the traumatic past in the form of nightmares, intrusions, and related posttraumatic symptoms, foregrounding the primarily visual nature and uncontrollable quality of these different forms of re-experiencing trauma.

Regarding the protagonist's psychology of trauma, it is also crucial to emphasize that Maria tends to respond to harrowing experiences with avoidance and denial – with repression, in psychoanalytical terms, or even escapism. It is telling that

Maria repeatedly shies away from giving too much detail when her life-story approaches a painful subject. She announces, for example, "I shall pass over the tyranny of my father, much as I suffered from it" (114). Similarly, she states, "I shall not dwell on the dead-bed scene, lively as is the remembrance, or the emotion produced by the last grasp of my mother's cold hand" (121). Yet while she avoids dwelling on moments of agony, these memories and emotions often seem to enter her narration through the backdoor; for example, she involuntarily returns to her father's tyrannical behaviour several times.

Even more than her method of narrating the past, her conduct in the asylum reveals patterns of avoidance and escape. The narrator records how readily Maria forms a romantic attachment with her fellow inmate Darnford, how easily she lets herself be absorbed by her romantic feelings, apparently welcoming and enjoying them as a source of distraction. However, given the setting in the asylum and the intensity of Maria's suffering, the description of the lovers' bliss seems unnatural, even hyperbolic: "So much of heaven did they enjoy, that paradise bloomed around them; or they, by a powerful spell, had been transported into Armida's garden. Love, the grand enchanter, 'lapt them in Elysium, and every sense was harmonized to joy and social extacy'" (91). The lovers are portrayed as charmed by "Love, the grand enchanter," and Maria's idea of Darnford as her romantic hero is described as the product of "fancy, treacherous fancy" (78). These phrases, especially the adjective "treacherous," alert us to the fact that this romantic idyll may not be so perfect after all. Like Mellor, who asserts that Wollstonecraft is here "writing a parody of the stylistic excesses of the romantic fiction of her day" ("Righting" 417), I read the depiction of the lovers' paradise as ironic. It is also crucial to acknowledge how much *The Wrongs of Woman* foregrounds "the textual and literary dimensions of heterosexual love" that Carlson identifies in a number of Wollstonecraft's and Godwin's texts (29). Maria and Darnford's first encounters are not physical; they take place in a textual and mental space, through marginal notes written in books they both read. Based on these notes, Maria, with the "creative power […] of an affectionate heart," begins to "sketch a character, congenial to her own" (78). The novel here performs a conjunction between literature – evoking "feverish dreams of ideal wretchedness or felicity" (75) – the imagination, and delusions of romantic feelings, which are reinforced by implied parallels between Maria's reaction to Darnford and her earlier response to Venables. As Johnson observes, "Maria, after all, is a prisoner to her marriage but is also in a larger sense a prisoner to the delusoriness of love that chained her to Venables in marriage to begin with, a love that enchains her to Darnford as well" ("Wollstonecraft's Novels" 201).

Highlighting the dangers of the imagination, *The Wrongs of Woman* suggests that, for Maria, the fancies of romantic love function as an escape from the bleak world of trauma. The interlacing of what I call the "trauma plot" (focused on Maria's traumatic past and her lost daughter) and the "romance plot" (centred on

her romantic attachment to Darnford) is crucial in this context. The text repeatedly performs the transition from one plot to the other in an abrupt, ruptured way, and it is precisely through these disjunctions that the novel signals trauma's haunting impact. Jemima's harrowing story, for example, which almost comically interrupts the intimacy of the lovers' tête-à-tête, abruptly rekindles Maria's anxiety about her daughter. Similarly, news of the alleged death of her child throws her back into a state of agonizing pain, and the trauma plot forcefully overrides the romance plot: "Plunged in the deepest melancholy, she would not admit Darnford's visits" (110). In contrast, after her escape from the madhouse, Maria tries to push away the tormenting thoughts of her child and strives to embrace love and re-enter the world of romance: "Darnford was arrived, and she wished to be only alive to love; she wished to forget the anguish she felt whenever she thought of her child" (167). Soon afterwards, however, the romance plot breaks off abruptly. As Johnson notes, "Maria's relationship with Darnford breaks off with a violence attesting to an investment so intense as to be unnarratable" (*Equivocal Beings* 65). With these abrupt interruptions, the text signals how avoidance and denial of trauma cause particularly intense moments of posttraumatic crisis; the attempt to escape from trauma into the dream of romance violently stirs up its forces.[30]

A particularly powerful eruption of the traumatic past into Maria's consciousness occurs during the escape scene. Right at the moment she is about to pass through the asylum's garden gate, that is, when she stands at the threshold between the confined space of the madhouse and the outer world, she is seized by a "being, with a visage that would have suited one possessed by a devil" (166). With its "scarcely human" appearance, its "ghastly eyes" and "sepulchral voice" (166), the being, who threatens to detain Maria, bears ghost-like features. In fact, the whole scene is heavily coloured in Gothic shades, merging trauma with the Gothic. The ghostly figure of the maniac, who embodies the horror rather than the sublimity of madness, triggers an outbreak of intense posttraumatic crisis in Maria: "[H]er child was ever before her; and all that had passed during her confinement, appeared to be a dream" (167). Like Anna Battigelli, I read this scene as a symbolic expression of Maria's ongoing confinement, even after "the escape from the physical confine-

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30 From a psychoanalytical perspective, this dynamic could be read in terms of repression and what Freud calls the "return of the repressed" (see for example "The Uncanny" 241-43). It is also interesting to note that contemporary trauma experts who use the concept of dissociation rather than repression similarly emphasize that higher levels of avoidance as well as unintentional dissociative responses lead to an increase in symptoms or particularly severe symptoms (see Brewin, "Remembering" 127). In her memoirs, Maria also records out-of-body experiences, which are commonly regarded as one form of dissociation: "My mind, during the few past days, seemed, as it were, disengaged from my body" (151).

ments of the prison walls" (71), and, more specifically, as indicating the impossibility of escaping her traumatic past. The haunting impact of trauma takes over and threatens to erase the love story, which is reduced to the unreal status of a dream (and is, thus, once again revealed to have an unnatural, delusory quality). It is crucial to note that, in contrast to the opening of the novel, the Gothic and trauma do not function in opposition in this scene. Staging an excess of emotions and a threat to reason as well as creating a mood of gloomy, nightmarish horrors, the scene's power hinges on the intersections between trauma and the Gothic; the Gothic here underscores and intensifies the eruption of trauma.

The Gothic escape scene also knits together a cluster of images and themes that, throughout the text, are connected to trauma: dreams and nightmares, intrusions and hallucinations, visions and delusions. Trauma not only manifests itself symptomatically through dreams, but it also erupts in the shape of dreamlike states that highlight its emotional intensity and its overwhelming, potentially maddening powers. With this exploration of vision and dreams, which occupied a pivotal place in the cultural imagination of the time,[31] *The Wrongs of Woman* offers a powerful Romantic version of a posttraumatic symptomatology. At the same time, the text's depiction of the relationship between dreams and trauma exemplifies how literature reveals aspects of trauma that tend to be eclipsed by psychiatric and psychological approaches. As Barrett emphasizes, despite the fact that nightmares and recurring dreams are recognized to be "among the most common symptoms of PTSD," dreams have not received a lot of attention in the field of traumatic stress studies (1).[32] In much literary trauma writing, in contrast, dreams play a central role, which applies not only to *The Wrongs of Woman* but also to Shelley's *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein*.

In *The Wrongs of Woman*, the protagonist's posttraumatic symptoms and the moments when the past breaks forth undermine and destabilize the feminist emphasis on female strength and resilience; calling attention to the powers of the uncon-

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31 As Christian La Cassagnère emphasizes, the Romantic fascination with dreams is related to the "general context of the Romantic quest for new frontiers of consciousness and for an expansion of human experience into 'unknown modes of being'" (98). *The Wrongs of Woman* can be seen as an example of how Romantic writers explore the "dream world" as "a fascinating virgin territory" – a fascination that was to take centre stage in writings of, for example, Shelley, Keats, and De Quincey (La Cassagnère 97-102).

32 According to Barrett, as the "formal Western disciplines of psychology and psychiatry developed, they to some extent lost touch with this awareness of trauma's impact on dreaming" (1-2). Lutz Wittmann, Michael Schredl, and Milton Kramer similarly maintain that researchers have so far tended to neglect issues of dreaming and have instead focused on PTSD and sleep (25).

scious,[33] they convey the uncontrollable forces that persist despite Maria's attempts to overcome her crisis, including her dream of romance with Darnford. Through these eruptions of trauma, the text creates fissures in what Conger calls the "drama of resistance" and punches holes in the seemingly hopeful scenario of "sisterhood, redemption and social protest" (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 165-66). The feminist vision of a woman's increasing liberation and freedom is undercut by the presence of the past, which threatens to keep the individual confined.

FRAGMENTS AND DISRUPTIONS: THE LIMITATIONS OF (SELF-)NARRATION

Like Shelley's *Mathilda*, *The Wrongs of Woman* can be characterized as a "performative" trauma narrative because it enacts or performs trauma on the textual level in a number of ways. One way it enacts trauma is through the structural relationship it builds between the romance plot and the trauma plot: the two are interlaced in such a way that they continually rupture one another. In addition, the persistent power of trauma is reinforced and reflected through the narrative's complex, fragmentary nature, through different kinds of gaps, disruptions, and displacements. This poetics of disruption and fragmentation not only performs the forces of trauma, but it also traces the intricate interrelations between trauma and narration, signalling the limitations of the medium of language.

The difficulty of putting a traumatic experience into words manifests itself with intensity at crucial moments in both Maria's and Jemima's self-narration. For most of her narrative, Jemima seems to be in control of her language, but words almost fail her when she confesses how she became another woman's victimizer: "The only reason for not taking me home immediately, was the having a girl in the house, with child by him – and this girl – I advised him – yes, I did! would I could forget it! – to turn out of doors" (104). The guilt is so severe that her command of language collapses into elliptic fragments. Likewise, Maria's memoirs contain several instances where she experiences difficulties in narrating her harrowing past. As with Jemima, the unspeakability of trauma appears with particular force when Maria tries to articulate one of her most intense traumatic experiences, namely, the moment her child was cruelly taken away from her: "I was already in the snare – I never reached the packet – I never saw thee more. – I grow breathless. I have scarcely patience to write down the details" (161). Language threatens to break

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33 Among others, Fritz Breithaupt highlights the emerging importance of the unconscious at the time: "[D]uring the last third of the eighteenth century the understanding of memory rapidly changes, making memory the precursor of the unconscious" (82).

down; verbalization and narration become exceedingly difficult. As with Jemima, this moment of near-unspeakability is expressed through an excessive use of dashes, which punctuate the flow of the narrative with gaps.[34] As Johnson highlights, "sometimes the very gaps in Wollstonecraft's prose seem to open up and afford space to the unspeakable, and as such have an uncanny brilliance all their own" ("Wollstonecraft's Novels" 195). In *The Wrongs of Woman*, then, gaps in the text's larger narrative structure and in the characters' language are important elements in the novel's poetics of trauma.

Wollstonecraft's novel, as Carlson emphasizes, is "composed almost entirely of scenes of reading, writing, or storytelling" (31). However, the novel's representation of these processes of narration, transmission, and reception involves a number of ruptures and disconnections. While Jemima tells her autobiographical story – from childhood up to the present day – in oral form, Maria's life-story is broken up into several fragments: her short, urgent account to Jemima; her memoirs addressed to her daughter; and her statement for the court. In contrast to both Darnford and Jemima, Maria's most extensive form of self-narration is not oral but written and involves a significant displacement in terms of communication and reception. The first reader of Maria's memoirs is her lover Darnford, while the intended reader and addressee, her lost daughter, may never get the chance to read them. Moreover, Maria's memoirs do not come to an end; they simply break off. It is telling that the ending Maria seems to have intended – her romance with Darnford – appears only in a few lines that are "crossed out" (162). Thus, the memoirs perform, both through the distance between their intended and actual readers as well as through their abrupt ending, further disruptions between the trauma and the romance plot.

Maria's statement for the trial does reach its intended addressee, but it fails to elicit the intended response. What Wollstonecraft depicts here is "the feminist nightmare – the lone woman crying for justice within an institution where her voice can never be heard" (Wilson 34). Wilson is right, then, to emphasize the novel's fundamentally ambivalent approach to narrative: "In *Wrongs*, narrative is always communication and miscommunication, source of truth and source of misrepresentation" (38). On the one hand, the novel powerfully evokes (especially with regard to Jemima) the positive effects of self-narration and the sharing of life-stories, resonating with psychologists' vision of the healing and connecting power of words. On the other hand, its emphasis on disruptions in narration and communication also expresses a profound scepticism. Tilottama Rajan goes as far as to claim that *The*

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34 Many of the features that contribute to a poetics of trauma are at the same time features that Kelly identifies as characteristic of a "sentimental poetics": "a 'lyrical' and expressive style – using dashes, exclamations, rhetorical questions, disrupted phrases, and broken sentences to achieve an effect of immediacy, to suggest strong feelings, and to mimic the vicissitudes of emotion, engaging the reader" ("Introduction" xix).

Wrongs of Woman "thematizes writing and speech as ill-fitting prostheses" ("Dis-Figuring" 215). Through ruptures in narration and displacements in reception, the novel points to trauma's intricate position in the symbolic order and its resistance to processes of verbalization and narration. While evoking the positive potential of narrating trauma from psychological and political perspectives, the novel also – perhaps more insistently – conveys the *limitations* of narrative both as a means of working through trauma and as a means of feminist action.

From a political perspective, the novel gestures towards the limitations of narrating trauma in the way it refrains from performing "the turn from writing revolutionary consciousness to taking revolutionary action" (Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism* 214). According to Wilson, the novel even demonstrates a "dichotomous relationship between narrative and agency: to write or read is almost by definition not to act" (33). Indeed, the novel's final section, which the editor Godwin labelled "Conclusion," performs an inward turn from the heroine's feminist consciousness to private suffering. Rajan reads the fragments of the "Conclusion" as follows: "Turning from public courage – the defiance of Maria's speech in court – to private fears, they return from rights to wrongs, and from revolutionary solidarity to the wound of gender" ("Framing" 517). The "Conclusion," then, powerfully shows that the forces of trauma persist. These textual fragments especially enact the novel's scepticism towards the idea that narrating trauma is a way of healing the "wounded mind."

The "Conclusion," which contains a series of short sketches and one longer text passage that outline possible endings of the novel, once again enacts the disruptive power of trauma through fragmentation and ruptures. While the fragmentary nature of the "Conclusion" is largely the result of the text's unfinished status, a closer look at the different fragments and their interrelations is, nevertheless, revealing.[35] As Godwin rightly observes, there is a gap between the short sketches consisting solely of key words – the "scattered heads," as Godwin terms them – and the final longer fragment: while the "scattered heads" depict various bleak endings for Maria's and Darnford's love story, circling around terms such as "discovery" (of Darnford's unfaithfulness), "miscarriage," and "suicide," the longer fragment performs a significant shift in focus by eclipsing the romance and focusing on Maria's relationship with Jemima and her daughter (175-77). Many critics read the longer fragment in a positive light, as depicting "an arena for kindred affection and community" based on the idea of female bonding and "comaternity" (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 68-

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35 It is also interesting to note that Godwin's editing, as Rajan highlights, served to underscore the text's fragmentary nature ("Framing" 4). In "Dis-Figuring Reproduction," Rajan elaborates her claim as follows: "Godwin further unworks this work in his editing by foregrounding breaks in its writing and characters that do not quite work" (215-16).

69).[36] Several critics also support their positive reading by referring to Janet Todd's claim that Maria's history is marked by two movements, "one circular and repetitive, and the other linear and developmental." According to Todd, "[t]he circular binds her to male relationships, […] the linear tends towards freedom and maturity" (*Women's Friendship* 211). Yet is the dominant note of the fragment as optimistic and hopeful as these readings imply? Does it indeed suggest, as Conger maintains, that the female protagonists over the course of the novel "undergo a metamorphosis from victims to victors" (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 161)?

While the linear movement linked to women-women relationships and to the "dramatic progress from self-absorption to sisterhood" (Conger 163) is important to the novel, I argue that this linear movement is, until the very end, checked and restrained by circular movements – not only by the circular movement that Todd identifies in relation to male relationships but also by the circular structure centred on the traumatic and posttraumatic. And this circular movement pervades both the "scattered heads" and the longer fragment, not with regard to Jemima, but with regard to Maria. In other words, it is essential to distinguish once again between the positive depiction of Jemima's progress and her "restoration of self" (Mallinick 18) and the complexity of Maria's development. Although the novel depicts Maria undergoing a process of growth, showing how she finds her missions, the "Conclusion" refrains from depicting Maria as a happy "victor": her feminist voice has fallen on barren ground, and her separation from Darnford seems far from voluntary. In fact, the "scattered heads" stage a tragic repetition of the protagonist's traumatic experiences: Venables' tyranny repeats itself in Darnford's betrayal, and the loss of her daughter repeats itself in the miscarriage of her second child. The "Conclusion" highlights that Maria's wounds are far from healed, or in the words of the narrator in *Mary*, that her new wounds "opened all her old wounds, and made them bleed afresh" (35) – with such intensity that suicide seems the only way out.

Furthermore, the longer fragment also conveys the circularity of trauma through intrusions in which Maria relives particularly painful moments of her life: "[O]ne remembrance with frightful velocity followed another – All the incidents of her life were in arms, embodied to assail her" (176). These intrusions illustrate how trauma collapses temporality; past and present merge in a timeless moment. Trauma tends to be remembered not as a "sequence" but as a "simultaneity"; it "stops the chronological clock and fixes the moment permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitudes of time" (Langer 95, 175). Maria's pre-suicidal vision closely resembles Mary's vision at the end of *Mary*, where the protagonist similarly

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36 Mellor similarly stresses Jemima's role as a "co-mother" and reads the ending in a positive light: "This ending posits an alternative to the prison of bourgeois marriage for women, the formation of a new family unit based on choice rather than on law or blood, a family composed of a community of women" ("Righting" 420).

experiences an atemporal fusion of her various traumas. Maria's intrusions and her suicide attempt highlight how deeply she is shaped by her traumatic past. Her traumatic experiences as a daughter ("she thought of her mother"; "may I find a father where I am going!") and as a mother ("Her murdered child appeared to her, mourning for the babe of which she was a tomb") erupt and fuse in this moment between life and death (176). The fragment depicts Maria in a state of profound agitation and despair, suggesting that her wounds seem too numerous and too painful to endure any longer.

However, this bleak suicidal scene is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Jemima with Maria's lost daughter, who utters the word "Mamma." The unexpected reappearance of her daughter seems to result in a positive turn of events, leading to Maria's decision – following her "agonizing struggle of her soul" (177) – to live for her child. While many critics read this final scene literally as a hopeful new beginning in an all-women family-like community, I want to suggest, with Rajan, that the child's reappearance "may be only a hallucination" ("Dis-Figuring" 212). Introduced with the words "a new vision swam before Maria's eyes" (177), the appearance of the allegedly dead child is situated at the edge of dream and reality. Following the nightmarish intrusions of Maria's gloomy past, the child's "phantasmatic" appearance (Rajan 212) carries undertones of a Freudian dream of wishfulfilment. Even if one reads the shift from character-focalization to narrator-focalization after the child's appearance ("Maria gazed wildly at her, her whole frame was convulsed with emotion" 177) as signalling a shift from the realm of visions and dreams to reality, it is crucial that the final fragment stages a last violent eruption of trauma, which clearly undercuts the alleged optimism of the novel's feminist vision. Besides the dreamlike quality of the scene, the fact that three of the four "scattered heads" end with Maria's suicide should equally lead us away from a hopeful reading of the fragment.

Thus, the "Conclusion" brings together a number of the novel's key themes and features connected to trauma. For one, it embodies the novel's fragmentariness and its poetics of disruption: each of the fragmentary endings opens up gaps, and the interrelations between the fragments are full of disjunctions. In addition, Maria's act of swallowing laudanum is depicted as the culmination of her tendency towards avoidance and escapism: "[N]othing remained but an eager longing to forget herself – to fly from the anguish she endured to escape from thought – from this hell of disappointment" (176). Once again, the conscious attempt to forget her painful past and to escape her nightmare of suffering is followed by an intense moment of post-traumatic crisis, during which she is assailed by the most painful memories of her life. The fragment labelled "The End" exemplifies how the novel stages eruptions of the traumatic past in visual ways, embedding them in a cluster of images that originate in visions and intrusive memories, dreams and nightmares. Hence, the final scene resonates with the previous scenes that depict Maria's frenzied state, in-

cluding the novel's opening and the escape from the asylum. Even if we read the ending of the final scene literally rather than as a vision, the intensity of Maria's suffering, her suicide attempt, and her struggle even after recognizing her child all testify to the profound impact of trauma that persists until the very end, despite Maria's development and her continual endeavour to fight the destructive forces of trauma.

The "Conclusion" is a powerful testimonial to the persistent impact of trauma. It depicts the eponymous heroine as unable to escape the cycles of trauma and suffering, cycles that have their roots in childhood and are perpetuated in the domestic sphere of marriage, revealing the nuclear family to be a space of severely disrupted relationships. As the most prominent of the many wronged and wounded women that populate the novel's dreary social landscapes, Maria acts as the mouthpiece for the author's feminist agenda of exposing male tyranny. However, in contrast to Jemima – who embodies female resilience, appears to succeed in overcoming her crisis, and finds a new identity as a survivor rather than a victim – Maria remains oppressed by the burden of her traumatic past until the very end. Her attempts at avoidance, denial, or escape backfire; the means of recovery evoked throughout the novel, self-narration, female bonding, and finding a personal or political mission, have their limitations for Maria, which challenges the novel's allegedly optimistic feminist vision. In its depiction of the divergent development of the two female protagonists, then, the novel raises crucial questions about processes of narrating and sharing traumatic experiences and about the potential for recovery inherent in a sense of community among trauma victims. On the one hand, *The Wrongs of Woman* evokes the empowering potential of narration from both psychological and political perspectives; on the other hand, it uses visions and dreams as well as fragmentation and disruption as devices for performing the uncontainable forces of trauma that seem to elude and escape words. The emphasis on the psychopathological as uncontrollable can also be read as symptomatic of the text's more general Romantic fascination with the workings of the human mind. At the same time, the novel, through its detailed exploration of an individual's mind as well as through its exploration of how trauma victims might talk and listen to each other, both textually and diegetically voices a plea for the importance of engaging and interacting with psychic injuries and mental disturbances. Situated at the intersections of the private and the social, of psychology and politics, of trauma and feminist discourses, the novel oscillates between celebrations of communication and community and anxiety about the disruptive powers of trauma that reveal the limitations of language and interpersonal connections. Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*, then, expresses an ambivalent and increasingly sceptical attitude towards processes of verbalizing and narrating trauma, suggesting that the painful, intrusive visions of a "wounded mind" are ultimately too powerful to be contained by words.

Chapter Three: Anatomizing the "Demons of Hatred"

Traumatic Loss and Mental Illness

in William Godwin's *Mandeville*

> "All that we know of the body, is owing to anatomical dissection and observation, and it must be by an anatomy of the mind that we can discover its powers and principles."
>
> (THOMAS REID, *AN INQUIRY INTO THE HUMAN MIND*)

William Godwin, who married Mary Wollstonecraft in 1797 in spite of his reservations about the institution of marriage, has long been established as a major political writer. Indeed, the radical theories he expounded in *Political Justice* had an "enormous impact in the tremendously politically-charged atmosphere of the 1790s" (Rounce 1).[1] His first novel, *Caleb Williams*, which is one of the most famous examples of the English Jacobin novel, with its "innovative blend of philosophy and fiction," was also widely read across different levels of society (Clemit, *Godwinian Novel* 1, 8).[2] However, Godwin has also become recognized as a dedicated "mental anatomist," in the words of William Brewer, and even been labelled "the first psychological novelist" (Scheuermann 17). Several critics have noted a shift from the political to the psychological in Godwin's fictional oeuvre, reading *Mandeville* and *Fleetwood* as examples of psychological fiction, while also beginning to acknowledge the psychological dimensions of his political novels *Caleb Williams* and *St*

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1   However, Godwin's reputation changed dramatically as the political climate turned: "Just as Godwin's striking thesis had found its appeal in the aftermath of the French Revolution, his popularity would dwindle accordingly as reaction and nationalism increased" (Rounce 2).

2   For an extensive discussion of the Jacobin novel, see Gary Kelly's *The English Jacobin Novel* and Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*.

Leon. The exploration of the mind, especially the disrupted mind, is particularly important to *Mandeville*, which, according to Mona Scheuermann, contains "the most finely drawn psychological study Godwin makes in any of his novels" (23).[3]

Following the structure of a first-person confessional tale, Godwin's 1817 novel *Mandeville* is framed around the autodiegetic narrator's meticulous anatomy of his own mind, tracing the causes, progress, and impact of his mental illness in an exceedingly detailed life-story that is, in fact, a trauma narrative. Charles Mandeville's childhood is marked by the trauma of seeing his parents brutally murdered; from that point, his autobiographical narration revolves around what seems to be the core of his mental illness, his "ruling passion" of hatred, although the text suggests that this hatred functions as the displacement of his primary trauma. The novel's psychology of the wounded mind, to use a central metaphor of both *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Mandeville*, resonates with contemporary trauma theory not only with regard to its representation of the pathological, but also with regard to issues of working through. I read Mandeville's narrative as enacting a complex "pornography of writing" (a concept that builds on Joel Faflak's notion of the Romantic "pornography of talking"), characterized by excessive indulgence in written self-expression and closely connected to the desire characteristic of trauma victims to put into words the fragments of the past and the self.

Moreover, the desire implicit in Mandeville's narrative to (re)gain control through the process of writing through points to a core concern of the novel: the text depicts and enacts different attempts at anatomizing, containing, and curing mental illness. Mandeville not only engages in numerous attempts at understanding and explaining his psychopathology, but he also records his experiences of different treatments – "whips and chains" at a madhouse and a domestic talking cure – which reflect different paradigms within the sciences of the mind. Contrasting attempts at containment with attempts at treatment and therapy, the novel negotiates a key issue in Romantic-era psychiatry: the exploration of how madness (now reconceptualized as mental illness and, thus, as curable) should be treated. The history of psychiatry is, as this chapter seeks to show, another context besides trauma theory that is crucial for understanding the novel's poetics and psychology of mental illness.

Mandeville relates to Romantic psychiatry in complex ways. For one, it explores emerging psychiatric trends, including placing increased value on the individual and examining the therapeutic potential of verbal expression. The novel can, in fact, be read as an example of how Romantic trauma fiction takes some of these trends even further than the psychiatric discourses. At the same time, it stages the

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3   Even the first reviews of the novel recognized *Mandeville* as an example of psychological fiction (Clemit, "Introductory Note" vi-vii). Pamela Clemit also notes that Godwin's later psychological novels "attracted a more select audience of writers and intellectuals" than *Caleb Williams* and *St Leon* (*Godwinian Novel* 8).

protagonist-narrator's pathological hatred as persistent and recalcitrant, thus, reflecting critically on the period's therapeutic optimism. It is, then, also symptomatic that the tensions between the different patterns of explanation for his mental illness, notably, ruling passions versus the impact of experiences and circumstances, are never resolved – which emphasizes Mandeville's endless but vain struggle to gain control over his mental illness. Both diegetically and textually, the novel expresses that the pathology of the posttraumatic persists through different attempts at dissecting, containing, and healing. Deeply concerned with the psychology of the disrupted mind and the complexities of curability, Godwin's *Mandeville* signals that mental illness may, ultimately, resist all external and internal attempts at management.

WRITING A LIFE, DISSECTING THE MIND

In his 1832 preface to *Fleetwood*, Godwin explicitly justifies his use of first-person narration in *Caleb Williams* and his later novels; he voices an artistic credo that includes the role of psychologist:

It was infinitely the best adapted, at least, to my vein of delineation, where the thing in which my imagination revelled the most freely, was the analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind, employing my metaphysical dissecting knife in tracing and laying bare the involutions of motive, and recording the gradually accumulating impulses, which led the personages I had to describe primarily to adopt the particular way of proceeding in which they afterwards embarked. (*Fleetwood* 10)

Godwin makes "the hero of [the] tale his own historian" (xi) because it allows him to pursue a psychological exploration of the mind. His phrase "metaphysical dissecting knife" evokes the rhetoric of Thomas Reid, an influential Scottish moral philosopher, who claimed that in analogy to "anatomical dissection and observation" of the body, an "anatomy of the mind" is needed to "discover its powers and principles" (431). Hence, Godwin shares some of the same aims and methods as the "mental anatomists" of his time.[4] As Brewer writes, in Godwin's view, literary works are "imaginary laboratories in which writers can conduct psychological ex-

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4   Godwin displayed a strong interest in the scientific discourses and developments of his day. As Angela Monsam stresses, "his knowledge of anatomy and disease is impressive for a non-medical man" (125). He was a great admirer of Erasmus Darwin and closely associated with eminent men of science, including the surgeon Anthony Carlisle and the chemist William Nicholson (125-26).

periments on their characters" (19). The parallel between medico-scientific methods and writing is also crucial with regard to Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft. As Angela Monsam asserts, Godwin's memoirs can be read as a form of "biographical autopsy" (112), in which the author sees himself as a "dissecting surgeon" dedicated to revealing knowledge about the individual being analysed (120). *Mandeville*, then, takes up and develops further the psychological dissection that Godwin had begun to employ in *Caleb Williams* and in the *Memoirs* of his wife.

Mandeville is primarily concerned with the science and observation of the disrupted mind. The novel reflects the Romantic reconceptualization of madness as mental illness, responding especially to the practice of closely and scientifically examining the pathologies of the mind. However, the text does more than simply respond to developments in psychiatry; it takes them further. It is crucial that Godwin chooses an autodiegetic narrator, granting the mentally ill protagonist a voice. The novel, thereby, develops the illusion that readers are being given insight into inner workings of a disrupted mind. Unlike psychiatric case studies, then, the text performs a fictional self-anatomy, pushing the emerging psychiatric emphasis on the individual and his life-story to an even more patient-centred level.

The autodiegetic narrator also explicitly states that his tale is constructed as a psychological study:

I have committed to paper what, during those years, passed through my mind; I have nothing to do with either vindicating or condemning that of which I am the historian. I may thus perhaps have performed a task of general utility; it surely is not unfitting, that that which forms one considerable stage in the history of man, should for once be put into a legible and permanent form. (61)

Mandeville stresses here that the act of writing his life-story is not meant to serve self-centred interests such as self-vindication but to contribute to a general science of man. He positions himself as an objective "historian" and mental anatomist.[5] Hence, while *The Wrongs of Woman* represents interpersonal and dialogic (though admittedly fractured and problematic) "scenes of psychoanalysis," in the words of Faflak (*Romantic Psychoanalysis*), *Mandeville* can be read as one extended scene of psychoanalysis, with Mandeville the narrating self functioning as the analyst and

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5   In that sense, Mandeville's justification for writing his life-story is different from that of the narrator in Godwin's subsequent novel *Fleetwood*: "The topic of the narrative I am writing is the record of my errors. To write it, is the act of my penitence and humiliation" (21). Fleetwood emphasizes the confessional aspect of his tale, writing about his "errors" in the hope of gaining the reader's "commiseration and pity" (22). For a discussion of how the novels by Godwin and Shelley relate to the confessional form established by Rousseau, see Brewer's *Mental Anatomies*, especially chapter 1.

Mandeville the experiencing self functioning as the analysand. However, this psychoanalysis is fraught with problems because the analyst seems too close to the analysand, especially as Mandeville's life-story progresses. The distance between the narrating and the experiencing self repeatedly collapses; as a result, the authority of the analyst is called into question. It is possible, however, to see the reader as being assigned the role of the second or implied analyst. In other words, by constructing the fictional author of the tale as a highly unreliable "self-anatomist," Godwin implicitly encourages readers to conduct their own dissection of Mandeville's mind. Godwin's philosophy of reading encourages active and involved reading, "an intellectually demanding process" (Brewer 33); with its mentally unstable narrator who indulges in repetitions and digressions, *Mandeville* demands much of its readers in terms of filtering and assessing information.

THE FORMATIVE POWER OF EXPERIENCE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TRAUMA

Through his dissection, Mandeville emphasizes the formative impact of childhood, especially childhood trauma. Dedicated to a meticulous study of his mind, Mandeville justifies the exceedingly detailed account of his childhood and youth as follows:

It is the express purpose of the narrative in which I am engaged, to show how the concurrence of a variety of causes operate to form a character: and if I were to omit any circumstance that possessed a very strong influence on my mind, the person into whose hands this story may happen to fall, would have an imperfect picture of the man who is set before him, and would want some of the particulars necessary to the development of the tale. (79)

In this psychological credo, Mandeville highlights the formative power of experiences and circumstances, claiming that readers need to have sufficient knowledge of a multiplicity of external factors to understand how his character was shaped. The profound impact of the environment is one pattern of explanation Mandeville returns to numerous times in order to examine the origins and causes of his mental illness.

Godwin has his autodiegetic narrator repeatedly voice a key idea that permeates much of his fiction, namely that "character must be understood as a function of circumstances" (Handwerk 69). In his exploration of how circumstances shape an individual, Godwin, like Wollstonecraft and Shelley, is influenced by associationist psychology: "In accordance with Lockean and Hartleian psychology, Godwin and Shelley often have the narrators of their works describe, in painstaking detail, the

series of associations that motivate their actions and determine their fate" (Brewer 24). In Godwin's fiction, characterization is constructed "in terms of associational habit," through a detailed recording of the series of thoughts and chains of associations that determine "the course of a character's growth to maturity" (Craig 136). In particular, Mandeville's narrative unfolds along strings of associations that progressively consolidate into a web of destructive convictions, including misanthropy, distrust, fatalism, and religious fanaticism – a web that increasingly takes control of his life.

The novel's emphasis on childhood also conforms to the "Godwinian rule that education and circumstances determine character" (Brewer 98).[6] Exploring the powerful influence of childhood on an individual's development, which is also important in *The Wrongs of Woman,* motivates Mandeville's extensive account of his boyhood. He claims that being raised by his uncle Audley had a profound and lasting impact on his character. He describes Audley, who appeared to him like the mere "shadow of a man" (40), as cultivating a "cult of gloom" (Colmer 334), which is also reflected in the servants' grave and solemn conduct and intensified by the monastic atmosphere of silence pervading Audley's secluded mansion. Feeling a distant awe for his uncle rather than a close emotional attachment, Mandeville soon learns to repress any boyish desires for cheerfulness, liveliness, and interaction and develops a "premature gravity" (Scheuermann 24). In his portrayal of his childhood, he emphatically asserts that he "never was a boy" (43), stressing that solitary reverie and the meditative contemplation of wild and desolate nature scenes were his primary pastimes. Furthermore, Mandeville emphasizes that the spirit of gravity that continuously surrounded him was aggravated by the dogmatic education he received at the hands of his tutor, the stern and authoritarian Presbyterian Hilkiah Bradford.[7] Violently resenting his tutor's displays of authority, he increasingly regards Bradford as his personal enemy, as an "evil genius, poisoning [his] cup of life" (59). Thus, in Mandeville's retrospective psychological analysis, growing up at Mandeville House is figured as a seminal chapter in his life that contributed significantly to the spirit of misanthropy and hatred growing in his mind.

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6 As Alan Richardson stresses, the belief in the close connection between child and adult is characteristic of Godwin's view of childhood and character development: "This strong sense of continuity between the child and the adult it must eventually (and in most cases, impatiently desires to) become is what the first-generation Romantics, with their child-angels, and best Philosophers, and spectral children of the woods, habitually repress" (*Literature* 108).

7 Scheuermann points out that, throughout his writings, Godwin displays a critical view of authoritarian forms of education: "Godwin throughout his intellectual life […] insists that the business of the teacher is to share intellectual discovery rather than to impose authority" (29).

Mandeville reinforces this claim by depicting Beaulieu cottage, his sister Henrietta's childhood home, as the counterpoint to his uncle's gloomy mansion. Idealized as an "earthly paradise" (148), the cottage is described as a blissful place of communication, interaction, and harmony. Mandeville's view of Beaulieu Cottage leads him to speculate about how a different childhood environment would have allowed him to become an entirely different human being:

Oh, had I spent my early years at Beaulieu […] I also should have been the member of a community, I should have lived with my fellow mortals on peaceful terms, I should have been as frank, as I was now invincibly reserved, suspicious and for ever disposed to regard my neighbour with thoughts of hostility! I should have been amiable; and I should have been happy! But my fate was determined, and my character was fixed. The effects of living under such a master of a household as my uncle, with such a preceptor as Mr Bradford, and in the midst of such an establishment as that of Mandeville House, will never be obliterated, as long as one thought exists within this brain, and one pulse beats within my frame of man. (75-76)

Mandeville here conceptualizes the impact of experience in terms of a fatalistic determinism; he expresses the view that, in George Sherburn's words, "[c]ircumstance is the prison house" whose "shades […] begin to close early in life upon all individuals" (73).[8] The emphatic repetition of "I should" in Mandeville's conjuring up of a hypothetical happier self expresses a melancholic regret about the nature of his actual self, which, in the last two sentences, turns into bitter resignation about the inescapability of his fate. At the same time, his deterministic philosophy betrays an unconscious attempt at self-vindication and at denying any responsibility for the course of his life. In other words, if "man is but a machine," if he "is just what his nature and his circumstances have made him" (153), as Mandeville later claims, it follows that he cannot really be blamed for his actions – which will be an important issue to consider in relation to Mandeville's murder attempt at the end of the novel.

While Mandeville puts particular emphasis on the formative impact of his years at Mandeville House, the novel as a whole suggests that the roots of his misanthropy and hatred reach back even further, to his early infancy. As a three-year-old, during the Irish rebellion of 1641, Mandeville witnessed the murder of his parents and hundreds of captives. He, however, was saved by his nurse, who pretended that Mandeville was her own child. The shattering experience of witnessing his parents' tragic death figures as Mandeville's primary trauma, which haunts his life and his

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8 As Clemit stresses, Godwin's use of autodiegetic narration is ideal to express this view of the individual as subjected to the forces of circumstances: "Godwin's use of the single first-person narrative permits an unprecedented analysis of character held in thrall by external circumstances" (*Godwinian Novel* 102).

text.[9] Interestingly, the description of this traumatic experience (in chapter 2 of volume 1) is preceded by an extensive historical account that is strikingly impersonal. Mandeville records events, including the cruelty of the Irish towards the English settlers, from the perspective of a detached historiographer, with sporadic references to his father as the only cues to his emotional involvement in the story. The opening of the novel is also significant in this context. The first sentence states Mandeville's year of birth, the second his place of birth, but then Godwin has Mandeville shift immediately from his personal history to an extended family history. From the second paragraph on, Mandeville's narrative essentially reads, contrary to what he claims, like a "piece of national history" (12). This detached historicizing perspective and lengthy introduction preceding the recounting of the traumatic event can be read as a psychological distancing device that allows Mandeville to approach step by step the dark centre of his childhood. It is as if the narrative circles the core event until the narrator finally finds the courage to face it. At this point, however, Mandeville can no longer uphold the posture of the objective historian; his language (e.g., calling O'Neile a "monster" 19) and his struggle to put into words what happened ("I cannot go on with the narrative" 20) convey the intensity of the emotion and pain inscribed in these events.

Mandeville describes his memory of the event in terms of the typical paradoxes of infantile and trauma memory: "I do not remember the scene distinctly in all its parts; but there are detached circumstances that belong to it, that will live in my memory as long as my pulses continue to beat" (19). Mandeville's memories are characteristically fractured and incomplete yet intense and persistent; the traumatic moment is kept alive through its "affective intensity," while it "remains unprocessed" intellectually (Handwerk 77). At Mandeville House, these atrocious scenes haunt Mandeville day and night through intrusions and nightmares; as Mandeville states, they persistently "lived in [his] mind" (44). These "visionary scenes" of his childhood trauma are then conspicuously eclipsed over many pages by Mandeville's narrative, only to erupt with more violence during his first fit of madness:

My father and mother died over again. The shrieks, that had rent the roofs of Kinnard fourteen years before, yelled in my ears, and deafened my sense; and I answered them with corresponding and responsive shrieks. I forgot the lapse of time that had passed between them. [...] The scenes of unspeakable distress that I had witnessed in my journey from the north of Ireland to Dublin, all assailed me, in their turn. (144)

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9   See also Handwerk's "History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination," which similarly argues for the central importance of Mandeville's original trauma: "*Mandeville* takes its entire plot and structure from an original, inerasable trauma" (76).

Mandeville relives his childhood trauma in his mind, as if past events were happening all over again in the present. This kind of atemporal experience, with its overwhelming vividness and intense auditory or visual quality, is typical of trauma memory, as we have already seen in *The Wrongs of Wom*an when Maria re-experiences her traumatic past. In both narratives, the traumatic past erupts with violent force in moments of crisis, as if the individual's psychic defence mechanisms were too weak at these moments to withstand the constant pressure of trauma.

It is important to note, however, that childhood trauma occupies a marginal position in Mandeville's anatomy of his mind. He analyses in detail the impact of his experiences at Mandeville House and the impact of his various failures in the "theatre of life" (310), all of which he attributes to his schoolfellow and antagonist Clifford, but he conspicuously refrains from psychoanalyzing his primary trauma. However, the novel implicitly suggests that it is precisely because the trauma is not "processed" (in Handwerk's terminology) or, rather, because it is not integrated into Mandeville's autobiographical or narrative memory that he fails to grasp its significance and cannot "dissect" and analyse it in the same way as most other instances in his life. Ironically, the text persistently implies that witnessing his parents' murder is the "wound" that cuts deepest, while Mandeville maintains that other, later wounds have affected him more deeply. The text signals, then, that the impact of Mandeville's childhood trauma is more profound than he is able to see. The violence in Kinnard makes him an orphan, depriving him of his parents and separating him from his sister. In other words, Kinnard is an extreme moment of childhood and family trauma: the nuclear family is destroyed violently and abruptly through external forces entirely beyond the individual's control. In this respect, the nature of family trauma in *Mandeville* significantly differs from the family traumas in *The Wrongs of Woman*, where the family is destroyed more slowly and from within. While the latter tends to be traumatizing over a long period of time, through the erosion of basic relations of trust and a sense of safety as well as through the festering of dilemmas of guilt, Mandeville's childhood experience is a sudden trauma, severely traumatic through its shock impact and relentless finality.

Mandeville's inability to perceive the impact of his primary trauma also manifests itself in his explanation of his religious attitudes. As mentioned above, Mandeville stresses the powerful impact that Bradford's instruction had on his character, arguing that Bradford's extensive sermons about "Popery" led to his own anti-Catholicism. Yet Mandeville's religious fanaticism can also be traced back to his experiences in Kinnard. After stating that his visions of the massacre in Ireland were "all the world" to him, Mandeville writes:

I had hardly a notion of any more than two species of creatures on the earth, – the persecutor and his victim, the Papist and the Protestant; and they were to my thoughts like two great

classes of animal nature, the one, the law of whose being it was to devour, while it was the unfortunate destiny of the other to be mangled and torn to pieces by him. (44-45)

This passage implies that Bradford's teaching feeds into a pattern of thinking that Mandeville had already developed based on the scenes of cruelty in Ireland.

In depicting how childhood trauma gives birth to specific patterns of thinking that are nourished by subsequent experiences, the novel not only resonates with associationism but also with contemporary cognitive approaches to trauma. Anke Ehlers and David Clark argue that individuals with lasting posttraumatic symptoms tend to have "idiosyncratic negative appraisals of the traumatic event/and or its sequelae that have the *common effect of creating a sense of serious current threat*" (320). Such "negative appraisals," which may affect the individual's view of the world, his or her fellow human beings, and the self, can have a persistent impact on the trauma victim's ways of thinking. Because trauma memory is "poorly elaborated in time, place," and other contexts, the threat resulting from these negative appraisals is not limited to the past but may extend to perceptions of the present and future, resulting in a threat that is unrestrained both temporally and spatially (Ehlers and Clark 325, 335). In other words, cognitive psychologists have identified a particular dynamic of associative chains in trauma victims – and such chains, driven by negative appraisals, run through Mandeville's narrative.

The persistent sense of threat encapsulated in Mandeville's view of the world as divided into two antagonistic "species of creatures" (45) results in his obsessive fear of being the victim of a conspiracy against him and in his perception of Bradford and then Clifford as his personal enemies. Mandeville can only construct his view of the world in terms of struggle and antagonism, hatred and enmity. He increasingly reduces relationships to a dynamics of victims and perpetrators, displaying, as Timothy Campbell rightly emphasizes, a "pathological capacity for enmity" (358). The power of negative appraisals manifests itself particularly strongly in Mandeville's fatalistic belief that he is doomed to be a victim of Clifford and of society as a whole. "Clifford was my fate" (253), Mandeville obsessively believes, and he is convinced that the chain that binds him to Clifford also irreversibly determines his position in society:

For me the order of the universe was suspended; all that was most ancient and established in the system of created things was annulled; virtue was no longer virtue, and vice no longer vice. This utter subversion related to me, and me alone; every where else, in every corner of the many-peopled globe, things went on right; I, and only I, was shut out of the pale of humanised society. (253)

Mandeville's pervasive negative appraisals culminate in the belief that he alone is the victim of injustice, that for him alone have notions of right and wrong crumbled.

In this way, the novel shows how Mandeville's entire existence becomes caught up in a paralyzing web of severely distorted and destructive perceptions.

While the primary goal of Mandeville's project is to narrate the growth of his mind and the history of his life, it should be stressed that, as in other novels by Godwin (including *Caleb Williams*, *St Leon*, and *Fleetwood*), the text firmly embeds specific experiences and circumstances within their historical contexts. As Handwerk asserts, Godwin's novels "encode" individual traumatic experiences "as part of a larger historical text" (80). Pamela Clemit similarly highlights the close interrelations between individual psychology and history, stressing that, especially in his later fictions, Godwin's "insight into the formative power of public events invites comparison with the more celebrated historical narratives of Scott and Byron" (*Godwinian Novel* 7). However, as Clemit further argues, an important difference between Godwin's and Scott's historical fiction is that Scott puts the focus on "the possibilities of human greatness liberated by moments of historical crisis," while Godwin investigates the "disabling pressures of politics and history on the individual psyche" (101). *Mandeville* explores these "disabling pressures" through a complex moment in history, the Cromwellian period.[10] As Porscha Fermanis asserts, *Mandeville*, with its "ambivalent representation of the 1641 rebellion," expresses Godwin's "unsettled views on the Irish question" (796). Mandeville is obsessed with the cruelty of the Irish, while entirely evading the brutality of Cromwell and the English settlers; in his narrative, the Irish victims of genocide are represented as the perpetrators.[11] Mediated only through Mandeville's perspective, history, politics, and justice become difficult to judge; politics, as Tilottama Rajan argues, figures as "a scarred and defaced project," which is determined by "[s]heer antagonism rather than ideologically legible differences" and by a "historical scene so chaotic that one cannot tell left from right, right from wrong" (*Romantic Narrative* 141-42).

In *Mandeville*, history is fraught with tensions and uncertainties, and Mandeville functions as a highly unreliable historian. In an ironic gesture, the novel creates a continuous tension between Mandeville's profound interest in historical events and his pressing – but continually frustrated – desire to make history through honourable and important actions. His narrative periodically returns to his anxiety about his blemished reputation and his distress about his "remove from events, his

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10 As Rounce stresses, *Mandeville* testifies to Godwin's "enthusiasm" for the period of the "Civil War and Interregnum" (5). His profound interest in this period also manifests itself in other writings, notably, in *Lives of Edward and John Philips, Nephews of Milton*, and in *History of the Commonwealth*.

11 For more detail about how Godwin especially in *History of the Commonwealth* responds to discussions about genocidal theories related to Cromwell's policy in Ireland, see Fermanis 794-95.

highly mediated relationship to his historically eventful era" (Campbell 357). In fact, Mandeville's exclusion from history is reinforced narratively through Godwin's combination of a historical angle with a "characteristic interiorized mode" (Clemit, *Godwinian Novel* 98).[12] While the narrative begins with a "deceptively impersonal account" of a central moment in Irish history (Clemit 100), historical events are throughout reported from Mandeville's subjective and often distorted perspective. As I will discuss in Chapter Six, this type of perspectivism serves as an important contrast to Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, which also focuses on how a child who has witnessed the murder of his parents views history's scene of ruthless cruelty. In *Fugitive Pieces*, historical events are staged simultaneously as individual and collective traumas; the novel features two autodiegetic narrators, and the perspective of both narrators is repeatedly opened up to the community's perspective. In contrast, Mandeville is too caught up in his own mind and too obsessed with his own presence in (or, rather, painful absence from) history to reflect on how other individuals might suffer under the burden of the past. Mandeville always remains a historian of his own life, trying to understand the factors that shaped the development of his mind.

RECONCEPTUALIZING BAILLIE'S "RULING PASSIONS"

Throughout the narrative, Mandeville seeks explanations for his mental illness. The idea that circumstances and experiences shape character is one important explanation that Mandeville explores, although he avoids examining the impact of his primary trauma. A second explanation, implied rather than explicitly stated, is fatalism: Mandeville believes that he is destined to live a miserable existence as a victim.[13] A third one, and one to which Mandeville devotes considerable attention, is the idea that a passion can develop into an obsession and, thereby, become a "ruling passion." Godwin has Mandeville frequently analyse his actions in light of this theory of uncontrolled passions, using terminology that was, as Brewer emphasizes,

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12 Clemit discusses Godwin's use of this "interiorized mode" as another central difference to Scott, arguing that this "exclusive subjective focus underscores Godwin's divergence from Scott's emphasis on moderation and social compromise" (*Godwinian Novel* 98).

13 Handwerk suggests that this mindset can also be seen in connection with Mandeville's religious beliefs, notably, with the "structure of Calvinistic predestination that dominates his mental outlook" (76).

common at the time.[14] In one of her long speeches, Mandeville's sister Henrietta describes the pernicious power of the passions:

I must be like a great military commander in the midst of a field of battle, calm, collected, vigilant, imperturbable; but the moment I am the slave of passion, my powers are lost; I am turned into a beast, or rather into a drunkard; I can neither preserve my footing, nor watch my advantage, nor strike an effectual blow. (155)

Like several other Godwinian protagonist-narrators, Mandeville repeatedly acts like a "slave of passion," displaying the loss of control that Henrietta depicts through military metaphors. In fact, passions are a crucial theme in several of Godwin's novels. Julie Carlson maintains that "[e]ach focuses on a particular passion that unmans its protagonist – curiosity in *Caleb Williams* and *St Leon*, jealousy in *Fleetwood*, *Cloudesley*, *Deloraine*, paranoia in *Mandeville*, remorse in *Deloraine*" (54). Godwin's fictional oeuvre, as Carlson claims, could even be read as a "Series of Novels on the Passions" (293), an allusion to Joanna Baillie's *Plays on the Passions*. Carlson here builds on the connection to Baillie that Godwin himself acknowledges in the preface to *Mandeville*, where he mentions *De Monfort* and Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* as texts that shaped his novel (*Mandeville* 8).[15]

Baillie's Gothic tragedy *De Monfort* focuses on the passion of hatred. It dramatizes De Monfort's increasingly obsessive hatred for his rival Rezenvelt, which is fuelled by his deluded perception of an attachment between Rezenvelt and his sister Jane, for whom he seems to harbour an incestuous passion. De Monfort's hatred progressively turns into madness and culminates in his murder of Rezenvelt. The parallels to *Mandeville* in terms of basic plot and character constellation are immediately obvious. However, there are important differences in the texts' approaches to passions and madness that provide insights into the psychology of Godwin's novel. In Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" to the 1798 *Series of the Plays*, where she outlines her dramatic credo, she declares that the primary focus of her plays are the passions, "those great disturbers of the human breast" (91), "those terrible ty-

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14 In Chapter 2 of *The Mental Anatomies of William Godwin and Mary Shelley*, Brewer explores "ruling passions" in the works of Godwin and Mary Shelley, without, however, expanding on the connection to Baillie in his discussion of *Mandeville*.

15 Godwin read Baillie's *De Monfort* in 1800 and Brockden Brown's *Wieland* in 1816 (see "Diary"). Furthermore, as Clemit emphasizes, "[i]n June 1816 Godwin read the rest of Brown's psychological novels, *Ormond* (1799), *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800), and *Edgar Huntly* (1799), along with Byron's poetic tales of loss and inner torment, *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), and *Lara* (1814)" ("Introductory Note" v). This selection of texts demonstrates Godwin's interest in literature that explores complex psychologies.

rants of the soul" (95). She further states that delineating a passion is more important than delineating the character who embodies it: "[I]t is the passion and not the man which is held up to our execration" (108). Godwin, however, chooses a different approach: he does not construct his novel around a passion; rather, he uses ruling passions as one element within the complex psychology of an individual character.

The novel suggests that Mandeville's psychology cannot adequately be defined in terms of one single passion. In fact, Mandeville struggles to determine which passion rules him. The first time he refers to the notion of passions, he identifies impatience as dominant ("Fierce impatience was the ruling passion of my soul" 138); however, soon after, he declares (echoing *De Monfort*), "My nature, or my circumstances, seemed to have made hatred my ruling passion" (202), only to shift the focus again later: "Perhaps the ruling passion of my soul was ambition" (310). The list of ruling passions that affect Mandeville at various points in his life could be expanded further to include religious fanaticism, paranoia, misanthropy, and an incestuous passion for his sister. In this respect, Godwin's psychological delineation of his protagonist is broader and more multi-layered than Baillie's, even if, overall, hatred appears to be Mandeville's dominant passion.

The depiction of one of Mandeville's ruling passions, paranoia, evokes a famous psychiatric case that was published a few years before *Mandeville:* the case of James Tilly Matthews. According to Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine, Matthews' text about his time at Bethlehem hospital (published by John Haslam as *Illustrations of Madness* in 1810), was "the first medical book devoted to a single case of insanity" (634). Matthews' narrative describes his compulsive paranoid fear, which finds its most striking verbal and visual expression in the "powerful figure of the air loom," a device Matthews believed was created to inflict pain on him in various ways and was controlled by a "conspirational gang of operators" (Ingram 116). Similar to *Mandeville*, *Illustrations of Madness* conveys the extent to which paranoid delusions can possess an individual. As Allan Ingram asserts, "political fervor," not unlike religious fervour, "presents a favourable climate for the nurturing of delusions" (142). Several examples of "mad writing" that Ingram discusses are closely connected to political or religious variants of fanatic fervour – both of which play a crucial role in *Mandeville* and feed into his obsessive hatred. Through its representation of paranoia, then, the novel explores a psychological phenomenon that was well known in the Romantic era.

However, a key issue to address with regard to the conceptualization of ruling passions in *Mandeville* is the question of origins. Here, once again, a difference in emphasis between Baillie and Godwin emerges. In the "Introductory Discourse," Baillie, who was conversant with the medical and psychological sciences of her

time,[16] defines the passions as follows: "[T]hose strong and fixed passions, which seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances, will from small beginnings brood within the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature are borne down before them" (86). In other words, passions develop a force of their own in the individual's mind, while external events and circumstances function merely as triggers. As Baillie specifies, passions take possession over an individual "with small assistance from outward circumstances" (94); that is, "it is from within that they are chiefly supplied with what they feed on" (92). In *Mandeville*, however, Godwin has his protagonist-narrator waver between different explanations about the source of his main ruling passion: "My nature, or my circumstances, seemed to have made hatred my ruling passion" (202). Like *De Monfort*, Mandeville's narrative shows how passions are partly nourished from within, how they function as internal enemies, influencing actions and reactions. Yet Godwin's novel, I argue, emphasizes the power of external factors, of experiences and circumstances, to a greater extent. While in *De Monfort*, the origin of the protagonist's hatred for Rezenvelt remains obscure, *Mandeville* suggests that the roots of the protagonist's passions can be traced back to his childhood trauma. Baillie claims that "hatred is a passion of slow growth" and asserts that it would, consequently, be impossible to put on stage the rise of that passion from its beginnings (107). This, however, is precisely what Godwin attempts with the medium of the novel; the comparison to Baillie hence reinforces Godwin's focus on an extensive analysis of the various (especially the early) influences that shape an individual's development.

Implying that Mandeville's hatred for Clifford is driven primarily by his distorted perceptions rather than by Clifford's actions, the novel allows us to read Mandeville's ruling passion as essentially one symptom of posttraumatic suffering. More specifically, I read his excessive reaction to Clifford, in the same way as Handwerk, as a "displacement of Mandeville's primary trauma" (78). Mandeville's memories of how he was "wounded" multiple times by Clifford may be interpreted as "screen memories" in a Freudian sense ("Screen Memories"),[17] that is, as memo-

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16 As Frederick Burwick emphasizes, Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* were influenced by the work of her brother: "With her insistence that drama should address the power of emotions to dictate behaviour and to compel the overwrought individual to acts of irrational excess, Joanna Baillie enters into the very same province of aberrational psychology that Matthew Baillie had begun to explore in his 1794 lectures on the nervous system" (51). Matthew Baillie studied with the famous anatomist William Hunter, who, like John Hunter, is an uncle of Joanna's, and he was also in service as a physician to King George III, who suffered from repeated bouts of mental illness (Burwick 64-65).

17 Freud defines the notion of a "screen memory" as "one which owes its value as a memory not to its intrinsic content, but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that has been suppressed" ("Screen Memories" 320). As Freud further specifies,

ries that screen off memories of an earlier, even more profound wounding that is too painful for the psyche to confront. Mandeville's obsession with Clifford, in other words, shields him from his core trauma. The extent to which Mandeville projects all his negative emotions and destructive energies onto Clifford becomes especially clear in Mandeville's account of his conversations with his fellow misanthropic student Lisle: "I could speak of my father and mother: but that not without the greatest difficulty, and with a feeling as if I was somehow violating a secret, which it was the most flagitious of crimes to violate. I spoke of them with a voice, low, tremulous, hollow, and death-like" (132). This passage is the only one in which Mandeville mentions speaking about his parents, and he describes it as almost unbearable; yet to speak about Clifford, as Mandeville laments in retrospect, was impossible for him. Thus, strikingly, his experiences of Clifford come to exceed his original trauma, even in terms of unspeakability. It is Mandeville's fit of madness, as mentioned above, that causes his protective shield to collapse and his original trauma to break forth with full force – in Freudian terminology, a typical scene of the return of the repressed (see "The Uncanny" 241-43).

In its exploration of childhood trauma, Godwin's *Mandeville* puts more emphasis on the impact of the environment than Baillie's *De Monfort*. However, it is important to stress that, ultimately, the tension between explanations based on internal versus external factors, on nature versus nurture, on innate qualities versus experiences, cannot be resolved – in either of the two texts. In the end, it is impossible to determine whether and to what extent Mandeville's character would have been different in other circumstances, especially had he not been an eyewitness to his parents' murder. Furthermore, while often emphasizing the power of circumstances, Mandeville also repeatedly suggests that his actions are heavily determined by his "nature." For example, he compares the hatred he feels for Clifford to the instincts of "those animals, that are said to derive from nature a mortal antipathy to some other species" (162). This ambivalence about the possibility of innate dispositions can be connected to a historical shift in ways of thinking about the mind and character that Alan Richardson explores in *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, namely, the shift from environmental to biological approaches that occurred as Romantic brain science gained influence (94-95). As Richardson asserts, this shift manifests itself clearly in Godwin's changing views, which can be illustrated by the contrast between the "social constructivist account of mind, one obviously indebted to Locke and Hartley" that Godwin advocates in *Political Justice* (1793),

different "chronological relation[s]" hold "between the screen and the thing screened-off" (320). While Freud in "Screen Memories" mainly discusses examples of how childhood scenes function as the screen for later experiences, *Mandeville* focuses on the opposite type of screen memories, with later experiences functioning as the screen for traumatic childhood memories.

and the ideas expressed in *Thoughts of Man* (1831), which shows that Godwin has become convinced that "[h]uman creatures are born into the world with various dispositions," most likely rooted in the "subtle network of the brain" (94). *Mandeville*, written between these two texts, gestures towards this shift: Godwin's conceptualization of the passions expresses both his inclination to hold on to the environmental model he (like Wollstonecraft) had so firmly believed in as well as his growing fascination with the ideas advocated by biological and brain-centred approaches.

Moreover, by maintaining the tension between nature and nurture, Godwin's novel highlights issues that are still important today; experts in the field of traumatic stress studies are trying to discover to what extent predispositions determine which individuals do or do not develop PTSD after certain kinds of traumatic events. In addition, the origin of those predispositions, whether genetic or experiential, is still being contested.[18] Baillie's and Godwin's texts, moreover, anticipate important insights of contemporary trauma theory in their emphasis on the close interrelations between body and mind. Richardson goes as far as to assert that the "interpenetration and mutual interaction of mind and body [...] forms the cornerstone of Baillie's dramatic theory and practice" ("Neural Theatre" 132). Likewise, Godwin has Mandeville depict his fits of frenzy as affecting both body and mind: "I was in a raging fever. [...] My agonies, and the distress both of my mind and body, were insupportable" (105).

A further implication of the novel's exploration of early experiences and the uncontrollable dynamics of ruling passions is that it reveals cracks in the boundary between sanity and madness. *Mandeville* demonstrates how passions, which are inherent in human nature, can develop a dynamic of their own and become uncontrollable; it also shows how external factors, such as seminal life events, are also largely beyond an individual's control. The novel implies that anyone can be affected either by strong passions or adverse circumstances, thereby creating a sense of fluidity between sanity and madness – in other words, the boundary between the two can dissolve at any moment for anyone. This sense of fluidity is also conveyed through hints at the fragility or even powerlessness of reason. Godwin has Mandeville emphasize, in line with the tenor of Baillie's "Introductory Discourse," how he struggles but fails to control his passions with reason, with the principles of rationality and philosophy: "[T]he passions of the human mind laugh at philosophy, and the events that the course of affairs brings forth to torture us, render its boasts as impotent, as the menaces of a man that had lost the use of his limbs" (174). The passions triumph over reason.

The novel, thus, indicates a shift in Godwin's philosophical views on reason and rationality. While *Political Justice* advocates the power of reason and the doctrine

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18 On PTSD and the impact of genes versus environmental factors, see for example Tracie O. Afifi et al.

of the perfectibility of man, *Mandeville* expresses a more pessimistic view, revealing the limitations of reason. As Rounce maintains, "Godwin's fiction moved, to some extent, from mirroring his philosophy to providing negative examples of it: characters like Mandeville and Fleetwood have need of a liberating internal philosophy of rationality, but seem the least likely of people to adopt it" (6). While Godwin's earlier fiction, often discussed within the context of Jacobin fiction, was characterized by "resolute rationality" and a "suspicion of the uncontrollable workings of the unconscious mind" (Butler, *Jane Austen* 33),[19] *Mandeville* marks a shift towards a more critical, pessimistic view of reason, which comes hand in hand with an increased emphasis on the unconscious and irrational: "The recognition of the irrational which we associate with the romantics shows itself in the works of this rationalist philosopher as well" (Scheuermann 22).[20]

The topos of a lack of control over ruling passions in particular and mental illness in general is reinforced at a metalevel by Mandeville's failure to pin down the roots of his fits of fury and obsessive hatred. While the text suggests that childhood trauma plays a key role in Mandeville's psychopathology, his extensive self-analysis leaves the origin of his uncontrollable passions "unaccountable" (Clemit, *Godwinian Novel* 100). This lack of explanatory resolution enacts textually Mandeville's failure to gain control over his mental illness. The autodiegetic narrator extensively or, rather, excessively explores different interpretations, without ever approaching coherence or closure.

A "MARRIAGE OF HATRED"

While the novel offers a complex and multi-faceted picture of the possible sources of his mental illness, Mandeville puts special emphasis on Clifford's role, giving a detailed analysis of his ruling passion of hatred, including its emergence and dynamics. In meticulously recording his various encounters with Clifford, Mandeville

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19 Rounce argues, however, that even Godwin's earlier fiction expressed a more critical view of reason than his political writing: "[E]ven at the height of his fame, Godwin's fiction both complemented *Political Justice*, and showed the inevitable limits of its over-reliance on the powers of reason" (2).

20 In this context, Richardson's observations about the unconscious in the field of the mental sciences of the time are revealing. Richardson highlights that contemporary thinkers such as Darwin, Herder, Canabis, and Baillie all "grant a large role to the unconscious and involuntary aspects of mental life." Thus, Richardson concludes, "[c]ontrary to a longstanding critical tradition, the Romantic poets did not 'discover' the unconscious in isolation" ("Neural Theatre" 138).

seems to realize that his reactions to Clifford were extreme. The self-diagnosis that he gives in retrospect is that he suffered from of a particularly severe ruling passion: "In a word, no passion ever harboured in a human bosom, that it seemed so entirely to fill, in which it spread so wide, and mounted so high, and appeared so utterly to convert every other sentiment and idea into its own substance" (106). Such retrospective self-analysing gestures may imply that, by the time Mandeville is writing, he has been able to master or even overcome his passion. However, a closer analysis of how Godwin has Mandeville narrate his ruling passion suggests otherwise. In general, Mandeville's descriptions of Clifford and Clifford's destructive impact on him are excessive in terms of their length and emotional intensity, the striking number of attributes and metaphors they use, as well as their repetitiveness, all of which betray the persistence of Mandeville's obsession with Clifford.

The first section of the novel that describes Clifford is Mandeville's account of his experiences at Winchester school, in which he outlines the emergence of his hatred. The origin of his hatred lies, paradoxically, not in an immediate reaction of dislike and antipathy but in a profound admiration he initially felt for his schoolmate. He perceived Clifford as "the great luminary" or the "sun" that would continuously outshine him, the "dark and malignant planet" (106), and prevent him from being successful and popular at school. Mandeville also describes Clifford as an "evil genius," a "poison-tree of Java," a "milstone hanged about [his] neck" that affected him "worse than all the diseases that can afflict a man," and as the primary "obstacle" that must be "removed" at all cost (106). The tropes in this passage suggest that, from the beginning, Mandeville felt that Clifford had both a highly obstructive and destructive impact on him. Furthermore, the images of Clifford as a "poison-tree" and a disease introduce the rhetoric of contamination to which Mandeville returns numerous times in his portrayal of Clifford.

In the second Clifford-centred episode, Mandeville employs the rhetoric of fatalism in his descriptions of his antagonist. Here, the intensity of his hatred increases dramatically, especially because Clifford, now positioned as his direct rival, is assigned the prestigious post of secretary to Sir Joseph Wagstaff, a post that was half-promised to him. A profound sense of shame and anxiety about his blotted reputation now feeds Mandeville's hatred and leads him to perceive this rivalry fatalistically: "Fate, I was fully persuaded, had bound Clifford and me together, with a chain, the links of which could never be dissolved" (140). The image of an unbreakable "chain" is also translated, as Brewer puts it, into an image of a predestined marital bond based on "true opposition and interdestructiveness," that is, a "marriage of hatred" (100-02). Mandeville's reflections on the involuntary and perverted "marriage" between Clifford and him are followed by a series of striking images: Mandeville compares the "chain" between them to the contaminating link between the living and dead bodies tied together by "Mezentius, the famous tyrant of antiquity" as well as to the destructive bond between twins whose bodies were in-

separable (141). Again, the compulsive nature of Mandeville's attachment to Clifford is here conveyed both diegetically and textually; his urge to verbalize and visualize this attachment in so many different ways signals his obsessiveness. Furthermore, the images of unhealthily attached bodies also convey that Mandeville perceives Clifford as something that has literally entered his body – an idea that is elaborated in his description of Clifford as an incurable disease:[21] "He is part of myself, a disease that has penetrated to my bones, and that I can never get rid of" (176). It is telling that Mandeville describes Clifford as part of his body because Clifford also figuratively represents all that Mandeville rejects about himself, acting as the screen for his negative emotions and destructive passions.

Mandeville's narrative allows us to identify a third step in his history of hatred: a shift from the belief in a fatal and fatalistically determined bond to the desire for revenge. This shift is caused by a combination of three factors: Mallison's treacherous schemes, which stir Mandeville's desire for revenge; the recognition that Clifford's conversion to Catholicism has not blemished his reputation; and his shock upon learning that Clifford and his beloved sister Henrietta are attached. As a result, Mandeville vows vengeance, devoting himself entirely to the idea of destroying Clifford: "I had felt that I had but one vocation in life, the destruction of Clifford" (217). It is at this point that the pathological nature of Mandeville's hatred reaches its full force, manifesting itself in deep embitterment and an uncontrollable desire for revenge.

In its emphasis on embitterment and revenge fantasies, the novel foregrounds two kinds of posttraumatic reaction that have only recently received close attention in trauma psychology. Studies by Michael Linden and Andreas Maercker, among others, highlight that embitterment and revenge are common reactions in trauma victims. Linden et al. identify a "prolonged feeling of embitterment" as a typical psychopathological reaction to events that are "experienced as unjust, as a personal insult, and psychologically as a violation of basic beliefs and values" (160).[22] Em-

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21 Through the imagery that Godwin has Mandeville use here to visualize his unwanted, hated attachment to Clifford, the novel can also be seen in connection with a group of Gothic novels that, according to Eve Sedgwick, developed a "tradition of homophobic thematics," including Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (92). *Mandeville* also seems to participate in discourses associating paranoia with homophobia. As Sedgwick argues, "paranoia is the psychosis that makes graphic the mechanisms of homophobia" (91).

22 As Linden and Maercker highlight, "[i]n spite of their very serious psychopathological features, states of severe pathological embitterment have been widely ignored by psychiatry and clinical psychology" ("Introduction" 2). Their collection entitled *Embitterment* is the first systematic investigation of this phenomenon, and it also includes a discussion of the interrelations between embitterment and revenge.

bitterment, as Maercker and Linden emphasize, "is nagging and self-reinforcing" and "goes on and on," even displaying an "addictive quality," and it tends to occur in combination with feelings of revenge ("Introduction" 1). Godwin's depiction of Mandeville's reaction to Clifford, then, parallels this clinical picture in several ways. First of all, Mandeville sees himself as cursed but "blameless" (216), as the victim of a fundamentally unjust world that has made Clifford, undeservedly, more admired and successful. Moreover, he perceives the fact that Clifford's conversion to "popery" has not damaged his reputation (i.e., he is not publically ostracized as a "renegade" 224), and the news about the love relationship between Clifford and Henrietta as deep personal insults; these painful recognitions shatter his fundamental beliefs about the way society operates and destroy his trust in his sister.

The emotional outlets that Mandeville uses to deal with his unbearable sense of injustice and embitterment are revenge fantasies. As Ulrich Orth, Maercker, and Leo Montada maintain, feelings of revenge are often observed in victims of violence, especially when it is possible to clearly assign the responsibility for the traumatic event to someone other than the victim (169). In Mandeville's case, issues of guilt are particularly pertinent with regard to the massacre in Ireland. However, in displacing his primary trauma onto Clifford, Mandeville also redirects his feelings of revenge for the murderers of his parents. It is Clifford who comes to function as the scapegoat for the unidentified perpetrators of the Irish massacre. In Mandeville's distorted perception, Clifford assumes the role of the primary perpetrator who is responsible for all his suffering. Mandeville believes that taking revenge on Clifford, "bath[ing his] arms to the very elbow in the blood of [his] rival" (217), will have a consoling effect. He dedicates himself to revenge with a seriousness that borders on solemnity: "I had taken upon myself a sort of Hannibal-vow for the extinction of Clifford: I had sworn, upon the altar of my revenge, immortal hostility to him whom I regarded as the author of all my woes" (296). The combination of military and religious vocabulary reveals that Mandeville regards the destruction of Clifford as a sacred duty, requiring his full devotion.

While revenge fantasies may function as a source of temporary emotional relief, feelings of revenge that persist beyond the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event should, as Orth, Maercker, and Montada note, be regarded as a "dysfunctional coping reaction" (169). Indulging in fantasies of revenge is harmful because it prevents trauma victims from coming to terms with the trauma (170). As Ira Gäbler and Maercker stress, "both embitterment and revenge focus more on the past than on the present or future" (54), thus, inhibiting a trauma victim's recovery. *Mandeville* draws attention to these psychological dynamics: the text conveys that Mandeville's constant ruminations about revenge push him further and further into the emotional downward spiral of his posttraumatic crisis, allowing the "demons of hatred" to take control of his mind (124). Anticipating Frankenstein's obsession with taking revenge on the creature for killing several of his close relatives, an obsession that

comes to define his whole life as he chases the creature up to the North Pole, the text demonstrates that the protagonist's self-imposed mission to destroy his enemy inevitably causes his own destruction. Both Frankenstein and Mandeville are consumed and driven mad by the desire for revenge.

In Mandeville's case, a vital issue that feeds into his hatred and causes it to become pathological is his incestuous attachment to his sister, which significantly contributes to his violent reaction to discovering Henrietta and Clifford's love relationship. In his narrative, Mandeville never explicitly confesses the incestuous nature of his attachment to Henrietta, yet from the description of their first encounter on, the way Mandeville writes about her betrays that his feelings for her exceed the boundaries of brotherly love. The text suggests that Mandeville's incestuous feelings for Henrietta are nurtured by the fact that, after the death of their parents, she is the only person who treats Mandeville with affection, and after his uncle's death, she is also the only remaining close family relative. Throughout the narrative, Mandeville idealizes and worships her, loving her with the same intensity and exclusiveness with which he hates Clifford, with a fervour that carries overtones of religious devotion. In Mandeville's view, Henrietta's impending marriage to Clifford is, thus, an unimaginable betrayal, "the greatest of crimes" (314). Through its exploration of sibling incest, the novel participates in discourses on what Richardson identifies as "the quintessential form of Romantic incest" ("Romantic Incest" 554). The text reflects on but also departs from the recurring pattern that Richardson describes: a tendency to idealization in combination with a tragic ending (see Richardson 564-70). In *Mandeville*, it is only the unreliable first-person narrator who idealizes and romanticizes incestuous desire;[23] the text as a whole depicts this passion as one-sided, pathological, and thoroughly destructive. The tragic ending seems inevitable.

Fearing the loss of his beloved sister, Mandeville indulges in violent revenge fantasies against Clifford and Henrietta. As his feelings for Henrietta transform into hatred, he imagines how he will make their children his "instruments of vengeance," envisioning what satisfaction it will give him to "see their infant fingers stream with their parents' blood!" (312). While this image also recalls Mandeville's primary trauma, some of his particularly disturbing fantasies are centred on their marriage:

Aye, my story is arrived at a festival; Clifford and Henrietta are one! May serpents and all venomous animals solemnise their union! May toads and aspics mark their path with odious slime! May the sheeted dead arise, in every monstrous and terrific form, and squeak and gib-

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23 As Richardson emphasizes, sisters became typically viewed as "ideal affectionate partners" as "sources of inspiration and icons of sensibility, as ideal intellectual companions and ethical guides" ("Romantic Incest" 564).

ber around them! May all the demons of hell celebrate their pomp in emblematic dance, and toss their torches on high, in testimony of their joy! (320-21)

In a series of curses, reinforced by exclamation marks, Mandeville wishes for their holy marriage to be perverted into a hellish feast. It is important to note that in this passage, there are no markers of external focalization, no verbs of thinking that would frame Mandeville's curses as the product of the experiencing rather than the narrating self. In other words, this passage reinforces the sense that Mandeville, contrary to his claims, has not succeeded in mastering his ruling passion, even at the time of writing. As Nathaniel Leach argues, "Mandeville seeks to dissect a still living passion while perversely disavowing that he is still dominated by it" (68). Conveying Mandeville's failure to control his dark passions, the text evokes a psychological vein of the Gothic that Leach terms the "Godwinian gothic": "Gothic horror lies not in external phenomena such as ghosts or corpses, but in the dark passions of the human mind itself" (65).

The horror arising from these "dark passions" manifests itself with particular force at the end of the novel, when Mandeville finally crosses the line from fantasies of revenge to an actual deed of revenge – he attempts to kill Clifford. The murder attempt, along with the revenge fantasies and fits of fury and frenzy, suggests that Mandeville resembles those trauma survivors who Kirby Farrell categorizes as exhibiting "impulsive force (berserking)" (*Post-Traumatic* 7). Farrell describes "berserking" in terms of "murderous frenzy," "'senseless' rampage," and an "intoxicating ideation of rage" (289). Possessed and intoxicated by his desire for revenge and fighting Clifford in a blind and trance-like state, Mandeville is, indeed, "berserking"; he displays the "do-or-die vengeance" and the "combat frenzy" that Farrell identifies as typical of a "berserk state" (290-91).

It is important, however, to distinguish between berserking and legitimate acts of resistance. While *The Wrongs of Woman* demonstrates how a patriarchal perspective (deliberately) misinterprets acts of feminist resistance and rebellion as frenzied acts of madness, Mandeville's self-analysis reveals that his berserking is rooted in compulsive hatred. Maria, who fights furiously to achieve a political goal that exceeds her own interest, and Mandeville, whose rage entirely escapes his control, represent two types of trauma survivors who exhibit very different patterns of posttraumatic behaviours. While Wollstonecraft's novel implies that Maria's fury is justified, Godwin's novel suggests that Mandeville's sense of injustice and resulting acts of rage are, above all, pathological. Berserking, as Farrell further emphasizes, is "charged with ambiguity because it may denote both chaotic madness and exemplary valor" (290). Godwin's novel enacts this ambiguity by showing how Mandeville misperceives his frenzy in heroic terms rather than as "chaotic madness." A tragic irony, then, lies in the fact that his berserking increases his vulnerability instead of leading him to the state of invulnerability often intuitively desired by ber-

serkers; the text shows how Mandeville's frenzied hatred and compulsive desire for revenge increasingly separate him from his fellow human beings and lead to a deterioration of his mental state.

"WHIPS AND CHAINS" VERSUS A DOMESTIC TALKING CURE

While Mandeville's narrative dedicates a lot of attention to the pathological, notably to the complex manifestation of the "demons of hatred," the exploration of how these "demons" can be tamed or exorcized, that is, the investigation of how mental illness can be contained or cured, is another crucial element of the novel's psychology of mental illness. One important topos in this context is Mandeville's representation of his experiences at a "receptacle for lunatics," where he was brought after a fit of frenzy (143).[24] He highlights that the period he spent as an inmate at this institution was, for a considerable time, buried in amnesia, but his memories eventually returned. However, given Mandeville's propensity for lengthy, extensively detailed descriptions, there is conspicuously little detail in his text about the methods employed at the asylum. He sums up the means of restraint that were used on him in one sentence: "All this [his memories] came mixed to my recollection, with the violence, the cords, the harsh language, the blows, it had been judged necessary to employ, for my restraint, or my cure" (144).

Why does Mandeville refrain from writing more about his time at the asylum? The text implies that his experiences at the madhouse remain mostly unspeakable because he experienced them as traumatic. It is telling that his assertion, "perhaps I am in the wrong 'to unfold the secrets of my prison-house'" (144), echoes the words of the ghost of Hamlet's father (*Ham.* 1.5.); in this way the text sets up a parallel between the ghost's suffering in purgatory and Mandeville's suffering as an inmate in the madhouse. Mandeville also implies that even though his suffering may not have been unusual for "that sort of madness, which expresses itself in fury" (144), he experienced it as unbearably intense. Moreover, Clifford once again functions as the screen that shields him from a confrontation with his most unbearable

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24 Mandeville also refers to this institution as a "madhouse." In light of the historical context, what is implied here is most probably a private madhouse. As Roy Porter emphasizes, even in Georgian times, "public authorities had no brief systematically to police the mad," so that "[f]ew tailor-made institutions as yet existed for them" (*Manacles* 121). In fact, Bethlehem remained the only public asylum in England until 1713 (129-30). As Porter asserts, "[t]hroughout the eighteenth century, private asylums remained tainted with accusations of neglect and corruption" (148).

wounds: "Enough: to this condition of man I was reduced by Clifford" (144). In-stead of confronting the unspeakable, Mandeville resorts to another act of blame.

Although he dedicates few words to his experiences at the asylum, the words he does use are suggestive. Like *The Wrongs of Woman*, *Mandeville* is critical of asy-lums; however, where Wollstonecraft focuses on corruption and abuse, Godwin di-rects his criticism primarily at treatment methods. Through terms such as "cords" and "blows," Mandeville unmistakably alludes to the fact that physical restraint and violence were repeatedly used on him. In a later passage, where he once again blames Clifford for all his misery, his language becomes even more explicit: "Was not this the man, for whose sake I had undergone whips and chains, a dark chamber and ignominious cords? Had he not by his machinations reduced me to the condi-tion of a beast?" (184). The "whips and chains" and beastlike condition Mandeville mentions resonate with accounts by historians of psychiatry of how madmen were treated in the classical period. In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault writes that, at the time, "[m]adness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast" (72).[25] Roy Porter similarly asserts that "[i]t had long been assumed that the mad were like wild beasts, requiring brutal taming"; "physical restraint" was, consequently, often used as a means of "taming," in combination with methods such as "bloodletting, purges, and vomits" (*Madness* 100).[26] Through a few stark images such as "dark chambers and ignominious cords" and through the power of the unspoken, through hints and gaps, Mandeville expresses how deeply humiliating and degrading he felt these methods and his resulting "beastlike condition" to be. In a particularly striking passage, which also connects back to the image of a raging berserker, he visualizes this beastlike state by depicting himself with grinding teeth, his head flailing side to side, and his mouth "scatter[ing] foam, like that of a war-horse in the midst of the din of arms" (144).[27]

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25 It should also be acknowledged, however, that from a historical perspective, it is hard to tell to what extent Godwin is drawing on practices in seventeenth-century England, the period of the novel's setting, or on eighteenth-century asylums. As Porter notes, from the seventeenth century, only "shreds of evidence" and "snippets of information" are avail-able (*Manacles* 137). Foucault's discussion of the "classical period," then, also mainly re-fers to the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

26 In *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, Porter describes the perception of madmen as "brutes" in even more graphic terms: "Semi-naked, filthy, hirsute, often chained or caged and tamed with whips – lunatics in Swift's age were handled very much like animals. It was often as-sumed, for example, that madhouses would not need heating, nor their windows glazing, because madmen, like brutes, were insensitive to cold" (43).

27 Mandeville's violent reaction to methods of physical restraint may be read as an illustra-tion of the philosophy of moral management: while eighteenth-century madhouse keepers regarded fear as "the most effectual principle by which to reduce the sane to orderly con-

The text also associates the "receptacle" at Cowley with a pre-Romantic approach to mental illness through its emphasis on restraint and confinement rather than therapy and cure. It is probably no coincidence that, with regard to personnel, Mandeville only mentions the "master of the madhouse" and his "keeper" – and no physicians (146). His statement that he remained "under the discipline of men, whose trade it is to superintend persons in [his] unfortunate condition" (146) once again puts the emphasis on containment and control. While reporting that his mental disturbance was diagnosed as temporary rather than permanent, Mandeville does not mention anything that would imply a therapeutic approach. Blows and chains rather than therapy and medical treatment dominate the depiction of the madhouse.

However, Godwin's novel not only evokes a pre-Romantic approach to madness but, in spite of its historical setting, also reflects on the Romantic period. First of all, Godwin's criticism of asylums may not be directed solely at asylums of an earlier period; it may also express his awareness that some asylums continued to use repressive methods in the first decades of the nineteenth century. As Scull maintains, "during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, conditions in both medically and nonmedically run madhouses generally ranged from the bad to the appalling" (127). John Reid's *Essays on Insanity* – published one year before *Mandeville* – reveals that the moral managers' philosophy of humane treatment was, in fact, rarely implemented in British asylums. Reid laments the deplorable circumstances of the mentally ill, writing that "it is to be feared, that many have been condemned to a state of insulation from all rational and sympathising intercourse, before the necessity has occurred for so severe a lot" (725). Reid goes on to postulate a different approach: "Instead of trampling upon, we ought to cherish, and by the most delicate and anxious care, striving to nurse into a clearer and a brighter flame the still glimmering embers of a nearly extinguished mind" (724-25). This approach illustrates the Romantic-era paradigm shift that championed therapy, humane treatment, and, to some extent, verbal interaction. It is with regard to this paradigm shift that *Mandeville* resonates most clearly with Romantic psychiatry. The novel evokes this approach to mental illness not in an institutional context but in the context of domestic care, mainly through Henrietta, who nurses Mandeville at home and tries to cure him by means of a self-designed talking therapy.[28]

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duct" (Scull 85), moral managers such as Pinel maintained that chains and coercion had the effect of increasing or producing the fury and the ravings of maniacs ("Treatise" 606).

28 The theme of domestic care of the mentally ill is typical of an earlier period, reflecting, perhaps, the novel's historical setting. Dating Mandeville's birth as 1638 (9), the novel is set even before the period that Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* identified as the beginning of the "great confinement" in the 1660s. Moreover, as Porter argues, Foucault's thesis about the great confinement needs to be relativized: in the Stuart period, and even in the eighteenth century, only a relatively small number of mentally disturbed individu-

Henrietta, whom Mandeville calls his "physician" (178), chooses her approach based on a belief in the soothing and beneficial power of words. In contrast to the "harsh language" of the madhouse (144), Henrietta's language, as Mandeville writes, draws harmonious and peaceful "Arcadian pictures" in a voice that resembles "the song of the Sirens," and "lulled [him] into forgetfulness" (129). Her language is not the language of discipline and control but the language of kindness, sympathy, and affection. While the first stage of her talking cure is focused on calming the turmoil in Mandeville's mind, the second stage relies increasingly on the instructive and educative potential of words. Henrietta tries to cure Mandeville of his ruling passions by means of long talks about principles such as benevolence, sympathy, and a "religion of love" (155). In attempting to teach Mandeville ideas of humanity and morality, Henrietta naturally assumes the role of "moral reformer." In other words, Godwin has Henrietta intuitively choose an approach that is in stark contrast to – and ahead of – the practice of physical restraint and violence; indeed, her approach gestures towards the idea in Romantic psychiatry that the mentally ill need to be morally reformed.[29] Henrietta's approach resonates with the philosophy of the moral managers in terms of the belief that, as Faubert puts it, "the psychologist and the patient could and should communicate" and that "the patient must be taught to look inside [him or] herself, to recognize the impulses that manifest symptoms of madness in [his or] her actions" (82-83).

Although Mandeville depicts Henrietta as a sympathetic physician, who tries to engage with and respond to his mindset, her therapy fails in the long run. Mandeville does suggest that her approach was successful over the short term, stating that "under the fashioning care" of Henrietta, he "could not fail to become peaceful, virtuous and happy" (151). His profound affection and admiration for her allow her to gain the authority that the Romantic-period moral reformers tried to achieve with their patients (see Faubert 111). As Mandeville writes, "every thing that Henrietta did, was right: every thing that Henrietta said, was best" (149). Yet her talking therapy and moral treatment only provide temporary relief and improvement; Mandeville's obsessive hatred soon repossesses him: "Mandeville was himself again – the same pernicious creature that the preceding sheets have described him!" (172). The failure of Henrietta's treatment may signal a criticism of the moral managers' typical method of asserting unquestioned authority; perhaps Henrietta's extensive sermonizing is too intent on encouraging Mandeville to listen rather than speak.

Yet Mandeville himself gives a clear explanation for why Henrietta's talking cure failed: he maintains that his nature, above all his inability to speak, made it

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als were institutionalized. As Porter asserts, "[m]anaging madness was allowed to remain *ad hoc*, indeed largely private" (*Manacles* 111); in the 1660s, it was "exceptional for a lunatic to be put in a madhouse" (155).

29 On moral management, see also Chapter One.

impossible for him to respond adequately to her treatment. He does express a belief in Henrietta's approach, repeatedly emphasizing the positive power of language, but he implies that listening is not enough: it must be combined with speaking. As Mandeville reflects in retrospect, "had I poured out the freight of my bursting bosom in all the exuberant rhetoric of vulgar abhorrence, there would have been hope. To the thus venting my passion, it were not unlikely that a comparative temperance might have succeeded" (292). Even though he is unable to experience the soothing power of talking about his sorrows, he presents the cathartic power of verbal expression as commonly accepted wisdom. He supports this philosophy by quoting both Shakespeare ("'Give sorrow words,' says the great master of the human soul") and the Bible ("Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"),[30] concluding that his "silent nature was an ever-living and incessant curse" to him (59).

Furthermore, Mandeville regards his inability to verbalize his sorrows as closely connected to his inability to find a friend. His definition of friendship is telling: "The true definition of a friend is, he to whom I can bear to speak, and whom I can bear to hear!" (145). Mandeville conceptualizes friendship in terms of verbal exchange and mutual sympathy; his belief in the necessity of having a friend is closely related to his belief about the positive power of communication.[31] Lamenting that he never had a friend, he concludes: "Had I encountered such a friend at my greatest need, I should never have gone mad" (145). The powerful desire for a friend is something that Mandeville shares with Fleetwood and other Godwinian characters. As Brewer emphasizes, "[m]any of Godwin's characters believe that a friend will provide them with much-needed emotional support and enable them to escape the evils of selfhood" (127).[32] *Mandeville*, then, also demonstrates how the protagonist's quest for a friend fails; he repeatedly engages in harmful and damaging relationships with individuals who betray him: Waller, the solitary, cowardly, and selfish boy at Winchester school who blames Mandeville in order to save his own reputation; Lisle, his fellow misanthropic student at Oxford, who lets Mandeville down

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30 The quotations are taken from *Macbeth* (*Mac.* 4.1.2) and Matthew (Matt. 12: 34).

31 As Carlson emphasizes, Mandeville's notion of friendship can also be seen in connection with "the impartial spectator posited as internalized by Scottish-enlightened notions of sympathy" (76). The idea is that through his or her different perspective, a friend "also moderates the passions by serving as a mediator of them" (77).

32 Brewer also argues that the depictions of "Romantic solitaries" such as Mandeville, Byron's Manfred, and Baillie's De Monfort resonate with Adam Smith's emphasis on the dangers of solitude: "In solitude, we are apt to feel too strongly what relates to ourselves: we are apt to over-rate the good offices we have done, and the injuries we may have suffered: we are apt to be too much elated by our own good, and too much dejected by our own bad fortune" (qtd. in Brewer 92).

once he hears rumours about Mandeville being a deserter; and the treacherous Mallison and his nephew Holloway, who pretend to nurse Mandeville and to have his best interest in mind, while secretly scheming against him and precipitating his mental and financial ruin. It is particularly striking that Mandeville repeatedly suggests he was aware (or at least partly aware) of these individuals' negative characters, yet he felt drawn to them – as much as he felt compelled to hate Clifford, whose character he saw as admirable. Mandeville even reports that he "never felt so unrestrained of speech" as with the deceitful Mallison, who nursed him after a riding accident (244). Time and again, the novel demonstrates how Mandeville, even though he believes in the therapeutic potential of talking to a kind and understanding listener, fails to engage with those who would listen sympathetically.

THE FAILURE OF ORAL SELF-EXPRESSION AND THE PORNOGRAPHY OF WRITING

Throughout the novel, Mandeville laments that he lacks the ability to express himself, both in public and private settings. His inability to speak contrasts sharply with the abilities of the other main protagonists, Clifford and Henrietta, who are portrayed as particularly eloquent. Mandeville often quotes their speeches at length, including Henrietta's speeches intended to cure him and the speeches Clifford delivers on various occasions. The fact that Mandeville grants the voice of his archenemy so much room in his narrative suggests that he is, against his will, captivated by this skill. This impression is reinforced by the fact that Mandeville not only describes Henrietta's speeches as "divine" but uses the same adjective when referring to Clifford's speeches at school, even while he is critical of Clifford's ideas (89).

Furthermore, the text draws a connection between trauma and the (in)ability to express oneself by constructing both Clifford and Lisle as Mandeville's foils. Mandeville reports that Clifford's father "was among the slain in the first battle" of the civil wars and describes the resulting difficult family situation (84), commenting that all this misfortune seems irreconcilable with Clifford's positive and communicative temper. In contrast, Lisle, whose father was, like Mandeville's, shot to death in a massacre, is obsessed with his father's story and indulges in mourning. Interestingly, Mandeville claims that Lisle has found a healthier way of dealing with his father's death than he has, envying him because Lisle "was blessed in a surprising degree with copiousness of speech, in which faculty [he] was deficient" (130). Lisle vents his emotions through, for example, violent cursing. Mandeville tries to join Lisle in practicing the "art of cursing" (129), but he keeps emphasizing that oral expression does not suit his nature. Through the contrast to Lisle and Clifford, the text

suggests that Mandeville's repressed trauma is "figured in the lack of eloquence that haunts Mandeville throughout the text" (Handwerk 77).

Mandeville's life-long inability to express himself figures, then, as a profound lack, as a deficiency that requires compensation. This compensation, or at least attempt at compensation, is enacted through what I, drawing on Faflak's notion of the "pornography of talking," want to call the "pornography of writing." Faflak describes the "pornography of talking" in terms of a proliferation of speech and a "striptease" of the psyche, identifying "an excess that exposes the Romantic expression of selfhood as pornographic" ("Pornography" 88, 79). In *Mandeville*, the subject's desire to indulge in self-expression, self-revelation, and self-confession is displaced from the scene of speaking to writing. The novel suggests that, for Mandeville, the "pornographic" impulse is particularly strong, both in terms of quantity and content, because he has always desired but has never been able to express himself in speech. Once Mandeville finally begins to verbalize his feelings, thoughts, and memories, the result is an exceedingly detailed, long-winded narrative of his life. He indulges in a retrospective anatomy of his own mind and devotes lengthy sections to periods of his life that seem of marginal importance to readers. Through large sections of Mandeville's autobiographical narrative, text-time seems out of proportion to story-time, which can be read as one marker of a pornographic approach to selfhood. This disproportion can also be illustrated by the fact that he devotes two volumes (about 200 pages) to the first eighteen years of his life, while the protagonist-narrator in Godwin's novel *Fleetwood* describes the first 45 years of his life in less than 150 pages. Reading Mandeville's devotion to self-narration in light of a pornography of writing shifts the focus of interpretation from the pragmatic purpose of writing that Mandeville emphasizes (i.e., the dissection of his mind as a project of general instructive value) to the subject's psychological needs, more specifically, to the trauma survivor's compulsion to express himself in words. Godwin's novel, thus, explores not only issues of therapy and language but also the interrelations between self-therapy and written narration.

The displacement of self-narration and the compulsion to narrate trauma in written rather than oral form is something that we recognize from Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman*, whose primary act of self-narration are her memoirs addressed to her daughter. Maria chooses a more solitary form of self-narration than Jemima, whose oral tale is oriented towards her listener. Yet because Maria's narrative addresses her daughter and is intended as a warning and a means of education, it is less solipsistic than Mandeville's, which addresses an unspecified addressee and claims only a vague, impersonal purpose, namely, psychological insight. Moreover, references to Mandeville's potential readers are scarce, creating the impression that his commitment to write for a public readership is, while self-imposed, secondary or, perhaps, even disingenuous. While Maria's posttraumatic suffering leads to a sense of solidarity and community with other trauma victims, Mandeville's suffering re-

mains self-centred. In Maria's case, then, the relation between the writing self and the addressee constitutes an integral part of the narrative, and cathartic self-expression also serves a larger educative purpose; in contrast, in Mandeville's case, self-absorption and self-obsession result in a pornographic excess of autobiographical writing that fails to produce catharsis.

As Faflak asserts, some Romantic writers, including William Wordsworth, evoke the topos of the pornography of talking in their texts, but these texts simultaneously contain or "manage" the pornography and its excess (82).[33] However, with *Mandeville*, Godwin shows precisely how his protagonist-narrator fails to control his pornography, which connects to Mandeville's more general failure to control his disrupted psyche. His countless – and rather compulsive – psychological self-diagnoses never result in any conclusive interpretations, oscillating between theories of nature versus nurture, and ruling passions versus environmental factors. While Mandeville's narrating self, the analyst, attempts to investigate madness from a position of sanity, the text implies that he may never reach any conclusions because, as we have seen in several contexts, the analysing self is too close to the analysand, the experiencing self. As Leach emphasizes, the "Godwinian narrator's attempts at self-anatomy invariably run aground on the recognition that the self is Gothically Other to all attempts to reduce it to a language of stable, rational knowledge" (77-78). The psychoanalysis enacted by Godwin's trauma narrative is, hence, in Faflak's terms, characterized by "interminability" rather than "terminability" ("Pornography" 83);[34] even the ending of the novel does not gesture towards an end or a conclusion, towards closure or control. Mandeville's self-narration, then, can be read as pornographic in Faflak's sense, as producing "a profligate talk that leads nowhere, an orgy of self-confession and self-exploration pornographic in its extravagance" (93), which demonstrates how the pathology of the mind refuses to be rationalized and contained by language.

THE BATTLE OF HATRED AND THE FINAL WOUND

Mandeville's mental illness persists through attempts at both therapy and self-therapy. The sense of incurability conveyed through his inability to express himself in speech and his pornography of writing is reinforced by the novel's ending, which

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33 For example, in "The Ruined Cottage," as Faflak argues, the narrator and the pedlar "rationali[ze] away Margaret's madness"; they displace madness "into the woman's symptomatic body," thereby attempting to contain and manage it ("Pornography" 84).

34 For a discussion of "terminability" versus "interminability," see also Faflak's *Romantic Psychoanalysis*.

expresses the culmination of his ravings both textually and diegetically. The final chapter focuses on his attempt to murder Clifford to prevent him from marrying his beloved sister. Mandeville attacks Clifford with uncontrollable fury, forcing his brother-in-law – the marriage has, in fact, already taken place – to engage in a frenzied duel to the death. While Clifford survives unhurt, he delivers Mandeville a "deep and perilous gash" (325). Thus, the topos of wounding that plays an important role throughout the text is here enacted on a physical level, through a wound that leaves Mandeville disfigured and half-blind: "The sight of my left eye is gone; the cheek beneath is severed, with a deep trench between" (325). This injury is both a literalization of Mandeville's figurative blindness, of the distorted vision he expresses throughout the text, and a literalization of the metaphor of anatomy and dissection. The notion of figurative cutting (the etymological roots of both "anatomy" and "dissection" point to the verb "to cut") for the sake of rational analysis is here translated into a physical cutting that has no meaning except to mark the consequences of Mandeville's obsessive hatred. Mandeville perceives the "trench" on his cheek as the inerasable mark of his enemy; Clifford, whom he had earlier imagined as a disease infecting him, is now literally "branded" into his body (325). Mandeville's detailed description of his scar and his lexicographical analysis of what the words for "scar" signify in French, Latin, and Italian once again testify to his obsession with the state of woundedness.

Moreover, in the description of his disfigured face, Mandeville resorts to a rhetoric of monstrosity: "When I first looked in my glass, and saw my face, […] I thought I never saw anything so monstrous. […] The sword of my enemy had given a perpetual grimace, a sort of preternatural and unvarying distorted smile, or deadly grin, to my countenance" (325). The text here introduces the thematic conjunction of trauma and monstrosity, which plays an important role in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and, in different ways, *Mathilda*. In the final pages of *Mandeville*, the notion of the monstrous that the protagonist evokes with regard to his changed facial appearance implicitly connects to a different kind of monstrosity: Mandeville's murderous hatred, which is monstrous in the way it leads to a complete disregard for the value of life and kinship. Mandeville is blinded by his obsession with extinguishing Clifford to the extent that he cannot see how the act will not only make him a murderer but also destroy his sister's happiness. Furthermore, in his state of "berserking," he does not even shrink from imperiling the lives of innocent victims: "I shrunk from no violence, I was willing to engage in the widest scene of blood and devastation, rather than suffer that event to take place, which I regarded with more horror than the destruction of millions" (321). Through this psychology of incurable madness and monstrous violence, the text may here be said to reproduce for the reader a series of sensations that are akin to Maria's experience of the "neural sublime," in Richardson's terminology. The text evokes mingled feelings of fascination and ter-

ror, leaving us with a sense of profound awe at witnessing the mind and psyche in such a deeply disrupted state.

Beyond this sense of awe, the last pages of the novel also confront readers with issues of guilt and responsibility and with the psychology of victims and perpetrators. Throughout the text, Mandeville describes the numerous times he was or felt victimized; however, by the end, he transforms from trauma victim to perpetrator of trauma, enacting his desire for revenge. As readers, we are left with the question of how to react to the narrator's final revelation, how to respond to the recognition that Mandeville, who has outlined in detail the emergence and progress of his mental illness and thereby tried to evoke our understanding and sympathy, is capable of murder. The novel hence raises crucial questions about ethics, about the relations between explication and justification as well as understanding and moral judgment.[35] We are forced to examine our response as readers: if we sympathize with this mentally ill trauma victim, to what extent do we respond to his implicit appeal to be regarded as merely a victim of his passions and circumstances, and to what extent do we judge his actions and attitudes critically, even if we understand what drives them?

A central consideration in this context is the narrator's attitude towards his murder attempt. Does the description of his facial features as monstrous symbolically express an awareness of the monstrosity of the murder attempt? Does it suggest that Mandeville feels a sense of guilt? The text implies that a sense of guilt might play into the narrator's confession, yet the absence of any direct expression of regret and remorse is conspicuous, even more so because he emphasizes that the murderous scheme was, in fact, Holloway's plan, who cleverly tricked him into believing it was his own plan (322). Thus, the act of confession is connected to a gesture of self-vindication and, it seems, an inability on Mandeville's part to assume responsibility for his actions. This impression is reinforced by the final image of his narrative, which once again underlines his self-perception as a victim: "Even as certain tyrannical planters in the West Indies have set a brand with a red-hot iron upon the negroes they have purchased, to denote that they are irremediably a property, so Clifford had set his mark upon me, as a token that I was his for ever" (325). It is crucial that Mandeville's narrative breaks off with this striking visualization of

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35 Implicitly, the text also calls attention to the complex relationship between mental illness, criminality, and (in)accountability. In this context, Porter locates the emergence of forensic psychiatry in the early decades of the nineteenth century: "Distinguishing criminality from insanity was not traditionally considered a matter of medical expertise. From the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, the insanity defence was increasingly likely to involve medical testimony" (*Greatest Benefit* 501). In other words, the intersections of criminality and insanity became contested territory, determined by "conflicts between legal and psychiatric models of consciousness and conduct" (501).

what he perceives as the permanent mark of his victimhood. Furthermore, while the rhetoric of colonialism evoked in these paragraphs is displaced from an Irish to a more distant setting, it functions as a final reminder of how much Mandeville's psycho-history is embedded in political circumstances. Hence, the text implicitly signals how – like his intricate psychology – the historical moment of which Mandeville is the victim refuses to be rationalized and resolved. By ending with this comparison to the victims of colonialism, which expresses Mandeville's sense of eternal enslavement, the text breaks off at a moment when reconciliation and recovery seem impossible, although it makes no gestures towards suicide or death. The text, then, ends abruptly at a moment when mental illness manifests itself at its most powerful.[36]

As this chapter demonstrates, Godwin's *Mandeville* depicts the profoundly damaging effects of childhood and family trauma: the traumatic loss of his parents haunts Mandeville throughout his life; the violent destruction of his family precipitates his mental and emotional decline; and his attempt at coping with the loss of his parents results in a dysfunctional and destructive relationship with his sister, marked by incestuous desire and jealousy. A deeply psychological novel, *Mandeville* reflects the Romantic-era interest in anatomizing the disrupted mind, investigating the sources, progress, and dynamics of mental illness and exploring possibilities of therapy and cure. Throughout, Godwin's "metaphysical dissecting knife" operates behind the scenes of Mandeville's autodiegetic narrative to expose a complex psychology of mental illness, which simultaneously responds to and moves beyond the mental sciences of its time, resonating in multiple ways with contemporary trauma theory. In comparison to the other trauma narratives discussed in this study, the repercussions of trauma are here represented as particularly pathological, while, at the same time, the investigation of curability is a core concern of the novel. *Mandeville* sets up a contrast between the containment approach of the classical period and the Romantic-period emphasis on curing the individual; it depicts the treatment common in madhouses as inhuman, cruel, and humiliating, in contrast to a more humane and progressive therapy approach based on verbal interaction and moral management. Nevertheless, the text departs from the period's therapeutic optimism, showing how all internal and external attempts at management fail. Henrietta's version of the talking cure has positive short-term effects, but it eventually proves powerless against Mandeville's inability to express himself verbally and the persistence of his obsessive hatred. Moreover, the text signals sceptically that an extensive self-anatomy is also not an adequate means for a mentally ill individual to come to terms with the disruptions of his or her mind.

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36 According to Rajan, most of Godwin's novels are "significantly unended," having "unconcluded endings" (*Romantic Narrative* 122, 140).

However, the text also encourages us to question whether or not Mandeville's writing, in fact, deserves to be labelled self-anatomy. Mandeville indulges in the process of life-writing, devoting himself to the act of self-revelation and self-expression using a "pornographically" excessive volume of detail. While his self-narration seems to represent an attempt at writing through, the dynamics of displacement at work in his narrative make the process one of writing around or writing over his core trauma, producing a kind of screen narrative. His obsessive focus on Clifford as the cause of his failures and sufferings, his compulsive hatred, and his desire for revenge indicate his inability to confront the core issues of his wounded mind, above all, his childhood trauma. Internalizing the historical and political dynamics of antagonism, he primarily displays affects that are directed outward rather than inward, that are other-related rather than self-related, notably, hatred and revenge. The novel can, then, be read as a testament to the destructive power of displacement, suggesting that Mandeville, while focused excessively on his life-story and writing extensively about the psychology of his mind, in the end fails to confront his self analytically and critically. His disrupted, alienated self emerges as Gothically uncontrollable and uncontainable. His goal of performing a self-conducted psychoanalysis always remains in tension with his tendency to cling to a state of woundedness and victimhood and with his absorption in self-pity and embitterment. Mandeville's final inability to confront his own guilt and his fixation on his permanent facial disfigurement underscore the limitations of his self-anatomy. The psychology of Godwin's *Mandeville* is, thus, characterized by a fundamental tension that runs throughout the text: the tension between the urge to analyse and penetrate into the complexity of mental illness and the impossibility of containment, management, or cure. Ultimately, the novel betrays a strong fascination with the pathological as uncontrollable: the "demons of hatred" (124) persist until the very end.

Chapter Four: A Tragedy of Incest

Trauma, Identity, and Performativity in Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*

> "But where were my friends and relations? No fa-
> ther had watched my infant days, no mother blessed
> me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my
> past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I
> distinguished nothing."
>
> (MARY SHELLEY, *FRANKENSTEIN*)

In the opening of Mary Shelley's 1819 novella *Mathilda*,[1] the eponymous narrator gloomily declares that the text chronicles the "precious memorials of a heartbroken girl" on the verge of death (6). The narrator sets out to write her "tragic history," her tale of "mystic terrors," on a dark and frosty winter afternoon in her desolate cottage, where "no voice of life reaches [her]" (5). Mathilda's melancholy prelude describing how and why she is writing her life-story introduces the dominant mood of the novella, a narrative of multiple trauma, fatal repetition, and continuous cycles of suffering. The determining events in the life of Mathilda, the autodiegetic narrator of this fictional memoir, are the early loss of her mother, a sad and lonely childhood, an incestuous father-daughter relationship, and her father's suicide.

Shelley wrote *Mathilda* at a time when death overshadowed her own life. She had lost her daughter Clara Everina in Venice in September 1818 and her son William in Rome in June 1819. Her letters written after the death of her second child express how deeply the loss affected her. On 24 September 1819, she wrote to Leigh Hunt "I can assure you I am much changed – the world will never be to me again as it was – there was a life & freshness in it that is lost to me" and concluded "in fact I ought to have died on the 7th of June last" (*Letters* I 108). It was in this

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1   Pamela Clemit calls attention to Shelley's inconsistencies in the spelling of "Matilda" versus "Mathilda": "Although the heroine's name is spelled 'Mathilda' in rough draft and fair copy, Mary Shelley in her published remarks refers to the work's title as 'Matilda'" ("Introductory Note" 2). I follow Tilottama Rajan and other critics in adopting the spelling "Mathilda" for both the title of the novella and the name of its protagonist-narrator.

state of mind that Shelley began the first version of the novella.[2] Given this context, it is not surprising that biographical, psychoanalytical, and psycho-biographical readings remained the dominant approaches to the novella for many years after its first publication in 1959.[3] However, by the mid 1990s, the focus had finally shifted, and several critics expressed scepticism about narrowly biographical readings.[4] Like Graham Allen, who calls Shelley an "overly simplified, overly 'translated' author" (183), I contend that *Mathilda* demands a multi-layered approach that moves the critical emphasis from biographical to textual levels.

The core concern of the text is tracing the destructive impact of father-daughter incest and the loss of a father. The novella explores how the trauma of incest manifests itself in a series of physical symptoms and depicts a nuanced psychopathology of trauma that puts special emphasis on Mathilda's complex identity crisis, calling attention to the tensions and paradoxes within an identity disrupted by trauma. On the one hand, the text highlights the ruptures of identity through its depiction of the protagonist's pathological mourning and her indulgence in self-destructive, depressive, and suicidal tendencies; on the other hand, it connects the protagonist's struggle of identity to performativity and self-fashioning. Drama metaphors pervade the novella: Shelley has Mathilda stage herself as a tragic heroine and her life as a trag-

2   Shelley finished the first version of the novella, entitled *Fields of Fancy*, in mid-September 1819. The fair-copy version of the novella *Mathilda* is dated "Florence Nov. 9th 1819" but was probably completed in February 1820 (see *Journals* 308). Through Maria Gisborne, she sent the novella to her father in May 1820, asking him for help to get it published. Godwin, however, finding the subject of the novella "disgusting and detestable," not only rejected her request but also refused to return the manuscript (see Nitchie 450). *Mathilda* was not published until 1959 in the edition by Elizabeth Nitchie.

3   It was probably Nitchie's reading of the novella, centred on an enumeration of parallels between Mathilda and Shelley and intent on proving that "[c]ertainly Mary is Mathilda" (454), that initiated the paradigm of biographical readings. More recent examples that approach the biographical in different ways include Terence Harpold's "Seduction Fantasy and the Circulation of Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*," Anne Mellor's *Mary Shelley*, and Tilottama Rajan's "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*."

4   Clemit is right to stress that the considerable differences between the original conception of the novella, *Fields of Fancy*, and *Mathilda* testify to the fact that the novella is a carefully crafted work of art and far more than "an uncontrolled expression of private anxieties" ("From *The Fields*" 152). Other readings that emphasize the limitations and problematic aspects of biographical and psychoanalytical approaches include Charlene Bunnell's "Mary Shelley's Romantic Tragedy," Kerry McKeever's "Naming the Daughter's Suffering," and Audra Dibert Himes's "Knew Shame, and Knew Desire." All these articles appeared between 1996 and 1997, which indicates a paradigm shift in Shelley criticism.

edy. Mathilda's persistent attempts to redefine and reconstruct her identity in the aftermath of trauma are enacted textually through a complex web of intertextual relations that take the shape of performative acts of (self-)identification. Through its interrogation of what a sense of unity and stability of identity signify for a traumatized individual, the novella alerts us to a set of key concerns regarding trauma – concerns that are also highly relevant to postmodern trauma writing and that relate to twentieth-century identity discourses in both literary theory and psychology.

Shelley's *Mathilda*, which is embedded in a complex web of textual and biographical connections to Wollstonecraft and Godwin, takes up a number of crucial issues addressed by *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Mandeville*.[5] Offering yet another exploration of the therapeutic potential of oral and written self-expression, Shelley's novella, as this chapter argues, rejects even more clearly the period's therapeutic optimism than Wollstonecraft's and Godwin's texts. Mathilda refuses to be cured, to be "morally managed" by the poet Woodville, indulging instead in her fatalistic belief that she is doomed to a life of tragedy. *Mathilda*, then, can be characterized as an especially bleak trauma narrative, a narrative pervasively focused on depicting the traumatic and posttraumatic. Its overall textual frame, which has neither a clear political trajectory like *The Wrongs of Woman* nor an explicit psychological or analytical agenda like *Mandeville*, makes this Gothic novella a particularly "performative" trauma narrative, enacting trauma in multiple ways. Finally, given the extent to which other novels by Shelley also explore trauma and, hence, resonate with *Mathilda*, Shelley's fictional oeuvre as a whole, I argue, can be read as an extensive, multi-textual trauma narrative, with the novella constituting a crucial nexus within that larger narrative.

A Textual Performance of Trauma

Shelley's *Mathilda* foregrounds trauma both diegetically and textually. A key feature that marks the novella as a trauma narrative is its use of repetition at several levels of the text. For example, repetition, which Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* identifies as a fundamental characteristic of trauma writing, is an important feature of the novella's plot: a series of losses and the repeated experience of abandonment determine Mathilda's life from early childhood on. Her mother's

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5   As Clemit stresses, the "multiple literary, political, and philosophical influences of Godwin and Wollstonecraft" are evident in most of Shelley's writing ("*Frankenstein*" 26). In the years up to writing *Frankenstein*, Mary and P.B. Shelley, as Clemit further emphasizes, "embarked on a shared, intensive course of reading, which included all of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's works" (30).

death a few days after Mathilda's birth marks the beginning of the family's tragedy. Her father, overpowered by grief, abandons Mathilda for a vagabond life in distant countries, leaving her to the care of a cold, unloving aunt, who, as Mathilda puts it, "without the slightest tinge of a bad heart […] had the coldest that ever filled a human breast" (11). Mathilda's nurse is the only one who treats her with warmth and affection, but she disappears from her life when Mathilda is seven, leaving her to a life even more defined by isolation, lack of affection, and neglect. Her experience of childhood is depicted as lacking a sense of home and human warmth.[6] Her father's return after sixteen years is the moment Mathilda finally "beg[ins] to live" (15), and the reunion leads to a short period of "paradisiacal bliss" and "unspeakable happiness" (17, 21). The way this period is described, with its emphasis on the complete exclusion of the outside world, recalls the description of her father's time of bliss with Mathilda's mother. This father-daughter paradise is, however, soon disrupted by the father's sudden recognition that the passionate love he feels for his daughter transgresses the boundaries of parental love. Her father's abrupt and incomprehensible change of temper, his suddenly "cold and constrained" manner (23), comes as a shock to Mathilda. His growing incestuous passion, which culminates in the confession scene, leads to the final, most devastating and traumatic loss of a series of losses in Mathilda's life: her father's suicide.

The repetition of abandonment, loss, and trauma, which figures as the driving force in Mathilda's life-story, is, moreover, connected to a fatalistic note that runs throughout the text. In her gloomy reflections at the beginning of the novella, Mathilda states: "My fate has been governed by necessity, a hideous necessity. It required hands stronger than mine; stronger I do believe than any human force to break the thick, adamantine chain that has bound me" (6). This fatalistic tone echoes Mandeville's sense of being doomed to a fate he cannot escape. As Pamela Clemit emphasizes, "Mathilda's deterministic outlook" can be interpreted as signalling her "affinity with other Godwinian protagonists who cast themselves as victims of forces beyond their control" ("From *The Fields*" 158). Mathilda's sense of being subject to fate manifests itself in her use of a rhetoric of tragedy, another determining feature of the novella. Mathilda repeatedly declares that she is doomed to be a tragic figure. This fatalistic way of thinking, displayed by Mathilda, Mandeville, and other traumatized protagonist-narrators in Romantic trauma fiction,[7] reappears

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6   To some extent, Mathilda seems to find happiness in nature. Yet, as Michael Scrivener rightly points out, this "romantic nature worship" is essentially caused by the bleak circumstances of her childhood: "[H]er love of nature […] is depicted as a traumatic 'internal witness' to provide an affective centre to her motherless and fatherless emotional world" (212).

7   Another example that is relevant here is John Galt's *The Omen*, a fictional first-person narrative on childhood trauma that resembles *Mathilda* in its emphasis on the trauma vic-

in Caruth's description of chains and cycles of trauma as a "possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected" (*Unclaimed* 2). This parallel reveals that Romantic trauma narratives and Caruth's trauma theory similarly conceptualize trauma as uncontainable, as bound up with forces beyond the subject's control. Inescapability and irreducibility are crucial characteristics of this view of trauma.

The elements of repetition and fatalism in Mathilda's narrative are further reinforced by the life-stories of the novella's other central characters. Parental loss in early childhood is an experience that Mathilda shares with both her father and her mother, Diana. Furthermore, the lives of both male protagonists, Mathilda's father and the poet Woodville, are, like Mathilda's, strongly determined by tragic loss and mourning. The characters' deeply painful experiences, all of which originate from disrupted familial and romantic relationships, as well as their reactions to such experiences, seem to resemble or even repeat each other – even though, as I will discuss later, Woodville's strategies for coping with bereavement contrast with Mathilda's. Mathilda's narrative, hence, contains within itself different versions of a drama of trauma.

Although *Mathilda* features several trauma victims, it refrains from enacting the kind of multi-perspectivism that Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* does. In this context, Shelley's choice of narrator is significant. In the draft of the novella, which – echoing Wollstonecraft's fragment *The Cave of Fancy*[8] – is entitled *Fields of Fancy*, the voice of the intradiegetic narrator Mathilda is framed by the narrative of an extradiegetic narrator, who offers readers an outside perspective on the heroine as well as some guidance on how to read Mathilda's story. By dropping the frame narrative in *Mathilda* and making the entire novella an account of the trauma victim, Shelley fundamentally reconceptualizes the novella, abandoning the mode of overt didacticism.[9] This change significantly contributes to the novella's resistance to closure, refraining from offering the reader an explicit interpretation of the heroine's tale. As Audra Dibert Himes emphasizes, *Mathilda* is "uncomfortable for

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tim's pervasive sense of doom and fatalistic ways of thinking. The narrator, Henry, is obsessed with the interpretation of omens, secrets, and mysterious events in his early life, when he time and again "experienced the foretaste of misfortune, and heard, as it were afar off, the groaning wheels of an unknown retribution coming heavily towards [him]" (24).

8 Wollstonecraft's *The Cave of Fancy* is also crucially concerned with death. However, in contrast to the marginalization of the mother in *Fields of Fancy* and *Mathilda*, *The Cave of Fancy* foregrounds the theme of a daughter prematurely losing her mother.

9 On this subject, see also Judith Barbour's "The Meaning of the Tree." Barbour asserts that Shelley shifts from the mode of "woman-centred didacticism" to that of "agonistic lyricism" (102).

the reader because it is so devoid of any perspective except Mathilda's," forcing the reader to "share Mathilda's vision of the world because it is the only moral, emotional and intellectual universe offered to her or him" (119). It is hence precisely Shelley's choice to use a single autodiegetic narrator that makes this novella a narrative that is – almost oppressively – dominated by one perspective and one individual's trauma.

In framing the text with a single narrative voice, with an unreliable and psychologically unstable narrator who functions as the fictional autobiographer, Shelley employs an overall narratorial constellation which resembles that of *Mandeville* and evokes a "Godwinian confessional mode" (Clemit, *Frankenstein* 38).[10] Her father's legacy also manifests itself in Shelley's profound interest in psychological fiction. However, while Godwin uses an unequivocally fictional construct as the subject of his psychological "dissection," Shelley makes the heroine Mathilda more complex. As mentioned previously, it is problematic to follow Nitchie in reading Mathilda as nothing more than a fictionalized Mary Shelley; however, at the same time, the novella's biographical context, marked by the pain of trauma, should be regarded as an additional level that defines the novella as a trauma text, making it a multi-layered textual performance of trauma – a text both about and of trauma.

There are other generic and textual features of Shelley's novella that support the idea that *Mathilda* can be read as a performative trauma narrative. For one, its poetics convey that trauma can bring us to the limits of language, representation, and knowledge. While Mathilda, like Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman*, writes with a specific addressee in mind, it is symptomatic that the novella's narrative frame enacts a broken relationship between the acts of composition and reception, between narrator and addressee, who are separated by the unbridgeable gap of Mathilda's imminent death. In this way, the text further develops the scepticism towards communication expressed in *The Wrongs of Woman*. The ambiguous view of language and narration in Wollstonecraft's text is here replaced by a more clearly pessimistic vision.

The text's complex relation to language is further reinforced by its generic characteristics. As Tilottama Rajan argues, *Mathilda* is closer to the form of a "novella" rather than a "novel": while "the novel can be seen as the form par excellence of the Symbolic order, the novella is rather a form of melancholy [which] gestures towards Symbolic structures but refuses to participate in them" by using but "para-

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10 Clemit, in fact, describes Godwin's legacy in Shelley's writing as particularly powerful with regard to *Mandeville*. She writes that the depiction of "psychological arrest" in *Mathilda* "confirms Mary Shelley's fundamental literary affiliation with Godwin, not so much as the author of the 1790s, but as the creator of *Mandeville*, which she later praised as superior to all his works in 'forcible development of human feeling'" ("*Frankenstein*" 41).

lyz[ing]" novelistic features like plot and character ("Melancholy" 48). Rajan suggests, furthermore, that *Mathilda*'s uncertain status in relation the Symbolic order is increased by its uncertain status "between lyric and narrative" (47). In other words, *Mathilda* cannot even satisfactorily be labelled a "novella" because some of its characteristics, like its "fixation on a single mood, its lack of action" are features of lyric rather than narrative (47).

This element of "fixation" connects to the narrator's obsession with the past and her refusal to move on, that is, to the theme of psychological imprisonment, which is also evoked by the novella's Gothic features. As Kathleen Miller stresses, "[w]ith its themes of alienation, entrapment, and unutterable personal secrets, Mathilda's story participates in many of the conventions of the female gothic form" (291). At the same time, the Gothic devices that the novella employs contribute to the text's depiction of psychological complexity, of the irrational, pathological, and transgressive aspects of the mind. It displays characteristics of a type of Gothic fiction that Fred Botting associates with the nineteenth century, when Gothic fiction "seemed to go underground: its depths were less romantic chasms or labyrinthine dungeons, than the murky recesses of human subjectivity" (11). According to Botting, the emphasis of Gothicism shifted from the supernatural to the psychological: "Excess emanated from within, from hidden pathological motivations that rationality was powerless to control" (12).[11] Thus, the mode of the Gothic and the mode of trauma merge here even more than in *The Wrongs of Woman*. These textual and generic features of *Mathilda* – its structures of repetition, its rhetoric of fatalism and tragedy, its specific narratorial constellation, and its brand of the Gothic – position the novella as an early example of the kinds of trauma narrative that, in the words of Laurie Vickroy, "incorporate the rhythms, processes and uncertainties of trauma within [their] consciousness and structures" (xiv). *Mathilda*, in other words, enacts trauma in multiple ways.

WORDS OF DESIRE AND THEIR WOUNDING POWER

At the diegetic level, the core of this trauma narrative primarily revolves around incest and its complex destructive impact. Mathilda, who, according to Margaret Garrett, is "one of the first psychological portraits in modern literature of an incest victim" (45), describes her trauma of father-daughter incest as the determining experience of her life, while the misery of her early childhood increasingly fades into

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11 Botting also emphasizes the importance of the family to this mode of the Gothic: "[T]he family became a place rendered threatening and uncanny by the haunting return of past transgressions and attendant guilt on an everyday world shrouded in strangeness" (11).

the background. At the beginning of her tale, she does mention the untimely death of her mother, but she then conspicuously avoids reflecting on this loss. Her marginalization of her mother's memory alerts us to the possibility that behind the trauma of incest, which she explores extensively, there might be other traumas fuelling her suffering; the loss of her mother may be as traumatic for Mathilda as the loss of her father, but, as Mary Jacobus suggests, it is "unknowable," "unmournable," and "more unspeakable" (175, 166). Mathilda's mother seems to hover over the narrative, also reflecting, perhaps, the way Wollstonecraft hovered over Shelley's life and writings.[12] Through the shadowy, uncanny presence of the mother (which manifests itself, for example, in the father's mourning and in his difficulty keeping apart his feelings for his wife and his daughter) the text signals that, although Mathilda's self-narration focuses on the traumatic experiences of her adolescence, her experience of trauma reaches back to infancy.

The novella implies, then, that Mathilda's lonely, dreary childhood has rendered her particularly susceptible to excessive emotional attachment. She experiences the reunion with her father as a time of "unspeakable happiness," which, however, soon gives way to "unspeakable grief" (21) because of her father's incestuous passion. Mathilda implies that it was the suddenness of her fall to grief, so soon after experiencing happiness for the first time, that made her pain overwhelming:[13] "I began to learn to hope and what brings a more bitter despair to the heart than hope destroyed?" (17). Mathilda constructs the moment of revelation like the climactic scene in a drama. Structurally, her father's confession acts as the moment of *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia*. Highlighting the intensity of this moment, Mathilda tries to capture her agony in vivid, dramatic language:

Yes it was despair I felt; for the first time that phantom seized me, the first and only time for it has never since left me – After the first moments of speechless agony I felt her fangs on my

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12 It seems that Godwin tried from early on to ensure that Wollstonecraft was present for her daughter. In a striking form of memorial practice, Godwin, as Alan Richardson highlights, "first taught her to read and spell by tracing the letters on the gravestone of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft" (*Literature* 78). Shelley indeed seems to have developed strong feelings about her parents' legacies. In a letter to Frances Wright in 1827, she writes: "[My mother's] greatness of soul & my father [sic] high talents have perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could from those from whom I derived my being" (*Letters* II 4).

13 Based on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Greg Forter stresses that the element of surprise may constitute a significant factor in rendering an experience traumatic: "The psychic apparatus is overcome, that is, partly because it fails to anticipate the event that overwhelms it, just as the body is traumatized when an external concussion catches it unawares, making flight or defense against the concussive force impossible" (263).

heart: I tore my hair; I raved aloud; at one moment in pity for his sufferings I would have clasped my father in my arms; and then starting back with horror I spurned him with my foot. I felt as if stung by a serpent, as if scourged by a whip of scorpions which drove me – Ah! Whither – Whither? (28)

Torn between attraction and repulsion, love and horror, Mathilda struggles in vain to overcome the shock of this revelation and to conquer her emotional turmoil in the face of "unnatural passion" (28).

What contributes significantly to the dramatic quality of this passage is the fact that Mathilda represents the scene mainly through direct speech. Even more importantly, the text here emphasizes the performative power of words. The scene preceding the moment of confession is dominated by Mathilda's repeated appeal to her father to "speak that word" (27), and it is, indeed, the fateful "word," finally spoken by her father, that hits her like a "flash of lightning" (27). Her father's frantic declaration, "My daughter, I love you!" is represented as carrying a striking emotional force; these words come as a shock to Mathilda because they retroactively eroticize and sexualize her girlhood dreams of reunion with her father, which all ended and culminated in his affectionate words "My daughter, I love thee" (14). Her father's confession, as Kerry McKeever also emphasizes, causes Mathilda to fall abruptly from the realm of the imaginary into the real (198).[14] The loss of her idealized image of her long-absent father repeats with increased intensity the first time she lost her father; his confession marks the end of her dreams. Emphasizing the affective power of the father's words – "My daughter, I love you!" – the novella evokes Judith Butler's discussion of how specific speech acts produce injury, "wounding" their addressee (*Excitable Speech*). Butler explores how speech, through its performative power, can function as an "injurious act" as well as a "bodily act" for the addressee (16, 12). Comparing the effect of her father's words to being injured by a "serpent" or "scorpion," Mathilda also describes his confession as an act of wounding, and her violent physical reaction underscores the profoundly physical nature of this injury.

The text's emphasis on the wounding impact of the father's words is characteristic of the novella's representation of incest: in contrast to most postmodern novels dealing with father-daughter incest and to P.B. Shelley's drama *The Cenci*[15] and

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14 McKeever also stresses that Mathilda's fall from the imaginary to the real was preceded by her father's fall, whose "spiritual," "fairy-like" conceptions of Mathilda collapsed when her suitor made him realize that another man could perceive Mathilda as a flesh-and-blood woman rather than a bodiless ideal (197).

15 Shelley's journal reveals that she was familiar with the material that P.B. Shelley used for *The Cenci*, copying for example, a manuscript about the history of Beatrice Cenci (see *Journals* 211).

other literary sources (such as Ovid's "Mirra" and Dante's tragedy *Mirra*), incest in *Mathilda* happens only on verbal as well as mental and emotional levels. Yet the novella still emphasizes the body, albeit in a different way. While the violation of the boundaries between natural and "unnatural" love is not enacted physically, the text highlights how much Mathilda experiences the shock of her father's confession, of his "injurious language" (Butler, *Excitable* 28), in her body.

The body is also emphasized in Mathilda's reaction to her father's suicide. This final loss of the father is literally at the centre of the novella, occurring in chapters six and seven, thereby dividing the novella almost symmetrically into a first half, which describes Mathilda's pre-traumatic past and the genesis of her trauma, and a second half, which is focused on the short- and long-term effects of her traumatic experiences.[16] Trying to retrospectively capture what she thought and felt right after her father's suicide, Mathilda writes: "[S]uch was the depth of my emotion that I had no feeling of what caused my distress, my thoughts even wandered to many indifferent objects" (29). This passage expresses what Caruth sees as a typical feature of trauma: that "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time" or, put differently, that it cannot be fully "witness[ed]" "as it occurs" ("Trauma and Experience" 4, 7). The text, then, evokes what Caruth describes as "unclaimed experience" (*Unclaimed*), emphasizing Mathilda's inability to respond emotionally to the experience:

I was too weak to feel any violent emotion. I often said to myself, my father is dead. […] Why is it that I feel no horror? Are these circumstances not dreadful? Is it not enough that I shall never more meet the eyes of my beloved father; never more hear his voice; no caress, no look? All cold, and stiff, and dead! Alas! I am quite callous: the night I was out in was fearful and the cold rain that fell about my heart has acted like the waters of the cavern of Antiparos and has changed it to stone. (40)

While Mathilda fails to grasp the meaning of this experience, to respond emotionally and mentally to what happened, her body responds powerfully to the trauma. While she suffers from an acute feeling of emotional deadness, a strong sense of "psychic numbing" or "emotional anesthesia," as contemporary psychiatrists call it (DSM-IV 464), her body reacts with "convulsions" and "fever," as Mathilda states (40).

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16 The novella's structure follows a symmetrical logic in other ways: the father's death, marking the middle of the novella, is framed by the death of two women, his wife and his daughter, at the beginning and the end of the novella. Furthermore, as Barbour points out, Mathilda's "two years of manless life" separate the two halves of her story, each focused on her relationship with a man, her father and Woodville (109).

In particular, the symptom of fever deserves closer attention. Fever, mostly an unspecified but violent brain or nervous fever, figures repeatedly as the immediate reaction to overwhelming, shocking, and painful experiences in Romantic fiction. After his creature's birth, Frankenstein succumbs to a dangerous nervous fever that persists for several months and is accompanied by haunting intrusions of the creature (43). Similarly, forced by his "adopted" daughter Elizabeth's attachment to Gerard Neville to confront his trauma of guilt, Falkner is seized by a "high fever" caused by the violent "tumult of his thoughts" (*Falkner* 145-46). Lady Lodore so acutely feels the pain of abandoning her beloved home that she is taken ill in her chariot, likewise suffering from a "high fever" (*Lodore* 272-74). Describing one of the fits of madness that Clifford caused, Mandeville writes: "I was in a raging fever" (105). St Leon, after gambling away all his fortune and causing his family's abrupt fall "from the highest rank to the lowest poverty," is seized by a violent "frenzy" and, shortly afterwards, succumbs to a dangerous fever, a "most dreadful disease" (69-72). The characteristics of fever – a term that seems to get used in Romantic fiction to describe a broad range of symptoms – resemble the set of PTSD symptoms labelled "increased arousal" (DSM-IV 464). One important Romantic-era reference to fever in relation to mental illness is in Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia* (1794-96), which describes fever as either a symptom or even a cause of madness (155). William Black's *A Dissertation on Insanity* (1810), moreover, lists "fever" as one category in his "*Table of the Causes of Insanity* of about one third of the Patients admitted into Bedlam" (646). Although Darwin notes that fever can sometimes be a "good symptom" "because when the fever is cured, or ceases spontaneously, the insanity most frequently vanishes at the same time" (*Zoonomia* 155), in trauma narratives like *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein,* fever primarily marks the onset of an individual's mental disturbance. Fever occurs at those moments when the agony of trauma hits the individual with unbearable intensity, thus functioning as a physical manifestation of emotional suffering. Beyond that, these texts depict the trauma victim's oscillation between states of increased arousal and fits of fever on the one hand and states of numbness and weakness on the other, and it is precisely this oscillation that contemporary psychiatry recognizes as a typical feature of post-traumatic disorders. Shelley's depiction of these symptoms, then, conveys her insight that a "wounded heart" (44) tends to disrupt the balance of the organism, leading alternately to a "freezing" and an "overheating" of the system.

Fever is one of many indicators Shelley uses in her trauma writing to convey the powerful impact trauma has on the body. It is interesting to note that recent traumatic stress studies, as mentioned in Chapter One, have repeatedly found that the body bears the burden of trauma just as much as the psyche. Yet Shelley's texts in particular explore the extent to which a mental wound can affect the whole body: *Mathilda*, *Frankenstein*, "The Mourner," and *Valperga* all represent the physical decline of the trauma victim in dramatic terms. Frankenstein recognizes how se-

verely his posttraumatic crisis affects his health – "This state of mind preyed upon my health, which had perhaps never recovered from the first shock it had sustained" (209) – and repeatedly mentions that his family is shocked to find him looking so weak, unhealthy, and emaciated. The "poor prophetess" Beatrice in *Valperga* is so fundamentally changed in physical appearance after her traumatic imprisonment and abuse that both Euthanasia and Castruccio do not even recognize her at first. Castruccio is shocked to find the Beatrice he remembers as "radiant with beauty and joy" to be utterly transformed, "with grey hairs and a wasted form, a young fruit utterly blighted" (283). The narrator emphasizes how closely Beatrice's mental decline and physical decay are intertwined and how rapidly this process happens: "[H]er attire displayed the thinness of her form and the paleness of her wasted cheeks; her hands were skinny and yellow, her hair perfectly grey; a few weeks ago, although mingled with white, its antient colour was preserved; but since then it had quite changed; her eyes were sunken, ringed with black, and rayless" (281). *Mathilda* sketches a similar process of physical decay, here accelerated by consumption. Showing not only the psyche but also the body so severely affected by trauma, Shelley's fiction highlights the fragility of a trauma victim's mental and physical health.

The text's emphasis on the close interrelations between trauma's impact on the psyche and the body, as we will see, also plays a paramount role in postmodern trauma fiction. While postmodern trauma novels tend to explore extensively the powerful effects trauma can have on the individual's body, Shelley's narratives are, in some ways, more radical in their depictions of trauma and the body: they repeatedly associate trauma with severe illness, inevitable physical decline, and, finally, death. They depict traumatic experiences as causing wounds whose direct or indirect injurious powers tend to be lethal. Similar to Godwin's *Mandeville*, Shelley's texts, ultimately, depict trauma as incurable.

"IN LOVE WITH DEATH" AND "POLLUTED" BY PASSION

While *Mathilda* emphasizes the protagonist's bodily suffering, it explores even more extensively the profound impact trauma has on identity and the self. Mathilda's identity crisis, one of the text's key themes, is perhaps the most complex and severe symptom of her posttraumatic suffering. The novella highlights how much her identity is in crisis by stressing her fixation on the past and refusal to face the future. After her father's death, she feigns suicide and breaks all ties with her earlier life. Symbolically killing her previous self, Mathilda repeats the pattern of mourning displayed by her father, who, after his wife's death, changed his name and virtually erased his previous existence. Feeling as if she died along with her fa-

ther, Mathilda withdraws to a remote spot, shuns company, and indulges in melan-
choly.[17] Throughout the novella, she remains obsessively fixated on her father and
her trauma, as if enslaved by the past: "[T]he life progress of the narrator is ar-
rested, the past is her only reality, and her psychic state and goal is dissociation"
(Carlson 174).

The novella suggests that Mathilda's fixation on the past is intensified by the
special nature of trauma memories. Immediately after her father's suicide, Mathilda
suffers from a mild form of amnesia, having only "vague recollections" of what
happened (40). The painful memories surface soon afterwards, however, and haunt
her as "memories that never died and seldom slept" (52). Like Maria and Mande-
ville, Mathilda experiences vivid and intense "intrusive memories" that, to use
Anke Ehlers and David Clark's phrase, appear with a strong "here and now" qual-
ity, producing a distorted sense of time (327). In passages describing particularly
painful moments, such as her search for her father after reading his suicide letter,
Mathilda's verb tense switches back and forth between past and present, as if she
were reliving the past in the present: "I did not weep, but I wiped the perspiration
from my brow, and tried to still my brain and heart beating almost to madness. Oh!
I must not be mad when I see him; [...] Yet untill I find him I must force reason to
keep her seat, and I pressed my forehead hard with my hands – Oh do not leave me"
(37). The sense that Mathilda cannot always properly distinguish between past and
present is also reinforced through metafictional comments that express the difficulty
of writing chronologically. As Himes puts it, "[i]n her consciousness and memory,
everything that has happened to her over the preceding four years and all the loca-
tions where she has been are fused, and every event is happening at every place at
this moment, the moment of her writing her final confession" (120). In other words,
the novella emphasizes the extent to which Mathilda feels both her pre-traumatic
past and her present to be dominated by her traumas, suggesting that she, as is typi-
cal of trauma victims, tends to "live in durational rather than chronological time,
[to] continue to experience the horrors of the past through internal shifts back in
time and space" (Vickroy 5).

Mathilda's fixation on the past and her inability to face the future causes her to
embrace death and negate life, a process that the novel depicts in several ways. For
example, her life-denying tendencies manifest themselves in connection with her

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17 Mathilda's reaction to her father's death is, in turn, echoed in Shelley's 1829 short story
    "The Mourner": like Mathilda, Clarice perceives her father's death as the end of her own
    life; she changes her name from Clarice to Ellen and hides from her fiancé in a solitary
    and secluded spot. Ellen/Clarice's farewell letter to her friend at the end of the text ex-
    presses her split identity and her sense that her former self, Clarice, is dead. Hence, this
    short story, written about ten years after *Mathilda*, parallels the novella in its emphasis on
    pathological forms of mourning and an identity disrupted by trauma.

sexuality. In response to the erotic nature of her father's attachment, with all its fatal consequences, Mathilda abnegates her sexuality. After faking suicide, she symbolically destroys her sexual self, dressing in a "fanciful, nunlike dress" in her self-imposed exile (44). She rejects her potential lover, the poet Woodville, to devote her life to her father's death and, increasingly, to her own death; *eros* plays a role only in connection with *thanatos*. The only moment between Mathilda and Woodville that might be read as a kind of seduction scene is, significantly, Mathilda's emphatic appeal for double suicide. However, the ultimate goal of this attempted seduction is not union through death with Woodville; it is reunion with her father.

Emphasizing Mathilda's devotion to death, the double-suicide passage is also revealing regarding the text's representation of incestuous desire. Mathilda stylizes herself not as the bride of a mortal man but as the bride of death and, possibly, as the bride of her dead father:[18] "[N]o maiden ever took more pleasure in the contemplation of her bridal attire than I in fancying my limbs already enwrapt in their shroud: is it not my marriage dress? Alone it will unite me to my father when in an eternal mental union we shall never part" (65). Mathilda deprives herself of a lived sexuality and increasingly indulges in being "in love with death" (65). However, the way the novella depicts her continuing romantic dreams of her father shows that Shelley does not pathologize incestuous desire as much as Godwin does in *Mandeville*. *Mathilda* could even be said to represent incest with a certain idealizing tendency, with an element of the "frisson" that Alan Richardson identifies as characteristic of Romantic approaches to incestuous love ("Romantic Incest" 554). Yet the consequences of incestuous desire are similarly fatal. As Richardson asserts, in Romantic literature, "incestuous desire, though idealized, nearly always ends tragically" (570).

In *Mathilda*, the tragic results of incestuous desire are underlined by Mathilda's response to her father's death: prolonged pathological mourning. Her mourning can be read in relation to the Romantic-era notion of "ruling passions," which is also important to *Mandeville*. However, in contrast to Mandeville, whose self-analysis repeatedly includes discussion of "the passions," Mathilda uses the term only in relation to her father, to describe his feelings for his wife and, later, for herself; she does not interpret her own emotions and reactions through this lens. While Mandeville dwells on his fits of madness, Mathilda only admits that she was often "on the verge of madness," and asserts: "Do not mistake me; I never was really mad" (43). Thus, it is not surprising that she refuses to identify her own emotions or passions as obsessional or pathological. In spite of Mathilda's self-analysis, the novella as a

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18 My reading here is closer to Mellor's, who states that "Mathilda wishes only to reunite with her father, to embrace him passionately in the grave" (*Mary Shelley* 195), than to Ranita Chatterjee's, who claims that Mathilda "dies to liberate herself from the clutches of the father's desire" (144).

whole can be said to evoke a psychology of the passions, notably of the "depressing passions," as described by John Haslam in *Observations on Madness and Melancholy* (1809):

Those under the influence of the depressive passions, will exhibit a […] train of symptoms. The countenance wears an anxious and gloomy aspect, and they are little disposed to speak. They retire from the company of those with whom they had formerly associated, seclude themselves in obscure places, or lie in bed the greatest part of their time. […] They next become fearful, and, when irregular combinations of ideas have taken place, conceive a thousand fancies: often recur to some immoral act which they have committed, or imagine themselves guilty of crimes which they never perpetrated: believe that God has abandoned them, and, with trembling, await his punishment. Frequently they become desperate, and endeavour by their own hands to terminate an existence, which appears to be an afflicting and hateful incumbrance. (44)

Withdrawal to a secluded place and separation from others, a "gloomy" appearance, and a tendency towards suicide are all important elements of Mathilda's psychology that evoke Haslam's description of the "depressive passions." She describes herself as a "poor girl broken in spirit, who spoke in a low and gentle voice" (43) and actively contributes to the picture of despondency through her choice of clothes. Moreover, her feigned, symbolic suicide is later followed by a serious contemplation of suicide by poison. Her depressive fixation on the past and her melancholic longing for death complete the picture.

Nevertheless, I read the novella, like *Mandeville*, as a multi-layered exploration of mental suffering and mental disturbances, not as a study of one ruling passion. If we extend the perspective to contemporary psychology, Mathilda's "depressive passions" may be seen as one crucial element of a more complex pathology of trauma. In this respect, my reading differs from William Brewer's, who claims that "in Godwin's and Shelley's works the primary cause of madness is generally a ruling passion" (135). While Brewer focuses on the "obsessional" passions between father and daughter (113), I locate the cause of the protagonists' mental disturbances in trauma, while ruling passions either figure as symptoms within their psychopathology (like Mathilda's depression) or as one factor in the individual's predispositions (like Mandeville's misanthropy, which, however, in turn seems to be rooted in trauma). To give a further example, Frankenstein's ruling passion, his fervent ambition, does have fatal consequences, but it only indirectly leads to his mental disturbance and emotional turmoil, which are the results of the trauma his creature inflicts. Furthermore, it is through the traumatic losses caused by the creature's murderous wrath that Frankenstein develops his later ruling passion, his obsessional desire for revenge. As these examples illustrate, the psychology of these protagonist-

narrators cannot be explained through a mere cause and effect model based on the passions.

Mathilda's psychology of trauma and her depression include reactions of self-blame and self-condemnation. The sense of guilt that Mathilda feels about her father's incestuous desires and their fatal consequences seems disproportionate, if not excessive – which, in fact, parallels Haslam's description of patients suffering from "depressing passions," who "often recur to some former immoral act which they have committed" (44). While Mathilda's self-judgment is unstable, oscillating between gestures of self-vindication and moments of acute self-accusation, she generally blames herself far more than her father for the complications in their relationship.[19] Yet the text refuses to identify clearly what precisely Mathilda feels guilty about. Does she feel guilty about forcing her father to confess his secret? Does she blame herself for provoking her father's incestuous desire? Or does she feel guilty about any incestuous desires that she may have felt? It seems to me that Mathilda's sense of guilt gets disconnected from specific actions and becomes a pervasive aspect of her sense of self. Her response, then, may be more accurately described in terms of "shame" than "guilt." In modern psychology, distinctions between guilt and shame tend to rely on the definition that the clinical psychologist Helen Block Lewis proposed in 1971: "The experience of shame is directly about the *self*, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the *thing* done or undone is the focus" (30). Hence, while guilt involves a specific "articulated condemnation of a specific behaviour," shame involves "fairly global negative evaluations of the self" (Tangney and Dearing 24). In Mathilda's case, her negative evaluations are less concerned with a specific action or behaviour and more concerned with her overall sense of self. Calling herself "another Cain," an "outcast from human feeling" and a "monster with whom none might mingle in converse and love" (60-61), her expressions of self-hatred echo the laments of Frankenstein's creature. The text suggests that it is Mathilda's sense of who she *is* rather than what she *did* that makes her feel "unfit for any intercourse" (55). Shame alienates her from other human beings.

In the context of guilt and shame, it is also important to note that the text combines the rhetoric of monstrosity with imagery of pollution, contamination, and illness. Mathilda perceives herself as a "living pestilence," believes her soul to be

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19 According to trauma psychologists, such patterns of self-blame are typical reactions of victims of childhood and family trauma. As Judith Herman highlights, children suffering from disrupted relationships with their parents tend to cling to the explanation of their own "badness" because blaming themselves allows them to uphold the belief that their parents are "good" (*Recovery* 102-03). In this light, Mathilda's self-blame could be read as a means of preventing her long-treasured, idealized image of her father from being entirely shattered.

"corrupted to its core by a deadly cancer" (61), and feels her ears to be full of the "poison" of "unlawful and detestable passion" (53). These passages show that, although the act of incest was committed only in thought, Mathilda feels polluted in both mind and body. Shelley's depiction of Mathilda's sense of contamination comes strikingly close to what has recently been discussed in studies of sexual abuse as "mental pollution." Nichole Fairbrother and S. Rachman define mental pollution as "feelings of dirtiness" that are "internal, emotional and moral in nature" and evoked by "memories, information or images" rather than by an actual, physical contaminant (175). According to Fairbrother and Rachman, after a sexual assault, many women experience a "sense of internal dirtiness," which is often connected to feelings of responsibility, guilt, or shame (174). This also applies to Mathilda, whose feelings of mental pollution are a vital aspect of her negative self-perception. It is telling, however, that the imagery of pollution is pervaded by ambiguity about whether Mathilda perceives the source of pollution as external or internal. Her phrases, such as her claim that she felt "polluted by the unnatural love [she] had inspired" (60), destabilize any clear sense of who she sees as primarily responsible for the pollution. Once again, what is at stake is less the *act* of polluting than the *state* of being polluted; guilt repeatedly becomes shame.

Issues of guilt and shame lead me to a textual crux of the novella, namely, the question of whether the incestuous passion represented here is one-sided or reciprocal. Critics are deeply divided on this question. Some read Mathilda as the innocent daughter, who feels nothing but a natural, daughterly affection for her father and is, thus, the victim of his incestuous passion. Garrett, for example, claims that Mathilda displays "natural feelings of the child for her father" (52), and Ranita Chatterjee asserts that "[f]ar from desiring her father sexually, she desires to be loved as a child" (143). In contrast, Charles Robinson characterizes her as having a "histrionic" and "hysterical" personality and even shifts the responsibility for the incestuous desires from father to daughter, claiming that Mathilda acts as the main "sexual aggressor," inspiring forbidden desires in her father through her powerful "seduction fantasy" (83). These divergent readings of Mathilda's "guilt" point to the text's inherent ambiguity and to the challenge it presents to moral judgment. In spite of this ambiguity, however, I want to suggest that, overall, it is not so much the text that blames and condemns Mathilda – it is Mathilda herself.

The connection between trauma and guilt is a theme that *Mathilda* shares with a number of Romantic trauma novels: Frankenstein is traumatized by the series of deaths within his family; at the same time, he feels guilty about these deaths because they are the result of his creature's murderous wrath and, thus, indirectly the result of his hubristic act of creation. Falkner exhibits a pathological condition of mourning on behalf of his beloved Alithea but at the same time considers himself her murderer (he abducted her in a moment of rash passion) and hates himself for having destroyed the happiness of Alithea's son. Godwin's St Leon, who is trau-

matically alienated from family and society through his immortality, suffers a profound sense of guilt from having caused the financial ruin and downfall of his family. Further Romantic-period examples of characters burdened by a heavy sense of guilt towards a close family member include Manfred in Lord Byron's *Manfred* and Oswald in Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, both of whom show symptoms of a trauma of guilt. This recurrent emphasis on the relationship between guilt and mental illness may reflect the moralistic trajectory of some Romantic-period psychiatric discourses. As discussed in Chapter One, some early psychiatrists claimed that there is a close connection between an individual's passions and sins and his or her mental illness, thereby assigning the responsibility for the mental disturbance to the individual. Should we, then, read Mathilda's melancholic depression as the consequence of – or even punishment for – her involvement in the tragedy of father-daughter incest? Does the novella encourage a moralistic reading of the narrator's pathology of the mind?

I read the novella's relation to the moralistic elements of Romantic-period psychiatric discourses as far more complex. Evoking "Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's shared emphasis on the formative power of education and circumstances" (Clemit, "*Frankenstein*" 35), Mathilda is depicted as the victim of her environment, more specifically, as the victim of deeply disruptive experiences within the family during childhood and adolescence. The novella, as Clemit emphasizes, "establish[es] knowable causes for irrational-seeming behaviour," representing Mathilda as "the victim of unfavourable circumstances" ("From *The Fields*" 159). In other words, although Mathilda, like most other trauma victims in Shelley's oeuvre and in Godwin's texts, is not a figure of purity and innocence, the novella implies that her mental disturbance should not be seen as her own responsibility. The text invites this reading by recording in detail the environmental factors determining her reactions and precipitating her crisis. This reading could, perhaps, be extended to Mathilda's father: on the one hand, he may be read, as Michael Scrivener suggests, as "an irresponsible father who victimizes her with his self-indulgent abandonments and revelations" (212); on the other hand, he – like Mathilda – figures as an embodiment of pathological mourning, as a victim of traumatic loss and, we might add, a victim of his powerful, unconquerable passions. Unlike Beatrice's father in P.B. Shelley's incest drama *The Cenci*, who is a merciless, cold-blooded, and cruel arch-villain, Mathilda's father does not fit the stereotype of perpetrator. Hence, the novella challenges clear-cut boundaries between perpetrators and victims and problematizes issues of guilt with regard to both father and daughter. The text shifts the emphasis from a *moral* assessment of guilt to a *psychological* exploration of guilt and shame related to trauma.[20]

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20 According to Ruth Leys, the notion of guilt tends to involve moral judgment far more than the notion of shame. While a discussion of guilt entails "concerns about accountabil-

Finally, the discussion of guilt and shame also needs to address gender issues. Shelley has Mathilda, like Ellen/Clarice in "The Mourner," suffer from different forms of self-hatred, including self-destructive and suicidal tendencies. The psychology of these female trauma victims stands in sharp contrast to the psychology of male trauma victims like Frankenstein and Mandeville: the female trauma victims mainly direct their destructive drives inwards towards themselves, while Frankenstein and Mandeville turn them outwards, directing them against their "enemies." Indeed, Mathilda not only considers suicide but also takes pleasure in her health's decline and her body's decay through consumption. While Mathilda longs for her own destruction and death, Frankenstein and Mandeville are obsessed with the idea of killing their antagonists. This contrast even manifests itself in the language of pollution and monstrosity. In a few rare moments, Mandeville and Frankenstein perceive an element of the monstrous in themselves, but on the whole, Mandeville is fixated on Clifford as the source of pollution contaminating his beloved sister, while Frankenstein reduces the creature to an embodiment of monstrosity, refusing to see his human features. Again, this attitude differs markedly from Mathilda's, who perceives herself rather than her father as monstrous and polluted. These male and female patterns of reaction constitute different manifestations of how trauma victims possessed by the past are unable to think and act in healthy, life-affirming ways.[21]

The origin of these gender differences may lie, in part, in education. In *Zoonomia*, Darwin claims that the type of education an individual receives influences the type of mental illness to which he or she is susceptible: "The violence of action accompanying insanity depends much on the education of the person; those who have been proudly educated with unrestrained passions, are liable to greater fury; and those, whose education has been humble, to greater despondency" (156). Brewer reads the "fury" of Mandeville, "this arrogant Oxford-educated aristocrat," in connection with Darwin's linking of education and type of insanity (142). Even though Darwin, in this context, does not explicitly refer to gender, the difference between

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ity" and "moralisms," the focus on shame shifts the emphasis to "the question of our personal identity and attributes" (Leys and Goldman 672). As Leys asserts, the relation between "what I feel (shame) and what I feel shame 'about'" is "now held to be entirely contingent and indeterminant" (671). In this light, the fact that *Mathilda* explores the affects of both guilt and shame can be said to support the interpretation of the novella as challenging moralistic perspectives.

21 It is interesting to note that recent research on PTSD also reveals these two contrasting types of posttraumatic reactions. As Matthew Friedman et al. maintain, some researchers consider PTSD an "internalizing disorder within the distress/anxious-misery domain," while other studies show that "many people exhibit an angry and aggressive form of PTSD" ("Classification" 741).

male and female education in the Romantic era seems relevant here. In this light, Mathilda's "despondency" can be related to her "humble" education. Her aunt did teach her to play the harp, but she mostly educated herself using her aunt's little library; in many ways, she grew up as a child of nature. It is only when her father returns that Mathilda has a human being to talk to, finding that "the subjects of [their] conversations were inexhaustible" (15). However, similar to several of Shelley's later texts, the novella specifically calls attention to the traumatizing potential inherent in overly close father-daughter relationships, where the daughter's education relies almost exclusively on the father. As Kate Ellis emphasizes, Shelley depicts the damaging effects of domestic isolation, revealing the dangers of "emotional victimization" and "excessive dependency" for daughters growing up in a family defined by the absence of the mother and the exclusion of the outside world (228).[22] This family constellation applies to Mathilda and Ellen/Clarice but also to Ethel and Elizabeth Raby in Shelley's later texts *Lodore* and *Falkner*. These daughters receive, in the words of the narrator of *Lodore*, a "sexual education" from their fathers (218), and they are moulded into self-sacrificing women wholly focused and dependent on men.[23] As Anne Mellor puts it, these works by Shelley portray women "whose selves are less than whole" (*Mary Shelley* 178), lacking autonomy, integrity, and independence, and whose identities are fundamentally "relational," determined by their roles as daughter or wife (205).[24] In the light of Darwin's theory, these educational patterns may be connected to the female protagonists' psychologies. Shelley's texts suggest that these familial power structures, which cast women as powerless and dependent, put women in a position where they are particularly vulnerable to trauma and suffering. Being largely deprived of agency, these female subjects struggle to cope with adversity because they lack the experience of using their psychological resources independently. In turn, the lack of

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22 For a Freudian reading of how the mother's early death influences the relationship between Mathilda and her father, see Chatterjee's "*Mathilda*."

23 An important figure of contrast, that is, a daughter who receives a significantly different education, is Fanny Derham in *Lodore*, whose father strives to foster her autonomy and independence: "Mr Derham contemplated his duties and objects befitting an immortal soul, and had educated his child for the performance of them. […] [He] sought to guard his [daughter] from all weakness, to make her complete in herself, and to render her independent and self-sufficing" (218). Fanny indeed acts independently when she plays a very active part in the reconciliation of Ethel with her estranged mother.

24 Mellor goes as far as to argue that in the typical structure of the bourgeois family, "the father-daughter relationship becomes a paradigm for all male-female relationships," which is exemplified by the phenomenon of "child brides": "[W]omen are urged to remain daughters (or children) and to marry 'father figures,' men who are older, wiser, stronger, and more economically powerful than they" (*Mary Shelley* 198).

agency resulting from their education seems to influence the specific types of symptoms that characterize their response to traumatic experiences – in Mathilda's case, numbing and withdrawal, depressive passions, guilt, shame, and self-destructive tendencies.

The Paradoxes of Performative Self-Fashioning

Mathilda's symptomatology is, in multiple ways, connected to her crisis of identity. The novella grapples with the complex relationship between identity and trauma, and it is precisely this complexity that I investigate in this subsection. First of all, the novella's large number of intertextual references are of vital importance to a discussion of its identity politics. Mary Jacobus explores the interrelations between intertextuality and identity in *Mathilda* primarily at the metatextual level of Shelley's position as a woman writer. Comparing the novella's textual fabric to Frankenstein's creature's skin, with its rough surface that is randomly pieced together, Jacobus interprets the numerous disjointed and de-contextualized quotations in the text as constituting a "poetic failure," which points to Shelley's problematic relation to masculine Romanticism, to her "trauma of being cut off from a productive relation to the poetry of the past" (197). Jacobus reads the novella as an expression of trauma at the level of literary creation, expressing Shelley's "anxiety of authorship," in the words of Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert (49).[25] Yet the complex workings of intertextuality in the novella have further layers of meaning.

At the textual and diegetic level, intertextuality figures as one of the novella's foremost means of problematizing identity, agency, and narrative. The novella's many intertextual references show how Mathilda identifies with a large number of characters, both male and female, from literature, myth, and the Bible, including Oedipus, Dante's Matelda, Wordsworth's Lucy, Boccaccio's Ghismonda, Psyche, and Proserpine, as well as Cain, Job, and David. Some of these intertextual identifications are conveyed through direct comparisons, as in the similes, "*Like Proserpine*, I lived for awhile in an enchanted palace" and "*Like another Cain*, I had a mark set on my forehead" (18, 60, emphasis added), while others operate with more fluid transitions from Mathilda's voice to another poetic voice, like Wordsworth's,

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25 On Shelley and female authorship, see also Mary Poovey's "My Hideous Progeny," Barbara Johnson's "My Monster/My Self," and Stephen Behrendt's "Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Woman Writer's Fate." In her preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley also explicitly addresses her struggle to develop her own voice as a writer alongside the dominant and powerful male voices surrounding her – especially the voices of Shelley and Byron (*Frankenstein* 7-8).

for example: "I am about to leave thee; [...] this emaciated body will rest insensate on thy bosom / 'Rolled round in earth's diurnal course / With rocks, and stones, and trees'" (64). Through her changing, temporary, yet in her mind powerful identifications with these different characters, Mathilda performs a considerable range of identities and subjectivities. The complex intertextual web Mathilda weaves around herself indicates that she perceives her identity as malleable and multiple rather than as unified, given, and permanent. In other words, the novella stages the collapse of a unified self and identity and foregrounds the performativity of identity. Yet in contrast to a number of texts of the time that celebrate performative identities (e.g., Lord Byron's *Beppo* and *Don Juan*),[26] *Mathilda* expresses a critical view of performativity, exploring selfhood and identity from the perspective of a severely traumatized individual. In order to elucidate the particulars of the novella's approach to performative identities, I bring the text into dialogue with Butler's conceptualization of identity and trauma specialist Klaus Grawe's psychological perspectives on identity.

According to Butler, the performativity of identity functions as an important source of power, resistance, and subversion. In her seminal study *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that identity is "produced" rather than essential and unified and that it is malleable rather than stable. Identity, then, emerges as a site for subversion and resistance, as a potential locus of agency and change. In *Mathilda*, the autodiegetic narrator constantly performs different roles and constructs her identity through numerous identifications with literary, mythological, and religious characters. These references and quotations function as performative acts. In Butler's terminology, they may be read as repetitions and variations of cultural identity constructions that create and continuously recreate Mathilda's identity. I argue, however, that the novella's negotiation of the performativity of identity differs crucially from Butler's, especially insofar as Mathilda's performative identity practice, expressed mainly through intertextuality, essentially points to a *crisis* of the self. Producing tensions and contradictions, these performative acts of identification seem to open up gaps, and they escape the subject's control. On the one hand, Mathilda identifies with victims who embody innocence, purity, and suffering, such as Proserpine, "who was

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26 My main points of reference regarding Romanticism and performativity are the studies by Angela Esterhammer. In *The Romantic Performative*, Esterhammer emphasizes how important performance and performativity were to the Romantic period and explores characteristics of the "Romantic performative." In *Romanticism and Improvisation,* her readings of Della Cruscan poetry, Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, and Lord Byron's *Beppo*, among others, demonstrate that these texts, in different ways, celebrate improvisation and performative identities. Written in an "improvisational style," Byron's *Beppo*, for example, strongly highlights the performative dimension of identities through its playing with Carnival masks, "shape-shifting," and national identities (150).

gaily and heedlessly gathering flowers on the sweet plain of Enna, when the King of Hell snatched her away to the abodes of death and misery" (19-20), Psyche, with her sudden fall from the happiness of an "enchanted palace" to the misery of a "barren rock" and "wide ocean of despair" (18), and Sigismunda, with her unspeakable grief over her lover, who was murdered by her father (29). On the other hand, Mathilda identifies with guilt-ridden figures like Cain and Oedipus (60, 5) as well seductresses associated with incestuous desire, particularly in her references to Leila in John Fletcher's *The Captain* and Vittorio Alfieri's *Myrrha* (20). These intertextual references to incest might, in some ways, appear subtle or even muted: the lament of Fletcher's Leila, which Mathilda repeats, is taken from a passage where Leila speaks to her lover, not her father (20), and unlike in many other intertextual references, Mathilda does not identify directly with the heroine of Alfieri's tragedy, referring only to the play as a whole. Nonetheless, Mathilda praises *Myrrha* to her father as "the best of Alfieri's tragedies" (20), a statement that evokes a kind of reaction in her father which makes her perceive for the first time an "unknown horror" in him (21). Hence, these references point to a concern with the themes of incestuous love and seduction and contribute to the text's ambiguity regarding whether Mathilda is passive or active in the scenes of incestuous love.

In addition to these tensions, a considerable number of intertextual identifications, many of which are only partial identifications, are de-contextualized and focus only on a single detail. The reference to Constance in *King John* accentuates the depth of Mathilda's grief; the reference to Wordsworth's "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" highlights Mathilda's death wish; and the reference to *Prometheus Unbound* heightens the intensity of her sufferings (42-43, 45). Yet the quotations are fragmentary, disconnected, and detached from their original contexts, only loosely interwoven into Mathilda's narrative. As Jacobus puts it, they are "strangely out of context, even wooden" (196). As a result, Mathilda's many performative acts of identification seem not only complex and conflicting but also barely connected and incompletely mapped onto her life-story. The novella thereby conveys that Mathilda experiences her self as unstable and disjointed and struggles to define her identity. The novella even seems to suggest that her performative identity practice, that is, imaginatively becoming Proserpine, Psyche, Oedipus, or Constance, does not help her overcome her posttraumatic identity crisis; on the contrary, it reinforces it. The sense of her identity as lacking unity and continuity and the tensions within her self, such as her profound ambivalence about her guilt, are not resolved, but intensified. Meaning is constantly deferred.

In *Mathilda*, the performative is not celebrated as offering potential for resistance, agency, or power; rather, it emphasizes the protagonist-narrator's identity crisis. Like a number of postmodern trauma novels, including Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place*, *Mathilda* does not celebrate the positive, creative, and subversive potential of subjectivities as generated, malleable, and multiple; instead, it foregrounds

the destabilizing and threatening effects of identities that are unstable, split, and fragmented. What the text emphasizes is, in Dominick LaCapra's words, that "[t]rauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence" (*Writing History* 41). In other words, in Shelley, the performativity of identity emerges as a problematic concept and practice for the traumatized individual who lacks the control over her self and her actions needed to play with subjectivities. Performativity even seems to function as a source of disempowerment for the self. When the self threatens to fall apart, the novella implies, the potential for agency, change, and resistance that identity theorists like Butler associate with the collapse of notions of the unified and stable self tends to get lost.[27]

Intertextuality is, thus, one important way in which the poetics of *Mathilda* enacts posttraumatic suffering. The shifting intertextual web that the novella weaves around its heroine captures her identity crisis and signals a crisis of meaning, both of which are characteristic of the posttraumatic. Mathilda's recurrent references to literary characters express how difficult it is for her to make sense of her past and her self. Because her traumatic past seems to resist direct expression, Shelley has Mathilda grasp at literary comparisons in an attempt to construct some meaningful connections to her obscure past.[28] In this way, I regard *Mathilda*, with its ingenious use of intertextuality, as an early example of a poetics of trauma that works with gaps and indeterminacies, with deferrals of meaning and aporias – the kind of poetics of trauma that, as Caruth writes in *Unclaimed Experience*, displays the "complex ways that knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma" (4). Like more recent trauma narratives, the novella also raises questions of knowing and not knowing for its readers. As Allen asserts, "[t]he intertextual character of Mathilda constantly falls into a wandering relation between figures, an overdetermined and unstable condition of textuality, which denies us the ability to read (figure) her, in the sense of translating figures and narrative structures into stable, originary, and thus explanatory referents" (180-81). Mathilda's complex, everchanging acts of identification make it difficult to identify and read her; the perfor-

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27 I see in Butler's approach to the performativity of identity a certain degree of ambiguity regarding the subject's agency. Butler emphasizes that any performative act of (subversive) repetition and variation is always inevitably grounded and embedded in cultural discourses and identity practices. Hence, while identities may be actively "performed," they are, paradoxically, always also constructed and generated by discourses beyond the individual subject's control (see *Gender Trouble* 175-93). A text like *Mathilda*, then, problematizes this essential paradox regarding the subject's agency and negotiates it in far more pessimistic terms than Butler does.

28 The abundance of intertextual references also emphasizes how important literature was for Mathilda's identity formation: during her isolated childhood, art determined her reality, and fictional characters replaced human companions.

mativity of identity seems to escape not only the narrator's but also the reader's control.

However, I would like to take this argument about identity and performativity one step further: I want to show that, in *Mathilda*, the subject's performative self-fashioning, in the sense of performing a multiplicity of identities and assuming shifting roles, co-exists and contrasts with its opposing impulses – the desire for unity, consistency, and stability. According to Grawe, the so-called consistency principle is, in fact, the most constitutive principle of psychic functioning; it subsumes the basic psychological needs for control, stability, and coherence (386, 421). Grawe maintains that trauma severely undermines or violates consistency – threatening the maintenance of a stable identity and stable relationships and causing memory disturbances (426) – and that the psychic system, destabilized by trauma, instinctively strives to restore consistency. Representing a different perspective on the performative than Butler, Shelley combines the exploration of the performativity of identity with an emphasis on the traumatized individual's urge to restore what Grawe calls "consistency," that is, the urge to recover a sense of a stable rather than multiple identity, to regain control over self and life and to construct one coherent life-story. Throughout, *Mathilda* foregrounds processes of narrativizing and dramatizing the self that are driven by impulses towards unity, agency, and control.

One way that Mathilda narrativizes her life is through constructing it as a tragedy; in fact, theatrical metaphors permeate the novella. On the final pages, for example, she summarizes the "drama of her life" as follows: "Again and again I have passed over in my remembrance the different scenes of my short life: if the world is a stage and I merely an actor on it my part has been strange, and, alas! tragical" (66). Patterning her autobiographical tale after the traditional five-act-structure of a tragedy "provides the audience with a sense of closure" (Bunnell, "*Mathilda*" 85), but it also signals that Mathilda aims for a sense of control, coherence, and closure for herself. The novella connects the trope of the heroine's life as a drama to issues of agency by suggesting that in the narrativization of her life-story, Mathilda figures not only as the "tragic heroine," as the actress on stage, but also as the director, staging and controlling the performance of her life. She seems to set the scene for the dramatic moments in her life-story, for example, when she prepares the "scene" for her suicide with Woodville: "[I] decorated the last scene of my tragedy" (57). In assuming the double function of actress and director, Mathilda expresses her desire to gain some control over the harrowing experiences that she feels have been beyond her control. Shelley figures Mathilda as a fictitious playwright who reconstructs her autobiography in the form of a tragedy and simultaneously "stages" the tragedy, thereby complementing the kind of "author metaphor" found in Godwin's *Mandeville* with a "stage director metaphor." In this way, the novella places particular emphasis on processes of narrative self-construction and self-dramatization.

Mathilda's theatrical self-dramatization may also be said to express a desire for agency and control in the way it functions as a psychological distancing device. Shelley's extensive use of theatrical metaphors seems to signal that the autodiegetic narrator, who clearly longs to narrate her life, endures the confrontation with her past only by creating distance from it, by treating her life-story as a drama on stage. The text's stylized rhetoric, poetic pathos, melodramatic language, and use of Gothic devices can be read as part of her dramatic self-fashioning. While the Gothic underlines the emotional intensity of the especially gloomy moments of her tale – Mathilda hiding from her father in a secluded chamber, dreaming prophetically of his death,[29] chasing her father through the stormy night, seeing the blasted tree and prophesying his death, finding his corpse – the Gothic devices make the episodes seem especially constructed and staged. In other words, by giving these central moments of her life a particularly dramatic quality, Mathilda might, paradoxically, experience the agony of the past as less palpably real, as mediated and contained by the distance of literary imagination.

The attempt to regain control expressed through the author and stage director metaphors is also closely linked to the basic narrative principles of order, coherence, and causality. Through metafictional comments such as "[b]ut I forget myself, my tale is yet untold" (6) or "[b]ut I wander from my relation – let woe come at its appointed time" (17), Mathilda signals her constant endeavour to maintain narrative order, to follow the logic of chronology. In terms of coherence and causality, the first chapter of Mathilda's narrative also deserves a closer look. After a short prelude, she begins her story with her father's story, relating his childhood, early passions, and all-consuming love for Diana.[30] Mathilda's detailed description of her father's familial background and her own familial roots can be read as an attempt to understand the foundations of her life-story and her trauma. In other words, the opening of Mathilda's narrative enacts a search for (lost) origins and is in line with psychiatrists' claim that the "reconstructing of the trauma story" should "begin[] with a review of the patient's life before the trauma and the circumstances that led up to the event" (Herman, *Recovery* 176). Mathilda then gives an account of her

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29 It should be noted that Mathilda's dream is a different kind than Maria's dreams in *The Wrongs of Woman*. While Maria's mainly constitute forms of re-experiencing the traumatic past, Mathilda's is uncanny and Gothic through its prophetic quality. Dramatically foreshadowing her father's death, the dream anticipates the imminent and irrevocable termination of the figurative dream of a blissful union with her father.

30 The fact that Mathilda views her father's story as a crucial part of her own is signalled by the opening sentence "I was born in England," followed by an immediate shift back to her father's past:"My father was a man of rank: he had lost his father early, and was educated by a weak mother […] " (6). It is revealing that Mathilda dedicates far more words to her father than her mother even in the opening pages.

early childhood, which she justifies as follows: "I must be allowed to dwell a little on the years of my childhood that it may be apparent how when one hope failed all life was to me a blank; and how when the only affection I was permitted to cherish was blasted my existence was extinguished within it" (11). Mathilda establishes a direct causal link between her childhood and her posttraumatic crisis after her father's suicide; she expresses the belief that her isolated childhood created a certain disposition in her character, a heightened vulnerability to a particularly violent response to adversity. This passage not only expresses the Godwinian view of the formative power of childhood experiences but also demonstrates a fundamental feature of how Mathilda narrativizes her life: she strives to make clear the overall plot of her tragedy and the causal connections between its individual acts. In other words, the overall structure of her narrative is not an episodic staging of different selves, not a dramatization of various subjectivities and identities, but the construction of one individual's (tragic) life-story, based on the principle of narrative coherence and on drawing clear causal connections between the determining events of her life. In this sense, the novella emphasizes the narrator's desire for a unified identity and a consistent life-story, alerting us to the basic psychological needs emphasized by Grawe.

Mathilda's self-fashioning and identity practices are, then, characterized by fundamental tensions. Her attitude towards identity oscillates between conflicting impulses – variety, multiplicity, and role-playing on the one hand and unity, stability, and control on the other – and these tensions are not resolved but co-exist throughout the novella. However, while Mathilda's dramatic self-narrativization as a literary heroine, with its impulse towards unity and control, could be read as a gesture towards working through, the construction of her life-story as a tragedy, ultimately, proves just as destabilizing and disempowering as her practice of assuming multiple literary identities. While Miller discusses Mathilda as a "heroine whose performative activities code her as a powerful actress or artist rather than as submissive victim" (292), I argue that a "powerful actress" or a "self-determinative" performer (304) is what Mathilda longs, but ultimately fails, to be. In contrast to Miller, I read Mathilda's construction of her autobiography as a tragedy as psychologically and emotionally disempowering. My reading is, thus, closer to Bunnell's, who asserts that Mathilda's self-dramatization illustrates the "dangers of a debilitating confusion of life with art" as well as the effects of an over-intense sensibility ("*Mathilda*" 76, 83). More specifically, while Mathilda's attempt to fit her life-story into a literary template expresses her desire to reduce the horror of her past, her choice of tragedy is disempowering in the way it reinforces a fatalistic sense of doom, forecloses any hope of recovery, and orients her towards death. The structure of unity that the frame of tragedy seems to promise revolves around adversity and suffering, thus feeding into Mathilda's pessimistic determinism and precluding the possibility of hope and happiness. Hence, Mathilda finds no way out of her identity

crisis. Her complex, multi-layered self-fashioning, even if it expresses a desire for agency and control, seems to take control of her.

SELF-NARRATION AND SYMPATHETIC "MANAGEMENT": THE FAILURES OF (SELF-)THERAPY

Mathilda's identity crisis and self-fashioning are closely connected with another crucial topos: the question of how *Mathilda* depicts processes of working through and recovery. I argue that while the novella evokes potential means of therapy and self-therapy, it does in fact depict these in a highly critical light. One way in which the novella explores the possibility of working through is in its representation of writing as a means of self-therapy. In the prelude to her story, Mathilda emphasizes her powerful urge to write her story: "Perhaps such a story as mine had better die with me, but a feeling that I cannot define leads me on and I am too weak both in body and mind to resist the slightest impulse" (5). This "impulse" also drives the protagonists in *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Mandeville* as well as a whole array of traumatized characters in Shelley's oeuvre – Woodville, Frankenstein and his creature, Beatrice in *Valperga*, Ellen/Clarice in "The Mourner," and Lionel Verney in *The Last Man* – who feel compelled to tell or write their stories. Although *Mathilda* evokes the idea of writing as self-therapy, the novella's frame pessimistically forecloses the possibility of recovery through written self-expression by closely linking the act of writing to death. In her opening reflections, Mathilda declares that it is only the certainty of her impending death that allows her to write: "I shall never see the snows of another winter – I do believe that I shall never again feel the vivifying warmth of another summer sun; and it is in this persuasion that I begin to write my tragic history" (5). In her closing meditations, she returns to the theme of writing and death: "Farewell, Woodville, the turf will soon be green on my grave. […] There is my hope and expectation; your's are in this world; may they be fulfilled" (67). These final sentences suggest that the end of Mathilda's narration virtually coincides with the end of her life; her last words seem written on the verge of death. *Mathilda*, as Rajan puts it, "does not make its reading part of its diegesis, addressing itself only posthumously to Woodville"; as a result, it enacts a "resistance to productive reading" ("Melancholy" 61). Once again, the novella not only signals its refusal to fully participate in the Symbolic order but also undercuts the beneficial potential of written self-expression. Mathilda's imminent death makes clear that for her, writing can, at best, serve as "a palliative rather than a cure" (Brewer 157) and is doomed to fail as a means for her to connect to her fellow human beings.

The novella's approach to therapy is just as pessimistic as its approach to self-therapy. Like Mandeville's sister Henrietta, the poet Woodville can be seen as a

self-appointed "moral manager," attempting to cure Mathilda. As Joel Faflak writes, Woodville figures as the moral manager who breaks Mathilda's self-imposed isolation to "offe[r] the cure of sympathetic exchange" ("Inoperative" 727). Woodville, who finds consolation in confiding his story to Mathilda, repeatedly encourages her to do the same, to trust in "human sympathy," friendship, and "the voice of consolation and kindness" (54). He serves as a figure of contrast to Mathilda, embodying a different reaction to bereavement. His reaction to the tragic death of his beloved Eleonor is *not* to wish for a gradual death; instead, driven by his deep determination to "dedicate [his] life for the good of others" (59) and by his sense of a mission of human sympathy and virtue, he is able to see mourning as a way back to living. The contrast between Mathilda's death-oriented, pathological mourning and Woodville's life-affirming mourning highlights the depth of Mathilda's posttraumatic crisis, the intensity of her grief, and her resistance to recovery.

The reasons why Mathilda refuses to be cured by Woodville deserve closer attention. At first, Mathilda feels that Woodville's "words had magic in them" (55), and she experiences the moment she first verbalizes her suffering to him – though without revealing anything about the source of her suffering – as soothing and comforting: "I know not why but I found it sweet to utter these words to human ears" (54). Despite these moments of temporary relief, which point to the therapeutic value of self-expression, Mathilda firmly refuses to talk to Woodville about her traumatic past. The novella suggests that Mathilda's refusal to talk is rooted in her belief that her "wounds" are "far too deep […] for any cure" (54) and entirely unspeakable. She repeatedly emphasizes that the subject of incestuous desire is taboo, perceiving her life as determined by "sacred horrors" that she cannot tamper with (5) – at least not in direct, oral communication.

Shame is another reason for her inability or refusal to talk. As June Tangney and Ronda Dearing assert, guilt causes a "press towards confession, reparation and apology," while "feelings of shame are more likely to motivate a desire to hide or escape the shame-inducing situation" (19). While her final written confession could be seen as motivated by a sense of guilt that becomes stronger when she is alone and about to die, it is, perhaps, shame that forces Mathilda to hide herself from society and protect her secret from Woodville. By representing incest as unspeakable, the novella explores issues, as the discussion of Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* will show, that still play a central role in postmodern literary texts. As Deborah Horvitz suggests, it seems that "[t]here is something uniquely 'unspeakable' about incest, as if discussing its existence exacerbates it" (14).[31] In different ways, both *Mathilda*

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31 The unspeakability of incest is also foregrounded in P.B. Shelley's *The Cenci*, where Beatrice's incestuous rape by her father remains the unspeakable gap around which her speech circles compulsively.

and *A Thousand Acres* signal that the kind of transgression, emotional and/or sexual violation, and injury that incestuous desire tends to entail shatters so many assumptions and ideals about the family that any form of expression or exposure is exceedingly difficult. Incest figures as a secret that resists being revealed.[32]

In addition to implying that Mathilda feels talking about incest is taboo, the novella hints at further reasons why she refuses to confide in Woodville. She also seems suspicious of the therapeutic rationale that Woodville proposes: "[D]o not tell me why you grieve but only say the words, 'I am unhappy,' and you will feel relieved as if for some time excluded from all human intercourse by some magic spell you should suddenly enter again the pale of human sympathy" (54). Woodville here constructs a simplistic version of a talking cure, and it is precisely this "all-too-willing transference" that "makes Matilda uneasy" (Faflak, "Inoperative" 727). Furthermore, the novella calls attention to the problematics of authority, power, and dependence, which are key issues in the context of moral management. Woodville not only seems to force himself on Mathilda by trying "day after day to win [her] confidence" (61) rather than accepting her refusal to speak, but he also seems overly obsessed with the idea, and the satisfaction, of doing good: "[Y]ou smile; Oh, Congratulate me, hope is triumphant, and I have done some good" (60). Ironically, his self-imposed mission of "bestow[ing] happiness on another" (60) comes across as a form of self-gratification. Moreover, he fails to see the danger in the power he tries to win over her; he fails to see that for Mathilda, "sympathy" turns out to be "an additional torture" (56). As Clemit puts it, "for all his visionary insight into human ordering schemes, he is unable to respond sufficiently to Mathilda's human needs" ("*Frankenstein*" 40).[33]

The novella calls attention to the destructive effects of Woodville's version of moral management by conveying how quickly Mathilda becomes emotionally dependent on him: "[H]e left me and despair returned; the work of consolation was

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32 The foregrounding of incest and unspeakability is one more way in which the text draws on Gothic conventions. Miller emphasizes that incest functions as a "common female gothic trope representing women's victimized position in patriarchal society" and stresses that the Gothic has often been identified as "literature based on unspeakable fears and personal secrets" (295). According to Nathaniel Leach, the interrelations between unspeakability and the Gothic are, in fact, at the very heart of *Mathilda*. Leach claims that the novella's "true source of Gothic horror" should be seen as lying "in the instabilities of language itself" (74).

33 Scrivener reads Woodville's visions in terms of a "cosmopolitan identity," being "intersubjective, formed in relation to a past and a future, oriented to a social project of enlightened modernity, informed by attention to the suffering of other people" (212). The novella demonstrates, however, that these cosmopolitan ideals are incompatible with Mathilda's pathological condition (212).

ever to begin anew" (55). On top of that, she feels painfully instrumentalized by him:

I am, I thought, a tragedy; a character that he comes to see act: now and then he gives me the cue that I may make a speech more to his purpose: perhaps he is already planning a poem in which I am to figure. I am a farce and a play to him, but to me this is all dreary reality. (56)

This passage, which dramatizes Mathilda's imaginary fall from a position of power as stage director to that of a powerless, self-alienated marionette, expresses a powerful critique of Woodville's version of moral management. It alerts us to the dark side of the moral manager's authority, to the ways in which the individual subjected to this kind of therapy can feel not only dependent and helpless but even abused and manipulated by the therapist. *Mathilda*, then, as Faflak emphasizes, can be said to revolve around "two halves" of a Romantic-era "psychiatric consciousness," situated between the two poles of a "democratic and empathic spirit" and a tendency "of foisting well-being upon populations in order better to manage their unwieldy psychological life" ("Inoperative" 721). The novella's critique of this strand of psychiatry is even more remarkable given that moral management tended – and to some extent still tends – to be celebrated as humane and kind, as a sign of progress and reform. In some ways, the novella's critique is more comprehensive than Godwin's in *Mandeville*: while Mandeville praises the beneficial effects of oral self-expression, of talking to a sympathetic listener, and argues that Henrietta's treatment would have worked had he been able to verbalize his wounds, Shelley's novella depicts not only Mathilda's *inability* to speak but also her *unwillingness* to be managed, implying a profound scepticism of psychiatric therapy.

Mathilda's refusal to be morally managed also needs to be seen in connection with her self-stylization as a tragic heroine. The novella suggests that her rejection of this psychiatric approach is closely linked to her perception of herself as a tragic heroine and her life as a tragedy. Although the strategy of representing her life based on a traditional cultural template may be a way of containing trauma, the structures of tragedy impose a deterministic autobiographical map onto her life that offers no space for recovery or room for escape. Whatever control this conceptual map offers, it does not put her on the road to becoming a "happy," "well-developed and self-fulfilled citizen[]," which Faflak identifies as the goal of moral management ("Inoperative" 721). While Mandeville seems to regret his failure to realize the therapy's potential, Mathilda does not; rather, she indulges in her suffering and cultivates her role as the embodiment of "Despair" (59). Hence, even though the novella explores the therapeutic potential of self-therapy and therapy, of life writing and oral self-expression combined with moral management, ultimately, the text conveys a radical scepticism towards the means and possibilities of cure; all potential pathways to recovery are blocked or seem doomed to fail from the beginning.

Even though Mathilda's theatrical and at times melodramatic staging of her despair may make us wonder to what extent she genuinely suffers, it is crucial that the novella never breaks out of the cycles of acting out. Mathilda seems so absorbed with the idea of the tragic heroine that this "role" becomes her identity.

Mathilda within the Trauma Narrative of Mary Shelley's Oeuvre

In the last section, I want to relate the novella to other texts by Shelley in order to further examine and contextualize the text's exploration of the family as a site of trauma as well as its position on the (in)curability of posttraumatic suffering. In other words, I open up the perspective to Shelley's entire fictional oeuvre in order to grasp more fully the more general but also changing meanings of trauma in her oeuvre and to further illuminate the specificities of the approach to trauma represented by *Mathilda*. First of all, it is essential to note that repetition, which is a core element of the novella's poetics of trauma, also plays a vital role on an intertextual level. As Constance Walker observes, the same pattern of trauma repeats itself throughout Shelley's oeuvre:

On a basic structural level, *Frankenstein*, *Matilda*, and *The Last Man* all tell the same story of abandonment and mourning: like Mary Shelley herself, the eponymous characters progressively lose almost everyone dear to them to violent death or fatal illness and end up utterly alone, anticipating only their own deaths as a release from misery. (135)

Indeed, *Frankenstein*, *Mathilda*, *The Last Man*, and "The Mourner" are focused (perhaps obsessively) on abandonment, death, and mourning. In several other novels by Shelley (i.e., *Valperga, Lodore*, and *Falkner*), while trauma is not the only focus, it still occupies a central position. Time and again, Shelley examines severe tensions and disruptions within the nuclear family, repeatedly returning to complex father-daughter relationships, especially in "The Mourner" but also in *Lodore* and *Falkner*. While the incestuous and traumatizing potential of the relationships between Ethel and Lodore and even more between Elizabeth Raby and Falkner are muted in comparison with Mathilda and her father, both relationships reveal problems at the core of seemingly idyllic parental-filial attachments. Moreover, while the topos of the daughter as a trauma victim is particularly prominent in Shelley's oeuvre, her works are also peopled with a range of individuals whose traumas stem from other familial roles, including husbands and fathers (Mathilda's father), mothers (Idris in *The Last Man*), wives (Clorinda in *Lodore*; Perdita in *The Last Man*) and sons (Neville in *Falkner*; Villiers in *Lodore*). For example, Villiers and Neville

suffer from their estrangement from their fathers, and Neville is also traumatized by the inexplicable disappearance and sudden loss of his mother. In addition, Lodore and Falkner are depicted as "Byronic" figures: gloomy, melancholy, seeking a self-imposed exile from society, and burdened by a trauma of guilt that arises from complicated love and familial relationships. Shelley's texts abound with fundamentally conflicted child-parent relationships and other types of tensions, disruptions, and traumas in the family. Based on these striking repetitions, I read Shelley's oeuvre as an extensive trauma narrative that, like *Mathilda*, compulsively returns to certain traumas.

Given the pervasive importance of trauma in Shelley's oeuvre, it is not surprising that Shelley criticism has discussed the possibility of a therapeutic function underlying her works. Shelley does, in fact, state that writing *Mathilda* was "sufficient to quell [her] wretchedness temporarily" (*Journals* 442), which suggests that the novella can be seen as a "literary work of mourning" (Carlson 173). There are, however, considerable displacements between biographical and textual levels. Shelley was mourning the loss of her children at the time of composition, but *Mathilda* emphasizes a different kind of loss, the loss of a father. This displacement could be read as a distancing device, rendering the process of writing about death less painful at an early stage of severe crisis.[34] More generally, as Rajan asserts, *Mathilda* "confuses" the modes of autobiography and fiction in more intricate ways than, for example, the "'autonarrative' fictions" of Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays ("Melancholy" 48). In *Mathilda*, the relations between life and text, between real and fictional characters, must be seen as inherently instable.[35] Finally, it is crucial to acknowledge that Shelley's texts consciously and self-reflexively explore processes of writing about trauma and suffering through the different protagonists and narrators.[36] In this sense, the multi-textual trauma narrative of Shelley's oeuvre offers a number of further negotiations of the potentials and limitations of self-therapy and therapy – negotiations that, as I want to demonstrate, constitute important contexts for the discussion of *Mathilda*.

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34 Also, while the novella has repeatedly been interpreted as a sign of an incestuous attachment between Shelley and Godwin, it might, instead, reflect an acute crisis between them, one reason being that Godwin responded to Mary's profound sorrow after William's death with demands for money rather than with sympathy and consolation. Godwin's lack of empathy in this situation, as P.B. Shelley stresses in a letter to Leigh Hunt, significantly exacerbated her grief: "[H]e heaps on her misery, still misery" (*Journals* 291)

35 On Shelley's complex "mapping of real onto fictitious characters," see also Rajan's *Romantic Narrative* 94.

36 As McKeever writes, "[m]ore than a self-conscious examination of her own pathology, Shelley writes about the pathology of less fortunate individuals, unable to heal themselves through the purgation of writing" (191).

A crucial parallel between *Mathilda*, "The Mourner," and *Frankenstein* is that the moment of self-narration and confession happens when the possibility of recovery is undercut by the protagonist's imminent death. In "The Mourner," this deferral of verbalizing suffering is, as in *Mathilda*, connected to the unspeakability of trauma as well as a resistance to recovery. Like Mathilda, Ellen/Clarice denies herself the consolation that could come from sharing her harrowing past with her friend, drawing a veil of silence over the source of her "agony of woe" (106). As Brewer observes, "[t]he brusque way in which Mathilda and Ellen-Clarice reject the catharsis of oral self-expression […] suggests a somewhat masochistic desire to preserve their lonely sufferings from outside observation and interference" (175). Like Mathilda, Ellen/Clarice at last seeks to verbalize the sufferings caused by her traumatic past, yet only in writing and only when she is on the verge of death, leaving a "posthumous" letter to her friend Horace Neville. Even her "posthumous" writing, however, expresses how much trauma tends to defy verbalization. In her letter, the word "parricide," which embodies the trauma of her father's death and her guilt, abruptly breaks off ("the parrici___"), conveying that this loaded word, even at this moment, is still unspeakable and unwritable (106). Ellen/Clarice's inability to spell out the word that encapsulates her trauma is telling; it reinforces the story's emphasis on the act of self-expression and confession being deferred to a moment that is, literally, too late, a moment beyond hope or even life.

Similarly, in *Frankenstein*, the eponymous hero perceives his impending death as finally opening up a space for confessional narration, this time taking the form of oral self-expression. The novel also explores the unspeakability of trauma, but with a somewhat different emphasis than *Mathilda* and "The Mourner." While in the case of the two female trauma victims an overwhelming sense of guilt and shame seems to be the main reason they are unable to confide in others, in Frankenstein's case, his sense that trauma is beyond words seems to result mainly from his awareness of how difficult it will be to find a sympathetic listener for his tale. The focus in *Frankenstein* is less on a subjective sense of guilt and more on the knowledge that the traumatic stressor, the creature, is an embodiment of the unthinkable and ungraspable. Thus, it is not a coincidence that Frankenstein finally tells his story in a place where the listener's confidence can more likely be won, namely, the Arctic: "Were we among the tamer scenes of nature I might fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps your ridicule; but many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions" (187). The sublime landscape, far away from society and civilization, functions as a space of empowerment for the trauma victim, where, long alienated and isolated from social connections, he can finally speak and be heard. However, as in "The Mourner" and *Mathilda,* the narration of trauma does not lead the trauma victim back into life; it ends with and culminates in his death – the novel denies Frankenstein the possibility of recovery. Nevertheless, the fact that Shelley has Frankenstein, unlike Mathilda and Ellen/Clarice, choose oral narration and

choose to face his addressee directly is pertinent. It reinforces by contrast Shelley's depiction of the female trauma victims' persistent resistance to recovery and their refusal to leave their absorption in suffering.

Shelley's exploration of the (im)possibility of therapy and recovery takes a different shape in her depiction of Beatrice, one of the female protagonists in her 1823 historical novel *Valperga*. On the one hand, the orphan Beatrice figures as one of the most severely traumatized characters in Shelley's oeuvre and also represents the unspeakability of trauma with particular intensity. On the other hand, her act of (therapeutic) talking happens at a moment when cure is not rendered impossible by the imminence of death. Beatrice's main traumatic experience, preceded and followed by a period of imprisonment as a result of the Inquisition, is her three-year imprisonment in Tripalda's "infernal house," where she endures unspeakable terrors. The unspeakability of trauma is here foregrounded even more than in Shelley's earlier trauma writing: in Beatrice's story, the core of her traumatic experience is missing, a gap that is never filled. Beatrice's narration revolves around this gap, but only to emphasize repeatedly its unspeakability: "Then something happened, what I cannot now tell, terrific it most certainly was. […] But I have said enough, nor will I tell that which would chill your warm blood with horror" (256-57). The profound tension between the trauma victim's urge to speak and the difficulty of verbalizing trauma comes across particularly powerfully in these passages. The central sentence, "[i]t was the carnival of devils, when we miserable victims were dragged out to —" (257), ends abruptly on a dash, breaking off into the silence of the untellable.

Although Beatrice never fully breaks through the wall of silence around the core of her trauma, both Euthanasia and Beatrice state that talking about the past, albeit in vague and general ways, has a positive effect. In fact, *Valperga* demonstrates the therapeutic potential of a talking cure more explicitly than Shelley's other trauma narratives, perhaps because it combines therapy with the positive potential of female friendship. The text implies that the main reason the talking cure fails is not Euthanasia's therapeutic approach but the malice of the witch Mandragola, who reawakens Beatrice's delusion that she is a Catholic prophetess, thereby precipitating Beatrice's fall from a posttraumatic crisis into actual madness. Despite the therapy's failure, it is significant that Euthanasia's attempt is not depicted as problematic in the way Woodville's moral management is; represented as potentially (although not actually) successful, Euthanasia's talking cure does not seem to involve the problems of authority, power, and dependence that Woodville's therapy entails for Mathilda. This contrast between the two texts' negotiations of therapy could be seen as implying that female friendship might function as a healthier ground for therapy than male-female relationships because it does not reproduce problematic power relations, especially structures of female dependence.

Even though the female version of a talking cure in *Valperga* is depicted less critically than the male one in *Mathilda*, Shelley still refrains from idealizing female friendship as a site of therapy. In *Mathilda*, sympathy figures as a trap that proves destructive. In some ways, *Valperga* makes us wonder if Euthanasia's sympathy for her friend is, indeed, beneficial because Euthanasia makes one fundamental misinterpretation of Beatrice's mental illness. According to the mental topography envisioned by Euthanasia, madness and "poetry and imagination" are closely connected and located in the same "inner cave" of the human mind (263). Beatrice, however, violently rejects this mental topography:

"Talk no more in this strain," she said; "every word you utter tells me only too plainly what a lost wretch I am. No content of mind exists for me, no beauty of thought, or poetry; and, if imagination live, it is as a tyrant, armed with fire, and venomed darts, to drive me to despair." (263)

Beatrice emphatically expresses that she experiences her mental illness not as a source of beauty or poetry but purely as a source of destructive delusions, despair, and suffering. The discrepancy between Euthanasia's theory and Beatrice's suffering is an indication that, even here, Shelley's representation of therapy has a critical edge, signalling how difficult it is for a therapist to respond with the appropriate kind of empathy.

Euthanasia's view of madness also calls to mind Brewer's claim that trauma is often linked to poetry, creativity, and genius in Shelley and, as a result, is represented in less bleak ways than in Godwin (29). With regard to *Valperga*, I find Brewer's reading problematic, especially because of Beatrice's refusal to accept Euthanasia's link between madness and genius but also because of the text's continuous emphasis on the fragility of Beatrice's mental health and the intensity of her suffering. If at all, the claim about Shelley's linking of mental disturbances and creativity seems more plausible with regard to *Mathilda*. From childhood on, Mathilda's lonely existence and suffering significantly contribute to her lively imagination and her creation of fictional worlds; it is through her lasting posttraumatic crisis that Mathilda becomes a writer, and it is her excessive grief and depressive passion that drive her to self-fashion herself as a tragic heroine. However, as the discussion of intertextuality has shown, *Mathilda*, like *Valperga*, refrains from celebrating the mentally unstable individual's indulging in imagination and creativity as a source of empowerment. Retreating into the imaginary worlds of literature and mythology is depicted as a coping strategy that, while aimed at gaining a sense of control, is in many ways destabilizing and disempowering. Even though Mathilda stages her suffering and incurability, her staging often escapes her control; what eventually dominates is still, as is the case with Beatrice, the agony of unbear-

able wounds. In the end, a sense of incurability underlies Shelley's trauma narratives from *Mathilda* to *Valperga*.

However, Shelley's later works display a shift away from incurability. Her apocalyptic novel *The Last Man* (1826) functions as the point of transition in this respect. The novel does echo or even redouble *Mathilda*'s fatalistic tone and emphasis on death and mourning, evoking an exceedingly bleak vision of the world where the plague is a never-ending source of trauma.[37] Nevertheless, Lionel Verney, the autodiegetic narrator and "last man," embodies endurance and survival more than he embodies trauma. In contrast to his wife Idris and his sister Perdita, Verney's mental and physical health are exceptionally stable. Despite the endless series of deaths, Verney's grief does not become pathological, and he is the only character who recovers from the plague and survives. In this way, *The Last Man* creates a tension between the relentlessness of death and trauma on the one hand and the protagonist-narrator's recovery, endurance, and survival on the other.

It is significant, though, that the reasons for Verney's exceptional resilience remain obscure. In fact, it is only in Shelley's later novels *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837) that the scene of trauma changes drastically and a shift towards curability and working through is explicitly enacted. In these later works, which have sometimes been labelled "sentimental," trauma victims are no longer incurable. *Lodore* and *Falkner* break through the earlier mode of fatalism and tragedy, ending with a clear move towards domestic harmony, happiness, and peace; the plot resolutions contain symbolic gestures that point to familial reintegration and the reconstitution of family structures. Shelley's last novel, *Falkner*, explores the development of the orphan Elizabeth Raby and her struggle to reconcile the two men she loves: her husband Neville and her surrogate father Falkner. Her mission of fostering forgiveness and reconciliation is successful and finally allows for a peaceful domestic reunion. Shelley's second-last novel *Lodore* is even more relevant as a reference point for *Mathilda*. In *Lodore*, Ethel's initial reaction to her father's death resembles Mathilda's. She is first seized by a severe illness and then continues to mourn excessively, focusing her whole existence on her father. Like Mathilda, she is obsessed with death and suffers from a profound sense of alienation. Unlike Mathilda, however, Ethel succeeds in forming an attachment to a lover and husband. It is significant that the kind of wound, the kind of traumatizing relationship that was depicted as fatally irresolvable fourteen years earlier in *Mathilda* turns out to be curable in Ethel's case. Moreover, in *Lodore*, the salient absence of mothers in texts like *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein* is replaced by a detailed exploration of a mother-

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37 This source of trauma is, as in the case of Frankenstein's creature, beyond human powers. In this "story of human vulnerability and helplessness in the face of what is described as a 'virulent, immedicable disease'" (Walker 139), trauma is thus associated with the uncontrollable and uncontainable even more than in *Mathilda*.

daughter relationship whose driving element is Lady Lodore's conversion from an immature, unloving, and non-maternal figure to a loving, benevolent, self-sacrificing mother.[38] In contrast to the earlier trauma texts, *Falkner* and *Lodore*, then, allow for scenarios of recovery, reconciliation, and reintegration.

Hence, if we read Shelley's oeuvre as a trauma narrative, we can trace a shift from acting out trauma to working through and recovery (embodied in the contrast between Mathilda and Ethel) as well as from a bleak and fatalistic to a more optimistic and hopeful outlook. In spite of this shift, it is important to recognize how many kinds of family-centred traumatic experiences and how many approaches to the (im)possibility of working through trauma and recovery Shelley's oeuvre explores. Even in her later fiction, there is still a remarkable frequency of and emphasis on deeply painful and traumatic experiences happening within the context of the family. The kind of trauma dominating *Mathilda* has not disappeared in *Lodore* and *Falkner*; it is still present, albeit in a muted form, lurking at the interstices of a seemingly romantic plot. Yet the pervasiveness of trauma that characterizes the plot, narration, psychology, and poetics of *Mathilda* makes the novella one of the core texts (if not *the* core text) in the extensive, multi-textual trauma narrative spanning from *Frankenstein* to *Falkner*.

On the whole, the repetition of trauma at the heart of Shelley's oeuvre displays the fundamental ambivalence of repetition that Anne Whitehead describes: "Repetition is inherently ambivalent, suspended between trauma and catharsis" as well as between "remain[ing] caught within trauma's paralysing influence" and "work[ing] towards memory and catharsis" (*Trauma Fiction* 86-87). While Shelley's earlier work embodies the former and her later work the latter, the tension between the compulsive, uncontrolled repetition of acting out and the conscious, controlled repetition of working through is never fully resolved. Shelley's larger trauma narrative, then, returns to fissures and disruptions in the family, which take on more or less pessimistic shapes; however, what remains at its core is the repeated scenario of the nuclear family degenerating from a safe haven to a cradle of trauma, a scenario also found in *The Wrongs of Woman*. Yet while Wollstonecraft's deeply political text focuses on cycles of trauma caused by wilful "wrongs" such as abuse and violence, Shelley's trauma writing puts special emphasis on the emotional impact of death as well as ungovernable passions. Hence, although Shelley's trauma writing also has important political dimensions, notably its exploration of gender issues, its representation of trauma revolves more strongly than the writing of her parents and,

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38 This mother-daughter relationship could be read as one important indication of a more general shift: it seems that the shift towards curability in Shelley's oeuvre goes hand in hand with an increasing emphasis on female-female relationships, which can also be illustrated with the theme of female friendship that is introduced in *Valperga* and plays a prominent role in *Lodore* through Ethel and Fanny Derham.

perhaps, even compulsively around trauma's uncontainable, irrational, and fatalistic aspects.

Mathilda is far more than a fictional reflection of Shelley's personal trauma and suffering; it is a nuanced exploration of a complex psychology and poetics of trauma. Framed as the "posthumous" writings of a young woman who struggles with unspeakable secrets about father-daughter incest, the text reveals how trauma can lead to a state of depressive stagnation and solipsistic absorption in suffering – a mental and emotional state of death-in-life. Mathilda's negative impulses are mainly directed against herself, in the form of self-destructive and suicidal tendencies and a disruptive sense of guilt that often turns into shame. Yet the psychology depicted in *Mathilda* is more complex than that: a core tension that runs throughout the novella is the tension between the pathological and the performative, between the disrupted self and self-fashioning. One side of Mathilda's performative identity practice is enacted textually through an extensive use of short, often de-contextualized intertextual fragments; it emerges as destabilizing for the traumatized individual by opening up multiple fragmentary identities instead of reconsolidating her already disrupted self. Nevertheless, there is one interpretation of her life that Mathilda particularly clings to and that stands for her attempts at (re)gaining a sense of unity: the view of herself as a tragic heroine. The essential paradox that the novella implies, however, is that even though Mathilda's attempt at interpreting and staging her life as a tragedy represents a desire for unity, consistency, and control, the structure of tragedy is inherently destabilizing, especially in the way it reinforces Mathilda's fatalism, her resistance to recovery, and her fixation on death. The literary template of tragedy offers no way out for the protagonist-narrator because its "unity" depends on misery and misfortune. Hardened in her belief that she is a tragic heroine, Mathilda refuses to be cured by Woodville. The problematic aspects of Woodville's moral management certainly influence Mathilda's rejection of his kind of therapy, and the novella here also participates critically in early nineteenth-century psychiatric discourses. Nevertheless, Mathilda's rejection of therapy is symptomatic of a more general resistance to recovery.

One question that remains is this: how much of Mathilda's suffering is genuine and to what extent can her self-fashioning be read as reinforcing or even generating her absorption in suffering? It seems to me that, ultimately, *Mathilda* challenges precisely this distinction between a "genuine" self or "genuine" feelings on the one hand and a performed self or performed feelings on the other. The novella explores in what ways Mathilda's identity is not performed but performative; in other words, it represents her self-fashioning not just as a theatrical role that she enacts but as an ongoing process that, in fact, creates her self. The self she fashions from the literary template of tragedy becomes her psychic reality, becomes her "genuine" self. Hence, even while the longing for death may originate through her theatrical, tragical self-fashioning, it cannot be dismissed as mere histrionics because, in the end,

the only prospect in which Mathilda does find consolation and comfort lies in the last "scene" of her tragedy, a scene that lies beyond the frame of her narrative: her own death. With Mathilda's farewell words to Woodville, "[*t*]*here* is my hope and my expectation" (67), this bleak trauma narrative, which is both diegetically and textually pervaded by trauma, comes full circle, ending, as it began, with the focus on Mathilda's imminent death.

Chapter Five: Polluted Daughters

Incestuous Abuse and the Postmodern Tragic

in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*

> "Down from the waist they're centaurs, / Though women all above. / But to the girdle do the gods inherit; / Beneath is all the fiend's."
> (WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *KING LEAR*)

> "The man we call Daddy who takes us away and we feel awe and love and terror: to do or say the wrong thing would take away the sense of security we are inventing here out of necessity."
> (CAMILLA GIBB, *MOUTHING THE WORDS*)

In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Lear's elder daughters Goneril and Regan are represented as the embodiment of evil. Driven by greed and ambition, they seem to have no scruples or conscience; they callously turn their aging father out into the storm, cruelly blind Gloucester, and, in the end, turn against each other because of their rivalry for Edmund. The play represents their villainy as the result of evil without clear motivation. It is precisely this gap in the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy that the American writer Jane Smiley explores in her 1991 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Thousand Acres*, a postmodern reworking of *King Lear* set on a farm in the Midwest. Smiley's rewriting of Shakespeare's masterpiece radically changes the father-daughter plot of the original story, reimagining the two elder daughters – here called Ginny and Rose – as victims of parental sexual abuse. The daughters are not coldblooded "pelican daughters" (*Lr.* 3.4.70) but trauma victims struggling to come to terms with their disruptive familial past and their present life within the family. Smiley's novel both textually and diegetically decentres the father – the ambitious Larry Cook, whose "kingdom" is his farm of a thousand acres – and places the daughters centre stage.

The novel's intertextual relationship with *King Lear* has received the most scholarly attention,[1] and intertextuality also plays a central role in my reading of the text as a postmodern trauma novel. Moreover, through its focus on father-daughter incest and its exploration of tragedy in relation to a personal trauma history, Smiley's novel shares a number of thematic connections with Shelley's *Mathilda*. At the same time, some of the central differences between Shelley's and Smiley's trauma narratives are indicative of certain general differences between Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction. Far more than the novels by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley, Smiley's text explores trauma in relation to the body and memory, thereby foregrounding issues that, in different ways, also play a paramount role in *Fugitive Pieces* and *The Hiding Place*. *A Thousand Acres*, as I show in this chapter, participates in late-twentieth-century psychological discourses of trauma in general and of incest in particular. The novel responds to one of the most violent debates in the history of trauma, the "Memory Wars" of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which revolved around the question of whether or not "recovered" trauma memories should be regarded as reliable and truthful or as unreliable, constructed, or even false. Smiley's novel engages with this debate in its depiction of how the autodiegetic narrator, Ginny, lives through a process of memory recovery after decades of amnesia. However, the novel moves beyond the main points of focus of the "Memory Wars," investigating in depth the complex psychological, familial, and political ramifications of remembering versus not remembering on the one hand and of silence and secrecy versus disclosure and confrontation on the other.

Like Shelley's *Mathilda*, *A Thousand Acres* foregrounds the unspeakability of incest, but it also explores whether or not there are ways of breaking this taboo. Moreover, it relates the topos of trauma as the unspeakable to more general issues of silence and speech. Through Ginny, the novel self-reflexively stages the process of a woman finding her voice within a patriarchal community. Yet the text refrains from depicting that process in sentimental ways; it highlights Ginny's persistent ambivalence about whether or not to use her voice and her increasing feminist awareness in order to talk about her traumatic past. *A Thousand Acres* is a meditation on familial ruptures and abusive relationships, on the difficulty of finding ways to confront traumas without destroying a family. Furthermore, the novel's vision of the family evokes elements of the tragic, one key aspect being a sense of inevitability. The text represents the disintegration and decline of the family and the farm as inevitable, exploring both through the recurring leitmotif of pollution. Most strikingly, it turns out that not even the relationship between the sisters and fellow

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1   A few examples to mention here are Anna Lindhé's "Interpersonal Complications," David Brauner's "Speak Again," and Sarah Appleton Aguiar's "(Dis)Obedient Daughters."

trauma victims Ginny and Rose is strong enough to withstand the dysfunctional, polluted dynamics that dominates the family. Ultimately, I argue, the text creates a profound tension between a narrative of female self-development through the recognition of trauma and a feminist revisioning of the tragic.

DECENTRING THE FATHER

The novel's intertextual links to Shakespeare's *King Lear* are crucial for reading *A Thousand Acres* as a postmodern novel and as a trauma novel. In this context, Linda Hutcheon's conceptualization of the postmodern, as articulated in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, is particularly relevant. Challenging notions of postmodernism as apolitical, Hutcheon emphasizes that the self-reflexivity characteristic of postmodern writing tends to have powerful political implications (3): postmodern fiction not only "make[s] overt the fact-making and meaning-granting process" (77), but it also combines this foregrounding of processes of signification with an attempt to challenge and de-naturalize the grand narratives, the fundamental assumptions and constructions underlying our cultural discourses. According to Hutcheon, "postmodernism works to 'de-doxify' our cultural representations and their undeniable political import" (3). Self-reflexively exposing the workings of specific forms of representation, postmodern writing often involves a combination of "complicity and critique," a "paradoxical installing as well as subverting of conventions" (14).[2] Postmodernism, thus, signals how heavily a long history of traditions and conventions weighs on the present and, at the same time, explores this history critically.

In this light, *A Thousand Acres* is postmodern in several ways. As a rewriting of a tragedy in the form of narrative fiction, the text self-reflexively calls attention to processes of representation and signification.[3] Furthermore, the novel follows the characteristically postmodern trajectory of "complicitous critique" that Hutcheon emphasizes (2): as one of a number of feminist texts that rewrite Shakespearean

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2   Hutcheon discusses parody as one important form of postmodern writing that exemplifies the characteristics of self-reflexivity and "complicitous critique" (2). Parody, Hutcheon writes, "can be used as a self-reflexive technique that points to art as art, but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past" (101).

3   *A Thousand Acres* also raises complex generic questions because the novel and tragedy have often been regarded as incompatible, an issue that Terry Eagleton explores in detail in chapter 7 of *Sweet Violence*. Eagleton grants that "[t]here is something to commend the case that the novel and tragedy are uneasily allied" (201), but he also argues that the claim of incompatibility is especially true for realist novels, while throughout the twentieth century, other types of fiction have begun to embrace the idea of the tragic (201).

plays, the novel both implicitly reinforces *King Lear*'s canonical status and critically challenges its master plot.[4] By fundamentally subverting the father-daughter plot of Shakespeare's play, Smiley's novel sets out to de-naturalize and "de-doxify" dominant patriarchal scripts. The novel is an example of what Christian Moraru discusses as a specifically postmodern form of rewriting, namely, rewritings that "set up a counterwriting distance, a 'rupture' between themselves and what they redo – the literary past – as well as between themselves and various hegemonic forces active at the moment and in the milieu of 'redoing'" (9). Appropriating the Lear plot into a twentieth-century setting, the novel reflects critically on patriarchal ideologies of the past and the present. According to Moraru, what is at stake in postmodern "rewriting" or "counterwriting" (like in *A Thousand Acres*) is a revisionism where "*literary and ideological intertextuality go hand in hand*" (35) – it constitutes an ideological critique of literary, cultural, social, and political scripts (26).

A Thousand Acres also resonates with Moraru's claim that postmodern rewriting tends to have a "clearly cultural-political thrust, especially on behalf of the exploited, marginalized and silenced by dominant ideologies" (35). While *King Lear* emphasizes the father's perspective, Smiley's novel shifts the focus to the daughters, who, as Susan Strehle puts it, have "little more than a sketchy fairy-tale identity" in Shakespeare's play (213). Endorsing the postmodern tenet that one story always contains multiple stories, Smiley's novel undertakes the project of telling, in the words of Molly Hite, "the other side of the story" (3).[5] It is especially important that the novel does not give a voice to the virtuous daughter Cordelia; instead, it allows Goneril, one of Lear's two malicious daughters, to speak through the first-person narrator Ginny.[6] The novel, thus, undertakes a double process of decentring:

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4   As Aguiar emphasizes, "Shakespeare's plays, as narratives constituting part of the very core of Western patriarchal literature, are crucial targets for feminist revisionists" (195). She notes that *A Thousand Acres* is only one of several late-twentieth-century women's novels that evoke and rewrite *King Lear*, notably, Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years*, and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*. While the other three novels focus on Cordelia, one primary feature that they share with Smiley's novel is the attempt to "broaden the outlines of the feminine archetypes" (Aguiar 195).

5   Hite's 1989 study *The Other Side of the Story* claims that women writers produce postmodern writing that has radical implications through its focus on "conventionally marginal characters and themes" and through its "critique of a culture and a literary tradition apprehended as profoundly masculinist" (2). Written two years after Hite's study, *A Thousand Acres* is part of this general trend in postmodern women's writing.

6   Shakespeare's tragedy portrays Goneril as more evil and ruthless than Regan: she is the first to turn out her father and to treat him and his train of servants with contempt; she is

it decentres the father and positions the daughters centre stage, and it focuses on the psychology of a supposedly evil character, which further reinforces its emphasis on the marginal.

I now want to push the discussion of the novel's decentring strategies further by connecting it to the subject of trauma. The foregrounding of marginalized voices is one important point where the central concerns of postmodern fiction intersect with those of trauma fiction. As Anne Whitehead emphasizes, "[t]he intertextual recovery of hitherto marginalised voices signals the ethical dimension of trauma fiction, which witnesses and records that which is 'forgotten' or overlooked in the grand narrative of history" (86). The "forgotten" history that Smiley sees in *King Lear* is the silenced history of the king's elder daughters, a history that she conceives as one of incestuous sexual abuse. The trauma of incest is the main change of plot; it constitutes the text's most radical departure from the original and represents its most insistent call for a rethinking of the assumptions underlying the plot of *King Lear*. Crucially, the revelation of the sisters' traumatic past occurs in the middle of the novel, and trauma is thus, literally and figuratively, the centre of the text.

Intertextuality, as Whitehead highlights, is a central feature of contemporary trauma fiction (94). She outlines the general workings of intertextuality in trauma novels as follows: "In returning to canonical texts, novelists evoke the Freudian notion of the repetition-compulsion, for their characters are subject to the 'plot' of another(s) story. Novelists can also revise canonical works, however, reading them against the grain and providing a new perspective on familiar texts" (85). *A Thousand Acres*, I argue, merges both approaches. With its critical rewriting and re-perspectivizing of the story, the text does read Shakespeare's tragedy against the grain. Furthermore, it suggests that underneath Ginny's narrative, there is a haunting legacy that reaches deeper than her own personal story. The representation of Ginny's struggle to cope with her traumatic past repeatedly insinuates that she may never be able to fully break out of the structure of Goneril's story. Thus, the novel resonates with Whitehead's claim that intertextual trauma fiction typically features a protagonist who "seems bound to replay the past and to repeat the downfall of another, suggesting that he is no longer in control of his own actions" (85). In an important passage at the end of Book Three, Ginny emphatically voices her feeling that her story is pre-determined or pre-scripted. In this moment of acute crisis, when the two elder sisters have been publicly accused of mistreating their father, Ginny represses her longing for escape: "But we went straight home, as if there were no escape, as if the play we'd begun could not end" (219). This self-reflexive passage suggests that the familial drama that Ginny is caught up in will inevitably take its tragic course, unfolding according to the "destiny that [they] never asked for" and

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the one who plots against her own husband in order to be with Edmund; and she is the one who poisons her own sister.

that was their "father's gift" to them (219). Hence, both Ginny's sense of impending doom and our knowledge of the tragic events determining the "hypotext" that underlies the "hypertext" (to use Gérard Genette's terminology from *Palimpsests*) contribute to the impression that Ginny's trauma history is overdetermined. In Book Five, when she attempts to poison Rose, Ginny seems completely caught up in Goneril's story. Even more strikingly, Lear's curse of sterility directed at Goneril is fulfilled in the novel in a literal and rather disturbing way through Ginny's five miscarriages. The novel's use of intertextuality in its representation of trauma, then, works in two ways at once: trauma functions as a key theme at the diegetic level, while the intertextual links to Shakespeare's tragedy also underline textually the sense of oppression, helplessness, and lack of control associated with trauma.

Smiley's rewriting of *King Lear* essentially turns the tale about a king's decline into a story about female trauma. While the first book of the novel closely follows Shakespeare's plot, restaging Lear's division of his kingdom on a contemporary American farm, the storm scene in Book Three conveys how radically the novel shifts the story's focus. In *King Lear*, the storm scene enacts a pivotal moment of self-confrontation and self-recognition for Lear. In *A Thousand Acres*, the storm sets the scene for a moment of confrontation between Larry and his daughters, a moment of violent reproaches and accusations that are indicative of deeper conflicts. After this confrontation, the novel's focus remains on the sisters, while Larry's experiences of the storm fade into the background. As Barbara Mathieson rightly points out, "Smiley shifts the psychological analogy to the storm from Lear/Larry's inner turmoil to the daughters'" (133) – a "turmoil" centred on their traumatic past. In contrast to Shelley's *Mathilda*, where the confession of incestuous desire is a highly dramatic moment between father and daughter – in fact, the *peripeteia* of the novella's tragedy – in Smiley's novel, the revelation of incest is displaced onto a confrontational moment between the sisters. Realizing that her sister suffers from long-term amnesia, Rose confronts Ginny with the shocking idea that they were both sexually abused by their father as teenagers. This moment between the sisters is constructed as the dramatic turning point and as the moment of *anagnorisis*. The comparison to the storm scene in *King Lear* as well as to the scene of revelation in *Mathilda* makes clear to what extent the novel decentres the father and highlights the daughters. *A Thousand Acres* is not concerned with the father's pain about seemingly unmotivated filial ingratitude and cruelty; instead, it explores in depth how Ginny and Rose cope with their traumatic past. The more the narrative focuses on the sisters' trauma history, the more the father's position is undermined both textually and diegetically.[7] This shift further illustrates how closely the novel's

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7   It is interesting to note that the novel's decentring and reconceptualization of the father has also provoked critical reactions. For example, Iska Alter, who explores Smiley's rewriting of *King Lear* in the light of generic potentials and limitations, discusses how

emphasis on female trauma and its postmodern, de-naturalizing trajectory are inter-related.

BURIED AND RECOVERED MEMORIES

Smiley has stated that her fascination with the story of King Lear results partly from the timelessness of the material ("Not a Pretty Picture" 161). She stresses that the "material of the play was already very ancient by the time Shakespeare got to it, which means that the patterns of human behaviour that it recognizes and explores are deeply ingrained ones" (160). However, this anthropological dimension of the novel's intertextuality is only one element of the text; Smiley's novel fuses the timeless and the topical. Through its exploration of father-daughter incest, the novel responds to late-twentieth-century gender, trauma, and memory discourses, negotiating a set of highly controversial issues. Besides the literary contexts of *King Lear* and postmodern rewriting practices, then, psychological discourses constitute a second crucial context for discussing *A Thousand Acres* as a trauma novel.

First of all, the novel engages with a paradigm shift within trauma discourses that took place in the last decades of the twentieth century, namely, the increased awareness of women's and children's traumatic experiences of domestic violence, incest, and sexual abuse. Calling attention to the dramatic nature of this shift, Roger Luckhurst speaks of a "trajectory of escalation, a remarkable exercise of traumatic transmission, in which incest moves from being a vanishingly rare event (perhaps two cases per million)" to a prototypical narrative permeating Western culture (*Trauma Question* 73). Incest and other forms of traumatic violence against children and women quickly became heavily politicized issues and "prompted all kinds of public controversy" (Luckhurst 71). The feminist struggle for the recognition of domestic violence as a widespread phenomenon evoked a strong backlash, thus adding a further example to the cycles of eruption and repression that characterize trauma discourses. As Deborah Horvitz emphasizes, similar to the late-nineteenth-century discourses about hysteria, "the late twentieth-century revelation of an epidemic of domestic abuse is fighting a [...] reactionary backlash, which attempts to mute the conversation and deny women's reality" (3). In the late twentieth century, however, this backlash met with considerable resistance. The cultural arena of women's non-fictional and fictional writing, for example, emerged as a powerful medium for asserting the importance of exposing and acknowledging the bleak real-

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Larry is silenced and depicted with "diminished majesty" (153): Larry is "fixed into certainty, deliberately contained and diminished by the explanatory methodology of narrative – details of language that localize, stipulate, and justify" (151).

ity of domestic violence and abuse. Diagnosing a "memoir boom" in the late 1980s and early 90s, Luckhurst maintains that "the memoir has been a key vehicle for the feminist articulation of silenced traumatic violence" (*Trauma Question* 88). Alongside this autobiographical trauma writing, a considerable number of semi-fictional and fictional explorations of incest and sexual abuse began to appear.[8] Incest, above all, rapidly assumed a pivotal position in different kinds of discourses. As Gillian Harkins asserts, the boom of incest novels and memoirs "emerged at the center of new literary markets, making incest one of the hottest topics to connect the daytime talk show circuit, the popular self-help industry, and the elite literary publishing circuit" (2). *A Thousand Acres* is a product of this boom, exploring issues that took centre stage in popular, literary, as well as legal discourses in the 1980s and 90s.[9]

The controversy over domestic violence and domestic trauma culminated in the "Memory Wars" of the 1990s, often referred to as the "False Memory Debate" and described by Chris Brewin as "the most contentious and heated debate in the field" (*Posttraumatic* 127-28). Since Smiley's novel responds directly to this debate, I will outline briefly the main issues at stake. In the late 1980s, a number of therapists began to proclaim publicly that memories of childhood trauma can be repressed or dissociated for decades and then accurately recovered through memory work or therapy. Essentially, these therapists focused on amnesia, one symptom of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder as listed in the DSM (DSM-IV 464), claiming that long-term amnesia may be a common phenomenon, especially in victims of domestic sexual abuse. These psychological discourses gave rise to the "Recovery Memory self-help movement," which, as Luckhurst emphasizes, used the "language of consciousness-raising and women's empowerment borrowed directly from feminism" (*Trauma Question* 72). This movement, whose peak can be dated to the years 1988-1992, resulted in a countermovement or backlash, which culminated in the founding of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in 1992. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation vehemently attacks any claims about trauma memories' preservation and full recovery and postulates instead that memories are subject to constant change and liable to distortion to the extent that a therapy may induce false memo-

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8   Examples to mention here include Kathryn Harrison's *Thicker than Water* (1991), Carolivia Herron's *Thereafter Johnnie* (1991), Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992), Anne-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), and Camilla Gibb's *Mouthing the Words* (1999).

9   Harkins also calls attention to the fact that this rapidly increasing, or even exploding, attention to incest has provoked widely different interpretations: "For some, these narratives expressed the empirical reality of women's lives" (2), a final revelation of a long-kept secret, while for others, "the popularity of incest literature in particular reflected a national turn 'inward,' a domesticating narcissism designed to shield readers from the broader social and political realities of the period" (3).

ries of a childhood trauma that never happened.[10] Describing the False Memory Debate in terms of a "collective failure of rationality," Brewin emphasizes the striking degree of polarization by "campaigners, journalists, politicians and academics" (*Posttraumatic* 137).[11] Brewin also asserts that the "initial polarization between memory researchers and clinicians has now dissolved" (150); some recovered memories have been identified as "almost certain false, and others as almost certainly true" (150-51).[12] Yet, as Janice Haaken and Paula Reavey emphasize, "even as the embers have cooled in most quarters of academia and popular culture," many "knotty questions" raised by the False Memory Debate persist ("Why Memory" 2, 6).

A Thousand Acres, written during the "Memory Wars," engages with these controversies over trauma and memory in complex ways.[13] In contrast to other novels that respond to the debate, such as Helen Dunmore's *Talking to the Dead* (1996) and Nicci French's *The Memory Game* (1997), Smiley's novel does not focus on the question of the (un)reliability of recovered memories. With its emphasis on therapeutic malpractice and the destructive impact of false memories, *The Memory Game* reads like a propaganda novel supporting the False Memory Syndrome Foundation's position. *Talking to the Dead*, in contrast, "refuses to stay *in* the debate" (Luckhurst, "Memory Recovered" 89); it refuses to participate in the polarization of the two opposing camps and, instead, depicts the question of whether or not recovered memories are true as exceedingly complex. In spite of their differences, both novels problematize the reliability and authenticity of recovered trauma memories. Surprisingly, this concern is not emphasized in *A Thousand Acres*: Ginny never questions that her flashback memory of incest is genuine, nor does the novel encourage us to doubt her memory. What do we make of this?

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10 As Nicola King rightly emphasizes, both memory theories can be traced back to Freud: the theory of preservation and recovery corresponds to Freud's model of archaeological excavation, while the rejection of the idea that memories can later be recovered intact is part of Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (*Memory* 4).

11 The highly polemical nature of this debate also manifests itself in book titles such as *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria*, by Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, and *Victims of Memory: Incest Accusations and Shattered Lives*, by journalist Mark Pendergrast.

12 For a concise account on the False Memory Debate, see also Rüdiger Pohl's *Das autobiographische Gedächtnis*, chapter 6.

13 A few critics mention the False Memory Debate in passing in their discussion of Smiley's novel (e.g., Mary Paniccia Carden's "Remembering/Engendering the Heartland" and Sinead McDermott's "Memory, Nostalgia, and Gender in *A Thousand Acres*"), but they refrain from discussing the connection in depth.

The novel appeared one year before the founding of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, that is, at a time when the debate about the nature and the reliability of recovered memories was about to reach its peak. In this light, Smiley's refusal to engage with the core aspect of the controversy must be interpreted as a conscious choice; consequently, the novel can be read as alerting us to the fact that the focus of the debate became increasingly – and problematically – narrow and reductive in its emphasis on true versus false memories. The novel seems to signal that there are other issues at stake in the "Memory Wars" that are just as pressing, maybe even more pressing. While the novel implicitly subscribes to the psychological notion of memory recovery, its main concern is not to highlight or politically defend the truthfulness of recovered memories; rather, it is to investigate the psychological and interpersonal ramifications of both amnesia and memory recovery. In other words, *A Thousand Acres* endorses the notion of memory recovery not with polemical and political fervour but with a nuanced vision of individual and family psychology – while it explores the interrelations between memory and politics in other ways.

Sketching in detail the individual steps of Ginny's memory recovery, the novel depicts this process as lying at the heart of her fictional autobiography. The revelation of her traumatic past marks the turning point of Ginny's life-story, that is, the *peripeteia* of her tragedy. In other words, I argue that through the way it frames its psychology of trauma and memory recovery, *A Thousand Acres* incorporates the Lear plot into a drama of memory. The dramatic nature of the narrator's crisis of memory is significantly reinforced by the structure of the novel. The first two books symbolically anticipate and lead up to the revelation of the traumatic past, which occurs dramatically late in the middle of the novel. Hence, the process of memory recovery is embedded in a textual structure that evokes central themes and plot elements of tragedy, including secrets and revelations, blindness and *anagnorisis*. These themes also appear in the novel in other contexts, for example, through Ginny's secret miscarriages, Ginny's and Rose's secret affairs with Jess, Caroline's inability to see her father's character, and Harold's physical blindness, caused by farm chemicals. Yet the novel foregrounds these themes especially in relation to Ginny's struggle of memory, signalling that trauma memory plays a central role within her tragedy.

The first half of the novel literally and figuratively enacts the topos of missing memories and absence. It resonates with the ideas of the recovered memory therapists in its depiction of a victim of childhood sexual abuse as lacking conscious memories of the abuse in adulthood but sensing an indeterminate memory gap.[14]

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14 As Jo Woodiwiss emphasizes, studies on sexual abuse and memory recovery often note the absence of "recall memory" and the significance of non-conscious "alternative"

The first two books feature a set of motifs that revolve around the unspoken, the invisible, and the hidden, which are metonymically connected to Ginny's buried memories and serve to build suspense. These motifs function as first hints that the reassuring family story of progress, success, and security that Ginny reports in the opening chapter might not be stable. For example, chapter 2 depicts the arrival of Jess Clark, the prodigal son of the neighbouring farmer Harold – an event that Ginny eagerly awaits because she associates Jess with the courage to challenge the community's rules of (un)speakability: "The real treat would be watching Jess Clark break through the surface of everything that hadn't been said about him over the years" (7). From her reflections on Jess, Ginny moves on to a meditation on the landscape of Zebulon county, expressing her fascination for "what is below the level of the visible" (9). The motif of digging beyond surfaces is taken up and pushed further in Book Two, where her fascination with the invisible and unspoken increasingly gives rise to a disturbing sense of an unknown threat. This threat becomes especially clear in Ginny's conversation with Mary Livingstone, a friend of her mother's. Mary's utterance that "kids on farms should be made to face facts early on" triggers a train of thought:

Had I faced all the facts? It seemed like I had, but actually, you never know, just by remembering, how many facts there were to have faced. Your own endurance might be a pleasant fiction allowed you by others who've really faced the facts. The eerie feeling this thought gave me made me shiver in the hot wind. (90)

Ginny suddenly perceives her complacency about the past as possibly founded on shaky ground. Her fear that her version of the past might be fractured or distorted becomes even stronger when Mary tells her that her mother was "afraid" for her when she died, much more so than for her two sisters (91). Mary also hints at something concerning Ginny that especially worried her mother, but she refrains from telling her. Creating dramatic suspense, this scene of near-revelation increases Ginny's feeling that she lacks full knowledge of her past. Her pervasive sense of "imminent disaster" (143) illustrates how strongly she, in spite of her amnesia, feels the force of the ruptures and traumas hidden behind the orderly façade of family life.

Ginny's uncertain sense of threat increasingly centres on her father. As part of her growing attention to the invisible and hidden, Ginny slowly begins to examine and question her relationship with her father. She remarks self-critically that she has never found what she considers "the optimum distance for seeing one's father" (20), and, later on, begins to analyse the dynamic between them more closely: "I

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memories, including "imagistic memory, body memory, feeling memory and acting-out memory" (105).

feel like there's treacherous undercurrents all the time. I think I'm standing on solid ground, but then I discover that there's something underneath it, shifting from place to place. There's always some mystery" (104). These "treacherous undercurrents" point to Ginny's childhood trauma, which she can neither name nor remember at this point. The trauma that has long been erased from conscious memory manifests itself as a haunting presence and through enigmatic symptoms whose source Ginny cannot identify. These psychological dynamics also manifest during a power struggle between Ginny and her father, triggered by his assertion that a proper breakfast must always include eggs. Yielding to her father's wishes, Ginny runs for the missing eggs. Even more than her submissiveness, her negative perception of her body is revealing:

The whole way I was conscious of my body – graceless and hurrying, unfit, panting, ridiculous in its very femininity. It seemed like my father could just look out of his big front window and see me naked, chest heaving, breasts, thighs, and buttocks jiggling, dignity irretrievable. (115)

Ginny's feeling of physical awkwardness and vulnerability under her father's piercing gaze is a symptom of her submerged sexual trauma. Her sense of nakedness points to earlier experiences, when her father violated her physical integrity. However, the text makes clear that Ginny does not grasp the implications of her feelings, implying that during her amnesia, it is only her *body* that remembers the abuse. Through recurring feelings of shame and physical awkwardness, her body betrays the secret of abuse: "My body told me that my shame was a fact awaiting [...] discovery" (295).

The final revelation of Ginny's traumatic past happens in two stages. First, her sister Rose confronts her with the shattering idea that their father abused them. Ginny's immediate reaction is a mixture of resolute disbelief and profound confusion; she feels as if she "had been shaken to a jelly" (192). The subsequent section of the novel emphasizes Ginny's persistent denial and her simultaneous fear that Rose might be telling the truth. The text conveys her overwhelming uncertainty through alternating linguistic markers of inclusion and exclusion, of identification and distancing: "The psychiatrist would of course take our side, Rose's side, that is. [...] he would sit in the middle, between Daddy and us, and he would phrase our, Rose's accusations perfectly" (207). These shifts between "our" and "Rose's" illustrate how Ginny's oscillates between identifying with the role of the sympathetic sister and the position of the fellow victim, highlighting her struggle to bear the idea that she was a victim of sexual abuse.

Soon afterwards, however, when Ginny lies down on the bed in her old bedroom, she is assailed by a vivid flashback of a moment of incestuous abuse:

Lying here, I knew that he had been in there to me, that my father had lain with me on that bed, that I had looked at the top of his head, at his balding spot in the brown grizzled hair, while feeling him suck my breasts. That was the only memory I could endure before I jumped out of the bed with a cry. (228)

In psychoanalytic terms, this passage depicts the "return of the repressed," a moment of profound shock, and Ginny describes how her "whole body was shaking and moans flowed out of [her] mouth" (228). After the initial shock, she fears that more memories will return, so she intuitively tries to block the process of memory recovery. This crucial section of the novel implies that Ginny knows immediately that she has "found the past" (228); the question of whether or not this memory is true does not arise for her. Instead, her primary worry is how other unearthed memories will affect her life:

Behind that one image bulked others, mysterious bulging items in a dark sack, unseen as yet, but felt. I feared them. I feared how I would have to store them in my brain, plastic explosives or radioactive wastes that would mutate or even wipe out everything else in there. (229)

The striking metaphor of returning memories as "plastic explosives or radioactive wastes" conveys the extent of Ginny's fear. She imagines that she is powerless to control the damage these memories will cause. Indeed, the image of these memories taking possession of her mind expresses her fear of losing her whole identity to her traumatic past. Given that feminist discourses of the time repeatedly highlighted the empowering potential of recovering memories of childhood trauma,[15] it is significant that Smiley calls attention to the threatening and destabilizing dimensions of memory recovery.

In the remainder of the novel, Ginny recovers a few more memories, yet the process of remembering remains incomplete: "What I remembered of Daddy did not get into a full figure, but always remained fragments of sound and smell and presence" (280). Highlighting the special nature of trauma memories, especially their sensory, fractured, and elusive qualities, the novel echoes concerns of the False Memory Debate, including concerns with the complexity and potential unreliability of recovered trauma memories. The main concern within Smiley's drama of memory, however, is the question of how individual trauma victims cope with recovered memories, how memories affect a victim's identity and sense of self, her

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15 Herman describes the interrelations between the recovery of trauma memories and the psychology of recovery as follows: "When survivors recognize the origins of their psychological difficulties in an abusive childhood environment, they no longer need attribute them to an inherent defect in the self. Thus the way is opened to the creation of a new meaning in experience and a new, unstigmatized identity" (*Recovery* 127).

relation to the present and past, but also her relation to others who are crucially involved in that past. *A Thousand Acres* focuses on the significance and impact of missing and recovered memories. Implying that both repression and remembering can be severely destabilizing, the novel, in the words of Marina Leslie, suggests that "[f]orgetting is a kind of death, but then so also is remembering" (48).

STRUGGLING WITH THE UNSPEAKABILITY OF INCEST

A Thousand Acres not only investigates the psychology of remembering trauma but also foregrounds the intricate – and dramatic – results of choosing between silence and disclosure, secrecy and exposure, exploring what it means for a trauma victim to keep her secret or reveal it to her family and community. The narrator Ginny's attitude towards silence and disclosure is ambivalent, and it also undergoes significant shifts. Her immediate reaction to Rose's revelation of their traumatic past is a pressing desire to talk about these deeply disturbing claims, to share her feelings of uncertainty and disorientation with a sympathetic listener. She confides in Jess but immediately regrets her unrestrained openness: "I knew that I was somehow at his mercy, not because he had exerted power or claimed me, but because in spite of my shame I had exposed myself to him in every particular" (196). Despite this uneasiness, Ginny continues to indulge in fantasies of disclosure. She imagines how her father, Rose, and she would consult a psychiatrist and how the "psychiatrist would of course take [their] side, Rose's side, that is" (208). She relishes the vision of the psychiatrist professionally managing the scene of confrontation and keeping any form of aggression or violence under control. However, she soon abandons the idea of family therapy as "impossible." Instead, her fantasies of disclosure turn to another setting; she imagines confiding in her pastor: "My pastor's voice would be deep and hollow, a good place for me to stash my story. Even while I was telling it, the comfort of his murmuring would rise around it. And then he would tell me what to do – how to talk to Daddy and Rose and Ty" (209). Ginny finds comfort in the idea of discussing the past, a past she cannot yet accept as hers, with a sympathetic and professional listener. In other words, at the time when Ginny has been confronted with her trauma but does not yet have any conscious memories, she displays the urge typical of trauma victims to talk about the past, feeling both a pressing need for disclosure and a longing for an appropriate listener.

However, Ginny's attitude to disclosure and confrontation changes dramatically once she does remember the sexual abuse. Her immediate impulse after the flashback memory is a desire to release the unbearable burden of her traumatic past by verbally transmitting it to Rose. Rose is not with her, so the only outlet Ginny finds to vent her emotions is to scream, "becoming all mouth, all tongue, all vibration"

(229). At this moment, Ginny, who has lived for so long in a state of submissive voicelessness, becomes all voice, her whole body absorbed in the sound. Yet, after this liberating scream, which she describes as a "full out, throat-wrenching, un-afraid-of-making-a-fuss-and-drawing-attention-to-myself sort of screaming" (229), she abruptly relapses into silence. The text conveys how entirely different the meanings of silence and disclosure become for Ginny once she can no longer perceive the story of incestuous abuse as belonging only to her sister: "[I]t was easier to be her sympathetic supporter than her fellow victim" (230). In other words, once this trauma history is part of her own life-story, the idea of disclosure and confrontation becomes exceedingly threatening. The shame Ginny feels in the encounter with Jess inevitably becomes her own shame; it is no longer a shame she can feel on behalf of – or displace on – her sister. And shame, as June Tangney and Ronda Dearing assert, functions as an obstacle to revelation and confession (19). Moreover, Ginny fears that confessing her recovered memory would lead to further unbearable revelations, and she begins to realize how much is at stake in confronting the traumatic past: "We had spent our life together practicing courtesy, putting the best face on things, harboring secrets. The thought of giving that up, right now, with my next remark, was terrifying" (260). Due to her anxiety about her life and family falling apart, Ginny refrains from telling anyone about her recovered memory, either a professional listener or Rose.

The novel adds further complexity to issues of silence and secrecy versus disclosure and confrontation by exploring what meanings these choices have for Ginny's sisters. For Rose, disclosing the incestuous abuse is part of her attempt to overcome a state of passive endurance and to strive for retribution and justice: "Weakened isn't enough. Destroyed isn't enough. He's got to repent and feel humiliation and regret. I won't be satisfied until he knows what *he* is" (216). For Rose, anger clearly overrides any sense of shame; for her, disclosure signifies uncompromising resistance and retaliation, while silence symbolizes weakness and cowardice. Thus, it is no coincidence that, throughout the text, Rose figures as the primary "betrayer" of the family secret: Rose tells her husband Pete; she confronts Ginny once she is aware of her amnesia; and she later tells her own daughters and some members of the community. For Caroline, who, her sisters assume, has been spared the trauma of sexual abuse, the practice of silence or disclosure has significantly different implications. The novel demonstrates how the silence surrounding Ginny and Rose's traumatic past functions as a barrier between them and Caroline: Caroline is unable to understand the source of the conflicts between her sisters and their father. Increasingly, she sides with Larry, even serving as his lawyer to defend him in court. Silence, then, destroys their sisterly relationship, and although Caroline does begin to feel that there must be dark secrets in her family, she shrinks from confronting those secrets. In an important passage in the final chapter of the novel, Caroline, seized by panic, shouts at Ginny:

You're going to tell me something terrible about Daddy, or Mommy, or Grandpa Cook or somebody. You're going to wreck my childhood for me. I can see it in your face. You're dying to do it, just like Rose was. She used to call me, but I wouldn't talk to her! (362)

This passage powerfully conveys how Caroline's urge to preserve her happy childhood memories and her untainted view of her parents overrides any desire to know the truth. One of the fatal consequences of Caroline's ignorance is that she remains convinced that her sisters "are just evil"; to the end, she fails to recognize her father's faults (363).

The novel suggests that Ginny's response includes elements of Rose's and Caroline's clashing attitudes. Throughout the text, Rose's dedication to disclosure is contrasted with Ginny's complex and shifting attitude, with her profound ambivalence towards breaking the familial reign of silence and lifting the veil of secrecy. According to David Brauner, "throughout the novel there is an unresolved tension within Ginny between the desire to penetrate the barriers of silence that surround so many of the key areas of her life, and the fear that to do so would cause an irreparable breach in the fabric not only of her social world, but of herself" (657). The text implies that Ginny's reluctance to expose her traumatic past is closely connected to her fear of unlocking memories that could be too traumatic to endure. She meditates on the benefits of a philosophy of silence: "One benefit, which I have lost, of a life where many things go unsaid, is that you don't have to remember things about yourself that are too bizarre to imagine. What was never given utterance eventually becomes too nebulous to recall" (305). Yet Ginny increasingly resents her husband Ty's avoidance of confrontation and his complicity in Larry's patriarchal regime. In this way, Ginny embodies a dilemma that many trauma victims confront, one that is especially powerful in cases of incest: "Most incest victims both long for and fear to reveal their secrets" (Herman, *Father-Daughter* 131). Ginny yearns for understanding and support but fears the devastating effects revelation could have for the entire family.

What the text shows, however, is that both remaining silent and talking about the traumatic past are inevitably damaging, causing severe ruptures within the family. All three sisters are, in different ways, confronted with this dilemma, but Ginny is depicted as experiencing it with particular intensity. Negotiating the unspeakability of incest, then, is one of the text's central concerns, as it is in most narratives of incest. In fact, according to a number of critics, the taboo of speaking about incest is even more powerful than the incest taboo itself. As Leslie asserts, "it is important to register and assess the force and duration of a taboo stronger by far than the incest taboo – that is, the cultural prohibition against its acknowledgement" (43). The history of discourses about sexual abuse within the family also reveals, as Herman's discussion in *Father-Daughter Incest* demonstrates, that the denial and silencing of

incest have a considerable legacy. Reflecting on the reasons for this pervasive un-speakability, Horvitz speculates:

Perhaps the issue of sexual violation, especially incest, evokes feelings so profoundly disconcerting that no matter how progressively politicized or socially transformed the public consciousness is, when incestuous rape becomes part of public discourse, we can expect an almost immediate and very powerful backlash. There is something uniquely 'unspeakable' about incest, as if discussing its existence exacerbates it. (14)

In other words, incest inevitably provokes cycles of disclosure and denial, of speaking and silencing, of political discourses and counter-discourses – perhaps because it threatens the sanctity of the family.[16]

The unspeakability of incest also figures as a key theme in Shelley's *Mathilda*. The text repeatedly shows how Mathilda perceives herself as a social outcast, believing that her history of incestuous desire makes her "unfit for any intercourse" (55). She avoids talking to anyone as much as possible, until she meets the poet Woodville. Even with him, though, she persistently refuses to reveal her traumatic past. Speaking about incest is represented as a taboo that Mathilda never even considers breaking; she keeps her secret until she is close to death – and even then she reveals it only in writing. *A Thousand Acres* echoes *Mathilda* in its representation of shame as a barrier to speaking about incest. At the same time, Smiley's novel explores this theme further in several ways, especially by depicting and enacting attempts at breaking the taboo. In fact, at a metalevel, Smiley's novel is part of a recent discursive shift towards breaking the taboo against speaking about incest: "From the 1970s to the 1990s, incest was transformed from taboo to trauma, recoded through new narratives by and about women" (Harkins 9). While the novel textually overcomes this taboo through its extensive exploration of incest as trauma, at the diegetic level, it emphasizes the profound difficulty of actually breaking it. What is particularly striking is that Smiley does not grant Ginny a way of talking about her past, not even with Rose. Rose forces Ginny to admit that she remembers, but Ginny refuses to utter any more than a reluctant admission: "Well, yeah" (302). Ultimately, for Ginny, incest remains not unwritable but, to a large extent, unspeakable. In this respect, the text resonates with *Mathilda*: both texts feature autodiegetic narrators who are victims of incest and who turn to written rather than oral self-expression.

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16 Herman also asserts that the incest taboo is deeply rooted in society: "[It] is commonly understood as a fundamental rule of social order. It is the primordial law, which defines the special place of human society within the natural and the supernatural world" (*Father-Daughter* 50).

Unlike Ginny, Rose repeatedly breaks the silence surrounding incest; through her, the novel foregrounds the pattern of reaction that Horvitz identifies, in which female attempts at disclosure are followed by counter-reactions of silencing or denial. The text enacts this pattern, which also played out during the False Memory Debate, within the context of the family and the community, that is, within the private and public spheres. The way Ginny's husband Ty reacts to Rose's disclosure exemplifies precisely the highly critical and even hostile reaction that, according to Herman, is typical of responses to women's attempts to speak about incest (*Father-Daughter* 9). Ty sides with his father-in-law, not with his wife and her sister, thereby supporting the ideological position of the patriarchal system. He condemns Rose for speaking publicly about their family secret: "Maybe it happened. I don't say it didn't. But it doesn't make me like her any more. I think people should keep private things private" (340). Hardly able to contain his anger, Ty blames the women rather than Larry, blames the female victims rather than the male perpetrator. Furthermore, Ginny suspects that Ty does not believe Rose's accusations, that he thinks she is telling a malicious lie. The novel here evokes the contentious question of how to distinguish between memories and fantasies, between truthful accusations and destructive falsehoods – a question that led to violent exchanges during the Memory Wars. The text highlights that the family and the community blame the sisters, especially Rose, for breaking the long-standing rule of keeping up appearances, for violating the reputation of the family, and for tampering with the sanctity of the patriarch Larry, the exemplary farmer. Within the community, as Leslie emphasizes, the view that Larry "was indeed more sinned against than sinning" prevails (46).[17]

In this context, the novel's representation of the trial and its aftermath is crucial, for even though Ginny and Rose win the trial, it is their reputation that suffers, not their father's. In its depiction of the trial (a trial about farm mismanagement, not sexual abuse), the text performs a significant mechanism of displacement. It is telling, though, that Caroline, the prosecutor, keeps digressing from farm management to familial conflicts, while Larry fantasizes about the alleged murder of his darling child Caroline by her two sisters. The court trial is thus almost as pointless and absurd as the mock trial depicted in the first quarto edition of *King Lear*, where a fool and a beggar act as judges, and two pieces of furniture stand in for Goneril and Regan (see *Lr.* 3.6.). Nevertheless, the court trial in *A Thousand Acres* is significant because it calls attention to the irreparable ruptures that result when family relationships are subjected to legal discourses – which might be an indirect reference to the numerous family trials that occurred during the Memory Wars. As Ginny bitterly

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17 The lines from *King Lear* that Leslie evokes here read as follows: "[…] I am a man / More sinned against than sinning" (*Lr.* 3.2.57-58). This utterance is one of Lear's many laments about filial ingratitude.

remarks: "One thing was surely true about going to court. It had marvellously divided us from each other and from our old lives. There could be no reconciliation now" (326). Smiley has Ginny realize that winning the trial is far from satisfying. Even more importantly, the novel implicitly points to a different kind of trial: "[T]he important trial in *A Thousand Acres* is not Larry's claim of corporate mismanagement or abuse, but Ginny and Rose's claim of sexual abuse," as Susan Ayres stresses, noting that Smiley explicitly voiced the idea of functioning as the "lawyer" for the two elder daughters through her novel (29).[18] *A Thousand Acres* implies that this trial – about sexual abuse rather than farm mismanagement – is far more difficult, perhaps even impossible, for the daughters to win. In this way, the novel takes up some of the issues explored in *The Wrongs of Woman*; like Wollstonecraft's novel, it points to the difficulty of advocating for women's concerns and rights within a legal system firmly inscribed with patriarchal values and ideas. Also, by displacing the scene of familial and legal confrontation onto a surrogate issue, the farm, the text indirectly reinforces the persistence of the unspeakability of incest.

TOWARDS A RECOGNITION OF POLLUTION

The text's representation of incest as being persistently unspeakable for Ginny is especially significant given that *A Thousand Acres* enacts her process of finding her own voice. She starts out as a narrator with a "self-minimizing style," as Strehle puts it (219), as a narrator who "hides herself in language that is purposefully simple, bare, and empty of value judgments" (220). In terms of narrative style, Ginny differs fundamentally from Shelley's Mathilda, who melodramatically exposes her feelings and, like Godwin's Mandeville, indulges in the detailed revelation of her most private emotions. Ginny's narrative style never approaches such a level of emotionality and self-absorption, but over the course of the novel, she does overcome her initial position as an uncritical mediator of their long-established family history and develop her own voice. The narrative realism that Smiley has Ginny use in the first part of the novel is deceptively plain and straightforward; as the narrative progresses, the text performs her process of finding a voice in a self-reflexive way

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18 In "Shakespeare in Iceland," Smiley writes: "As the lawyer for Goneril and Regan, I proposed a different narrative of their motives and actions that cast doubts on the case Mr Shakespeare was making for his client, King Lear. I made Goneril my star witness, and she told her story with care. I made sure that, insofar as I was able to swing it, she was an appealing witness as well – cautious, judicious, ambivalent, straightforward" (172).

that increasingly subverts the conventions of traditional realism. As Strehle asserts, "[b]y the end, Smiley's text shatters its own form" (212).

Textually enacting the interrelations between voice and agency, between speech and power, *A Thousand Acres* features a narrator who becomes increasingly self-confident and assertive over the course of her narration. This emphasis on the development of a female voice is a central aspect of the text's overall feminist trajectory. However, it is precisely by tracing the limitations of what is speakable in a given social context that the text avoids idealizing or sentimentalizing the narrator's process of finding her voice. In fact, the novel signals critically that while the process of finding one's voice has the potential to be liberating and empowering, this potential may be significantly curtailed if one does not find an appropriate audience. *A Thousand Acres* implies that although Ginny finds her voice, her voice fails in relation to her traumatic past, at least in part because the patriarchal farming community does not provide an audience for her tale of incestuous abuse. Yet in spite of its emphasis on the unspeakability of incest, the text does depict voice and agency as closely related to Ginny's changing attitude to her traumatic past. The novel implies that it is Ginny's growing understanding of abuse as part of systemic structures (i.e., her increasing feminist awareness) that gives her the courage to speak up for herself – not regarding the abuse itself, but in general. Hence, *A Thousand Acres* suggests that an understanding of traumatic abuse not only in its personal and familial context but also in the socio-political context of the community is essential for a trauma victim's self-development.

The novel represents Ginny's increasing awareness of the systemic contexts of her abuse through the recurrent and multi-layered theme of pollution, especially the polluted body, a recurrent topos in the context of incestuous abuse. The comparison to Shelley's *Mathilda* is revealing in this context. Even though incest only happens at the level of words and imagination, Mathilda feels profoundly polluted in both body and mind by her father's revelation of his incestuous desires. In contrast to *Mathilda*, where incestuous feelings are associated with passion and romantic love, albeit an "unnatural" form of love (28), *A Thousand Acres* shifts the emphasis from the verbal and mental to the physical and from a rhetoric of emotions and passions to one of possession and brutal exploitation. In *Mathilda*, the text's ambiguous representation of the reciprocity of the incestuous attachment creates a space in which incest is connected to elements of romantic fantasies and erotic desires, resonating with Harkins's claim that "precisely because it establishes regulatory norms, the concept of incest can produce a pleasurable frisson" (xii). However, in Smiley's novel, incest is stripped of "pleasurable frisson" and rooted firmly in a bleak reality of physical violation and the abuse of power. It is not surprising, then, that *A Thousand Acres* examines the incest victim's highly problematic relationship to her body even further than Shelley's novella.

Once Ginny begins to analyse her patterns of reaction in the light of her traumatic past, she sees a direct connection between her experiences of sexual abuse and her disturbed sense of her body. She realizes that her recovered memories make the thought of sexual intercourse unbearable (256), examining her general inability to live her sexuality: she recalls how frantically she cleaned her entire body before her wedding night and reflects on the many "little rituals" that have come to determine her sexual life, such as her particular needs regarding the amount of light, the time of day, her clothing, and so forth (279). During her married life, her body, as Ginny emphasizes, has not been something to look at or talk about; it has increasingly become a *Fremdkörper*, a "foreign body," alienated from herself and defying both language and vision. Ginny explicitly traces the roots of this attitude back to her experiences of incest: "One thing Daddy took from me when he came to me in my room at night was the memory of my body" (280). The narrative highlights Ginny's gradual recognition that trauma has permanently contaminated her attitude towards her body and her sexuality. She comes to understand why her feelings of sexual attraction for Jess produce such a complex mingling of "[d]esire, shame, and fear," why sexual desire makes her feel like a "freak," like a "three-legged woman" (262).

The abuse victim's problematic relationship with her body and sexuality is a common theme in contemporary novels dealing with incest and sexual abuse.[19] *A Thousand Acres*, however, adds further layers to the theme of pollution, making it a leitmotif that reaches beyond the typical association between incest and the victim's sense of being polluted, as noted by psychologists Nichole Fairbrother and S. Rachman. Figuring sexual abuse as one source of contamination, Smiley's novel also literalizes the motif of pollution by emphasizing the damaging effect of poisonous farm chemicals. Through Jess, who has a passion for organic farming, Ginny learns that her five miscarriages were probably caused by farm chemicals in the well water. In addition, although Rose has two children, like several of her female ancestors, she suffers from cancer, which is similarly represented as an effect of ecologically irresponsible, exploitative, and unsustainable farming practices. In fact, the novel draws an extensive analogy between male abuse of the female body and the farmer's abuse of the land, an analogy that has led to several ecofeminist readings of the novel.[20] The female body and the farmland are represented as male

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19 Novels to mention here include Dorothy Nelson's *In Night's City*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*, and Camilla Gibb's *Mouthing the Words*. In Gibb's novel, for example, the autodiegetic narrator resolves "never to be a woman" and to be "thin and little and rigid as a twig" instead (86); her ensuing anorexia nervosa is a symptom of her more general rejection of her body, sexuality, and womanhood.

20 See for example Mathieson's "The Polluted Quarry" and Almila Ozdek's "Coming out of the Amnesia."

property that is used and abused freely by the patriarchal father/farmer, while the community quietly tolerates these abuses. Hence, the female protagonists Ginny and Rose are victims of pollution in a double way: their bodies are contaminated figuratively by sexual abuse and literally by poisoned soil and water. *A Thousand Acres*, thus, critically exposes the dark secrets behind the reassuring narratives of progress and economic success that the men in the farming community propagate.

Furthermore, Smiley has Ginny become aware that these experiences of pollution and abuse affect a larger collective of women. Like Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman*, Ginny begins to develop a feminist consciousness through her analysis of trauma, realizing that the personal may have powerful political implications. Her growing awareness manifests itself in a heated discussion with Ty about farming practices, when Ginny angrily insists on the damaging effects of keeping "private" experiences such as miscarriages a secret:

Jess said to me that the reason for the miscarriages is probably in the well water. Runoff in the well water. He says people have known about it for years! We never even asked about anything like that, or looked into a book, or even told people we'd had miscarriages. We kept it all a secret! What if there are women all over the country who've had lots of miscarriages, and if they just compared notes – but God forbid we should talk about it! (259)

Here, Smiley has Ginny express a powerful criticism of the traditional values of silence and secrecy. In her last conversation with Ty, which takes place after their separation, Ginny speaks up even more forcefully – and with a political and polemical vigour that contrasts sharply with her initial submissiveness:

"You see this grand history, but I see blows. I see taking what you want because you want it, then making something up that justifies what you did. I see getting others to pay then price, then covering up and forgetting what the price was. Do I think Daddy came up with beating and fucking us on his own?" Ty winced. "No. I think he had lessons, and those lessons were part of the package, along with the land and the lust to run things exactly the way he wanted to no matter what, poisoning the water and destroying the topsoil and buying bigger and bigger machinery, and then feeling certain that all of it was 'right,' as you say." (342-43)

This passage is significant because it is the one moment in the text when Ginny breaks the taboo against talking about incest and speaks with a degree of self-assertiveness that shocks Ty. Ginny here functions as the mouthpiece for the text's feminist politics, explicitly connecting the abuse of the female body and of the land practised within the patriarchal ideological system of the farming community. In a de-doxifying gesture (to return to Hutcheon's terminology), the narrator exposes the "grand history" propagated by the men as a self-serving construction intended to hide the exploitative violence that sustains it.

The novel's analogy between abuse of the female body and abuse of the land signals its ecofeminist potential. However, Greg Garrard points out that certain kinds of ecofeminism may seem politically problematic: ecofeminism can become "questionable in terms of its feminism" if it connects the female to the land in ways that risk perpetuating patriarchal stereotypes (24). According to Garrard, an essentialist vein of ecofeminism runs the risk of "present[ing] us with a mirror-image of patriarchal constructions of femininity that is just as limited or limiting" (24). I argue, though, that Smiley's novel departs from a problematically essentializing ecofeminist perspective in that it complicates a straightforward analogy between the abused female body and the abused land. First, the novel challenges conventional patriarchal associations of the female body with nature by emphasizing repeatedly how the farmland was shaped by Larry's forefathers, who first had to drain it (14). Ginny and her sisters, then, are part of a generation of women living on "engineered" land rather than in "nature." Moreover, the novel does not only depict women as suffering from the abuse of the land: Harold, who is blinded by farm chemicals, represents a male victim of the polluted land and is, thus, an important counterpart to the female victims of pollution. Hence, the novel may be said to represent an ecofeminist vision without essentialising gender, complicating the parallel between the female body and the land in several ways. It is precisely through these de-essentialist elements that the novel's de-doxifying gestures, represented in its discourse on pollution, seem more persuasive and powerful from a feminist perspective.

A Thousand Acres adds even further layers to the theme of pollution, suggesting that the family as an institution is also polluted, particularly through dysfunctional and destructive familial structures and interpersonal dynamics. The text implies that Ginny recognizes some of these structures, while remaining caught up in others. One issue that Ginny increasingly comes to understand is her father's problematic position in the family. From the beginning, she represents him as a domineering figure who causes everything around him to fade into the background or dissolve into nothingness: "[I]n my recollections, Daddy's presence in any scene had the effect of dimming the surroundings" (48). Through reflections on her childhood, Ginny eventually realizes that his overarching presence has eclipsed her memories of her mother. Furthermore, her father was to her *the* incarnation of the father and the farmer, and she regarded him with near-religious awe: "In my youthful estimation, Laurence Cook defined both categories. To really believe that others even existed in either category was to break the First Commandment" (19). This reference to the Ten Commandments is one of a number of religious allusions that Smiley has Ginny use to characterize her father. Larry Cook is described as a God-like father

figure whose desires and commands must be obeyed under any circumstances.[21] However, in the course of the narrative, Ginny becomes increasingly critical of her father's domineering position and begins to understand that her mother's early death exacerbated her problematic relationship with her father: "My mother died before she could present him to us as only a man, with habits and quirks and preferences, before she could diminish him in our eyes enough for us to understand him" (20). In other words, Ginny speculates that had her mother lived longer, she might have helped her find "the optimum distance for seeing [her] father" (20). The novel, then, traces Ginny's struggle to renegotiate that distance and, simultaneously, reconnect with her memories of her mother.[22]

Through the combination of a domineering father and an absent mother, *A Thousand Acres* evokes a type of family structure that often appears in connection with father-daughter incest. Drawing on material ranging from psychological studies to literary representations, Herman concludes that "the theme of maternal absence, in one form or another, is always found in the background of the incest romance" (*Father-Daughter* 44). The mother's absence increases the daughter's vulnerability, making her more dependent on the father, which can result in the formation of unhealthy father-daughter attachments. As discussed in Chapter Four, this type of familial constellation is explored and problematized in several of Shelley's trauma narratives. In particular, *Mathilda* suggests that a daughter can become a substitute for her mother in her father's eyes. When Mathilda's father asks her to start reading to him exactly where her mother had left off, Mathilda symbolically occupies her mother's position as her father's intimate companion. *A Thousand Acres* stresses that Larry's nightly visits to his daughters began shortly after his wife's death, which implies that a similar mechanism of replacement is at work, though one involving possession not passion. Rose forcefully expresses to Ginny the idea that, after their mother's death, Larry considered it his right to replace his wife with his daughters, the sexual objects most easily available to him: "You were as much his as I was. There was no reason for him to assert his possession of me more than his possession of you. We were just his, to do with as he pleased, like the

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21   In this context, Herman's discussion of how family structures with domineering fathers affect the prevalence of father-daughter sexual abuse is interesting: "The greater the domination of the father, and the more the caretaking is relegated to the mother, the greater the likelihood of father-daughter incest. The more democratic the family and the less rigid the sexual division of labor, the less likely that the father will abuse their daughters" (*Father-Daughter* 63).

22   Carden also emphasizes Ginny's search for her mother. She argues that Ginny attempts to construct alternative versions of the past by engaging with unknown and imagined sides of her mother: "These 'answers', however, reside not in the mother she knew, but in the possibilities she invests in a kind of mother-under-the-mother" (194).

pond or the houses or the hogs or the crops" (191). Rose here claims that incestuous abuse is symptomatic of highly problematic patriarchal structures of ownership, and she relentlessly forces Ginny to examine family structures more critically. Ginny's final conversation with Ty, where she maintains that Larry "had lessons" that "were part of the package" (343), demonstrates that, by the end, Ginny has internalized Rose's critical view of her father's abuse and its familial and systemic contexts.

Thus, the narrative traces the emergence of Ginny's critical awareness of the kind of pollution that permeates her family. The novel, moreover, sets up the motif of cleaning as the counterpoint to pollution. The first time Ginny refers to cleaning, she proudly evokes it as an inherent element of her daily housework: "[M]ostly farm women are proud of the fact that they can keep the house looking as though the farm stays outside" (120). Yet, in the course of the narrative, Ginny begins to question her dedication to cleaning and comes to think of it as an obsession: "How did we get so well trained, Rose and I, that we never missed a corner, never left a cleaning job undone" (227). She eventually realizes that this obsession is connected to their familial custom of hiding conflicts behind a neat façade – and to the related habit of accepting this seemingly perfect façade as truth. Ginny's careful cleaning at a moment of crisis, her feeling that it was "the one thing [she] still knew how to do" (253), and Rose's frantic urge to clean the house after her husband's suicide, vacuuming the living-room at 2a.m. (298), demonstrate to what extent cleaning functions as a strategy for re-establishing order after things have fallen apart. It is ironic, however, that just as Ginny begins to question their cleaning habits, their lawyer encourages the sisters to push their dedication to neat surfaces even further, asserting that "appearances are everything with a clause like this" (284). It is telling that Ginny does not struggle with this task; rather, she revels in it: "I was so remarkably comfortable with the discipline of making a good appearance! It was like going back to school or church after a long absence. It had ritual and measure" (285). In spite of her emerging critical awareness, Ginny finds it difficult to overcome deeply internalized habits and beliefs.

The novel suggests, moreover, that there are some familial structures that Ginny fails to recognize and remains entangled in, notably, the structures of sibling rivalry and jealousy. Ginny admits that she is deeply jealous of Rose because of her two daughters, but she fails to see that, from early on, her father fostered a sense of rivalry among the sisters. In blatant displays of favouritism, Larry always made his two elder daughters feel that Caroline was his darling child. Moreover, it is especially striking that the seed of jealousy was nurtured, if not planted, by incestuous abuse. In a rather disturbing passage, Rose tells Ginny how incest made her feel special:

I was flattered, too. I thought that he'd picked me, me, to be his favourite, not you, not her. On the surface, I thought it was okay, that it must be okay if he said it was, since he was the

rule maker. He didn't rape me, Ginny. He seduced me. He said it was okay, that it was good to please him, that he needed it, that it was special. He said he loved me. (190)

The text here calls attention to Larry's manipulative rhetoric of favouritism and his shameless abuse of a child's vulnerability and credulity, signalling how he distorted Rose's perception of their sexual encounters so that the incest appeared to her like a gift rather than an injury. Larry's rhetoric incorporates a denial of responsibility and damage that, according to Herman, is a common claim of or about victimizing fathers in different types of literature: "[F]irst, he did no harm, and second, he is not to blame" (*Father-Daughter* 22). The text implies that Larry manipulated Rose precisely by denying any harm and by assigning her the role not of the *seductive* daughter – another common theme in the context of incest – but of the *seducible* daughter, who gave her active consent to their sexual encounters. The novel thus evokes "the myth of the willing victim of interpersonal violence," a common trope in discourses on trauma and gender, according to Laura Brown (105). An even more powerful reversal of responsibility is at work in the confrontation between Larry and Ginny during the stormy night, when he calls her a "whore," a "slut," and a "bitch" (181), accusing her of a transgressive sexuality in the – maybe even unconscious – attempt to gloss over the dark nature of his own sexuality. In calling Ginny a "*barren* whore" and a "*dried-up* whore bitch" (181, emphasis added), Larry reverses responsibility in further ways. His use of agricultural terms to condemn her for her inability to bear children is darkly ironic: he is, in fact, responsible for Ginny's infertility through his use of farm chemicals. While Larry seems unaware of the denial of responsibility his swearing performs, he once again tries to break the bond between the sisters, here symbolized by their holding hands while confronting him. Perceiving this gesture of sisterly solidarity as a threat, Larry tries to play the sisters off one another:[23] "Now he sounded almost conciliatory, as if he could divide us and conquer us" (182). Larry manipulates his daughters in two ways, imposing responsibility for his transgressions on them and repeatedly pushing them towards rivalry.

A Thousand Acres signals that the narrator Ginny, in spite of her increasingly critical attitude towards her father and the community, largely remains blind to and caught up in her father's manipulations. One blind spot in Ginny's perception also concerns the extent to which their familial relationships are determined – and con-

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23 The way in which Larry tries to play Ginny and Rose off against each other repeats a central pattern of reaction that Lear displays towards Goneril and Regan. Lear repeatedly tries to side with one of them against the other, depending on his momentary judgement of who likes him more: "[…] Oh Regan, she hath tied / Sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture here – I can scarce speak to thee – thou'lt not believe / With how depraved a quality – oh Regan!" (*Lr*. 2.4.126-29).

taminated – by issues of property, possession, and power. As Anna Lindhé rightly stresses, the novel shows how "transfer of property and power penetrates and encroaches upon the firmest family relationships and the most solid loyalties" (58). Of vital importance in this context is Larry's division and handing over of the farm to his daughters, a plan that Ginny immediately accepts, with some scepticism, but without perceiving its deeper meaning. Larry's decision to pass on his property to his daughters is depicted as just as bizarre and enigmatic as Lear's division of his kingdom. Yet the way Lear introduces his plan, forcing his daughters to proclaim their love for him publically, is revealing: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most, / That we our largest bounty may extend / Where nature doth with merit challenge?" (*Lr.* 1.1.46-47). Through this question, Lear not only creates rivalry, but he also problematically fuses public issues of power and possession with private ones of filial love and duty. Larry phrases his corresponding question in a less obviously charged way: "What do you think?" (19). Nevertheless, the text signals that Larry's seemingly innocent question masks what is really at stake – power. As Tore Høgås argues, "by giving a gift, you take control over the recipient. It is a form of economic power-assertion" (66). Larry's "gift," then, should be read as a "poisoned gift" that imposes a "debt of filial duty" on his daughters (67).[24] In handing over the farm, Larry forces upon his daughters a gift that is, like Lear's gift to his daughters, an assertion of power and a demand for love; as such, it is metonymically connected to the incestuous abuse. Ginny, however, remains largely unaware of these implications. While she in many ways comes to understand the pollution that she faces at various levels of her life – the double pollution of her body through sexual abuse and farm chemicals as well as polluted family relations – she remains entangled in a complex web where issues of property and duty, love and abuse are entwined in intricate and destructive ways. Thus, while *A Thousand Acres* follows a feminist trajectory by evoking the empowering and liberating potential of self-recognition and of gaining critical insights into the dynamics of family and community, the novel refrains from idealizing these processes of female growth. The text's feminist narrative is, in fact, undercut by a darker vision.

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24 Høgås pushes his reading of Larry's gift even further: "Larry's gift was not only poisoned, it was also an empty gift, designed to display his power. Obviously, it is meaningless to give one part of one's property (the farm) to another part of one's property (his daughters). Ultimately, then, the gift Larry presented to his daughters was a gift to himself – a narcissistic gesture" (71). While Høgås's reading of the gift as a "narcissistic gesture" is convincing, the narrative reveals that the gift is not as "meaningless" as Larry intended it. Because his daughters and sons-in-law interpret the gift literally, the "poisoned gift" backfires: As Ozdek stresses, "his realization that he is no longer the owner completely destroys his sense of being, and he gradually goes mad" (67).

THE SISTERS' TRAGEDY

A Thousand Acres, then, is characterized by two opposing movements. On the one hand, the novel evokes ideas of female development and resistance through the protagonist-narrator's process of overcoming a double amnesia: first, she recovers her trauma memories and overcomes her personal amnesia; second, she becomes aware of and tries to defeat the collective amnesia of women living within patriarchal grand narratives.[25] Even if her understanding of interpersonal and systemic structures remains incomplete, Ginny's narrative suggests a movement of growth and progress. On the other hand, the narrative follows a seemingly inevitable downward spiral, depicting the disintegration of the family and the decline of the farm.[26] Within this downward movement, the text focuses especially on the daughter's tragedy. As Barbara Sheldon remarks, each book of the novel "marks a further step in Ginny's alienation from her family and in her personal growth" (62). In other words, Ginny's process of finding her voice, of gaining self-knowledge and a critical awareness, comes at a dramatically – even tragically – high cost: in the end, she loses almost everything important to her. Thus, while the novel participates in late-twentieth-century discourses on women's domestic trauma and female self-narration, it "ferociously resist[s] a sentimental portrayal of female empowerment through the discovery of the female voice" (Leslie 35). Any feminist optimism about the beneficial aspects of confronting trauma is here undercut by elements of tragedy.

One central tragic element is the dramatic turn in Ginny and Rose's relationship in Book Five, which reveals that the bond between the two sisters – and fellow trauma victims – is not strong enough to withstand the destructive power of familial disruptions and trauma. The concrete cause for the sisters' estrangement lies in rivalry and jealousy. In another textual echo of *King Lear*, Book Five uncovers Rose's betrayal of her sister: Rose confesses that she had an affair with Jess, the Edmund figure of the novel, knowing that Ginny had had sexual intercourse with

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25 On the idea of a collective amnesia, see also Carden: "Smiley enters the contentious debates swirling around 'repressed memory' by suggesting that the gender/power arrangements embedded in cultural structures force corresponding amnesias" (188).

26 Amy Levin stresses that this simultaneous decline of the family and the farm should be seen in connection with popular discourses of the 1980s: "[T]he vitality of the Midwestern farm belt was associated with and perceived as a reflection of the condition of the American family. Any threat to the farm represented a potential assault on the family, as well as on the moral values in which the family was grounded" (23). From a historical point of view, the novel's setting (1979), as Alter emphasizes, also evokes the context of the American farm crisis (153).

him first. It is the explanation Rose gives for her betrayal that is particularly dis-turbing: Rose admits that all her sexual relationships, ranging from early sexual ad-ventures to her marriage with Pete to the affair with Jess, have been determined by her compulsion to "erase Daddy," that is, to expunge the memories of incest (298): "I always thought one of them would have to supersede Daddy eventually" (299). The second reason Rose mentions is just as unsettling. She confesses that she wanted Jess because she knew how much Jess liked Ginny (303). Thus, Smiley has Rose display a striking degree of selfish and jealous possessiveness. For Ginny, the discovery of Rose's betrayal seems as traumatic as the revelation of incestuous abuse, and her betrayal is the reason why Ginny resolves to kill her sister. The text highlights that for Ginny, this betrayal constitutes an emotional abuse that shatters the foundations of their relationship: "The future seemed to clamp down into some-thing writhing and fluid, and at the centre of it, the most changed thing of all, was Rose herself" (308). Ginny suffers from a sense of unbearable hurt and irreparable loss, and her agony makes her see only one option: revenge. She records in detail her careful research into poisonous plants and then meticulously pursues her scheme of killing Rose with homemade sausages, rendered deadly by water hem-lock. In another (particularly literal) variation on the theme of the "poisoned gift," Ginny presents her sausages to Rose as a special surprise and a gesture of sisterly affection (313), then waits for Rose's death. The callousness with which Ginny pur-sues her scheme is at least as disturbing as Rose's cold-hearted, selfish betrayal. In this moment, Smiley's female protagonists come closest to resembling the "pelican daughters" of Shakespeare's tragedy (*Lr.* 3.4.70).

At this point, a number of crucial questions arise. On the one hand, the novel's decentring strategies suggest that the role of the tragic hero is displaced onto the daughters, who could be read not only as trauma victims in a patriarchal context but also as tragic heroines. But on the other hand, Book Five aligns them with their Shakespearean counterparts, who are figures of evil, not tragic heroines. The two roles are difficult to reconcile. Do the flaws that Smiley has her female protagonists display reach too deep to qualify as the "tragic flaws" of tragic figures? To what ex-tent does our knowledge of the roots of their flaws affect our judgment of their ac-tions? Do readers still sympathize with the traumatized autodiegetic narrator once she becomes a scheming would-be murderer? *A Thousand Acres* encourages us to reflect on the complex interrelations between trauma and the tragic. Given how dif-ficult it is to define tragedy and the idea of the tragic,[27] a detailed examination of these interrelations on a broader scale lies beyond the scope of this chapter. How-

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27 The first chapter of Eagleton's study *Sweet Violence*, which has the telling title "A The-ory in Ruins," is an impressive testimony to the difficulty of defining the tragic: Eagleton evokes numerous definitions and theorizations of the tragic, only to expose the weak-nesses, paradoxes, or even absurdities of each of them.

ever, investigating the specific ways in which Smiley's text negotiates the relationship between trauma and the tragic is crucial for an understanding of this trauma novel.

First of all, it is important to note that the roots of the sisters' flaws, that is, their rivalry and jealousy, can be traced back to their childhood sexual traumas. Hence, what is at play is not pure evil, as it seems to be with Goneril and Regan, but a complex entanglement of victimization and cycles of hurt, which raises intricate questions about responsibility and guilt. Smiley's female protagonists are not simply embodiments of evil, nor are they simply victims; they unite elements of victimhood and resistance, which is, according to Terry Eagleton, characteristic of tragic figures: "Tragedy must be more than mere victimage; it must involve a courageous resistance to one's fate, of the kind we witness in the great tragic works of art" (*Sweet Violence* 15). While this rather circular definition exemplifies the difficulty of pinning down the meaning of tragedy, it nevertheless points to a dimension of the tragic that I regard as pivotal to Smiley's novel: a combination of intense suffering, the struggle to resist, and an inevitable downfall.[28]

Unlike Lear, Smiley's Lear figure, Larry Cook, does not undergo the struggle of self-confrontation typical of a tragic hero; instead, he acts firmly within a specific ideological system and remains blind to the workings of that system and the consequences of his actions.[29] It is Ginny who undertakes the hero's struggle for understanding and resistance. However, despite her increasing knowledge and self-knowledge, she fails to prevent the familial disaster that she fearfully anticipates throughout the text. The novel's tragic vision, then, hinges on its depiction of the protagonist's downfall as doomed to happen, even when she is able to analyse, recognize, and name many of the causes of her suffering. The novel's conceptualization of the tragic resonates with a modern idea of the tragic as discussed, for exam-

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28 It should here be mentioned that Eagleton is sceptical about the compatibility of tragedy and the postmodern: "There is an ontological depth and high seriousness about the genre which grates on the postmodern sensibility, with its unbearable lightness of being" (*Sweet Violence* ix). However, Eagleton grants that it is only "*some* postmodernism" that is "rather too shallow for tragedy" (x, emphasis added), and this is certainly not the kind of postmodernism that Smiley's novel represents.

29 In *King Lear*, as is often noted, the tragic hero learns essential lessons through his madness; the storm makes him aware of the suffering of the "[p]oor naked wretches" (*Lr.* 3.4.28) and induces him to reflect on what constitutes the elemental human condition (see *Lr.* 3.4.91-97). While determining the extent of Lear's self-knowledge is complex – Stanley Cavell's reading in *Disowning Knowledge*, for example, problematizes the nature of Lear's self-recognition – it should be emphasized that *A Thousand Acres* precludes any discussion of self-recognition regarding Larry. The novel stresses that, unlike Lear's madness, Larry's only intensifies his delusions.

ple, by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle: "[T]here is a fundamental shift from a classical idea of tragedy as inevitable and beyond human control to the modern idea of a tragedy as something humanly engineered and happening in a world in which something could and should be done, for instance about sexual inequality, racism and so on" (72).[30] *A Thousand Acres* endorses the idea that tragedy emerges from non-transcendent contingencies. The disintegration of the Cook family and their farm is represented as "humanly engineered" – yet it entirely escapes the control of its human agents. The tragedy is, thus, not only the result of the protagonists' flaws but also the effect of a mismatch between characters and the system they inhabit, between the "tragic subject" and a "cultural milieu" (Drakakis and Liebler 9). The systemic forces of patriarchy are depicted as too persistently powerful. The tragedy that the text stages, especially through Ginny, is that in spite of her awareness of the disruptive forces at play within the patriarchal family that has victimized her, she fails to prevent those forces from gaining more power over her life. The tragic in Smiley's novel, then, works differently than in Shelley's *Mathilda*. While Mathilda embraces the idea of her life as a tragedy, stylizing herself as a tragic heroine, Ginny fights against the imminent tragedy of her life. Ginny's resistance makes her a more genuinely tragic figure than Mathilda, at least according to Eagleton's characterization of tragic heroes. While Shelley's novella expresses Mathilda's connection to tragedy through its excessive use of a rhetoric of tragedy that verges on the melodramatic, Smiley's novel conveys the idea of the tragic mainly through its dramatic structures, assigning Ginny the role of the tragic heroine at a metalevel, as if against her will.

Through Ginny's failure to rescue her relationship with Rose, *A Thousand Acres* implies that the contingencies in which the individual subject is enmeshed are sometimes too powerful to be countered or overcome. At this point, I want to return to the idea that, although the novel mainly focuses on Ginny's suffering, *A Thousand Acres* revolves around a daughter's tragedy but also around the tragedy of two sisters. Ginny repeatedly emphasizes how special her bond with Rose has always been, so it seems especially tragic that their struggle against the destructive impact of incestuous abuse and paternal domination eventually fails to unite them. The core of the sisters' tragedy, then, is that their father's desire to divide them materializes in their persistent jealousy and rivalry; Smiley grants Larry the power to irrevocably destroy the sisters' close relationship. In this way, the novel's tragic frame has a feminist slant. The text highlights the disturbing power of the father's

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30 Referring to notions of the tragic as expressed by twentieth-century playwrights, notably Artaud and Brecht, John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler also argue that what is a stake here is that "the delight in tragedy is generated from another source, the danger of enslavement coming not from the gods but from the cultural and psychological constructions with which modern Western humanity has deluded itself" (6).

will and his words: not only is Larry's curse of sterility (an echo of Lear's) fulfilled, but so is his implicit curse against the sisters' relationship. The idea of a feminist notion of the tragic is also reinforced by the fact that the sisters turn against each other, while they, at the same time, miss the opportunity for a direct confrontation with Larry as well as with Caroline, who is still ignorant of the family's history of abuse. On her deathbed, Rose bitterly laments her failure to "get Daddy to know what he had done, or what it meant" (355), while Ginny, in her last encounter with Caroline on the farm, realizes she should tell her the truth but still refrains from doing so. Although Ginny fights for her own voice and struggles to gain the courage to speak up, in the final chapter of Book Six, she fails to break Larry's destructive reign of silence and secrecy and instead even perpetuates it. With poisoned sausages, which function as phallic symbols in the shape of "a man's thumb" (313), Ginny attempts to punish Rose for her selfish urge to "grab" things and claim them as her personal property (62) – a flaw that makes Rose strangely complicit in a patriarchal value system. The ending, however, suggests that also Ginny is still tragically held in thrall by the destructive power of her father's reign.

Yet this is not to say that the ending of the novel fully endorses a mode of the tragic; rather, I read the ending as a complex and deliberately ambiguous negotiation of the tragic. It is telling that the ending has provoked conflicting readings, ranging from claims that Smiley's novel ends in a more tragic way than *King Lear* to assertions that the novel's ending is far more hopeful.[31] One reason for these divergent interpretations is, perhaps, that *A Thousand Acres* has not one clear and contained ending but multiple endings. The ending of Book Five can be read as the ending of the novel's tragedy, in line with the five acts of a Shakespearean tragedy. Book Six depicts Ginny's "afterlife" – after she has left her husband, her family, and the farm – and may, simultaneously, be read as the "afterlife" of *King Lear*. With this section, the novel adds a sequel to the original plot, thus adding a second ending. Finally, the epilogue, featuring Ginny's reckoning with her family and her past, constitutes the third and last ending. Those critics who claim that the ending of the novel is less tragic and more hopeful than the ending of *King Lear* focus especially on Ginny's new life as a waitress. James Schiff, for example, argues that "Smiley's novel is not nearly as unforgiving as Shakespeare's *Lear*. In Smiley's

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31 Compare, for example, Mathieson's claim that the "implied future Smiley depicts is, if anything, more bleak and less hopeful than the ending of *King Lear*" (129) or Brauner's assertion that "Smiley offers no consolation, no happy ending" (666) with Ty Kessel's reading of the novel's ending: "Even though she cannot become fully uncolonized, Ginny is, at the end, fully present, fully resistant. The ultimate proof of her victory is the retelling of her story through her eyes, in her voice. She has become, to use one of Heidegger's concepts, at-home in the not-at-home – in other words, comfortable in a completely different, new life" (244).

novel, Ginny is given a second chance, something that does not exist in tragedy"
(380). Indeed, as Bennett and Royle assert, tragedy relentlessly expresses the idea
that "we have to suffer, we are going to die, there is no justice and there is no after-
life" (106), while Book Six does depict Ginny's "afterlife" (a term the novel liter-
ally uses). In addition, in Book Six, Ginny finally breaks free of the haunting legacy
of Goneril's story: unlike Goneril and unlike the great Shakespearean tragic heroes,
Ginny survives. At this point, the question arises of whether Smiley's novel here
departs from the mode of tragedy – perhaps to follow recurrent patterns of contem-
porary trauma novels, whose endings often represent processes of working through
and recovery and gesture towards new beginnings. The specific nature of Ginny's
"afterlife" hence needs to be examined more closely.

Ginny's life as a waitress constitutes a radical break with almost everything that
used to be important to her. She refrains from keeping in touch with her husband
and her family and makes human contacts of only the most superficial, shallow, and
impersonal kind: small talk at a roadside restaurant. A similarly radical break also
manifests itself in the stark contrast between her life on the farm and her life in an
entirely urban environment, which lacks the rhythms of nature, the weather, and the
seasons. The text constructs Ginny's afterlife as a monotonous existence, an exis-
tence lacking depth and emotion in every respect. Ginny takes refuge in a state of
emotional and physical numbing reminiscent of Mathilda's withdrawal. For
Mathilda, this refuge lies in solitude and nature; for Ginny, it lies in the anonymity
of urban life. What they have in common, however, is the avoidance of emotional
attachments and love. As Ginny writes, "[i]t is easier, and more seductive, to leave
these doors closed" (369). For both protagonist-narrators, their sexual traumas func-
tion as lasting obstacles not only to romantic relationships but also to close relation-
ships of any kind. This refusal of emotional depth, closeness, and love could be
read as the female trauma victims' attempts at self-protection, at shielding them-
selves from any further emotional wounds. Emotional numbing, the texts suggest,
may originate from the need for a sense (or for the illusion) of psychological invul-
nerability. The epilogue of Smiley's novel emphasizes numbing in several ways. As
Leslie argues, "[a]lthough Ginny, no less than Caroline, finally achieves independ-
ence, her new life, with its anonymous eternal present – serving breakfast at a road-
side restaurant – seems to be the numbing replication of the caretaking role she has
always played" (47). It is also telling that Ginny mentions her father's and Rose's
deaths (Rose dies from cancer, not from eating the poisoned sausages) only in pass-
ing and in a non-emotional way.[32] The sentence with which Ginny sums up her ac-

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32 It is pertinent that Smiley includes Larry's and Rose's deaths in Book Six, that is, in the
    "afterlife" rather than in the core of the tragedy. Both the structural position and the rep-
    resentation of Larry's death continue the marginalization and de-tragedization of the fa-
    ther. Larry's death is represented in a decidedly undramatic, non-immediate way, with

count of her life, "Maybe another way of saying this is that I forgot I was still alive" (42), also expresses the pervasiveness of her sense of numbing. Thus, while Ginny does not die a physical death at the end of Book Five, she dies a symbolic, emotional death; her afterlife constitutes a kind of death-in-life that resembles the psychological state of Shelley's Mathilda. Yet, in chapter 42, Ginny implies that this life did turn out to "contain a future" (334): Rose's daughters Pam and Linda come to live with Ginny after Rose's death. In a tone of cautious optimism, the novel evokes the possibility that Ginny may eventually find a way out of her numbing afterlife into a new life.

The epilogue, moreover, continues the novel's complex and ambiguous negotiation of the tragic. For one, the epilogue foregrounds issues of self-recognition, implying that Ginny has reached a state of self-understanding that her father never did. Being able to critically reflect on her "dead young self" (370) and her attempted sororicide, Ginny displays the ability to confront the darkest aspects of her self. The novel here resonates with the theme of the monster within that recurs in Romantic trauma fiction. However, in sharp contrast to Godwin's Mandeville, who similarly represents the monstrous in connection with the desire for revenge and murder (unlike Shelley's Mathilda, where the monstrous is mainly connected to the trauma victim's sense of shame), Smiley's protagonist-narrator displays the ability to accept and analyse and, possibly, to tame this monster within herself. Given how important issues of blindness versus self-recognition, of oblivion versus understanding are to both *King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*, it is significant that, at the end of the novel, Ginny is in a position to analyse the individual components of her physical and emotional legacy. In trauma psychology, the ability to confront, examine, and accept the impact the traumatic past has had on the self is described as a significant step towards recovery, and this ability is linked to agency and empowerment in feminist trauma discourses. In this respect, Ginny undergoes an important process of growth in the course of the novel. Nevertheless, *A Thousand Acres* raises fundamental questions about the interrelations between (self-)recognition and recovery. Can recognition be seen as an indicator of recovery, of the trauma victim's coming to terms with the past, if that recognition is intimately bound up with numbing, resignation, and even bitterness? Might such a state of recognition and acceptance be the only form of "recovery" possible for a trauma victim like Ginny, who feels deeply and inexorably marked by her family and her past in body and mind? Is resigned acceptance a healthier way of coping with the traumatic past than Rose's way of lasting anger?

Ginny learning about the event through Rose's letter. Finally, Smiley has Ginny further undermine any dramatic potential of Larry's death, a sudden death from a heart attack in the supermarket: Ginny coldly – perhaps even gleefully – "imagine[s] him falling into the boxes of cornflakes" (335).

The novel refuses to provide any conclusive answers. But the idea of recovery in the sense of reconciliation, forgiveness, or a readiness to turn from the past to the future is clearly destabilized by the epilogue's sobering and bleak picture of what Ginny considers her "inheritance" (368). Ginny begins with her financial legacy, and it is telling that this legacy is one of loss and lasting commitment: she has to pay back two hundred dollars a month for a period of fourteen years. From questions of property, Ginny moves on to consider the other components of her familial inheritance:

[A]lthough the farm and all its burdens and gifts are scattered, my inheritance is with me, sitting in my chair. Lodged in my every cell, along with the DNA, are molecules of topsoil and atrazine and paraquat and anhydrous ammonia and diesel fuel and plant dust, and also molecules of memory. (369)

Through these images about the contaminated cells of her body, the text one last time evokes the notion of pollution. Ginny further examines the impact of memory by conceptualizing her inheritance in terms of personal legacies that connect her to each family member: "Let us say that each vanished person left me something, and that I feel my inheritance when I am reminded of one of them" (370). It is pertinent that Ginny's exploration of this "inheritance" mainly highlights negative emotions, such as anger and bitterness, and a sense of incomprehensibility, especially regarding Rose and her father. She stresses that Rose "has left [her] a riddle" (370) and describes her father as a man "who is what he is and can't be labelled" (369). Hence, Ginny seems to realize that her analysis of the burdensome legacies that connect her to her family members has gaps and blind spots that escape her control.

One crucial aspect of the epilogue is the powerful position Larry occupies within Ginny's final reckoning. In the last paragraph of the novel, Ginny attempts to penetrate her father's psyche, imagining what he must have felt in those moments before he entered his daughters' bedrooms:

I can't say that I forgive my father, but now I can imagine what he probably chose never to remember – the goad of an unthinkable urge, pricking him, pressing him, wrapping him in an impenetrable fog of self that must have seemed, when he wandered around the house late at night after working and drinking, like the very darkness. This is the gleaming obsidian shard that I safeguard above all the others. (370-71)

Ginny here sets up a contrast between the "impenetrable fog of self" in which her father remained enwrapped and her own quest for understanding, which includes the recognition of her father's and her own capacity for evil. To some extent, this passage can be read as her attempt to understand rather than just condemn her father. Yet the passage also has a disturbing quality. It is striking that Ginny focuses

her empathy on her father's urge to abuse his daughters and chooses to "safeguard" her imaginary insight into this dark abyss of his psyche. Her visualization of this insight as a "gleaming obsidian shard" that she actively preserves expresses her attempt to render tangible the incomprehensible and elusive and to appropriate and control the disturbing and threatening. The image of a fragment of volcanic glass[33] is evocative of trauma: its volcanic origin symbolizes the eruption of the traumatic past, and the fractured "shard" represents the materialization of the lava cooled down, that is, the manifestation of the recovered trauma. In this light, the term "safeguard" might be read as representing her recognition and acceptance of the darkness in her past, and "gleaming" perhaps gestures towards some kind of hope. However, the fact that Ginny chooses this specific aspect of her father as the fragment to preserve for herself "above all the others" still suggests an unhealthy approach to her traumatic past, indicating a problematic over-identification with her father. Although Ginny sets out to find the "optimum distance" for seeing her father, namely, a distance that would make him seem "dwarfed by trees or the sweep of a hill" (20), she ends, on the contrary, by focusing too closely. Entering her father's mind, Ginny identifies with her abuser and his psychology of abuse with such disturbing closeness that she appears trapped in this relationship. The epilogue, then, reinforces the sense that Larry's overpowering presence extends beyond his death. His legacy, the epilogue implies, continues to overshadow Ginny's life.

The overwhelming presence of Ginny's father in her analysis of her familial inheritance has its counterpart in the marginalization of matrilineal legacies. While she returns to her father several times throughout the epilogue and devotes several paragraphs to him, her mother only appears in one line. Furthermore, it is not her mother as a person that Ginny recalls but merely a sensory impression of her presence in the "exotic redolence of the dresses in [her] mother's closet" (369). Given her earlier attempts to find ways of connecting with her mother, this near-absence is conspicuous. Ginny seems to fall back into a state of amnesia regarding her female ancestors' silenced histories, which she had earlier begun to unearth. The epilogue, furthermore, strikes a sad note regarding Ginny's role as a mother. Having always jealously desired for Pam and Linda to be her daughters, once she does "inheri[t]" them, she seems to find little fulfilment in motherhood. Moreover, the text reveals that Ginny's five lost children continue to overshadow her life. She describes her imaginary encounters with her children in a disturbingly casual tone of voice: "I am reminded of Jess when I see one of my five children on the street, an eleven-year-old, a thirteen-year-old, a fifteen-year-old, a nineteen-year-old, a twenty-two-year-old. Jess left me some anger at that" (370). She seems to suffer from delusions re-

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33 The OED defines the term "obsidian" as follows: "A hard, dark, glass-like volcanic rock which is formed by the rapid solidification of (usually acidic) lava without crystallization and shows a conchoidal fracture; volcanic glass."

garding her lost children – even though the term "anger" suggests that she some-times recognizes the delusional nature of these moments. Finally, it is significant that Smiley has Ginny remain childless, even after her discovery of what caused her miscarriages. Motherhood, thus, figures as a contingent, troubled notion throughout the epilogue, both with regard to Ginny's mother and her own role as a (surrogate) mother. This bleak view of motherhood and the overpowering presence of Ginny's paternal legacy, which almost entirely eclipses her maternal legacy, further supports the idea that *A Thousand Acres* rewrites Shakespeare's male-centred tragedy to express a feminist vision of the tragic.

Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, then, is a feminist and postmodern trauma novel that rewrites *King Lear* by exploring silenced histories of female trauma, while de-centring the father and destabilizing grand patriarchal narratives. By inserting the theme of incestuous abuse into the core of the Lear plot, the novel signals its participation in the "cultural zeitgeist" of the late 1980s and early 90s, when "the United States was caught up in a sex panic of massive proportions" (Harkins x). *A Thousand Acres* responds to debates about incestuous sexual abuse, trauma, and memory recovery in complex ways: it engages with several key issues within psychological discourses on incest but pushes them further by negotiating them on several levels of the narrative and integrating them into an intricate web of motifs and themes that frame the Cooks' familial drama. The psychology of memory recovery, a highly contested terrain within the False Memory Debate, is embedded into dramatic structures of secrets and revelations, confessions and denials; the topos of incest as unspeakable forms the core of a broader gendered struggle for voice, agency, and power; and the incest victim's sense of pollution is connected to different literal and figurative meanings, constituting a multi-layered leitmotif. These motifs and themes form the pillars of the unfolding tragedy: the text suggests that both forgetting and remembering, keeping secret and talking about incest are deeply painful and destructive – physical and emotional pollution reaches so deep that it infuses every cell of Ginny's body.

Yet the core of what constitutes the tragic in the novel is the pervasive and persistent impact of the father and the disintegration of the sisters' relationship. In spite of their critical awareness of familial and communal dynamics of abuse and exploitation, the sisters' relationship is tragically destroyed by the complex after-effects of their traumatic past. The text calls attention to the intricate relationships between fellow victims, between victim and perpetrator, as well as between victim and unknowing or unbelieving family members. Through the powerful tension that it enacts between female self-development and a sense of inevitable doom, and between recurring patterns within contemporary trauma fiction and a feminist tragic vision, the text encourages us to reflect on the meanings of recovery. *A Thousand Acres* highlights the complexity of working through traumatic experiences that are firmly rooted in the family, meditating on the importance and the limitations of self-

knowledge and understanding as well as on the meanings of anger, acceptance, and forgiveness. Ultimately, the novel leaves us with a sense of the crucial value and meaning of the family. As Eagleton asserts, tragedy shows us what is most valuable precisely by confronting us with its loss: tragedy "needs meaning and value if only to violate them," or, put differently, the tragic "reminds us of what we cherish in the act of seeing it destroyed" (*Sweet Violence* 26). By making the family the site of tragedy, *A Thousand Acres* may thus, paradoxically, be read as a forceful affirmation of the family as exceedingly important and precious. In this light, Ginny's final act of treasuring the "gleaming obsidian shard" (371) of her father's transgression may be read as an attempt to recognize the persistent value her family holds for her, even in the face of trauma, disruption, and seemingly irreparable loss.

Chapter Six: Inheriting Trauma

Family Bonds and Memory Ties

in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*

> "The dead leave us starving with mouths full of love."
> (ANNE MICHAELS, "MEMORIAM," *THE WEIGHT OF ORANGES*)

> "It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener which makes possible something like a repossessing of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth."
> (DORI LAUB, "AN EVENT WITHOUT A WITNESS")

"During the Second World War, countless manuscripts – diaries, memoirs, eyewitness accounts – were lost or destroyed. Some of these narratives were deliberately hidden – buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors – by those who did not live to retrieve them" (x). With these opening sentences, the preface to Anne Michaels's 1996 novel *Fugitive Pieces* immediately embeds the text in discourses of testimony, raising questions about acts of bearing witness. Is it possible to bear witness to one's own traumatic experiences? How do we remember, narrate, and share trauma? Can we act as witnesses for a witness who can no longer speak or write his or her testimony – and is it our ethical duty to do so? *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels's debut novel, is a Holocaust and trauma novel that explores, through the perspective of two autodiegetic narrators, the complexities of experiencing and remembering, of inheriting and transmitting trauma. The Jewish poet Jakob Beer, a survivor who lost his parents and sister in Poland during World War II when he was seven, narrates the first part of the novel, relating his life-story from his childhood spent in hiding to his experiences of exile and his gradual development as a poet. The second part of the novel is narrated by Ben, a survivors' child, whose child-

hood is haunted by his parents' experiences in the concentration camps and by the death of his siblings. In the light of contemporary psychological perspectives, Jakob can be read as a victim of "traumatic grief," while Ben's story participates in discourses about the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Fugitive Pieces has been discussed extensively in terms of its relation to Holocaust literature as well as its politics of place and poetics of landscape. The protagonists' relationship to the larger narrative of Jewish history, including narratives of dislocation and exile, is a central critical concern. However, other key aspects of the novel have so far not received sufficient attention; indeed, the overall direction of the criticism on *Fugitive Pieces* is symptomatic of literary trauma studies' tendency to privilege the historical over the private and familial. I suggest, then, that even though the novel is concerned with the historical and the political, its enactment of processes of remembering, narrating, and witnessing foregrounds the personal and the familial.

The novel revolves around ruptured families and the protagonists' desperate attempts to (re-)create family ties – ties that transcend both the boundaries of biological kinship and the boundary between the living and the dead. In different ways, both Jakob and Ben are haunted by the dead and by the unsettling silences surrounding their deaths, yet it is precisely this feeling of being haunted that drives their need to connect with the dead. I read *Fugitive Pieces*, then, as a novel about traumatic loss and mourning that puts particular emphasis on connectedness: the protagonists display a pressing need for what I call "intermemory," a sense of intersubjective connectedness achieved through empathetic sharing and mutual assimilation of memories, as well as for "transmemory," which builds, through transmitted or imagined memories, a sense of connectedness with someone who is dead. The main sites where processes of intermemory and transmemory are enacted in *Fugitive Pieces* are family relationships, relationships with surrogate parents, and love relationships – with the latter, perhaps, being represented somewhat sentimentally. Ultimately, the novel privileges memory over history. I argue that for both Jakob and Ben, history essentially functions as an instrument that helps them survive their personal struggles with memory. At the same time, remembering emerges as an ethical duty owed to one's intimates, whether dead, living, or not yet born, and this duty is throughout the novel performed through various acts of writing. *Fugitive Pieces* is a highly self-reflexive novel that emphasizes the importance of forging intersubjective connections in the face of traumatic loss and mourning, through bonds of family and love, memory and writing.

Haunted by the Dead: Traumatic Grief and Incestuous Fantasies

Like Godwin's Mandeville, Jakob loses both his parents to murders that are part of larger, genocidal structures of violence – in this case, the Nazis' attempted extermination of Jewish people. Michaels's representation of this core childhood trauma, however, puts even more emphasis than Godwin's on the impossibility of witnessing for the child who is present at the site of his parents' death. At the moment of murder, Jakob is in his "hiding place," "behind the wallpaper in the cupboard" (6), which allows him to hear, though not see, what happens:

Since those minutes inside the wall, I've imagined that the dead lose every sense except hearing.

The burst door. Wood ripped from hinges, cracking like ice under the shouts. Noises never heard before, torn from my father's mouth. Then silence. My mother had been sewing a button on my shirt. She kept her buttons in a chipped saucer. I heard the rim of the saucer in circles on the floor. I heard the spray of buttons, little white teeth. (7)

This traumatic moment is represented as an experience of death-in-life that Jakob – in spite of his fragmentary aural recollections – perceives as a missed experience. It is a moment of unfamiliar and disturbing sounds that are, paradoxically, intensified and simultaneously rendered meaningless by his suffocating blindness. In retrospect, Jakob writes: "I did not witness the most important events of my life. My deepest story must be told by a blind man, a prisoner of sound. From behind a wall, from underground" (17).

These passages literalize Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as an event that cannot be fully witnessed by the one who experiences it.[1] As Caruth writes in *Unclaimed Experience*, what essentially characterizes trauma is "its very unassimilated nature," that is, "the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance" (4). Godwin's *Mandeville* and Shelley's *Mathilda*, as mentioned previously, also represent the moment of trauma as too emotionally overwhelming to be "known" as it is experienced. *Fugitive Pieces*, however, pushes the trauma victim's crisis of witnessing and the idea of "unclaimed experience" even further. When Jakob leaves his hiding place, he is confronted with the sight of his parents' bodies, drenched in blood – the relentless visual evidence of their death. Fleeing from the sight of horror as quickly as possible, Jakob only realizes his main failure as a witness with spatial and temporal distance: "Then I felt the worst shame of my life: I was pierced

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1 Anne Whitehead similarly emphasizes that this passage of the novel "encapsulates Caruth's notion of 'missed' or 'unclaimed' experience" (*Trauma Fiction* 48).

with hunger. And suddenly I realized, my throat aching with sound – Bella" (9). The belatedness of his realization that he momentarily forgot about his older sister Bella, because he neither saw nor heard what happened to her, marks a moment of shock and profound shame. As Adrienne Kertzer writes, Jakob's trauma is "occasioned by what he does not see, and more significantly, by what he does not hear" (205). It is this visual and aural void around Bella's disappearance that turns out to be particularly traumatic for Jakob – even more traumatic than the partial witnessing of his parents' death. Jakob's loss of his sister takes to an extreme the Caruthian idea of "unclaimed experience," of the impossibility of witnessing, which is, to a varying degree, inherent in the structures of traumatic experience.

Fugitive Pieces depicts Jakob's reaction to these traumatic losses in terms of a complex pathology of mourning. One of the most striking aspects of his immediate response to his family's murder is his sense of the dead being literally within his body:

I knew suddenly my mother was inside me. Moving along sinews, under my skin the way she used to move through the house at night, putting things away, putting things in order. She was stopping to say goodbye, and was caught, in such pain, wanting to rise, wanting to stay. It was my responsibility to release her, a sin to keep her from ascending. I tore at my clothes, my hair. She was gone. (8)

Jakob's "bodily vision" is centred on the act of letting go; however, this moment of feeling the body of his mother within his body is only the first of a number of such experiences. Jakob writes: "Through days and nights I sped from my father and my mother. […] They were yanked right through my scalp" (13). His reaction to his parents' death resembles the psychological response to loss that Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok call "incorporation," which involves "fantasies" based on the act of "[i]ntroducing all or part of a love object or a thing into one's own body, possessing, expelling or alternatively acquiring, keeping, losing it" (126). As Abraham and Torok emphasize, "incorporation" is most common when the loss is particularly difficult to acknowledge, and it is "inexpressible mourning" that tends to "erect[] a secret tomb inside the subject" (130-31). As the passages above illustrate, Michaels draws on the notion of incorporation; she has Jakob perceive his body as a "secret tomb" for his parents. Michaels represents incorporation as a complex psychological mechanism, depicting Jakob as feeling torn between the desire to keep his parents in this bodily crypt and the urge to expel them.

Moreover, while Jakob's fantasies of incorporation betray the desire to *possess* his parents, he repeatedly implies that he feels *possessed by* them. Thus, Michaels constructs the pathological mourner as feeling a profound ambivalence towards his own acts of incorporation, and she also challenges issues of agency: the text implies that Jakob's fantasies are so real to him that he cannot see he is the agent of these

fantasies. He is blind to his refusal, or inability, to mourn – for this is what incorporation essentially signifies: "[I]n order not to have to 'swallow' a loss, we fantasize swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing" (Abraham and Torok 126). The act of swallowing the dead creates the illusion of presence, the sense that the lost are not entirely lost, and it is this illusion that Jakob needs because acknowledging the finality and irrevocability of his losses would be unbearable.

The pathology of mourning that Jakob displays also needs to be seen in connection with the traumatic nature of his parents' deaths. In contemporary traumatic stress studies, the notion of "traumatic grief," also called "complicated grief," has received increasing attention; it denotes an individual's suffering from the impact of both trauma and loss, from posttraumatic symptoms as well as persistent symptoms of unresolved grieving in response to "the loss of a loved one under traumatic circumstances" (Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger 5). The death of Jakob's parents involves "elements of the grotesque, violence, or suddenness," which, as B. Hudnall Stamm stresses, expose the bereaved to an increased risk of developing pathological forms of grief (15).[2] An additional factor that tends to increase the traumatic nature of witnessing a violent, sudden death is seeing the deceased "in a disfigured state" (Stamm 15).[3] Michaels has Jakob record the deeply traumatic moment of seeing his parents' disfigured bodies: "The soul leaves the body instantly, as if it can hardly wait to be free: my mother's face was not her own. My father was twisted with falling. Two shapes in the flesh-heap, his hands" (7). This moment is dominated for Jakob by "horror" even more than "terror," in Adriana Cavarero's sense of the terms. Cavarero associates terror with trembling, fear, panic, and the instinctive reaction of flight, while she primarily relates horror to deep repugnance, a state of frozenness, and paralysis (*Horrorism* 4-9). In *Mandeville*, the main emphasis in the description of the massacre is on the omnipresent threat of death and how Mandeville "was the only one that escaped" (36). In *Fugitive Pieces*, the emphasis shifts to horror. Fear for his life and the instinct to take flight (i.e., the reactions of terror) come second; Jakob's immediate response is paralysis: he stares at his parents' bodies, which have been cruelly stripped of their uniqueness and reduced to a dehu-

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2   E. Rynearson and Russell Geoffrey also emphasize the specificities of bereavement after homicide, describing the key characteristics of this kind of dying as follows: "(a) The dying is violent, a forceful, suddenly traumatic act; (b) the dying is a violation, a transgressive act; and (c) the dying is a volition, an intentional act" (112).

3   See also the definition of "childhood traumatic grief" (CTG) by Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger: "When children lose a loved one to an unexpected, violent, or gory death, or when they are exposed to graphic details such as blood, mutilated or missing body parts, or being the first person to discover the body of the loved one, they may develop a condition known as childhood traumatic grief" (15).

manized "flesh-heap," drenched in blood. Cavarero describes the essence of such scenes of horror as follows: "The body undone (blown apart, torn to pieces) loses its individuality. The violence that dismembers it offends the ontological dignity that the human figure possesses and renders it unwatchable" (9). Horror is not merely a reaction to "the end of a human life"; it is a reaction to "the human condition itself," the essential human vulnerability that shockingly manifests itself in "the spectacle of disfigurement" (8).[4] Scenes of death producing horror involve severe *violence* and severe *violation*; they strike to the core of what trauma is about.

Fugitive Pieces explores, then, how the sudden and deeply traumatic loss of his parents affects Jakob. He not only displays a number of posttraumatic symptoms – such as repeated nightmares of the dead rising and waiting to turn human again (93) – but he also cannot work through his grief; his intense experiences of horror and terror inhibit him. Jakob identifies "fear" as the emotion that rules his life (19) and seems to feel "'stuck' on the traumatic circumstances of the death," a common reaction of children suffering from traumatic grief (Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger 19). In fact, Jakob acknowledges that he has become fixated on the moment of death: "I couldn't turn my anguish from the precise moment of death. I was focused on that historical split second: the tableau of the haunting trinity – perpetrator, victim, witness" (140). Jakob's fixation on this "historical split second" is an important parallel to Mandeville, whose worldview remains dominated by the deeply traumatic scene of the massacre in Ireland: from childhood, Mandeville compulsively believes that everything is determined by the dynamics between victims and perpetrators. An essential difference between the two narrators is, however, that Mandeville becomes obsessed with the figure of the perpetrator (albeit not the actual perpetrator), while Jakob becomes fixated on the victim, especially his sister Bella.

Indeed, his response to the trauma of losing Bella is especially pathological. Jakob develops an intense and extended fantasy of incorporation about her, one that lacks the profound emotional ambivalence that characterizes his incorporations of his parents: while he claims he tried to escape from his parents, he indulges in the fantasy of carrying Bella with him – or rather, *inside* of him – into his exile in Greece with his rescuer, the archaeologist Athos: "But Bella clung. We were Russian dolls. I inside Athos, Bella inside me" (14). Once again, Jakob reverses agency, identifying Bella as the one who does the clinging, failing to see his fantasy and his

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4   Cavarero proposes the term "horrorism" to call attention to the pervasive presence not just of terror but also horror in contemporary forms of violence: "This coinage, apart from the obvious assonance with the word 'terrorism', is meant to emphasize the peculiarly repugnant character of so many scenes of contemporary violence, which locates them in the realm of horror rather than that of terror" (*Horrorism* 29). For Cavarero, the politics of this term are also based on the idea that "ideally all the innocent victims, instead of their killers, ought to determine the name" (3).

own act of clinging. With Bella, unlike with his mother, he does not express a need to get her out of his body; he lets her cling the whole way to his new exilic home, the Greek island Zakynthos.

It is only after arriving on Zakynthos that Jakob finally expels her, paralleling the way Athos "plucked" him "[f]rom out of his trousers" (14). However, he "excorporates" Bella not to release her but to turn her into a ghost that secretly lives with him:

Athos didn't understand, as I hesitated in the doorway, that I was letting Bella enter ahead of me, making sure she was not left behind. I paused when I ate, singing a silent incantation: A bite for me, a bite for you, an extra bite for Bella. […] I felt her presence everywhere, in daylight, in rooms I knew weren't empty. I felt her touch on my back, my shoulders, my hair. (31)

Like his fantasies of incorporation, his perception of Bella's ghost signifies his refusal to let her go, to proceed with the work of mourning. Her persistent invisible presence can be read as another fantasy originating from his need to feel that he has not entirely lost her – even if he is "half comforted, half terrified" by feeling such a "thin wall between the living and the dead" (31). This key passage also revolves around a central paradox: while Jakob thinks of Bella as dead, he simultaneously constructs her as alive by imagining that she still needs to eat and still has the ability to speak and sing and even touch him. He imagines that she can reach out and tear the "gossamer wall" between them (31).[5] The ghost, then, represents Jakob's desire to make Bella live on through and after her death.

Furthermore, Bella's ghost is symptomatic of Jakob's more general psychology of grieving. It is telling that not only his incorporation fantasies but also his fixation on the moment of death are strongest in relation to his sister: "Night after night, I endlessly follow Bella's path from the front door of my parents' house. In order to give her death a place. This becomes my task. I collect facts, trying to reconstruct events in minute detail" (139). This passage indicates one of the reasons why Jakob becomes increasingly fixated on his dead sister. He is obsessed with his lack of knowledge about her death; the profound shame about his failure of witnessing, his "fail[ing] to see Bella had disappeared" (111), haunts him and compels him to re-

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5   Jakob's imaginary sharing of food with his dead sister is strikingly reminiscent of an example Abraham and Torok use in "Mourning or Melancholia": "We are reminded here of the unforgettable sight of a man, seated alone at a table in a restaurant, ordering two different meals simultaneously; he ate them both as if he were being accompanied by someone else" (129). This passage and the novel's use of the trope of incorporation fantasies can be read as an indication that Michaels might be drawing directly on this chapter by Abraham and Torok.

construct her death "in minute detail." The text suggests that, in relation to his sister, Jakob suffers from both a trauma of loss and a trauma of guilt.

Yet the novel hints at a second reason for Jakob's fixation on Bella, implying that he develops an incestuous attraction towards her. One pertinent feature of Jakob's narrative in this respect is the sensual, if not erotic, imagery he repeatedly uses to talk about Bella. A recurrent focal point in his descriptions is her hair, her "magnificent black hair like black syrup, thick and luxurious" (6), which is "[s]hiny as black lacquer under the lamplight" (106). His memories and dreams revolve around a few vivid sensual images of her hair and her dress, suggesting that he is obsessed with her beauty. Most strikingly, when Jakob imagines the encounter between Bella and the soldiers who killed his parents, he ruminates about the soldiers' reactions to her beauty:

[W]hat did they make of her hair, did they lift its mass from her shoulders, assess its value; did they touch her perfect eyebrows and skin? What did they make of Bella's hair as they cut it – did they feel humiliated as they fingered its magnificence, as they hung it on the line to dry? (106)

It is telling that Jakob gets caught up in imagining their reactions to Bella's body and her beauty – rather than thinking about Bella's feelings and thoughts during that horrific moment. Yet the meaning of Bella's hair in this scene is evidently overdetermined. The cutting of hair symbolizes death as well as "the cutting of life, power and strength" and traditionally occurs in combination with rituals of sacrifice (Jobes 710). In this light, Jakob's imagining of how the soldiers cut and dry Bella's hair expresses the vision of a ritualistic preparation for death. Nevertheless, his focus on its "magnificence" and on physical touch suggests that his perspective here is less that of an empathetic brother than of a male subject visualizing a sexualized female body.

Moreover, it is revealing that Bella figures prominently in the chapter dedicated to Jakob's relationship with Alex, a lively young librarian. In this chapter, the novel depicts a pattern of emotion that both resembles and inverts one from Godwin's *Mandeville*. For Mandeville, it is his sister Henrietta's attachment to Clifford that causes his incestuous feelings to reach full force; for Jakob, it is his first sexual relationship that causes his obsession with Bella to erupt with particular power. In both cases, the emergence of a lover or potential spouse for one of the siblings is perceived as a threat to the brother-sister relationship. While Mandeville reacts with raging jealousy, Jakob fears that his relationship with Alex will create a barrier for Bella, his "shadow-bride" (Hillger 36), in her attempts to reach him: "Bella, who is nowhere to be found, is looking for me. How will she ever find me here, beside this strange woman?" (126). Hence, while Jakob's incestuous feelings are, on the whole, depicted in more subtle ways than Mandeville's, which manifest themselves

in compulsive descriptions of his jealousy and fantasies of revenge, the imagery Jakob uses to describe Bella's body and the psychology of his first relationship are powerful indicators that his pathological mourning involves an incestuous attachment.

Both *Mandeville* and *Fugitive Pieces* show how parental loss creates the conditions for the male protagonists to channel their desires towards their sisters. In both cases, social isolation feeds into this process of channelling. In Mandeville's case, one source of his incestuous attachment seems to be that Henrietta is his only surviving close relative. Michaels's novel offers an interesting variant on this topos, depicting how Jakob *turns* Bella into the only other surviving family member through his fantasies. In different ways, both novels signal that the trauma victim's incestuous attachment works as a coping mechanism or survival strategy,[6] in which the agony of loss is transformed into romantic dreams. The last sentences of Jakob's narrative reinforce this reading: "My blood pounded in my chest and I knew my heart's strength would soon be exhausted. I saved myself without thinking. I grasped the two syllables closest to me, and replaced my heartbeat with your name" (195). Through the metaphoric image of Jakob substituting his "heartbeat" with the two-syllable sound of his sister's name at a moment of intense agony, the novel sets up an explicit connection between the narrator's psychology of incestuous desire and his struggle for survival. The ending of Jakob's narrative also calls attention to a core issue in the psychology of haunting, suggesting that, ultimately, Jakob is not the passive recipient but the active agent of his persistent sense of feeling the presence of the dead.[7] In this way, both his obsession with Bella and his sense of being haunted figure as key symptoms of his pathology of mourning.

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6   A similar pattern of traumatic loss and brother-sister incest can also be found in Ian McEwan's novel *The Cement Garden*. The story is narrated by 15-year old Jack, who records how he and his three siblings tried to keep their mother's death, which happens shortly after their father's death, a secret, hiding the mother's corpse in the cellar in leftover cement. Soon after the parents' deaths, an incestuous relationship begins to develop between Jack and his 17-year old sister Julie. Similar to *Fugitive Pieces*, McEwan's novel allows us to read the siblings' incestuous relationship in connection with their trauma of parental loss and their struggle for survival. Incest also emerges as a symptom of the teenagers' desperate attempts to reshape the family.

7   In this sense, *Fugitive Pieces* differs significantly from the approach to ghosts that characterizes Toni Morrison's famous trauma and slavery novel *Beloved*. While *Fugitive Pieces* allows us to read the ghost of Bella as existing only in Jakob's mind, *Beloved*, which constitutes a powerful reappropriation and refiguration of the Gothic, constructs the ghost of Beloved as unequivocally real within the diegesis of the novel, staging encounters between the ghost and several of the protagonists.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL LEGACIES OF TRAUMA

The haunting impact of silence and the crisis of witnessing, which play a central role in Jakob's experience of traumatic loss, are refigured in different ways in the childhood experiences of the second narrator, Ben, a child of survivors. Ben's family life is dominated by oppressive silence:

There was no energy in my family, not even the fervour of an elegy. Instead, our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements and we were forever whispering in a strong wind. My parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking. (204)

Ben perceives that his parents, who were liberated from the camp four years before his birth, are haunted by an "aura of mortality" (204), but the "code of silence" (223), which his father in particular clings to, makes it exceedingly difficult for Ben to understand his parents' enigmatic patterns of behaviour, such as his father's compulsive eating habits and his mother's excessive anxiety about him. As Robert Eaglestone writes, "the 'second generation' dynamic involves bringing to light the specific and often untold stories of the parents who survived, and (as it were) their continuing 'symptoms' of survival" (19).[8] In Ben's case, the stories of his family's past remain untold, and this persistent silence constitutes one of his parents' main "'symptoms' of survival."

Ben's complex relation to his parents' traumatic past can be read in terms of what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory":[9]

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8   The novel's focus not only on a child survivor but also on a child of survivors may be seen as part of a general shift in cultural discourses. Michael Rothberg maintains that as both the Holocaust and decolonialization become more distant temporally, "questions of generational transmission – or lack of transmission – take centre stage. In order to address this transformation in individual and collective memory, artists and scholars engaged with the Holocaust in particular have in recent decades been exploring second- and third-generation stories and have sought aesthetic forms and analytic categories for these new memorial phenomena" (*Multidirectional* 276).

9   As Hirsch emphasizes in "The Generation of Postmemory," the – rather controversial – idea that "descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory*" has been discussed by various critics with different terminologies (105-06). Among others, Hirsch refers to Young's "received history," Zeitlin's "vicarious witnessing," and Raczymow's "mémoire trouée."

In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. [...] Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (*Family Frames* 22)

Resonating with Hirsch's conceptualization of postmemory, Ben's description of his childhood conveys how he feels oppressed by a past he did not witness and fails to understand, a past that is, paradoxically, distant and present at the same time. Being persistently excluded from his parents' traumatic past, the construction of some kind of "postmemory" is rendered exceedingly difficult; the unknown past, whose enigmatic traces make him feel as if he was "born into absence" (233) and make his own story (in Hirsch's terms) seem "belated" and "evacuated,"[10] remains enwrapped in silence.

Ben's father's patterns of behaviour are, however, characterized by a profound tension between his refusal to share his past with his son and a forceful imperative to bear witness, notably, by urging his son to look at photos in books and magazines that testify to the horrors of the past. This "discipline of looking," in combination with his father's reign of silence, which is only occasionally broken by decontextualized verbal fragments such as "kapos, haftlings, 'Ess Ess'" (217),[11] is deeply disturbing for Ben: "Images brand you, burn the surrounding skin, leave their black mark" (218). Ben is forced to bear witness, but his act of witnessing is one that lacks understanding; his father forces Ben to see – with a "ferocity that frightened" him (219) – but keeps him in the darkness of unknowing.

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10 Hirsch contextualizes the idea of "belatedness" inherent in the term "postmemory" with other prominent terms in our "era of 'posts,'" for example, "'post-secular,' 'post-human,' 'postcolony,' 'post-white.'" She emphasizes that "[p]ostmemory shares the layering of these other 'posts' and their belatedness […]. Like them, it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture" ("Generation" 106). Hence, as Hirsch's discussion implies, "postmemory" is a contentious term for a particularly contingent form or structure of remembering.

11 The spelling "Ess Ess" for "SS" signals Ben's lack of understanding and also exemplifies that these disjointed references have subjective, decontextualized meanings for Ben. The words "Ess Ess" point to Ben's distressing memory of being forced by his father, who suffers from pathological eating habits, to eat a rotten apple that he had thrown away. As Barbara Estrin writes, the text here stages "the memory of force-feeding as inverse response to food deprivation during the war" (286).

Michaels deepens her exploration of visual versus verbal testimony by making a family photograph a crucial nexus in Ben's life-story. Two months after his parents' death, Ben finds a photograph showing his parents with two small children. Only then does he find out that he had a brother and sister, Hannah and Paul, who did not survive. It is this photograph that finally disrupts the familial "code of silence," revealing the family's darkest secret. Michaels's use of a photograph to convey the unspeakable secret is pertinent; it resonates with Hirsch's discussion of family photographs as playing a vital role in constructions and self-constructions of the family. According to Hirsch, family photographs traditionally function as "an instrument of its togetherness" (*Family Frames* 7) but also reveal the family's "contingency," its threatened position "in the postmodern moment as fractured and subject to conflicting historical and ideological scripts" (10, 13). For Ben, this specific photograph embodies the core of his family's rupture: "We think of photographs as the captured past. But some photographs are like DNA. In them you can read your whole future" (251-52). The meaning of this photograph transcends the function of "captur[ing]" the past; rather, it functions as the long-deferred signifier that Ben lacked for understanding his family. According to Hirsch, photographs are characterized by a "simultaneous presence of death and life," and photography tends to "bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant" (*Family Frames* 19-20). Michaels's depiction of the family photograph literalizes this idea: the photo brings to life his dead siblings, who had hovered over his own childhood as a ghostlike, ungraspable presence that manifested in his sense of "absence," and it simultaneously evokes the irretrievability of their death. At the same time, the photograph brings to life his dead parents' past and painfully evokes the sense of an irretrievably lost future.

The novel further underscores the powerful impact of this family photograph by making it the catalyst of a double revelation. When Ben shows the photograph to his wife Naomi, she confesses that she has known the family secret for a long time, albeit without realizing it was a secret for Ben: "My parents, experts in secrets, kept the most important one from me to their last breath. Yet, in a masterful stroke, my mother decided to tell Naomi. The daughter she longed for" (252). For Ben, the painful sense of being excluded is exacerbated by the discovery that his wife was allowed a kind of intimacy with his parents that they denied him. Ultimately, the text constructs the parents' traumatic past, and especially the traumatic loss of their first two children, as the barrier that relentlessly distances them from their third child – whom they did not name, hoping that he might thereby be spared death: "Ben, not from Benjamin, but merely 'ben' – the Hebrew word for son" (253). This refusal to name may be read as symptomatic of the parents' larger failure to fully recognize and engage with their third child. However, through its biblical resonances, the name acquires additional layers of meaning: Rachel, the biblical Benjamin's mother, first named him "Ben-Oni," which means "son of my suffering"

(Oded and Hirschberg 354).[12] Hence, Ben's parents' decision to name their son "Ben" could also be read as symbolizing their attempt to protect their youngest child, to spare him not just from death but also from pain and suffering – in fact, their refusal to share their stories may be part of this urge to protect.

In spite of these protective gestures and omissions, Ben's story dramatizes how powerfully a child can be affected by his or her parents' traumatic past. It forcefully evokes the idea of intergenerational transmission of trauma, which is the notion that "massive trauma shapes the internal representation of reality of several generations, becoming an unconscious organizing principle passed on by parents and internalized by their children" (Danieli, "Conclusions" 670). Studies of second-generation trauma suggest that parents' traumatic experiences sometimes impair their parenting abilities. These studies also note that harm is caused by dysfunctional "patterns of communication" about the traumatic past, ranging "from silence to overdisclosure" (Dekel and Goldblatt 285).[13] Ben's narrative highlights both the harmful impact of silence and the idea of internalization. Just how powerfully Ben is affected by his parents' traumatic past becomes clear when he reflects on his future child:

Naomi says a child doesn't have to inherit fear. But who can separate fear from the body? My parents' past is mine molecularly. Naomi thinks she can stop the soldier who spat in my father's mouth from spitting into mine, through my father's blood. I want to believe she can rinse the fear from my mouth. But I imagine Naomi has a child and I can't stop the writing on its forehead as the child grows. (280)

This passage encapsulates Ben's anxiety about the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Ben implies that his father's traumas were passed on to him through the body – and in this sense, it did not matter much whether his parents talked or refused to talk about the past. He speculates that the names of his dead siblings might not actually have been enough to fill "the silence of [his] parents' apartment" (280). The text implies, however, that precisely this idea increases Ben's fear regarding his own children: through its close association with the physical, the intergenerational transmission of trauma emerges as a profound threat, as a biological phenomenon that entirely escapes his control, no matter what approach to the family's past he

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12 "Ben-Oni" can also mean "son of my vigor," but "son of my suffering" is the meaning that is usually referred to in the context of Rachel and Benjamin, "as her labor was hard and she died in childbirth" (Oded and Hirschberg 354).

13 Rachel Dekel and Hadass Goldblatt outline the problems of parent-child attachment in the context of trauma as follows: "Fathers who have difficulty regulating distance/ closeness from their traumatic memories might also find it hard to properly regulate distance/ closeness from their children" (285). On intergenerational transmission in the context of the Holocaust, see for example Miri Scharf's "Long-Term Effects of Trauma."

will choose with his own children. In this sense, the trope of haunting takes on a particularly dark shape in Ben's narrative. While Jakob's narrative revolves around the idea that the living feel haunted by the dead and experience this haunting in the body, Ben's narrative links the theme of haunting to the disturbing idea that, inevitably, parents physically contaminate their children with the residue of trauma.

The novel's approach to second-generation trauma also needs to be read in the context of contemporary traumatic stress studies. Interestingly, Michaels's novel appeared two years before the publication of the *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*. The handbook's editor, Yael Danieli, describes the collection of essays as "represent[ing] a pioneering effort to portray a comprehensive picture of the 'state of the art' in the study of multigenerational transmission of trauma" and as offering an overview of this "emerging field" in traumatic stress studies ("Conclusions" 669). The book forcefully claims that the phenomenon of intergenerational transmission has been proven to exist in a number of different contexts and calls for more research in the field. At the same time, the preface describes the handbook as a "profoundly disturbing book," presenting disconcerting insights: "It is bad enough to see images of children victimized today; that the same images may shape the lives of generations to come, sometimes unconsciously, often by design, is even harder to comprehend, and accept" (xvi). Part X of the handbook also presents initial findings of biological research into the intergenerational transmission of trauma, suggesting that survivors' children may both "*psychologically* and *biologically*" display an increased vulnerability to trauma and that "the 'intergenerational syndrome' may have a phenomenology and *neurobiology* similar to that of PTSD" ("Conclusions" 670).

This handbook, a milestone publication in the emerging field of the intergenerational transmission of trauma, is an important point of reference for understanding crucial aspects of *Fugitive Pieces*. Through Ben's narrative, Michaels evokes an area of trauma research that was just beginning to establish itself at the time she was writing and foregrounds a disturbing phenomenon that, as Danieli stresses, had long been treated as "secondary" ("Preface" xvi). In addition, by evoking the idea that intergenerational transmission of trauma happens not only through psychological but also through biological and genetic transfer mechanisms, the novel resonates with the tentative findings of a particularly new area within this emerging field – and these findings can also be said to represent some of the most disturbing claims of contemporary traumatic stress studies. It is noteworthy that Michaels's novel seems to be directly influenced by these psychiatric discourses.

Yet what strikes me as even more significant is that this novel, which examines the need of the living to feel connected to the dead (a key issue I will discuss in detail later in this chapter), also highlights unwanted and threatening connections with the dead. Ben's fear of passing on his parents' and his own traumas to his children arises from his anxiety about, to speak with Danieli, the "multigenerational legacies

of trauma" – an anxiety that haunts the reader throughout the text in, perhaps, more disturbing ways than Bella's ghost. The notion of physical transmission and contamination that unsettles Ben also resonates with an earlier passage in Jakob's narrative: "When the prisoners were forced to dig up the mass graves, the dead entered them through their pores and were carried through their bloodstreams to their brains and hearts. And through their blood into another generation" (52). Hence, Michaels has both her autodiegetic narrators express the fear that the dead can physically enter the living against their will. The text, then, draws on a contentious idea debated in trauma studies – an idea that more recent studies have struggled to corroborate empirically[14] – and represents it through graphic and concrete bodily imagery. This profound anxiety about the dead as a source of contamination needs to be kept in mind as a dark and forceful counterpoint to Jakob's fantasies of incorporation and, more generally, to both Jakob's and Ben's attempts to find ways of connecting with the dead.

HISTORICAL AWARENESS AND THE PRIMACY OF THE FAMILY

In spite of this anxiety about how the dead and their traumas impact the living, both Jakob and Ben, as well as several other characters in *Fugitive Pieces*, are concerned with finding ways of establishing meaningful connections to the dead. Jakob's rescuer Athos and Ben's wife Naomi are particularly prominent figures in this context, both of them having a special affinity for rituals of mourning. Athos devotedly teaches Jakob a general philosophy of remembering rather than forgetting, reminding him every day: "It is your future you are remembering" (21). Athos also instructs him in the art of memorial rites for the dead. Before Athos and Jakob leave Zakynthos, they perform a "ceremony" for Jakob's parents and for "the Jews of Crete, for all who have no one to recall their names" (75); they throw flowers into the sea and pour in water for the dead to drink. Athos underscores the importance of

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14 In their overview article, Dekel and Goldblatt assert that "[w]hereas intergenerational transmission of different kinds of trauma is presently well established in both the empirical and clinical literature, [...] the mechanisms by which trauma and/or its symptoms are transmitted are scarcely known and lack empirical base" (284). In addition to psychodynamic mechanisms of transmission, such as "projection" and "identification," the authors also mention the possibility of genetic forms of transmission, but with considerable hedging: "Recent research has introduced a new perspective *suggesting the likelihood* that PTSD is transferred genetically and is not solely a learned and/or psychological response to severe life-endangering experiences" (284, emphasis added).

the ceremony by insisting that "good deeds help the moral progress of the dead" (75) and by affirming that the dead may respond to the living through a "message" sent "on the wings of the birds" (76). The motif of flowers for the dead reappears again with Naomi, whose personal ritual of mourning consists of regular visits to Ben's parents' graves in order to bring them flowers.[15] Beyond that, Naomi believes: "The only thing you can do for the dead is to sing to them" (241). She has a special fascination with the ghetto lullabies that were made up by mothers when their children died – lullabies intended to be passed on to future generations.

Especially for Athos, rituals of mourning have both a personal and a general dimension, addressing loved ones and entire generations. This concern with a general philosophy of interconnectedness is a feature of the novel that has received considerable critical attention, often in connection with the novel's Jewish legacy. Meredith Criglington emphasizes that *Fugitive Pieces* draws on "Jewish conceptions of time and remembrance" as well as the "Hebrew tradition [that] encourages accountability to all our human ancestors as well as our descendants" ("The City" 146). As Annick Hillger asserts, the novel endorses a notion of "history which keeps the past open in memory of the future" (29);[16] accordingly, Jakob regards his memoirs as part of a long Jewish tradition of commemorating a collective past (see Bölling 188). Other critics focus on the novel's emphasis on interconnectedness in relation to issues of place: Dalia Kandiyoti maintains that, in *Fugitive Pieces*, places of exile open up possibilities of "partial belonging" for survivors. She argues that the survivor's consciousness is structured along a dynamics of "superimposition" with regard to place and time, allowing the survivor to place himself within a "multidimensional and relational geography" (316).[17] According to Coral Howells, it is this ability to relate to different times and places, to "mov[e] between cultures, languages and countries, never settling everywhere," that allows us to read Jakob as a "nomadic subject" (110).

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15 The motif of flowers is taken up again in Michaels's second novel *The Winter Vault.* After her mother's death, Jean keeps tending her mother's garden, and her passion for botany and plants becomes an extended homage to her mother and a ritual of mourning that gives her the sense of remaining connected to her: "Then planting became a vocation. Suddenly I felt I could keep on loving her, that I could keep telling her things this way" (59).

16 Hillger's article provides a particularly well-founded discussion of the novel's Jewish legacies, relating *Fugitive Pieces* to Benjamin's notion of history, to kabbalism, as well as to the concept of "messianic time" (41).

17 Kandiyoti reads the novel as consciously departing from the notions of "absence-of-place" and "place-as-absence" that are common in Holocaust writing and as mapping out a decidedly "*topophilic* outlook" (302, 319).

Hence, many critics emphasize the ways in which the novel's protagonists, especially Jakob, display a powerful capacity for connecting with larger communities, with different times and places, with dead and future generations. To some extent, the novel may even be said to gesture towards the idea of "multidirectional memory" that Michael Rothberg considers crucial to cultural practices of remembering the Holocaust; he calls attention to the "dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance" (*Multidirectional* 11). Jakob's and Athos's roaming back and forth along the temporal axis of history and geology could be read as an example of what Rothberg calls a "multidirectional linkage of different eras and different histories" (278).[18] Jakob's narrative is indeed structured according to his physical dislocations, with most of the chapter divisions corresponding to his various dwelling places: Biskupin, Zakynthos, Athens, Toronto, and Idhra. Through Jakob, but also through Ben, the novel weaves a complex web that links these different places and their histories. While the protagonists' historical awareness and their sense of connections that reach across time and place are important aspects of the text's approach to history, memory, and identity, I argue that *Fugitive Pieces* anchors this philosophy of "multidirectional" interconnectedness to the personal and the familial. I contend that Jakob, especially, uses history as a means of coping with memory, that is, he focuses on the collective past in an effort to endure his personal traumatic past.

During his time in hiding on Zakynthos, Jakob eagerly shares Athos's passion for history and archaeology in an attempt to escape or be distracted from his traumatic past. Jakob explains his passion for prehistoric objects as follows: "To go back a year or two was impossible, absurd. To go back millennia – ah! That was . . . nothing" (30). The text suggests, however, that Jakob finds it increasingly difficult to keep the historical separate from the personal. For example, he incorporates processes of mourning for a collective into his personal mourning for his dead fam-

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18 Rothberg conceptualizes his notion of "multidirectionality" as follows: "I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (*Multidirectional* 3). Rothberg's conceptualization of memory as multidirectional is also inherently political: he challenges the idea of the uniqueness and singularity of the Holocaust and stresses that remembrance in one historical context may well encourage remembrance in other contexts: "[T]he emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the emergence of other histories – some of them predating the Nazi genocide, such as slavery, and others taking place later, such as the Algerian War of Independence" (6). The multidirectional linking of different places and historical contexts that occurs in *Fugitive Pieces* is even more prominent in Michaels's *The Winter Vault*, where she explores issues of trauma and loss, of destruction and reconstruction in three contexts: the Aswan Dam in Egypt, the St. Lawrence Seaway in Canada, and Warsaw after WWII.

ily when he is confronted with the horrific stories of the Jews of Crete drowning at sea. He deeply empathizes with these Jewish victims, vividly imagining their drowning. Yet this tragedy soon mingles with his own familial tragedy, giving way to persistent visions of his family dying at sea: "These nightmares, in which my parents and my sister drowned with the Jews of Crete, continued for years, continued long after we'd moved to Toronto" (44). Furthermore, a particularly powerful example of how Jakob blends stories of suffering with his family history is in the chapter "Vertical Time," which is focused on Athos and Jakob's stay in Athens. The chapter contains a section about Athos and his friends Kostas and Daphne sharing memories of the awful events that happened in Greece during the Nazi occupation, while Jakob is present as a silent listener. Jakob's listening, however, is punctuated by powerful intrusive memories of his traumatic past. The text switches back and forth between fragments of the adults' stories and Jakob's thoughts:

"We heard sirens, anti-aircraft guns, yet the church bells kept ringing for early Mass."
. . . When they pushed my father, he was still sitting in his chair, I could tell afterwards, by the way he fell.
"Our neighbour Aleko came to the back door […]. It wasn't until evening, when we saw the flags ourselves, and the flag over the Acropolis, that we wept."
. . . I could tell by the way he fell. (63)

As this passage exemplifies, Jakob's response to these stories is dominated by his personal traumas; he seems unable to relate to them except in a freely associative way, returning compulsively to his family. Moreover, as Jakob listens, he becomes increasingly absorbed in his own memories; the narrators of the stories he hears are not identified anymore, their utterances increasingly represented as if spoken by disembodied voices. The text signals that for Jakob, the collective tragedy of the Greeks fades into the background, and his own traumatic past takes centre stage.

The complex relationship between collective and individual remembering, between history and memory, is foregrounded even more in Jakob's obsession with the moment of death. He states, "[h]istory and memory share events; that is, they share time and space. Every moment is two moments" (138). He then imagines specific moments from the perspectives of both history and memory, compulsively returning to scenes of death: "I seek out the horror which, like history itself, can't be stanched. I read everything I can. My eagerness for detail is offensive" (139). The text repeatedly implies that Jakob's obsession with history and historical details originates from his crisis of memory and crisis of witnessing: he reads historical and biographical accounts of death in the hope of somehow filling the disturbing void surrounding Bella's death. A similar mechanism operates for Ben: his increasing passion for biography, which also manifests itself in his research on weather and biography, may be read as an attempt to compensate for his incomplete knowl-

edge of his parents' life-stories. Yet his quest for knowledge is less focused and specific than Jakob's, who explicitly explains that his extensive research into death is an attempt to "remain close to Bella" (167). In other words, Jakob instrumentalizes history for the sake of memory. Interestingly, he assigns memory a stronger ethical value than history: "History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers" (138). Hence, the text signals that while Jakob is deeply interested in history, his ultimate concern is memory. This foregrounding of memory (as well as the familial and the personal) within the novel's discourse on interconnectedness, relationality, and empathy needs to be recognized as a core aspect of the novel. While Criglington is right to claim that "Athos and Jakob transcend racial, linguistic and national boundaries by making connections across time and space" ("The City" 145), *Fugitive Pieces* nevertheless powerfully asserts the primacy of the family, highlighting the devastating impact of broken family connections and the desperate quest for reconnections – even if this quest is embedded in the context of larger communities.

WRITING TOWARDS "TRANSMEMORY" AND TESTIMONY

The quest to (re)connect with lost family members is a key theme enacted throughout *Fugitive Pieces* in multiple ways, and this quest, as I want to show, goes far beyond the rituals of mourning mentioned earlier. A particularly important example is Jakob's desire for a sense of intersubjective connectedness with his dead sister, but variations of this motif also appear in his response to Athos's death and in the way Ben, in turn, attempts to relate to Jakob after his death. To some extent, these patterns of reaction evoke the notion of postmemory, yet they represent a different phenomenon, which I want to call "transmemory." Postmemory mainly refers to memories of massive trauma that are transmitted from survivors to their children, who have not experienced these traumatic experiences themselves but, through their parents, feel their powerful impact and affective force. However, I suggest that a distinction should be drawn between postmemory as an intergenerational structure of remembering that happens without the subject's active involvement (i.e., not only through narratives of the past but also through posttraumatic symptoms) and transmemory as a condition *desired* by the subject. Transmemory, then, arises from the subject's longing for a state of connectedness with a loved one, even after his or her death, through transmitted or imagined memories. While postmemory mainly refers to the involuntary transmission of a severely traumatic past, transmemory encompasses a broader sense of connectedness, one that may involve both memories and thoughts and traumatic as well as non-traumatic memories. Transmemory also aims at overcoming the sense of belatedness inherent in postmemory, striving for

the illusion of intersubjectivity and bilateral transmission – a desire that is more directly graspable when the longing for connectedness is directed not towards a dead loved one but towards a living loved one. I call this phenomenon (which I discuss in the next section of this chapter) "intermemory," that is, a state of intersubjective connectedness based on a mutual empathetic sharing of memories that reaches so far as to create a sense of the other's memories being assimilated into the self.

Transmemory arises from the subject's desire for connectedness, but *Fugitive Pieces* also represents it as having a strong ethical component. As Criglington points out, Michaels conceptualizes memory "as an ethical act that is located in the individual and collective conscience" ("The City" 141). Jakob's and Ben's quests for transmemory are, then, intimately connected both to a *desire* to remember and the sense of an *ethical duty* to remember. Jakob's quest to penetrate into the void surrounding Bella's death is driven not only by the need to "remain close" to her (167) but also by a sense of responsibility for bearing witness to a death that seems to foreclose testimony. This double motivation for transmemory also applies to Jakob regarding Athos and Ben regarding Jakob, and in both cases, transmemory is closely connected to acts of reading and writing.

Both Jakob and Ben strive for a sense of connectedness that transcends death. After Athos's death, Jakob longs to gain access to his memories and thoughts – but also to feel physically close to him. Indeed, for many nights after his death, Jakob sleeps on the floor of Athos's study. Reading Athos's writing and spending as much time as possible in his place allows Jakob to feel a sense of both mental and physical connectedness: "Working in his study, alone now in our flat, I felt Athos's presence so strongly I could smell his pipe, I could feel his hand on my shoulder" (119). A few years later, Jakob visits Athos's family home on the Greek island Idhra and searches through his old library. This visit can be read as part of Jakob's quest for transmemory, as part of his effort to feel connected to Athos by letting himself be absorbed both by his memories and ideas and by a place deeply inscribed with personal meaning.

Jakob's quest is refigured in the second part of the novel in Ben's quest for a sense of connectedness with Jakob, whom he seems to have chosen as his spiritual surrogate father. Ben's desire for transmemory can be read as an attempt to compensate for the precarious kind of postmemory he experienced through his father, a type of postmemory transmitted not through narratives and stories but only through symptoms of suffering and oppressive silence. Even though Ben only met Jakob once, he displays a strong need to feel connected to the dead poet through transmemory. Jakob's visit to Athos's family house is, then, paralleled by Ben's search for Jakob's notebooks in Greece. In Jakob's house, Ben is deeply affected by the sight of the poet's abandoned objects and feels that the house is "drenched with [his] presence" (265). Ben writes: "I sat on your terrace and looked at the sea. I sat at your table and looked at the sky. I felt the power of your place speaking to my

body" (266). Once again, the text evokes a type of intersubjective memory that is transmitted not only through the mind but also through places and through the body. Moreover, the recurring figure of address (i.e., the way Ben repeatedly addresses Jakob directly as if he were still alive) linguistically and narratively enacts Ben's desire for connectedness – and the chapter titles of Ben's narrative, which repeat Jakob's titles, further underscore this desire.

However, *Fugitive Pieces* conveys that both protagonists' quests for transmemory are motivated not only by their personal longing and their psychology of mourning but also by a sense of ethical responsibility. After Athos's death, Jakob devotedly engages in the task of completing Athos's unfinished work. As Donna Coffey observes, "Jakob's true ritual for Athos is not the burying of the ashes, but the completion of Athos's book *Bearing False Witness*" (35). This "ritual" can be understood as a form of vicarious testimony; it functions a way of preserving and transmitting Athos's work, which Athos himself had regarded as part of his ethical duty towards his colleagues who died at Biskupin (after he had left to take Jakob to Greece). Athos's inscription to *Bearing False Witness* reads: "Murder steals from a man his future. It steals from him his own death. But it must not steal from him his life" (120). Hence, Athos strives to bear witness to his colleagues' lives and their work in a responsible rather than "false" way,[19] and it is this ethical responsibility that Jakob shoulders for the sake of both Athos and Athos's colleagues.

In its exploration of vicarious testimonies, *Fugitive Pieces* addresses the problematics of speaking about and testifying to one's experiences of damage and injury that Jean-François Lyotard discusses in *The Differend*. In this context, Lyotard's definition of a "wrong" is especially relevant:

This is what a wrong [*tort*] would be: a damage [*dommage*] accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage. This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or of the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase itself is deprived of authority […]. In all of these cases, to the privation constituted by the damage there is added the impossibility of bringing it to the knowledge of others, and in particular to the knowledge of a tribunal. (5).

Hence, for Lyotard, the defining feature of the "victim" is precisely that he or she does not have the means to prove the damage incurred (9). *Fugitive Pieces* engages with these concerns about victims and wrongs by featuring several victims who are "deprived of life" and thus lose the means to prove what happened to them: Jakob's

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19 See also Hillger, who similarly asserts that for Athos, "to bear witness is a moral responsibility he feels towards those who either have not had the opportunity to speak or whose testimony has been erased" (31).

parents, Bella, and Athos's colleagues are particularly prominent examples. Yet Michaels's novel explores how survivors take on the responsibility for the act of testifying on behalf of the victims who can no longer do so – this is what Jakob attempts on behalf of his parents and sister and Athos on behalf of his colleagues. *Fugitive Pieces* suggests that these acts of vicarious testimony may be at least one way of addressing the wrongs that happened and of bringing the damage "to the knowledge of others," in Lyotard's terms (9). Although these victims cannot speak for themselves, for Athos and Jakob, the text implies, to speak for victims to whom they feel intimately connected can be an important way of addressing damage and "wrongs" in an ethically responsible way.

The theme of witnessing and testimony that is repeatedly foregrounded in Jakob's narrative also reappears in Ben's narrative, which, in fact, repeats some of the patterns of bearing witness. Ben's extensive reading of Jakob's poetry parallels Jakob's reading of Athos's writing, and Ben's biographical research on Jakob can, like Jakob's self-imposed mission of completing Athos's book, be read as an act of testimony building on an earlier writer's testimonial writing. Although Jakob's poems are imaginative rather than historical and archaeological writing, they are, as Ben recognizes, infused with a strong ethical imperative. As Hillger writes, Jakob's *Groundwork* "signals the need to address the injustices of the past, rather than dismissing them as casualties of mankind gone berserk, so that the ground for a better future may be provided" (36). Like Jakob writing for Athos, Ben strives not only for a deep understanding but also for the perpetuation of Jakob's writing. Through its three male protagonists, then, the novel reveals its profound concern with acts of testimony and processes of bearing witness, and it is through this extensive negotiation of witnessing that *Fugitive Pieces* expresses the commitment to the documentary, the historical, and the referential that Rothberg in *Traumatic Realism* describes as characteristic of fictional representations of the Holocaust. The novel displays a highly self-reflexive engagement with the "persistence of the problem of reference and documentation," which is, as Rothberg asserts, especially powerful in the context of the Holocaust (99). Employing a self-reflexive, fragmentary, and poetic narrative style that departs from the conventions of narrative realism even more radically than Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, *Fugitive Pieces* nevertheless retains a commitment to the real and the referential through this emphasis on testimony.

Testimony is depicted as especially complex in Jakob's case. For him, writing as a quest for both transmemory and testimonial remembrance extends beyond his writing on behalf of Athos. As Coffey stresses, Jakob dedicates his poetry to his dead loved ones, and his notebooks also revolve around Bella (35). As discussed earlier, his urge to feel connected to his family beyond death is particularly intense regarding his sister. It is essential, then, that during his processes of mourning and remembering Bella, Jakob chooses a kind of writing that is different from the writing he pursues for Athos – for her, he produces different forms of life writing and

fictional writing as well as hybrid forms. He begins by writing short stories, all "in one sense or another, about hiding" (134), and then increasingly turns to poetry. Finally, "half a century" after he first arrived on Zakynthos (18), he writes his memoirs. All these different forms of writing are represented as means of re-confronting and working through the past.

The novel stages Jakob's attempts to write about the moment of Bella's death as a kind of watershed within his processes of writing. As Gordon Bölling emphasizes, Jakob finally gives up the hope of getting any closer to the moment of Bella's death through history and instead resorts to imagination (193). He describes this moment as follows: "I want to remain close to Bella. To do so, I blaspheme by imagining" (167). Jakob goes on to imagine in detail the moment when Bella died in the gas chamber; he minutely describes the reactions of the bodies of the dying as well as Bella's thoughts. Yet Jakob also articulates a strong sense of uneasiness about his own act of imagination:

Some gave birth while dying in the chamber. Mothers were dragged from the chamber with new life half-emerged from their bodies. Forgive me, you who were born and died without being given names. Forgive this blasphemy, of choosing philosophy over the brutalism of fact. (168)

Jakob here expresses his anxiety about the ethics of using imagination to take him where historical facts cannot go, about whether or not he is tampering with the sanctity of death. Nevertheless, the text implies that for Jakob, this is an extremely precious moment, a moment of "pure belief" reached by imagining that Bella might have turned to "faith" as she was dying – a moment that he never could have reached through the "*brutalism* of fact" (167-68, emphasis added). For Jakob, this moment of conciliatory transmemory functions as a moment of healing, providing him with a sense of redemption. Ultimately, however, Jakob's feeling of ambivalence about this moment cannot be fully resolved – and perhaps deliberately so.

This key passage raises contentious issues about the ethics of testimony and the value of imaginative as opposed to fact-oriented approaches to the Holocaust. These issues are also relevant to the poetics and politics of Michaels's novel as a whole, and they have in fact played an important role in the scholarly response to *Fugitive Pieces*. Several critics refer to Adorno's famous statement that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" and read Michaels's novel as participating in more general discourses about what forms of literary expression may or may not be appropriate in the face of massive trauma.[20] According to Susan Gubar, *Fugitive Pieces* voices a "defense of poetry after Auschwitz" ("Empathic Identification" 251). And it is precisely the novel's lyricism, or more generally, the way the novel "aestheti-

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20 See for example Nicola King's "Remembering the Holocaust" 96-98.

cizes the Shoah" (Coffey 28), that has provoked discussion and controversy. Through its "lyric voice and engagement with the pastoral," as Coffey further maintains, the novel departs from earlier modes of Holocaust writing (31). While an emphasis on fragmentariness and challenges to narrative order, coherence, and linearity are recurrent features of late-twentieth-century trauma narratives,[21] it is the novel's combination of the fragmentary with lyricism and poetic beauty that challenges established boundaries of trauma and Holocaust representation. For example, Kertzer stresses that she, a survivor's child herself, is reluctant to share readers' determination "to find in this text a celebratory discourse" and feels "resistance to readers' praise of the novel's 'beauty'" (195-96).

Kertzer's uneasiness about finding "beauty" in *Fugitive Pieces* relates to crucial issues about the poetics and politics of representation that scholars working on trauma grapple with. Dominick LaCapra expresses a critical attitude towards trauma narratives that are determined by "an imaginary, illusory hope for totalization, full closure, and redemptive meaning" (*Representing* 192-93), narratives that, as he puts it in *Writing Trauma, Writing History*, "seek facile uplift, harmonization, or closure" (78). According to LaCapra, such trauma narratives tend to elicit a problematic kind of reader response, one characterized not by "empathic unsettlement" but by a sense of consolation and redemption. Does *Fugitive Pieces* allow, or even encourage, its readers to respond to the text in this way, as Kertzer's emphasis on "beauty" seems to suggest?

One important argument in defence of the novel involves its self-reflexivity. Coffey maintains, for example, that Michaels's reinvention of the pastoral is heavily "self-conscious"; Michaels creates a new kind of pastoral that can be called "traumatic pastoral," which, unlike traditional pastoral elegies, does not seek "to fill the hole with new life" but "attempts to keep the hole visible" (30, 33).[22] The novel's self-reflexivity, which aligns it with both trauma fiction and postmodern fiction, is enacted textually through its structural strategy of combining two interrelated narratives, a fact that Bölling also highlights.[23] Ben, the reader of Jakob's

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21 For a discussion of narrative features characteristic of trauma fiction, see for example Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* and Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question*.

22 Coffey also discusses in detail how the novel's pastoral, for example Athos's "lyric geology," may be seen as showing unsettling affinities with Nazi ideology; however, through its "traumatic pastoral," the novel consciously departs from Nazi appropriations of the pastoral tradition (40, 42-43).

23 Bölling offers a detailed reading of the complex interrelations between Jakob's and Ben's narratives, highlighting, for example, the parallels between the narratives' beginnings and endings (177-78). Bölling also suggests that Ben could be drawing directly on Jakob's memoirs in the writing of his narrative, a reading that can be supported by the fact that Ben is the one who finds Jakob's memoirs.

writing, addresses Jakob in his own narrative, thereby assigning the dead poet the precarious position of listener and witness. More generally, the novel can be read as a self-reflexive meditation on the psychological and ethical potential of different forms of writing in response to trauma and the Holocaust; it insistently calls attention to acts of writing and reading, of witnessing and testimonial transmission. Nicola King warns us of the danger of "fixing" that is inherent in both non-fictional and fictional narratives of the Holocaust: "If memorials, histories and even survivors' testimonies run the risk of totalising, fixing, 'memorialising', so do fictional narratives or other cultural representations" ("Remembering" 97). *Fugitive Pieces*, it seems to me, alerts us to the danger of "fixing" at a metalevel: it suggests that we should refrain from defining one genre of writing as *the* appropriate response to trauma. In other words, the novel can be read as a plea for diversity and hybridity, demonstrating how different types of writing – historical and archaeological writing, biography, fiction, poetry – can function as ways of bearing witness and as means of working through.

While *Fugitive Pieces* and *A Thousand Acres* both employ strategies of postmodern self-reflexivity, the two novels follow different directions in their explorations of processes of representation, narration, and construction of meaning. *A Thousand Acres* undertakes a typical postmodern project: rewriting a canonical text, here Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in order to challenge "grand narratives" and subvert literary and ideological scripts. In contrast, *Fugitive Pieces* does not respond explicitly to one specific intertext; rather, it explores the politics of representation by examining critically how different genres operate in terms of historical documentation and personal constructions of meaning. What the texts do have in common, however, is that they both challenge totalizing and unifying narratives or histories. Smiley's novel is an attempt to let marginalized voices speak (women who have been branded as evil), while Michaels's novel resists totalizing gestures regarding norms of aesthetic representation and responses to history. It explores the history of the Holocaust through an assembly of multiple individual narratives embedded in the two main narrators' stories. *Fugitive Pieces*, then, approaches history through memory, through little rather than grand narratives, thereby expressing a vision based on multi-perspectivism and fragmentariness.

Michaels's decision to admit the lyrical into her novel, both through the text's lyricism and by making her main protagonist-narrator a poet (like herself), can be read as a deliberate and self-conscious participation in debates about Holocaust poetry. Several critics note that for a long time, Holocaust critics were sceptical of Holocaust poetry, in contrast to Holocaust fiction.[24] However, more recently, Antony Rowland has insisted that the "critical opposition between poetry and testi-

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24 See for example Rowland and Eaglestone's "Holocaust Poetry" and Gubar's *Poetry after Auschwitz*.

mony" needs to be "unravelled" in order to explore how poetry can function as testimony (487). As Rowland and Eaglestone assert, "[i]f Adorno's maxim still haunts post-Holocaust debates about poetry […], perhaps the time has come to break the spell" ("Holocaust Poetry" 5). *Fugitive Pieces* anticipates this plea, implicitly claiming that the lyrical deserves its place in Holocaust writing. It suggests that while some writers may find scientific writing particularly appropriate for their acts of testimony (like Athos), others (like Jakob) may need to turn to different kinds of autobiographical, fictional, or lyrical writing.

The idea that Michaels's novel encourages us to see how individuals' generic choices reflect their needs is also supported in its examination of the emotional freight that different languages carry. Jakob, whose native tongue is Polish and who learns Greek from Athos, finally discovers that English offers the kind of "food" he hungers for (92), that is, it is the language that, for him, facilitates writing about his traumatic past. The metaphor of language as food, which appears several times, also illustrates how the novel conceptualizes processes of remembering as intimately connected to the body.[25] English is figured as a kind of food that Jakob can swallow easily because it comes without memories: "[L]ater, when I began to write down the events of my childhood in a language foreign to their happening, it was a revelation. English could protect me; an alphabet without memory" (101). In other words, English functions as a linguistic and physical survival tool for Jakob, as a medium with a protective function, allowing him to retain a certain distance from his past: unlike Polish, Greek, or Hebrew, English is not inscribed with his past traumas. In this way, language is another integral aspect of the novel's self-reflexivity.

However, is this pervasive self-reflexivity enough to erase ethical concerns about the novel's practice of expressing severe trauma in a register of poetic beauty? The novel's multi-layered self-reflexivity does convey the author's critical awareness and, simultaneously, encourage readers' critical responses. Yet, in certain passages, the text can indeed be said to employ a lyricism that distracts us from the traumatic horror and the suffering underlying the descriptions. In addition, the novel's visions of transmemory and intermemory come close to expressing the kind of "uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios" LaCapra warns against (*Representing* 78). To illustrate this danger, I want to return to the passage where Jakob imagines Bella's death in the gas chamber. In some ways, this passage is profoundly self-reflexive; the narrator himself problematizes his imaginative testimony by repeatedly framing it as an act of "blasphemy." The text thereby calls attention to the problematic aspects of the act of witnessing performed here. Based on an ex-

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25 The image of memory being processed through the body and, specifically, through the mouth reappears in Michaels's poem entitled "Last Night's Moon": "All the history in the bone-embedded hills / of your body. Everything your mouth remembers" (*Skin Divers* 19).

ample from Primo Levi, Rowland argues that there are texts that enact the "concern that it is impossible to witness properly" for someone, while at the same time "engag[ing] with the impossible necessity of trying to do so" (501). And this is precisely what this passage seems to do: it expresses the painful sense of the impossibility of witnessing that has haunted Jakob for so many years and that has finally become unbearable. In other words, this moment marks the culmination of Jakob's quest for transmemory with his dead sister and, simultaneously, constitutes the moment when he experiences with particular intensity this sense of connectedness. The subject's pressing need for transmemory overrides his ethical concerns about the alleged primacy of fact and the sanctity of death. However, as Colin Davis asserts, it is crucial to remember that we "do not participate in or co-own the other's trauma" (20); giving an account of another's trauma should not result in the appropriation of that trauma. In this light, King does have a point in claiming that this passage is "presumptuous" and strikes a "false note" ("Remembering" 106). While Jakob's psychological need is comprehensible, his gesture towards appropriating or "co-owning" his sister's trauma and "participating" in her death, in King's terminology, nevertheless seems problematic.[26]

One reason why the passage retains a disturbing quality in spite of its self-reflexivity is that Jakob's moment of transmemory abruptly shifts from the horrors of the scene to a dream of hope, faith, and redemption. What is at stake for Jakob is his pressing need for consolation, which turns out to be even more powerful than his need for a sense of connectedness with Bella. Hence, this passage can be read not only as a powerful testament to how intense the need for transmemory can get but also as a manifestation of the more ethically unsettling aspects of transmemory. Throughout the novel, the healing and ethical functions of writing are closely connected: the text suggests that writing out of a sense of responsibility towards others contributes significantly to its healing potential. Yet, in this moment, the individual's needs override the ethical demands of bearing witness.

LONGING FOR INTERMEMORY AND A PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

Transmemory is a key theme in both Jakob's and Ben's narratives. Its counterpart, which also plays a central role throughout the text, is intermemory, the longing for a

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26 Imagining another's death is a recurring theme in trauma fiction. For example, in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, the autodiegetic narrator, a nine-year-old boy named Oskar Schell, develops an obsession with his father's death (he died in 9/11). Similar to Jakob regarding Bella's death, Oskar is haunted by his lack of knowledge about how his father died and desperately tries to fill the void.

state of profound connectedness not with a dead but with a living loved one. As structures of desire, transmemory and intermemory are closely related, but intermemory differs fundamentally from transmemory in terms of its basis for reciprocity: its connection does not have to transcend the "thin wall between the living and the dead" (31), while transmemory involves precisely the desire to remove this "wall." It is pertinent how Jakob envisions transmemory in terms of an actual, bilateral "conversation": "All the afternoon conversations that winter on Idhra, with Athos or with Bella, while it grew dark. As in any conversation, sometimes they answered me, sometimes they didn't" (165). The dead, Jakob insinuates, respond whenever they want to respond. In a sense, then, transmemory also figures as the (desire for the) continuation of intermemory after a loved one's death. At the same time, the novel repeatedly depicts the desire for intermemory as particularly intense in response to trauma. It enacts the longing for intermemory primarily with regard to two kinds of relationships, love relationships and family relationships, with a particular focus on surrogate or adoptive parents and children – which further reinforces the text's emphasis on the personal and familial.

Within its depiction of family relationships, *Fugitive Pieces* highlights the close connection between Jakob and Athos, his rescuer and surrogate parent. As Jakob writes, to "share a hiding place, physical or psychological, is as intimate as love" (20). This growing intimacy emerging out of their shared experience of hiding builds on both mental and physical connections. Jakob emphasizes their endless hours of talking, of learning each other's language, and of undertaking mental excursions together into history and geology. Athos insists that Jakob should never forget his past and, at the same time, shares his own family history with him, showing him, for example, the sea charts he inherited from his father and drawing for him "his great-grandfather's trading routes" (20). Jakob soon recognizes his surrogate father's offer of intermemory: "Even as a child, even as my blood-past was drained from me, I understood that if I were strong enough to accept it, I was being offered a second history" (20). Yet their connectedness transcends memory in its more narrow sense; it includes a sense of physical closeness. Jakob stresses his urge to be physically near Athos, refusing to sleep in his own bed and instead "lay[ing] at his feet like a cat" (21). The text depicts a state of intersubjectivity that both Jakob and Athos cling to in their attempts to survive and live on. Athos insistently tells Jakob: "We must carry each other" (22).

The novel's detailed depiction of the relationship between Athos and Jakob also illustrates its concern with broken family lines and the need to (re-)create familial bonds. Through Athos's caring for Jakob, moreover, the novel foregrounds the theme of adoption. Barbara Estrin reads Michaels's narrative of adoption as a foundling story, a form with a long literary heritage. She maintains, however, that Michaels departs from the traditional patterns of the genre by focusing on the period of adoption rather than on the final reintegration of the child into its own fam-

ily (277-80). In this way, as Estrin further emphasizes, the novel departs from an "essentialist reading of parenthood" (280),[27] highlighting that parenthood is not necessarily a question of biology.[28] The novel enacts the motif of adoption in further variations, especially in its depiction of how Ben's parents – who struggle to build a healthy relationship with their biological son – emotionally adopt their daughter-in-law. In turn, Ben can be said to choose the poet Jakob as his imaginary adoptive father. The spiritual son-father relationship between the two narrators Ben and Jakob has biblical echoes: in Genesis, Benjamin is the youngest son of the patriarch Jacob, the second son of Isaac (Gen. 35:16-18). This biblical allusion could be seen as adding a religious dimension to the spiritual adoption performed implicitly by Ben. However, in spite of a number of religious and biblical allusions, God, as Barbara Korte asserts, is only ever a "vague" or "fugitive" presence in Michaels's novel, and religion seems to offer little consolation (522). The scenes of adoption in Ben's narrative, then, complicate the positive, reassuring vision of adoption that Jakob's narrative seems to express. Even in Jakob's case, as Coffey stresses, adoption is essentially built on suffering: "Jakob's ties to his biological family do matter deeply, and he spends the rest of his life mourning them" (37). Yet adoption provides Jakob with a loving father and with the chance to gain a "second history" (20). In Ben's narrative, by contrast, it is the disruption and failure of the biological family that give rise to attempts at emotional and imaginary forms of adoption. Hence, the novel's representation of adoptions is characterized by a deep ambivalence: it strikes a hopeful note by showing how an orphan like Jakob can build a close relationship with a surrogate parent; at the same time, adoption, especially regarding Ben and his parents, remains inextricably bound up with an emphasis on how deeply familial disruptions affect individuals.

One key feature that these different adoptive relationships have in common is that they rely heavily on connections built on memory. This applies not only to Athos and Jakob but also to Ben's parents' adoption of Naomi: the extent of their intimacy manifests itself in their decision to entrust Naomi, the "daughter [Ben's mother] longed for" (252), with their bleakest memory, the death of their first two children. However, *Fugitive Pieces* enacts the theme of intersubjective connectedness not only through such adoptive relationships but also, perhaps even more strongly, through love relationships. The text stages memory, especially the intense engagement with each other's memories, as a core aspect of a fulfilled love relationship. Intermemory emerges as the most precious "gift" lovers give each other,

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27 Through its de-essentialist view of family relationships, the novel, as Estrin highlights, also undercuts Nazi ideology's "preoccupation with blood ties" (276).

28 As both Estrin and Gubar suggest, Athos can be read not only as a father figure but also as a mother figure. Gubar argues that the depiction of how Athos rescues the lost child (i.e., by carrying Jakob under his coat) evokes "a sort of male pregnancy" (255).

an idea voiced explicitly by Avery, the male protagonist in Michaels's second novel *The Winter Vault*, once he believes he has lost his wife Jean to another:

Jean's childhood, her web of memory and unconscious memory, had once been her gift to him. Now it had been given to another. This was the loss that overwhelmed him the most. […] Of all the privileges of love, this seemed to him to be the most affecting: to witness, in another, memories so deep they remain ineffable, glimpsed only by an intuition, by an illogical preference or an innocent desire, by a sorrow that arises out of seeming nothingness, an inexplicable longing. (329)

The intimacy in a love relationship is here explicitly defined in terms of memory.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, the importance of being allowed to "witness" the depths of a lover's memory is performed structurally through a parallel constellation of female characters in Jakob's and Ben's narratives: in each, there is a lover who facilitates access to memory and one who acts as an obstacle to remembering. Jakob's first wife Alex, a lively, even restless young woman, wants Jakob to forget. When he sits in the dark, absorbed in the past, she always turns on the lights – a symbolic gesture that expresses the psychological dynamics between them (144). Jakob recognizes that Alex is trying to help him, but he perceives the pressure to forget, which to him is a form of "brainwashing," as a profound threat to his sense of self: "[E]ach time a memory or a story slinks away, it takes more of me with it" (144). The section on Jakob and Alex demonstrates how much survivors perceive memories, as painful as they may be, as an integral part of their identity and sense of self. Alex, then, demonstrates *ex negativo* Jakob's powerful need both for memory and a sense of intermemory, functioning as a figure of contrast to Jakob's second wife, Michaela, who actively facilitates processes of remembering and mourning. Ben's narrative echoes the contrast between these two female characters: his wife Naomi parallels Michaela, while the American girl Petra, with whom Ben has an affair in Greece, parallels Alex. Petra represents the physical and sexual, while Naomi embodies a connectedness based on shared memory. Through his affair with Petra, Ben comes to recognize the significance of the kind of intermemory that connects him to his wife – "I know what she makes of her memories. I know what she remembers. I know her memories" (285) – and he ruefully and longingly returns to her.

This near-symmetrical structure of relationships, however, seems a bit schematic or even clichéd, and it may also be said to entail a problematic representation of women. Criglington asserts that the female characters are "figured either as vessels of or impediments to memory," and they are reduced to the functions they serve for the male protagonists, while at the same time subjected to an "erotic objectification" that assigns them a "diminished sense of agency" ("Urban Undressing"). The novel indeed perpetuates stereotypical images of the male lover as an explorer of the female body: Jakob compares his "roam[ing]" of Michaela's body to

the act of "an animal outlining territory" (180); Ben, even more strikingly, describes his wife's body as "so familiar a map, folded so often at the same places, tearing along the folds" (256) – so he eagerly explores every line of the yet unknown territory of Petra's body (276). Yet the novel does imply that traditional images of exploration are here reconceptualized: what is at stake is not primarily the desire for erotic pleasure and sexual gratification and possession; rather, the exploration of the lover's body is depicted as part of the male trauma victim's quest for intersubjective connectedness. In the same way the text assigns the body a key role in Jakob's desire for connectedness with the dead (notably, through his fantasies of incorporation and in his desire for closeness with Athos), it also highlights the body in the quest for intermemory in love relationships. Michaela's body enables Jakob to finally feel a sense of home, and he perceives the transfer of memories as happening literally through the body: "I cross over the boundary of skin into Michaela's memories, into her childhood" (184). Nevertheless, even if what is at stake is a quest for memory, a certain uneasiness about the instrumentalization of the female body may still persist, especially from a feminist perspective. Yet, again, it needs to be emphasized that Michaela consciously offers her body to Jakob: "I realize she's entirely concentrated [...] she's giving me the most extravagant permission to roam the surface of her" (180). Moreover, Michaela, who functions as the main facilitator of memory in a text so deeply concerned with processes of remembering, is depicted as one of the most powerful figures in the novel and wields considerable agency.

Fugitive Pieces, in fact, represents the relationship between Jakob and Michaela as the perfect fulfilment of intermemory. The text suggests that it is primarily Michaela who makes this experience possible, mainly through her extraordinary capacity for listening. The novel thus resonates with Dori Laub's claim that testimony crucially hinges on the listener, on his or her openness and readiness to participate in the joint act of witnessing ("Event" 85). Michaela figures as the embodiment of the empathetic listener, who enables the trauma survivor to talk about his wounds and feel understood. The novel here explores issues that are also important in Romantic trauma fiction: like Godwin's *Mandeville,* the text examines if and how a trauma victim can be healed by a loved one. However, in contrast to Henrietta's attempts to cure her brother, Michaela's attempts to cure her husband invert the dynamics of talking and listening. While Mandeville only ever listens, Jakob first listens to Michaela, displaying a striking "hunger for her memories" (179), but then takes over the role of speaker, and it is Michaela who does the listening that is so essential to Jakob. In other words, the trauma survivor Jakob seizes the chance to talk and be listened to empathetically – something that Mandeville desperately desires yet never experiences.

In this sense, *Fugitive Pieces* resonates more strongly with *The Wrongs of Woman*, with its depiction of the beneficial impact of an empathetic listener, enacted especially through Jemima. Wollstonecraft's representation of a mini-

community of suffering between the imprisoned Maria and the prison guard Je-mima (and, to some extent, Darnford) may even be said to gesture towards the idea of intermemory enacted in *Fugitive Pieces*. However, the kinds of interpersonal connections that the two texts depict as resulting from sharing memories are fun-damentally different. In *The Wrongs of Woman*, what is at stake is the recognition of parallels between individual women's suffering, and the purpose of sharing is to foster a sense of commonality, solidarity, and mutual sympathy. *Fugitive Pieces* envisions a different kind of connectedness, one that I, like Gubar, read as empathy rather than sympathy. As Gubar writes, *Fugitive Pieces* "dramatizes Michaels's ef-fort to replace the concept of sympathy which supposes affinity among people, with the mechanisms of empathy, with its recognition of disparity" ("Empathic Identifi-cation" 253). In other words, empathy does not presuppose the recognition of simi-larity and shared experience that is so important in Wollstonecraft's novel; empathy transcends difference. Moreover, the kind of empathy depicted in *Fugitive Pieces* reaches significantly deeper than the sympathy depicted in *The Wrongs of Woman* in that it produces a sense of overcoming the boundaries between two individuals. This difference also manifests itself in the specific nature of Michaela's listening. As Jakob stresses, Michaela's entire body seems absorbed in the act of listening: "She has heard everything – her heart an ear, her skin an ear. Michaela is crying for Bella" (182). The image of Michaela listening with her whole body conveys how deeply she immerses herself – mentally, emotionally, and physically – in Jakob's memories, and it is this kind of listening, the novel suggests, that enables the emer-gence of intermemory.

Hence, while both *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Mandeville* do recognize the im-portance of empathetic listening, *Fugitive Pieces* expresses far more optimism about the power of such listening, which becomes particularly clear in how Michaela's ability to listen relates to healing. After the intense moment of being lis-tened to and "recognized for the first time," Jakob falls asleep and dreams of Bella talking to Michaela, while "tears stream down Michaela's face," tears that express her deep empathy (182). This symbolic dream is depicted as a profoundly therapeu-tic experience for Jakob: "Every cell in my body has been replaced, suffused with peace" (182). The moment of waking is figured as the moment when Jakob finally finds his way back into the world; he wakes to sunlight and feels at home next to Michaela's body, amazed at the feeling of having been "saved by such a small body" (183). Through Michaela, the ghost of Bella can finally be laid to rest.

This key moment in the text is written as a moment of intense emotion and beauty – yet is it perhaps *too* beautiful? Does the novel here shift from a mode of cautious optimism to one of sentimentalism? Does it idealize the healing powers of love and empathy? Kertzer's discussion of the novel expresses a strong criticism of any Holocaust narrative that finds "resolution in romantic and redemptive patterns" and that makes the Holocaust problematically "accessible and reparable" (206). *Fu-*

gitive Pieces does indulge in such "romantic and redemptive patterns," and it stages the protagonist's central moment of healing in a way that risks reducing it to one of the "optimistic, self-serving scenarios" and "uplifting messages" of which LaCapra is so critical (*Representing* 78). Jakob's recovery is represented as almost too sudden and too comprehensive, with "every cell" of his body having been replaced overnight (182); his wounds seem almost too easily "reparable," in LaCapra's terminology. Michaels does have Jakob deny the possibility of sudden change ("We think that change occurs suddenly. But even I have learned better" 185), which seems to imply that he regards this vital moment only as the beginning of a healing process. And yet the impression of an "uplifting message" about recovery persists through the final pages of Jakob's narrative, which revolve around scenes of domestic happiness and peace, around images that express the (re)integration of the traumatic past and hopeful scenarios about the future.

The endings of both narratives are especially significant regarding the text's approach to recovery. Jakob ends with a meditation on his longing for a child and an extensive prayer for their son or daughter, who would – in a heavily symbolic gesture of testimony to and reconciliation with the past – be named Bela or Bella. Jakob "pray[s]" that his children will understand and internalize their parents' love (195). This ending signals that love may triumph over the destructive impact of severe trauma and that familial ties broken by death may be restored by future generations. The hopefulness of this ending is weakened to some extent by our knowledge of Jakob's accidental death and the fact that he was prevented from reading Michaela's note telling him about her pregnancy. In reporting Michaela's death, who dies two days after Jakob, the novel's preface enacts the abrupt severing of family lines that plays a central role throughout the text. Ben's narrative, however, symbolically closes the circle, or, as Estrin puts it, the novel "closes with a sense of circles enclosing circles" (294). The "circles" that Estrin refers to are the circles of love that are fused through Ben's recognition of the bond of love between his parents, a bond whose strength he has never been able to see before, and through his desire to return to Naomi. Ben's last sentence reads: "I see that I must give what I most need" (294). Yet the ending of Ben's narrative closes even more circles. Ben, who feels profoundly connected to Jakob and who finds Michaela's unread note, symbolically becomes their (adoptive) child, fulfilling Jakob's prayer that his child "suddenly know how miraculous is [his] parents' love for each other" (195). Ben represents the found son in a double sense, and his epiphany about his parents' love and his adoptive parents' love inspires him with hope for his own relationship with Naomi. Thus, Ben learns a philosophy of love from his adoptive father Jakob, who, himself a lost and a found child, had learned this essential lesson – "to make love necessary" (121) – from his own adoptive father Athos.

Through this ending, with its various closing circles, and through climactic moments of transmemory and intermemory, *Fugitive Pieces* confronts us with fun-

damental issues about the ethics of writing and reading trauma. The hopefulness and optimism that dominate the ending of Michaels's novel contrast sharply with the bleak endings of *Mandeville* and *Mathilda*. Like LaCapra, I see trauma narratives that resolve themselves on the extreme poles of optimism or pessimism as involving certain ethical weaknesses. On the one hand, narratives characterized by the "phantasm of total mastery, full ego identity, definitive closure" problematically distract us from the intensity of suffering and the lasting impact of trauma, comforting us too easily; on the other hand, writing determined by "endless mutability, fragmentation, melancholia, aporias, irrecoverable residues or exclusions" risks perpetuating cycles of trauma (*Writing History* 71). A *via media* between these two poles seems most appropriate from an ethical point of view, that is, a trauma narrative that expresses the ruptures caused by trauma and acknowledges that there are elusive aspects that cannot be fully communicated but also gestures towards some understanding of trauma and towards some means of working through.

While I feel uneasy about trauma writing that seems too optimistic or pessimistic, at the same time, my own uneasiness makes me uneasy and raises a number of disconcerting questions. First of all, how do I reconcile my sceptical attitude as a literary critic towards anything that seems idealistic and sentimental, especially in the context of trauma, with my emotional desire as an empathetic reader to see a character who has undergone so much suffering and pain finally find a way to recovery and happiness? More importantly, why do I feel more uneasy about trauma narratives that seem overly harmonizing or redemptive than about those dominated by the unspeakable, the incomprehensible, and inescapable cycles of suffering? This tendency is surprising, given that I firmly believe issues of recovery need to receive sufficient attention in trauma studies. Is it possible that I have stronger reservations about the optimistic patterns of redemption and recovery in *Fugitive Pieces* than in other novels because Jakob is a victim of childhood trauma that is related to his family but, at the same time, involves strong historical and political dimensions? My reaction might be influenced by the prominent idea in trauma studies that visions of healing in the context of massive trauma run the risk of downplaying and distracting from the pervasive destructive impact of that historical event – an anxiety, which, as we have seen, might also have influenced Godwin's decision not to let Mandeville get anywhere near recovery. Yet does recovery not deserve to be given room, irrespective of whether the context is personal or historical trauma or both? And finally, does it make sense to ascribe one type of trauma narrative more (ethical) value than another? Do we thereby gesture towards writing a metanarrative of trauma that is too prescriptive rather than descriptive and that runs the risk of "fixing" trauma writing? These, I think, are questions to keep in mind when reading trauma narratives in order to remain alert to the profound ethical challenges trauma poses to both writers and readers.

Rather than closing these reflections by trying to come up with conclusive answers, I would like to end with a few provisional thoughts. First, it is essential to bear in mind that LaCapra's thinking about trauma is rooted in the discipline of history (even if he gestures beyond disciplinary boundaries), and the ethical expectations we have of historiographical writing about trauma, with its more explicitly factual orientation, do not necessarily have to apply – or at least not to the same extent – to literary writing. Second, as literary critics, we may also attempt to negotiate the two extreme poles of trauma writing critically by engaging with different kinds of trauma narratives, here exemplified by the contrast between *Mandeville* and *Fugitive Pieces*, and by interrogating the different ethical functions as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each.

In this light, it is important to stress that even though I have certain reservations about a few key passages that push the "romantic and redemptive patterns" that Kertzer criticizes rather far, I still read Michaels's novel as a significant and thought-provoking contribution to discourses about trauma and recovery. A seminal aspect of the novel's vision of healing is that it conceptualizes recovery as a process based on connectedness and relationality rather than as a self-centred, purely individual process. After all, Jakob's overnight spiritual and physical transformation is only one aspect of the text's multi-layered negotiation of recovery. The emphasis on the healing powers of love is complemented by an emphasis on the curative *and* ethical functions of different acts of writing, writing that is simultaneously a form of working through and a form of testimony. In that sense, the novel can be said to echo and push further the philosophy of working through embodied by Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman*, whose memoirs originate out of her sense of responsibility towards her daughter and also involve acts of testimonial writing on behalf of other women. Hence, the conceptualization of recovery expressed by *Fugitive Pieces* relies not only on intersubjective connectedness but also on deep empathy and a sense of responsibility towards the suffering of others.

Fugitive Pieces is, then, a profound meditation on the complex ways in which individuals are entangled in and respond to each other's traumas. Even though the novel gestures towards a web of connections between trauma in different cultural and historical contexts and between individual and collective trauma, the novel carefully and extensively examines how the legacies of trauma manifest themselves in the private space of the family. It demonstrates how profoundly historical events affect families, foregrounding broken family ties and the traumatic grief of children who have lost their parents and siblings and of parents who have lost their children. At the same time, the novel encourages us to rethink what family means, emphasizing different forms of adoption and relationships built on emotional rather than biological kinship. In its exploration of familial bonds, *Fugitive Pieces* opposes two extremes, represented by the two narrators: the desperate clinging to broken bonds and the suffocating impact of unhealthy, destructive bonds. While Jakob obses-

sively desires to remain connected to his dead parents and especially his dead sister, Ben invests most of his energy in breaking free from his oppressive family environment. In different ways, however, both narratives testify to the deeply formative and persistent impact of family relationships.

These two contrasting attitudes to family ties relate to two diametrically opposed visions of memory. *Fugitive Pieces* characterizes bonds of memory between individuals as both valuable and threatening. When Jakob describes how he spent "half [his] day gnawing through misery" to reach the memory of one single moment (144), he expresses the pressing need for memory, even if that memory may be deeply painful. Memory is here figured as something precious, as something to be restored, preserved, and protected – an attitude towards memory that is intimately connected to the memory crisis of the twentieth century and not present in this way in Romantic trauma fiction. It is the sense of memory's elusiveness, its fragility, its potential to be lost that makes it so valuable. *Fugitive Pieces* hence participates in the "memory project" that Whitehead associates with postmodern fiction (*Trauma Fiction* 82);[29] the novel highlights how the crisis of memory results in a longing for memory, representing bonds of individual and intersubjective memory as highly precious. Diametrically opposed to this pressing desire for memory is the fear of unwanted bonds transmitted from parents to children: Ben fears the intergenerational transmission of trauma as a form of physical contamination carried in his genes and blood. For him, memory figures as a familial legacy that defies control, as a danger haunting a family across generations. *Fugitive Pieces*, then, represents the two extremes of memory's affective power.

Crucially, both these extremes are closely connected to the body. This association applies to Ben's fear of physical transmission, but it also surfaces in the novel's scenes of transmemory and intermemory, which revolve around the desire for a state of connectedness that erases the boundaries between minds and bodies, even beyond death. Fantasies of incorporation, the idea of an intimacy fusing sexual and memory bonds, as well as Jakob's notion of different languages as types of food that make the mouth and the body either remember or forget are primary examples that demonstrate how closely *Fugitive Pieces* connects processes of remembering to the body. This recurring emphasis on the body reinforces Michaels's notion that the forces of memory – both in their most disturbing and most empowering manifestations – are exceedingly powerful.

Besides this emphasis on the body, another key aspect of the novel's approach to memory is that it interrogates the ethics of remembering. *Fugitive Pieces*, as we have seen, negotiates processes of remembering and narrating trauma in the context of testimonial discourses, suggesting that to record and transmit one's own memo-

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29 For an excellent overview of the dominant paradigms of memory through history, see Whitehead's *Memory*.

ries and to bear witness to the memories of others should be seen as an ethical practice. The novel responds to concerns about the Holocaust and witnessing, notably, Laub's assertion that "the collapse of witnessing" is at the core of "the Holocaust experience" ("Event" 80) and Lyotard's discussion of victimhood as defined by the impossibility of speaking and testifying (8), yet it chooses a more optimistic approach than these theorists: it explores how survivors, even if they experience profound crises of witnessing, find ways of bearing witness to their own past and to the past of others. Featuring several protagonists that are writers, the novel investigates the functions of different forms of writing for this ethical practice. At the same time, *Fugitive Pieces*, like the trauma narratives by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley, participates in discourses about the healing function of narrative in the face of trauma. The text's vision of narration as therapeutic endorses its overall emphasis on connectedness: many of the forms of writing that the novel explores are oriented towards others. The text pushes this emphasis on connectedness – through memory and through writing – even further, suggesting that there is a means of healing even more potent than narration: love. Through its insistent expression of a philosophy of love in the face of severe trauma, the novel, finally, leaves readers with some of the crucial questions about the ethics of reading and writing trauma that it explores in multiple ways. Expressing a powerful concern with ethics, this self-reflexive novel calls for a critical, self-reflexive, and ethically aware reading of trauma fiction.

Chapter Seven: The Body of Evidence

Family History, Guilt, and Recovery

in Trezza Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place*

> "Mother is our first home, the original *safe house* –
> or the idealized fantasy of such a person and place –
> by which all later spaces of belonging are meas-
> ured."
> (ROBERTA RUBENSTEIN, *HOME MATTERS*)

> "Our wounds name or identify us; do our names in
> some way wound us as well?"
> (DENNIS PATRICK SLATTERY, *THE WOUNDED
> BODY*)

"Dol," "crip," "Sinistra," "la Diavola," "il Demone": these are the names and labels that Dolores, the autodiegetic narrator in Trezza Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* (2000), is given as a child by her own family. Dolores's disfigured hand, the result of a fire when she was a baby, is the constant target of her father's superstitious hatred and her sisters' bullying. The loss of two sisters, her father's violence, and her mother's decline into mental illness further contribute to Dolores's bleak childhood. Set in the Maltese community in Cardiff in the 1960s, which loosely reflects Azzopardi's own background,[1] the novel is framed around the narrator Dolores's quest for the past and for recovery. Back in Cardiff after thirty years, on the occasion of her mother's funeral, Dolores sets out to confront her traumatic past and (re)write her life-story as well as the tragedy of her whole family.

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1 Several reviews emphasize the novel's Maltese perspective. D.J. Taylor, for example, states that "much of the novel's appeal stems from the unfamiliarity of its subject matter," while Azzopardi herself asserts that the novel was not consciously constructed around a specifically Maltese perspective (See "Out of Hiding").

Engaging critically with experiences of loss and violence, *The Hiding Place* particularly emphasizes the body in its representation of trauma, even more so than Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* and Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*. Wounds and scars, injury and branding appear as key topoi throughout the novel. The disfigured body, which bears the mark of the protagonist's primary traumatic experience of being injured in a fire, becomes an object of stigmatization and leads to cycles of physical and verbal violence. The novel's approach to trauma and the body and its complex psychology of stigmatization are, then, the main aspects I explore in the first part of the chapter, drawing on both trauma psychology and disability studies.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on how *The Hiding Place* explores processes of remembering, reconstructing, and narrating a traumatic past, especially in relation to recovery and to ethics.[2] Like *A Thousand Acres* and *Fugitive Pieces*, Azzopardi's novel is profoundly concerned with the complex processes and meanings of recovery. It is structured around the narrator's quest for the past, which is simultaneously an attempt at recovering what was lost and an attempt at re-evaluating what seems beyond understanding in her life-story and family history. Her act of rewriting the past revolves around the metaphors of "unearthing" and "putting things in order," expressing Dolores's desire to piece together the fragments of the past into an overall "design" (33). The novel's two-part structure, moreover, represents the quest for the past as a twofold process. While the first part highlights Dolores's solitary attempt at coming to terms with the past, the second foregrounds her urge to find a sense of consistency with her sisters about their shared past, emphasizing her longing for a familial community of memory. Through its emphasis on Dolores's pervasive desire for consistency, order, and understanding, the novel testifies to the psychological needs of victims of childhood trauma. In this sense, Azzopardi's novel resonates with psychological trauma discourses, while its overall textual politics at the same time signals sceptically that it may be impossible to fulfil these psychological needs. In other words, the narrator's desire for order, control, and stability contrasts with the text's poetics of fragmentation, disruption, and instability.

The novel's complex exploration of trauma and recovery is complemented by its emphasis on the intricate interrelations between trauma and ethics. As in Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*, the family here fails to provide a space of safety and protection, constituting instead the main site of childhood trauma. *The Hiding Place*, which depicts six daughters suffering at the hands of their abusive father, also raises pressing questions about trauma and gender as well as about responsibility and guilt. However, Azzopardi's novel represents the familial history of

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2   A number of key issues that I explore here regarding the novel's approach to memory, recovery, narration, and ethics are also discussed in my article "Loss, Violence, and the Ethics of Guilt."

trauma filtered through the lens of a decidedly unreliable autodiegetic narrator, which forces readers to reflect critically on how to respond to this trauma narrative and its implicit political and ethical vision. Yet the novel also emphasizes the narrator's psychological needs in relation to ethics. The textual performance of a crisis of ethics stands in tension with the narrator's continual need to engage with and find answers to questions of responsibility and guilt. Because of these recurring tensions, I read *The Hiding Place* as a thought-provoking exploration of the psychology of the posttraumatic that calls for a critical rethinking of some key premises of trauma theory. Revolving around Dolores's quest for memory, meaning, and reconciliation, the text pushes us to reflect on the psychological and theoretical meanings of notions such as "consistency" and "order." At the same time, Azzopardi's novel on childhood and family trauma signals time and again how much recovery is concerned with and dependent on the family.

DOLORES'S "BAD HAND," LOSS, AND "GHOST PAIN"

As part of its critical engagement with trauma and the body, the text foregrounds the complex psychology of loss Dolores develops in response to her primary trauma, a severe burn accident that happened when she was left alone at home as a one-month-old baby. In this accident, Dolores loses the fingers of her left hand, and this injury plays a prominent role throughout the narrative. Besides recurring nightmares of fire, Dolores has dreams of wish-fulfilment, in which dream magic allows her to "hol[d] the handle of the rope with *both* hands" (80). This desire for the recovery of her damaged hand permeates several crucial scenes. When her sister Celesta shows her how powder can make her scar become "almost invisible," Dolores's immediate impulse is the wish for her hand to be restored, too: "I hold out my bad hand for mending" (125). Her fascination with gloves similarly expresses her profound desire for the injury of her hand to be invisible: "My mother has padded out the fingers of the left one with pipe cleaners wrapped with wool. It's wonderful; I can bend them into any shape I like. My hand looks normal, nearly" (164).

While these passages revolve around fantasies of wholeness and recovery, the narrative as a whole suggests that Dolores responds to her hand through a profound awareness of difference and loss but, unlike her environment, she does not necessarily perceive it through the lens of normality versus abnormality. Dolores's meditation on how ice cream changes the visual appearance of her healthy right hand is a case in point: "[A]ll I could think of was how my one hand suddenly looked like the other, with the fingers hidden behind the cone and the thick drips running down" (187). Interestingly, this passage reverses the fantasies expressed in the previous

passages; here, Dolores focuses on the illusion of the normal hand looking like the disfigured one. Another telling example is her fascination with a one-eyed boy in the neighbourhood: "I'm curious about people who used to have two of something and then end up with one only" (94). The word "curious" indicates Dolores's interest in the phenomenon of loss rather than a perception of abnormality in a negative sense.

The theme of loss and recovery reappears in complex ways in Dolores's description of "Ghost Pain," an enigmatic sensory perception that seems to originate in her missing fingers. Through the pain, her missing body part manifests its presence in a strange and disturbing way, a phenomenon called "phantom pain" in medical terminology. As medical studies emphasize, "phantom limbs" are experienced as strikingly real, as integral parts of the body (Halligan 254-55). According to Dolores, her "Ghost Pain" puzzles her doctor: "Dr Reynolds says it would be normal if I'd ever had my fingers, but he thinks it's strange I should miss something I never knew" (80). Dolores highlights, however, that she does *not* find it strange, drawing a parallel to the loss of her sister Marina, who was "bartered" (i.e., gambled away) to a sinister business partner of her father's when Dolores was still a baby: "I miss Marina, and I never knew her" (80). The text here engages with the psychology of loss in a thought-provoking way, shifting the moment of loss to an even earlier point than the traumatic losses that determine the childhood of the protagonist-narrators in *Mandeville* and *Fugitive Pieces*.

The passages above raise crucial questions about the distinction between "absence" and "loss" that Dominick LaCapra investigates in *Writing History, Writing Trauma.* LaCapra conceptualizes loss as historical and absence as transhistorical, asserting that "absence is not an event and does not imply tenses" (49). The doctor's assertion that "it's strange that [Dolores] should miss something [she] never knew" resonates with LaCapra's claim that "one may recognize that one cannot lose what one never had" (50). What the doctor suggests is that it would be natural for Dolores to perceive the lack of her fingers as absence rather than loss because she was too young to consciously experience the accident and, thus, lacks the temporal perspective inherent in the idea of loss. Through Dolores's statement that "[i]t's not so strange to [her]," the text implies that, although technically, "one cannot lose what one never had," to return to LaCapra's assertion, one can in fact feel a sense of loss about something that one once had, even if one did not consciously experience the loss. Due to infantile amnesia, Dolores cannot possibly have any memories of her sister Marina or of her left hand prior to the accident; nevertheless, she suffers from a painful feeling of missing something and of being haunted by a kind of ghost presence with regard to both. And, in contrast to Shelley's Mathilda, whose loss of her mother also precludes memory and conscious experience, Dolores deliberately confronts her sense of loss.

One reason why the logic of loss seems to prevail over that of absence is probably that with regard to both her sister and her hand, Dolores can imagine and construct the specific historical moment of loss that is unavailable to her memory. The idea of loss implies the possibility of narration and historicization, and, as LaCapra further emphasizes, thinking in terms of loss opens up perspectives of restoration and recovery, while absence represents a more constitutive, elemental state that tends to foreclose ideas of retrieval and recuperation (51-52). In this sense, Dolores's pervasive and multi-faceted sense of loss – with regard to her hand, Marina, her family, and her past – is one of the main forces driving her act of self-narration.

THE "EXTRAORDINARY BODY" AND THE DYNAMICS OF STIGMATIZATION

While Dolores's reconstruction of how she perceived her physical otherness as a child revolves mainly around her damaged left hand, the tragic fire accident remains inscribed on her body in several ways – through her hand, her scarred face, and her burned scalp. The scarring of hands and the face are especially significant because they are the most socially visible body parts, and, functioning as key organs of perception, they also constitute both the boundary and the connection between the individual and the environment. As psychologists Markus Landolt, Sandra Grubenmann, and Martin Meuli emphasize, the visibility of burn disfigurements poses the biggest challenge to an individual's adjustment to a burn injury as well as to his or her social acceptance ("Adjustment" 1042). It is surprising, then, that the scars on Dolores's face and her lack of hair are mentioned far less than her hand. Except for the scene with Celesta's powder and a moment when she studies people's heads, highlighting that "everyone blames the shock of the fire for [her] lack of hair," for the "brittle furze on the crown of [her] head" (124), the focus is entirely on her hand. Does this suggest that the fire's impact on her face and scalp is not as bad as on her hand? Does her hair eventually grow normally and her scars become less visible? Or might the disfigurement of her face be so traumatic that she cannot confront it?

Since the entire narrative is filtered through Dolores's perspective, there is no conclusive answer to these questions; the novel refrains from explaining why her physical disfigurement is explored almost exclusively in relation to her hand. What the novel signals powerfully, however, is the sharp contrast between Dolores's reaction to her burn injuries as a child, focused on loss more than abnormality, and the reactions of others. Dolores's description of the traces that the flames left on her body is pertinent here:

But the left hand. People who don't know me stare when they see it. They look away, then sidelong at my face in search of further evidence. There are scars there too: if they get close enough they could find them. But not many get that close: an outstretched hand, my left one – it's enough to ward them off.

I lost the fingers. At one month old, a baby's hand is the tiniest, most perfect thing. It makes a fist, it spreads wide, and when it burns, that soft skin is petrol, those bones are tinder, so small, so easily eaten in a flame. (33)

This passage is symptomatic of Dolores's concerns in the way it immediately shifts from describing the baby's physical injuries to emphasizing the reactions of others, the gaze of strangers. A retrospective attempt at capturing what she looked like after the fire, Dolores depicts the physical disfigurement of this "most perfect thing," her hand, as functioning as a barrier to the outside world.

The text implies, in fact, that Dolores experiences her damaged hand less as a trauma of physical disfigurement than as a trauma of stigmatization; it explores in detail processes of othering and stigmatization within the family.[3] The sections of the narrative focalized through her perspective as a child suggest that her family responds in far more negative ways to her damaged hand than she does, thereby aggravating the impact of her trauma.[4] Frantic superstition makes her father interpret the accident as a sign that "a devil had come into his house" (264). Moreover, Dolores recalls how her sisters Rose and Luca treated her as an inferior human being, bullying her repeatedly because of her hand. In this way, the trauma of being burned leads to further cycles of trauma.

In its depiction of stigmatization, *The Hiding Place* resonates with *The Wrongs of Woman* and its representation of Jemima as an outcast figure. Both novels emphasize how difficult – or even impossible – it is for a traumatized and branded child to fight against cycles of stigmatization within the family and the wider social sphere. In the case of both Dolores and Jemima, their siblings are so deeply influenced by their parents' branding of one child as inferior and hated that they begin to participate in the process of stigmatization themselves. Furthermore, both novels highlight how society reinforces and perpetuates the stigmatization experienced in the family. In *The Hiding Place*, staring functions as the primary means of stigmatizing in the social sphere. As we have seen, Dolores imagines that she was the ob-

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3   For a detailed discussion of the novel's representation of the disfigured body and processes of stigmatization see also Schönfelder, "Verletzte Grenzen."

4   According to psychological studies, familial support is the primary indicator (more important even than burn severity) for burned children's "psychosocial adjustment" and their capacity to cope with the injury (Landolt, Grubenmann, and Meuli, "Family Impact" 1149). *The Hiding Place* emphasizes the crucial importance of the familial environment ex negativo, through the depiction of a severely dysfunctional family.

ject of people's stares as a baby, and she also describes in detail how the shop assistant in a local shop would always obsessively "inspect" her hand. As Rosemarie Thomson emphasizes in her discussion of staring, "stigmatizing is a social process that hurtles a body from the safe shadows of ordinariness into the bull's eye of judgment" (*Staring* 45). Dolores, then – in those moments when she is socially exposed – becomes a particularly visible or, in the words of Thomson, "stareable" subject (or object). Similarly, Jemima perceives herself as literally branded in the public eye: "I was sent to the neighbouring shops with Glutton, Liar or Thief, written on my forehead" (95). Stressing the devastating impact of stares even more explicitly than Dolores, Jemima emphasizes that becoming a public icon of contempt and scorn was "the most bitter punishment" (95).

The Hiding Place explores processes of othering not only through the phenomenon of staring but also through names and naming. Dolores's sisters call her "Crip" or "Stupid Crip," while her father refers to her as "Sinistra," "La Diavola," and "Il Demone." The derogative label "Crip" reduces Dolores's identity to one defining characteristic, her disfigurement and disability, while her father's labels dehumanize her, identifying her as a cursed being. These acts of naming within the family can be read as examples of what Judith Butler in *Excitable Speech* discusses as "injurious speech" or "hate speech." Exploring various ways in which words can wound, in which speech can produce injury, Butler highlights names as one important phenomenon that illustrates our "linguistic vulnerability" (30). As Butler asserts, "one is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned" (2). In this light, the names and labels Dolores is called in her family can be read as performative acts that constitute her as a subject; these acts of naming determine – in a process of "sedimentation" produced by repetition – her identity through verbal wounding centred on her physical wound. Throughout the novel, Dolores emphasizes these forms of linguistic injury, which suggests that even though she seems to learn about some of the names her father used for her only indirectly, she perceives the impact of such names as powerful. The novel implies that, as a child, Dolores struggled to resist the force of injurious names and not to think of herself as being defined by her left hand, which her family – in another example of "hate speech" – always called her "bad hand."

Similar to Ben in *Fugitive Pieces*, Dolores also highlights the significance of her given name. She reports how disappointed her father was when he found out that she was not the long-desired boy he had hoped for, and she sketches the abrupt shift of her role from "luck personified" to an unwanted child who brings misery and bad luck to her family (12). This shift is reflected in the act of naming. While her father had proudly imagined that he would name his first son "Fortuno," the birth of another girl leaves her parents at a loss for a name, until "Dolores drifts up in miserable smoke" (15). The misery surrounding her birth, as Dolores implies, is

firmly inscribed on her identity through her name, which is derived from the Latin word "dolor," which signifies "pain." Not unlike the naming of Ben in Michaels's novel, the naming of Dolores is shaped by her parents' distress. Ben's parents' choice is described as essentially a protective gesture; nevertheless, both acts of naming are indicative of the parents' difficult relationship with their last child and their struggle to fully acknowledge this child in its own right. Dolores's narrative also implies, then, that her name does not quite fit. At her hospital bed after the accident, her father "chant[s] Bambina, Bambina, Bambina" because her name "has deserted him" (67); her mother, when writing down the names of her children on the back of a photograph, misspells and crosses out her name twice, "as if she hadn't got used to this last child" (248). Her nickname "Dol," finally, with its obvious resonances with the word "doll," could be read as another injurious name, implying a lack of agency and independence. Dolores's retrospective account, thus, repeatedly emphasizes names as playing a crucial role in the formation of her identity.

The act of naming or addressing someone, as Butler further emphasizes, tends to involve the act of placing the subject, even if "such a place may be no place" (4). In this sense, her parents' initial struggle to find a name for Dolores is an early indication of the difficult place she occupies in the family. More importantly, performatives such as "Crip" and "Sinistra" locate Dolores in the no-place of the outsider or outcast; because she is visibly marked, her family tries to make her socially invisible. She is mainly kept away from school and not allowed to play in public with her sisters or move freely around the neighbourhood. As Rose asserts, she is "bad luck and […] mustn't be seen" (79). Even more strikingly, Dolores is not only hidden from the public eye, but she is also pushed into hiding within the domestic sphere. As a baby, she has to sleep in a closed chest – a precaution against her father's hatred and violence. Later on, her father cruelly locks her in the rabbit cage in the garden. Through these claustrophobic, inhuman "hiding places," whose importance is signalled by the title, the novel ironically reverses the conventional meaning of a "hiding place" as a sanctuary. The degrading, dehumanizing hiding place of the rabbit cage is not a place of safety and shelter, but a place of confinement and exclusion, a place where Dolores is not hiding but being hidden away.

The Hiding Place is a thoughtful meditation on the psychology of stigmatization and on how a marker of otherness becomes a stigma. The label "Crip" identifies the protagonist according to her physical disability, which suggests that we can read Dolores, in the words of Thomson, as a "disabled figure" with an "extraordinary body" (*Extraordinary*).[5] As Thomson highlights, "the meanings attributed to ex-

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5   *Extraordinary Bodies* is an attempt at bringing into dialogue literary studies and disability studies. As Thomson puts it, one of the main aims of her book is to "begin formulating

traordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships"; it is "social framing" and cultural norms that determine the value and the meanings of bodies that disrupt "the normal" (7, 31-32). Through Dolores, Azzopardi calls attention to the social framing of the disabled body. However, it is important to note that while the protagonist-narrator and the people around her construct her body as different and deviant, these internal and external constructions are focused primarily on what her body looks like, or does *not* look like, but they never refer to what her body cannot do, to any tasks it fails to perform. One exception is the scene when Rose shows surprise at the neat appearance of a list that Dolores has written – "as if the lack of one hand meant the other would be useless," Dolores comments (222). This scene resonates with the rhetoric of disability, which also applies to the repeated address "*Stupid* Crip" (emphasis added). Yet on the whole, *The Hiding Place* uses a rhetoric of deformity and disfigurement in its exploration of physical otherness much more than a rhetoric of disability and impairment.

With regard to stigmas marked by visual differences, Azzopardi's second novel *Remember Me* (2004) is a revealing counterpart to *The Hiding Place*. In the later novel, the autodiegetic narrator Winnie, a Norfolk bag lady in her seventies, who, like Dolores, narrates her life in retrospect, records how strongly her environment responded to her "telltale" red hair. Winnie's hair parallels Dolores's hand in the way her family regards it as a physical mark that needs to be hidden. Her grandfather obsessively tries to make it invisible by forcing Winnie to hide her hair under a beret when she goes to school. Yet because all the other girls wear plaits, the beret sets her apart; her red hair is soon discovered and becomes the target of the girls' bullying, who start calling her "pikey" (76). Winnie's hair, as Gloria Lauri-Lucente puts it, marks her as "the bearer of all that is different, and therefore the one to be excluded in a world in which marginality is the seemingly logical destiny of physical difference" (79). In the course of the narrative, Winnie is repeatedly forced to remove this visual marker of difference by changing her hair, and these physical transformations symbolically erase her past identity.[6] Thus, *Remember Me* calls attention to how crucially the "social framing" of the body determines which physical

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what disability studies might look like as a subfield in literary criticism and cultural studies" (16).

6   *Remember Me* also echoes *The Hiding Place* in its emphasis on (injurious) names as a powerful means of identification and stigmatization. Winnie highlights the relentless struggle between her father and her grandfather about her name and records how she was first Patsy, then became Lillian, and later on Winnie. Winnie depicts these conflicts of naming as related to her ensuing identity crisis and also stresses the impact of the derogatory labels she was confronted with in the course of her life: a "hobo and a tramp and down-and-out; a dipso, a wino," a "beachcomber," and a "derelict" (111).

features are perceived not just as different but as abnormal; it demonstrates how even an unusual hair colour can cross the boundary to a stigma.

In *The Hiding Place*, the social framing of the "extraordinary body" is fore-grounded especially through the emphasis on superstition. It is through the lens of superstition that her father perceives her disfigured body as a "sinister" object, a cursed body. Dolores's account of her childhood suggests that her father's rhetoric of cursedness had a powerful impact on her familial and social environment, especially on her sisters. Rose still calls her "Crip" at their reunion as adults (223), which demonstrates the persistence of this stigma. A key question that the text raises, then, is why Dolores's family responds in such a powerfully negative way to her, that is, why she becomes an object of superstition to this extent. I want to pursue one line of explanation related to general issues about trauma and the body.

Trauma, generally speaking, involves a confrontation with human vulnerability and mortality, and so does seeing the visible marks of trauma. While many trauma victims suffer from invisible emotional and mental wounds, Dolores also has wounds that are visible. Through her physical disfigurement, she is literally marked as a trauma victim; the state of woundedness associated with trauma is plainly exposed on her body. "Wounding," as Dennis Slatters asserts, "is one way the body shows its hyperbole, drawing our attention to it in unexpected ways" (11). In other words, the wounded body, and especially the disfigured body, can be read as a living memento of human vulnerability and mortality, that is, as an image or icon of trauma. A body like Dolores's calls attention to its materiality and physicality, forcing us to see the body in shapes that we do not expect, and often do not want, to see. As Thomson writes, "[m]odern culture's erasure of mortality and its harbinger, bodily vulnerability, make disabled bodies seem extraordinary rather than ordinary, abnormal instead of mundane – even though in fact the changes in our function and form that we think of as disabilities are the common effects of living and are fundamental to the human condition" (*Staring* 46). Thus, devaluing disabled bodies as other may be part of a psychological defence mechanism against the recognition of vulnerability and mortality. In this sense, physical disability can be perceived as a threat: "That anyone can become disabled at any time makes disability more fluid, and perhaps more threatening, to those who identify themselves as normates than such seemingly more stable marginal identities as femaleness, blackness, or non-dominant ethnic identities" (*Extraordinary* 14). In other words, an abnormal body may represent a particularly "threatening" other because it confronts the subject with his or her own vulnerability.

The Hiding Place demonstrates precisely this phenomenon. It shows how a trauma victim can become an object of fear, and how fear drives stigmatization. The fact that Dolores's father Frank locks her up in a cage suggests that he fears her like a dangerous animal; some potential foster parents are more scared by the prospect of having Dolores, a "damaged child," in their family than her pyromaniac sis-

ter (193); and her classmates refuse to sit with her because they fear she is some-how contagious. Finally, at the reunion with her sisters, Dolores finally realizes: "[*T*]*hey were afraid*. They still are" (272). Hence, fear alienates Dolores from her family and community.

With regard to these dynamics of stigmatization, Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a re-vealing point of comparison. Frankenstein's creature is of course a being with su-perhuman strength, which contrasts with the vulnerability of the burned child in *The Hiding Place*; far from "disabled," the creature's body is "super-abled." Yet what both have in common is that their fathers and, as a consequence, their families and wider social environments reject them based on their physical disfigurement, based on specific features of their bodies that do not fit in the socio-cultural image of normal human bodies. In both cases, disfigurement makes their environment blind to their character. Their physical otherness becomes their stigma; their physical branding also becomes a social branding, and their bodies are associated with the monstrous and the devilish respectively. In *Frankenstein*, which has repeatedly been read as a kind of "patchwork text," the protagonist's physical scars are re-flected in the novel's scarred textual surface, and, as I will show later in this chap-ter, the same is true of *The Hiding Place*, a text full of ruptures and gaps.

According to Norbert Greiner, *Frankenstein* can be read as a turning point in the history of literary and cultural representations of the scarred body: Greiner asserts that from *Frankenstein* on, scars in literature tend have negative connotations; they tend to be interpreted as signs of the non-human, as marking a subject who is both physically and morally deformed – in sharp contrast to mythological heroes such as Odysseus, whose scar functions as a positively connoted mark of his individual identity and history (203, 207). Focussing on the disabled rather than the scarred body, Thomson argues along similar lines: "The saint's stigmatic wounds, Oedi-pus's and Socrates's lameness, Tiresias's and Homer's blindness, and Philoctetes's wound certainly seem to function as ennobling marks rather than signs of diminish-ing abnormality like those of the modern 'cripple'" (*Extraordinary* 40). These shifts in literary and mythological discourses once again demonstrate the extent to which perceptions and representations of the scarred, disfigured, or disabled body hinge on specific cultural and historical contexts.

Thomson claims that in modern texts, unlike in ancient ones, disabled charac-ters are almost never main characters and tend to be made "into freaks, stripped of normalizing contexts and engulfed by a single stigmatic trait" – freaks whose bod-ies serve as "spectacles" (*Extraordinary* 9-11). *The Hiding Place*, however, signifi-cantly departs from this pattern. The protagonist-narrator is disabled, and while some characters do reduce the protagonist to a "spectacle of otherness" (9), the novel as a whole makes readers see her as a complex human being. Through a con-junction of discourses on disability and trauma, the disabled figure is here repre-sented in a way that encourages processes of identification and empathy in the

reader rather than processes of othering. I argue, then, that Azzopardi's novel depicts diegetically – rather than performing textually – the stigmatization of the extraordinary body. While Thomson sets out to "denaturalize the cultural encoding" performed by literary representations of disabled figures (5), *The Hiding Place*, in fact, enacts crucial aspects of this critical denaturalization that Thomson attempts in her readings. By exploring stigmatization through the eyes of a "physically different" subject, the novel allows insight into the psychological impact of processes of othering.

VIOLENCE, GUILT, AND GENDER

The depiction of stigmatization is one way in which Azzopardi's novel calls attention to the interrelations between trauma and guilt. Similar to *The Wrongs of Woman*, *The Hiding Place* highlights how much the protagonist is both wounded and wronged, and its approach to interpersonal trauma within the family raises important questions about trauma and ethics as well as about trauma and gender. Dolores's father, the primary agent of stigmatization and violence, is particularly important in this context; his six daughters and his wife all suffer because of his ruthlessness and cruelty. Recalling the tyrannical father figures in *The Wrongs of Woman*, Frank Gauci is depicted as a callous and cruel parent who is responsible for the family's tragedy.

The way Frank is introduced on the first pages of the novel is telling. Dolores is on the lookout for him so that she can warn her mother once he approaches. As she is waiting, she reconstructs, based on her mother's stories, how she had to be hidden from her father, who "would have smothered [her]": "I think about the little baby in the chest, and my father, creeping into the bedroom like a pantomime giant. He's lifting his legs very high, placing one shiny hobnail boot slowly in front of the other. He has a pillow concertinaed in his hands; he's sniffing the air for signs" (5). This disconcerting image of the father is extended to a detailed portrayal of fatherly irresponsibility, callousness, and violence over the course of the novel. For instance, Frank's obsession with gambling not only results in the family's financial downfall, but he also gambles away one of his daughters, Marina, giving her to a ruthless business partner in exchange for a house, a job, and money.

Moreover, the novel paints a decidedly negative image of this father figure through its many allusions to his physical violence. Dolores's description of her father hitting Fran is typical: "Fran knows the best way to behave in these moments. We all do. She stays absolutely motionless, taking small sips of air through her mouth" (113). Dolores here signals that physical violence at the hands of their father is part of the sisters' everyday experience. At the same time, the text contains

resonant details which suggest that a lot is left unspoken. Some of the most graphic images of the father's cruelty occur in connection with the family's rabbits. Dolores reports how her father dissected and killed one of these rabbits – loved by the children as pets – in front of her, peeling the fur, chopping off the feet, and exposing the different organs, "with his hand inside the rabbit" (156). It is significant that her narrative devotes more attention to her father's violence towards the rabbits, which function as the epitome of innocence violated, than towards her. Does this suggest that Dolores represses the memories of her father's violence against her? Could the memories of her father and the rabbits be interpreted as variants of screen memories (in Freudian terms)[7] and the rabbits as a kind of placeholder, screening off the memories of her own injuries? The novel refuses to provide answers to these questions, yet it sets up a close connection between Dolores and the rabbits, not only through its emphasis on Dolores's empathetic suffering with the rabbits but even more through the rabbit cage that the father perverts into a temporary prison for his daughter. Through the cluster of images revolving around the rabbits, the novel powerfully evokes Frank's cruel, de-humanizing treatment of his child. While Jemima in *The Wrongs of Woman* uses a polemical rhetoric based on animal comparisons to express the extent of the humiliation and maltreatment she suffered, *The Hiding Place* pushes the phenomenon of animalization even further, with the traumatized child being literally and physically placed among animals.

With its depiction of an abusive, ruthless father, its representation of several female trauma victims, and its choice of a female "marginalized" figure as the first-person narrator (Kačkutė 379), *The Hiding Place* can be read as a feminist novel, even though its specific feminist vision is not easy to define. Like *The Wrongs of Woman*, Azzopardi's novel situates children's and women's traumatic experiences within familial and social contexts – though the former panoramically spans different social classes, while the latter puts the focus on a clearly defined community, the community of Maltese immigrants in Cardiff. While both novels explore the dynamics between male perpetrators and female victims, their feminism operates in different ways. *The Wrongs of Woman* abounds with general statements about the deplorable circumstances of women, the cruelty and tyranny of the male sex, and the injustice created and perpetuated by patriarchal society. In contrast, the feminism of *The Hiding Place* is less explicitly verbalized, less directly stated. Both Maria and Jemima function as mouthpieces for Wollstonecraft's feminist politics and are, thus, in spite of their emotional involvement in the stories they tell, set up as essentially reliable narrators. In contrast, Dolores, who is represented as an unreliable narrator in several ways, is not given the authority to draw socio-political conclusions about the general implications of her life-story. Azzopardi also has Dolores narrate her tale in far less straightforward and positivistic terms than Woll-

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7   See Freud's "Screen Memories."

stonecraft's Jemina. *The Hiding Place* lets the scenes of male violence against chil-
dren speak for themselves, drawing on the power of "the many graphic images that
burn in the mind unresolved" (Adams 18) and leaving readers to form their own
conclusions. In this sense, the text displays features that recall Rothberg's notion of
"traumatic realism." Traumatic realism, according to Rothberg, expresses the
"search for a form of documentation beyond direct reference and coherent narra-
tive" (101); it is "a realism in which the claims of reference live on, but so does the
traumatic extremity that disables realist representation as usual" (104). It is pre-
cisely in this way that the novel expresses a commitment to the referential and
documentary: like *The Wrongs of Woman*, it seeks to document familial and social
scenes of violence, but it does so by self-reflexively troubling straightforward acts
of reference and narrative coherence. The novel relies on the reader's recognition
that the personal is political – a central notion asserted by Wollstonecraft and many
feminists after her – but without saying so explicitly.[8]

The novel's approach to trauma and gender should also be considered in con-
nection with issues of trauma and ethics. In particular, the text highlights the extent
to which traumatic experiences, especially interpersonal trauma, inevitably involve
questions of guilt and responsibility. The pressing need to reflect on these questions
is encapsulated in Dolores's powerful statement: "Children burnt and children bar-
tered: someone must be to blame" (75). The novel here calls attention to the child's
vulnerability and issues of parental responsibility. It resonates with Adriana
Cavarero's claim that "it is precisely the thematization of infancy that allows the
vulnerable being to be read in terms of a drastic alternative between violence and
care" (*Horrorism* 24). *The Hiding Place* explores this "drastic alternative" by de-
picting parental wounding rather than caring. Like the novels by Wollstonecraft and
Smiley, it emphasizes the essential vulnerability of children by depicting a family
where a parent functions as the perpetrator of trauma.

The Hiding Place calls particular attention to the complexity of guilt in connec-
tion with interpersonal trauma, emphasizing the difficulty of any clear or appropri-
ate moral judgment. First of all, a particularly unsettling aspect of the novel's ap-
proach to guilt is its representation of Dolores's attitude to her father's guilt, an atti-
tude full of tensions and contradictions. A few times, Dolores identifies her father's
guilt explicitly. Moreover, the way Azzopardi has Dolores repeatedly juxtapose two
parallel strands of narrative – switching back and forth between her father's dubious
business transactions and the children's and mother's sufferings – also contributes

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8   As Terry Eagleton asserts, the close interrelations between the private and the political is
    a recurrent key issue in novels by women writers: "[F]ew things are more politically and
    historically important than sexuality and the family, which is why Woolf, like Jane Aus-
    ten, can engage with the wider world simply by recording what goes on at home" (*The*
    English Novel 322).

to a sense of blame. This structural pattern implicitly reinforces the charge that Frank is never where he is supposed to be, ruining rather than supporting his family. However, the fact that so much space is devoted to his life-story, his thoughts, and his feelings suggests that Dolores attempts to understand rather than simply condemn him. She makes the effort to reconstruct events from his perspective rather than simply pass judgment on him from her own perspective.

The novel here hints at a psychological dilemma typically experienced by children who are victims of family trauma. As Herman emphasizes, the child "must find a way to develop a sense of basic trust and safety with caretakers who are untrustworthy and unsafe" ("Recovery" 102). In other words, believing in a parent's "badness" is severely unsettling and destabilizing for a child; in response, the child will often blame him or herself and attempt to somehow reconstruct an image of the parent's "goodness" (103). While Dolores's representation of her father does not go quite that far, it does display her tendency to mitigate his guilt. Several sections of the narrative portray him as a thoughtless and unlucky gambler rather than a cold-blooded, cruel tyrant, and the discourse of luck, which can be traced throughout the novel, also contributes to a sense of ethical relativity.[9]

The way the protagonist-narrator in *The Hiding Place* responds to male violence, then, contrasts with Maria's reaction in *The Wrongs of Woman*. Dolores's reluctance to denounce her father reveals how much she differs from the feminist subject represented by Wollstonecraft's Maria as well as by Smiley's Rose; both Maria and Rose are figured as politically aware women full of anger and indignation against the wrongs done to women in a patriarchal system. In contrast, Dolores, the novel suggests, feels wounded as a daughter and sister rather than as a woman, and her quest for recovery is focused on the family, not on politics. In her struggle not to judge her father too negatively and her tendency to reflect on his point of view, she resembles Ginny, the protagonist-narrator in Smiley's novel, who is also torn between recognizing her father's abusive and destructive character and her desire to be close to him. It is telling, then, that Dolores mostly refers to her father using the diminutive and affectionate form "Frankie" rather than "Frank." In her reconstruction of her family's story, she also mentions that Frank had occasional pangs of conscience about the way he was treating his daughters, yet the text makes us wonder whether Frank, who in general emerges as a thoroughly irresponsible and callous character, did indeed suffer from a sense of guilt – or whether this is merely Dolores's wishful thinking.

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9   According to Azzopardi's discussion of the novel in an interview, the idea of luck is a fundamental aspect of the character Frank: "I felt so much that his belief in luck was driving everything, and that it wasn't a complete act of will that he would behave in such an appalling way" ("Out of Hiding" 4).

Issues of responsibility and guilt become even more complex and ambiguous in Dolores's representation of her mother and her sisters. On the whole, her retrospective account portrays her mother as loving and caring and suggests that Mary mainly failed to effectively shield her children from their abusive father because she was also a victim and overwhelmed by the burden of holding the family together. Yet the text also creates ambiguities in its representation of Mary. Some passages suggest that Mary may not have been nearly as protective and loving as Dolores claims, and Dolores also mentions that her sister Rose is deeply critical of her mother. Could Dolores's positive representation of her mother thus be an expression of the traumatized child's urge to believe that her familial environment is warm and protective, even when it is not? Is it possible that Dolores projects her need for a caring, supportive, and loving parent, which her father radically fails to fulfil, onto her mother and, as a result, unconsciously idealizes her?

As these unresolved questions exemplify, *The Hiding Place* represents the family as generating cycles of hurt and violence that make it difficult to pin down cause and effect. As in *The Wrongs of Woman*, issues of responsibility and guilt are complicated by interpersonal constellations, where victims hurt other victims or even turn into perpetrators of trauma.[10] Yet *The Hiding Place* pushes the challenge to moral judgment even further; it creates a space of profound ethical uncertainty, exemplified by Dolores's representation of her sisters. Dolores depicts several scenes from her childhood in which Rose and Luca exclude, bully, or frighten her. While Dolores implies that her sisters, who are also victims of their father in different ways, internalize and pass on his aggression and violence, she still seems to blame them for also turning against her. For instance, Dolores portrays the moment when Luca tattoos her arm with a knife as a scene of sisterly violence. While Fran's tattoo, the source of inspiration for Luca, is represented as a mark of self-identification, Dolores represents her tattoo as essentially a wound. While Fran marks herself with her own name, Dolores is marked by another, which recalls the way in which she is repeatedly branded by injurious names. Dolores depicts the moment of being tattooed as a moment of fear and helplessness, a moment in which she identifies with the rabbits skinned by her father: "Luca takes up my father's rabbity knife, licks her finger and runs it over the edge; she's about to skin me" (184). Frank's knife, his instrument of violence, seems to symbolize the way in which Luca perpetuates her father's violence against her sister. Yet the scene also contains ambiguities. It is crucial that the theme of tattooing is placed in the context of what makes one "hard" (185), and the fact that Luca cuts Dolores's arm with the inten-

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10 Azzopardi's *Remember Me* pushes the destabilization of categories such as victims and perpetrators even further. Towards the end of the novel, the autodiegetic narrator Winnie, who throughout the narrative portrays herself as a victim, finally confesses her own guilt, which forces readers to rethink their perceptions of innocence and guilt.

tion of cutting her own afterwards raises the possibility that the tattooing may be intended as a gesture of sisterly bonding and solidarity rather than wounding and violence.[11] Ultimately, this scene sheds an ambiguous light on Dolores's repeated emphasis on how her sisters participated in her father's cruel treatment of her.

Issues of guilt are complicated further by the text's emphasis on the unreliability of (childhood) memory. Memory talk with her sisters reveals that they were not locking her into the rabbit cage, as Dolores used to believe, but were, on the contrary, freeing her from it. This false memory raises questions about how distorted Dolores's other memories are – and, as a result, how accurate her view about her sisters' guilt might be. The text time and again creates a sense of ethical uncertainty. Azzopardi also has Dolores explicitly emphasize the plurality of truth and the impossibility of making firm moral judgments (in this case about her father's bad luck in gambling): "My parents argue about whose fault it is. She blames him, he blames me, and I can't blame anyone yet. But I will. I will lay it all at Joe Medora's doors [her father's business partner], when I'm ready. Except Joe Medora has so many doors" (23). Hence, each concrete allocation of blame is immediately destabilized. This pervasive atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety surrounding questions of guilt is representative of the novel's general approach to violence and gender. Its profound concern with feminism and ethics is expressed through resonant images (such as the chest and the cage, the rabbits and the father's knife) and knotty implications (such as the mother's involvement in familial cycles of trauma) far more than through overtly political rhetoric or explicitly judgmental language.

"PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER": THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOVERY

A pervasive sense of loss and deep anxiety about questions of guilt, then, emerge as the two dominant emotions in the narrator's attitude to the past. The novel, however, not only conveys the "radical disruption" caused by traumatic experiences (Caruth, "Trauma and Experience" 4); it also explores in depth the individual's attempt to cope with this disruption. Dolores's quest for recovery, encapsulated by her emphatic statement "I want a cure" (223), is depicted simultaneously as an attempt to recover her losses and memories as well as an attempt to understand some of the disturbing secrets of the past, especially of the family's history of violence.

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11 As Ernst Jung emphasizes, tattooing tends to be connected with processes of individual self-awareness, self-representation, and self-fashioning (172). More specifically, some of its typical associations include pride and rebellion, freedom, and courage (172-74) – all attributes that the text evokes regarding Fran's tattoo.

The Hiding Place stages the struggle for recovery through the process of rewriting the traumatic past, thereby using a structural pattern that is typical of trauma fiction. All the trauma novels of my corpus feature autodiegetic narrators engaged in processes of narrating trauma and narrating the self; they play with the illusion that the traumatized protagonist-narrator becomes the fictional author of his or her own life-story. Thus, many fictional trauma texts evoke the frame of autobiographical writing. However, it is crucial to note that trauma fiction tends to depart from the model of a full-fledged fictional autobiography; most postmodern trauma novels subvert the autobiographical model in that they are structured as a more partial, fractional retelling of the past. As in Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* or Helen Dunmore's *Talking to the Dead*, for example, the fictional act of autobiographical writing tends to revolve around the integration of trauma into the life-story.[12]

The same applies to *The Hiding Place*, where the autodiegetic narrator does not record her entire life-story but focuses on her traumatic past and its present impact. The first part of the novel is centred on Dolores's past as a five-year-old, oscillating between the child's and the adult's perspective, while the second part is set at the time of her mother's funeral thirty years later. This structural division opens up a temporal gap of several decades in the narrator's life-story, which indirectly reinforces the narrative focus on trauma. A crucial aspect of processes of narrating trauma and rewriting the past, as mentioned in earlier chapters, is that they tend to express the individual's need for a sense of consistency, unity, or stability, a need caused or intensified by the disruptions of trauma. This aspect of self-narration is foregrounded in Azzopardi's novel, which depicts the process of rewriting the past with a powerful emphasis on the act of ordering. Highlighting both the need for narration and the need for consistency, *The Hiding Place* resonates with – or, perhaps, even deliberately draws on – psychological approaches to trauma.

The novel establishes a close connection between acts of narration and processes of ordering – in Dolores's words, of "putting things in order" (267). It depicts the quest for the past as closely interlinked with the act of homecoming. Back in the house of her childhood after thirty years, Dolores embarks on a project of retrospective ordering: "I go back, and try to piece together how it was. I think there must be a design" (33). The narrator's belief in – or hope of finding – the "design" underlying the fragments of her life-story and her family history drives the narrative. As Lauri-Lucente emphasizes, Dolores "perceives memory as the most powerful instrument in her struggle against fragmentation and oblivion" (78). She tries to piece

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12 Some of these fictional texts may be said to follow the structural model of what Roger Luckhurst calls the "trauma memoir" more closely than that of autobiography: "[T]he 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" (*Trauma Question* 119).

together the past in an attempt to regain a sense of control and stability, often through a precise attention to detail. Standing in the kitchen, she examines how her present impressions of the light, the furniture, the colours, and the overall atmosphere correspond to her childhood memories (155-56). In this way, she tries to bring a sense of order to her fragments of memory.

The recurring phrase "putting things in order" is complemented by the leitmotif of lists. Dolores writes common lists, such as a shopping lists, but she also compiles several far more complex, symbolic lists, including a list of the "gains and losses" of her life, a list of who is missing from her childhood, and a list of hypothetical versions of her life. Her obsession with lists could be seen in connection with her profession as a reference librarian, but it can also be read more generally as an attempt to break down intricate issues into small, controllable items. Even though lists often tend to be written in associative or somewhat random rather than neatly ordered and structured ways, listing still implies the attempt at gaining an overview and a sense of control. The text indeed signals that Dolores clings to lists as a means of upholding a feeling of order and stability. At her mother's funeral, for example, she tries to fill her unsettling emotional vacuum by thinking of her list of family members and past acquaintances: "I don't feel anything. I'm just waiting for it to be over. I don't know who is alive now, and who is dead. I think about my list, tucked neatly in the pocket of my holdall. At least I can tick off Luca" (252). The novel suggests that lists also function as an emotional anchor for Dolores through their associative connection with her mother: "I must have got the habit from Mam, I say, She used to make lists all the time" (221). For Dolores, making lists serves both as an attempt to establish order and a way of identifying with her mother.

However, the primary medium Dolores employs in her project of retrospective ordering is autobiographical writing. What needs to be examined more closely, though, is the novel's specific framing of this medium, which raises fundamental questions about narratorial perspective, authority, and knowledge. In the first part of the novel, Dolores traces the roots of her life-story back to the time before she was born, describing her own birth, her tragic accident in the fire, and her early family experiences, interspersed with fragments from the lives of her parents and sisters. These sections of Dolores's narrative are puzzling in that she neither acknowledges the impossibility of having conscious memories of these events nor mentions any other source for these stories. In other words, the knowledge that the narrative claims clearly transcends the limitations of a homodiegetic narrator; the novel pushes the boundaries of conventional first-person narration. Several reviewers therefore argue for at least two narratorial voices: the autodiegetic narrator Dolores and an omniscient narrator who tells the events that the first-person narrator could

not have witnessed.[13] Yet this reading can be challenged by the fact that even in the seemingly "omniscient" segments of the narrative, the recurrent use of possessive pronouns, notably "my father" and "my mother," indicates first-person narration. At the same time, there are parts where these references to the parents are replaced by their names, which again challenges the distinction between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration. Through this unusual narrative constellation, the novel can be said to consciously destabilize conventional narratological categories, encouraging readers to reflect on questions of narration and focalization.

While the novel refuses to let these categories become fixed, I suggest a reading with Dolores as the only narrator – at least in the first part of the novel. Dolores can be read as a highly unreliable narrator who constructs parts of her narrative based on other people's stories, hearsay, or her imagination, without indicating that this is what she does. The short non-numbered chapters that are interspersed throughout the main narrative, which carry the resonant titles "tinder," "interference," "amulet," and "missing," significantly contribute to this impression of unreliability. Focalized through Dolores as an adult, these chapters undermine the status of the main narrative through the narrator's comments on the difficulty of remembering the past – "I try to recall it" (156) – and on her lack of memories about someone who repeatedly figures in her narrative – "I don't remember Marina" (75). Hence, these short metafictional chapters, which interrupt the flow of the story, repeatedly challenge readers' "willing suspension of disbelief" and foreground the constructedness of Dolores's entire narrative. The novel implies that the act of remembering the past fundamentally involves (re)construction and imagination. As Lauri-Laucente puts it, "the reader is constantly reminded that memory is elusive and multifaceted. As a result, it is not always possible to distinguish memory from sheer fantasy, truth from falsehood, subterfuges and lies from historical actuality" (80).

The novel's narrative puzzles, the unreliability of its first-person narrator, and the constructedness of the narrative become more meaningful when interpreted in the light of trauma. The text's distinct narrative technique can be read as highlighting the traumatized subject's pressing need for a story or narrative to make sense of the past, the desire to establish some kind of knowledge or "truth" at all costs. *The Hiding Place* suggests that the gesture of omniscience – even if it is just a pretense – may give the narrator a sense of authority, control, and consistency. In other words, even if the "design" created by her narrative does not correspond to the his-

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13 Kevin Mahoney claims that "[t]he narrative moves forwards and backwards in time, and jumps from narrator to narrator," and Meredith Blum argues that the novel "changes perspective constantly, shifting from Dolores's memories of her childhood […] to her father's flashbacks of his arrival in Wales to third-person accounts of the actions of minor characters."

torical truth, it may give her the illusion of knowledge.[14] The fact that Dolores begins her life-story with stories surrounding her birth also points to a characteristic problem inherent in the act of autobiographical narration, which Cavarero describes as follows:

Autobiographical memory always recounts a story that is incomplete from the beginning. It is necessary to go back to the narration told by others, in order for the story to begin from where it really began; and it is this first chapter of the story that the narratable self stubbornly seeks with all of her desire. (*Relating Narratives* 39)

The pressing need for the "first chapter," as well as the dependence on others for this chapter, is particularly exposed here precisely through Dolores's pretense of knowing all about what she cannot possibly know first-hand; the mask of omniscience highlights the extent to which Dolores, as the "narratable self" and fictional autobiographer, is engaged in a quest for origins and for a life-story that would give her the sense of completeness and order.

Pushing this line of thought further, it is crucial to note that through its multilayered emphasis on the need for consistency and order, Azzopardi's novel responds to key issues in trauma and identity discourses. I read the novel as offering a critical reflection on the celebrations of multiple and fluid identities, of flexibility, malleability, and fragmentation that can be found in much postmodern writing and post-structuralist theory. The novel suggests that for an individual (especially a trauma victim) who suffers from an unstable identity, a shattered self, and a ruptured life-story, it may be exceedingly difficult to adopt a creative, playful, or performative approach to fragmentation and fluidity. In relation to trauma, ideas such as consistency and stability, order and control gain new meanings and value as potential sources of empowerment, not of constraint and disempowerment. It is through the lens of trauma that the novel forces us to rethink whether, to speak with Cavarero, the post-structuralist "demoniz[ing]" of unity may have gone too far (*Relating Narratives* 70).[15] The novel, in other words, critically alerts us to the ways in

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14　In *Remember Me*, processes of remembering and reconstructing the past are also depicted as an integral part of survival. While Winnie, in contrast to Dolores, had always refused to reflect on the past, it is the incisive experience of being robbed that makes her, an elderly woman, realize how much the past matters and, like Dolores, she then embarks on a quest for that past. Like Dolores, Winnie narrates fragments of her own past as well as fragments from her family history that she cannot possibly know.

15　Cavarero discusses the need to rethink the notion of "unity" mainly with regard to feminism: "[G]iven the familiar metaphysical unfolding of the One in philosophical phallocentrism, it is above all unity that becomes demonized within the post-modern or poststructuralist horizon that these feminists embrace; with the odd result, as Christine

which theoretical notions may marginalize or gloss over psychological needs. The "disillusionment with the unitary subject" (Anderson 57), with notions of a stable self and a coherent identity, does not mean that the psychological need thereof is also dead – and this is particularly true in the context of trauma.

This is not to say, however, that *The Hiding Place* endorses ideas of a coherent autobiography and a consistent self in an overly optimistic or idealistic way or that it naively argues for a theoretical return to notions of a stable self or a unified identity. Rather, it alerts us to clashes between theoretical perspectives and the psychology of the posttraumatic.[16] The novel time and again calls attention to the trauma victim's psychological needs, which persist through postmodern and post-structuralist theoretical challenges, while it nevertheless, like many literary trauma texts, expresses ambivalence about the potential of narrative in the face of trauma. *The Hiding Place* can in fact be seen as a particularly interesting example of how trauma fiction emphasizes the tensions between, in Luckhurst's terminology, the "narrative" and "anti-narrative" dimensions of trauma, oscillating between "narrative possibility" and "impossibility" (*Trauma Question* 80, 83). Throughout, there is a powerful tension between the protagonist-narrator's need for consistency, order, and control and the emphasis on a *lack* of order, controllability, and unity enacted by the text as a whole.

While Dolores's narrative construction of the earliest chapters of her life-story and central chapters of her family history that precede her memory reflect her quest for origins and order, this specific narrative technique at the same time raises crucial questions about narratorial perspective and authority. Its narrative frame reflects the uncertainty and anxiety often associated with trauma and severely disrupts the reader's sense of narrative stability. According to Luckhurst, many trauma narratives "have ostentatiously played around with narrative time, disrupting linearity, suspending logical causation, running out of temporal sequence, working backwards towards the inaugurating traumatic event, or playing with belated revelations that retrospectively rewrite narrative significance" (80).[17] The novel uses several of these typical techniques. It jumps back and forth between past and present, challenges boundaries between memory and imagination, and withholds central revelations until the end. As is characteristic of postmodern trauma fiction, *The Hiding Place* problematizes processes of remembering, narration, and representation; like

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Battersby would say, of confirming the traditional patriarchal meaning that wants 'women to be a fragmented self, incoherent and resistant to every synthesis'" (70).

16 On these tensions between theoretical conceptualizations of identity and selfhood and the psychological needs of trauma survivors, see also Schönfelder, "(Re-)Visions of the Buried Self."

17 For a discussion of characteristic features of trauma fiction, see also Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* and Vickroy's *Trauma and Survival*.

A Thousand Acres and *Fugitive Pieces*, the novel is profoundly self-reflexive.[18] It does not use postmodern strategies of intertextuality and rewriting like Smiley's novel, nor does it emphasize the functions of different genres of writing like Michaels's novel. Rather, what makes *The Hiding Place* radically self-reflexive is its distinct narrative technique, which challenges the status of large sections of the text, subverts narratorial categories, and forces us to question the narrator's reliability, authority, and knowledge. While some reviewers criticize this unusual narrative technique as a weakness of Azzopardi's debut novel,[19] I argue that the profoundly unsettling effect achieved thereby is deliberate and a key aspect of the text's approach to trauma. The novel's narrative "design," to return to one of the narrator's central images, is one of ruptures and indeterminacies, of gaps and textual scars, but it is vital to acknowledge that the challenge to narrative and (autobiographical) unity on the textual level throughout remains counterpointed by the narrator's desire for consistency and order (and for establishing order through narrative) at the diegetic level. In other words, the novel's relation to postmodernism emerges as essentially twofold: *The Hiding Place* is postmodern with regard to its poetics of trauma, while it problematizes and challenges views of identity that postmodernism and post-structuralism have made influential, forcing us to rethink these theorizations through the lens of psychological discourses.

Through these tensions between the diegetic and the textual level, the novel seems to signal that what is at stake here is an acknowledgement of psychological needs rather than a perfect fulfilment of them. The novel does, however, gesture towards the possibility of fulfilment by implying that notions such as consistency, unity, and order may be reconceptualized in less absolute and more subjective terms, a case in point being Dolores's approach to her family's past. Dolores's desire for wholeness extends from her autobiography to her family's history. It is pertinent that her narrative includes seemingly first-hand reports of important events (e.g., her parents' first encounter) of which she has only second-hand knowledge. Similarly, it is telling that her story also features her sister Marina, whom she never knew; the act of writing about Marina illustrates the extent to which retrospective ordering and the attempt at recovering losses are interrelated. Creating a sense of

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18 Through its problematizing of knowledge, authority, and reliability, the novel may also be said to reflect critically on processes of life writing more generally and thus, perhaps, to point to the crisis of the actual genre of autobiography that some critics have diagnosed in connection with trauma (Luckhurst, *Trauma Question* 120).

19 Leo Carey, for example, criticizes the fact that "we get observations far beyond the scope of a child, and even descriptions of incidents at which Dolores was not present," and he dismisses the novel's narrative constellation as a sign of the author's inexperience. Likewise, Michiko Kakutani emphasizes that the novel's "narrative strategy can be distracting for the reader," without exploring the functions or the impact of this "distractive" effect.

wholeness and understanding seems more important to Dolores than uncovering the truth about the past: "But I'm not interested in old times. I want to know about scattering a family like grains of rice: about Marina, my father, Fran; about what it means to burn" (258). What matters primarily to Dolores, then, is not factual knowledge about "old times" but the meaning and impact of significant past events for her life in the present. The novel here resonates with psychologist Harald Welzer's claim that, for the individual, discovering the perfectly accurate truth about the past sometimes matters less than the *sense* of finding the truth about the past – and the factual truth may not be identical with the emotional truth (see *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*). Indeed, passages like the one above demonstrate how much Dolores longs to grasp the meaning and impact of significant past events emotionally. In this light, the gesture towards understanding (or perhaps even sympathy or forgiveness) inherent in Dolores's stories about her father's past seems more important than their factuality. Dolores's quest for recovery thus emerges as a quest for a subjective sense of consistency and order.

RE-MEMBERING THE FAMILIAL PAST

In the second part of the novel, Azzopardi highlights an additional dimension of the protagonist-narrator's need for order and consistency by exploring in detail the interpersonal aspects of remembering the past. Throughout part two, Dolores displays a strong desire to establish a shared past with her sisters, attempting to consolidate – or perhaps rather initiate – a familial community of memory. Like *The Wrongs of Woman*, *The Hiding Place* highlights the need to feel that one's memories are validated and accepted by one's fellow human beings – a need that is particularly important for trauma victims, who tend to have a complex and conflicted attitude to their past. However, while *The Wrongs of Woman* stages the empowering potential of sharing memories and stories of the past, *The Hiding Place* explores the more dysfunctional aspects of telling and sharing memories. Wollstonecraft demonstrates how sympathy and mutual understanding may lead to a sense of communality and the emergence of a "community of suffering," while Azzopardi's novel highlights the unsettling effects of a memory community dominated by tensions, misunderstandings, and distrust.

In her quest to understand the past, Dolores relies on her sisters' cooperation, longing to fill the gaps in her autobiography and her family history through what I, with Welzer, want to call "memory talk."[20] She repeatedly confronts her sisters with

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20 Welzer draws on the notion of "memory talk" as conceptualized by developmental psychologists such as Katherine Nelson, who explores how the parents' practice of memory

statements or questions about the past. However, her sisters not only refuse to join her on this journey back in time but also strongly disapprove of her attempts to "dig up" past events (266). Luca flatly denies her memories: "I don't remember, she says, turning away, Understand me, Dolores, I don't remember One Single Thing" (274). Celesta expresses her refusal to remember just as emphatically: "I Don't Do Memory Lane" (274). Because Celesta still lives in Cardiff with her family, her most pressing desire is to let the past remain buried in oblivion – which is diametrically opposed to Dolores's fervent attempts at "unearth[ing]" (277). While Jemima, Maria, and Darnford at least to some extent share the desire to narrate their past, Dolores seems to be the only one in her family who feels, or admits to, this desire. *The Wrongs of Woman* suggests that sharing past experiences of distress is crucial for a community of suffering to emerge; the parallels that Jemima and Maria recognize between their life-stories, especially through Maria's daughter, create a bond of communality. Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, moreover, demonstrates how empathetic listening may lead to powerful forms of interpersonal bonding through memory, even if there is no common ground of experience between the trauma survivor and the listener. In contrast to such positive visions of sharing memories, *The Hiding Place* signals critically that a shared past may not suffice for a community of suffering to emerge – or may even function as a barrier to it. Similar to *A Thousand Acres*, where the three sisters embody different attitudes to the past, Azzopardi's novel establishes a contrast between Dolores's and her sisters' approaches to remembering and forgetting. Both novels depict the familial memory community in crisis, highlighting the chasms that emerge when the willingness to recognize the past *as a shared past* is missing.

Dolores's attempts to create a sense of community, for example, her buying presents for her sisters and the inclusive gesture of her toast "To us, To *all* of us – wherever we are" (272), fail to produce the kind of bonding she desires. If we trust Dolores's perception of her sisters' persistently negative attitude towards her, their refusal to join her efforts at creating a sense of community could be read in the light of Dolores's possible function as a scapegoat within the family. The emphasis on Frank's view of Dolores as the harbinger of bad luck and the scenes that depict how her sisters internalized this view ("We're cursed, we are. We got a hex!" 264) could imply that Dolores acts as the family's scapegoat. According to Eagleton, the scapegoat is "symbolically loaded with the guilt of the community," so identifying with it would shift the community's feeling of horror from the scapegoat to its own

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talk teaches children to acquire the narrative structures of autobiographical remembering (see *Language in Cognitive Development*). What Welzer emphasizes, however, is that "memory talk" continues to play a crucial role throughout adult life; he sees different forms of "memory talk" or "conversational remembering" as an essential social practice and life-long process (*Das kommunikative Gedächtnis* 16).

failure (*Sweet Violence* 278-79). As Eagleton further emphasizes, an essential characteristic of the scapegoat is its lack of individual humanity and subjectivity: "[T]he whole point of the scapegoat is its anonymity, as a human being emptied of subjectivity and reduced to refuse or nothingness" (278). Hence, if Dolores were allowed to become part of the sisters' community, she could no longer function as the scapegoat for the family's tragedy. Yet while Dolores's perspective seems to hint at such a reading, the text as a whole also allows us to interpret the sisters' reluctance to engage in the sharing of memories more neutrally as merely a different strategy of coping with the traumatic past, one driven by the need for denial, repression, or silent acceptance rather than explicit confrontation. Moments of dialogue with her sister Luca, for example, indicate that Luca experiences any confrontation with memories as profoundly unsettling. Luca's "sickness" when thinking about the past seems more powerful than her desire to distance Dolores (274).

However, Azzopardi has Dolores face further obstacles in her quest to understand the past, especially through her recognition of the unreliability of memory. In one of the moments when her sisters finally engage in a discussion about the past, Dolores is forced to realize that some of her memories are false. It turns out that her recollections of Joe Medora, a business partner of her father's – who plays an important role in the first part of her narrative – are not genuine memories but impressions based on "an engraving from an old book" (243). Each scene of memory talk produces a different version of the past, and the boundaries between memories and stories repeatedly get blurred. Her sisters make her painfully aware of the unreliability of memory. Hence, while Dolores needs her sisters in her attempt to "put[] things in order," they complicate her struggle to recover and understand the past in several ways. As Dolores states in a moment of disillusionment: "It felt like a swamp, this past we were supposed to have shared" (244).

In spite of her sisters' reactions, Dolores continues her quest for the past, looking for other opportunities to engage in memory talk. In her nephew Louis, Celesta's son, Dolores finally finds a companion who is happy to support her search for memories and who is also keen to discover more about the past. It is significant that Louis, though a member of the family, has no first-hand experience of the past Dolores seeks to reconstruct; it seems that the generational distance that separates him from this past facilitates the process of sharing stories. In their conversations, however, Dolores realizes how much Louis's stories of the past, these "gilt-edged stories" that are based on what he has heard from his parents and on rumours circulating in the neighbourhood, differ from her own version of the past: "A small fire is an inferno, a burnt hand is a horror story, and a falling-out between friends is murder. […] My own recollections seemed drab by comparison" (244-45). What is more, when Martineau, a witness of the accident in which Dolores was injured, describes the fire and the subsequent events, she reacts with suspicion, believing that "[s]omething is wrong with Martineau's story" (261). She downplays the status of

his account by stressing that "he's just telling a tale" (265). Thus, memory talk seems to result in disillusionment; Dolores realizes how much these different stories are based on reconstruction and interpretation rather than fact: "As with all truth, there is another version" (75). *The Hiding Place*, thus, conceptualizes the remembering and writing down of memories as inevitably hinging on reconstruction and interpretation, which resonates with a view of memory advanced by many contemporary memory theorists.[21] As Michael Lambek and Paul Antze put it, memory involves a continuous negotiation of "the balance between reproduction and representation, or fact and interpretation, or recollection and understanding" (xxvii). *The Hiding Place* expresses this notion of remembering, which contributes to the novel's self-reflexivity, through its persistent emphasis on unreliability and its conceptualization of both personal and familial memory as an intermingling of first- and second-hand stories.

The novel suggests, however, that the protagonist-narrator also plays with this critical awareness of memory. For example, after visiting Eva, an old friend of the family, who tells her that her father supposedly murdered one of his business partners, Dolores repeats Eva's rhetorical question – "Can you imagine!" – and replies "I can" (231); subsequently, she describes in detail the circumstances of the murder (231-34). Her account of the murder clearly carries undertones of spontaneous improvisation. Similarly, Dolores immediately integrates Martineau's story into her narrative, retelling it in her own words, despite the fact that she doubts its reliability. Here, she displays an approach to memories that resembles Winnie's philosophy of memory in *Remember Me*. Listening to all her father's stories about her mother, Winnie longs to hear more of them, in spite of her distrust of their accuracy:

There's no reason to disbelieve him, but I do. […] I don't say a word. I want him to tell me again, to tell me all the other versions, the ones where he can believe how it might have been. […] I balance his memories, all the same, storing them on top of mine, carefully leaning one against the other like a stack of playing cards. (68)

Like Dolores, Winnie preserves other people's stories of the past with a keenness that betrays how much she longs to fill the gaps in her family history. Both protagonist-narrators think of the past as made up of different layers of stories – a bit like a palimpsest – and indulge in processes of (re)constructing and (re)creating tales and memories of their family.

The narrative technique of the second part of the novel is important in this context. In part two, Dolores's account of the reunion with her sisters is interspersed

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21 See also Richard Terdiman's *Present Past*, Mark Freeman's *Rewriting the Self*, and Ian Hacking's *Rewriting the Soul*.

with fragments about the sisters' past. Again, it is not clear if these sections of the narrative are told – and constructed – by Dolores or if they are told by a hetero-diegetic narrator who tells these stories focalized through her sisters. In this part, there are no possessive pronouns to indicate first-person narration, but given the narrative constellation in the first part and the way it plays with narrative categories, it is possible to argue that Dolores is the narrator throughout and to read the stories about her sisters as her attempt to empathize with them. Either way, multi-perspectivism becomes increasingly important in part two in the way the novel re-constructs the perspective of several trauma victims. The history of family trauma is composed like a collage, with individual fragments and different perspectives that do not quite match. Even though the collage created here is not the perfect "design" that Dolores sets out to find early in the novel, the text suggests that it nevertheless yields some insight for her. As Kačkutė emphasizes, "[i]n *The Hiding Place* the family narrative functions as an active designer and an inherent part of the identity of the protagonist-narrator" (379). While spending time with her sisters, Dolores repeatedly reports that "something is being unearthed" (277); she describes how "the years piled up in front of [her]" and how "things surface" (276), signalling that she unearths buried layers of the past. In other words, Dolores's solitary and imagi-nary act of reconstruction is here coupled with some revelations and insights, emerging out of the snippets of memory talk with her sisters.

Moreover, despite the sisters' apparent reluctance to allow a community of memory to develop, there are a few moments when a sense of understanding and closeness does finally emerge among them. The most powerful scene in this context happens with Luca, who suffers with Dolores through an overwhelming moment in which she relives the experience with the rabbits in the cage:

I'm kneeling with Luca in the long grass. I don't know how long she's been with me. She's holding my hair back from my face, and her mouth is pressed close to my ear; she's whisper-ing words. There. It's gone, It's all gone. […]
Bad dreams, Dol, she says. That's all they are. We all get them.
With her arms wrapped tight around me, we walk the plank, unsteady as a pair of drunks. (278)

It is crucial that this moment of sisterly bonding occurs with Luca, who, according to Dolores's childhood memories, often bullied her. This scene of empathy and support, in which Luca admits to their shared past and creates a sense of communal-ity through her use of the pronoun "we," functions as a counterpart to the tattooing scene and further destabilizes Dolores's interpretation of the tattooing as an act of sisterly violence. The moment of understanding and shared suffering with Luca is followed by another moment of bonding, this time while drinking whisky with Luca and Rose: "And this time I drink with them, and it feels warm, the whisky and the

moment and being on the inside" (279). For the first time, Dolores no longer feels excluded; the trauma victim reaches an – at least tentative – reconciliation with some of her sisters (and alleged victimizers), who finally acknowledge their shared past.

RECOVERY, GUILT, AND ETHICS

The final chapters of *The Hiding Place* express a move towards recovery in several ways, suggesting that the processes of writing and talking about the past constitute a key step in Dolores's struggle to come to terms with her traumas. The powerful scenes with Luca and Rose are just two of several symbolic moments. Furthermore, the novel signals that Dolores begins to fight the stigmatization she experiences due to her damaged hand. Finding it "damning" that Rose still calls her "Crip" (223), Dolores tries to counteract the persistent force of the stigma. Sitting in a café with her sister Celesta, Dolores consciously resists the impulse to hide her hand, leaving it on the table and intentionally exposing it to her sister:

Celesta drops her spoon, places her right hand flat on the table next to my left. Careful not to touch me. Two grown-up hands now, mine and hers. I turn my palm upwards, expose the proud edge of bone where my thumb would have been, the crescent of white flesh and the splash of purple scar tissue where the skin grafts failed. I resist the urge to bury it in my lap. She has to look at me now. (242)

Dolores here attempts to overcome her passive role as the object of the stigmatizing gaze; instead, she actively orchestrates the moment of staring, thereby transforming a moment of helplessness to one of empowerment – a move that resonates with Thomson's claims in *Staring* about the positive potential of staging scenes of staring. Celesta immediately recognizes the significance of Dolores's gesture: "You don't mind it? she says, It doesn't bother you?" (242). Yet the power dynamics threaten to shift, as Dolores recognizes that her sister still struggles not to perceive Dolores's hand as a *Fremdkörper*: "I turn my hand over again; she means it bothers *her*" (242). In spite of her sister's reaction, which points to the vulnerability of the one being stared at and the fragility of an intentional staging of staring, this central moment nevertheless suggests that Dolores not only displays an acceptance of her hand's physical difference but now also consciously chooses visibility and exposure, rejecting the state of hiding and invisibility that her family used to assign her. Finally, Dolores not only stages herself as the one being looked at but also assumes the role of the one looking – "All the time I talk, I'm studying her face" (242) – in another gesture of empowerment.

Another way in which the ending of the novel evokes a mood of reconciliation, integration, and recovery is the last chapter's emphasis on Dolores's relation to her mother and her sister Fran, the two members of the family with whom she always had the strongest emotional attachment. In other words, the last chapter foregrounds the endurance of two forms of female relationships: sisterly attachment and a mother-daughter relationship. The novel's final scene is focused on Dolores's reunion with Fran, brought about by her nephew Louis. Similarly, the last chapter highlights Dolores's attempt to mentally and emotionally reconnect with her dead mother. Believing that "[a]t the end she made a start; putting things in order, tidying" (207), Dolores's rearranging and reordering of the furniture, a concrete counterpart to her mental and memorial acts of "putting things in order," serves as a way of bringing her mother's final actions to an end. Dolores then sits where she "used to sit with [her] mother" and performs one last act of identification with her mother's habits – she makes a list (281).

The persistence of the protagonist's strong connection to her mother, years after their physical separation, is an important theme that reappears in *Remember Me*. The "ghosts" that haunted Winnie's mother throughout Winnie's childhood have their counterpart in the "spirits" of the dead who often appeared to her when she was a teenager. Besides her affinity with the spiritual, the moment of (mis)identification, when Winnie mistakes her reflection in the mirror for an image of her mother, reveals her special bond with her mother. In both *The Hiding Place* and *Remember Me*, the mothers, suffering from physical and mental illness, are too weak and vulnerable to live up to a Wollstonecraftian ideal of education as pursued by Maria, who uses her experiences of being "schooled in misery" (110) to prepare her daughter for future hardships. Dolores's and Winnie's mothers seem more loving than many of the negative mother figures in *The Wrongs of Woman*, but they nevertheless fail to give their daughters the support they would need. Similar to Ginny's mother in *A Thousand Acres*, who is pushed into the role of an absent presence by the patriarchal father figure Larry even before her death, Dolores's mother, even though she seems to have more agency, also fails to protect her daughters against their abusive father. Both mother figures are depicted ambiguously with regard to their involvement, or even complicity, in familial cycles of violence and trauma. Yet both Ginny and Dolores express a longing to connect with their dead mothers – though in Ginny's case, this longing is always almost immediately erased by her father's overarching presence. Azzopardi's novels especially resonate with Wollstonecraft's credo concerning the fundamental importance of mother-daughter relationships – in Jemima's words, "a mother's affection" is "the grand support of life" (95).[22] While the novels on father-daughter incest by Shelley and Smiley fore-

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22 Vickroy asserts that mothers and daughters feature prominently in much trauma fiction: "[M]others and children are most frequently vulnerable to situations of oppression, depri-

ground the damaging effects of absent mothers, the novels by Azzopardi and Wollstonecraft emphasize that a special bond between mother and daughter persists, even through dramas of wounding and suffering.[23] In *The Hiding Place*, it is through the emphasis on this bond that a hopeful note rings through the novel's ending.

The novel's move towards acceptance and reconciliation is expressed through further symbolic details. When Dolores sets out to leave the family home again, she gathers a number of objects closely connected to her childhood – an old wooden dice, a rosary, two photographs, and the chest she slept in when she was a baby – to take them with her to her new home (280). Her decision to keep these objects, these tangible tokens of memory, reads like a gesture of integration, signalling that Dolores finally accepts her traumatic childhood as part of her life. The chest, an object deeply inscribed with her father's violence, is especially significant in this context. It is not an object of nostalgia, like some of the objects that Winnie in *Remember Me* attempts to preserve; rather, it is a token of trauma that Dolores reinterprets as a symbol of resistance and durability: "It has survived a fire" (280). The chest also symbolically stands for the survival, endurance, and strength of the protagonist-narrator herself and for her development from a trauma victim to a trauma survivor over the course of the novel. In this light, the chest has connotations relating to the body. It is not only one of Dolores's physical hiding places but also a metaphor for her own chest, her heart's hiding place.

While the last section of the novel expresses a movement towards integration, redemption, and recovery in several ways, it clearly does so without turning to the kind of harmonizing or idealizing approaches to trauma that LaCapra criticizes (see *Writing History* 71). The positive tenor underlying the scene of reunion with Fran, for example, is counterpointed by the sad note resonating through Dolores's description of her sister: Fran is "crabbing along the road […], pushing a trolley full of bags," a bag lady who "looks like a refugee from a war zone," with "bruised and liverish arms" (281). It is telling that the "inky stain" on Fran's arm, the tattoo spelling her name, functions now as Dolores's means of identifying her. The last sentence of the novel once again evokes the cluster of images revolving around wounds and scars, branding and tattooing, names and identity, while the depressing image of Fran mutes the ending's optimism.

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vation, and exploitation. Further, mothers are uniquely positioned as powerful nurturers and socializers even if they often have no social power. They are frequently the locus for determining whether legacies of trauma will be resisted or perpetuated" (222).

23 Given the importance of names throughout the narrative, it is likely that the novel also suggests a special bond between mother (Mary) and daughter (Dolores) through names. The Latin phrase Mater Dolorosa or just Dolorosa is a commonly used to refer to the Virgin Mary.

The ending of the novel also raises pressing questions about issues of guilt and ethics. As mentioned earlier, Dolores repeatedly emphasizes the difficulty of determining guilt, and the text as a whole problematizes judgement in several ways. In this sense, *The Hiding Place* resonates with Rothberg's assertion that trauma challenges binary categories like victims and perpetrators, innocence and guilt: "The categories of victim and perpetrator derive from either a legal or a moral discourse, but the concept of trauma emerges from a diagnostic realm that lies beyond guilt and innocence or good and evil" (*Multidirectional* 90). Azzopardi's novel calls attention to how trauma pushes ethics to its limits, demonstrating how moral judgements disintegrate into a sense of uncertainty. For the protagonists, who engage with issues of guilt in the non-legal, highly emotional context of family trauma, it is exceedingly difficult to draw lines between victims and perpetrators. Yet the textual performance of trauma as a challenge to ethics throughout the novel remains in tension with the narrator's desire to unravel the intricate knot of intra-familial guilt. In her final list, Dolores once again reviews her life-story and family history in terms of responsibility and causality:

> If my mother had not left the house, I would not have been burnt
>
> If she didn't owe rent to Joe Medora
>
> If Frankie hadn't gambled it away
>
> If we still had the cafe
>
> If Frankie hadn't gambled it away
>
> If I had been a boy
>
> If Frankie hadn't gambled me away.

I ran out of space, but I only needed to add one more thing: blame can be twisted like a flame in a draught; it will burn and burn. Ask Fran. (281)

Dolores's catalogue of conditional clauses about the past revolves around her father's gambling and irresponsibility, but the closing sentence, which is introduced as a kind of conclusion, shifts the emphasis to more general issues. The phrase "blame can be *twisted*" (emphasis added) signals once again that Dolores regards issues of guilt as complex and equivocal. The sudden reference to her sister Fran, for example, is ambiguous: Fran could be evoked here simply in her role as kind of fire expert, well acquainted with the dynamics of flames because of her pyromania, or with reference to her possible involvement in the fire that wounded Dolores. Even more importantly, the avowal that blame "will burn and burn" emphasizes that – irrespective of the complexity of guilt – the trauma survivor's need to explore questions of guilt persists. The image of the persistently burning flame of blame, then, represents the inescapability of questions of responsibility and guilt.

Furthermore, this sense of inescapability needs to be connected to the reader's position. While the ending refrains from providing final answers, its emphasis on

clashing acts of blame and contradictory moral judgements forces readers to confront questions of guilt. While Dolores hesitates to judge her father too negatively, we are left with the question of whether we should not, after all, assign the primary guilt for the family's psychological, social, and financial ruin to her father. Even though "trauma has the potential to cloud ethical and political judgements" (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 90), can – and should – we indeed eliminate notions of guilt and perpetrators? Dolores's statement that "someone must be to blame" haunts us until the end of the novel (75). The text suggests that, even though trauma complicates ethical questions, to resort to ethical relativism may be both psychologically impossible and politically problematic. Instead, it encourages us to reflect on how such notions could be renegotiated in the context of trauma. What it especially signals is that, even though trauma tends to render ethical questions particularly difficult, the *need* to continue asking these questions – a need that may well be shared by those immediately involved and those more indirectly confronted with trauma – must be recognized. The novel's negotiation of ethics, hence, can be read as one more way in which the text stresses the individual's need for consistency. The ethical questions that reverberate throughout the novel point to the traumatized subject's urge to create a family narrative that she can accept – and the image of the flame of blame, despite its bleakness, may be said to gesture towards consistency precisely through Dolores's final recognition and acceptance that her family history *is* a history heavily punctuated by guilt.

The novel's approach to recovery raises a further set of ethical questions. Like *Fugitive Pieces*, *The Hiding Place* depicts the traumatized narrator's complex development from victimhood to survivorhood. In spite of the differences between their traumatic experiences, Michaels's Jakob and Azzopardi's Dolores both embody the struggle to move from their experiences as helpless, victimized children to a conscious and critical awareness of their traumatic past as adults. Revolving around processes of working through, both novels participate in contemporary discourses of what has been called a "wound culture." As Luckhurst emphasizes in *The Trauma Question*, both the "memoir boom" of recent decades and the prominence of trauma discourses in contemporary celebrity culture are important elements of this "wound culture," which tends to stage traumatized individuals in a frame of survivorhood. The idea of survivorhood allows for trauma victims to function not just as an embodiment of human vulnerability but also an embodiment of strength and endurance. This wound culture, in other words, testifies to a widespread fascination with stories of suffering, pain, and trauma as well as with the struggles to overcome these crises. As Rudolf Freiburg emphasizes, "[w]ithout any doubt, other people's pain, caused either by private accidents and tragedies, by regional or even global catastrophes, is fascinating" (171). Trauma novels with autodiegetic narrators allow readers to identify with these processes, to experience them vicariously through the act of reading. Yet *The Hiding Place* calls attention to

our involvement in the current wound culture by employing self-reflexivity in far more destabilizing and unsettling ways than Michaels's and Smiley's novels, notably, through a narrative technique that continuously challenges readers. Confronting us with a traumatized protagonist who is repeatedly revealed to be an unreliable narrator, the text encourages us to reflect critically on our attitudes and responses to trauma survivors. In this sense, Azzopardi's novel is an interesting counterpart to *Fugitive Pieces*. Michaels's novel raises ethical questions about representing the Holocaust by using a poetic, lyrical style that makes us wonder if the reader response it evokes is too comforting. In contrast, *The Hiding Place* employs more overt means of disrupting comforting and complacent reading experiences. In forcing us to reflect on the meanings and implications of the current fascination with (as well as consumption of) narratives of pain, suffering, and trauma,[24] the novel alerts us to crucial issues about the ethics of reading trauma.

The Hiding Place, a novel about loss and violence, is profoundly concerned with the psychology of the traumatic and posttraumatic, trauma and narration, and trauma and ethics. Calling for critical and ethically aware responses to trauma fiction, the text also performs a complex psychology of recovery, which focuses on the need to remember and reconstruct the past and on writing through and talking through individual and familial trauma histories. The novel departs from the anti-narrative, anti-therapeutic trajectory pursued by important representatives of literary and cultural trauma studies and resonates with psychological approaches to trauma – even as it echoes the scepticism about narration, integration, and recovery in the face of trauma that Caruth and others express. *The Hiding Place* dramatizes the tension between, on the one hand, trauma's tendency to challenge the foundations of narrative and disrupt stable notions of ethics and, on the other, the traumatized subject's need for narration and moral stability – but it is reluctant to resolve this tension. Yet what particularly characterizes this specific trauma text is its repeated insistence on the importance of re-evaluating and giving room to notions that theory has fundamentally challenged. Azzopardi's novel calls attention to how the disruption and fragmentation caused by trauma tend to evoke a pressing desire for regaining the sense of a consistent identity, a coherent life-story, and a sense of order and control – and how these needs of trauma victims should be acknowledged, even if their fulfilment may remain illusory. The novel also encourages us to rethink theoretical notions by foregrounding the specific, often highly subjective meanings "consistency" or "recovery" may take on for particular individuals. In Dolores's case, the quest for recovery is crucially connected to the family. Much like *A Thou-*

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24 Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw discuss issues of consumption as follows: "[I]n a culture of trauma, accounts of extreme situations sell books. Narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture or the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventure as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion" (2).

sand Acres, the novel is a testament to the extent to which the family can hurt – but also to the persistent importance of familial bonds. Throughout, *The Hiding Place* demonstrates how much Dolores, despite all the wounds and wrongs she suffered, still defines herself and her life-story through her family. Her quest for recovery is ultimately a quest not merely for a lost part of herself but also for a lost family.

Conclusion

"Since then, at an uncertain hour, / That agony re-
turns; / And till my ghastly tale is told, / This heart
within me burns."
(SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, *THE RIME OF THE
ANCIENT MARINER*)

"This is not a story to pass on."
(TONI MORRISON, *BELOVED*)

The Romantic trauma novels by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley, and their
postmodern counterparts by Smiley, Michaels, and Azzopardi all highlight the for-
mative impact of childhood and the familial home. Even if the family figures as the
locus of pain and suffering, of violence and loss, the subject continues to define his
or her identity and life-story through the family. The family, in these texts, func-
tions simultaneously as the site of trauma and as the site of essential and persistent
needs and desires. For instance, Dolores in *The Hiding Place,* who experiences
multiple traumas in her childhood, keeps striving for a sense of understanding and
familial community decades later. Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* embarks on a life-long
quest to find ways of restoring the familial bonds that were broken by scenes of his-
torical violence, while Wollstonecraft's Jemima yearns for human connections and
relationships that might compensate for the home and family she never had.

Exploring how families are disrupted through internal or external destructive
forces, these novels share a political commitment to children, often (especially in
Wollstonecraft, Smiley, and Azzopardi) in conjunction with a feminist commit-
ment. In addition, the dialogue between novels of the two periods has revealed sig-
nificant differences between Romantic and postmodern approaches to trauma. Ro-
mantic trauma fiction displays a conscious attention to language, narrative, and the
functions of self-narration, but this critical awareness takes on a far more radical
shape in postmodern forms of self-reflexivity. Romantic trauma novels are pro-
foundly concerned with issues of voice and audience, listening and reading; the
autodiegetic narratives of Maria, Mandeville, and Mathilda contain gaps and rup-

tures; and Godwin's and Shelley's texts implicitly problematize the narrators' reliability. However, postmodern trauma novels – perhaps not too surprisingly – push such narrative techniques further. Textual fragmentation and narrative disruptions are key features permeating *The Hiding Place*, and the novel not only foregrounds the unreliability of memory, like *A Thousand Acres*, but also fundamentally challenges the position of the narrator and the status of the text. In fact, the novels by Smiley, Michaels, and Azzopardi all consciously explore what demands trauma imposes on narration and representation. They play with notions of temporality, linearity, and causality, and, even more importantly, they undermine narrative conventions and subvert expectations – Smiley destabilizes traditional realism; Michaels transcends conventions of representing the Holocaust; and Azzopardi challenges the boundaries of autodiegetic narration – thereby pushing their readers to reflect critically on their relationship to the narrative and to the trauma depicted therein.

Moreover, the texts also reveal significant differences between Romantic and postmodern negotiations of memory, recovery, and the body. While Romantic trauma novels seem to hinge on the idea that a consistent identity crucially depends on memory, postmodern trauma fiction tends to express an obsession with memory that is deeply rooted in an intense crisis of memory. The narration of the past is an integral part of Maria's, Mandeville's, and Mathilda's narratives, which is one important way in which Wollstonecraft's, Godwin's, and Shelley's shared belief in the powerful, formative impact of experience and education manifests itself. The past as a crucial influence on the present and the individual's confrontation of that past – especially its particularly painful and traumatic moments – run as central common themes through the trauma texts of this family of writers. Yet the protagonists' engagement with the past often seems motivated by drives beyond their control: Maria suffers from the power of "the events of her past life pressing on her" (75); Mathilda refers to a "feeling that [she] cannot define" (5); and Mandeville seems compelled to anatomize his mind. The postmodern protagonist-narrators Ginny, Jakob, and Dolores, in contrast, engage in more conscious, intentional, and extensive memory work and in active quests for the recovery of memories. In fact, they explicitly identify the reconstruction of the past as an attempt at working through and overcoming their pervasive crisis of memory.

In addition, postmodern trauma novels display more optimism about the possibility of recovery and healing than Romantic trauma texts. Even though *Mandeville*, *Mathilda*, and *The Wrongs of Woman* explore means of therapy and self-therapy, their endings resist consolation, integration, and cure. Drawing on elements of the Gothic, they express a profound fascination with the abysses of the "wounded mind" (Wollstonecraft 74) as persistently uncontrollable and uncontainable. Postmodern trauma fiction also emphasizes the complexity of recovery processes, but it refrains from depicting trauma and the pathologies of the mind as radically uncontained in the way that Godwin, for example, does in *Mandeville*. The novels by

Smiley, Michaels, and Azzopardi enact a shift from a fascination with the pathological to a profound interest in the figure of the survivor. All three texts explore the posttraumatic not only in relation to the crises caused by the past but also in relation to the psychology and the meanings of survival, survivorhood, and recovery.

This contrast between Romantic and postmodern negotiations of recovery is, perhaps, surprising, given the therapeutic optimism that drove the young discipline of psychiatry in the Romantic period and given that trauma is often described as a defining feature of the post-Holocaust era and the late-twentieth-century "posttraumatic" culture (Farrell, *Post-Traumatic*). In this light, the critical approach to recovery expressed in texts such as *Mandeville* and *Mathilda* can be read as an example of how literary discourses have the potential to challenge and question the assumptions, premises, and findings of scientific discourses: Romantic trauma fiction consciously and critically examines the paradigmatic changes taking place in the mental sciences of the time. By contrast, the more optimistic approach to recovery in the postmodern texts discussed indicates how the "wound culture" of late postmodernism has generated a need for gestures of hope amidst the sense of trauma's pervasive presence and impact. In fact, this need may be driving postmodern writers to explore and (to a varying extent) endorse the claims of contemporary traumatic stress studies concerning the healing functions of (self-)narration. It seems, then, that the continuous confrontation with trauma produces a desire for narratives that embed their depictions of vulnerability and victimhood into a reassuring frame of self-mastery and survivorhood. This cultural shift from victim to survivor figures may also be seen in connection with the increasing commodification and consumption of trauma stories. For example, the strikingly popular genre of "misery memoirs" or "misery lit," which began to emerge in the mid-1990s, capitalizes on the idea of depicting the individual's way from suffering to recovery, his or her triumph over trauma, which is meant to inspire other trauma victims with courage and hope. Even though the novels by Michaels, Azzopardi, and Smiley complicate such straightforward patterns of overcoming trauma, they can still be seen as symptomatic of a postmodern need to engage with trauma through the lens of survival and with an emphasis on recovery. While a number of Romantic trauma stories end in death – Shelley's trauma figures Mathilda, Frankenstein, and Beatrice in *Valperga* all die – postmodern trauma texts of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century tend to gesture towards new, albeit complex, beginnings and to signal to their readers that there is, indeed, a future after or beyond trauma.

Besides this strong contrast between Romantic and postmodern approaches to recovery, a further significant difference between the novels of the two periods concerns the role of the body. Romantic trauma fiction displays a twofold conceptualization of the way a mental wound affects the body. First, the texts depict fever as an immediate response to a traumatic experience. While this physical illness is usually not elaborated much further, the texts signal that it is a severe condition,

thereby highlighting the violent impact of the mental or emotional wounding. Second, some of the novels emphasize the intensity of an individual's posttraumatic suffering and/or madness through the depiction of a general physical decline that seems to resist explanation. Hence, they express a view of the body that emphasizes incurability. Moreover, both Romantic and postmodern trauma fiction highlight the close interrelations or even merging of physical and mental suffering. Yet postmodern fiction shifts the emphasis: the body takes on a crucial role in connection with memory. Smiley's novel, for example, suggests that the body not only retains the traumatic past but also carries memories that the mind has repressed. Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* pushes the notion of body memory even further by exploring whether trauma may be passed on from parents to children through their bodies, that is, through a physical transmission of memories.

As these examples from Smiley and Michaels indicate, "trauma" has come to signify a phenomenon that often seems too complex to be captured by the term or the notion of a "wound," even if the idea of trauma as an injury remains implicit in many literary representations. In *Fugitive Pieces*, for example, Jakob's witnessing of his parents' murder is depicted as the one moment that disrupts his life and leaves him emotionally scarred. In contrast, *The Hiding Place*, which associates emotional wounding with physical injury, represents the narrator's experience of trauma as extending over her entire childhood. Hence, the novel resonates with contemporary psychiatric discourses, which conceptualize posttraumatic disorders as a response to "stress" rather than shock (i.e., as "stress-related disorders"). In other words, if trauma is a "wound" here, it is not a sudden one; rather, it emerged and deepened gradually through an accumulation of distress and suffering. It is also significant that while the Romantic trauma novels, which were written before the explicit theorization of psychological trauma, all refer specifically to the protagonists' "wounds" of the mind or heart, the postmodern novels discussed here participate in trauma discourses without using the terms "wound" or "trauma." This refusal to name trauma can be read in different ways. It might, in part, result from a sense that, in an age where trauma discourses are so prominent, labelling the phenomenon would appear redundant and might even reduce it to banality or cliché. Or it could be read as an indication that trauma has come to be regarded as an experience with such complex psychological, physical, social, and cultural implications that one single word – be it "wound" or the more multi-layered, albeit more slippery term "trauma" – might fail to encompass it. This reading could also be supported by the fact that trauma novels depict a range of posttraumatic reactions, including crises of identity and memory, guilt and shame, fear and anger, depression, a sense of haunting, and a general loss of orientation.

Comparing Romantic and postmodern literary discourses on trauma, as I have attempted to signal with the preceding observations, leads to new insights about both periods and also raises new questions. Moreover, as I have sought to demon-

strate throughout this study, literary trauma texts intersect in complex and revealing ways with psychological and psychiatric discourses. An interdisciplinary approach to trauma fiction is crucial not only for deepening critical responses to texts but also for rethinking theoretical assumptions and providing a corrective to universalizing and aestheticizing tendencies within contemporary trauma theory. A salient example involves the proposed changes to the definition of PTSD in the DSM-5 (to appear in 2013). As mentioned in Chapter One, Ann Kaplan exemplifies the universalizing tendencies of literary trauma studies by discussing responses to literary, cinematic, and media representations of traumatic events as a form of secondary trauma (21, 39). In contrast, the proposed definition of trauma in the DSM-5 specifies explicitly that "exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures" does *not* constitute a traumatic experience (APA, "G 03 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder"). Alerting us to the importance of distinguishing between experiences of media consumption and experiences of vicarious trauma based on direct exposure, the DSM-5 points to the problematic nature of Kaplan's approach. One further crucial change between the DSM-IV and the proposed DSM-5 definitions concerns the conceptualization of trauma. The DSM-5 defines the distinction between a traumatic and non-traumatic event based exclusively on the type of stressor experienced (A1 criterion), and it considers the individual's subjective response to the event (A2 criterion) as having no clinical utility; as a result, the A2 criterion has been omitted. In this respect, literary texts – which reveal how deeply the individual's specific response to a traumatic experience affects the meaning the trauma takes on – constitute an important corrective to the trend towards a more narrow and prescriptive definition in this leading psychiatric manual. Hence, engaging with literary and literary critical as well as psychiatric approaches to trauma helps to bring into focus the disciplinary blind spots of each. Finally, the changes to the DSM definition also reveal once again that the meaning of trauma is contested and historically variable – which reinforces the importance of comparing approaches to trauma from different historical periods.

These changing and conflicting notions of trauma lead me to a set of issues that I have repeatedly emphasized in this study: the complex relationships between trauma and ethics. According to Colin Davis, "[t]alking of the other's trauma is an ethical minefield" (19), and this assertion holds true even if the traumatized "other" is a character in a literary text. How one defines and analyses trauma as a literary scholar has important political and ethical implications. And trauma, as the above example illustrates, is notoriously difficult to define, requiring a careful balancing act between inclusion and exclusion, between expansive and restrictive definitions, between a register of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the normal and the pathological. Too much emphasis on trauma as part of the everyday risks downplaying its impact, while too much emphasis on singularity risks reducing it to extreme events such as the Holocaust, while glossing over experiences of, for example, domestic

trauma. A further ethical challenge is how to acknowledge adequately the intensity of posttraumatic suffering without unnecessarily pathologizing trauma survivors or reducing them to a position of helplessness. Important ethical concerns also arise from the contradictory needs that trauma tends to evoke. The title of Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué's recent essay collection, *Between the Urge to Know and the Need to Deny*, calls attention to a tension that trauma typically produces. Similarly, trauma causes a pressing desire for verbalization and narration (as expressed in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*), while often seeming unspeakable and unnarratable (as the ending of Morrison's *Beloved* signals powerfully). Trauma also tends to lead to ambivalent feelings of too much and too little memory, represented by flashbacks and amnesia, and to produce contrary responses of numbing versus aggression, withdrawal versus protest.

In the light of these complexities and paradoxes of trauma, a number of questions arise, some of general relevance and some more specific to literary trauma studies. What kinds of responses are psychologically and politically empowering for trauma survivors? When is it an ethical duty to pass on stories of trauma and engage in memorial practices, and when – if at all – should one allow for silence to bury these stories and for forgetting to take place? How can trauma narratives be transmitted in ways that convey their impact but refrain from internalizing, appropriating, or instrumentalizing the other's trauma, pain, and suffering? What perspective should an ethically conscious reading and literary criticism of trauma assume? To what extent should we strive for knowledge of trauma? To what extent should we insist on aspects of incomprehensibility and attend "to the traces of that which remains foreign to us" (Davis 40)?

Beyond these persistent questions, the current study also opens up a number of possible directions for further research. For one, the exploration of trauma in a selection of novels by three Romantic writers of one family, whose writings are connected in manifold and complex ways, could serve as a starting point for a fuller investigation of trauma in Romantic fiction as well as trauma in Romanticism more generally. For example, the dynamics of trauma and self-representation at the intersections of autobiographical and fictional writing – issues that Leigh Gilmore explores in depth in relation to twentieth-century trauma writing – constitutes an area where this study leaves a number of questions open for further analysis. Secondly, the combination of postmodern texts from different cultural contexts could be a point of departure for exploring intercultural differences in the context of trauma – an area of research that postcolonial trauma critics such as Stef Craps have started to develop. In this context, a further investigation of interdisciplinary perspectives could yield particularly interesting insights. It might be fruitful, for example, to examine if and in what ways psychological and literary discourses about the therapeutic potential of self-narration play out in cultural contexts that place less emphasis

on the individual. Finally, interdisciplinary approaches could also provide input for further analysis of trauma and gender in these different areas of research.

Trauma studies, as the questions above signal, faces a number of intricate issues if it aims at the ideal described by Susannah Radstone as "an active, engaged and agentic practice that intervenes in and practices a politics and ethics open to critique, negotiation and transformation" (66). Openness to how disciplines other than one's own conceptualize trauma as well as openness to the perspectives of earlier historical periods, as I have sought to demonstrate, can be two ways of remaining alert to the continuing challenges of finding ethically and politically appropriate approaches to trauma. Another methodological aim that I have pursued was to remain critical about my own perspective, that is, to respond with a self-reflexive scholarly approach to the self-reflexive genre of trauma fiction. Trauma fiction explores the power of words to address wounds – a power that ranges from its function as an emotional outlet and space of escape (as in *Mathilda*) to its use as a means of bonding and as a political weapon (as in *The Wrongs of Woman*) and to its capacity as a tool of survival and healing, preservation and testimony (as in *Fugitive Pieces*) – and this self-reflexive awareness is also crucial regarding theoretical and literary critical languages of trauma.

Self-reflexivity is of vital importance in this context because trauma is a subject that forces us to confront the foundations of our selves. Trauma involves a complex conjunction of subjectivity and alterity, which not only confronts the trauma survivor with elusive aspects of the self but also exposes the reader of trauma writing to narratives that tend to be both fascinating and unsettling through their combination of disturbingly alien and uncannily familiar elements. In bringing together the "everyday and the extreme," in Michael Rothberg's terms (*Traumatic Realism* 4), trauma exposes a basic but troubling fact of the human condition – vulnerability. And this experience of vulnerability, alienation, and disruption is particularly powerful in relation to childhood trauma within the family, especially because the family plays a key role in determining an individual's sense of identity, belonging, and home. As Roberta Rubenstein asserts, as adults, we are all "exiles from childhood" (5) in the sense that "one cannot literally go home again (at least, not to the home of childhood that has been embellished over time by imagination)" (6). Yet childhood trauma significantly complicates an individual's relation to the past, resulting in pervasive feelings of displacement. What Romantic and postmodern trauma novels, with their scenarios of families falling apart and children suffering from emotional, mental, and physical wounds, are ultimately concerned with is the profoundly unsettling experience of feeling exiled not only from home in a literal sense but also from the sense of home in relation to identity and memory.

Through its disruption of these existential dimensions of home, trauma touches upon core issues of the human experience – issues encapsulated in Jakob's response to Bella's ghost in *Fugitive Pieces*. Hovering between the world of the dead and the

living, Bella's ghost captures the tensions that typically characterize the experience of the traumatic and the posttraumatic: tensions between a disturbing absence and an unsettling presence, between loss and the urge for recovery, between a ruptured sense of belonging and an intense longing for connection. As Jakob's imaginary companion in exile, Bella stands for both the home that he has irrevocably lost and the home that he desperately seeks. Her ghost signifies the quest of trauma survivors to find a sense of home in the "wounded landscape" (60) of their selves. As Jakob writes in retrospect, he tried to cope with his traumatic past by making his lost sister the core of his existence: "I saved myself without thinking. I grasped the two syllables closest to me, and replaced my heartbeat with your name" (195). Jakob's strategy for survival exemplifies the conscious and unconscious attempts of trauma survivors to create some sense of meaning and stability out of disruptive and destabilizing experiences. This quest for meaning in response to the inconceivable and incomprehensible appears, in many variations, in Romantic and postmodern representations of trauma, constituting a crucial aspect of the need for narrative in the face of trauma – the need, that is, for words to address even the deepest of wounds.

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