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This study examines the discursive act found in the writing and reading of trauma literature and argues for a theory of empathetic reading based on an ethical-aesthetic approach. An ethical-aesthetic approach offers an interpretive theory that examines how writers and readers may construe textual depictions of trauma that generate emotional response. I apply Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theories to demonstrate how readers and writers, alike, make meaning through a self-conscious awareness of their relationships toward the text. Empathetic readers come to the act of reading from an ethical stance that respects both the sites of the writer and of the text. This process yields a critical aesthetic interpretation through cognitive (identification) and ethical value judgments that illuminate a reader's reaction with the work.

This study analyzes various genres of trauma literature that represent varying perspectives of truth: life narratives represented in testimony, autobiographical fiction with its blurred boundaries, and fictional novels depicting historical traumas. Each genre's features define the means of textual representation, thus readers make cultural assumptions about representations of truth represented in the genre. They expect testimonials to deliver words-equal-truth as in Elie Wiesel's *Night* or the narrative embellishments of memoir found in Ishmael Beah's use of pathetic fallacy in *A long way gone: memoirs of a boy soldier*. When addressing each genre, I consider how the writer employs literary narrative devices that evoke a cognitive-emotional response in the reader. Moreover, I examine the ethical implications found in fictionalized

representations of real atrocities in the works of Kurt Vonnegut, Jonathan Safran Foer, and Toni Morrison, as these authors of fiction respect the sites of trauma while not trivializing nor dishonoring its victims. Both Foer and Morrison use concepts of co-creating, by inviting the reader to fill in the gaps or participate in the formation of the text, as a means to amplify a moral awareness of handling difficult representations.

My analysis of these works illustrates Bakhtin's discursive theory of co-experiencing an utterance, or "utterance-as-text," that demonstrates the personal chaos brought about through the lived experience of writing and reading trauma literature. This co-experience, whether through writing or reading, leads one to a self-reflective positioning of an ethical secondary witness via the text.

THE SPARK OF THE TEXT: TOWARD AN ETHICAL READING THEORY FOR
TRAUMATIC LITERATURE

by

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To my mom, Gwen,
for her personal sacrifices to bring stability in tumultuous times;

To my sons, Hayden and Collin,
for their endearing support and writing companionship;

To my wife, Michelle,
for her love and patience,
we are “sleeping spoons now dreaming the same dream.”

In memory of my grandfather, Bealer,
for whose hand I still reach.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: “SILENT CRIES”

Painfully aware of my limitations, I watched helplessly as language became an obstacle. It became clear that it would be necessary to invent a new language. But how was one to rehabilitate and transform words betrayed and preserved by the enemy? Hunger—thirst—fear—transport—selection—fire—chimney: these words all have intrinsic meaning, but in those times, they meant something else. Writing in my mother tongue—at that point close to extinction—I would pause at every sentence, and start over and over again. I would conjure up other verbs, other images, other silent cries. It still was not right. But what exactly was “it”?

- Elie Wiesel *Night* (ix)

In these words from his memoir *Night* Elie Wiesel demonstrates an inherent doubt of both his ability to reconstruct and represent the events and the ways these representations will carry over toward an intended audience. Wiesel, having lived through these incidents, of the Holocaust, could not keep silent no matter how difficult it is for the words to come, and by trusting silence, by surrendering to the realization that no one can actually relive his experience, the words came to him in his native tongue, Yiddish. Wiesel “trusted the silence that envelops and transcends words. Knowing all the while that any one of the fields of ashes in Birkenau carries more weight than all the testimonies about Birkenau” (*Night* x). He wonders if readers are capable of carrying this weight, of comprehending his atrocity. He wonders if they are willing to engage in a discourse with his traumatic past, thus risking a bringing forth of a painful past into the present, wondering if readers can trust those silent moments within Wiesel’s testimony to rightfully understand what these gaps between experience and expression convey.

Authors of atrocity often doubt their own reasoning and memory in their attempts to recollect traumatic events. In the process of reconstructing the personal pain suffered, they too wonder if what they experienced really happened. The process of recollection and reconstructing events threatens madness—threatens experiencing these moments emotionally and cognitively through recalling/retelling—and often becomes a site of rupture where survivors feel that they have lost a part of themselves. Other sites of rupture occur during the actual happening of the traumatic event, and later during its transference through discourse affecting both witness and listener. When a witness pieces fragments together, to the best of one’s ability, the psychological realization of a traumatic event takes hold. The initial shock wears off once victims process the information of the experience. It is here that unwarranted memories, nightmares, scenes intrude from inner states of repression. In a similar light, receiving testimony places a listener as a secondary witness where the exposure to information can also create a ruptured experience. The complexities found in traumatic discourse lies in one’s inability to both represent the experience through testimony and to comprehend the testimony as an aware and present audience.

Trauma theorists extol the impossibilities of representing the site of disaster through language to “speak the unspeakable.” For Cathy Caruth (and others represented in her collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*) a “neurotic distortion” occurs in the wake of traumatic experience wherein “trauma is not experienced as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment. The trauma is a repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving

of its site” (“Education” 10). It is within this departure where a “collapse of witnessing” (Dori Laub’s term) takes place—a realization that one cannot embody, nor fully discover another’s personal experience. The gaps that remain both in the fractured lives of survivors as well as those who are willing to listen continually challenge both parties within the transaction of discourse.

While I concur with Caruth, et al, on the point of neurotic distortion, I differ with them by arguing that trauma exists within three sites: the first occurs at the site of the actual traumatic event, the second within its psychological aftermath, and the third at the site of discourse where historical trauma affects both survivor and audience, who through this transmission of discourse becomes a secondary witness. Mikhail Bakhtin postulates the dialogic experience of discourse in the same light. We define and make meaning through emotional-cognitive states where experience is actualized through one’s self and others. For Bakhtin we become “consummated” through language (“The Problem of Content” 278). Human relationships are built upon differing evaluative positions. People embody unique times and spaces, thus enabling diverse perspectives. Discourse at this level contains both intrinsic and extrinsic value, denoting an awareness of the personal made public. We come to each other with an ethical responsibility that requires us to negotiate between the internalized selections of what to reveal and the societal expectations of truth in representation. This theory views Bakhtin’s “consummation” as retaining both objective and subjective value judgments within discourse. Two bodies come to each other holding unique positions, and may offer a form of fulfillment through the transference of discourse (that becomes a subjective co-creation), but the dialogic

remains ontologically based in that the relationship must retain the objective boundaries of personal entities. No two people can share the same position. This relationship defines the recursive struggle to express (and to comprehend) the chaos of personal trauma, thus emphasizing 1) the survivor's linguistic processing of the psychological aftermath, and 2) the affect of discursive transference upon the listener as secondary witness. Caruth suggests that "to listen to the crisis of a trauma, that is, is not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it; the challenge of the therapeutic listener, in other words, is *how to listen to departure*" (*Unclaimed* 10). Thus we as listeners and readers must remain aware of those rare, valued moments when the authorial source departs from him/herself in the retelling and reliving of the traumatic event. On these sites are soulful struggles that often rise from the deepest moments of discourse.

Listening to departures: My multiple (re)readings of *Night*

The disaster is not somber, it would liberate us from everything if it could just have a relation with someone; we would know it in light of language and at the twilight of a language with a gai savoir. But the disaster is unknown; it is the unknown name for that in thought itself which dissuades us from thinking of it, leaving us, but its proximity, alone. Alone, and thus exposed to the thought of the disaster which disrupts solitude and overflows every variety of thought, as the intense, silent and disastrous affirmation of the outside.

–Maurice Blanchot *The Writing of the Disaster*

Not only the writing but also the reading of traumatic texts can also create a rupture in one's experience. Through reading one takes the role of secondary witness thus implicating one's self by showing a willingness to listen for departures. For Bakhtin, discourse holds immediacy that is shared and co-experienced by speaker/listener

and writer/reader. This dynamic demonstrates the unrepeatable singularity of the discursive event through time and space. The Blanchot passage above reflects on such a dynamic. Liberation might come if one could fully relate the experience to another, but there is no means to fully recreate the experience. The uniqueness of first encounters with texts and narratives (testimonies, memoirs, fictions) provides co-creation in the mind of the reader. The ethical reader rightfully recognizes the text as aesthetic artifact, a representation of lived events, and crafts a co-creation with these delimiting factors in mind. The consciousness of the author delimits the ways readers experience the narrative through the raw material of artistic endeavor, yet the two co-experience and jointly possess the event of the text. Bakhtin allows for joint ownership through responsive understanding: a reader who owns a particular outside position in time and space in relation to the author's utterance ("Problem of Speech Genres" 69).

Since language remains grounded in culture, aesthetic acts convey the way we create or understand our life experience. Utterances, whether written or verbal, are speech acts and become unrepeatable discursive events. Bakhtin writes of the utterance act as, "An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life" (*Toward 2*). Life events can never become fully reproduced through writing or oral testimony. Likewise, the meaning and experience of texts are co-created through dynamic discursive relationships in responsive reading. There can be only one first reading that owns the particular immediacy and unrepeatability of the event. Such a dynamic denotes the threat

of the text to rupture life experience into a before and after the act of reading. In this light, readers become secondary witnesses to another's testimony through the transference of trauma within the discursive act.

The transference that occurred during my first reading of Wiesel's *Night* created a parallel state of disbelief and brokenness. The initial encounter resulted in a similar before-and-after-rupture of life experience. I had heard of *Night* but never wanted to voluntarily read the memoir. My take on the book was similar to my response toward those who came out of *Schindler's List*; I knew it was dismal, and I came to my first reading of the text with reservation. The foreword written by Wiesel's dear friend François Mauriac¹ disturbed me in that within his foreword to a Holocaust memoir he deals with the schism between Christianity and Judaism. Mauriac and Wiesel are dealing with difficult questions that arise in the wake of atrocity. Both attempt to find answers from the faiths of their childhood. Mauriac reduces the answer to "all is grace." Mauriac begins by evoking one of the most deeply theological and physically troubling scenes of *Night* even before Wiesel's story has a chance to begin. The scene depicts a child hanging from the gallows while those who witness the event are struck in disbelief; one witness asks "where is God?"

Mauriac pulls from Wiesel's memoir the reaction to the event, the silent desperation that leads him toward outrage and estrangement on the night of Rosh Hashanah—the last day of the Jewish year: "My eyes were open and I was alone—terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy. I had

¹ Mauriac reportedly helped this book see publication at a time when no publishing houses wanted to touch the Holocaust.

ceased to be anything but ashes [...] I stood amid that praying congregation, observing it like a stranger” (*Night* x). Mauriac publicly writes his inward, private Christian response to Wiesel that God is love and that the suffering of the Jews in the flames of the Holocaust resembles “that other Jew [...] the Crucified, whose Cross has conquered the world” (x). Did Mauriac mean to provide words of comfort in the face of affliction? Or does he wish to console the Christian audience reading this memoir? Mauriac’s parallel of Jewish suffering alongside Christian supremacy further exemplifies this divide between faiths. Mauriac writes, “Did I affirm that the stumbling block to his faith was the cornerstone of mine, and that the conformity between the Cross and the suffering of men was in my eyes the key to that impenetrable mystery whereon the faith of his childhood had perished?” (xxi).

When I read Mauriac’s words for the first time, I wondered why Wiesel chose to include the introduction in his memoir, as I also pondered Wiesel’s possible response. The answers for Wiesel lead only to more questions—an infinite interruption of the silence in the universe; just as the quote that opens this section suggests, “Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him, he [Moishe the Beadle] liked to say. Therein lies true dialogue” (5). This theological tension at the onset of the text both angered and intrigued me to read further, and this tension threads throughout the memoir. Wiesel articulates his internalized struggle with the role of God in suffering, in the face of atrocity, by balancing both historical and cultural observances within the camps while simultaneously revealing anger at having been forsaken. Like Job, Wiesel presents readers, and the maker Himself, with difficult and troubling questions.

Wiesel's portrayal of doubt, anxiety and sorrow broke down those reservations I held before reading his memoir. The memoir does this through the juxtaposition of Elie's naiveté and life within his Jewish community with the narrator's and Moshe the Beadle's experiential wisdom and religious questions. The opening chapter initiates first-time readers with the guidance of Moshe the Beadle—a mystic, a crier, a seer, a mentor to young Elie in the ways of Kabbala. In the initial pages Wiesel recaptures Jewish life within his depiction of the shtetl in Sighet. He recounts his family life, his father's emotional reserve and practical wisdom that gains him respect within the community. He gives brief descriptions of his mother and sisters, yet theological concerns never disappear from the text, thus serving to tie the knots between life and faith within the thread of the narrative. For example, Moshe the Beadle enters the dusk lit synagogue where young Elie weeps when praying. Moshe asks him why he cries and Elie responds that:

The question had never entered my head. I wept because—because of something inside me that felt the need for tears. That was all I knew.
“Why do you pray?” he asked me, after a moment.
Why did I pray? A strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?
“I don't know why,” I said, even more disturbed and ill at ease. “I don't know why.” (2)

During this first reading, I struggled with many of the same issues found within *Night*: the intricacy of isolation, repeated loss of innocence, disbelief in the wake of personal trauma, and dealing with those classical theological questions first raised by Job and readdressed numerous times concerning the role of God in human suffering. I am not saying that I was looking to parallel my grief with the suffering of Wiesel, nor equating

my suffering with his, nor looking for comfort in the wake of others' suffering. Within the pages I began looking for connections, answers.

Thus, my first reading consisted of both brokenness and disbelief. The brokenness arose from reading with empathy—finding validation in connecting personally to the memoir on differing levels, dealing with the same questions, and enabling myself to emotionally experience what the text has to offer. The disbelief came from the inability to fully process or comprehend the events represented in the text. I need to emphasize that an ethical approach to empathetic reading requires one to remain mindful that the memoir is a representation of a lived life and not one's own. There exists a threat that rises from reading empathetically that is both real and imagined: a threat to one's being, to the psyche, memory, emotional stability in reading—or listening to—the account of another's atrocity. The threat is there, it is real, it can be felt, and yet, it remains outside the self in the way that readers/listeners remain outside as other.

It is at this moment of discourse when the aesthetic process begins accounting for the appreciation of the aesthetic artifact as representation. The realization that I cannot live the trauma of another through the witnessing his/her account, yet I can experience a personal crisis within myself as a result of living through this experience of his/her retelling leads to a co-experiencing of the text through what Bakhtin refers to as “creative understanding” (“From Notes” 142). Creative understanding allows me, in my relationship outside the author and text, to “live in a world of other's words,” essentially orienting myself in reaction to the traumatic text (142). This also pertains to the disbelief encountered in attempting to comprehend the representation of traumatic events that

unfold within another's narrative. Those rare occasions in *Night* when Wiesel inserts his authoritative voice in parenthetical asides further distances both writer and reader from the lived experience by writing that he too doubts what he witnessed. When he arrived at Birkenau and saw the crematoria, ““And the flames, do you see them?’ (Yes we saw the flames)” (*Night* 31). When he questions the reality of the SS, the Schutzstaffel,² throwing living children into the flames, he writes, “A truck drew close and unloaded its hold: small children. Babies! Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes... children thrown into flames. (Is it any wonder that ever since then, sleep tends to elude me?)” (32). These moments when the authorial Wiesel breaks the narrative demonstrate the complexities found within the gap between experience and expression that both reader and writer cannot cross, serving to remind readers that distance and separation are always there. It was through this first reading that I learned to listen for departures.

First readings offer the strongest emotional response from the text, for here is the core of empathetic reading where the experience of traumatic discourse is at its most intense. Afterward, with successive readings, expectation and anticipation intrudes upon the raw emotive response found within most first encounters. My subsequent readings of *Night* were performed for primarily academic reasons. In the late 1990s while finishing a bachelor's degree, I read the memoir again in a Judaism class and even later during graduate work. These later encounters with the memoir offered more reserved emotional responses accompanied with distance gained through insight and education. Subsequent readings enabled me to recognize the narrative techniques Wiesel used throughout the

² The Schutzastaffel is a defense corps which eventually evolved into multiple branches including the Einsatzgruppen, or Action Group, which is what Wiesel refers to.

memoir. Both the religion and history courses offered an in-depth study of Judaism's practice and cultural background that highlighted Wiesel's technique of using the Jewish calendar to parallel cultural, religious observances with Nazi actions such as Germans arresting Sighet's Jewish leaders on the seventh day of Passover, the liquidation of the ghetto two weeks before Shavuot, and the child hanging from the gallows on Rosh Hashanah—the last day of the Jewish year. These marks of days continue the threads of life and faith throughout the narrative uniting culture and history, preserving the memory of community far removed from home and essentially embodying the shtetl, the Kingdom of David carried on through the living memory of Jewish communities. Wiesel's use of Jewish observances that marks the linearity of his personal narrative also serves to preserve family, cultural histories in the face of annihilation. Writing toward preservation also comes with significant weight and struggle to young Elie, as readers repeatedly encounter the theological tension that rises throughout the memoir: “For the first time, I felt anger rising within me. Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for?” (33).

Through Wiesel's word choice and phrasing, he illustrates the unbelievability of the narrative: “We stared at the flames in the darkness. A wretched stench floated in the air. Abruptly, our doors opened. *Strange-looking creatures, dressed in striped jackets and black pants*, jumped into the wagon. Holding flashlights and sticks, they began to strike at us left and right...” (28 emphasis added). These lines immediately convey the hyper-reality of atrocity—a welcoming to “planet Auschwitz”—an experience so far

removed from reality that even its representation still remains alien to both survivor and audience. Disbelief is further exemplified when seeing the crematoria for the first time.

Here Wiesel unites past and present within one paragraph:

I pinched myself: Was I still alive? Was I awake? How was it possible that men, women, and children were being burned and that the world kept silent? No. All this could not be real. A nightmare perhaps... Soon I would wake up with a start, my heart pounding, and find that I was back in the room of my childhood with my books... (32)

Wiesel's struggle with representation—his attempt to “create a new language”—began to emerge and resurface with further subsequent readings for my doctoral exams and dissertation research. Having gained more rhetorical theory in my educational background brought about greater insight applied to readings of the memoir at a later stage. Here three concepts began to take shape: 1) Louise Rosenblatt's theory of reading transaction shed light on the emotional-cognitive responses to the text; 2) Robert Eaglestone's ethical dilemmas of representing the Holocaust addressed how this negatively implicates base reader reactions toward testimonies; and 3) I recognized that I needed to find a balance between these two by working toward my own ethical empathetic readings of traumatic literature. Bakhtin's writings provide a means to examine the relationship of responsibility to representation. Responsibility occurs on multiple levels within traumatic literature: the writer's responsibility to balance between “historical fact and imaginative truth”; the text's responsibility to evoke generic features and the cultural expectations that arise from them; and the reader's responsibility to react and remember that this is a representation of lived events. Bakhtin accounts for a

dialogic exchange within literature: how writers, readers, and texts speak to each other through experiencing cultural aesthetic artifacts (texts, testimonies, fictions), and looking at how we witness to each other through language.

During this time my reading of Wiesel expanded into the *Night* trilogy: *Night*, *Dawn*, and *Day* as well as delving into his memoirs, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* and *The Sea is Never Full*. Within these readings I became even more aware of Wiesel's employment of digressions and asides wherein the authorial Wiesel breaks the thread of narrative, inserts himself into the text that often conveys his present thoughts that demonstrate the inability of language to adequately represent past events. Wiesel breaks the memoir titled "Darkness" at the moment when writing becomes personally unbearable—the emotions of reconstructing the event reveal itself. He relives the nightmare of being torn from his family and must immediately place distance between Wiesel the narrator, Wiesel the author, and his intended reader. He calls attention to the immediate present: "I reread what I have just written, and my hand trembles. I who rarely weep am in tears. I see the flames again, and the children, and yet again I tell myself that it is not enough to weep" (*All Rivers* 79). Digressions and asides disrupt the movement of the narrative and effectively bring more distance between writer and reader—even between the authorial Wiesel and the implied narrator. Distancing is important because it demonstrates the writer's act of creation, interaction with the narrative hero, thus distancing the writer from him/herself. Wiesel dialogically experiences himself through the writing of the text, serving to remind readers of their

position outside the text. He remains separate and capable of voicing multiple truths and perspectives.

I recount this personal reading history of *Night* to illustrate the dynamic and interactive process among writer, text, and reader in creating an empathetic reading of trauma literature, a reading that is based on aesthetics and ethics. This dynamic implicates all parties involved in actively listening and witnessing Wiesel's testimony. As readers, we must take sides; we must become a viable participant within that transaction among writer, text, and reader.

Crossing the Abyss: defining empathetic reading

Reading is anguish, and this is because any text, however important, or amusing, or interesting it may be (and the more engaging it seems to be), is empty—at bottom it doesn't exist; you have to cross an abyss, and if you do not jump, you do not comprehend.
– Maurice Blanchot *The Writing of the Disaster*

The aim of the dissertation is to examine the implications of a transactional empathetic reading theory when applied to traumatic literature. Bakhtin's concept of "creative understanding" is an integral part of this study. As he writes: "In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture" ("Response" 7). Bakhtin views the act of empathizing with another as the creation of an active relationship with another. His process assumes that multiple layers of interpretation exist in an ongoing dialogue among the writer's composing of the text, the genre features that shape the text, and the reader's previous experience before the act of

reading the text. In other words, the act of writing a lived experience is already a representation of it. Representation remains modified through the genre features with which the experience becomes narrative, and the reader creates a third representation in the act of reading. The writer, text, and reader are each located in specific times and places, but in each individualized act of reading these elements simultaneously intermingle in that interpretation.

An empathetic reader comes to the act of reading from an ethical stance respecting both the site of the writer and the text. This approach joins reason and emotion in the attempt to formulate an aesthetic interpretation. Aesthetic interpretation through cognitive (identification) and ethical value judgments categorizes our experience. Bakhtin allows for this “emotional-volitional understanding of Being” as the basis for his “non-alibi in Being,” in which one acknowledges the responsibility of his/her actions and language (*Toward* 46). It is this responsibility for self that calls forth the reader’s obligation to the writer and the text: “Thus knowledge of [*znanie*] the content of the object-in-itself becomes a knowledge of it *for me*—becomes a *cognition* [*uznanie*] that *answerably obligates me*” (49). The non-alibi in Being is what makes an obligated response ethical. Reading trauma literature requires self-conscious awareness of relationships toward the text and its writer. Narratives crafted from life experience, or fictionalized from real historical traumas, have the capacity to affect others. Due to the ability of words to gain materiality, these representations demand an ethical responsibility on both the writer’s and reader’s part.

Empathetic reading accounts for the emotional responses that arise from a reader's identification with the text. Identification can be experienced through relating to characters/narrators, and situations that stir personal memories, and the threat to one's emotional being. With my first reading I connected personally to *Night* on various levels—the anxiety found in Wiesel's theological struggle, his pangs of religious doubt, his personal isolation—that enabled my intense emotional response from Wiesel's memoir. Often first readings offer the most powerfully poignant reactions to the text. Intricate response becomes wrapped up in initial uncertain struggles of comprehension such as the personal disbelief that rises in the wake of reading/listening to a survivor's testimony or in the struggle of dealing with the emotional reactions of horror, sadness, and displacement. For literary critics such as Robert Eaglestone, reader identification to a real testimony is an immoral act because this “normalizes” the survivor's experience by attempting to reduce an incomprehensible event into one's own understanding (“From Behind” 22). Emotional responses experienced through reader identification leads to what Eaglestone refers to as an “illicit grasping and assimilation (to use Primo Levi's word) of Holocaust survivor testimony. Survivors do not believe that they can or should be identified with, even through their testimony. Moreover, the process of identification underlies debates about the representation of the Holocaust” (28). Eaglestone's terms “assimilation” and “normalization” in reference to the Holocaust assumes a reader's emotional identification as a more passive adaptation of another's experience—a further means of immorally objectifying the other. He goes even further, borrowing from Theodor Adorno's arguments that *any representation* of the Holocaust, or of any atrocity,

is unethical because it is a static, plastic representation, thus objectification, of another's suffering. Yet to remain silent denies the ethical responsibility on the part of the survivor to carry forth the memory of the dead. Silence of representation also denies the responsibility of the reader to act as secondary witness, as having a non-alibi in Being, in carrying the knowledge of others out into the world.

Adorno already sets himself against artistic representation in that it never can convey the atrocity, the disaster. The ethical means of dealing with this problem is, for readers and writers alike, to remain aware that the end product is a representation of a lived life. Even when the experience of representation results in emotional-cognitive responses causing personal sites of stress and pain, there always remains the gap between experience and expression, act and representation. An interpretive theory of an ethical aesthetic allows for an understanding as to how writers and readers may interpret the text that generates such an emotional response. The term aesthetic certainly denotes an appreciation of a work based on its extrinsic and intrinsic artistic qualities—essentially examining how techniques of representation stir something within readers/viewers. Bakhtin emphasizes that aesthetic understanding can only occur between the self positioned against the other through an excess of seeing. He writes,

[...] the excess of my seeing must “fill in” the horizon of the other human being who is being contemplated [...] I must empathize or project myself into this other human being, see his world axiologically from within him as *he* sees this world; I must put myself in his place and then, after returning to my own place, “fill in” his horizon through that excess of seeing, which opens out from this, my own, place outside him. (“Author and Hero” 25)

The reader does not embody or passively take on the life of the other. During my empathetic readings of *Night* I never thought of myself as gaining *ownership* of Wiesel's memoir, nor assimilating my full being with his. I remained mindful that *Night* was a representation of Wiesel's life and not my own. While I cannot relive another person's trauma, I can allow myself to experience a personal crisis as a result of experiencing his/her retelling. An ethical aesthetic aids readers in seeing these connections between personal emotional response and the techniques within the memoir's narrative that invokes those responses. Blanchot reminds audiences that "reading is anguish," that the text is empty; it is the emotional response—the anguish—that comes from creative understanding, that provides a means to an empathetic reading. Experiencing anguish is the risk of the text.

As a category, traumatic literature brings together multiple genres that focus on historical catastrophic events. Place-names like Auschwitz are no longer dots on a map; instead Auschwitz comes to signify the darkness and terror that echoes through our collective memory. Trauma literature depicts a survivor's personal struggle in responding to and representing the mass atrocities suffered through the threats to individual, cultural and inhuman eradication.³ According to Lawrence Langer, the challenge for writers of trauma literature—or rather what Langer prefers to call the "literature of atrocity"—is "to find a way of making this fundamental truth accessible to the mind and emotions of the reader" (*Holocaust and the Literary* xxi). Likewise Cathy

³ While a memoir illustrating an individual's struggle with cancer is traumatic and while at any one moment millions of people have cancer, thus creating an atrocity, this type of memoir is not trauma literature because it is not an historical account of mass atrocity that resides in our cultural memory.

Caruth sees trauma literature as “forcing us to rethink our notions of experience, and of communication” (*Trauma* 4). There lies a gap between a traumatic experience and a survivor’s processing of that experience. One does not fully witness the event as it unfolds, it is the piecing together of fragmentary experience that “carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory” (7). The trauma lies in the survival of the event. Caruth continues, “The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding” (7). Trauma literature depends on such lacunas.

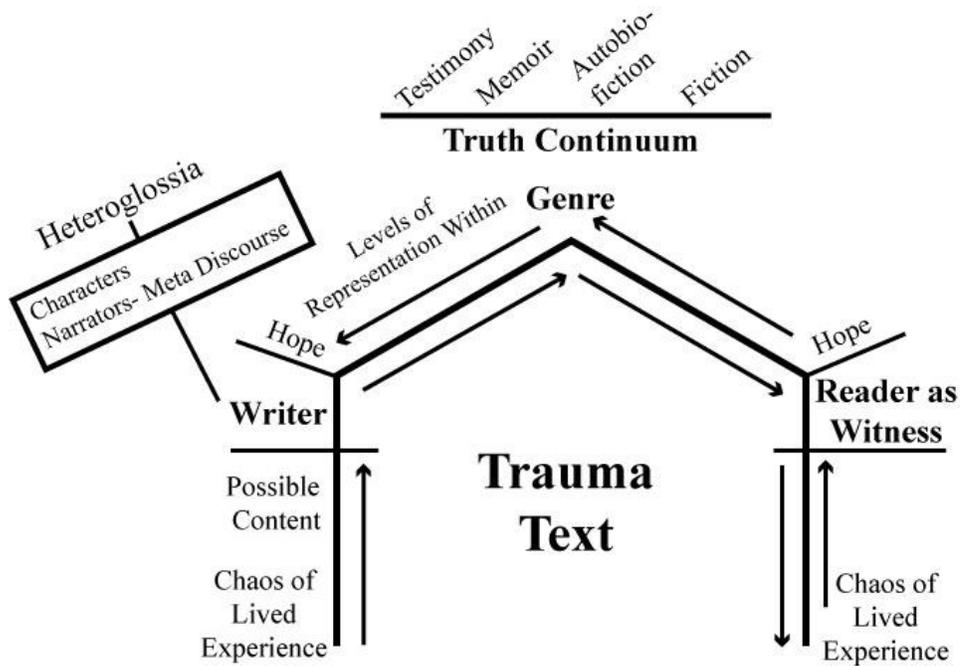
The recollection of events adds another level of interpretive difficulty for traumatic literature in conveying the type of experience being represented because it blurs the boundaries among genres and complicates the distinctions between fact and fiction. Langer allows for such complexities by situating a survivor’s need to embellish between “historical fact and imaginative truth” (*Holocaust and the Literary* 8). He states, “History provides the details—then abruptly stops. Literature seeks ways of exploring the implications and making them imaginatively available” (9). Writers of traumatic texts must balance representations of personal experience, “imagined truths,” with historical accuracy. Traumatic literature’s genres which span from testimony to fictionalized representations are never far removed from historical accountability. Genre calls forth issues of responsibility on the writer’s part to follow a framework of historical facts while simultaneously exposing the emotional and intellectual on imaginative levels. Writers of atrocity “speak the unspeakable,” breaking Adorno’s sacred silence with their imaginative representations. Eaglestone refers to this breakage as a “necessary betrayal.”

He suggests that *any representation* of the Holocaust ultimately fails to convey the real trauma of the experience. There is no way to effectively portray the true horror of the event. Any attempt to do so through history and art shows that “representations are made at the cost of betrayals and consequently must be open to interruption, to disagreement” (“From Behind” 104). Therefore for representations to possess an ethical aesthetic, they must be understood as taking part in an ongoing, *and infinite*, discourse taking place between testifier and audience, writer and reader, survivor and witness in order to carry the word. As Elie Wiesel writes in his preface to *Night*: “To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time” (xv).

The issues of responsibility regarding representation in traumatic literature raise four important questions when reading empathetically:

1. What is the writer’s responsibility in writing trauma literature?
2. In what ways does genre delimit the representation of trauma in literature?
3. What is the reader’s responsibility in interpreting trauma literature?
4. What is the relationship among these responsibilities in generating an ethical aesthetic theory (and how does this relate to empathetic reading)?

These four questions span the breadth of this study, filtering through the multiple layers of representation and interpretation that exist within the writer’s composition, the generic features that delimit such content, and the reader’s transaction with text. The application of an ethical aesthetic to the traumatic works in this dissertation demonstrates what it means to respond to and witness another’s account of atrocity.



The diagram above illustrates the dialogic act of writing and reading trauma literature. Writers select possible content out of the chaos of lived experience. A gap exists between actual experience and the writer’s representation wherein authors know there can be no full recreation of an actual life. The writer’s use of meta-discourse, as Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, is an attempt to work through such limitations of language, allowing for a multiplicity of voices and stratification of these interrelationships (“Discourse” 262), thereby accounting for the differing levels of experience. A writer’s use of digression and asides, such as Wiesel’s rupturing of his own narrative in “Darkness,” also serves as a means for the writer (and reader) to remind him/herself that this is a representation and not a relived event.

The writers of trauma literature must remain aware that representation is also defined through the genre features with which this experience becomes the narrative.

Genres are often stable in the delimiting definitions set forth for textual portrayals, yet they can also create dynamic ways for meaning to emerge in a multiplicity of layers. In “The Problem with Speech Genres,” Bakhtin shows how genres are not stable but dynamic and influential on the text and content: “Each epoch, each literary trend and literary-artistic style... is typified by its own special concepts of the addressee of the literary work, a special sense and understanding of its reader, listener, public, or people” (98). Within trauma literature the genres’ styles of reprisal serves simultaneously as a form of silence by not repeating and a form of voicing by speaking the unspeakable. These reprisals shape representations through the emphasis of gaps, lacunas, and losses in the wake of traumatic experience. Reprisals often retell with varying accounts and differing perspectives that remain fractured, no longer linear—a metonymy where the piece represents the whole. An example of such technique can be found in the multiple retellings of Sethe’s choice in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Characters focus on the retelling of the event, and the gaps that occur in representing and recollecting remain defined by the genre’s style—where true horror can only be suggested through representation, not lived experience.

Genre is a key factor for the diagram’s (and dissertation’s) framework. This method moves across varying perspectives of a truth continuum: demonstrating the considerations of how truthful lived events are represented in testimonial works, in the more blurred lines of factual-fictions of memoir and autobiographical fiction, and in entirely fictionalized representations of real historical trauma. Concepts of truth along this continuum rely on the relativity of perspective allowing for awareness of constructed

realities—rising from both actual lived experience as well as the created world of the text. Accounting for the relativity of perspectives does not take a neutral position toward traumatic representations. Instead it allows for a multiplicity of viewpoints and voices that defy a totalizing theory of reading trauma literature, thus considering the local and cultural influence upon narratives (and how these culturally defined generic features delimit such representations). This study demonstrates how writers adhere to the genre's expectations of traumatic representation while dealing with the tensions that arise when using innovative, dynamic multilayered narratives.

Bakhtin states that lived events are chaos and that narratives are a means of co-experiencing a life through “sympathetic understanding”—similar to his concept of creative understanding—by having an experience actualized inwardly by an outward and unique position toward the other. In *Art and Answerability*, Bakhtin explains,

Lived experiences, when experienced outside myself in the other, possess an inner exterior, an inner countenance averted toward me, and this inner exterior or countenance can be and should be lovingly contemplated, it can be and should be remembered the way we remember a person's face (and not the way we remember some past experience of our own). [...] For the point here is not the exact, passive mirroring or duplication of another's experience within myself (nor is such duplication really possible); the point is a transposition of another's experience to an entirely *different* axiological plane, into an entirely *new* category of valuation and forming. Thus, the *other's* suffering as co-experienced by me is in principle different (different, moreover, in the most important and essential sense) from the other's suffering as *he* experiences it for himself and from my *own* suffering as I experience it in myself. (“Author and Hero” 102)

The traumatic representation remains in the forefront and the writer, reader, and genre take responsibility for this by acknowledging the differing levels of evaluating

CHAPTER II

“THE DISASTER RUINS EVERYTHING”

The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular; “I” am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me—an other than I who passively become other.

- Maurice Blanchot *The Writing of the Disaster*

Nothing I have seen--in photographs or in real life--ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs--of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to affect, of suffering I could hardly imagine and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead, something is still crying.

- Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

Like Susan Sontag’s life, mine remains bifurcated into a before and after. This division occurred when I first encountered trauma literature in Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and again with Lawrence Langer’s Holocaust literature anthology *Art from the Ashes*, and the divide widens as I continue to read, listen, and view trauma literature. Sontag writes of images, striking photographs that immediately shock the senses, yet the experience of reading is not far removed. Both require deciphering compositions, positioning one’s self outside as a witness to the suffering of others. As Maurice Blanchot writes, this positioning is the risk of the disaster, the threat of trauma literature: it can quicken the pulse, evoke tears, shock us into disbelief, and pull us into abysmal dark doubt. The literature threatens harm and yet spares us. How do we account for these true physical

responses? How do we explain what happens to us as readers when reacting to what we witness? How do we bridge the gap between raw emotional response and the cognitive placement of how such a response is generated through representation?

Once we have witnessed the disaster we cannot turn away. Our course in life remains altered. We search to make meaning. We try to find redemptive narratives. We try to find redemption in remembrance for that is the closest we come to responsibility: to witness, to carry such brokenness outward to the collective, to preserve these events in cultural memory. Striking scenes ask that we turn away, ask for disbelief, and ask for distance, for removal of the personal threat. Morality asks that we witness with respect, that we bear these scars, carry these ashes, and realize our failures to make meaning. Morality demands that writers distrust language while struggling against silence. Blanchot reminds survivors to “write in order not simply to destroy, in order not simply to conserve, in order not to transmit; write in the thrall of the impossible real, that share of disaster wherein every reality, safe and sound, sinks” (*Writing* 38). That impossible real represents atrocity through the layering of lived experience. These layers of perspectives offer accountabilities toward the sufferings of others, glimpses of how reality remains dispersed by survival. Writers give depictions of experiences that resonate with horror and remain with us for some time. These texts are not pleasurable texts to read. These stories are stories that scar.

How can we deal with the ethical implications found in the multiple genres of trauma literature? Each genre carries moral weight tied to expectations of perspective and portrayal of traumatic events. At the core of each text we must remain aware that the

writing is built upon layerings of representations of lived experiences. Testimony at the onset conveys semblance of “truths” told through personal authenticated accounts. In many ways such a definition of truth in testimony tests the societal boundaries of aesthetic representation by raising questions regarding ethics and art. The generic markers of testimony ask that writers adhere to a framework of historical fact while portraying personal experience on emotional-cognitive levels; yet “truths” are always filtered through one’s perspective. Hayden White emphasizes this position when he questions assessments of reality and interpreting the recording of history in his essay, “The Politics of Historical Interpretation.” White suggests that we “must face the fact that when it comes to apprehending the historical record, there are no grounds to be found in the historical record itself for preferring one way of construing its meaning over another” (*Content* 74). A similar position can be found in *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda* where Philip Gourevitch’s research of documentary evidence, gathering of sworn testimonies and personal interviews, shows his attempt to reconstruct and represent historical trauma. The implicit weight of “truth” lies in the testifier’s intentions to reveal toward his/her audience. Audiences may gain greater impact upon verbal testimony depending upon the dynamic of its delivery: the dialogue toward a receptive other or a direct interview held with a reporter. Questions can direct responses just as physical presence has an impact. Hence if the correlation between testifier and audience is direct, the dynamic plays out in various ways (non verbal cues for example). The site of testimony also has an impact: courtroom, cell chamber, deathbed, or returning to the site of trauma. These locations

also affect the three existing sites of trauma where the event is retained within 1) the occurrence itself, 2) the psychological aftermath, and 3) the transference of retelling/representing the event to another.

Gourevitch repeatedly demonstrates the implied filtered perspectives of testifiers in recorded documents and conducted interviews. We all remain conscious of the ways in which we present ourselves to others. If one is guilty of mass genocidal acts, one may reconstruct events differently in order to redirect the blame. Others show no shame, nor little remorse for such acts. Perpetrators, as well as victims, cast themselves in certain ways to suit societal expectations. Regardless, we as readers need to be especially cautious of authorial intent of consulting factual records. Historians reconstruct fragments to the best of their abilities. “Like all of history,” Gourevitch cautions, “it is a record of successive struggles for power, and to a very large extent power consists in the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality—even, as is so often the case, when that story is written in their blood” (*We Wish* 49).

The historical embellishments found in the genre of memoir are methods of inviting readers to inhabit the other’s reality. Historical embellishment often gets forgiven in memoir so long as the story adheres to historical evidence. The recent controversy surrounding Ishmael Beah’s *A long way gone: memoirs of a boy soldier* entails discrepancies regarding the actual dates of events and internment records. Currently, critics question the date range Beah gives for invasions and the time spent as a child soldier. Narrative embellishment can be forgiven if the reprisals portray intended rhetorical flourishes. And there are numerous moments within the narrative where Beah

simultaneously initiates his intended audience by recalling events through the retelling of distressed, detailed depictions of atrocities suffered in the civil war of Sierra Leone. Autobiographical fiction certainly takes liberties with personal histories tied to fictionalized retellings of events, often employed as a means to overcome the obstacles of impossible realities. Kurt Vonnegut, for example, takes a similar approach in *Slaughterhouse Five* by writing his war experiences into a science fictional narrative. He employs several meta-fictional techniques that demonstrate the difficulties representing the bombing of Dresden, and openly establishes a relationship with his implied readers in the process (Davis 77). Finally fictionalized representations of real historical traumas must also attempt to accurately portray these incomprehensible, catastrophic horrors by writing toward the imagination. The works of Jonathan Safran Foer, both *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, convey fictional worlds and characters that ache with memories created from the absences left in the wake of trauma. Many of us leave these textual worlds remorseful, only later reflecting on the lives that have touched us. As readers of historical trauma literature, we know how it will end. How we get there is the story created through our emotional-cognitive reaction to the reading. How we make the experience meaningful is through the application of an ethical aesthetic.

An ethical aesthetic aids readers in making these connections between a personal emotional response and the narrative techniques that invoke such a response. The ethical means of dealing with the problem of any “pleasure” gained through an aesthetic appreciation of traumatic texts is, for readers and writers alike, to remain aware that the

end product is a representation of a lived life. Representations of trauma can indeed create emotional-cognitive responses in us. Allowing for such responses does not mean that readers inhabit, embody, or relive another's trauma. In viewing reading transactions ethically we search for a means to understand appropriate and inappropriate responses to representations of suffering. As ethical readers we do not want to venture into voyeuristic titillation that arises from objectifying another's pain.

How should readers allow themselves to experience a personal crisis rising from empathetic reading? Mikhail Bakhtin views empathizing with another as creating an active relationship through a process he calls "creative understanding." His process accounts for the multiple perspectives and interpretations that arise in the transaction of creating and reading a text—the writer's act of composing toward an idealized reader and the actual reading of the manuscript. Layering often becomes fashioned through the use of asides—those temporal breaks in the narrative where the authorial voice severs the traumatic moment in order to create distance—to remind his/her audience that the narrative is indeed a retelling and not a reliving of the traumatic event. The act of composing a lived experience is already a representation discursively attempting to bring memory into the present. Thus, the aside is a secondary representation, reflecting the time of the writing, a technique employed in trauma literature to make itself visible as well as the representation it refers to. Within "creative understanding" the writer, text, and the reader are each located within their own specific time and place, yet each individualized act requires these elements to simultaneously overlap in interpretation. Here it is important to emphasize that an empathetic reader comes to the text with an

ethical stance that respects both the sites of the writer and the text. Empathetic reading joins reason with emotion in an attempt to formulate an aesthetic interpretation. The emotional response generated from the text can be experienced through identification: relating to characters, familial and social structures, depictions of life before the disaster, and the difficult scenes and images that stir unsettling emotional reactions.

In this chapter I demonstrate how an ethical aesthetic links authorial representation with an implied reader and how an actual reader may emotionally-cognitively experience the text via the implied author. This process entails examining multiple perspectives or points of view of the texts and their effects and implications in the aftermath of reading trauma literature. First I examine the tensions found in an author's representing lived traumatic experience. I apply Bakhtin's theory of "utterance-as-act" to show how writers attempt to overcome such limitations in language. This section also highlights theories of representation raised by Lawrence Langer, Cathy Caruth, and Shoshana Felman. Each scholar reveals the tensions of portraying trauma in diverse ways: Langer focuses on the cultural implications of language and its metaphorical links between writer and reader; Caruth applies a post-Freudian psychological analysis of trauma and its representation in the aftermath; and Felman employs a pedagogical approach concerning the transference from texts. Second I look at the problems within the field of trauma studies centering on the clinical-redemptive urge that rises from labeling such literature "trauma," then moving toward the ethical questions of representation and reader identification. The final section examines the ways Elie Wiesel writes through the paradox of testimony, the betrayal and impossibility

of remaining silent and the betrayal at representing the trauma. These betrayals implicate both writer and reader alike.

Sparks of Expression: Trauma Literature and Theory.

Within trauma literature everything hinges upon representation—a means to convey kernels of truth filtered through one’s perspective. The trauma survivor in his/her attempt to relay experience remains cognizant of audience—remains influenced by his/her time, space, history, and worldview. Traumas that occur on a mass scale that evolve into atrocities become collective historical experiences that resound in death and destruction—slavery, internment camps, the Holocaust, the mass genocides of Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur, the civil wars of Sierra Leone and Iraq. These atrocities become ingrained in our modern society. Because these acts of horror resonate within cultural memory, one challenge for survivors is to find the narrative means to represent the personal trauma that rises in the wake of atrocity. For writers, these acts become factors when choosing the genres and words, the truthful means to characterize the past for the present. How a writer brings a truth about experience from thought to expression is where correspondence occurs. It is in this dynamic of expressing personal trauma in the wake of mass atrocity that Bakhtin reminds us of such complexities of communicating one’s history when he writes in “The Problem of Speech Genres” that “the contact between the language meaning and the concrete reality that takes place in the utterance can create the spark of expression. It exists neither in the system of language nor in the objective reality surrounding us” (87). As readers we must realize that we can never get to the reality of another’s experience. How another’s truth is revealed relies on our relation to the

other—our responsibility is to be fully present in this exchange. Thus, the act of witnessing, in effect, becomes an act of speech. When survivors struggle through their limitations of language to convey the impossible, it is essentially through the separate but co-experienced emotion where real communication occurs. Bakhtin makes this point clear when he continues with “emotion, evaluation, and expression are foreign to the word of language and are born in the process of its live usage in concrete utterance” (87). Through the shared experience of the utterance, and because of it a co-experienced emotion, the traumatic witness and audience come together in discourse.

The increased popularity of trauma and Holocaust studies over the past three decades has produced significant inroads regarding language, psychology and representation. Three noteworthy literary and cultural theorists, Lawrence Langer, Cathy Caruth, and Shoshana Felman, reconcile the problems of representation in differing ways. Langer focuses his study on the cultural implications of language and how disturbing images are recreated from the minds of authors toward readers through metaphorical language. Langer shows how writers of atrocity craft a “new language” or new ways of perceiving reality altered from incomprehensible acts of violence. Caruth relies heavily on psychoanalysis, mainly the writings of Sigmund Freud, in theoretical application that reveals how trauma occurs in the wake of events. The site of trauma comes to the forefront once the mind has the ability to recollect the experience. Shoshana Felman focuses on the responsibility of the reader/listener as secondary witness. Similar to Bakhtin’s view of the utterance, Felman sees testimonies are actual acts of speech where testifier and audience share/co-experience the representation of trauma within discursive

space. While all three address the tensions in the transaction between lived experience, the writer's recollection, the textual representation, and the author's interpretation, each locates the shared co-experience of witnessing at different points: Langer in the reader, Caruth in the writer, and Felman in the text.

The tensions and disconnect among the lived experience, the representation of it by the writer/testifier, and the reader's inability to fully comprehend the horror remain at the center of Langer's reservations toward the possible redemptive quality in the act of retelling.¹ The tension lies in how to define the actuality of the lived traumatic event in comparison to the reality of recollection and attempts at comprehension in the face of a survivor's story (*Holocaust and Literary* 92). His first book, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975), focuses on how authors (and survivors) struggle with the limitations of language in representing horrific events. Langer brings forth examples of linguistic, metaphorical devices employed by writers of traumatic narratives that effectively demonstrate how authors seek to present the hyper-reality known as the Holocaust to an intended audience. I use the term hyper-reality because the events that took place in the camps, in the ghettos, in the wake of the advancing German front pertain to life lived within *l'univers concentrationnaire* or "planet Auschwitz," what Langer means by the effects of authorial impact upon both the reader's imagination and outward into cultural memory (93). He postulates that writers of Holocaust literature

¹ One of the leaders in the comparative literature field to deal with these dismal representations of dark personal suffering rising from the ashes of the Holocaust is Lawrence Langer. Langer's writings on Holocaust literature remain influential in the field of trauma studies. *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, 1975, was one of the first texts to examine literary representations of the Holocaust.

create a new art because they are forced to create a new language, a new means of representation: that writers,

provide [our consciousness] with a fresh or unique perception of the nature of reality, chiefly because the enormity of the atrocities they recount finally forces the reader to lose his orientation altogether and to feel as though he were wandering in a wilderness of evil totally divorced from any time and place he has ever known—a reality not latent in, but external to, his own experience.” (75)

It is in these tensions between the horror of the lived experience and the textual representations of them that Langer questions our abilities as readers, our preparedness, our capacities to comprehend “the grimmer realities and the imaginative re-creations of the literature of atrocity” (76).

More often than not, readers turn away from trauma literature, books like *Night*, because it depicts violent scenes and harsh realities that readers would rather repress. Langer addresses reluctant readership as offering insight “into the literature itself, which has as one of its goals (and indeed as one of its themes) the conquest of this very inability of the mind to contend with the recollections, the emotions, the apprehensions that *l’univers concentrationnaire* evokes” (91-92). By using Wiesel’s *Night* as the leading example of the literature of atrocity, Langer goes on to state that the feature of this genre is to acknowledge the tensions between historical accuracy and the individual’s perspective. The speaking-of-the-unspeakable recovers chaotic events from indifference, so that they may endure within a realm of aesthetic representation “that is partly invented and partly recreated from episodes which themselves appear too fantastic to be anything but fiction” (92). In fact, most realities within the *l’univers concentrationnaire* are so

extraordinary, so far removed from reality that our minds cannot process the scenes, cannot endure the pain that pours forth from the page. Yet within the act of reading our created representations of these graphic scenes are indeed grafted into our imaginations, into our minds, and carried forth into our modern world.

Just as Langer, Caruth views trauma (or atrocity) as an event that occurs and remains outside normal human experience (similar to the definition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Relying heavily on psychoanalytic theories applied to the field of comparative literature, Caruth reveals how trauma does not occur during the actual horrific event, but rather occurs in the aftermath when the mind has the ability to recollect. Recollection may happen either involuntarily through unwarranted nightmares and unrepressed visions, or voluntarily in a survivor's attempt to piece together fragmentary experience. The very nature of repression has at its kernel a conscious awareness of an unwanted threat. These recollections cause what she refers to as "forgotten wounds." She states, "If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (*Unclaimed* 3). The written act of recollection, or primary witnessing, becomes a means of reclaiming and reliving the traumatic experience revealed through discourse. This process is not a redemptive act of reclaiming "unclaimed experience"; this retelling stirs an awakening and, "as an act, the awakening is thus not an understanding but a transmission, the performance of an act of

awakening that contains within it its own difference. [...] the words are *passed on* as an act that does not precisely awaken the self but, rather, *passes the awakening on to others*" (106-7). As a rhetorical process of representation, the writer as witness provides the reader with brief flashes that illuminate experience toward expression. The writer is not necessarily concerned with having him/herself understood, but is instead focused on transmitting the ethical-cognitive awareness on to others. Such awareness brings forth a responsibility on the reader's part to the survivor.

Shoshana Felman focuses on the ethical responsibility on the reader who, in turn, becomes secondary witness to the testifier. She sees the act of testimony as an act of speech. Borrowing a line from Elias Canetti, she writes, "A life testimony is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*" ("Education" 14). Through the survivor's recollection of the traumatic event, an experience that does not exist until its recollection, the listener becomes an actual witness prior to the victim. Focusing on the responsibility of the reader/listener/ as secondary witness, Felman claims that the ethical stance of the listener is the willingness to take the risk of sharing the trauma within discursive space. This discursive relationship places the listener not as a secondary witness, but quite possibly as a primary witness. For example, Felman writes of encountering a "crisis in the classroom" that arose with several of her students who deeply internalized the reading of Holocaust texts (50). They reacted so strongly to these readings that they began having nightmares. She found her students unable to articulate the problems they were having. In working through these issues with her class she

discovered that one cannot reduce the testimony of others to some “graspable knowledge.” She emphasizes that “this knowledge does not exist. It only happens through the testimony [...] It cannot be possessed by speaker or listener outside the dialogic process” (53). The figure of the witness is not in the telling; it resides in the medium of the testimony. It is the shared, lived experience of discourse that creates witnessing, creates meaning, thus creating the speech act. It is within the act of speech where primary and secondary witnessing and aesthetics meet through an ethical empathetic reading, a process of linking the multiple levels of representation—the writer’s, the text’s and the reader’s—that creates the experience of the text.

“Hope cannot be built from the ruins”: Addressing the problems compounded with trauma theory as it now stands.

Painful memories are not always disabling, and narratives about them—at least this is true of Holocaust testimony—rarely ‘liberate’ witnesses from a past they cannot and do not wish to escape. For them, forgetting would be the ultimate desecration, a ‘cure’ the ultimate illusion. As for renewal or rebirth, such monuments to hope cannot be built from the ruins of a memory crammed with images of flame and ash.

- Lawrence Langer, “The Alarmed Vision.”

Criticisms of defining this writing as “trauma literature” fall on the clinical terminology of the word *trauma*: a physical thus psychological wounding, piercing of the self and soul. Placing testimonials (both written and verbal) and other representations of life threatening events under the therapeutic term *trauma* conveys injuries that can be healed through psychoanalytic theory, through acts of retelling, reclaiming a semblance of life that existed before the disaster. Robert Eaglestone identifies the fallacy of healing as a glossing over of our ability to comprehend the traumatic event(s). The ethical responsibility is to acknowledge the difficulties in interpreting testimonials. Instead,

argues Eaglestone, readers tend toward cultural myths of “working through” by grasping and normalizing the survivor’s speech (“Not Read” 33).

Cultural myths build upon the idea of reclaiming the self through reassembling fractured pieces, and readers of trauma literature consciously or unconsciously tap into those myths when reading. Therein these myths create a desire for witnesses, as well as readers/listeners, of testimonials to grasp at some underlying, inherent form of meaning as a way to fill the silence that resounds in simple disbelief. While the literary theories addressing trauma literature address these impossibilities, they also compound the problems of ethical representation and interpretation. In his essay titled “‘Not Read and Consumed in the Same Way as Other Books’: Levinas and Ethical Reading,” Eaglestone argues against the possible redemptive undercurrents of these theories for writers or readers: “Trauma theory offers not only misapplied science but also an illusory redemption” (32). Readings may call forth the temptation for experiential tourism through which readers derive pleasure from the pain of others, leading further toward simulated acts where readers embody the suffering of the narrator thus delving into aesthetic pleasures found in the mimesis of artistic representation. As Eaglestone argues, within this process readers reduce survivors to “mythological” mimetic beings through identifying with their stories, thus further objectifying them (“From Behind” 99). Like Adorno he equates this audience with the original perpetrators because they both continue to objectify and denounce survivors and the dead as others. Eaglestone believes that the best way to resolve the issue is to redefine or argue for the creation of a new genre, testimony, as a means to “draw into significance the generic context, with its inherent and

constantly developing practices, codes, and specific relation to issues of the past, the status of the author as witness, of memory and the writing of history, of the relation of form and content, of ethics and ways of reading, each changing with each particular text” (“Not Read” 38).

While Eaglestone’s genre considerations are vital to understanding the shared co-experience of trauma literature, locating the solution for ethical reading in one genre is limiting for three reasons. First, testimonies, as always multiple, competing textual representations of lived experience, are no closer or farther away from the lived experience than other genres. Second, focusing on one genre privileges it and moves it toward sacredness, the sacred text—or the impression of its being more truthful than other representations; thus this approach undermines the argument of the impossibility of comprehension and pushes readers toward more voyeuristic interpretations. Eaglestone essentially argues that a reader’s identification with a testimonial assimilates the events toward an internalized titillation. Third, equating empathetic readers to the original perpetrators does not rectify the absurdity of his argument, since those who verbally testify about their lived experience invite readers/listeners to witness their retelling. Rather an alternative way is to show how a theory of ethical reading: 1) identifies the narrative techniques the writer employs in representing lived experiences; 2) examines the practices of the author writing toward an intended, idealized reader through the delimiting boundaries of a genre; and 3) offers readers the stance for a critical reading (with creative understanding) toward an intended, idealized writer.

Testimonial texts borrow from novelistic narrative features. *Night*, for example, moves in a reverse *Bildungsroman* style, building upon the loss of innocence not toward an embracing, understanding of life, but toward death.² Eaglestone accounts for the use of such narrative techniques in that many writers of testimonial texts model their craft after the qualities found in nineteenth-century realism. He reasons for such formal methods as serving tropes under a “mimesis of production.” By referring to James Young’s *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, Eaglestone shows how cultural expectations bind us in that:

The act of witnessing is always mediated and because all such moments show that ‘in addition to time and place,’ the writer’s ‘very language, traditions and world view played crucial roles in the making of their literary witness... As raw as they may have been at the moment, the ghetto and camp experiences were immediately refined and organized by witnesses within in terms of their *Weltanschauung*’.
(“Traces” 53-54)

Indeed acts of witnessing are mediated. Writers, testifiers, remain cognizant of intended audience and relation of self within time and place. The realization toward intended audience holds the underlying obligation to truthful representations, an ethical responsibility. The act of mediation is exactly what Bakhtin sets out in *Art and Answerability*: “it is about the other that all the stories have been written, all the tears have been shed [...] it is only others who are known, remembered, and recreated by productive memory, so that my own memory of objects, of the world, and of life could also become an artistic memory” (“Author and Hero” 111). Bakhtin continually

² For a discussion of this reversal see Langer’s “Acquainted with the Night,” *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*.

emphasizes how human relationships depend upon “consummation” with another through language. Authors write themselves through aesthetic acts of positioning how one sees through cultural constructs. Reading and writing alike remain bound by cultural expectations that often influence narrative structures.

Eaglestone admits that readers do indeed identify with testimonial writers due to the cultural expectations of reading (“Not Read” 37). Identification refers to how readers directly relate to characters in the text, at times risking a loss of self within the narrative. Eaglestone sees such reading as immoral on the basis of an audience internalizing the pain of others, thus normalizing the experience. He goes further by stating that testimonies resist identification in readership through its relationship of otherness. Readers cannot internalize something as foreign to them as the horrors of Auschwitz. The encounter remains outside one’s framework and any attempt to grasp or understand these horrors “reduces the other” toward equating reader with witness (“Traces” 71). Eaglestone argues that our literary imagination has been forever changed by the horrific acts in Auschwitz, thus going beyond any comprehension of events. As he argues, “This is why testimony is not pleasurable to read: it rejects the pleasures of identification. This, too, is a sign of it being a different genre” (“Not Read” 38-39).

Testimonies are not pleasurable to read, but this is not why we read them, even when aesthetically critiquing narrative structures. The reading of testimonies is an empathetic experience that changes us from the knowledge gained through the secondary witnessing of another’s account of their history. Our exposure to a survivor’s personal atrocity awakes something within ourselves; it disturbs our moral bearings by implicating

our position as witness. Readers encounter the horrors as they unfold within the text but with the awareness that this encounter is with representations of those events. The testifier's survival does not lessen the dark and troubling affects of atrocity. Furthermore, even in rereading a text, a reader's emotional-volitional encounter with troubling scenes may not lessen. In fact, this may enhance the reading experience due to anticipating such moments within the text.

Eaglestone bases his moral compass on Emmanuel Levinas's writings concerning our ethical relation to the other in *Totality and Infinity*. Truth, with a capital "T," falls on the face-to-face relationship, correspondence with the other, with a capital "O." Levinas sees the basis of ethics as the call of responsibility while in the presence of the other; it is during this exchange where "truth becomes correspondence" and "animates the movement unto truth." This idea of "Truth as correspondence" lies at the core of testimony—this idea of truth is what writers and readers alike depend upon (and often take for granted). For Levinas (according to Eaglestone), the core of our ethical responsibility lies in our "profoundest ethical relation with the Other, and this relationship is summed up in what Levinas calls the 'face-to-face'" ("From Behind" 100). Levinas defines this discursive space as primarily offering obligation. In the presence of the other, the significance of the face "interrupts our enclosed self, and opens us to the Other. Our totalizing systems through which we understand the world are interrupted, dislocated by this call to our responsibility for the Other" (101). It is this direct relation, this occupation of space and time *alongside* the other that shakes us from our internalized selves, thus forcing us into an actual accountability within our relationship. For Levinas,

direct relation with the other inhabits the ethical real, the primacy of ethical relationships, and for Eaglestone, true testimony.

Eaglestone attempts to build in a loophole that accounts for this inevitable tension between the ‘face-to-face’ and recorded oral and written testimonies—how to apply recorded representations within Levinas’s primacy ethics of the face. He does this with a Levinasian sleight of hand, countering “visible” historical evidence with that of “invisible” recollections of experience—memory becomes expressed through a “correspondence of truth.” The totalizing threat of historical evidence lies in its ontological and epistemic value. Historians favor visible evidence for its ability to convey conditions of existence. Paradoxically, Eaglestone sets Levinas’s notion of the “invisible” alongside Heidegger’s *aletheia*—knowledge not necessarily gained from the ontological object itself, but gleaned from the initial moment of metaphysical revelation. Eaglestone proposes “a radically new historiography [that] should be developed which could solely reflect the existential ethical truth, but rather that the discipline of history relies first not on ‘scientific truth’ but upon the ‘invisible’ revelation of the truth of the ethical relation, which is, for Levinas, ‘how things are for us’” (“Against Historicism” 157).

Is Eaglestone creating a “radically new historiography” when he views testimony as a genre in and of itself? If evidence is “visible” it becomes a dogmatic method of automatically objectifying the other. The “invisible” relies upon ethical relationships within testimony (truth told as history). Essentially, Eaglestone sets up a disciplinary divide placing testimony-as-history against testimony-as-literature. His approach

muddles both historical accountability and its narrative constructs. The unseen becomes taken for granted in this ethical relationship relying upon “truth as revelation.”

Eaglestone defines this concept as operating through personal and cultural memory:

“Memory reveals a world and, in so doing, reveals the other. Memory is not reducible to an understanding of history as correspondence because it underlies the idea of history, since it manifests the ethical relationship” (158). Eaglestone uses “memory” as an ethical means of representation in recreating historic events—therefore creating a narrative. The weight of ethics lies upon truthful information given through such “correspondence.”

But arriving at a testimonial narrative through the correlation of aletheia and the revelations of remembrance does not ethically answer for aesthetics. Even making the genre sacrosanct, as Eaglestone is apt to do, cannot account for representation and the transference of cognitive-emotional responses from the text.

Eaglestone’s method is similar to Langer’s genre theory, as stated above, that acknowledges the tensions between actual occurrences and the implication of said events for the individual. The historical episodes fall victim to temporality while the repercussions are rescued by memory and imagination. The attempt to resolve such tensions demonstrate how Langer arrives at “historical facts versus imaginative truths” (*Holocaust and the Literary* 92). In a similar light, Bakhtin’s definition of chronotopes builds narratives from historical recollections by demonstrating the inherent relationship between truth, experience, and expression.

For Bakhtin evidence from experience is not simply “visible or invisible”; on the contrary, these concepts, as demonstrated in narrative, are intertwined and complex.

Bakhtin defines chronotopes as being the “organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative” (“Forms of Time” 250). The chronotope provides sites for representation, a means of moving the plot forward from the past into the present, from the text into the world. This becomes a “showing-forth [...] thanks precisely to the special increase in density and concreteness of time markers—the time of human life, of historical time—that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas [...] functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation” (250). Chronotopes operate in complex relationships between experience and expression. They refuse to fall prey to temporality due to their abilities to co-exist and contradict. Chronotopes are dialogic representations both within and outside the text and the world it inhabits. The dialogue extends from the text out into the world of readers (252). Chronotopic dialogue brings forth, through representation, the real historical past into the real present within the presence of readership. Chronotopes account for the featured structures within the genre of testimony (and overall trauma literature) as well as providing the means to locate the texts across time and space: “The real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers” (254).

In contrast, Eaglestone points out that Levinas sees enlightened, recorded evidence as “visible” that threatens to become a totalizing framework of history. As he

states, "History misses the pain. It may recount it but the suffering is lost in the totalizing facts of an historical account of events. The 'I' has been turned into a thing, an event of history: the 'verdict of history is pronounced by the survivor who no longer speaks to the being he judges'" ("From Behind" 102). History misses the pain? Is not that what Eaglestone wants? If we are to feel another's pain empathetically, is not that immoral in his view? History threatens "the absent Other [unable to speak], a suffering being to whom we are obligated before all else, disappears" (102).³ The only means to speak for the silenced is through ethical relations, truthful correspondence offering the "invisible" recaptured through memory and ethical truth. Does it not follow then, that historical narratives portraying embellishments of facts align themselves with Eaglestone, and by doing so only complicates Levinas? Eaglestone attempts to rectify this issue only by calling our attention to it:

There is a problem in this account for Levinas. Where the face is absent, represented in writing or signs, for example, the Other is not encountered, and thus the moment of ethical obligation does not arise. To be expressed by symbols is for Levinas, 'precisely to decline expression. This problem is perhaps at its most acute in relation to the representation of the past, to history. History passes over the 'deaths and suffering of individuals'. (102)

Does this not go against Levinas's views concerning artistic representation? For Levinas, art cannot contain the ethical, and aesthetics are only a return to enjoyment. When we respond to truly moving works of art what stirs us are "plastic" representations made up of "dead celluloid" ("From Behind" 101). Art is absence in representation, and our

³ Equating this to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Differend*.

responses to aesthetic artifacts are inauthentic reductions of reality. Likewise, for Eaglestone, such shadow play is why identification remains impossible and immoral.

I do not agree that a reader's identification with the text is normalizing the experience of the Holocaust. How can one not be changed from the encounter with such texts? Even the narrative structure of historical testimony defies mere chronology (the method Berel Lang argues for). And Eaglestone admits to the totalizing neutrality of history as "glossing over" those affected by atrocity. There is no threat to lose the self completely by turning ourselves over to passive adaptation of another's experience. Bakhtin reminds us that when we empathize through reading we do so actively. We remain conscious of our location outside the author in our aesthetic appreciation of the text. He writes, "Pure empathizing would be, in fact, a falling away of the act/deed into its own product, and that, of course, is impossible" (*Toward* 17). For Bakhtin, writers of testimonies write toward a reader willing to cast him/herself into a co-creation of the text. Writers orient themselves toward an audience with a realization that anticipates such a response ("The Problem of Speech" 69). And while the representation of trauma remains a daunting task for the survivor, an experience that is nearly impossible to communicate, he/she must paradoxically write through the silence.

For Eaglestone and Levinas, writers of testimonies do not think their stories are representable or comprehensible, nor do they carry a capacity with which to be identified. In many ways this portrays the Holocaust as a mystical, hyper-real event that remains beyond interpretation and representation. Eaglestone views acts of testimony arising from personal memory as offering ways around issues of representation. Here, he sets

readers up for a contradictory solution resulting in a “necessary betrayal.” Testifiers must rely on memory, the “invisible,” to relay their experience, and memory for Levinas, “realizes impossibility: memory, after the event, assumes the passivity of the past and masters it’. That is memory presents without representing” (“From Behind” 103). Offering such “mastery of the past” sounds redemptive by reclaiming the narrative through revoking memory.

This presents problems within Eagleton/Levinas’s theories of ethics, especially when one is not face-to-face. One of the main problems with using Levinas in this light is that we cannot always be face-to-face with another; we cannot always occupy that same space, time, or cultural awareness; therefore, we are always in a position of outsideness with another. Being removed from the actual presence is not a terrible and immoral act. As Bakhtin reminds us in “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” “No one can assume a position toward the *I* and the *other* that is neutral. The abstract cognitive standpoint [via Levinasian “invisible” memory] lacks any axiological approach, since the axiological attitude requires that one should occupy a unique place in the unitary event of being—that one should be embodied” (129). If writing relies on memory, a form of representation, then memory yields an aesthetic mode of production (107). Bakhtin views biographical writing as producing an aesthetic narrative that, at the onset, an author knows will be consumed by an audience. There is no postmodern ironical paradox that “presents without representing” here. The writer, by writing his life history generates a narrative to be consumed, to be placed out in the world with another.

The writer of testimony writes toward an intended audience, a receptive other who reads with aesthetic appreciation, thus empathizing through aesthetic seeing.

Eaglestone equates empathetic responses to the problems of reader identification, yet with any artistic representation comes aesthetic appreciation. His use of Levinas to arrive at a formulation of an ethical aesthetic essentially plays out with a dependency on interrupting totalizing dogmas. Ethical responses to the Holocaust call for non-totalizing, open-ended discourse *ad infinitum*. For Eaglestone, if the Holocaust is to be represented in history and art then we should remain “acutely aware that their representations are made at the cost of betrayal and consequently must be open to interruption, to disagreement” (“From Behind” 104). As readers we need to acknowledge that representations are merely words forming the depictions of life stories and not an actual life. The betrayal comes from the necessity to break the silence, but cannot be fully grasped nor understood. Eaglestone continues:

The suggestion has been that representation in general, and representations of the Holocaust in particular, exist as *necessary betrayals* of the events. In order to redeem themselves from this betrayal, these representations need to be understood not as final words or complete histories, but as contributions to an ongoing conversation about the Holocaust, a conversation which, Beckett-like, can't go on, but must go on. (105 emphasis mine)

Testimonies whether oral or written are necessary betrayals, but our reactions to them also form ethical betrayals through our obligations toward becoming a secondary witness. My responsibility as secondary witness to the primary witness is to realize my position outside the text and to exist for the other within my unique sense of time and place, and to recognize the testifier's location in relation to me. The call to responsibility

is to remain truthful (as possible) toward the telling of one's testimony, and as Wiesel reminds us, we as readers must be willing to listen.

A Child of the Night

The truth is I could spend the rest of my days recounting the weeks, months, and eternities I lived in Auschwitz, abandoning all other subjects and devoting my life, my survival, to testifying for those who died in the storm of ashes. But the student of mysticism within me always holds me back: "Wait! One must not say too much. The secret of truth lies in silence." And that is the dilemma: To be silent is impossible, to speak forbidden.

- Elie Wiesel "Darkness"

As Wiesel explains, the paradox of testimony is the mutual impossibility of remaining silent or speaking the lived experience. Personal limits are often tested in the writing of testimony and memoir; such life writing requires one to occupy a space outside the self in order to obtain a greater sense of perspective, and possibly objectivity gained through time and distance. Bakhtin's definition of biography, one's life writing, is a means of aesthetically contemplating and constructing one's experience within a performed act toward another. As Bakhtin postulates in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," "The productiveness of the event of a life does not consist in the merging of all into one. On the contrary, it consists in the intensification of one's own *outsidedness* with respect to others, one's own *distinctness* from others: it consists in fully exploiting the privilege of one's own unique place outside other human beings" (88). This position is essential in showing how testimonial texts work. Wiesel's reflection on the writing of *Night* gains an outside position when he refers to himself in a removed-third-person perspective as "the witness." He states, "Deep down, the witness knew then, as he does now, that his testimony would not be received. After all, it deals with an event that

sprang from the darkest zone of man. Only those who experienced Auschwitz know what it was. Others will never know” (*Night* ix). Yet he continues by asking, “But would they at least understand?” There was no way for Wiesel to remain silent. He wrote his testimony out of painful chaos of experience, out of silence toward an audience of those lost in death, and those who have lived and suffered; he wrote to an audience of self living with anguish; he wrote to his father, mother, sisters, community, preserving images of Sighet’s shtetl in the opening pages; he wrote to comrades, survivors, scared by experience; he wrote to “recapture my father’s wisdom, my mother’s serenity, my little sister’s innocent grace;” he wrote to “recapture the rage of the resistance fighter, the suffering of the mystic dreamer, the solitude of the orphan in a sealed cattle car, the death of each and every one of them;” he wrote to “step out of myself and merge with them;” he wrote to “hold my memory open, drive it beyond the horizon, keep it alive after my death” (*All Rivers* 5). He wrote to an idealized receptive reader who will never know Auschwitz, but who takes a position in relation to the testifier as one who willingly risks understanding.

As secondary witness, this audience, both idealized in the mind of the writer and actualized through empathetic reading, owns an awareness of the positioning between author (real and implied), hero, text, and themselves as readers (real and implied). Biography relies on “the unitary two-sided reflexion of the unitary act that illuminates and assigns to a single answerability both the content and the being-as-performance of the act/deed” (*Toward* 14). By becoming empathetic toward the act/deed of testimony, the reader is capable of seeing the experience from inside and outside the discursive

experience, thus creating an “excess of seeing.” Once this excess of seeing is achieved then one may pull back within this objectification and gain a sense of being placed outside the self, even seeing one’s own act/deed aesthetically as if through the other. It is only the return back to the self that the reader may gain an understanding of the unity within the whole of experience through empathizing aesthetically. It is this return to the self after gaining such objective insight that enables the act/deed of biography and testimony to become transgredient. Therefore meaning depends upon the empathizer, the “one situated *outside* the bounds” of the testifier (*Toward* 14). In effect, what often accompanies such readings is an anxiety rising from a certain depth gained at taking the risks of reading and experiencing these accounts from survivors. It is here where

We open the boundaries when we “identify” ourselves with the hero and experience his life from within; and we close them again when we consummate him aesthetically from without. If in the initial movement from within we are passive, then in the answering movement from without we are active—we create something absolutely new, something “excessive.” And it is this meeting of *two* movements on the surface of a human being that consolidates or gives body to his axiological boundaries—produces the fire of aesthetic value (much as fire is struck from a flint). (“Author and Hero” 91)

That fire of aesthetic value rising from the strike of a flint is the spark of expression that ignites empathetic readership and an ethical aesthetic. This relationship with the text is not a passive mimesis or normalization within ourselves of another’s pain revealed through testimony, as Eaglestone is apt to remind us. This relationship offers a means of creating new categories of validation by transposing the writer’s testimony with a co-experiencing of the text. The representation of “the *other’s* suffering as co-experienced by me is in principle different (different, moreover, in the most important

and essential sense) from the other's suffering as *he* experiences it for himself and from my *own* suffering as I experience it in myself" ("Author and Hero" 102). Such a realization recognizes different positions, those boundaries that are open and closed within the relation of experiencing testimony.

Wiesel said that if he were to write just one book that *Night* would be the one. He cannot escape its significance, thus it haunts everything that he has written afterward. The writer of *Night* was a young man in his 30s responding to—as Wiesel notes in his Nobel Prize speech—the demand of “a young Jewish boy [who] discovered the Kingdom of Night” (*Night* 118). His younger self, a boy of 12-15 who occupies the narrative turns to the authorial Elie and asks, “What have you done with my future, what have you done with your life?” The older Elie responds, “I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices” (118). The authorial Wiesel openly questions the motives behind writing his testimony. He wonders if he wrote to avoid madness, or did he dare to embrace the dark nature of insanity in an attempt to understand? Did he long to leave behind words to mark his experience for us to learn from and not to relive his past? Or did he want to preserve his account of what was suffered as an adolescent, “an age when one's knowledge of death and evil should be limited to what one discovers in literature?” (vii).

The death and trauma that young Elie encountered was something far beyond anything given through literature. Wiesel in the writing of this testimony continually struggles with finding the means of expression, overcoming the poverty of language in order to somehow represent his experience. He abandoned French, German and English,

all betraying the meanings of words—words like *thirst*, *hunger*, *chimney* take on greater depth after Auschwitz. He turned to writing in his mother tongue, Yiddish, in attempts to convey the experience. He writes, “I would pause at every sentence, and start over and over again. [...] All the dictionary had to offer seemed meager, pale, lifeless. Was there a way to describe the last journey in sealed cattle cars, the last voyage toward the unknown?” (ix). Was there a way for him to represent the anguish of families being torn apart, entire communities demolished, “or incredibly, the vanishing of a beautiful, well-behaved little Jewish girl with golden hair and a sad smile, murdered with her mother the very night of their arrival? How was one to speak of them without trembling and a heart broken for all eternity?” (ix). The silence of others’ suffering is what haunts Wiesel and speech offers no solution, no means to signify the depth of pain, the depth of hunger, thirst. Definitions fail to convey the extremity of the experience. Wiesel asks himself how he can speak of innocent children and weary old men who were killed by educated men in uniform. He remains aware of the risk that his testimony will not be welcomed, received and read by those outside of Auschwitz. It is “only those who experienced Auschwitz know what it was” (ix). He confesses that at the core of his writing this testimony, he did not really understand what it was he wanted to accomplish. In the preface of the 2006 edition he maintains, “I only know that without this testimony, my life as a writer—or my life, period—would not have become what it is: that of a witness who believes he has a moral obligation to try to prevent the enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory” (viii). The act of speaking, of primary witnessing, of depicting the mass graves, the gas chambers, the

starvation, and thirst and hunger, risks betraying the dead within the portrayal of their suffering. As Wiesel writes within his memoirs about his own grandfather, “I try to imagine him walking with the sick and the old toward the fiery site from which there was no return, and ... No, I don’t want to imagine that. I cannot. It would be indecent. A man’s encounter with death must remain private” (*All Rivers* 43). Yet to remain silent is a further betrayal allowing time to erase the horrors performed by the perpetrators in our collective, cultural memory. The secret of lived experience still lies in silence. It remains on the verge of expression, on the limits of representation. This representation of a lived life is indeed witnessed by us, the readers, and in this act we must receptively acknowledge another as existing outside of ourselves. We must bear witness to the textual representation.

These impossible tensions between silence and speech, the horror of lived experience and its representation, the moral and immoral acts of testimony echo in the opening of *Night*. Wiesel employs a number of narrative techniques by using Moishe the Beadle as the opening figure as the mystic madman, and the quiet crier chanting of the divine sufferings of the Shekhinah in exile. He lives up to both definitions of Beadle, a minor caretaker of the shtetl and a messenger (or town crier). Moishe’s role as messenger plays a figurative role in Wiesel’s writings, for he is the messenger for the dead, urgently testifying to a populace who refuses to listen. One passage from Wiesel’s memoir portrays Moishe as

the first survivor [...] he lived our destiny before any of us. Messenger of the dead, he shouted his testimony from the rooftops and delivered it in silence, but either way no one would listen. People turned their backs so as not to see his

eyes, as though fearing to glimpse a truth that held his past and our future in its steely grip. People tried, in vain, to make him doubt his own reason and his own memory, to accept that he had survived for nothing—indeed, to regret having survived. (*All Rivers* 61)

This reaction is similar to the authorial Wiesel, the testifier, the writer, who must surrender to this risk that others cannot understand and that some are even afraid to listen to the telling of traumas suffered. Wiesel even doubts his own perspective, wondering if he really witnessed Germans throwing living infants into the infernos of the crematoria in Auschwitz.

In his memoir chapter titled “Darkness” where he recounts many of the scenes in *Night*, especially those horrific moments that the young Elie and his father walked toward the crematoria, uncertain if this procession would remain among the living, he questions if what he sees is real:

What remains of that night like no other is an irremediable sense of loss, of parting. My mother and my little sister left, and I never said goodbye. It all remains unreal. It’s only a dream, I told myself as I walked, hanging on my father’s arm. It’s a nightmare that they have torn me from those I love, that they are beating people to death, that Birkenau exists and that it harbors a gigantic altar where demons of fire devour our people. (78-79)

Wiesel breaks the narrative of memoir right at the moment when this becomes unbearable. He places distance between Wiesel the narrator, Wiesel the author, and the intended reader. He breaks the narrative by calling attention to the immediate present: “I reread what I have just written, and my hand trembles. I who rarely weep am in tears. I see the flames again, and the children, and yet again I tell myself that it is not enough to weep” (79). Many scenes that depict deep personal familial memories are often tied to

the present authorial Wiesel. At one point while they await deportation from the ghetto in Sighet, Elie looks “at my little sister, Tzipora, her blond hair neatly combed, her red coat over her arm: a little girl of seven. On her back a bag too heavy for her. She was clenching her teeth; she already knew it was useless to complain. Here and there, the police were lashing out with their clubs: ‘Faster!’” (19).

When Wiesel recalls Tzipora in his memoir he does so with the utmost reserve. He rarely speaks of her as an attempt to sustain an image of a brother’s love for his sister:

My little sister with her sun-bathed golden hair is my secret. I never even talked to Marion [his wife] or to my son Elisha about her. It mortifies me to talk about her in the past tense, for she is present. Her presence is more real to me than my own. My little sister Tzipora, my little angel scorched by a darkened sun, I cannot picture you as death’s hostage. You will remain on our street, on the pavement in front of our house.

I gazed at the house—we all did—with anguish. [...] I picture myself sitting under an acacia tree, a book in my hands, talking to the clouds. Tzipouka is playing with a hoop. “Come and play with me,” she says, but I don’t feel like it. And now, as I write these words, my heart is pounding. I should have closed my book and stopped my dream, dropped everything to play with my little sister. (*All Rivers* 71)

Regret resounding in loss and absence. Here in this depiction, young Elie shall remain preoccupied with a book braced against the sky as his sister remains enwrapped in a circle, eternally turning. A secret whispered in writing to a trusting memoir, toward an ideal reader.

Throughout *Night* young Elie narrates the impossibility of scenes by contrasting the surreal suffering experienced in the Holocaust alongside historical accounts that center on past Jewish torments. One example of this can be found in Wiesel’s recollection of the ghetto’s deportation. Young Elie watches as teachers and friends pass

him by. He notices the chief rabbi within the crowd and how “his very presence in the procession was enough to make the scene seem surreal. It was like a page torn from a book, a historical novel, perhaps, dealing with the captivity in Babylon or the Spanish Inquisition” (*Night* 17). This scene demonstrates the danger of history, the cold, removed distance within perspective. Elie narrates this scene in effect reiterating to the authorial Wiesel the responsibility of witnessing:

Not far from us, flames, huge flames, were rising from a ditch. Something was being burned there. A truck drew close and unloaded its hold: small children. Babies! Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes... children thrown into the flames. (Is it any wonder that ever since then, sleep tends to elude me?) So that was where we were going. A little further on, there was another, larger pit for the adults.

I pinched myself: Was I still alive? Was I awake? How was it possible that men, women, and children were being burned and that the world kept silent? No. All this could not be real. Soon I would wake up with a start, my heart pounding, and find that I was back in the room of my childhood, with my books... (32)

Perhaps due to his belief in the Kabbalah, in several places Wiesel often juxtaposes these ‘unreal’ events alongside his longing for the comfort of books. The study of Kabbalah seeks to unlock the mysteries of God and universe through in depth study of the text. Within this mysticism a discourse with God yields a silent dialogue with one’s self. By teaching young Elie the ways of Kabbalah, Moishe the Beadle gains magnitude. The genre of testimony also remains significant, resurfacing throughout *Night* showing Wiesel’s belief in the power of the word. Above we read of young Elie’s struggle to accept witnessing the burning of helpless children. He wishes to rouse and reclaim his innocence by waking up in his childhood room comforted by the books that once surrounded him. For Wiesel the images, the recollection of events are coming to

him from sites of departure, like pages torn from a book, he must reconstruct and call forth the depth of his experience. As a narrative technique, the juxtaposition of devastating flames and instructive books highlights for the reader two different types of knowledge and memory that are created through the text: destructive versus constructive and painful versus pleasurable. This technique contrasts the site of empathy and understanding for the reader and serves as a reminder that this is textual representation.

There remain scenes held too close to be properly revealed, pages torn from the manuscript, reshaped and retold. In the 2006 preface Wiesel writes of his reframing his father's death in *Night*. The Yiddish version remains the unabridged raw representation. For the later translations from Yiddish to French and English revised and penned by his wife Marion, "who knows my voice and how to transmit it better than anyone else" (xiii), Wiesel wanted his father's death scene rewritten in order to obtain more distance. He asks, "Why not include those in this new translation? Too personal, too private, perhaps; they need to remain between the lines. And yet..." (xi). The result is that he offers the original here in the preface. Perhaps the genre's characteristics prevent Wiesel from true portrayal wherein recollections and representations are formed within the gaps and silences of the text. Wiesel translates the original Yiddish:

Yet his plaintive, harrowing voice went on piercing the silence and calling me, nobody but me...

"Eliezer! Eliezer! Come, don't leave me alone..."

His voice had reached me from so far away, from so close. But I had not moved.

I shall never forgive myself.

Nor shall I ever forgive the world for having pushed m against the wall, for having turned me into a stranger, for having awakened in me the basest, most primitive instincts.

His last word had been my name. A summons. And I had not responded. (xi-xii)

The silence is direct, resounding with guilt, a summons to which he did not answer. This lies in contrast to the death scene in the later translation where the words of his father occupy the space between them:

“Eliezer... I must tell you where I buried the gold and the silver... In the cellar.. You know...”

And he began talking, faster and faster, afraid of running out of time before he could tell me everything. I tried to tell him that it was not over yet, that we would be going home together, but he no longer wanted to listen to me. He *could* no longer listen to me. He was worn out. Saliva mixed with blood was trickling from his lips. He had closed his eyes. He was grasping more than breathing. ...

His breathing was labored. His eyes were closed. But I was convinced that he was seeing everything. That he was seeing the truth in all things. (108-09)

Here the scene is more comforting and redemptive in portraying the son coming to comfort his father on his death bed within the infirmary of the camp. Elie's anger directed at camp's doctor coming to “finish off the patients.” Wiesel remains, “riveted to my father's agony. My hands were aching, I was clenching them so hard. To strangle the doctor and the others! To set the whole world on fire! My father's murderers! But even the cry stuck in my throat” (109). In the attempts to recreate and represent his father's death, Wiesel withdraws from the actual experience in order to artistically signify an act that remains too close to himself. Unwilling to have the end of his father's life consumed by others, Wiesel alters the event as a means to internally preserve and respect this life. In effect Wiesel does not want to make that betrayal, and yet in this preface he makes that representation a necessary, moving, and ethical betrayal.

These betrayals implicate both writer and reader alike. There cannot be a position located here that remains dispassionate. If we grant Eaglestone via Levinas his standpoint of “invisible memory,” our readings become void of any cognitive-emotional judgment. For Eaglestone, betrayals come at the expense of aesthetic reproduction where our responses are inauthentic and immoral. But testimonies become necessary betrayals through our obligations of becoming a secondary witness. As a reader of trauma literature, my responsibility is to locate and acknowledge my position outside the text and to recognize the testifier’s position in relation to me. Langer, Caruth and Felman all circumvent this common issue of betrayal by focusing on specific sites of traumatic discourse instead of considering the ethical aesthetic of such representations. The written act of recollection, or primary witnessing, becomes a means of transference, a means of transmitting the ethical-cognitive awareness on to others. This is why Wiesel ends the translation with the mirrored image, “One day when I was able to get up, I decided to look at myself in the mirror on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto./ From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me./ The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me” (115). This scene demonstrates how representation positions the intended writer/narrator, character, and intended audience making possible a co-experience through language of primary and secondary witnessing. It is at this point of witnessing that the emotional-cognitive response operates within empathetic reading of trauma literature. Similar to Sontag at the beginning of this chapter, my reading(s) of *Night* forever changes me. The gaze from young Elie’s eyes never leaves me.

CHAPTER III

“NAKED BEFORE THEIR NAKEDNESS”: FROM TESTIMONY TO MEMOIR

To paraphrase a Talmudic saying, I hope the last page will bring me greater certainty than the first.

- Elie Wiesel "Childhood"

All at once, as it seemed, something we could have only imagined was upon us—and we could still only imagine it. This is what fascinates me most in existence: the peculiar necessity of imagining what is, in fact, real.

– Philip Gourevitch *We wish to inform you...*

Testimony owns uncertain weight, taken as one’s sworn account that conveys life experience through the word. Cultural narratives shape our view of testimonials as sites of courtrooms, church congregations, and the immediacy of recorded documentary evidence (both verbal and written). We typically imagine a courtroom scene where persons give eyewitness accounts in front of a jury of peers. Witnesses being sworn in are expected to speak the truth; here testimonial words embody the truth by bringing forth lived experience toward public acknowledgement. Or we picture the religious “witnessing” toward others through declarations of belief. The site of testimony occurs in the presence of a congregation where private and public converge through the word. The power of the word, as word equals truth, as word equals lived experience, is part of our social structure. On the basis of the term *testimony* we come to expect one’s words to present the most accurate truth that one can describe.

We come to testimony with a blind faith, and this faith is the problem because words cannot recreate nor embody lived experience. And since testimonies are private statements turned public, another uncertainty lies in the testifier's relationship and perspective toward intended audience (jury or congregation). Testifiers filter information on the basis of this relationship, always concerned as to how one will represent one's self toward others. Cultural narratives ask that we look at testimonies as words conflated with reality as opposed to layers of representation. We want to read testimonials as one voice, one true story, and one perspective. This perception that "word equals truth" gives the genre of testimony its authoritative discourse, leading us toward unmediated acceptance. The genre becomes sacrosanct in the text. Readers and writers come to the genre of testimony with the expectations of a truthful accountability of one's lived experience: word embodies truth. What we overlook is how word, imagination, and lived experience become one.

The chapter complicates our cultural expectations of testimony as bearing the word as truth. After showing why testimony, as a genre, is such a problem for trauma theorists, as a genre, I complicate this issue by arguing that Philip Gourevitch and Ishmael Beah employ a novelistic narrative structure that emphasizes key moments by breaking the narrative. Such ruptures accentuate the positions of reader, writer, and text in three ways: 1) by showing authorial outsidedness in relation to the text, 2) by placing emphasis on traumatic scenes for both author and reader, and 3) by reiterating the reader's position of interacting with the text, thus constantly reminding the reader of textual representations of lived experience.

Testimony as Genre

In *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, Lawrence Langer proposes creating a new genre of literature centered on representations of atrocity.¹ He contends that the writing and reading of such literature is an innovative act of illustration bordering between historical facts and imaginative truths. Langer argues for a genre that rests somewhere between the historical accuracy of testimony and the narrative embellishments of memoir. Langer writes, “History provides the details—then abruptly stops. Literature seeks ways of exploring the implications and making them imaginatively available” (*Holocaust and Literary* 9). Robert Eaglestone similarly reasons that testimonies should be read differently from autobiographies. It is testimony that bears “witness to these events and should not be reduced simply to a historical account or a ‘documentary novel’... it is part of a genre of its own” (“Traces” 71).

Langer and Eaglestone argue that testimony is different from other genres, but they do not concur on how to deal with it. Eaglestone argues that testimonies (both verbal and written) resist audience identification through the genre’s relationship to outside experience. Audiences cannot internalize something as foreign as the horrors of Auschwitz. The encounter remains outside one’s framework, and there are no means to fully represent this trauma to another. Langer, conversely, examines the narrative techniques testifiers employ to communicate these experiences to the imaginations of

¹ For Langer the term *trauma* carries with it the clinical oppression and belief that trauma can be worked through.

others. In his introduction to *Holocaust Testimonies*, he writes of the immediacy found in experiencing oral testimony:

Writing about Holocaust *literature*, or even written memoirs, as I have done in my previous works, challenges the imagination through the mediation of a *text*, raising issues of style and form and tone and figurative language that—I now see—can deflect our attention from the “dreadful familiarity” of the event itself. Nothing, however, distracts us from the immediacy and the intimacy of conducting interviews with former victims (which I have done) or watching them on a screen [as in Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*]. Struggling to identify with the voices of the witnesses, who themselves are struggling to discover voices trustworthy enough to tell their *whole* stories (and not all have the courage or stamina or resources to succeed), I often found myself naked before their nakedness, defenseless in the presence of their vulnerability. (xii-xiii)

Langer sees the creation of the text as providing a representation producing a tangible artifact that deflects the “dreadful familiarity” of recaptured lived events. The delivery of written narrative through metaphorical language and stylistic devices may detract from the immediate process of retelling; whereas the act of direct testimony offers observable and interactive immediacy. Within the act of oral testimony there is a visible struggle for witnesses to find words to convey experience in the physical presence of Langer as a witness before their lived testimony. Nevertheless, even written accounts, while not having such a direct impact, can still implicate the audience within the act of empathetic reading. Mikhail Bakhtin extends this account of identification in arguing that we cannot escape the aesthetic of narrating the lived event. As empathetic readers we remain self-consciously aware of our aesthetic treatment of narrative artifacts, imparting a cognitive-emotional response onto the text. We come to such readings with cultural expectations, backgrounds, and even situate certain moments of the narrative within our past

experience. These are “excessive features” that are balanced between writer, text, and reader and come into play when we aesthetically experience any form of representation (“Author and Hero” 147-48). Therefore, to aesthetically perceive a work of testimonial writing is not to normalize a survivor’s experience of the Holocaust but to co-experience the event of the text while appreciating the structure of its narrative.

Eaglestone attempts to protect testimonies from such readings by placing these texts within a protected, albeit sacred, genre. He demonstrates various genre techniques that serve to disrupt reader identification. These techniques include the use of historical documentation, narrative framing, interruptions of narrative, and lack of closure. Yet such methods do not deny empathetic reading; they only demonstrate how the genre of testimony delimits the act of writing lived events. There are qualities that ask writers to follow a framework of historical facts while simultaneously exposing the emotional and intellectual imaginative levels. Writer and reader become responsible to each other through co-experiencing the text. With our excess of seeing, we come to rely on each other to define ourselves. Through this revelation of the other we come to what Levinas calls “truth as correspondence,” truth as revealed. This framework is what connects us, what forms world views, truths through revelations that depend on those historical and social undercurrents in our lives.

This chapter examines the ways testimonial writers employ literary techniques similar to the novel in reconciling representations of traumatic experience. The genre of testimony calls forth responsibility on the writer’s part to follow a historical framework while simultaneously exposing the emotional and intellectual imaginative levels. The

genre itself delimits the representational framework by asking that writers attempt historical accuracy where word equals reality (or real life experience). This chapter considers how writers address these problems through novelistic qualities of representation: ruptured and fragmented narratives, the use of reprisals, digressions, and asides, as well as meta-discourse that allows for a multiplicity of voices (as in Philip Gourevitch's *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda*) and differing levels of experience (as in Ishmael Beah's *A long way gone: memoir of a boy soldier*). Critical/empathetic readers, while responding emotionally to the content and form, still retain these techniques in the forefront of their interpretation, or "creative understanding," of these representations, thus reviewing testimonials for their aesthetic, novelistic, and imaginative techniques.

If we are to examine testimonies for their inherent novelistic features, then we must draw distinctions regarding the imaginative qualities found within the texts. Hayden White's work revisits and renovates concepts of historicized-literary narratives. White repeatedly illustrates our cultural expectations of history to remain neutralized in its presentations of the past. Traditional history is to adhere to our notions of "the real" or "truthful accountability." Such an idealized approach to the past easily overlooks how narratives are formed. We become culturally determined to differentiate between facts, interpretations, and stories ("Historical Emplotment" 29). The portrayal of truth certainly yields a fascinating perspective of lived events, as in the Gourevitch quote from above. Our necessity to imagine what is real renders what Bakhtin refers to as owning the "form and values of an *aesthetic of lived life*" ("Author and Hero" 153). Representation remains

reliant on aesthetic acts of memory where recollection involves a placing of the narrative self in a self-aware positioning alongside the audience, real or intended. By doing so, such positioning builds a relationship dependent upon witnessing toward another. To effectively balance the emotional-cognitive values of a lived life, testifiers must in the process of retelling and recalling the past position the self as the other by becoming both the real author and implied author of one's life story. It is within this dialogic, this split self, where the actual author and implied author, narrator and hero collide in recollection. For Bakhtin, "creative understanding" remains reliant upon relationships with others: two different consciousnesses existing on different self-conscious positions. Even the author, a real person, does not coincide with the hero. The retelling becomes interdependent upon hero and implied audience. This distance held by the author, as an actual other, provides multiple perspectives. Bakhtin drives this point further by demonstrating that "I captivate myself through my own narration. Wherever I am in solidarity with others, the forms in which others are axiologically perceived are transposed upon myself. It is thus that the narrator becomes the hero" (154). The act of recollecting becomes an act of reconstructing experiences into meaningful and aesthetic narratives to be imagined by others (implied readers). The speaker/writer's acknowledgement of his/her audience becomes idealized in the stance of an empathetic reader. Because expression is an immediate event—even when there is no real audience present—the writer of traumatic discourse, as primary witness, writes to the idealized secondary witness. The act of witnessing, of utterance, is a shared and lived through experience. It is this interactivity that yields understanding between speaker/writer and audience/reader.

Langer finds a similar splitting of self within the survivor's process of recalling and retelling traumatic events. Survivors focus more on locating themselves within the recollection of incomprehensible experience instead of locating themselves in relation to their perpetrators. Langer explains, "They struggle further with the incompatibility between the impromptu self that endured atrocity and the self that sought reintegration into society after liberation" (*Holocaust Testimonies* 148). Similarly, Gourevitch often records the physical immediacy of remembrance by describing the unnerved mannerisms of his interviewees, recording how gestures and rapid speech patterns affect the retelling of events. A Tutsi survivor named Odette, for example, shields her face while crying, recalling something remotely insignificant. These minor depictions illustrate the dramatic personal effects of testimonies that are often times on the verge of a confessional. Many compose their lives by digressing to reveal personal histories, or by using reprisals to amplify the importance of crucial events. These methods rely on narrative structures with the ethical implications of truthful, accurate portrayals of such events. Yet at the base of these portrayals lies multiple layers of representations, owing a sense of doublesidedness.

The writers and recorders of testimony own the same doublesidedness wherein the author exists within two different positions: the narrative hero who relives past experience and the author writing within the present moment—just as Elie Wiesel is so apt to remind us with temporal breaks in his memoirs. Bakhtin presents this doublesidedness in biographical writing as delimited by defining the boundaries of others: "The act of biography is somewhat one-sided: there are two consciousnesses, but

they do not represent two different positions with respect to value; there are two human beings, except that they are not the *I* and the *other*, but—two others” (“Author and Hero” 164). We are bound to this aesthetic framework of narrating to others. Autobiography remains dependent upon an implied reader just as oral testimony relies on intended audience, and both acts entail how one represents one’s self. This self-conscious portrayal remains dependent on, and often delimited by, the boundaries of others. Through recollection and retelling the testifier inhabits two consciousnesses that simultaneously share a position. At the time of recollection and writing, the author gains distance in the aesthetic act of representing one’s own lived events.² Through this positioning testifiers/authors retain self-awareness in relation to another, embodying a role of implied reader, thus creating a loophole for one’s self where one may gain further distance in an attempt to bridge the gap between self and other, although Bakhtin accounts that such disjunctions of lived experiences can never be remedied.

While critics like Eaglestone argue that testimonies should not be read as literary novels due to the threat of reader identification, the writing of these texts retain many novelistic qualities. When White writes in response to Berl Lang, a theorist who occupies a position similar to Eaglestone, that we should reconsider what it means to realistically represent the Holocaust and to “take account of experiences that are unique to our century and for which the older modes of representation have proven to be inadequate” (“Historical Emplotment” 49). Post-modernism’s generic features of fractured narratives, temporal shifts, filtered perspectives, and complex narrative

² This is a typical characteristic of any generic life writing, not necessarily tied to representations of traumatic testimony.

structures allow for the acknowledgment of tensions found in a survivor's attempt to represent experiences for an implied audience. The testimonies reconstructed by Gourevitch and Beah often present fractured moments through reprisals, amplifications, and digressions. By doing so, the authors and the implied readers remain aware of the task at hand, the representation rising from another's chaotic life story.

The ethical means of becoming a secondary witness to another's testimony is to take the risks necessary to listen, to take sides, to become involved, to locate one's self in the speech act of testimony. Readers must realize that I as a willing audience will never bridge the abyss between myself and the suffering of the other. Readers remain outside the other with this excess of knowledge that offers the ability to pull back with a fuller, more complete, perspective.

Readers cannot get to the kernel of another's experience; even identifying with characters within testimonies should not be an attempt to embody nor delve into experiential tourism through another's suffering. If such an empathetic reading yields these results, then I agree with Eaglestone in that such a reading becomes an immoral offense toward the witnessing of a survivor's testimony. Yet my ethical approach to the transactional readings of trauma literature examines the transaction of reading as an empathetic seeing, a means of co-experiencing the pain of others through the event of the text. Author/testifier and reader/listener must remain cognizant of the dynamic discourse that occurs between them. To Bakhtin, taking these risks in reading develops a co-experience with the author. This co-experience is not a means of incorporating the author's inner life into one's self, but rather a co-creation through the transaction of the

text. The actual reader does not inhabit the same position of the author. The ethical responsibility on the reader's part is to be as present as possible within this exchange. Any aesthetic activity creates an actualized inner response with the autobiographical artifact, and brings to light a conscious contemplation internalizing the outside artifact through aesthetic appreciation. The internalized emotional response becomes a cognitive-ethical response once the author's story is acted upon by the reader. Writers consummate their life experiences from chaos to written text, what Bakhtin refers to as "utterance-as-act." Readers, in turn, take the autobiographical artifact and empathetically react to the language as an act of internal positioning to gain understanding. Just as Wiesel reminds us that testimonies are:

Hard, almost impossible to read, let alone read aloud. These pages of these diaries were found in the ashes. *Then you say to yourself that if they had the courage and the desperate faith, if they had the strength to write such words, we must have the strength to read them.* ("The Holocaust" 11 emphasis added)

The Voice of Ghosts

[T]he conventional distress signal carried an obligation. "You hear it, you do it, too. And you come running," he said. "No choice. You must." ... "So there is responsibility. I cry, you cry. You cry, I cry. We all come running, and the one that stays quiet, the one that stays home, must explain. Is he in league with the criminals? Is he a coward? And what would he expect when he cries? This is simple. This is normal. This is community."

- Philip Gourevitch *We wish to inform you*

Philip Gourevitch opens *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda (We wish to inform you)* with a gruesome tale from Plato's *The Republic*. Told by Socrates, the story concerns Leontius coming upon a horrific scene at the Peiraeus where many dead bodies lay strewn about their executioner.

Leontius, initially shocked at the sight, attempts to avert his eyes. He simultaneously experiences a strong desire to look at the bodies, and repulsion from his own curiosity. Eventually desire gets the best of him and, pulling his eyes open with his fingers, he runs toward the dead cursing them for their “lovely spectacle.” Coming at the beginning of Gourevitch’s personal journey, this scene parallels a similar encounter when he witnesses nearly fifty decomposed bodies in a parish schoolroom. In 1995 Gourevitch travelled to the province of Kibungo, located in eastern Rwanda, to report on the genocide that had taken place thirteen months earlier. The dismembered and decayed bodies that were strewn about his feet became his “lovely spectacles.” Gourevitch describes the bodies as looking “like pictures of the dead. They did not smell. They did not buzz with flies... Skin stuck here and there over the bones, many of which lay scattered away from the bodies, dismembered by the killers, or by scavengers” (*We wish* 15). Like Leontius, he cannot avert his gaze. He pieces together fragments of the scene in order to capture its horrific nature: “more complete figures looked a lot like people, which they were once. A woman in cloth wrap printed with flowers lay near the door,” her decomposed body cradling a child’s skeleton between her legs (15-16).

The difficult scenes and images that Gourevitch presents to his audience call forth various emotional responses. Within the act of reading, graphic scenes become ingrained into our imaginations and unsettle our hold on reality. The reader’s attempt to frame the survivor’s trauma is similar to the survivor’s attempt to articulate the reality of their experience (*Holocaust and Literary* 92). Readers create an implied writer (not necessarily the narrative voice, and not the actual author, but a position of creator) when

framing a survivor's story, knowing that any representation of a lived life remains only a representation. There is no means of actually knowing the "real" writer/testifier. With Gourevitch, the testifier is even further removed, filtered through Gourevitch's presence in the act of testimony, or interviews, and filtered through Gourevitch's representation of these events through the writing of the text. Nevertheless, readers interact with this artifact through actively empathizing with another through a discursive relationship in the text. This relationship helps account for Gourevitch's usage of multiple perspectives and interpretations. The multiple voices and narrative-temporal breaks create distance that reminds readers of the retelling and not a reliving of the traumatic event. The empathetic reader respects the sites of the witnesses, the writer Gourevitch, and the text. Empathetic reading joins reason with emotion in an attempt to formulate an aesthetic interpretation by remaining aware of such multi-layered representations of "reality." The schoolroom that houses Gourevitch's first encounter with the dead also becomes his reader's initiation into the residual horrors of Rwanda. He states that these bodies will remain ingrained in his memory. He is "stuck with them—not for their experience, but *with the experience of looking at them*" (*We wish* 16 emphasis added).

These acts become the spectacle, the aesthetic, of trauma literature. Gourevitch reflects on such representations when interviewing United Nations monitors with the Human Rights mission in Rwanda:

The aesthetic assault of the macabre creates excitement and emotion, but does the spectacle really serve our understanding of the wrong? Judging from my own response to cruel images and to what I had seen in the hospital ward of Kibeho wounded, I wondered whether people aren't wired to resist assimilating too much horror. Even as we look at atrocity, we find ways to regard it as unreal. And the

more we look, the more we become inured to—not informed by—what we are seeing. (196)

Herein Gourevitch taps into the experiential tourism of trauma—the rush of excitement mixed with shock and disbelief regarding the images presented. Audiences seek to frame the atrocity, but these images render logic obsolete due to the hyper-reality of the spectacle. If readers approach traumatic discourse only for the titillation it brings, readers will never see beyond the horrors, thus growing progressively desensitized and irresponsible in a discursive relationship toward another’s testimony.

Alexandre, a UN comrade, sees things differently. He reflects on the objective distance granted by living through the experience, then the haunting of repressed memories that appear thereafter. Alexandre rebuts, “I totally disagree. I experienced Kibeho as a movie. It *was* unreal. Only afterward, looking at my photographs—then it became real.” Reflecting on Alexandre’s reaction Gourevitch continues,

I never saw Alexandre’s photographs, but I told him that his description of that moment, and of his own passage from a sense of unreality during the events to the reality of his pictures, was more disturbing, more vivid, and more informative than anything I believed the photographs themselves could tell. In some ways it was quieter; the moment of shock was less concentrated, but it also involved one more and took one along with it.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I couldn’t tell you anything if I wasn’t looking.”

“You see and you don’t see,” Annick said. “Mostly you just do things. The pictures come later. When they [the refugees] were crushing on the gate at Zambatt, we were crushing back on it so it didn’t fall, and people started throwing babies over. You just catch them. You do things you’d never want to see a picture of.” (196-97)

Annick’s statement suggests how trauma is not located in the occurrence of horrific event; “clinical” trauma appears once the mind has the ability to recollect. These events

remain outside normal human experience causing what Cathy Caruth refers to as “forgotten wounds.”³ The retelling, re-witnessing, becomes a narrative act—also found in the composition of Alexandre’s photography—a means of reclaiming and reliving the experience revealed through discourse, and the trauma that exists within its transference. The aesthetic of Alexandre’s photographs amplifies the cognitive-ethical response of empathetically reacting to the artifact as a means of internal positioning to gain understanding.

In the years that followed the initial attacks of 1959 Tutsis marked the calendar of their lives with the terrors that occupied specific months and days. One particular scene that demonstrates marking this passage of time is Gourevitch’s interview with Odette, a doctor of mixed lineage. She recalls the ongoing genocide marked by years when the killings increased—1959, 1960, and 1962—leaving out those years when Tutsis were able to enjoy a life without terror. It was those silent times that interested Gourevitch, but in his experience interviewees continually glossed over their lives always aware of the atrocity that defines them, and giving specific attention to those moments. Odette, for example, gives her life story, her experience growing up in a family of mixed marriage—her father a Hutu and her mother a Tutsi. Her father arranged for her ID card to say she was Hutu, although her “racial features” conveyed otherwise. When speaking of her education and the ability to go to medical school, she let it slip that a professor had made a sexual advance: “What a pretty girl,” he said to her while trying to set up a date. Gourevitch finds it intriguing that she would divulge such information, but it was as if

³ See Caruth’s “Introduction: the Wound and the Voice” in *Unclaimed Experience*.

Odette had forgotten Gourevitch was taking the interview and had just recollected this deeply personal memory that remained repressed behind moments of terror. Gourevitch tries to press the matter, to provide more background. He recounts, “it seemed to amuse Odette, and it reminded me of all that she wasn’t telling as she recited her life story. She was keeping everything that was not about Hutu and Tutsi to herself” (70). If the stories did not directly address a cultural landscape fractured by war, then she reserved those happy moments to herself. Gourevitch continues,

This made sense to me. We are, each of us, functions of how we imagine ourselves and of how others imagine us, and, looking back, there are these discrete tracks of memory: the times when our lives are most sharply defined in relation to others’ ideas of us, and the more private times when we are freer to imagine ourselves. (71)

We prefer to keep those times where we are free to imagine ourselves closer to us, more guarded, whereas for Odette it is easier to position and define herself as a genocide survivor in relation to Gourevitch as a foreign correspondent. Holding to this dynamic in public discourse, in the act of testimony, creates personal boundaries of defining the self in relation to the other always aware of self representation and perspective.

Gourevitch picks up the narrative thread relating how most Rwandans recall their years of normalcy with resolute privacy. He pointedly asks questions, peering for depictions of household life, school, work, family gatherings, etc. Yet each Rwandan basically answers with “in normal times we lived normally” (72).⁴ Gourevitch comes to

⁴ White raises similar issues when examining the *Annals of Saint Gall*’s empty entries that denote years when nothing “happened.” This leads White to question the intent of plot and the structure of historical events. He reflects upon Hegel’s commentary that during “periods of human happiness and security are blank pages in history” to show how narrative longs to fill in the gaps (“Narrativity” *CF* 11).

understand that “remembering has its economy, like experience itself” (72). Odette’s remembrance of the professor’s sexual advance travels beyond this reserve, showing a scene of two people misunderstanding each other. Gourevitch continues, “But people have the strangest notions as they navigate each other in this life—and in the ‘good years,’ the ‘normal times,’ that isn’t the end of the world” (72). No. The “end of the world” did not come until October 1, 1990.⁵ That was when the world began to fall apart.

Gourevitch’s reporting relays firsthand Rwanda’s traumatic past, collects stories and testimonies, and examines what it means to reconstruct history through multiple perspectives. He continually reminds readers that what is received is through a filtered lens. He explains: “I’m telling you this here, at the outset, because this is a book about how people imagine themselves and one another—a book about how we imagine our world” (6). Readers need to remain cautious of intent—authorial and otherwise—even when consulting factual records. “Like all of history,” he claims, “it is a record of successive struggles for power, and to a very large extent power consists in the ability to

⁵ On October 1, 1990 the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel army coming from southern Uganda, invaded Rwanda attempting to overthrow Habyarimana. The RPF sought to liberate Rwanda from the “tyranny, corruption, and the ideology of exclusion ‘which generates refugees’” (82). On October 4th, a fierce gunfight erupts around Kigali which is easily quelled so that Habyarimana announces that the rebellious attempt was thwarted and that there will no longer remain a multi-party system in place for the safety of the state. Gourevitch points out that while the RPF invasion in the northeast borders of Rwanda was in fact true, the uprising silenced by Habyarimana’s forces was a farce. It was staged in order to give Habyarimana increased political power unifying the country against a common enemy. Gourevitch claims that this is the ideology of oligarchies: “identity equals politics and politics equals identity—all Tutsis were considered to be RPF ‘accomplices’, and Hutus who failed to subscribe to this view were counted as Tutsi-loving traitors” (83). On October 11th, local government officials in the village of Kibilira issued new “work orders” for the remainder of the month for all Hutus to turn and fight against their Tutsi neighbors. The next day Hutus “went to work with singing and drumming, and the slaughter lasted three days; some three hundred fifty Tutsis were killed, and three thousand fled their homes. For those whose memories do not extend as far back as Odette’s, the massacre at Kibilira is remembered as the beginning of the genocide” (84).

make others inhabit your story of their reality—even, as is so often the case, when that story is written in their blood” (48). And like many of post-colonial countries left in the vacuous chaos of retreating empires, the tensions between tribes take shape in relation to statehood and power. Gourevitch’s techniques of reporting frame the testimonies in order to provide a political and social context. Further, he focuses not on just facts and events but on national and institutional discursive practices that influence how the individual testimonies are constructed and how they are representations. These techniques include documenting Rwandan recorded history, political ideological narratives, the role of the media, and the role of religious beliefs.

Gourevitch warns readers that the “recorded history” of Rwanda is unreliable, consisting of compliant stories shaped by those who have held power. Rwanda’s pre-colonial history is difficult to ascertain and what remains of colonial/postcolonial writings are filtered through patriarchal perspectives.⁶ He recaps the various influential

⁶ According to Gourevitch, the founding of the country also holds more to legend than factual accounts. Hutus are believed to have settled Rwanda first in the southwestern part of the country. Tutsis came in to inhabit the northeastern portion. The two tribes are believed to have intermingled considerably, sharing the same language, religion, and land. Yet the names Hutu and Tutsi remained, eventually denoting the inequalities of “classes.” Hutus became synonymous with cultivation while Tutsis rose to an elite status through ownership of cattle being a more valuable asset (48). With Rwabugiri’s rise to power in the late fourteenth century, as a Tutsi he extended his rule to favor those sharing similar descent assigning Tutsis to hold political and military positions. The identities of the two tribes began to take shape under political rule and each group adopted their own distinctive culture offsetting the other: A Hutu took pride in being what a Tutsi was not. When Europeans entered the country in the late nineteenth century the noticeable differing physical attributes mixed with the popularity of “race science.” Hutus who were “stocky and round-faced, dark-skinned, flat-nosed, thick lipped, and square-jawed” were seen by Europeans as a subordinate race to the Tutsis who were characterized as “lanky and long-faced, not so dark-skinned, narrow-nosed, thin-lipped, and narrow chinned” a representation of “stately race of warrior kings” (50). Europeans combined “race science” with Hamitic myths alongside German colonial expansion; then Germany conceded Rwanda to Belgium after World War I, add the ethnic identity cards Belgium made as policy for colonization and the tensions between the two tribes sparked the flames of violence flaring up at various intervals from the early 1900s onward. The Belgians forced the Tutsis into overseeing Hutu labor on plantations and road construction, thus further dividing the two tribes by defining the roles of power through ethnicity.

factors attributing to the genocide: the pre-colonial political structure that saw Tutsis rising to power, the German and Belgian colonization mixed with race science and the Hamatic myth, the Hutu revolution in 1959 leading up to the Diasporas of Tutsis in the 1960s and 1970s, the economic downfall in the 1980s, Habyarimana's political reign, RPF attacks, civil war, and extremist propaganda preying upon the population's ignorance and superstitions, all of which culminates to show that those in power write the history and wield tremendous influence.

In searching for human motive behind these horrific acts, Gourevitch views the Rwandan genocide as a product of political authoritarian influence that became ingrained through decades of advancing an ideological narrative to the Hutu masses. The Rwandan genocide “was promoted as a way not to create suffering but to alleviate it. The specter of an absolute menace that requires absolute eradication binds leader and people in a hermetic utopian embrace, and the individual—always an annoyance to totality—ceases to exist” (95). Gourevitch accounts for the few in the early 1990s who refused to take part in murdering their Tutsi neighbors. Yet this refusal was short-lived. It seemed that for many, “killing Tutsis was a political tradition in postcolonial Rwanda; it brought people together” (96).⁷ If the numbers are greatly in the favor of the powerful, as was the

⁷ Gourevitch demonstrates how the actions at Kibilira set the tone for the numerous sporadic massacres that followed in the early 1990s. Most often these acts against Tutsis were brought about by local government officials who provoked uprisings through “consciousness-raising” tactics that enabled neighboring Hutus to view the slaughters as acts of anger or even self-protection. The national government propaganda often portrayed Tutsis as demons with horns and hooves, or subhuman cockroaches. The orders to kill became known as official “work assignments” and the local administrators also profited greatly from seizures of Tutsi property. Gourevitch reflects that “in retrospect, the massacres of the early 1990s can be seen as dress rehearsals for what proponents of Hutuness themselves called the ‘final solution’ in 1994” (94).

case with the Hutu majority, and if all of those people are coerced through narrative to eradicate an entire “race” of people, then the guilt of accountability is greatly distanced by the willingness of the population.⁸

These seeds of genocidal influence germinated in the minds of Hutus through the use of Hutu media. In November, 1992, vice president of the MRND Leon Mugesera delivered a speech that demanded Hutus take personal responsibility for illuminating Tutsi “scum.” He denounced oppositional parties within the state and claimed that it was the duty of Hutus to “spread the alarm and to instruct the people to ‘defend themselves’” (96). Mugesera reflected on the year 1959, when Habyarimana rose to power and made the horrible mistake of letting Tutsis survive: “Destroy them. No matter what you do, do not let them get away” (97). He closed by saying, “Drive them out. Long live President Habyarimana” (97). The speech was so powerfully persuasive that many Rwandans were able to quote key phrases years afterward.

Hutu media also retained prevailing religious influence by shaping the genocide as gaining divine endorsement. According to Gourevitch, the last recorded apparition of the Virgin Mary on the hill of Kibeho happened on May 15, 1994. This occurred when several Tutsis who had fled the surrounding hills sought refuge and protection in the cathedral at Kibeho. It was here that one of the largest massacres took place, lasting for days “until the killers got tired of working by hand and set the building ablaze,

⁸ With the outward show of political distress Habyarimana was able to glean foreign aid and weapons from France and Egypt and portrayed the killings, if they were shown in the Western media at all, as sporadic uprisings. Habyarimana’s in-laws were able to create and bankroll extremist groups such as the *interahamwe* and the Zero Network bent on running their own death squads and spreading anti-Tutsi propaganda through newspapers and radio. These messages had a powerful effect on the Hutu community.

immolating the living and the dead” (136). Two priests from the parish took up opposing stances with the oncoming invasion. One, Father Pierre Ngoga, defended trapped refugees to the extent of sacrificing his life, and the other, Father Thadée Rusingizandekwe, stood alongside the invading *interahamwe* firing his rifle into the crowd (137). The apparition, reported on Rwandan radio, stated that Habyarimana was with the Virgin in heaven, thus providing the genocide with divine authorization.

The national authoritative discourse flowing through Hutu propaganda greatly influenced individual testimonials. Bishop Monsignor Augustin Misago, who researched and wrote on the Marian apparitions, was also bedfellows with several priests aligned with Hutu Power. Misago’s account frames his actions as influenced by national narrative. In early May, he misled the Tutsi schoolchildren huddled in his cathedral, telling them not to fear the oncoming onslaught of *interahamwes*, that he would protect them. Only three days later did Misago, alongside several policemen, massacre all eighty two of them (137). Misago is ill at ease when meeting with Gourevitch for an interview; nevertheless he takes this opportunity to defend his actions. Gourevitch reminds Misago of his influential position, to which he responds:

‘No, no, no. That’s an illusion.’ He laughed his nervous laugh. ‘When men become like devils, and you don’t have an army, what can you do? All paths were dangerous. So how could I have influence? Even the church—we are not like extraterrestrials who can foresee things. We could have been victims of a lack of information. When one is poorly informed, one hesitates to take a position. And there was powerful official misinformation. As a journalist, when you are not sure, you don’t publish it—you go verify it. The global accusations against the Church are not scientific. That’s ideological propaganda.’ (139)

Gourevitch reminds readers how Bishop Misago attempts to present himself, as most perpetrators do, as a victim of misinformation. In the aftermath of genocide, perpetrators bend reality in their recollections, often reframing events as “self defense,” or as the result of propaganda. In Misago’s case, he reframes the public record of his actions as propagandistic reportage, an affront to Gourevitch’s historical research.

A similar stance is taken during an interview with Dr. Eliel Ntakirutimana, a pastor at the Mugonero Adventist church and hospital complex which held a gruesome massacre of nearly two thousand Tutsi refugees. But with this testimony, other testimonies, contradict and complicate the pastor’s retelling. The village of Mugonero saw an influx of thousands of wounded Tutsis fleeing the violence from the north. The scene was very similar in that police arrived and stated that they were there to offer protection. Yet Tutsi pastors at the complex took up donations to pay for police protection of refugees. It is reported that Dr. Ntakirutimana pleaded with the mayor and higher officials to intercede and protect the mass population of Tutsis residing at the hospital. One eyewitness named Samuel recalls Dr. Ntakirutimana reading the response, stating “Saturday, the sixteenth, at exactly nine o’clock in the morning, you will be attacked.” Then the doctor personally added, “Your problem has already found a solution. You must die” (28). Another eyewitness, Manase Bimenyimana recalls Ntakirutimana’s reply differently: “You must be eliminated. God no longer wants you” (28).

Samuel recalls the attack coming from all sides of the complex with “shots and cries and they chanted the slogan ‘Eliminate the Tutsis’” (29). Samuel and others looked

for any means of defending themselves, but many were too sick and weak to do anything. The attackers broke down doors, threw grenades, and fired shots. Even the local Hutus helped by brandishing machetes, cutting Achilles tendons and necks in order to slowly kill victims who spent ““a long time crying until they died. Cats and dogs were there, just eating people”” (31). After a day of the horrific massacre they began firing tear gas into the complex in order to tell who remained alive: ““People who were still alive cried. That way the attackers knew where people were, and they could kill them directly”” (29).⁹ The multiplicity of voices and perspectives Gourevitch presents to his readers ultimately complicates the ways in which we culturally come to testimonials as word-equals-truth.

Ultimately, the actual horrors that haunt survivors, as retold through Gourevitch, are depictions that also affect his readers. This dynamic calls to the forefront the responsibility of ethically handling this material. Gourevitch implicates his audience through direct address:

⁹ Facing multiple charges from the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Dr. Ntakirutimana fled to Laredo, Texas. It was here where Gourevitch was able to find him for an interview. He was found to be living in a very well-to-do community. They met, with Dr. Ntakirutimana's lawyer, Gorza-Gongora, in tow, at Laredo's Country Club. Ntakirutimana refused to use the word "genocide" and instead referred to the unfolding events as mass chaos. Gorza-Gongora also addresses this issue of semantics by saying "“You say ‘extermination,’ you say ‘systematic,’ you say ‘genocide.’ That’s just a theory, and I think you’ve come all the way to Laredo to hold up my client as clever proof of this theory”” (39). Gourevitch responds to this accusation that this man of God may have killed half his congregation, to which Gorza-Gongora replies: ““What’s the evidence? Eyewitnesses?” He chuckled. ‘Anybody can say they saw anything’” (39). As with Bishop Misago, Ntakirutimana preferred to present himself as falling victim to Tutsi aggression that necessitated self-defense. To him, it was the Tutsis who assassinated President Habyarimana and brought this violence upon Rwanda. He sees the genocide as government spin and witnesses as bending to the conspiracy out of fear. He continues to assert himself as someone who came to the aid of Tutsi refugees, not as one who organized the massacre at the complex. He refutes seeing anything. Even when he returned to Mugonero in late April he states that all the bodies were buried, “I never saw anything. I never went anywhere. I stayed at my office. Only, one day I went to Rwamatamu because I heard that pastors had also died there, and I wanted to see if I could find even a kid of theirs to save. But I found nothing to save. They were Tutsis” (41). Gourevitch sums up the pastor's story giving details of his arrest by the FBI only to be released to his family fourteen months later. This arrest went basically unnoticed in the U.S. media. He was picked up again in nine weeks.

Like Leontius, the young Athenian in Plato, I presume that you are reading this because you desire a closer look, and that you, too, are properly disturbed by your curiosity. Perhaps, in examining this extremity with me, you hope for some understanding, some insight, some flicker of self-knowledge—a moral, or a lesson, or a clue about how to behave in this world: some such information. I don't discount the possibility, but when it comes to genocide, you already know right from wrong. The best reason I have come up with for looking closely into Rwanda's stories is that ignoring them makes me even more uncomfortable about existence and my place in it. The horror, as horror, interests me only insofar as a precise memory of the offense is necessary to understand its legacy. (19)

Empathetic readers cannot gain true understanding and access to another's experience.

What is entailed is the experience of witnessing another's atrocity, of indicting ourselves by taking part in the historical aftermath—and in the case of Rwanda, recognizing the failure to do something about the incident at the time of occurrence. Gourevitch forces readers to acknowledge our own morbid curiosity and our desire to rectify this guilt through attempts at gaining insight, some self-reflective method of looking at our world. The ethical responsibility of readers is to remain aware of our position. The transaction that occurs in reading trauma literature entails an empathetic seeing, a means of co-experiencing the text with the author (or in this case Gourevitch's experience of recording testimony). Gourevitch and his interviewees create through representation life experiences from the chaos of genocide located within an intended recorded/written text, for an idealized reader. Through the multitude of voices represented by Gourevitch, and with an awareness of his framing techniques, readers continue to shape the represented experience of the text for their own lives.

A Child of the Moon

In some way my journey was like that of the moon—although I had even more thick clouds coming my way to make my spirit dull. I remembered something that Saidu had said one evening after we had survived another attack by men with spears and axes.... Alhaji, Kanei, Saidu, and I were awake and listening to the night. Saidu's heavy breathing made our silence less unbearable. After a few hours had gone by, Saidu spoke in a very deep voice, as if someone were speaking through him. "How many more times do we have to come to terms with death before we find safety?"

– Ishmael Beah *A long way gone*

The recent controversy surrounding Ishmael Beah's *A long way gone: memoir of a boy soldier*, (*A long way gone*) centers on the accuracy of dates reported for the first attack on his home village, thus leading critics to question his time spent in forced internment as a child soldier.¹⁰ Unfortunately, with the recent discovery of faked memoirs, Beah's moving account has also fallen under skeptical scrutiny. The current controversy demonstrates the cultural demands on memoirists to factually represent the "truth," countered with how much "poetic license" we are willing to grant autobiographers. The cultural implication that historical narratives must deliver a factual chronology of events simply glosses over the nature of narrative. "Narrative" as a term carries a cultural undertone of questionable authenticity (White "The Value of Narrativity" 21). Beah certainly employs many novelistic narrative techniques in representing his personal traumatic experience. In bringing the chaos of lived experience

¹⁰ Three reporters (Peter Wilson, David Nason, and Shelly Gare) from Rupert Murdoch's *The Australian* have uncovered discrepancies concerning dates of the first attacks on the village of Matru Jong (Beah cites 1993, *The Australian* 1995). These are key dates for Beah's memoir. According to *The Australian* if the attacks occurred in 1995, this means that Beah spent roughly ten months as an abducted child soldier instead of two years. The reporters also unearthed questionable records regarding Beah's rehabilitation at the boy's home. Regarding *The Australian's* challenges of Beah's memoir, see Gabriel Sherman's "The Fog of Memoir," *Slate*, March 6, 2008; Peter Willson's "Beah's Credibility a Long Way Gone," *The Australian*, February 02, 2008; and Graham Rayman's "Boy Soldier of Fortune," *Village Voice*, March 18, 2008.

toward the formation of possible content for representation, Beah utilizes digressions, reprisals, and pathetic fallacy and disorients readers through fragmented narrative. The overall structure follows a traumatic Bildungsroman, similar to the structure of Elie Wiesel's *Night*. The memoir recounts the arc of Beah's life from the victimhood of war at the age of ten, then moves toward his unwilling role as perpetrator when he is forced to fight as a child soldier. His account concludes with his rehabilitation, where he speaks on behalf of the United Nations, enlightening the world about the use of children in war. For the purposes of exploring how Beah overcomes limits of traumatic representation I turn to William Labov's definitions of producing narrative experience in "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax," more specifically the use of abstracts, orientation, codas, and narrative evaluations.

Labov, a sociolinguist, classifies narrative as a means of reiterating one's past experience through generally temporally ordered sequences of clauses ("Transformation" 360). In breaking down the overall structure of narrative, he proposes that most biographical accounts begin with an abstract that summarizes the whole story. In Labov's experience of interviewing Harlem youths, a question such as: "Were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of being killed?" is usually followed by an abstract clause like: "I talked a man out of—Old Doc Simon. I talked him out of pulling the trigger" (363). Beah employs a similar abstract technique that opens his memoir in New York in 1998. He depicts high school friends asking banal questions about his fleeing his war-ravished homeland. Beah's reserved reactions leads his friends to believe that he withholds information regarding his traumatized past. They ask him if

he had ever seen the violence first hand, “Were people running around with guns and shooting each other?” Beah replies, “Yes all the time,” to which his friends simply respond, “Cool” (*A long way* 3). This brief abstraction serves as a brief glimpse into the horrors that unfold. Beah’s memoir is not addressed to that audience. It is a response to that juvenile simplicity—a testimony that at times shows remorse at having lost such innocence, while simultaneously conveying a depth of experience having endured and survived the civil wars that strangled Sierra Leone. While the questions and remarks from his friends welcome his witnessing, there is something more detached, reserved, and cautious in Beah’s beginnings. Perhaps this comes from writing to a different audience, a different time. As exemplified earlier in Bakhtin’s concept of an author’s positioning outside the text, Beah occupies another space to share his story, another moment that offers distance and the ability to step back and see these events with the eyes of an adult author.

Like Wiesel’s *Night*, Beah’s account begins with horrific stories of the war spreading in advance of the oncoming rebel front. Again like Wiesel’s young Elie, the young Ishmael has not yet experienced horror, nor conceived of it: “imagination at ten years old didn’t have the capacity to grasp what had taken away the happiness of the refugees” (6). Refugees pass through the town with dire warnings, yet most local inhabitants feel far removed by thinking that they remain unreachable. The refugees refuse to remain in town because they know of the oncoming onslaught. Beah recalls how refugee children jumped at the sound of chopping wood, or rocks flung from slingshots at flying birds landing on tin roofs echoing like gunfire. He describes adults

looking lost when conversing with others because “it was evident they had seen something that plagues their minds, something that we would refuse to accept if they told us all of it” (5). At this point, the only experience he had with war came from reading books, hearing the BBC news coverage of neighboring Liberia, or watching movies like *Rambo*. This opening yields an important narrative evaluation suggesting that Beah, himself, lacked the ability, the experience, to imagine the atrocities carried out in horrified neighboring towns. By evaluating his limitations of representation, he equates himself with his intended audience, receptive readers who may never understand, relate, or accurately imagine the experience of war. When we, as readers, encounter situations foreign to past experience we negotiate the event, realizing that the meaning we create is different from its original. We then realize the poverty of our own language and imagination to attempt these individual representations so we come to accept our naiveté and surrender to those proximate visions created through discourse with another’s testimony. Beah guides his readers in the retelling of events with great detail, employing his emotions, as a narrative technique, at the initiation of this horrific experience. Within his depiction of the first scene of graphic violence, he also evaluates the experience of witnessing the spectacle, the shock and numbness that allows for psychological distancing and disbelief. A Volkswagen van frantically comes down the road and immediately stops at the front of a house. From his vantage point, hiding in the bush, Ishmael realizes whoever is in the car is not armed:

We saw a man run from the driver’s seat to the sidewalk, where he vomited blood. His arm was bleeding. When he stopped vomiting, he began to cry. It was the first time I had seen a grown man cry like a child, and I felt a sting in my

heart. A woman put her arms around the man and begged him to stand up. He got to his feet and walked toward the van. When he opened the door opposite the driver's, a woman who was leaning against it fell to the ground. Blood was coming out of her ears. People covered the eyes of their children. (12)

The scene portrays the breakdown of familial and societal structures by depicting “a grown man cry like a child” alongside the women and men who cover the eyes of the children. No one is there to prevent Ishmael, himself a child of ten, from seeing the gruesome event that unfolds in front of him. He continues describing the incident, making the point that he, like Gourevitch's Leonitus, could not avert his gaze: “In the back of the van were three more dead bodies, two girls and a boy, and their blood was all over the seats and the ceiling of the van. I wanted to move away from what I was seeing, but couldn't. My feet went numb and my entire body froze” (12-13).

This moment in the narrative becomes powerfully influential by demonstrating the blurred boundaries between the realities of traumatic experience and a survivor's psychological repression of the real. Such repression serves as an exemplary of the three recurring sites of trauma: within the event itself, its psychological aftermath, and through the transference of retelling. Beah recalls the final victim of that significant day, a woman carrying her baby on her back. His memory of her rendered through distressed description:

Blood was running down her dress and dripping behind her, making a trail. Her child had been shot dead as she ran for her life. Luckily for her, the bullet didn't go through the baby's body. When she stopped at where we stood, she sat on the ground and removed her child. It was a girl, and her eyes were still open, with an interrupted innocent smile on her face. The bullets could be seen sticking out just a little bit in the baby's body and she was swelling. The mother clung to her child and rocked her. She was in too much pain to shed tears. (13)

During these renditions of his traumatic past, as if he relives the experience through the retelling, Beah breaks the distressed narrative by digressing to tell the tumultuous history of Sierra Leone. Labov addresses evaluation by suspension as having great impact upon both writer and reader (listener). When the testifier stops the action of narrative this amplifies specific scenes and “indicates to the listener that this has some connection with the evaluative point. When this is done artfully, the listener’s attention is also suspended, and the resolution comes with much greater force” (“Transformation” 374). Beah’s narrative disruption serves to remind him and his audience of the aesthetic life experience being represented through the text. This break also creates narrative impact by giving readers a moment to let the depictions form in their consciousness.

There are several moments in the memoir where Beah intentionally disorients the narrative through depicting the unwanted reprisal of nightmares. At various points in the text readers are uncertain if portrayals are real or imaginary, hence the hyper-reality of the horrific lived events represented through imagery. He begins one chapter with a dream sequence depicting a desolate village he walks through where the “breeze brings the faint cries of those whose last breaths are leaving their mangled bodies” (*A long way* 18). The townspeople lay strewn about in a violently graphic portrayal of Armageddon-like ruin:

Their arms and legs are missing; their intestines spill out through the bullet holes in their stomachs; brain matter comes out of their noses and ears. The flies are so excited and intoxicated that they fall on the pools of blood and die. The eyes of the nearly dead are redder than the blood that comes out of them, and it seems that their bones will tear through the skin of their taut faces at any minute. I turn my

face to the ground to look at my feet. My tattered *crapes* [tennis shoes] are soaked with blood, which seems to be running down my army shorts. I feel no physical pain, so I am not sure whether I've been wounded. I can feel the warmth of my AK-47's barrel on my back; I don't remember when I last fired it. It feels as if needles have been hammered into my brain, and it is hard to be sure whether it is day or night. (18)

The gratuitous violence relayed through first-hand witnessing leaves readers, like the character Ishmael, unsure if this event is dream or reality. Departures from the narrative story line not only compound the disorientation on the reader's part, but also highlight the resonating aftermath of trauma throughout the text. Such departures amplify Beah's digression causing a cessation of events and heightening the experience of traumatic transference that occurs while reading the text.

The fragmentation rising from a traumatic past posits survivors within multiple positions. Even when Beah links the narrative to present day New York, nightmares of experiences rise from repression. He cannot shake himself from a dreamlike state, always uncertain as to his position in reality or dreams. He writes of waking:

A shudder racked my body, and I tried to think about my new life in New York City, where I had been for over a month. But my mind wandered across the Atlantic Ocean back to Sierra Leone. I saw myself holding an AK-47 and walking through a coffee farm with a squad that consisted of many boys and few adults. (19)

This foreboding dream sequence delivers a foreshadowing of the narrative thread, while linking the memoir to present day reality. Beah, still haunted by the atrocities of war, attempts to regain his bearings. He explains,

I was afraid to fall asleep, but staying awake also brought back painful memories. Memories I sometimes wish I could wash away, even though I am aware that they are an important part of what my life is; who I am now. ... These days I live in three worlds: my dreams, and the experiences of my new life, which trigger memories from the past. (19)

The fragmentation rising from a traumatic past posits survivors within multiple positions. Beah's balancing between these three states of lived experience, psychological aftermath, and the transference of retelling shows readers both the multiplicity of voices coming through his discourse and the recursive sites of a survivor's trauma. Multiple layers of voiced representations arise from Beah's personal history through the positioning he occupies as character and narrator and the language he employs to convey traumatic experiences.

Beah further embellishes the layering of his experiences through his use of pathetic fallacy—the depiction of inanimate or natural objects as having human characteristics. Several moments within his recollections, Beah uses the narrative device to decisively mark the certainty of the experience with the awareness of his surroundings. He depicts death scenes with natural surroundings, delivering a sense of the surreal to gratuitous aftermaths. His use of pathetic fallacy deepens the experience of unwarranted reprisals of traumatic images in the imaginations of empathetic readers. At one point Beah describes Ishmael walking alone through dense forests, reflecting on many of the atrocities he has witnessed. He writes, “Everything felt awkwardly brutal. Even the air seemed to want to attack me and break my neck” (49). Beah's use of pathetic fallacy strengthens the narrative impact upon his readers. Several moments within his recollections Beah uses the narrative device to decisively mark the certainty of the

experience with the awareness of his surroundings. Such methods metaphorically demonstrate Ishmael's loss of innocence to his intended audience. He writes of "pass[ing] through burnt villages where dead bodies of men, women, and children of all ages were scattered like leaves on the ground after a storm." The depiction of bodies as leaves negotiates the threatened distortion of traumatic aftermath with images the uninitiated reader may hold on to—a link through language that allows for a secondary witnessing to the narrative event. When Beah recalls the chaos of his first ambush he conveys the action in relation to natural surroundings: "The sun showed flashes of the tips of guns and bullets travelling toward us. Bodies had begun to pile on top of each other near a short palm tree, where fronds dripped blood" (118). Here again Beah utilizes pathetic fallacy in depicting this scene: "there in the forest, which had taken on a life of its own, as if it had trapped the souls that had departed from the dead. The branches of the trees looked as if they were holding hands and bowing their heads in prayer" (119). Beah's use of natural surroundings echoes his cognitive-emotional response through the narrative toward his implied audience.

Repeatedly, Beah attempts to evoke childhood memories but these are left distorted by unsettling flashbacks. The repressed traumas of the war bleed through in recurring thoughts. Scenes resurface, giving him horrible migraines. He spends several nights knowing that he "couldn't face the nightmares [he] knew that would come" (160). The military makes a deal with UNICEF to turn over child soldiers for rehabilitation. During this time he forms a meaningful relationship with Esther, a nurse who loans Ishmael a Walkman with several rap tapes, a journal to write in, and often remains with

Ishmael just for him to discuss his disturbing past. Beah attempts to scare her away by telling some of his graphic war stories. He depicts these sessions, thus giving further reprisals of traumatic memories. He recollects becoming a calloused killer, looking in the eyes of each man before he ended their lives: “I looked at him and saw how his eyes gave up hope and steadied before I pulled the trigger. I found their somber eyes irritating” (159).

Beah indirectly implicates his intended audience by questioning their motives for reading his life story. Thinking of Esther, Ishmael could not understand why anyone would voluntarily be in her position. He states that he had a hard enough time living with his own traumatic past: why would anyone willingly want to take on the pasts of others? “It must be tough,” he writes, “living with so many war stories. I was just living with one, mine, and it was difficult, as the nightmares about what had happened continued to torment me. Why does she do it? Why do they all do it?” (181).

Beah includes scenes of his testimonial to Esther as a type of Labov’s coda, a reprisal of experiencing testimony. This technique demonstrates levels of representation implicating the memoir as yet another representation and the reader as yet another Esther. In working through journals and music, Ishmael writes of his experience. He becomes a spokesperson for the rehabilitation center and delivers speeches notifying the world of the use of child soldiers. He presents at several conferences sponsored by UNICEF, the United Nations, and the European Commission where he would remind the audience “that [he] believes children have the resilience to outlive their sufferings if given a chance” (169). These conferences offer hope in changing the dire situations on the

African continent as a means of “transforming our sufferings as we talked about ways to solve their causes and let them be known to the world” (198). When Ishmael leaves New York in November, 1996, days before his sixteenth birthday, he reflects on his experience: being removed from the horrors of Sierra Leone; seeing the towering skyscrapers of New York; conversing with others from around the world that faced similar situations. In a somber state of reflection he writes, “If I was to get killed upon my return, I knew that a memory of my existence was alive somewhere in the world” (200). With this statement, Beah has acknowledged the necessary betrayal of his representation and the necessary ethical stance of his reader.

The multitude of voices that rise in the aftermath of traumatic events frames the occurrence in a myriad of ways. Perspectives of “truth” remain filtered from the selection of information voiced on the basis of relationships and motives, the representation of the self to an intended audience, a reader outside of the lived experience. When analyzing testimony we must consider the motives behind such “truths” and how this frames a reader’s understanding—guiding readers toward an authoritative discourse—of the disaster. The research covered in this chapter presented by Gourevitch calls attention to the multitude of perspectives residing within reconstructing past experiences. Gourevitch’s reporting brings forth voices representative from the sides of both victim and perpetrator, in an attempt to understand what possesses a person to take part in genocide. Ishmael Beah tells of a boy who unwillingly makes the transition from war victim to child soldier in Sierra Leone with both framed through the recounting of his time in the United States. These testimonies

present a cacophony of voices, some in accordance others in dissidence, yet never far removed from motives of representation toward intended/specific audiences.

The survivor's retelling of distressing events yields the transference of trauma upon a secondary witness (the listener). At this site, both Beah and Gourevitch operate as actual primary witnesses to atrocities passed onto us through their accounts. This implicates writers at the sites of witnessing alongside readers when encountering the speech act upon the page. The ethical stance of the reader is the willingness to risk sharing the trauma within this discursive space. It is this discursive relationship that places the reader not only as a secondary witness, who by reading ethically carries forth and preserves these voices in cultural memory.

During one of Gourevitch's last interviews with Odette, she stops and nods towards his notebook and asks "Do the people in America really want to read this? People tell me to write these things down, but it's written inside of me. I almost hope for the day when I can forget" (*We wish* 238). Odette places her life story with Gourevitch. She puts it out in the world toward an implied audience—a receptive other. Gourevitch's responsibility is to provide a faithful representation of Odette toward that audience. We as readers co-experience these events alongside the implied writers and witnesses. Through our experience of the traumatic events that unfold within the text, we become a witness to the traumatic artifact.

CHAPTER IV

“IF THE ACCIDENT WILL”: THE BLURRED BOUNDARIES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION

All this happened, more or less.

– Kurt Vonnegut *Slaughterhouse-Five*

The term *autobiographical fiction* denotes an inherent paradox by simultaneously conveying the fact-based accuracy associated with life-writing alongside the imaginative pretense expected in fictional genres such as short story and novel. Autobiography as life-writing requires a framing of the self while writing for another, even if that other is an internalized, implied reader. Typically this genre denotes the confessional through letters, diaries, and internalized dialogue turned public. However, autobiographies are never wholly factual, and fiction is never wholly fabricated. The narcissistic positioning gained through autobiography allows for fragments of memory to create an illusory sense of continuity toward one’s life. Even recollection becomes an act of imagining. Joel Agee refers to his own life-writing as, “the act of transposing memory into written words is a creative act that transforms the memory itself” (“A Lie” 55). This calls into question the faculties of memory, accurate recall versus fabricated imaginings. What we remember remains essentially reliant upon imaginative recreation.

The genre of autobiographical fiction moves further along the truth continuum outlined in the introduction, blurring the lines between historical accuracy and the personal representation of lived events. Historical frameworks still delimit

representations in autobiographical fiction. Whether the narrative comes through the use of the first-person singular pronoun, or whether authors use a protagonist representative of themselves, readers expect a narrative based on representations of lived experience. Therefore, our cultural expectations in some way denote playing a game of authorial hide-and-seek, in which we find ourselves wondering which textual representations rise from real experience versus which ones that are fabricated or exaggerated. We think we will know the outcome before we start reading because historical accuracy restricts the results. At least that is how experienced readers approach trauma literature. The actuality of the reading experience is a surrendering of self to the chaos of disorientation rising from the representations of atrocity. Lawrence Langer reminds readers that “no fiction can ever be completely that—a fiction; however extraordinary the imaginative efforts of the writer to disguise his theme with the garments of literary invention” (*Holocaust and Literary* 91). Authors who choose to write in this genre have the opportunity to embrace, expand, and shape the chaos of lived experience. Writers gain additional distance in the representation of lived events, an opportunity of looking at the past and themselves through metaphorical language. This genre offers authors of atrocity an ability to explore the fragmentation that arises through a multiplicity of voices through its characters and self-representations. Furthermore, and most importantly, the genre yields the opportunity to represent lived traumatic events in innovative ways.

Readers come to this genre expecting a writer’s innovative experimentation with narrative structures, and the lacunas represented originally through fragmentation are often demonstrated through silences. Silence also serves to symbolically convey the

ruptures of memory and of the personal self that occur within traumatic recollection. The characteristic techniques of this genre may seem, at first glance, to distance empathetic reading. Readers typically encounter the generic devices of temporal shifts, ruptures of experiences, flashbacks, dreamlike-nightmarish states, authorial breaks of the narrative, and surreal descriptions. These remind readers that the text is a representation of lived experience. Critical readers who remain aware of these literary devices encounter a deeper aesthetic appreciation of the text. The risks of reading fictionalized portrayals can result in greater psychological and emotional distress, for these texts, even through their use of ambiguity and fragmentation, implicate readers as well. For example, Toni Morrison's introduction to *Beloved* addresses her desire to "kidnap" readers and to relocate them in the alien landscape of slavery. By doing so, she forces readers, who are willing, to creatively understand Sethe's life narrative. Similarly, Kurt Vonnegut "kidnaps" both protagonist and reader through a textual alien abduction. Vonnegut's experimentations on the narrative's simultaneous structure display (like *Beloved*) several recursive accounts of traumatic events. These serve to explore the psychological implications of faulty memory and its affects upon representation.

I focus on both Elie Wiesel and Vonnegut in this chapter, because both authors relay and amplify the futility of representation in conveying personal trauma to another. Wiesel and Vonnegut emphasize this futility in various ways by employing the genre's features of fragmentation, silence, barriers of communication, and self-reflexive features of meta-textual representation. The authors' intentional techniques of narrative disruption emphasize the failure of communication. The disruptions Vonnegut employs

concerning time and Wiesel's self-reflexivity, demonstrate how both readers and writers struggle to communicate across the text and how the participants involved negotiate the disorientation and silence (common generic features) rising in the representations of atrocity. An awareness of these techniques works toward an empathetic reading.

“Transparent Twilight” Moving from *Dawn to Day*

True exchanges take place where simple words are called for, where we set out to state the problem of the immortality of the soul in shockingly banal sentences.

- Elie Wiesel *Day*

The genre of autobiographical fiction enables Wiesel to continue his exploration of the theological, political, and philosophical issues that rise from *Night*. The generic markers of testimony limited Wiesel's range of questioning by holding him to historical accuracy. Autobiographical fiction allows the invention of protagonists who may embody the same history as *Night's* young Eliezer, but they experience an entirely new set of moral circumstances in *Dawn and Day*. Nevertheless, Wiesel implicates his own accountability through direct authorial positioning. As he reminds readers that *Dawn* is a work of fiction, he writes: “I wrote it to look at myself in a new way. Obviously I did not live this tale, but I was implicated in its ethical dilemma from the moment that I assumed my character's place” (vii-viii). Wiesel's self-implication is caused by the cognitive-ethical positioning of implied author toward the narrative hero. Ellen Fine explains that Wiesel's fictive protagonists are an embodiment of his past: “Their story is basically his, for he is very much a part of many of his protagonists. Yet, transposed into a fictional mode, Wiesel's story exposes the reader to the intensely problematic nature of the

witness” (*Legacy* 3). This inward/outward self-consciousness between author and protagonist, who embodies a similar past, allows Wiesel to deal with personal issues through a fictionalized character with a better means to gain a position outside the self in relation to another. Wiesel’s characters exemplify the complexities in witnessing to another. Within these two novels he positions protagonists who deal with the ethical responsibility of witnessing in differing ways. *Dawn*’s hero, Elisha, illustrates the significance of personal responsibility when confronted with a difficult choice, whereas the three central characters in *Day* refuse to genuinely account for their life experience, thus providing an unethical model of primary witnessing. Wiesel has, in Fine’s terms, “created characters who allow him to confront himself, and a new kind of protagonist... issues forth from the literary mind after Auschwitz: *the protagonist as witness*” (3). Wiesel repeatedly emphasizes this positioning of witnessing through the motif of the face.

The significance of the face brings forth personal accountability toward the outside world—a self-reflexive acknowledgement that demonstrates the internalized mental reflection being externalized physically. This creates self-awareness between writer and audience through the aesthetic contemplation of character and text. Wiesel’s depiction of the mirrored face shows to his readers an authorial transitioning that enables the writer’s self-reflection superimposed onto his implied narrator, yet it is only a reflection, a representation. As Fine writes, “He exists in a state of *dedoublement*, dwelling on both sides [between life and death, fact and fiction, past and present] of the

mirror at the same time” (37). This textual scene also offers a transition of genre within the trilogy from *Night*'s truth in testimony toward *Dawn*'s fictionalized life narrative.

Just as *Night* closes with the self-reflective image of the face, the second book of the trilogy, *Dawn*, picks up this motif of playing upon perspective when the protagonist gazes out a window upon the “transparent twilight.” This scene offers a visual transition between the two texts. Wiesel's portrayal symbolically amplifies the gaze and the eyes. Elisha wonders how he can kill the British soldier held in captivity: “I did not know the man. To my eyes he had no face; he did not even exist, for I knew nothing about him” (3). He contemplates the Kabbalistic belief that “Death is all eyes” (*Dawn* 140).

Panicked at the realization that he must become the executioner, Elisha begins to see his gaze returned from all angles. In seeing himself as a killer, he searches the reflection in agonizing uncertainty. This leads Elisha to recall how a beggar first taught him how to distinguish night from day. This beggar, Moishe the Beadle, remains unnamed in this reprisal. Wiesel transports readers back to *Night* using the memory of encountering Moishe in the dimly lit synagogue as a discursive mirror, a mirror of words from the beginning of one text to the other. For Wiesel, Moishe is always the messenger for the dead. Elisha remains at the window in deep personal reflection waiting for the outwardly image to emerge in the window:

Every evening since then I had made a point of standing near a window to witness the arrival of night. And every evening I saw a face outside. It was not always the same face, for no one night was like another. In the beginning I saw the face of the beggar. Then, after my father's death, I saw his face, with the eyes grown large with death and memory. Sometimes total strangers lent the night their tearful face or their forgotten smile. I knew nothing about them except that they were dead. (6)

The vision of multiple visitors symbolically depicts the multiple voices rising from Wiesel's life narratives—the numerous faces evoking memories that haunt and fight forgetting. These ghostly apparitions, some known, some unknown, return to remind Elisha of the composure of his life, its lineage and loss. Ultimately his reflective image appears: “I looked out the window, where a shadowy face was taking shape out of the deep of the night. A sharp pain caught my throat. I could not take my eyes off the face. It was my own” (6). This face of Elisha's coming out of the “night” transitions readers from that unknown face young Elie encounters returning his gaze at the closing of *Night*.

Wiesel positions Elisha's personal history alongside young Elie's in *Night*.

Elisha, too, is a survivor of the concentration camps who turns to philosophy, bringing forth difficult questions that connect Elie's gaze in the mirror with Elisha's self-reflective thoughts at the window. His difficult questions echo from *Night*: “Where is God to be found? In suffering or rebellion? When is a man most truly a man? When he submits or when he refuses? Where does suffering lead him? To purification or to bestiality?” (12). In attempting to address these questions of suffering, Wiesel conflates perpetrator with victim, for Elisha occupies both positions. The young man who survived the executioners of the camps is now, in turn, ordered to become one: “I had sought after the truth, and here I was about to become a killer, a participant in the work of death and God. I went over to the mirror hanging on the wall and looked into my face. I almost cried out, for everywhere I saw my own eyes” (19). This image immediately brings readers back to that unsettling ending of *Night* where young Elie sees the corpse with his own reflection

gazing back at him. Elisha, taking part in his first terrorist operation, equates being a terrorist with the actions of the SS. He sees himself reflectively, “with the eyes of the past I imagined that I was in the dark gray uniform of an SS officer” (23).

Elisha’s self-reflection that conflates oppressor and oppressed demonstrates Wiesel’s intentional disruption that disorients his readers. Within the reprisal that follows, readers are not readily aware if the scene depicts a Nazi liquidation or the terrorist action Elisha takes part in: “They ran like rabbits, like drunken rabbits, looking for the shelter of a tree. They seemed to have neither heads nor hands, but only legs. And these legs ran like rabbits sotted with wine and sorrow” (23). He depicts the spray of their bullets becoming the “flaming wall on which their lives were shattered to the accompaniment of agonized cries which I shall hear until the last day of my life” (24). When Elisha concludes his retelling of this episode, he immediately shifts toward a reprisal of other frightened rabbits running in all directions. The rabbits ruing this recollection are Jews slaughtered in the Polish ghettos. Elisha reflects that death is the order of God, and it comes at the hand of God. A death at the hand of the executioner, for any “movement,” is to play the part of God. Within the role of executioner, this act is so absolute that not only the killer but those who have formed him become implicated as well (47), which Wiesel demonstrates in Elisha’s seeing of ghosts. The room where Elisha, the executioner, comes face to face with his victim John Dawson, a British soldier, fills with the visiting dead—those persons who entered Elisha’s life at one time or another. At first, he sets himself as “his own witness and judge,” for his own “private tribunal,” but the figures of the dead become “his witnesses and judges” (*Fine Legacy*

38). He reflects: “[these witnesses] contributed to my formation, to the formation of my permanent identity” (44). Elisha longs to place his accountability on events outside of himself. If killing is an act of God and the movement is for a Zionist cause, then Dawson’s death is justified. Yet, Elisha being confronted with the self-reflected dead leads him to take the responsibility and judgment upon himself, bringing forth ethical accountability of the role of primary witness.

In order to understand Wiesel’s use of self-reflexivity of the face to symbolically illustrate accountability of Elisha’s ethical dilemma, we must examine our ethical responsibility to another in the presence of that person. In a similar light, Robert Eaglestone defines the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas as being the “moment of facing [that] interrupts our enclosed self, and opens us to the Other. Our totalizing systems through which we understand the world are interrupted, dislocated by this call to our responsibility for the Other” (“Behind the Bars” 101). Our ethical responsibility relies on our being in physical presence with another person. We define ourselves through language, and for Levinas via Eaglestone, “language as the relation to the other [is] expressed, not represented... Language is only language if the interlocutor is actually present” (“Cold” 122-23). Eaglestone continues, stating that writing becomes merely material and vacuous in terms of the plasticity of aesthetic mimesis. Art/writing is only representation, whereas the actual and immediate utterance face-to-face with another person denotes presence.

This responsibility in the physical presence of another does not resolve the issue of ethical responsibility. Just as Wiesel’s executioner scene demonstrates, the faces of

the past are carried within us. Discourse, even in the presence of another, becomes what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as “utterance-as-act” where the word can only be representative of lived experience. The actual occupation of space, time, and culture does not guarantee the authenticity of word-equals-life-experience, or word-embodies-truth. Bakhtin allows for these differing self-conscious positions between the self and another whether in a face-to-face encounter or in writing. The aspect of human relatedness and witnessing to another depends upon the utterance-as-act. The utterance parallels speech and writing as both state of remaining cognitive of the aesthetic event of language and the “intersubjective negotiation between a self and some other, which in at least some sense serves to re-author the subject himself” (*Mikhail* 62). While the discourse between persons positioned in the same time and space can hold immediacy, utterances remain meditated representations of self. Through writing, that meditation is directed toward an implied audience. Even Levinas reveals that, “In reality, the fact of being is what is most private; existence is the sole thing I cannot communicate; I can tell about it, but I cannot share my experience” (*Ethics* 57). The ethical responsibility of the writer and reader is to acknowledge that we cannot get to the kernel of another’s experience. The only means is through representation and language.

Wiesel portrays these internalized tensions of witnessing and responsibility through representation to his audience through the text. The climactic scene of *Dawn* depicts the faces of the past returning to witness Elisha’s execution of Dawson, assimilating all moments into one. His father and mother appear; the English soldiers Elisha killed during the convoy attack emerge; other comrades from the past who were

once part of the rebellion and other comrades from Auschwitz and Buchenwald become visible. Their presence forces Elisha, as he faces the other, to acknowledge his personal accountability in the choice of playing the executioner. All eyes are on him, thus creating a self-reflectivity of following a cause, of making this choice.

In *Dawn*, Wiesel employs not only the metaphors of reflection but also those of silence. Silence welcomes self-reflexivity, a calling to personal judgment. Bakhtin also raises this issue of self-reflectivity in stating that, “The other may be needed as a judge who must judge me the way I judge myself, without aestheticizing me, he may be needed in order to destroy his possible influence upon my self-evaluation” (“Author and Hero” 142). Again in that climactic scene, Elisha sees by his father’s side a boy that strongly resembles himself at his age before he went to the camps. In a self-reflexive act, he goes to the child and asks him why all these people have gathered here. In a symbolic move that eerily echoes Wiesel’s personal Nobel Prize speech, the little boy, his former self, says to him,

“I’m not judging you,” he said. “We’re not here to sit in judgment. We’re here simply because you’re here. We’re present wherever you go; we are what you do. When you raise your eyes to Heaven we share in their sight; when you pat the head of a hungry child a thousand hands are laid on his head; when you give bread to a beggar we give him that taste of paradise which only the poor can savor. Why are we silent? Because silence is not only our dwelling-place but our very being as well. We *are* silence. And your silence is us. You carry us with you. Occasionally you may see us, but most of the time we are invisible to you. When you see us you imagine that we are sitting in judgment upon you. You are wrong. Your silence is your judge.” (*Dawn* 60)

In being placed in the position of responsibility for another’s life in exchange for a cause, Elisha justifies the potential action as an exoneration of past atrocities. Such a

justification may free one's self of others' opinions and shame ("Author and Hero" 142). In a similar act, the boy who emerges from the crowd of silent dead exonerates Elisha from his self-abasement. He liberates Elisha from the guilt of his position as executioner. The presence of the dead, as secondary witnesses to Elisha's act of execution, makes Elisha evaluate the location of blame. The presence of the dead as secondary witnesses indirectly implicates them in the act of killing. Elisha, by acknowledging this, must take the responsibility upon himself, and not transfer the guilt unfairly onto the dead. Accountability falls solely on Elisha. The dead refuse to cast judgment, because it is not their place. Their place is silence.

The closing of *Dawn* bookends the novel with the same depiction of our protagonist gazing out the window, listening to the cry of a child: "Soon there was only a tattered fragment of darkness, hanging in midair, the other side of the window. Fear caught my throat. The tattered fragment of darkness had a face. Looking at it, I understood the reason for my fear. The face was my own" (81). The novel ends with unsettled self-reflexivity. The night has lifted, and with those few fragments, Elisha's stare returns its unabated isolation. Wiesel employs the symbolic gaze of his protagonist in order to discursively mirror both the novel's opening and its unity with *Night*. The gaze demonstrates Elisha's accountability as gained through the acknowledgement of his own self-reflective witnessing.

In order to show how narrative disruptions convey methods of self-reflexivity, Wiesel's depiction of miscommunications among the three central characters in *Day* continue to show readers aesthetic engagements with trauma literature. *Day's* nameless

protagonist effortlessly transitions from the fading night of *Dawn*. Originally titled *The Accident*, *Day* depicts its main character trapped in the isolation of self-reflection while recovering from being struck by a cab in a hospital room. The novel takes place in a one room setting depicting the personal reprisals brought forth by visitors—some real, others imagined—that intensify how a Holocaust survivor struggles with a fragmented existence. The genre of autobiographical fiction liberates Wiesel to explore the fragmentation of survival through a protagonist who has lost the will to live. This idea is similarly conveyed once he opens his eyes in the hospital: “I’ll always remember: I opened my eyes and had to close them right away because I was blinded by the whiteness of the room. A few minutes went by before I could open them again and locate myself in time and space” (*Day* 13). Wiesel states in *Day*’s introduction that Auschwitz remains in the background of his writing and the dead whisper questions throughout the text. Wiesel explains, “As I have said elsewhere, I feel unable to tell the story of this event, much less imagine it. A novel about Auschwitz is not a novel—or else it is not about Auschwitz” (x). He turns to fictionalized representations of lived events to liberate the writing from the overbearing weight of survival. Also Wiesel reminds his readers that “certain episodes here are true—that is, taken from life. The accident actually happened to me. I didn’t see the taxi coming” (x). Again in *Day* complicated questions continue to haunt him: “Does life have meaning after Auschwitz? In a universe cursed because it is guilty, is hope still possible? For a young survivor whose knowledge of life and death surpasses that of his elders, wouldn’t suicide be as great a temptation as love or faith?” (x). Dealing with these issues through a fictionalized character provides further distance, a

better means to gain a position outside the self in relation to the reader. As readers, become aware of Wiesel's positioning of author and protagonist in the creation of the text, this positioning allows Wiesel to reframe past experience with deeper embellishments and emotional responses.

These emotional responses fall within Wiesel's fictional framework and allows for an exploration of a survivor's detachment that competes with the multiplicity of voices of characters and self-representations. *Day's* nameless protagonist parallels *Dawn's* Elisha in his isolation and self-reflection. Yet, in contrast to Elisha, his alienation is harmfully nuanced in his unethical refusal to meet his own gaze, signifying his rejection of personal accountability to himself and others. In fact, his estrangement is amplified by his near paralysis in recovery (Fine *Legacy* 49).

Wiesel depicts the frustration that occurs in the protagonist's attempts to tell a witness his personal trauma to another. Wiesel displays unethical discursive relationships between three characters: Kathleen, an empathetic other, who is moved to cathartic extremes of embodying the protagonist's pain; Sarah, a willing participant in titillating, non-committal acts of "consummation" (both through the word and through the body); and the protagonist's unwarranted transference of suffering through testimony. Wiesel shows the complications of discourse within multiple scenes that depict failed attempts at testifying due to the repressive refusal of becoming a primary witness. While the genre provides methods of autobiographical portrayal, there still exists a struggle of representation.

The first scene that demonstrates unethical discourse is between the protagonist and Kathleen. The protagonist sees Kathleen as his polarized opposite. She retains a sense of optimism, hope, and healing through her repeated attempts at empathetic understanding (although her attempts come as an unethical, cathartic identification, her intent is a moral one). In stark contrast stands the novel's narrator haunted by a past that prohibits him from looking toward the future and trusting another person. A particular scene that demonstrates the immoral position of witnessing shows the protagonist and Kathleen embedded within his titillating testimony:

I kept talking. In every detail, I described the screams and the nightmares that haunt me at night. And Kathleen, very pale, her eyes red, continued to beg: "More! Go on! More!" ... She was saying "more" in the eager voice of a woman who wants her pleasure to last, who asks the man she loves not to stop, not to leave her, not to disappoint her, not to abandon her halfway between ecstasy and nothing. "More... More..." ... I kept looking at her and holding her. I wanted to get rid of all the filth that was in me and graft it onto her pupils and her lips, which were so pure, so innocent, so beautiful. ... But Kathleen was drinking in every one of my words as if she wanted to punish herself for not having suffered before. From time to time she insisted in the same eager voice that sounded so much like the old prostitute's "More... More..." ...

I opened my eyes and noticed that she was really suffering. She was biting her lips; there was despair in her face. (*Day 42-43*)

This scene unfolds with the personal bonds of communication becoming devalued through the titillation that arises from Kathleen's cathartic empathy. Between these two characters lies an ill-communicated and unethical witnessing. The objectification arises from the protagonist's desire for cathartic release. He longs to graft his traumatic past onto her eyesight. Kathleen further objectifies this exchange by asking him to give more, thus prostituting him to betray his past. This affects the novel's readers by offering the

same implication—placing readers on the same level as Kathleen, calling attention to our own demands for more. Wiesel’s strategy of alignment demonstrates the risk of the text, the threat to the self when one seeks to empathize. The dialogue emphasizes the arousal resulting from fear, vulnerability, and the pleasure of defiling. This scene and its objectification illustrates just *opposite* of what Wiesel’s introductions and speeches call for in an ethical necessary betrayal of the primary witness and the ethical responsibility of the secondary witness.

This exchange also demonstrates the tensions rising from Kathleen’s inability to embody the narrator’s lived experience, thus reminding the reader that the text is a representation. Horrific scenes cannot be grafted onto her eyes. Images can become ingrained within her imagination, but the gap between representation and experience can never be crossed. The gap, or this lacuna, is what lies at the core of the narrator’s agony. He performs these betrayals in order to frighten others into fear. He punishes others for not truly suffering like he has. The protagonist shocks Kathleen and readers from the comforts of neutrality and forcefully reveals the implications of responsibility: a responsibility the protagonist remains reluctant to accept.

The second scene that depicts unethical discourse in witnessing occurs in a flashback showing the narrator with a prostitute named Sarah. Again the protagonist experiences a catharsis by using sex and meaningless confession—a means of baring the skin and baring the soul for an immediate, non-committal release. Within their nakedness, she recognizes him as a survivor from the camps; she is one too. She tells of her camp experience and he reflects:

There are times when I curse myself. I shouldn't have listened. I should have fled. To listen to a story under such circumstances is to play a part in it, to take sides, to say yes or no, to move one way or the other. From then on there is a before and an after. And even to forget becomes a cowardly acceptance. (81)

With these words, Wiesel reiterates the responsibility of the witness to the testifier and his protagonist's unethical reluctance to take part in being a secondary witness. There can be no neutrality within this discursive exchange. The willingness to listen means to take part.

Sarah's story summons the protagonist to participate in emotional-cognitive understanding: to realize his ethical responsibility in the presence of the primary witness. His presence directly implicates himself to act, to answer, and acknowledge her position. The narrator continues:

I think of her and I curse myself, as I curse history... *Whoever listens to Sarah and doesn't change*, whoever enters Sarah's world and doesn't invent new gods and new religions, deserves death and destruction. Sarah alone had the right to decide what is good and what is evil, the right to differentiate what is true from what usurps the appearance of truth. (81 emphasis added)

He does not internalize her suffering as his own; he only wants the co-experience of her suffering and humiliation. And he curses her, for the realization that her memory shall evoke similar responses with other women in his future: "I knew that she would talk, that she would tell me something terrible, abominable, words that I would always hear whenever I tried to find happiness in a woman's body" (87). The scene then transitions back to present day with Kathleen at the hospital bedside. The narrator looks up at her, noticing that "She wanted to hurt herself. Suffer openly. So I would see. So I would

know that she was suffering with me, that we were bound together by suffering. She was able to hurt me just to show me that she too was unhappy” (88). While the narrator embraces estrangement and the futility of discourse, Kathleen visibly struggles to cathartically empathize and unethically embody his suffering. The only difference between Sarah and Kathleen’s approach to accountability lies in degrees of intimacy. With Kathleen the intimacy is intricately bound to expectations and motives. With Sarah the vulnerability comes in the simplicity of self-exposure that cannot hide the visible and telling scars of camp experiences. Sarah offers a fleeting exchange that masks this exposure with the comforts of anonymity. The act of talking to strangers becomes easier because it lacks commitment. Essentially, the interaction with strangers carries no obligation.

The third demonstrative scene shows the protagonist contemplating suicide by jumping off a ship when a stranger appears on the deck. The protagonist reflects, “he was shrouded in darkness, that I didn’t know him, that I probably wouldn’t even recognize him the next day... To talk to a stranger is like talking to stars: it doesn’t commit you” (37). In a similar manner of attempting to graft the horror of his experience onto another’s consciousness, he cathartically releases the horrific events of his life into the dark silence toward the stranger. Toward reaching the end of his recount, the stranger breaks the silence to tell him, “You must know this... I think I’m going to hate you” (39). When the protagonist recovers from the initial shock, he wanted to thank him for having the “courage to accompany me lucidly to the end” (39). The stranger hammers the deck’s rail, repeating the phrase, “I hate you...” then turns and walks away. The protagonist

feels exonerated for having been judged. Perhaps it is easier to pass the hatred, the guilt, the haunting of the past onto a stranger rather than a loved one, and to have that stranger unwilling offer the accountability of secondary witnessing.

In contrast to these three immortalized discursive scenes Gyula's interaction with the protagonist offers the only ethical stance to primary witnessing. With this novel the entire trilogy, closes on the choice of accountability and is exemplified by the protagonist's friend Gyula's visit. He comes bearing a portrait, thus recapitulating the motif of the face and its reflection. The narrator looks at the painting placed before him: "I was there, facing me. My whole past was there, facing me. It was a painting in which black, interspersed with a few red spots, dominated. The sky was a thick black. The sun, a dark gray" (106). The narrator's gaze moves from the background to the face: "My eyes were a beating red, like Soutine's. They belonged to a man who had seen God commit the most unforgivable crime: to kill without a reason" (106). The actual site of trauma becomes grafted onto those eyes of the portrait by the protagonist—he assigns the meaning through his cognitive-emotional reactions to the aesthetic representation. He asks, "And in this painting, Gyula? They [the dead] are there. In the eyes [...] Why did you put them there if you ask me to chase them away?" Gyula, tries to convince him to emerge from his protective shell of isolation, to acknowledge his responsibility to be a primary witness in order to fight back the past:

"I put them there to assign them a place. So you would know where to hit. ... If your suffering splashes others, those around you, those for whom you represent a reason to live, then you must kill it, choke it. If the dead are its source, kill them again, as often as you must to cut out their tongues." (106)

The protagonist knows he cannot do this; he cannot kill them a second time. The images of the dead will remain even if he were to violently gouge his eyes like Oedipus. There exists no cathartic release from survivor's guilt. His exchange through traumatic discourse offers no redemptive reclaiming of experience; it only serves to graft the horrors of representation onto the minds of others. Gyula, the artist, is capable of killing them a second time. In an enraged state, he takes a match to the canvas reducing it to ashes.

It is telling that Wiesel ends the trilogy with a scene depicting the power of the artist. Gyula is capable of painting the narrator from what Bakhtin calls an "excess of seeing": insight gained through a position of being outside of another. A portrait is an internalized response to an outward aestheticized representation created through a capacity of seeing aesthetically. The eyes of the portraiture are only described as "beating red, like Soutine's," yet they convey what they have seen, what has been internally grafted onto the narrator's gaze. It is Gyula, the creator of this representation of trauma, through his occupying a doublesidedness (like Wiesel), who is capable of killing the dead a second time. Wiesel's depiction of Gyula burning the painting is a symbolic act to show the narrator (and readers) the necessity of exorcizing the past (Halperin 63). Wiesel and Gyula's "necessary betrayals" leave their representations in ashes: a symbolic secondary Holocaust—a burnt offering of remembrance. Wiesel's texts demonstrate an awareness of accountability gained through self reflexivity born of aesthetic representation and testimony toward another.

“Like bugs trapped in amber”: the Chaos of Composition in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

There were vile people in both those cities, as is well known. The world was better off without them.

And Lot’s wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she did look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human. So she was turned to a pillar of salt. So it goes.

—Kurt Vonnegut *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Unlike the realistic representations of Wiesel, Vonnegut breaks with traditional novelistic structures and models *Slaughterhouse-Five* as an alien novel that reveals the simultaneity of lived experience in order to amplify the futility of representing a personal trauma. Vonnegut acknowledges this futility when he writes to his publisher, “It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again” (*Slaughterhouse* 19). Both the introduction and the novel require the reader to address questions of secondary witnessing and ethical representation: How does Vonnegut’s reframing of the narrative set us up as readers? Are we still the implied readers or is it a Tralfamadorian? If Vonnegut simply resigns his authorship to the ineffectiveness of conveying the experience, thus blowing it out of proportion through science fiction, what chance then, do readers have in responding to this call to responsibility? I answer these questions by demonstrating the disruptions of narrative technique that Vonnegut employs to conflate time in relaying the simultaneity of his novel. The result shows the artistic difficulty in attempting to represent the chaos of lived experience.

The narrative’s stylistic simultaneity parallels both Vonnegut’s own positioning as a writer who sees all moments concurrently and Vonnegut’s experimentation with the

temporal structures of the novel. Because of the inability to represent the experience, Vonnegut portrays the chaos of trauma through the chaos of the text, in order to illustrate the paradox of witnessing. The novel's chaotic narrative thread spirals from the epicenter, the bombing of Dresden, toward multiple angles within a recursive narrative structure demonstrating the author's repeated struggle to write about trauma. The result indirectly depicts the catastrophe itself. Jerome Klinkowitz argues, "By not portraying the event itself, the author is able to recast it not as a describable entity but as an unanswerable question: what do you say about a massacre?" (*Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming* 48). Vonnegut's way out of this conundrum is to admit to the novel's limitation upfront: "This one [book] is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt" (*Slaughterhouse* 22). What does this do for readers of the text? Why take the risks necessary to play the game? To answer this question is to become an active observer: a participant who attempts to grasp the relations unfolding within *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Michael Holquist, in writing about Bakhtin's theories of simultaneity, shows how Albert Einstein's Relativity Theory influenced Bakhtin's dialogic concepts that concern how bodies relate in time and space. Holquist writes of Bakhtin's emerging theories as addressing the observer's position as essential to ground the non-centeredness through their active perception (*Dialogism* 21). Vonnegut's use of cause and effect certainly denotes the kinetic terms of the novel's narrative structure. Although he conflates time, he weaves enough common elements into the narrative for readers to grasp the thread of relationships between artifacts, bodies, and space. He demonstrates simultaneity by conflating time frames wherein Billy Pilgrim, the novel's

protagonist, makes unexpected “jumps” between his lived experiences on the planet Tralfamadore and his internment as a POW. While readers are initially disoriented by the text’s time warps, Vonnegut gives enough details for critical readers to gain their bearings. The act of continually orienting one’s self to the text forces readers to become active participants, calling forth a responsibility to Vonnegut’s indirect witnessing of a massacre.

Vonnegut, having experienced one of the largest (and what he deems as unnecessary) massacres of modern warfare, takes the responsibility to bear witness. He demonstrates what it means to be human, what it means to write a life narrative in the wake of atrocity. This responsibility causes him, like Lot’s wife, to look back onto the destruction, and the chaos rising from lived trauma and he struggles with the uncertainties in recollection. Yet, unlike Lot’s wife, he has the opportunity to survive and to portray what he witnessed. He metaphorically turns to look back out of curiosity with a desire to see the spectacle, not unlike Gourevitch’s Leonitus. But more than that, looking back denotes an act of remembrance, and for Vonnegut we are not supposed to look back. From the very beginning of the novel, he states that the book is a failure for doing so. Yet, by turning to science fiction as a genre to portray the unimaginable massacre in Dresden, Vonnegut finds the means of indirectly representing the experience, thereby opening possibilities for witnessing.

Throughout the introductory chapter Vonnegut significantly struggles to find the proper narrative form that can represent his traumatic experience. In his attempts to structure the novel, he states that he has rewritten his story numerous times, crafted

outlines, and sketched narrative diagrams. As a writer, he sees himself as “a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization” with “wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations” (*Slaughterhouse 5*), yet even his art fails him. In attempting to map out the chronology of the narrative, he visually represents the plot unfolding on a wallpaper roll that houses the beginning of the story at one end with the conclusion on the other: “[T]hen there was all that middle part,” exploding colors of red lines merging into yellow ones, and then “the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead” (5). At the destruction of Dresden comes a “vertical band of orange cross-hatching, and all the lines that were still alive passed through it, came out the other side” (5). His frustration with traditional narrative form forces him to realize the impossibility of representing a massacre. The futility compels him to restructure time. Vonnegut cleverly moves the narrative, nearly seamlessly, from the diagram into a reprisal: “The end, where all the lines stopped, was a beetfield on the Elbe, outside of Halle. The rain was coming down” (5). Thus just as easily, he moves back into reflecting on the impossibility of writing his experience. By surrendering to futility of representation, he rethinks his plan and visits an old war buddy to gain another perspective. Even this visit becomes counterproductive. In closing this chapter Vonnegut admits the failure he has made in attempting to write history. He addresses the rupture from the chaos of lived experience and the botched act of representation. The only way he knows how to write his “Dresden Book” is to fictionalize the account. Playing against common cultural narrative expectations, he proceeds to give readers the first and last lines of the novel.

Giving away the novel's last line even before the narrative has a chance to begin demonstrates the novel's simultaneous structure.

An extraordinary feature of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is its intricate, recursive narrative arrangement that intends to model a Tralfamadorian novel. In order for his text to exhibit the simultaneity of Tralfamadorian texts, Vonnegut conflates time by depicting key features of how events unfold then reappear unexpectedly within the novel. The first chapter alone carries several reprisals that reveal this recursive-simultaneity in various ways: teapots, taxi cabs, and the act of writing in comparison to the act of reading historical documents, all of which weave throughout the narrative and play upon the chaos of lived experience. Vonnegut abducts his readers into a world of science fiction uncertainty that parallels his reader's disorientation to Billy Pilgrim's survival of alien abduction. Adding to the disorientation is the Tralfamadorians' concept of time. For the Tralfamadorians, lived moments are permanent: "It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever" (27). There are no beginnings or endings. There is no death for Tralfamadorians; life remains contained in all preceding events. "All time" is the term Tralfamadorians have for their abilities to see every moment at once, and it does not change. Tralfamadorians see the dead as existing in "bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments" (27). Once Tralfamadorians realize that someone is dead they say, "So it goes." The phrase is repeated within the course of the novel one-hundred times and applied to not just living species but inanimate objects as well (such as the novel). The Tralfamadorian's way of

sardonically leveling the significance of living species in comparison to everyday artifacts (possibly byproducts from once living things) relegates human drama as an absurdity of our condition. Perhaps this is why Billy Pilgrim becomes so bored with life within the course of his experience. Having a near omniscient knowledge concerning the structure of all events removes the cognitive-emotional responses rising from such tensions.

The simultaneity of Tralfamadorian texts are organized with “brief clumps of symbols separated by stars” (88). Billy makes the assumption that these are telegrams, and to some extent, they are. Yet what is most important about the Tralfamadorian texts is how the author arranges the relationship of events: “[S]o that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time” (88). Although Vonnegut attempts to frame the narrative around Tralfamadorian simultaneity, in order to arrange the relationship of events he has to examine cause and effect, and any resulting implications. Essentially the moral implication Vonnegut demonstrates is that denying the structure of human drama, of not knowing the outcome of events, essentially denies our humanity. It is as if the text’s structural problem of knowing all events at once forces Vonnegut (and his readers) to realize the moral complexities of fatalism.

This moral dilemma is the underlying problem for Billy, for he has backed himself into an existential crisis in considering what it means to be human with the knowledge of Tralfamadorian perspectives. Cause and effect are essentially the burdens

of our humanity. Vonnegut shows the results of existing in a predetermined world without accountability when he parallels the Tralfamadorian's "zoo" with Pilgrim's POW experience. In this way Vonnegut builds layer upon layer of representations, merging moments between Billy Pilgrim's alien abduction with his German interment. Both serve to immerse Pilgrim and the reader into this other universe. Robert Merrill and Peter Scholl in their essay "Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*: The Requirements of Chaos," similarly explicate one such scene that depicts Pilgrim asking the Tralfamadorians why he is being kidnapped:

"Why me?" The Tralfamadorians reply, "Why you? Why *us* for that matter?" (76). Later, one of Billy's fellow prisoners is beaten gratuitously by a German guard. "Why me?" the prisoner asks. "Vy you? Vy anybody?" the guard answers (91). (Merrill and Scholl 148)

As this example illustrates, Vonnegut's narrative disruption of simultaneity results in an exploration of capturing the chaos of lived experience to another.

In another example of simultaneity in the narrative, Billy's seamless transition between his past on Tralfamadore and the German camps unites both worlds through the hyper-reality of representation. Vonnegut continually finds innovative ways of linking the temporal shifts that occur throughout the novel. His experiments with narrative structure and symbolic word play cause frustration and disorientation for readers, yet he provides enough commonality for his audience to hold on to through "logical association." Klinkowitz identifies this experimental technique as easing readers into Vonnegut's narrative-time-travel: "As a science fiction device, it allows the author to shift scenes with fluid ease, moving from year to year and from place to place with no

need for cumbersome exposition to explain such shifts” (*Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming* 73). One textual example portrays Billy walking through several gates of the camp. As he walks through gate after gate he comes to “what he thought might be a building on Tralfamadore. It was shrilly lit and lined with white tiles. It was on Earth, though. It was a delousing station through which all new prisoners had to pass” (*Slaughterhouse* 83). Reader and protagonist alike, struggle to imagine in their literary minds this otherness, this alien cold that envelops the scene. Billy removes his clothes as instructed while he recalls that this “was the first thing they told him to do on Tralfamadore, too” (83). Vonnegut’s conflation of time around two similar spaces, the alien abduction and/with the POW camp, amplifies the traumatic experience while paradoxically fragmenting the narrative structure at crucially vulnerable moments. Vonnegut’s narrative ruptures exemplify the futility of representation while emphasizing the novel’s disorienting simultaneity. Ironically, the process of showing the collapse of narrative invites readers to experience a co-creation of the text. In an interview with John Casey and Joe Bellamy, Vonnegut refers to the active participation of the reader in deciphering his Tralfamadorian novel: “No other art requires the audience to be a performer. You have to count on the reader’s being a good performer... It’s a learning process” (*New Fiction* 203). As responsive ethical readers, we have to be willing to actively participate in the co-creation of the text. The learning process falls on both writer and reader alike in negotiating the aesthetic discursive relationship. Vonnegut remains aware of the reader’s task in deciphering the complex narrative structure of his text. He must provide enough

associations for readers to hold on to while weaving through Billy Pilgrim's experience.

In order to make an attempt at empathetically relating to another's trauma.

Vonnegut deliberately crafts Billy's life narrative as fluid and malleable. He flows in and out of conscious states, memory lapses, time travel, and key elements within present experiences, like musical quartets that send him into prior moments. Through Vonnegut's assimilation of real life POW experience with fictional alien abduction, these blurred boundaries offer ways of representing a traumatic past in a Tralfamadorian style novel. Billy's life is trapped in amber where he sees all moments simultaneously. Yet, there are moral implications when all parts are seen within the whole. Within the Tralfamadorian novel, dialogue has ceased and there is no need for further differentiation because body, environment, time value, and space value have become a unified totality. Events may become repeatable. A result of simultaneity is stasis in being. If the dialogue has already occurred then there is no accountability for our position: the transaction between writer, the characters, and the reader. What we end up with, if we are Tralfamadorian readers, is a resignation to response (Harris "Illusion" 137). Vonnegut ultimately uses the simultaneity of the novel to show that if human beings become bugs trapped in amber, trapped in predetermined structured moments, then the meaning of human life is diminished and drama becomes a fabrication. If events are already determined, there remains no free will and accountability or responsibility for the individual.

Bakhtin defines our accountability and responsibility as remaining dependent upon the willingness for reader's to respond: "[A]ddressivity, the quality of turning to

someone, is a constitutive feature of the utterance; without it the utterance does not and cannot exist” (*Speech Genres* 99). If there is no call to answer, then we remain unobligated to act. By structuring *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a Tralfamadorian novel, Vonnegut shows the relevance of reader response and asks a great deal of his audience. Klinkowitz describes Vonnegut’s writing: it asks the reader “to participate in not just a series of recounted events, but an immediately present act of writing—an act cued to equally verifiable acts in their own lives,” such as the Robert Kennedy assassination being included at the close of the text as one example (*Slaughterhouse-Five: Reforming* 22). By doing so, Vonnegut indirectly implicates his readers in their co-creation of the work. Klinkowitz continues: “in this novel’s closing pages we see that shared experience[s] become part of the literary work itself—a work that step by step has involved the reader in its on-going action” (22-23). All of us come to trauma literature with the choice of participating or not. If we take part in the reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, we have already accepted the novel’s absurdities and failures at reclaiming the chaos of lived experience.

Vonnegut, like Wiesel, employs narrative disruptions of auto-biographical fiction to signify the complexities of bearing witness. For Wiesel, the atrocity remains residual in the personal histories of protagonists demonstrated through repeated notions of self-reflexivity. The catastrophic events for Vonnegut are so far removed from reality that there is no means to represent the chaos; therefore he invites readers to co-experience the disorientation of deciphering a traumatic event. Both authors are compelled to speak the unspeakable even if it means risking failure. The multiple miscommunications depicted

within these autobiographical fictive texts demonstrate the ethical/unethical positions within relaying one's experience to another. Reader and writer alike, work through this insurmountable task of representation.

CHAPTER V

“WHY I AM WRITING FROM WHERE YOU ARE NOT”: ABSENCE AND PRESENCE IN JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER’S FICTION

The narrative ends in the rubble and it is left to us to create the counter-narrative.

-Don DeLillo “In the Ruins of the Future”

Cultural expectations of the novel denote a realistic rendering of contemporary (typically middle class) life. Novels range from the episodic picaresque to the epistolary novel, encompassing historical, regional, and political themes. Readers often encounter the novel as a solitary experience, entering the fictionalized world through accessible language and dialogue that portrays “real” conversation. For Mikhail Bakhtin, novelistic dialogue surveys and mirrors several social languages. It is through dialogue that characters, authors, readers, and texts acquire a self-conscious awareness toward each other.¹ We also find narratives rich in symbolism and allegory that capture contemporary issues and behaviors. Traditional narrative structures once framed the “reality” of life by following typical emplotment, leading toward climax, fallout and resolution. Cultural expectations of conventional storylines centered on the portrayal of experience through sequence, and a meditation on a prior form of “reality.” Twentieth-century American modernists began to reinvent themselves by rejecting traditional nineteenth-century realism. These writings captured the sense of societal change by depicting emerging

¹ I address this topic near the chapter’s conclusion.

knowledge gained from growth in scientific fields. For example, these experimentations on literary form through psychological perspectives are seen in stream-of-conscious representations in William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* or Gertrude Stein's fragmented identity in *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. These texts deal with the rising sense of fragmentation and disillusionment within American culture.

Authors within the overarching genre of trauma fiction who are now writing in the age of post-modernity similarly embrace the disorientation and simultaneity of perception. The characteristics found in the psychological studies of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder influence how writers fictionally demonstrate the sites of rupture and fragmentation. A primary generic feature of these new narratives demonstrates the tensions between reprisals and silence, in which innovative texts often use meta-textual representations that signify the recurrent gaps, lacunas, and fragmentation rising in the wake of traumatic experience. These qualities both delimit and offer a means of inventive exploration of representations.

In this chapter, I briefly demonstrate how the meta-textual novel of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* creates counter-narratives through the text's representation of multiple voices. The novel's three main characters suffer a fragmented existence in the aftermath of personal trauma. Such a reality exemplifies a silence resounding from absence and presence, thus amplifying the nearly impossible task of representing one's traumatic past to another. Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future" emphasizes the importance of forming counter-narratives from the remnants of disaster. DeLillo heralds the multitude of voices rising from the streets of New York

through both testimonials and fictions that perpetuate cultural memory. Next I examine Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* by applying Bakhtin's dialogic theory (utterance as open ended) and his concepts of architectonics (how the parts rely on the whole) to the novel's complex narrative structure. A primary characteristic of Foer's fiction communicates trauma through meta-textual representations. These meta-texts offer a multiplicity of voices: counter-narratives rising from traumatic aftermath that illustrate both the actual sites and the transference of traumatic experience. Finally, I conclude with Bakhtin's emphasis on the novel as offering an authoring of self that highlights positions of ethical accountability in the retention of cultural memory.

Signs of Silence in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*

Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* rises out of a landscape now demarcated by absent spaces in the skyline. The novel's meta-textual employment of texts within texts, images, letters, handwriting, drawings, icons, and quite simply, nothingness, exhibit the gaps between experience and discourse. Foer's use of multiple voices within complex narrative structures exhibits experimentation with traditional novelistic formats. These twists on traditional forms amplify the generic qualities of trauma literature. Foer exploits many narrative structures/styles of conventional novels by delving into Bildungsroman, confessional realism, and one-sided epistolary arrangements in order to represent the chaos of traumatic events. Both the meta-textual and the twist on traditional narrative form create aesthetic artifacts that disrupt reader expectation and amplify the sites of transference holding readers accountable for the

retention of cultural memory, thus making it possible to engage in trauma literature in ethical-empathetic ways.

The chaos of trauma suffered during the actual occurrence often becomes too real for comprehension; psychological coping defenses ask that victims deny what they witness. Even afterward, once the mind has an opportunity to process the occurrence, survivors search for distance gained through objectivity. DeLillo reminds us that

We have to take the shock and horror as it is. But living language is not diminished. The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us. ... language is inseparable from the world that provokes it. The writer begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately. Before politics, before history and religion, there is the primal terror. People falling from the towers hand in hand. This is part of the counter-narrative, hands and spirits joining, human beauty in the crush of meshed steel. ("In the Ruins" 39)

Specific details reach us through repeated words and images of box cutters, paper and ash, people running through the streets under a threatening sky. Reality is reduced to the surreal, and we struggle to make sense. The writer attempts to give meaning from the chaos of traumatic experience, weaving these into life narratives.

Foer's first twist on traditional narrative forms comes as the novel's main plot centers on Oskar Schell's post-modern Bildungsroman quest. Oskar's search comes out of the guilt for not having answered his father's last call on the morning of 9/11. His inability to speak to his father for the last time signifies a "betrayal" that continually wracks him with guilt (Codde 244). His quest begins nearly two years after the funeral. While going through his dad's belongings, he knocks over a vase, and within the remnants of fragments on the floor he finds a key marked with the word "Black." Oskar

sets out through New York City, visiting every Black listed in the phonebook, searching for what the key unlocks. The task is overwhelming, but Oskar's journey reaches the lives of several 9/11 survivors. He chronicles the search in his journal, "The Stuff that Happened to Me": a meta-text that essentially encompasses the whole novel. Oskar's meta-narrative provides readers with a poignant account of the various voices that rise from the ruins. He meets interesting New Yorkers who genuinely relate to his loss and share pieces of their history during the course of his journey. The hope within his quest is to discover something that brings him closer to his father. In the process of looking for what the key opens, Oskar feels as if it opens everything. Foer's embedding of the meta-textual journal as encompassing the novel demonstrates the need for and creation of an artifact for retention in cultural memory.

Foer amplifies several generic features of trauma literature through representation. Each character deals with the fragmentation of experience through self-awareness gained through epistolary writing. Thomas, Oskar's grandfather, has not spoken since surviving the bombing of Dresden. He communicates to others by writing in journals, often referring back to past "conversations" for immediate sentences. He also writes unsent letters to his son, who always retains the position of implied reader. Likewise, Oskar's grandmother writes her past in letters addressed to Oskar. Her writings exemplify the confessional through the epistolary generic markers of the novel.

Grandfather's journals metaphorically show how word becomes materialized in the world. Readers catch glimpses of these pages while he interacts with others. Usually, these letters often leave their mark. For example, when he meets the woman who later

becomes his wife, he explains to her why he does not speak. She responds with tears: “she covered her eyes with her hands and cried, tears seeped between her fingers and collected in the little webs” (*Extremely* 30). As she continues crying, he rips a page from his journal “and used it to dry her cheeks, my explanation and apology ran down her face like mascara” (31). Grandfather’s words literally become tactile images that affect his immediate surroundings. Grandfather also authors himself *on* himself. He demarcates his body, objectifying the self in order to communicate with another.

The generic marker of trauma’s absence-in-presence through the epistolary also occupies positions in the novel. Oskar’s grandparents create “nothing spaces” around their apartment. These are places for them to gain solitude. It is within one such “nothing space” that grandfather asks his wife to write her life story. His suggestion comes out of the redemptive cultural myth that life writing reclaims and heals past traumatic experience: “I thought maybe if she could express herself rather than suffer herself, if she had a way to relieve the burden... I told her there’s nothing to know, just let it come out, she put her hands on the typewriter, like a blind person feeling someone’s face for the first time” (119). While she spends several days “putting all her life into her life story,” he recalls the generative act of co-creating: “feeling the feeling she was feeling, the exhilaration of building the world anew, I heard from behind the door the sounds of creation, the letters pressing into the paper” (119-20). In her act of composing her life, she fills the page with nothing. She takes him to the room to show the stacks of pages. She tells him these pages are her life. She says, “I just made it up to the present moment. Just now. I’m all caught up with myself. The last thing I wrote was ‘I’m going

to show him what I've written. I hope he loves it'" (120). When he picks up the pages full of blank space, he gets a paper cut that smears the page. Readers witness the following three blank pages with only a slight smudge of blood running along the edge, marking his handling of the empty manuscript. Foer's meta-textual example shows how Grandmother's act of writing herself only amplifies the silence. Her speaking the unspeakable is represented by blank pages. The paper cut symbolizes a wounding from the text, leaving a trace of presence in absence.

Grandmother, in her confessional letters to Oskar, recapitulates her past and works toward bringing her history to the present. She confides to Oskar that she never wrote down her life story in that "nothing space." She sat in that room and pretended to write by hitting the space bar repeatedly: "My life story was spaces" (176). She defines the marital communication barriers as having "everything to say to each other, but no ways to say it" (81). The narrative's amplifications of silence convey the futility in expressing experience to another, even a loving other as husband and wife. Such breakdowns exemplify the outsideness always occupied by another person. Communication breakdowns are a recurring theme in the novel, often emphasizing narrative ruptures. An innovative means of portraying rupture is through an overload of information where Grandfather's journals become visually compelling. As the narrative moves progressively toward the present moment, the paper in his journal runs out. His writing becomes smaller, and more compressed by both time and space. Visually this works well on the page with words laying on top of the other, eventually becoming indecipherable, forming a text-less black mass amplifying the silence: no room yields no

voice. Foer's use of epistolary letters and journals denotes the self-reflective positioning that shows the paradox of witnessing: bringing the past to the present, and overcoming the silence in absence toward textual artifacts that preserve personal memory, thus leading to retention in culture.

At this point in the novel, Oskar and Grandfather's narratives come to co-exist in the meta-textual "Stuff That Happened to Me." Oskar's journal writing carries the novel to its conclusion. Here, his narrative provides readers with a touching representation of various voices that rise out of the ruins. The multiple voices resulting from Oskar's account yields a multitude of counter narratives that relays fragmented experience in the aftermath and shows how they rebuild their lives post 9/11. These counter-narratives help to define our accountability in retaining the cultural memory of those lost when the towers fell. The act of cultural memory does not necessarily grant the clinical redemptive act through retelling, but does in some ways offer redemption in the act of remembrance.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Don DeLillo writes that "plots reduce the world" ("In the Ruins" 34). DeLillo reminds readers how we make sense of our world through narrative structures: news media, word of mouth, testimonies, and religious and cultural beliefs. For those affected by atrocity, plots serve as a response, a means of taking "us beyond the hard numbers of dead and missing and give us a glimpse of elevated being" (34). The creation of counter-narratives, and their importance, brings materiality out of the word to spark its effect in others. Counter-narratives evolve from the thousands of whispers telling of lives saved by circumstance or lives lost in ruins. The use of fictional narrative emphasizes a need to represent trauma through multiple voices, to counter the master

discourse surging through our media—a totalizing threat of politicized history. Similar to Philip Gourevitch’s reporting of how the Hutu media shaped its master narrative, the authoritative discourse of the War on Terror attempts to shape how we process the aftermath. The media conglomerates that replayed the images of the planes colliding into buildings over and over sought to graft the hyper-reality onto our eyes. Yet stories surfaced in the days and weeks afterward: financial reports embedded in concrete, appointments that saved lives, and the voices of lost loved ones left on answering machines. These stories became ingrained in our cultural memory. Foer’s counter-narrative crafted through Oskar’s collection of interviews, offers a fictional means of having these stories speak back to the master narrative. Foer retains the resemblance of individual lives through aesthetic artifacts—these are memories that become materialized, retold in images, words, and voice—of Oskar’s narrative that offers us “glimpses of elevated being.”

The “Excess of Seeing” in *Everything is Illuminated*

They stared—glared—at one another, their voices (it was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least to Shreve) shades too) quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath.

– William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*

Though both works by Foer are fictionalized representations, in many ways *Everything is Illuminated* can be classified as autobiographical fiction. Foer did go to the Ukraine in search of a woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. His poorly planned journey to find Augustine and Trachimbrod, the Jewish shtetl of his family origins, turns up a vacuous landscape. Disillusioned, Foer travels to Prague and spends one month writing. The nothingness from his search turns into the imaginative representations of what could have been. Foer bends historical truths toward fictionalized worlds.

The aim of this section applies Bakhtin's dialogic theory (utterance as open ended) and his concepts of architectonics (positioning of author, implied author, hero, implied reader and the co-creation of this text showing a true process of creative understanding) to the unfolding narrative structure found in *Everything is Illuminated*. The novel plays with many of trauma literature's generic characteristics—those being aesthetic representations of language and memory lapses, the difficulty of expression, and the silence that contains both absence and presence. The fragmentary structure of the narrative shows the lacunas that occur between thought and expression. Alex's narrative focuses on the psychological sites of trauma in writing out lived experience, whereas Jonathan's novel effectively portrays the gaps of thought and expression, meta-textual artifacts, and the significance of overcoming the poverties of language and memory in order to preserve the past. The novel's meta-narrative portrays three perspectives: the first is Foer as implied author, crafting a historical novel of family origins that focuses on Trachimbrod (a Jewish shtetl); the second perspective embodies Alex's story, a Ukrainian

travel guide who narrates the novel's primary plot of taking Jonathan through the country in search of Augustine and the shtetl; and finally, the third perspective is told through epistolary letters that Alex writes to Jonathan concerning the difficulties of writing and representation. All narrative threads eventually culminate into a Bakhtinian co-experience through creative understanding. Foer portrays the creative energies of Alex and Jonathan as they move from naive artists toward an illumination of experience. Readers witness the stylistic maturation of Jonathan and Alex's writings throughout the course of the novel. Like Shreve and Quentin in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, Jonathan and Alex craft separate narratives, significantly struggling with limitations of language and memory that eventually come together, through creative understanding. All of which show the positions (author, reader, character) related to the co-creativity of textual events that allow for a co-accountability in witnessing.

Everything is Illuminated demonstrates the struggles found within the act of imaginative creation. Jonathan's novel, a work in progress, contains intentionally bad writing showing the complex growth of composition over the course of the novel. At the beginning the writing is dreadful; it feels forced and inelegant and is often overly sentimentalized. For example Jonathan writes: "Brood was afraid any tears of her own would cause the walls of the old house to give way, so she sandbagged them behind her eyes, exiled them to someplace deeper, safer" (*Everything* 97). Alex addresses this issue of poor writing in one of his letters to Jonathan:

We are being very nomadic with the truth yes? The both of us? Do you think that this is acceptable when we are writing about things that occurred? If your answer is no, then why do you write about Trachimbrod and your grandfather in the

manner that you do, and why do you command me to be untruthful? If your answer is yes, then this creates another question, which is if we are to be such nomads with the truth, why do we not make the story more premium than life? It seems to me that we are making the story even inferior. (179)

For Alex, writing in this manner misses the mark of truthfully representing lived experience. If a witness is to hold accountability for representing what happened, then the truth should speak easily for itself. If he is to embellish the story, then why not make the narrative better than life? In turn, Alex wonders why anyone would want to read what a witness has written. Such a statement indirectly implicates the implied reader of the text (the actual implied reader as well as Jonathan's reading of Alex's draft). If the imaginative world is wide open, then there are no limits as "to how excellent we could make life seem" (180).

The authorial Foer structures the narrative in this way to demonstrate the act of aesthetically crafting art out of the chaos of lived experience. Foer's disorienting narrative structure amplifies and conflates the positions of author, implied author, hero, and reader. Bakhtin's architectonics allows for specifying the relations between persons and entities through their temporal and spatial positions. It recognizes entities as both distinct from and correlated to each other as they exist in the world; each is outside of the other, a position that Bakhtin refers to as "outsidedness."

The temporal and spatial correspondence between the authorial Foer and the character Jonathan amplifies the co-creation of aesthetic artifact. Jonathan's framing the history of his grandparents, even their pre-history, illustrates the importance of community, and the preservation of memory (both cultural and personal). Jonathan

builds this fictive novel tracing the non-truths of his “great-great-great-great-great-grandmother,” pulled from the River Brod by Yankel D. Yankel “adopts” the girl, whom he names after the river, and provides her with fabricated family stories that provide protection. Yankel’s creation of non-truths to protect his daughter simulates Jonathan’s (both real and implied) fictional representations of his own past. Yankel writes love letters with his left hand to say they were from his “never-wife” as he struggles to “remember in earnest the weight of gestures she never made, long for the un-weight of her un-arm slung over his too real chest” (48-49). Yankel repeats this untruth so many times that it becomes impossible for him to remember his life before. Here, in creating this past of haunted love, he makes his never-marriage “more premium” than life. Yankel’s inventions of “non-truths” mirror the authorial Foer’s creation of this aesthetic artifact.

Jonathan makes use of several meta-textual artifacts from the shtetl—personal letters and diaries as well as more communal religious texts, plays, poetry, and prophetic writings found in *The Book of Dreams* and *The Book of Antecedents*—to further exemplify how societal texts preserve cultural memory, by retaining narratives for those who search for them. *The Book of Antecedents* is annually updated by members of the community: “Even the most delinquent students read *The Book of Antecedents* without skipping a word, for they knew that they too would one day inhabit its pages, that if they could only get hold of a future edition, they would be able to read their mistakes” (196). The book defines many characteristics of both the shtetl and Jewish life. Under a heading

that reads “Jews Have Six Senses,” the entry contrasts how Gentiles and Jews use memory differently:

While Gentiles experience and process the world through the traditional senses, and use memory only as a second-order means of interpreting events, for Jews memory is no less primary than the prick of a pin, or its silver glimmer... The Jew is pricked by a pin and remembers other pins. It is only by tracing the pinprick back to other pinpricks. (198)

Here the writing conveys a satirical sense of recorded memory: “when his grandfather’s fingers fell asleep from stroking his great-grandfather’s damp forehead, when Abraham tested the knife to be sure Isaac would feel no pain—that the Jew is able to know why it hurts. When a Jew encounters a pin, he asks: *What does it remember like?*” (198-99).

Within those texts, cultural memory reflects layers of past and current rewritings.

Hebrew texts trace lineage through repetition, a recorded causal chain stretching back in time. According to *The Book of Antecedents* a Jew is capable of recalling other pins through recorded cultural memory ingrained through reading, listening, or historical tradition. Hebrew rhetoric remains demarcated by its poetic discourse that demonstrates the use of repetition and parallelism (Sloane 325). Blocked Biblical passages portray such poetic parallelism to the point of musical refrains: passages for chanting and reflection. *The Book of Antecedents* provides a related entry titled “Ifactifice,” defined as:

Music is beautiful. Since the beginning of time, we (the Jews) have been looking for a new way of speaking. We often blame our treatment throughout history on terrible misunderstandings. (Words never mean what we want them to mean.) If we communicated with something like music, we would never be misunderstood, because there is nothing in music to understand. This was the origin of Torah

chanting and, in all likelihood, Yiddish—the most onomatopoeic of all languages. It is also the reason that the elderly among us, particularly those who survived a pogrom, hum so often, indeed seem unable to stop humming, seem dead set on preventing any silence or linguistic meaning in. But until we find this new way of speaking, until we can find a nonapproximate vocabulary, non-sense words are the best thing we've got. Ifactifice is one such word. (*Everything* 203)

Foer's fabricated Hebrew anthologies demonstrate the complex recursive relationship between society and text. The shtetl's collections exemplify how language is material, demonstrating the everyday use, depicting how the Jews of Trachimbrod saw their world. "Ifactifice" shows the cognition of constructing representation and the limits of language.

Language barriers work in a multitude of ways within *Everything is Illuminated*. These breakdowns amplify positioning and limits of representation for readers. Alex's chapters are particularly welcomed after readers encounter Jonathan's rough drafts of his novel on Trachimbrod. Alex's language barrier displays the difficulties found within communication itself, and coupled with Jonathan's creative writing, they show the growth pangs of artistic expression. Readers initially encounter Alex's awkward narrative. Portrayed as not fluent in English, Alex mistranslates due to his misuse of a thesaurus in his attempt to use American slang. At the onset readers are lost in translation, distanced through attempts at deciphering Alex's misuse of modern language, and yet Alex becomes charmingly awkward, genuine in his attempts to overcome language barriers and to connect with his English readership. Just as he struggles to find the means to communicate, readers in turn encounter the same struggle in deciphering what he has to say: "My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all of my many friends dub me Alex, because that is a more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name" (1). What

is at first a frustrating reading experience eventually becomes an endearing narrative that readers look forward to in his representative chapters and letters.

Alex's narrative is what drives the novel's plot forward, depicting Jonathan's search for Trachimbrod and Augustine. Another way Alex represents the amplified positioning through language use is when he writes the story to Jonathan (both character and implied author), often using asides asking for authorial advice: "[I]t seemed like a very reasonable thing to say. But how does this make you feel, Jonathan, in the luminescence of everything that occurred?" (6). Similar to Quinton and Shreve crafting the back story of the Sutpen trauma in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the authorial asides create narrative interruptions that alter the perspective of reader identification. Readers are drawn away from the immediacy of the text by shifting positions toward emphasizing the creation of the text out of chaotic experience. Retaining these asides shows the creative understanding taking place between Alex and Jonathan, serving to unite the epistolary letters with this narrative thread, and demonstrating the intimacies found in co-creation of the text. The asides show Alex's process of self-reflection at the moment of writing in two ways: one represents internalized reactions Alex had at the moment of occurrence; the second demonstrates reactions to the account that rise from sites of recollection and writing.

According to Alex, if this is an autobiographical fictionalized account of his and Jonathan's "very rigid search," then why not embellish the truth? To lighten the novel's sorrowful weight, Alex's character often serves as the novel's comic relief and engaging conscience in his portrayal as a jovial ladies man in his city of Odessa:

I dig to disseminate very much currency at famous nightclubs in Odessa. Lamborghini Countaches are excellent, and so are cappuccinos. Many girls want to be carnal with me in many good arrangements, notwithstanding the Inebriated Kangaroo, the Gorky Tickle, and the Unyielding Zookeeper. (2)

Yet, his way with the ladies sadly demonstrates a further breakdown of communication, and these quaint embellishments are seen for what they are, a fabrication that is “being premium” with the truth.

Alex’s lack of firsthand experience with English texts makes the structure of his writing confusing at times, especially regarding the textual portrayal of dialogue. Contrary to traditional dialogue formats, Alex’s depictions of conversations come in full paragraphs with only quotation marks demarcating who says what. This creates some confusion as the reader gets lost within the discourse. An effective example is when Jonathan tries to explain the motives behind searching for Augustine:

First he exhibited me a photograph. It was yellow and folded and had many pieces of fixative affixing it together. “See this?” he said. “This here is my grandfather Safran.” He pointed to a young man who I will say appeared very much like the hero, and could have been the hero. “This was taken during the war.” “From who?” “No, not taken like that. The photograph was made.” “I understand.” “These people he is with are the family that saved him from the Nazis.” “What?” “They...saved...him...from...the...Na..zis.” “In Trachimbrod?” “No, somewhere outside of Trachimbrod. He escaped the Nazi raid on Trachimbrod. Everyone else was killed. He lost a wife and a baby.” “He lost?” “They were killed by the Nazis.” (59)

This narrative technique effectively portrays the chaos of translation. The struggle to communicate and to make meaning remains compacted within the confining space of paragraphs. But more importantly it demonstrates what Bakhtin refers to as the open-

endedness of dialogue. Within the text, discourse is offset by quotation marks denoting when one speaker ends and another begins. Bakhtin sees these marks as presenting:

The boundaries of each concrete utterance as a unit of speech communication [that] are determined by a change of speaking subjects, that is, a change of speakers. Any utterance – from a short (single word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel... has an absolute beginning and an absolute end. (“Speech Genres” 71)

The finalized utterance invites a response, and in turn, becomes open ended. Foer complicates the open-endedness of discourse by overlapping his characters’ dialogue. Even when the voices become confused and coupled, they still retain hints of characterization, thus providing a textual means for readers to co-create the experience, reminding us of our accountability in witnessing.

Another scene that demonstrates co-creation is the dialogue, and subsequent translation, that occurs while Alex, Grandfather, and Jonathan drive out through the countryside in search of Trachimbrod. Grandfather tells Alex to tell Jonathan about the land before the war:

“Tell him that the land is premium for farming.” “Grandfather desires me to tell you that the land is very premium for farming.” “And tell him that much of this land was destroyed when the Nazis came, but before it was yet more beautiful. They bombed with airplanes and then advanced through it in tanks.” “But it does not appear like this.” “They made it all again after the war. Before it was different.” “You were here before the war?” “Look at those people working in their underwear in the fields,” the hero said from the back seat. I inquired Grandfather about this. “This is not abnormal,” he said. “It is very hot in the morning. Too hot to be anxious about clothing.” I told the hero. He was covering many pages in his diary. I wanted Grandfather to continue the before conversation, and to tell me when he was in the area, but I could perceive that the conversation had been finished. (111)

The unfolding discourse demonstrates several layers of communication, what is said and left unsaid. On one level there is the dialogue between just Alex and Grandfather in their native tongue. Second, there is the back story, the hidden history of Grandfather's life in this part of Ukraine. It is a conversation that abruptly ends, a history Alex has to wait to uncover. Third, is Jonathan's diary that reflects the dialogue he holds with himself through the written word. Possibly he records the conversation just as Alex retells it in this account or as it reflects on something entirely different. Finally, there is the dialogue as it unfolds between the three of them in the car. The scenic countryside also reveals secrets of its own, making connections to the three of them in differing ways.

When the car comes to a stop in front of a dilapidated house and Alex goes alone to knock on the door, the textual dialogue remains portrayed in constricting paragraphs. Alex recalls, "I could hear, as I approached, that she was humming. (This is called humming, yes?)" (116). This aside is not only for Jonathan but also mirrors "Ifactifice," a reference Jonathan makes in another chapter. Alex also conflates both narratives when he describes the woman's face while she denies knowing of Trachimbrod or Sofiowka: "She presented me with a sad smile, which was like when the ant in Yankel's [a character of Jonathan's novel on Trachimbrod] ring made to conceal its face—I knew it was a symbol, but I did not know what it was a symbol for" (117). This not only parallels the two narratives between past and present, but it also slows down Alex's story to depict a crucial scene. Since this initial encounter turns up no information, Alex walks away. She resumes her humming. He internalizes the failure of the situation:

I felt as if all of the weight was residing on me. As with Father, there are only so many times that you can utter “It does not hurt” before it begins to hurt even more than the hurt. You become enlightened of the feeling of feeling hurt, which is worse, I am certain, than the existent hurt. Not-truths hung in front of me like fruit. Which could I pick for the hero? Which could I pick for Grandfather? Which for myself? Which for Little Igor? Then I remembered that I had taken the photograph of Augustine, and although I do not know what it was that coerced me to feel that I should, I rotated back around and displayed the photograph to the woman. (117)

Alex learns that Augustine is not Augustine. At this point, non-truths present various counter-narratives that he might choose from. It is the tangible artifact of the photograph that forces Alex to go back. It is the photograph that forces Augustine to confess. Here Alex’s structure of the narrative takes on the more traditional mode of representation. The dialogue becomes separated in line breaks, slowing down the moments of the narrative; thus, notifying readers when one utterance ends and the other begins. He asks,

“Have you ever witnessed anyone in the photograph?”

“No,” she said. “No.” I saw a tear descend to her white dress. It too would dry and leave a mark.

“Have you ever witnessed anyone in the photograph?” I inquired, and I felt cruel, I felt like an awful person, but I was certain that I was performing the right thing.

“No,” she said, “I have not. They all look like strangers.”

I periled everything.

“Has anyone in this photograph ever witnessed you?”

Another tear descended.

“I have been waiting for you for so long.”

I pointed to the car. “We are searching for Trachimbrod.”

“Oh,” she said, and she released a river of tears. “You are here. I am it.” (118)

The exchange between Alex and Augustine depicts the repressed memories on the site of trauma. Alex shows a meticulous use of vocabulary in representing the scene when

everything hinges upon this moment: the act of witnessing and her denial of witnessing to anyone in the photo; the tear leaving its mark; his struggle to gain insight, to press through; his “periled” thought. Alex shows the dynamic of relationships and perspectives by turning the question into: “Has anyone in this photograph ever witnessed you?” By doing so, he turns the responsibility of witnessing toward those placed within the photograph. Augustine becomes the living, tangible artifact. She houses the memories, holds the past, remains defined by Trachimbrod. She embodies cultural memory and the responsibility of bearing the past toward the present.

Augustine carries and embodies the counter narrative by retaining relics that come to signify the memory of lived experience. Her house holds the remains of Trachimbrod; it is full of relics organized in boxes, and photographs cover the walls. Alex’s depiction of Augustine inviting everyone inside the house reveals another aside toward Jonathan and the reader: “Augustine had a very unusual walk, which went from here to there with heaviness. She could not move any faster than slow. It looked like she had a leg that was damaged goods. (If we knew then, Jonathan, would we have still gone in?)” (146). Here Alex’s narrative builds suspense, demanding that readers look further into the text for clues as to who this woman really is. She is not the Augustine they search for, but she does indeed hold the memories of Trachimbrod. Alex writes: “We watched her, as if the whole world and its future were because of her” (148). She presents Grandfather and Jonathan several relics pulled from boxes: photographs, letters, diaries, hair, and wedding rings. Augustine tells them, “Here is Rivka’s wedding ring. [...] She hid it in a jar that she put in the ground. I knew this because she told me” (152). Rivka tells her to hold

onto the ring “just in case.” Many Jews buried their belongings in the ground. Augustine tells them: “The ground is still filled with rings, and money, and pictures, and Jewish things. I was only able to find a few of them. But they fill the earth” (152). At this point in the narrative readers are uncertain as to whom she talks, Grandfather or Jonathan. Moments later, when things become “illuminated” between Augustine and Grandfather, their past comes to the present.

Rivka believed that someone might come looking for artifacts. The ring exists for others to experience, to create meaning from, to decipher and carry their significance through culture. Jonathan’s search for the shtetl brings Grandfather and Augustine’s past toward the present. This particular scene within the novel’s narrative places Alex and Jonathan with a similar outsidership that the reader occupies. Alex and Jonathan are asked to remain outside the house, where Alex longs to be on the other side to take part in the secret dialogue occurring between Grandfather and Augustine. He reflects: “But I knew that my side was on the outside with the hero. Part of me hated this, and part of me was grateful, *because once you hear something, you can never return to the time before you heard it*” (156 emphasis added). Alex’s statement indirectly implicates his readership, whether it is Jonathan (as implied author) or another implied reader. Once we witness to someone—once we hear of certain events, of traumatic lived experiences—we are altered, fragmented, and become secondary witnesses. We struggle to make meaning and adapt this into our own chaotic narratives, exemplifying the transaction of trauma literature.

This scene also depicts Alex focusing on the layers of representation through language that yields a co-creation of the text. This technique amplifies the psychological characteristic of trauma, the fragmentation and silence rising in the transference: “After that there was a famine of words for a long time” (156). Alex remains on the outside, attempting to piece together the fleeting fragments of what just passed him. He attempts small talk with Jonathan, but Alex can tell this leads to nowhere as well: “I did not utter a thing, so that he would preserve. This was so difficult at times, because there existed so much silence. But I ~~understand~~ understood that the silence was necessary for him to talk” (157). Alex demarcates the text with the strikeout, thus visually representing his grammatical correction. This signifies to readers the stylistic growth and evolving process of his writing. Retaining the strikeout in the text shows the raw material of creating, or rather Alex’s attempts at creative understanding. This also implicates readers in the co-creation of the text.

The novel’s main plot continues by focusing on Alex and the co-creation of narrative through the transference of trauma. Alex’s narration portrays the responsibilities that rest upon him in being a translator. He mediates between Jonathan and Augustine, but not only this, the story Grandfather implores from Augustine is not just for Jonathan, but for Alex. Upon hearing Augustine’s testimony, Alex must simultaneously occupy two spaces at once. Alex must translate these words to Jonathan, an act that places Alex as secondary witness because this story must pass through him. Here the dialogue becomes very rapid, thus depicting the site of trauma, the difficulty of recall and the silence that follows:

“Tell him what you know.” It was only then that I understood that ‘him’ was me. “No,” she said. “Please,” he said. “No,” she said. “Please.” “It was all very rapid, you must understand. You ran and you could not care about what was behind you or you would stop running.” “Tanks?” “One day.” “One day?” “Some departed before.” “Before they came?” “Yes.” “But you did not.” “No.” “You were lucky to endure.” Silence. “No.” Silence. “Yes.” Silence. We could have stopped it there. We could have viewed Trachimbrod, returned to the car...” (184)

Alex wants the story to stop here because he knows that he (and readers alike) will be changed after hearing this account. He writes, “I was not ashamed and I was not scared. I was not anything. I just desired to know what would occur next. (I do not intend what would occur in Augustine’s story, but amid Grandfather and her.)” (185). This parenthetical aside is for both Jonathan and intended readers as Alex demonstrates the difficulties of living the co-experience of this story passing through him:

“They made us in lines,” she said. “They had lists. They were logical.” I translated for the hero as Augustine spoke. “They burned the synagogue.” “They burned the synagogue.” “That was the first thing they did.” “That was first.” “Then they made all of the men in lines.” *You cannot know how it felt to have to hear these things and then repeat them, because when I repeated them, I felt like I was making them new again.* (185 emphasis added)

The repetition of lines effectively shows the difficulty of translation and the sites of transference, Alex’s becoming a witness to Augustine’s traumatic narrative. This scene demonstrates the intricacies of traumatic discourse, the multiple voices rising to convey chaotic experience, and, more importantly, the difficulty of expressing this representation. Translating Augustine’s traumatic experience invokes emotional cognitive responses in Alex. He writes, “I will tell you that what made this story most scary was how rapid it was moving. I do not mean what happened in the story, but how

the story was told. I felt that it could not be stopped” (186). The narrative contains its own structure. Augustine must tell her testimony and the weight moves upon all parties involved, eventually becoming too much for Jonathan to bear: “‘I don’t want to hear any more,’ the hero said, so it was at this point that I ceased translating” (186). What follows is a crucial moment of Alex’s narrative, a direct aside to Jonathan, for he has not heard/read this point of the story onward. Alex writes: “(Jonathan, if you still do not want to know the rest, do not read this. But if you do persevere, do not do so for curiosity. That is not a good enough reason.)” (186). By doing so he not only implicates Jonathan, he implicates intended readers as well, thus making the ethical stance of what it means to listen to another’s testimony. Essentially demonstrating Bakhtin’s “non-alibi of being,” that knowledge remains dependent upon our participation and obligation to act and answer for another (*Toward* 49). When Alex progresses toward the climax of Grandfather’s confession, and ultimately the novel’s “illumination,” he portrays the intensity of the situation in one paragraph that spans several pages, where words start running together: “I looked at Grandmother and shekissedmeontheforehead and I kissedheronthemouth and our tearsmixedonourlips and then I kissedyourfather many times I secured him from Grandmother’s arms and Iheldhimwithmuchforce so much that he started crying I said I love you I love you I love you I loveyou Iloveyou...” (*Everything* 251). Alex writes the narrative’s progression with words running upon words, textually showing the rapidity with which he attempts to convey the experience. Alex’s final portion of his narrative depicts the act of representing chaotic experience as

is the significance of community. Jonathan (and his readers) gives meaning to the artifact (relic and novel); he creates its history through the formation of counter-narratives. By doing so, Foer reminds readers of our accountability in carrying forth these stories into society as a means of preserving the individual against the threatening totality of grand narratives.

CONCLUSION

Those that perished rely on us to speak. [...] Words also have materiality when they fictively render that process into a text that lives in its effects on others. Narrative provides an order, a sequence, an explanatory concatenation that represents in mediated form a prior reality. Narratives shape events with meaning, purpose and teleology.

–Daniel Swartz *Imagining the Holocaust*

This chapter summarizes the ethical-aesthetic transaction within trauma literature.

As ethical writers and readers, we respect and experience traumatic discourse as fully as possible, while remaining aware that this transaction centers on a representation of remembrance. A critical ethical-aesthetic theory evaluates trauma literature in four ways: 1) by demonstrating the ethical dialogic that occurs between writer and reader and by identifying the generic literary devices that signify that transaction through the text; 2) by examining how writers imaginatively portray historical evidence; 3) by valuing the human experiences represented through the text as well as by reflecting on the multiple voices that speak from the co-creation or co-experience of these representations; and 4) by sustaining the redemptive act of cultural memory through the “necessary betrayal” of continual witnessing.

Throughout this study several of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories have provided means of examining the problematic claims set forth by comparative literature critics. Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, for example, addresses how writers represent the unrepresentable through a position that is distanced from the reader and the text but is always in relation to both.

Writers and readers alike realize that we cannot embody another's experience, thus all we have is representation. Genres provide a framework for how writers represent the chaos of traumatic experience in their stories. In addition, genres define how readers come to a text with certain cultural expectations. Michael Holquist sums up Bakhtin's view of genre as cultural perspective: "Bakhtin treats genres as a sub-topic of the larger problem of point of view; a genre is a particular way of looking at the world" (*Dialogism* 163). The novel for Bakhtin is not only a historical marker, but also it provides a means of perception. Holquist summarizes: "the novel is for him an event in not only the history of literature, but the history of *perception*: for those who have experienced novelness, the world will not look the same" (163). What Holquist and Bakhtin claim for the novel extends to other genres. Testimony, for example, embodies the cultural perspective where word equals truth. As Holquist reminds readers, "A point of view is never complete in itself; it is rather the perception of an event as it is perceived from a particular place, locatable only as opposed to any other place from which the event might be viewed" (163). Beginning with the writer-text-reader diagram in the introduction, this dissertation illustrates how perspectives of truth fall upon a continuum of genre expectations. Writers employ elements of genre in their representations of traumatic experience, and for writers of testimony, truth remains relative to one's position and perspective. A life story with embellishments that follows a novelistic structure becomes memoir. Working from these expectations, this study briefly surveys twentieth-century American literature for how authors represent historical atrocities using genres that frame truth in different ways: "values are sculpted out of time and space" (163).

Throughout this study I examine the various, and often innovative, ways writers use and distort narrative techniques to portray traumatic experience. Elie Wiesel, Philip Gourevitch, and Ishmael Beah rely on more traditional narrative structures of testimony and memoir to convey their experiences, while Kurt Vonnegut and Jonathan Safran Foer turn on traditional modes of representation to amplify certain characteristics of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. An ethical-aesthetic mode of critically reading trauma literature leads me to ask: How does one represent the unrepresentable? How can survivors convey their traumatic experiences to another person? Lawrence Langer addresses such concerns when he writes:

But the moment one speaks of "the reality of the Holocaust," one is compelled to include its "unreality," since the two coexist as a fundamental principle of creation... The unreality - the presence of children in graveyards, their obsession with death, the indefinite atmosphere which surrounds and threatens them - causes the aesthetic ground to shift continually, so that the reader is forced to grope for new footholds, and to alter his own interpretive point of view along with the narrative, until uncertainty becomes part of his experience of the narrative vision too... Language itself and not merely the idea behind the language reshaping and modifying a reader's sense of reality, it is exemplified by a comparatively small number of modern writers. (*Holocaust and Literary* 149)

Textual representations can cause disorientation across generic limits. Traumatic representations strike a reader/audience in ways that are beyond their capacity to fully imagine or understand. Both writer and reader acknowledge that these representations in each genre are limited and that one cannot live another person's experience. Even survivors cannot relive the experience through the retelling. In addressing Bakhtin's dialogic theory, David Patterson accounts for such representations in the novel:

Because encounter in the novel is encounter between discourses, "language in the novel," Bakhtin points out, "not only represents, but itself serves as the object of representation" (Dialogic 49) This insight may help us to see why the subject of the Holocaust novel is the word, particularly as it interacts with an alien word or discourse. In this connection Bakhtin introduces his notion of polyglossia [heteroglossia] or the multiplicity of languages that makes possible the encounter between the familiar and the foreign. Polyglossia draws language into a self-reflective process of speaking and response and makes the discourse of one responsive to the discourse of another. (*Shriek* 23)

Perhaps an ethical-aesthetic theory carries no greater responsibility toward the transaction of writing and reading, of speaking and response, than recognizing the multiple voices that lead to a co-creation or co-experience of the text.

The cognitive emotional transaction arising from the writer's imagination through the text to the reader's imagination reveals the co-experience and co-creation of the text. I allot for the physical and psychological response to the retelling of traumatic events. These physical responses are the quickening of pulse, shortness of breath, nervousness, sweating, shaking, that may lead to unwarranted psychological response as the repressed returning in the subconscious, nightmares. Even readers and witnesses may experience similar physical/psychological responses. This is the threat of the text. The dilemma is how to turn traumatic events into words, then toward the imagination of the reader. Through her fiction, Toni Morrison attempts fills in the gaps for her readers in order to: "expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it... I'm trying to fill in the blanks the slave narrative left—to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard" ("Site of Memory" 113). Foer's fictionalized representations, for example, continually demarcate these positions held by author, character, text and reader in this co-creation of filling in, or completing, the traumatic

narrative. The numerous disruptions within the narratives in all of these genres exemplify crucial moments where traumatic textual transference occurs between writer, text, and implied reader (and vice versa, reader, text, and implied writer). Disruptions amplify the cost of witnessing, what Eaglestone refers to as “necessary betrayals.” For Adorno and Levinas via Eaglestone, any aesthetic representation of atrocity is a betrayal. Disruptions amplify the co-experience created through the text, thus offering a deeper aesthetic experience for readers who internalize this co-experience of the text (art form). Daniel Schwarz writes of this transaction that provides a deeper significance: “when Holocaust history is personalized and dramatized, when abstractions and numbers give way to human drama, that the distance between us and the victim closes” (*Imagining* 149). Representation through remembrance and remembrance through representation offer writers and readers a textual site to engage in a critical ethical-aesthetic.

Morrison’s *Beloved* exhibits many of the narrative techniques discussed throughout this dissertation: elements of repressed trauma, multiple voices, narrative disruptions, co-creation of narrative, and cultural memory, what she refers to as “rememory,” a method of remembering through cultural awareness that demonstrates the co-experience of remembering through representation. The unwarranted return of *Beloved*, the actual haunting within the narrative’s plot represents Sethe’s (and her community’s) repression of trauma. The resulting multiplicity of voices emerging from community exemplifies the numerous narratives, which yields multiple perspectives, of Sethe’s traumatic act. The weaving of the retelling and the simultaneity of narrative elements among Sethe, Denver, and *Beloved* also demonstrate the co-experience in

recreating the past toward the present. Rememory also serves to emphasize the need to place one's story out into the world through cultural memory.

Important implications of culture and society resound throughout *Beloved*. Historical accounts are often preserved through cultural memory, oral tradition, and documentation records, and the American slave trade was certainly no exception. Morrison, by writing within the genre of historical fiction, frames her novel around the historical Margaret Garner, a freed slave who conducts infanticide to protect her newborn from returning to the plantation. Morrison, a twentieth-century American novelist dealing with a nineteenth-century atrocity, shows how this discussion of trauma literature is not delimited by modern day atrocities. Morrison employs the characteristics of historical fiction to conflate current contexts of freedom and gender with historical implications. She explores these issues through Sethe, the fictionalized Margaret Garner, in order to “plum [the protagonist's thoughts] for a subtext that [is] historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's ‘place’” (*Beloved* xvii). Morrison takes readers through a “repellent landscape (hidden, but not completely; deliberately buried, but not forgotten)... a cemetery inhabited by highly vocal ghosts” (xvii).

Ghost stories typically evolve around communal guilt and *Beloved*'s return literally embodies the communal haunting of repressed trauma. *Beloved* not only illustrates Sethe's horrific act of infanticide, but also indicts the society from which she was so abruptly claimed. Morrison writes in her introduction that she wants “the reader to be kidnapped, thrown ruthlessly into an alien environment as the first step into a shared

experience with the book's population—just as the characters were snatched from one place to another, from any place to any other, without preparation or defense" (xviii). She deliberately disorients audiences by placing readers in a tumultuous environment, nearly rendering the atrocity as personal experience. Morrison writes that she longed to disrupt the quiet of everyday life with "the chaos of the needy dead" (xix). The account of *Beloved*'s chaotic past, ultimately "not a story to pass on," illustrates the reader's responsibility to the echoing voices of victimized dead through the aspect of arduous representation—arduous from the disturbing images depicted, the guilt implied, and the implications of historically remaining tied to society.

Beloved also embodies the paradox of traumatic testimony, the demand for both silence as a respect for the dead and a betrayal of that silence by breaking it. Morrison illustrates this paradox by making *Beloved* a story "not to pass on" because "remembering seemed unwise" (324). The story is too crippling. Those that knew *Beloved* sought to disremember her: "After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her" (323). The novel's closure concerning communal repression exhibits the recursive elements of traumatic discourse. *Beloved*'s haunting emphasizes the communal and personal repression resulting from Sethe's act of infanticide. Morrison effectively demonstrates the faulty faculties of memory through the multiple retellings rising from the site of trauma, a site literally given the address of 124 Bluestone Road. The numerous voices retell the occurrence in a myriad of perspectives showing how language shapes culture and vice versa. Communal stories affect our perspectives. The voices

demonstrate a community's response and retention of unwelcome sites within cultural memory. The story is recaptured in meta-textual representations, retold through fragmented narratives, hearsay, rumors, news clippings, and firsthand witness accounts. The firsthand accounts are retold by the white men who came to claim her; an account that eventually culminates in Schoolteacher's story. Stamp Paid's recollection to Paul D. Garner remains influenced by a news clipping and secondhand hearsay. Finally Paul D. obtains the tale from Sethe herself, an account that differs from the earlier two by showing her intention to protect, not simply kill, her children. Disoriented readers must piece together the event by filtering through the multiple voices and stories within community. All the while readers remain reserved as to whose story represents the true experience. Multiple retellings reshape how one comes to terms with tragedy. Even by the time readers encounter Sethe's retelling, the story has already taken on a multitude of meanings so that readers are unable to fully accept her direct recounting.

Morrison requires her readers, like Sethe and Denver, to co-create the narrative experience. Readers continually reorient themselves to the unfolding narrative. She indirectly implicates her readers through scenes depicting acts of co-creation. One such event has Denver retelling her birth to Beloved. Denver, in retelling the story, does so through Beloved: "Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked" (91-92). She takes a position outside herself in order to see and experience the retelling through Beloved. This re-authoring of the self, also brings to light how both Denver and Beloved co-experience her life story: "The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down

together, Denver nursing Beloved's interest... Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was, something only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it" (92). Denver and Beloved's co-creation of Sethe's experience enlightens readers to the co-experience of the novel. Denver's recreation of the story, one that Sethe never completely told her, demonstrates Bakhtin's theory on how we rely on others to form our identity. While the space I occupy is unique, this I is also dependent upon others' accounts of birth and death. While my death is solely my experience, for this to hold unification another must provide the stability (Holquist 24-25). My story resides in the world of others.

Morrison's concept of rememory illustrates a person's story's continuation in the lives of others. Rememory essentially demonstrates the co-experience of remembering through representation. At one point in the narrative, Sethe defines rememory for Denver as:

Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world...Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (43-44)

The act of rememory encompasses all the paradigms discussed in *Beloved*. Rememory puts the fragmented pieces of narrative and self back together. Rememory is recursive between past and present experience and also enables the resurrection of the repressed in

the form of *Beloved*. As Sethe warns Denver, those sites are real. Sethe tells Denver that if she goes there, for she has never been, that place will affect her too. It threatens through co-experience. Sethe illuminates Denver's awareness of anguish. In the act of remembering and retelling, rememory raises awareness of one always outside another's experience but always in relation to it. For Sethe, rememory is communal, she says, "Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (43).

Rememory serves as a significant narrative device to conclude this study because rememory haunts us and directly implicates our responsibility as secondary witnesses. Rememory is cultural memory, our means of reshaping and retelling another's testimony. The texts covered in this study, from Wiesel's testimonial *Night* to the amplified hyper-realities found in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* to the endearing fiction of Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, resemble rememory narratives. As critical ethical-aesthetic readers, we encounter the stories of others and incorporate these into our lives. The co-experience of the text yields the witnessing on the writer and reader's parts to remember through representation.

Ultimately, I concede to a redemptive framing of what it means to read and write in the genres of trauma literature. However, I do not accept the event of reclaiming as a "healing" that favors the psychologically clinical ways of looking at trauma, a reclaiming of the self through retelling and reclaiming experience. Rather, due to the unbridgeable gap between experience and representation and between writer and reader, we can never

access the actual mind of the author nor relive the chaos that led to writing. We cannot unlock the motivations and reasons behind why atrocities occur. Langer warns: "The literature of atrocity, by design and of its very nature, frustrates any attempt to discover a moral reality behind the events it narrates; its questions compel not 'answers,' but a reliving of the nightmare that inspired them. And part of the nightmare is the impulse to reject the nightmare" (*Holocaust* 121). As secondary witnesses we contend with uncertainty and ambiguity and with no closure or answers. These textual representations require readers to examine and reflect on the multiple voices and levels of unending meaning in the wake of atrocity. As Michael Bernard-Donals reminds us that the discursive act found through reading, "does not end when the subject finishes the book, but rather continues in dialogue: once a language-act is completed, it becomes interiorized and acts as a springboard for yet another aesthetic event to be consummated either by that same subject or by some other" (*Mikhail* 64). Awareness lies in the responsibility of remembrance, which gives voice to those who were silenced and allows them to get their stories out into the world.

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