The Representation of Trauma in Narrative: a Study of Six Late Twentieth Century Novels

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.
This thesis conducts a close analysis of representations of trauma in six late twentieth century novels. I construct a theoretical framework by examining debates about trauma and narrative which have taken place in the fields of historiography, social studies, psychoanalysis and literary fiction. By drawing on these debates, I argue that the relationship between narrative and trauma is paradoxical: narrative is an essential tool, both for working-through and bearing witness to the trauma, but it can also intentionally or unintentionally be used to create an inauthentic version of events.

I illustrate the need felt by many late twentieth century theorists for the development of a narrative form that will be able to produce an effective version of trauma. This narrative needs to facilitate working-through and enable witnessing of trauma. However, it must strive to avoid producing a falsifying version of the trauma. I argue that it can achieve this by acknowledging its own provisionality and therefore highlighting the limitations but also the necessity of narrative representations of trauma.

I argue that the six contemporary novels I have chosen are examples of narratives that strive to develop a more effective means of representing trauma. The novels explore their concerns about trauma and narrative on both a thematic and formal level. The story told in each novel follows a similar pattern of events: in each novel the protagonist is depicted as suffering from the effects of trauma; they all try to evade their traumas by creating falsifying versions of their experiences; and they all offered a means of interpreting which will allow them to work-through and, therefore, bear witness to their traumas. Finally, the six authors utilise their narrative strategies to teach their readers this therapeutic and ethical hermeneutics which corresponds with contemporary concerns about trauma and narrative.
This thesis examines the representation of trauma in six novels written in the late twentieth century: Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko; Beloved by Toni Morrison; Margaret Laurence's The Diviners; Lives of Girls and Women by Alice Munro; Michèle Roberts’ Daughters of the House and The Sea, The Sea by Iris Murdoch. I have chosen these particular novels as they all correspond with contemporary debates about trauma and narrative. These debates have emphasised the need to use narrative as a means of working-through trauma, but have also highlighted the simultaneous concern that such narratives of trauma may intentionally or unintentionally present a compromised version of events. These concerns have led to the ethical necessity to develop a narrative form that is able to effectively represent trauma. The novels I analyse in this thesis all explore these concerns through their varying depictions of trauma. All of the novels strive to find an effective means of representing trauma. To achieve this they all follow a similar pattern: they all depict their protagonists suffering the consequences of trauma; they all demonstrate the way that public or private narratives can create a falsifying version of traumatic events; they teach their protagonists a means of working-through their trauma by changing their interpretation of their traumatic experiences; and they illustrate that this changed perception is necessary for trauma to be adequately witnessed. Finally, all of the novels use their narrative strategies to teach their readers this ethical and therapeutic interpretation of trauma.

Each of the novels studied in this thesis either depicts a collective trauma, which is explored from a personal point of view, or they focus solely on a
personal experience of trauma. *Beloved, Ceremony* and *Daughters of the House* all explore the personal consequences of the public trauma of war and genocide. In *Beloved*, Morrison depicts the story of Sethe, a slave mother who is forced to experience the horror of a slave life and who kills her own daughter rather than allow her to endure a life of slavery; through this story Morrison explores issues regarding the traumatic history of the American deportation and enslavement of African people. In *Ceremony* Silko portrays the story of Tayo, a young Native American man who is suffering from the psychological effects of the trauma of the Second World War, particularly the horror of witnessing his cousin’s murder at the hands of the Japanese during the Bataan Death March. Silko utilises her story about Tayo to illustrate the consequences of the traumatic history of the colonisation, exploitation and displacement of Native Americans by the American Government. Roberts, in *Daughters of the House*, uses her fictional story regarding the betrayal and murder of a Jewish family who had escaped deportation and sought refuge in a French village, to evoke the atrocity of the deportation and extermination of Jews in France during the Second World War. *The Diviners* focuses more on the protagonist’s personal trauma of her parents’ deaths, rather than a public trauma, but uses this personal story as a means of exploring issues regarding the traumatic history of the indigenous peoples of Canada. In all four of these novels the trauma depicted is a specific event, such as the historical trauma of war or the personal trauma of the death of a loved one.

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1 The Bataan Death March occurred during 1942 when tens of thousands of American and Filipino soldiers defending the Philippines were captured by Japanese soldiers and forced to march through the Philippine jungles to the prisoner of war camp over one hundred miles away. Many of the captured soldiers died or were killed on the march and those who survived faced the hardship of the Japanese prisoner of war camp.
Lives of Girls and Women and The Sea, The Sea also focus on a personal experience of trauma. However, in these two novels, the kind of trauma depicted is very different from these previous four novels. Rather than presenting trauma as caused by a specific circumstance or experience, the authors depict a more general sense of reality as itself inherently traumatic. This conceptualisation corresponds with the psychoanalytic notion that external reality cannot be translated by conscious thought: like a traumatic experience, certain elements of reality are too overwhelming for the subject to be able to translate it into existing structures of meaning. In Lives of Girls and Women Munro depicts a strange and troubling reality which exists beyond our everyday structures of meaning; she explores this concept through the story of Del who prefers the comforts of the familiar and tries to avoid the more threatening aspects of reality. In The Sea, The Sea Murdoch presents reality as monstrous and unrepresentable and illustrates the ways in which her protagonist Charles tries to protect himself from this reality.

The novels which depict a more material sense of trauma are political in their motivation; they aim to make a political comment about the way in which traumatic events are experienced, remembered and represented. Of these four novels Ceremony, Beloved and Daughters of the House are more overtly political and utilise their depiction of the protagonist’s experience of a public trauma as a means of raising awareness about the consequences of specific historical events. Silko is concerned with the need to develop strategies for living in the contemporary world as a Native American; she proposes in Ceremony that this can be achieved through a transformation of the subject’s interpretation of trauma. Morrison is concerned with the need to ensure that the horror of slavery is remembered; Beloved is an attempt to counteract the repression of slavery from
the ideological construction of America as land of freedom and democracy. Roberts is concerned with the consequences of France’s attempts to forget their complicity with the Nazis during World War Two; *Daughters of the House* illustrates how the falsification of this traumatic past leads to the resurgence of Nazism in contemporary France. *The Diviners* also explores political concerns about the depiction of collective trauma but does so in a less overt manner. Rather than depicting the protagonist’s direct involvement in a public trauma, Laurence uses Morag’s reaction to her personal trauma as an analogy for the way that public traumas are remembered.

*Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Sea, The Sea* are less political and more philosophical in their aims; they both explore an existential notion of reality as traumatic rather than a specific traumatic event. Although the kinds of trauma depicted and the motivation of these novels is very different from the previous four, they are still concerned with the necessity for the individual to change their perception of trauma. However, in these novels the result of this changed perception is not so that the specific traumatic event can be witnessed, but rather so that the traumatic external reality can somehow be perceived rather than denied. *Lives of Girls and Women* is concerned with developing strategies to be able to perceive and represent a traumatic reality that lies beyond the signifying systems we give to the world. Munro explores this concern through Del’s attempts at transforming reality through narrative.

In *The Sea, The Sea* Murdoch conceptualises reality, in similar terms to Munro, as a traumatic otherness which lies beyond our everyday perception. The novel is not located historically: it is set in an unknown location rather than a specific geographical and historical place and is thus more of a fantasy space in
which Murdoch display her philosophical ideas. Murdoch uses the story about Charles to illustrate her philosophical and moral concerns about the way in which in everyday life we create fantasies that hide us from an underlying traumatic reality. The novel therefore is concerned with the need to, in Murdoch’s words, ‘attend to’ a traumatic reality; not to create an illusory perception, but to attend to the details in the world and to accept otherness, however traumatic the experience.

These six contemporary novels engage in late twentieth century concerns about the interrelationship between trauma and narrative. These debates emphasise the fact that the medical concept of trauma, and particularly its definition as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, is something which has been constructed through discourse. It is presented as a universal, natural reaction to traumatic events but is in fact a diagnostic narrative that was invoked as a political response to the Vietnam War. The concept of trauma, therefore, is a definitive narrative into which the diverse symptoms of trauma are fitted.

The debates about trauma in the late twentieth century also explore the implications of representing both personal and public traumatic experiences in narrative. On a personal level, many trauma survivors feel that their attempts to depict their experiences in narrative may produce an inadequate version of the events; narrative is perceived as being too rigid a structure to be able to encompass the overwhelming nature of traumatic experiences. However, narrative is also an essential tool for two crucial reasons. Firstly, trauma survivors believe that it is necessary for them to work through their traumas by ordering their experiences into chronological order. Secondly, the representation of the trauma in narrative is essential to bear witness to the events, particularly to later generations.

On a public level, narrative is again necessary so that a version of the
events can be produced which will facilitate the healing of the community. However, on a public level, the intentional falsification of the events becomes a crucial issue: the version produced may be politically motivated to reinforce the ideology of those in power rather than striving to adequately represent the traumatic events. Thus, the main concerns about trauma and narrative in the late twentieth century are focused on the way that narrative is an essential tool in representations of trauma, but that it paradoxically can unintentionally or intentionally create a compromised version of the traumatic events.

In terms of the particular concerns about trauma and narrative, the perceived inadequacy of conventional narrative has led to the need to develop a new narrative that can effectively represent trauma. Thus a distinction is made between inauthentic narratives that intentionally or unintentionally produce a compromised version, either on a public or personal level, and a more effective narrative that strives to represent the trauma and so allows both a form of working-through and facilitates witnessing of the events. I argue that this effective narrative is one that must be able to acknowledge its own provisionality by indicating the excess in narrative that it is unable to represent. Thus, rather than rejecting narrative completely, because of its limitations, the conventional structure of narrative can be challenged and experimental strategies, such as indeterminacy, used to develop the narrative form; the narrative developed must strive to bear witness to the events and achieve a form of working-through for those who have suffered the trauma, but must simultaneously be aware of its own limitations, rather than creating the illusion that it is a definitive version.

I argue that the six novels analyzed in this thesis achieve this kind of ethical and therapeutic narrative. Despite the varying kinds of trauma depicted
and the different political or philosophical aims of these novels, all of the novels utilise a similar narrative development to explore contemporary concerns about trauma and narrative. All of the novels illustrate the effects of trauma on their protagonists. In some of the novels the consequences of the trauma are depicted in terms of the standard symptoms of PTSD, in others the symptoms include an inability to develop a coherent sense of identity, and in the philosophical novels, the effects of the trauma are shown more in terms of the protagonist's position in relation to a traumatic reality.

All of the protagonists attempt to create a false version of their experiences to protect themselves from these traumatic effects. In the novels that are concerned with specific traumatic events the protagonists use different strategies to forget their experiences rather than confronting what has happened to them. In the novels that are concerned with a more general sense of a traumatic reality the protagonists attempt to screen themselves from a world which seems unfamiliar and strange by creating a self-deceptive version of events. The creation of an illusory version is associated with narrative in all of the novels. In some of the novels the protagonist is a writer who explicitly utilises narrative as a means of reconstructing their experiences into an ordered and controllable pattern. In the other novels the utilisation of narrative to create a mis-represented version is explored on a public level, in terms of the way in which historical narratives can be intentionally used to create a particular representation of a public trauma.

All of the protagonist are offered a means of working-through their trauma by developing a different perception of their experiences. The only protagonist who is unable to eventually achieve a new perception of the trauma is Charles in The Sea, The Sea: he ends the novel with the same self-deceptive attitude that he
maintains throughout the novel. However, all of the other five protagonists are eventually able to attain a new hermeneutics with which to respond to their traumas. This is either shown explicitly, as in *Ceremony, Daughters of the House* and *The Diviners*, or is indicated by the situation in which the protagonist ends the novel, as in *Beloved* and *Lives of Girls and Women*. The interpretation of trauma that the novelists offer to their protagonist is one that the reader is also invited to develop. The novels, therefore, all use their narrative strategies as a means of teaching the reader an ethical and therapeutic interpretation of trauma that corresponds with contemporary concerns about trauma and narrative.

The theories that I discuss in this thesis are all involved in late twentieth concerns about trauma and narrative. I examine the debates and conflicts within trauma theory. Through an analysis of theories about trauma proposed by critics such as Ian Hacking, Ruth Leys and Richard McNally I highlight the status of the concept of trauma as a constructed narrative rather than a standard reaction to traumatic events. Within my analysis of trauma theory I reject the notion of traumatic memory as being distinct from normal memory; this conceptualisation of trauma proposes that traumatic experiences are stored in a literal form in the mind rather than being re-worked and integrated as in normal memory processes. This theory is relied upon by contemporary literary theorists such as Cathy Caruth and is simplistically applied to readings of representations of trauma in novels. Instead, I set-up a more psychoanalytically constructed concept of trauma by examining contemporary re-workings of Freud's seduction theory, his main theory concerned with trauma. Through an analysis of the psychoanalytic theories proposed by Jean Laplanche, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Lacan, I provide an alternative conceptualisation of trauma in terms of a traumatic reality rather
than an actual event.

I also examine the concerns raised both within Holocaust theory and contemporary Historiography regarding the narrativisation of traumatic historical events, particularly focusing on the debates raised by Geoffrey Hartman, Saul Friedlander and Jenny Edkins. These implications include the possibilities and limitations of narrative for a personal working-through of the trauma, the necessity for later generations to bear witness to past events, and the way that practices of memory, including built and written memorials, can be used to reinforce the values of those in power rather than witnessing the complexity of a traumatic past. I finally examine contemporary debates about the ways in which built and written memorials can avoid falsifying the past. In this discussion, I focus specifically on how this can be achieved in written narratives, through strategies which install and then challenge realistic narratives. I then utilise this theoretical framework to analyse the strategies utilised in the six novels.

Within my detailed analysis of the narrative strategies used by the writers, I utilise psychoanalytically-oriented theories that are specifically concerned with the relationship between trauma and representation. For example, to analyse the references to the photograph in some of the novels I examine Barthes’ theory of the photograph as a traumatic form of representation. Through this I develop a notion of the photographic which, rather than valorising the pictorial over the written as in some theories of photography, instead explores the possibilities for narrative offered by Barthes’ conceptualisation of the photograph as both a trace of the object represented and an interpretation. I also explore the ways in which some of the writers use the uncanny to disrupt narrative; I position the uncanny as associated to contemporary psychoanalytic theories of trauma developed from
Freud’s theory of Nachtraglichkeit and so conceptualise it as related to psychoanalytic notions of trauma. I also illustrate Lyotard’s conceptualisation of the sublime as a narrative strategy which can indicate the impossibility of expressing the inexpressibility of trauma, and so can offer narrative a means of acknowledging its own provisionality.
INTRODUCTION

In this introduction I will firstly introduce the main concerns of the novels and will demonstrate that although the novels I have chosen are concerned with different political or philosophical aims they are all structured according to a similar organisation of events. All of the protagonists are shown to be suffering the consequences of trauma, they all try to evade their respective traumas by creating illusory versions of the events, and they are all offered the opportunity of working-through their traumas by developing new interpretative strategies.

Following this introduction to the representation of trauma in the novels, I will explore the way in which the concept of trauma has been constructed through discourses of medicine and psychiatry. The psychiatric concept of trauma, and particularly its definition in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, can be seen as a narrative that fits the diverse symptoms caused by a traumatic experience into a standardized diagnosis which presents trauma in terms of a universal, natural reaction to an overwhelming experience.

I will then explain that once this diagnosis was defined, theories of trauma became established into two seemingly opposite poles: that of traumatic amnesia and traumatic intrusion. Both of these theories are grounded upon the proposition that traumatic memory is distinct from the usual workings of memory; they propose that the memory of a traumatic event is somehow stored in a literal form in the mind rather than being transformed through the usual process of translation involved in memorising. However, contemporary trauma theorists have challenged this claim for the literal nature of traumatic memory and have argued that it is based on a mis-interpretation of Freud’s theories on trauma.
To demonstrate this I will concentrate on the contribution of Freudian theory to concepts of trauma. I will firstly illustrate the debate between the advocates of traumatic amnesia and the False Memory Syndrome Foundation and will expose that both movements are based upon a mis-reading of Freud’s seduction theory. Following this I will re-conceptualise Freud’s theory to highlight his proposition that trauma is caused by the re-interpretation of childhood memories, and not by an actual event. I will finally concentrate on contemporary psychoanalytic theories of trauma that re-conceptualise Freud’s seduction theory to highlight the emphasis that Freud himself placed on the interpretative processes involved in the remembering of a childhood trauma. Contemporary psychoanalysts illustrate that Freud’s notion of trauma is a conceptualisation of the general condition of mankind, rather than a theory about the consequences of specific traumatic events; thus, they conceptualise trauma in terms of the subject’s position within a world of pre-existing messages and systems of meaning which cannot be translated on a conscious level. This, therefore, will set up another notion way of conceptualising trauma; not just as an actual event, but in terms of a traumatic reality.

Following this analysis of psychiatric concerns about the effects of trauma, I will examine concerns about the representations of traumatic experiences. I will explore the way in which the narrating of traumatic experiences has raised questions about the effectiveness of narrative to communicate these events, whilst, somewhat paradoxically, acknowledging the necessity of utilising narrative to achieve coherency for traumatised individuals and communities. I will demonstrate that trauma survivors fear that their stories about their experiences may lead to a compromised version of events being produced. This concern is felt particularly in relation to traumatic experiences as trauma is felt to be an
overwhelming, incomprehensible experience that cannot necessarily be fitted into the confines of the conventional narrative structure. However, despite their acknowledgment that narrative is a limiting form, survivors express the necessity to use narrative to order the incomprehensibility of their traumatic experiences into a coherent narrative to facilitate a healing form of closure. In association with this, is the equivalent need to use narrative to produce a version of the events that is able to testify to the atrocities they have experienced.

Not only is narrative necessary at the level of personal healing, but also on a public level in terms of the need to find a means of allowing a community to work-through their trauma. However, I will argue that this level of public narrative raises questions regarding the political motivation of the version of events that is produced, and makes apparent that narrative can be used to reinforce a political ideology. These questions about narrative are part of a much more general awareness in the late twentieth century about the political implications of totalising narratives, which is expressed in Lyotard’s criticism of Grand Narratives that claim to produce a definite and universal explanation of the world. To explore these concerns I will discuss particular examples of both built and written memorials that have been created to intentionally produce a falsifying version of the past.

Lastly, I will discuss examples of built and written memorials that strive to produce a more effective version of past traumatic events and will examine the strategies they use to avoid producing a false version of trauma. I will argue that effective practises of memory are those that are able to produce a version of events that facilitates working-through and enables the events to be witnessed but which also acknowledges its own provisionality rather than producing a definitive
and limited version. I will then explore the potential that these strategies have for literary representations of trauma. I will argue that strategies such as indeterminacy and contradiction can be used to challenge the conventional narrative form to develop a narrative that can respond to contemporary concerns about trauma and narrative. Within this analysis of literary fiction I will examine the relationship between aesthetics and politics in metafictional novels, and will argue that the novels which I examine in this thesis avoid the criticism aimed at metafiction, that it is too inward looking to be politically motivated, by transforming their reader's perception of trauma and so striving to change the way that their readers interpret traumatic events in the world in which they live.
I. The Novels

In this section I will illustrate the similar pattern that all of the novels in this thesis follow to explore their concerns about trauma and narrative. I will firstly discuss the specific ways in which the novels depict their protagonists suffering the consequences of trauma. I will then describe how all of the protagonists attempt to shield themselves from the trauma by producing a false version of events. Following this, I will illustrate that all of the novels offer their protagonists a new means of interpreting their trauma; this allows each protagonist to work-through and to bear witness to their specific traumas. I will finally introduce the way in which all of the novels utilise their narrative strategies to teach this new hermeneutics to their readers.

I.1. The Effects of Trauma

The novels that depict particular traumatic events illustrate the traumatic effects on their protagonists. Thus in Ceremony, Beloved, Daughters of the House and The Diviners the authors depict their protagonists suffering from the consequences of their traumatic experience. However, in Lives of Girls and Women and The Sea, The Sea, the two novels that depict a traumatic reality, there is not such a defined sense of a traumatic event that causes a particular effect on the protagonist, but, instead, more a depiction of the protagonist’s experience of a traumatic reality that tries to break through the everyday familiarity of the world.

Silko opens Ceremony with a depiction of Tayo’s traumatic nightmare to present him immediately in terms of his position as trauma sufferer. Tayo is
diagnosed by Western doctors with 'battle fatigue', a condition that in the discourses of medicine becomes defined in the 1970s as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. After the war, Tayo is kept in an army hospital and treated with drugs that numb his traumatic memories. When he is released, and returns home to the reservation, he continues to experience traumatic nightmares and is unable to re-integrate into the community; he rejects his responsibility to his family and prefers to get drunk with other returned veterans. Although Silko presents Tayo in terms of the common behaviour displayed by war veterans, behaviour that Silko herself witnessed, she also presents Tayo's main traumatic symptom in very different terms from the standard definition. During and after the war Tayo experiences what he perceives to be a breakdown of the boundaries that separate people, places and time. His first realisation of this changed perception occurs during the war when he believes that the Japanese soldier he has been ordered to shoot is his Uncle Josiah, who is in fact living thousands of miles away on the reservation. Through the story of Tayo, therefore, Silko challenges the standard notion of PTSD by showing that Tayo experiences a very different kind of effect produced by the trauma of war.

Sethe in Beloved is also suffering from the effects of trauma which have been defined as symptoms of PTSD; she experiences intrusive memories of her experiences as a slave, which invade her mind on a daily basis. Although she has escaped from the physical trauma of slavery, the psychological trauma of her experiences ensures that she cannot escape from her memories of this time. In addition to these memories, Sethe is physically possessed by her traumatic past: at the beginning of the novel her house is haunted by what she believes to be the ghost of the daughter she murdered, and later in the novel the enigmatic and
indeterminate figure of Beloved possesses her life. In Beloved, the effects of trauma are not only shown in relation to those who directly suffered the trauma, but also in terms of later generations who did not directly experience the events. This is illustrated through Sethe's daughter, Denver, who is too frightened to leave the house because of the unknown something that caused her mother to murder her own daughter; therefore, although Denver has never experienced slavery, its traumatic consequences determine her life.

This notion of the continuing effects of trauma on later generations is illustrated in Daughters of the House in which the focus of the novel is the consequences of past traumas on the two daughters of the Martin family, Léonie and Thérèse. The main example of these continuing effects of past trauma is when Léonie as a child hears the ghostly voices of the murdered Jewish family in her bedroom at night. Léonie is terrified by these voices when she first hears them; later, when she learns that during the war the Jewish family had been locked in her bedroom before being murdered and she realises that the voices belong to them, Léonie is again traumatised and vows never to enter the room again. Thérèse experiences the effects of trauma on a more personal level when her mother, Antoinette, becomes ill and dies.

Like Thérèse, Morag in The Diviners cannot accept the trauma of both her mother's and father's deaths. Morag's parents die when she is very young and, although she has very few memories of them, their deaths effect her relationship with her past for the majority of her life. Because of the trauma of her parents' deaths Morag severs her connection with her past and is therefore unable to install a sense of belonging in her own daughter, Pique. Morag's husband Brooke also suffers from the consequences of his childhood traumas; like Tayo, Brooke suffers
from repetitive nightmares, but in his case these nightmares concern the abuse he suffered at the hands of his father.

In *Lives of Girls and Women* Del experiences only a few specific events that are felt to be overtly traumatic; her trauma is felt more in terms of the disturbing elements of reality rather than actual traumatic circumstances. However, the most prominent example of Del’s experience with trauma is when her Uncle Craig dies suddenly of a heart attack. In *The Sea, the Sea* this notion of specific traumatic experiences becomes even more vague. Although Charles experiences many events that could be perceived as traumatic, such as his near drowning when he is pushed into the whirlpool near his house, Charles does not actually present these events to the reader as traumatic as he transforms them through the comforts of narrative. The only time that Charles does experience a sense of the traumatic reality which lies beyond his fantasy perception is at the beginning of the novel when he momentarily sees a huge sea-serpent emerging from the sea. This event occurs when Charles is attempting to describe the sea in his journal; the emergence of the serpent disrupts his artistic narrative and it is only later when he has had time to re-conceptualise this event in terms of an LSD induced flashback, that he is able to describe it to the reader.

1.2. Falsifying Versions of Trauma

All of the novels explore concerns about the way in which falsifying narratives may intentionally or unintentionally be created as a response to trauma. These implications are explored on the level of personal narratives in all of the novels; all of the protagonists are depicted as attempting to present a false version
of their traumatic experiences. This is apparent in some novels through the creation of written narratives, such as journals, or autobiographical novels, or in others in terms of the way that the past is remembered. In the philosophical novels these personal attempts to falsify trauma are presented in terms of the protagonist's desire to protect themselves from a reality which seems disturbing and frightening. Thus the protagonists of *Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Sea*, *The Sea* transform the events of their lives through narrative and so they are unable to perceive the reality which lies beyond their fantasies. In the political novels the creation of personal narratives that falsify trauma is connected to the way that public narratives can be used to create a particular, ideologically motivated version of events rather than striving to effectively represent the past. Thus *Daughters of the House*, *Beloved*, *The Diviners*, and *Ceremony* explore the historical re-writing of the traumatic pasts of colonisation, exploitation, abuse, war and genocide.

In *The Sea*, *The Sea* Charles, after retiring from his career as a theatre director and moving into an old, seemingly haunted house by the sea, decides to write the events of both his past and present life into a memoir/diary/journal. However, rather than attempting to produce an authentic version of his life, Charles deliberately sets out to create a false version; he states his intention that he wants to use the trickery he learned as a theatre director to deceive his audience into believing his version of events. However, not only does Charles mislead his audience but he also deceives himself; he is unable to perceive the reality of his situation and creates an illusory narrative about the events that he experiences, particularly the situation with Hartley. Murdoch utilises this situation to show that Charles is blind to the traumatic reality which lies beyond his fantasies.
Like Charles, Del in *Lives of Girls and Women* uses narrative to transform the events she experiences; however, she does not intentionally set out to produce a false version of her life, but instead unknowingly uses narrative as a means of protecting herself from anything that disturbs the familiarity of her everyday world. The most obvious example of this is when she wants to diminish the trauma of death by trying to pin it down in language, in an attempt to gain control over its unrepresentable reality. Later in life, Del retrospectively re-examines her attempts at novel writing and realises that she had tried to use stories to transform the world into a more familiar version. The most prominent example of this is the story she has written about a local family in which, she later realises, she had falsified their reality by transforming them through narrative.

In the same way as with Del, Morag in *The Diviners* creates a retrospective narrative about the events of her life. She is writing an autobiographical novel that re-examines her life in terms of her attitude towards her past; through this, she realises that she has denied her past for most of her life. Since childhood, she has tried to deny the trauma of her parents’ deaths by creating an illusory version of her early childhood and obsessively clinging to this, despite the fact that she has very little memories about her parents. Because she cannot come to terms with her parents’ deaths and the lack of memories she has of them she denies the importance of her adoptive parents, Christie and Prin. When she leaves them and her childhood home of Manawaka, Morag tries to forget all about her childhood with Christie and Prin: she tells her husband Brooke that her past is not important to her and so there is no need for her to tell him anything about her childhood. Brooke encourages this reticence and throughout their relationship neither of them discuss their pasts. Through Morag’s desire to
create a false narrative about her early childhood, Laurence explores her political concerns about the way in which a falsifying version of Canadian history has been produced by the government.

The connection that Laurence makes between public and personal narratives that falsify the past is explicitly illustrated by Roberts in *Daughters of the House*. She associates the community's desire to forget the traumatic events of the war with attempts made by the French government to erase, from public memory, its complicity with the Nazis in the deportation of Jews from France. Roberts illustrates the way in which monuments can be built with a particular ideological motivation: she emphasises that the town's public memorial confirms and reinforces the community's desire to forget the war by allowing them to celebrate victory rather than forcing them to remember the atrocities carried out in their country. The villagers are therefore able to use this public representation of war to forget that one amongst them was responsible for the betrayal of the Jewish family; this ensures that the identity of the collaborator is never sought out. The Martin family are complicit in these attempts to forget the past; they try to protect Léonie and Thérèse from the horror of war by refusing to answer the girls' questions about the events. The Martin family also try to deny the personal trauma they experienced when Antoinette was raped during the war. Léonie and Thérèse repeat this denial in relation to both a personal and public past. When Thérèse's mother dies, rather than confronting her feelings about this traumatic event, Thérèse denies her feelings for her mother and transfers her love onto the idealised maternal image of the Virgin Mary; she then hides herself away in a convent and uses her worship of the Virgin Mary as a means of protecting herself from the trauma of her mother's death. Léonie is also guilty of a similar denial of
the public past; when as a child she discovers the identity of the voices in her old bedroom she denies the reality of the Jewish family and closes the door on them; as an adult, when she inherits the house, she continues to keep the door of this room closed and forbids her own children from entering the room.

The concern in Daughters of the House regarding the connection between personal and public attempts to create a falsifying version of events is also explored in Beloved. Morrison argues that Sethe’s attempts to deny the trauma of her own life reinforces the ideological narrative that tries to repress the trauma of slavery. Sethe re-creates the trauma of her life as a slave at Sweet Home by remembering it as a place where herself and the other slaves were able to live happily together; she focuses solely on the period of time when Mr and Mrs Garner, who treated the slaves comparatively well, were in charge of the farm. Sethe tries to forget the events that occurred after Mr Garner’s death when Schoolteacher took ownership both of the farm and the slaves. She refuses to recall the abuse inflicted on her and the other slaves, their failed escape attempt and the subsequent murder of many of the slaves, and also the abuse and punishment inflicted on herself by Schoolteacher’s nephews. Sethe also refuses to confront the complexity of the reasons that drove her to murder her own child; she simplifies this horrific event by presenting it as an act of mother love, rather than confronting the fact that slavery has so deformed the notion of maternity that infanticide could be perceived as an expression of maternal love. Sethe’s attempts to deny her traumatic past result in the arrival of Beloved who represents both the disavowed public and personal past. However, Beloved’s arrival also offers Sethe the opportunity to realise that her attempts to forget her own experiences denies her responsibility to bear witness to the public trauma of the history of slavery.
In *Ceremony*, Tayo also denies his traumatic experiences, and rather than trying to work-through the trauma he has suffered, he instead gets drunk with other war veterans in an attempt to numb his memories. However, in this novel, rather than the focus being solely on Tayo's own construction of a personal trauma, Silko emphasises how others try to impose a particular narrative on him. This is apparent in the way that the Western doctors try to define Tayo's symptoms according to the standard diagnosis of battle fatigue; they interpret his trauma solely in terms of their narrative about the effects of traumatic experiences rather than being able to deal with the specific symptoms he is experiencing.

1.3. The Opportunity to Work-Through Trauma

In all of the novels the protagonists are offered a means of working-through their traumas by changing their interpretation of trauma. In the political novels this is achieved by a transformation of the protagonists' interpretation of their particular traumatic experience; this allows them to witness their personal trauma, which has the effect of either facilitating them in attaining a sense of a coherent identity, or allowing them to bear witness to a collective trauma. In the philosophical novels this changed perception offers the protagonists a means of perceiving the traumatic reality which has been screened by their fantasy, illusory perception.

In *Ceremony* Silko creates the character of the medicine man Betonie as her fictional equivalent to teach Tayo a means of working-through his trauma. Tayo learns, through the ceremonial journey that Betonie takes him on, that the reality that was revealed to him through his traumatic experiences, one in which
there are no boundaries separating people, places and time, is in fact the way that
the world really is. He learns that his previous perception of reality, in terms of
distinctions and separations, has been produced by western discourse, which
divides the world into binary opposites. However, Tayo learns that he must
reconnect with the Native American belief in the connection between phenomena.
Betonie teaches Tayo a means of interpreting his traumatic experience so that he
can develop from a position of confusion to one of understanding and
interpretation. Tayo's changed perception enables him to finally bear witness to
the trauma of living as a Native American in contemporary America and he
returns to his community to tell his stories to others. This enables him to develop
from the position of a passive victim of trauma to take on the active role of
storyteller; through this role, he teaches his people a new therapeutic
hermeneutics. Thus the novel illustrates the necessity to develop a new
perception of trauma which will lead to a form of personal healing and therefore
the healing of the community.

In Beloved the destructive effects of Beloved's presence on Sethe forces
Denver to seek help from, and therefore re-connect with, the Black community;
this forces the community to confront their banishment of Sethe and allows them
to finally realise the complex reasons that drove Sethe to commit infanticide.
Beloved's presence also forces Denver to hear her mother's story for the first
time, and she is able to bear the responsibility of witnessing her mother's trauma.
The ability of her community and family to work-through their trauma finally
offers Sethe the possibility of a future which is not haunted by the past. Through
this story, Morrison illustrates the need for survivors to develop a means of being
able to live after slavery; she argues that this must be achieved by survivors of
trauma being able to work through their trauma, rather than denying it; this working-through is essential so that those people who have experienced the trauma of slavery can pass on their stories to later generations.

In *Daughters of the House* Thérèse returns from her twenty year self-imposed exile in a convent to force herself and her sister to confront the trauma of the past that they have tried to avoid. As adults, therefore, Léonie and Thérèse compel themselves to remember the discoveries they made as children about the family’s and the community’s secrets about the war; discoveries that had been too traumatic for them to accept as children. Thérèse finally confronts her mother’s death and Léonie is finally able to listen and bear witness to the ghostly voices of the murdered Jewish family. Thus, Léonie and Thérèse develop from an inability to confront a traumatic past to an ability to bear the responsibility of their roles as witnesses to trauma. Roberts positions this ability to witness in overtly political terms: Léonie’s capacity, as an adult, to remember the discoveries of the past allows her to attend the tribunal being held regarding the resurgence of Nazism in the village, and to testify as to the name of the collaborator. Therefore, in this novel, Roberts argues that the individual has a political responsibility to bear witness to the trauma, so as to prevent the horrific events of the past from re-occurring.

In *The Diviners* Morag is forced to re-interpret her past and through this she finally accepts the trauma of the loss of her parents and acknowledges the significance of her adoptive parents. She is finally able to relinquish her attempts to control her past and accepts its place as both memory and imagination. In this novel the political themes are kept more in the background than in the previous two novels and the focus is placed on Morag’s development of a sense of her
ancestral and personal past. Like the other novels mentioned so far, *The Diviners* focuses on the need for the individual to change their responses to a traumatic past but is less concerned with the responsibility of the individual to bear witness for the sake of the community and more concerned with the need to create a sense of personal belonging through an awareness of our relationship with the past.

In *Lives of Girls and Women* Del, through her retrospective narrative of her life, is able to perceive the traumatic reality which lies beyond the familiar, everyday world. She realises the dangers of certain forms of reductive narrative, but also the capacity for narrative to access hidden depths through a confrontation with traumatic reality and acceptance of contradictions that cannot be resolved. Eventually, therefore, Del develops the ability to accept the existence of a troubling reality and is able to create a narrative form that is able to perceive this reality without attempting to limit it through narrative closure.

In *The Sea, The Sea* Charles is offered the chance to see the reality behind his fantasies. On one level, this occurs when his friends and his cousin James try to make him understand that his pursuit of Hartley is based on a fantasy, and on another level this occurs when he experiences the sublimity of the stars and so is given the chance to attend to a frightening and formless reality. However, Charles ends the novel by resurrecting the barrier of fantasy so that, unlike in the other novels, it is the reader alone who is able to attend to the traumatic reality which lies within the narrative structure.
I.4. The Transformation of the Reader's Perception

All of the protagonists in these six novels, therefore, are offered a new means of interpreting their trauma which enables them to work-through and therefore bear witness to their traumas. This therapeutic and ethical hermeneutics is taught to the reader, not only through the stories depicted, but through the narrative strategies the authors use which force the reader to participate in the novel and thus allow them to experience a changed perception of trauma. These strategies include the refusal to posit a fixed and determined ending, contradictory sentences, the disruption of linear chronology, and a general sense in all of the novels of the adaptability and fluidity of interpretation over the imposition of fixed meanings. These strategies challenge the realist narrative structure which can result in the production of a definitive version of experience. They do not reject narrative, as they all acknowledge its necessity in working through and bearing witness to trauma, but instead install and then disrupt the conventional narrative structure to create a narrative form that recognizes the necessity of creating narratives about trauma but also acknowledges its own provisionality and limitations.
II. The Construction of Trauma through Discourse

In this section I will examine the ways in which the discourses of psychiatry have constructed the concept of trauma through a unified, coherent narrative to present it as a universal response to a horrific experience. I will firstly illustrate the way in which the development of present day notions of trauma have been retroactively constructed through a linear, continuous history of development from the end of the nineteenth century through to its official ‘recognition’ in the Psychiatric journals of the 1980s. I will explain how this definition was not the eventual identification of a natural response to traumatic events but was in fact influentially provoked by anti-Vietnam War campaigns that wanted the effects of the war to be officially recognised by the government. Following this, I will explore the ways in which this official diagnosis creates a fixed and determined narrative about trauma which rejects the disparate and complex symptoms of trauma survivors. One of the effects of this diagnosis is that it attempts to silence the victims of war by interpreting their horrific memories into symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), rather than as witness statements about the horror of war. These notions are explored in Ceremony in which Tayo’s traumatic effects are interpreted by the Western doctors solely in terms of their expectations of the symptoms of a traumatic experience. The doctor’s so-called treatment of Tayo’s illness leaves him unable to speak about his experiences and therefore unable to bear witness to the atrocities of the Second World War.
II.1. The coherent narrative of the history of trauma

The history of trauma is presented as a coherent narrative which masks the way in which it has been constituted through the discourse of psychiatry. Contemporary experts in trauma studies tend to present the history of trauma in terms of a continuous development from late nineteenth century observations of the traumatic effects of, specifically, railway accidents through to the diagnosis of PTSD after the Vietnam War, a diagnosis that has remained, with small but crucial modifications, until the present day. However, as Ruth Leys asserts, this history falsely presents trauma ‘as a timeless diagnosis, the culmination of a lineage that is seen to run from past to present in an interrupted yet ultimately continuous way’ (3). Many contemporary theorists criticise this history of trauma as it is based upon the assumption that PTSD is a natural reaction to a traumatic experience; instead, critics such as Ian Hacking, Allen Young, Ruth Leys and Jenny Edkins argue that rather than being a natural reaction, trauma is a socially constructed theory that is shaped by the discursive practices of the historical moment. As Young suggests, the notion of trauma is ‘glued together by the practises, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented’ (qtd. in Leys 6). Edkins agrees with this position in her assertion that

traumatic stress as a possible diagnosis, as something people can be seen and see themselves as suffering from, has become current in a particular time period. Trauma was not something that was discovered – it is a man-made object [that] originates in the scientific and clinical discourses of the nineteenth century. In other words, it is neither ‘natural’ nor universal. It is
Hacking’s groundbreaking study of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) demonstrates the way in which PTSD is closely tied to theories of MPD: both are part of what he calls the ‘sciences of memory’ that developed in the late nineteenth century and have dominated twentieth century thought. He proposes, as part of his theory of the existence of what he calls the ‘memero-politics’ of the twentieth century, that memory has in fact become, not only ‘a criterion of personal identity’ (198), but also the ‘scientific key to the soul’ (198). He argues that contemporary thought supposes that there are certain facts to be discovered about memory and that ‘what would have previously been debates on the moral and spiritual plane’ now take place ‘at the level of factual knowledge’ about memory (198). Therefore, it is only within this particular historical period that our understanding of trauma can exist; it is a theory that is forged out of the practises and discourses of our time.

The narrative of trauma posits its origins in British physician John Erichsen’s work with railway accident survivors. These victims had no visible physical injuries to explain their symptoms of amnesia and so Erichsen proposed that the amnesia was caused by the traumatic shock of the accident. However, this story of the origins of traumatic neurosis is, Hacking claims, ‘something of a metamyth about the power of the railroad to change the nineteenth-century vision of both the material world and the life of the mind’ (185). Therefore, it is a retroactively imposed origin which posits a beginning to the linear narrative of trauma.

2 Although this diagnosis became defined as ‘traumatic neurosis’, it was still considered to be a physical rather than mental condition; this is apparent in Berlin Neurologist Paul Oppenheim’s attribution of the symptoms to ‘undetectable organic changes in the brain’ (Leys 3).

3 For a fuller analysis of the relationship between the railway and the development of the theory of the traumatic neuroses, see Hacking 185-7.
In the next stage of this history, it is argued that the work of Sigmund Freud caused the focus to shift away from the body to the mind in his conceptualisation of trauma in terms of a 'hysterical shattering of the personality consequent of a situation of extreme terror or fright' (Leys 4). It is argued that Freud's development of the seduction theory during the 1890s, particularly in his 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895) and the 'Aetiology of Hysteria' (1896) emphasised the trauma of childhood sexual abuse. However, his so-called abandonment of the seduction theory and re-conceptualisation of hysteria in terms of the effects of repressed infantile wishes is purported to have caused a disregarding of the concept of trauma during the early years of the twentieth century. In this constructed history, the prominence of the symptoms of First World War soldiers is seen to have caused a re-emphasis on the hysterical effects of traumatic events; this is apparent in Freud's return to the notion of trauma in his description of these traumatic effects of war in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in which the recurrence of traumatic dreams in his patients led Freud to reformulate his theory of dreams as wish-fulfilments.

After the First World War, so the narrative of the history of trauma informs us, the study of trauma declined and the concept was only resurrected after the Vietnam War with the first official definition of PTSD in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) published in 1980. This official definition represents an attempt to integrate the diverse fields of trauma theory and to develop a unified definition of trauma, one that is still largely relied on today. Thus it is the moment when the

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4 Once again, both Hacking (183-4) and Leys (4) highlight how this history is a simplistic one as the idea of *traumatisme moral* was already in circulation when Freud began to study under Charcot in Paris.
disparate and multiple symptoms of trauma survivors are unified into a coherent and cohesive diagnostic narrative. However, this definition of PTSD was not provoked by the psychiatric community's eventual recognition of a previously undiscovered disorder, but instead can be perceived as a politically motivated diagnosis that was generated through the legal system. It was achieved through political pressure from Vietnam Veterans' organisations that called for the legal recognition of the traumatic effects of the war to enable the provision of compensation for veterans who were unable to re-integrate into society. The political pressure for a formal diagnosis of PTSD came mainly from psychiatrists such as Robert Lifton whose anti-war sentiment joined with that of the Veterans' organisations supporting the call for a legal recognition of 'post-Vietnam syndrome'. The reluctance of the DSM-III committee to, as McNally argues, 'include a diagnosis so closely tied to the war' (9), led to the specific symptoms of Vietnam veterans being associated with victims of other kinds of trauma, such as natural disasters, imprisonment in concentration camps, and sexual abuse; this in turn led to the collective grouping of symptoms under the heading PTSD.

What followed this official definition of PTSD was a huge number of litigation cases in which Veterans could claim compensation if they were diagnosed with PTSD according to the symptoms defined in this cohesive and

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5 The official diagnosis of PTSD in DSM-III specified three kinds of symptoms caused by a traumatic experience. The first set of symptoms included flashbacks and nightmares and focused on the re-experiencing of the trauma through intrusive recollections which constantly and insistently recurred in the survivors' waking and sleeping lives. The second group of symptoms comprised, as McNally explains, 'numbing symptoms, such as blunted emotions, feelings of estrangement from others, and loss of interest in formerly enjoyable activities' (8) and the third group included miscellaneous symptoms such as disturbed sleep, avoidance of reminders of the traumatic experience, impaired memory and concentration, and what became known as survivor guilt. Both Beloved and Ceremony depict their protagonists suffering from these kinds of symptoms as a result of their traumas. Sethe experiences intrusive memories, and Tayo experiences traumatic nightmares, he feels estranged from his community and he suffers from survivor guilt in regards to his cousin's death. However, as I will show in the chapter on these two novels these standard symptoms of PTSD are utilised by the writers to raise concerns about
fixed diagnosis. To be able to claim compensation, the Vietnam veterans had to undergo rigorous psychiatric testing to judge whether they fitted the category of PTSD sufferer. These assessments included the use of previous medical evidence, interviews with relatives about the patient’s behaviour in the past, and lengthy interviews with the patient themselves in which they were ‘obliged to answer questions about their life before and after the traumatic event – their family, their social life and school performance, their marital situation, employment, income – as well as describing the ‘designated life event’ or traumatic experience’ (Edkins 47). Once this evidence was collected, the interviewer presented the information in the form of a chronological narrative to a committee. As Edkins explains ‘cases that [did] not fit the narrative, or where there are complications such as pre-service trauma, petty crime, or doubt about the extent of in-service trauma, [were] puzzles’ (47) that had to be worked out through the process of a conference held by the committee. This case conference, as Young argues, is a means for ‘bridging the gap between the test results which diagnose PTSD and the sufferers’ own accounts, which often present a much more complicated picture’ (Edkins 48). Thus it is a means of fitting the diverse symptoms of trauma into a standard narrative regarding the effects of traumatic experiences.

One of the unforeseen repercussions of this diagnostic process is that the victims were medicalised and their political voice removed. This medicalisation interprets survivor testimony as a symptom of illness; therefore, the diagnosis of PTSD attempts to silence the political voices of these people and to remove their this so-called universal reaction to trauma, rather than to confirm this definition of PTSD.

6 In these interviews, it was not only the patient’s answers that were recorded but also observations about their ‘appearance, behaviour (including posture, facial expressions, body movements, speech, ability to interact with the interviewer), appropriateness of emotions and predominant mood, and intellectual functioning’ (Edkins 47).
political and ethical power to bear witness to the horrific experiences they endured. Edkins argues that this 'reduces the political controversies of the Vietnam War to questions of stress-related illness, treatment and maybe compensation' (48). Therefore, the narrative about trauma was used by those in power to silence the victims of the state-sanctioned violence of war. This particular consequence of the diagnosing of PTSD is examined by Silko in *Ceremony*. In this novel, Tayo is diagnosed with 'battle fatigue' when he suffers from symptoms caused by his experiences during the Second World War. He is forced to remain in a medical hospital, rather than being allowed to return to his Native American community and tell them what he has witnessed. He is eventually diagnosed as 'cured' and sent home, although he continues to suffer from traumatic nightmares. Silko uses Tayo's story to highlight the way in which the narrative of trauma created by the Western medical profession is one that is fixed and determined, and is based upon a limited notion of the quick-fix cure rather than an examination of the real causes of the symptoms.

A long-term problem of the diagnostic process of PTSD is the extent to which it standardises the different and varying reactions to the trauma of war by fitting the diversity of symptoms into the framework provided by the DSM-III definition of PTSD, and so creates a coherent narrative which rejects any disparate material. This has serious repercussions for the present day understanding of trauma which relies on these post-Vietnam observations on the effects of a traumatic experience. As McNally argues, this is further complicated by firstly those who exaggerated their symptoms in an attempt to obtain a diagnosis of PTSD and secondly the vast number of 'phony combat Vets'.

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7 In the context of present day trauma 'human rights advocates vigorously object to diagnosing PTSD among torture survivors because they believe that medicalizing the problem misdirects attention away from the perpetrators of institutionalised violence' (McNally 282).

8 As McNally argues, this is further complicated by firstly those who exaggerated their symptoms in an attempt to obtain a diagnosis of PTSD and secondly the vast number of 'phony combat Vets'.
this moment of defining PTSD, and the practises involved in diagnosing it, makes apparent Leys' argument that 'the term “post-traumatic stress disorder” did not just name a pre-existing complaint; it produced a syndrome that people could then be said (and feel themselves) to suffer from' (45). This is the crux of Hacking’s argument about MPD; he proposes that in a similar manner to post-traumatic stress disorder, the diagnosis of MPD imparts ‘a certain picture of origins [...] to disturbed and unhappy people, who then use it to reorder or reorganize their conception of their past’ (88). Thus PTSD, like MPD, is a constructed framework through which people can explain their distress, rather than being a natural reaction to a traumatic situation. This is not to claim that people do not suffer from symptoms following a traumatic experience, but instead to argue that the diagnosis of PTSD provides a structure into which the diverse and complex reactions to trauma are slotted.

who falsely claimed that they had fought in the Vietnam War and faked the symptoms of PTSD to claim compensation (276).
III. The Notion of Traumatic Memory as Distinct from Normal Memory.

In this section I will illustrate that the defining feature of the official definition of trauma is the belief that traumatic memory is stored differently in the brain from normal memory. Analysts working in the field of trauma studies believe that the overwhelming nature of the traumatic experience cause it to be remain as a literal presentation in the mind rather than becoming re-worked and interpreted as in the normal processes of memory. This belief was instigated by a crucial change made to the definition of PTSD in DSM-III-R, published in 1987. The original definition of PTSD described everyday forgetfulness as one of the symptoms, and included ‘memory impairment or trouble concentrating’ (McNally 10). However, in the later definition in DSM-III-R this was changed to ‘inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma’ (McNally 10). This was a crucial modification as it shifted the diagnostic criterion to that of traumatic amnesia, rather than just everyday forgetfulness, as McNally argues: ‘This was a radical change. No longer was PTSD only about having excruciatingly vivid memories of trauma; it was now about an inability to remember parts of the trauma’ (McNally 10). Since this alteration, trauma theory has been dominated by two seemingly opposed poles. On the one hand, the theory of traumatic amnesia proposes that the survivor is unable to remember their traumatic experience. On the other hand, the theory of traumatic intrusion emphasises that the experience repeatedly intrudes in the form of nightmares and flashbacks. Although these two theories seem at odds with one another, they are both founded upon a notion of traumatic memory as something that is stored intact in the brain. This theory of traumatic memory, which has dominated since the 1980s, has been in recent years
countered by critics such as Hacking, Leys and McNally, who argue that the evidence supporting this model is at best ambivalent and at worst non-existent. Indeed, Hacking argues that rather than being a verifiable scientific fact, this notion of memory is instead part of the memero-politics of our time.

This concept of the literality of traumatic memory is challenged by Morrison in *Beloved*. The figure of Beloved is seemingly presented by Morrison as the literal return of the past; she is presented as possibly being the physical representation of the daughter that Sethe murdered. However, this is how Sethe and Denver choose to interpret her, whereas Morrison presents her as something much more ambiguous than this; she is an indeterminate figure who resists any kind of final meaning. Thus Sethe’s determined interpretation of Beloved as the literal return of the past is an attempt to impose a fixed, and determinate meaning on something that is much more heterogeneous and indeterminate. Therefore, I read Sethe and Denver’s fixing of Beloved as a literary equivalent to the way in which advocates of the model of traumatic intrusion attempt to determine the complex and re-worked traumatic memories according to their notion of them as literal presentations of the past.

I also examine the implications that this theory of the literal nature of traumatic memory has for the necessity of working-through. Advocates of this model argue that working-through the trauma will lead to the reality of the experiences becoming diminished through the comforts of therapy. However, I argue that this denial of working-through is opposed by trauma therapists who argue, as do all of the authors of the novels studied in this thesis, that working-through is essential for the past to be effectively witnessed.
During the 1980s, the theory of traumatic amnesia became dominant through the work of therapists who believed that the symptoms of their adult patients could be traced back to childhood traumas, predominantly sexual in nature, that had been repressed or dissociated. By the end of the 1980s this growing awareness of the effects of childhood abuse became solidified into a general theory of traumatic amnesia when the reluctance of incest survivors to discuss their abuse became translated by therapists as ‘an inability to remember’ (McNally 5). Alice Miller was the main instigator for this theory: she wrongly interpreted Freud’s seduction theory in terms of the repression of childhood sexual abuse and developed a therapeutic technique based on the notion that, as she explains, ‘traumatic experiences in childhood are stored up in the body and, although remaining unconscious, exert their influence even in adulthood’ (McNally 5). Other therapists, such as Judith Herman and Emily Schatzow, believed, in accordance with Miller, that the symptoms of their adult patients were caused by the repressed memories of childhood abuse and the means for curing these patients was by recovering these memories: this was called ‘Recovered Memory Therapy’.

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9 According to McNally, this particular perception of trauma developed during the 1960s and 1970s with the publication, in 1962, of Henry Kempe’s article detailing what he called ‘battered child syndrome’ and the increase in public awareness about child sexual abuse during the 1970s resulting from feminist campaigns.

10 The techniques that were used to recover these memories ranged from ‘interpreting pains, panic attacks, and other bodily sensations as possible indicators of abuse [due to the belief that] the body “remembers” even when the mind cannot’ through to hypnosis which was ‘accorded a special status as a retrieval method’ (McNally 6). Thus these therapies made claims that they were accessing literal memories when in fact they were interpreting ambiguous bodily symptoms by fitting them into their fixed definition of PTSD.
Recovered Memory Therapy was based upon four assumptions: firstly, that ‘sexual abuse was far more widespread than anyone had imagined’; secondly, ‘that the mind protects itself from blocking awareness of abuse memories’; thirdly that ‘these hidden but toxic memories are expressed in diverse psychological problems’; and lastly ‘that recovering the memories is vital to overcoming psychological problems’ (McNally 13). The belief in traumatic amnesia upon which these therapies were grounded became a popular and widely accepted theory which was published in books written for a lay audience; for example, the *Courage to Heal* (1988) written by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis which stated that so far, no one we’ve talked to thought she might have been abused, and then later discovered that she hadn’t been. The progression always goes the other way, from suspicion to confirmation. If you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were. (qtd. in McNally 7)

III.2 Multiple Personality Disorder

A corresponding diagnosis to PTSD that was founded upon the theory of traumatic amnesia and that was included in DSM-III was that of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). This diagnosis assumes that the mind dissociates itself by creating distinct personalities, called alters, as a coping mechanism for childhood sexual abuse. To treat MPD, Recovered Memory Therapy was used to encourage multiples to recover ‘ghastly scenes of long ago’ (Hacking 14). However, as Hacking argues, the diagnosis of MPD, like PTSD, did not necessarily define an existing but undiagnosed reaction, but was instead constructed through the association of ideas and theories about memory that were
prominent in the late twentieth century. Thus, as part of his theory of the memero-politics of the twentieth century, Hacking argues that ‘multiple personality and its treatment are grounded upon the supposition that the troubled mind can be understood through increased knowledge about the very nature of memory’ and he questions ‘why it is so taken for granted [...] that memory is the key to the soul’ (20). Thus MPD is another totalising narrative which aims to produce a fixed and determinate diagnosis.

In his study, Hacking argues that the MPD movement began with the case of Sybil, whose therapist, Cornelia Wilbur, diagnosed her with MPD resulting from the child abuse inflicted on her by her mother. Hacking argues that this initiated the MPD movement because it occurred within the larger cultural concerns about child abuse; it became a famous and widely believed example of the way in which the mind creates alters as a means of dissociating childhood trauma. However, this founding case study, which set the ground for future therapeutic techniques for MPD, was dismissed by academic and scholarly journals, so Wilbur published his findings through the popular press in the form of a book and then later a film. Indeed, through the book and the film adaptation, ‘Sybil became a prototype for what was to count as a multiple’ (Hacking 43). However, as McNally points out, it later emerged that Sybil was not a multiple at all, but that ‘Sybil’s therapist had believed that a book based on Sybil’s life would never sell unless she carried the exotic diagnosis of multiple personality disorder (16). Hacking argues that, in addition to the case of Sybil, the multiple personality movement was developed through the publication of Henri

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11 This quote was taken from an article published by Herbert Spiegel, an eminent psychiatrist who knew Sybil and who claimed that Sybil’s multiple personalities were ‘artefacts of treatment’ (Hacking 124).
Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970) which recovered much of the early history of multiple history from the nineteenth century, particularly Pierre Janet's theory of dissociation. However, as Hacking argues, Ellenberger neglected to mention Janet’s own rejection of this theory in his later writing, in which he ‘ceased to take multiple personality seriously’ believing it to be instead ‘a special case of what is today called bi-polar disorder’ (Hacking 44). Thus, the underlying theories upon which the Multiplicity movement developed are undermined by Hacking and other contemporary theorists who show instead that the diagnosis of MPD was created through mis-readings and false descriptions. This, therefore, questions the validity of the theory of traumatic amnesia and the recovered memory therapy that developed in conjunction with this theory.

### III.3 The False Memory Syndrome Foundation

During the late twentieth century, the theory of traumatic amnesia began to be questioned by psychologists due to the extreme nature of many of the memories that were being recovered, for example, 'cults, rituals, Satan, cannibalism, innocents programmed to do terrible things later in life, adolescent girls used as breeders of babies intended for human sacrifice' (Hacking 14). The bizarre nature of these memories raised awareness of the part played by the therapist in terms of the form that the recovered memories took. This was particularly apparent, as Hacking observes, in that different therapists seemed to

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12 These bizarre memories created a division within the Recovered Memory movement between those who believed these memories were real and those who believed that their must be some element of fantasy to them.
'encounter' different kinds of memories. For example, George Ganaway\textsuperscript{13} stated that while most of his dissociative patients had memories of satanic cult abuse, other therapists were treating a similar number with memories of alien abductions. As Hacking satirically points out 'One possibility is that the cults are active in Georgia and the aliens in Massachusetts' (116). However, a more likely explanation is that 'the consulting clinician has a great deal to do with the form these memories take' (116). What was becoming increasingly apparent, therefore, was the extent to which these memories were being created through the therapists' interpretations of their patients' symptoms according to the accepted narrative of PTSD.

The argument that memories are shaped within the interpretative process of therapy was taken up by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) established in Philadelphia in 1992. This was set up by parents whose children had recovered memories of abuse during therapy; many of these children had sued their parents and other family members for compensation based solely on their therapist's belief that their symptoms were caused by repressed memories of child abuse. The FMSF highlighted the extent of interpretation occurring during therapy by arguing that 'therapeutic techniques designed to recover hidden memories of trauma often result in the inadvertent creation of psychologically compelling but false memories of abuse' (McNally 14). They claimed that recovered memory therapy in fact produced 'an epidemic of False Memory Syndrome' (McNally 15). The publicity about False Memory Syndrome led to a decrease in lawsuits against family members and a rise in the malpractice cases

\textsuperscript{13} Ganaway was the director for the Center for Dissociative Disorders at the Ridgeway Institute in Georgia who was the first to 'sound the alarm' about the effects that these bizarre memories would have on the credibility of recovered memory therapy and MPD.
brought against therapists for creating these false memories. The debate between
the two sides continued throughout the 1990s, with the recovered memory
therapists accusing the FMSF of being a support group for child abusers and
rejecting the idea that false memories can be implanted through their therapeutic
techniques.\textsuperscript{14}

III.4 Freud's Seduction Theory

What is interesting in this debate is that the only point of consensus between the
two sides is their condemnation of Freud. The FSMF blames Freud for, as they
perceive it, inspiring the theory of recovered memory through his seduction
theory, and the advocates of recovered memory therapy condemn Freud for
having abandoned this theory and 'thereby silencing the voices of abuse
survivors' (McNally 159).\textsuperscript{15} However, as Leys points out, 'the terms in which
modern trauma theorists tend to describe Freud's "betrayal" reveal a fundamental
misunderstanding of his thought' (18). Freud's seduction theory is wrongly
interpreted by both sides of this debate as proposing that repression or dissociation
of childhood sexual abuse leads to hysteria.\textsuperscript{16} However, if we examine Freud's

\textsuperscript{14} In 1993, the American Psychological Task Force, which was set up to investigate the claims of
both sides of this debate, was 'unable to reach consensus' and 'remained sharply divided on the
most important issues, forcing the two-sides in 1998 to issue their conclusions in different
publications in a point-counterpoint exchange' (McNally 22). Even as late as 1999 the debate was
still being waged on a political level when the US congress condemned an article published in a
leading journal. This article claimed that their evidence showed that 'contrary to widespread
belief, early sexual experience was seldom traumatic. Lasting psychological harm was the
exception, not the rule' (McNally 23). Although the article was scientifically sound, as it had been
'rigorously reviewed' (McNally 23) by scientists before publication, Congress 'denounced it for
its alleged moral and methodological flaws' (McNally 22). This research did not fit the accepted
narrative about child abuse and so was legally prevented from entering the narrative about trauma.

\textsuperscript{15} See McNally for a fuller discussion of the debates surrounding this abandonment, particularly
his criticism of Jeffrey Masson's famous attack on Freud.

\textsuperscript{16} Even McNally, who debunks the theory of traumatic amnesia on which the two sides of this
debate rely, argues that the 'early Freud certainly qualifies as a recovered memory therapist, even
theory closely it is apparent that this is a mis-reading of his work.

Freud sets out the basis of his seduction theory in his essay ‘Psychopathology of Hysteria’ published in 1895. In this essay he explores the particular components of hysterical compulsion and attempts to develop an aetiology of hysteria. He proposes that hysterical compulsion differs from simple neurotic compulsion in that it is unintelligible and also incongruous. Freud provides an example of neurotic compulsion to contrast with the unintelligibility of hysterical compulsion:

A man may have run into danger by falling out of a carriage, and driving in a carriage may after that be impossible for him. This compulsion is (1) intelligible, since we know its origin and (2) congruous, since the association with danger justifies the link between driving in a carriage and fear. (348)

However, in hysterical compulsion this simple tracing of the fear back to an experience is not possible; the fear that is provoked seems to have no relation to the experience that the patient offers as a means of explaining it. Freud proposes that this unintelligible and incongruous structure of hysteria results from a substitution of ideas of which the patient is unaware:

Before the analysis, A is an excessively intense idea, which forces its way into consciousness too often, and each time gives rise to weeping. The subject does not know why he weeps at A; he regards it as absurd but cannot prevent it.

After the analysis, it has been discovered that there is an idea B, which justifiably gives rise to weeping [...] B stands in a particular relation to A
it is as though A had stepped into B’s place. A has become a substitute, a symbol for B. (348-9)

In an attempt to explain the particular reasons why certain ideas are repressed and substituted in this specific way, Freud argues that the precondition of sexuality must be present. He states that unpleasurable thoughts in general cannot be repressed in this way and so there must be something specific to unpleasurable sexual ideas that distinguishes them all from other unpleasurable thoughts so as to be able to cause this kind of repression and symbol-formation: ‘It is quite impossible to suppose that distressing sexual affects so greatly exceed all other unpleasurable affects in intensity. It must be another characteristic of sexual ideas that can explain how it is that sexual ideas are alone subjected to repression’ (352). It is this other characteristic of sex that becomes of utmost significance in Freud’s seduction theory; this characteristic is the onset of puberty. Freud argues that the change of perception brought about by puberty causes the memory of early childhood events to become re-interpreted and perceived in regards to a sexual content that was not originally perceived. Freud calls this particular kind of repression ‘Nachtraglichkeit’, which James Strachey translates as ‘deferred action’.

Freud explains this notion through the case of Emma who has a hysterical compulsion of not being able to go into shops alone. In therapy, Emma explains that this fear is the result of a particular experience that occurred when she was twelve years old, as Freud highlights ‘shortly after puberty’ (353). Freud describes that she went into a shop to buy something, saw the two shop-assistants (one of whom she can remember) laughing together, and ran away in some kind of
affect of fright. In connection with this, she was led to recall that the two of them were laughing at her clothes and that one of them had pleased her sexually. (353)

Freud felt that this experience did not explain the hysterical compulsion; he questioned how this seemingly innocuous incident could have caused such an intensive fear of going into shops alone. He explains, however, that ‘further investigation now revealed a second memory’ (353) of when she was eight years old and had, on two occasions, been assaulted by the shopkeeper of a small shop where she had gone to buy sweets. Freud follows with an explanation of how the substitution and symbol-formation of the different elements of this memory had been transposed onto her explanation of the later experience, through the symbols of her clothes and the laughing shopkeeper.

What is particularly significant is the way that Freud explains the moment of repression. He stresses that Emma ‘now reproached herself for having gone [to the sweet shop] a second time’ (354 My emphasis). He argues that the anxiety that Emma feels towards this experience occurs in the present not in the past. Thus, it is the memory of the experience that causes the affect and becomes repressed, not the experience itself, as the traumatic amnesia model proposes.17 Freud argues, therefore, that this later re-interpretation of the memory of these experiences has occurred because of the onset of puberty, in which the sexual content of the two assaults is now understood by Emma which causes her to re-interpret these scenes and to reproach herself for having gone back to the shop a second time. As Freud states: ‘here we have the case of a memory arousing an

17 Freud’s emphasis on the traumatic effect of the memory rather than the experience is evident in his thought as early as 1892, when in his translation of Charcot’s lectures he added the following footnote: ‘The core of a hysterical attack, in whatever form it may appear, is a memory […] the
affect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change [brought about] in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered' (356). Thus, as Leys points out, 'for Freud, trauma is constituted by a dialectic between two events, neither of which was intrinsically traumatic, and a temporal delay or latency through which the past was available only by a deferred act of understanding and interpretation' (20).

Therefore, Freud’s ‘Nachtraglichkeit’ differs vastly from the theory of recovered memory: firstly, it is not the experience that is repressed but the memory of it; secondly, the repression is caused because the memory is interpreted in a different manner due to the onset of puberty; and thirdly, the repression does not constitute a fixing of this original experience to be later recovered, but is a re-working which includes the processes of translation, symbol-formation and substitution. In reference to the continuing belief in the model of traumatic amnesia that has dominated in the late twentieth century Hacking questions why modern trauma theorists ‘have been so literalist, so mechanical, and imagined that an illness produced by trauma is produced at the time of the trauma, in early childhood? (137). In fact, as Hacking acknowledges and McNally demonstrates, trauma research has begun to challenge this model and many recent neurobiological studies have discredited this particular theory of traumatic memory.

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18 As Leys argues ‘even at the height of his commitment to the seduction theory, Freud problematizes the originary status of the traumatic event by arguing that it was not the experience itself which acted traumatically but its delayed revival as memory after the individual had entered sexual maturity and could grasp its sexual meaning’ (20).

19 See McNally for a description of these studies, particularly his debunking of the research conducted which has led to this model, and his analysis of recent research into traumatic memory in chs.2, 4, 5, and 7.
III.5 Traumatic Intrusion

An associated theory to that of traumatic amnesia is the belief in traumatic intrusion, in which the past is perceived as returning upon the trauma victim in a literal form experienced in intrusive recollections, nightmares and flashbacks. Leys describes this perception of trauma thus:

Owing to the emotions of terror and surprise the mind is split or dissociated. It is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result the victim is unable to integrate the experience and is possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. (2)

This theory, whilst seemingly opposed to the model of traumatic amnesia, still relies upon the central assumption that traumatic memory is somehow fixed and stored in a literal form in the mind. In a similar manner to the theory of traumatic amnesia, this notion of the literal return of the past has been recently questioned and criticised by contemporary critics. Critics of this theory are not arguing, however, that people do not experience such intrusive thoughts and nightmares, as this phenomenon has been widely reported by survivors of all kinds of traumatic experiences. Instead, what is being discredited is the underlying assumption that the traumatic intrusions are the literal presentations of the past experience, rather than a memory that has been re-worked and placed into a narrative.

The strongest advocate of the model of the literality of traumatic memory is Bessel A. van der Kolk whose studies ‘popularised the notion that traumatic nightmares replicate genuine events’ (McNally 109). In his theory of traumatic memory van der Kolk relies on Janet’s belief that new experiences are ‘integrated
into existing mental structures' (van der Kolk 160), whereas 'under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which causes the memory to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control' (160). This dissociation of the memory, van der Kolk argues, leads to 'later manifest recollections or behavioural reenactments' (160). Unlike Freud, who placed the emphasis on the later re-interpretation of a past experience, van der Kolk argues that 'contemporary research has shown that dissociation of a traumatic experience occurs as the trauma is occurring' (168). He argues that the reason traumatic memories become fixed is because they are experienced as 'speechless terror' (172) that 'cannot be organised on a linguistic level' (172) but only on an iconic level, and so they 'cannot be easily translated into the symbolic language necessary for linguistic retrieval' (173).

III.6 Problems with the theory of traumatic intrusion

Recent theorists have heavily criticised van der Kolk's research methodology and have debunked his theory of traumatic memory. Leys argues that 'implicit in [van der Kolk's theory] is the idea that because the victim is unable to process the traumatic experience it leaves a "reality imprint" in the brain that in its literality testifies to the existence of a pristine historical truth

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20 Van der Kolk cites his studies on trauma victims to support his theory of the specificity of traumatic memory: In our studies on post-traumatic nightmares, traumatic scenes were re-experienced at night over and over again without modification (van der Kolk et al. 1984). In our Rorschach tests of trauma victims, we saw the unmodified reliving of traumatic episodes of ten, twenty, or thirty years ago.
uncontaminated by subjective meaning etc' (7). However, as Leys states, 'there is no consensus in the field of memory research regarding such a claim' (7). Leys examines van der Kolk's famous 1984 paper, which published the results of his research into post-traumatic nightmares, to show its methodological flaws and to undermine its conclusions. She states that the supposed literality of the dreams can be questioned when one takes into consideration that 'all the information about the time, nature and content of the nightmares was obtained from self-reports given by patients in interviews' (234). Therefore, van der Kolk did not take into account the subjects' possible later interpretations of their dreams in which they could have easily related the various images and symbols of their dreams to a particular experience that they have suffered.

A later study by Milton Kramer took this particular variable into consideration and gathered reports from the trauma victims immediately after their nightmares had occurred in a laboratory situation and then compared this with their later descriptions of their dreams. Through this, Kramer discovered 'a discrepancy between the group's impressions about the contents of their dreams and the actual contents as recalled by them under controlled laboratory conditions' (Leys 236). Instead of the dreams being solely about the traumatic experience, as van der Kolk had argued, they were as much about family and life before the combat experience as they were about combat. This obviously surprised the patients who had the impression that there nightmares where replicas of the traumatic experiences they had suffered.

In contrast to this more detailed and objective study, van der Kolk was 'committed to the idea of traumatic dreams in advance' (Leys 237) and so set up

(van der Kolk and Ducey, 1989). (van der Kolk 172)
his experiment in a way that confirmed his already established beliefs. However, despite the ‘flimsiness of evidence’ (Leys 237) of van der Kolk’s research, since its publication it has been ‘cited regularly in support of a sweeping neurobiological theory which treats traumatic dreams as literal memories of the traumatic event’ (Leys 238). Hacking points out that, instead of being a verifiable truth, this theory has developed because the overwhelming nature of traumatic nightmares and flashbacks have led trauma victims to believe that these memories are distinct from their normal memories and that they somehow must attest to the reality of their traumatic experience. However, although the nightmares feel as if they are reenactments of the trauma there is no evidence to support this theory. In spite of the obvious problems with van der Kolk’s ideas, his theory of the literality of traumatic memory has gained considerable support from poststructuralist literary critics who have adopted this specific perception of trauma to develop a model of narrative. The predominant critic in this area is Cathy Caruth who directly cites van der Kolk in her work and who has been herself quoted by van der Kolk to support his theory. Caruth proposes that

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21 As a result of the controversy over recovered memories caused by the bizarre nature of many of these memories and from the numerous studies discrediting van der Kolk’s claims, in particular Loftus’ studies on memory, the literal quality of trauma was brought into question. However, van der Kolk remained devoted to his theory and responded to this criticism by firstly rejecting all studies conducted under laboratory conditions, arguing that ‘laboratory experiments cannot replicate eye-witness experience of trauma’ (Leys 246); he instead relied solely on research ‘that examined real-life situations [although] the authors of these studies themselves highlight the problem of having to rely on the description of the original experience from the subject’ (Leys 247). He also adapted his theory of the literality of traumatic nightmares to argue that ‘proof of the accurate and stability of traumatic memories is besides the point’ due to his belief that traumatic memory is not organised on a linguistic level and so cannot be expressed through ‘verbal-linguistic-semantic representation’ (Leys 247). Instead, van der Kolk argues, the only true means of trauma victims expressing their traumatic nightmares, flashbacks, etc, is through painting and drawing, which incorrectly implies, as Leys argues, that pictures are non-symbolic. Hacking criticises the assumption that van der Kolk’s theory is founded upon: that traumatic memory is stored as visual scenes and normal memory as linguistic narrative. He argues instead that all memory is presented as scenes and that it is only in the telling of these memories that they become narratives; therefore, there is no distinction between normal and traumatic memory, and the privileging of one over the other in van der Kolk’s theory of traumatic literality is an incorrect assumption (252-2).
because the event is not translated through conscious interpretation it remains in a literal form; she transposes this theory onto a notion of the way that narrative should strive to 'miss' the event rather than consciously represent it allowing a more direct access to the event. Caruth’s theories obviously raise serious issues for the necessity of witnessing a traumatic past as it proposes that the past can only be accessed through what she calls a 'gap in understanding'.

III.7 The denial of working-through inherent in the model of traumatic intrusion

One of the major problems that arise from the model of traumatic memory as a literal return is that it denies any form of working-through that may lead to the trauma survivor being cured. As an advocate of this model, Caruth believes that, as the traumatic nightmares and flashbacks present the 'truth' of an experience, any form of healing will ‘imply the giving up of an important reality, or the dilution of a special truth into the reassuring terms of therapy’ (Caruth "Preface" vii). This is in direct contrast to the belief of many therapists working with trauma patients who argue that working through the trauma is the only means of allowing the sufferer to attain a level of ‘ethically responsible agency, including consideration for others […] insofar as the survivor trapped in acting out past scenes of traumatic violence […] may be less capable of such agency in the present’ (Saint-Amour 62). Caruth’s position is also in direct contrast to the necessity of working-through which is apparent in the novels studied in this thesis that deal with specific public or personal traumatic events. In these novels the traumatic memory is not valorised as a means of accessing the past, but is instead
perceived as a disabling symptom which must be cured to allow the protagonist to achieve the ability to properly witness their traumatic experiences.
In this section I will discuss contemporary theories about trauma that have re-conceptualised Freud’s seduction theory, which has been so mis-interpreted by theorists working within trauma studies. As evident in the previous section, the advocates of the literal nature of traumatic memory ground their ideas on a mis-reading of Freud’s ideas, rather than a sustained analysis or contemporary re-working of his central insights. For example, the advocates of recovered memory therapy interpret Nachtraglichkeit as proposing that childhood trauma is repressed or dissociated as it occurs and can later be recovered through therapy. The model of traumatic intrusion also relies upon a notion of the past as fixed in a literal form in the brain, which again mis-reads Freud’s notion of the re-interpretation of the past. However, rather than rejecting the significance of Freud’s ideas because of these mis-interpretations and the way they have shaped theories of trauma, contemporary theorists have returned to Freud’s central concept of Nachtraglichkeit to develop their own concepts of trauma that radically re-interpret Freud’s ideas. These theorists strongly reject the model of traumatic memory as stored in the mind, and instead construct a theory of the unconscious itself as formed through trauma. They highlight that Freud was concerned with developing a general theory of the way in which the unconscious is constituted by trauma, and, therefore, these theories move from the specific case of traumatic memory to a more general theory of the subject’s confrontation with a traumatic reality. This conceptualisation of a traumatic reality is illustrated in the two philosophical novels studied in this thesis: unlike the other novels which describe a specific event that triggers the traumatic effects, both Lives of Girls and Women
and *The Sea, The Sea* depict a notion of reality as being unrepresentable and untranslatable to conscious thought.

The main advocates of this contemporary notion of a general traumatic reality are Jean Laplanche, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Lacan. Although these psychoanalysts differ in their specific theories they all re-conceptualise Freud's theory of Nachtraglichkeit to emphasise the notion of the traumatic effects of the subject's interrelationship with an external world. For Laplanche this relationship is conceptualised in terms of 'enigmatic messages' which are imposed upon the child by the parents; these messages are enigmatic because they are compromised by the unconscious of the parent. The messages cannot be properly translated by the child through the usual processes of interpretation and so there exists an untranslated remainder which, Laplanche argues, actually constitutes the unconscious as a separate place in the subject's mental system. Thus for Laplanche the creation of the unconscious as a place is achieved through a traumatic relationship with messages from outside of the subject.

Lyotard emphasises a different element of Freud's Nachtraglichkeit by focusing on the effect produced by this process; he calls this 'unconscious affect' and highlights the way in which it is an unlocatable and atemporal element within the subject's mental topography. Lyotard positions this theory specifically within his concerns about narrative to argue that the organising of reality into chronological order in narrative is an attempt to control and impose order on the formlessness of unconscious affect. The notion of narrative as a comforting process which imposes form through chronologization is a concept which is explored in some of the novels in this thesis. The novels in which the protagonists are writers explicitly illustrate the way in which narrative can be a means of
imposing an order on the traumatic experiences they face. This is particularly apparent in the two philosophical novels in which the protagonists use narrative to protect themselves from the trauma of reality.

Lacan directly explores the notion of a traumatic reality through his theory of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. He argues that, through the Imaginary and Symbolic registers, the ego strives to achieve a coherent image which masks the fragmentation of self that the child experiences. Lacan therefore sets up a notion of the way that humans create illusory versions to protect themselves from fragmentation and chaos. In all of the novels studied in this thesis the protagonist create false versions of their lives to attempt to create a coherent sense of self. In his formulation of trauma, Lacan posits a third register, that of the Real. This is an unrepresentable element which escapes the systems of meaning we use to structure the world. This notion of a traumatic reality, although it differs from Laplanche’s formulation, is, like Laplanche’s enigmatic messages, concerned with the notion of an external reality that is experienced as traumatic by the subject. This notion, therefore, corresponds with the conceptualisation of reality in both Murdoch’s and Munro’s novels. In Lives of Girls and Women and The Sea, The Sea trauma is presented, not in terms of a specific event, as in the other novels, but in terms of a traumatic, unrepresentable reality which lies outside of the signifying systems we use to create order and coherence in the world.
IV.1 Laplanche’s theory of afterwardsness

French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche is one of the most prominent advocates of the ‘return to and reformulation of Freud’s abandoned “seduction theory”’ (Fletcher ‘Introduction’ 1). He re-conceptualises Freud’s Nachträglichkeit, which he translates as ‘afterwardsness’, to construct a theory of ‘human foundations, of “generalised seduction”’ (Fletcher ‘Introduction’ 15).

Laplanche reformulates the two scene model of afterwardsness in terms of an initial intrusion and the attempt to translate this intrusion; of ‘implantation and translation, of inscription and reinscription’ (Fletcher ‘Introduction’ 16). He argues that the initial intrusion takes the form of an ‘enigmatic message’ which is offered to the child by the parent whose behaviour towards the child is necessarily compromised by their own unconscious. The second stage of ‘afterwardsness’ occurs as the child attempts to translate this message.

During this second stage, elements of this enigmatic message cannot be translated, as Fletcher explains: ‘the child’s attempt to substitute a signifier or signifying sequence of its own, for the enigmatic signifier or message of the other, always leaves something untranslated; there is always a remainder, which Laplanche calls the à traduire, the yet-to-be-translated’ (‘Introduction’ 16). Laplanche proposes that these failed translations ‘form the kernel of the unconscious’ (93); therefore, primal repression is the ‘creator of the unconscious as a place’ (Laplanche 85-6). In this respect, for Laplanche, ‘the development of
the human individual is to be understood as an attempt to master, to translate, these enigmatic, traumatizing messages' (Laplanche 165). The unconscious element or 'trace' cannot be considered as 'a stored memory or representation, but as a sort of waste-product of certain processes of memorisation' (Laplanche 89). This understanding of repression is crucial to identifying the different position that Laplanche takes from theories that are grounded in a notion of the traumatic memory as a literal presentation. Laplanche argues that 'repression cannot be considered a particular case of committing something to memory' (95), that 'the unconscious is not memory; repression is not a particular modality of memorising' (152) and his theories 'undermine any notion of the unconscious as representation, as memory and as historical record' (Fletcher 'Introduction' 38). Thus, for Laplanche, the aim of psychoanalytic therapy is 'not to restore a more intact past' (163); the unconscious does not contain such literal presentations of the past, but only what Laplanche calls 'thing-like presentations' (93) which are the remainders of the failure of translation.23

Laplanche’s theory of ‘afterwardsness’ lies between the opposites of the recovered/false memory debate. Laplanche positions the recovery memory advocates in terms of a naively realistic or 'deterministic standpoint' that believes that 'neurosis is a “disease of memory” and that only the recovery of the subject's real history can allow the ego to detach itself from blind mechanisms and achieve some degree of freedom' (139). In opposition to this perspective, the FMSF occupy a ‘creative hermeneutic’ (139) position, which believes that the past is

23 For Laplanche, rather than analysis being aimed at the recovery of scenes from the past as in Recovered Memory Therapy, it is 'first and foremost a method of deconstruction (ana-lysis), with the aim of clearing the way for a new construction, which is the task of the analysand' (165) and thus 'what is reconstructed is a certain process including the message, the attempt to translate the message, and what was lost in this translation: it is essentially the reconstruction of a defence or a
created solely in the present. He proposes that his theory of afterwardsness denies the naively realistic view, as the unconscious elements cannot be perceived as memories; however, his notion of the reality of the enigmatic message from the other challenges the solely hermeneutic view. Laplanche argues for a realism of the unconscious, referring to Freud’s term ‘psychical reality’; this challenges the creative, hermeneutic model, as Fletcher argues:

[The] very realism of the letter, of the thing-like presentations in the unconscious, the reified fragments of enigmatic messages that continue to interpellate and excite the subject from within […] contests the ‘constructivism and facile relativism of the hermeneutic ‘invention’ of the past by the present. (39)

Therefore, Laplanche’s theory of afterwardsness challenges the oppositions of determinism and hermeneutics and positions the unconscious between these two poles.

IV.2 Lyotard’s concept of unconscious affect

In a similar manner to Laplanche, Lyotard re-conceptualises Freud’s Nachtraglichkeit to challenge the underlying assumptions about memory that have dominated in the twentieth century. In his re-working, Lyotard emphasises the atemporality of unconscious affect to destabilise the notion of a temporalised historical event that forms the basis of theories of traumatic memory. Lyotard posits the first moment of Nachtraglichkeit as an ‘excitation’ which ‘upsets the apparatus with such ‘force’ that it is not registered’ (15). This first moment, repression’ (163-4).
therefore, affects the unconscious system but is not registered and therefore not translated, as Lyotard states:

the force of the excitation cannot be "bound," composed, neutralised, fixed in accordance with other forces "within" the apparatus, and to that extent it does not give rise to a mise-en-scène. This force is not set to work in the machine of the mind. It is deposited there. (15)

Lyotard conceptualises this first moment in terms of a 'shock of which the shocked is unaware' (12) and so on the level of the mind it is an event that has not actually occurred.

Lyotard formulates the effect of this shock in terms of Freud's 'unconscious affect' which Lyotard compares to 'a cloud of energy particles that are not subject to serial laws, that are not organised into sets that can be thought in terms of words or images' (15). Thus, unconscious affect 'is not representable [...] It is energy, to be sure, but in an unusable form, untransformable to be precise' (15). Although this unconscious affect is indiscernible at the moment it occurs, it makes its presence felt through the symptom that it produces at a later stage. This is the moment of the second blow, which unlike the first blow, which is 'a shock without an affect', is 'an affect without shock' (16). Lyotard argues that

something, however, will make itself understood "later." That which will not have been introduced will have been "acted, " "acted out," "enacted," played out, in the end — and thus re-presented. But without the subject recognising it. It will be represented as something that has never been presented. (16)

This second moment is evident in Freud's formulation of Emma's flight from the
store. Lyotard argues that in this second moment the affect is ‘understood as feeling, fear, anxiety, feeling of a threatening excess whose motive is obviously not in the present context’ (13). Lyotard argues that this feeling of fear ‘informs consciousness that there is something, without being able to tell what it is’ (16). Therefore, Lyotard’s theory of unconscious affect opposes any notion of an actual historical memory stored intact in the brain.

Lyotard argues that Freud’s model of Nachträglichkeit is dependent upon a temporality which does not actually exist in the unconscious. He states that Freud’s model is a chronologization, obtained by virtue of the qualification and localization of a first blow, by virtue of anamnesis, the setting into diachrony of what takes place in a time that is not diachronic since what happened earlier is given at a later date (in analysis, in writing), and since what is later in the symptom (the second blow) occurs “before” what happened earlier (the first blow). (16)

He calls this a ‘realistic’ or ‘historical decision’ to ‘bring in line the first and second blow according to a series computed in so-called real time’ (16). He associates this temporalization with ‘narrative organisation’ that is ‘constitutive of diachronic time’. This has the effect of “‘neutralizing” an “initial” violence, of representing a presence without representation’ (16), and so is an organisation which produces comfort by imposing an origin onto an event that did not actually take place. Lyotard therefore contrasts this comforting narrative time with the ‘time of the unconscious affect [which] seems, in light of the aforementioned [realistic and historical] decision, a bit monstrous, unformed, confusing, confounding’ (17). He argues that Freud’s model relies on a chronologization
which has developed as a means to protect consciousness from the ‘ungraspable’
unconscious affect and so presents Freud’s chronological model as being result of
the need to create linear narratives to impose meaning. For Lyotard, therefore, it
is the linear chronology of realist narratives that produce a sense of comfort and coherence. This use of narrative is apparent in the novels studied in this thesis in
which the protagonist is a writer; these protagonists utilise narrative to comfort themselves from this traumatic reality by organising events into chronological, linear time.

With Laplanche and Lyotard’s re-working of Nachtraglichkeit there develops a re-conceptualisation of trauma, not as a specific traumatic event, but as an effect that is produced on the child by the structures which it is born into. These structures are defined in Laplanche and Lyotard in terms of a ‘shock’ which cannot be translated and which Laplanche determines in terms of the enigmatic messages coming from the other. Thus, the concept of trauma moves away from a particular experience to be defined more in terms of the general condition of mankind, born into a world of signifiers and messages that it cannot formulate.

IV.3 Lacan’s Traumatic Real

With Lacan this conceptualisation of trauma becomes determined in terms of what he calls the ‘Real’. The ‘Real’ is one of the registers in Lacan’s tripartite structure; the other two are the Imaginary and Symbolic. Lacan’s theories are structured around the human desire to create a sense of coherence in the face of disorder and fragmentation. Through his tri-partite structure of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real he argues that we create a fantasy image of ourselves that
belies the necessary alienation that results from this coherence, and he posits a
beyond to the signifying systems that we used to impose meaning in the world.

Lacan developed the notion of the imaginary register through his theory of
the mirror phase in which the child identifies with either its real image or that of
another child. This occurs due to the child’s lack of coherence and thus the
complete image the child identifies with is a means that the child uses to gain
mastery over its incomplete body. However, this identification leads to a
fundamental alienation, as the child’s identity arises from an image that is outside
him/herself. What is significant in Lacan’s formulation is that the imaginary
register is a ‘misrecognition’ (Sarup 102) rather than recognition and is therefore
‘the scene of a desperate delusional attempt to be and to remain “what one is”’
(Bowie 92). Therefore, the ego which is constituted through this Imaginary
Register functions to conceal the fragmentation of the body and strives to achieve
coherence and completeness by identifying with an image external to the self.

Later in his work, Lacan’s interest in the significance of language in
Freud’s theories led him to develop a notion of the priority of the signifier in the
formation of identity. He called this the Symbolic Register to encompass the
linguistic, social and cultural systems into which the child is born. These
structures are not understood by the child but they determine the nature of the
child’s identity; like the Imaginary Register this leads to alienation in that the
subject’s identity is constructed from the outside. With this concept, Lacan
develops a more defined sense of the ‘intersubjective and social’ (Bowie 93)
effects on the ego. The symbolic register not only creates an alienation but also
grounds the subject in a chain of signification to which it can now belong.
However, Lacan believes that language is structured through the difference
between words and so is characterised by gaps and absences rather than continuity and coherence. Therefore, the discontinuity of the Symbolic register in some ways lies in opposition with the Imaginary register which continually strives for coherence.

The third register is that of the Real; Lacan defines this in terms of 'the impossible to symbolise' (Sarup 104). The Real is that which is excluded from the symbolic, that which lies outside of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. The 'Real' is not reality in the normal sense of the word; in fact the Imaginary and Symbolic make up what we think of as reality, whereas the Real is all that is excluded from this reality. Therefore, as Sarup argues, the Real 'reminds human subjects that their Symbolic and Imaginary constructions take place in a world that exceeds them' (105). The traumatic element of the Real is apparent in that Lacan associates it with 'the sudden, the disconcerting and the unpredictable' (104).

The theories of Laplanche, Lyotard and Lacan highlight that the psychoanalytic model of trauma refers more to a sense of the untranslatable elements of reality which escape our attempts to translate and give meaning to the world around us. Thus, the trauma is experienced either through the failure of the mind to be able to translate these enigmatic signifiers or in the sense of that which escapes the Symbolic structures which we use to achieve a sense of coherence and completeness.
V. Representing Trauma

In the previous section I concentrated on the psychological and psychoanalytic theories of the consequences of a traumatic experience. In this section I change the focus to the way that the effects of trauma complicate attempts to represent that experience. In this section I will explore the issues regarding both personal and public representations of trauma. I will firstly examine the difficulties experienced by individuals who attempt to communicate their personal experiences of trauma. I will highlight the way that survivors of traumatic experiences often feel that they are unable to adequately express their overwhelming experiences to others. The most prominent difficulty experienced by survivors is the inadequacy of conventional narrative as a means of representing their experiences, as many trauma survivors feel that it produces a limited version of events. However, despite these problems of representing trauma in narrative, trauma survivors believe that narrative is essential for them to represent their experiences. The representation of their experiences in narrative is necessary for both personal and public reasons. On a personal level, narrative is felt to be essential to be able to work-through the trauma by ordering the experiences into a chronological story and to therefore gain mastery over the events they suffered. On a public level, these personal narratives of trauma are felt to be necessary to bear witness to the horrific events they experienced.

Following this, I will argue that the necessity of witnessing is dependent not only on the survivors ability to communicate the events but also on the audience's ability to be able to register and adequately respond to their stories. I will emphasise the responsibility of the audience in being able to read personal
accounts of trauma and to be able to transform these personal accounts into a public narrative about past trauma. The reasons for the necessity of public narratives of trauma are similar to personal narratives of trauma in that they are essential to provide a form of working-through for the community who has experienced the trauma. However, the implications of the nature of the versions produced becomes more of a political issue as narrative can be used to deliberately falsify the past: versions of past trauma can be used, not to bear witness to the horror of the events, but to reinforce the ideology of those in power. To examine these concerns, I provide examples of built memorials which have been constructed to allow a community to forget the ambiguity of past traumatic events. For example, I discuss the French memorials which attempt to mask the complicity of the French government with the Nazis during the second world war; this issue is explored in Daughters of the House. I also discuss the US Holocaust Museum which aims to create a particular story of the Holocaust to construct America as a land of freedom and democracy and therefore to mask the abuse perpetrated on other cultures by the American government. This is examined in Ceremony and Beloved which both illustrate the horrific treatment of other cultures, such as Native Americans and African Americans, by the American government. Following this discussion of built memorials I explore the way in which written memorials can be used to create a particular, politically motivated version of past trauma. In this section, I emphasise that it is the linear chronology of the conventional narrative structure which can be utilised by those in power to create a falsifying version of a public traumatic event. This utilisation of narrative to present a compromised version of a public past is indirectly explored in the novels which examine public trauma and directly examined in The Diviners.
V.1 Communicating Personal Experiences of Trauma

One of the most prominent statements made by Holocaust survivors is that their experiences seem inexpressible; for example, Robert Antelme, describes that ‘even to us, what we had to tell would start to seem unimaginable’ (Edkins 177), and Geoffrey Hartman explains that ‘disbelief [...] touched the survivors themselves [so that] two phrases stand out in their testimony: “I was there” and “I could not believe what my eyes had seen.”’ (326). To substantiate this claim, Hartman quotes Aharon Appelfeld, a child survivor of the Holocaust, who states that “everything that happened was so gigantic, so inconceivable, that the witness even seems like a fabricator to himself” (326-7 Book).24

This sense of inexpressibility is felt by some survivors in terms of the inadequacy of language as an effective tool for communicating the horror. For example, as Sara Horowitz explains, Charlotte Delbo, a French poet who survived Auschwitz, felt that she had to struggle ‘against a language which [...] falsifies her experience. Her memoirs complain that ordinary words such as fear, hunger, evil, and fatigue fall short when used to describe extraordinary circumstance’ (45).

Not only is language an inadequate tool, but also the actual act of narrating the experience is perceived as diminishing its trauma. Thus, many survivors fear that their narratives would provide an inadequate and incomplete version, even whilst they acknowledge the need for clarity and simplicity as a means of bearing witness to the Holocaust. David Carroll argues that the phrase ‘Let’s not talk about that’ ‘constitutes a refusal to narrate based on the feeling that once narrated

24 This inconceivability is felt not only in relation to the past but also to the present life after liberation, as Hartman proposes: ‘What limits representation of the Shoah is already expressed in survivor testimony as a sense of unreality that affects their past and present life’ (326)
or represented the horror is no longer the horror that it was; now it is narratable, representable’ (vii-viii). Narrative, as poststructuralist criticism argues, can erase the past rather than effectively representing it: this is evident in Jacques Derrida’s argument that ‘the production of writing is also the production of a system of effacement’ (389) and in Lyotard’s assertion that ‘only that which has been inscribed can [...] be forgotten, because it could be effaced’ (26). Morrison in *Beloved* creates a powerful image of the inscribing of Sethe’s baby’s headstone to emphasise the way that this act of naming is one that forgets the reality of the dead child. Sethe uses the inscription of the word Beloved upon the tombstone of the baby she murdered as a means of forgetting the reality of her act and of transforming the actuality of her baby, who remains unnamed in the novel, into an expression of her love for the child, it is beloved to her. Horowitz conceptualises the problems of representing trauma in narrative in terms of the ‘packaging’ of the past:

> Rather than transmitting meaning, ritual retelling can empty a story of meaning. Many survivors share this fear that the Holocaust will suffer in the retelling, that it will come to future readers as a pre-packaged event, that the public has grown tired of the Holocaust and that nothing will change. (57)

In accordance with Horowitz, Jean Amery emphasises the dangers of this kind of definitive narrative in his belief that ‘clarification would amount to dispersal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history’ (qtd. in Rosenfeld 64). Thus the tendency of realist narratives to produce a fixed and defined story leads to the fear that the trauma of the Holocaust would be neatly

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25 This notion that the Holocaust will suffer through its repeated telling is something that many critics believe has already occurred in Germany where ‘the near-obsessive emphasis on both the Nazi era and the Holocaust’ (Geyer and Hansen 176) has led to a ‘culture industry aiming at mass
resolved for its audiences rather than remaining a traumatic and inconceivable experience. This fear is obviously confronted with the equal necessity to provide some kind of clarity to enable proper witnessing of this event.

Because of these difficulties of communicating trauma, many Holocaust survivors sometimes feel that silence would be a better option rather than risking creating a narrative that limits and diminishes their experiences. However, this plea for silence must not be taken literally but must in fact be seen, paradoxically, as a way of talking about the trauma, as Carroll argues in his discussion of the requests made by Holocaust survivors to ‘not talk about that’:

Such pleas/commands, however, inevitably open the way for “talk” and narration and thus constitute a way of talking about the Shoah in the mode of refusing to talk about it. They are an admission that in certain circumstances not talking about “that” can be a powerful way of taking about it, that silence can at times say more or speak louder than discourse. They also acknowledge that discourse, if it is to say something about “that” must respect and maintain within itself a fundamental silence. (vii)

The necessity of not taking this appeal for silence literally is evident in that the consequences of silence are far more damaging than the dangers of producing a limited version of events. For example, the public consequences of silence are apparent in Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel’s assertion that ‘keeping silent only strengthens those who wish to deny or evade knowledge’ (Hartman ‘Introduction’ 10). On a personal level, silence prevents any kind of working-through: this is emphasised by Appelfeld who describes that after liberation the silence that he

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26 This paradox of silence and speech is neatly summarised by Wieviorka who states that ‘the very person who writes in order to testify appeals at the same time to silence’ (25).
and the other children adopted as a coping mechanism, which at first felt like a 'marvellous oblivion, was in fact a means of denying their own identities and eventually led to self-hatred:

We did not yet know of the bitter and hostile quality nestled within that marvellous oblivion. Perhaps we did know – but we refused to admit its existence. I have said "oblivion", but it was actually a latent protest against suffering and fate, and certainly against its immediate cause, our being Jewish. Everything that had happened to us had only happened as a consequence of that. This recognition soon degenerated into its ugliest and most painful phase. At the lowest point the victim took on the malevolence of the evildoer; something wicked lurked within us. The inability to submit a full accounting to oneself and the will to forget fused mysteriously and turned into abysmal. Not loathing for the murderer who committed the crime but loathing for ourselves. (151)

Therefore, in spite of the difficulties of communicating their traumas, Holocaust writers have continued to write about their experiences in the concentration camps as they are aware of the personal and public consequences of silence and acknowledge the necessity of telling their stories. Hartman indicates the necessary difficulty of representing trauma when he discusses the 'creative impulse' which 'has led to remarkable works of art after the Holocaust despite the dangers of trivialisation and sensationalism' (Hartman 2-3); in accordance with Hartman, Carroll claims that 'the literature of the concentration camps indicates that most survivors [...] know that if it is impossible to tell of what happened, this is why they must tell and retell what happened' (ix).

One of the most well-known statements regarding this compulsion to tell
was made by Primo Levi who describes that 'the need to tell our story to 'the rest', to make 'the rest' participate in it had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse, to the point of competing with our other elementary needs' (Levi 15). This necessity was experienced during the actual events, as evidenced by the enormous quantity of ghetto writing produced that documented the details of the atrocities as they were occurring, and after the events, as shown by the testimonies written years after liberation, as in Levi's case. This writing was produced in spite of the physical and mental hardships of the ghettos and the camps and despite the fear of punishment and perhaps death if the documents were discovered.

The reasons for this compulsion to write are varied and complicated; however, one of the most persistent claims in survivor testimony is the necessity for survivors to work-through their experiences by transforming their trauma into stories which they can tell to others. Dori Laub, a child survivor of the Holocaust, explains how he became aware, through his work with other survivors, that:

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect

27 The huge amount of writing that took place in the Ghettos is described by Sara Horowitz, Head of Jewish Studies at the University of Delaware, who discusses the 'diaries, chronicles, even vast archives [that] are unearthed on the killing grounds of the Third Reich. Written privately or cooperatively, thousands of pages survived their authors' (42). French historian and researcher Annette Wieviorka questions 'How can we fail to be struck by the fever to testify that gripped the Warsaw ghetto' (25). She quotes Ringelblum as evidence of this fever:

Everyone wrote [...] Journalists and professional writers, of course, but also teachers, social workers, youth, even children. For the most part, they composed journals in which the tragic events of the era were grasped through the prism of personal, lived experience. There were countless such writings, but the majority were destroyed with the extermination of the Jews of Warsaw. Only the contents of the archives of the OS [Oneg Shabbes] were preserved. (25)

The Oneg Shabbes was a secret project that documented the personal lives of those in the Lodz
Laub asserts that this need to know one’s story by telling it to others is particularly significant for Holocaust survivors as the ‘the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event […] created in this way a world in which one could not bear witness to oneself’ (65-6).

Therefore, after liberation, the survivors need to tell their stories to regain their position as witness and to therefore regain a sense of self.²⁸

It is not just the act of telling that is necessary but, more specifically, the way that it is told, the ordering of the experience into a linear narrative. This is emphasised by Hartman who proposes that the chronological temporality of linear narratives allowed the survivors to create a sense of past, present, and future that was denied them in the concentration camps. Hartman highlights the way in which the telling of their stories allowed Holocaust survivors to gain mastery over their lives. He argues that, ‘for the Survivors of the Holocaust, simply to tell their story is a restitution, however, inadequate. Ordering one’s life retrospectively brings some mastery, and so relief, to the unmastered portion’ (‘Book’ 325). He emphasises the necessity of this mastery in terms of the ability to develop a sense of the linearity of time, a concept that was denied to the concentration camp inmates, who

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²⁸ Not all Holocaust survivors, however, express a desire to work-though their traumas. Holocaust Survivor Jean Amery is an example of one who felt he must hold on to his status of victim rather than allowing himself any kind of healing, as he feels that this will force the perpetrators to recognise their crimes. Amery, as Rosenfeld explains, sees himself bound more to the past and its ruins than to the future and its promises. Whereas the criminals have now entered a new era, largely free of the taint of their crime, he, its victim, remains tied to his resentments. Why hang on to these? Because, he answers, they keep alive the moral truth of the conflict between him and his torturers, a truth that he insists on retaining even if most of them have never been moved to acknowledge its existence in the first place. (Rosenfeld 66)

For Amery ‘resolution would only be possible if people like himself, acting on their resentments, continued to protest the injustices of the past’ (Rosenfeld 66).
were systematically deprived of foresight; though they saw all too forcefully what was before their eyes, their ability to discern a normal pattern that could eventually be expressed in the form of a story was disrupted or disabled. Few could hope to make sense of the events, could hope to hope, could link what they had learned in the past to the future via the coherence of the stories we tell each other, stories that gather as a tradition – that promise was shattered. (‘Book’ 325).

The necessity of ordering events according to a linear chronology is therefore expressed in terms of the human desire to create order and meaning out of the randomness and complexity of human experience. The sense of the human need for order is highlighted by Kermode who argues that ‘fiction [is] deeply distrusted and yet humanly indispensable’ (150). Kermode emphasises the human necessity to use the linear chronology of narrative to create a sense of belonging in the world ‘to be related to a beginning and an end’ (4) and thus ‘we use fictions to enable the end to confer organization and form on the temporal structure’ (45).

For those who have suffered a traumatic and incomprehensible experience this need for order and stability is even more necessary. However, for survivors of the Holocaust and other traumatic events this desire for the ordering of experience into a linear narrative can seem impossible, as Lawrence Langer explains:

Uncontaminated heroic memory is virtually unavailable to these witnesses, because for them remembering is invariably associated simultaneously with survival and loss. The propulsion of the one, driving the narrative toward life and the future, faces the resistance of the other, tugging the witness and us back toward encounters with atrocity. And this cancels the possibility of meaningful celebration. (Langer 75)
Along with this personal necessity for working-through the trauma, the compulsion to tell was driven by a public act of bearing witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust. This duality of testimony creates a tension between the personal need for working-through the past and to a certain extent relinquishing its hold, and the public necessity to ensure that these events continue to be told to future generations. The writing conducted after liberation demonstrates both the personal and the public necessity of writing; as illustrated by Annette Wieviorka in her discussion of the testimonies written by those deported from France to concentration camps during the Second World War:

All the testimonies respond to one imperative: to remember, not to forget. But the imperative of memory never exists for itself; does not suffice unto itself. The majority of those who wrote testimonies justify recording their experience in terms of motives that go beyond the representation of their own suffering. Sometimes remembering is an obligation towards their dead companions; most often it is motivated by the fear of seeing Germany reborn. (30)

Thus, the public act of witnessing is necessary to prevent similar horrific acts ever being perpetrated again. This is emphasised by Carroll, who asserts that most survivors [...] express the feeling of being obliged to bear witness to

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29 The ghetto writing was slightly different in its aims. It is characterised by a more immediate desire to, on a personal level, survive the atrocities, and on a public level, make the contemporary world aware of the atrocities occurring. For the Ghetto writers, as Horowitz argues, 'the act of writing often provided a means to preserve without giving way to despair. During an onslaught deliberately designed to dehumanize, writing reminded the diarists that they were thinking, autonomous humans beings' (49) and 'on a collective level, the chroniclers and diarists regarded their work as active resistance against the Nazi plan' (49-50). Horowitz, however, emphasises that the writers also hoped this active resistance of writing would work for both present and future means; Ghetto writers 'believed that an explicit account of ghetto atrocity, smuggled out and brought to the attention of ordinary people, would put an end to the slaughter' (50) and that the ghetto writing, like survivor testimony, would also provide 'a tangible record of their suffering for future readers who would otherwise not know what occurred' (50).
what they experienced and saw—no matter how inadequate their testimony—so that generations after will know and will not forget, so that something "good" will come of the Shoah. The "good" being that with the memory and knowledge that it did happen, nothing like it will ever happen again.

Saul Friedlander acknowledges the specificity of the Holocaust in creating the need to publicly bear witness. He proposes that in view of 'the fact that the perpetrators invested considerable effort not only in camouflage, but in effacement of all traces of their deeds, the obligation to bear witness and record this past seems even more compelling' (3). The prominence of the necessity of witnessing in Holocaust literature is so strong that critics, like Alvin Rosenfeld, have argued that 'Within the context of Holocaust literature the question "What does it mean to write" is often synonymous with "What does it mean to bear witness?"' (59).

The necessity of communicating the trauma of the Holocaust, however, is dependent not only on the Holocaust survivors' ability to describe their experiences, but also on the audience's ability to listen to these stories. Unfortunately, many Holocaust survivors felt that their audience did not possess the ability to share the burden of witnessing this traumatic event. 30 Carroll suggests that 'If most survivors are, by their own admission, then, inadequate, incompetent, unworthy narrators, they certainly find no adequate, competent, worthy listeners to hear what they have to say.' He declares that in 'the inadequacy and even irresponsibility of the rest of us in our responses and nonresponses to all such narratives' we have failed to 'bear the terrible

30 Hartman describes the way that initially 'the liberated were [...] shunned or disregarded, like the
responsibility of the survivor’ (x). Appelfeld illustrates his own experience of finding an inadequate audience:

The questions from the outside were useless. They were questions full of endless misunderstanding, questions from this world, having no contact at all with the world from which we came. As though you were catching up with information about the unfathomable abyss or, rather, eternity. (149-50).

The public and personal consequences of these inadequate responses to the Holocaust testimonies are apparent in Jean Amery’s realisation that his essays about the Holocaust had failed to achieve his initial aspiration to reach, as Rosenfeld explains, ‘all those who wish to live together as fellow human beings’ (61). Amery’s hope in the lessons that must be learned from the Holocaust faded when he became aware of the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Germany during the late 1970s; his lack of hope for the future and his belief that he had failed as a witness eventually led him to commit suicide.32

V.2 Public Representations of Trauma

In this section I will change the focus from the difficulties of communicating personal trauma to the implications of creating public depictions of traumatic events. Within this discussion, I will emphasises the responsibility of later generations to create an ethically motivated representation of past trauma that can preamble messenger of bad news’ (Introduction 3).

32 For example At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities. 33 Rosenfeld proposes that Amery, therefore, is an example of the many survivors who feel, ‘that for all the urgency of their testimony [they have] failed to find a truly responsive audience and, hence, have failed as agents of memory and moral conscience’ (61).
respond to the plea made by those who survived the experiences to witness the
events. However, I also highlight that public representations of trauma can be
politically motivated to create an intentionally under-represented version of past
traumatic events.

In the move from the first hand accounts of the traumatic experience to later
representations of this past event, the responsibility of the necessity of
communicating the trauma shifts from the survivors of the trauma to later
generations. Thus the attention changes from communicating an actual lived
experience to the representation of a past historical event. As Michael Geyer and
Miriam Hansen claim, this alteration in emphasis occurs due to the fact that the
trauma ‘has become an imaginative construct’ (177). Geyer and Hansen argue
that this changes the emphasis from ‘being an issue of motivation (the willingness
to remember) to an issue of representation (how to construct the presence of the
past).’ (177). This issue of how to represent the past becomes the responsibility of
succeeding generations; they must become ‘witnesses for the witnesses’
(Horowitz 60). The notion of later generations as witnesses is significant as it
positions those involved in remembering past traumas in terms of active and
involved witnesses who inherit the responsibility of those who survived these
traumas. Hartman emphasises that this second generation responsibility of
witnessing is one that belongs to us all; we are all implicated in remembering the
traumatic events of the past:

In this transitional phase the children of the victims play a particular role as
transmitters of a difficult, defining legacy. Their situation is special, but it
suggests a more than temporary dilemma in that the burden on their
emotions, on their capacity to identify, is something we all share to a degree
[...] It could be said that we are all part of that second-generation dilemma.

(7)

The responsibility of later generations, therefore, is to find a way of transforming the lived experience of the survivors into a narrative that can be communicated effectively to succeeding generations; as Geyer and Hansen suggest: ‘how to enable remembrance in order to keep the memory of the Holocaust [and other traumatic events] alive in the midst of these transformations remains the question’ (178).

In a similar way to the first generation’s need to use narrative to work-through their traumas, these practises of memory are necessary to provide a ‘healing [...] form of closure’ (Hartman 7) for the community that has suffered the trauma. Hartman argues that this closure is necessarily achieved through an alteration of the events:

Some distortion is inherent in every attempt to achieve stability or closure, as history changes into memory and its institutionalisation. Otherwise all man-made disasters, as well as some natural ones [...] would draw us into an endless, emotional vortex. (5)

Thus without a distortion of the events and the sense of determinacy this leads to, the consequences could be devastating for the community that has suffered the trauma. However, what must be questioned is the political motivation behind the intentional falsification of events. The problem here is the extent to which these practises of memory produce a representation of the trauma that leads, not to remembering, but to forgetting. These kinds of narratives may ignore the pleas of trauma survivors to remember and, instead, produce narratives that deliberately falsify the past.
The desire to heal a community can be adopted as a means of falsifying the past by providing a definitive version that claims to present a universal and coherent narrative, but in fact omits any element that may challenge or disrupt the totalising version it strives to produce. These historiographical concerns are part of the more general awareness of the way in which we use signifying systems to impose order and meaning upon the world and also our realisation that our notion of reality is manufactured rather than being a natural, universal given, which leads, not to a "loss of belief in a significant external reality" [but to] a loss of faith in our ability to (unproblematically) know that reality' (119). Therefore, the acknowledgement of the fictive and provisional nature of these signifying systems, that were previously perceived as fixed and natural, raises questions about the power relations of discourse. Thus, so-called universal truths are now seen to have been constructed through an ideological position that is intent on producing a coherent account of reality; this cohesive narrative masks the intentional omission of material that may question its legitimacy. In the particular area of historiography, this issue have been raised by historians such as Haydn White and Dominick La Capra who have questioned the claim to objectivity made in historiography and have emphasised the necessary subjective and selective nature of historical documents. This awareness raises issues about the selectiveness of historiography and the question, therefore, of 'whose history survives' (Hutcheon 120) and also the way in which the act of narrating past events, their transformation from lived event to historical fact, imposes values upon the past. This is apparent in White's argument that 'to narrativise past events is to moralise and impose closure on a story which did not end', ensuring that 'there is no value-free mode of emplotment' (Hutcheon 192). Thus
Historiography’s claim to objectivity and truth is increasingly questioned through a developing awareness of the provisional and limited status of all narrative systems that claim to be universal and transcendent.

Hartman conceptualises the implications of definitive historical narratives in terms of the ‘pathological potential in collective types of thought that claim to unify or heal a community’ (16). This pathological potential is evident, as Edkins indicates, in ‘the ease through which processes of memory become recipes for forgetting’ (Edkins 171). Lyotard, who is one of the most prominent critics of this tendency in practises of memory, constructs in his work, as Carroll explains, a ‘radical critique of the limitations of all historicisms and “monumental” or memorialising histories that “forget” by having too certain, too representative, too narrativised (too anecdotal) a memory’ (xiii). Lyotard asserts that ‘this memory of the memorial is intensely selective; it requires the forgetting of that which may question the community and its legitimacy’ (7). He proposes that this kind of representation ‘wraps up’ and ‘elevates’ the event: ‘every politicization implies this getting all wrapped up in something (emballlement) that is also a being wrapped up, packaged (emballage), this elevation that is an enthralment and a removal’ (8).33 Santner conceptualises this falsification of the past in terms of narrative fetishism, which he contrasts to the work of mourning:

Both mourning and narrative fetishism as I have defined these terms are strategies whereby groups and individuals reconstruct their vitality and identity in the wake of trauma. The crucial difference between the two

33 Lyotard argues that this act of wrapping and of elevation occurs because it is necessary as a protective act:

If there is cause for getting all wrapped up, it is because there is something to wrap up, something that gives rise to be wrapped up, packaged. One elevates because one must enthral/remove. The pain brought on by shame and by doubt generates the edification of
modes of repair has to do with the willingness or capacity to include the traumatic event in one's efforts to reformulate and reconstitute identity. (Santner 152)

The building of memorials and monuments is one example of the way in which practises of memory can be adopted by those in power to 'forget' the past in the very act of representing it. Hartman argues that in memorials 'an event is given a memory-place in the form of a statue, museum or concentration camp site and annually repeated day' ("Introduction" 15). This may lead, not to an engagement with the event, but to 'forgetting on a collective scale' ("Introduction" 15). For Hartman, this 'forgetting' is achieved through the simplification of the past: instead of foregrounding the complexity of the past, the memorial constructs 'a highly selective story' by shaping 'a gradually formalised agreement of intensely shared events in a way that does not have to be individually struggled for' ('Introduction' 15). Such selective memorials prevent any individual interpretation of the past, and so replace heterogeneity with a homogenous and fixed representation.34 Italian architect, Giovanni Leoni, echoes Hartman's criticism of the memorial when he states that

The very term "monument" has a treacherous sound, for it is associated with the idea of celebration and assumes the existence of some solid collective memory which will appeal to the majority of people. But intellectuals like Levi and Amery have cast grave doubt on the possibility of commemorating an event like deportation. (211)

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34 Edkins describes memorials thus: 'War memorials are often seen as nothing more than monuments erected by the state to reproduce national heroism and glorify the wars fought in the state's name. With their narrative of sacrifice they represent deaths as purposive and meaningful' (Edkins 230).
Many memorials have been built in the late twentieth century that have aimed to falsify and therefore forget the past. For example, the French Holocaust memorial on the Île de la Cité is, as Edkins argues, ‘like the other Paris monuments erected in the late 1950s and early 1960s’ in that it ‘comprises a series of motifs that evoke an eternal, supposedly permanent vocabulary of memory’, for example, ‘the everlasting flame, the poems or religious quotations, [and] the imposing monumental dedication (130). Through these symbols, these memorials ‘install a singular vision of national memory, one that does not acknowledge ambiguity or plurality’ (130). Edkins highlights how these supposedly universal and generalised symbols allow the memorials to avoid ‘reference to the shared responsibility for the mass deportations or to French collaboration with Germany’ (130). Therefore, rather than including reference to the ambiguous and complex nature of this particular historical moment for the people of France, ‘these monuments stand as evidence of a problem solved’ (Edkins 130).35 Roberts’ Daughters of the House explores these specific concerns about French monuments by depicting in her novel the way that the Second World War monument erected in the village of Blémont-la-Fontaine reinforces the village’s desire to forget the events of the war.

Another famous example of a memorial constructed to forget the past is the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. This was designed to create a linear narrative; however, the museum’s designers found it impossible to tell the whole story of the Holocaust through this linear narrative and so combined this linearity with a thematic structure; as Edkins highlights, ‘not only, as the museum’s designers admit, does a narrative fail to convey what happened, a linear narrative was not to

35 Another example of this kind of memorial is the ‘monuments and memorial sites built in the
prove a suitable vehicle for telling the story the designers had in mind. Reality itself, it was discovered, was not linear’ (157). The themes chosen for the final section are particularly significant to the overall project of the museum; they divide the Holocaust experience into ‘rescue, resistance and the fate of children’ (157). As Edkins explains ‘the sections on rescue and resistance were minor parts of the historical record […] But they obviously provided a good “ending” for the narrative: a moral could be drawn and “role models” provided’ (157). Therefore, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, rather than remembering the Holocaust in all of its complexity, instead ‘uses the “Holocaust” story to elicit a desire for answers. It then provides those answers – in the form of American values’ (Edkins 163). Edkins emphasises that

In its attempts to portray American values by presenting their opposite, it conveniently forgets that Americans have themselves been involved in the extermination or enslavement of different racialised groups in the past, and that these actions existed quite comfortable alongside liberal values of tolerance, individual liberty and democracy. (Edkins 162)

In accordance with the specific concerns that Edkins raises regarding American history, both Morrison and Silko emphasise in their novels that the violence and abuse perpetrated on other cultures by America has been ignored by the historical record as it does not fit neatly into the ideology of America as a land of freedom.

In the same way as with these built monuments, written memorials can utilise the linearity of narrative to create a form of representation that can easily lead to the past being erased rather than remembered. This misuse of narrative is highlighted in the novels dealing with historical trauma which illustrate the way

Eastern bloc countries’ on which ‘the Jewish identity of the victims was suppressed’ (Hartman 4).
that the past can be re-written to disregard the horrific treatment of ethnic and
social groups, such as Native Americans in *Ceremony*, Africans in *Beloved*, the
Métis in *The Diviners* and Jewish people in *Daughters of the House*. Edkins
asserts that, in written memorials, the linearity of narrative enables the nation state
to produce a straight-forward story about the traumas they have inflicted on their
citizens. Thus it is the linearity of narrative that allows the manipulation of the
content of that narrative. She proposes that 'what we call politics draws on a
particular linear notion of time' (Edkins xiii), and claims that 'for the nation-state
and its so-called 'politics' to work, the linear time associated with it has to be
produced and reproduced all the time' (Edkins xiv). She argues that the
reproduction of this linear-time allows the nation state to hide its involvement in
the traumatic events. This is achieved 'through the way in which it
commemorates wars, genocides and famines. By rewriting these traumas into a
linear narrative of national heroism [...] the state conceals the trauma that it has,
necessarily, produced' (Edkins xv). Lyotard also proposes that it is the linear
temporality of writing that ensures this effacement:

It should be quite clear that the temporalization implied in memorial history
is itself a protective shield [...] That is its “political function”, its function of
forgetting [...] It is political in that it subordinates what has happened and
has passed on to emergence and survival; it closes the gaps, collects the so-
called past in the service of the future thereby employing a temporality that is
obviously spread between ek-static moments – past, present, future, but
nonetheless homogenous [...] And thus this politics forgets the
heterogeneous [...] The heterogeneous did not enter into it - and one does not
and cannot remember it by means of this soliciting, wrapping-up gesture. (8)
Significantly, Lyotard extends this notion of memorial writing beyond the limits of historical memorials to argue that all writing is in danger of performing this enveloping gesture as a protection against the formlessness of unconscious affect. He argues that ‘The decision to analyse, to write, to historicize is [...] taken against this formless mass and in order to lend it form, a place in space, a moment in temporal succession’ (Heidegger 17). He positions the temporalization inherent in narrative, therefore, as possessing ‘restorative value for the evil done to the soul because of its unpreparedness, which leaves it an infant’ (33). This unpreparedness is that caused by the first scene in ‘Nachtraglichkeit’ in which the infant does not have the capacity to translate the messages it receives from the external world.

Throughout the late twentieth century, memorial narratives have been repeatedly created to forget the past rather than attempting to work-through it. One example of this is the transformation of the Holocaust in German memory, as Geyer and Hansen illustrate:

The critical commentary on “working-through” the German past has become one of a general “working-over” that past, involving governments, popes, journalists and professional historians. They remember in order to forget. And these rituals of remembering are the benevolent versions. Others [...] have begun to remember so as to prepare for revenge. (Geyer and Hansen 176)

Edkins cites a more recent example of this kind of memorialisation in her discussion of President Bush’s commemorative act of calling for a minute’s silence while the events of 9/11 were still occurring:

During the silence, people in the Trade Centre towers were calling relatives
on their mobile phones; firefighters were streaming up the staircases to rescue those trapped; aircrew on other hijacked planes and their passengers were attempting to alert people to what was happening to them. The traumatic events of that day had only just begun to unfold, and yet there was already a rush to memorialisation by the state. This can be seen as an attempt [...] to secure the authority of the state, reinforce the narrative of the nation and produce closure in the face of events that had thrown all three into question. (Edkins 103)36

36 Edkins argues that the narratives produced about 9/11 are evidence of governments using narratives of memory not after a war, to glorify the losses that sovereign power had produced, but before a war, to claim lives lost as a justification for a military response. The prevalence of memorialisation and the awareness of past horrors at the turn of the last century made it easy perhaps for humanitarian war to become the war against terror. Practises of memorialisation insisting on bearing witness to past trauma were co-opted and used as a legitimisation for more trauma. (Edkins 171-2)
VI. The Development of Effective Representations of Trauma

In this section I will examine strategies that are being used memorials and in literary fiction to achieve a means of adequately representing trauma. These strategies are used to produce a version of the trauma that can facilitate working-through and enable witnessing but which can also acknowledge its own limitations by marking the impossibility of expressing the complexity of traumatic experiences. I will firstly provide examples of both built and written memorials that strive to create an effective means of representing trauma. I will then focus on literary fiction to emphasise its privileged position as a means of highlighting both the limitations but also the necessity of narrative as a means of working-through and thus being able to bear witness to trauma. I will then argue that the six particular novels that I have chosen to analyse in this thesis are excellent examples of this examination of contemporary concerns regarding trauma and narrative. I will introduce the way in which these six novels use their narrative strategies as a means of developing a narrative form that can adequately represent trauma. Following this, I will position these novels as metafictional and will highlight the implications of this kind of fiction. The most prominent issue is the criticism that such fiction is too inward looking to be able to make a political comment; I will counter this argument by arguing that these six novels are politically and ethically motivated in their attempts to teach their readers an ethical and therapeutic hermeneutics regarding trauma. This is achieved through the narrative structure of the novels which all strive, Hartman's words, to `accomplish the impossible: allow the limits of representation to be healing limits, yet not allow them to conceal an event we are obligated to recall and interpret, both to ourselves and those growing
up unconscious of its shadows' ("Book" 334).

VI.1 Built Memorials

One example of the kinds of strategies being used by contemporary memorials to avoid creating a totalising version of the past is the use of audience participation. This is apparent in the 'counter-monuments' in Germany, in which 'the visitor is invited to take an active role in the process of memory, sometimes by adding their voice to the monument, sometimes by 'being' the monument itself' (Edkins 134). These monuments, therefore, avoid the creation of a definitive, fixed version of the traumatic past by inviting their audience to participate, and so create instead a more dynamic and evolving version of events. Other memorials being built which strive to avoid a definitive version include, as Edkins argues, 'The Cenotaph' in London and 'The Vietnam Wall' in Washington. Edkins asserts that these two memorials 'encircle trauma rather than absorbing it in a national myth of glory and sacrifice' (57). She proposes that through this 'encircling', they both 'express the impossibility of closure and the inevitable contradictions of any society.' (87). In regard to the Cenotaph, Edkins argues that the simplicity of its design ensures that 'it does not conceal the trauma of war but yet provides a means of marking it' (65). The memorial does not create an interpretative narrative about the war; its simplicity, therefore, 'marks something that is shared yet inexpressible in more explicit terms. What is shared, we might say, is the inexpressibility' (65). Not only does the design contribute to this effect but also its position in the middle of Whitehall:

'The cenotaph is a point around which Londoners and tourists endlessly
circle in the course of their daily business [...] It is not tucked away in a London park where it could be forgotten, as some had wished. It is there in the middle of the traffic, as the stumbling block, the hindrance that reminds us of the impossibility of closure.’ (Edkins 66)

Thus, Edkins argues, The Cenotaph marks the impossibility of representing such traumatic events as war by refusing to produce a definitive narrative. Instead it acknowledges its own provisionality by marking the impossibility of adequately expressing the horrific events of the First World War.

Edkins argues that The Vietnam Wall utilises similar strategies to ensure that it does not produce a totalising version of the events of the Vietnam war. Edkins argues that the Wall’s circular structure prevents it from concealing ‘the lack revealed by death and trauma. It does not cover over the problematic nature of certainty and social power. It marks the trauma and enables us to recognise it.’ (Edkins 80) The notion of linear chronology is also challenged by the Wall. Temporal linearity is installed and then subverted in the list of the dead: the fact that the names are listed in date order of their death initially suggests the use of ‘the authority of stone [to produce] a sequence in time’; however, this apparent linearity is disrupted as the two sections of the wall intersect and bring together the first and last names on the list, and so ‘bring together the beginning and the end and make both uniquely atemporal’ (81-82). In addition, the reflective surface of the wall ensures that the faces of the visitors are reflected onto the names of the

37 Edkins explains that when the designs were being drawn up for this memorial, ‘What was imagined was a veterans memorial not a war memorial.’ (Edkins 74) which emphasised the need to “negotiate a public memorial without either celebrating or explicitly renouncing the war” (Edkins 74).

38 Edkins highlights the changing responses to these two memorials, the lack of interest shown by tourists to the Vietnam Wall in recent years, and the perception of the Cenotaph as a signifier of imperialism in the anti-capitalism marches: ‘memorial in stone are not permanent, and their intended message – whatever it is – can change as it is seen by different generations or co-opted
dead; this effect refuses 'to allow [the visitors] to forget their own existence, their own survival.' (109). Therefore, these memorials create a means of remembering the past but do so in a way that acknowledges the limitations of any representation of trauma and so they find ways of marking the trauma, rather than attempting to create a definitive narrative.

VI.2 Written Memorials

In the same way as with built memorials, written memorials are being developed that can effectively represent trauma. With these memorials the emphasis is placed on the need to develop a form of narrative that is able to adequately represent the trauma, and thus narrative strategies can be used to ensure that the trauma is not fixed through a definitive version. These strategies include the need to attend to the details of the survivor's accounts and to accept the indeterminacy and complexity that arises from these varying versions of the trauma. They also include the use of what Friedlander calls a 'narrative margin' which protects the reader from the full impact of the trauma and so prevents them from building their own internal barrier to distance themselves from the events depicted. The most prominent strategy is one that, as I have already indicated, is used in the construction of built memorials; this is the need to acknowledge the impossibility of being able to encompass the inexpressibility of trauma and to therefore acknowledge the limitations of narrative whilst striving to simultaneously witness the events of the past.

Edkins argues that one of the ways that an effective representation of trauma into new purposes.' (Edkins 109)
can be achieved in historical narratives is by attending to the details of the survivors' accounts of their experiences. She states that we should try to remember the Nazi mass murders, not as history, not as part of some neatly scripted 'Holocaust' narrative, but in all the ambiguity and difficulty of the accounts of those survivors brave enough to give us their stories [...] Remembering what happened, in all its traumatic reality, is the only way to escape the cycle of violence that our present reliance on neat and heroic stories of the past traps us in. [...] We have to attend to the details, however much we would rather put them to one side. (174)\textsuperscript{39}

Friedlander argues that such attention to details will avoid narrative closure which he defines in terms of 'an obvious avoidance of what remains indeterminate, elusive and opaque' ("Trauma" 261). Another means of representing the trauma is, as Friedlander suggests, by using a 'narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid' ('Introduction' 17). This narrative margin is achieved by the exclusion of straight, documentary realism, [and] the use of some sort of allusive or distanced realism. Reality is there, in its starkness, but perceived through a filter: that of memory (distance in time), that of spatial displacement, that of some sort of narrative margin. ('Introduction' 17)

Friedlander proposes that 'even when the unsayable is almost directly present, the existence of this narrative margin appears a necessity, lest our capacity for comprehending and perceiving be entirely blunted, lest we create an internal barrier to supplement the absence of external distancing' ('Introduction' 17).

\textsuperscript{39} Claude Lanzmann's groundbreaking film about the Holocaust, entitled Shoah, is cited repeatedly as an example of a form of representation that attends to the details of the Holocaust. Friedlander argues that 'The documentary material [used in Shoah] often carries the story of minute incidents which seems to escape the overwhelming dimension of the overall catastrophe but which nonetheless express the excess that cannot yet be put into phrases or, differently stated,
Thus, this narrative margin prevents the reader from building their own barrier to protect themselves from the trauma depicted and so, rather than trying to avoid the trauma, the reader is able to take on the responsibility of witnessing it.

Edkins’ notion of the encircling of the trauma in memorials is also relevant to the discussion of narratives of memory. Edkins argues that historical narratives cannot try to address the trauma directly without risking its gentrification.

[They] cannot remember it as something that took place in time, because this would neutralise it. All [they] can do is “to encircle again and again the site” of the trauma, “to mark it in its very impossibility”. (15)40

Edkins’ concept of marking impossibility is foregrounded in Lyotard’s theories of representation. Lyotard argues that the only kind of narrative that can avoid becoming a memorial form of writing that forgets the past is one [that] does not say the unsayable but says that it cannot say it. [...] To bear witness to this impossibility remains possible’ (Heidegger 47). He proposes that the sublime is the means of achieving this, as the effects of the sublime are analogous to the untranslatability and achronology of unconscious affect. He describes the sublime as ‘what dismantles consciousness, what deposes consciousness, it is what consciousness cannot formulate and even what consciousness forgets in order to constitute itself’ (“Sublime” 197); it ‘is not localisable in time’, ‘it has no moment’ (Heidegger 31).

Lyotard, therefore, formulates the sublime as creating a narrative form that allows the unrepresentable to remain as the traumatic kernel of representation itself, rather than reducing the unrepresentable to narrative continuity.
VI.3 The Representation of Trauma in Literary Fiction

The novels in this thesis all use similar strategies to those suggested above to develop a narrative that is able to effectively represent trauma. For example, all of the novels ensure that their audience participate in the creation of the story and they all to a certain extent install and then subvert a linear chronology. Some of the novels explicitly utilise strategies suggested above; for example, Morrison creates a similar effect as that proposed by Friedlander in his notion of a 'narrative margin' and Murdoch utilises the sublime to achieve the effect that Lyotard proposes. All of the novels utilise general strategies such as indeterminacy, contradiction, and the refusal of closure, to create a narrative form that acknowledges it own limitations and so indicates the impossibility of adequately expressing the inexpressible whilst emphasising the necessity of continually striving to do so. Through their use of such strategies, these six novels are examples of what has been defined as metafiction; that is fiction that self-consciously draws attention to its status as discourse. The novels in this thesis then utilise metafictional strategies to raise questions about the implications of representing trauma in narrative. They do not reject conventional narrative because of its perceived limitations, but instead install and then challenge its assumptions to create a narrative that acknowledges the necessity for the coherence of traditional narrative but also strives to avoid its tendency towards fixity and closure. They also utilise their narrative strategies to teach their readers this means of interpreting trauma and so they are politically and ethically motivated in their desire to transform their reader's perception.
All of the novels that I analyse in this thesis utilise metafictional strategies to question the implications of representing trauma in narrative. They correspond, therefore, with the first and second types defined in Waugh’s definition of metafiction:

‘There are those novels at one end of the spectrum which take fictionality as a theme to be explored (and in this sense would include the ‘self-begetting novel’) [...] At the centre of this spectrum are those that manifest the symptoms of formal and ontological insecurity but allow their deconstructions to be finally recontextualized or ‘naturalized’ and given a total interpretation [...] Finally, at the furthest extreme [...] can be placed those fictions that, in rejecting realism more thoroughly, posit the world as a fabrication of competing semiotic systems which never correspond to material conditions’ (19).

The novels that I analyse in this thesis, like the first two examples cited by Waugh, are fictions which to varying degrees draw attention to their own fictionality and whilst they do disrupt the formal organisation of the text they all ensure that they do not reject an external reality. Whilst, as Waugh emphasises, metafictional strategies can to varying degrees be found in most novels, in general the issues raised about metafiction have taken place in discussions about postmodernism due to their prominence in postmodern novels. In spite of this, I would like to avoid defining these novels as exclusively postmodern and instead wish to use the concerns raised in discussions about postmodern metafiction to emphasise specific issues regarding the metafictional strategies used in the six novels to represent trauma.

Metafictional novels are those that utilise their narrative strategies to raise
awareness about narratives in general. The novels that I analyse in this thesis utilise their strategies to raise awareness about the implications of representing specifically trauma in narrative. However, the discussion about metafiction in general raises important points in regards to the novels that I analyse. Metafictional novels highlight the way that realist narrative strategies are utilised in the creation of Grand Narratives and so expose the fictionalisation of reality. As Waugh proposes:

The materialist, positivist and empiricist world-view on which realistic fiction is premised no longer exists. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that more and more novelists have come to question and reject the forms that correspond to this ordered reality. (7)

Waugh cites the ‘well-made plot [and] chronological sequences’ (7) as examples of conventional realist strategies which contemporary novels challenge. The six novels in this thesis therefore correspond with these concerns. Like other metafictional novels they disrupt these strategies by emphasising, among other things, provisionality over determined meaning, contradiction over coherence, difference over homogeneity, impossibility of final meaning over closure, and gaps and aporias over continuity. These strategies therefore expose the totalizing drive of Grand Narratives and offer a means of representation that does not rely on these traditional structures.

In their use of innovatory strategies, however, the novels in this thesis do not reject the conventions of realism but instead install and then challenge them. Thus they accord with Waugh’s description of metafiction which explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them. Very often realistic conventions supply the ‘control’ in metafictional
texts, the norm or background against which the experimental strategies can foreground themselves. More obviously, of course, this allows for a stable level of readerly familiarity. (18)

Waugh's sense of reader familiarity is crucial to the concerns of the novels in this thesis; they do not want to alienate their readers, but instead they want to allow their readers to 'become absorbed' (Waugh 130) in the imaginary world that they create in order for their readers to take on the responsibility of witnessing the events depicted. Hutcheon argues that this balance between the necessity of narrative coherence and formal innovation is a characteristic of postmodern fiction which 'acknowledges the human urge to make order, while pointing out that the orders we create are just that: human constructs, not natural or given entities' (42). In the novels that I analyse, these concerns about narrative are conducted in regards to trauma and narrative and so emphasise the necessity of narrative as a necessary tool to provide stability and coherence in the face of traumatic events, whilst paradoxically recognising the provisionality of such narratives. In the novels that deal with specific traumatic events, the need for coherence and order is presented in terms of a working-through of the trauma, which simultaneously recognises that this working-through is a continual, ongoing process, not a means of packaging and forgetting the experience. In the novels that deal with a traumatic reality this necessity is presented in terms of our human

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41 Hutcheon emphasises that our realisation of the constructed nature of reality does not necessarily lead to a rejection of systems of meaning, as we still need to create a sense of coherence by which to live our everyday lives. However, it does make us aware that these narratives are provisional rather than fixed. Thus postmodernism does not reject the need to create systems, but instead

What it does say is that there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world – and that we create them all. That is their justification and their limitation. They do not exist "out there", fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history. This does not make them any the less necessary or desirable. It does, however, condition their truth value.' (43)
need to create normalising structures, whilst still acknowledging the traumatic reality that lies beyond these signifying systems.

One of the major criticisms that has been made about metafictional novels is that their concentration on narrative form makes them too inward looking and therefore prevents them from being politically motivated. They are criticised, therefore, of rejecting any real sense of historical or political reality through their formal play of signifying systems. Waugh indicates this criticism when she asks, 'to what extent can aesthetic experimentation actually make a political difference' (148), thus emphasising the issue of 'the question of the politically radical status of aesthetically radical texts' (148). This question emphasises the 'problematic relationship of aesthetics to a world external to it' (Hutcheon 23). However, the emphasis on the discursive construction of reality and the use of narrative in this construction makes these particular six novels, like other metafictional novels, more than just reflections on the form of the novel. Instead, it situates them as a form of discourse which is constructed in a similar way to all other discursive practises; thus, as Waugh argues 'such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text' (2). Hutcheon argues that self-conscious novels 'work to instruct us in the inadequacies of totalising systems and of fixed boundaries' (224) by installing and then challenging these cohesive narratives. Therefore, the novels go 'beyond self-reflexivity to situate discourse in a broader context' (Hutcheon 41) and so 'have self-consciously acknowledged their ideological position in the world' (179). Waugh highlights the necessity for this ideological acknowledgement in similar terms to the novels that I examine, as incited 'by [...] previously silenced ex-centrics' (179). Therefore, one of the
ways in which the four politically motivated novels situate themselves as political rather than just as novels about novel writing is through their thematic emphasis on the necessity for the silenced voices of history to be heard; thus the marginalised cultures that have had their histories disavowed must be able to bear witness to their traumas.

All of the novels in this thesis utilise their formal experimentation, not as self-conscious meditations on literary fiction, but to ensure that their novels are linked to the world external to the text; they achieve this by using innovative narrative strategies to transform the reader’s perception of reality. Therefore, the novels instruct the reader about the limitations of narratives that attempt to create a fixed, determined version of reality, be that on the level of historical or personal reality, on both a thematic and formal level. By engaging the reader and inviting them to participate in the construction of a less totalising narrative they allow their reader to experience the possibilities of a more open perception which is able to acknowledge indeterminacy and heterogeneity; the readers will then utilise this to challenge the totalising narratives that are imposed upon them in their everyday lives. Therefore, the novels strive for the effect that Waugh argues Metafiction can produce in its reader:

[although the reader] will presumably continue to believe and live in a world for the most part constructed out of “common sense” and “routine” they will, hopefully do so with a new awareness of the how the meanings and values of that world have been constructed and how, therefore, they can be challenged and changed. (34)

Therefore, the readers of the six novels I analyse, by becoming participants in the creation of the novel, can experience on an epistemological level the kind of
narrative that can be achieved once both the necessity and provisionality of narrative are acknowledged.

In the following chapters I analyse the different strategies utilised in the six novels to achieve this ethical and therapeutic interpretation of trauma. The chapters, therefore, are organised according to the kinds of narrative strategies as well as the kinds of trauma represented. Within the individual chapters, the theoretical frameworks that I utilise are those that are specifically concerned with representation and trauma; for example, Barthes’ conceptualisation of the photograph as a traumatic form of representation; the way that the uncanny, in its associations with Freudian notions of trauma, disrupts narrative structure; and Lyotard’s’ conceptualisation of the sublime as a means of representing a traumatic reality.

In the first chapter I analyse the two novels, *Ceremony* and *Beloved*, which directly engage with the concept of traumatic intrusion and illustrate the ways in which Silko and Morrison utilise the traumatic symptoms of their protagonists to explore the possibility of a less totalising perception of traumatic events. In *Ceremony* Silko uses Tayo’s traumatic experience as a revelation of the reality which lies beyond the construction of the world according to binary opposites in Western epistemology. Through this revelation, she offers Tayo and the reader a perception which is based upon the connection between phenomena rather than separation, and so constructs an inclusive and heterogeneous narrative. In *Beloved* Morrison creates the indeterminate figure of Beloved to problematise the notion of the literal return of the past and to reject the imposition of final meaning on her novel. Through this, Morrison highlights the sense of the multiplicity and
indeterminacy of interpretation; however, she refuses to allow all perspectives to become equally valid by emphasising the necessity of an ethical and engaged response to events. In her depiction of the central traumatic event of infanticide Morrison creates a similar effect as Friedlander’s ‘narrative margin’: Morrison builds up to the event slowly by using repetitive images to subconsciously prepare the reader in advance; this prevents the reader from becoming so horrified by the description of the infanticide that they attempt to create a barrier to protect themselves from its impact. Instead, it creates a safe environment for the reader so that s/he is able to bear witness and remember the horrific consequences of slavery.

In the second chapter I analyse the two novels, *The Diviners* and *Lives of Girls and Women*, that explore the possibilities of the photographic in the creation of a non-totalising narrative. In their reference to the photograph, Laurence and Munro are not privileging the pictorial over the written; instead their two novels illustrate the potential for narrative offered by the notion of the photograph as both a trace of reality and a necessary interpretation. Each writer utilises this concept to explore their concerns about the limitations and possibilities of narratives about trauma. Laurence illustrates the misuse of narrative to construct both a personal and historical narrative that falsifies the past and illustrates her protagonist’s development of a more dualistic perception of reality; this interpretation accepts reality as a trace and a creative re-construction and is able to acknowledge the necessary contradiction of reality rather than attempting to resolve it. Munro illustrates the way in which narrative can be used to protect oneself from a traumatic and unrepresentable reality; however, she also demonstrates that, through the duality of trace and interpretation, realism and experimentation,
narrative can become a means of revealing the unfamiliar reality which lies beneath everyday structures of meaning.

In the final chapter, I examine two novels, *Daughters of the House* and *The Sea, The Sea*, that utilise the uncanny to disrupt the structures upon which traditional narrative is organised. Roberts utilises the uncanny to complicate the sense of determined meaning in the discovery of the hidden secrets of the past. Thus, the necessary working-through that Roberts allows for her protagonists is balanced by her disruption of the realist narrative through the use of the uncanny. Murdoch combines the disruptive effects of the uncanny with the use of the sublime as a means of acknowledging the trauma of reality which cannot be represented in narrative. She constructs her novel through narrative layers which represent the layers of her protagonist’s fantasies; the reader, therefore, must peel away each of these layers of narrative fantasy to be able to perceive the reality which lies beneath them. However, Murdoch avoids defining this reality by representing it through the sublime. Through her novel, Murdoch argues that narrative can be used to create a fantasy that protects the writer from the traumatic real, but it is also the only means through which this underlying reality can be acknowledged.
CHAPTER ONE

The Necessity of Witnessing a Traumatic Past in Silko’s Ceremony and Morrison’s Beloved

Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony and Toni Morrison’s Beloved both explore the necessity to develop a narrative form that is able to work-through the trauma and thus bear witness to its actuality, but also avoids becoming a totalising narrative that creates a fixed version of events. The two novels create chronological narratives that illustrate the development of their protagonists’ ability to achieve closure in the face of trauma, but also utilise innovatory narrative strategies, such as heterogeneity, multiplicity and indeterminacy, to balance their necessary linearity. Through these strategies they create narratives that are able to ethically witness the past, but in a way that acknowledges their own provisionality. Both novels utilise their narrative strategies to engage the reader, to make them aware of the limitations of fixed narratives, and to experience a version of events that encompasses multiplicity and heterogeneity rather than trying to dismiss complexity and indeterminacy. Through this participation, the reader must assume the responsibility of bearing witness to the events depicted in the novel, which have been mis-represented by the historical record. The two novels, therefore, examine the experience of actual historical traumatic events to illustrate the difficulty, but also the necessity, of representing the complexity of a traumatic past. Silko’s Ceremony depicts the effects of the Second World War on Tayo, a Native American veteran, and connects this to the larger trauma of the colonisation of the Native American people. Morrison’s Beloved portrays the traumatic effects of slavery on Sethe, an escaped slave
woman in late nineteenth century America, to illustrate the larger trauma of the
Middle Passage and enslavement of the African people. Thus both novels are
politically motivated in their desire to make their readers witness the trauma of the
abuse conducted by the American government on other cultures. Both novels also
connect the personal to the communal trauma of historical events and, in so doing,
emphasise the social responsibility that the individual has to bear witness to the
past.

Silko's *Ceremony* describes different techniques used to heal Tayo's
trauma to illustrate opposing interpretations of traumatic suffering which she
organises according to Western and traditional Native American perceptions.
Silko portrays how both of these opposing techniques fail to cure Tayo: the
Western army doctors, who impose the diagnosis of PTSD sufferer on Tayo, are
unable to make him forget his experiences through drugs, and the traditional
methods used by the Native American medicine man are unable to cope with the
traumatic events of the twentieth century. Therefore, Silko offers Tayo and the
reader a third interpretation of trauma which mediates between these two
opposing modes of thought. She presents the unconventional healing man
Betonie as her fictional representative in the novel to teach Tayo a transitional
perception of the trauma of the modern world. The fluid interpretation that
Betonie teaches Tayo is enacted through the experimental narrative techniques of
the novel that break down the binary opposites of past and present, self and other,
active and passive, which, Silko argues, structure Western thought. Through this
dissolution of boundaries, Silko creates a narrative form that is able to allow the
trauma to be worked-through whilst acknowledging multiplicity and
heterogeneity.
Morrison's *Beloved* focuses on the consequences of falsifying a traumatic past through Sethe's attempts to deny her experiences, particularly her refusal to acknowledge the complex reasons which drove her to kill her own daughter. Morrison depicts how this disavowal has caused Sethe to be possessed by the past in the images which invade her conscious mind. It has also caused her surviving daughter Denver to be unable to confront her traumatic childhood, and it severs the connection Sethe has with her community and prevents her from forming a relationship with Paul D, who, like Sethe, is unable to acknowledge the horror of his experiences as a slave. Eventually, Sethe's denial causes her to be literally haunted by the past when Beloved arrives at her house. Morrison presents Beloved as an indeterminate and contradictory figure who is both the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter and a real woman who has survived the Middle Passage. Through this multiplicity, Morrison constructs Beloved as representative of the complexity of the traumatic past and connects Sethe's personal disavowal of her slave past with the wider forgetting of all those who died during the Middle Passage. Through the figure of Beloved, and through other experimental narrative strategies such as indeterminate ending, Morrison allows her reader to experience a more heterogeneous perception of traumatic events.
Leslie Marmon Silko was born on March 5, 1948 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, of Pueblo, Laguna, Mexican, and white descent. She grew up on the Laguna Pueblo reservation and attended an Indian school and later attended Catholic schools in Albuquerque. She then attended the University of New Mexico where she received her BA in 1969. She attended three semesters at the law school at the University of New Mexico but became disillusioned by the legal system and so focused her attention on writing instead. During her career she has been associated with the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona; and she is now professor of English at the University of Arizona, Tuscon.


*Ceremony* directly explores Silko’s main concerns; for example, the
In Ceremony and her other works she uses her position as a writer to make a political statement about the continuing appalling treatment of Native Americans by the American government since colonisation of their land. Unlike her second novel, Almanac of the Dead, which is much darker in tone and which calls for revolutionary action against white people, Ceremony is a much more positive novel which believes in the mediation between two cultures. Its publication made it possible for other Native American writers, particularly women, to also get published and it is therefore a key book in the development of a recognised canon of Native American writing. It is now a standard text on many American university syllabuses, although it is not as well-known in other countries, including Britain.

In Ceremony Tayo is diagnosed with PTSD by the American army doctors; this silences him and prevents him from being able to effectively witness the trauma of the war. It also imposes a limited and definitive diagnosis upon Tayo which cannot encompass his Native American beliefs. Tayo’s particular traumatic experience is presented as a revelation of the reality which has been masked by Western structures of meaning. His so-called traumatic symptoms include an ability to perceive the world in terms of a loss of boundaries. Thus, in Tayo’s traumatic perception, the separation between past and present, myth and reality, self and other, become dissolved. The Western doctors attempt to cure him of this deconstructive perception and to re-instate the division of the world into binary opposites. However, when this cure fails, Tayo is sent by his family to Betonie, a strange medicine man who teaches Tayo that his so-called traumatic perception is in fact his ability to see the world as it really is. Silko illustrates that the
organisation of the world into binary opposites is in fact a structure of meaning produced by Western discourse; whereas the Native American belief system is based upon connection rather than separation. Betonie teaches Tayo to understand and accept his changed perception of reality rather than to fight against it. Through the ceremony Betonie performs, Tayo is able to develop a perception of reality which acknowledges connection, rather than separation, and which is therefore more open to the heterogeneity and multiplicity of reality, rather than dismissing these disparate elements. The novel ends with Tayo’s ability to utilise this perception to bear witness to the trauma of living as a Native American, and he is able to return to the community he had previously distanced himself from, to teach them how to challenge the totalising narratives that have been imposed upon them by Western culture. Silko’s narrative strategies allow the reader to experience this same break-down in the division between binary opposites; her novel dissolves the oppositions of reality and myth, self and other, past and present, active and passive. These strategies force the reader to participate in the creation of the novel; they initially confuse the reader and prevent them from being able to construct a secure position from which to read the novel, but as Tayo’s perception develops from confusion to acknowledgement, so the reader is offered clues as to how to read the confusing structure of the novel, and thus, if they allow themselves to become open to a more inclusive way of reading they can develop this new perception with Tayo. Through this, the reader is taught both a means of challenging the totalising narratives in their own world and also the ability to develop a perception of reality which acknowledges heterogeneity and provisionality. Silko emphasises the necessity of the development of this new perception in terms of the Native American belief in the creative power of words;
thus, the reader’s changed perception will in fact effect a change in the world in
they live.

The novel is organised into three stages through which Tayo must travel in
his journey from trauma to cure. The first section depicts Tayo’s life after the war,
once he has returned to the reservation to live with his Auntie and Grandma.
During this section, Tayo’s existence is characterised by the traumatic effects of
the war which repeatedly return upon him in the form of nightmares, and, although
he is still only a young man, he lives an empty life trying to avoid his memories by
drinking with other returned war veterans. Although Tayo has been released from
hospital and diagnosed as cured by the army doctors, his continuing nightmares
and inability to live a fulfilled life convince his Grandma to send him to a
traditional medicine man, Ku’oosh. However, when Ku’oosh also fails to heal
Tayo, his Uncle Robert takes him to Betonie. The second part of the novel
describes Tayo’s time with Betonie, and explains the form of perception that
Betonie teaches Tayo as a means of interpreting the traumatic events of his life. In
the final part of the novel, Tayo undertakes a physical and psychological quest to
develop Betonie’s interpretation through which he can then witness the events of
his past and the subsequent experiences he faces.

Although the narrative of Tayo’s journey towards healing is set in the
present, it is so entangled with the events of his past that the two time frames
become inseparable. The chronological temporality that the reader expects to
encounter in narrative is complicated: instead of indicating a distinction between
the present and the past moment, Silko avoids any change in tense so that the
reader is unsure about the temporal location of the events depicted. This is an
example of one of many experimental narrative techniques that Silko utilises,
which also includes unexplained references and repetitions of images; these force
the reader to make the connections in the novel and so participate in the telling of
the story. Many of the narrative strategies Silko uses confuse the readers and so
destabilise them from a secure position from which to interpret the novel: the main
element of this technique is the inclusion of Native American myths. The
destabilising effect of these mythic narratives is apparent in the opening of the
novel which, rather than describing Tayo’s situation, presents, instead, a Native
American myth which depicts Thought-Woman creating reality through her
thoughts; this immediately confounds the reader’s expectations that the novel
concerns a war veteran’s recovery from trauma. These mythic passages are
interspersed throughout the narrative; they re-iterate and extend the information
provided by the narration, and so the reader must learn to interpret the information
that they provide. This is exemplified in the most prominent myth, delineating the
actions conducted by Hummingbird and Fly to placate the earth mother who has
abandoned them, which explains in advance the ceremony that Tayo must
undertake by establishing a mythic example of the way in which ‘individuals may
[...] work transformations through correctly ordered actions and perseverance’
(Purdy 64). In this respect, the spoken word sections provide a ‘meta-textual set of
instructions’ (Rainwater “Semiotics” 128) for the experiences that Tayo is facing,
and so teach the Western reader, who is unfamiliar with the Native American
myths, or the Native American reader, who may have forgotten these myths, what
s/he needs to know to succeed in interpreting the novel correctly. In this respect,
the reader must learn to read both realms of the novel in the same way, rather than

\[^{42}\text{For a fuller description of Native American myths in the novel see Purdy and also Nelson and}\]

Nelson.
dismissing the mythic sections and concentrating on the narration as might be the
initial impulse when reading the novel; as Ruppert suggests: 'Both Tayo and the
reader must employ a mythic way of knowing. They must be able to appreciate, in
addition to other modes of knowing, this manner of giving meaning to events' (181).

The opening myth of Thought-Woman, who is also called Spider-Woman,
introduces the reader to the dissolution of boundaries which Silko conducts
throughout the novel. For example, the myth shifts from the objective depiction of
the mythic Spider-Woman 'sitting in her room/thinking of a story' (1) to the
subjective narrator 'telling you the story/she is thinking' (1); this erases the
separation of self and other by breaking down the distinction between Spider-
Woman and the narrator. This dissolution of binary opposites illustrates Silko's
postulation that these boundaries are culturally constructed rather than natural and
so can be broken down through a change in perception. Owens emphasises this
effect of her writing when he asserts that

Silko works carefully to ensure that such binary oppositions are impossible
to construct and that readers seeking to find distinct 'realities', 'planes',
'dimensions' or 'times' operating within her text will find that the text
refuses to divulge such divisions. [...] Silko spins an elaborate web that
makes distinguishing between such concepts impossible. (168)

However, Silko's transformation of the reader's interpretation through
these narrative strategies is not just a literary act, but also philosophical and
ideological in that it will change the reader's perception and thus, Silko proposes,
effect a transformation of reality itself. This aspect of Silko's writing is crucial for
an understanding of what she is trying to achieve in the novel: in accordance with
Native American beliefs she asserts that words have the power to create, rather than just describe; as Bell explains:

Singing it, saying so, according to Native American ways of perceiving time and space, often makes it so [...] the idea that the word – that is the formulation of sounds (sacred because associated with breath itself) has a “compulsive power” which brings about “a close identification of person, mind, word, and power, and its extension to objects and means”. (31)

Therefore, interpretation has a direct influence on reality; this is illustrated in the opening myth in the description of Spider-Woman’s ability to create reality through the act of thinking: ‘and whatever she thinks about appears’ (1). The correlation between the myth of Spider-Woman and Silko’s own story, evident in the final line of the myth - ‘I’m telling you the story she is thinking’ - informs the reader of the ceremonial nature of Silko’s novel.43 The novel’s aim, therefore, is to transform the reader’s perception and so to affect a change on reality, as Rainwater argues: ‘Silko’s text commands especially active readers […] whose ultimate role is to change our way of living in the world by recognising and transforming our linguistic relationship to it’ (“Semiotics” 119). In this respect, the responsibility for this transformation lies with the reader, who must actively engage with the text to be able to perceive reality through Silko’s interpretation.44

The narrative structure of the novel changes in accordance with Tayo’s and

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43 This facet of Silko’s text has been foregrounded by many critics: Ruppert argues that ‘the text’s effect shifts from speech-as-narrative to speech-as-action’ (185), and Rainwater claims that Ceremony ‘exposes the “constructedness” of reality by revealing its origins in imagination and semiotic practices’ (Dreams 15).

44 As Rainwater asserts: ‘The main point of Silko’s book [is that] reality is the direct result of the versions of the world we construct. We may construct the story of reality carefully or carelessly, and we may either revise an uninhabitable reality or become its victims’ (“Semiotics” 128).
the reader’s development of this perception. In the first section, which illustrates Tayo’s confusion when suffering from trauma, Silko hurls the reader into a whirlpool of images that have no definable location in time or space; the distinction between the past and the present is erased, as reality and dream, history and myth merge, forcing the reader to undergo Tayo’s own traumatic experience of reality. In the middle part of the novel, which describes the interpretation that Betonie offers to Tayo, although the narrative continues to shift between past and present, history and myth, the movement from one to another becomes less confusing as Tayo and the reader develop the ability to accept the dissolution of the boundaries between different phenomena. In the final section, which portrays the development of Tayo’s ability to perceive the world through this interpretation, the narrative progresses in a linear movement and, although the mythic passages remain, the events depicted all occur in the present as Tayo and the reader are able to interpret the events that they witness through the understanding that they have learned.

Section One: Tayo’s traumatic experience.

In the first section of the novel, Tayo is presented as a trauma sufferer; his life is determined by the traumatic effects of the Second World War, when, among other experiences, he saw his cousin Rocky killed by a Japanese soldier. The traumatic events he experienced during the war return upon him in his waking and sleeping hours, evident in the nightmare that opens the main narrative: ‘Tayo didn’t sleep well that night. He tossed in the old iron bed, and the coiled springs kept squeaking even after he lay still again, calling up humid dreams of black night
and loud voices rolling him over and over again like debris caught in a flood' (5). Tayo’s experience chimes with the DSM-III definition of trauma as a ‘response to an overwhelming event or events which takes the form of repeated, intensive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event’ (Caruth “Introduction (Part 1)” 4). In Ceremony, Tayo’s traumatic hallucinations continue throughout the early stages of the novel so that he constantly fears ‘that the sinews connected behind his eyes [will] slip loose and spin his eyes to the interior of his skull where the scenes waited for him’ (9).

Tayo’s trauma is defined by his belief that the normal organisation of time and space has become confused; this is illustrated when during the war he believes that the Japanese soldier he has been ordered to shoot is his uncle Josiah, who is, in fact, at home on the reservation: ‘So Tayo stood there stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he knew it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was still Josiah lying there’ (8). Tayo’s sense of the confusion of both time and space continues after the war when he is treated by the army doctors for battle fatigue, and also when he returns home once the doctors believe him to be cured. When Tayo arrives back at the reservation he cries ‘at how the world had become undone, how thousands of miles, high ocean waves and green jungles could not hold people in their place. Years and months had become weak, and people could push against them and wander back and forth in time’ (18). Silko ensures that the reader experiences this same confusion: before providing him/her with any textual clues as to the location or situation of the novel, or any descriptive information about its protagonist, Silko submerges the reader into the confusing density of images of Tayo’s nightmare, confounding the reader’s attempts to grasp
the textual clues normally provided by the opening paragraphs, and thwarting their attempts at constructing a secure position from which to read the novel. This confusion is also achieved through the omniscient narrative voice which carries Tayo’s thoughts within a unified present moment: the narrator follows Tayo’s sequence of thoughts from the present moment to the past without signalling the change of time-frame, as exemplified in the opening pages in which Tayo’s ruminations about the drought on the reservation pull the narrative back into the past to the suffocating jungle rain during the war (11); however, in this passage, the present tense suggests that the two events are not separated by time and space but are held together within one moment through Tayo’s memory.

The fact that Tayo’s trauma continues after he has been released from the army hospital indicates that the cure offered by Western thought has failed. The doctors impose a diagnosis that accords with the Western diagnosis of PTSD onto Tayo which attempts to interpret the complexity of his symptoms according to the rigid definition of the effects of war. The army doctors attempt to treat him by injecting him with drugs that will make him forget his experiences during the war, causing him to feel that his past is obscured by the presence of white smoke in his mind: ‘[t]he smoke had been dense; visions and memories of the past did not penetrate there, and he had drifted in colors of smoke, where there was no pain, only pale, pale gray of the north wall by his bed. Their medicine drained memory out of his thin arms and replaced it with a twilight cloud behind his eyes’ (15). In this respect, the doctors perceive the traumatic event as something to be disavowed, literally, through drugs that will make the patient forget their experiences. The doctors believe that Tayo is cured when after many months of silence he starts talking again. However, Tayo is only able to speak in the third
person, rather than the first, by referring to himself as ‘he’: ‘One day Tayo heard himself answering the doctor. The voice was saying, “He can’t talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound”’ (15). Thus, Tayo is unable to bear witness to his traumatic experiences, as he cannot claim his own subjectivity as witness. The doctors’ belief in Tayo’s cure at this stage illustrates that their interpretation of trauma, which Silko utilises to represent Western modes of understanding in general, is based upon the separation of self from self, and self from other, and so is formed upon the division inherent in binary thought.

In contrast to these Western ideas, Tayo’s Uncle Josiah represents the Native American perception which emphasises the connection that man has with the land and the animals, and asserts the significance of knowing the myths which explain how these phenomena came into existence. Josiah’s connection to the land is revealed through Tayo’s memory of him emphasising its significance when Tayo was young: ‘He pointed his chin at the springs and around at the narrow canyon. “This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going”’ (45). Josiah’s belief in the connection between phenomena opposes the binary opposites which, Silko proposes, structure Western thought. He teaches Tayo the Native American myths which explain the world as a place of connection rather than division; the most significant of these depicts the bond between man and the land in its explanation of why drought occurs. Tayo blames himself for the drought that has occurred in his land because during the war he cursed the continual jungle rain

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45 For a fuller analysis of the significance of a connection to the land in Native American beliefs see Allen (“Feminine Landscape”).
which he blamed for Rocky’s death; however, the myth that Josiah teaches him counteracts this self-blaming: it describes, through the story of two brothers who are responsible for the care of the ‘mother corn altar’, the Native American belief that droughts occur when people forget their responsibility to the myths, to the land and to each other. In the myth, the two brothers are distracted from their duty by the false magic of a witch in the guise of a medicine man; because of their abandonment of their responsibilities ‘mother Nau’ts’ity’i’, who provides the people with the abundance of the land, deserts them: ‘So she took/the plants and animals from them./No baby animals were born./She took the rainclouds with her’ (49). This story becomes the predominant mythic narrative in the novel; it interweaves with Tayo’s own story and explains the ceremony that is needed to heal the land and to convince the mother to return to the people, and thus defines the ceremony that Tayo must undertake to heal himself, his community and the land in which they live.

This myth also provides an explanation for the situation of the Native American people who have been tricked by the false magic of the Western world into abandoning their beliefs and traditions and so follow the Western belief in separation and division which contrasts with the Native American belief in the connection between all things. Tayo’s cousin, Rocky, attempts to live his life according to these Western ideals; he rejects the ‘old-time ways’ (51), the traditions of his people, and adopts the discourse of the Western world in an attempt to ‘win in the white outside world’ (51). This is revealed in his

46 In the novel. Rocky is injured when he and Tayo are captured by Japanese soldiers; when Tayo and another soldier carry him on a stretcher, the rain causes the soldier to slip over and drop one end of the stretcher, provoking a Japanese soldier to kill Rocky to prevent him from slowing the prisoners down any further. (12, 43-44)
embarrassment about his family's treatment of the deer that they have killed; because his family believe in the connection between man and animals, they treat the deer's carcass according to rituals which respect the animal: '[Rocky] knew when they took the deer home, it would be laid out on a Navajo blanket, and old Grandma would put a string of turquoise around its neck [...] Rocky tried to tell them that keeping the carcass on the floor in a warm room was bad for the meat' (52). Rocky believes the words of his white teachers whose explanations of the world conflict with the traditions of his people; this is illustrated when he criticises Josiah's attempts at raising cattle according to the traditional Native American beliefs, rather than by following the advice in the manuals provided by the white people. In this episode, Josiah decides that he needs to breed cattle that will be able to survive the drought affecting the reservation; he rejects the breed of Hereford suggested by the Western textbooks as he has seen for himself how they are too weak to survive in the harsh conditions of the reservation: 'The problem was the books were written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with' (75). Josiah's rejection of the Western textbooks prompts a disrespectful retort from Rocky who argues that '[t]hose books are written by scientists. They know everything there is to know about beef cattle. That's the trouble with the way the people around here have always done things – they never knew what they were doing' (76).

Rocky's mother, Tayo's Auntie, nurtures Rocky's desire to enter the white world; she believes that it is more powerful than that of the Native Americans and so she encourages her son to succeed within it, even if this causes him to reject his own people. This encouragement, however, is impelled by Auntie's selfish desire to gain the respect she lost from the community when her sister, Tayo's mother,
abandoned Tayo to live in the white world: ‘[Auntie] wanted [Rocky] to be a success. She could see what white people wanted in an Indian, and she believed this way was his only chance. She saw it as her only chance too, after all the village gossip about their family. When Rocky was a success, no one would dare to say anything against them anymore’ (51). Auntie perceives the world in terms of the discourse of Christianity, in which self-sacrifice will earn you a place in heaven; hence, she follows the Western doctrine of individual sacrifice and redemption, and so separates herself from her people in an attempt to prove that she is a worthy Christian; as the narrator comments: ‘Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family’ (68). Auntie’s identification with the white world is evident in her compliance, when Grandma suggests that they should send for the medicine man to heal Tayo, with the white doctors’ rejection of Indian medicine; she argues that, ‘“You know what the Army doctor said: ‘No Indian medicine.’ Old Ku’oosh will bring his bag of weeds and dust. The doctors won’t like it”’ (34).

Emo, Rocky’s enemy, represents the most dangerous example of someone who has adopted the belief system of the Western world, as his desire to become part of the white world extends to his enthusiasm for killing. When the army shows him the weapons they want him to use, ‘big mortar shells that blew tanks and big trucks to pieces; jagged steel flakes that exploded from the grenades’, Emo believes that ‘he understood them right away; he knew what they wanted’ (62). Emo eagerly adopts the ideology of violence to gain acceptance from the Western world; during the war, rather than perceiving the connection between himself and
the Japanese soldiers, as Tayo does when he sees Josiah in the place of the Japanese soldier, Emo willingly tortures and kills as many Japanese men as he can, and so separates himself from the Japanese and identifies with the white world of the U.S. Army: ""We were the best. U.S. Army. We butchered every Jap we found. No Jap bastard was fit to take prisoner. We had all kinds of ways of getting information out of them before they died. Cut off this, cut off these"" (61). In this respect, the Western emphasis on division and separation violently manifests itself in Emo's desire to maim and kill other human beings.

Section Two: Betonie's interpretation of Tayo's trauma.

In the second part of the novel, when it becomes apparent to Tayo's family that the contrasting responses to trauma by the Western doctors and the traditional Native American medicine man have failed, they take Tayo to Betonie, an unconventional medicine man, who teaches him the more open-ended form of interpretation that Silko is endeavouring to make the reader experience through her narrative techniques. Thus, Betonie becomes the fictional counterpart of Silko, teaching Tayo and the reader the understanding they need to effect a change on the world around them.

Betonie interprets Tayo's trauma as an example of the illness which afflicts the entire community of Native American people, rather than as an isolated case: he perceives Tayo's experience of the trauma of the Second World War as part of the larger trauma of living as a Native American in the modern world, and so his cure is part of the ceremony needed to heal the Native American
people.\textsuperscript{47} When Betonie tells Tayo that ‘[t]his has been going on for a long long time. They will try to stop you from completing the ceremony’ (125) Tayo reacts angrily by shouting; ‘I don’t know anything about ceremonies or these things you talk about. I don’t know how long anything has been going on. I just need help’” (125). Tayo’s dismissal of this interpretation of his experience reflects the reader’s own initial rejection of the explanation offered by Betonie. Betonie’s belief that Tayo is part of something much larger than the narrative of trauma sufferer, which the reader has been following up until this point, confuses the reader and leaves her/him bewildered in a text which has suddenly become alien and ambiguous. Rather than the expected narrative of Tayo’s experience of trauma and the search for his cure, Betonie’s words disrupt this fixed temporality to imply that Tayo is caught up in something which seems almost timeless and without limits. By adopting this strategy, Silko refuses to allow her readers to read this novel as a single narrative, and forces them to accept the multiplicity of her text.

Tayo learns from Betonie that his confusion of time and place is not an erroneous perception of the world caused by his trauma, but is, instead, his recognition of the way that the world really is. Therefore, Tayo’s traumatic experience, in fact, allows him to see that the world consists of connections between people, places and moments in time. Tayo’s cure, then, arises from an acceptance, rather than a rejection, of this traumatic experience of reality; as Ruppert asserts: ‘Tayo’s ultimate realisation is that he has never been crazy, that he was simply always perceiving the timeless way things truly are, without the

\textsuperscript{47} The notion that colonised people are traumatised is suggested by Frantz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks in which as part of his drama of consciousness in ” he suggests that his experience of encountering the white world as a black person is an inverted case of Freud’s description of
artificial boundaries imposed by western thought' (179). Thus, the reader, rather than dismissing the dissolution of boundaries in the novel as a symptom of Tayo’s illness, must learn that this is the means by which to read the events of the novel.

Betonie teaches Tayo that the larger trauma of the Native American people has been caused by the division of reality into binary opposites. He explains, through the myth of the ‘witchery’, the reasons why the Western belief in separation and division has developed. The myth, which Silko creates by adapting existing Native American myths, depicts a contest between witches that occurred ‘long time ago/in the beginning’ (132), during which one of the witches offers to tell the others a story, that, as he tells it, ‘will begin to happen’ (135). His story describes the creation of white people, who are depicted in terms of their separation from the land and from each other:

    Then they grow away from the earth
    then they grow away from the sun
    then they grow away from the plants and animals.

    They see no life
    When they look
    they see only objects. (135)

The myth predicts the reality of the European colonisation of the Native Americans’ land, an event which will destroy the Native Americans by causing them to turn away from their myths and their connection to the land; thus, it foretells the situation of Rocky, Auntie and Emo who have lost the belief in the connection between all things. In this myth, the division which structures Western thought has been created by the witches to organise the world in terms of trauma.
opposition, white against Indian and man against nature. This causes a destructive division within the Indian himself, as is illustrated by the difference in the Native Americans before and after the arrival of the white people. Before colonisation, the Native Americans had lived as great clans, connected in the beliefs that they shared: 'they recounted the actions and words each of their clan had taken, and would take; from before they were born and long after they died, the people shared the same consciousness. The people had known, with the simple certainty of the world they saw, how everything should be' (68). However, when the white people arrived with their contrasting beliefs and explanations 'all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name' (68) causing 'the messages the people felt [to be] confused' (68).

If the confusion has arisen from the conflict between these two belief systems, then the cure must be achieved through a mediation between these opposing ways of perceiving reality. In this respect, the interpretation that Silko creates must become a third term, between the opposition of these beliefs, and so must dissolve the boundaries caused by the division of the world into binary opposites. Silko's novel, therefore, can be perceived as a mediational text which breaks the division between Western and Native American thought in its combination of the different discourses, such as the familiar Western narrative of the trauma sufferer and the Native American myths. Silko's decision to include these myths has been criticised by theorists such as Allen who condemns Silko for her inclusion of clan stories which should not be communicated outside of the clan, and which can only be recounted orally and not in written form ("Special Problems"). However, as other critics, particularly Taylor, have indicated, Silko's

As argued by Rainwater ("Dreams") and Ruppert.
adaptation of these myths allows them to retain their power by situating them in a new context and thus allowing them to develop and grow. Indeed, this sense of growth is crucial to the power of Native American stories in which the storyteller adapts the story rather than just repeating it; as Owens argues, 'the relationship between text and interpretation is a dialectical one: he or she both respects the text and revises it' (170). Thus, Allen's fear that Silko's inclusion of the myths will fix them through narrative, rather than allow them to grow through oral transmission, is countered by Silko's adaptation of the myths which confirms her position as a traditional storyteller changing the stories to fit them into a new context. As such, Silko's interpretation can be perceived as transitional, as well as mediational; this emphasises her adaptation of the Native American myths to fit into her modern novel and indicates the necessity of growth and change in her form of interpretation.

Through the figure of Betonie, Silko directly explains her perception of reality to Tayo and the reader. She presents Betonie as a transitional figure, who combines the beliefs of the Native American with those of the modern world informed by Western discourse, to create a new form of perception which frees Tayo and the novel itself from the confines of duality, and therefore facilitates Tayo's move into the final, healing section of the novel. Betonie's mediational position is evident in the mixture of white and Indian objects with which his house is cluttered: 'Piled to the tops of the WOOLWORTH bags were bouquets of dried

49 See Nelson and Nelson for a fuller account of the ways in which Silko conducts this adaptation of traditional myths.

50 Indeed, Silko herself has emphasised this element of her work in interviews in which she has focused upon the interplay between memory and imagination which informs her writing (Coltelli 135-154).
sage and the brown leaves of mountain tobacco wrapped in swaths of silvery unspun wool [...] Light from the door worked paths through the thick bluish green glass of the Coke bottles' (120). Betonie emphasises the significance of growth and change which presents this form of interpretation as transitional, when he explains to Tayo that the ceremonies have to be flexible enough to change with the changing times:

At one time the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but it is only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. (126)

This is why the first medicine man, Ku’oosh, fails to heal Tayo: his ceremonies are fixed and do not take into consideration the changing nature of the world, particularly the horror of modern day warfare; as Tayo explains:

But the old man would not have believed white warfare – killing across great distances without knowing who or how many died. It was all too alien to comprehend [...] even if he could have led him through the fallen jungle trees and muddy craters of torn earth to show him the dead, the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous. (36-7)

Ku’oosh believes that his failure to cure Tayo is due to the changes which have occurred due to the arrival of white people; he laments that “There are some things we can’t cure like we used to [...] not since the white people came.” (38). However, he is unaware that these transitions characterise the nature of the world

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51 Ruppert argues that Betonie 'is able to translate Western and Native discourse spheres into new ceremonies and ceremonial visions. His phone books, newspapers, bear stories and medicine
which consists of 'balances and harmonies [which] are always shifting' (130). The ceremonies have to reflect the transitional nature of the world in their adaptability and fluidity otherwise they will fail and the 'witchery' will have succeeded; as Betonie explains: "That's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more" (126). Thus, the form of interpretation that Betonie teaches to Tayo dissolves the fixed, binary oppositions created by the 'witchery' to achieve a fluid and transitional perception.

The interpretation that Betonie teaches Tayo balances the opposites of movement and stasis through its simultaneous emphasis on the transition over time and the significance of the moment; this is represented in the novel through the images of the circle, the sunrise and the hoop. The focus on transitions over time is exemplified when Betonie tells Tayo that he is already part of the ceremony, explaining to him that he 'has been doing something all along. All this time, and now [he is] at an important place in this story' (124). Betonie arrives at this assertion when Tayo tells him of his encounter with a woman called Night Swan, a Mexican dancer with whom Tayo has sex in the first section of the novel, who mysteriously tells Tayo to "remember this day. You will recognise it later. You are part of it now" (100). When Night Swan says these words early in the novel they are incomprehensible to both Tayo and the reader; however, Betonie's pouches objectify mediation and cross-cultural discourse' (182).

Bell emphasises this when he asserts that 'change, which keeps the ceremonies strong, which characterises life itself, is forever working through order, balancing opposites, restoring itself' (28). Moore highlights this element of Tayo's ceremony when he argues that 'the stakes of Tayo's quest are to find an alternative to the destructive cosmology of dualism represented by the witchery, which sets white against Indian, contemporary against traditional culture, Tayo against himself' ('Myth' 376).
explanation that Tayo is already part of the ceremony makes it evident that Night Swan represents more than the reader had initially assumed and that Tayo's encounter with her is part of the ceremony in which he is already involved. Betonie informs Tayo that his participation fulfils the destiny laid out by Betonie's grandfather and grandmother when they first came together to initiate the ceremony; as Betonie's grandmother explains during one of the sections which takes the narrative back to the distant past: "Sometimes I don't know if the ceremony will be strong enough to stop them. We have to depend on people not even born yet. A hundred years from now" (150). The idea that Tayo has become part of a timeless ceremony disrupts the limited narrative of trauma and cure formulated by the Western discourse of the doctors; rather than the quick fix cure of the doctors' drugs, the ceremony is, instead, a series of small transitions which occur over a long period of time.

In the interpretation that Betonie teaches to Tayo, the linear temporality inherent in this notion of the transition over time is balanced by an emphasis on the significance of the individual moment. This provides Tayo with a way of conceptualising the confusion of time and space in terms of the connections between all things in the unified moment; this can be perceived in terms of a circle, an image which Silko repeatedly employs throughout her novel. For example, many of the stories in the first section of the novel are told in a circular rather than linear movement; in addition, the narrative in general, works in terms of what Bell calls 'repetition and recapitulation' (25) which constructs it in terms of the endlessness of the circle rather than the finality of linearity. This is exemplified by the vague reference the narrator initially makes to an event or character which is expanded upon later in the novel; when the narrator describes
the event in detail, the reader has a sense of recalling it from the reference made to it earlier, and thus the narrative works more in terms of memory recall, placing the reader in the centre of the novel as the one who is remembering these events. Through these narrative strategies, Silko's entire novel is structured as a circular narrative, compelling the reader to return to the beginning once s/he has reached the end of the novel. To emphasise this circularity of form Silko frames her novel with the word 'sunrise' which can be perceived, in a similar way to the circle, as a connection between phenomena held together in the moment; as Tayo perceives:

At that moment in the sunrise, it was all so beautiful, everything, from all directions, evenly, perfectly, balancing day with night, summer months with winter. The valley was enclosing this totality, like the mind holding all thoughts together in a single moment. The strength came from here, from this feeling. It had always been there. (237)

Silko develops the image of the circle into that of a sunrise, as it is a moment of both unity and transition; as Salyer emphasises: 'sunrises speak of liminality, of thresholds to be crossed' (32). Thus, Silko's novel must inscribe both the unity of the moment of the sunrise and the sense that it is a moment before a transition, one that is on the brink of becoming, rather than fixed in a static form. The sunrise, then, enacts the form of perception that Betonie teaches Tayo; it is the moment in which all things are connected, not in stasis, but in a moment of transition. To achieve this balance of stasis and change Silko also develops the image of the circle into that of a hoop, as both a moment of unity and a gateway to the next moment of transition. The hoop represents the means of recovery: 54 in the ceremony that Betonie performs on Tayo, he makes hoops from

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54 See Bell for a fuller discussion of the significance of the hoop ceremony in Native American
bundles of weeds for Tayo to step through to facilitate his journey to recovery. The movement through the hoop can only be achieved with an awareness of the connections between all things held together within the circle; thus, the individual has to be able to interpret the world correctly to be able to continue to the next stage in the ceremony. This is illustrated in the opening sections of the novel when Tayo is unable to step through the hoop which he sees lying on the ground because he has not yet learnt Betonie’s perception of the world: ‘Tayo stepped inside [the hoop] that was half buried in the reddish blow sand; he hooked the edge with the toe of his boot, and then let it slip into the sand again’ (10). Therefore, the middle section of the novel acts as a metaphor for the ceremonial transition through the hoop; it is only through the hoop ceremony, and the understanding that it teaches, that the reader is able to interpret the events of the final part of the novel.

In addition to the sunrise and the hoop, Silko utilises the image of the spider web to symbolise that the world is re-created through interpretation; this is illustrated in the opening myth of Thought-Woman which refers directly to the Native American belief in the Spider-Woman who created the world with her thoughts, as a spider spins its web. In interviews, Silko has confirmed the connection between the spider web image and the Native American belief in the power of stories; she explains that: ‘The structure of Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider’s web – with many threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other [...] Words are always with other words, and the other words are almost always in a story of some sort’ (qtd. in Ruppert 176). Salyer also connects the stories to the spider web image when he emphasises ‘the delicacy of
stories as well as their strength. Like spider webs, their fragility derives from their individual strands, and their strength results from their connection to other stories' (31). The fragility of the web emphasises the capacity for changing reality by breaking and re-forming the connections between the various strands of the story. The image of the spider-web emphasises, therefore, that because the world is created through stories a change of interpretation is something that will affect a change in reality. Thus the spider web image, like the sunrise and the hoop, denotes the strength of the moment which is held together, but also suggests the continuing change; that the world is not a fixed pattern, but is something always in transition. If the individual knows the stories, and can interpret the world according to them, then s/he has the ability to change events through their interpretation; this makes interpretation active, rather than passive.

Silko ensures that her readers assume this responsibility by forcing them to make the connections in her novel; this causes the reading process to become an active interpretation of transitional elements, rather than a passive reception of fixed messages. This is what Tayo must learn; he must interpret the events he sees through the form of interpretation that Betonie teaches him, one based upon the open-endedness and timelessness of the circle, the balance of stasis and transition in the sunrise and hoop metaphors, and the image of the spider web, which holds all things together through its connecting stories. Through this interpretation, Tayo can learn to directly influence events by bearing witness to them. The reader must also learn this interpretation to be able to take on Tayo's trauma and bear witness to his journey through this same open-ended perception of events.
Section Three: Tayo’s development of the ability to bear witness to the traumatic events.

In the third section of the novel, Tayo and the reader journey to achieve the transitional interpretation that has been taught to them by Betonie’s explanation and Silko’s narrative strategies. Tayo’s journey is organised around a series of events which he must experience in order to complete the ceremony; these are depicted as a succession of transitions through which Tayo must pass, as he passed through each hoop in Betonie’s ceremony. Thus, the final section of the novel develops in terms of a linear progression, in which Tayo’s journey moves towards the healing at the end of the novel. However, Silko’s organisation of Tayo’s development according to each particular stage balances this linearity with a sense of the significance of the isolated moment.55

The first event that Tayo experiences is meeting Ts’eh who lives in the mountains and with whom he begins a sexual relationship. Ts’eh embodies the kind of interpretation that Betonie has taught to Tayo: they meet in a moment of transition between light and dark at sunset, and her house is timeless: it is ‘like the mesas around it: years had little relation to it’ (183). Their lovemaking is described as involving a loss of boundaries which, rather than being traumatic, is a comforting feeling that allows a stronger connection between the two bodies:

But he did not get lost, and he smiled at her as she held his hips and pulled him closer. He let the motion carry him, and he could feel the momentum within, at first almost imperceptible, gathering in his belly. When it came, it

55 Jahner conceptualises this structure of the novel as giving ‘event structure [...] over temporal structure’ (35). However, I perceive it more in terms of the balance between moment and
was the edge of a steep riverbank crumbling under the downpour until
suddenly it all broke loose and collapsed into itself. (181)

Not only is their lovemaking a loss of the boundaries between self and other, but
also between dream and reality, as is evident when Tayo’s dream about the cattle
becomes intertwined with the reality of having sex with Ts’eh:

He dreamed about the cattle that night. It was a continuous dream that was
not interrupted even when [Ts’eh] reached out for him again and pulled him
on top of her. He went on dreaming while he moved inside her, and when he
heard her whisper, he saw them scatter over the crest of the round bare hill,
running away from him, scattering out around him like ripples in still water.

(181)

Tayo’s time with Ts’eh enables him to see the world through this perception; this
is apparent when he perceives the significance of the sunrise: he feels that ‘the
instant of the dawn was an event which in a single moment gathered all things
together – the last stars, the mountaintops, the clouds, and the winds’ (182).

The next stage in Tayo’s journey is his discovery of Josiah’s cattle which
were stolen when Tayo was fighting in the war. Tayo finds the cattle on the other
side of a ‘huge fence of heavy-gauge steel mesh with three strands of barbed wire
across the top’ (187). This fence represents the division between man and nature
which forms the basis of Western thought in the novel. Tayo cuts through this
fence and so destroys the boundaries which have been constructed to separate, not
only man and nature, but also the white man and the Native American: ‘The lie.
He cut into the wire as if cutting away at the lie inside himself. The liars had
fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the

movement, stasis and development in Silko’s transitional form of interpretation.
lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other’ (191). After this, Tayo experiences a moment which dissolves the boundaries between time and place: rather than time being a linear progress, the past and future are held in connection with the present:

He knew then why the old timers could only speak of yesterday and tomorrow in terms of the present moment: the only certainty; and this present sense of being was qualified with bare hints of yesterday or tomorrow, by saying, “I go up to the mountain yesterday or I go up to the mountain tomorrow”. The ck’o’yo Kaup’a’ta [from a Native American myth] somewhere is stacking his gambling sticks and waiting for a visitor; Rocky and I are walking across the ridge in the moonlight; Josiah and Robert are waiting for us. This night is a single night; and there has never been any other. (192)

This passage illustrates the balance between stasis and movement, in that the actions of Rocky and Tayo are linked to the stasis of Josiah and Robert waiting for their return; it also reveals the dissolution of the borders between myth and reality, in that the mythic Kaup’a’ta’s actions are as real as the movements of Rocky and Tayo walking in the jungle.

Once he has found the cattle, Tayo decides to return to the ranch where he had lived at the beginning of the novel; this creates a circularity that allows the reader to gain a sense of the difference in Tayo before and after he learns this transitional form of interpretation: ‘The terror of the dreaming he had done on this bed was gone, uprooted from his belly; and the woman had filled the hollow spaces with new dreams’ (219). He experiences a feeling of connection to the world around him and significantly to Rocky and Josiah which he expresses in
terms of the connection between phenomena: ‘The dream had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had lost nothing’ (220).

After this, Tayo returns to Ts’eh; during this period Tayo fully experiences the interpretation taught to him by Betonie when he sees, during a strange hallucination, ‘diamond patterns, black on white; the energy of the designs spiralled deep, then protruded suddenly into three-dimensional summits, their depth and height dizzy and shifting with the eye’ (229). This experience encapsulates the distinctive features of Betonie’s perception: the circularity, and the sense of the ‘convergence and emergence’ of the transition of the moment.

Towards the end of their time together, Ts’eh takes Tayo to visit an ancient cave-painting of a she-elk; this episode is significant in the development of Tayo’s interpretation: during their walk to the painting ‘the position of the sun in the sky is delicate, transitional’ (230) and, although the painting itself is faded, Ts’eh explains to Tayo that ‘as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of the story we have together’ (231). Ts’eh, therefore, foregrounds that what is important in the interpretation of the world is that something has been seen and remembered, and so she emphasises Tayo’s role as witness.

In the final stage of the novel, Tayo fulfils his role as witness when he discovers the mine from which the uranium, for the first atomic bomb, had been taken. The mine is depicted as the centre of the pattern that Tayo finally has the

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56 Purdy takes this phrase from the ‘Laguna oral tradition’, which is characterised by ‘people converging in a previous world and then emerging into this one (which is only one event in a long history of transformations), and when a ceremony is to begin, the people converge by societies, then emerge into public celebration’ (66).
ability to see: ‘he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth had been laid’ (246). The mine represents the culmination of all the powers of the ‘witchery’, in which the atomic bomb made from the uranium taken from the Indian’s land becomes the ultimate form of destruction; as Tayo explains: ‘They had taken these beautiful rocks from deep within the earth and they had laid them in a monstrous design, realizing destruction on a scale only they could have dreamed’ (246). In this respect, Silko presents the development of the nuclear bomb as the ultimate traumatic event; she depicts the effect of the nuclear explosions, which occurred when the bombs were originally being tested in the desert, as an ‘inverted sunrise’ (Lincoln 58), highlighting its contrast to the kind of perception that she is trying to create. Grandma, who lived on the reservation during the time of these nuclear tests, describes it thus:

It was still dark; everyone was still sleeping. But as I walked back from the kitchen to my bed there was a flash of light through the window. So big, so bright even my old clouded-up eyes could see it. It must have filled the whole south-east sky. I thought I was seeing the sun rise again, but it faded away. (245 emphasis mine)

Tayo’s recognition of the significance of the uranium mine allows him finally to perceive the world according to Betonie’s interpretation:

He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together – the old stories, the war stories, their stories – to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (246)
He realises that he is in a transitional moment in which 'the old priests would be praying for the force to continue the relentless motion of the stars' (247), but also in which 'there were others who would be working this night, casting loose countermotions to suck in a great spiral, swallowing the universe endlessly into the black mouth, their diagrams in black ash on cave walls outlining the end in motionless dead stars' (247). To combat the 'witchery' Tayo has to be able to see the pattern through the interpretation of the world that Betonie has taught him:

He saw the constellation in the north sky [...] the pattern of the ceremony was in the stars. [...] For each star there was a night and a place; this was the last night and the last place, when the darkness of night and the light of day were balanced. His protection was there in the sky, in the position of the sun, in the pattern of the stars. He had only to complete this night, to keep the story out of reach of the destroyers for a few more hours, and their witchery would turn upon itself. (247)

Tayo’s position as witness in the novel is evident in Silko’s portrayal of him in terms of the Arrowboy myth of Native America; Silko inserts this myth to illustrate what Tayo must do: he must witness the events and so have control over their outcome. In this myth, the presence of Arrowboy at the witches’ ceremony causes the witchery to fail:

The witchman stepped through the hoop

he called out that he would be a wolf.

His head and upper body became hairy like a wolf

But his lower body was still human.

"Something is wrong," he said.

"Ck’o’yo magic won’t work
Tayo’s final transition in the ceremony is when he is confronted with the sight of Emo torturing Harley to lure Tayo out of hiding. However, Tayo’s position as witness means that he must realise that just seeing this event is enough; if he acts and tries to kill Emo, as he momentarily desires, then he would end the ceremony according to the pattern of the witchery: ‘It had been a close call. The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan; Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo’s skull the way the witchery had wanted ... Their deadly ritual for the autumn solstice would have been completed by him’ (253). Because Tayo has the ability to see the ‘convergence of the patterns’ (254), he is able to respond accordingly to the event and allow ‘the transition [to be] completed’ (255) by becoming Arrowboy whose presence as witness prevents the witches’ magic from working. After witnessing the event, Tayo returns home to tell the story to the villagers and, therefore, allows them to become witnesses to the event as well.57

Tayo’s position as Arrowboy allows him to destroy the boundaries created by the witchery. This is apparent in that Arrowboy’s presence at the ceremony can be perceived as an act which breaks down binary divisions, as Moore argues in his conceptualisation of the ‘dynamic silence of the final scene’ (“Blood Sacrifice” 150):

How does Arrowboy’s witnessing stop the witchery from working? By exploding, opening, triangulating the binary of victim and victimiser, the

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57 Taylor argues that the structure of event and witness, evident at the end of the novel, is inherent to the Native American myth of the Spider-Woman with which Silko opens her novel. He asserts that the two sisters created by Spider-woman, who are called Ureste and Naostete, can be signified in terms of, respectively, ‘she who matters’ (event) and ‘she who remembers’ (witness) (40).
witness creates a circulation of the bloody energy among three poles — and 
then many in the telling — rather than between an oppositional two. ("Blood 
Sacrifice" 163)

In this respect, the reader must become Arrowboy, and must develop an ability to 
witness the traumatic event through the interpretation described and enacted in 
Ceremony. This perception is formed upon a balance between time and 
timelessness, linear progress and the isolated moment, stasis and movement, and 
is represented in the novel by the hoop and the sunrise as moments of unity and 
change, and the spider web as the balance between linearity and circularity. By 
engaging with Silko’s novel, by experiencing the form of interpretation that she 
creates, and by learning from Tayo’s own development of this interpretation, the 
reader can perceive events through an open-ended, fluid and transitional 
perception and, in doing so, can then effect a change on the world in which they 
live.
II. Morrison's Indeterminate and Heterogeneous Narrative in Beloved.

Toni Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford, on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, and was raised in a family that believed in the importance of an appreciation for black culture, particularly traditional elements such as story-telling, folktales and songs. She studied humanities at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and Cornell University in New York. She then began what was to become an accomplished academic career, firstly at Texas Southern University, then at Howard University and Yale, and later in the position of chair at Princeton University. Along with her academic career she has worked as an editor for Random House during which time she influential in publishing work by other African American writers, and also came into contact with material which she would later draw on in her novels. One example of this was The Black Book, a collection of anecdotes, personal genealogies and histories, newspaper clippings, songs detailing the everyday lives of African Americans. Another significant example of her involvement in the publishing world was the foreword she wrote to The Harlem Book of the Dead, published in 1978, which was a collection of photographs and stories and poems inspired by them.

Morrison is an acclaimed author who has published eight novels so far: The Bluest Eye (1970); Sula (1973); Song of Solomon (1977); Tar Baby (1981); Beloved (1987) Jazz (1992); Paradise (1998) and Love (2003) She has also written one play, Dreaming Emmet, which was performed 1986, but has remained unpublished, and she has also published an important study entitled Playing in the Dark-Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), which examines the occluded Black Africanist presence in American Literature and argues that the
American concept of whitehood is dependent upon the suppression of a Black other. She has won many awards for her fiction, including the 1978 national book critics’ Award for *Song of Solomon* and the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*; in 1993 she became the first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.

*Beloved* is Morrison’s fifth novel and its publication established her international reputation. Originally Morrison had planned to organise the novel according to three events separated by about fifty or sixty years. However, this project for one novel became divided into the trilogy of *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*. This three novels examine different moments in African American history: *Beloved* examines the history of slavery and the continuing effects after abolition, by re-imagining the true story of Margaret Garner; *Jazz* begins where *Beloved* ends and explores the historical situation of the 1917 St. Louis riot and the resulting protest march in New York through a story about the murder of a young girl who was murdered by her lover and who refused to name him as her killer, a story Morrison read in the Black Book; *Paradise* examines the situation of a black utopian community set up in Oklahoma to challenge the idealist cultural myth of an all Black community as utopia.

*Beloved* explores many of the same themes that Morrison examines in all her novels. For example, although *Beloved* is the only novel to focus the history of slavery, all of her novels examine the continuing effects of slavery and particularly the consequences of institutional racism on Black individuals and communities. Within this, one of the central themes of her writing is the struggle for individuals to establish both an individual and cultural identity. Thus while *Beloved* focuses on the immediate trauma of slavery, all of her novels focus bear witness to the trauma of racism in America. Morrison not only explores the
trauma of racism in terms of actual physical acts, but also in terms of the way that language is itself structured by ideology. Morrison's focus in _beloved_ on the power of naming and the implications of interpretation is explored in many of her novels; for example _Sula_ forces the reader to question their own responses to the challenging figure of Sula, and in _Tar Baby_ the varying interpretations of the Tar Baby legend make apparent the power situation between the white and black people which they had all previously ignored. On the level of narrative strategies, all of Morrison's novels explore the creative possibilities of narrative; her novels challenge the realist narrative form by moving backwards and forwards in time, shifting rapidly from one perspective to another, and generally favouring, like in _Beloved_, contradiction, incompleteness, indeterminacy, inconsistency, disruption.

Morrison's _Beloved_ is, like Silko's novel, concerned with the traumatic effects of the domination of one culture by another: _Ceremony_ concentrates on the colonisation of the Native Americans by the European settlers, and _Beloved_ the enslavement of the African people. In the same way that Silko linked Tayo's personal experience of the Second World War to the larger trauma of the suffering of his people, Morrison connects her protagonist Sethe's personal experience of slavery to the wider history of slavery. In a similar manner to Silko, Morrison utilises this connection between the personal and public experience of trauma to emphasise the responsibility of the individual towards the healing of his/her people. Thus, Morrison proposes that Sethe must assume responsibility for bearing witness to the trauma of slavery by recognising the complexity of her own traumatic life; this is analogous to Silko's proposition that Tayo's personal recovery is necessary to cure the suffering of the Native American people in general. In the same way that Silko portrays the consequences of attempts to
falsify a traumatic experience, as Tayo is trapped by his past, Morrison depicts how Sethe’s attempts to forget her past cause her to become possessed by images from her traumatic life. Morrison’s novel also expands the extent of the effects of this denial by demonstrating the consequences for subsequent generations, represented in the novel by Sethe’s daughter, Denver.

Like Silko, Morrison offers a new form of interpretation to her protagonist which will allow her to bear witness to the traumatic events of the past. However, rather than this perception being taught to the main protagonist, as in Ceremony, in Beloved it is Sethe’s daughter Denver and her lover Paul D who develop this new perception; they then offer this to Sethe at the end of the novel. To teach her readers a means of perceiving the traumatic past of slavery through this form of interpretation, Morrison, like Silko, utilises her narrative strategies, such as the intertwining of the past and the present, repeated motifs, and contradictory images, to engage her readers in the story-telling process so that they have to assume responsibility for witnessing the traumatic past.

Like Silko’s novel, Beloved is organised into three sections. In the first section of the novel, Morrison describes Sethe’s attempts to disavow the trauma of her past experiences. Sethe has denied the trauma of her life as a slave at Sweet Home where she lived with her ‘husband’ Halle, and a group of other men, including Paul D. Sethe instead focuses on the fact that her owners, Mr and Mrs Garner, treated her well, ignoring the traumatic events which occurred once Mr Garner had died and schoolteacher took over running the farm. This period is described through fragmented references throughout this section of the novel which allow the reader to gauge the trauma of Sethe’s past. During this period of Sethe’s life, schoolteacher had attempted to reverse, what he calls, the ‘damage’
done to the slaves due to the Garners' soft treatment of them, and so had repeatedly abused them and denied them their basic human rights. He had perceived the slaves as animals and treated them accordingly, allowing his nephews to study them and to make lists of their 'animal characteristics' in their textbooks. When Sethe and the other slaves decide to escape from this horrific life, their plans fail and Sethe is horribly abused by the nephews who steal the milk from her breasts and then whip her when she tells Mrs Garner what they have done to her.

Sethe, however, is the only one who eventually manages to escape, as the men are either killed or, in Paul D's case, captured and forced to work in a chain gang as punishment. Sethe's escape involves an exhausting and life-threatening journey to Halle's mother's house in Cincinnati, during which she gives birth to Denver. When Sethe reaches Cincinnati, Halle's mother, Baby Suggs, cares for her and Sethe begins to live a 'normal' life, enjoying the experience of raising her four children in freedom. However, schoolteacher eventually tracks her down, and, rather than allowing him to take her children, Sethe tries to kill them all to save them from the horror of slavery; she only, in fact, manages to kill her two year old daughter, and is subsequently taken to prison along with her youngest daughter, Denver. This infanticide is the central traumatic event of the novel; it is not described until the middle section, but is indirectly referred to throughout the first part of the novel in the repeated images and references to the 'something' that happened. Rather than confronting this event, Sethe has dismissed it by ignoring its implications. Sethe's denial of her past and her refusal to accept the complexity of her actions has caused her to become isolated from the rest of the black community who condemn her, not necessarily for her infanticide, but for her
refusal to confront the complex reasons which drove her to murder her own child.

Sethe’s refusal to acknowledge her traumatic past not only affects her own life, but also has serious consequences for her daughter Denver, who is trapped in the house as she is too scared of the unknown ‘something’ that exists in the outside world which caused her mother to kill her daughter. Denver is also unable to confront her past, particularly her time in prison with her mother, and she becomes deaf rather than having to hear about her past; in this respect, Denver repeats her mother’s inability to bear witness to the past. Sethe’s refusal to discuss her past with Denver also creates a gap between Sethe and Denver. The damaging effects that this silence has on Sethe’s and Denver’s relationship is also apparent in Sethe’s relationship with Paul D who arrives at their house after having eventually escaped from the chain-gang. Paul D cannot confront his traumatic past, particularly his horrific experiences in the chain gang, and so the conversations between him and Sethe are characterised by gaps and silences which prevent any real connection between them.

In the second section of the novel, these respective attempts to forget the past cause the entrance of Beloved into their lives. Beloved is an enigmatic and contradictory figure that Morrison utilises to represent the disavowed past: she is the ghost of Sethe’s dead baby, but also a real woman who has survived the Middle Passage. She therefore embodies the effects of the disavowal of Sethe’s infanticide, but also the consequences of the forgetting of the wider trauma of slavery, and so, through her, Morrison links Sethe’s attempt to ignore her personal past to the larger forgetting of the collective past of slavery. Beloved is not only a consequence of their respective disavowals of the past, but she also represents an opportunity for them to confront this denial, literally, by having to face the
forgotten past. However, Sethe and Denver reject this opportunity by limiting Beloved's multiplicity by interpreting her as the murdered baby returned to them, and, rather than examining this bewildering manifestation of the dead baby as a young woman, they blindly accept her into their home. This causes the past to possess Sethe and Denver, who become entrapped within their own house by the presence of Beloved.

In the final section of the novel, the increasing dangers of Beloved's presence for Sethe, whose obsession with explaining to Beloved why she had to kill her baby confines her to the house, causes Denver to eventually seek help from the community who had condemned Sethe for her act of infanticide and had left her as an outcast. When Denver seeks their help, the members of the community are forced to re-think their responses to Sethe and to take responsibility for rescuing her from the past which is threatening to consume her: they gather outside her house to exorcise the ghost from Sethe's life and, finally, accept her infanticide as a result of the traumatic experiences which they have all been subjected to. Thus, the story of Sethe ends on a positive resolution in much the same way as Silko's novel, which concludes with Tayo's re-connection with his community. However, Morrison refuses the closure implied in this ending by including an ambiguous and indeterminate section that emphasises the contradictory status of Beloved and re-affirms the necessity of confronting the complexity of the traumatic past in a way that does not attempt to limit it through a determined and fixed narrative.
Section One: The dangers of denying the past.

Morrison's depiction in *Beloved* of the necessity of bearing witness to the past can be understood in terms of her belief that the millions that died during the Middle Passage and throughout the three hundred year period of slavery have been forgotten by the historical record; as she explains: 'There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours' (Davis 224). Not only have the millions of dead been forgotten by the official history, but also by the African-American people who, in leaving their slave past behind them in order to continue with their lives, have forgotten their traumatic past:

I suspect the reason is that it was not possible to survive on certain levels and dwell on it. People who did dwell on it, it probably killed them, and the people who did not dwell on it probably went forward. They tried to make a life. I think the Afro-Americans in rushing away from slavery, which was important to do - it meant rushing out of bondage into freedom - also rushed away from the slaves because it was painful to dwell there, and they may have abandoned some responsibilities in so doing. (Darling 247)

Therefore, Morrison's project in *Beloved* is to assume 'responsibility for people no one's ever assumed responsibility for' (Darling 247), and thus attempt to undo the attitude of 'national amnesia' (Angelo 257) toward the millions that died during slavery.

However, Morrison is also aware of the difficulties inherent in remembering a traumatic past, evident in her 'fear of not properly, artistically,
burying them’ (Naylor 209). The danger here is that she will create a narrow version which will forget these people by rather than remember them, a problem which is emphasised by Mandel who highlights ‘the implicit silencing and forgetting bound up in the act of commemoration’ (585). Morrison, therefore, must create a form of remembering which avoids the pitfalls of memorialisation, but which also confronts the complexities of bearing witness to the past. In accordance with Felman’s proposition that ‘the truth requires art for its transmission, for its realisation in our consciousness as witness’ (“Film” 91) Morrison proposes that ‘art alone can stand up to’ (Caldwell 244) the difficulties of remembering a traumatic past properly. Morrison argues that art is able to achieve this by providing a safe environment for the reader which is healing rather than destructive; as she claims: ‘There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there’s a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember’ (Darling 248). One of the narrative strategies that Morrison cites as being part of this protective environment is the use of omens which build up to the traumatic moment, as Morrison explains:

[The] comfort in knowing whatever it is has already happened so you don’t have to be too frightened [...] You’re going to find out about it, but its not going to be a big surprise, even though it might be awful [...] I don’t want

\[58\] The paradoxes of remembering, the ‘tension between the compulsion to speak and the equally compelling need to remain silent’ (Mandel 600) which Morrison has to confront, are foregrounded by many critics in their analysis of Beloved; for example Roger Sale highlights the ‘struggle to remember, the need to forget and the inability to forget’ (169) and Rushdy foregrounds the ‘tension between […] necessary remembering and an equally necessary forgetting’ (142).
to give you total surprise. I just want you to feel the dread and to feel the awfulness without having the language compete with the event itself [...] when it happens you expect it, though you did not before. (Tate 164)

Morrison utilises this particular narrative strategy as a way of approaching the infanticide as the central traumatic event in the novel. The repetition of the line 'That's how it began' builds an ominous atmosphere in the narrative that forewarns the reader to expect that something traumatic is about to occur. Once the actual event is described, the reader has a sense that they already expected it without actually realising. This is achieved through the repeated images which link to the moment when Sethe draws a saw across her baby's neck; for example, the use of phrases such as 'breakneck possessiveness' (54), and references to ghost stories of a beheaded woman (13). Through this 'repetition of words and phrases' (Rodrigues 150) and 'hints and insinuations' (Matus 108) Morrison creates a sense of latency, or what Nicholls terms 'retroactive effect' (59), which she believes provides a form of protection for the reader.

Like Silko, therefore, Morrison utilises repetition as a crucial narrative strategy in her novel. Whereas for Silko the repetition is used to create a sunrise or hoop effect which develops the totality of the circle into a more transitional form, Morrison utilises repetition to build towards the traumatic event and so to ensure that the reader confronts it within a safer environment. Morrison believes, therefore, that preparing the reader for the trauma will allow them to experience it without being so shocked by it that they attempt to disavow it. This notion of trauma differs strikingly from Caruth's notion of the possibilities of trauma for historical representation. Caruth argues that the latency of trauma, the fact that the subject is unprepared for it at the time, prevents the event becoming
assimilated into consciousness and thus allows it to remain as an excess beyond narrative resolution. Therefore, in Caruth’s formulation it is the impact of the trauma which creates the possibility for a form of representation which does not attempt to define the trauma. In contrast to Caruth’s formulation, Morrison proposes that if the reader is too traumatised by the event described they will try to limit its impact through narrative consolation. This will then cause them to deny the traumatic event, rather than confront it, and so they will repeat Sethe’s simplification of her infanticide. Morrison’s use of repetition can be compared to Santner’s notion of working-through. Santner proposes that the repetitive dreams experienced in trauma allow a situation of readiness to the feeling of anxiety which was ‘absent during the initial shock’, and that ‘until such anxiety has been recuperated and worked through, the loss will continue to represent a past that refuses to go away’ (147). Thus for Santner it is the repetition of the traumatic images which allows the subject to be able to confront their trauma. This is comparable to Morrison’s notion that it is the repetition of images in her narrative which prepares the reader for the trauma and allows them to confront it in a healing, rather than destructive, environment. 59

Morrison believes that her readers need to experience the event within a safe environment so that they can ‘feel’ for themselves the trauma of slavery,

59 The sense of healing which is necessary to Morrison’s project, in that she does not want to traumatising her readers but to provide, instead, a protective and healing environment in which the trauma of slavery can be confronted, has led many critics to over-value certain aspects of her novel, rather than being able to perceive the complexity and ambiguity as part of its overall aim. For example, Henderson emphasises the ways in which narrativisation leads to the development of a coherent self, thus downplaying the ambiguity of the ending of the novel, and Finney perceives the novel in terms of an attempt to understand, which again simplifies the contradictions of the narrative form of Beloved.
rather than just having it described to them (qtd. in Angelo 257). Thus, her readers must be allowed to feel safe enough to take on the trauma of the past, rather than denying it, as they may if its impact is too great. Not only must the reader be able to experience the traumatic event but also, Morrison argues, they must be able to imaginatively reconstruct it, rather than limiting it through a definitive interpretation. In this respect, Morrison believes that the only means of accessing the past is by taking the trace of the event and then using 'the act of imagination' to reconstruct it, as she illustrates through her metaphor of 'literary archaeology' (qtd. in Henderson 65): 'you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply' (qtd. in Henderson 65-6). In this respect, Morrison proposes that, as a writer, 'part of what you are doing is re-doing the past as well as throwing it into relief' (qtd. in Jones and Vinson 171).

Morrison's belief in historical representation as a trace of the past is demonstrated by her decision to reference, in her creation of Sethe's story, an actual historical event: the case of Margaret Garner, who committed infanticide to prevent her children being taken into the slave trade. However, the novel is not an actual depiction of this historical event, but a fiction which re-imagines this original situation: although she uses the Garner story as a basis for her novel, she 'didn't want to know a great deal about [Margaret Garner's] story because there would be no space for [her] to invent' (qtd. in Moyers 272). However, it is not just the story of Margaret Garner that becomes the motivation for the novel, but also that this story reminds her of something that she had already been thinking about without realising it; this is exemplified by her awareness that the Garner case was 'a piece, a tail of something that was always around' (qtd. in Naylor
This ‘something’ is the impact created by a photograph of the ‘young girl lying in the coffin’ (qtd. in Naylor 208) which she found when she was editing the Harlem Book of the Dead.

In this respect, the impetus for the novel is, itself, achieved through this double movement of latency; the photograph that she saw sparked a traumatic reaction, which returned upon her when she read the Garner case; so that the two historical traces together provided the focus for Beloved. The idea of the traumatic effect of the photograph chimes with Barthes’ theories of the traumatic communication of the punctum, which ‘rises from the scene, shoots out of the Photograph like an arrow and pierces’ (Camera 26). Barthes conceptualises the photograph as a form of representation that communicates on a level which evades conscious interpretation to puncture the unconscious mind. He argues that this communication is achieved via the punctum; this is the opposite of the studium, which is the public significance of the photograph, for example, the depiction of a particular moment in history. The punctum is, instead, a more private experience of the photograph; it is a detail that catches the viewer’s individual attention which penetrates the subject and causes ‘internal agitation’ (Camera 19) within the viewer’s mind. Barthes proposes that the significance of the punctum is only experienced latently when the viewer remembers the photograph:

the punctum [is] revealed only after the fact when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision oriented its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always miss its point of effect. (Camera 53)
Therefore the punctum causes a reaction in the viewer which exceeds its initial effect, and so the punctum is, as Barthes states, `an addition; it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there' (*Camera 55*). Thus, the punctum triggers a reaction in the subject’s mind, ensuring that, however immediate and incisive it was, the punctum could accommodate a certain latency (*Camera 53*). Barthes calls this latent effect the `blind field'; he conceptualises this as `a kind of subtle beyond - as if the image launch[es] desire beyond what it permits us to see' (*Camera 59*). Barthes’ notion of the latency of the photograph provides a way of conceptualising the latent effect that the photograph had on Morrison: it is only later, when she reads the Garner case and recalls the photograph, that its significance is apparent to her. Morrison’s realisation of the meaning of the photograph actually occurs through the double movement of latency: at the end of the interview with Naylor, in which she describes her interest in the photograph, Morrison provides an overview of her comments, stating that `[she] said something [she] didn’t know she knew. About the “dead girl”. That bit by bit [she] had been rescuing her from the grave of time and inattention ... Little by little bringing her back into living life ... She is here now, alive’ (qtd. in Naylor 217). This idea of ‘something she didn’t know she knew’ is exactly the latency effect that Morrison utilises in her novel to represent the traumatic event as both a trace of reality and a re-construction.

Morrison’s notion of the duality of the historical event accords with Barthes’ theories of the dual nature of the photograph. Barthes argues that the photograph is a unique form of representation because, unlike other art forms, the referent - the object represented - must have been present when the photograph was taken, and therefore the photograph ‘carries its referent within itself’ (*Camera
However, the photograph is also an interpretation of this trace, as the photographer selects a particular moment to capture. This causes the photograph to be a paradoxical form of representation in that it embodies 'the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photo analogue), the other with a code (the 'art' or the treatment)' (Image 19). Barthes argues that this duality confuses the viewer who may only consciously perceive the photograph as a trace of reality and thus concentrate solely on its public significance, its studium. This confusion allows the effect of the punctum to invade the viewer's mind and to achieve, therefore, the latent effect which enables access to the 'essence' of reality; thus, Barthes proposes that it is the duality of the photograph that allows the photograph to communicate on an unconscious level.

Morrison's novel resonates with the notion of the unassimilability of unconscious forms inherent in Barthes' theories on the photograph. This sense of unassimilability prevents the fixed narrative which may have resulted from Morrison creating a safe environment for her reader; it is achieved through her narrative techniques which do not give into what Friedlander calls 'the temptation of closure' which would be an 'avoidance of what remains indeterminate, elusive and opaque' ("Trauma" 260). Morrison's main strategy for creating this indeterminacy is the figure of Beloved whose true meaning and status in the novel is impossible to determine: she seems to be a real person in the text, who has conversations with the other characters and who has her own thoughts and desires, but she is also a ghost, a trace from the past. Much of the early criticism of the novel attempts to determine her meaning as either a ghost or a real woman.\(^6^0\)

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\(^6^0\) See, in particular, House's argument against Beloved being a ghost, in which she determines her solely as a young woman (117).
However, it is evident from the varying interpretations of Beloved offered by different critics since the publication of the novel\textsuperscript{61} that Beloved cannot be defined, as Morrison has intentionally presented her as indeterminate and multiple. This is evident in Morrison’s explanation of the ‘different levels on which [she] wanted Beloved to function’: ‘She is a spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. And she must function like that in the text. She is also another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh, which is a survivor from the true factual slave ship’ (qtd. in Darling 247).\textsuperscript{62} What is evident in the more recent criticism of the novel is that the focus has turned to the implications of the indeterminacy of Beloved.\textsuperscript{63} It is now widely accepted that Beloved ‘escapes any comprehensive, coherent account’ (Phelan 230), that she ‘exceeds […] dualism’ (Otten 293), that she works on both a symbolic and actual level, (Wyatt 220), and that she ‘is a layering of unstable and suggestive identities’ (Matus 114). However, the implications of this multiplicity need to be determined without limiting or reducing Beloved to a single interpretation. Therefore, I formulate Beloved’s indeterminacy as characteristic of the traumatic historical event which is both a trace and an interpretation: this allows a way of formulating Beloved without reducing her complexity and ambiguity.

Morrison utilises other narrative techniques to create a sense of

\textsuperscript{61} See Phelan (226) for a comprehensive list of these different responses.

\textsuperscript{62} In fact, Beloved’s indeterminacy and multiplicity caused problems for Morrison when she was writing the novel; this is evident when she cites her difficulty in portraying Beloved (Washington 235), particularly her struggle to make Beloved’s voice heard in the novel (Caldwell 241).

\textsuperscript{63} Even some of the criticism that attempts to limit Beloved to a single interpretation shows an awareness of her multiplicity, for example Heinze, who attempts to define Beloved as Sethe’s double, also suggests that the figure is ‘continually in a state of transition’ (208).
indeterminacy and avoid narrative closure. For example, the narrative voice shifts confusingly between different time frames, and also between different characters' thoughts, encompassing varying perspectives at the same time in a similar way to Silko's narrator. The narrative is also constructed through contradictory and ambiguous images; for example, the description of Sethe's face as a 'mask with mercifully punched out eyes' (9) which is a complex image that involves a dissolving of the boundaries between seeing and blindness: the punched out eyes of the mask allow the wearer of the mask to see, but also refer to a violent act of blinding. By using such ambiguous images Morrison warns her readers not to be too hasty in their interpretation of the events of the novel and so instructs them that to grasp her perception of the past they must accept that conclusions cannot necessarily be drawn. Thus, through these narrative strategies, Morrison attempts to transform her reader's perception, in a similar way to Silko, evident when in response to Mayer's question 'Are you aware when you're writing that you're going to invade my imagination? That you're going to subvert my perception? Were you intentionally trying to do that' (Mayers 274), Morrison answers in the affirmative and states that she wants the reader 'to see things he has never seen before' (qtd. in Mayers 274). To achieve this, Morrison uses her confusing narrative strategies to force her readers to participate in the novel; this

64 Indeed, in the same way as with the criticism of the ambiguity of the figure of Beloved, the criticism of these narrative strategies can be divided in two groups: that which has resolved the paradoxes of the novel, and that which is willing to confront its complexity and to perceive the ambiguity as part of Morrison's overall aim in the novel. In the first group are response from critics such as Bjork (Ch.7) and Mbalia (Ch.6) who smooth out the contradictions and ignore the ambiguities of the novel or House who resolves these ambivalences too easily. In contrast to these critics are those that confront these ambiguities and, rather than attempting to resolve them, perceive them as an intentional narrative strategy, for example, Nicholls, Harding and Martin, and Phelan.
technique directly teaches the reader her concept of the historical event as a trace
and re-interpretation: firstly, it allows the reader to experience the traumatic event
and, secondly, it invites her/him to join Morrison in its imaginative reconstruction.
Morrison has cited this technique as being associated with the African tradition of
call and response storytelling in which the audience, through their responses, are
directly involved in the shaping of the story:

[W]hat’s rich […] is what the reader gets and brings him or herself. That’s
part of the way in which the tale is told. The folk tales are told in such a
way that whoever is listening is in it and can shape it and figure it out. It’s
not just over because it stops. It lingers and is passed on. It’s passed on and
somebody else can alter it later. (qtd. in Darling 253)

This is comparable with Silko’s narrative which takes the traditional Native
American myths and re-interprets them in the context of the modern world,
positioning Silko as a traditional storyteller adapting the myths and so allowing
them to grow.

In *Beloved*, the reader’s sense of their own involvement in the
reconstruction of the story teaches him/her a conceptualisation of the historical
event that Sethe, Paul D and Denver in their proximity to the events cannot
immediately achieve. All three characters disavow their pasts by ignoring the
trauma of their lives. Beloved’s arrival, as the return of the ‘forgotten’ traumatic
event, offers them an opportunity to realise their respective denials of the past;
however, they cannot immediately achieve this realisation and so continue to
ignore the complexity of the traumatic event by fixing Beloved into a single
interpretation. The effects of this denial are similar to Tayo’s entrapment within
the past in *Ceremony* and the social estrangement this brings; in *Beloved*, Sethe
and Denver become trapped with Beloved in the house, and Paul D is left outcast and alone. However, in bringing their situations of disavowal to a crisis point, Beloved's presence offers them the opportunity to realise their damaging 'forgetting' of their traumatic pasts; thus, Paul D develops the ability to perceive Sethe's act of infanticide from Sethe's perspective, Denver is able to 'feel' her mother's story by having to listen to it when Sethe repeatedly recounts it to Beloved, and Sethe is offered the opportunity for a future which acknowledges the past but doesn't allow it to possess her.

Section Two: The disavowal of a traumatic past.

The novel opens with an example of Sethe's continuing attempts to forget her act of infanticide. The house in which Sethe and Denver live is haunted by a ghost that they believe is that of the daughter that Sethe killed. Sethe and Denver have decided to call forth this ghost to, as Sethe explains, 'make [...] clear' (4) to the ghost the reasons why Sethe had felt that she must kill her own child. However, Sethe's assertion that she can bring clarity to this event is not a desire to confront this trace of the traumatic past, but is instead an attempt to 'end the persecution' (4) and thus to banish this traumatic trace from their presence. The dangers of Sethe's desire to simplify this experience can be conceptualised in terms of Amery's belief, in reference to the Holocaust, that 'clarification would amount to dispersal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history' (qtd. in Rosenfeld 64). Sethe's attitude towards the ghost demonstrates her desire to simplify the complex reasons which drove her to commit infanticide; this memorialising act is illustrated in the image of the headstone, which is the
most prominent visual image in the early stages of the novel. Sethe has bought this headstone for her daughter’s dead body and has had the name Beloved carved onto it; this, however, is not her baby’s name, which remains unspoken in the novel, but is the name that she says she heard at the funeral. Therefore, her renaming of her dead baby on the gravestone represents the moment when she transforms her actual baby into a representation of what it meant to her; it is beloved to her; this act forgets the real baby and the actuality of the moment when Sethe killed her. My formulation of this as an act of forgetting, rather than remembrance, can be conceptualised in terms of Lyotard’s argument that ‘only that which has been inscribed can be forgotten, because it could be effaced’ (Heidegger 26) and in Barthes’ proposition that ‘what I can name cannot really prick me’ (Camera 51). Sethe, therefore, has memorialised this event in the hope of ‘the stillness of her own soul’ (5); however, as the narrator explains, ‘she had forgotten the other one: the soul of her baby girl’ (5). In this respect, Sethe’s act of monumentalisation denies the existence of her baby and transforms the complexity and horror of the baby’s death into a simple act of maternal love.

Sethe not only dismisses her act of infanticide, but also, more generally, denies her traumatic past as a slave. However, her denial of the past, in which she works ‘hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe’ (6), causes the traumatic event to continually return upon her. Thus, Sethe experiences the same traumatic effects as Tayo in Ceremony, as her daily life is characterised by the presence of the past:

65 This aspect of the novel, which is often overlooked by critics, is emphasised by Mandel who argues that the lack of a name for the murdered child ‘is the result not of the child being nameless but rather of a general reluctance or refusal, on the part of the novel’s characters and narrator, to speak it. The baby’s given name, then, is posited as unspeakable’ (586).
Unfortunately her brain was devious. She might be hurrying across a field... to get to the pump quickly... Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard. [...] Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward water... Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path... and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling out before her eyes. (6)

Sethe's memories of Sweet Home are shaped by her attempts to disavow the horror of her experience as a slave; this has led to an ambiguous response regarding her time there, illustrated in her memory of the slave men who were hanged in the trees when they were caught trying to escape: 'It shamed her - remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that' (6). In fact, even when Sethe was a slave at Sweet Home she had denied the horror of her life by attempting to transform the farm into a real home; evident when she explains that 'a few yellow flowers on the table, some myrtle tied around the handle of the flatiron holding the door open for a breeze calmed her ... and she felt fine' (22). Sethe's continuing refusal to acknowledge the reality of their position as slaves at Sweet Home is revealed when, in the present, she counters Denver's criticism of her nostalgia for Sweet Home with the words 'But it's where we were ... All together' (14). However, when she mentions Sweet Home, her apparent composure towards the horrific events of her past is contradicted by her need to console herself by caressing the 'light ripple of skin on her arm ... back into sleep' (14). Sethe's attempts to soothe her traumatic memories have ensured that her brain has become 'a greedy
child [which] snatch[s] up everything' (70). Her memory is loaded with images from the past; these memories are static traces which she is unable to re-interpret as she continually tries to ignore them. Sethe, however, does not realise that if she confronts her memories she will be able to re-interpret them; this will prevent her being haunted by the past and will allow her the possibility of a future. However, Sethe sees the past as being separate from the present and the future, as exemplified when the narrator states that ‘to Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay’ (42).

Sethe’s denial of the past is encouraged by her mother-in-law Baby Suggs who, instead of forcing Sethe to confront her traumatic experiences, supports her disavowal of the past; this is illustrated when the narrator states that Sethe ‘and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable’ (58). Baby Suggs represents the initial response to slavery which occurred immediately after emancipation, and so, as Morrison has explained in interviews, it is understandable that she would have needed to leave this life behind in order to move into the future. Morrison demonstrates the necessity of Baby Suggs’ forgetting of the past through the constant references to her ‘intolerable life’ (4) at crucial moments in the novel and so suggests that for this first generation of freed slaves forgetting was a survival tactic which allowed them to continue with their lives.

However, Morrison distinguishes Baby Suggs’ reactions from Sethe’s by illustrating that the continuing disavowal of this traumatic past by Sethe, as a second generation African-American, destroys the historical past of black people by denying its witnesses. In addition, the effects of this disavowal are then passed on to the next generation, in this case Sethe’s daughter, and so the initial act of
forgetting causes significant damage to subsequent generations of black people.

Sethe ‘raises Denver by “keeping her from the past”’ (Mobley 194); she is unable
to confront the trauma of her experiences and so, rather than describing the trauma
of slavery, she gives ‘short replies or rambling incomplete reveries’ (58). Sethe
believes that this lack of explanation is a way of protecting her daughter from the
horror of slavery: this is apparent in Sethe’s concept of ‘re-memory’ that describes
the continuing existence of the past in the present, and which is clearly illustrated
in Sethe’s belief that Sweet Home still poses a threat to Denver:

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 was never 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. So, Denver, you can’t never go there.

Never. Because even though it’s all over - over and done with - it’s going to
always be there waiting for you. (36)

Sethe’s notion of ‘re-memory’ is not an acceptance of the past’s inevitable
existence in the present, but is, in fact, the opposite; it is a warning to Denver not
to visit the past. Denver, however, cannot avoid the past as Sethe’s disavowal of
it has ensured its encryption within her. Denver’s situation mirrors Abraham and
Torok’s concept of ‘trans-generational haunting’ which examines the effects of
the secrets kept by one generation on the subsequent generations:

Should the child have parents with secrets, parents whose speech is not
exactly complimentary to their unstated repressions, the child will receive
from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognisable knowledge
– a nescience – subjected to a form of repression before the fact. (140 Note 1)
These secrets cause a ‘phantom’ to be encrypted within the child’s unconscious, thus the ‘phantom’ ‘is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious. It passes from the parent’s unconscious to the child’s’ (173). This notion is useful in conceptualising the way that Sethe’s memorialisation of her act of infanticide affects Denver. Sethe’s refusal to discuss the past has caused Denver to be unable to access it and reconstruct it from her own perspective; this is emphasised when Denver replays the story of her birth in her own mind: rather than being able to recreate this story through her imagination, she can only repeat the words that her mother has told her; which is emphasised in the repetition of the phrase ‘Sethe told Denver’ (30).

The relationship between Sethe and Paul D is also characterised by their respective disavowals of their experiences. Their conversations about the past are shaped by their attempts to keep away from discussing their traumatic experiences; for example, when Paul D first arrives at 124, they both avoid having to confront the truth about Sethe’s husband, Halle. In this episode, Sethe’s question to Paul D – “I wouldn’t have to ask about him, would I? You’d tell me if there was anything to tell, wouldn’t you?” – is not a request for information, but a plea for Paul D not to tell her anything that will traumatise her; Paul D’s reply protects her from the truth and abides by this subconscious plea: “I’d tell you. Sure I’d tell you. I don’t know any more now than I did then.” Except the churn, he thought, and you don’t need to know that’ (8). However, when Paul D does finally tell Sethe about Halle’s mental breakdown, which was caused by his witnessing of the nephews’ abuse of Sethe, she rejects this information and battles with her greedy brain which is intent on visualising the picture of Halle ‘squatting

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66 For a more comprehensive reading of this aspect of the novel, see Nicholls (63).
by the churn smearing butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind" (70).

The conversations between Sethe and Paul D, therefore, are full of gaps and spaces into which neither wants to delve. This partially explains the difficulty that Sethe faces in making Paul D understand the trauma of the nephews stealing her milk. To illustrate the trauma of this event, Sethe needs to make Paul D understand how it feels to be a mother and suffer the trauma of having your baby’s milk stolen from your own breasts. However, Paul D ignores this explanation and instead focuses on the one element of her explanation that he is able to understand; the experience of being whipped as a punishment:

“"They used cowhide on you?”

“And they took my milk.”

“They beat you and you was pregnant?”

“And they took my milk!”’ (17)

Sethe struggles to make Paul D realise that having her milk stolen was far more traumatic than being whipped; however, he cannot understand this as he is unable to perceive the event from her perspective. Paul D’s inability to hear Sethe’s story properly is also evident when his memory of his horrific experiences in the chain-gang in Alfred, Georgia, which have caused him to ‘shut down a generous portion of his head’ (41), prevents him from further questioning Sethe when she begins to tell him the story of how she ended up in prison. Sethe, however, is guilty of a similar kind of silencing when Paul D tries to tell her about his experiences in the chain-gang; however, rather than silencing him through misunderstanding, she physically soothes him by rubbing his knee and so prevents him from continuing his horrific story of the physical, sexual and mental abuse he
suffered. This action is described as being necessary for Paul D who believes that it is ‘just as well’ that she stopped him from telling this story, as ‘saying more might push them both to a place they couldn’t get back from. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin in his chest where a red heart used to be’ (72). In this episode, the need to pacify the trauma of the past is also necessary for Sethe, who hopes that her rubbing ‘calmed him as much as it did her’ (73); she explains that this consoling action is ‘like kneading bread in the half-light of the restaurant kitchen [...] Working dough. Working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the day’s serious work of beating back the past’ (73).

The lack of real communication and understanding caused by both Paul D and Sethe’s inability to verbalise the trauma of the past prevents their relationship from being one that will help them heal and progress into the future. This is why, when Sethe decides to hand Paul D responsibility for her past, depicted through her desire ‘that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, [could be] in somebody else’s hands’ (18), the ghost, as the disavowed past, shakes and pitches the house. When Paul D smashes up the house, his emotional and mental battle with his traumatic past finds outward expression; but, although his actions seem to achieve their desired effects, the emphasis on the breath of the ghost - ‘Another breathing was just as tired’ (19) - highlights the physical presence of the past that cannot be forced into disappearing. This act of violence against the past then causes it to manifest itself physically in the figure of Beloved.

When Beloved enters the novel, she is immediately presented as ambiguous and contradictory. Firstly, the narrative shifts between depicting her as a real woman and emphasising her ‘otherness’; for example, her dishevelled
appearance is compared to ‘women who drink champagne when there is nothing to celebrate’, but then her difference from real women is confirmed in her ‘new skin, lineless and smooth’ (50). Beloved’s actions are also contradictory; she appears to walk with purpose toward Sethe’s house ‘through the woods past a giant temple of boxwood to the field and then the yard of the slate-gray house’, but also seems to stop at 124 by accident; ‘exhausted again, she sat down on the first handy place - a stump not far from the steps of 124’ (50). Her contradictory appearance, as someone who is exhausted but smiling, is described as something to avoid or to approach hesitatingly: through this, Morrison warns the reader to approach this figure carefully, not to jump to conclusions regarding her status in the novel, but, instead, to recognise her contradictory nature.

Beloved’s entrance into their lives provokes a series of questions in the minds of the three main protagonists, as it opens up the reader’s mind to the various interpretations: ‘Underneath the major question each harboured another’ (53). Beloved is presented as an enigmatic past which the three main characters respond to according to their attitudes toward their experiences. Sethe’s initial reaction is a physical one; her bladder fills and she rushes off to empty it. This response is, firstly, presented in terms of its relation to Sethe’s childhood, particularly the absence of her mother: ‘Not since she was a baby, being cared for by the eight year old girl who pointed out her mother to her, had she had an emergency that unmanageable’ (51). Sethe’s reaction is also connected to her own role as a mother with the reference to her water breaking when she gave birth to Denver. In this respect, Beloved immediately represents Sethe’s ambiguous feelings towards her own mother who was killed trying to escape her slave life and how these have shaped her perception of her own maternal role. However,
Sethe chooses to ignore these signals and the implications of Beloved’s significant name, just as she has ignored her own re-naming of her dead baby, and she soothes her surprise by speaking to Beloved in a normal and calm manner: ‘Sethe hung her hat on a peg and turned graciously toward the girl. “That’s a pretty name, Beloved. Take off your hat, why don’t you and I’ll make us something.”’ (53). Paul D is prevented from questioning Beloved by his own traumatic past during which he had seen numerous black people drifting alone through life with no family or friends left alive; this causes him to ‘not press the young woman with the broken hat about where from or how come’ (53). Denver’s reaction to Beloved, however, is described in terms of an immediate ‘breakneck possessiveness’ (54); the word ‘breakneck’ associates Denver’s reaction to the destructive nature of Sethe’s mother love which caused her to draw a saw across her baby’s neck; thus Denver, in an example of generational transmission, repeats the same possessive attitude that her mother exhibited in her decision to kill her children rather than allow them to be taken from her.

These responses to Beloved are continued throughout this section which depicts a series of interactions between Beloved and each of the three main characters. The first conversation is between Beloved and Sethe, with Denver listening, in which Sethe continues to react dismissively towards Beloved, apparent when, in response to the ‘longing’ (58) that she sees in her eyes, she pats Beloved’s fingers, in a similar calming motion to when she had rubbed Paul D’s knee. During this conversation, Beloved asks Sethe about her diamonds, which she interprets as being a question about the earrings that Mrs Garner had given to her. In response, she tells Beloved the first of many stories about her past and becomes aware of ‘the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling’ (58)
and the happiness she feels herself when she tells these stories. In contrast to Beloved's question which impels Sethe's story, Denver's question about the present location of the earrings immediately silences Sethe. The next conversation between Sethe and Beloved focuses upon Sethe's mother and the severing of the bond between mother and child. Sethe tells Beloved about her own mother whose position as a slave prevented her from forming a relationship with her daughter. Sethe tells Beloved that she does not remember her mother's body as a place of warmth and comfort, but only in terms of its possession by their owner; this is imaged through the circled cross that was branded under her mother's breast. This image emphasises that slavery is an institution which denies the status of mother; the branding marks the signifier of maternity (the breast) with the sign of slavery which severs the connection between mother and child. During this story, Denver's questions again silence Sethe; her enquiries about what happened to Sethe's mother make Sethe remember the traumatic event of her mother's death; this memory causes Sethe to stop talking and find comfort in the mechanical action of folding and re-folding the sheets:

Sethe walked over to a chair, lifted a sheet and stretched it as wide as her arms would go. Then she folded, refolded and double-folded it. She took another. Neither was completely dry but the folding felt too fine to stop. She had to do something with her hands because she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind [...] the circled cross. (61)

Denver's next question "'Why they hang your ma'am?'" (61) accurately indicates the 'privately shameful' thing that Sethe does not want to remember; that her mother had not only been running away from her slave life but also from Sethe
when she was caught and hanged. Sethe cannot admit this to herself yet, let alone to the two girls, and so she stops talking and longs for the comfort of Baby Suggs who would have helped her keep these memories at bay.

Denver is relieved at her mother’s inability to answer her questions; the only story that she wants to hear from the past is the story of her birth, ‘the rest was a gleaming, powerful world made more so by Denver’s absence from it’ (62). She is perplexed by Beloved’s desire for these stories and she questions how Beloved knows which questions to ask: ‘Denver noticed how greedy [Beloved] was to hear Sethe talk. Now she noticed something more. The questions Beloved asked: “Where your diamonds?” “Your woman she never fix up your hair?” And most perplexing: Tell me your earrings. How did she know?” (63). It is this element of the conversation that Denver misinterprets; it is not that Beloved knows the right questions, but just that she allows Sethe to tell these stories, whereas Denver has never wanted to hear them. In fact, the final question about the earrings that Denver attributes to Beloved had not even been asked by her, and so Denver misinterprets her words to give them more significance than they actually possess. This kind of misinterpretation characterises the conversation between Denver and Beloved later in this section: when Denver catches sight of the tip of Beloved’s scar, she asks her questions about her time before she arrived at 124, which focus on the experience of death, as Denver believes Beloved to be her dead sister. However, Beloved’s answers describe the experience of the Middle Passage, but Denver misinterprets her words so that they fit into her interpretation of Beloved as her sister. At the end of the conversation, Denver

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67 This aspect of the novel has been commented upon by Morrison herself in interviews (Darling 247) and has been further analysed by House (122).
struggles to interpret Beloved’s expression: ‘[Beloved] lifted her eyes to meet Denver’s and frowned, perhaps. Perhaps not. The tiny scratches on her forehead may have made it seem so’ (75). Therefore, Denver’s misinterpretation of Beloved is caused by the fact that she is concentrating on the evidence that supports her interpretation of her as her sister, and so her focus on the scratches, which would support this reading, make it hard for her to perceive Beloved’s complexity. Denver’s inability to define Beloved at this moment causes her to grab hold of Beloved’s arm in fear that she is losing grip over her interpretation of her.68

Paul, too, attempts to define Beloved; his undetermined anxiety toward her (67) impels him to finally ask her questions about her family. When Beloved refuses to answer, he shouts at her threateningly, gripping the knife in his hand, in a repetition of the violence that he used to chase the ghost away earlier in the novel. However, Beloved assumes the guise of a helpless child and Denver reacts in a maternal manner by stepping in to protect her; this makes Paul D feel as if he lost his grip on Beloved, that he has lost hold of his attempts to define her: ‘Paul D had the feeling a large, silver fish had slipped from his hands the minute he grabbed hold of its tail [...] it was streaming back off into dark water, gone but for the glistening marking its route’ (65).69 The depiction, in this passage, of the glistening trace left behind implies the idea that the historical event is both a trace and an imaginative re-interpretation: Beloved leaves a trace, but her interpreters

68 This scene is repeated later in the novel when Beloved disappears in the barn (101).
69 It is significant that Paul D’s failed attempt to define Beloved, to pin her meaning down, leads him to consider the traumatic effects of slavery, particularly the severing of the bonds between mother and child, in his memory of the ‘witless colouredwoman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her own babies’ (66). Thus, Paul D indicates one of the meanings of
cannot re-construct her as they are blocked by their attempts to define her rather than confront her complexity.

Later in this scene, Beloved’s presence does, however, give Denver the chance to perceive the event as both a trace and interpretation. This is apparent when Beloved asks Denver to tell her the story of her birth; in this episode, Beloved’s presence as the audience creates a call and response situation which, rather than just allowing Denver to repeat her mother’s story word for word as she did earlier on in the novel, permits her to give ‘blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her - and a heartbeat’ (78). In this respect, she is able in Beloved’s presence to imaginatively recreate the story through the traces that have been passed to her, rather than remaining fixed in her mother’s encryption of the past; this allows her to feel, rather than just repeat, this event: ‘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’ (78). So Beloved, here, offers Denver the chance to perceive the historical event as both an actual trace and an imaginative re-creation; the complexity of this conceptualisation of the past is emphasised when the narrator depicts that this call and response situation recreates a story that has already been recreated by Sethe: ‘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’ (78). Denver and Beloved ‘create’ it ‘how it really was’, but Sethe is the only person who can ever know how it really was; not just because she experienced it, but because she also had the ‘time afterward to shape it’.

Beloved. her representation of the trauma of slavery and its severing of the mother-child bond.
To counter any sense that this change in Denver's perception of the historical event is going to be easy, Morrison follows this section with examples of the denial of the past conducted by the three main characters. Paul D and Denver's disavowals are ones that have taken place in the past, thus, Paul D has been continually unable to confront the trauma of his time in the chain-gang and, when she was younger, Denver had gone deaf rather than having to hear the truth about her mother's act of infanticide. Sethe's disavowal, however, is conducted in the present in her desire for a monument to her husband Halle. Paul D's denial of his horrific experiences as a prisoner in the chain-gang is evident in that the depiction of this episode remains unhinged in the narrative: it is neither presented as Paul D's memory nor his telling of this to someone else; instead, it is told by an objective, third person narrator who describes the experience in a stark and powerful manner:

He saw the ditches; the one thousand feet of earth - five feet deep, five feet wide, into which wooden boxes had been fitted. A door of bars that you could lift on hinges like a cage opened into three walls and a roof of scrap lumber and red dirt. Two feet of it over his head; three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters. (106)

The vivid reality of this event challenges the efficacy of Paul D's decision to disavow it by locking it into 'the tobacco tin lodged in his chest' (113).

Denver's disavowal of the truth of her mother's act of infanticide and her own early years spent in prison with her mother takes the form of a physical deafness which lasts for two years. The chain of events which leads to this physical blocking of the past begins when her classmate, Nelson Lord, asks her
"Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (104). Denver's difficulty with this question is not so much in respect to her mother's past, but her own: 'It was the second question that made it impossible for so long to ask Sethe about the first. The thing that leapt up had been coiled in just such a place: a darkness, a stone, and some other thing that moved by itself' (104). This image of the darkness, the stone and the moving thing can be interpreted on two levels; firstly, it is a description of Sethe and Denver's prison cell, which was full of rats which moved in the dark, but it also suggests the process by which this repressed memory has returned upon Denver: she has attempted to keep this memory in the 'darkness' of repression, it has become a fixed representation, a 'stone' encrypted within her self, which is now 'moving' towards the surface of consciousness through the pathway of the return of the repressed. Therefore, this return of Denver's repressed memory, which leaps up when Nelson asks his question, prevents her from probing her mother about the past, and when she finally manages to ask her mother the truth, she goes deaf rather than having to hear the answer: 'She could not hear Sethe's answer, nor Baby Suggs' words, nor anything at all thereafter' (104).

Sethe's denial of the past in this section of the novel is illustrated in her decision to monumentalise the image that Paul D has given her of Halle as a mentally broken man smearing butter all over his face: 'The butter-smeared face of a man God made none Sweeter than demanded more: an arch built or a robe sewn. Some fixing ceremony' (86). To achieve this 'fixing' of the memory of her husband, Sethe goes to the clearing to connect with Baby Suggs' advice to her to 'lay all that mess down. Sword and shield' (86). This action repeats her earlier memorialising of her act of infanticide and so is an attempt to disavow the past
rather than confront it. During this episode in the clearing, Sethe feels ghostly fingers rubbing her neck, soothing the trauma of the memory; this causes her to want to ask 'for some clarifying word; some advice about how to keep on with a brain greedy for news nobody could live with in a world happy to provide it' (95). She desires that the complexity of the past be simplified and clarified, and, rather than confronting the reasons why her brain is full of these fixed images from the past, she wants to find a way to win her battle against her greedy brain. These renewed attempts to deny the past cause the consoling fingers to be replaced with hands that try to strangle her, hands that she later recognises as belonging to the ghost that haunted her house at the beginning of the novel. Denver realises that these hands are under Beloved's control, and so, once again, the disavowal of the past has caused the ghost/Beloved to react angrily, strengthening the grip that the past has on Sethe.

However, Beloved's actions are double-edged in this scene; her physical hands replace the ghostly grip and soothe the hurt caused by the strangling hold of the past: 'Beloved's fingers were heavenly. Under them and breathing evenly again, the anguish rolled down. The peace Sethe had come there to find crept into her' (97). Beloved's comforting fingers allow Sethe to pacify her memory, to fix the image of Halle, to achieve the peace that she desired by calming the trauma of the past, and to consider a happy future; this feeling compels her to leave the clearing and rush home to begin her new life with Paul D. However, in order to focus on the future, Sethe ignores her growing 'suspicion that [Beloved's] touch was also exactly like the baby's ghost dissipated' (99), as she feels that this suspicion is 'only a tiny disturbance anyway - not strong enough to divert her from the ambition welling in her now: she wanted Paul D' (99). Therefore, her
desire to begin her new life is, again, at the expense of the past, as Sethe’s decision here to ignore her suspicions about Beloved is another attempt at ignoring the past. The entire section which depicts Sethe’s desire to return home and start a new life with Paul D is split into two levels: on the surface is Sethe’s ignorance toward the ambiguity and multiplicity of Beloved, but on a deeper level is her realisation that Beloved is, perhaps, much more than just an escaped slave girl; this is exemplified by her association of Beloved with her dead daughter, apparent in her feeling that ‘Beloved [was] so agitated she behaved like a two-year-old’ (98), and in her realisation that Beloved and Denver ‘were alike as sisters’ (99).

In the sections that follow, Sethe continues this dual-thought: on the one hand, she repeatedly asserts her belief that ‘Beloved had been locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door. That she must have escaped to a bridge or someplace and rinsed the rest out of her mind’ (119), but on the other hand, she subconsciously acknowledges that Beloved is her dead baby who has returned to her, evident when she considers that ‘if her boys came back one day, and Denver and Beloved stayed on -well, it would be the way it was supposed to be, no?’ (132). To contrast with Sethe’s avoidance of the significance of Beloved’s arrival, the impact that Beloved will eventually have on Sethe and Paul D is emphasised when Beloved tells Denver that she wants to ‘“make [Paul] go away”’ (133). Sethe and Paul D’s continuing obliviousness to the complex meanings of Beloved’s presence is demonstrated in this episode in the image of the snow falling outside whilst they make love indoors: ‘outside, all around 124, the snow went on and on and on. Piling itself, burying itself. Higher. Deeper’ (134).
The portrayal of Sethe and Paul D's ignorance of the dangers of disavowing the traumatic event is followed by the narrative description of Sethe's act of infanticide, which is in turn succeeded by Paul D's denial of this event and Sethe's inability to communicate it to him. The infanticide is the traumatic kernel of the novel; Morrison builds up to this moment slowly by depicting the party and the events which precede it, and she allows her reader's to gain a sense of foreboding through Baby Suggs' fear that something is about to happen. When the narrative eventually focuses on this traumatic event, Morrison chooses to present it through an objective narrative voice, which is similar to that which describes Paul D's experience on the chain-gang, but which differs significantly from this by recounting the event from the varying perspectives of those who witnessed it. The first perspective is that of schoolteacher who, according to his ideology of ownership, reacts angrily to the fact that 'there was nothing there to claim' (149), and who interprets Sethe's actions as animalistic, as a dog who had been 'overbeaten' and, thus, gone wild. The second perspective is that of the nephew 'who had nursed [Sethe] while his brother held her down' (150); to him Sethe's actions are completely incomprehensible, and like schoolteacher, he believes them to be in response to the particular incident of the beating rather than having any relation to the trauma of Sethe's position as a slave and a mother. The third perspective is that of the sheriff who in his official capacity takes on the responsibility of having to sort out the consequences of Sethe's actions, and the last perspective is that of Baby Suggs who fights with Sethe over possession of Denver. The narrating of this event from these multiple perspectives foregrounds Morrison's notion of interpretation; however, as Maggie Sale points out, Morrison 'refus[es] the problematic notion that all positions are equally valid' (178) by
preventing the reader from identifying with schoolteacher’s and the nephew’s interpretations. This confirms my argument that, although Morrison emphasises that the historical event is a trace and a construction, she believes that the recreation of the event through interpretation can only be achieved if the witness can experience the trauma of the event for themselves, which prevents them from attempting to limit it through a fixed interpretation. This is why Morrison withholds judgement on Sethe’s infanticide; she does not want to force a limiting interpretation onto the reader, but instead wants to allow the reader to perceive the complexity and ambiguity of this traumatic event for themselves.

Following the portrayal of the infanticide, Morrison portrays Paul D’s inability to confront its complexity when Stamp Paid decides that he should know what happened. This episode opens with Paul D’s words, ‘That ain’t her mouth’ (154), which he constantly repeats throughout Stamp’s description in order to deny the implication of Stamp’s story about Sethe. Paul D’s blocking of the trauma of this event is constructed before Stamp has even begun his explanation, when he first takes out the newspaper clipping: ‘From the solemn air with which Stamp had unfolded the paper, the tenderness in the old man’s fingers as he stroked its creases and flattened it out, first on his knees, then on the split top of the piling, Paul D knew that it ought to mess him up. That whatever was written on it should shake him’ (154). Paul’s awareness of the hurt that this clipping could produce causes him to create a barrier of words to deny this trauma, in a similar way to Denver’s deafness which blocks out the traumatic description of her mother’s infanticide, so that when Paul D looks at it he is able to be ‘not at all disturbed’ (154) through his repetition of the word ‘no’:

Paul D slid the clipping out from under Stamp’s palm. The print meant
nothing to him so he didn’t even glance at it. He simply looked at the face, shaking his head no. No. At the mouth, you see. And no at whatever it was those black scratches said, and no to whatever it was Stamp Paid wanted him to know. (155)\textsuperscript{70}

Paul D’s disavowal prevents Stamp from being able to tell him the story from his own perspective and denies his attempts at making Paul D see the complexity of Sethe’s actions. Instead, all that Stamp is able to do is to replace his own words, all the things that he ‘did not tell him’ which are told to the reader, with the official explanation provided in the newspaper clipping: ‘So Stamp Paid didn’t say it all. Instead he took a breath and leaned towards the mouth that was not hers and slowly read out the words Paul D couldn’t. And when he finished, Paul D said with a vigor fresher than the first time, “I’m sorry, Stamp. It’s a mistake somewhere ’cause that ain’t her mouth”’ (158).

Paul D’s denial of the infanticide is followed by Sethe’s attempt to explain her actions to him; therefore, Paul D’s inability to hear it being spoken is already put into place before Sethe has a chance to recount it from her own perspective. Sethe begins her story with a depiction of her mother love and the significance of her lack of maternal knowledge due to her position as a slave; however, once again Paul D cannot perceive the significance of this account and feels that the

\textsuperscript{70} The narrative depicting Paul D’s disavowal of this event is punctured with references to the denial of the horror of death, imaged through the re-packaging of the slaughter of the pigs, the ‘poking, killing, cutting, skinning’ (155) which is then transformed into death neatly packaged for the ‘Germans [... who] developed swine cooking to its highest form’ (155). In addition, the futility of Paul D’s attempts to deny the past is indicated in the reference to the continuing presence of the dead in the image of the dead bodies which are buried and ignored in the cemetery, but which remain a present and angry force: ‘Outraged more by their folly in believing land was holy than the disturbances of their peace, they growled on the banks of Licking River, sighed in the trees on Catherine Street and rode the wind above the pig yards. (15).
fact that ‘he only caught pieces of what she said [was] fine, because she hadn’t
gotten to the main part - the answer to the question he had not asked outright, but
which lay in the clipping he showed her’ (161). Paul D feels that Sethe is
‘gnawing something else instead of getting to the point’ (162); he cannot hear her
attempts at explaining the reasons for her actions, as he needs the complexity of
this traumatic event to be reduced to a simple rationalization. Sethe is willing to
provide this simplification by reducing their complexity to an act of mother love;
her circling movements around the room are a soothing action which, like rubbing
Paul D’s knee and kneading dough, she uses to calm the trauma induced by the
recollection of this event:

She was spinning. Round and round the room [...] Paul D sat at the table
watching her drift into view then disappear behind his back, turning like a
slow but steady wheel. Sometimes she crossed her hands behind her back.
Other times she held her ears, covered her mouth or folded her arms across
her breasts. Once in a while she rubbed her hips as she turned, but the
wheel never stopped. (159)

Sethe’s defensive postures and the mechanical movement of her circling are a
means of disavowing the trauma of her actions, also evident in her refusal to
explain the event to Paul D: ‘Sethe knew the circle she was making around the
room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it
down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn’t get it right off - she could never
explain’ (163). Sethe’s belief in this passage that she is unable to pin down the

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The circling movement that Sethe makes to avoid the traumatic event at its core has been
conceptualised by many critics as analogous to the circling narratives which Morrison’s repetitions
create. For example, Maggie Sale equates Sethe’s circling with Morrison’s spiralling narratives
when she suggests that they are ‘a metaphor for what is asked of the readers: the refusal to rest on
event is significant, as it implies an awareness of the complexity of the past; however, Sethe uses her feeling that the infanticide can not be pinned down to avoid any confrontation with its complexity; instead, she thinks that 'the truth was simple':

Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them.

(163)

In fact, Sethe does not even tell Paul this simplified version, she only thinks it to herself, whereas what she does tell Paul D is a further simplification of the event: she states that she 'stopped [schoolteacher. She] took and put [her] babies where they’d be safe' (164). Paul D's inability to hear Sethe's explanation of the event is presented in terms of a 'roaring' (164) in his head, which allows him to hear only 'the pat she gave to the last word' (164) this causes him to respond to Sethe in the same way that the black community have responded to her: he condemns her actions through his own inability to confront their complexity, but also indicates that it is not the actual act of infanticide that is the problem to him and the community, but Sethe's simplification of it: 'Suddenly he saw what Stamp Paid wanted him to see: more important than what Sethe had done was what she

any single element' (184). However, I contrast Sethe's and Morrison's circling by arguing that Sethe uses her movement to avoid the traumatic event, whereas Morrison uses it to build towards
claimed' (164). By condemning Sethe, however, Paul D is complicit with Sethe's own simplification of her actions: rather than confronting the complex reasons that drove her to kill her own child, Paul D retreats from her and constructs, what Sethe perceives to be, a 'forest' between them through his too easy judgement of her.

Section Three: The consequences of the disavowal of a traumatic past.

The middle part of the novel illustrates the effects of these attempts to ignore the complexity of the traumatic past: Sethe and Denver are trapped with Beloved in the house, Paul D is left outcast, and Stamp Paid, who represents the healing power of the community, is prevented from entering 124 by the voices of the disavowed dead which have imprisoned Sethe and Denver within. Sethe's response to Paul D's departure is one of resignation; she returns to her decision to take Baby Suggs' advice 'to lay it all down, sword and shield' (173). She believes that 'she should have known that [Paul] would behave like everybody else in town once he knew' (173) and, rather than confronting the reasons for this response, she dismisses it by thinking 'well, if that's the way it was - that's the way it was' (173). It is in this frame of mind that Sethe decides to take Denver and Beloved skating, as if to pretend that she is living a normal life. However, the repetition of the line 'Nobody saw them falling' throughout this section infuses the narrative with a sense of danger that counters Sethe's happy obliviousness. During this episode, Sethe experiences a 'click' which signals the moment when she decides that Beloved must be her dead baby; this is presented in terms of
clarity and simplicity, through phrases such as 'clear as daylight' (175) which deny Beloved's complexity. Sethe fits the enigma of Beloved into a simple pattern, evident in her sense that the 'click' has caused 'the settling of pieces into places designed and made especially for them' (175) and that 'things were where they ought to be or poised or ready to glide in' (176). Again, the image of the falling snow alerts the reader to the fact that Sethe is once again disavowing the trauma of the event and choosing to continue to live in oblivion: 'outside, snow solidified itself into graceful forms' (176).

To contrast with the peaceful oblivion into which Sethe has descended, Morrison describes Stamp Paid's attempts to confront the voices that surround 124. Stamp has decided to visit Sethe as he feels that he had ignored her perspective in his decision to tell Paul D about the infanticide. However, when he arrives at the house he hears loud voices surrounding it, voices which have formed a covering around the house and which cause him to repeatedly fail to enter 124. Stamp believes that the voices belong to 'the people of the broken necks' (181), to 'the black and angry dead' (198), connecting Sethe's refusal to acknowledge her infanticide with the disavowal of the traumatic history of slavery. The passage's conclusion on the line 'what a roaring' (181) also emphasises the denial of the past by linking back to the roaring in Paul D's head which prevents him from hearing Sethe's explanation of her act of infanticide. However, Stamp, unlike Sethe and Paul D, has the strength to face the traumatic

72 His visit is also impelled by the 'red ribbon knotted around a curl of wet woolly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp' (18) that he finds in the river, which forces him to confront the horror of slavery; this red ribbon acts on Stamp Paid's mind as Morrison hopes her particular story of Sethe will act on the imagination of the reader; by focusing on the story of one particular slave. Morrison hopes to represent the millions of people killed by slavery.
past, as, although the voices are ‘outside his mind’s reach’ (172), he is still able to confront their ambiguity: ‘Yet he went on through’ (172). Therefore, Stamp’s reasons for repeatedly trying to enter 124 highlight an alternative response to the ambiguous traumatic event than the one taken by Sethe: he is compelled by the memory of Baby Suggs’ resignation and death to attempt this confrontation with the past; he recalls that Baby Suggs ‘could not approve or condemn Sethe’s rough choice. One or the other might have saved her, but beaten up by the claims of both, she went to bed’ (180). Through Stamp Paid’s actions, the narrative is offering the reader a chance to take on the responsibility that Baby Suggs did not have the energy to manage: the reader must confront the ambiguity of traumatic events, just as Stamp confronts the enigma of these voices, and must keep interpreting it with an awareness that no concrete conclusion can ever be drawn. The ethical necessity for this difficult interpretation of the past is emphasised through Stamp’s awareness of the continuing effects of slavery, evident in the presence of the Ku Klux Klan ‘desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live’ (66):

Eighteen seventy-four and white folks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. (180)

In contrast to the trauma of this roaring caused by the disavowal of the past, Sethe lies in bed happily oblivious to the harm that she is causing to the past while the snow continues to fall outside. Her ignorance continues when she leaves the house to go to work; she does not see the footprints left by Stamp’s
repeated visits, nor does she hear ‘the voices that ringed 124 like a noose’ (183); she is also able to look ‘straight at the shed [where she killed her daughter], smiling, smiling at the things she would not have to remember now’ (182). She confirms that she will take Baby’s advice to ‘Think on it then lay it down - for good’ (182), which she uses to support her renunciation of responsibility towards the outside world, stating that ‘[w]hatever is going on outside my door ain’t for me. The world is in this room. This here’s all there is and all there needs to be’ (183). Sethe’s decision to forget the traumatic events of her own life is also a rejection of her responsibility to remember the past of slavery, evident in her dismissal of the horrific actions conducted by white people upon the black community: ‘She didn’t want any more news about white folks; didn’t want to know what Ella knew and John and Stamp Paid’ (188). On her journey home she addresses Beloved in her thoughts, stating that she does not have to explain anything to her as she already knows it all; this is significant as Beloved represents an audience that cannot learn from Sethe’s explanation, because she already knows everything that Sethe has to say; thus, the conversations between Sethe and Beloved deny the call and response development of traditional storytelling. This is why Sethe and Beloved’s conversations cannot progress to a situation of healing, and why their relationship becomes increasingly destructive.

The lack of a call and response pattern in the conversations between Sethe and Beloved is illustrated in the following episodes of the novel which depict the isolation of each of the three women in the house, firstly, through monologues which emphasise their differing interpretations, and, then, through conversations which are characterised by miscommunication and lack of understanding. Sethe’s opening monologue connects her interpretation of Beloved to her mother’s death
and the severing of the mother-child bond caused by slavery. Sethe’s desire to be the perfect mother causes her to interpret Beloved as her daughter, who, she states, she will tend ‘as no mother ever tended a child, a daughter’ (100). This desire is linked to the lack of a relationship with her own mother; as Sethe explains: ‘Nan had to nurse white babies and me too because Ma’am was in the rice’ (100). The lack of knowledge that Sethe has about her own mother is emphasised throughout the novel, and clearly indicated by the fact that

of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? Or was it Louisiana?) she remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother, who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones - pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field. (30)

Sethe’s memory of the severed mother-daughter relationship causes the traumatic memory of her mother’s death to re-surface, which she quickly dismisses: ‘It was her alright, but for a long time I didn’t believe it. I looked everywhere for that hat. Stuttered after that. Didn’t stop it till I saw Halle. Oh, but that’s all over now. I’m here. I lasted. And my girl come home’ (201). The memory of her mother’s dead body causes Sethe to consider the possibility that her mother had been killed when she was caught trying to escape, and so had, in fact, abandoned Sethe: ‘I wonder what they was doing when they was caught. Running you think? No. Not that. Because she was my ma’am and nobody’s ma’am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now?’ (203). In this respect, Sethe’s refusal to confront her act of infanticide and her memorialisation

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73 Matus’ reading of the novel foregrounds this aspect in her argument that ‘Sethe’s confrontation with her own feelings of abandonment and ‘mother-lack’ develops Morrison’s indictment of
of her baby into the figure of Beloved are conducted in defence against her own ambiguous feelings towards her mother abandoning her. The fact that Sethe has still not confronted the ambiguity of her emotions about her past is evident in her continuing desire to avoid the struggle to interpret her actions:

When I put up that headstone I wanted to lay there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I would have if Howard and Buglar and Denver didn’t need me, because my mind was homeless then. I couldn’t lay down with you then. No matter how much I wanted to. I couldn’t lay down nowhere in peace, back then. Now I can. I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy. She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine. (204)

The reference, here, to the drowned, directly links Sethe’s forgetting of her own traumatic past with the disavowal of those who died on the Middle Passage.

Denver’s monologue emphasises that her mother’s denial of her actions has caused them to be encrypted within her, as exemplified by her traumatic dreams which re-enact the scene in which Sethe kills her baby, but substitute Denver for her sister. Sethe’s refusal to explain the infanticide to Denver has caused Denver to fear Sethe, and so has severed the bond between mother and daughter. The complexity of Denver’s position in relation to Sethe’s infanticide is emphasised in her awareness that she needs to know what caused her mother to kill her baby but, at the same time, does not want to know: ‘I don’t know what it is, I don’t know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don’t want to’ (105). During her monologue, Denver also highlights her refusal to accept the slavery as an institution devoted to distorting and truncating maternal subjectivity’ (109).
death of her father Halle, which mirrors Sethe’s denial of the memory of her mother’s dead body. Denver links her deafness to this disavowal of her father’s death when she explains that ‘the quiet let [her] dream [her] daddy better’ (107); her deafness also allows her to imagine that her father has been delayed and is on his way: ‘I always knew he was coming. Something was holding him up. He had a problem with the horse. The river flooded; the boat sank and he had to make a new one. Sometimes it was a lynch mob or a windstorm. He was coming and it was a secret’ (107).

Beloved’s monologue offers an alternative interpretation of her than the one perceived by Denver and Sethe, in that it focuses on the experience of the Middle Passage. Beloved’s monologue is un-punctuated and so reads as a fragmented and confusing cacophony of images, which opens it up to reader interpretation. The monologue firstly depicts, from the perspective of a young girl, the horror of the experience of the Middle passage, and then focuses on the particular moment when the girl’s mother jumps into the sea in an effort to escape, and thus abandons her daughter. Following this, the narrative suggests that the girl is kept for the pleasure of one of the men on the ship, but eventually escapes by diving into the sea where, in a dream-like sequence, she joins with and then separates from her mother. The girl then surfaces from the water and needs ‘to find a place to be’ (213); it is at this point that she becomes Beloved who finds the house, and who interprets Sethe as ‘the face that left me’, with which she can join. The narrative then follows with Beloved’s re-interpretation of her story to position Sethe as the mother; therefore, in Beloved’s monologue, Sethe represents

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Phelan argues that, rather than the ‘location of explanation of who Beloved is’ (233) as many critics propose, Beloved’s monologue is, instead, ‘a counter to the powerful response to Beloved
the mother who abandons her daughter because of the situation of slavery. In this respect, Beloved’s return represents a re-connection of the mother-daughter bond which both Sethe and Beloved desire; however, this can only be achieved through their confrontation with the horrors of slavery and their acceptance of it as a situation in which a mother may be forced to abandon her child.

After these three monologues, the narrative delineates the conversations between the three women, which, rather than creating healing patterns of call and response, are characterised by their lack of communication. Sethe’s responses to Beloved are focused upon her perception of her as her daughter, whereas Beloved’s comments, in her continual references to the Middle Passage, signify an interpretation that Sethe cannot perceive:

I was going to help you but the clouds got in the way

There’re no clouds here.

If they put an iron circle around your neck I will bite it away.

Beloved. (215)

Because Sethe’s interpretation of Beloved as her daughter has become fixed, she cannot respond properly to Beloved’s words. In fact, Sethe silences Beloved’s story by saying her name; this repeats her earlier memorialisation of her daughter when she named her Beloved on the headstone. The next conversation, between Denver and Beloved, is again characterised by its miscommunication due to Denver’s fixed perception of Beloved as her sister which opens the dialogue:

We played by the creek.

I was there in the water.

In the quiet time, we played.

as the daughter and sister in Denver and Sethe’s monologues’ (234).
The clouds were noisy and in the way. (215)

To contrast with the fixed perspectives of the three women locked inside the timeless present of the house, Morrison depicts Paul D's growing ability to question his condemnation of Sethe. Paul's re-interpretation of his reaction to Sethe is achieved when Stamp Paid provides him with his own perspective on the events, and also when Paul begins to consider the effects of his own traumatic past. Paul D's consideration of his life firstly focuses on his own lack of family relationships, particularly his lack of memories about his mother and father - 'Didn't remember the one. Never saw the other' (219). Secondly, Paul thinks back to his life at Sweet Home and realises that, like Sethe, he has disavowed the reality of their situation; this is evident in his awareness of the absurdity that it took himself and Paul A one night to overcome their anxieties about escaping and to decide to join the others:

Why did the brothers need one whole night to decide? To discuss whether they would join Sixo and Halle. Because they had been isolated in a wonderful lie, dismissing Halle's and Baby Suggs' life before Sweet Home as bad luck. Ignorant of or amused by Sixo's dark stories. Protected and convinced they were special. (221)

Paul D questions his belief that schoolteacher alone was to blame for their problems at Sweet Home, and realises that he had never considered that Garner was their owner and so had the same amount of power over them as schoolteacher but chose to exercise this power in a different way:

For years Paul D believed schoolteacher broke into children what Garner had raised into men. And it was that that made them run off. Now, plagued by the contents of his tobacco tin, he wondered how much difference there
really was between before schoolteacher and after. Garner called and announced them men - but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? (220)

This realisation makes him reconsider the horror of their position as property at Sweet Home, as apparent in his recollection of the time when he overhears schoolteacher discussing how to recuperate his loss and so ‘learns his price’ (226). Paul D’s acceptance of the reality of their situation as slaves makes him consider the reasons behind Sethe’s act of infanticide. Although this does not necessarily explain why Sethe murdered her child, it does make Paul D realise the trauma that Sethe must have suffered to get her children away from Sweet Home, and the horror of the paradoxical situation of being a mother and a slave:

The pupils must have taken her to the barn for sport right afterward, and when she told Mrs Garner, they took down the cowhide. Who in hell or on this earth would have thought that she would cut anyway? They must have believed what with her belly and her back, that she wasn’t going anywhere. He wasn’t surprised to learn that they had tracked her down in Cincinnati, because, when he thought about it now, her price was greater than his; property that reproduced itself without cost. (228)

When Stamp Paid visits Paul D to attempt to offer an alternative perspective on Sethe’s actions, by suggesting that ‘she was trying to out-hurt the hurter’ (234), Paul realises that his condemnation of Sethe was provoked by his unresolved feelings towards the trauma of his past:

A shudder ran through Paul D. A bone-cold spasm that made him clutch his knees. He didn’t know if it was bad whiskey, nights in the cellar, pig fever, iron bits, smiling roosters, fired feet, laughing dead men, [...] neck jewlry,
Judy in the slaughterhouse, Halle in the butter, ghost-white stairs ... or the loss of a red, red heart. (235)

Paul D’s re-interpretation of his condemnation of Sethe accepts that it may have been caused by his own denial of his past; this realisation opens up the possibility of a future in which he can acknowledge his traumatic past but not let it possess him.

Section Four: The possibility of a future through the re-interpretation of a traumatic past.

When the narrative returns to the three women in 124, in the third part of the novel, the difference is starkly apparent between Paul D’s freedom in his awareness of the hold the past has had over him and Sethe’s continuing entrapment within the trauma of the past. The intense relationship between Sethe and Beloved has now become argumentative:

Sethe cried, saying [...] that she had to get them out, away, that she had the milk all the time and had the money too for the stone but not enough. That her plan was always that they would be together on the other side, forever. Beloved wasn’t interested. She said when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. (241)

The destructive nature of their relationship, which has been foretold in the earlier image of ‘their shadows [which] clashed and crossed on the ceiling like black swords’ (57) to emphasise the inevitability of this outcome, results from the fact that Sethe can only interpret Beloved as her daughter and so thinks that she can make amends for killing her when she was a baby. However, Beloved is not
interested in Sethe’s words, because she represents the disavowed past as well as the returned baby, and so Sethe’s apology needs to be for her refusal to confront her infanticide and the implications this has for the denial of the traumatic past of slavery.

The destructive relationship between Sethe and Beloved causes Denver to be concerned for her mother’s safety. Denver’s change in perspective occurs when Sethe’s attempted explanations to Beloved about her reasons for killing her baby force Denver to hear her mother’s stories for the first time. Through hearing these stories, Denver achieves the ability to recreate her mother’s traumatic experience through her own imagination:

She knew Sethe’s greatest fear was the same one Denver had in the beginning -that Beloved might leave. That before Sethe could make her understand what it meant - what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hands; to hold the face so her head would stay on; to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored body, plump and sweet with life - Beloved might leave. (251)

The intimacy of Denver’s perspective emphasises her growing ability to perceive this traumatic event from her mother’s point of view. Denver’s realisation of her mother’s trauma enables her to break free from the destructive hold of the past and to go to the community for help.

However, Denver not only goes to the community but also decides to seek help from the white Bodwins who offer her a job; Denver’s acceptance of this work, therefore, replicates the situation of slavery from which Sethe has striven to protect her. Morrison makes it apparent to the reader that Denver’s reliance on
the Bodwins is a mistake by portraying her actually looking in the wrong direction: while she is sitting on the porch steps waiting for Mr Bodwin to collect her for her first day’s work, the women from the community gather and make their way towards 124 to exorcise Beloved from its presence: ‘[Denver] was looking to the right, in the direction Mr Bodwin would be coming from. She did not see the women approaching, accumulating slowly in groups of two and threes from the left. Denver was looking to the right’ (257). Although the Bodwins appear to outwardly oppose slavery, their attitude towards black people is still grounded upon assumptions that made slavery seem acceptable by white people. This is illustrated in the statue of the black boy in the Bodwins’ house: ‘His head thrown back farther than a head could go, his hands were shoved in his pockets [...] His mouth wide as a cup, held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service [...] Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words “At Yo Service”’ (255). Mr Bodwin is also presented as someone who disavows the past; the image of the objects that Bodwin has buried in his garden - ‘precious things he wanted to collect’ (259) - presents an image of the encryption of the past. This is associated with his desire not to confront the horror of slavery but to transform it, working for the ‘Society for the Abolition of Slavery’, into a cause that he can fight for, which ignores the people who are really suffering: ‘The society managed to turn infanticide and the cry of savagery around, and build a further case for abolishing slavery. Good years, they were, full of spit and conviction’ (260). Therefore, Mr Bodwin represents the denial of the past and so when Sethe attacks him as he enters her yard to collect Denver, she is attacking the white man’s disavowal of the traumatic historical event; her attack is thus a positive action which takes a first step towards her developing a responsibility
towards the past. Thus, Sethe’s story concludes on a positive note with hope for
the possibility that she can now build a future with Paul D:

“Sethe” [Paul D] says, “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody.
We need some kind of tomorrow.”

He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. “You
your best thing, Sethe. You are.” His holding fingers are holding hers.

“You?” (273)

The sense of closure in these final scenes is countered by the contradictory
and ambiguous ending which refuses to form a particular interpretation of
Beloved and continues to depict her as both a presence and an absence, a real
woman and a ghost, Sethe’s dead baby returned and a representation of all those
who died on the Middle Passage. The ambiguity of the ending is illustrated
through Morrison’s statement - ‘It was not a story to pass on’ (274) - which is
stated twice and then changed to ‘This is not a story to pass on’ (275). This
phrase has been interpreted by Horvitz, as contradicting ‘the crucial theme of the
book, that it is the imperative to preserve continuity through story, language and
culture between generations of Black women’ (101); by Atkinson, as signifying
that this is ‘a story that deserves everyone’s full attention, is not to be passed over’
(258); by Perez-Torres, as meaning that it ‘cannot be repeated ... cannot be
allowed to occur again in the world’ (93); and by Phelan, as proposing that it is a
story that ‘cannot “pass on” or die’ (226), and that it is ‘not a story to ‘pass by’.

My reading of Sethe’s attack on Mr Bodwin develops the idea, proposed by critics such as Otten
(295), that her actions highlight her ability to attack the symbols of slavery, rather than herself and
her children; I argue that Bodwin represents not only the continuing ideology of slavery but also
the disavowal of the horrors of slavery, and so Sethe is able to reach a position in which she
outwardly opposes the denial of the trauma of the past.
but [...] something else, a reality to be confronted' (236). What is significant in all of these interpretations is that they refer to the paradoxes of remembering the historical event that Morrison has examined throughout the novel; the sentence illustrates the ethical imperative to remember an historical event, so that those who died are not allowed to be passed over or forgotten in history, but it also indicates the difficulties of how to tell such a traumatic event in a form that will not restrict it. It also demonstrates that the interaction between story-teller and audience must allow the narrative to be re-interpreted and re-created through the imagination, rather than remaining as a fixed story which is just passed on from person to person. This sentence can be conceptualised in terms of Morrison's concept of the role of call and response in her formulation of the historical event as both a trace of reality and an imaginative re-creation; Morrison emphasises that the passing on of the story needs to be a transitional act, in the same way as Silko's transitional interpretation, which allows the story to change and grow, but also to retain an essential trace of the original traumatic event. By ensuring that her readers become part of this process, Morrison teaches them, as does Silko through her novel, that the traumatic event is a complex and ambiguous event which needs to be interpreted through an open-ended perception which does not attempt to limit it through a single interpretation.

Beloved's paradoxical presence and absence in the ending is apparent in the complex sentences which Morrison constructs that contradict any attempt to locate Beloved in the narrative; for example: 'Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how they can call her if they don't know her name?' (274). These sentences
assert that Beloved represents the unknown, the forgotten masses that died during
the Middle Passage and throughout the history of slavery, but also that she
represents more than this, in that she is still 'the girl who waited to be loved'
(274). The narrative also comments that 'they forget her like a bad dream' (274)
which is, however, contradicted by her presence:

Occasionally, however, the rustle of a skirt hushes when they wake, the
knuckles brushing a cheek in sleep seem to belong to the sleeper.
Sometimes the photograph of a close friend or relative - looked at too long-
shifts, and something more familiar than the dear face itself moves there.
They can touch it if they like, but don't, because they know things will
never be the same if they do. (275)

In this paragraph, the reference to the photograph re-emphasises the significance
of the photograph that Morrison had seen in the Harlem Book of the Dead, and the
extent to which it has shaped the formation of the novel. In the paragraph cited
above Morrison portrays the photograph as something which is dangerous to
touch; through this, she implies that the photograph is a traumatic form of
representation that causes its viewers to avoid its impact by denying it, rather than
confronting it. Therefore, Morrison contrasts this photographic shock with her
narrative form which, through the repetition of images, provides a safe
environment for the reader to be able to confront the traumatic event.

The linking of the impact of the photograph with the safety of narrative,
which forms the motivation for Beloved, can, in fact, be conceptualised in terms
of the latency of Freud's 'Nachtraglichkeit'. For Morrison, the photograph of the
young girl in the Harlem Book of the Dead is too traumatic for her to be able to
interpret, and thus it is an initial shock which cannot be translated; however, the
narrative of Margaret Garner, which she reads later, provides a more protective environment that allows Morrison to re-interpret the traumatic historical event as something she did not know she already knew. Therefore, it is only when the traumatic effects of the photograph are allowed to communicate latently through the healing effects of narrative that a form of representation can be achieved that can adequately remember the 'Sixty Million and more' to which the novel is dedicated. This representation is one that through this duality is able to bear witness to the traumatic events of slavery without fixing them through narrative. The possibilities of a narrative form which allows for a sense of the past as a trace and a re-interpretation, and the connection between this and photography, is explored in more depth in the following two novels analysed in this thesis.
CHAPTER TWO

Memories of Personal Trauma in Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners* and Alice Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women*.

*The Diviners* and *Lives of Girls and Women* both focus on the personal experience of trauma. Like *Ceremony* and *Beloved*, they examine the protagonists’ responses to the traumatic experience of the death of a family member. *The Diviners* focuses on the death of the protagonist’s parents, whereas *Lives of Girls and Women* depicts the death of the protagonist’s uncle and then widens this examination by using the trauma of death as a means of representing the trauma of reality in general. Like *Ceremony* and *Beloved* the two novels illustrate their protagonist’s response to these traumatic situations; thus in *The Diviners* Morag rejects the memory of her parents’ deaths by idealising her early childhood with her parents and forgetting her time with her adoptive parents, Christie and Prin, and in *Lives of Girls and Women* Del evades the trauma of death by defining it through language as part of her more general attempts to determine the incomprehensibility of reality in narrative. As in *Ceremony* and *Beloved*, the two protagonists are offered a new perception which transforms their interpretation of their traumatic experiences. This perception is directly analogous to that which Sethe learns in *Beloved*, in which the past is a trace of the real event and a re-interpretation of this through memory.

In *The Diviners*, Morag as an adult is forced to confront her childhood memories when her daughter Pique, to discover more about her mother’s hidden past, decides to visit the town where Morag had lived after her parents had died. This action causes the memories of the past, which Morag has tried to deny, to
arise and so Morag is forced to re-examine her life, to recognise her lack of memories about her parents and to accept the significance of Christie and Prin in her life. Through this re-interpretation, Morag is able to develop a perception of her past as both a reality which existed and something which she has re-created through her imagination. She illustrates that this duality of perception was something that her adoptive father Christie and her lover Jules tried to teach to her. However, she realises that she had rejected this interpretation when she abandoned her past to start a new life at University. She recalls how her new life was founded upon a complete denial of her childhood, which was encouraged by her husband Brooke who was himself unable to face his traumatic childhood. Through her awareness of the destructive effects of Brooke’s denial of the past, Morag realises the dangers of her own denials of her childhood. Thus, through her re-interpretation of her past Morag is eventually able to recognise the significance of her childhood, but is also able to understand the duality of perception offered to her by Christie and Jules. Through this, she is able to confront her ambiguous emotions regarding her parents’ deaths and to accept their place in her memory as a reality and a re-creation through imagination.

In Munro’s novel, Del’s retrospective re-interpretation of her life allows her, like Morag, to become aware of the consequences of her attempts to evade reality. This is achieved through Del’s recounting of particular moments in her life when she had used language as means of avoiding the trauma of reality, and also of her explanation of the various forms of interpretation offered to her. Firstly, Del describes her Uncle Craig’s historical manuscripts which focus solely on the recounting of factual, superficial information; Del rejects this narrative form because she is interested in the stories that lie beyond these factual details.
The second historical perception that she describes is her mother’s relationship with her past; through this, Del illustrates that, like Morag in *The Diviners*, her mother is trapped by her own ambiguous feelings towards her childhood. Del also describes how she questions these totalising narratives which are used to impose meaning on the world when she is confronted with the mystery of reality. The trauma of reality is delineated by Del through two episodes which portray the incomprehensibility of death: these two episodes illustrate that death is too indeterminate to be contained within traditional forms of narrative. Through these episodes in her life, Del illustrates her developing interest in a more heterogeneous narrative form. In the final, metafictional chapter, Del directly examines her earlier attempts at narrativisation in which she had utilised writing as a means of avoiding the mystery of reality, and through this awareness she is finally able to achieve a more complex narrative form.

Both of these novels conduct their exploration of this dualistic narrative representation through the context of photography. The notion of the photograph as a form of representation which embodies a dualistic sense of the past as a trace and a re-interpretation particularly accords with Barthes’ theories. Barthes, as I have explained in Chapter One, argues that the photograph is a trace of an actual object, in that the referent must have been present when the photograph was taken, and is also an interpretation of that reality, in that the photographer has selected that particular moment to capture. Both Laurence and Munro utilise this duality of the photograph as a means of exploring a dualistic perception of the past as a trace and an interpretation. Laurence’s novel opens with Morag examining her childhood photographs and depicts these in terms of the duality of this form of perception, whereas Munro’s collection concludes with an
exploration of photography through Del’s own novel about a sinister photographer and his almost supernatural photographs. Both novels portray the protagonist rejecting this dual form of perception, through a desire in Morag’s case to deny her unresolved feelings about her parents’ early deaths and her impoverished childhood with her adoptive family, and in Del’s case through an attempt to use representation as a means of evading the incomprehensibility of reality. Although Munro’s novel, therefore, focuses more explicitly on fictional representation as Del explores her own novel writing endeavours, Laurence’s protagonist is also a novelist who can only finish her novel once she has achieved this dualistic form of perception. In the same way as in Silko’s and Morrison’s novels, the narrative strategies used in each novel allow the reader to experience a new narrative form. For example, both novels are narrated through a mixture of first and third person narrative, which achieves a notion of the past as an actual lived experience and a re-interpretation. The two novels, like Morrison’s novel, also avoid the creation of a totalising narrative by acknowledging indeterminacy, contradiction and heterogeneity.
I. The Memory of a Traumatic Childhood in Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*.

Margaret Laurence was born Jean Margaret Wemyss on July 18, 1926 in the prairie town of Neepawa, Manitoba. Her parents died when she was young and so she was raised by her aunt and her grandfather. Her first writing job was as a reporter for the local newspaper in 1943. The following year she studied English at Winnipeg’s United College (now University of Winnipeg) where she published stories and poems in the college newspaper and later became the newspaper’s assistant editor. In 1947 she received her BA in English and became employed as a reporter for the *Winnipeg Citizen*. Later that year she married Jack Laurence and in 1950 they both moved to Somalia and lived in Africa until 1957. During her time in Africa, Laurence’s became seriously involved in writing. Her first publication was *A Tree for Poverty* (1954) which included translations of Somali poetry and legends. She then concentrated on fiction writing and wrote many short stories inspired by her time in Africa which she later published in the collection *The Tomorrow Tamer* (1963). During her time in Africa she also began work on her first novel *This Side Jordan* (1960). Her interest in African literature, which continued even after she left Africa and returned to Canada, is evident in her 1968 publication of *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966* a critical study of Nigerian Literature.

After leaving Africa Laurence, her husband and their two children settled in Vancouver where they lived for five years. During this time she completed and then published her so-called African novel *This Side Jordan* and started her first
novel set in Canada, *The Stone Angel*. This was the first of her Manawaka novels which are all set in the fictional town of Manitoba. Laurence separated from her husband in 1962 and moved to England with her two children where she lived for a year in London and then moved to Buckinghamshire. During her time here she completed *The Stone Angel* (1964) and wrote three more of the eventual five novels in her Manawaka series: *A Jest of God* (1966), for which she won her first Governor General's Award for fiction and which was adapted into a movie entitled *Rachel, Rachel; The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), and *A Bird in the House* (1970). The first four novels of the Manawaka series were critically acclaimed also of great commercial success and established Laurence as one of the most important writers in Canada.

In early 1970s Laurence returned to Canada and settled in Ontario. She worked as a writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto, the University of Western Ontario, and at Trent University, where she was appointed Chancellor for the years 1981-1983. During her summer vacations she lived in her "Manawaka Cottage" on the Otonobee River in Southern Ontario where she completed her final book in the Manawaka series, and her last novel, *The Diviners* (1974) for which she received her second Governor General's Award. *The Diviners* has been acclaimed as the outstanding achievement of Margaret Laurence's writing career. It is an epic novel that completes Laurence's celebrated Manawaka series and is revered as one of the great Canadian novels of our times. It is concerned with one of the key themes throughout her writing; the importance of coming to terms with the past and of developing an identity through a sense of ancestry. After this, Laurence turned her attention to writing essays, published in a collection *Heart of a Stranger* (1976); her memoirs and children's fiction. In the last decade of her
life she became actively involved in promoting causes such as nuclear disarmament, environmental concerns, women’s rights, through her writing, such as letters, essays and lectures, and through fundraising campaigns. She died on January 5, 1987.

*The Diviners* describes Morag’s denial of her traumatic past; Morag disavows her parents’ deaths and instead idealises her early childhood when they were still alive, although, in fact, her memories of this period are very limited. Her continuing inability to confront the trauma of her parents’ deaths leads her to reject the significance of her adoptive parents and thus sever the connection she has with her childhood. Morag’s daughter Pique suffers the consequences of this denial in the same way that Sethe’s disavowal of her past effects Denver; Pique does not have a clear picture of her mother’s childhood nor does she have any information about her adoptive grandparents with which to build a story of her ancestry. When Pique decides to establish a link with her mother’s past, Morag is forced to confront her ambiguous feelings about her childhood, and so she re-examines the events of her life. In so doing, she is able to accept the ambiguity she feels towards her parents due to the lack of true memories about them, and she is also able to establish a connection to her childhood with Christie and Prin. This is achieved through an acceptance of the kind of perception taught to her by Christie and her lover Jules which she had rejected when she was younger: they teach her that the past is both a trace of events that actually occurred and a re-interpretation of these events through the selective processes of memory.

The novel opens with Morag’s anxieties about her daughter Pique’s decision to discover more about Morag’s past. When Pique tells Morag that she wants to visit Manawaka to explore where Morag lived with Christie and Prin,
Morag examines her own childhood photographs as a way of attempting to determine and organise her ambiguous feelings towards her past. However, the photographs were taken when her parents were still alive rather than when she lived with Christie and Prin, and so she uses the photographs to disavow the life she had after her parents' deaths and to seek comfort in her idealistic childhood memories of her early life at her parents' house. However, the trauma of her parents' deaths is the hidden reality of these photographs; this eventually prevents Morag from finding comfort and forces her to re-interpret the life she spent with Christie and Prin that she has tried to forget.

Morag's re-interpretation of her life is organised into three stages, and so the novel is structured in a similar manner to both Silko's and Morrison's novels. In the first section, Morag depicts her life with Christie, who is the town's garbage collector, and Prin, who is an overweight recluse, and, through this description, she confronts her social exclusion and financially impoverished childhood which she has tried to forget in her attempts at making a better life for herself as a novelist. During these memories of Christie and Prin, she recalls the tales that Christie used to tell her about the ancestral past of the Canadian people. In particular, Morag recalls the story of Piper Gunn, a fictional ancestor of Morag's that Christie had created as the leader of the Scottish people on their journey to Canada. Morag remembers that Christie had told her these tales as a powerful alternative to the official version of history that she was taught at school which downplayed the heroism of the Scottish people and celebrated the Canadian army. Christie had also told Morag about his experiences during the First World War for the similar reason of offering an alternative to the official descriptions of the war that diminish its horror. In this respect, in Morag's re-interpretation of her
childhood, Christie is depicted as being able to confront his traumatic experiences of the war rather than attempt to lessen them; Christie’s acknowledgement of a disavowed reality is also illustrated in his job as the garbage collector in which he confronts on a daily basis the discarded remains of people’s lives. Christie is also presented as someone who, through his historical tales, teaches Morag the importance of knowing her ancestral past, but he also emphasises that this past cannot be fixed into one official version but is open to interpretation through the creative imagination. During this first section of the novel, Morag also describes her relationship with Jules, who teaches her the significance of the past and the importance of being able to re-interpret this past through stories. He is also able, like Christie, to confront the horror of warfare, evident in his ability to recount his experiences during the Second World War.

The second part of the novel illustrates Morag’s rejection of her past, and thus her dismissal of the open-ended form of historical thinking taught to her by Christie and Jules. Morag moves away from Manawaka to go to university, believing that she can leave her past behind. She ignores Christie’s assertion that the past will always be with her and tries to forget her childhood and build a new life that does not take into consideration the importance of her past. During her time at university, she falls in love with, and then marries, her university lecturer Brooke who, through his own denial of his childhood, actively encourages Morag to forget her past. However, Morag’s realisation of the harm that Brooke’s denial of his past is causing him, evident in his repetitive nightmares, causes her to re-think her denial of the past. Morag’s re-interpretation of her reaction to her own past impels her to desire to re-establish the connection with Christie and Prin, and so she visits Christie for the first time since leaving home and calls him father.
Brooke becomes annoyed at Morag's attempts to connect to her past, which is illustrated in his dismissive attitude towards Jules when he visits Morag. Brooke's lack of understanding of Morag's need to establish a connection with her past causes her to leave him and have a brief affair with Jules, during which time she gets pregnant with Pique.

In the third section of the novel, Morag begins to re-connect to Christie's and Jules' perception of the past when, as Pique gets older, Morag recounts Christie's tales about Piper Gunn to her. Morag also tells Pique stories about Christie and so is able to accept his significance in her life and also to re-create him through her imagination. The third section, then, brings the events of the novel back to the present moment and allows Morag a way of re-connecting with Christie's open-ended perception of the past. Morag's realisation of the duality of perception creates the possibility for her to release the tight hold that she has over her past and to accept her complicated emotions towards her childhood. Her new attitude towards her past is particularly evident in that she finally accepts the trauma of her parents' deaths and, rather than continuing to idealise her childhood with her parents, she accepts the importance of her time with Christie and Prin. Morag's recognition of the significance of her childhood, and her ability to re-create her past through her imagination allow her to conclude the novel which she has been struggling to write.

*The Diviners* is structured to enact Morag's interpretation of the past. Each chapter, apart from the last, opens with Morag in the present and then moves back to the past through Morag's interpretation of her life. The sections from the past depict particular events in Morag's life in the form of short episodes entitled 'Memorybank Movies'. These 'Memorybank Movies' describe experiences
throughout Morag's life in chronological order and in the present tense. Through this chapter format, the focus on Morag's present interpretation of events is balanced by the actuality of these events from the past which dominate each chapter; this then presents the past as a very real set of events which denies its existence as solely an interpretation constructed in the present.

This dual perception is continued through the mixture of third and first person narrative which creates a narrator who has the ability to present Morag's thoughts in the first person and, at the same time, provide an interpretation of these events; as Warwick explains: 'We are not simply presented with Morag's thoughts from an external perspective, but rather the illusion that this is Morag describing herself from a detached perspective' (3-4). Laurence's creation of a narrator who is a mixture of both a third and first person perspective ensures that the voice of the novel itself is ambiguous and fluid. For example, the narrator, while speaking in the third person, will imitate the way that Morag speaks; this is particularly apparent when Morag is a child, and the third person narrator reproduces her child-like speech: 'Seven is much older than six. A person knows a hell of a sight more. And can read. Some kids still can't read yet. But they are dumb, dumb-bells, dumb bunnies. Morag can read like sixty. Sometimes she doesn't let on in school though. Just depends on how she feels. So there' (28). This paragraph opens with what appears to be an adult voice, but then changes to that of a child's speech with the phrase 'dumb-bells, dumb-bunnies'. The return, after that, to the use of the third person perspective in the use of 'she' rather than 'I' is again contradicted by the child's voice that concludes the paragraph with the words 'so there'. This narrative, therefore, creates a sense of the actuality of the
original event, in the child's voice, and Morag's later interpretation of it as an adult.

Laurence's dualistic notion of narrative representation is evident in her simultaneous emphasis on the necessity of a connection to the past and the belief that the past is open to imaginative re-construction. Laurence's emphasis on the significance of the past is evident in her argument that her fiction addresses 'the question of where one belongs and why, and the meaning to oneself of the ancestors, both the long-ago ones and those in remembered history' (qtd. in Easingwood 20). However, Laurence's underlining of the importance of a connection to the past is not necessarily a naive belief in the ability to access the past, but more a recognition that a culture or individual can only move into the future through an awareness and acceptance of their origins, as she has stated: 'My writing, then, has been my own attempt to come to terms with the past. I see this process as the gradual one of freeing oneself from the stultifying aspect of the past, while at the same time beginning to see its true value' (qtd. in Easingwood 21). Thus, as New argues, Laurence feels that her role as a writer is one of having a 'moral responsibility for the future' (223) which arises from knowledge of the events of the past. Laurence's emphasis on the moral and ethical responsibility that a writer must have towards the past counters the critical interpretations of her work which argue that she valorises the imaginative re-construction of the past over the actuality of the event. This kind of critical response to The Diviners is evident, for example, in Bowen's focus on Morag's re-organisation of the past into a decipherable pattern (33) which simplifies Morag's more ambiguous

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76 She perceives her role as a writer as having a political impetus to speak out against certain historical circumstances, for example the nuclear arms race, to prevent future catastrophes from
relationship with her past, and also in Hehner’s avoidance of the contradictions inherent in the novel, in her argument that it ‘illustrates [Laurence’s] belief that every person, writer and non-writer alike, makes a fiction of his past truth and by doing so, transmutes it into a new truth. And the new truth is myth’ (53). The confusion about Laurence’s conceptualisation of the past partly arises, as Easingwood argues, from the contradictory concept of myth which Laurence uses in reference to her fiction. The concept of myth can be defined as an ‘engagement with issues of the deepest cultural concern’ but also as ‘invention of a vague, arbitrary or factitious nature’ (Easingwood 22). Laurence’s definition of her work in terms of myth-making emphasises her dualistic notion of fiction as the re-interpretation of the past which is founded upon the actuality of the historical events:

What I get into my work, I hope, is a strong sense of place and of our own culture, I’m writing very deeply out of that. If Canadian writers can do anything, it is to give Canadians a very strong sense of who they are, where they come from and where they may be going. Our writers can affect this whole struggle simply, by forging our myths and giving voice to our history, to our legends, to our cultural being and that is what should come out in a novel or poems. (qtd. in Easingwood 22)

In this respect, Laurence’s concept of myth-making demonstrates this notion of narrative as a trace of an actual lived experience and as an interpretation. Her focus on the significance of historical identity then counteracts the implied definition of myth as solely invention, a notion which risks erasing the reality of the original event.
Laurence's proposition that the past is a trace and an interpretation is analogous with Barthes' theories of the photograph. The link that Barthes makes between a dualistic perception of the past and the unassimilable forms of the unconscious, in his notion of the punctum, is evident in Laurence's avoidance of a fixed and determined meaning in her narrative. One of the ways that Laurence achieves this sense of unassimilability in her fiction is through her sentence structures, which hold together the contradictions of reality, rather than attempting to resolve them; these counter any attempt at narrative resolution as they illustrate the necessary incongruity of reality. This is illustrated when Morag questions the nature of language: 'I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracles. But no, only occasionally' (4). Although this statement seems to imply that Morag has rejected the power of words, her assertion that words can 'occasionally' 'do' magic balances the negativity of the first half of the sentence. Laurence utilises this technique throughout the novel to highlight her notion of the both/and of reality, which she illustrates in her opening depiction of the river:

The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching. (3)

Laurence's rejection of narrative resolution is also apparent in the circular structure of the chapters. The chapters open with a description of Morag in the present and then circle back to the past, creating a repetition between the two time

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frames. For example, in chapter eight, Morag in the present examines a photograph of herself and Pique who are 'both smiling hesitantly at the person behind the camera, who has just refused to have his own picture taken' (276); later in the chapter, the narrative circles back to this photograph when the 'Memorybank Movie' describes Jules taking a photograph of Morag and Pique. This circularity balances the linear organisation of the novel which follows Morag's emotional and psychological development. In this respect, the balance of circularity and linearity in Laurence's novel chimes with Silko's utilisation of the hoop and sunrise metaphors as moments of unity but also of transition.

Therefore, Laurence's dualistic notion of narrative representation as both a trace and an interpretation is, like in Silko's and Morrison's novels, enacted in the narrative strategies of the novel. The continual switching from the present to the past ensures that, as in Ceremony and Beloved, the reader must become involved in the interpretation of a fluid, open-ended and circular form, rather than being the receiver of a fixed message. Because the present events of the novel are provided before those from the past, the readers are presented with references to events which have not yet been portrayed. The reader must, therefore, construct the links between the initially confusing references to the past and the detailed occurrences in the 'Memorybank Movies'. This narrative technique has the effect of both distanc ing and including the reader: although the reader may initially feel that the events of the novel have happened without their knowledge, when the information is provided in the 'Memorybank Movies' the reader has the opportunity to engage with the events of the past with an awareness of how they effect Morag in the future. This participation ensures that, as Morag re-interprets her life and gains an awareness of this dual perception, the reader is also able to learn and to
experience the possibilities of an open-ended form of representation.

**Section One: Morag's childhood photographs.**

In the opening chapter of the novel, Morag’s concerns about her daughter’s need to re-connect with her past cause her to confront her ambivalent relationship with her own childhood: ‘Something about Pique’s going, apart from the actual departure itself, was unresolved in Morag’s mind […] Would Pique go to Manawaka? If she did, would she find anything there which would have meaning for her?’ (5). Morag’s anxiety about her past causes her to search for her childhood photographs as a means of controlling these ambiguous feelings. These photographs are described in the ‘Snapshot’ sections in which each photograph is depicted in a separate paragraph. The first ‘snapshot’ describes Morag’s parents:

She is young, clad in a cotton print dress (the pattern cannot be discerned) [...] the man’s head is bent a little, and he is grinning with obvious embarrassment at the image-recorder who stands unseen and unrecorded on the near side of the gate [...] Colin Gunn and his wife, Louisa, stand here always […] looking forward to what will happen. (6)

This first photograph offers Morag a perception of the historical event as both a trace and an interpretation; this is apparent in that the photographer not only records the event, but also, in doing so, affects the picture, as exemplified in Colin’s embarrassed reaction toward him. However, Morag is unable to perceive this duality, as she attempts to decide the veracity of her memories in terms of truth and lies. Morag needs to believe that her memories of her parents
are real to be able to hold on to the reality of her parents' existence. However, this belief in the veracity of her memory is disturbed by her awareness of the possibility that she may have invented many of these memories, and that she may, in fact, have only a very limited recollection of her parents. Thus, Morag continually tries to determine her memories in terms of truth and fiction throughout the 'snapshots' section. This is illustrated in the second 'snapshot' which firstly describes in an emotional tone Morag's childhood pet Snapdragon, 'a mild-natured dog, easygoing [...] who never once snaps at anyone' (7) and then follows with Morag's thoughts regarding her interpretation of this photograph, written in italics to denote the change from the third to first person narrator: 'all this is crazy, of course, and quite untrue. Or maybe true and maybe not. I am remembering myself composing this interpretation, in Christie and Prin's house' (7). In this passage, Morag's assertion that her emotional description of her childhood pet is 'quite untrue' shocks the reader who believes that they are being provided with a genuine childhood memory. However, Morag's assertion is followed by the ambiguity of her statement that it is 'maybe true and maybe not'; this suggests that it is this notion of 'truth' which is being questioned in Laurence's examination of narrative. Morag attempts to determine the accuracy of her memory in terms of traditional notions of truth and invention; however, she is unaware of the duality of perception that Laurence is proposing.78 This is demonstrated in the third 'snapshot' in which the description of the photograph is followed by Morag's ambivalence towards its accuracy; her initial feeling that she can't 'recall when [she] invented that one', is contradicted with an assertion that

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78 Warwick argues that this attempted distinction between truth and fiction, past and present, is evident in the use of italics in the early sections of the novel, which is abandoned later when
she does remember inventing it 'very clearly' (8).

The following two 'snapshots' repeat this pattern of an emotional description of a happy childhood memory, of her childhood bedroom in the fourth 'snapshot' and her mother teaching her to play the piano in the fifth, which is followed by Morag's assertion that she has invented these memories after the photograph had been taken. These descriptions illustrate that Morag feels that she has created her childhood memories from the photographs, rather than her photographs being images which represent moments from her past. For example, at the end of the fourth 'snapshot' she explains that she 'recall[s] looking at the pictures, these pictures, over and over again, each time imagining [she] remembered a little more' (8). The complexity of this statement is worth noting: Morag does not say that she has invented these memories, but that she imagined that she could remember more each time she looked at the photograph; this is a much more ambiguous suggestion which illustrates the unsettling lack of certainty that Morag has regarding her childhood memories. At the end of the fifth 'snapshot', Morag asserts that 'that is the end of the totally invented memories'; however, she follows this positive assertion with the more undecided suggestion that she 'can't remember [herself] actually being aware of inventing them, but it must have happened so' (9). Morag's response to her photographs highlights that, at this point in her life, she experiences the duality of the past as a confusing contradiction, rather than an open-ended form of perception that can liberate her from the tight hold that the past has over her; as she states: 'Perhaps they're my totems, or contain a portion of my spirit. Yeh, and perhaps they are exactly what they seem to be - a jumbled mess of old snapshots' (5). Therefore, Morag's

Morag realises 'the impossibility of achieving such a distinction' (11).
ambivalence about her past is apparent in the way that she simultaneously mythologises and trivialises her past.

In the final 'snapshot' Morag states that her memory of her imaginary childhood friends is, ironically, 'the first memory of actual people that [she] can trust' (11); the ambivalence that Morag feels towards her past is evident in her belief that her imaginary friends were actual people and that she trusts her memories of these more than those of her real parents. Typically, this assertion of the accuracy of memory is followed by a questioning of memory's veracity when she states 'although I can't trust it completely, either, partly because I recognise anomalies in it, ways of expressing the remembering, ways which aren't those of a five-year-old' (11). What becomes evident in her reaction to this photograph is that her confusion about the status of her memories arises from her refusal to accept the lack of memories that she has of her parents. This has caused her to replace this lack with an idealistic version of her childhood which she has clung to as a way of refusing to accept her parents' deaths. However, her realisation that her childhood may be a fiction causes her to feel ambivalent and confused about her childhood memories, rather than being able to realise that, as Warwick asserts, 'the alterations and additions which [she] makes to her past are just as much a part of that past as the actual experiences themselves' (7).

However, the photographs eventually offer her little comfort, as the deaths of her parents are the hidden reality within them. The trauma of her parents' deaths is implied in the reference in the fourth 'snapshot' to the 'something terrible [that] had happened' (8); it is also indicated in the fifth 'snapshot' in which Morag's sense of loss is evident in that she has forgotten what her parents looked like, and that when she looks 'now at that one snapshot of them, they
aren’t faces I can relate to anyone I ever knew’ (9). The final ‘snapshot’ confirms the significance of her parents’ deaths when it leads into Morag’s memory of her imaginary friends that she created ‘around the time [her] mother took sick’ (11). The ‘snapshot’ ends by providing a sense of this traumatic event which does not actually define what occurred, through Morag’s questions: ‘what was happening to everyone else? What really happened in the upstairs bedroom?’ (11), and through her recollection that her father ‘was moved into the spare room. People couldn’t be that sick together in the same bed, I guess’ (11). In this respect, Morag indicates that her parents had died when she was young, but she also exposes her lack of knowledge regarding this traumatic event. Indeed, in the following ‘Memorybank Movie’, the narrator confirms that Morag’s parents died of polio, that she had not been allowed to see her parents while they were ill, and that their dead bodies had been removed from the house without her knowledge. Morag, then, experiences her parents’ deaths as an absence, as a lack of knowledge. 79 Because Morag is not allowed to see her parents she substitutes the image of their dead bodies with an image of death which she recognises, that of dead gophers lying in the road: ‘Morag does not imagine they have gone to some real good place. She knows they are dead. She knows what dead means. She has seen dead gophers, run over by cars or shot, their guts redly squashed out on the road’ (13).

It is at this point, when Morag recalls the memory of her dead parents, that the narrative form switches from ‘snapshot’ to ‘Memorybank Movie’. Thus, the

79 The fact that it is the absence of the event, and not the actuality of it, that causes its traumatic effect on Morag, chimes with Caruth’s argument that trauma is caused by the ‘inability fully to witness the event as it occurs’ which creates ‘a gap that carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory’ (‘Introduction (Part 1)’ 7).
narrative changes from an attempt in the ‘snapshot’ sections to simulate the effect of a photographic image, to the organisation in the ‘Memorybank Movies’ of the past in terms of a more traditional linear narrative. This change in narrative suggests that the ‘snapshot’, in its alliance with the photograph, is perhaps too traumatic a form of representation that forces Morag to confront the actuality of the deaths of her parents. This accords with Morrison’s depiction of the photograph at the end of Beloved as having too strong an impact to be able to represent the past. It also resonates with Barthes’ theories of the punctum which ‘shoots out [of the photograph] like an arrow and pierces’ (Camera 26) the viewer. In The Diviners, the trauma of the photograph contrasts with the ‘Memorybank Movie’ which, through narrative consolation, allows Morag to diminish the shock of her memories of her parents’ deaths. Thus, Morag’s change from photographic image to narrative, in her move from the ‘snapshot’ to the ‘Memorybank Movie’, may be a way of dealing with her parents’ death within a safer environment; however, it also risks fixing the traumatic event through the soothing effects of narrative consolation. The difference between the two narrative forms is evident in the way that the deaths are represented in each format. In the ‘snapshots’ the deaths are communicated to the reader on a subconscious level, through hints and echoes of the event, as if this is all Morag can bear to allow herself to remember; whereas, in the safer, narrative flow of the ‘Memorybank Movie’ Morag can fully represent the deaths as an event which occurred in the past rather than as something which interpenetrates the present. Morag’s desire to ensure the traumatic event remains in the past is challenged, however, by the effect this memory has on her now. This is illustrated at the end of the ‘Memorybank Movie’ when the narrative returns to the present (the only
instance of this in the novel) to present Morag’s thoughts, denoted by the use of italics: ‘Now I am crying, for God’s sake, and I don’t even know how much of that memory really happened and how much of it I embroidered later on’ (15). In the passage above, Morag’s desire to distance herself from the past is evident in her continuing attempts to register this event as real or imagined. She has not yet realised that it is only through a perception of this event as both a trace and a reinterpretation that she can free herself from the ambiguity that she feels towards the memory of her parents.

The ambivalence Morag feels towards her past, which is apparent in the ‘snapshot’ section, leads her to attempt to re-interpret the events of her life. Through this re-interpretation, Morag is eventually able to achieve a more open-ended perception of her past by re-connecting with the kind of thought taught to her by Christie and Jules. The narrative which depicts the events of the past follows Morag’s development of this interpretation, portraying her initial dismissal of Christie and Jules’ form of percepion, her subsequent disavowal of her past when she leaves Manawaka and meets Brooke who encourages her denial of her childhood, to her eventual rejection of Brooke and recognition of the significance of Christie’s and Jules’ perception of the past.

Section Two: Christie’s and Jules’ perception of the past as an actuality and an interpretation.

Christie is presented, by Laurence, as someone who is willing to confront events rather than trying to deny them. His employment as the garbage collector, or scavenger as the locals derisively call him, highlights Christie’s attitude
towards life: on a daily basis he confronts the disavowed and discarded elements of people’s lives. His ability to face what others deny is evident when he tells Morag about the aborted foetus, which he had buried in the dump after finding it in the rubbish bin of one of the respectable families in town. Morag reacts with disgust at the thought of ‘what [Christie’s] hands have touched’; as the narrative explains: ‘She won’t think of it. Once she used to take Christie’s hand, crossing the street. She’s too big for that now, but even if she weren’t, she wouldn’t’ (62). The notion of Morag’s disavowal, in her decision not to ‘think of it’, is comparable to the family’s decision to discard the unwanted object in an attempt to erase its existence; these reactions contrast with Christie’s ability to deal with the dead baby, as Christie explains to Morag: ‘They put it in [the bin] and that’s the end of it to them. But I take it out, do you see?’ (62). The town’s disdainful attitude towards Christie is a response to his ability to deal with the things that they cannot face. Their lives are structured upon a thinly woven mesh of respectability which is based upon a rigid sense of the division of the world into binary opposites; thus, Christie’s ability to cross into the world of everything which they deem to be filthy, disgusting and therefore ‘bad’ ensures that they perceive him as the opposite of everything they are claiming to be. The town’s desire to disavow the trauma of their lives is evident in the ‘decent and respectable’ cemetery which has ‘big spruce trees, and grass which is kept cut, [and] plots [with] flowers which people plant and tend’ (57). The respectability of the cemetery disavows the trauma of death, and the plants that grow there contradict the cemetery’s purpose as a burial place for ‘dead stuff’ (57). In this respect, the cemetery is depicted as a place where people can avoid being confronted by the horror of death, which contrasts with the rubbish dump where
Christie works as a place where nobody with any decency could bear to go.

Christie’s ability to confront the horror of life is also apparent in his capacity to face the trauma of his experiences during the First World War which is exemplified in his description of the battle in which he was involved: ‘There we were, getting ready to fire old Brimstone, and a shell explodes so Christly close to me I think I’m a goner. The noise. Jesus. And then the air all around me is filled with [...] bleeding bits of a man. Blown to smithereens. A leg. A hand. Guts, which was that red and wet you could not credit it at all’ (74). He provides this explanation for Morag to counter the disavowal of the traumatic experiences of the war in the official version in ‘The 60th Canadian Field Artillery Battery Book’ which denies the horror of the war through its official military terminology: ‘On the night of September 26th the guns were moved into position. Zero hour was 5 A.M. on the 27th September, and, promptly to the second, the guns opened fire, continuing in action until 12:10 P.M.’ (73).

However, Christie’s decision to describe his experiences during the war is not an attempt to claim authenticity over the official version, but is conducted with the recognition that his is just another interpretation of the event; as he explains: ‘Well, d’you see, it was like the book says, but it wasn’t like that, also. That is the strangeness’ (73). Christie’s confrontation with the past, therefore, is conducted with an awareness that the event is both an actuality and an interpretation. His perception of the duality of historical representation can be summarised in his idea that ‘It’s all true and not true. Isn’t that a bugger, now?’ (71), and is also apparent in the tales that he creates about his ancestors which he tells to Morag when she is young. These tales are interspersed throughout the ‘Memorybank Movies’ of Morag’s childhood and represent a defining element of
Christie’s relationship with Morag; they highlight the importance of ancestry, of a connection to the past, but also Christie’s awareness that this connection is partly achieved through interpretation. When he first tells Morag the tale of Piper Gunn it is to assert a sense of ancestry in Morag and to contradict the dismissal of the Clan Gunn’s history in the official book, entitled ‘The Clans and Tartans of Scotland’ (39), which states that ‘the chieftainship of the Clan Gunn is undetermined at the present time, and no arms have been matriculated’ (40). To counter the official negation of Morag’s ancestry, Christie invents an extensive tale detailing the exploits of the imaginary Piper Gunn; how he led his people from Scotland to Canada and with his strength and faith managed to comfort and guide them in their despair. When Christie tells Morag these tales, she constantly interrupts him with questions and comments; these interjections modify the story and so structure these conversations according to a call and response pattern which illustrates the duality of event and interpretation:

They hunted for meat, to live.

(What did they hunt, Christie?)

Oh, polar bears that looked like great moving snowbanks with jaws and claws, then, and great wild foxes with burning eyes in them, and

(Did they eat foxes, Christie?)

Well, maybe not the foxes. They would use them for the fur, see?

[...] And in the spring they walked to the place where the supplies would be. It was a long long way. It could’ve been maybe a thousand or so miles, then.

(They walked? A thousand miles? They couldn’t, Christie.)

Well, it might not have been quite the thousand, but it was a christly long
The call and response pattern apparent here resonates with the healing possibilities of conversation in *Beloved*; when Beloved’s presence allows Denver to recount her mother’s story from a more intimate perspective, Morrison demonstrates how the involvement of an audience can allow a story to be experienced rather than just described.

Morag reacts ambivalently to Christie’s stories; she loves hearing them, but she also judges them according to her separation of truth and fiction, believing that these stories are not true as they contradict the official history that she has learnt at school. This is illustrated when Morag counters ‘Christie’s Tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels’ (105) with the historical facts that she has been taught:

> Now, then, when Piper was a real old man [...] it happened that the halfbreeds around the settlement got very worked up. They decided they was going to take over the government of the place. So they got themselves a rebel chief [...] His name was Reel.

(Louis Riel, Christie. We took it in school. He was hanged.) (105-6)

When Christie tells how Morag’s ancestors, the Sutherlanders, fought the halfbreeds and managed to prevent them taking over the fort when the Army neglected to respond to their uprising, Morag contradicts his story when she tells him that ‘the Government Down East sent out the Army from Ontario and like that, and Riel fled, Christie. He came back to Saskatchewan, in 1885’ (106). Christie’s reply to Morag’s dependence upon the historical record of the event is informed by his belief in the open-endedness of historical interpretation: ‘Well, some say that. Others say different. Of course I know the Army and that came out, like, but the truth of the matter is that them Sutherlanders had *taken back the*
Fort before even a smell of an army got there' (106). Morag’s continuing reliance on the official version of history, apparent when she asserts ‘Oh Christie! They didn’t. We took it in History’ (106), is countered by Christie’s detailed story of how it happened: ‘I’m telling you. What happened was this. Piper Gunn says to his five sons, he says, What in the fiery freezing hell do you all think you’re doing, not even making a stab at getting back the bloody Fort?’ (106). Christie’s recreation of the words spoken by the people involved counters Morag’s reliance on the facts taught to her at school by creating a more intimate description of these events which allows Morag to experience them, rather than remain as a detached observer.

Jules is similar to Christie in his ability to confront the traumatic past. When he returns from fighting in the Second World War, rather than avoiding anything that may traumatise him, he forces Morag to describe the particulars of how his sister was killed when her shack was burned to the ground. Although Morag had witnessed the aftermath of this fire in her official capacity as a writer for the local newspaper, she struggles to describe this event; her faltering attempts to depict it illustrate the problems of witnessing and leads to a general questioning of the nature of historical representation: ‘What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer’ (49). This highlights the tension within narratives depicting traumatic events; the event is perceived as being beyond description, but the ethical imperative of witnessing demands its representation. Jules’ need to have his sister’s death described to him is associated, in this episode, with his ability to acknowledge the horror of the war; this is evident in his description of the death of John Lobodiak who had lived in the town with them: ‘He was right next to me when he got it. He was shot in
the guts. He kept trying to hold them in – they were spilling out, there. Ever seen a dead gopher?’ (133). Jules’ ability to confront the traumatic event is directly contrasted to Morag’s continuing disavowal of her childhood trauma; this is illustrated when the image of death which Jules presents provokes a memory of her parents’ deaths, which she has associated with the image of dead gophers at the side of the road: ‘Yes yes when cannot remember the blood squirming entrails sheets what was it a dream’ (133); Morag’s need to deny this memory is apparent when she shouts ‘Skinner – please. Don’t’ (133).

To demonstrate the link between Christie and Jules’ perception of the past, Laurence ensures that Jules is closely associated with Christie in the reader’s mind by, firstly, emphasising Jules’ admiration of Christie, when he says to Morag ‘He’s quite a guy, that Christie’ (109), and, secondly, depicting his familiarity with the rubbish dump, or Nuisance Grounds as it is commonly known, where Christie works. In fact, the relationship that steadily builds between Morag and Jules begins with their accidental meeting in the Nuisance Grounds, and the importance of ancestry is the topic of their first conversation together. In this scene, Morag responds to Jules’ insulting remarks to her by asserting that she is ‘related to Piper Gunn, so there’ (59), and, although ‘she is afraid to speak it, now, in case Christie has got it wrong after all’ (59) she tells Jules the tales of Piper Gunn which Christie had told her, provoking Jules to tell her the story of his ancestry. Jules’ perception of the historical event is similar to Christie’s, as evident in his realisation that the possibility that the tales his father tells him may be partially fictional, does not diminish the significance of his ancestral past. This is apparent when he tells Morag the tale of Riel which provides another version to Christie’s tale earlier on:
He is like a prophet, see? And he has the power.

(The power?)

He can stop bullets – well, I guess he couldn’t, but lots of people, there, they believed he could …

(You’re talking about Riel.)

Sure. But the books, they lie about him. I don’t say Lazarus told the story the way it happened, but neither did the books. (119)

Section Three: Morag’s rejection of Christie’s and Jules’ form of historical representation.

Morag rejects the perception of the past taught to her by Christie and Jules; rather than accepting the presence of the past, she attempts to deny its existence by moving away from Manawaka to go to university and rejecting the words that Christie says to her on her departure, that ‘It’ll all go along with you’ (168). Her disavowal of her past continues when she meets Brooke, a lecturer at her university. During her first conversation with Brooke, Morag intentionally denies her past: when he asks her where she comes from she replies ‘Oh - nowhere really. A small town’ (156), and when he questions who raised her, after she tells him that her parents had died when she was young, she breaks off her sentence thinking to herself that ‘she cannot speak Christie’s name, Prin’s name’ (156) and tells him, instead, that she was never close to her adoptive parents. When Brooke continues to question her about her past, she tells him that she feels that she does not have a past, ‘as though it was more or less blank’ (157). Rather than realising that Morag is self-destructively denying her past, Brooke
encourages her rejection of her childhood, telling her that it is her lack of a past that he is attracted to: "'Perhaps it's your mysterious nonexistent past," he says. "I like that. It's as though you were starting life now, newly"" (158). In this initial conversation between them Morag denies her past as she fears that Brooke may not love her if she reveals her true self; however, his compliance with this decision makes her momentarily feel as if she should tell him everything to confirm that he would still love her, even if he knew the truth. When she struggles to explain her childhood to him, during which her stuttering sentences emphasise her ambiguous feelings towards the past, Brooke prevents her attempts at communication by laughing at Prin's name, and then silencing Morag when she cries with his assertion that she should not tell him anything that will upset her, and that he only wants to know her as she is now.

Brooke's silencing of Morag's descriptions of her past is provoked by his own denial of his childhood. The consequences of Brooke's disavowal of his past are illustrated in the nightmare that he repeatedly experiences regarding the traumatic punishment he received from his father when he was a young child. The first time Morag realises that Brooke is having a nightmare she rouses him from his sleep and questions him about it; in response, however, he dismisses her questions and goes back to sleep. The second time his nightmare occurs, he briefly mentions that his father had bullied him when he was a child, but he dismisses Morag's suggestion that this must have been terrible, telling her instead that 'it's a nuisance that it comes back to me' (187). Brooke believes that his father's treatment towards him has 'strengthened his resolve' and taught him 'to keep a firm control over things so that the external forces would batter at the gates as little as possible' (187). In this respect, he believes that he can control his
ambiguous feelings towards his traumatic childhood, particularly his hatred towards his father, by building a barrier to block it entering his mind. However, his sense of the past as an external force is mistaken, as it now exists in his memory and thus assaults him from within; an attack from which he cannot protect himself.

Morag’s realisation of Brooke’s denial of the past forces her to confront the damage she may be causing in her own attempts to leave her past behind. When Brooke dismisses his traumatic nightmare the first time, Morag realises that he has denied the impact his childhood has had on him: ‘She wants to console him, for whatever it was, but how could you do that for hurts which must have gone deeper than he wants to know? (179). The second time Brooke experiences his nightmare, and dismissively describes to Morag the childhood event that he repeatedly dreams about, Morag begins to realise the dangers of denying the past, and so suggests that they tell each other about their childhoods. Brooke, however, rejects this offer, ostensibly because he has to get up early for work, but, really, because he is unable to acknowledge his past. Brooke’s silencing of Morag’s attempts to discuss her past continue throughout their relationship; this is particularly apparent when Morag returns from Manawaka after burying Prin and becomes dissatisfied with the fact that she is living a lie, rather than accepting who she really is: instead of encouraging Morag to remember her past, Brooke believes that Morag’s unhappiness is caused by her return to Manawaka and the memories that this visit has unfortunately caused to surface: “It’s too bad you had to go back to the town this last time”, Brooke says. “You had effectively forgotten it. Now it’s all risen up again, and it’s only upsetting you, Morag. Can’t you simply put it from your mind?” (210). Brooke’s misguided belief that the past is
something that can be just dismissed is countered by Morag's assertion that she 'never forgot any of it. It was always there' (210). In this respect, Morag's perception of the continuing presence of the past has significantly developed from her earlier assertion to Christie that she will be able to leave her past behind. Eventually, Morag's realisation of Brooke's continuing need for her to deny her past, which so conflicts with her growing realisation of the significance of her past, causes her to leave him.

Section Four: Morag's development of a perception of the past as a trace and an interpretation.

Morag's realisation of the significance of the past, which is impelled by her visit to Manawaka, is not a sentimental attachment to a long lost childhood, but is in fact an awareness of the inevitable duality of the past as a trace and an interpretation. This is apparent when during a visit to Christie she feels the ghostly presence of the people of her childhood inhabiting her room and realises that the distinction between real and fictional has become blurred:

Ghosts of people and of tales. Morag, a child, a girl, a young woman. Christie ranting the old ironic battle cry. Clowny McPherson [Morag's imaginary friend]. Piper Gunn who led his people to bravery. Gunner Gunn, who once, unbelievably, had life as Colin Gunn, her father. [...] They are all here tonight. Who has been real and who imagined? All have been both, it seems. (203)

Morag's awareness of the duality of the past develops throughout the final sections of the novel, and is seen most clearly in relation to her own re-
interpretation of her childhood when she tells her daughter Pique stories about her time with Christie. In this respect, Morag becomes the story-teller, and takes on Christie’s belief in the duality of the historical event to be able to tell ‘Morag’s Tale of Christie Logan’ (300). Morag’s description to Pique of the tales that Christie used to tell her emphasises her changing perspective on the historical event:

When [Christie] told me the tales about Piper Gunn, at first I used to believe every word. Then later I didn’t believe a word of them, and thought he’d made them up out of whole cloth.

(What means Whole cloth?)

Out of his head - invented them. But later still, I realized they’d been taken from things that happened, and who’s to know what really happened? So I started believing in them again, in a different way. (300)

The duality of the historical event is evident in this section in the call and response pattern between Morag and Pique which mirrors that between Christie and Morag earlier in the novel. Morag’s identification with Christie’s perception of the past is evident when she writes a novel which deals with the same historical period as Christie’s tales:

Odd - the tales Christie used to tell of Piper Gunn and the Sutherlanders, and now this book deals with the same period ... Christie always said they walked about a thousand miles - it was about a hundred and fifty, in fact, but you know, he was right; it must’ve felt like a thousand. The man who led them on that march [...] was young Archie Macdonald, but in my mind the piper who played them on will always be that giant of a man, Piper Gunn, who probably never lived in so-called real life but who lives forever.
Christie knew things about inner truths that I am only just beginning to understand. (341)

It is significant that Morag now realises that the past is inevitably a combination of the original event and its imaginative reinterpretation.

In the present events of the novel, Morag's re-connection, through her memories of the past, with this perception of historical events allows her to confront her ambivalent emotions towards her past with an awareness that she will not necessarily resolve these feelings; this permits her to accept her daughter's desire to connect to her past in her decision to visit Manawaka, and enables her to confront her ambiguous feelings about her parents' deaths. Morag's developing awareness of the duality of narrative in the present is evident when she tells Pique, in response to her desire to 'know what really happened' (287) during her childhood, that '[t]here's no one version. There just isn't' (287). This emphasis on interpretation is balanced by Morag's sense of the continuing presence of her childhood in her memories; this is illustrated when she explains to Pique's boyfriend Dan, during a discussion about Pique's need to re-connect with her past, that Dan will fail in his attempts to deny his past by avoiding where he grew up:

"I sort of know," Dan said, "and yet I don't. I won't try to persuade [Pique] not to go. If she has to, well, that's that. But I can't go. Not yet, anyway. Maybe never. Maybe I'm afraid to go back, even if it's not the exact same place. I really hated the prairies when I lit out."

"I know. So did I. I felt that way about the town where I grew up. Then I found the whole town was inside my head, for as long as I live." (290)

In the final chapter, Morag's ability to allow her daughter to leave is achieved through an acceptance of her own past and her recognition of the trauma of her
parents’ deaths. When Jules, Piques’ father, requests for Morag not to tell Pique of his impending death, Morag realises that her parents’ desire for her not to see them when they were dying was not an act of rejection toward her, but a desire for her not to experience the trauma of their deaths, and thus was an act of love:

How can I not tell about Jules? How can I tell her? He doesn’t want me to tell her. He doesn’t want to see her. He wants to see her, but not for her to see him.

The aeons ago memory. The child saying I’ll just go up and see my mother and father, now, for a minute. And Mrs. Pearl, holding tightly to the child’s wrist, saying No you don’t; they’re too sick to see you; they don’t want to.

They had wanted to see her; they had not wanted her to see them. (365)

These words repeat those used in the earlier description of this event, resulting in a circularity in the reading which causes the reader to feel as s/he is recalling this traumatic moment for her/himself.

Morag’s acceptance of the ambiguity of the past, which allows her to confront it through a realisation that it can be re-interpreted through her own imagination, ensures that she is able to complete the novel that she is writing: ‘Morag returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title’ (370). The ending, then, can be perceived as circular, in that the novel that Morag is writing could be the novel we have just read, thus, the narrative strategies utilised in The Diviners are evidence of Morag’s ability not to resolve the contradictory nature of interpretation, but to see it as something which liberates her mind. That Morag now perceives contradiction as a creative liberation, rather than a destructive ambiguity, is evident in the difference in

80 As suggested by Warwick (1) among others
Morag’s perception of the river that flows both ways which she watches at the beginning and end of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Morag tries to define the contradictory nature of the river: ‘Morag [...] sat looking out at the river, which was moving quietly, its surface wrinkled by the breeze, each crease of water outlined by the sun. Naturally, the river wasn’t wrinkled or creased at all—wrong words, implying something unfluid like skin’ (4). Rather than being able to accept the incongruity of reality and be able to use writing as a means of portraying this contradiction, Morag initially struggles to describe the river, as she wants to use her writing as a form of narrative consolation which resolves this ambiguity, rather than confronting it. This is illustrated in that it is the fluidity of the river that Morag finds difficult to represent; she still perceives the world according to fixed binaries and so cannot create a more fluid form of representation. However, by the end of the novel, she can now perceive this contradictory nature as being representative of the contradictions involved in narrative; this is demonstrated when she follows her closing description of the river with the words, ‘Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence’ (370). Therefore, at the end of the novel Morag is finally able to re-connect with the dualistic form of perception taught to her by Christie and Jules through her retrospective re-organisation of the events of her life. This allows her to develop a more open-ended form of representation which does not attempt to resolve the paradoxes inherent in reality through a determined narrative and allows her to accept the significance of her past but also to realise the extent to which it is something that she is able to recreate through her imagination.
II. The Trauma of Reality in Alice Munro’s Lives of Girls and Women.

Alice Munro was born Alice Laidlaw on July 10, 1931 in the small rural town of Wingham, Ontario. She went to Wingham and District High School. Her mother became seriously ill with Parkinson's when Munro was twelve and she was left to run the household. She later left home to study English at Western Ontario University and began to take writing seriously, publishing her first story "The Dimensions of a Shadow" in 1950 while still a student. She left university early and married James Munro. They moved to Vancouver, and then Victoria, British Columbia where she ran a bookshop with her husband and gave birth to three children. In 1968 she published her first collection of stories, Dance of the Happy Shades, which won the Governor General's Literary Award. This success was followed by Lives of Girls and Women (1971), a collection of interlinked stories that was published as a novel and won the Canadian Booksellers Association International Book Year Award. In 1972 she separated from her husband and returned to Ontario where she took up the position of writer-in-residence at University of Western Ontario. In 1974 she published another collection of stories Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You.

She met and married Gerald Fremlin in 1976 and they moved to a farm outside Clinton, Ontario. Her next collection of stories Who Do You Think You Are? (entitled The Beggar Maid in American and English editions) was published in 1978, which won the Governor General's Literary Award. She took up a position at University of British Columbia and University of Queensland in 1980 and continues to write, publishing Moons of Jupiter (1982) The Progress of Love (1986) wins Governor General's Literary Award and Marian Engel Prize. Friend

Munro is widely regarded as Canada's best writer of short stories. Lives of Girls and Women is like her other collections of stories in that it is full of penetrating insight into the daily lives of people in Ontario. Munro’s detailing of everyday life has, however, led her stories to be interpreted in quite simplistic terms as mere observations about her family, friends and community. Munro’s rejection of this reading stems from the fact that her novels are much more than this; they are meditations on the nature of reality and on the way that writing in particular can falsify this hidden world.

Morag’s ability, in The Diviners, to perceive the past as a trace and an interpretation is also achieved by Munro’s protagonist Del in Lives of Girls and Women. In a similar manner to Laurence, Munro depicts her protagonist retrospectively examining the events of her life and, through this, reaching a dualistic perception of the past. Whereas Laurence’s novel focuses on Morag’s avoidance of the traumatic experience of her parents’ deaths, Munro’s novel utilises the incomprehensibility of death as a metaphor for the traumatic ambiguity of reality in general. Munro presents reality as inherently contradictory and illustrates the way that, when Del was younger, she had used language and stories to protect herself from a world which seemed strange and unfamiliar. Through her retrospective narrative Del is able to recognise the limitations of her
consoling narratives; she becomes aware of the indeterminacy of reality and develops a more heterogeneous narrative form which does not attempt to define or resolve these contradictions.

The short episodes that follow Del Jordan from childhood to adolescence demonstrate her developing awareness of different forms of representation and interpretation, her own attempts at novel writing and, in the final episode, her questioning of the limitations and possibilities of fiction. The first story in the collection, 'The Flats Road', portrays Del looking back on the distinction she had made as a child between the strange and the familiar; these two worlds are exemplified by, on the one hand, Uncle Benny's bizarre stories and, on the other, her mother's comfortingly realistic explanations of events. Del illustrates the way in which when she was younger she had preferred the consolations of the familiar and had avoided anything that seemed strange. She also highlights that she had used fiction to protect herself from unusual or threatening events, which is particularly apparent in the episode in which she had transformed Uncle Benny's violent and erratic wife into a figure in a fairytale to protect herself from her strangeness.

In the next story, entitled 'Heirs of the Living Body', Del recounts her rejection of her Uncle Craig's perception of the past, which is illustrated through her reaction to his town history and family tree: Del dismisses these historical projects as they concentrate solely on the surface detail of people's lives, whereas she is interested in the stories behind the factual details. Del retrospectively connects her rejection of Craig's historical perception with two separate encounters with death that she had faced when she was young; the first encounter was her discovery of a dead cow lying in a field and her failure to give this
incomprehensible object meaning; the second experience occurred when her Uncle Craig died and she had tried to use language as a way of avoiding the ambiguity of death. In 'Princess Ida' Del continues her examination of historical representation by depicting her mother's perception of the past; through this, Del realises that her mother was imprisoned by her ambiguous feelings about her impoverished childhood, which is a similar situation to Morag in *The Diviners*. Through Del's mother's fragmented stories, Del reconstructs her mother's childhood as a gothic fiction; however, when Del's Uncle Bill visits, his memories of his childhood contradict Del's mother's version and so teach Del the extent to which the past is re-interpreted through the imagination.

In 'Age of Faith' Del recalls her attempts to use religion as a means of controlling the mystery of reality. However, once again, Del's attempts to imprint some design on the incomprehensibility of reality fail; this is illustrated in the episode in which Del is unable to provide any religious meaning regarding the family dog's death to console her younger brother Owen, a failure which convinces Del that religion is too limiting to be able to encompass the ambiguity of reality. In the following story, 'Changes and Ceremonies', Del recalls the struggle that she had experienced when younger between what she perceived as the oppositions of life and art: to illustrate this, Del uses the example of the school operetta as a form of artistic expression which stands in opposition to their normal daily routine. In this story, Del also recalls the suicide of the teacher who directed the operettas to define the moment when her younger self was forced to confront the contradictions of life, in the different facets of Miss Farris' personality that she had to accept; through this, Del is made to realise that these contradictions cannot necessarily be resolved.
The episodes presented in these stories demonstrate Del's development of an awareness of the incomprehensibility of reality and the failure of her attempts to define this ambiguity through narrative organisation, and so lead towards the final story in the collection, entitled 'Epilogue: The Photographer', in which Del examines her past attempts at representing the world through writing. In this story, Del recalls the novel that she had started writing when she was younger, in which she had transformed a local family into her fictional version; in particular, she had fictionalised the daughter Marion into Caroline and then created a story in which Caroline commits suicide as a result of her doomed love affair with a photographer. Through Del's novelistic depiction of the photographer, Munro directly explores the possibilities of photographic representation as being a trace of reality and an interpretation. By examining Del's fiction writing endeavours, Munro illustrates Del's development of a more open-ended perception which is achieved through her awareness that her novel had attempted to avoid the reality of the family on which it was based. This realisation occurs when Del meets the son of the real Sheriff family and is forced to consider the reality which conflicts with her fictional version. Through this confrontation of fiction with reality, Del becomes aware of the mystery of reality which lies beneath the familiar surface. She awakens to fiction's ability to access this strangeness through a perception of the past as a trace of reality and an imaginative reconstruction.

Del's retrospective narrative is similar to Morag's in The Diviners; however, rather than two distinct narrative voices, as occurs in the separation between the sections in the present and the 'Memorybank Movies' of the past in Laurence's novel, the older and younger voices of Munro's protagonist intertwine so that the boundary between the actual events and the re-organisation of these
events through narrative is blurred. This ‘retrospective narrative technique’ ensures, as Thacker argues, that ‘Del treads a fine line between the two points of view […]’ Her older voice seldom intrudes overtly; instead, it is subtly present to instruct, clarify and expand the younger narrator’s pronouncements’ (56) so that the older voice which organises the experiences is felt through ‘covert intrusions’ (Thacker 56) rather than obvious commentary. This older voice belongs to Del the fiction writer who is re-interpreting her life and organising it into a coherent pattern with the insight that she has later gained. However, this kind of retrospective interpretation risks a resolution of the complexities of the past; as Orange argues, Del’s position as a writer who is re-organising her life ‘reinforces the reader’s assumption that the events of the story have some implicit, or even explicit, meaning in that the writer has set her experience into the form of a story’ (85). In this respect, Munro’s fiction risks becoming a way of controlling the chaotic nature of reality by ‘imaginatively transforming random experience into a coherent pattern’ (Lamont-Stewart 114). This utilisation of fiction as a means of ‘asserting a measure of control over the distressing confusion of the world’ (Lamont-Stewart 121) then becomes a way of avoiding rather than confronting reality, as Munro herself fears may occur in her fiction; as she explains: ‘Even as I most fervently, desperately practice it, I am a little afraid that the work with words may turn out to be a questionable truth, an evasion (and never more so than when it is most dazzling, apt and striking), an unavoidable lie’ (qtd. in Thacker 62).

How, then, does Munro avoid this ‘evasion’ of reality? I argue that she does so through concepts of representation which she derives from photography. Munro’s particular short story form has been repeatedly compared to photographs; her organisation of her protagonists’ lives into isolated episodes, rather than
extended narratives, has led critics to consider the photograph as an appropriate analogy for her stories. Munro, herself, has invited this comparison through her repeated references to photographs throughout her stories; for example, in this collection she entitles her most self-reflexive and metafictional chapter ‘Epilogue: The Photographer’ to create an unmistakable link between Del’s attempts at representation and photography. Munro has also referred to her adoption of the metaphor of the photograph in numerous interviews, declaring an interest in photography\(^8\) and explaining her selection of the photograph in terms of the way that she perceives people’s lives: ‘There are just flashes of things we know and find out ... I like looking at people’s lives over a number of years, without continuity. Like catching them in snapshots ... I don’t see that people develop and arrive somewhere. I just see people living in flashes, from time to time’ (qtd. in Bowen, 22).

However, the argument put forward by Bowen and other critics, that Munro’s use of the metaphor of the photograph relates solely to the attempted pictorial aspect in her writing, is complicated in *Lives of Girls and Women* by her extension of the short story collection into what she calls an ‘episodic novel’ (qtd. in Besner 35). In this collection, each episode from Del’s life is recounted through a form which, as Howells suggests, ‘blur[s] the distinction’ (11) between the seemingly opposite genres of the novel and short story: each section can be read in isolation as a complete story, or as part of a larger whole as a chapter in a novel. Thus, in certain chapters, information is given to the reader which repeats that provided in a previous story, and in other chapters, reference is made to overtly connect the story to a previous episode. In addition to this, although

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\(^8\) See Bowen for a fuller description of Munro’s interest in photography.
altogether the stories form a chronological order, certain chapters, for example, ‘Age of Faith’, backtrack to a previous moment, while others remain outside of the episodic organisation of the stories to cover a more extensive period of Del’s life; this occurs significantly in ‘Epilogue: The Photographer’ which describes Del’s development of fiction writing over time.

Therefore, the similarity between Munro’s fiction and photography in this collection must exist for other reasons than that her episodes imitate photographic images. I argue that this other reason is that the photograph, as Barthes argues, is a trace of reality and an interpretation, and so it offers Munro a form of representation which allows for a sense of the past as a real occurrence and a reconstruction. Munro enacts the development of this dual nature of representation through Del’s various endeavours at writing: Del progresses from an attempt to utilise her writing as a means of avoiding the paradoxical nature of the real world by transforming it into an idealistic or romantic fictionalisation, to a realisation of the limitations of this and, therefore, to an awareness of a dual form of writing which is able to confront the contradictory nature of reality and not attempt to limit it through narrative consolation. The novel that we read, therefore, is Del’s retrospective re-creation of her childhood which combines a sense of the actuality of her past and a realisation that the past is also something which is re-created through the imagination.

Munro combines the two aspects of trace and interpretation in her work as she re-creates places, people and events from her own life in her fictional stories. This technique has resulted in her work being interpreted solely as autobiographical and much of the early criticism is obsessed with tracing the references in her stories to real events in her life. Munro has repeatedly stated in
interviews that this limited interpretation of her stories is a mis-reading of the complex processes at work in her fiction: she argues that she does not unproblematically write about her past but, instead, translates and interprets the places, people and events in her life through the creative imagination. Munro’s apparently realistic technique also contributes to this kind of reading of her work; she uses ‘intensely realistic detail to root her fiction in the illusion of the ‘real’ world - in life’ (Smythe 493) in an effort, as Munro herself states, ‘to be able to get at the exact tone or texture of how things are’ (qtd. in Lamont-Stewart 113). However, this attempt at realism relies on fictional techniques just as much as the most experimental forms of writing, as Munro suggests: ‘What I most admire is where the fictionalising is as unobtrusive as possible, where there has been as strong an attempt, as honest an attempt, as one can make to get at what is really there. But I’m not so naïve as to suppose that even this, of course, is not trickery’ (qtd in Struthers 6). Therefore, it is the amalgamation of the details of the past and their re-interpretation, and not just the recording of facts from the past, that is the technique that Munro utilises to create her fiction; as Besner argues: ‘The texture of Lives of Girls and Women presents us […] with a composition of seemingly opposed impulses organised around the documentary, objective recording of a ‘real’ past and the imaginative recreation of a fictional one’ (13). Thus, Munro’s apparent realism is actually a complex amalgamation of realism and experimentalism. The reason, therefore, that the photograph is such an appropriate analogy for Munro’s work is due less to its pictorial nature and more to its apparent realism which masks the interpretation underlying it; as Conde argues, photographs ‘convey Munro’s conviction that the ‘true lies’ of memory

82 See Thacker for a fuller discussion of this aspect of Munro’s fiction.
and interpretation are the only reality we can ever know' (110).

Throughout *Lives of Girls and Women* this duality of realism and experimentalism, which Howells calls 'double vision' (31), is evident in the juxtaposition of the strange and the familiar; rather than being held in tension, these are intertwined so that the strange is perceived at the heart of the familiar, creating 'a defamiliarization of the ordinary' (Smythe 494). Munro perceives reality as 'inherently and physically contradictory' (Bowen 31) and so attempts to re-create this 'paradoxical nature of the world' (McMullen 145) in her fiction. Thus, the representation that Munro creates is that of a hyper-realism, in which the focus on the surface details of reality allows the reader to sense some kind of hidden depth to this world. The difficulty of attempting to classify this effect in Munro's fiction is evident in the various discussions of this aspect of her work; for example, Conron describes it as 'a kind of illusionary, three-dimensional aspect, a super-realism or magical or mysterious suggestion of a soul beyond the objects depicted' (110). Munro has herself described this in terms of a hidden meaning beyond the surface of perceived reality: 'Even totally commonplace things [...] Are endlessly interesting in their physical reality [...] they seem to mean something way beyond themselves' (qtd. in Bowen 25).

The difficulty in defining this aspect of Munro's writing can be perceived in terms of the more subconscious effect that it has on the reader which seems to evade interpretation, and so her fiction seems to communicate through the unassimilable forms in the unconscious, rather than through conscious inscription. The argument proposed by critics that Munro's stories require intuition as an interpretative tool suggests the idea that her stories communicate on a level

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83 For example, Conron argues that Munro's 'extended images [...] evoke in the reader an intuitive
which exceeds the intellectual and conscious interpretation required by most forms of representation. Munro’s fiction is repeatedly perceived as communicating its meaning through moments of revelation in which that which lies beneath the surface of the familiar is exposed to the reader. These revelations have been conceptualised by critics, such as Smythe, as epiphanies; however, I argue that the effect they have is very different from the kind of knowledge revealed in an epiphany. In an epiphanic moment, as Smythe argues, the revelation produces ‘the effect of knowledge, of certainty’ (494); however, Munro’s moments of revelation refuse to provide certainty and conscious knowledge, and work more in terms of Barthes’ punctum. This formulation is conveyed in what can be perceived as the co-presence of the studium and the punctum in Munro’s fiction, in which, as Smythe argues, ‘the studium is that which produces the reality effect’ which is the surface, autobiographical and realistic detail in her stories, and ‘the punctum produces the surprise, the shock of revelation’ (495). Therefore, Munro’s juxtaposition of the strange and the familiar creates what Munro calls ‘queer bright moments’ (qtd. in Smythe 494) which reveal the hidden depths beneath the surface of the ordinary, but do so, not through conscious knowledge which provides resolution, but by leaping from the page as Barthes’ punctum shoots from the photograph, and attacking the reader on a subconscious level beyond interpretation. This form of representation creates an effect which is similar to Barthes’ ‘blind field’ in that, rather than creating resolution and thus a form of writing that evades the reality of the past by

awareness of a story’s entire impact’ (110)

84 My reading of Munro’s fiction, whilst similar to Smythe’s notion of the co-presence of the studium and punctum, disagrees with his argument that Munro’s moments of revelation lead to elegiac consolation in the same way as conventional epiphanies.
reducing it to narrative consolation, Munro's fiction refuses closure and creates a form of representation that exists beyond the confines of the page to live more in the minds of her readers. This is the effect that Munro has stated she wants to achieve in her writing: 'I want the story to keep going on. I want the story to exist somewhere so that in a way it's still happening, or happening over and over again. I don't want it to be shut up in a book and put away' (qtd. in Howells 11).

This is the form of representation, therefore, that Munro wants Del to achieve. By allowing Del to experience different kinds of interpretation of the world, and by depicting her experience of these 'queer bright moments' which arise from the juxtaposition of the strange and the familiar, Munro takes Del on a journey towards an understanding that her attempts at fiction are too limiting, whether in terms of her transformation of reality into a romantic idealisation, or her attempt to evade the strangeness of reality by reducing it to narrative resolution. At the end of the collection, Munro offers Del a moment of revelation which leaves her, and the reader, with a greater awareness of the duality of representation as both a trace of reality and an imaginative re-construction.

Section One: The transformation of the mystery of reality through narrative consolation in 'The Flats Road'.

The opening line of the first story in the collection sets the tone of retrospective narrative in that it depicts Del's representation of a childhood moment by the river with her brother Owen and eccentric neighbour 'Uncle Benny': 'We spent days along the Wanawash river, helping Uncle Benny fish' (1). This retrospective tone is apparent at different moments throughout the story;
for example, in comments from the older Del such as ‘though I did not know it then’ (8). The immediately organising effect of this retrospective narrative is, however, unsettled by the defamiliarization techniques which Munro utilises. For example, rather than Munro providing necessary information to the reader, such as Del’s name and age, she throws the reader into the middle of Del’s reverie. In addition, one of the only certainties initially provided, the naming of Uncle Benny in the first line, is retracted by Del’s explanation that ‘He was not our uncle, or anybody’s’ (1). Therefore, Munro complicates the organising efforts of the retrospective narrative by refusing the reader’s attempts to navigate the opening paragraphs according to conventional reading strategies.

Munro uses this first story to introduce the theme of the contradictions and paradoxes of reality, through Del’s attempts to organise the oppositional worlds inhabited by Uncle Benny and her mother. Uncle Benny is described by Del as an eccentric figure who lives in a mysterious world which contrasts with the safe, domestic world occupied by her mother, who, as Del claims, cannot bear ‘haphazard lives’ (8). Uncle Benny constantly tells tales that seem ‘extraordinary (3) and ‘preposterous’ (3) to Del; most of his stories describe the wilderness that surrounds the area in which they live; for example, he asserts that there is ‘a quicksand hole in [the Grenoch swamp] which would take down a two-ton truck like a bite for breakfast’ (2), and he describes the ‘holes in the Wanawash river that [are] twenty feet deep in the middle of summer’ (2). In this respect, Uncle Benny is associated with the mystery of nature through his knowledge about the uncharted territory of the swamp, evident in his claim that he is the ‘only person who had been right through the swamp, not just made little trips in around the edges’ (2). To contrast with Uncle Benny’s association with the mystery of the
world, Munro portrays Del's mother's need for realistic and reasonable explanations, as Del explains: Uncle Benny 'told stories, in which there was nearly always something happening that my mother would insist could not have happened' (9). One example of this kind of story is Uncle Benny's tale about Sandy Stevenson who, after marrying a recently-widowed woman, is haunted by the ghost of her dead husband. After hearing this tale, Del's mother replies "But you don't believe that, do you?" (9) and continues to provide a reasonable explanation that 'it was all coincidence, imagination, self-suggestion' (10) rather than a real haunting; in response to Del's mother's dismissal of his story, Uncle Benny asserts its truth by stating that he had seen, as evidence of the haunting, the bruises left by the ghost on Sandy's body.

In Munro's first story, Del cannot discover the connection between the two worlds of the strange and familiar, but, instead, veers from one to the other. This is evident in Del's journey from Uncle Benny's house to her own home: whilst visiting Uncle Benny, Del gorges herself on the extraordinary stories in his tabloid newspaper, stories with headlines such as:

FATHER FEEDS TWIN DAUGHTERS TO HOGS
WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO HUMAN MONKEY
VIRGIN RAPED ON CROSS BY CRAZED MONKS
SEND HUSBAND'S TORSO BY MAIL (5)

In response to knowing that she would not be allowed to read these papers in her parents' house, Del reads 'faster and faster, all [she] could hold, then reeled out into the sun, onto the path that led to [her home] across the fields. [She is] bloated and giddy from revelations of evil, of its versatility and grand invention and horrific playfulness' (5). However, the impact of these stories subsides as Del
nears the ordinariness of her parents' house; as she explains:

But the nearer I got to our house the more this vision faded. Why was it that
the plain back wall of home, the pale chipped brick, the cement platform
outside the kitchen door, washtubs hanging on nails, the pump, the lilac
bush with brown-spotted leaves, should make it seem doubtful that a woman
would really send her husband's torso, wrapped in Christmas paper, by mail
to his girl friend in South Carolina? (5)

Del’s question, which vividly depicts her house in term of the comforts of the
familiar, is significant in that it can be perceived as being asked by both the
younger and older Del with opposing connotations. On the one hand, it is a
rhetorical question from the younger Del asserting the obvious reasons why the
story of a woman sending her husband's torso by post seems absurd. However,
on the other hand, it is spoken by the older Del, who retrospectively questions
why her younger self felt this need to construct a barrier between the mysterious
and the familiar, and why she had always chosen the comforts of the familiar over
the giddiness of the strange. Del’s discomfort with the unfamiliar is apparent
when as a child she refuses to look directly at the house, belonging to a strange
local man Mitch Plim, which ‘seemed to embody so much that was evil and
mysterious that [Del] would never look at it directly, and walked by with [her]
face set stiffly ahead’ (7). Del’s avoidance of the unfamiliar is also evident in her
attitude towards the local mad woman, Irene Pollox, who ‘would chase children
on the road and hang over her gate crowing and flapping like a drunken rooster’
(7). Del, like the rest of the town, chants a rhyme when passing Irene’s house as a
form of protection from the danger which lurks there: ‘Irene don’t come after me /
Or I’ll hang you by your tits in a crab-apple tree’ (7). This rhyme transforms
Irene into an absurd figure to diminish the anxiety felt towards her, and is the first example that Munro cites of Del's use of words to protect herself from the mystery of reality.

Del, even at this early stage in her life, perceives the world through the transforming effects of story telling; this is apparent, for example, when she describes her mother sitting 'on the steps holding the handle of the broom under her chin, like a witch in a story' (14). The most significant person whom Del transforms through fictionalisation is Uncle Benny's wife Madeleine. The entire story about Madeleine is strange and unusual: Uncle Benny is forced into marrying her after replying to an advert placed in the tabloid newspaper by her brother. When Uncle Benny returns to Jubilee with his new wife, she refuses to socialise with his friends, she is rude to Del's mother, and she locks herself away in Benny's house. On the rare occasion when she does walk into town, she shouts abuse at everyone, including Irene Pollox, and on one particular occasion when Del visits Uncle Benny's house she physically threatens and shouts abuse at Del. Del's response to this threatening situation is to perceive it through the eyes of an audience watching a play, a perception that diminishes the apparent danger of the situation: she observes that Madeleine's 'violence seemed calculated, theatrical; you wanted to stay and watch it, as if it were a show' (17) and she wishes she 'could take this scene back to tell at home' (17) as a way of transforming the threatening situation into a story. The rest of the town also represent Madeleine through stories, as Del explains: 'Stories of Madeleine were being passed up and down the road' (18). Indeed, even Uncle Benny, after his initial reticence to speak about her strange behaviour, begins to tell stories about her; he informs them that 'she had thrown a kettle through the window because there wasn't any
water in it. She had taken the scissors and cut up his green suit, which he had only worn once, at his wedding [...] She had said that she would set fire to the house, because he had brought her the wrong brand of cigarettes' (18). However, these amusing stories about Madeleine mask the real threat that she poses to her daughter Diane whom she physically abuses, as Del’s mother realises only after Madeleine has left Uncle Benny and taken Diane with her. Once Del’s mother has recognised the reality of Madeleine’s abuse she wants to tell the police so that they can track her down, but when she acknowledges the futility of these attempts, she joins the rest of the town in their willingness to erect the barrier of fiction:

After a while we would all just laugh, remembering Madeleine going down the road in her red jacket, with her legs like scissors, flinging abuse over her shoulder at Uncle Benny trailing after, with her child [...] Uncle Benny could have made up the beatings, my mother said at last, and took that for comfort; how was he to be trusted? Madeleine herself was like something he might have made up. We remembered her like a story, and having nothing else to give we gave our strange, belated, heartless applause.

“Madeleine! That madwoman!” (27)

This transformation of Madeleine, therefore, creates a story about her which, as Besner argues, can be ‘repeated until it becomes soothing and familiar’ (39).

In this first story, to contrast with the way that fiction can diminish the strangeness of reality, Munro emphasises the creative power of fiction which has the ability to make the audience experience an unknown reality. This is apparent in the story that Uncle Benny recounts about his journey to Toronto to find Madeleine after she has left him, as Del explains:

A map of the journey was burnt into his mind. And as he talked a different
landscape - cars, billboards, industrial buildings, roads and locked gates and high wire fences, railway tracks, steep cindery embankments, tin sheds, ditches with a little brown water in them, also tin cans, mashed cardboard cartons, all kinds of clogged or barely floating waste - all this seemed to grow up around us created by his monotonous, meticulously remembering voice, and we could see it. (25)

It is significant that this ability to allow others to see a mysterious and unknown reality is achieved through a mixture of memory - the map 'burnt into his mind' - and imagination - his ability to turn this experience into a story. Therefore, in this first story, Munro delineates the different effects that fiction can achieve: it can utilised either to evade the strangeness of reality, or, through a mixture of memory and imagination, to access the mystery of the world. Del, however, at this early stage in her life, is unable to perceive fiction's ability to access the hidden depths of reality, and she reaffirms her difference from Uncle Benny even whilst celebrating his power to make them experience the mystery of reality through his stories. This is evident in a much quoted paragraph towards the end of this story in which Del situates Uncle Benny's world as existing as an alternative reality:

So lying alongside our world was Uncle Benny's world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same. In that world people could go down in quicksand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities; luck and wickedness were gigantic and unpredictable; nothing was deserved, anything might happen; defeats were met with crazy satisfaction.

It was his triumph, that he couldn't know about, to make us see. (26)

It is significant that although Del celebrates Uncle Benny's ability to allow them to experience this strangeness, she still perceives the unfamiliar as troubling, and
so she protects herself from this disturbance by positioning the strange in Benny's world and not her own. However, in the following stories, Del develops a growing awareness of mystery as something which exists within the ordinary and she becomes increasingly aware of the power of fictional representation as a means of revealing these depths.

Section Two: Del's rejection of Uncle Craig's limited narratives in 'Heirs Of The Living Body'.

'Heirs of the Living Body' is the first of two stories which deal specifically with historical representation. In this story, Del is offered an objective, factual form of history conducted by her Uncle Craig in his documentation of the history of the Wanawash County; this is subsequently rejected by Del as being too limiting a form of historical representation. Initially, the opposing perspectives of Craig and Del, in relation to the perception of the past, are explored through their differing interpretations of a photograph of Uncle Craig's ancestors standing outside of the family house. Craig's interest in this photograph is purely in regards to its public, historical significance; its 'studium'. His dissatisfaction with Del's lack of historical knowledge about the time and place of the photograph emphasises his interest of the photograph solely as a historical document, as Del explains: 'He was disappointed with me [...] because of my inaccurate notions of time and history. "By the time I was born," he continued severely, "all that bush you see in the picture would be gone. That road would be gone. There would be a gravel road"' (29). Del, however, seems to perceive something else in the photograph, although this remains obscured; her
notion that the photograph seems to present 'another country, where everything
was much lower, muddier, darker than here' (28) implies an enigmatic quality of
the photograph which remains undefined, suggesting that its effect is analogous to
the indefinable, private experience of the punctum.

Uncle Craig is involved in two main historical projects: 'a history of
Wanawash county and a family tree, going back to 1670, in Ireland' (30-1). In his
family tree, he records the 'surface' information about his ancestors, as Del
describes:

Nobody in our family had done anything remarkable. They had married
other Irish Protestants and had large families. Some did not marry. Some of
the children died young. Four in one family were burned in a fire. One man
lost two wives in childbirth [...] And to Uncle Craig it seemed necessary
that the names of all of these people, their connections with each other, the
three large dates of birth and marriage and death, or the two of birth and
death if that was all that had happened to them, be discovered [...] and
written down here, in order, in his own large careful handwriting. (31)

Uncle Craig's attitude towards his family tree is repeated in his history of the
county, in which he records 'a great accumulation of the most ordinary facts,
which it was his business to get in order' (31). However, what is evident in Del's
portrayal of Uncle Craig's projects is the density of the experiences behind the
facts, which he omits in his obsession to record the details of daily life. Thus, in
Del's description of his family tree, she hints at the traumatic stories hidden
within the ordinary lives of her ancestors; the early deaths of the children, the
destruction of an entire family in a fire, and the tragic deaths of women during
childbirth. Del demonstrates an immediate curiosity for the stories behind the
facts: Craig’s disapproval of this interest highlights their very different perspectives on how to represent the past, as Del explains: ‘Uncle Craig gave out information; some that I was interested in, some that I wasn’t. I wanted to hear about how Jenkin’s Bend was named, after a young man killed by a falling tree just a little way up the road; he had been in this country less than a month’ (29). In this respect, Del’s interest lies in the imaginative transformation of these factual details into stories, which creates a more complex and detailed narrative than can be achieved by Craig’s documenting of the past. It is not surprising, then, that at the end of this story Del abandons Uncle Craig’s historical manuscript which she inherits when he dies.

Del informs the reader of this rejection of Uncle Craig’s historical representation only after she has recalled two episodes about death, as if it is her encounter with the incomprehensibility of death which convinces her that Craig’s historical documenting of the past is an insufficient and limiting form. The first encounter with death is Del’s discovery of a dead cow lying in a field. Del reacts to this object by trying to transform it into something comprehensible, evident when she states that she ‘could see the cow’s hide was a map. The brown could be the ocean, the white the floating continents’ (44). She continues this imposition of form onto the ambiguity of the dead body by tracing the outlines of the shapes on the cow’s body with a stick, ensuring that she keeps ‘the point of the stick exactly between the white and the brown’ (44) of the patterns on the cow’s hide. In this respect, Del’s initial response is to try impose a familiar pattern onto death and to achieve this through a desire to ensure the separation of the two colours, in the same way that she attempted, in the earlier story, to separate the two worlds of the familiar and strange rather than allow them to
merge. However, Del's attempts to define the dead cow falter when she traces her stick along the cow's neck to its face and then to its eye which, she admits, she is 'shy about looking at' (44). Del's shyness is then replaced with a lavish description of the cow's appearance, as Del relies on the transforming effects of narrative to avoid having to confront the anxiety she feels towards the dead cow's eye: 'The eye was wide open, dark, a smooth sightless bulge, with a sheen like silk and a reddish gleam in it, a reflection of light. An orange stuffed in a black silk stocking' (44). Del's transformation of the eye protects her from its otherness, as Besner states: 'Description itself becomes a kind of defence for Del, as if by imagining the eye in other terms, she might be able to protect herself from its actual impact' (47). The dead eye has diminished her sense of subjectivity by opening up the possibility of her own death; therefore, Del's translation of this dead eye into something else allows her to re-instate her position as the subject who has the power to define. Following this inscription of the eye in narrative, Del feels a desire to poke it with her stick 'to see if it would collapse, if it would quiver and break like a jelly, showing itself to be the same composition all the way through, or if the skin over the surface would break and let loose all sorts of putrid mess' (44). Del's desire to poke the eye can be perceived in terms of her desire to penetrate beneath the surface, just as she desires to reveal the hidden depths of the surface facts of Craig's history. However, she cannot yet achieve this revelation of the strange which lies beneath the surface of the familiar and, instead, traces the stick around the outside of the eye, again attempting to impose a design onto it. In response to her failure in defining the dead cow, Del desires to desecrate its dead body to gain power over it; as she explains: 'Being dead, it invited desecration. I wanted to poke it, trample it, pee on it, anything to punish
it, to show what contempt I had for it being dead' (44). However, the dead body still maintains its power over her which, significantly, manifests itself in terms of the 'gleaming strange map on its back' (44).

The second encounter that Del has with death is when her Uncle Craig dies and she tries, once again, to avoid the incomprehensibility of this event through the consolations of narrative, an evasion which is enacted literally in her avoidance of his dead body at the funeral. Del's first reaction to the news of her Uncle's death is to abstractedly ponder the word 'died' and to follow this with a general consideration of the ambiguity of meaning, particularly the meaning of the phrase 'heart attack', as Del explains: 'Heart attack. It sounded like an explosion, like fireworks going off, shooting sticks of light in all directions, shooting a little ball of light - that was Uncle Craig's heart, or his soul - high into the air, where it tumbled and went out' (46). These literary considerations of the ambiguity of language allow her to distance herself from the actuality of death. This behaviour is followed with a seemingly opposite desire to know the details of his death; although this may seem to be a contrasting response to her earlier avoidance of death it is, in fact, just another form of consoling evasion:

I followed [my mother] around the house, scowling, persistent, repeating my questions. I wanted to know. There is no protection, unless it is in knowing. I wanted death pinned down and isolated behind a wall of particular facts and circumstances, not floating around loose, ignored but powerful, waiting to get in anywhere. (46)

Del's avoidance of the concept of death is mirrored by her behaviour at the funeral in which she does everything that she can to avoid the dead body in the house. Del describes the house as a maze in which the 'black dot' at the centre is
her Uncle Craig's body that she must avoid at all costs: 'not to open even the safest-looking door because of what might be stretched out behind it' (49). To escape the possibility that she may accidentally enter the room in which the body is laid out, Del hides in the storeroom, a room which she recalls her Aunt describing as a 'tomb' (53). Del's recollection of this description of the storeroom leads her to consider the meaning of the word: 'I loved the sound of that word when I first heard her say it. I did not know exactly what it was, or had got it mixed up with womb, and I saw us inside some sort of hollow marble egg, filled with blue light, that did not need to get in from outside' (53). Del's association of the word 'tomb' with the comforting resonances of 'womb' illustrates the comfort that she receives from her literal and literary evasion of death. When Del finally gains the courage to view the dead body she struggles to define the incomprehensibility of death, which remains something powerful, beyond definition: 'He was the terrible, silent, indifferent conductor of forces that could flare up, in an instant, and burn through this room, all reality, leave us dark' (58).

In Del's retrospective narrative it is only once she has described these encounters with death that she then recalls how, later in her life, she had rejected Uncle Craig's manuscripts; her experience of the incomprehensibility of death is, therefore, the event which convinces her that Uncle Craig's documenting of history is too limiting a form to be able to encompass the ambiguity and mystery of reality. Uncle Craig's two sisters give Del the manuscript in the mistaken hope that she will continue his work in the same style that he had started it. Del, however, replaces the manuscript, which is preserved in a waterproof and fireproof tin, with poems and sections of a novel that she has written, and so replaces Craig's documentary style with the creative and imaginative works of
fiction she favours. She then puts the manuscript in a cardboard box in the cellar where, years later, it is destroyed by a flood. Del’s lack of interest in the manuscript, in which she explains that when she found it she ‘didn’t look to see how it was damaged, or whether it could be saved’ (62), emphasises her rejection of the kind of historical representation which is based solely on factual information. However, as is evident in the following stories this kind of documentary representation is replaced by an equally limiting romanticisation of reality.

Section Three: Del’s mother’s imprisonment in the past in ‘Princess Ida’.

The next story in the collection continues the concern with the possibilities and limitations of historical representation. This is firstly examined through Del’s love of the encyclopaedias that her mother sells, which, as Del explains, depict historical events ‘with a kind of operatic flourish, a superb unreality’ (65) and, thus, create a romantic fictionalisation of the past which convinces Del that the past actually existed in this way; as she explains: ‘I had the impression that in historical times the weather was always theatrical, ominous; landscape frowned, sea glimmered in various dull or metallic shades of gray’ (65). Del’s interest in historical representation becomes focused on her mother’s past, and she realises that her mother is trapped by her painful memories of her childhood. Her mother communicates these memories through fragmented references which Del pieces together to construct her mother’s past as a Gothic fiction with her mother’s childhood home as a Gothic house: ‘The barest, darkest, tallest of all old frame houses, simple and familiar yet with something terrible about it, enclosing evil,
like a house where a murder has been committed' (73). Del’s presentation of her mother’s childhood as Gothic illustrates her romanticisation of the past and also demonstrates that her mother is haunted by her past like a heroine in a Gothic novel. Del’s mother’s attitude towards her past is caused by the fact that she cannot forgive her own mother for the poverty in which they lived and for her mother’s religious fanaticism which caused her to spend money on buying Bibles to be distributed ‘to the heathen’ (75) rather than on buying food and clothes for her children. As evidence of her inability to relinquish her hold on the past, Del’s mother clings to her image of her younger self as someone who had the courage to leave this economically and emotionally impoverished family life and to work as a housemaid to earn the money to go to school; as Del explains:

   My mother could not help, could never help, being thrilled and tender, recalling this; she was full of wonder at her old, young self. Oh, if there could be a moment out of time, a moment when we could choose to be judged, naked as can be, beleaguered, triumphant, then that would have to be the moment for her. Later on comes compromise and error, perhaps; there, she is absurd and unassailable. (77)

In this respect, Del’s mother holds onto this earlier version of herself to deny her dissatisfaction with her present life as an ordinary farmer’s wife; as Del recognises: ‘My mother had not let anything go. Inside that self we knew, which might at times appear blurred a bit, or sidetracked, she kept her younger selves strenuous and hopeful; scenes from the past were liable to pop up any time, like lantern slides, against the cluttered fabric of the present’ (73). Del desires a more heroic and satisfying ending to her mother’s story; her need to believe that her mother’s life is a gothic drama and not an ordinary life emphasises her continued
separation of the mysterious and the ordinary: ‘In the beginning of her story was
dark captivity, suffering, then daring and defiance and escape. Struggle,
disappointment, more struggle, godmothers and villains. Now I expected as in all
momentous satisfying stories - the burst of Glory, the Reward.’ (78).

However, Del learns that her mother’s stories about the past are just one
version and that her mother’s lack of understanding about the duality of the past,
as something which is both a trace and an imaginative reconstruction, has trapped
her mother in its grasp. This realisation occurs when Del’s Uncle Bill visits and
complicates Del’s mother’s memories of the past by providing an alternative story
of their childhood. In his version, Bill selects a particular moment as
representative of his childhood, in which their mother had rescued a cocoon and
kept it safe indoors for it to emerge as a butterfly on Easter Day. Bill remembers
this beautiful moment as an example of their mother’s benevolent spirit and
therefore re-creates their childhood as them having ‘a simple life and hard work
and fresh air and a good spiritual example in our momma’ (86). Del struggles to
reconcile the story of the butterfly with her mother’s childhood stories, thinking to
herself; ‘That was in the same house. The same house where my mother used to
find the fire out and her mother at prayer’ (88) and she, therefore, gains an insight
into the different versions of the past.

Section Four: Del’s attempt to organise the incomprehensibility of reality through
the structure of religion in ‘Age of Faith’.

Del’s encounter with different ways of perceiving the world continues in
‘Age of Faith’ in which she becomes attracted to religion as a way of defining the
mystery of the world. In opposition to her mother’s wishes, Del begins to attend church with the hope of being able ‘to settle the question of God’ (95) and, therefore, she continues her reliance on definitions and distinctions which control the strangeness and ambiguity of reality. Whilst in the church she hopes that God will ‘display Himself ... like a dome of light, a bubble radiant and indisputable’ (95) and, rather than questioning the minister about the strength of his faith, she avoids talking to him in fear that he ‘might falter in defending his beliefs, or defining them’ (96). Del’s need for the reassurances of religion is evident when she believes that finding God will protect her from the incomprehensibility of reality:

> If God could be discovered, or recalled, everything would be safe ... It seemed plain to me that this was the only way the world could be borne, the only way it could be borne - if all those atoms, galaxies of atoms, were safe all the time whirling away in God’s mind. How could people rest, how could they go on breathing and existing, until they were sure of this? (99)

Eventually, Del abandons religion when she realises that it fails to explain the incomprehensibility of reality. Del’s rejection of a limiting form of representation occurs once again through her encounter with death, which, in this instance, occurs when her father decides that he must shoot the family dog to prevent it from attacking any more of their neighbour’s sheep. When Del’s father decides that Major has to be killed, Del’s younger brother Owen pleads with Del to ask God to intervene and let Major live. However, Del’s realisation of the futility of such a prayer leads her to consider that, rather than God being the familiar figure prayed to in churches, he might, instead, exist an indefinable incomprehensibility:

> ‘Could there be God not contained in the churches’ net at all, not made
manageable by any spells and crosses, God real and really in the world, and alien and unacceptable as death? Could there be God amazing, indifferent, beyond faith?’ (114). In this respect, Del begins to gain a sense of the incomprehensibility of the world which cannot be contained within the controlling structures of language, or of religion, as it exists beyond these representations.

Section Five: Del’s realisation of the contradiction inherent in reality in ‘Changes and Ceremonies’.

‘Changes and Ceremonies’ explores the relationship between fiction and life through the novels that Del reads, and the school operetta in which she takes part. In the opening pages, Del describes her continuing delight in reading novels, a habit which is outgrown by most girls in Jubilee:

I was happy in the library. Walls of printed pages, evidence of so many created worlds - this was a comfort to me. It was the opposite with Naomi [Del’s friend]; so many books weighed on her, making her feel oppressed and suspicious. She used to read - girls’ mystery books - but had outgrown the habit. This was the normal thing in Jubilee; reading books was [...] a habit to be abandoned when the seriousness and satisfactions of adult life took over. (116)

Fiction is construed by the town as being opposite to real life, and it is with this distinction that Del struggles throughout her life until she is able to reach an understanding of the necessary mingling of art and life. Del’s fascination with the created worlds of artistic representation and her contrasting of this to ‘life’ is illustrated in the description of the operetta which is being created by two
teachers, Miss Farris and Mr Boyce, who annually disturb the order and formality of the school day with their theatrical intrusions:

The operetta would keep growing and growing, it would push down all [Del's teacher's] rules, his divisions of time, like so many matchstick fences [...] The whole operetta, at present, was contained in [Miss Farris' and Mr Boyce's] two selves, but when the time came they would let it loose, it would belly out like a circus balloon, and we would all just have to hold on.

(121)

Del continues to separate art and life throughout her depiction of the operetta; it is something which is 'devoted to the manufacture of what was not true, not plainly necessary, but more important, once belief had been granted to it, than anything else we had' (129). However, the operetta, for all its disruptive power, is only a momentary interruption in the lives of the schoolchildren and is allowed to quickly disappear from view as the children return to their daily routines:

What happened after the operetta? In one week it had sunk from sight. Seeing some part of a costume, meant to be returned, hanging in the cloakroom was like seeing the Christmas tree, leaning against the back porch in January, browning bits of tinsel stuck to it, reminder of a time whose hectic expectations, and effort, seem now to have been somewhat misplaced. (137)

In fact, Del and the other children find comfort in the return to their daily lives, as if the strange and mysterious world created by the operetta can only be tolerated for a while and the real world of school life must, in the end, return everyone to their familiar setting.

The ending of this story emphasises the retrospective significance of the
operettas: they come to represent to Del her growing awareness that life is contradictory and ambiguous. This retrospective meaning is evident when Del recalls that years later she was told that the director of the operettas, Miss Farris, had committed suicide by drowning in the Wanawash river. Del struggles to come to terms with this incomprehensible act; she believes that it is 'a mystery presented without explanation and without hope of explanation, in all insolence, like a clear blue sky. No revelation here' (139). She finally realises that she must give up her attempts at making sense out of this ambiguous event and accept that reality itself is contradictory. Del associates the different recollections of Miss Farris with the different versions of the operetta, which Del perceives as 'bubbles [...] set free' by Miss Farris (139), as a way of illustrating this contradiction which confuses her:

Miss Farris in her velvet skating costume, her jaunty fur hat bobbing among the skaters, always marking her out [...] Miss Farris painting faces in the Council Chambers, Miss Farris floating face down, unresisting in the Wanawash river, six days before she was found. Though there is no plausible way of hanging those pictures together - if the last one is true then must it not alter the others - they are going to have to stay together now.

(139)

In this respect, Del begins to gain a sense of the contradictions of reality which cannot always be resolved.
Section Six: The photograph as a dual form of representation in 'Epilogue: The Photographer'.

Del’s encounters with different forms of representation, with death and with the contradictory nature of the world throughout these stories compels her, in the epilogue, to examine her own endeavours at fiction writing; this is conducted through an examination of photographic representation. The epilogue is crucial to the overall structure of the collection; as Munro explains: ‘I found eventually that the book didn’t mean anything to me without it’ (Bowen, 20). It opens with Del looking back on her earlier decision to write a novel and her choice of the Sheriff family as the subject matter for her novel. Del’s decision to take real life as the subject of her fiction is not evidence of her realisation of the necessary duality of representation as both a trace and an interpretation. Instead, she chooses the family as she believes them to be extraordinary, because the daughter committed suicide, one of brothers died an alcoholic and the other brother lives in a mental asylum, and so the family seems, to Del, more appropriate for fictionalisation than ‘ordinary’ families; as she explains: ‘A time came when all the books in the library in the Town Hall were not enough for me, I had to have my own. I saw that the only thing to do with my life was to write a novel. I picked on the Sheriff family to write about; what had happened to them isolated them, splendidly, doomed them to fiction’ (240). However, rather than representing the Sheriffs as they are, in all of their perceived otherness, Del normalises them by making them seem more realistic. For example, she changes their father’s occupation from ‘a storekeeper to a judge [as she] knew from [her] reading that in the families of judges, as of great land-owners, degeneracy and madness were things to be
counted on' (240) and she omits the alcoholic older brother as 'three tragic destinies were too much even for a book' (241). The story that Del creates around this family focuses on Marion, the daughter who committed suicide. Del transforms her into her fictional Caroline, who replaces the real girl, 'blotting out altogether that pudgy Marion' (242), and writes a bizarre and disturbing story in which Caroline falls in love with a photographer and subsequently drowns herself when he abandons her after making her pregnant.

Munro utilises the story that Del writes about the photographer to examine the limitations and possibilities of photographic representation. She explores the limitations of the photograph through depictions of it in terms of death, as if it is a death-dealing rather than life-giving form of representation. This is apparent in the description of the photographer in Del's story: the black cloth and the 'black hair [...] combed back in two wings' conjure up images of the Grim Reaper, and his 'hump of gray-black', his 'wicked, fluid energy' and 'bright unpitying smile' construct an image of the devil. These images vividly illustrate Barthes' statement that photographers are 'agents of death' (*Camera* 14), which he makes because he believes that the subject of a photograph becomes 'total Image, which is to say, Death in Person' (*Camera* 14). Barthes proposes that the process of taking a photograph transforms the person photographed from a subject into an object which, he argues, makes the subject of the photograph experience 'a micro-version of death' (*Camera* 14). Barthes' notion of the transmutation of subject into object which occurs in photographs is mirrored by Munro's portrayal of the photographer as an object rather than a subject; this is apparent when Caroline first meets the

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85 This phrase is used by Linda Hutcheon in *The Canadian Postmodern* (46-53) in relation to Canadian writers' utilisation of the metaphor of the photograph.
photographer and perceives him to be an integral part of his photographic equipment: ‘She saw him first shrouded in his photographer’s black cloth, a hump of gray-black, shabby cloth behind the tripod, the big eye, the black accordion pleating of the old-fashioned camera’ (242). The description of Caroline’s pregnancy does not instil images of life in an otherwise deathly narrative, but further extends the images of death that surround the entire episode in which the photographer features. Del uses the phrase ‘like a hard yellow gourd in her belly’ (243) to describe Caroline’s pregnancy; the image of a gourd contains no connotations of life, as the link between gourds and containers/ornaments creates an image of an object that denies any reference to seed or fruit which would denote life. Thus this image of pregnancy echoes what Barthes’ photograph enacts; it transforms subject into object, life into death.

However, Munro also utilises the association between photographs and death as a possibility of photographic representation, thus echoing Barthes’ proposition that death becomes the ultimate punctum of photography. This is evident in the images created by the photographer in Del’s story which communicate the punctum of death through their representation of their subjects as they will appear in the future:

People saw that in his pictures they had aged twenty or thirty years. Middle-aged people saw in their own features the terrible, growing inescapable likeness of their dead parents; young fresh girls and men showed what gaunt or dulled or stupid faces they would have when they were fifty. Brides looked pregnant, children adenoidal. (243)

However, Del has not yet realised the power of a representation that communicates through the punctum. Rather than allowing for a sense of the dual
nature of the photograph, its communication through the studium and the punctum, Del utilises her novel as a means of evading reality. This is apparent in the way that, through her novel, she transforms Jubilee into an unfamiliar and heightened version of reality:

It became an older, darker, more decaying town [...] People in it were very thin, like Caroline, or fat as bubbles. Their speech was subtle and evasive and bizarrely stupid; their platitudes crackled with madness. The season was always at the height of summer - white, brutal heat, dogs lying as if dead on the sidewalks, waves of air shuddering, jellylike, over the empty highway. (243)

Del’s use of the word ‘bubbles’ in this passage associates her novel with the operettas in ‘Changes and Ceremonies’, emphasising her perception of her novel as a created world which is opposed to the ordinary world of Jubilee. In fact, her depiction of Jubilee seems very much like an over-exposed photograph which is too stark to be able to reveal anything, and which, therefore, ‘obscures the real place for her’ (Howells 47). Therefore, Del cannot perceive the potential of photographic representation for narrative, its ability to reveal the hidden depths of reality through the punctum, but instead prefers to over-expose her photographic depiction to create an unreal image of reality. Her utilisation of her novel to avoid reality is evident in her description of it as ‘one of those magic boxes a favoured character gets hold of in a fairy story: touch it and his troubles disappear’ (241).

However, Del cannot avoid reality forever, and even as she transforms her town into an unreal other world, she is disturbed by the realistic detail which disrupts her fiction; for example, she is aware that her portrayal of the town in the height of summer contradicts her depiction of Caroline drowning in the river:
But how, then - for niggling considerations of fact would pop up, occasionally, to worry me - how then was there going to be enough water in the Wanawash river? Instead of moving, head bowed, moonlight-naked, acquiescent into its depths, Caroline would have to lie down on her face as if she was drowning herself in the bathtub. (244)

Del's confrontation with reality eventually occurs later in her life when the real Bobby Sheriff, home from the mental asylum, invites her into his house for a drink of lemonade and a slice of cake. The ordinariness of Bobby Sheriff, depicted through the mundane details of the plate, fork and napkin which he hands to Del, forces Del to realise the extent to which she had attempted to transform reality through the novel that she had written when she was younger:

The ordinariness of everything brought me up short, made me remember. *This was the Sheriffs' house.* I could see a little bit of the hallway, brown and pink wallpaper, through the screen door. That was the doorway through which Marion had walked. Going to school. Going to play tennis. Going to the Wanawash river. Marion was Caroline. She was all I had, to start with; her act and her secrecy. (246)

Del's awareness that her fiction had avoided the reality of the Sheriff family makes her realise the reasons why, as she had got older, she 'had lost faith' (247) in her novel. Although, Del explains, she had always believed 'that [her novel] was carefully stored away, to be brought out some time in the future' (247), she now understands that her novel was a 'mysterious and, as it turned out unreliable, structure' (247). This makes her recognise that 'damage had been done' (247) to reality through her evasion of the mystery of the reality of the Sheriff family when she had transformed them into a consoling fiction. This awareness makes her
question what happened to the real Sheriff family:

And what happened, I asked myself, to Marion? Not to Caroline. *What happened to Marion?* What happened to Bobby Sheriff when he had to stop baking cakes and go back to the asylum? Such questions persist in spite of novels. It is a shock when you have dealt so cunningly, powerfully, with reality, to come back and find it still there. (247)

Del’s confrontation with the reality of Bobby Sheriff causes her to become aware of the detail of life in Jubilee; this is evident in that as Bobby is talking to her Del begins to note the ordinary daily details of Jubilee: ‘At ten o’clock the banks would open, the Canadian Bank of Commerce, and the Dominion Bank across the street. At twelve-thirty, a bus would go through the town, southbound from Owen Sound to London’ (249).

Del retrospectively recalls how this awareness of the reality of life caused her to become obsessed with making a list of these details, ‘a list of all the stores and businesses going up and down the main street and who owned them, a list of family names, names on the tombstones in the cemetery and any inscriptions underneath. (249). These lists repeat Uncle Craig’s documentation of the history of Wanawash County and hence, in an attempt to avoid her romantic fictionalisation, Del has shifted too far in the other direction by relying on factual information as a means of achieving a sense of realism. However, Del’s retrospective voice informs the reader that she eventually abandons these lists as ‘no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion’ (249). Del, therefore, has acknowledged that her desired form of representation, which depicts every layer of reality, cannot be achieved.
either through an evasive fictionalisation of reality or through a listing of factual reality, but must occur by combining a sense of the trace of reality and its imaginative reconstruction. This realisation occurs in the older Del who is retrospectively re-ordering her life, and is apparent in her intrusion into the narrative when she states that ‘people’s lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable - deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum’ (249). This much quoted line from the novel highlights that the older Del has eventually realised that reality is a mixture of the familiar and the strange, the kitchen linoleum and the deep caves, that it is, simultaneously, simple and unfathomable, and that the work of fiction is to reveal these hidden depths through attention to the ordinariness which lies on the surface.

Munro chooses not to define the actual moment of Del’s recognition of this possibility of fiction, but, allows it to remain beyond the pages of her novel and thus in the reader’s imagination. Instead of a more explicit depiction of Del’s realisation, Munro portrays Del’s experience of a moment which opens up her mind to the ambiguity of reality, as it opens the reader’s mind to the possibilities of fictional representation. This occurs when Del watches Bobby Sheriff perform an unusual ballerina movement when clearing away the plate, fork, and napkin:

Then he did the only special thing he ever did for me. With those things in his hands, he rose on his toes like a dancer, like a plump ballerina. This action, accompanied by his delicate smile, appeared to be a joke not shared with me so much as displayed for me, and it seemed to have a concise meaning, a stylized meaning – to be a letter, or a whole word, in an alphabet I did not know. (250)

This is the concluding moment of the collection, and is utilised by Munro to
refuse any sense of closure to her episodic novel by creating an image which is ambiguous to Del and the reader. The incomprehensibility of this image creates an effect which is analogous to Barthes' blind field by allowing the novel to communicate latently in the reader’s mind once the novel has been finished. Therefore, Munro’s novel concludes by communicating to the reader through the unassimilable forms of the unconscious, rather than through conscious interpretation, and so allows reality to remain contradictory and ambiguous, rather than determined through a fixed narrative.
CHAPTER THREE

Representing the Unrepresentable in Roberts’ Daughters of the House and Murdoch’s The Sea, The Sea.

The writers studied so far in this thesis have all been concerned with the consequences of denying past traumas and the need to develop a means of confronting these pasts without creating a definitive version. Thus, Silko in Ceremony suggests that trauma allows the subject to experience an open-ended perception which dissolves the binary opposites inherent in Western thought; this allows a means of interpreting a traumatic past in a way that does not create a totalising version. In Beloved Morrison creates a narrative form that neither consoles nor shocks the reader; this allows him/her to interpret a traumatic past with an awareness of it as both a trace of reality and a re-interpretation of this through the creative imagination. This dualistic perception is also offered by Laurence to her protagonist, in The Diviners, to allow her to confront the trauma of her parents’ deaths and to complete her novel which is based upon a re-interpretation of her past. The issue of representation in The Diviners becomes the focus of Munro’s Lives of Girls and Women which portrays Del’s attempts to use writing as a means of avoiding the trauma of reality, and depicts her development of a narrative form that, through this dualistic perception, is able to acknowledge indeterminacy and contradiction.

Roberts’ Daughters of the House and Murdoch’s The Sea, The Sea, the final two novels in this thesis, bring together the varying concerns of these four novels. They illustrate the consequences of denying the past and in so doing propose the need to confront the past. Through an emphasis on writing as a
means of bearing witness to the past, they highlight the need to create a narrative form that avoids fixing trauma by acknowledging the impossibility of representing the unrepresentability of trauma. Roberts emphasises the need for a less totalising form of narrative by situating her novel within the horrific events of the Second World War and, in particular, the Holocaust, in her depiction of the two girls' endeavours to discover the events that those who experienced the war refuse to explain. Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* centres upon the protagonist's desire to transform his past to examine an attempt to avoid the trauma of reality.

In *Daughters of the House*, the predominant disavowed narrative from the war is that regarding a Jewish family, who had taken refuge in the village after escaping from transportation to a concentration camp, but who were murdered by the Germans when they were betrayed by someone in the village. The villagers' attempts to forget these events fail as the past inevitably returns, firstly when one of the daughters, Léonie, hears the Jewish family's ghostly voices at night, and secondly when, years later, the community's refusal to confront the past causes it to resurface in the form of Neo-Nazism. The second occluded event that occurred during the war is that Léonie and Thérèse's mother, Antoinette, was raped by a German soldier. This event is also kept hidden from the girls who are the offspring of this rape, and, as a result of this denial, they are raised as cousins, rather than sisters. The girls eventually discover the truth about both of these events but choose to deny this discovery until, years later when they are adults, Thérèse decides that they must both confront the past.

In *The Sea, The Sea*, when Charles, a retired theatre director, retires to the sea to write his memoirs he unexpectedly meets his childhood sweetheart Hartley whom he then pursues in the mistaken belief that he can re-create the relationship
that they enjoyed together as children. However, Charles is an unreliable narrator and the reader must read beyond his version of the past to perceive that the perfect relationship between Charles and Hartley which Charles is trying to re-experience is just a fantasy. Eventually Charles realises this and his recognition allows him to accept his true feelings for his cousin James which have been masked by Hartley. Therefore, Charles' fantasies are depicted as a series of layers which screen him from the reality underneath.

Both novels, therefore, explore the protagonists' relationships with the past and examine ways in which this past can be witnessed without becoming fixed. They firstly depict the consequences of denying the past: in *Daughters of the House* the disavowal of the horrific events experienced during the German occupation of a French village in the Second World War causes these events to become encrypted within the subsequent generation, the two daughters of the novel's title; and in *The Sea, The Sea* the protagonist Charles is blinded from the truth by his attempts to re-create his childhood through fantasy. Both novels emphasise the totalising tendency of traditional narratives; thus in Roberts' novel the traumatic past has become fixed by the official commemoration of the events of the war, and in *The Sea, The Sea* Charles, like Del in Munro's novel, uses his journal as a means of effacing the past. Both novels offer a means of accessing these occluded pasts: in *Daughters of the House* this discovery is achieved by the two girls, who eventually confront the trauma of the past which has been hidden from them; in *The Sea, The Sea*, however, Charles never manages to discover the truth, and the reality which lies beyond his fantasy interpretation of events is revealed only to the reader who must see beyond Charles' unreliable description.

The organisation of the two novels according to the discovery of hidden
truths risks the fixing of these traumatic pasts through a realistic linear narrative; however, the writers avoid this through their utilisation of the uncanny to disrupt the homogeneity of narrative. The uncanny refuses the closure of homogeneity by disrupting the boundaries between self and other and, thus, offers a means of challenging the totalising impulse of narrative. This is apparent in Freud's conceptualisation of the uncanny in Schelling's terms as 'the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light' (224). Freud positions this formulation within his theories of the unconscious to argue that this repressed material which returns is projected 'outwards as something foreign to itself' (Freud 236) by the ego, creating the existence of the uncanny double. The uncanny double, therefore, is something that is perceived as other, but which is in fact a part of the self. The emphasis on the home in Freud's formulation of the 'unheimlich' ensures that, as Fletcher argues, the uncanny is 'not just another example of the general law of the return of the repressed' but is aligned more with the transmission of family secrets in Abraham and Torok's concept of the phantom, and the implantation of untranslated messages within the child's unconscious in Laplanche's 'afterwardsness'.86 Thus the uncanny, like 'afterwardsness' and the 'phantom' emphasise the existence of the other within the self; as Kristeva argues, it proposes that the 'unconscious [is] always, already shaped by the other' (Kristeva, 182). Thus, the concept of the uncanny double dissolves the distinction between self and other, and so its existence in a fictional text can be perceived as carrying out a deconstructive function which allows for the situation of both/and rather than either/or in its position 'athwart the categories, alive or dead, inside or outside, of rational expectation' (Fletcher

86 For a fuller description of Abraham and Torok's concept see Chapter One, and for Laplanche's
“Sins” 128). This deconstruction achieves a form of representation that dissolves the binary opposites and allows for a situation of indeterminacy and multiplicity.

In *Daughters of the House* Roberts utilises the uncanny to disrupt the resolution which may have resulted from the discovery of hidden truths; she depicts Léonie and Thérèse as uncanny doubles and also creates a doubling of her narratives. In *The Sea, The Sea* James is depicted as Charles’ uncanny double to disrupt, again, the closure implied by the revelation of secrets. However, Murdoch takes this disruption of traditional narratives a stage further than Roberts by depicting another layer beyond James, that of Charles’ love for his Aunt Estelle. Murdoch utilises the sublime to depict Estelle, and, thus, allows the reality which lies beyond Charles’ fantasies to remain as the unrepresentable traumatic kernel at the heart of the narrative. Thus, the use of the uncanny in these two novels creates a narrative form that is able to acknowledge the complexity of a traumatic experience by being aware of its own provisionality.

concept of ‘afterwardsness’ see the Thesis Introduction
I. The Dissolution of the Boundary between Self and Other in Michèle Roberts' *Daughters of the House*.

Michèle Roberts was born in Hertfordshire, England, on 20 May 1949 to a French Catholic mother and an English Protestant father. She was educated at a convent school in north London before reading English Literature and Language at Somerville College, Oxford. She studies for a post-graduate qualification in librarianship and in 1973 began work as a librarian for the British Council in Bangkok. She became involved in creative writing working as Poetry Editor for *Spare Rib* in 1974 and *City Limits* magazine from 1973. After that she became Visiting Professor at Nottingham Trent University and then in September 2002 she took up the post of Professor of Creative Writing at University of East Anglia. She now regularly presents arts programmes on radio, writes regular reviews for the national press, is frequently a member of judging panels for literary prizes, and is Chair of the British Council literature advisory panel. In 1999 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1999 and in 2000 she was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France). She has written eleven novels so far for which she has won many awards, including the Gay News Literary Award in 1978 for *A Piece of the Night*. *Daughters of the House* is her sixth novel. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1992, and won the W.H.Smith Literary Award in 1993. Along with her novels she has also published numerous short-stories, a poetry collections and plays.

*Daughters of the House* examines the limitations and also the necessity of narrative when confronted with the traumatic events of the Holocaust. It portrays the attempts of two French girls, Léonie and Thérèse Martin, to discover and bear
witness to the truth of the events that occurred during the Second World War in their village and particularly in their home where German soldiers had been stationed. Roberts utilises this story to explore the necessity of creating a narrative that is able to bear witness and thus work-through the trauma but also to avoid a fixed version of that traumatic past. Thus, like Beloved, the novel enacts the conflict between the necessity for conclusions bound to witnessing an event, and the search for a narrative form that encompasses the complexity and indeterminacy of trauma.

The novel opens with Thérèse’s return, after twenty years in a convent, to her family home where her cousin Léonie now lives. Thérèse has returned to write her autobiography and so needs Léonie’s help to remember the events of their childhood in the small French village of Blémont-la-Fontaine. Thérèse’s decision to write about the events of the past is similar, therefore, to Morag and Del’s attempts to re-write their pasts and, like their narratives, Thérèse’s journal risks becoming a means of forgetting the past, rather than confronting it. Thérèse’s decision to remember their childhood takes the narrative back to the past to illustrate Léonie and Thérèse’s attempts, as children, to discover the events of the war that the villagers have tried to forget. The main historical event that has been disavowed is the murder by German soldiers of the escaped Jewish family who had taken refuge in the village. In conjunction with this narrative is that regarding Thérèse’s mother Antoinette, whose rape by a German soldier stationed at the house during the war is an unspoken secret within the family. The third narrative focuses on the local saint whom the villagers had worshipped before the Priest prohibited them from doing so during the war. Each of these events is denied by the villagers who prefer to forget the past rather than confront its complexity. The
Martin family, therefore, raise their two daughters by protecting them from the violent past of the war; this protection fails as it results in the secrets of the past becoming encrypted within the girls. Thus, the situation of the two girls is comparable to that of Denver in Beloved in which Sethe's attempts to protect her daughter from the past ensure that it becomes encrypted within Denver's unconscious. In Daughters of the House, when Léonie and Thérèse do eventually discover the truth about the past, they consequently repeat the villagers' denial of these events by trying to forget what they have discovered. However, when the girls are adults, Thérèse's return to the village forces them both to confront these disavowed events and so allows them to bear witness to the past.

In the historical narrative, when the Jewish family who are being hidden by Rose and Henri Taille are betrayed to the German soldiers, they are imprisoned with Henri in one of the bedrooms in the Martins' house and then taken into the woods and shot. The villagers, rather than attempting to discover the identity of the collaborator or even trying to discover where the bodies have been buried, prefer to forget these events and continue to do so once the war has ended. This communal secret, however, is threatened with exposure when years later Léonie as a child hears the voices of the dead Jewish family in her bedroom at night. When she tells Antoinette about these voices, she is dismissed and the family re-affirm their attempts to protect the girls from this traumatic past by refusing to describe to them the events of the war. Shortly after, the victims' bones are discovered in a shallow grave in the woods; this offers the villagers an opportunity to confront their past, but instead they allow the Priest to quickly bury the bones in a grave marked only with Henri's name. The girls' persistent questions about these bones to Victorine, the housekeeper, and to Rose Taille enable them to eventually
discover the truth; however, the trauma of Léonie’s realisation that she has heard the voices of the murdered Jewish family causes her to deny these voices. When, as an adult, Léonie inherits the Martins’ family house she locks the door of the bedroom in which the Jewish family had been imprisoned and forbids her own children from entering the room, so risking a further encryption of the past. However, Thérèse’s return into Léonie’s life twenty years later forces Léonie to confront these voices and she is eventually able to enter the room and witness the disavowed past.

The narrative regarding the personal past illustrates that during the war Antoinette was raped in the cellar by one of the German soldiers who was involved in the murder of the Jewish family. Rather than confronting this traumatic event, Antoinette denies it and so separates Léonie and Thérèse, the twins who are the result of this rape, by allowing her sister Madeleine to raise Léonie as her own daughter in England. When Madeleine returns to France with Léonie, after her English husband is killed during the war, the girls are not told of their real relationship and continue to be raised as cousins, rather than sisters. However, later in their childhood when Antoinette dies, Thérèse receives letters her mother had written to her aunt who lives in a convent, explaining the real events of the past. When Thérèse tells Léonie of her discovery, Léonie is offered an opportunity to confront this denied past, but she again resorts to denial, preferring to believe that Thérèse is lying about Antoinette. It is, again, only once Thérèse returns from the convent that Léonie finally accepts the truth regarding her true maternal heritage.

The final narrative, that regarding the saint, focuses on the villagers’ worship of her statue in the woods. When the new priest arrives during the war, he
prohibits them from worshipping this saint and dismantles her statue. Rather than fighting this prohibition, the villagers accept the priest’s act and pray in the church instead; they do not even attempt to discover what has happened to the remains of the broken statue, which have, in fact been hidden by Antoinette and Madeleine in their cellar. When Léonie is a child, she experiences a vision of this saint which offers the villagers the opportunity to start worshipping her again. The priest, however, denies this vision, arguing that it is the work of the devil; he performs an exorcism and destroys the pile of stones which are all that remain of the saint. The main focus of this narrative is the link between the saint and Thérèse’s denial of her mother’s death. After her mother dies, Thérèse lies to her family and tells them that she had seen the saint in the woods and that it had appeared in the form of the Virgin Mary; her false vision is accepted as truth by the village and so it replaces Léonie’s true vision. Thérèse’s lie is caused by her refusal to confront the trauma of her mother’s death, and so she replaces her mother with the perfect sanctified image of the mother represented by the Virgin Mary. Thérèse then buries herself within her worship of the Virgin Mary in the convent to avoid the trauma of her mother’s death. However, when she leaves the convent twenty years later she is finally able to accept the truth of Léonie’s vision and to realise her love for her mother.

The three narratives highlight the necessity of bearing witness to the past but also the dangers that this witnessing may produce a transcendent and universal version of events. Roberts’ decision to situate her novel within the historical events of the Nazi occupation of France during the Second World War positions this issue of witnessing within the specific concerns of Holocaust theory; in this,

87 This aspect of the novel is examined in detail by Parker.
the enormity of this event is perceived as locating it beyond representation, but the need for political and ethical judgements regarding the Holocaust necessitates its representation. The questions raised in Holocaust theory regarding the political motivation of memorials and memorial narratives is apparent in Roberts’ depiction of the town’s public war memorial and the annual commemoration of those who died during the war:

The names of those who had died in battle were inscribed on a stone roll of honour on the war memorial by the cemetery. Every village had one. Blémont’s was a heartily built stone woman in clinging robes carrying a wreath and a scroll. Her hair tumbled loose, her breasts were pointed [...] The village band, all discordant trumpetings and squeaks, led the congregation in procession to the war memorial. The national anthem was played. Everyone bowed their heads. Later on that day there would be the fair, fireworks, and dancing, but now they were still, quiet. (117)

This annual event is an act of memorialisation rather than remembrance; instead of forcing the villagers to confront their past, it replaces the processes of thought initially with the silence of veneration, and, subsequently, with the noisy relief of the fireworks display, and also replaces the horror of war with the sexualised beauty of a woman. In this respect, it allows the villagers to feel as if they are remembering the war whilst, in fact, substituting any real thought about it with controlled and regulated grief. Roberts, therefore, uses this memorial to emphasise the dangers of representations which attempt to diminish the trauma of the Holocaust.

In Roberts’ novel, the movement from disavowal to witnessing in all three narrative strands suggests an attempt to create a form of narrative closure and
resolution which may limit the complexity of the traumatic event and so forget it. Each narrative proceeds towards a definable and locatable conclusion in the novel, and the continuing consequences of the villagers’ acts of disavowal are prevented by Léonie’s ability to confront the past. However, the novel avoids the homogeneity of a conclusion by creating an ambiguity in the narrative which refuses the confines of narrative resolution. This effect has led critics to propose that ‘the text does not suggest that history can ever be complete and objective or that the notion of truth is unproblematic’ (Parker 168), and that the novel ‘while moving forward toward forms of closure, of accommodation, [retains its] revenants, still, at and beyond [its] final pages’ (Luckhurst 244). These critics have suggested that the effect of indeterminacy is achieved through the enigmatic nature of the text, the fact that it is comprised of occluded and intertwining narrative strands, developed through partial hints and semi-revelations which give rise to this sense of an undefined ‘beyond’ to the text. Although I agree to a certain extent with this reading of the novel, I nonetheless feel that, ultimately, the three narrative strands are given clarity and conclusion in the text, and the reader is able to discover the truth regarding these three occlusions. Although the narrative and time frames are multiple, they are also bound tightly together; this is achieved through the repeated imagery of the novel, such as the barking dog and the vein of red, which turns the reader into a detective following the trail of blood to discover the identities of the victims and the murderers. In this sense, the novel works in a similar way to the nineteenth century detective novel, which satisfies the reader by providing the solution to the riddles of the text.

I argue, instead, that the ambiguity of Roberts’ narrative is created through her depiction of Léonie and Thérèse as uncanny doubles. It is through this
doubling that the occluded narratives are discovered, as it is only when Thérèse returns to her home and thus returns to join Léonie that both she and Léonie are able to bear witness to the past. Thus, this uncanny doubling allows Léonie to confront the voices of the murdered Jewish family and the trauma of her mother’s rape and Thérèse to confront the trauma of her mother’s death, in a way that does not attempt to produce a totalising version of these past events. The uncanny doubling of these characters disrupts the homogeneity of the novel by dissolving the boundaries between self and other, and so has a deconstructive function in the narrative. Roberts initially emphasises Thérèse’s position as Léonie’s uncanny double when she depicts her in terms of a projection of repressed material from Léonie’s unconscious. This is illustrated in the first page of the novel when the narrator explains that ‘the deadness and the evil and the stink were inside Léonie’ (1); this evil is projected out of Léonie through the metaphor of her vomiting: ‘It was Thérèse she was throwing up. She vomited her forth, desperate to be rid of her and then weak and gasping relief that she was gone’ (2). Rather than getting rid of Thérèse, this action causes Thérèse’s physical presence in Léonie’s life: Léonie’s attempts to reject her repressed material, therefore, causes it to be manifested in her uncanny double.

Roberts confirms that Thérèse and Léonie are more than just twins by using references to doubling when describing their relationship. For example, when Léonie awaits the return of her sister at the beginning of the novel she feels as if her identity is threatened by Thérèse’s return: ‘The mirror opposite flickered a warning. Which of us is which? For twenty years she had cohabited peacefully with her reflection […] Yes, she existed, the mirror told her over those years […] Now that other one was turning up, to disrupt her steady gaze’ (4). The
threatening of subjectivity caused by the doubling of Léonie and Thérèse is the effect produced by the uncanny in Freud’s formulation, in which he argues that ‘the subject identifies himself with someone else so he’s in doubt as to which is his self, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own’ (234); this is apparent in Léonie’s sense that she ‘hasn’t got a soul ... Thérèse stole it’ (19). Léonie’s confusion over her unique subjectivity manifests itself in childhood in her questioning of the difference between one and two; ‘Two was an odd word anyway. It did not express twoness. It was as short, round and compact as one.’ (97).

In adulthood, this disruption of subjectivity manifests itself in the violent emotions Léonie experiences towards her sister: when she awaits Thérèse’s return, Léonie wonders that ‘if she smashed her fist into Thérèse’s face would she hear the crack and splinter of glass’ (4), and whilst thinking about her sister she realises ‘she was testing the tip of the vegetable knife [...] against her thumb. She divided the air in two’ (5). It is interesting to note that Léonie’s violent impulses are directed at herself, rather than outwards towards Thérèse: Léonie considers smashing her own reflection in the mirror, and cuts her own thumb in an attempt to hurt her double. Roberts reinforces her use of the device of the uncanny by situating her novel in the familiar gothic territory of the familial house filled with labyrinthine corridors, half-concealed doors, shadowy corners, a constant chill in the air, and mysterious and forbidden spaces.

Roberts’ use of the uncanny emphasises the breakdown of the distinction between self and other; this is achieved through her depiction of the consequences of the parents’ secrets on the daughters which chimes with Abraham and Torok’s concept of the phantom. Therefore, Roberts’ novel implicitly associates the
uncanny with this concept of the unconscious as characterised by the presence of the other within the self. The inheritance of 'the secret psychic substance of their ancestor's lives' (Abraham and Torok 166) is an appropriate description of the situation in which Roberts sets Léonie and Thérèse. They inherit the legacy of their parents' secrets about the war and Antoinette's rape; these secrets then form a phantom in their unconscious, which ventriloquises them 'like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography' (Abraham and Torok 173). The way in which Roberts utilises generational transmission as a mode of historical awareness resonates with Rand's proposition that the concept of the phantom 'enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance or disregard of the past is the breeding ground of the phantasmatic return of shameful secrets at the level of individuals, families, the community and possibly even entire nations' (Abraham and Torok 169).

The uncanny, in its assertion of the existence of the other within the self, disrupts the boundaries upon which the symbolic order is structured. Roberts emphasises the necessity of such dissolution by foregrounding how society constructs boundaries as a means of regulating the lives of its subjects. She depicts the way in which religion provides strict rules and controls for the daily lives of the villagers, evident in the Priest's sermon to his parishioners:

The theme of the sermon was reverence and obedience. Waywardness of certain elements of the youth in the parish. Authority of our Holy Mother the Church vested in me. Regular attendance at Mass and the

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88 This is where the link between the Freudian uncanny and the concept of the phantom is evident. The stress on the familial situation in the uncanny points to this sense of the effects of the 'cross-generational transmission of trauma that cannot be verbalised' (Fletcher "Sins" 123) that results in the residence of the phantom in the child's unconscious, which is then projected outwards in the form of the uncanny double.
sacraments, especially confession, as ordained by Holy Church. The sheep guided by the shepherd. Undesirable elements of individualism and mysticism, undesirable attempts at originality, to be weeded out.

(115)

The priest, himself, remains separated from his community; his house is surrounded by imposing iron railings to keep 'himself' shut away from his parishioners' (111) and he separates himself from the outside world with dense curtains which are 'fastened so tightly they kept out both air and sun' (112). The controls and regulations apparent in religion are also part of the daily lives of the villagers. For example, Léonie and Thérèse are taught the difference between filth and cleanliness; their faeces must be 'dropped into a disinfected gaping hole, discreetly, behind a locked door. Must never be talked about' (67) and their periods must be hidden by them burying the used towel 'in the heart of the range' (124). By emphasising the rigidity of these social and psychological structures, Roberts demonstrates the necessity of disrupting them. Her structuring of her novel upon three narrative strands and three different time-frames emphasises her refusal to construct her novel according to the confines of binary logic, which is also emphasised in the trope of liminality which Roberts uses throughout the novel: the opening image of Antoinette dead but crawling her way out of the cellar initiates the existence of the liminal undead, which culminates in the words spoken by the dead Jewish family at the end of the novel.

Roberts' use of the uncanny also transforms her protagonists' and her

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89 The construction of boundaries can be conceptualised in terms of Kristeva's notion of abjection in which the 'functioning of the symbolic order depends upon distinct divisions and clear categories' which means that the 'symbolic subject must disavow [or abject] whatever threatens to blur boundaries' (Parker 154). The two daughters are then taught by their mother(s) to 'experience their own bodies as abject', and thus they learn 'to police the boundaries of [their] bod[ies]'
readers’ notion of the stranger. This can be elucidated through Kristeva’s conceptualisation of the uncanny which, she argues, destroys the boundary between foreign and familiar by situating foreignness ‘within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided’ (181). Kristeva argues that this shifts our perception of the foreigner, so that it s/he is not external and alien, but internal and ‘an integral part of the same’ (181): ‘Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity flounder’ (Kristeva 1). The dissolution of boundaries inherent in Kristeva’s argument is an epistemological activity proposed by many feminist theorists who, as Santner argues, ‘suggest that the task facing post-Holocaust societies […] include that of a radical rethinking and reformulation of the very notions of boundaries and borderlines, of that ‘protective shield’ regulating exchange between the inside and the outside of individuals and groups’ (152). Thus feminist critics suggest a destruction of the boundaries that society constructs between self and other, which reinforce notions of racism and xenophobia, proposing ‘the development of a capacity to constitute boundaries that can create a dynamic space of mutual recognition (between self and other, indigenous and foreign)’ (Santner 153).

In Daughters of the House, the breakdown in the distinction between foreign and familiar allows Léonie’s final confrontation with the past. She must learn that the Jews are not distinct and separate from herself, as she asserts when confronted with their ghostly voices but are, instead, part of the same collectivity of humanity as herself. When Léonie is a child, Victorine tells her of the villagers’ general hatred towards Jewish people which Thérèse explains in terms of the anti-Semitic

(Parker 155).
thought of the Christian religion:

Léonie was confused: Jesus was a Jew wasn’t he?

Yes silly, but then he invented Christianity, didn’t he, so all the Jews were supposed to stop being Jews and be Catholics instead. Only they wouldn’t.

They had Jesus put to death. It was their fault, really, that Jesus was on the cross. They were as bad as the communists. (48)

This attitude towards the Jews causes Léonie to renounce her Jewish friends in England: ‘[Léonie’s] Catholic primary school in the north London suburb had many Jewish pupils. When she went home to tea with them, she ate delicious food [...] But now she denied that memory [... she] said nothing’ (48). When Léonie first hears the voices of the Jewish people as a child, she does not want to understand them and rejects any affinity with them by confirming their foreignness, in her assertion of her identity and her difference from them. However, Thérèse’s return forces her to eventually join the Jewish family in the forbidden room and enables her to hear their message. Thus, it is only through a realisation of the connection between herself and others, achieved through the dissolution of the boundaries between self and other in the uncanny, that Léonie is able to accept responsibility for bearing witness to those who have died in traumatic circumstances and to remember these without trying to limit them through a determined narrative.

Section One: Léonie’s continuing denial of the past as an adult.

The novel opens with a portrayal of the family house as uncanny: it is a safe haven, where Léonie as an adult protects herself within her comfortable
bourgeois existence, but also a place where secrets are revealed: ‘It was a changeable house. Sometimes it felt safe as a church, and sometimes it shivered then cracked apart’ (1). The house represents Léonie’s attempts to hide from the past and the futility of these attempts in the inevitable return of past traumas; this duality is apparent in the description of the house: the images of blindness, for example, the windows which are depicted as ‘eyes [which] were blinded by white shutters’ (1), demonstrate Léonie’s desire to close her eyes on the past. However, the violence of the past which Léonie is trying to ignore has become embodied the house itself, as exemplified by the skin which ‘bounded the house’ (1) that is ‘a wall of gristle a soldier could tear open with his bare hands’ (1); this image refers to the Nazi soldier’s rape of Antoinette to create a horrific image of the violence of this act. The uncanny nature of the house, where family secrets are hidden but also revealed, is apparent in the ‘forbidden places’ (1) which the rules of the house say you must not enter. These forbidden places, therefore, represent sites of disavowed memory: ‘Chief of these was the bedroom at the back on the first floor’ (1), Léonie’s childhood bedroom where the Jewish family were imprisoned before being murdered. Léonie’s fear of confronting this traumatic past is evident in her failed attempts at entering this room:

The rules said you mustn’t go there. It was for your own protection. Each time Léonie tried she had to halt. The terror was so strong. It pushed her away, wouldn’t let her come near. Behind the terror was something evil which stank and snarled and wanted to fix her in its embrace. Better to flee, to clatter back across the bare plank floor of the landing, find the headlong stairs and fall down them. Better to stay at the front of the house. (1)

The inevitable return of the disavowed past is enacted in Léonie’s opening
nightmare about Antoinette ‘buried in the cellar under a heap of sand. Her mouth [...] stuffed full of torn-up letters and broken glass’ (1). This dream emphasises Léonie’s burial of her mother’s violent experiences in her denial of the revelations made in the letters which Thérèse gave her to read. The return of this disavowed past is highlighted by the fact that in the dream Antoinette is ‘tunnelling her way out [of the cellar] like a mole’ (1). The description of Antoinette in the cellar creates a doubling of her with the saint whose statue is, in reality, buried in the cellar, and so links these two disavowed pasts. In addition, the reference in this dream to Antoinette’s ‘Nazi laugh’ also links this image to the violence of the German soldiers towards Antoinette and the Jewish family. Thus, these denied pasts are forcing their way out of their position as repressed to disturb Léonie’s safe life, just as in Beloved Denver’s repressed memory of her time in prison works its way back into her conscious mind. The delineation of the return of the repressed past is continued throughout Léonie’s nightmare about Antoinette: ‘She moved under the heap of sand. She clutched her red handbag, which was full of shreds of dead flesh. She was trying to get out, to hang two red petticoats on the washing-line in the orchard. Sooner or later she would batter down the cellar door and burst up through it on her dead and bleeding feet’ (1). Léonie’s nightmare reveals her knowledge about her mother’s rape which she has repressed but which, despite her attempts to deny it, is forcing its return into her consciousness. Her continued efforts to deny this return of the past causes her to awaken from her nightmare and to attempt to physically eject this trauma from her by being sick; she ‘vomits’ forth her uncanny double Thérèse, causing her to become physically manifested in the novel when she arrives at Léonie’s house the following morning.
Thérèse returns to her childhood home to confront the past that she has tried to ignore by hiding from life in the convent. Her journey home takes her past the graveyard where her mother Antoinette, her father Louis, and Léonie's adoptive mother Madeleine, are all buried. This is also the graveyard in which Henri Taille and the Jewish family are buried 'in a far corner, separated from the fields beyond by a high wall' (7). Thus, Thérèse's journey home is a reminder of the villagers' denial of the past and their compliance with the priest's wishes to bury the bones of the Jewish family and Henri Taille in a grave which is separated from the other graves and hidden from view by a high wall. When Thérèse passes this graveyard she considers going to 'see for herself what she had read about in the newspaper. The grave newly opened and desecrated, swastikas in red daubed on the tombstone' (7); thus her return is associated with the resurgence of Nazism in the village, which is linked to the community's refusal to confront the horror of German occupation and their complicity of silence towards the Germans' massacre of the Jews.

When Thérèse arrives at the family house she informs Léonie that she has decided to leave the convent because she feels that there is 'something unfinished' (22) that she must complete, which has 'something to do with what happened here during the war' (22). Her need to discover the truth of the events of the war is associated with her desire to confront her childhood in her decision to write her autobiography; as she explains to Léonie: 'I thought if I write down what happened when we were children it would help me decide what it is I've got to do. But there's so much I've forgotten. You'll have to help me remember' (23). Léonie rejects Thérèse's attempts to discover the truth both about the historical and the personal past: in response to Thérèse's reference to the war, Léonie tells
her that ‘It’s no use raking up the past [...] making people suffer all over again. They want to forget not to remember’ (23), and when Thérèse tells her about her autobiography, Léonie responds defensively by curling ‘up tight at the end of the bed, like a caterpillar when you prod it with a twig’, and she shouts at Thérèse ‘leave my childhood alone. Don’t you dare take away anything more of mine [...] if you tell any more lies about the past I’ll kill you’ (23). This passage illustrates that Léonie has denied the violence of their mother’s rape and the fact that she and Thérèse are the offspring of this rape by choosing to believe that Thérèse had lied when she told her what she had learnt in the letters. However, Thérèse’s return forces Léonie to remember the childhood she has tried to forget; this takes the narrative back to the events of the past.

Section Two: The girls’ attempts to discover the events of the Second World War.

The opening depiction of Léonie’s and Thérèse’s childhood characterises the Martins’ family life as being organised around the avoidance of the secrets about Antoinette’s past and the war. The narrative regression into the past occurs through the description of the family photographs which illustrate the family’s disavowal of Antoinette’s rape, as her photograph was taken before she was raped and before she married Louis (27). In this photograph, Antoinette’s appearance is youthful whereas now she looks faded because, as Victorine explains without giving any details to the young Léonie, ‘her terrible experiences during the war had sapped her physically’ (27). When Léonie questions Victorine about these experiences, her questions are either ignored or dismissed with an abrupt comment about the war being ‘terrible for everybody’ (27). The disavowal of the
historical past is apparent when Madeleine and Léonie arrive at the Martins' family house from England and Léonie tells Antoinette that she is afraid of the voices she hears at night in her bedroom. Antoinette responds to this fearfully, as the narrative describes: 'Antoinette's eyes flew wide open, like a doll's. She stared. Her voice was high and cross' (39); but rather than confronting these voices, she silences Léonie by consoling her with the words 'there are no dead people in this house I assure you. Dead people can't talk. They're in the cemetery, at rest. Don't be so silly' (39). However, Antoinette's dismissal of these voices does not, in fact, manage to silence the voices, as when she leaves the room they make themselves heard to Léonie and the reader: 'Something ticked in the shadows over by the door [...] Now it was a shuffle, as of worn loose slippers. A slack tread. Back and forth. Back and forth. And then the voices. That cried out and chanted, and mourned. In a language she did not want to understand' (39). This passage emphasises the fact that Léonie intentionally chooses not to understand these voices and therefore chooses not to hear their message.

These two disavowals of the past are followed by the narrative regarding the Priest's attempts to prevent the villagers from worshipping the saint in the woods when he destroys the shrine and forces them to pray in the officially designated space of the church. This act of denial is explained to the girls by Victorine when she shows them the place where the shrine had once stood: 'She is, was I mean, a very ancient saint [...] her statue used to stand on that ledge of rock, just there above the spring [...] People used to come here all the time, in those days, before the war, to ask for things' (41). The connection between the destruction of the shrine and the villagers' attempts to deny the horror of the war is made apparent when Victorine explains that she does not know where the
shrine disappeared to, as ‘it happened during the war, everything was topsy-turvy then. The statue just vanished’ (42). Victorine’s references to the war cause Léonie to question her about this period of the town’s history, but Victorine refuses to explain these events to the children, telling them that are ‘too young to understand’ (43). Despite Victorine’s attempts at composure, her appearance reveals the impact that this traumatic past still has on her: ‘She was red in the face. She twiddled a strand of fizzy blond hair. She screwed up her mouth and regarded them. Let’s go and pick blackberries’ (43).

Victorine’s decision to protect the girls from the horror of the war is contradicted by the snippets of information that she gives to them which only increase their fascination. For example, when the children are helping her clean the house, she shows them the marks left on the floor by the Germans’ boots, traces that remain despite Antoinette’s attempts to hide them by covering them with a carpet: ‘Léonie peered at the pockmarks in the red surface. The memory of the house made visible. Scars that would never fade. The injuries of the house lived on, under the carpet which concealed them. Once you knew they were there, you could not forget’ (44). This passage is significant as it firstly emphasises the futility of the family’s attempts to hide their past which continues to be a physical presence in their house, and secondly illustrates the role that Léonie must assume; she must take on the responsibility that Tayo faces in Ceremony and bear witness to this denied past.

Victorine’s refusal to explain the events of the war to the children is repeated by Léonie’s adoptive mother Madeleine who, rather than allowing the children to bear witness to the horror of the past, transforms the trauma of the war through the comforts of narrative; this is apparent when she changes the events
surrounding Antoinette’s rape into a children’s story with a happy ending by focusing on the heroic efforts of the men to hide the village’s wine in the Martins’ cellar:

It was when Paris fell and the Germans were occupying everywhere. People in the village could imagine what it would be like, the Germans taking all their supplies. So they got together and decided to hide their cider and wine […] Our cellars are so big, they put it there […] the Germans never found them. Well, once they nearly did. When Antoinette, when she … Well. But it was alright in the end. After the war everybody got their wine and cider back. (49)

The damaging effects that Madeleine’s transformation of the horror of the war has on the reality of the past are illustrated through the image of her cutting out patterns in a piece of cloth: she ‘snipped serenely. Her scissors took long delicate strides. The cloth fell apart as they advanced’ (49). Madeleine’s transformation of this event has serious consequences, as the girls’ fascination with the story leads them to venture into the cellar, a space which Antoinette has ruled off limits in an attempt to deny what happened to her there. When the children go into the cellar Antoinette, hearing their footsteps, cries out in fear of this reminder of her traumatic past. Antoinette’s attempts to deny her past are re-asserted when the children venture into the cellar a second time and discover Antoinette’s shoe which had fallen off her foot during her struggle with the soldier and had lain forgotten ever since. When the children show Antoinette this shoe, she seizes it from them and throws it in the fire in belief that her destruction of the physical evidence of her traumatic past will erase the event from history.

These attempts by Antoinette to deny her past, of Madeleine to transform
the past into a children’s story, and of Victorine’s refusal to explain her vague references about the past, ensure that it becomes encrypted within Léonie and Thérèse. This is illustrated in Léonie’s nightmare which emphasises her unrealised knowledge that Antoinette is her real mother and that this is a secret which Antoinette carries with her in an attempt to prevent it being discovered:

Antoinette’s suitcase was bound in scarlet cloth. She was weighed down by it. She dragged it across the Customs Hall. She had got off the boat and was looking for the way out. Léonie followed her. None of the uniformed customs men would touch the red suitcase, let alone chalk a squiggle on the side and let it through. Back and forth Antoinette went, ever more urgently. Léonie crept behind, red and dangerous, that suitcase. The Customs men knew it. They’d been tipped off: A bomb inside it, timed to explode and tear them all to shreds. Red shreds of flesh. Antoinette began to run.

Watched by the Nazi soldiers through plate-glass doors. (52)

In this dream, Léonie’s subconscious awareness that Antoinette is her mother is apparent in that she has substituted Madeleine with Antoinette in the arrival at the French Customs office after the boat trip from England. The suitcase that Antoinette carries in this dream represents the secret that she keeps about the rape and the subsequent birth of the twins. The consequences of her keeping this secret are illustrated by the fact that it is presented as something dangerous which the customs officials fear, and so she is left floundering, increasingly desperate, attempting to escape from her traumatic past and to simultaneously keep the secret hidden with her. This secret is depicted as a bomb timed to explode, and thus the futility of Antoinette’s desperate attempts to hide her secret is apparent in the inevitability of its revelation.
The family's desire to protect the children from the trauma of the past is repeated in regards to death when Antoinette becomes seriously ill. Rather than explaining Antoinette's illness to the children, the adults discuss her situation over their heads:

[The girls] ran into the kitchen [...]

Victorine looked over their heads at Louis.

Madame's back from the seeing the specialist. Doesn't sound too good, she says.

I know, Thérèse shouted: let's go and look at the kittens. (57)

Thérèse's decision to run out and play is interpreted by the adults as indicating her obliviousness to her mother's approaching death, but it is, in fact, Thérèse's attempt to escape the death of her mother, which is also apparent in her request to change bedroom so that she is not too close to the room in which her mother lays sick in bed (60). The futility of the adults' attempts to hide the reality of Antoinette's illness is evident in their prolific use of disinfectant which, however, 'couldn't mask that other smell that was Antoinette dying' (72). This situation is similar to that experienced by Morag in The Diviners who is prevented from witnessing her parents' deaths and who, in turn, refuses to acknowledge the impact of their absence in her life. When Antoinette dies, the adults try to protect the girls by prohibiting them from attending the funeral because 'it would upset them too much' (81). The cemetery in which Antoinette is buried re-affirms this denial of the horror of death:

The cemetery was a square plot of ground, enclosed by a high wall with ornamental turrets at the corners. The dead lay inside this fortified enclosure in rows as neat as those in the Martins' kitchen-garden [...] Here
and there women tended the graves, just as they tended their houses [...] 

Most [of the graves] looked like dolls’ houses [...] where the women played at rearranging the clean furniture. (107)

In the same way as in *The Diviners*, the cemetery disavows the reality of the death and the true nature of the grave, which is, as Léonie later describes it, ‘a dump for torn flesh, broken bones’ (137).

Shortly after Antoinette’s death, Thérèse lies about seeing the saint, who has actually been seen by Léonie in a vision in the woods. Thérèse describes the saint as the Virgin Mary and so her lie can be interpreted as a reaction to the trauma of her mother’s death in which she replaces the ambiguous emotions towards her mother with the worship of the sanctified image of the Virgin Mary. Thérèse’s use of this worship as protection from the trauma of the loss of her mother is apparent when she experiences a moment of religious ecstasy: ‘She was rapt in a frame of fiery clouds. She no longer spoke to anyone except God. She chose silence, obscurity, poverty. She chose him whom was everything, her hollow in the rock, her desert refuge’ (115). In contrast to Thérèse’s lie, Léonie’s true vision of the saint is portrayed in terms of a connection to something that has been lost: ‘Something outside her, mysterious and huge, put out a kindly exploring hand and touched her. Something was restored to her which she had lost and believed she would never find again’ (86). Roberts presents this lost connection in terms of a pre-symbolic maternal world; it is described as a connection to a language and a feeling that Léonie had once known: ‘A language she heard once but had forgotten about, forgotten ever hearing, forgotten she could speak [...] She had heard it spoken long ago. She heard it now, at first far off, thin gold, then close warm. The secret language, the underground stream that
forced through her like a river’ (86). Thus, through the narrative of the saint, Roberts connects the disavowal of the past with the lost connection between the mother and child, an intimacy which is denied through the separation of self and other in the boundaries inherent in the structure of the symbolic order. Léonie’s witnessing of this vision is presented as a creative act that allows the disavowed past to become embodied: ‘Then she saw it. Saw the fine rainy air become solid and golden and red, form itself into the shape of a living and breathing woman’ (86). Therefore, Léonie’s role as witness is comparable to Tayo’s in Ceremony in that is has an active, rather than passive, function.

Thérèse’s false vision denies the opportunity created by Léonie’s vision for a re-connection to both the maternal world and the disavowed past. The destruction of this opportunity to confront the past is represented through the image of the Quimper dish; this is shattered when Thérèse knocks it off the table when she runs out of the house to follow Léonie and pretend that she saw the vision: ‘The Quimper dish lay in pieces on the floor. Violence measured the distance of one fragment from another. Painted jigsaw bits. The Breton lady had been dismembered. Her head lay near a table-leg. Her flower clasping hands rested at the foot of the stove’ (94). The Breton Lady depicted on the dish is linked to the saint by the detail of her ‘flower clasping hands’, which is how the saint is depicted in the statue of her that has been broken by the Priest. Thus, Thérèse’s lie repeats the dismembering of the saint originally carried out by the

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90 Parker argues that Léonie’s vision of the saint is a semiotic experience which reconnects the severed mother-daughter bond, and this is why Thérèse’s acceptance of the vision at the end of the novel is a reconnection with her mother. Thérèse’s rejection of her mother is then conceptualised as an action of abjection which disavows the maternal body and replaces it with the non-maternal virgin mother which accords with the representations of the symbolic order.

91 It is interesting, also, that Léonie depicts the emergence of the woman in terms of a photograph: ‘she swam up slowly. She developed, like a photograph. She composed herself, a red and gold figure on a red ground’ (87)
Priest in his desire to erase her from reality. However, Léonie is also complicit in this disavowal of the reality of the saint when she allows her vision to become erased by the belief that everyone has in Thérèse’s Virgin Mary. When Léonie returns home, her difficulty in describing her vision to Victorine and Rose presents it as unrepresentable; Léonie explains that she looked ‘as though she were made of fire. And she had yellow stars around her head’ (89). However, this unrepresentability causes Victorine to dismiss Léonie’s vision; she tells Léonie that it is ‘just an excuse. Or your imagination. Overtired. Staying awake too late chatting to poor Thérèse’ (89). Rather than trying to confront the complexity of Léonie’s experience, Victorine and the rest of the village choose the simplicity of Thérèse’s familiar image of the Virgin Mary. Léonie does not fight this dismissal of her vision but instead chooses never to speak about her saint again; Léonie’s decision not to reveal her knowledge about the saint is illustrated in that when the Quimper dish lies fragmented on the floor, Léonie takes the piece depicting the ‘flower holding hands’, which connects the Breton Lady with the saint, and hides this fragment in her room. Therefore, she chooses to hide her knowledge about the real saint, rather than bearing witness to this denied reality.

The Priest reacts to Thérèse’s vision by telling the villagers that their saint is the devil and performing an exorcism to cast it out; he also pulls down the pile of stones which are all that remain of the original statue to ensure ‘that this pagan nonsense [is] completely done away with’ (110). When the men acting on the Priest’s orders destroy the heap of stones, they discover that it covers ‘a shallow grave. Inside this was a mess of human skulls and bones’ (116). Rather than utilising this discovery as a means of confronting the past, the village continues to deny the past by allowing the Priest to take the bones away ‘for a quick burial in
the cemetery with as few people as present as possible’ (121). Also, Léonie’s attempts to discover to whom these bones belonged are countered by the usual dismissals and partial answers from the adults: for example, Madeleine silences her by saying ‘You and your questions can’t you see I’m busy’ (118).

The discovery of the bones does, however, convince one member of the village to confront the reality of the past: Rose Taille, whose husband was murdered along with the Jewish family, uses this opportunity to reveal the truth to Léonie about the genocide of the Jews in the concentration camps:

The Germans were highly organised, she said, [...] they hunted up all the Jews they could find. Regular round-ups. The really big one in Paris, we called it la grande rafle [...] they kept the Jews in a sports stadium outside Paris. Packed in with hardly any food or water. Of course lots of them died. Then they were sent to the camp at Drancy, and from there they were put on trains and sent to Auschwitz to be gassed [...] Freight trains [...] people jammed in standing up, into trucks. Without food or water. For a journey that took three days. Afterwards we found out. Those who wanted to know that is. (126)

Rose tells Léonie about the escaped Jewish family that she and her husband had sheltered, and that, when they were betrayed by someone in the village, the Germans had taken the family and Henri and shot them. Rose’s story illustrates the refusal of the villagers to accept the atrocities of the concentration camps and the murder of the Jewish family and Henri in their own village, but, as she explains to Léonie, she cannot forget, as the trauma of her husband’s murder caused her baby to be stillborn.

Léonie, however, is unable to accept this truth about the past. When
Baptiste explains to her that the room in which she had slept when younger was the room in which the Jews had been imprisoned, she realises that the voices she heard when she was a child must have been the ghostly echoes of the Jewish family, and she is severely traumatised by this knowledge: 'Somewhere a massive pendulum swung to and fro. It counted the minutes before the dawn. There was no escape from it. So heavy it would crush you as it pushed from side to side. It was the blood in Léonie's chest. Her heart pumped so strongly she felt she'd burst' (137). Her initial identification with the Jews, evident in her anger towards the reduction of the Jewish family to the signifier 'the Jews', is reversed when Baptiste asserts the Jewish family's 'otherness': 'some foreign name ... I can't remember ... they weren't from round here' (137). This causes Léonie to withdraw from her initial identification with them and to assert her own identity when she writes her name in the dust on the bedroom floor. This protective action prevents Léonie from having to confront the voices of the Jews; she, instead, releases herself from the burden of witnessing by finding consolation in a child's game when she pulls Baptiste away from the haunted bedroom with the words 'come downstairs and we'll get some potatoes off Victorine and I'll show you how to juggle' (138). The narrative describes how Léonie uses this diversion to disavow the past:

Magic tricks. To make things vanish you threw them into the air then cooked and ate them. You could do it with bones too. Léonie left the Jews behind in her room. She closed the door on them. They could not escape, but she could. She was a mongrel, only half-French, but she wasn't Jewish. She had a larder with baskets of potatoes, she would not starve, she would not burn. (138)
In conjunction with these revelations about the war, the family secret about Antoinette is revealed to Thérèse when she reads her mother’s letters which refer to the rape and the fact that Léonie is her daughter. Thérèse struggles to comprehend the revelations of the letters; as the narrative explains: ‘Words from the letters banged about in Thérèse’s head. [...] Cellar. Hiding it. He found me. Dark. Held. Couldn’t escape. (132) and she questions what has been explained ‘What did he do is Léonie really my sister what did he do?’ (133). Thérèse’s inability to confront this truth about her mother causes her to run into the woods to search for the Virgin Mary and to find comfort in this replacement for her real mother (134). Thérèse eventually tells Léonie what she has discovered in the letters; but when Léonie repeats this information to Baptiste she chooses not to accept Thérèse’s story and, although she accepts that they are sisters, she rejects that Antoinette had been raped: ‘Oh, I think I’m wholly French, she said: I’ve been working it out. I don’t think it was a German soldier at all. I’m sure Thérèse made that up. I think it was Louis all along’ (152). Instead of accepting the traumatic feelings caused by this information, Léonie consoles herself by blaming Thérèse for making her confront the past:

The pain burrowed through Léonie, tore at her with sharp claws [...] Really it was all Thérèse’s fault. She’d insisted on telling Léonie. She’d taken everything from her. Then she’d said they were sisters. Like a slap. Léonie would scratch back. Rescue herself. She wouldn’t be caught, trapped in the darkness. She wasn’t a Jew. It wasn’t her fault. She was French. (152)

Léonie’s rejection of the information that Thérèse provides occurs in the final section of the narrative set in the past; hence, the past events of the novel conclude on the link, in the passage cited above, between Léonie’s denial of her personal
past and her rejection of bearing witness to the historical past through her assertion of difference from the Jews.

Section Three: Léonie’s and Thérèse’s witnessing of the traumatic events of the past.

The final part of the novel, which returns to the present, portrays the girls’ achievement, through their doubling, of the ability to confront the past in a way that does not create a homogenous version. Thérèse’s confrontation with the past is achieved through her eventual acceptance of her falsification of the vision of the saint; this is illustrated when she finally admits to Léonie that she has ‘come to put the record straight about the past […] to admit [she] made a mistake when [she] described those visions’ (158). Thérèse’s rejection of her false image of the Virgin Mary, that had replaced her real mother, causes her to experience a dream in which she and the nuns in the convent stitch her mother’s dismembered body back together: ‘They were preparing her for burial. They stitched up the torn skin, moulded the features of the face back into position, set the broken bones, then coaxed the limbs to lie straight. The body having been made whole again, they washed and dried it, then wrapped it in a linen sheet’ (160). The image of her mother as a dismembered woman links her to the saint which Thérèse has dismembered by her lie, thus, her acknowledgment of this lie allows her to accept her mother’s death. This dream, therefore, enacts the process of Thérèse’s acknowledgement of the reality of the past: the events of the past, which have been dismembered through disavowal, will be stitched back together so that they can be buried properly, rather than denied. To confirm her acceptance of her
mother, Thérèse decides to destroy the false image of the saint in the church. This action is impelled by her recognition of the longing that she feels for her mother and her realisation that she had blamed her mother for dying:

She had gone off and abandoned Thérèse, she had expected her to grow up and manage on her own, in the end she'd forgotten her daughter, death was impatient and wouldn't wait.

Thérèse had been right behind her, forced to halt when Antoinette disappeared, left there alone on the brink, thrown back. Antoinette had pushed her away, hadn’t let her come too, hadn’t needed or wanted her company. (165)

Thérèse realises that her anger towards her mother had caused her to replace her mother with the Virgin Mary, and she also becomes aware that she had hidden herself away in the convent to avoid having to confront her pain at her mother’s death: ‘Thérèse had done the best she could. She’d found herself another mother, she’d been sold one ready made by the priests of her Church. Perfect, that mother of God, that pure Virgin, a holy doll who never felt angry or sexy and never went away’ (165). To reclaim her real mother, Thérèse sets fire to the statue of the Virgin Mary in the church: ‘She jumped clear of those rags and tatters of flame. She cried Maman, and flung herself at the church door’ (166).

In conjunction with Thérèse’s acceptance of the past, Léonie is finally forced to confront the voices in her childhood bedroom. This sequence opens with Léonie trying to calm the anxiety that Thérèse’s return has caused her:

Something was going to happen, to be upset. Léonie lay back, tried to reassert control over her world. She applied her usual formula for overcoming anxiety. She wandered in imagination through her house. She
listed her numerous possessions one by one [...] No good. This morning the spell would not work. (168)

The failure of her attempts at consolation causes Léonie to finally confront the voices of the Jews; that this decision has been caused by Thérèse’s return is evident when the narrative explains that ‘the words she was frightened to say were fastened up inside this room. She’d thought she’d lost them, she’d forgotten she’d put them away in here. For twenty years. For thirty. Until Thérèse had arrived back and reminded her’ (170). Léonie’s decision to enter the room is a recognition of her responsibility to bear witness to the past and so prevent the terrible events of the German occupation from re-occurring: ‘Léonie had to look steadily at what was rising up in her village, out of the grave of the war, the unburied and the undead arriving to lay hands upon them all, claim them for its own’ (170). Léonie’s act of bearing witness is to remember the words of the Jewish family who ‘called out their own names and the name of the informer who had betrayed them’ (171) and whose ghostly echoes she had heard when she was a child. She realises that she had shut these words away in the room because she was afraid, and she had then prevented her own children from entering the room, as she had been prohibited from entering the cellar as a child. However, Thérèse’s return has made her realise that the past cannot be ignored as ‘history was voices that came alive and shouted’ (171) and thus she has to remember the words which she has tried to forget. She decides to accept the responsibility of bearing witness to the past and thus attend the enquiry ‘to tell the lawyers the names of the slaughtered Jews’ (171) and to tell them her knowledge that the Priest was the informer. She realises that she must finally enter the bedroom to ‘go in and join them, listen to what they had to say’; hence, the novel concludes
with Léonie stepping into the room:

She twisted the handle of the door. She opened it. She paused in the doorway, then went in.

The voices came from somewhere just ahead, the shadowy bit she couldn’t see. She stepped forward, into the darkness, to find words. (172)

Léonie’s decision to join the Jewish family in the room is an acceptance of her connection to them which opposes her earlier assertion of difference from the Jews; this allows her to take responsibility for witnessing this disavowed past. Léonie’s final act of witnessing is, therefore, accomplished through the dissolving of the distinctions between self and other, foreign and familiar which is facilitated by the uncanny doubling of Thérèse and Léonie. Through this, Roberts creates a form of witnessing that is able to confront the traumatic past in a way that avoids confining these events through the disruption of narrative caused by the deconstructive effects of the uncanny.
II. Murdoch's use of the sublime in *The Sea, The Sea.*

Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin, Ireland, on July 15, 1919, the only child of Anglo-Irish parents. The family moved to London in Iris's childhood and she grew up in the western suburbs of Hammersmith and Chiswick. Murdoch studied classics, ancient history and philosophy at Somerville College, Oxford. During World War II she became a member of the Communist Party, but eventually resigned as she became disillusioned with its ideology. From 1938 to 1942 she worked at the Treasury as an assistant principal, and then for the United Nations relief organization UNNRA (1944-46) in Austria and Belgium. During this time, she befriended Jean Paul Sartre, on whom she wrote what was to be her first published work, a critical study entitled *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953). Murdoch took up a postgraduate studentship at Cambridge in 1947 studying philosophy under Ludwig Wittgenstein. In 1948 she was elected a fellow of St. Anne's College, Oxford, where she worked as a tutor until 1963. In 1956, Murdoch married John Bayley who became a professor of English at Oxford and also published fiction. They lived more than thirty years at Steeple Ashton, then moved into the suburbs of North Oxford. Between the years 1963 and 1967 Murdoch lectured at the Royal College of Art. In the mid-1990s she developed Alzheimer's Disease and was cared for by her husband. She died in Oxford on February 8, 1999.

Iris Murdoch was one of the most acclaimed British writers of the twentieth century. She was a prolific writer, publishing twenty-six novels, four books of philosophy, five plays, a volume of poetry, a libretto, and numerous essays. Her novels have won many prizes: the James Tait Black Memorial Prize
for *The Black Prince*, the Whitbread Literary Award for Fiction for *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, and the Booker Prize for *The Sea, The Sea*, her nineteenth novel. She was also the recipient of many esteemed awards: Dame of the Order of the British Empire, the Royal Society of Literature's Companion of Literature award, and the National Arts Club's (New York) Medal of Honor for Literature. Like *The Sea, The Sea* her novels explore her philosophical concerns through lively, comic plots. She creates highly imaginative plots, characters and settings to explore her philosophical concerns about human freedom and the nature of reality. Her first novel, *Under The Net*, was published in 1954. From this point onwards she published nearly a novel a year during throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, and continued at a slightly slower pace throughout the '80s and early '90s. Her novels cover many different genres and styles; such as romance, for example, *The Sandcastle*, 1957), religious fables, for example one of her most successful novels *The Bell*, 1958 and fantasies such as *The Unicorn* (1963), historical fiction (*The Red and the Green* 1965). From the 1970s her novels began to win international acclaim, particularly *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), which became one of her more popular novels. Her last novel, *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), was published just as the effects of the Alzheimer's were beginning to take over her life.

In a similar way to Roberts, Murdoch uses the uncanny to disrupt the traditional narrative structure. However, she develops this by also using the sublime to allow the trauma to remain as an impossibility beyond narrative inscription. Whereas Roberts' novel examines the representation of a traumatic historical event, *The Sea, The Sea* develops the notion of a traumatic experience into a theory of a traumatic reality which exists beyond our everyday perception.
In this respect, Murdoch's novel resonates with Munro's presentation of the trauma of reality and her novel is concerned with the same issues of how to achieve access to this unrepresentable reality without fixing it in narrative. Like many of the novels examined in this thesis, *The Sea, The Sea* concentrates on the temptation to constrict reality through writing: her protagonist Charles has decided to re-write the events of his life as a way of protecting himself from the reality of his past and thus he uses his journal as a form of narrative consolation by transforming events through his fantasy-led perception. Murdoch presents Charles as blinded from reality by his fantasies, and rather than allowing him to discover the truth about his past, as achieved by Thérèse and Léonie in *Daughters of the House*, Murdoch ensures that it is the reader alone who is able to see past Charles' self-deceptive depiction of his life to glimpse the reality which lies beyond.

Murdoch creates a narrative regarding Charles' relationships with women to represent the different layers of Charles' fantasy. Initially, Charles believes that his many failed relationships with women have been caused by his childhood sweetheart, Hartley, abandoning him in adolescence; therefore, when he unexpectedly meets her again when he retires to the coast he pursues her in an attempt to re-create his lost past. However, the reader is able to realise through the details in Charles' narrative that Charles' and Hartley's perfect childhood relationship is a fantasy which, in fact, masks his repressed feelings for his cousin James. Charles, himself, is eventually able to realise that his image of Hartley is a fantasy and he is also able to accept his feelings for James; hence, he ends the novel with what he perceives to be a degree of self-realisation in which the hidden truths of his past have become revealed to him. However, James does not, in fact,
represent the underlying reality, but actually functions as a further mask for Charles’ ambiguous and undefined feelings for his Aunt Estelle who, it is suggested, is Charles’ biological mother, and so, like Daughters of the House, the narrative regarding the revelation of hidden truths about the past is linked to the discovery of the protagonist’s maternal heritage. To avoid the narrative inscription of this underlying reality represented by Estelle, Murdoch portrays her through images of the sublime, particularly the familiar sublime image of the stars. Through this, she is able to create a form of representation that avoids narrative consolation through the unassimilability of the experience of the sublime.

The novel is organised into three sections, entitled ‘Prehistory’, ‘History’, and ‘Postscript: Life Goes On’. The first section of the novel opens with Charles’ decision to retire from his glamorous life as a theatre director in London, to live a life of solitude by the sea where he can think over the events of his life. Charles has decided to record these thoughts on paper; thus, the novel that we read is Charles’ retrospective re-organisation of his past and, therefore, his attempt to organise and create a pattern out of his random memories. In the second section of the novel, Charles’ solitude is interrupted when he sees Hartley in the nearby village; he becomes obsessed with her and pursues her in an attempt to re-create their lost childhood relationship. The events surrounding Charles’ pursuit of Hartley continue throughout this lengthy middle section until, eventually, Charles is forced to abandon his obsession and in the final section of the novel he begins to look forward to the future and the possibilities that it may bring.

In the ‘Prehistory’ section, Charles focuses on the form that his narrative should take; he is unable to decide whether it will be a memoir of his past life, a
diary of his daily activities in the present, or a philosophical journal in which he records his thoughts. In fact, this first section displays a mixture of all three narratives, as it shifts from memories of his time in the theatre and the people from his past, mainly his family and his former lovers, to descriptions of his surroundings, particularly the vastness of the sea and his seemingly haunted house, to his likes and prejudices which illustrate his dogmatic attitude towards life. Through this random and confused structure, Charles indicates his fraught relationship with his parents who are now dead, describing his distance from his mother and his protective love for his father; he also mentions his Uncle Abel, Abel's glamorous wife Estelle and their son, Charles' cousin James. Intermingled with these descriptions of his family, Charles describes his successful and glittering career as a theatre director, focusing mainly on his actor friends and the women with whom he has had affairs. Indeed, through Charles' vague references to his love affairs, the reader is able to gauge his appalling treatment of these usually married women whom he pursues and then discards once he possesses them. One woman that features strongly in Charles' memories is his first mistress Clement, an older actress whom he met when he was twenty years old, and whom he nursed until her early death. Indeed, Charles states that he intends his memoir to be a lasting memorial to Clement, as he believes her to be the most significant figure in his life. The final woman that Charles mentions is Hartley, with whom he had shared an innocent childhood relationship, but who had left him when they were teenagers as she had felt that he was too domineering.

These ruminations on his past and descriptions of his daily activities continue into the second section of the novel, but are interrupted when he

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92 For a fuller analysis of the effects of Charles' different narrative styles see Spear (93)
unexpectedly sees Hartley walking near his house. In response, Charles pursues Hartley and tries to bully her into returning to him: he spies on her and her husband Ben while they are in their marital home and, after hearing them having an argument, he convinces himself that Hartley must be unhappy living with Ben. He then decides that he must rescue Hartley and so manipulates events to cause a rift between the couple: he deceives her into staying at his house later than she had planned and uses the return of Hartley and Ben’s son Titus, who has been missing for two years, to his advantage by luring Hartley to him through her son. When Hartley resists these attempts at manipulation, Charles kidnaps her and locks her into a room in his house until his cousin James, his friends, and his past lovers, who have all come to visit him, manage to convince him to allow Hartley to return to her husband. Eventually, Charles is able to accept that he has deceived himself in his feelings for Hartley and that his desire to re-create their childhood relationship had been a fantasy; this makes him aware of the strength of his feelings for his cousin James, but when he tries to contact James, he discovers that James has died and has left him all of his possessions, including his apartment. In the final part of the novel, Charles moves into James’ apartment where he is depicted pondering over the recent events of his life and looking forward to the future.

These events are all communicated to the reader through Charles’ first person retrospective narrative which he is writing after the events have occurred; hence, the reader only has access to Charles’ version of the events. Charles, therefore, is similar to Morag in *The Diviners* and Del in *Lives of Girls and Women*; he attempts to shape the events of his life to give them meaning.  

93 For a fuller discussion of the effect of this retrospective narrative in *The Sea, the Sea* see Nicol.
Charles is portrayed as a self-deluded man who fools himself into perceiving the events of his life in a particular way and so he is an unreliable narrator who repeatedly misinterprets his situation. Therefore, the reader must avoid taking Charles’ interpretation at face value and must, instead, attend to the details of the novel to gauge the reality of his situation, as Johnson argues: ‘The journal [Charles] writes offers itself to be read between the lines, to be deconstructed by the sceptical reader’ (46). The reader, therefore, must resist the ‘page-turning impetus’ (Dipple qtd. in Johnson 99) of the novel to concentrate on the minute particulars of the narrative so as to perceive the reality which is masked by Charles’ self-deceptive interpretations.

Murdoch utilises this narrative strategy and her depiction of Charles’ continual misreading of events to illustrate her theories on the way that fantasy can blind people from reality. Murdoch proposes in her philosophical essays that reality is ultimately unknowable, but that art is the only means to access this by allowing reality to remain unrepresentable. She formulates reality as ‘whatever is contingent, messy, boundless, infinitely particular and endlessly still to be explained’ ("Sublime and Beautiful" 274) and believes that this unassimilable reality is screened by the fantasies and desires of everyday perception. The only means possible to pierce the veil of fantasy is by an act of attention; this is not a simple proposition that reality can be seen by looking directly at it, but is more of a moral position in which the subject can achieve a level of ‘goodness’ by directing their attention to a reality that lies beyond their fantasies. Murdoch posits the relationship between two people as a model of the necessary suppression of the self to achieve the ability to perceive the otherness of reality. In the ideal relationship the attainment of love through moral attention will enable
‘the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real’
(“Sublime and Good” 215), and will lead to a perception of a reality beyond their
fantasy constructed world: ‘Freedom is exercised in the confrontation by each
other, in the context of an infinitely extensible work of imaginative understanding,
of two irreducibly dissimilar individuals. Love is the imaginative recognition,
that is respect for, this otherness’ (“Sublime and Good” 216).

This moral concept becomes a model of representation in her belief that
morals and art are entwined rather than separate spheres: ‘Art and morals are […]
one. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals.
Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is
real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality’ (“Sublime and
Good” 215). Murdoch believes that everyday love is ‘normally too profoundly
possessive and also too mechanical to be a place of vision’ (“On ‘God’ and
‘Good’” 361); thus, she proposes that art is the privileged location for the
achievement of a vision of reality that will pierce the veil of fantasy: ‘That the
highest love is in some sense impersonal, is something which we can see in art,
but which cannot be seen clearly in the relationships of human beings’ (“On
‘God’ and ‘Good’” 361). Therefore, Murdoch believes that art, if it attends to this
otherness, will be able to access reality. However, she isn’t proposing a naïve
notion of the ability of all art to represent reality; instead, Murdoch foregrounds
the inherent paradox of representation by highlighting that, although art is the
means for attaining access to reality, it is also inherently bound to the processes of
fantasy and desire. This is particularly evident in literature in which the majority
of writers, Murdoch argues, use narrative continuity to transform the particularity
of reality into their fantasy constructed version. Therefore, Murdoch proposes her
notion of attention as a means for an artist to avoid creating their art as a ‘form of fantasy-consolation’ ("On ‘God’ and ‘Good’" 352) and to construct a mode of representation that can become a place of vision in which the real which lies beyond the veil of fantasy can be perceived. Once art has achieved this it can then teach its audience how to achieve a level of goodness by allowing them to attend to reality. Murdoch’s theories of representation, then, are presented in terms of her concerns for the attainment of morality, and so art’s ability to achieve access to reality is necessary for the morality of mankind. Therefore, Murdoch’s own novels must aspire to the achievement of morality by becoming places of vision in which the real can be attended to.

How, then, does Murdoch escape from the trap into which most writers fall and avoid using her art as a means to define and control an inherently formless and ‘inexhaustible reality’ ("Idea of Perfection" 333)? A means of answering this question is to examine her choice of narrative strategies in *The Sea, The Sea*. By portraying her protagonist as an unreliable narrator, she composes the novel in terms of layers of fantasy which the reader must peel away to access the reality underneath. However, this model risks defining and controlling that ultimate reality once it has been discovered; thus, Murdoch uses the disruptive force of the uncanny to refuse the closure of narrative resolution, and the sublime as a means of allowing the underlying reality to remain unrepresented in the narrative.

In the movement between the levels of Charles’ fantasy, the link between James and Estelle is not one of the processes of repression and substitution as in the other layers, but is, in fact, a very different kind of process. This is apparent in that, firstly, James is presented by Murdoch as Charles’ uncanny double, and
so, like Thérèse in *Daughters of the House*, his presence in the novel disrupts the homogeneity of narrative closure. In addition, the anxiety that Charles feels toward his cousin suggests that James’ position is analogous to the second scene in Freud’s theory of ‘deferred action’. To return briefly to this theory, Freud discovered in his analysis of Emma’s phobia of going into a shop alone that her trauma was in fact located within two scenes: the first scene occurred when she was sexually assaulted as a young girl by a shopkeeper, and the second moment was experienced during adolescence when the trauma of this first scene returned upon her, causing her to run out of a shop in fear. This model of trauma positions two scenes: an initial underlying event and a second event which masks this original scene. This layered model resonates, therefore, with Murdoch’s concept of the underlying reality which is masked by something else. In ‘deferred action’ the affect released in the first moment becomes attached to something else in the second moment. In *The Sea, The Sea*, therefore, the anxiety that Charles feels towards James positions James as this second moment; this directs the reader to another layer existing beyond him, a someone or something else which is the location of this original event; this underlying scene is represented in the novel by Estelle.

To avoid defining this underlying reality and thus using her fiction as form of fantasy-consolation, Murdoch utilises the sublime to represent Estelle; this confuses the reader and hinders her/his attempts to define the first moment of trauma. Murdoch conceptualises the sublime as an experience of the vision of ‘reality’, arguing that

the theory of the sublime can be transformed into a theory of art. ‘The sublime’ is an enjoyment and renewal of spiritual power arising from an
aprehension of the vast formless strength of the natural world. [...] It is indeed the realisation of a vast and varied reality outside ourselves which brings about a sense initially of terror, and when properly understood of exhilaration and spiritual power. (‘Sublime and Beautiful’ 282)

Therefore, the sublime offers, for Murdoch, a means of representing reality without reducing it to narrative continuity. Murdoch’s notion of the sublime resonates with Lyotard’s proposition of the similarities between the sublime and ‘unconscious affect’ (Heidegger 31), which as I have defined in more detail in the introduction Lyotard proposes is ‘ungraspable by consciousness’ (17), that it is atemporal and unlocatable, that it ‘is not localisable in time’ (32) and seems therefore to remain as an excess beyond the chronologisation of narrative. In this respect, the sublime offers Murdoch a means of indicating an excess in the narrative which remains an undefined absence. Through this, Murdoch avoids her novel becoming a form of fantasy consolation and allows the reader, who must peel away the layers of fantasy created by Charles, to attend to the formlessness of reality without this unrepresentable reality being confined through narrative definition.

Layer One: Charles’ desire to memorialise Clement in his journal.

Murdoch opens the novel with a depiction of Charles’ transformation of his life through narrative. Charles has decided to re-write the events of his life and, in particular, to describe his relationship with his first mistress Clement which prompts him to move to the area of the country where Clement grew up; as Charles explains: ‘I had better get straight on to Clement Makin. After all it is for
Clement that I am here. This was her country, she grew up on this lonely coast’ (32). However, he soon falters in his determination to re-connect with the memory of Clement when his description of her invariably turns to lengthy ruminations about his life as a theatre director. Charles’ immediate reversion to discussing his experience in the theatre is not only a characteristically egotistical move, but also illustrates his inherent nature as a director; this has become transferred to his attempts to direct his own life, illustrated in his desire to transform Clement and the events of his life through artistic devices; as Charles states, he has turned from the ‘assault’ of the theatre to the easeful deviousness of literature (34). In fact, he admits that his journal will be even more controlling than his plays; he states that, unlike his plays, which were ‘magical delusions, fireworks’, his journal will be ‘a lasting memorial’ (35). This monumentalising act is based upon a similar logic as Sethe’s engraving of the word Beloved on the gravestone in Morrison’s novel; it will ensure that the events of his past are transformed into an unthreatening version of events, protecting him from having to face the reality of his past. Indeed, he is aware that to perform this act of memorialisation he must deceive his readers into accepting his version of events; he perceives his readers ‘as enemies, to be deceived, drugged, incarcerated, stupefied’ (33), and his journal as ‘a factitious spell-binding present moment [in which] to imprison the spectator’ (36).

However, Charles’ attempts to control reality through representation fail in the opening pages of the novel when he experiences an event that he cannot describe. In the first paragraph of the novel Charles tries to define the sea in narrative; his desire to control the reality of the sea is illustrated by the artistic terminology he uses, for example he writes that his ‘view is framed’ and describes
the sky as 'very pale at the indigo horizon which it lightly pencils in' (1). However, in the second paragraph Charles mentions an event which is 'so extraordinary and horrible' (1) that it disrupts his artistic depiction; this event is his sighting of an enormous sea serpent which surfaces out of the depths of the sea: 'I had written the above, destined to be the opening paragraph of my memoir, when something happened which was so extraordinary and so horrible that I cannot bring myself to describe it even now after an interval of time ... Perhaps I shall feel calmer and more clear headed after yet another interval' (1). The emergence of the sea serpent disrupts the 'smooth elegance of artful order' (Dipple 276) and, thus, as Weese argues, 'cannot easily be fitted in his reductive world where everything constitutes part of the artistic pattern he imposes on events' (637). In this respect, the sea serpent represents something else which lies beyond Charles' perception, suggesting that Murdoch is associating it with the trauma of reality; this is apparent in the excessive fear that the serpent induces in Charles; he describes how 'it later struck [him] as significant that the creature had appeared at once as utterly frightful, rather than as very surprising or even interesting. [He] was excessively frightened' (20).

The sea, from which the serpent emerges, can therefore be conceptualised as the formlessness of reality. This formulation is evident in that the sea remains as a constant backdrop to the events of the novel, reminding the reader of the reality that exists beyond Charles' fantasy-led interpretations of events, as Conradi proposes: 'The world which lies beyond the realm of images [...] is partly figured by the sea' (248). Murdoch, as Dipple (280) argues, uses the metaphor of Charles' various devices for exiting the sea to illustrate his attempts at controlling reality. To aid his exit from the sea, Charles uses a rope, an iron railing and a curtain,
which, however, all become detached or broken, leaving him struggling to return to the safety of land. Therefore, his means of controlling the sea and his artistic devices for controlling reality both fail. The serpent, which emerges from the sea, is also presented as emerging from Charles’ subconscious mind; this equates the sea, and the reality that it represents, with the unconscious. Murdoch’s presentation of the sea-serpent as an image which is projected from Charles’ unconscious is evident in Charles’ doubt as to the distance it was situated from him; ‘Out of a perfectly calm empty sea, at a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile (or less) I saw an immense creature break the surface and arch itself upward ... to a height of (as it seemed) twenty or thirty feet’ (19); Charles’ uncertainty is emphasised in his attempts to make sense of the event: ‘How far off had the animal been and how high above the water had it risen?’ (20). However, his continuing vagueness is inconsistent with the detail that he provides of the interior of the mouth, suggesting that it is, indeed, an image which has been projected from his unconscious onto the external scene. This interpretation is supported by Charles’ depiction of the falling of the sea-creature into the sea as a shattering image rather than the movement of an animal: ‘Then in a moment the whole thing collapsed, the coils fell’ (19). The serpent only partially rises from the water, suggesting that it is an image which is only partly revealed to Charles’ conscious mind, as evident in Charles’ description that he ‘could not see the whole of the creature, but the remainder of its body, or perhaps a long tail, disturbed the foaming water around the base’ (19); its partial revelation, therefore, ensures that it remains ambiguous and unrepresentable in the narrative.

94 Dipple (278) also argues that the image is projected from Charles’ subconscious mind, but she differs from my interpretation by emphasising that the sea-monster is a projection of Charles’ jealousy of women.
Murdoch's depiction of the emergence of the sea serpent from the sea allows the reader to glimpse the reality which lies beyond Charles' fantasy-led interpretation; through this, Murdoch instructs the reader early in the novel to attend to the details of the narrative, rather than accepting Charles' version of events. Therefore, the reader must remove the curtains of fantasy which Charles creates in an attempt to discover the reality which lies beyond; the first layer of fantasy which must be pierced is Charles' initial desire to write about Clement which the reader discovers is a screen masking his feelings towards his childhood love Hartley. The layering of Clement over Hartley is evident when he accidentally encounters Hartley in the nearby village and proclaims that 'I had come here because of Clement, and I had found Hartley' (113).

Layer Two: Charles' idyllic childhood love for Hartley.

When Charles sees Hartley for the first time as an adult, he experiences a sense of shock at the removal of the first layer of his fantasy construction. In response, he immediately tries to control the situation through a belief in his power to transform this bewildering coincidence; this is illustrated the following morning when he states that he feels he had been 'changed in the night into a beneficent being powerful for good'; as he explains: 'I could produce, I could bestow, good. I was the king seeking the beggar maid. I had power to transform, to raise up, to heal, to bring undreamt-of happiness and joy. My God, I had come here to this very place, and against all the chances I had found her at last!' (113). Charles, therefore, distorts the situation to appear as if he has been searching for Hartley all along and had moved to the coast, not to reconnect with the memory of
Clement as previously stated, but to find Hartley. In this respect, he places himself in the position of the director, changing these surprising events so that they are under his control. From this moment on, Charles attempts to manipulate events to force Hartley into leaving her husband in order to live with him. He firstly deceives her into returning late to her husband, and then, when these malicious attempts to drive a wedge between the couple fail, he kidnaps her and locks her into a room in his house. He deludes himself that he is conducting these terrible actions for the sake of the reconstruction of their beautiful childhood relationship. However, it is apparent to the reader that this ideal is a fantasy of Charles' which has little bearing on the reality of the situation. The difference between reality and Charles' perception is apparent when Charles sees Hartley in the village:

I saw: a stout elderly woman in a shapeless brown tent-like dress, holding a shopping bag [...] This figure, which I had so vaguely, idly, noticed before was now utterly changed in my eyes. The whole world was its background. And between me and it there hovered [...] the vision of a slim long-legged girl with gleaming thighs. (113)

This fantasy that Charles has created screens the reality of the situation from him, as the 'long-legged girl' hovers in front of the 'elderly woman in a shapeless brown tent-like dress'. After this moment, Charles repeatedly tries to transform Hartley into this idealised image of her as a young girl; the contrast between this and reality is illustrated when he visits Hartley at her marital home and experiences 'shock again at her changed appearance, since in [his] intense and cherishing thought she had become young again' (123).

95 Weese, in her reading of the novel in terms of Gothic narratives, argues that Charles imprisons
Charles' transformation of his present relationship with Hartley is evident when he portrays them walking together in classical terms: 'How odd it must have looked though, with me as a crazed Orpheus and her as a dazed Eurydice' (128). However, he has also created the ideal nature of their childhood relationship; this is demonstrated when he depicts them in childhood as 'Adam and Eve upon an old fresco, two innocent beings bathed in a clear light' (85). Thus, Charles' present actions are based upon an ideal that he has created and which he now obsessively pursues. His immersion in his fantasy world during his pursuit of Hartley is illustrated by the fact that when Charles is in her presence he is unaware of the reality of the sea, as he explains: 'It struck me in an odd way that while I was talking to Hartley I had forgotten about the sea, forgotten it was there' (233). Because Murdoch presents the sea as the unassimilable reality, Charles' unawareness of its presence illustrates the distance between himself and reality which results from his fantasy-driven perception of Hartley.

The fact that Charles is blinded by his fantasies becomes increasingly apparent to the reader who, from the advice given to Charles by his friends and James, gains a sense of the reality of the situation. James is the main instigator in the attempts to convince Charles that Hartley is a fantasy; he also assumes responsibility for rescuing Charles from drowning in the events which spiral out of his control because of his inability to see the reality of his situation. Murdoch's presentation of James as Charles' saviour is evident when Charles nearly drowns: in this episode, Charles is pushed into a dangerous whirlpool near his house, called Minn's Cauldron, by Peregrine in revenge for Charles' affair with his wife Rosina, and is saved when James supernaturally levitates and lifts him out of the water.

Hartley 'literally just as he imprisons her metaphorically in his story' (636).
Thus, Charles' egotistical perception of the world, in which he has every right to
steal another man's wife, causes him nearly to drown, just as he is nearly
overwhelmed by his fantasy-driven pursuit of Hartley which causes events to
spiral out of control. In both of these situations, it is James who rescues him and
returns him to safety.

James manages to persuade Charles to release Hartley and let her return to
her husband and he repeatedly tries to convince Charles that his image of Hartley
is 'a mental charade' (353), explaining that 'time can divorce us from the reality of
people, it can separate us from people and turn them into ghosts. Or rather it is we
who turn them into ghosts or demons' (352). Charles' eventual realisation that he
has created a fantasy of Hartley is apparent when he acknowledges his conscious
decision to desire her: '[A]s I worked and worked to join together her youth and
her age, I so much desired to desire her. To achieve this was a crucial test, a trial,
a labour undergone for her' (186). Eventually, Charles concedes that he has been
deluding himself about Hartley; he admits that he was a 'fantasist', a 'dreamer'
and a 'magician', and that Hartley is a 'dream text' (499). Not only does Charles
admit that he has transformed Hartley into an ideal in the present, he even accepts
that he may have never loved her: 'And am I now actually beginning to wonder
how much I loved her even at the start? The sad fact was that Hartley was not
really very intelligent. What a dull humourless pair we seem, looking back,
without spirit or style or a sense of fun' (489).

What becomes apparent to the reader, in Charles' realisation of his fantasy
image of Hartley, is that she is a substitution; Charles has constructed their ideal
childhood love as a screen for his feelings for someone else. This other person is
James, so another layer must be peeled away, that of Hartley’s position as a substitute for James whom Charles has repressed, but who increasingly becomes significant in Charles’ life.

**Layer Three: Charles’ anxiety towards James.**

The substitution of James with Hartley is evident in the link between the two that Charles subconsciously makes throughout his journal; for example, he correlates the two childhood friends when he says in reference to James that ‘a childhood hatred, like a childhood love, can last a lifetime’ (395), illustrating the strength of emotion he feels for both of them. The two people are also linked together in his dreams; this is apparent in his uncanny dream about Hartley levitating, which is a premonition of later events when James saves him from drowning by levitating and lifting him out of the water. Charles’ meandering streams of consciousness also move from thoughts about Hartley to images of James, and, when Charles visits his flat in London the same movement from Hartley to James is apparent in the photographs that he discovers: during his search for photographs of Hartley, he discovers ‘some horrible pictures of James on his pony’ (156) which prompt him to ask himself the significant question, ‘why ever had I kept those’ (156).

Although Charles is blind to his real feelings towards James, his fragmented and unreliable memories allow the reader to realise the significant part

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96 The significance of James in the novel is indicated in various critical responses to the work. For example, Dipple argues that on James ‘rests the deep infrastructure of the book’ (275); Spear argues that ‘the deliberately offhand way in which Charles constantly refers to James makes us realise […] the extent to which he is really obsessed with James’ life’ (97); and Todd refers to James’ love for Charles, but does not perceive the reciprocality of these feelings nor their
played by James in Charles' childhood and the continuing relevance of James in Charles' life. James' importance is indicated by Charles when he remembers the anxious and furtive nature of their childhood relationship:

Silently, James and I, from earliest moments, were acutely, suspiciously, constantly aware of each other. We watched each other; and by a mute instinct kept this mutual attention largely secret from our parents. I cannot say that we feared each other; the fear was all mine [...] But we lived, in relation to each other, in a cloud of discomfort and anxiety. All this of course in silence. We never spoke of this strange tension between us; perhaps we would not have been able to find words for it. (62)

Rather than the description of a childhood friendship, Charles' words sound more like the portrayal of a secret attraction between the cousins; this, however, has remained repressed and, because Charles' feelings for James have remained unarticulated, his love for his cousin has become transformed into fear and anxiety. This continuing unease towards James is evident in Charles' inability to describe him in his journal: 'Rereading these paragraphs I feel again that I am giving the wrong impression [...] When we were younger, and then when we were older, James and I played together as ordinary boys play [...] we played alone with each other, watching each other' (63). His constant attempts to revise his representations of James emphasise his frustration and confusion in relation to him, which is also illustrated in Charles' adult conversations with James:

I was beginning to have an old familiar sensation which, oddly enough, I tended to forget in the interim, a feeling of disappointment and frustrated helplessness, as if I had looked forward to talking to James and had then

implications for the novel's structure. (89)
been deliberately excluded from some kind of treat; as if something significant which I wanted to tell him had been, inside my soul, shrivelled, trivialised by a casual laser beam of his intelligence. (176)

Murdoch uses James' awareness of the situation as a means of letting the reader gauge the reality of the relationship between the cousins. James is the means by which Charles has the opportunity to face reality; he not only forces Charles to realise that Hartley is a fantasy construction, but also tries to make Charles recognise and remember his own significance in Charles' childhood, apparent when he compels Charles to `ask [him]self what really happened between whom all those years ago' (335). The strength of James' emotion towards Charles is demonstrated when he reacts emotionally to Charles' continuing assertion of the importance of his childhood relationship with Hartley: `When you've known someone from childhood, when you can't remember when they weren't there, that's not an illusion. She's woven into me. Don't you understand how one can be absolutely connected with somebody like that?' (354-5). James' affirmation in reply to this question and his quick exit from the scene confirm the reader's suspicions that James' and Charles' relationship was more than just cousinship. However, whenever James appears close to making Charles remember the strength of their childhood relationship, Charles retracts from him and re-directs his attention onto Hartley. This is apparent when Charles and James share an erotic moment in which James reaches out and touches him whilst Charles murmurs `Yes, yes' (363); in this scene, the emergence of Charles' true feelings for James causes him to react by subsequently increasing his efforts to manipulate Hartley into returning to him. In this respect, when James nearly succeeds in removing Charles' fantasy and forcing him to confront the reality of his past, Charles
reconstructs the fantasy screen.

It is only when Charles has to face the futility of his plans to recreate his relationship with Hartley, when she and her husband move to Australia, that he finally becomes aware of James. In this respect, it is only once Charles' ability to construct Hartley as a fantasy has been denied that the possibility of him facing his feelings for James arises. The process of Charles' eventual awareness of his love for James begins with his memory of James' supernatural ability to levitate:

[A]t the idea that my cousin had used some strange power which he possessed to save my life I was suddenly filled with the most piercing pure and tender joy, as if the sky had opened and a stream of white light had descended [...] I also thought, in a curious ridiculous way, what fun! And I recalled James saying 'What larks we had!' And I wanted to thank him and in doing so to laugh. (470)

However, the feelings of joy which Charles experiences here belie the anxiety that he constantly feels towards his cousin which causes him to react in a fearful manner in James' presence. This anxiety suggests that Murdoch is presenting James as Charles' uncanny double, and so she utilises the uncanny to disrupt the sense of closure implied in Charles' 'discovery' of his feelings for James. This disruptive strategy accords with that used by Roberts in Daughters of the House in which Thérèse's presence as Léonie's uncanny double disturbs the resolutions inherent in the revelation of the occluded events of the past.

Murdoch's depiction of James resonates with the Freudian formulation of the uncanny double in many ways. For example, Charles' fear in response to his cousin's presence chimes with Freud's notion that the one experiencing the uncanny is filled with terror; Charles calls James 'sinister' and 'menacing' (57)
and he is constantly threatened by his presence, feeling ‘confused, exasperated, profoundly startled’ (321) by his cousin’s return into his life. James’ position as an unrepresentable, shadowy character also emphasises his uncanny nature; he is a ‘soft footfall and [...] a shadow’ (351), his profession and daily life are shrouded in mystery, and he also possesses seemingly supernatural powers, such as his ability to levitate. James’ location as the uncanny is also illustrated in the gothic atmosphere that announces his entrance into the novel; for example, he first appears during a gothic stormy night, as described by Charles:

I remember the lurid impression of that evening, the vivid dark light, the brilliant vibrating colours of the rocks [...] The sea was menacingly quiet [...] Then there were silent flashes, extraordinary lightings up of the whole horizon, like vast distant fireworks or some weird atomic experiment. Not a cloud, not a sound of thunder, just these huge displays of yellowish-white light. (320)

Later, James arrives on the scene when Charles’ house is ‘moving, shaking itself and twitching, jerking and creaking and stretching’; when Charles can hear ‘the window frames shifting, the bead curtain clicking, the front door rattling [...] and] from across the sea, a prolonged repeated booming [...] and] the peculiar regular slapping boom which was produced by the water racing into Minn’s cauldron’ (440).

James further coincides with many of the features of the uncanny highlighted by Freud. Firstly, Freud postulates that the subject and its double will ‘be considered identical because they look alike’ (356); James is repeatedly mistaken for Charles’ brother, and indeed, Charles himself states that he feels they were more like twins than cousins. The notion of telepathy, of ‘knowledge,
feelings and experience in common' (Freud 356), a feature attributed by Freud to the double, is evident in Charles' and James' shared childhood experiences and also in that James seems to be connected to the same people as Charles; thus James' confession to having known Charles' former lover Lizzie for a long time and Titus's sense of already having met James illustrate James' physical or telepathic link with Charles' friends. The uncanniness of this is indicated by Charles when he accuses James of having always got there first: 'I daresay you knew Lizzie before I ever met her, you were there first, you were there before me, as you were with -- as you were with -- with Aunt Estelle and -- and with Titus -- you'd met Titus before, he said he'd seen you in a dream [...] you're everywhere, spoiling everything in my life' (409). The dissolution of a sense of identity caused by this doubling, which is also apparent in Daughters of the House in Léonie's questioning of her identity, is evident in Charles' lack of identity: he repeatedly mentions the 'very little sense of identity' (3) that he has of himself, he images himself through other people's perception of him, and only on one occasion does he actually attempt to describe himself in his journal. Also, his identity seems to be threatened by James' presence; as he explains: 'I could never decide whether James was real and I was unreal, or vice versa. Somehow it was clear we could not both be real; one of us must inhabit the real world, the other one the world of shadows' (57).

Charles, however, ignores James' threatening and ambiguous status by transforming him from the uncanny to the familiar. This is apparent when Charles experiences an epiphany in which he realises his feelings for James; this occurs after James' death when Charles sees the seals for which he has been searching since he moved to the coast:
I remembered that James was dead. Who is one’s first love? Who indeed […] Then I heard, odd and frightening in that total stillness […] a sudden and quite loud splashing […] I had a moment of sheer fear as I turned and leaned towards the sea edge. Then I saw below me, their wet doggy faces looking curiously upward, four seals, swimming so close to the rock that I could have almost touched them … And as I watched their play I could not doubt that they were beneficent beings come to visit me and bless me. (476)

Charles’ epiphany suggests to Charles that James is the reality which has been finally revealed to him. However, the comforting and consoling nature of this epiphany suggests instead to the reader that James is another layer which, in fact, masks the underlying reality; this is evident in that, like the serpent earlier in the novel, the seals are only partially emerged from the water, denoting that something else lies hidden beneath the surface. Therefore, rather than this moment being one of true revelation, Charles’ representation of this event as a moment of epiphany resurrects James as a fantasy screen as protection against the reality which lies beyond James which is too traumatic for Charles to face. The trauma of this underlying reality, evident in the ‘sheer fear’ that Charles experiences, is then appeased by the ‘wet doggy faces’ of the seals.

My reading of this moment in the novel differs greatly from other critical responses to the work. Many critics perceive James as the final layer in Charles’ substitutions and so argue that Charles’ awareness of James is evidence of his ability to perceive the reality underlying his fantasy. For example, Spear perceives this moment as a positive one which illustrates Charles’ realisation of his love for his cousin and so argues that ‘as the novel draws to an end it is clear that Charles has reached a new understanding of himself’ (99) and Nicol agrees with Spear’s
reading by arguing that Charles' realisation of his feelings for James 'is the conclusion of his pilgrimage from appearance to reality' (204). However, I argue that Charles' love for James, in fact, masks an underlying reality and thus it is only the reader, and not Charles, who can perceive the formlessness of reality by seeing beyond James to the reality which he masks.

One of the central scenes which illustrate James' masking position is when Charles visits the art gallery. Murdoch uses the gallery to represent, as Dipple argues, 'a neutral space endowed by the mind of the perceiver and made into a symbolic inner place' (290); this is evident in that, during his visit to the gallery, Charles hallucinates that the paintings on the wall are portraits of his former lovers. Charles becomes overwhelmed by the power of these fantasy images and suffers a fainting fit; during this, he begins to get a sense of something that he must remember, something that fills him with anxiety; this traumatic reality is presented in terms of the sublimity of the stars:

[F]lashing lights swarmed and receded, blending with my headache. I found myself searching my mind for something that it was important to remember, to do with that night when I had lain out on the rocks and seen the ultimate cavern of the stars when the universe seemed to be turning inside out, and at the time this had reminded me of something, only I could not make out what; only now, as I seemed to see again that vast slowly changing infinitely deep dome of luminously golden stars, stars behind stars behind stars, did I recall what it was that I had been put in mind of. It was the changing lights in the Odeon Cinema where I used to go with Hartley as a child! (170)

In this episode, to protect himself from the anxiety caused by the emergence of an ambiguous and unrepresentable reality, Charles tries to reconstruct Hartley as a
screen by referring to his childhood relationship with her. However, Charles’ attempts to resurrect Hartley fail as he continues to experience his fainting fit which is abated, instead, when James appears to restore order to the formlessness of reality with which Charles is confronted:

I began to walk away down the gallery and as I went my hangover seemed to be turning into a sort of fainting fit. A man had come into the room by the other door at the far end and was standing looking at me through the curiously brownish murky air. I reached out and put one hand on the wall. Of course I recognized him at once. He was my cousin James. (171)

James, therefore, is the means for Charles to restore order to the anxiety he feels and so he masks the reality which is trying to break through Charles’ fantasy constructions. James’ role in the novel as Charles’ saviour ensures that he screens the underlying reality; this is evident in his earlier rescue of Charles from Minn’s Cauldron in which he saves Charles from the formlessness of reality, imaged in the sea, to return him to the safety of land.

Layer Four: The formlessness of Murdochian ‘reality’, or the first scene in ‘deferred action’.

Murdoch portrays the underlying reality that James masks in terms of the sublime. This is apparent in the episode set in the art gallery in which Murdoch describes the emergence of something else which disrupts Charles’ fantasies: this other thing is depicted through Charles’ experience of the sublime in the image of the ‘stars behind stars behind stars’ (170). To represent this underlying reality Murdoch presents Charles’ Aunt Estelle; she is the final layer in Charles’
substitutions, the location of the first moment of 'deferred action'. By using the sublime to represent Estelle, Murdoch avoids defining this first scene, this formless reality, by ensuring that it remains unassimilable to conscious interpretation.

Estelle is a hidden presence in Charles' journal and, in a similar way to James, the reader must attend to the brief and fragmented references that Charles makes regarding Estelle to piece together her full meaning. Initially, she appears as an absence, as the only close family member not represented in Charles' descriptions of his family relationships. She is then only mentioned in terms of her effect on other members of Charles' family: the embarrassment she caused his father, and the detestation his mother felt towards her. Primarily, therefore, Estelle's presence is sensed more by what is not being said about her by Charles, thus securing her position as an unrepresentable element in his journal. It is only later that Charles tries to describe Estelle in his journal; he then depicts her as a site of trauma which causes fear and anxiety, as exemplified in his admission that 'it is probably in some way because of Aunt Estelle that the human voice singing has always upset [him] with a deep and almost frightening emotion' (60).

Towards the end of the novel, when the various layers of Charles' fantasy are beginning to collapse around him, Estelle surfaces at different moments as an opportunity for Charles to face reality. For example, when Charles hears Lizzie singing 'Roses of Picardy' which Estelle used to sing, the anxiety associated with Estelle causes him to try to escape the trauma to sit with James. This is the episode in which Charles and James share an erotic moment, emphasising that Charles' and James' relationship is a layer which masks the reality which Estelle represents. Therefore, in reaction to the trauma of the memory of Estelle, Charles
turns to James as a protective layer which screens him from the trauma of reality. In this episode, the anxiety produced by the memory of Estelle makes Charles feel the need to talk to James about Estelle. Although he is unsure exactly what he wants to say, he is certain that 'she had shone somehow on [his] childhood' (364); thus, the only way that Charles can represent Estelle is as an image of the sublime, a shining star, and thus beyond representation and comprehension.

Interestingly, Murdoch suggests that Estelle is actually Charles' biological mother; thus, the underlying reality which Charles must discover is his true maternal heritage; this is comparable to Léonie's discovery that Antoinette is her biological mother in Daughters of the House. In Murdoch's novel, this underlying truth remains occluded and can only be gleaned through the tense relationship between Charles' mother and his Aunt Estelle. His mother, Charles writes, particularly disliked Estelle, a feeling which goes beyond a general distaste for her extravagant lifestyle and suggests a more deep-rooted reason to explain her being 'thoroughly depressed by [Estelle's] existence' (61). Charles also recalls how Estelle's visits 'spoilt' (61) their home, as if her appearance there disrupted the relationship which Charles had with his mother. Thus possibly, and I remain intentionally undecided about this, Charles is Estelle's son, and therefore James' twin, and was adopted by Estelle's brother-in-law Adam and his wife. This may explain why James and Charles seem like twins rather than cousins, and why Charles feels that James was 'there first' before him (409). It may also explain the lack of any maternal family in Charles' life, Charles' father's dislike towards James, whom he saw as a rival to Charles, and the distance which Charles felt towards his mother, whom he perceived as a 'separate force' (22). Indeed, Charles' immersion in his fantasy relationship with Hartley is described by him as
a direct reaction to his mother’s ‘withdrawal of love’ (84) suggesting his awareness that he was given up by his biological mother.

Charles eventually gains a vague idea that James is a mask for Estelle; he questions ‘How was it that [Estelle] resembled James?’ and suggests that ‘some gauzy mask of similarity had been put over [James’] head, like the Hartley-mask that so many women had worn for [him] through the years’ (145). Charles’ substitution of Estelle with James is apparent when Charles asks himself ‘Then was James really Aunt Estelle?’ (145); these revelations allow Charles to experience the sublime:

The sky was [...] bright, golden, gold-dust golden, as if curtain after curtain had been removed behind the stars I had seen before, and now I was looking into the vast interior of the universe, as if the universe were quietly turning itself inside out. Stars behind stars and stars behind stars behind stars until there was nothing between them, nothing beyond them, but dusty dim gold stars and no space and no light but stars [...] And the stars seemed to move as if one could see the rotation of the heavens as a kind of vast crepitation, only now there were no more events, no shooting stars, no falling stars, which human senses could grasp or conceive of. All was movement, all was change, and somehow this was visible and yet unimaginable. (146)

In this passage, the opportunity for Charles to experience and attend to the formlessness of reality is evident in his sense of the removal of curtains which is presented as a metaphor for the removal of the layers of his fantasy constructions which reveal the underlying reality. In addition, the inconceivability and incomprehensibility of the experience of the sublime (it is ‘visible and yet unimaginable’) chimes with the unassimilability of ‘unconscious affect’. Charles,
however, continues to believe that James is the final layer in his substitutions, as he cannot consciously realise the significance of Estelle.

To represent Estelle, Murdoch uses two ambiguous images to avoid defining the formlessness of reality she represents. The first image is that of a woman singing; this relates Estelle directly to the open mouth of the sea serpent which emerges from the sea and paralyses Charles with fear in the opening pages of the novel: Charles’ feeling that ‘there is something strange and awful about the distorted open mouths of singers, especially women, the wet white teeth, the moist red interior’ (60) is analogous to his description of the serpent’s ‘mouth opening to show teeth and a pink interior’ (19). This links Estelle to the trauma of the reality which lies beyond Charles’ fantasy constructions. The second image that Murdoch uses to describe Estelle is that of a dancing woman, evident in the photograph that Charles hangs on his wall at the end of the novel: ‘Uncle Abel dancing with Aunt Estelle so lightly touches her hand, so lightly touches her shoulder, as if he were lifting her off the ground simply by the force of his love [...] Were they waltzing, at that fleeting moment which the camera seized and tossed on into the future? Her feet seem scarcely to touch the dance floor’ (488). The image remains ambiguous and tinged with a sense of the supernatural force of love, and thus Murdoch creates a strong visual representation which remains detached from the rest of the narrative. This image of the dancing couple becomes a fixed representation of Estelle which Charles draws on in the strange hallucinatory sequence that immediately follows Charles’ vague notion that he has substituted James for Estelle: ‘Now Aunt Estelle was dancing on a dark rotating gramophone record, dancing in the middle where the label was, and somehow she was the label, a face, with torn paper, torn paper, turning and turning with the
record' (145). In this sequence, the image of the torn paper recalls the stripping away of the layers of fantasy to expose the underlying reality, and the whirling movement of the record, which links to the whirlpool, associates this with the experience of the sublime. Through these images, Murdoch attempts to resist the totalising view of narrative sequence to allow the underlying reality of Estelle to exist more in terms of the atemporality and untranslatability of 'unconscious affect'.

In conclusion, the narrative strategies that Murdoch uses in this novel create a sense of unassimilability. Firstly, her organisation of the two layers, that of James and Estelle, resonates with the theory of deferred action which posits trauma as being located within two scenes: an underlying reality which produced the trauma, and a second moment onto which this traumatic affect becomes attached. Thus, the anxiety that Charles feels for James is, in fact, an indication that the traumatic reality lies beyond him, as he represents the second moment of deferred action, whereas Estelle represents the underlying reality. Therefore, the layering of James and Estelle is a means of allowing the reality to remain obscured within the narrative, and thus the reader is tricked into believing that James represents the final layer. Murdoch's use of the sublime to represent Estelle becomes a further device for ensuring that the formlessness of reality remains as an undefined ambiguity within the text. Through these strategies, Murdoch avoids defining the trauma of reality within narrative consolation and creates a form of representation that allows reality to remain as the unrepresented traumatic kernel of her novel.
CONCLUSION:

The Development of a Narrative that can Effectively Represent Trauma.

All of the novels in this thesis use their depictions of trauma as a means of exploring questions about trauma and narrative. These issues are part of a more general problematising of narrative in the late twentieth century which includes the awareness of the way that we construct reality through narrative and the ideological implications involved in the creation of structures of meaning. The novels specifically raise issues about the limitations but also the necessity of narratives about trauma. Traumatic experiences are generally perceived to be beyond representation and thus the attempt to narrativise trauma raises awareness of the way that narratives can create a restricted and confined version of events. However, narrative can also become the means to achieve healing for those who have suffered a traumatic experience as it allows the subject to order their experience into a chronological story which is able to construct meaning out of a seemingly overwhelming event. The transformation of traumatic experiences into a narrative also allows the events of the past to become witnessed; this is particularly necessary for traumatic historical events such as war and genocide which tend to be dismissed or falsified by the historical record.

Four of the novels in this thesis directly explore the consequences of these historical narratives that falsify a government’s abuse and genocide of a cultural or ethnic group: Ceremony emphasises the denial of the American government’s horrific treatment of the Native American people, Beloved examines the omission of the history of slavery from America’s ideological construction as a land of equality and freedom, The Diviners highlights the re-writing of the history of the
Métis, and *Daughters of the House* examines the refusal of the French government to acknowledge their involvement in the deportation and murder of Jewish people. These novels, therefore, are concerned with the way in which historical narratives can falsify the past by omitting anything that may question the legitimacy of those in power. The other two novels studied in this thesis widen this examination to problematise the way that narratives in general are used to impose meaning upon the world. *Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Sea, The Sea*, both utilise this exploration to examine the limitations of narratives that attempt to falsify reality by providing a universal and totalising structure. These two novels emphasise that these totalising narratives cannot encompass the trauma of reality which exists beyond our semiotic systems and which is depicted by the writers in terms of a traumatic, unrepresentable, formless otherness.

The six novels, despite the different kinds of trauma they represent, all use a similar thematic approach to problematise the notion of narrative. Each of the novels depicts their protagonist as attempting to falsify trauma, be this a personal experience or a traumatic reality, and emphasise the consequences of these attempts. All of the novels then offer their protagonists a means of being able to work-through and so bear witness to their traumas. By taking their protagonists through this emotional and psychological development the novels explore the ways in which narrative can be both used as a means of falsification and also a means of witnessing trauma. They explore these thematic concerns on a formal level by utilising their narrative strategies to develop a narrative form that is able to bear witness to trauma but to also acknowledge its own provisionality and therefore avoid creating a homogenous and fixed version.
Initially, all of the novels all explore the dangers of remembering the past in a way that falsifies it. In *Ceremony*, the consequences of trying to forget a traumatic past are depicted through Tayo’s inability to confront his experiences during the Second World War; this causes him to become possessed by the past, evident in his repetitive nightmares and his inability to build a future. In *Beloved*, Sethe’s attempts to forget her traumatic life cause her, like Tayo, to become haunted by the past, in the visions and memories which unexpectedly enter her mind and in the literal return of the past when Beloved arrives. Sethe is also unable to build a future with Paul D and is disconnected from her community by her refusal to explain to them the complex reasons why she murdered her daughter. Sethe’s forgetting of the past also causes it to become encrypted within her daughter Denver, who is unable to confront the complexity of her mother’s infanticide and who tries to forget her childhood in prison with Sethe.

In *The Diviners*, Morag denies her ambiguous feelings towards her childhood and so creates an idealised version of her past which ignores the trauma of her parents’ deaths and rejects the significance of her adoptive parents Christie and Prin. This denial causes Morag to become trapped within her ambivalence towards her childhood, and makes her unwilling to allow her daughter Pique to connect with the past. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the emphasis shifts from the denial of a traumatic past to an inability to confront the trauma of reality in general. This is explored through Del’s use of narrative to evade the necessary contradictions of reality which causes her to be unable to perceive the mystery that, Munro argues, lies beyond the familiar. In *Daughters of the House*, the villagers’ attempts to forget the traumatic events of the Second World War, particularly their indirect complicity in the murder of the Jewish family, cause
these events to become encrypted within the subsequent generation, Léonie and Thérèse. In *The Sea, The Sea* Charles re-writes the events of his life, and so, like Del in *Lives of Girls and Women*, he uses narrative to create a consoling fiction which allows him to avoid facing reality. This causes him to be blind to the reality of his situation and to become engulfed in the events of his present life which spiral out of his control.

In all of the novels, the protagonists are offered a means of working-through their traumas and reaching a position from which they can bear witness to trauma. In *Ceremony* Betonie teaches Tayo that his traumatic perception of reality, in terms of the loss of boundaries, is, in fact, the way that reality actually exists. Rather than denying his traumatic experience, as suggested by the Western doctors and the traditional Native American medicine man, Tayo must use his experience of trauma to develop a more open form of perception in which the binary divisions inherent in Western thought are dissolved. Once he has achieved this, he is then able to bear witness to the events that he experiences. In *Beloved*, it is Denver and Paul D who learn a more heterogeneous form of historical perception. Denver learns to perceive Sethe’s traumatic past from her mother’s perspective, but also realises that this past can be re-created through the imagination rather than remaining fixed. Through this perception of the past, Denver is able to reject the hold the past has over her and her mother, and to seek help from the community; this action forces the community to change their condemnation of Sethe’s infanticide and to acknowledge her traumatic life. Paul D is also able to eventually interpret Sethe’s actions with the awareness of the trauma of her position as a slave mother, and it is his renewed relationship with Sethe at the end of the novel that offers Sethe a way of living without allowing the
past to possess her.

In *The Diviners*, Morag, like Denver in *Beloved*, learns to perceive the past as simultaneously something that has actually occurred and something which she can re-create through the imagination. She achieves this by re-connecting with the kind of thinking taught to her by Christie and Jules, who both emphasise the importance of a connection to the past, but also perceive the past as something which is open to interpretation. Through this perception, Morag is able to accept the trauma of her parents' deaths and to recognise the importance of her childhood with Christie and Prin. In *Lives of Girls and Women* Del learns, through encounters with varying perceptions of the world, that reality is too complex and indeterminate to be resolved through narrative closure. Like Morrison's depiction of Sethe's achievement of a new historical perception in *Beloved*, Munro does not make explicit the actual moment of Del's realisation of the limiting nature of her fictionalisations of reality. Instead, by suggesting that the stories we have just read are Del's ability to recreate her life in fiction, Munro's narrative strategies illustrate Del's perception of the past as a trace and something that is shaped by the creative imagination.

In *Daughters of the House* Thérèse's return from the silence of the convent forces Léonie, and herself, to confront both the disavowed events of their childhood and the discoveries they made about the events of the war, in a way that does not attempt to ignore the indeterminacy of the past. In *The Sea, The Sea* Charles is offered the opportunity to perceive the reality which lies beyond his fantasy version of events when he experiences the sublimity of the stars. However, unlike the protagonists of the other novels, Charles never achieves this perception as he continues to interpret his life through his fantasies. This is
apparent in his decision to re-instate James as the final layer in his fantasy to
protect himself against the trauma of the reality which continually breaks through
his fantasies.

All of the writers explore these thematic concerns on a formal level by
exploring ways in which narrative can become the means of witnessing rather than
falsifying trauma. The narrative strategies utilised in *Ceremony* dissolve the
distinctions between binary opposites, such as myth and reality, self and other, past
and present, active and passive, to create a more deconstructive perception of the
past. To emphasise this, Silko uses the images of the hoop, the sunrise and the
spider web to represent the balance of circularity and linearity, stasis and
movement in her novel, to break down the binary opposites which, she argues,
construct a limiting perception of reality. Through these confusing narrative
techniques the reader is forced to actively engage in the story-telling process and
so is made to experience the loss of boundaries which characterises Tayo's
traumatic perception and, in so doing, is able, like Tayo, to bear witness to the
events of the novel and therefore effect a change on reality. Morrison, in *Beloved*,
utilises the latency of trauma to create a safe environment in which her readers can
experience the trauma of slavery in a way that prevents them from denying this
past to protect themselves from its impact. In this, she combines the traumatic
effects of the photograph with the comforting linearity of narrative to allow her
readers to develop a sense of the past as an actuality and an interpretation.
Through her narrative strategies, particularly the figure of Beloved, Morrison's
novel achieves a narrative form that allows the past to be witnessed in a way that
acknowledges its own limitations rather than trying to create a totalising narrative.

Both *The Diviners* and *Lives of Girls and Women* develop Morrison's
exploration of a form of representation that is both a trace of the past and an interpretation. They utilise their narrative strategies, particularly the intermingling of past and present, first and third person narration, to allow the reader to experience this duality. In *The Diviners* this is apparent in the structure of each chapter which opens in the present and then moves back into the past; this structure forces the reader to make the connections between the two time-frames and so actively engage with the novel. This form also creates a circularity which balances the implied linearity of Morag's chronological development. The novel also achieves a sense of unassimilability through its contradictory sentences which allow the incongruity of reality to remain unresolved. In *Lives of Girls and Women* the past and present, first and third person narratives are further intermingled so that the distinction between the original event and its interpretation by the older Del is difficult to distinguish. The novel creates a sense of the duality of this interpretation through its mixture of autobiography and fiction, realism and experimental forms. These narrative strategies allow the 'mystery' of reality to be communicated to the reader through moments of revelation which bypass narrative inscription.

Roberts, in her depiction of the discovery of the hidden past in *Daughters of the House*, utilises the uncanny doubling of Léonie and Thérèse to disrupt the closure implied in the revelation of secrets. The uncanny dissolves the distinction between self and other, foreign and familiar, past and present, and so, like in *Ceremony*, the narrative strategies of *Daughters of the House* disrupt the distinctions between binary opposites to create a narrative form which is able to bear witness to the traumatic events of the past without attempting to create a totalising version. In *The Sea, The Sea* Murdoch allows the reader to perceive the
underlying reality which Charles cannot see. Murdoch represents this reality through the figure of Estelle, whose significance is communicated through implications and hints, rather than directly revealed, forcing the reader to attend to the details of the narrative. To avoid defining this underlying reality, Murdoch utilises the sublime to depict Estelle and so allows this reality to remain unrepresented in the narrative.

Through these thematic and formal explorations of the ways in which narrative can be used to falsify but also to witness trauma, the novels situate themselves within a broader problematisation of narrative that acknowledges the ideological and political implications of the way that we use narrative to structure the world in which we live. These implications include the way in which totalising narratives are politically motivated in their desire to create a universal and transcendent version of reality which ignores the multitude of perspectives that may question the dominant narrative. The novels, therefore, are all engaged in a political and ethical project to expose these falsifying narratives and to develop, through their experimental narrative strategies, a means of witnessing trauma which acknowledges heterogeneity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy. The novels all avoid becoming solely self-reflexive experiments with narrative by ensuring that their reader's become involved in the creation of the story. They achieve this through their confusing strategies which force the reader to make the connections and to engage in the telling of the story, and so become active participants rather than passive viewers. This emphasises the reader's position as one who must bear the responsibility of witnessing the trauma depicted and thus be able apply their awareness of the limitations and possibilities of narrative to the semiotic systems which structure reality.
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