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FIGHT CLUB AND LULLABY: THE TRAUMATIC SHIFT IN CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S FICTION

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ÖZ

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Her ne kadar ismi çoğunlukla **Fight Club** (1999) ile anılsa da, Chuck Palahniuk takip eden yıllarda da istikrarlı bir şekilde üretmeye devam etmiş ve bilhassa popüler kültür bağlamında adından sıkça söz ettirmiştir. Yapıtlarını kimi diğer yazarların eserleriyle birlikte "transgresif" romanlar olarak tanımlayan yazarın yaklaşımı, hem kendisinin hem de eleştirmenlerin gözlemlediği üzre, 11 Eylül saldırılarının ertesinde değişime uğramıştır. Bu gözlem geçerliliğini koruyor olsa da, bu değişimin yazarın 11 Eylül'den sonraki yapıtlarına nasıl aksettiğine ve 11 Eylül felaketinin Palahniuk'in yazınına nasıl yansıdığına dair kapsamlı bir açıklama getirilmemiştir. Bu çalışma, bu açıklamayı getirmeyi amaçlamakta, bunu gerçekleştirirken de, hem yazarın kendi edebi felsefesinden, hem de 11 Eylül saldırılarının tabiatından hareketle travma çalışmalarından yararlanmaktadır. Dominick LaCapra'nın edebiyat ve travma üzerine tezlerini, bilhassa da "travmatik yazın" ve "working through" ile "acting out" reformülasyonunu temel alan bu tez, metodolojik açıdan ise Ann Kaplan'ın gözlemlerinden ve "11 Eylül saldırılarının yeni bir öznellik inşa ettiği" görüşünden yola çıkmaktadır. Bu teorik çerveve ile, bu tez, travma çalışmaları dahilinde yazarın eserlerinin neden genel itibarıyla ihmal edildiği sorusuna da eğilirken, en nihayetinde, yazarın kendine özgü yaklaşımını en iyi ortaya koyan eseri **Fight Club** ile 11 Eylül vakasından sonraki ilk yapıtı olan **Lullaby** (2002) romanlarının "travmatik yazın" sıfatını hakettiği pozisyonunu alarak, benzer örgüleri takip eden bu iki eserin birbirlerinden ayrıldıkları en mühim hususun post-travmatik sürece olan yaklaşımları olduğunu, ve bu farklılığın Ann Kaplan'ın gözlemlediği "yeni öznelliği" yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Chuck Palahniuk, Dövüş Kulübü, Ninni, travma çalışmaları, 11 Eylül, travmatik yazın, Dominick LaCapra, Ann Kaplan

ABSTRACT

FIGHT CLUB AND LULLABY: THE TRAUMATIC SHIFT IN CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S FICTION

HALİLCAN SAP

Albeit mostly known for his best-selling novel **Fight Club** (1999), Chuck Palahniuk has steadily kept producing and gained a prominent place in popular culture. While the author asserts that his works belong to a group of "transgressive" novels, as he and critics observe, his approach has undergone a noticeable change following 9/11. Despite the acceptance of this assertion, a detailed account of this shift and the role played by 9/11 in prompting this change has not yet been given. This study attempts to provide a detailed account of this phenomenon, and taking into consideration both the author's philosophy and the nature of the 9/11 attacks, uses the theoretical and critical lens provided by trauma studies. While utilizing Dominick LaCapra's theories vis-à-vis trauma and literature, especially his formulation of "traumatic writing" and reformulation of the "working through" and "acting out" duo, this study takes as its departure point Ann Kaplan's methodology, and suggestion that "9/11 produced a new subjectivity." While the reason(s) for the dearth of analyses of Palahniuk's works in trauma studies scholarship will also be considered, under the light provided by this theoretical framework, this study holds the position that Palahniuk's most famous, signature work **Fight Club** and his first novel after 9/11, **Lullaby** (2002) constitute excellent examples of "traumatic writing," and further that the most significant point on which the two novels diverge is their approach towards and portrayal of the post-traumatic process and that this stark divergence is indicative of the "new subjectivity" posited by Kaplan.

Key Words: Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club, Lullaby, trauma studies, 9/11, traumatic writing, Dominick LaCapra, Ann Kaplan

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İstanbul, 2021

Halilcan Sap

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Introduction

Charles Michael Palahniuk was born on February 21, 1962, to a second-generation immigrant family from Ukraine. He obtained a degree in journalism, and despite working for a short period of time as a reporter, since his diploma "couldn't get [him] more than five dollars an hour[,]" Palahniuk started working for a truck company as a diesel mechanic, and then as a technical writer (Palahniuk, 2005: 196).

While working at the factory, he pursued his dream of being a writer by attending workshops organized by Tom Spanbauer and kept his job until he could sustain himself solely by his books. Even though **Invisible Monsters** was his first novel, it was rejected by publishers on the ground that the narrative was "too dark and too risky." Not giving up, he "made it even darker and riskier and more offensive"[1] and wrote **Fight Club**, the success and popularity of which, according to Palahniuk, made him "the guy who wrote that book. The *Fight Club book"* (2005: 227) (italics in the original)[2]. Especially with the 1999 film by David Fincher starring Brad Pitt and Helena Bonham Carter, he gained fame and credit enough to be able to see his first novel published, and further penned **Survivor** and **Choke**, in 1999 and 2001, respectively.

Both the film version and the novel itself became iconic cultural products, following which the author attained a "cult following" (Keesey, 2016: 3). The story has become so popular that the author is regularly served free meals by waiters at the restaurants he frequents, a nod to the fact that the protagonist of the narrative works as a banquet waiter. Palahniuk further laments that he regularly receives calls from reporters inquiring about the locations of fight clubs, promising not to alert the police, or that he is approached, during his book tours, by his fans asking if there exists "a club like this for women?" (2005: 229). It is rather easy to spot that photographs of the stars of the film are used as profile pictures on social media, quotes from the novel

[1] "Is it fistfighting, or just multi-tasking?"
[2] Italics always in the original if not otherwise stated.

regularly adorn users' "walls" and posts. Even a quick search on certain major retail websites reveals fight-club-themed t-shirts, coffee mugs, tapestry, jackets, pillow cases, baseball caps, socks, dolls, embroidery, carpets, shower curtains, doormats, sleeping masks, Christmas ornaments, phone cases, yoga pants and surprisingly, even **soapbars**.[3] The popularity of **Fight Club**, according to the author, besides paving the way for the publication of his censored first novel, allowed him to experiment with different techniques, since he now has "the time to work on [writing] in one long stretch, rather than five minutes here and five minutes there."[4]

The author remarks that his fiction is considerably influenced by his experiences and the stories he is told by his friends and family which find their place in his novels, ultimately making his work "a product of all these people" (2005: 230). Some of these stories indeed render his work "dark and risky," yet, there exist two factors to consider and qualify this phenomenon. The first one is the fact that despite the grim appearance and themes of his works, telling stories about and transforming these themes into narratives carry a therapeutic quality for Palahniuk. He explains this quality by remarking that his novels "are my overflow retention systems for stories I can no longer keep in my recent memory" (2005: 223). Indeed, as has been remarked, his life and his loved ones' experiences directly influence his writing. His essay collection in which he elucidates his writing style and process is punctuated with anecdotes about the deaths of his parents, for instance; deeply significant events that have had a tremendous impact on the author's life. Palahniuk thus approaches his profession as a storyteller in terms of its close relationship with "personal suffering" (2005: 28), and asserts that fiction constitutes "a safe laboratory for exploring ourselves and our world. For experimenting with a persona or character and social organization, trying on costumes and running a social model until it breaks down" (2005: 37).

The second factor to consider is the fact that, according to Palahniuk, his novels belong to a group of "transgressive novels," and are thus similar to certain works of fiction such as Bret Easton Ellis's **American Psycho** and Irvine Welsh's

[3] Amazon.com, the results obtained by searching for "fight club."
[4] "The Lit Interview: Chuck Palahniuk"

Trainspotting, narratives which share protagonists "who'd try anything to feel alive" (2005: 213), and which are "cathartic" (2005: 215). Insofar as these narratives contain characters or protagonists that overstep social norms and breach the boundaries of what is socially acceptable, it shall be seen that his classification appears to be correct, since chapters 3 and 4 provide an extensive analysis of two of his novels. Nevertheless, the beginning of the 21st century was to prompt a shift in the "transgressive" paradigm due to a catastrophic event, following which the author was to change his style.

On September 11, 2001, terrorists affiliated with the Al-Qaeda hijacked 3 passenger jets and attempted to crash the planes into three buildings: the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, and the Pentagon, resulting in the complete destruction of the towers and partially destroying the military complex. In total, 19 terrorists had killed 2,999 civilians, and injured approximately 25,000. The event continued to reverberate both with its devastating scale, and the following, controversial Patriot Act of October 26, 2001, which expanded the scope of domestic surveillance capabilities of the federal government.

Indeed, Palahniuk asserts that his first 4 novels and his following works radically diverge, that the "cathartic transgressive novel" is "going out" (2005: 215), meanwhile critics assert that his first work after **Choke** (2001)**, Lullaby** (2002), "is a savage break from his previous material[,]"[5] or that he "turned away" from his previous approach and separate the author's fiction, taking as a turning point 9/11: while his novels from **Fight Club** to **Choke** constitute one group, his following works, starting with **Lullaby,** are separated from the rest (Keesey, 2016: 50). The author explains that 9/11 has prompted the change and asserts that:

> Whether it's eco-terrorism, monkey wrench gangs, or cultural terrorism like *Trainspotting*, people just do not see it the same way anymore. They can't laugh at it. If you're going to say anything about culture, you have to do it carefully and in a charming, entertaining way, like George Orwell did with Animal Farm.[6]

[5] "Nothing's Shocking"
[6] Ibid.

The crucial point here is to note that the author's fiction, according to both the critics and Palahniuk himself, underwent a change following the attacks, yet the questions as to how this change has occurred, in which way a shift is discernible in his fiction, and what role 9/11 has played in prompting this shift have not been answered. This thesis attempts to provide an answer precisely to these questions by using the lens provided by trauma studies.

According to Ann Kaplan, the attacks had such a traumatic impact on the American psyche that they were "border event[s]" (2016: xvi), and that "9/11 produced a new subjectivity" (2005: 4), both because of the unimaginable scale of the destruction and also because of the fact that the event, since the media swiftly circulated images and videos of the attacks, was able to reach all the layers of society.

> The phenomenon of 9/11 was perhaps the supreme example of a catastrophe that was experienced globally via digital technologies (Internet, cell phone) as well as by television and radio, and responded to in a myriad of ways depending on peoples' national and local context (2005: 2).

Thus, the problematic nature of the relationship between trauma and media, which is exacerbated by what Kaplan terms "sensationalized reporting" is significant in order to understand the results of the 9/11 attacks. As Alan Gibbs puts it, the attacks were exploited by "the media's selective and incessant repetition of images in the days following the attacks" (126), and were abused to transform "a shared sense of grief in[to] an ideological national unity based on blind patriotism" (136). Moreover, the questionable practices of the mainstream media resulted in the justification of "the domestic crackdown on civil liberties[,]" i.e. the Patriot Act (21).

One week after the first anniversary of the attacks, Palahniuk's 5th book, **Lullaby** was published. Thus, the change in the cultural climate of the US detected by the author is directly pertinent to Kaplan's observation that the attacks "produced a new subjectivity." This thesis analyzes and compares two of Palahniuk's novels vis-à-vis their approach to trauma: his most famous, "signature" work, **Fight Club**, and his first novel after the attacks, **Lullaby,** and argues that, following 9/11, a shift in the author's approach towards trauma is detectable and the said shift reflects the "new subjectivity"

posited by Kaplan. Even though both texts pivot around suffering and traumatic themes, while the former demonstrates the devastating impact of "acting out" one's trauma, the latter has the protagonist complete his traumatic process starting from his position as a "victim" and moving on "to survivor and social agent" (LaCapra, 2014: xi), and highlights elements of "working through." Since, according to Kaplan, processes of mourning and working through pain took on an increased importance following the attacks, the fact that while his first novel after 9/11, **Lullaby** spotlights a protagonist who is able to work through his trauma, and brings a compelling critique to mainstream media; the novel that perhaps reflects his unique literary approach the best, **Fight Club,** is characterized by "acting out" elements is highly significant and is directly pertinent to the "altered consciousness" (2016: xvi), which, according to Kaplan, the attacks brought into existence.

The term trauma comes from a Greek word meaning "wound," and as Kirby Farrell observes, "the analogy to a physical wound has influenced thinking about trauma" (1998: 5). Trauma studies as a discipline, according to Kaplan, was born from Freud's observations, whose work, she asserts, highlights the fact that traumatic phenomena "were closely linked to modernity" (2005: 25), and the study of traumatic occurrences and their effect on individuals or societies took on renewed vigor following especially unsettling events of the 20th century such as the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Vietnam War, returning from which veterans exhibited symptoms that prompted researchers to formulate the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (**PTSD**), and 9/11 (2005: 19). Given the "problems of definition" (Kaplan, 2005: 1) in trauma studies, here the definition from the latest edition of the **Oxford Dictionary of English** shall be given.

1. A deeply distressing or disturbing experience.
2. Emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis.
3. Physical injury (Stevenson, 2010: 30249).

For an author whose work is punctuated with traumatic themes and traumatized characters, as shall be seen in chapters 3 and 4, there exists a relative dearth of analyses

of Palahniuk's work conducted with the theoretical and critical lens of trauma studies, and this lack is even more pronounced apropos **Lullaby**. Indeed, Jeffrey Sartain observes that

> Despite his continued literary production and popularity, the academic criticism around his work still focuses largely on his first and best-known novel, *Fight Club* (2009: xv).

Similarly, Douglas Keesey notes that "[r]ecent scholarship has also made progress toward situating Palahniuk's fiction within some revealing contexts" (2016: 12).

Nevertheless, perhaps confusing Palahniuk's deliberate confrontation of the "New York literary establishment" and his preference for "embracing rather than abhorring rebellion and transgression" (Keesey, 2016: 19,13) for adolescent angst and empty contrarianism, some critics have argued that the author attacks

> the shallow, simplistic, dehumanizing culture of commodity capitalism by writing shallow, simplistic, dehumanized fiction[7]

that his stories are "appetite-suppressing[,]"[8] or that Palahniuk has "opened the floodgates for wretched excess of a less inspired kind."[9] Not taking into account Palahniuk's satiric mode which incorporates anti-establishment sensibilities into his defiant fiction, the critics quoted above, perhaps because of the fact that the author's novels follow a direct, plain style, that his works have gained a prominent place in popular culture and that Palahniuk deliberately eschews a "high-brow" approach, apparently consider the author's fiction inferior, or substandard. Though the claims above shall be refuted in parts 3, 4 and 5 of this thesis where it will clearly be seen that Palahniuk's novels incorporate deep, subtle and relevant observations vis-à-vis

[7] "Diary"
[8] "Not for a Full Stomach (or an Empty One Either)"
[9] Ibid.

modern society, the question as to why his works have been neglected by trauma scholars shall also be addressed following Alan Gibbs's observations.

In terms of methodology, this thesis follows Ann Kaplan's observation that, together with Shoshanna Felman's and Dori Laub's study, **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History**, Cathy Caruth's **Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History** and her edited volume, **Trauma: Explorations in Memory** "initiated what has become a growing field in the humanities" (2005: 33). Thus, following Freud's pioneering work, an outline of these three studies, which are in this thesis collectively called "constitutive texts" shall be given, after which certain problems in mainstream trauma studies, or what is in this thesis called "Caruthian orthodoxy" are addressed. Following Michelle Balaev and other Pluralists' work, and Alan Gibbs's studies, Ann Kaplan's critique of the Caruthian orthodoxy and observations regarding the relationship between media and trauma shall be outlined. Dominick LaCapra's views, which constitute the backbone of this thesis are presented next. His reformulation of the working through and acting out duo is tremendously important for the theoretical framework of this study. Afterwards, Kirby Farrell's poignant observations vis-à-vis the socio-cultural climate of the US in the '90s are summarized, observations that are especially significant in order to understand the system **Fight Club** criticizes. In Chapters 3 and 4 **Fight Club** and **Lullaby** are analyzed, following which conclusions shall be presented.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. The Freudian Beginning

As brilliantly put by Kaplan, "[i]t all begins with Freud, of course" (2005: 25). Concepts crucial to trauma studies such as **Nachträglichkeit** which implies a sense of latency, or deferredness; or the repetition compulsion had appeared elsewhere in Sigmund Freud's oeuvre. Nevertheless, the text that engendered the greatest interest in the phenomenon of trauma for future scholars was indubitably his **Beyond the Pleasure Principle.**

Whereas Gregory Zilboorg, in his introduction to the text, alerts the reader that the view Freud "changed his mind" (1961: ix) in his study is not entirely true, it is nonetheless, arguably, symptomatic of the intricate nature of trauma as perceived by medical professionals and researchers in that the phenomenon paved the way for him to reconsider his long-held insistence on pleasure principle and prompted him to revise his theoretical framework by appending the death instinct.

After presenting "mechanical concussions" and technical failures such as railway incidents (6) as potential causes of trauma, Freud defines traumatic phenomena as "excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield" (23). He correlates the defensive capability of the individual when faced with trauma-inducing phenomena to his/her level of "cathectic energy" (24), a concept akin to psychic energy when put into context in respect to Freud's psychological framework. Further, the potential of the excitation to cause trauma is also closely related to anxiety, which underlines the fact that, retrospectively speaking, anxiety mitigates the impact of traumatic symptoms, since the dissolution of this "protective shield" is predicated on a "lack of any preparedness for anxiety" (25). For Freud then, the unexpectedness of an event is what makes trauma possible in the first place. By spatializing the traumatogenic effect on the mind of the survivor, Freud reveals that his understanding

of trauma is akin to a swift coup on the psyche of the individual. Even though he tries to distance himself from the "naive shock theory" of war neurosis, this rapid temporality was to have lasting consequences for the route trauma studies took (25).

Another key point in Freud's delineation of what later came to be called "post-traumatic" symptoms such as the compulsion to repeat or certain dreams and children's games, which, on the surface seem to be in defiance of the pleasure principle, on which his earlier accounts of psychoanalytic thought had been centered, is his idea that these seemingly "daemonic" manifestations were actually attempts at strengthening "the mastery they are in search of" (29). Namely, the mastery that attempts to come to grips with unpleasurable, anxiety-inducing phenomena, such as his grandson's fear of being separated from his mother, around which he bases his game of "fort-da," repetitively enacting the separation, whereby he throws a ball and then retrieves it, meanwhile uttering a series of "o" and "a" sounds, symbolically making his mother "disappear" and then "reappear." This oft-quoted and interesting observation prompts Freud to assert that "o" is a rendition of the German word **fort** meaning gone, and that "a" is instead **da** which is German for here (9).

He also stresses the role of memory vis-à-vis traumatic experiences by asserting that the patient who survives a traumatic event is "obliged to repeat the repressed material" as if he or she is literally living through it again, instead of "remembering it as something belonging to the past" (12). Thus, Freud also highlights the "inbetweenness," the liminal experience of trauma survivors, their "uncanny" or **unheimlich** nature, to use his own term, which he had introduced elsewhere[1], partially occupying two temporal zones at the same time, undoubtedly confusing both the sufferer and the observer. In this respect, what is crucial for the subject to come to terms with his/her past and suffering is the necessity that he or she "retain some degree of aloofness" from it, for what is of utmost importance for the therapeutic process to produce results is dependent on the subject's recognition that what is experienced by

[1] Freud connects the notion of uncanny to ambivalence, involuntary repetition and notes that doubling, or duality has a strong connection to it (2003: 53).

him or her, whether it is the intrusion of traumatic, unpleasurable memories or repetitive compulsions is nothing but "a reflection of a forgotten past" (13).

The apparent paradox for Freud, in terms of post-traumatic reenactments of painful events then, is their forced nature on the psyche, and the resultant contradiction, namely, that these phenomena stood in defiance of his earlier theories: the pleasure principle, and in terms of dreams, wish-fulfillment[2]. This dilemma, arguably, is indicative of the complex nature of traumatic suffering and its influence on both individuals and collective groups.

1.2. The Turbulent 20th Century

While Freud was writing these lines in the wake of the Great War which shook to its foundations the Western Civilization amid concerns regarding the mental well-being of soldiers returning from the trenches, further catastrophes kept alive the interest and concern in traumatogenic phenomena and their effect on individuals or societies (Kaplan, 2005: 25). The genocide of Jewish people at the hands of Nazi Germany which resulted in the near disappearance of Jews in the countries under the occupation of the Third Reich was unique in both its proportions and unimaginable nature.

Meanwhile, catastrophic phenomena humanity faced during the 20th century that were shocking and overwhelming were not limited to the Holocaust. The newly emerging use of atomic technology that saw its culmination in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August, 1945, with the iconic "mushroom-cloud" image that was widely disseminated on newspapers, colonial atrocities such as the Algerian massacres during the war of 1954-1962, which was witnessed by and left a lasting impression on one of the most influential psychoanalysts, Frantz Fanon, whose theories regarding the suffering of colonized

[2] For Freud, wish fulfillment and being "the guardian of sleep" were two constituent roles dreams played in our lives (2010: 578).

peoples worldwide still hold relevant or the Holodomor famine in Ukraine could be counted among these painful occurrences.

What prompted awareness in the American public of trauma and post-traumatic phenomena during the last quarter of the 20th century was, though, the Vietnam War (Kaplan, 2005: 25). Following the widespread proliferation of post-traumatic symptoms among "shell-shocked" veterans, experts had to add, for the first time, an entry on post-traumatic stress disorder for the 3rd edition of the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders** (**DSM**). The entry defines the trauma-inducing cause as something "that is generally outside the range of usual human experience" (236). As shall be seen shortly, this definition was to prove problematic for future theorists. By adhering to a model in which consideration of disturbances that are gone through daily and traumatic, phenomena which exhibit a different modality than that envisaged by the mainstream clinical practice; such as sexual, economic or racial discrimination or oppression is omitted, the scope **DSM** delineates falls short of providing a conceptualization inclusive enough to bear on traumas experienced by "ordinary people."

Apart from the problematic definition given above, the manual highlights some of the elementary aspects of traumatic suffering such as: "re-experiencing the traumatic event" or "recurrent painful, intrusive recollections of the event or recurrent dreams or nightmares[,]" dissociation that could last minutes to even days, psychic numbing, difficulty falling asleep and feeling guilt about surviving. The belatedness factor is also given: "It is not unusual," it is claimed, for the traumatic symptoms to come forth "after a latency period of months or years following the trauma" (236).

1.3. Constitutive Texts

It was a decade later when the first constitutive text of literary-cultural trauma studies appeared: Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.** The coming into existence of this work, which was a collaboration between a literary critic and a psychoanalyst who spearheaded the foundation of Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archives for

Holocaust Testimonies; while taking witnessing and testimony as its primary subject matters, witnesses itself, in turn, to the renewed interest in both the Academia and the wider public regarding traumatic occurrences in the late '80s.

As has been mentioned, the study takes as its primary subject matters the notions of witnessing and testimony; Felman and Laub analyze a diverse range of works of art by Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Celan and Albert Camus; archival footage from the Fortunoff project and the groundbreaking Holocaust documentary by Claude Lanzmann, **Shoah**; with one purpose, to attempt to provide an answer to the questions:

> What is the relation between literature and testimony, between the writer and the witness? What is the relation between the act of witnessing and testifying, and the acts of writing and of reading, particularly in our era? (1992: xiii).

They proclaim that we live in an era in which exists a "radical historical *crisis of witnessing"* and that what made the Holocaust such a mind-shattering event was its having been "an event eliminating its own witness" (xvii). Further, according to Felman, the way Holocaust functions in Western historical understanding is closely related to the way "primal scene functions in psychoanalysis. It is a witnessing that cannot be made present to itself, present to consciousness" (194)[3].

In terms of the role of literature regarding crises and history in general, what is put forth is that this crisis is "translated" into a crisis of literature as well, since they claim that "literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated" (xviii). In this sense, their valuable insight bears on the complex, but often overlooked relationship between history, trauma, literature and the testimonial enterprise. After questioning the volition of the witness in terms of his/her act of giving testimony, Felman argues that contemporary writers often play out this dilemma of volition in their texts by being a

[3] Freud argues that "primal scenes," later in the life of the growing infant, by their very unassimilated nature produce symptoms, revealing their deferred impact (1989: 412).

“witness to a trauma, to a crime or to an outrage; witness to a horror or an illness whose effects explode any capacity for explanation or rationalization” (4).

Thus, writing, and by implication reading are imagined as attempts to testify in an age where the concept of being a witness is at stake. Literature rises in Felman and Laub’s thought as perhaps the only viable way left to humanity for speaking about, witnessing, and acknowledging suffering. Felman’s reading of Camus’s **The Plague** is perfectly suited to this argument since the narrative dramatizes the struggle of a physician-chronicler who takes it upon himself to bear witness to his dying countrypeople. And highlighting the role played by the metaphor of the plague epidemic, it is suggested that the metaphor, by extension, has the potential to stand for “massive killing” (97).

This contagiousness is also expounded in one of the most oft-quoted passages of Felman and Laub’s study: namely, the class that “broke into a crisis” after viewing archival footage from the Fortunoff archive (47). For the following weeks the students became “obsessed” or could only talk about the experience they had in watching the extreme suffering of concentration camp survivors (48). This contagious character of trauma (Farrell, 1998: 12), or what is commonly called “vicarious trauma” summarizes the vicissitudes of the act of witnessing, seeing, and looking at the suffering of others. Felman’s advice to her students sums up what her view of coming to terms with traumatic events is, since she remarks that what her students felt was a disconnection, which was extremely demanding, but now, she would like them to look “*for the connections”* (51).

Felman’s understanding of bearing witness is closely related to discursivity as well as ethics, since, for her, to testify “is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative to others: [it is] to take responsibility – in speech” (204). To testify, to tell, to narrate inherently functions as a therapeutic process for Laub as well in struggling with trauma, for he asserts that “the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” (78).

By establishing this close link between narrating-telling and surviving, Laub highlights the significance of the due attention that needs to be given to survivors’ narratives and the need for them to be able to, safely and comfortably, tell their story.

By linking narrativity, survival and witnessing, he asserts that testimony is "the process by which the narrator(the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal 'thou,' and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself" (85). The narratorial, discursive element in this approach in terms of getting on with one's life after surviving trauma is so important for Laub that he remarks:

> The "not telling" of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny (79).

Finally, what needs to be stressed is that Laub perhaps follows Freud's line of argument in saying that "[i]nsofar as they remind us of a horrible, traumatic past, insofar as they bear witness to our own historical disfiguration, survivors frighten us" (74). This problematic arguably touches on the double-temporality Freud remarks regarding trauma survivors, both there-then and here-now, they occupy a zone that has kept and keeps puzzling both scholars and the wider public.

The following two studies, one compendium and a monograph, the former edited and the latter written by Cathy Caruth, complete what is in this study called constitutive texts in respect to literary and cultural trauma studies.

1.4. The Nascent Polyphony in Literary-Cultural Trauma Studies

In her preface to the first volume of the compendium, Caruth notes that there is no "single approach" to the way the listener may construct his or her performance of lending ear to the trauma survivor (1995: ix), and briefly touches on what she terms "long-term, chronic trauma" (viii). She starts off her preface with a quote from a Vietnam War veteran explaining that he "must remain a memorial to my dead friends" (vii), and asserts:

> For the survivor of the trauma, then, the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple *comprehension* (153) (italics mine).

She further extends what she implies by this incomprehension, and touching on Lanzmann's assertions in respect to his documentary **Shoah,** puts forth that the refusal to understand "is also a fundamentally creative act" (155). Caruth further claims that **PTSD** and post-traumatic phenomena "dislocated the boundaries of our modes of understanding[,]" and that trauma has become "too inclusive" (4).

She envisages traumatic experiences as being such incomprehensible phenomena that her choice of words reveals her own astonishment: on page 6 of her first introductory chapter alone, the word "paradox" is used thrice, besides words such as uncertainty (twice) and enigma (once). Apart from this, Caruth stays close to the definition given by the **DSM** in that responding to trauma "takes the form of" diverse phenomena such as "repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors," and "numbing, or increased arousal" to any stimulant that may trigger a reminiscence of the traumatic event. Quoting Lenore Terr (1988), she also touches on the contagious aspect of trauma, noting how the "ones who listen" are traumatized as well as the sufferer himself/herself. Ultimately for a viable recovery to occur, "integration" must be attained according to Caruth, which she advises under the light of Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart's claim that the repetition inherent to trauma "is a solitary activity" (153). Further, she asks a question which was to be problematic for later scholars, via citing Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart's observations, whether it is:

> Not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past? (179).

Remarkable for providing insight as to how individuals or groups respond to traumatogenic phenomena and could establish recovery, Henry Krystal in his essay in the compendium asserts that what he terms "effective" grieving constitutes a major viable process in order to "accept the negative aspects of one's self." And further notes that many Holocaust survivors consciously reject healing to bear witness "against the

outrage of the Holocaust" (83). Nevertheless, for Krystal, mourning or grieving does not constitute an all-powerful magic wand for he states that "there are limitations to the kind of losses an individual may be able to deal with through mourning." As an example of this situation, he presents one in which a couple lose their child (84). What seems to be the most gruesome after-effects of trauma, according to Krystal is that "it causes widespread use of repression, denial, and psychic splitting." And instead of undergoing a healing process, some survivors feel virtuous to "'feed' righteous indignation, and treasonous to stop the rage." Against such a response, Krystal urges self-acceptance (85).

1.5. A Quiet Revolution

One of the most emancipatory and revolutionary responses to trauma research comes from Laura S. Brown. She severely criticizes "that bible of psychiatric diagnosis" (100). She further attacks **DSM**'s blatant conformism to the dominant groups' interests and remarks that "human experience" becomes a tool for the ruling class to arbitrate what constitutes "valid" suffering (101). Making clear her stance as a feminist therapist, she asserts that denying a sufferer's trauma or deeming it invalid by adhering to the dominant, privileged discourse "sends a message" by which various types of oppression such as those based on "gender, class and race" are in turn normalized (105). She for the first time introduces the concept of "insidious trauma" to the wider literary-cultural trauma studies' bricolage via Maria Root, and states that it refers to "traumatogenic effects of oppression" that are not necessarily punctual or directly "threatening" to the body but nonetheless "do violence to the soul and the spirit" (107).

By connecting the personal to the social, she lays bare the types of immanent oppression and discrimination endemic to American society. A viable approach "to change that which would wound again," according to Brown, is predicated on moving from our comfort zones, and implementing "identification and action" with and on behalf of the victims (109). What follows from her line of argument is that by portraying trauma as inherently punctual, mainstream academia precludes any socio-political action, a preclusion which needs to be countered by a more socially-

communally oriented approach. Her feminist perspective remarkably counts in discrimination and oppression, from which especially unprivileged groups suffer. Her argument seems simple but revolutionary in its reverberations, for she claims that a feminist perspective

> reminds us that traumatic events do lie within the range of normal human experience (110).

What is utterly remarkable about the significance of Brown's contribution to the compendium is that it reveals the already-inherent contradictions of the burgeoning trauma studies, and uncovers that looking at trauma from a solely abrupt, event-based perspective blinds one to the immanent and daily traumatogenic oppression and discrimination generated by American society, which, she poignantly claims, "subjects so many of its inhabitants to traumatic stressors" (108). This study avidly supports giving due credibility to the insidious modality of trauma yet at the same time without discarding the sudden, punctual aspects of traumatogenic events. What seemed and still seems to be problematic in respect to this dual modality arises when caution or attention is attached exclusively to the one or the other, to the detriment of a possibility to grasp the various facets of traumatic suffering.

Approaching the concept of trauma with the lens of a historical analysis of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, in their contribution, note how the growing body of neuroscience scholars are "arriving at similar conclusions" as the "founders of modern psychiatry" (176), among whom they name William James, Pierre Janet and the famous director of Salpêtrière, Jean Martin Charcot, at whose clinic, they claim, Psychoanalysis was born (164). What was to attract the eyes of future trauma studies scholars is Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart's adherence to Janet's notion of the opposition between "narrative memory, which is a social act," and traumatic memory which is "inflexible and invariable" (163). Thus, the authors of the chapter under consideration posit an inherent difference between "traumatic memories" and "narrative" memory, but their observation is significant in

that narrativity and discursivity is again tied to non-traumatogenicity; by implication, the traumatic potential of a memory resides precisely in its inarticulable nature.

Following Janet's theories regarding dissociation, a common factor attributed to post-traumatic experience as has been already seen, Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart further claim that the "most extreme example" of a coping mechanism with extreme suffering following a traumatic experience is "multiple personality disorder" (164). Besides "hyperarousal and numbing" which were also noted by the **DSM**, the authors stress the importance of remembering and mnemonic activity, which are also stressed by Caruth herself, and that these symptoms are compatible with non-remembering, or "amnesia" which is included among the symptoms of post-traumatic experience (175).

Following the traumatic-narrative memory opposition, they define traumatic memory as "the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language" (176). For the recovery to be achieved, according to Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, "the sufferer" should be in a state that he or she would not "suffer anymore from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks [...] Instead the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality" (176). Finally, Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart stress that individuals who experience trauma go through lengthy intervals "in which they live, as it were, in two different worlds: the realm of the trauma and the realm of their current, ordinary life" (176). They claim that "[m]emory is everything" (178).

1.6. Claude Lanzmann and Working-Through

Claude Lanzmann, in the chapter focusing on his documentary, introduces a term which is crucial for this study. The director, in terms of his film **Shoah** and the motivation behind it, remarks that "[t]he whole process of Shoah was to connect, to link up, to accomplish the whole work of rememoration. I think there is a word of Freud to describe this process: Durcharbeitung (working-through)" (211). The introduction of this term merits a lengthy note here.

The concept's appearance dates back to 1914 (Péran, 2005: 1879), to the article **Remembering, Repeating and Working Through** in which Freud, after touching on the incipient phases of psychoanalysis which were influenced by hypnotic techniques, puts forth that among patients who have had experiences "in very early childhood" yet have not adequately assimilated them into their existing mental structures (1958: 149), there exist a portion who, later in their life, without being aware that they have indeed experienced anything traumatic, "act out," **agieren** what they have previously repressed. What seems to be problematic and detrimental to the therapeutic process happens to be that the patient, regarding the repressed and traumatic memories, "reproduces it not as a memory, but as an action. Without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it" (150). Ascribing this contra-therapeutic situation to the resistance exhibited by the patient and remarking that "the part played by resistance is" obvious to the analysand, Freud directly places acting out against remembering, putting forth that "[t]he greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering" (155). Thus, remembering, and unearthing hitherto repressed memories, according to Freud, is of utmost importance in order to overcome resistance and acting out. Working through, as a concept, comes to the fore at this crucial junction, for if a particular therapeutic relationship becomes stuck under the weight of the resistance, Freud urges that the patient be given time to "become conversant with this resistance," thus paving the way "to work through it, overcome it" (155). For Freud's approach then, acting out and working through are polar opposites, former highlighting the lack of adequate insight into one's memories and constituting an obstacle to the therapeutic process, and the latter what is presumably the optimal behavior expected from the individual to complete his or her recovery.

Turning back to the compendium, Georges Bataille, in his analysis of John Hersey's work on the aftermath of the atomic bombings, which have been considered traumatic events in this subchapter, remarks that the bombings demonstrated the traumatic effect of the first usage of a new invention, shook the earth, and "left its inventors themselves shattered" (224), thus counting in the role of the perpetrator in terms of understanding trauma. According to Bataille, the "meaning" of the atomic bomb is predicated on "its human origin," that the "*hands of man"* cast its traumatic shadow "over the future" (226).

The chapter focusing on the AIDS epidemic further highlights the need for socially-oriented attitudes towards trauma victims, for Douglas Crimp remarks that the catastrophic aspect of AIDS derives its power to inflict suffering from social factors, since, regarding the epidemic, he expresses that what "most of us experience are social" (257).

1.7. Community-Oriented Approaches

One of the most significant contributions to the volume is included in sociologist Kai Erikson's **Notes on Trauma and Community**. As a scholar who has interviewed victims of both natural and technological disasters, he notes the ambiguity surrounding the term trauma (183). He points towards the fact that the line between trauma and its consequences is blurred which is often put forth by theorists as has been seen in this chapter, and underlines one of the most important aspects of survival which ties it to subjectivity, since according to Erikson, what makes events traumatic or non-traumatic is contingent on "*how people react to them* rather than *what they are*" (184). This brings out a more finely-tuned approach to trauma, counting in the subjective experience of survivors and does not preclude personal history from the process of recovery. He acknowledges both the abrupt and the non-abrupt/insidious models of trauma and thus opens the door for a multiplicity of experiences to be scrutinized without invalidating either the specificity of an event or attempts at understanding the underlying structures that foster traumatic suffering.

The sociologist remarks that "[t]rauma […] has a social dimension" (185), and he further highlights how trauma "can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can" (186). Erikson calls this type of communities "a gathering of the wounded" in which "similarly marked" individuals take refuge (187, 186). By counting in the socially- and communally-oriented aspects of trauma, he concludes that "trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies" (186). That while survivors feel the need to isolate themselves, such as one Buffalo Creek survivor who remarks that he feels dead, a remark which Erikson sees as a reminder that victims often have "the feeling that they have been set apart and made

special[,]" there also exist centripetal tendencies such as people coming together "who share a traumatic experience" and further "seek one another out and develop a form of fellowship" (187). By pointing out the failures of technological artifices and their traumatic impact, which he claims constitute a different modality than that of natural catastrophes, Erikson remarks that one "can begin to lose confidence in the use of logic and reason as ways to discern what is going on" (196). And that a myriad of "old exuberances" such as "millennial movements, witchcraft, the occult, and a thousand other systems of explanation" provide safe refuge against this background (196).

The compendium also includes an interview with Robert J. Lifton as well, in which he claims that through his experience interviewing Hiroshima survivors, he has observed that "extreme trauma creates a second self[,]" and that recovery could only occur if the traumatized "second self" could be reintegrated into the psyche of the individual (137). Lifton's line of thought resembles Felman and Laub's in that he remarks that holding a responsible stance in terms of traumatic experiences and witnessing suffering is utterly crucial and that "carrying through this responsibility" has immense therapeutic potential (138).

Lifton's contribution is also significant in that he brings forth an implicit call for caution towards community-based approaches in trauma studies. He introduces the concept of "false witnessing" by which, he claims, a group victimizes others and designates as victims with which it attempts to affirm the life power of itself (139), transferring the death anxiety to the "other" (140). This reveals how denying the role of death in one's life and community paves the way for further destruction and scapegoating, and brings valuable insight into group-behavior-related aspects of trauma studies. For Lifton, denying death is followed by the phenomenon of "false witnessing" which amounts to denying trauma (143). Thus, Lifton, while stressing the communal aspects of traumatic suffering, also casts doubt on naively adhering to the view that any and every type of communal gathering would constitute a viable form of properly coming to terms with traumatic events by highlighting the destructive potential posed by clustered and traumatized individuals.

1.8. Caruthian Orthodoxy

Finally, what completes what have hitherto been called constitutive texts in this study, and the final polish on what later came to be called the "Caruthian" theory, is **Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History.**

It would not constitute a blunder, arguably, to assert that this last study could be seen as an extension of her introductory essays in the previous compendium. She presents the "central and recurring image of trauma in our century," for instance, just as she had started her preface to the previous compendium with a quote from a Vietnam War veteran, as the "experience of the soldier" on the frontlines, witnessing destruction on a massive scale (1996: 11).

Caruth puts forth that trauma is a blow "not upon the body but upon the mind" (3), and that it is not a "simple and healable event" (4). Here she appears to be following the dichotomy posited by Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, namely, traumatic and narrative memory, since she claims that the "very unassimilated nature" of trauma is what "returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). Survival takes on an increased importance in this last work that is now under consideration. For she puts forth that what Freud had all along meant to underline was the question: *"What does it mean to survive?"* (60). And that most trauma narratives, Caruth claims, turn around two central stories: "the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7).

History, which has also been stressed in its relation to trauma in her previous writings, here takes on an increased significance. What seems important that we do, Caruth claims, analyzing trauma and its aftermath, is that we "begin to see the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential" (11). By analyzing Freud's work on Jewish history, **Moses and Monotheism** and connecting it to his forced exile, his expulsion from his native land, just as Jews had been persecuted, enslaved, and then exiled following their Egyptian captivity, she asks: "What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma?" (15).

Caruth continues centralizing incomprehension in her quest to expound traumatic phenomena. Analyzing Duras's **Hiroshima Mon Amour**, Caruth claims that the film

transcends what the viewer may grasp, yet "it is in the event of this incomprehension and in our departure from sense and understanding that our own witnessing may indeed begin to take place" (56). And further that at the core of traumatic experience lies "the legacy of incomprehensibility" (58).

At this point, Caruth's insight into literature appears peculiar for she claims that literature is intimately bound with trauma, since it "is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (3). Yet the significance of narrativity, on telling coherent stories about one's traumatic experience that has been stressed by a myriad of scholars discussed above in this chapter seems to be sidetracked by Caruth's line of thought. Literature provides an excellent toolbox, a bricolage with which to represent suffering, demonstrate traumatic occurrences and their impact, yet, incomprehensibility on which much of Caruth's theoretical model depends proves to be at odds with narrativization and the effort to understand and uncover, which are arguably underappreciated if not outright discouraged by Caruthian trauma theory. The question arises: How to narrate what, at its core, defies comprehension, as posited by Caruth? Her answer to this crucial question is that literature must implement "a language that is always *somehow literary*: a language that *defies*, even as it *claims*, our understanding" (5) (italics mine).

Thus, the void of comprehension in Caruth's theoretical framework and the question she asks in her preface to the compendium analyzed above, regarding "playing with the reality of the past" being a "sacrilege" raise questions about the adequacy of language in its attempt to represent trauma and were to attract the eyes of other trauma scholars. If we as readers must leave the realms of sense and understanding in order to comply by an author's extended offer to witness trauma and that if analyzing and scrutinizing traumatic phenomena are discouraged, how then must literature come up to the task of taking trauma as its subject?

Caruth's views vis-à-vis the route trauma studies later took are of immense importance, since as Kaplan remarks, it was Caruth, with Felman, who "introduced trauma studies as such" (2005: 73). Thus, as the editor and author of the two volumes, out of three of which I have tried to give an outline, Caruth's views have significantly influenced the growing body of scholars who have turned to trauma as a literary, cultural and overall an academic subject of analysis.

1.9. Implications and Problems of Caruthian Orthodoxy

As has been noted by Michelle Balaev, "The history of the concept of trauma is filled with contradictory theories and contentious debates" (2014: 2). It is nothing but eventual that trauma studies has attracted both widespread criticism and applause from the Academia. In the subchapters above has been elucidated how the seminal texts of trauma studies themselves carry within them the seeds for further criticism and theoretical approaches that diverge immensely.

In her introduction to the edited volume **Contemporary approaches in Literary Trauma Theory** which showcases a collection of essays from scholars who adhere to the **Pluralistic** school (2014: 3), Balaev notes that

> For Caruth's deconstructive criticism in particular, the model allows a special emphasis on linguistic indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality, and aporia. The unspeakable void became the dominant concept in criticism for imagining trauma's function in literature (1).

She finds especially problematic in the Caruthian variant of trauma theory the stress on unrepresentability (3), and "the traditional concept of trauma as unspeakable" (4). By counting in the specific, subjective and socio-political concerns, she claims, the new generation of trauma scholars' work may elucidate that "literature is more diffuse, varied, and less programmatic than the classic model affords" (5). Given Caruth's remarks about trauma having become too inclusive, the rigidity of her theoretical framework and her insistence on incomprehension, Balaev is arguably correct in pointing out that these factors render Caruthian view of trauma problematic.

The compendium is significant as well in that the essays reveal the "broadening borders" of the newly emerging interests in trauma research (Balaev 11). Greg Forter, for instance, analyzes novels depicting colonial atrocities and the impact of slavery, and attacking the notion of the unspeakable, claims that novels such as Toni Morrison's **Beloved** and Arundhati Roy's **The God of Small Things** are "efforts to speak 'the unspeakable'" (77).

The most powerful critique to the insistence on silence comes from Barry Stampfl, who asserts that the notion of the unspeakable is a rhetorical device closely related to the notions of the "sacred, and the sublime" (15). This quasi-religious hue surrounding the sacralization of traumatic events, arguably, is excellently detected by Stampfl and he is speaking the truth in saying that "the trope of the unspeakable actually gives permission to turn away," instead of "facing-up-to" and "coming-to-grips-with" atrocities. He further makes clear his stance by stating that the "trope's essential duplicity" is overlooked (18).

Both Irene Visser and Laurie Vickroy in the same volume find problematic the insistence on the unspeakable under consideration here. Visser, noting that the legacies of colonialism merit closer scrutiny, asserts that "trauma theory must be open to power structures, as a necessary and new perspective" (111). Following the pioneering work of scholars such as Kai Erikson and Laura Brown, an outline of which has been given above, she claims that the dominant Caruthian vein even rejects the "notion of a resolution to trauma following the narrativization of traumatic memory" (118).

In a similar vein, Vickroy as well finds the insistence on silence limiting, and argues that novels of authors such as Jane Smiley and Margaret Atwood highlight "how groups become invested in discouraging victims from speaking out" (133). Vickroy's contribution is significant as well for its socially-oriented approach, an approach with which this study also undertakes to analyze two works of fiction. Commenting on this aspect of her thought, Vickroy asserts that "[b]y seeing trauma as collectively and situationally-driven, the possibilities for telling increase" (140). Thus, challenging the dominant event-based or abrupt models of trauma opens up new ways of thinking about catastrophes, chronic or systematic suffering, discrimination or abuse, and demands closer scrutiny towards the underlying base holding together the trauma-inducing, capitalist systems both the US and the world are.

Studies conducted by the Pluralistic School, while focusing mostly on postcolonial themes, reveal the extent to which trauma studies had diverged from the Caruthian influence under which it had long been limited to verbose polemics turning around incomprehensibility, a staunch insistence on the refusal to understand and an urge to sacralize traumatic happenings.

1.10. Avant-gardism, Decontextualization and Depoliticization

Although heavily influenced by critics such as Leys, who is criticized in turn by Kaplan as risking bringing nothing new to the discussion apart from contrariety, Alan Gibbs also benefits from studies conducted by Pluralists such as Vickroy, and Kaplan. In his **Contemporary American Trauma Narratives,** Gibbs remarkably demonstrates how the Caruthian model binds aesthetic, contextual and political aspects of trauma in a conundrum.

Gibbs concurs with the Pluralists by heavily criticizing the "[t]he restrictive modes of representation approved by dominant trauma theory" (2014: 242). He further posits that a "trauma genre emerged," which consists of "a self-reinforcing circuit of fictional and non-fictional prose narratives that existed in tandem with a supporting critical structure" (2). The manner with which Gibbs approaches the dominant tendencies in trauma studies reveals that the model provided by Caruth "is far too rigid, partial, and exclusionary" (12), with which I strongly concur.

Attacking the mnemonic dichotomy postulated by Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, Gibbs further concurs with the theorists discussed above in that "art and literature is considered by Caruthian theory to be unrepresentable, or only representable through the employment of radically fragmented and experimental forms" (14). He puts forth that the dominant understanding of trauma and certain authors are engaged in a vicious cycle, thus reinforcing "each other's texts and the dominant theoretical model" (241).

By approaching the problem of the anti-representational sentiment in Caruth's writings and the aesthetic consequences of such a preference, and revealing the culpability of some of the unchallenged assumptions of the dominant trauma discourse, which lead to "a narrow, derivative, and only superficially experimental genre of works" (242), Gibbs brilliantly uncovers the reason why critics implementing trauma studies tend to overlook more "popular" types of literature or media and implicitly follow the incomprehensibility so powerfully stressed by Caruth, and by extension repeatedly show their preference for "high-brow" novels or other various forms of artistic production. Thus, Gibbs brilliantly demonstrates the predilection born by mainstream

trauma studies towards the "avant-garde" (242). Further, he points out that unquestioningly adhering to the dominant Caruthian model of trauma might risk overlooking "the variety of trauma writing in contemporary literature, American and worldwide" (31). Thus, Gibbs' views are in perfect harmony with Balaev's claim that "the 'unspeakability' of trauma claimed by so many literary critics today can be understood less as an epistemological conundrum or neurobiological fact, but more as an outcome of cultural values and ideologies" (2012: 19).

Apropos the avant-garde bias in mainstream trauma studies, when glossed over, the texts Caruth has chosen to analyze for her monograph suffice to demonstrate the validity of the claim submitted by Gibbs: Alain Resnais's and Marguerite Duras's avant-garde New Wave film **Hiroshima Mon Amour,** Paul De Man's theoretical discussions on Immanuel Kant and 18th century German dramatist Heinrich Von Kleist's novella, **On the Marionette Theater**.

The problem also highlighted by the Pluralists, that theories regarding traumatic phenomena must be more open and flexible, both in terms of their epistemological basis and aesthetic concerns, is stressed by Gibbs and apropos socio-political and contextual factors, excellently summarized.

Gibbs heavily draws on Laura Brown, who, as has been seen above, has challenged the dominant trauma discourse and inspired future scholars for broadening the scope of the field by widening the discussion and pointing out that another modality of trauma exists, a modality which lays bare structural, economic, ethnic and sexual discrimination, oppression and inequalities with which our societies are heavily punctuated. Another scholar he is inspired by is Anne Rothe, who, Gibbs claims, points out that the dominant trauma paradigm "desocializes and thus depoliticizes suffering" (21). Drawing on these pioneer scholars' studies, Gibbs excellently summarizes the aporia Caruthian trauma theory is stuck in with its rigidity and sacralizing tendencies by pointing out that Caruthian orthodoxy is punctuated with a "decontextualizing tendency" (122), and that it suffers from a "depoliticized sentimentality" with which I concur to the fullest extent (22). Also notable here is that Gibbs highlights the fact that some of the most powerful critiques to the dominant or mainstream trauma studies come from postcolonial theorists, which has been remarked above apropos the Pluralists, and Gibbs's account stresses the direct link between the debate surrounding

depoliticization and the legacies of colonialism. "[H]ence" he remarks, "the growing number of critiques from postcolonial theorists, who object to a set of theories that distracts from political inequalities" (22). Further, by remarking that this depoliticization "may be linked of course, to the insistence of Caruth and others that trauma must be transmitted rather than represented by the text" (20), Gibbs brilliantly reveals the problematic position literature occupies in Caruthian theory, how this is not a solely aesthetic problem and how this might discourage critics from analyzing the underlying structures that foster trauma.

1.11. Ann Kaplan, Media and 9/11

Ann Kaplan, whose study, **Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature** is enframed by her own experience of the 9/11 attacks, and is one of the foremost trauma scholars in the US concurs with the Pluralists and Gibbs on the limiting nature of Caruthian orthodoxy. Her account, albeit written before the pluralistic and classical model debate, and that she objects to some of the critics of Caruth's work such as Ruth Leys, because of the fact that Leys "does not offer anything in place of the theories she attacks" (2005: 37), brings forth sharp criticism to Caruth's rigid framework.

Noting how, coinciding with the rise of trauma studies, critical theory "had, indeed, through the influence of Lacan and poststructuralism more generally, become very abstract" (35), and how this situation might have prompted the interest in trauma since it is arguably suitable for linking "high theory with specific material events that were both personal and which implicated history, memory, and culture generally" (35); nevertheless, she finds problematic both the mnemonic dichotomy posited by Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart (34), and "Caruth's insistence on the 'unspeakablity and unreprenstability' of trauma" (37). Nonetheless, Kaplan reserves caution when approaching dissociation, a widely-accepted aspect of post-traumatic experience, as has been seen above where **DSM** was discussed. "What seems wrong in the way criticisms have been formulated," according to Kaplan, is the outright dismissal of dissociation, or what she terms "splitting" (21).

Remarking that "[t]rauma theory bridged the gap" and made possible for her to analyze the "political/national structures that produce catastrophe" while simultaneously making use of its aftermath "according to prevailing ideological and other discourses," yet, given the rigidity of Caruthian theory, Kaplan asserts, "a more complex model than that of Caruth and many psychologists was needed" (36).

Indeed, Ann Kaplan's understanding of trauma is wide in scope, and inclusive since she maintains that

> how one reacts to a traumatic event depends on one's individual psychic history, on memories inevitably mixed with fantasies of prior catastrophes, and on the particular cultural and political context within which a catastrophe takes place (41),

which, arguably, while bringing out a more finely-tuned and wider lens vis-à-vis Caruth's rigid theoretical matrix, situates Kaplan's framework as a forerunner of, and closer to the later studies conducted by the Pluralists and Gibbs, given their rejection of the notion of the "unspeakable," decontextualization and their insistence that socio-political concerns not be overlooked or ignored in trauma studies.

I shall return to Kaplan's framework and other similarities detectable between her view of trauma and other theorists whose views have been outlined in the previous subchapters after stressing the inefficiencies of Caruthian theory in terms of its ambivalent and limiting position apropos the relationship between literature and trauma. By remarking, echoing Claude Lanzmann, that

> Trauma can never be "healed" in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place, or before one witnessed a catastrophe; but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being "translated" via art (19).

Kaplan approaches art and literature as viable tools to work on and represent trauma, which, as has been seen, had been absent from Caruthian orthodoxy.

One of the central dilemmas of the rigid account of traumatic suffering Caruth puts forth arguably lies at this point. A banal modality of complete transcendence of

trauma obviously does not befit the actual experience survivors go through, yet even working on the past, sorrowful or shocking experiences through representing it in art and literature is precluded from Caruthian trauma theory. This, of course, does not mean that literature must take up a role as a "feel-good" euphoric activity, a "facile uplift" (LaCapra, 2014: 78), or that it must always be directed towards a vague notion of "healing." What is problematic is the absence of any function that might be attributed to literature in terms of representing trauma. Stressing the role of literature whilst enshrouding traumatic phenomena under the cloak of a forced incomprehension renders Caruth's pioneering yet conflictual work elusive.

As I have tried to indicate, if juxtaposed with Caruth's rigid matrix, Kaplan's framework is broad and inclusive, qualities heavily conspicuous in terms of their lack in mainstream trauma studies as pointed out by both Gibbs and the Pluralists. This breadth is visible both in terms of its subjects of analysis and the forms of media it focuses on. Kaplan, for instance, by scrutinizing newspaper headlines (98), photographs of memorial statues (7), and films such Alfred Hitchcock's **Spellbound** and Kevin Costner's **Dances with the Wolves** (107), demonstrates that trauma studies could have a lot to say about popular types of media, in stark contrast with Caruth's avant-gardism and narrow choice of subjects.

This contrast is evident on a thematic level as well. Noting that the struggles of indigenous peoples to have "Western cultures [...] face their crimes and consider reparation" are visible and on the rise throughout the last quarter of the 20th century (104), and especially in the United States in terms of "a changing consciousness on the part of the general United States public about grave injustices done to Native Americans" (114), Kaplan's perspective is in perfect harmony with both the Pluralists, who, as I have remarked, tend to focus on postcolonial themes, and Gibbs. By remarking that

> Trauma studies usefully illuminates processes following from contact between indigenous groups and Western invaders that was catastrophic. Understanding trauma's overwhelming impact helps us comprehend the mental state of peoples who were victims of catastrophic inter- (as well as intra-) cultural contact, and who nevertheless find strength to resist and fight for rights[.] (105)

Kaplan, in a sense, anticipates and paves the way for the later implementation of trauma studies in terms of resisting and analyzing colonialism and its legacy. Her reading of **Dances with the Wolves,** for instance, is illuminating in terms of the cultural contact she underlines, the analysis of which is significant to understand how "misinformation" or "empathic understanding" is produced about groups still viewed as "the Other". In the film, she detects the trope of "going native (or indigenization)," which "requires a complete reversal of identity for the white person," and whose deeper meaning might be that "going native" may be one of the ways whereby people belonging to the colonizing group may try to deal with their unconscious guilt arising from their forefathers' having appropriated someone else's land. In "going native," Kaplan asserts, "such people simply give up their white identity" (107).

Elsewhere, in her latest study Kaplan adds more nuance and broadens the scope of her perspective, namely, in her **Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction.** Citing the research conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the summary of which is that "our planet is suffering catastrophic damage from human activities[,]" she contends that "the increasing number of futurist dystopian worlds in film and literature in the post-9/11 era evidence severe anxiety about the future" (2016: 1). Nevertheless, she laments the fact that "links between these dystopian fantasies and climate change per se have been slow to penetrate public consciousness[,]" and develops the concept of climate trauma, beneath which lies, according to Kaplan, the fact that humans are the cause of the catastrophic changes in nature and ecological patterns, something, she claims, and I concur with her fully, commentators in the "media are still reluctant to say" (ix). The fact that Kaplan acknowledges Hurricane Sandy as a motivation for her study, which she claims was a "border event" and "[a] bit like 9/11" in that both had "social and psychological impacts and marked a cultural change in the United States, an altered consciousness of Americans as citizens[,]" is indicative of both the colossal remains of 9/11 and Kaplan's theoretical depth (xvi).

Another definition Kaplan provides for the 9/11 attacks situates media, trauma and the public in a close and problematic relationship since

> The phenomenon of 9/11 was perhaps the supreme example of a catastrophe that was experienced globally via digital technologies (Internet, cell phone) as well as by television and radio, and responded to in a myriad of ways depending on peoples' national and local context (2005: 2).

Indeed, a major aim of Kaplan's study is to scrutinize and understand what she terms "sensationalized reporting" in the media (22). She indicates that there exist studies researching the role played by vicarious trauma in medical and therapy-based contexts, yet cultural and literary studies generally tend to overlook the concept and its significance [4] (41). Noting how "[m]ost of us generally encounter trauma vicariously through the media rather than directly[,]" Kaplan indicates that media and film studies focusing on trauma must take the fast and incessant circulation of unsettling and traumatic images and clips by the press more seriously (87).

Kaplan further develops the concept of "empty empathy" to refer to "empathy elicited by images of suffering provided without any context or background knowledge" (93). While criticizing the misguided use of "new wireless and cell phone technology" (94), which made possible the direct transmission of live, catastrophic events to the wider public and by remarking that the phenomenon of trauma was "closely linked to modernity, especially to the industrial revolution and its dangerous new machines(the railway, the factory)" Kaplan demonstrates the curious relationship between technological developments and human psyche echoing Bataille, Erikson, and also following what is implicit in Freud's original framework, given his interest in railway accidents as causes of trauma, a developing and relatively new invention at the time (25).

The problem for Kaplan in the exploitative reportage under consideration is the lack of proper contextualization and framing. The void that remains at the heart of these images, the lack of informed, contextual opinions and their unmediated nature augment their harmful impact which arguably explains how the "altered consciousness" of Americans that 9/11 prompted came into being.

[4] Here it could be seen that only Felman, in her "Class in Crisis" anecdote has tried to give an adequate account of this phenomenon.

In this respect, Gibbs fully concurs with Kaplan since he heavily criticizes "the media's selective and incessant repetition of images in the days following the attacks" (126), and that further the trauma of 9/11 was abused by the media to transform "a shared sense of grief in[to] an ideological national unity based on blind patriotism" (136), finally to garner "support for the Bush administration's forays into Afghanistan and Iraq[,]" and "the domestic crackdown on civil liberties[,]" referring to the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan following the attacks of 9/11 and the Patriot Act, which was widely seen, as Gibbs's remark demonstrates, as an attempt to use the trauma of 9/11 for limiting the freedom of American citizens via widespread use of surveillance techniques, impinging on their elementary human rights (21). In this respect, Kaplan's remark apropos the caution necessary to exercise when thinking about how trauma is "'managed' by institutional forces" perfectly captures the problematic triad of media, trauma and politics (2005: 1).

Yet, perhaps the most powerful, concise claim that encapsulates the meaning of 9/11 and one that is oft quoted is that

> 9/11 produced a new subjectivity (4).

Reminiscing about the public services held on the 11th of March, 2002, 6 months after the attacks of September 11, she expounds the nature of this altered subjectivity and highlights that mourning took on an increased importance after the incident:

> I watched the Ground Zero memorial service for the families of the victims and was moved. America has learned to mourn and to respect mourning, and that's a good thing (17).

The last paragraph that closes Kaplan's study calls attention to both the colossal scale of the trauma terrorism inflicted on Americans and attempts at coming to terms with it such as working through the pain of 9/11 and mourning the loss the attacks caused. Since, even though "New York will be forever 'wounded[,]'" Kaplan contends,

the fact that a plan for a memorial building to be constructed on the site emptied by the twin towers is decided upon

> is a relief to many and a sign that a certain process of working through, of providing a fitting "witness" to the tragedy, has taken place.

These attempts, Kaplan puts forth, indicate that

> we are learning to mourn what happened, bear witness to it, and yet move forward (147).

1.12. LaCapraean Intervention

Kaplan indicates that she uses the term "working-through" in the sense that Dominick LaCapra revised it from the earlier framework put forth by Freud (2005: 155). Given the staunch insistence of the authors of the constitutive texts analyzed above on the close relationship between history and trauma, it must not come as a big surprise that the scholar who popularized the term and its correlate, "acting out," in trauma studies was a historian.

As I have tried to elucidate above, Freud was using the term and its counterpart in a therapeutic context, where acting out was indicative of fixating on one's unpleasant memories and working through of gaining a mastery over them and progressing towards recovery by overcoming the resistance to therapy. What makes LaCapra's intervention in his **Writing History, Writing Trauma** against "traumatropism," which he claims includes rendering traumatic phenomena in an "aura of the sublime or the sacred" (2014: xxiii), and could further have the potential to constitute an obstacle to the process of working through (xiv), and in turn could legitimate an approach to the phenomenon of trauma as a "limit experience or as stigmata demanding endless melancholy or grieving, whose mitigation or rendering in narrative is perceived as objectionably consoling or even as sacrilegious" (xv), is his

popularizing Freud's nomenclature for use in literary or cultural studies by making it available for implementation in supra- and extra-therapeutic contexts and thus enriching the discussion of traumatic phenomena by highlighting that working through as a concept is "underdeveloped" in "academic approaches to psychoanalysis" (xxiii).

In terms of his influence, besides Ann Kaplan's direct implementation of his work, Stampfl, in his essay presented above heavily draws on LaCapra's ideas regarding the resistance of Caruthian theory towards articulating, representing and attempting to comprehend trauma. Adherents of the Pluralistic school such as Vickroy cites LaCapra's insight that "fiction can reveal the emotional experience of historical phenomena" (2014: 137), similarly, Balaev, in her monograph, **The Nature of Trauma in American Novels,** asserts that LaCapra "provides important insights regarding the uses of trauma theory in the humanities" (2012: 24), Alan Gibbs notes that LaCapra "is amongst the few theorists to address the issue of perpetrator trauma" (2014: 166).

Having stressed his impact; traumatropism, which I understand to be a fixation on a narrow definition and framework of trauma, carrying with it a tendency of anti-representational and sacralizing sentimentality towards narrating and articulating traumatic suffering, I believe, directly bears on the central dilemma that I have asserted above apropos Caruthian orthodoxy. Further, it is not the case that this assertion is superimposed on LaCapra's, since LaCapra posits that the "traumatic" in Caruthian theory is "inherently incomprehensible or unrepresentable" and asserts that, echoing Balaev, Caruthian trauma theory "may itself be interpreted as an intricate displacement and disguise of the de Manian variant of deconstruction" (2014: 107).

Remarking that traumatized individuals "have a tendency to relive the past, to be haunted by ghosts or even to exist in the present as if one were still fully in the past, with no distance from it" (142), LaCapra defines acting out as a phenomenon in which "the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present" (70), alongside which he situates mourning, a social practice, he asserts (69), echoing Krystal's effective grieving, and working-through (65), which would, according to LaCapra, allow "for critical judgment and a reinvestment in life, notably social and civic life with its demands, responsibilities, and norms requiring respectful recognition and consideration for others" (70). A notable point here is that acting-out as a

phenomenon is related to ethics (a quality which Felman and Laub have initially highlighted vis-à-vis traumatic phenomena and witnessing) since, if fixated on, it could render the individual "tragically incapable of acting responsibly or behaving in an ethical manner involving consideration for others as others" (70), and further it would enable behavior which could be "destructive and self-destructive" (143).

Noting how there exists a predilection shown by contemporary critics for acting out (145), LaCapra brilliantly demonstrates the dilemma orthodox trauma studies is stuck in: comprehending acting out as a tool against "any facile notion of cure," LaCapra remarks, mainstream critical practice finds itself in "a paralyzing kind of all-or-nothing logic in which one is in a double bind" by seeing working through as "closure, totalization, full cure, full mastery" (145). Indeed, LaCapra explicitly stresses the fact that he tries to "distance" himself from the "therapeutic conceptions of psychoanalysis" (143).

Besides mourning, which, according to LaCapra is not "isolated grieving or endless bereavement but [is] a social process that may be at least partly effective in returning one to the demands and responsibilities of social life" (23), he presents certain kinds of "nontotalizing narrative and critical, as well as self-critical, thought and practice," as "modalities" of working through (67), which is inherently "articulatory" (22), which would enable the individual in his journey from "victim to survivor and social agent" (xi), to obtain "critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal" (66). The crucial point of his theoretical framework is that he explicitly states that the acting out-working through duo is not a "dichotomy" (144), and further that they are "intimately related parts of a process" (143).

What is valuable in this revision of Freud's original terminology is that LaCapra situates the working through and acting out duo not as completely opposing terms and in a therapeutic matrix, rather, by highlighting the social aspects of responses to trauma, stressing the roles of ethics and narrativity, which were initially two fundamental factors in Felman and Laub's framework, LaCapra, besides popularizing the terms and revealing the need for their wider use in humanities, also makes them more applicable and enlivens the discussion surrounding post-traumatic phenomena. Further, his revision does not preclude structural and political scrutiny, for he asserts that his use

of psychoanalysis does not "constitute a substitute" for socio-economic or political analyses but augments them (xxix).

Moreover, by putting forth that "[v]arious modes of signification" such as

> forms of modern art and writing, as well as some of the most compelling forms of criticism provide relatively safe havens for exploring the complex relations between acting out and working through trauma, often seem to be traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma (23).

LaCapra situates literature and art as significant loci and tools for representing and articulating traumatic suffering. Traumatic writing, apart from the description above, is defined by LaCapra as "experimental, gripping, and risky symbolic emulation of trauma […] ("writing" in the broad sense that extends to all signification or inscription)" (105). With these dicti, LaCapra brilliantly demonstrates the due significance of literature in terms of its value in providing an excellent ground for exploring the post-traumatic experience which is intertwined with the interaction between working through and acting out. Here lies one of the most crucial points making LaCapra's framework immensely valuable for this study. While Lanzmann and Kaplan were using the terms in order to explain **why** an artist has chosen to produce a particular work (in Lanzmann's case himself), LaCapra's matrix brings out a perfect tool to analyze **how** trauma is represented in a given text, or texts, and why this is significant, which is the ultimate aim of this study. Since the aim is to demonstrate the significance of this **how** in two works of fiction, and not precisely that the author or a given author has chosen to write these works of fiction for **this** or **that** particular reason, LaCapra's thought bears high significance.

Another point pertinent to the relationship between literature and trauma, with which I highly concur, is LaCapra's rejection of "redemptive" mode of narratives, which "circumvents, denies, or represses the trauma that called it into existence, for example, through unqualified objectification, formal analysis, or harmonizing" (98). What could be appreciated in LaCapra's view of literature vis-à-vis trauma lies right at this point where he approaches these "Pollyanna" (74), or "feel-good" (152) modes of writing skeptically. By stressing the interactive play between acting out and working

through, how this is related to ethics, social and political concerns, LaCapra posits that narratives about trauma, or traumatic writing must not be relegated to a solely uplifting activity.

Having stressed the interaction of acting out and working through and their representation in writing, LaCapra offers valuable insight for understanding the nuances of the discussion held in this study in respect to community-oriented approaches. According to LaCapra, traumatropism may also bring into existence what he terms "founding traumas" via sacralizing the traumatic event and elevating it to the level of the sublime, in which "[a] crisis or catastrophe that disorients and harms the collectivity or the individual may miraculously become the origin or renewed origin of the myth and serve an ideological function in authorizing acts or policies that appeal to it for justification" (xii). This is significant, arguably, to grasp the critique put forth by Lifton in pointing out the manipulable nature of traumatic events and that they may prompt a never-ending cycle of violence and traumatization. LaCapra includes under this class of founding traumas, for instance, American Civil War (xvii), Vietnam War (161), French Revolution for the French, or the Battle of Kosovo for the Serbs (162). But there may be more destructive and sinister consequences of this process "to transvalue the traumatic into a figure of the sublime" (135), since he remarks that Nazi ideology "achieved this feat in particular" (135), prompting a "quest for redemption or regeneration through an extremely violent, distorted sacrificial process involving quasi-ritual anxiety about contamination and the quest for purification" (94). LaCapra thus highlights the need for more caution in rendering trauma and traumatic events unspeakable or unrepresentable, paving the way for rendering them inscrutable and precluding analysis.

1.13. Kirby Farrell, the US in the Late 20th Century, Berserking

In this last subchapter of my theoretical framework shall be given an outline of Kirby Farrell's thought as expressed in his **Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and**

Interpretation in the Nineties, which, while complementing the previous discussions held by theorists, provides valuable insight in terms of American culture in the late 20th century.

Farrell's study is structured as a socio-cultural and political analysis of the American psyche focusing on the late 19th and 20th centuries. This renders his work especially crucial to my framework, initially, because of the fact that trauma as a phenomenon was observed by medical professionals, such as Freud, for the first time during the period under consideration, and second, that his poignant criticism and insight into the late 20th century US culture directly pertains to the works of fiction that I try to analyze in this thesis.

Farrell, presenting the narratives that he has opted to probe in his work, such as H.G.Wells's "scientific romances" (1998: ix) of the late 19th century and films produced during its counterpart, the '90s, including Steven Spielberg's **Schindler's List** and Michael Moore's **Roger and Me,** explains the core problematic by putting forth that the rationale behind his study is his having sensed in

> these stories from the ends of two centuries – what they all share, suffusing and energizing them, latent and yet formative – was a mood of *cultural crisis*: a sense that something has gone terribly wrong in the modern world, something that we can neither assimilate nor put right (ix) (italics mine).

Farrell continues, and poignantly brings to the fore the intimate relationship between culture, society and trauma by asserting that "trauma is an injury not just to the central nervous system or the psyche, but also to the culture which sustains body and soul" (xii), and detects a "cultural crash" in the US during the '90s (184). Farrell's following dictum eloquently summarizes the socio-cultural dynamics of trauma: "When trauma disturbs the ground of experience, cultural values lose their life-supporting conviction" (85). He further highlights the due significance of contextualization vis-à-vis trauma, and asserts that

> trauma is also psychocultural, because the injury entails interpretation of injury. I emphasize that phrase because terror afflicts the body, but it also demands to be

> interpreted and, if possible, integrated into character. In an effort to master danger the victim may symbolically transform it, compulsively reexperience it, or deny it. And those interpretations are profoundly influenced by the *particular cultural context*. (7) (italics mine)

He takes this contextualization one step further, similar to Ann Kaplan, and locates the birth of trauma as a phenomenon meriting both academic and public interest in modernity's "shockwaves" (27) and its concomitant technical innovations such as railways (2), whose malfunctions, Farrell reports, "could produce thousands of deaths in a year" (2). "[T]he flood of passenger litigation included many psychosomatic injuries" (2), he points out, citing court-cases turning around this new technology, that trauma, as a concept and formulation, from the beginning, "had been accompanied by concerns about compensation" (7), and further that it "was bound up with tort law from the start"[5] (23). As an analogue of this phenomenon in the late 20th century, he locates automobiles and airplanes (175), since he claims "[f]ew images evoke the traumatic potential of modernism as powerfully as a plane crash[,]"[6] and these artifices, while they "enable us to overcome our physical limits" (175), due to their very propensity for endangering our lives, arouse in us death anxiety (315). "The airplane, that symbol of modernism's promise and peril, magnifies dread" (189), he observes and concludes, "[h]ome is safe but deadening," yet, "escape through technology […] can be fatal. If travel relieves and arouses death anxiety, that magnifies any threat to safety on a train or plane" (8). In this respect, Farrell's exquisite formulation that

> science sharpened a sense of human futility. Technological society evolved a double-bind which is still acute. The same order that tamed menacing forces through databases, graphs, insurance tables, and highly rationalized social codes could also suffocate the spirit and make life's inevitable terrors more plainly unmanageable. (52)

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5 It is worth noting here that public and medical interest in trauma during the last quarter of the 20th century was prompted by the distressing situation of Vietnam War veterans. Farrell notes that **PTSD** as a phenomenon initially became "widely familiar" to the public when it was used "as a legal defense" for disturbed veterans "in trouble with the law" (11).

6 This observation, written in 1995, anticipates the later traumatic impact of 9/11 attacks. On another note, Farrell even mentions that terrorists have tried and still try to destroy "the cosmic sounding" World Trade Center (32).

fits in perfectly with both Kaplan's views outlined above and LaCapra's claim that "[o]ne of the dangers in Western self-consciousness has been to think that technical rationality can solve all problems" (2014: 178).

Symptomatologically, death anxiety, as seen above, is a crucial factor for Farrell in understanding trauma, similar to Lifton, by whom Farrell is influenced (1998: 316). And he explains this factor by putting forth that a "salient characteristic of post-traumatic experience," alongside its belated impact (11), or the Freudian **Nachtraglichkeit;** contagiousness/vicariousness (12), and dissociation (12), "is the way in which it destabilizes the ground of conventional reality and arouses death anxiety."

The problem for Farrell is comprised not only of a loss of trust in "particular guarantees, but the recognition that no life can be absolutely grounded," and further that "trauma necessarily entails dread of the future. For a survivor the past may be safely past, but survival also cues the now vigilant imagination to the death sure to come someday" (43). In this respect, trauma is directly pertinent to the "basic developmental project of coming to terms with mortality" (12). He perfectly summarizes the impact of trauma, and remarks that, "[b]y exposing the constructed and interdependent nature of our existence, it makes vivid how radically vulnerable and ephemeral we are" (176).

Before moving on to further qualify the cultural crisis which occupies a highly significant position in Farrell's framework, I would like to note one more point on which he and Lifton concur: the malleable quality of trauma. Farrell reveals the problematic brilliantly, that

> People not only suffer trauma; they use it, and the idea of it, for all sorts of ends, good and ill. The trope can be ideologically manipulated, reinforced and exploited (21).

An example he provides, for instance, is hero worship, whereby members of a group, by identifying with "a powerful other," convince themselves that they may transcend the death anxiety that trauma entails, by making a hero "larger than life,"

and carrying out the "master[']s will," deceive themselves into believing that they may share in a "conviction of superhuman vitality" (83). On another note, Farrell remarks how ancient Romans "maimed captives to instill lasting inhibitions." And in this respect, he concludes, torture, for instance, could be used for "invoking a ground of being" (21). Constituting another example of the use of trauma to "strengthen group bonding," he presents military rituals, such as those that had been observed in the Vietnam War, where, "officers sometimes ordered new soldiers to kill enemies who were then revealed to be innocent civilians, deliberately using traumatic guilt to promote bonding among the new men" (22). As a horrific and still controversial example, the My Lai Massacre could be given here, which claimed the lives of more than 500 Vietnamese villagers.

Another instance of this phenomenon Farrell provides is the one LaCapra also highlights, "in the 1990s," Farrell explains, the Serbs transformed their "legendary trauma" of their defeat in Kosovo in the long-gone 14th century into the "ground of their 'resurrected' ethnic identity and the justification" for the atrocities that have culminated in the horrors of Srebrenica, which, according to Farrell, together with the atrocities in Rwanda, "a 'war' on drugs, […] epidemics of AIDS, rape, domestic battering, teen violence" have had "newspaper headlines" and the society shudder (3). These, according to Farrell, together with socio-economic concerns and widespread generational antagonism[7] (308), played a major role in bringing about the mood of cultural crisis he detects in the late 20th century America. In terms of his claims vis-à-vis the role played by trauma in forging new group identities and becoming pretexts for explosive violence, Farrell's insight perfectly complements and further expounds LaCapra's concept of "founding trauma." I shall turn back to newspaper headlines, reporting and the media proper about which Farrell provides valuable insight but first the connections of the socio-cultural conundrum of the '90s to the wider socio-

[7] In the form of widespread public concern and fascination with "the terrifying nihilism of youth (320), "'bad-boy' nihilism of the inner city," and "the predatory frenzy of youth gangs that has been dubbed 'wilding.'" Farrell notes the significance of frequent newspaper headlines such as "we've become a nation being terrorized by our children," or "a generation of teens" who are "numerous, savage" and "super predators" (320), and widely sensationalized court-cases such as "the Menendez trials" (317), the publicization of which exposed the story of the murder of a well-off couple by their young sons for inheritance money in 1996.

economic factors prevailing in the US during the epoch under consideration shall be given.

Farrell ascribes the cultural "mood" of the late 20th century America which he terms post-traumatic, an outcome of cumulative stresses, which directly translates to a "disturbance in the ground of collective experience: a shock to people's values, trust, and sense of purpose" (3), to the famous concept coined by Tom Engelhardt, the end of "the victory culture" on which, according to Farrell, "America's national identity was grounded […] that euphemized a history of exploitation[,]" starting with the "New World Genocide" in the name of expanding democratic freedom and Manifest Destiny (27). Its demise with the "Vietnam debacle, the Soviet collapse" and an economic system which "demanded sacrifices at the bottom while redirecting major economic benefits toward those at the top, creating an unprecedented federal deficit" (159), according to Farrell, created the mood of cultural crisis. Following this line of argument, Farrell expounds another term brought into circulation by Engelhardt, "storylessness," which came into existence with the defeat in Vietnam and the dissolution of the "Soviet 'evil empire';" lacking "enemies to support warrior self-esteem" (151), and to justify an extravagant "trillion-dollar military build-up," with the collapse of the narrative of "the victory culture" in the 90s, there arose, according to Farrell, "a scarcity of narrative resources" (354). Farrell's claim perfectly captures the complicity of what he terms the "consumer democracy" that is the American economic culture in this lack of discursive options for American citizens, since according to Farrell, "storylessness is primarily a by-product of corporate capitalism's mania for monolithic control and immoderate profit" (300). The affluent nation that is the US, Farrell claims,

> that 'cannot afford' health insurance or welfare can afford a massive peacetime military-industrial enterprise and one of the world's largest prison systems. When workers' 'terminations' are justified by a need to 'survive' foreign competition, the fear of death takes on fabulous euphemistic forms. Competitive capitalism is rooted in survival motives and dread. (214)

This suffocating system which comprises “gross inequalities in class and gender; predatory economic behavior” and showcases “multimillion-dollar executives, minimum-wage workers in virtual peonage” (196), Farrell brilliantly demonstrates, amounts to “a savagely competitive civilization whose business culture is in truth the Social Darwinist’s jungle” (298). This “hierarchical, dog-eat-dog society” (132), which is “based on coercion and betrayal, in which ‘redundancy’ or inefficiency on the job spells social death[,]” Farrell continues, by benefiting the “financial and technological elites,” slashed valuable and scarce resources from social and welfare programs (295), has dropped “wages and living standards” and has had “workers feel trapped and betrayed” (296), and provided the breeding ground for the cultural crisis under consideration.

His profound insight crystallizes the conundrum working citizens of America in the ‘90s found themselves in, since policy-makers, killing social welfare and benefit programs, driving and stimulating the stunning inequalities between the affluent and the poor, “have begun reviving Social Darwinist visions of the survival of the fittest” (213), an order which is “deeply corrupting” both because what is under consideration is “a society obsessed with competition” (95), and also because it forces individuals to race in order to survive (225).

In such a system which “makes service an industry and does not value it,” which is further “increasingly dominated by a powerful elite that hoards not only material wealth but also the scarce jobs that can give people a sense of primary worth, and then blames the ‘losers’ for burdening-injuring- everybody else[,]” and in which “marginal service jobs have displaced skilled workers, as corporate muscle has deliberately destroyed organized labor,” survival becomes the primary motive for life, which aptly dramatizes the “distressing situation of working people in postindustrial America” (245).

By 1995-96 alone, Farrell reports,

> the same year that Congress abolished federal welfare guarantees for the poor, the nation still had a wartime military budget but no enemies, the Pentagon spent five million dollars for a golf course at Andrews Air Force Base (295).

The late 20th century America, with the "renewed economic and status competition" (164), saw the "military-industrial elites" forcing a "'lean and mean' discipline […] massive layoffs, attacks on housing and lunch subsidies" and thus, while this disciplinary mentality "lifted the regulatory restraints on the already powerful," has left shaken "those with few resources to compete" (161). Farrell notes that there exists beneath these "lean and mean" sacrificial policies and "executive anger" an "obsessional perversity," whose delusional modus operandi "depends on the self-intoxicating fantasy that shedding guilty 'fat' creates more life" (160).

By pointing out the role of "economic violence" in sorely affecting the well-being of Americans (15), the dark situation working citizens face every day in their lives, and the dire social antagonism American life harbored in the late 20th century, and perhaps still carries within itself, Farrell's formulations, while demonstrating the traumatic impact of such a suffocating system, exquisitely complement Laura Brown's assertions regarding the "traumatogenic effects of oppression" that American society is plagued with. His following observation encapsulates the inherent connection between the personal and social factors in post-traumatic experience; revealing that, within his framework, trauma is akin to a tear in the social fabric, and exposes the immanent complicity of the social order in inducing, or enabling the nascence of trauma. "[I]njury," he claims, "exposes society's failures[,]" and continues:

> Whether it is an earthquake, a shipwreck, or an abusive relationship, every trauma reveals the inability of the social world to protect the victim from harm. In fact, the event may expose society's active evil. The aftershock of disaster tests the sympathies of those around the survivor. *Every trauma implies a criticism of life.* (187) (italics mine)

Farrell further notes that this oppressive system, whose "civic religion is consumer capitalism" (165) which is accompanied by "visions of endless plenty" is quixotic and operates as an "immortality fantasy" (166) against the background of a society plagued by death anxiety, which leaves only "the pleasures of consumerism to provide escape from a repressive 'work ethic'" and "journalism and mass entertainment's" (16) exploitation of "traumatic themes to relieve the cramped ennui of workaday discipline."

Kirby Farrell's critique of the media is inherently bound up with the dissociative aspect of post-traumatic experience. Following Judith Lewis Herman's observation that

> traumatized people [may] alternate between feeling numb and reliving the event. The dialectic of trauma gives rise to complicated, sometimes uncanny alterations of consciousness, which George Orwell, one of the committed truth-tellers of our century, called 'doublethink," and which mental health professionals … call 'dissociation.' (Quoted in Post-traumatic Culture: 11)

Farrell likens what Lifton calls "the second self," or Ann Kaplan and Henry Krystal "splitting" to the Orwellian "doublethink," noting the "frequency of dissociation in post-traumatic stress," he implements the concept of dissociation in his approach to media and reportage. He notes that society not only tolerates "daily accounts of catastrophe," but is further drawn to them, "53 percent of television news is devoted to crime and disaster coverage" (16). He concludes that what draws the public to these "obsessive headlines" is the fact that "violence sells" and further that it "serves a sharpened appetite for stimulation," that "tamed violence is an important means of regulating our needs for excitement and security."

> In this context, disaster stories model a range of human relationships to misfortune and keep our defenses exercised. They may function as a reality check even as they frame, and distance us from, horror (17).

The last passage quoted reveals also that Farrell envisages these "disaster stories" as phenomena akin to Freud's concept of "gaining mastery" over unpleasurable experiences by enacting them in ritualized forms, just as his grandson's invention of the "fort-da" game, since, "the headlines invite momentary low-grade worry that, like worry beads, superstitiously promises to buy off big trouble if we submit to a little ritualized distress every day." Further, this formulation highlights the relationship between media and trauma which is bound up with the phenomenon of dissociation for

> We engage them in a spirit of doublethink, registering the data with safely mediated feeling (17).

By "vaccinating the skittish human animal against crippling dread," Farrell suggests, "the news regulates doses of adversity and death, mediating horror through dissociation." Finally, Farrell contends that these stories and the media in which they are proliferated reveal "deeply disguised motives in us: to pity and terror perhaps, but also to a magical sense of our own immunity, our own ransom from death, our ability to 'beat' adversity and outlive others" (17).

Overall, Farrell's framework, while perfectly complementing Ann Kaplan's critique of "sensational journalism," the hypocritical, dubious nature of "empty empathy;" and Alan Gibbs's approach to the complicity of media in "selling" trauma for political purposes, by counting in the dissociative factor inherent in "consuming" widely-circulating images and narratives of suffering, expands the lens with which they may be scrutinized.

Kirby Farrell's approach to the mass entertainment industry, or what he terms "media capitalism" is poignant and lays bare the socio-economic factors laying beneath the "communications revolution in cable, satellite, and computer technologies[.]" Noting how the media had actually never been "so richly diverse," Farrell puts forth that it is transformed into "mass-market trivia," emulating "tabloid or lifestyle entertainment," whereby it is "dumbed down" and "disconnected from any direct citizen action" (341). In this way, Farrell notes, entertainment and media industry not only becomes a "controlled provocation to elicit excitement in an audience paying for pleasurable stimulation" (319), but a way to "amuse ourselves to death."[8] This situation "attenuates our subjectivity," which, according to Farrell, "reflects the plasticity of 1990s culture" (30):

> We speak of television "baby-sitting" the young, the ill, and the old, even as its manipulative venality evokes the specter of demonic agencies – such as vampires

8 Here borrowing Neil Postman's concept.

> or those Orwellian telescreens – capturing the souls of "couch potatoes" and zombie consumers (213).

Indeed, Kirby Farrell's framework explicitly reveals not only the negative cultural impact of the American media capitalism, but further how it plays into the hands of the ones at the top, serving "the financial powers that direct the nation" (264), masking the beneath-the-surface economic strife, revealing its equivocal stance towards both "established power" and violence (303), packaging suffering and trauma, "safely distanced and for sale" (338).

Farrell's last observation, while pointing out the consumer demand for on-screen depictions of destruction and havoc in a "warrior culture" tinged with survival anxieties (289), also highlights the central character of violence which comprises the core of "social experience in America" (195). And in this respect, the demand is a reflection of the fact that violence was not only a virtual but also an actual disposition of American cultural climate during the late 20th century, and perhaps still is. One conspicuous component of this disposition which is highly connected with the socio-economic (296), cultural crisis (293), and generational antagonism (308) outlined above is what Farrell terms going "berserk" or "berserking," citing psychiatrist Jonathan Shay's study, **Achilles in Vietnam,** on American soldiers' traumatic experience and responses during the war, as a source of inspiration (406). The word itself, per the entry in the Oxford Dictionary of English, 3rd edition, derives from the Old Norse **berserkr**, from two root-words: **berr**, referring to bare, and **serkr**, to coat (Stevenson, 2010: 2507). The etymological background of the word is closely related to the meaning Farrell attaches to the concept, as shall be seen shortly.

According to Farrell, there exist three "principal modes of coping with traumatic stress[,]" and these are comprised of:

> social adaptation and relearning, depressive withdrawal or numbing, and impulsive force (berserking) (7).

By "overwhelm[ing]" the body's natural "fight-or-flight response" (6), trauma as a shocking experience may thus reveal not only "society's defects," or comprise a "cry

for distress," but also constitute "a justification for aggression" (14). In this sense, by "destroy[ing] a conventional mind-set," as a "'mind-blowing' experience" (19), it could bring into existence radically disparate behavior in the individual.

Thus, noting the variation of symptoms among individuals exposed to traumatic stressors, Farrell defines going berserk thus:

> To go "baresark" or "bare shirt" is to shed your armor and all other […] supports and be possessed by a godlike or beastlike fury (289).

"Through central-nervous-system flooding and its psychic analogue, the intoxicating ideation of rage," the individual, Farrell notes, "gains access to extraordinary power[.]" The concept of this "killing frenzy," Farrell further underlines, "can be related to […] ideas of restoring order or 'getting even' through revenge, of mystically replenishing life through death" (289). Indeed, as the primary motive for the violent behavior under consideration here, Farrell presents, "to impose narrative closure" on life against the background of a milieu in which "depersonalization and violence are so extreme that no particular action can seem climactic or even authentic. Only losing control, being cool in the grip of frenzy, conveys authenticity[,]" hence the close relationship between this "ecstatic violence" (315), with the entailing "conviction of invulnerability" (329), and concepts of suicide (2015: 38) and dystopian, "apocalyptic" sensibilities (1998: 318). Moreover, the practice, as a "willingness to abandon all restraints on violence" (320) prompted by "a traumatic response to threatened subjectivity" (334) is "culturally conditioned," hence the massive role of culture and "society's defects" in providing a breeding-ground for the destructive behavior under consideration (290). Indeed, Farrell notes the existence of a wide array of forms of berserking in American culture which are conditioned by the socio-economic factors outlined above: "from football hooliganism to 'crimes of passion,' from rampages in the work-place to the Long Island Railroad commuter massacre in December 1993" (290).

The socio-economic conditioning in berserk behavior is analyzed by Farrell further. He highlights that berserking became "a popular symbol" of post-traumatic

stress, especially "[a]fter a string of workplace rampages" in the late 20th century American society (290), and that "management techniques in the '90s increasingly emphasized ways to defuse the potential for violent retaliation when 'cutting loose' an employee," amid widespread fear about the "down-going" man (350).

By remarking that the public fascination and concern over the phenomenon is closely related to "the nation's venerable faith in raw power and deliverance," and how "American slang is rich in terms that evoke the overthrow of inhibition," such as flipping out, going off the deep end, or synonyms for passing away such as being wasted or being blown away, Farrell's formulation directly counts in the American experience while analyzing this phenomenon:

> In a culture that casually encourages people to 'go for it,' calls social fun a 'blast,' honors 'cutthroat' competition, we should expect ideology to favor the heroic violation of restraints and efforts at self-transcendence (291).

Though it does not constitute the only form of berserking, mass shootings, for instance could reveal the "cultural conditioning" beneath the violent behavior under consideration. The US, while comprising only %3 of the world population, has witnessed %31 of mass shootings that have occurred anywhere on earth between 1966 and 2012, according to Adam Lankford, an expert on criminal justice (2016: 192).

Farrell notes the protean character of the concept, how, as times and socio-cultural contexts shift, berserking changes shape, as the behavior is always "in motion, changing shape, just beyond us" (2015: 213). He notes that "[c]onventional wisdom nowadays associates berserk behavior with rampage killing," and provides further examples of this "richly volatile, readily self-intoxicating" phenomenon and reveals its prevalence in American social life during the late 20th and early 21st century (2015: 11). "The final year of the twentieth century[,]" he remarks,

> began with gunfire blazing in a Salt Lake City television station and ended in November with seven Honolulu office workers dead. On April 20, at Columbine High School in Colorado, 2 students slaughtered 15 people and wounded 23

> before taking their own lives. A month later a discharged Marine killed four Las Vegas supermarket employees. Before the year was out, the carnage reached an Atlanta day trading firm, a Los Angeles day care center, and a church in Fort Worth, Texas, where seven worshipers died during a service. (2015: 2)

And this propensity reflects itself as a form of ambivalence as well. Farrell remarks that America harbors an "ambivalence about berserking," visible in various forms such as "equivocation in Hollywood and the media," or "fascination with gang violence" (1998: 297). As could be seen in the films Farrell analyzes, such as the "Rambo" series, in which a Vietnam veteran goes amok "in his battle against apocalyptic military-industrial evil" (102), Farrell asserts that various forms of berserk-related phenomena are exploited by the media industry, and this exploitation operates by "magnifying their bravado and ignoring their actual complexities" (297), thus masking the "economic strife and generational antagonism" beneath them (309).

Thus, closely related to socio-economic and cultural factors, berserking as formulated by Farrell provides an excellent theoretical concept with which the vicissitudes of post-traumatic experience could be scrutinized. The following quotation aptly summarizes the problematic under consideration:

> victimization converts to vindictiveness as fluidly as the central nervous system may turn flight to fight (193).

Further, Farrell's formulation excellently complements LaCapra's working-through and acting-out duo. As an anti-social, destructive and unethical behavior, berserking constitutes, arguably, a modality of acting out. Since working-through involves social agency and "consideration for others as others," berserking, as a violent and delusional mode of coping with post-traumatic stress which puts at risk both the survivor and other individuals, fits in perfectly as a subgroup of acting-out behaviors, while Farrell's "social adaptation" complements LaCapra's working through, given the significance of "civic responsibilities" and the social agency just mentioned. In this case, Farrell's "depressive withdrawal" could be construed as a modality of LaCapra's "endless grieving" which constitutes an obstacle to recovery. Overall, berserking, as

formulated by Farrell, is an excellent tool to analyze trauma vis-a-vis the American experience. His following observation crystallizes the protean nature of both trauma and narratives about trauma:

> Trauma could support opposite scenarios (160).

CHAPTER TWO

FIGHT CLUB

2.1. Plot Summary

The story opens in media res. The unnamed protagonist, whose narration comprises the novel, is on top of the "Parker-Morris Building[,]" the tallest building on earth, with a "gun stuck in [his] mouth." The hand behind the trigger belongs to Tyler, with whom, the narrator laments, he was best friends "[f]or a long time." Tyler addresses the protagonist, and remarks that the two "really won't die," that they will be "legend. We won't grow old" (11).

The narration is punctuated with the protagonist's giving recipes for a silencer (11), plastic explosives (12), and napalm bombs, (13) with which, he claims "[y]ou can topple anything." The "how-to stuff isn't in any history book[,]" he comments, and spread among the dialogue and the recipes, a countdown slowly proceeds until three minutes is left for the building to "go into all the history books." The narrator mentions that "the national museum" adjacent to the building is "Tyler's real target."

While this confrontation takes place on top of the skyscraper,

> [d]esks and filing cabinets and computers meteor down on the crowd around the building and smoke funnels up from the broken windows and three-blocks down the street the demolition team watches the clock[.]

The said demolition team belongs to what the narrator calls "the Mischief Committee of Project Mayhem[,]" who, organized by Tyler, are "destroying every scrap of history." The protagonist likens them to "space monkeys," whose only job is to

> Pull a lever.

> Push a button.

prematurely dying without understanding what they are actually part of. Before the story rewinds and the scene is cut, the protagonist realizes that

> […] the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer.
>
> Six Minutes.
>
> We have a sort of triangle thing going on here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me.

What upsets the narrator about this "triangle" is the fact that it is not "about *love* as in *caring*. This is about *property* as in *ownership*" (14). Prior to the three-minute mark, he announces that

> I remember everything (15).

and he narrates how he has come to be on top of a skyscraper with a gun in his mouth while the building is destroyed and all the spectacle being orchestrated by the very person who holds him hostage, Tyler Durden.

The narrative recommences, telling the story of how the protagonist met Marla. Having trouble sleeping for three weeks, the narrator consults a physician. He suffers from insomnia, which leaves him feeling like "[e]verything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy[,]" and "you can't touch anything and nothing can touch you[,]"affecting him profusely, since

> The bruised, old fruit way my face had collapsed, you would've thought I was dead[.]

His doctor suggests that his having trouble with sleeping "is just the symptom of something larger[,]" and urges him to attend support groups where patients suffering

from cancer, brain parasites, or degenerative brain diseases gather if he "wanted to see real pain[.]" Though he never gives his real name at the events, narrator is fascinated by observing people "so close to death[,]" where

> Everyone smiles with that invisible gun to their head (19).

The patients gathering there, with the protagonist in attendance, conduct spiritual rituals and give moral support to each other, and hug to provide "therapeutic physical contact" (20). Observing the meetings, he wonders that

> On a long enough timeline, the survival rate for everyone will drop to zero (17).

While he is not able to find what he seeks for at first, finally Bob comes along, whose honesty has the protagonist feel he has found what he is after (20). A patient suffering from testicular cancer after years of using drugs to increase his chances of winning bodybuilding contests, Bob remarks that "[t]his is better than real life." He closes "in around me with his arms[,]" and when they finally part, "the front of Bob's shirt was a wet mask of how I looked crying." Every following meeting, he cries in the bosom of Bob, never going back to the doctor. The protagonist deduces that Bob loves him as well because "he thinks my testicles were removed, too" (17). The experience he has in attending support groups at the local Church makes him ecstatic,

> Walking home after a support group, I felt more alive than I'd ever felt.

And going home, he is finally able to sleep. "Every evening, I died, and every evening I was born[,]" he comments, that he feels "[r]esurrected" (22). Noting how he is able to "build something" with the attendants and converse freely, he ponders:

> This is why I loved the support groups so much, if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention (107).

This lasts until Marla starts attending support groups. Observing how she smokes cigarettes at cancer group meetings and appears nonchalant, he presumes that "[s]he's a fake," and with her in attendance he is not able to cry, nor sleep after the meetings. Since he grows dissatisfied with this situation, he plans to tell Marla that "I need this. Get out" (24).

At a brain parasite support meeting, which Marla attends for the first time, it is revealed that one of the members has passed away, Chloe, who, according to the narrator, was "the genuine article" (36). The protagonist calls the phenomenon "the amazing miracle of death" (35):

> Oh, the proof that one day you're thinking and hauling yourself around, and the next, you're cold fertilizer, worm buffet.

He complains that Marla is in attendance, calling her a liar, and a faker. As in many other parts of the novel, repetitive phrases punctuate his narration, this time, a countdown marking when "death will commence[.]" When the attendants gather in groups of two for intimately sharing their stories and pain, he approaches Marla. He tells her that "she isn't dying" like the other patients (37). Threatening her with exposing her alibi, the narrator receives the response that Marla shall do the same too if he decides to realize his threat. Meanwhile

> [a]round us, couples stand sobbing, propped against each other (38).

He suggests that they "split the week[,]" yet Marla refuses, remarking that "she wants it all." Similar to the protagonist, she remarks that she never "felt alive" before. The narrator pleads with her further, and after hearing that he has attended these meetings for two years, she accepts the proposal:

> "Okay," Marla says, "okay, okay, you can have testicular cancer" (39).

The novel then moves on to the protagonist's profession and how he has come to meet Tyler. The narrator, a thirty-year old "recall campaign coordinator" (31), constantly travels the United States, going to "meetings my boss doesn't want to attend." Working for a car company, his job requires that he only "apply the formula[:]"

> It's simple arithmetic.
>
> It's a story problem.
>
> If a new car built by my company leaves Chicago travelling west at 60 miles per hour, and the rear differential locks up, and the car crashes and burns with everyone trapped inside, does my company initiate a recall?
>
> You take the population of vehicles in the field (A) and multiple it by the probable rate of failure (B), then multiply the result by the average cost of an out-of-court settlement (C). (30)

"Everywhere I go," he remarks, "there's the burned-up wadded-up shell of a car waiting for me. I know where all the skeletons are" (31).

The protagonist travels incessantly, the narration of which is punctuated with repetitive phrases such as

> You wake up at Air Harbor International.
>
> You wake up at Dulles.
>
> You wake up at Love Field

listing all the airports between which he shuttles back and forth, complaining about the "tiny life. I go to the hotel, tiny soap, tiny shampoos, single serving butter, tiny mouthwash and a single-use toothbrush" (28).

During take-offs and landings,

> When the plane banked too much to one side, I prayed for a crash.

He begs “for wind shear effect. I prayed for pelicans sucked into the turbines and loose bolts and ice on the wings” (26). He flies so often that he struggles to keep his watch synchronized with the local time:

> I set my watch two hours earlier or three hours later, Pacific, Mountain, Central, or Eastern time; lose an hour, gain an hour.
>
> This is your life, and it’s ending one minute at a time (29).

During one of his trips, he meets Tyler Durden, who “could only work night jobs[,]” as against himself, who is able to work only during the day (26). Durden is “a banquet waiter, waiting tables at a hotel, downtown, and [a] projectionist with the projector operator’s union” (27). A defiant worker, he places pornographic images in family and children’s movies, single frames featuring shots of genitalia in close up (30), the impact of which, while usually not noticed by the audience, still had “people feel sick or start to cry[.]” The audience does not realize the existence of these frames, because the pornographic images last only a millisecond (31). The narrator discusses at length how Tyler does changeovers, where he matches the end of one film reel with the following one, so that the film is smooth and there is not a gap between them (26). Addressing the possible question as to how he knows about the minutiae of Tyler’s job routine, he remarks:

> I know this because Tyler knows this.

Narrating how he precisely met Tyler, he comments that it was an “accident” (32). Only person, apart from Tyler, sunbathing on “a nude beach[,]” the protagonist observes Tyler digging holes in the sand and planting five logs with an arc, after which he draws “a straight line in the sand several feet away.” Tyler asks the time, and the protagonist obliges. Feeling curious, he asks if Tyler “was an artist” (33), the response to which is that “he’d use the line to gauge the shadow cast by each log.” The protagonist observes that the shape of the shadow resembles that “of a giant hand.” The interaction culminates in an exchange of phone numbers (33).

Returning from a business trip, his electric razor malfunctions and starts buzzing in his luggage, which prompts the security services to seize it. Turning back home, he finds that an explosion has destroyed his condominium. He is startled and upset since all his furniture and household items are gone:

> We all have the same Johanneshov armchair in the Strinne green stripe pattern. Mine fell fifteen stories, burning, into a fountain (43).

He remarks that it took his "whole life to buy this stuff," yet his frustration is visible as well, since he realizes that

> […] the things you used to own, now they own you (44).

He decides to call Tyler to ask if he could live with him for some time. While the phone rings "in Tyler's rented house on Paper Street[,]" he mutters to himself

> Oh, Tyler, please rescue me.
>
> Deliver me from Swedish furniture.
>
> Deliver me from clever art.

Meeting at a pub and drunk, Tyler asks him to hit him "as hard as [he] can" and out of the blue, they start fighting (46). This experience inspires the duo to found the eponymous fight club. Every week, young men working in the service industry, waiters, stock-boys, account representatives or law clerks gather in the basement of the local bar and "kick the air out of" each other (49). They must fight shirtless, and the firstcomers must always fight (54). Remarking that he never felt alive "anywhere like you're alive at fight club," the protagonist celebrates the fact that the practice is not about losing or winning but it is about "self-destruction:"

> […] maybe we have to break everything to make something better out of ourselves (52).

He imagines that what he tries to destroy is "everything in the world that didn't work, […] the bank that says I'm hundreds of dollars overdrawn. My job where my boss got on my computer and fiddled with my DOS execute commands" (53). Further, "[a] lot of best friends meet for the first time at fight club[,]" he remarks and observes

> Now I go to meetings or conferences and see faces at conference tables, accountants and junior executives or attorneys with broken noses […]
>
> We nod to each other (54).

Now living with Tyler for a month, one day, after confronting him about his decrepit physical state, his boss sends him "home because of all the dried blood on my pants[.]" His face is swollen and eyes are "punched-out" because of the previous fight club meeting (63). Marla starts living with them as well, yet, the protagonist is startled because Tyler and she are "never in the same room. If Tyler's around, Marla ignores him" (65).

While Tyler is busy finding him a job as a banquet waiter to "stoke [his] class hatred" (65), the narrator expresses that he needs soap to wash his outfit so that he could get back to work. Tyler asks him to "get Marla out of the house" to buy lye. Meanwhile he teaches him how to make soap, reaching for the freezer where fat is stored, an essential component of soap-making, according to Tyler, and complains about how the protagonist is "nowhere near hitting the bottom, yet. And if I don't fall all the way, I can't be saved." He wants the narrator to run "toward disaster" (70). After having the protagonist promise that he shall never talk about him to others, Tyler gives him recipes for various explosives that could "blow up the whole world." Afterwards, he kisses the protagonist's hand and pours lye on it, creating a "chemical burn[:]"

> "You'll have a scar," Tyler says (73).

Pouring the substance, he wants the narrator to embrace the pain, remarking that he first needs “to hit bottom” (76). According to Tyler, the experience is the “greatest moment” of the narrator’s life. Meanwhile, he teaches him how soap-making originated in the practice of human sacrifice, whereby the fatty substances naturally mixed with water and ash.

“It was right to kill all those people,” Tyler says (77).

The narration, again, is punctuated with repetitive sentences and surfacing of memories from the narrator’s life, this time, they are comprised of images from his trip to Ireland after college. Indeed, the sentence “You’re in Ireland” is repeated 6 times in one four-page chapter alone (78).

The narration recommences with detailed accounts of how Tyler and the protagonist became “guerrilla terrorists of the service industry[,]” noting that “to them you’re just a cockroach[,]” the duo start to sabotage dinner parties organized by “titans and their gigantic wives,” by urinating and ejaculating on their patrons’ beverages and dishes (81).

At one of the events, from a health professional they learn that there exist “medical waste dumps” where they may procure materials (85). Having obtained a steady supply of human fat, because that is the best option for making soap according to Tyler, the narrator remarks that Tyler is “making real bucks.”

People are saying it’s the best soap ever (87).

The narrator starts suffering from insomnia again. A new recall campaign is in order at the company. While there are a myriad of defects, such as “leather interiors that cause birth defects,” or the faulty “fuel-injector flashback” which is the reason why “many people burn alive” in the cars the company produces and authorities do not take a step, this time a recall is organized (99). While he is busy doing paperwork, his boss finds a page listing the rules of the fight club. Implying that the narrator could

get laid off, his boss confronts him about the paper. The protagonist is consumed by rage and threatens to "stalk from office to office with an Armalite AR-180 gas-operated semiautomatic" (97). He ponders that the two holes in his cheeks and black eyes could have prompted his boss to fear him (98). Since he is aware that he is privy to a myriad of illegal corporate maneuvers to hide the defects in the cars which cause numerous deaths, and could use the knowledge to his leverage, he dismisses his boss rudely (99). He reflects that Tyler's "words are coming out of my mouth" (98).

Next time he attends the support group meetings at the local church, he comes across with Bob, the testicular cancer patient, who tells him that various fight clubs organized by a man named Tyler Durden have appeared around the town, so the meetings now are always empty. Questioning the viability of this information since it is impossible for Tyler's timeline to match the events and they are almost always together; the protagonist is startled (101).

The narrator receives a call from Marla, asking for his help in identifying two lumps in her breasts, since she "can't afford to see a doctor[,]" and she does not want to scare the people she loves with her problem. "Our culture," she remarks, "has made death something wrong" (103). The memories from his past resurface again, going back in time to when during college he had to endure an unpleasant interaction with medical students since he also had not had health insurance. The narration thus shifts between Marla's room and the student hospital. It is also revealed that Marla has started attending the meetings because of the lumps, which prompted her to persuade herself to accept "that she can die at any moment." The feeling of hopelessness that this interaction prompts in the protagonist is stressed by his observation that

> Everything is falling apart (108).

Since the protagonist feels that his support meetings are usurped by Marla, he expresses his frustration:

> Marla's heart looked the way my face was. The crap and trash of the world. Post-consumer human butt-wipe that no one would ever go to the trouble to recycle (109).

One night, the narrator receives a phone call from a detective asking him if anyone around him knew how to make "homemade dynamite." The results of forensic tests have revealed that the burning of the protagonist's flat was an attack, and not a faulty circuit as had been assumed. Tyler stands pressed to his ear whispering to him to "tell him" that the protagonist "blew it all up." Yet,

> I tell the detective, no, I did not leave the gas on and then leave town. I loved my life. I loved that condo. I loved every stick of furniture. That was my whole life. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me.

But he is not able to assuage the detective and is told not to leave the town (111). Meanwhile, Tyler receives a call from his employer; because of the new self-changing projectors, the union does not need Tyler anymore. The union president self-righteously tells Tyler that he must see it as "downsizing[,]" not as a "rejection[.]" Yet, by threatening the union president that he would release to the press the fact that hundreds of pornographic images exist in children's and family movies, he succeeds in obtaining an "early retirement" (113). In turn, the narrator confronts the manager of the hotel he works at and threatens him, similarly, to release the information that their patrons regularly consume urine and semen, after which, the manager concedes. The protagonist realizes that he and Tyler are "looking more and more like identical twins" (114). Both because of their synchronized confrontation with their employers and how "punched-out" they look (114). Since his professional obligations are of no consequence now, "Tyler was free to start a fight club every night of the week" (117), following which, the number of fight club chapters exponentially grow.

The narrative leaps forward in time while the protagonist's inability to sleep gradually worsens. During a club gathering, he picks for a fight "a young guy with an angel's face[,]" thinking destroying "something beautiful" would alleviate his frustration, culminating in the complete disfiguration of the man's face (122). He

learns that Tyler has expanded the scope of the meetings and founded "Project Mayhem[,]" with the aim of "the complete and right-away destruction of civilization[,]" so that "we can make something better out of the world" (125). He assigns "homework" to his disciples whereby office-workers sabotage the skyscrapers "where every day they felt their lives end one hour at a time" (121). Further assignments include picking random fights on the street or procuring a weapon and killing a person. The narrator concurs with "[w]hat Tyler says about being the crap and the slaves of history[,]" growing frustrated with being burdened with the misdeeds and miscalculations of the previous generation (124).

The recruits of the Project Mayhem start to cluster in Tyler's house, the protagonist remarks that

> I come home from work now, and the house is filled with strangers that Tyler has accepted. All of them working. The whole first floor turns into a kitchen and a soap factory (130).

Being ordered to show up at the premises with "black shoes, black shirt[s], [a] black pair of trousers" (128), the recruits, according to the narrator, work "with the energy of trained monkeys, cooking and working and sleeping in teams" (130). He realizes that they carry the wound from lye-burn on their hands just like himself. While the organization storms "through a better neighborhood and a luxury car dealership," sabotaging the automobiles, or sets random forest fires, the protagonist grows frustrated since he is not able to locate Tyler. He is not able to figure out why all the recruits refer to him as "sir," and wink at him, yet

> Nobody they know has ever seen Tyler Durden (135).

While sitting in his office which resembles "a maze of cubicles" and upsets him with its uniform style, he learns that his boss is planning to fire him. The phone at his desk rings and Tyler tells him to go outside to meet "some guys." Puzzled, he quips

> Here, I'm not sure if Tyler is my dream.
>
> Or if I am Tyler's dream (138).

Getting in the car the recruits have driven there to pick him up, he enquires about Tyler's whereabouts. Yet, the driver directs the car towards the opposite lane, deliberately trying to hit other vehicles, and asks him what he wishes "you'd done before you died?" Realizing the gravity of the situation his mind races:

> My job, I say. I wish I'd quit my job (144).

The near-death experience turns out to be a celebration for his birthday. The cake splattered all around the interior, he berates himself. He laments that he feels "helpless," that he is "stupid" and that "all I do is want and need things" (146). The meaning behind this enigmatic act turns out to be an assignment given to the recruit by Tyler. He remarks that he "had to make four human sacrifices, and I have to pick up a load of fat."

He asks the recruit what Tyler is planning, and his answer, according to the narrator, is "pure Tyler Durden."

> You have a class of young strong men and women, and they want to give their lives to something. Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don't need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don't really need.
>
> We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. (149)

The driver aims the car for the medical waste dump to procure fat for the production of soap to sell it "back to the very people who paid to have it sucked out."

> "Fat," the mechanic says, "liposuctioned fat sucked out of the richest thighs in America" (150).

The narrator obliges with Tyler's orders, since

> This is what Tyler wants me to do.
>
> These are Tyler's words coming out of my mouth.
>
> I am Tyler's mouth
>
> I am Tyler's hands.
>
> Everybody in Project Mayhem is part of Tyler Durden, and vice versa. (155)

Trying to locate Tyler, he starts travelling again. At all the chapters of fight club that he visits, he is referred to as "sir" and the narrator feels puzzled:

> Every bar I walk into, every fucking bar, I see beat-up guys. Every bar, they throw an arm around me and want to buy me a beer (157).

The protagonist is told that he has recently visited the group and he expresses his shock by remarking that

> I've never been in here before tonight (158).

Calling Marla "to see what's happening on Paper Street[,]" he learns that "all the space monkeys are shaving their heads" (157). Turning back home, she berates him for not remembering his own past, and the narrator asks her what his name is. Marla replies that he is Tyler Durden, that he gave her "[t]he scar on her hand[.]" He grows worried and remarks that he has to find Tyler (161).

During one of the sabotage activities, the police kills Bob, and the recruits celebrate his death. "In death" they chant, "we become heroes" (178). Meanwhile, his boss is killed in a horrific manner by a bomb planted inside his computer monitor. "Screaming," the narrator reports, "burned-alive dead" (185). The novel's atmosphere keeps darkening with each new death, against the background of which, and as a

repetitive expression that is spread throughout the novel, the protagonist feels obliged to observe that

> Everything has fallen apart (202).

Finally, Tyler appears to the protagonist and confronts him, claiming that since the narrator broke his promise of not talking about him, there would be consequences. He explains to the protagonist that while he thinks he is sleeping, he "takes over," and they are the same person. "Tyler Durden," the narrator finally realizes, "is my hallucination" (168). He concludes that the reason his "hallucination" came into existence was:

> I hated my life. I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn't see any way to change things (172).

On the run from the police because of the murder of his boss, and urging Marla to keep him awake, since Tyler appears when he falls asleep, he tries to shut down the fight club by attending a meeting and proclaiming that the events are cancelled yet he is not able to succeed in his attempt. "One hundred men just stare at me," he remarks, and they beat him.

After being hauled out of the basement in which the fight is organized, he deduces that "Tyler will kill anybody who threatens Project Mayhem." While the organization constantly keeps him under surveillance, he tries to flee

> […] guys with shaved heads or guys who look beat up. Black eyes. Missing teeth. That sort of thing.

The narrative speeds up and circles back to where it has begun:

> So Tyler and I are up on top of the Parker-Morris building with the gun stuck in my mouth.

While the countdown proceeds towards the explosion, Marla and patients from the support groups he used to attend reach him and even though Tyler disappears, police helicopters hover above the building. Seeing no way out of his situation, he pulls the trigger and shoots himself. The bullet does not kill him. Waking up, he notices that "it tore out my other cheek to give me a jagged smile from ear to ear."

> [e]very once in a while, somebody brings me my lunch tray and my meds and he has a black eye or his forehead is swollen with stitches, and he says:
>
> "We miss you Mr.Durden."
>
> "Everything is going according to the plan."
>
> "We're going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world." (208)

2.2 The Nature of Trauma

The protagonist's oft-repeated observation that "everything is falling apart" encapsulates the struggle of an American living in the '90s with the cultural crisis and the concomitant socio-economic strife detected by Farrell. Indeed, as Farrell puts it, the sensibility that "something has gone terribly wrong with the modern world" permeates the narrative thoroughly from its beginning to its end.

The narrator's suffering is directly related to his lifestyle and his profession. Working as a recall campaign coordinator, his job dictates that he must arbitrate the value of human life vis-à-vis the profits of the car manufacturing company he works for. I concur with Steven Gold in that his job and American business culture play a major role in engendering the narrator's trauma, which reduce

> automobile consumers to statistics, dollar signs, or figures in a "story problem," disembodying and dehumanizing them, and in the process, the Narrator as well (2004: 22).

Here, in the novel's America as well as in the one in Farrell's account, "the corporate mania for profit" reigns supreme, overriding any critical attempt to impose boundaries on the "economic violence" weaponized by this "hierarchical dog-eat-dog society." Based on a streamlined, innocuous-looking formula, what the narrator must do amounts to witnessing death, "skeletons" in his everyday life, travelling the vast geography that is the US, and evaluate the demise of the company's costumers in dollars, converting suffering to currency, guarding "the predatory economic behavior" of the company he works for, where no regard or caution for the essential value of human life exists. Thus, LaCapra is completely correct in cautioning against the redemption obtained by viewing the world solely through a prism of "technical rationality." Hence, disillusioned with his career, his "furniture," and the lack of a promising future that could be provided for him in this "consumer democracy," as Farrell puts it, the protagonist is clearly traumatized. For the narrator, as Farrell asserts, trauma is certainly about "compensation," and "insurance tables" indeed prove to be suffocating.

The incessantly repeated expressions that have been outlined above which comprise his repetitive compulsion, the rapid shifts in time and resurfacings of his past (which emulate, arguably, the experience of a trauma survivor in narrative form), unpleasant memories, his trouble sleeping, which is a symptom of **PTSD** given by **DSM**, are some of the indicators of the narrator's trauma, though there exist countless other clues, one of which is his discomfiture when he travels. As Farrell remarks, trauma prompts death anxiety in the individual, by facing a traumatic phenomenon, the individual realizes how "ephemeral" he or she is. In the novel, the narrator's plea that he die each time he travels by plane, his complaint about his "tiny life" because of which he grows increasingly dissatisfied, his job which is directly related to death and witnessing death, all underline the narrator's increasing ambivalence towards death, wishing it at one moment, yet, beneath the surface, fleeing it. "Home is deadening" as Farrell points out, yet travel operates as an intoxicating and suffocating activity for the narrator. What Tyler, his "hallucination," utters during the opening scene must be kept in mind, that they shall never grow old, that they shall never die; since it crystallizes both the consequences of living in a "society obsessed with competition" with the "survival anxiety" that is endemic to it, where the mentality of "survival of the fittest"

reigns, and also his ambivalence towards death, if juxtaposed with his wish to find his demise. His meeting Tyler, arguably, is symptomatic of his death anxiety and must be considered. He meets Tyler during one of his trips, on a beach where Tyler appears to be gathering logs on the sand. Even though the protagonist approaches the artifice as a type of artistic endeavor, the logs and the line on the sand with which he gauges the shadows, arguably, constitute a crude sun-dial whose shadow, according to the narrator, resembles a "giant hand." Moreover, his comment could be taken to allude to the hour and minute hands of a clock, and this reading fits in perfectly with the fact that what considerably troubles him vis-à-vis his life is his feeling it is being wasted away "one minute at a time." In short, the device, the construction of which comprises the center of the scene in which the narrator meets his doppelgänger, symbolizes time and future, of which he grows increasingly fearful, since, as Farrell remarks, "trauma necessarily entails dread of the future."

His habit of attending support groups provides another excellent clue for understanding his trauma. First, because his voyeuristic pleasure of seeing people "with an invisible gun to their heads," in other terms, people who are close to their demise, symbolizes his preoccupation with death. And second, for he is essentially alone in his suffering and that there exists no other individual to "witness" his trauma, as Felman and Laub assert, he provides for his need to have someone testify to his suffering via his parasitical relationship with the support groups. Since he has nothing ailing him apart from insomnia, this guilt surfaces as his yearning for authenticity. Bob's honesty which attracts the protagonist and Chloe's being the "genuine article" both exemplify this guilt, the essentially duplicitous nature of his attendance, and also his yearning for what is real, which is directly related to the "attenuation of subjectivity" Farrell sees as a symptom of the US in the '90s and overall living in a society whose "civic religion" is consumerism. The protagonist repeatedly points this relationship out, both when he claims that he wants Tyler to deliver him from his "Swedish furniture" and also when he expresses that "everything is a copy of a copy of a copy." Since nothing is real in this world, the narrator tries to compensate for this by attaching himself to "genuine articles" with whom he comes across in the support group meetings. Yet, as the narrative progresses, he fails to do so because Marla's presence reflects his own deceitful activity, even though he is incorrect in labeling her "a fake,"

since she has breast cancer. Never providing his real name, he lies about his health in order to exploit the sense of sharing that arises during the meetings.

Eventually, since he is not able to have anyone beside him witness his suffering, the narrator externally projects Laub's "internal thou" in the person of Tyler.[1] Indeed, the narrative excellently corroborates Laub's dictum that

> The "not telling" of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny.

Failing to articulate his suffering, his trauma worsens and takes complete control of his life. He undergoes an extreme form of dissociation, and even though Kaplan and Crystal call the phenomenon splitting; Lifton's "second self" arguably fits perfectly here and carries with it a richer metaphorical potential. That is, Tyler Durden constitutes a second self for the protagonist, as he himself increasingly grows aware: that they look like "twins," that he speaks Tyler's words and ultimately that Tyler is his hallucination. At first this starts with the protagonist's noting that Marla and Tyler are never in the same room, then progresses with his surprise when people he does not know act like they know him and approach him as Tyler; peaks with Marla telling the narrator that he is in fact Tyler Durden, and culminates in the narrator's feeling of "helpless[ness]" since he is not able to eradicate and perhaps "integrate"[2] the second self who slowly takes complete control and destroys his remaining subjective autonomy. What he had set out to obtain, a witness to his suffering, ends up consuming the vigor he had been able to store. As Gold remarks, Tyler becomes "progressively more dominant" in the narrator's post-traumatic experience which finally renders the narrator "a cipher, a non-entity" (2004: 25). In this respect, the gradual erasure of the narrator's personality highlights Farrell's "attenuation of subjectivity" which was an

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[1] According to Laub, "reconstitut[ing] the internal 'thou'" within oneself enables the individual to testify to his or her own suffering, via creating "a witness or a listener inside himself." (See Subchapter 1.3.)

[2] Integration of what is traumatic to the individual's psyche is attached considerable importance in Caruth, Van der Kolk and Van der Hart and Lifton's framework. Meanwhile, Krystal highlights the importance of acceptance, which arguably belongs to the same family of ideas.

essential part of life during the late 20th century in the US. Dissociation, insofar as the narrative reveals it to be a direct component of life in the milieu under consideration, points out the role played by

> [the] distancing impact of social structures that are built upon and in turn encourage a lifestyle reliant on advanced technology, rampant consumerism and constant mobility (Gold, 2004: 31).

His trauma, to the extent that it could not be connected to a specific event but to a prolonged exposure to "traumatogenic effects of oppression," is "insidious trauma," per Laura Brown's definition, and as Farrell demonstrates, this "injury exposes society's failures" perfectly. In the narrator's case these stressors are the unethical, brutal corporate structure whose guardian he is forced to become, a society which is "savagely competitive" and is illuded by "visions of endless plenty," that is consumerism, which eradicates all differences and flattens every individual characteristic to impose uniformity, and his lack of witnesses to the suffering he endures.

Tyler, his imaginary witness, and second self's disruptive activities, in turn, reflect the angst the protagonist carries towards this trauma-inducing system. By placing pornographic images in film reels, he attempts to sabotage media industry, which, as Farrell suggests, packages and exploits "traumatic themes to relieve the cramped ennui of workaday discipline" and masks the "economic violence" Americans daily endure. On another note, when, as a waiter, he urinates or ejaculates in his patrons' dishes, he embodies the idea of getting back at the ruling elite, trying to disrupt the pleasure for reveling "titans and their gigantic wives."

2.3. A Gathering of The Wounded

The protagonist's trauma, while it has disastrous consequences for his own life and mental well-being, also becomes the basis for fight club and Project Mayhem, or constitutes a "founding trauma" to use LaCapra's phrase. In this respect, his parasitic

relationship to support groups is illuminating as well. Since these groups operate as gatherings of individuals with the same disease, in so far as these diseases are traumatic, such as cancer, for instance, they also constitute "a gathering of the wounded," as Kai Erikson above defines it; trauma may "serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can," engendering groups in which "similarly marked" individuals take refuge. Yet, as has been demonstrated, the narrator fails to share in the sensibility of this communality via support group meetings, first because he is inherently aware that he is an impostor, and second that Marla brings this awareness to surface by reminding him of, and reflecting his dubiousness.

Moving forward, what unites the "space-monkeys" of fight club and Project Mayhem is their shared trauma as well, as individuals enduring the hardships of being working American citizens during the late '90s, they "feel betrayed and trapped" by an economic system which "makes service an industry and does not value it," as Farrell puts it. Indeed, they are predominantly comprised of service workers: law clerks, plaza workers, stock boys. Since they face the consequences of living in a society which harbors "gross inequalities," and in which exists considerable daily "economic violence," they carry the same traumatic mark upon them. The driver's speech in the near-death experience scene crystallizes their conundrum. Working in jobs they hate, as the driver speaks "Tyler's words," they are seeking items they do not need, and they feel, as a generation, engaged in a "great war of the spirit." As the narrator remarks at one point, society views them as "cockroaches." The socio-economic system, while making them feel worthless, in turn, as Farrell remarks, only provides the "pleasures of consumerism" to fill the void in their lives. The driver's remark also points towards the "generational antagonism" detected in the US during the '90s by Farrell. Bob, for instance, is an excellent example of a member of this trapped generation. Accepting the dogmas of a "society obsessed with competition," he risks and damages his health by applying performance-enhancing drugs to fuel his predilection for attending body-building contests, and in the end becomes a testicular cancer patient.

Against the background of the American cultural climate during the '90s which Farrell excellently summarizes, they vent their anger and frustration by damaging each other at fight club meetings, that is, they act out their trauma. The project outlined by the driver, that they have a "great revolution against the culture" reflects the fact that

the primary culprit in having them trapped and suffocated enough to see physically assaulting each other as the only viable way of "feeling alive" is the culture that surrounds them. Moreover, the logic of these meetings perfectly matches the mechanism of "going berserk" as Farrell defines it. Fight club, as a practice in which "shirtless" service workers beat each other, harbors an immanent "willingness to abandon all restraints on violence."[3] The shared trauma in their lives, later on, since they act it out on one another, evolves into physical wounds on their faces; "black eyes, missing teeth," as the narrator observes, and these wounds even start to operate as "identification documents," to the extent that they recognize each other by their wounds. Since trauma originally meant "wound" in Greek, the metaphorical implications of this practice are colossal. Further, since fight club grows and later becomes Project Mayhem, where committees are set up for devising a myriad of terroristic activities, the twisted logic behind the project constitutes an excellent example of what LaCapra defines as a "redemption or regeneration through an extremely violent, distorted sacrificial process involving quasi-ritual anxiety about contamination and the quest for purification." Indeed, the conspicuous and puzzling practice of soap-making, for instance, is worthy of analysis under the light provided by LaCapra's and Farrell's insight into the matter. First, this practice, by collecting fat from the "richest thighs" in America and selling it back to their previous owners, aims to "get at" the elite ruling class by reversing the logic of "lean-and-mean" managerial practices. Just as massive lay-offs characterized these policies, with the aim of "shedding guilty fat," by making soap and selling the fat back to the elite, Project Mayhem's modus operandi implies a reversal of roles and attempts to disrupt the executive stance under consideration. Yet, there appear more sinister undertones to their activities as the narrative progresses. By wearing "black shirts," shaving their heads, and terrorizing the society by demolishing buildings and outright killing other

[3] The word's etymological background and Farrell's analysis are illuminating here. Meaning "coatless" in old Norse, Farrell comments that the practice implies the individual's abandoning of all ties to his or her society or culture. (See Subchapter 1.13.)

individuals, the organization increasingly resembles a fascist group.[4] Thus, the preoccupation with hygienic substances such as soap and lye also symbolizes the "ritual anxiety about contamination and the quest for purification." The use of lye in creating "chemical-burns" on the hands of the members, as much as it resembles a sadistic activity, also fits in with Farrell's insight as to how torture could be used to invoke a "ground of being" among the members of a group. The assignments given to the members by Tyler, such as obtaining "sacrifices" further matches activities whose aim is to "manipulate trauma" according to Farrell, such as demanding that the member inflict violence on innocents to enhance "group-bonding." On another note, the extreme reverence shown towards Tyler, and the narrator's observation that "[e]verybody in Project Mayhem is part of Tyler Durden" point towards "hero-worship" highlighted by Farrell. Members of Project Mayhem, by carrying out Tyler's orders, elevating him to the status of a master, and making him "larger than" life thus attempt to share in the "conviction of superhuman vitality" and transcend the death anxiety their trauma has engendered in themselves, and this is evinced by the chant of the members after Bob passes away, that they shall "become heroes in death." Finally, the narrator's decision to commit suicide and the dystopian tone the novel ends with, where the narrator is stuck in a bed recuperating, while the plan to destroy civilization is at full throttle, corroborate Farrell's insight that berserking as an idea is closely related to the concept of suicide and apocalyptic sensibilities.

While the narrator's threat that he shall go on a rampage with an automatic rifle, and the later, actual murder of his boss directly reflect the "workplace massacres" with which berserking and mass-killing became popular tropes during the '90s, overall, the terroristic acts perpetrated by Project Mayhem, their sabotaging activities and sacrificial killings, as forms of "ecstatic violence," with the entailing "conviction of invulnerability," and the concomitant sensibility of "'getting even' through revenge, of mystically replenishing life through death," as Farrell notes, constitute their attempts at going berserk and getting back at the system which holds these service industry

[4] **Camicie Nere** or "Black shirts" was the name of a fascist militia group organized in Italy in 1923 by Benito Mussolini. Shaving heads, in turn, arguably alludes towards the "skin-head" movements observed in America during the late 20th century.

workers “in virtual peonage.” Indeed, their “victimization turns to vindictiveness” rather swiftly, as Farrell suggests. What commences as one man’s post-traumatic experience culminates in the founding of a no-holds-barred combat club and a fascist terror organization.

2.4. The Post-Traumatic Process

As has been asserted by LaCapra, for the individual to obtain “critical distance” from traumatic memories that haunt him or her, and not get stuck in a conundrum which precludes “behaving in an ethical manner involving consideration for others as others,” the process of moving from being a “victim to survivor and social agent” must be completed. To be able to do so, the individual must work through his or her trauma and achieve “resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal” which would counteract the acting-out tendencies towards “destruction and self-destruction.” As “modalities” of working-through, which is “a social process,” had been given inherently “articulatory” activities such as “nontotalizing narrative and critical, as well as self-critical, thought and practice.”

In the protagonist’s case, it is obvious how his trauma has devastating consequences for both himself and other individuals around him, notably the members of Project Mayhem, whose formation stems from the narrator’s initial suffering. In this respect, the narrator’s trauma operates precisely as how LaCapra defines founding traumas: as a crisis that “miraculously become[s] the origin of [a] myth and serve[s] an ideological function in authorizing acts or policies that appeal to it for justification.”

The devastation wrought by the protagonist via his second self, and his ultimate failure to regain control are evinced by the ending of the novel, where he is hopelessly recovering while Project Mayhem still remains unleashed and protected by its members. Thus, the protagonist’s conundrum is intimately related to his failed and incomplete post-traumatic process, whereby he is not able to become a social agent or survivor, but he is stuck at the phase of being a victim. And the crucial point here is that this failure stems from his not being able to work through his trauma and instead fixating on it and acting it out. Both the practice of fighting one another in the

basements of bars, which, according to the narrator, is ultimately about "self-destruction," and the later project of "the complete and right-away destruction of civilization[,]" point towards the fact that his post-traumatic experience is characterized by acting his trauma out, instead of working it through.

The narrator, as has been remarked, attempts to compensate for his loneliness in his suffering by attending support groups, yet, instead of being genuine about his trauma, "articulating" and sharing it with other individuals which could enable him to work through the crisis he finds himself in, he chooses to exploit the support group meetings, approaching them as replacements for sleep medication. Stuck and fixated on his injury, he is, in the last analysis, not able to obtain renewal, or practice critical distance and instead his experience begets further trauma. Via his second self, his suffering becomes the basis on which terror and further destruction is fostered, or, as Gold puts it

> Forms of violence tacitly approved of by society are substituted with more explicitly destructive types of brutality perversely executed under the guise of liberation (2004: 31).

By focusing on traumatized individuals, their post-traumatic experience, and groups comprised of such members, which Erikson calls "gathering[s] of the wounded," **Fight Club** fits in perfectly with LaCapra's definition of "traumatic writing." As it pivots around traumatic themes, centralizes traumatized individuals, and presents the mental distress of a survivor whose compulsive repetitions, rapid shifts in sense of time and place, and psychic disorientation are conveyed to the reader in first-person narration, the novel constitutes an excellent example of "writing in closest proximity to" and "symbolic emulation of trauma[.]"

As a narrative "exploring the complex relations between acting out and working through trauma," **Fight Club,** as has been seen, predominantly focuses on acting out, and plays out, in narrative form, the failure of one individual to work-through his trauma. By demonstrating the destructive consequences of fixating on trauma and acting it out in a myriad of ruinous forms, Palahniuk, in **Fight Club,** while bringing a

powerful critique to the American socio-economic system, pivots the narrative primarily on forms of acting out.

Finally, the bold and unabashed style of **Fight Club,** in focusing on and displaying the effects of traumatic experiences on both individuals and communities, prevents the novel from becoming a "redemptive" narrative, per LaCapra's definition. Never resorting to "circumvent[ing], deny[ing], or repress[ing] […] trauma" and instead vividly laying bare the socio-economic structure that breeds suffering, Palahniuk provides the reader with a novel which, arguably, stands completely opposite "Pollyanna" or "feel-good" types of narratives.

CHAPTER THREE
LULLABY

3.1. Plot Summary

The novel opens in media res. The narrator, Carl Streator, a middle-aged journalist working for a "big-city daily," starts the story with a prologue in which a scene from a real estate office is presented (12). While on the phone, Helen Hoover Boyle, the realtor, follows "what's happening on the police scanner" (2), in order to obtain leads to locate "distressed houses" (5) which are characterized by tragedies that have occurred in them:

> Murders, suicides, serial killers, accidental overdoses[.]

Figuring that she "can't wait until this stuff is on the front page of the newspaper" (2), she listens to the police radio, searching "the obituaries and the crime pages for suicides and homicides" (5), jotting down each detail on her "thick daily planner," which is "her record of everything" (3), and sends Mona, her secretary, to "check on every possible lead" (5). The rationale behind the effort is that Helen earns her living by selling these distressed houses on the market multiple times (3). The new owner of a distressed house, such as the one she is on the phone with, witnesses a baby crying "from inside the north wall of the master house," which is followed by the appearance of a face in the bathtub, and "the phantom shadows that circle around and around the dining room walls" (2). Not being able to withstand the scary phenomena, the owners eventually request that Helen sell their houses to someone else immediately, acceding to a low price, a "vest-pocket listing" (5). In another case, for instance, the face of a "barbiturate suicide[,]" repeating "phantom gunshots of a double homicide" (3) that had taken place at the premises years ago eventually force the owners to relocate, and Mona, a magic-enthusiast checks the houses for "energ[ies]," or a "subtle presence" (4).

The scene closes with the protagonist remarking that “this is about Helen Hoover Boyle. Her haunting me.” He claims

> We’re all of us haunted and haunting (6).

Carl, the protagonist, then goes on to narrate his experience in journalism school. “Just before you graduate” the instructor asks a question which constitutes the “entire final exam for the Ethics course” (12). Formulated as an “either/or question,” the exam requests that the student imagine being a reporter and sent “to investigate a death.” The infant child of a young couple is deceased, “choked to death on an ornament.” It is Christmas Eve and the reporter/student, finalizing the story for “press deadline,” submits it to the editor, yet, is rejected on the ground that he or she had not specified “the color of the ornament. Was it red or green? You couldn’t look and you didn’t think to ask” (11). The choices are

> Call the parents and ask the color.
>
> Or refuse to call and lose your job.

Figuring that it would be inappropriate to call “the parents after midnight on Christmas Eve,” the narrator has opted to answer the question “call the paramedics. Items like this have to be catalogued.” Having received a D from the class, Carl remarks that

> Instead of ethics, I learned only to tell people what they want to hear. I learned to write everything down (12).

Since it is nearly fall, which is “the peak time of the year for last-term pregnancies and newborns,” and that “the news [are] slow,” his editor, Duncan, devises to run a series on sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Though there exists “no new information,” Duncan figures that the series would be a “story that every parent and

grandparent is too afraid to read and too afraid not to read," and requests that Carl "profile five families that had lost a child" by accompanying paramedics, to increase his own chances of winning a journalism award (13). Carl notes that the series is "[s]omething to panic people," since autumn is nearing, and the temperatures are dropping, which increase the frequency of SIDS, this would "guarantee advertisers a highly invested readership" (35). The narrator remarks that:

> Every year seven thousand babies die without any apparent cause. Two out of every thousand babies will just go to sleep and never wake up. My editor, Duncan, he kept calling it crib death (13).

which is followed by a sentence summarizing Duncan's physical features, starting with "the details about […] are[.]" This sentence structure occurs repeatedly throughout the novel, referring to various objects and individuals.

The narrator stresses that "all doctors can do is gather statistics and hope someday a pattern will emerge" before the chapter ends (12).

Stopping by the corner store with a limp, the narrator buys a plastic model house. He comes home and is deeply irritated by the "siege of noise" his neighbors' TVs and radios create:

> Up through the floor, someone's barking the words to a song. These people who need their television or stereo or radio playing all the time. These people so scared of silence. These are my neighbors. These sound-oholics. These quiet-ophobics (13).

The last two sentences comprise a series of expressions which are repeated throughout the novel at a changing level of frequency, another member of which is

> Either an ancient cursed Egyptian mummy has come back to life and is trying to kill the people next door, or they're watching a movie (16).

He observes that the people around him, “with their radio blaring,” or “bellow[ing] into their cellphone,” are engaged in an “arms race of sound[,]” which is about volume but not quality, about winning and not about music.

> You dominate. This is really about power (17).

Complaining about the “distraction-oholics. These focus-ophobics[,]” and that people always “just need more of it, more channels, a larger screen, more volume[,]” the narrator remarks

> Old George Orwell got it backward.
>
> Big Brother isn't watching. He's singing and dancing. He's pulling rabbits out of a hat. Big Brother's busy holding your attention every moment you're awake. He's making sure you're always distracted. He's making sure you're fully absorbed.
>
> He's making sure your imagination withers. Until it's as useful as your appendix. He's making sure your attention is always filled.
>
> And this being fed, it's worse than being watched. With the world always filling you, no one has to worry about what's in your mind. With everyone's imagination atrophied, no one will ever be a threat to the world. (18)

He claims that “no one’s mind is their own” anymore.

> You can't concentrate. You can't think. There's always some noise worming in. Singers shouting. Dead people laughing. Actors crying. All these little doses of emotion (19).

He yearns for “silence, not heaven,” which “would be reward enough” (21). Having finished the plastic model house, with his bare feet he starts stomping on it, and destroys it, scattering “the brittle broken plastic and wood and glass” around (22).

Turning back from the first family he has interviewed for the newspaper, he reports to Duncan all the minute details of the scene, from the model of the refrigerator to the date on the calendar in the kitchen, an effort which irritates him. The narrator,

albeit frustrated, is so conditioned to provide a detailed description of the premises that he even gives a list of the channels on the family's TV (26). He comes across a library book at the premises as well, Poems and Rhymes from Around the World, page 27 open and marked with a pencil (24).

Meanwhile, Duncan brings to him a puzzling advertisement from the newspaper, a variation of which recurs throughout the novel, piquing Carl's curiosity.

> Attention Patrons of the Treeline Dining Club
>
> The body copy says: "Have you contracted a treatment-resistant form of chronic fatigue syndrome after eating in this establishment? […] If so, please call the following number to be part of a class-action lawsuit (25).

The protagonist keeps wondering about the nature of his profession, remarking that "[i]n journalism school, what they want you to be is a camera. A trained objective, detached professional[,]" yet, the detachment between "killers and reporters" bothers him, a duality which, according to the narrator, is thought as "that the news and you are always two separate things" (25).

In all the five cases, the protagonist finds the same book, with the same pencil mark on page 27.

The narrative moves on to Carl's meeting Helen, the real estate agent. He visits her office, located in an upscale neighborhood, and observes that Helen's "arms sparkle and rattle with gold and pink bracelets, gold chains, charms, and coins."

> Enough ornaments for a Christmas tree. Pearls big enough to choke a horse (29).

While she urges that he wait for her phone call with Mona to finish, he grows impatient and asks her if her son died of SIDS twenty years ago, whether she read to Patrick, her son, a poem from a certain book, every copy of which he wants to make sure is destroyed. The scene ends with Carl being hauled out of the office (32).

He checks the book at the county library, and notices the book is "back on the shelf, waiting." On page 27, "there is a poem. A traditional African poem" (34). He

tears out the page and replaces the book. Turning back to the newspaper, he points out that in cases of SIDS, “it’s standard procedure to assure the parents that they’ve done nothing wrong[,]” since the death is so sudden and without an apparent cause. The narrator remarks that

> All we know is, we don’t know (33).

Another advertisement similar to the one that Duncan has brought to him appears again. Calling the number, the narrator is told that the matter is not to be discussed until the court trial is held (35).

He visits Duncan’s office to tell him that he has found the same book with the same page marked at all the scenes he has investigated, that maybe there is “a pattern.” Being asked what he precisely means by that, Carl remarks that

> I say I don’t know. The book calls it a culling song. In some ancient cultures, they sang it to children during famines or droughts, anytime the tribe had outgrown its land. You sing it to warriors crippled on battle and people stricken with disease, any one you hope will die soon. To end their pain. It’s a lullaby.

Before he reads the lullaby out loud to Duncan to “experiment” with it, the scene shifts back to journalism school again, which is a recurring feature of the novel, and he muses about the nature of his job:

> As far as ethics, what I’ve learned is a journalist’s job isn’t to judge the facts. Your job isn’t to screen information. Your job is to collect the details. Just what’s there. Be an impartial witness. What I know is someday you won’t think twice about calling those parents back on Christmas Eve (36).

The following day Duncan is nowhere to be found, and everyone is searching and struggling to find out his whereabouts. The narrator figures that he must not tell anyone about his experiment, since the poem would leak and lead to the extinction of the

human race (40). “How long” he asks to himself, “until it’s read over the radio to thousands of people?” He feels stuck, and induces that

> You don’t become a reporter because you’re good at keeping secrets.
>
> Being a journalist is about telling. It’s about bearing the bad news. Spreading the contagion. The biggest story in history. This could be the end of mass media.
>
> The culling song would be a plague unique to the Information Age. (47)

The narrator imagines that there would be “book burnings[,]” that people would destroy libraries and bookstores, attack fiber-optic networks in order to prevent the song from reaching them, “a plague you catch through your ears[,]” he remarks (41). He deduces that if the poem is ever disseminated, there would be a “quarantine against communication” (42). That armed personnel would protect bookstores, libraries and theaters, which would leave only “certified” news that are “[a]pproved for consumption[,]” that people would “wear earphones” that would give them safe “[w]hite noise” (43). The leak, according to Carl, would result in a situation where someone would “dissect the culling song and create[s] another variation,” a more powerful version of the lullaby:

> Until Oppenheimer invented the atom bomb, it was impossible. Now we have the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb and the neutron bomb, and people are still expanding on that one idea. We’re forced into a new scary paradigm.
>
> If Duncan’s dead, he was a necessary casualty. He was my atmospheric nuclear test. He was my Trinity. My Hiroshima. (43)

After a rich entrepreneur and his new wife die in a hotel room mysteriously, the narrator meets John Nash, the paramedic that he used to accompany to the scenes of death of the babies that have passed away due to SIDS. Nash tells him that he felt the urge to have intercourse with the dead couple, which sickens and worries the narrator (47). After a lengthy conversation, he bribes Nash and learns that the last number on the couple’s telephone call log belongs to Helen Hoover Boyle (48).

Looking for an opportunity to talk to Helen, Carl, the narrator/protagonist, is given a rendezvous in a "warehouse antique store[.]" While surrounded by corridors and branches of armoires, sideboards, armchairs, sofas or tables, he confronts Helen about the killing of the newlywed couple, accusing her of using the culling song to prevent them from demolishing a stately house that she had wanted to buy (50). She then launches a tirade about her hobby, buying antique furniture after damaging the product so that its price would be lowered. She explains the motivation behind her shopping frenzy by remarking that

> "People die," she says. "People tear down houses. But furniture, fine, beautiful furniture, it just goes on and on, surviving everything" (51).

The narrator replies and says that he did his homework, and found out that both her husband and Patrick, her baby, died in mysterious circumstances, without a cause. He asks for her help in finding out the locations of all the copies of the book, that it is important for him to make sure "no one ever discovers the spell." She responds by pointing out the possibility that he would never get to forget it. "What if it stays in your head, repeating itself like one of those silly advertising songs" she asks (53).

She tells him how he could use the lullaby to get rid of all the people in his life that he does not like, or for revenge. This reminds him of Nash. He assuages himself by remarking that the power of the song "doesn't mean I'll become a reckless, impulsive killer." He decides not to use the culling poem ever again (57).

Returning to the newspaper, Henderson, his new boss, requests that he follow up on the new case of SIDS and push for more information, which angers Carl, and "fast as a flinch, me flinching the other way down the hall, the culling song spools through my head while I grab my coat and head out the door" (58).

He comes home and takes a bath while pondering about the lullaby and its effects on society in case it is leaked. "It would be a dangerous, frightened world, but at least you could sleep with your windows open. It would be a world where each word was worth a thousand pictures[,]" he remarks, and picks up a recurring theme, one that he has thought about before:

> Maybe without Big Brother filling us, people could think.
>
> The upside is maybe our minds would become our own (60).

Having fun, he sings the poem in his "big opera voice[.]" Getting out of the bathtub, he realizes that the air ventilation panel was open, and that the whole apartment has heard him (61). The following morning, he notices a wet spot on the ceiling. Feeling anxious, he meets Nash to learn if there have been any medical emergency calls from his building, but Nash replies that there have not been any reports. Meanwhile, a customer sitting at the same bar as they are irritates him with his manners, and he recites the poem in his head "[a]s fast as a reflex[,]" killing the man (65).

Heading towards his office from the bar, he decides to count his steps to keep his mind busy. Yet he recites the poem again when a man in a trench coat shoves him on the pavement, again when a police officer tries to stop him from entering a lane that is closed due to a film shoot, a crew member tries to redirect him, and when another man tries to shove his way into the elevator, killing them on the spot. Next, the narrator learns that Henderson, his boss, is nowhere to be found. He calls Helen to stop him "before I kill again" (70).

Hurrying to Helen's real estate office, he finds she is busy and spends time with her secretary, Mona Sabbat. The narrator observes that the office is full to the brim with antique and expensive furniture. As she listens to a televangelist on the radio hurling slurs towards "promiscuous" people, he complains that

> Here's Big Brother, singing and dancing, force feeding you so your mind never gets hungry enough to think (74).

Meanwhile, the song passes through his mind again, killing the speaker, and the broadcast stops. Following this incident, he asks Mona if she has ever heard Helen reciting poetry on the phone, but Mona tells him that Helen is "way too much into the money side of everything" (76). He shows her the torn page from the book, and she

recognizes that it is a “culling spell” since she is interested in magic. He notices that she has crystals, pendants and rings all over her body.

Upon being asked as to how the spell does not affect the reciter but kills the targeted person, and without the person even hearing the song, Mona tells him that this is usually not the case. She suggests that the spell operates just as a gun does, not the person behind the trigger but the one that is targeted is killed (77). “The more emotion a person has bottled up,” she explains, “the more powerful the spell.”

> “My guess is,” she says, “is you’re a powder keg of something. Rage. Sorrow. Something (78).

Following the interaction, she invites him to one of her “Wiccan” rituals to learn more about these phenomena (79).

The narrator meets Helen at the furniture warehouse again. She requests that he quit digging up about the poem and deaths, figuring he is just a journalist looking for a way to get himself into a newsworthy situation, following which Carl reveals that he had a wife and a daughter as well, and killed them by reading from the book before sleep, without knowing its effect. He confronts her about her skepticism:

> I limp a step closer, asking, does that make me wounded enough in her book? (84).

She then drops her previous stance and the duo starts talking about the publication history of the poetry book. The narrator presents his own findings, that it had “a pressrun of five hundred copies” (84). The publishing house has gone bankrupt, and the author has passed away. Helen replies by saying that she bought the rights to the book, managed to find three hundred copies of it and burned each one. Further that she tracked down the author, Basil Frankie, bought his estate and looked for the original “Book of Shadows,” which, according to Helen, contains all the spells of a witch, yet she could not find it at his house (84). Carl urges Helen to search for and destroy it, yet Helen remarks that she wants to know about other spells, that perhaps there exists

an immortality spell among them (87). Carl rejects all the offers to use it in any form apart from destroying it.

Nash the paramedic confronts the narrator in a bar, showing him a newspaper headline proclaiming "seven dead in mystery plague[,]" among the victims of which is listed his deceased editor (89). He then tells him that the police have found his neighbor dead, aware that Carl is privy to his necrophilia, he threatens that he has left a letter with his friend to be given to the police in case the narrator decides to kill him.

At the séance, the narrator meets Oyster, Mona's boyfriend, who berates and cusses at him for bringing anchovies, a non-vegan product (99). While being bullied, the narrator is barely able to contain himself from reciting the poem to kill Oyster. Towards the close of the meeting, Carl and Helen agree on embarking on a journey to find and destroy the remaining copies of the book:

> Mona and Helen and me, and Oyster, the four of us will hit the road together. Just another dysfunctional family. A family vacation. The quest for an unholy grail (102).

With a map of all the libraries which have the poetry book, the "family" starts their journey. Mona, the magic-enthusiast is working on a "Navajo dream catcher," collecting feathers. She carries on herself a "Hopi medicine bag," and claims that she is Native American, yet Helen cuts her off and tells Carl that her real surname is "Steinner," not Sabbat (111). Mona says she wishes she were a Native American "just living in harmony with all that natural beauty" (110), that she sees the road-trip as her "own personal vision quest," following which she shall have an "Indian name" (114).

Meanwhile, it is revealed that the puzzling advertisements on the newspapers were due to Oyster, since that is "how he makes money" (115). By giving advertisements on newspapers and collecting money from the businesses he indicts to cancel the ad, he earns his living by "antiadvertising" (152).

During the trip, Oyster speaks at length about how "nothing in nature is natural anymore" (110). His words and tone reveal that he is extremely distressed about the situation of nature, and he launches multiple tirades touching on how certain invasive species were introduced to America and later on became an ecological problem, "a

biological pandemic" according to him (110). Carl observes that he has a "Hopi medicine bag" as well (111).

> "The way yellow fever and smallpox killed off your Native Americans," he says, "we brought Dutch elm disease to America in a shipment of logs for a veneer mill in 1930 and brought chestnut blight in 1904. Another pathogenic fungus is killing off the eastern beeches. The Asian long-horned beetle, introduced to New York in 1996, is expected to wipe out North American maples." (114)

After learning that Oyster is planning to use the culling song for "population control" (142), Carl grows distressed and tells him that they need to destroy it, making up his mind that he needs to keep Oyster and Helen separate, so as not to allow him to influence Helen with his ideas (149).

In the meantime, they locate libraries, obtain the list of people who have borrowed the book, and pretending they sell cosmetics, they enter their houses and tear out the page on which the lullaby is written. On the road, Helen reveals that she has had her child, Patrick, in a frozen state for the past twenty years (126). Carl also learns that Helen uses the poem to kill people on the hit-lists of government agencies, hence her extravagant jewelries and expensive hobbies:

> She says, "I'm an independent contractor."
>
> She's an international hired killer working for huge diamonds (148).

Growing frustrated, Carl speaks to Mona about how Helen is not to be trusted. "She only wants the grimoire so she can control the world[,]" he says, and learns that Helen has told Mona not to trust Carl as well, since he only wants to destroy it (154).

After obtaining the address of a borrower, they decide to impersonate a missionary couple and knock on the door of his house. The man, looking derelict and appearing to have been drinking alcohol for a long time, prompts Carl to pity him. It is revealed that the man's baby has recently passed away because of the lullaby, the tragedy resulting in a divorce, and the police is regarding him as a suspect. When the narrator

attempts to distract him, so as to allow Helen to find the book, by speaking about the Bible and Christ, he explodes and describes the futile situation he is in:

> "Tell me how to prove to the police I didn't kill anybody," the guy says (172).

For a moment the narrator falters, indecisive as to whether he should tell the man about the nature of the culling song, and thereby ease his suffering. Yet, in order to prevent the lullaby from spreading, he decides against it. Helen tells the protagonist that she has thrown the torn page out of the bathroom window while he was busying the man, but, counting in the possibility that someone could find the page and cause harm, the narrator decides to walk to the backyard and collect the pieces. While he is doing so, the man enters the bathroom, prompting Carl to hide beneath the windowsill, and the bereft father starts sobbing and crying.

> And hitting me as fast as a chill, me breathing between my fingers, I start to cry, too. Sobs as hard as vomiting. My belly cramps (174).

Walking back to Helen's car, the narrator changes his mind and decides not to burn the grimoire when they find it (175). While on the road, the narrative takes a pause and the protagonist reexperiences the day her wife Gina and baby daughter Katrin passed away after being read the lullaby the night before. The following morning Carl woke up and kissed his daughter and left for work,

> I felt so blessed.
>
> No one in the world was as lucky as me that morning (178).

He remarks that that day was his "last really good day[,]" and that he did not realize that he had accidentally killed his own family by reading the poem until he came home from work (178).

There still remains 84 books to “disarm[,]” and then the original book of shadows to find (181). The narrator expresses his fear that Oyster may use the poem to exterminate “all of humanity” (182). While Helen ignites the page on which the poem is written, the one that they have last collected, Oyster attacks Helen from behind and topples her, acquiring the burning page, yet it turns to ash before he could memorize it. He hurls insults at Helen, telling her to kill him just as she killed her “real son” (185). The narrator likens him to the devil with his “red goatee” and shattered blond hair that, according to him, resembles the “devil’s horns” (187). They decide to expulse Oyster from their group, and the narrator observes that Helen is in tears (189).

In the meantime, the narrator receives a call from a police detective urging him to report to the homicide division, revealing that he is under investigation for multiple murders, yet the poem passes through his mind and he kills the detective (183).

The trio decides to stop at an amusement park, discussing their future route, and the narrator and Helen start to become more intimate:

> Looking down at the rides, the spinning colors and screams, Helen says, “I’m glad you found me out. I think I always hoped someone would.” She says, “I’m glad it was you.”
>
> Her life isn’t so bad, I say. She has her jewels. She has Patrick.
>
> “Still,” she says, “it’s nice to have one person who knows all your secrets.” (199)

While they try one of the rides at the park, Helen’s planner drops to the ground, picking it up, Mona reveals to the couple that the grimoire they are looking for is Helen’s notebook. Having picked the empty notebook from Basil Frankie’s house, Helen had not noticed that the pages were written on with invisible markers, available to the eye only when they are exposed to certain types of light sources (200).

Now in possession of the original book which records a wide array of spells, such as a spell for levitation or one for possessing the body of another person, they start translating the material. Yet, Mona grows bitter towards the couple because she feels entitled to the grimoire, claiming it belongs to a “real witch” like herself, and because they parted ways with Oyster (204). She proceeds to call the police on Carl. Running from the police, the narrator checks his apartment one last time. The narration switches

back to the day he inadvertently killed his wife and daughter, and reveals that the first model house he built was for his daughter's first birthday, and "that was the first house I stomped[,]" he remarks (217). Even though two decades have passed since the tragedy, he realizes that he never called his father to explain what actually took place. He rings him and confesses what happened that day. Growing more desperate, he describes the hopeless situation he is stuck in by remarking that

> I'm out of a job. The police are after me. My apartment stinks. My picture's full-page in the paper (219).

Meeting with Carl to discuss their future plans, Helen offers him to apply the "immortality spell" to be together forever. Feeling confused and depressed, the narrator rejects the offer and calls 911 for them to send Nash with their unit. Commenting on his lack of options, he ponders whether he has

> Free will, or do the mass media and our culture control us, our desires and actions, from the moment we're born? (228).

Now at the bar with Nash, the narrator confronts him about his necrophilia and the way he exploits his job to rape deceased individuals. Nash reveals that he has managed to obtain the poem from the Library of Congress, and attempts to kill him, yet Carl acts more quickly and recites the lullaby (235). Following the police's arrival at the scene, he is taken to jail.

Using his right to a phone call, he calls Helen, who tells him that she shall save him (239). Casting the occupation spell, she takes the form of a police officer and helps him to escape. Helen reveals to the narrator that Mona and Oyster are in possession of the spell book. They are planning to enslave a portion and exterminate the rest of humanity (253). Occupying Helen's body, Oyster destroys her frozen baby and damages her health beyond recovery. Not being able to stop him, he witnesses the destruction and swears to "track down" Oyster and Mona (255).

Since her own body is “now dead,” Helen occupies the body of the police officer again, and now they follow supernatural phenomena, searching “for the fantastic, for miracles. The amazing tabloid headlines” (260). Time to time, Mona and Oyster use the spells to create chaos and destruction, and they follow the news for clues about their whereabouts. Determined to stop them from destroying the world, the narrator, coupled with Helen, utters the same exclamation again.

> We’re all of us haunting and haunted (258).

3.2. The Nature of Trauma

As aptly summarized by Fransisco Collado-Rodríguez, “in his double role as narrator and protagonist, Streator can be best defined as a severely traumatized man” (2014: 624). Indeed, the following analysis of his psychic distress shall establish the narrator as an individual direly afflicted by trauma.

Albeit inadvertently, having killed his baby daughter and wife, the narrator’s incessant returns to this ur-scene, as a substantial part of his post-traumatic life, corroborate Freud’s observation that the traumatized individual is “obliged to repeat” what is most ardently wished to be forgotten. Indeed, throughout the novel, Carl is repeatedly transported to what Freud terms his “primal scene,” insofar as the event affects him and shapes his future behavior. In this respect, the narrator’s claim that the day was his “last really good day[,]” and the fact that he confesses to have “felt so blessed” prior to the unfortunate murder highlight the colossal scale of his traumatic suffering. Oblivious to the painful future his use of the “culling song” portends, his bliss and lack of anxiety comprise exacerbating factors in his traumatization, since, as Freud notes, “lack of any preparedness for anxiety” plays an aggravating role in the inducement of trauma.

One of the salient features of the novel is the “culling song,” the recitation of which kills the targeted individual. As Mona, Helen’s secretary, remarks, one has to sing it out loud in order for it to produce results. Yet, in the narrator’s case, it suffices

for him to only chant it in his mind. Thus, Mona is correct in her diagnosis that Carl is "a powder keg of something. Rage. Sorrow. Something." Since the narrator is traumatized, his suffering empowers the spell, cancelling the need for the targeted individual to hear it.

As much as its use has tragic consequences, for Carl for instance, as he accidentally kills his family, the origin of the lullaby points towards a painful past as well. A poem collected from Africa and a remnant of bygone ancient cultures, the narrator suggests that it used to be sung during famines, battles which left its participants "crippled[,]" and during disease outbreaks. It used to be recited to "any one you hope will die soon[,]" in order to end their pain. This context behind the genesis of the poem, with the mention of Africa as its place of origin, while alluding to slavery and colonialism, notions heavily accentuated with America's traumatic past, foregrounds the fact that what brought it into existence in the first place were painful, traumatic events: famines, wars, disease outbreaks. Since in the diegetic universe of the novel the lullaby is the culprit behind Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, on which the protagonist is set to collect information, the curious relationship between the poem and SIDS bears a striking resemblance to Felman's reading of Camus's **The Plague,** in that both the eponymous plague as a disease, and the culling song as the cause of SIDS symbolize "massive killing[,]" and point towards the resultant trauma.

Vis-à-vis the protagonist, as an event inducing shock and leaving insurmountable traces on his psyche, SIDS, with the lullaby as its cause, traumatizes the narrator and shapes his life long after its occurrence. Carl's remark that "[a]ll we know is we don't know[,]" while highlighting how hopeless and oblivious a parent might feel following the occurrence of SIDS, coupled with the conspicuous magical elements in the novel, the culling song being one of the most salient ones, corroborates one of Kai Erikson's assertions. The sociologist posits that following a tragedy, in which technology is implicated, the sufferer "can begin to lose confidence in the use of logic and reason as ways to discern what is going on[,]" and that this could provide a breeding ground for the proliferation of certain "systems of explanation" such as witchcraft and the occult. In this respect, both the culling song and other supernatural phenomena in the novel, the grimoire, spells and witches constitute an alternative to a science which is silent in the face of an unsettling, harrowing and painful medical condition, the unexpected

death of one's infant child. Following this line of argument, the narrator's claim that all the medical professionals could only "gather statistics and hope someday a pattern will emerge" crystallizes a bereft parent's frustration with a medical technology that is not able to provide a robust account of the death of his baby daughter. Collado-Rodríguez's claim, that magical elements in the novel possess a "naturalized character" in that apropos the narrator there exists "no further questioning on his part or any surprise about the manifestation of the fantastic in the narrative" (2014: 632), is correct in pointing out the lack of a critical stance, and by extension, the narrator's total acceptance of the existence of magical phenomena. Yet, the claim also risks overlooking the fact that the first "manifestation of the fantastic" in the narrator's life occurred 20 years ago, and the incident is narrated in retrospect. Thus, the acceptance in question, while underlining the hopeless nature of Carl's acknowledgement of magical phenomena, has also had ample time to sprout in the narrator's psyche and is not a sudden phenomenon. His guilt, pain and trauma, while evident in the novel itself, could not be dismissed and denied to the narrator prior to his narration.

Another salient element characterizing the narrator's post-traumatic life is his habit of stomping on plastic houses, building which he spends long hours, an activity which appears perplexing and aimless at first sight considering Carl even becomes limp as a result of "the brittle broken plastic and wood and glass" damaging his bare feet. It is worth noting as well that the activity is so urgent and essential for the protagonist that he even builds and destroys one while on the run from the police.

The meaning of the activity emerges once his first attempt at building a miniature house is taken into consideration. Following Mona's report to the police, Carl takes refuge in his apartment one last time. While the memory of the ur-scene resurfaces, as it does repeatedly throughout the narrative, he reminisces how he and his wife Gina have been building a model building as a gift for Katrin's first birthday, prior to the unfortunate tragedy, following which it becomes a compulsive habit for the narrator. While highlighting Carl's repetitive compulsion, since it recurs and punctuates his life long after the event, its ritualized form, whereby the same act, construction of a plastic miniature, is repeated only to symbolically reverse it, via destroying the said miniature with one's bare feet, qualifies the activity as a perfect example of Freud's "fort-da"

game. As remarked above[1], Freud observes his grandson throwing and retrieving the same ball, meanwhile uttering "fort," and "da," which the psychoanalyst sees as an attempt to acquire "the mastery [he is] in search of[,]" the child's separation from his mother, a painful phenomenon for the growing infant. Since Carl's self-destructive habit gestures towards and is directly connected to the most painful occurrence of his life, the death of his wife and daughter, his ritualized "stomping" which renders him a post-modern **King Oedipus**[2] comprises his attempt at gaining "the mastery" over being separated from his family. Thus, via repeatedly reenacting the scene, the narrator struggles to symbolically come to terms with, and distance himself from the tragic separation, and harms himself in the process. Insofar as the activity points towards his painful past, I concur with Collado-Rodríguez in that it "offers a metaphorical reading suggestive of the past he tries to abolish due to the emotional pain caused by the deaths of his wife and daughter" (2014: 626).

[1] See Subchapter 1.1. for a detailed discussion of the phenomenon.

[2] Although a myriad of connections to the "Freudian use of the Oedipus myth" (1963: 217) could be established, the reference here is to the brilliant structural analysis of Sophocles's timeless classic conducted by Claude Lévi-Strauss. "The remarkable connotation of the surnames in Oedipus' father-line has often been noticed. However, linguists usually disregard it[,]" the anthropologist asserts, underlining the fact that the surnames "have a common feature[,]" that they refer to "difficulties in walking straight and standing upright" (215). In Greek, Oedipus' grandfather's name, Labdacus means "lame", while his father's name Laius means "left-sided," and his own means "swollen foot" (214). Levi-Strauss establishes that the myth is related to the struggle over abandoning the view "that mankind is autochthonous" (216). Thus, occupying liminal positions, the meanings behind the names reflect the fact that when the first humans emerged from the soil (the autochthonous myth of origin) "they either cannot walk or they walk clumsily" (215). I would like to suggest here that the depiction of the narrator as a character afflicted with a limp because of his stomping habit generates various connections between himself and Oedipus Rex, the most prominent of which is their common liminal and traumatized character (See Subchapter 1.1. for a detailed discussion). Overcoming the plague and saving Thebes from the Sphynx, the character's story perhaps could be taken to epitomize a life of pain and struggle, as little had he known that he was going to kill his own father and marry his mother following his abandonment. Insofar as the two narratives set as their focal points traumatic events and their aftermath, Palahniuk, with the possible allusion, augments the traumatic mood of the novel.

3.3. A Gathering of The Wounded

The lullaby devastates the narrator's life, and given his later compulsive murders, including his editor, Duncan, continues to afflict him. Yet, the protagonist is not the only character in the novel whose story is tainted with trauma.

Having unintentionally killed her son Patrick and husband via reciting the lullaby, Helen's trauma parallels that of Carl, the narrator. Working both as a real estate agent, and clandestinely as a hired killer, long after the accidental murder of her husband and son, Helen, similar to the protagonist, is tormented by the event. Not being able to come to terms with it, it is even revealed that she has had her son preserved in a frozen state, only to be destroyed by Oyster.

Helen's profession, though, is more than simply buying and selling houses. Her expertise is in "distressed houses," where traumatic occurrences have taken place, such as "[m]urders, suicides, serial killers, accidental overdoses[.]" Following such emotionally charged events, the premises are haunted by the ghosts of its previous occupants. Eventually, voices of a baby crying, faces appearing in the bathtub, or "the phantom shadows that circle around and around the dining room walls" force the current occupants out of the premises, thus enabling Helen to sell the house with a higher profit margin. In so far as what enables her to sustain herself are these initial traumatic events, the "hauntings" directly parallel and reflect her own torturous post-traumatic life. As both the perpetrator and the victim of the destruction of her family, she winds up monetizing other people's traumas. Further, since LaCapra asserts that trauma forces the individual to "relive the past," and results in the survivor's being "haunted by ghosts," the visions of the deceased, unfortunate individuals besetting the distressed houses symbolize Helen's own post-traumatic experience which is haunted by the ghosts of her husband and son. In this respect, the narrator's claim, which is repeated once in the first chapter and once in the last, perfectly encapsulates both Carl's and Helen's pain:

> We're all of us haunting and haunted.

Helen's having Patrick in a cryogenic state, while pointing out her tendency to "relive the past" and become stuck in it, also highlights a conspicuous quality of her traumatic life, namely, her preoccupation with immortality. Indeed, throughout the narrative, it is made clear that she is deeply exasperated by mortality and yearns for a way to overcome it. In this respect, Kirby Farrell's formulation of death anxiety applies perfectly vis-à-vis Helen's trauma.

According to Farrell, trauma, as a "'mind-blowing' experience," exposes "the constructed and interdependent nature of our existence," and "makes vivid how radically vulnerable and ephemeral we are." In this respect, a significant aspect of trauma "is the way in which it destabilizes the ground of conventional reality and arouses death anxiety." Even though the survivor could be safely over his or her tumultuous past, "survival also cues the now vigilant imagination to the death sure to come someday."

Thus, utterly shaken and traumatized because of the death of her son, by refusing to accept the demise of Patrick and having him in a cryogenic state, Helen's behavior is directly shaped by her death anxiety, and comprises her attempt at denying or overcoming it. Her denial of the death of her son, and thus her trauma, amounts to a futile attempt at surmounting what Farrell terms the "basic developmental project of coming to terms with mortality."

Her predilection for large diamonds and expensive furniture provides another clue and highlights the fact that she is plagued by death anxiety. While at the warehouse with Carl, she remarks that:

> "People die," she says. "People tear down houses. But furniture, fine, beautiful furniture, it just goes on and on, surviving everything."

Hence it is revealed that what attracts her to the armoires, sideboards, armchairs, sofas and tables is the fact they survive their owners and symbolize the epitome of immortality for Helen. Her obsession with surmounting mortality is also evinced by the fact that during the scene where they meet to discuss the publication history of the poetry book at the "warehouse antique store," what appeals to Helen in terms of

potential spells to be found in the grimoire is the possibility that perhaps there exists an immortality spell among them. It is highly significant as well that she tries to help Carl by suggesting that they use the "immortality spell" to be together forever. While these factors aptly demonstrate the role played by death anxiety in Helen's life, her shopping addiction, whereby she enjoys buying expensive furniture, extravagant jewelry such as "gold and pink bracelets, gold chains, charms, and coins[,]" or "[p]earls big enough to choke a horse" corroborates Mona's remark that Helen is "way too much into the money side of everything." Since, according to Farrell, consumerism as it is institutionalized in the US is accompanied by "visions of endless plenty" and operates as an "immortality fantasy[,]" Helen's practice of it symbolizes both her struggle with filling in the void left by her past trauma and overcoming the death anxiety caused by her bereavement.

As the narrator remarks, before the quest for the grimoire commences, Mona and Oyster, together with Helen and Carl comprise "[j]ust another dysfunctional family." Though for different reasons, the "family" thus "hit the road together." In this respect it is highly significant to observe that Mona and Oyster are traumatized individuals as well.

According to Oyster, "nothing in nature is natural anymore[,]" and he points out how "yellow fever and smallpox" decimated the Native American population following the introduction of the diseases via European settlers. He further notes how certain invasive species wrought havoc in the New Continent and slowly suffocated the Edenic environment. "Dutch elm disease," he comments, has caused widespread "chestnut blight[,]" a particular type of "pathogenic fungus" continues to kill "eastern beeches[,]" and that "[t]he Asian long-horned beetle" is expected to extinguish the native "North American maples." Thus, his frustration with the slowly deteriorating ecological health of the American landscape and the world characterizes his behavior, even prompting him to plan to use the culling song for "population control" and kill the majority of humans only to leave a certain number to be used as slaves for Mona and himself. His disturbance is thus revealed to be so gross that he manages to justify murder and slavery. In this respect, his obsession with the worsening natural conditions directly parallels Ann Kaplan's assertions regarding "climate trauma."

Kaplan cites an observation made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, that "our planet is suffering catastrophic damage from human activities[,]" and asserts that the increasing number of natural catastrophes around the world have "social and psychological impacts" on individuals. Though the pundits in the "media are still reluctant to say [it][,]" Kaplan puts forth that both the victim and the perpetrator in the ecological crisis humanity is confronted with are the same, that humans are behind the traumatic deterioration of the ecological health of the world.

Thus, Oyster's obsession with this deterioration is traumatic to the extent that it prompts him to fantasize about the wholesale destruction of human population to let nature recuperate. In this respect, his trauma directly reflects the climate trauma formulated by Kaplan.

Another significant aspect of Oyster's mantra is the parallel he draws between the colonization of the North American continent, what Kirby Farrell terms the "New World Genocide," and the ecological catastrophe. His tirade starts with human diseases which have killed Native Americans and continues with various viral or herbal ailments. Thus, his line of thought approaches the European colonization of the continent and the later ecological crisis similarly. Combined with Mona's and his own preoccupation with Native American culture, the couple's behavior provides an excellent illustration of another one of Kaplan's observations, namely, "indigenization."

As specified by Kaplan, indigenization "requires a complete reversal of identity for the white person," and the individuals concerned simply "give up their white identity," thus assuming and adopting the character of a particular native culture. According to Kaplan, the unconscious guilt of the individual who undergoes indigenization reflects the "changing consciousness on the part of the general United States public about grave injustices done to Native Americans."

Thus, for instance, Mona's "Navajo dream catcher" or "Hopi medicine bag," which intrigues Carl, or her claim of being Native American fits in perfectly with Kaplan's insight. Since Helen reveals that Mona's real surname is "Steinner" and that she is not of Native descent, her tribal paraphernalia amount to mere appropriations of Native American culture. Similarly, her wish that the road trip be her "own personal vision quest," with which she shall acquire her "Indian name[,]" simply reflects her desire to have been born as a Native American "just living in harmony with all that

natural beauty[,]" and is in accordance with Oyster's concern with invasive species which had wrought havoc on the landscape. Since the idea that the white European colonizers comprise one group of these "species" and are part of the "biological pandemic" is implicit in his remarks, his Hopi medicine bag and concerns, and Mona's refuted claim stem from their unconscious guilt arising from belonging to the white, colonizing group, reflect the "changing consciousness" about Native Americans detected by Kaplan, and constitute their attempts at "going native" and undergo "indigenization."

Thus, all the members of the "dysfunctional family" bear the imprints of their traumas, reflected in their thinking and behavior. Mona and Oyster are disturbed, first, because of ecological reasons, what Kaplan terms "climate trauma" and second, what Farrell terms "New World Genocide" which is reflected in their "indigenization[;]" Carl and Helen suffer because of the death of their partners and children, and the group is comprised of traumatized individuals. In this respect, their gathering corroborates Kai Erikson's statement that trauma "has a social dimension" and it "may serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can[,]" and the "dysfunctional family" under consideration provides an excellent example of what Erikson terms "a gathering of the wounded" in which individuals "similarly marked" take refuge.

In this regard, the narrator's question to Helen following his confession of his past, that he has killed his own family in the same way that Helen has done reflects the nature of their gathering:

> I limp a step closer, asking, does that make me wounded enough in her book?

3.4. The Post-traumatic Process

Dominick LaCapra asserts that in order for the sufferer to move from being a "victim" to "survivor and social agent" the individual must proceed from "acting out" his or her trauma to "work[ing] through" the trauma. By doing so, the individual may

obtain “critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal” against the background of acting out, which could ultimately render the sufferer “tragically incapable of acting responsibly or behaving in an ethical manner involving consideration for others as others.” Thus, in LaCapra’s framework, working through, which necessitates the emergence of “articulatory” activities such as “nontotalizing narrative and critical, as well as self-critical, thought and practice” and mourning, which is not “isolated grieving or endless bereavement but [is] a social process that may be at least partly effective in returning one to the demands and responsibilities of social life[;]” and acting out, in which “the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present” which could be “destructive and self-destructive,” are not dichotomous but “intimately related parts of a process.”

As argued above, the protagonist, Carl, is traumatized because of the death of his wife and baby daughter and plagued by the memory of their death. Feeling guilt and pain at the same time, he has not even talked to his father about the tragedy. Following his meeting Helen, a “similarly marked” real estate agent, he undertakes a journey to find and destroy the remaining copies of the poetry book, which is the cause of his inadvertent murder and trauma, in order to prevent it from spreading and claiming other lives. Yet during the narrative, he recites the poem in his mind and kills numerous individuals. His first use of the poem in the narrative is to conduct an “experiment” and he recites it to his editor and boss, Duncan. This first murder is, partially, due to the narrator’s discomfort with Duncan’s insensitivity towards SIDS and obliviousness to the delicate nature of the subject matter.

Irritated by his editor’s inconsiderate manner of approach to SIDS, the narrator, as an individual who has lost his family due to the phenomenon, conducts an experiment with him, by reading the poem, which eventually kills Duncan, prompting Carl to confess that the experiment has been his “Trinity,” or “Hiroshima,” former referring to the nuclear test conducted by the US army in 1945 in New Mexico, and the latter to a Japanese city, the bombing of which, as has been remarked, left even its perpetrators “shattered” according to Georges Bataille. Further, by likening himself to Robert Oppenheimer, the chief architect of the atomic bomb, the narrator also highlights the traumatic impact and context of the “culling song,” adding new layers of meaning to the scope of the novel which pivots around traumatic themes.

Yet the murder leaves an imprint on the narrator's conscience, having qualms about his killings, he decides to consult Helen. Her ominous suggestion reflects the nature of Carl's later murders:

> What if it stays in your head, repeating itself like one of those silly advertising songs?

Indeed, despite his refusal to "become a reckless, impulsive killer," this is precisely what the narrator eventually becomes. The fact that the poem passes through his mind "[a]s fast as a reflex" or "fast as a flinch," reflects the forced and compulsive nature of the act, and this is directly related to his insurmountable angst stemming from his murder of Katrin and Gina, his initial trauma. Having his picture "full-page in the paper[,]" the narrator finds himself in a conundrum and reveals that he is aware as well of the compulsive nature of his serial killings which is reflected by his questioning whether he has "[f]ree will" at all, or whether his "desires and actions" are determined "from the moment we're born?"

In this respect, the narrator's murders fit in perfectly with acting out one's trauma as formulated by LaCapra in that his angst and trauma render him "tragically incapable of acting responsibly or behaving in an ethical manner involving consideration for others as others." By killing other individuals because of his pent-up frustration as a result of his decades-long suffering, his acting out indeed proves to be "destructive and self-destructive." Further, his "stomping" habit, insofar as he reenacts a scene from his pre-traumatic life, corroborates LaCapra's insight that in acting out "the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present," and since he damages himself in the process, is destructive and comprises a part of his acting-out behaviors.

Furthermore, Carl's murderous acts, by pointing towards, per Farrell's formulation, a "willingness to abandon all restraints on violence" comprise his attempts at "going berserk." Trauma, as construed by Farrell, as a "'mind-blowing' experience" may constitute "a justification for aggression" and may engender in the individual an "intoxicating ideation of rage." Reciting the poem, killing a myriad of individuals and becoming almost addicted to murder, Carl's behavior, shaped by the

colossal pain of his trauma, proves to be "self-intoxicating" and corroborates Farrell's observation that "victimization converts to vindictiveness as fluidly as the central nervous system may turn flight to fight." Consequently, the narrator's murders, or his "killing frenzy," as Farrell puts it, fit in perfectly with "berserking" as formulated by Farrell.

Notwithstanding the fact that acting out, berserking and vindictiveness characterize his behavior early in the novel, such as his murders or his harmful habit of stomping on plastic buildings, which he ritualizes to "act out his trauma by constructing models to destroy" (2014: 627), as pointed out by Collado-Rodríguez, the narrator is able to work through his trauma and proceed to become a "survivor and social agent." In order to do so, the first step the protagonist takes is confiding in and communicating with an individual traumatized in a similar manner, Helen.

Given the "articulatory" nature of working through, the narrator's communication with Helen about their shared trauma, which culminates in a romantic relationship and prompts her to remark that

> "I'm glad you found me out. I think I always hoped someone would."
>
> "Still," she says, "it's nice to have one person who knows all your secrets[,]"

represents the initial and most significant step taken by the protagonist in order to free himself from the paralyzing clutches of his traumatic past. Moreover, both his relationship with Helen and his confession to his father on the phone as to how he has lost his family, talking to him about his trauma after two decades, highlight the value of speaking about and expressing one's trauma, as put forth by Laub, that

> The "not telling" of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny.

Having found another wounded individual, the narrator is thus able to share his suffering and initiate his process of working through. In this respect, it is highly significant that the protagonist's question that has been cited above, whether losing his

family in a similar manner to Helen "make[s] [him] wounded enough" for her to accept and confide in him follows his first expression of his trauma and paves the way for their relationship, enabling them to find solace in each other. Eventually, this relationship, insofar as it enables the narrator to put into words his traumatic past, corroborates Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart's insight that traumatic memories must be "transformed into narrative language" following which

> the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality.

Another crucial point to consider vis-à-vis the narrator's post-traumatic experience is the nature of the scene where he and Helen visit the house of a father who has been similarly devastated by the loss of his infant child. Making his way to the man's backyard in order to collect the torn pieces of the book so as not to allow anyone else to find it, Carl has to hide beneath the windowsill as the devastated father sobs and mourns his loss. What follows makes the scene one of the most significant ones in the narrative apropos the protagonist's post-traumatic process. Seeing the father hopeless, and perhaps reminding him of himself, since they both have lost their child due to the culling song, the narrator unexpectedly collapses and starts crying for the first time in the novel:

> And hitting me as fast as a chill, me breathing between my fingers, I start to cry, too. Sobs as hard as vomiting. My belly cramps.

What makes this scene utterly significant is the fact that his crying, the first sign in the novel of his attempt to mourn his loss and pain comes right after he "witnesses" another individual's suffering, and highlights the importance of the act of testifying asserted by Laub and Felman. Equally significant is the fact that the narrator changes his mind following the scene, just before the chapter in which it is told closes. Only wishing to destroy the book before, becoming aware of Oyster's destructive and

genocidal plan, he and Helen implement the spells in the grimoire to counteract the havoc wrought by the young couple. Collado-Rodríguez is thus correct in claiming that "the episode also represents a turning point[,]" after which the narrator starts to curb his "compulsive acts," and "emotions start to play more intensely in his report[,]" which could arguably be ascribed to the fact that via his witnessing he commences his process of working-through and that his clogged emotional mechanisms start to function once more (2014: 629).

In this respect, the direct relationship between the narrator's mourning process and his decision to take a stand against Mona and Oyster, whose countenance resembles the "devil"[3] according to the protagonist, who are determined to exterminate and enslave whom they please corroborates LaCapra's insight that working through one's trauma enables the individual to obtain "ethical responsibility[.]" Further, the fact that the narrator's mourning process does not occur in vacuo, but commences following his witnessing the bereft father's hopeless situation that reflects his own painful past corroborates LaCapra's formulation that mourning, insofar as it enables the individual to proceed from being a "victim to survivor and social agent[,]" is not "isolated grieving or endless bereavement but [is] a social process that may be at least partly effective in returning one to the demands and responsibilities of social life." Ultimately, the narrator's stance against Oyster and Mona, and his determination to disrupt their genocidal plan prove that he has become a social agent and started to return to the "demands and responsibilities" that could be born only by Helen and him

[3] Interestingly, in the same article that has been quoted above, Lévi-Strauss speaks at length about "the trickster of American mythology" (1963: 224). Noting how the figure is always a coyote or a raven in native cultures, Lévi-Strauss concludes that "the trickster is a mediator[,]" who "occupies a position halfway between two polar terms" (226). Trickster figures, from the Slavic Veles and the Nordic Loki to the African Anansi usually play mischievous tricks and cause destruction. Names of the Native American versions indicate their liminal position: coyote is "intermediary between herbivorous and carnivorous," and raven between "beasts of prey" and "food-plant producers" (224). I would like to suggest here that oysters are commonly known to be hermaphrodite, carrying both male and female reproductive organs, rendering them "liminal" sea-creatures. The eponymous character in the novel is also distinguished by mischievousness: he makes his living by creating fake ads, manages to steal the grimoire from Helen and he plans to destroy humanity. In fact, the name puzzles Helen as well and she expresses her curiosity by asking Mona if "[she's] dating a boy named Oyster?" (5). Thus, the character who has "gone native" even resembles a figure from Native mythology and the possible allusion arguably augments the theme of indigenization in the narrative.

in that the sole individuals privy to the nature of the grimoire and its destructive potential are the "wounded" duo.

Palahniuk's **Lullaby,** since it focuses on traumatized individuals and groups constituted of such members, "gathering[s] of the wounded" as defined by Erikson, constitutes an excellent instance of what LaCapra terms "traumatic writing[.]" Centralizing traumatic themes and told in first-person narration which conveys to the reader the mental state of a traumatized individual, the novel is both "writing in closest proximity to" and "symbolic emulation of trauma[.]" Exquisitely "exploring the complex relations between acting out and working through trauma," Palahniuk, while demonstrating and depicting various forms of acting out, such as the narrator's serial murders, or his habit of ritually stomping on plastic model houses which results in his going limp, or Oyster and Mona's planned destruction and enslavement of humanity, also devotes a significant portion of his novel to exhibiting forms of working through suffering, the result of which is clearly seen in the case of Carl, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, who, through mourning and articulating his suffering, succeeds in becoming a social agent following his initial position as a victim. In this respect, I strongly oppose Collado-Rodríguez's claim that "[i]t is clear that he has not fully worked through or achieved effective mourning for his loss" (2014: 625). Indeed, the narrative starts with Carl in such a situation, yet, the narrator's sharing his past and pain with Helen, the sense of communality in their gathering, his articulation of his trauma to his father after two decades, his witnessing to another individual's suffering and the resulting narrative pause, which is filled with the narrator's collapse and crying, which, for the first time in the novel portrays the protagonist showing any emotion, and the ethical stance taken by the duo, I believe, vividly demonstrate the fact he **is** able to work through his trauma and "achieve[d] effective mourning for his loss." Thus, Collado-Rodríguez's claim could be taken as an illustration of LaCapra's assertion that contemporary critics tend to favor focusing on forms of "acting out" in their analyses rather more than working through, which, as a concept, is underutilized in "academic approaches to psychoanalysis."

Never resorting to "circumvent[ing], deny[ing], or repress[ing] […] trauma" but vividly demonstrating the impact of catastrophic events on individuals and their post-traumatic experience, including both their tendency to destructively act out their

accumulated pain and work it through, **Lullaby** does not become what LaCapra terms a "redemptive" narrative.

3.5. Media

Carl's murder of Duncan, while motivated by his editor's callous handling of the subject matter of the newspaper series, SIDS, concatenated with his remarks vis-à-vis journalism and certain details in the narrative, underscores the relationship between trauma and media, and presents a compelling critique to the media industry, which permeates the novel. In this respect, I do not agree with Francisco Collado-Rodríguez's view that the narrator's viewpoint regarding the role played by the media in shaping our lives, or his frustration with it as a journalist "refers to his own narrating role as nonobjective and manipulative" (2014: 623). The protagonist is clearly traumatized and this is obviously reflected in his narration, yet more than casting doubt on "the truth of his report" (2014: 623), I believe that his distressed mental state highlights the fact that the story is narrated by a traumatized individual, and that it attempts to "emulate" the experience of living through post-traumatic stress for the reader, as LaCapra asserts vis-à-vis traumatic writing; otherwise the reader has no access to the story apart from the narration of the protagonist. Collado-Rodríguez's claim, while trying to highlight the potential "unreliability" of the narrator, overlooks the fact that the portrayal of the narrator's mental health, which casts him as "nonobjective and manipulative" according to Collado-Rodríguez, is precisely what is aimed to be conveyed to the reader, and his claim undercuts this emulative quality of the narrative. By the same token, Collado-Rodríguez's claim that the narrator's "own traumatized condition leaves readers without any sound anchor from which to evaluate the truth of his report[,]" risks overlooking the mimetic nature of the novel, the experience of reading which mirrors the post-traumatic disorientation the narrator suffers from, whether it surfaces with repetitive expressions or rapid shifts in temporality (2014: 631).

Apropos the newspaper series, the editor makes clear the fact that he views SIDS only as a curiosity with which to increase the revenue of the newspaper. Indeed,

Duncan completely disregards the tragic nature of the phenomenon, demonstrates his dismissal of human suffering and lack of empathy by calling it “crib death[,]” assigning the narrator the task of creating a series on the phenomenon, which proves to be painful to endure for Carl, the father of a victim of SIDS.

The season being “the peak time of the year for last-term pregnancies and newborns,” Duncan figures that this way the newspaper could “guarantee advertisers a highly invested readership.” Even though there is “no new information” on SIDS, since medical professionals are not able to spot the cause of the phenomenon, because “the news [are] slow,” the editor devises the series under consideration and explicitly states that the series is designed “to panic people.”

Duncan is fully aware that the series would eventually become popular because of its shock-value, since he remarks that the series would be a “story that every parent and grandparent is too afraid to read and too afraid not to read,” and his insight as to what could sell and what could not corroborates Farrell’s claim that the public does not shy away from “daily accounts of catastrophe,” but is further drawn to them, and a significant portion of news coverage consists of traumatic themes. Hence, the logic advocated by the editor directly reflects the modus operandi of what Kirby Farrell terms “media capitalism” which exploits traumatic themes by rendering them “safely distanced and for sale.” Conforming to the logic of “disaster stories,” the “obsessive headlines” under consideration here, one specimen of which is the one Duncan devises, “serve a sharpened appetite for stimulation.” Since the editor is surely aware of the twisted appeal of his reportage, in the end, Duncan’s journalistic practice amounts to selling anxiety to an emotionally vulnerable readership.

Duncan’s editorial style finds its analogue in Oyster’s business model as well. The narrative is punctuated with intriguing advertisements given on various newspapers which attract Carl’s attention. Consisting of bold and eye-catching titles such as “Attention Patrons of the Treeline Dining Club[,]” the readers are led to believe that the establishments they frequent are infected with certain viruses, bacteria or fungi, and are asked “to be part of a class-action lawsuit” for compensation, yet, as the narrator discovers, the accusations merely operate as Oyster’s ruses to extort money from the owners of the shops, gyms or restaurants mentioned in the advertisements. Since he makes his living by arbitrarily casting doubt on these establishments and

exploiting their patrons' concern, what Mona, his girlfriend, terms "antiadvertising" constitutes another method of selling anxiety.

Furthermore, Duncan's editorial policy fits in perfectly with Ann Kaplan's formulation of "sensationalized reporting[.]" Per Kaplan's definition, such a journalistic practice, by presenting accounts of suffering "without any context or background knowledge[,]" amounts to exploiting trauma, and brings into existence "empty empathy[.]" In this regard, since there is "no new information" on SIDS, Duncan's pecuniary priority, his sole aim of generating profit via newspaper articles which are chosen only on the basis of their being able to "panic people" reflects the nature of the editorship in question, which, instead of meaningfully informing the public, prefers sensationalized reporting. Thus, the irreverence and disingenuity of Duncan's remarks towards such a traumatic phenomenon as SIDS, calling it "crib death," mirror the empty nature of empathy his series engenders in the readers.

The article series on SIDS, with its sole aim of exploiting traumatic themes and sensationalized nature, comprises only one instance in the novel where the dyad of media and trauma is problematized, and the press is critiqued. Apart from the narrator's contemplations and certain repetitive phrases pertaining to the role media plays in people's lives, which shall soon be touched upon, another critique is presented in the narrator's resurfacing memories regarding his experience in journalism school.

The last question prospective journalists are presented with prior to their graduation involves a family whose child has choked on a Christmas ornament. The reporter, in whose place the students are put, is asked to call the family and inquire about the color of the ornament, having forgotten to do so while at the scene. The narrator figures that it would be improper and insensitive to phone the devastated family "after midnight on Christmas Eve," and answers the question suggesting that he would "call the paramedics. Items like this have to be catalogued." Yet he receives only a passing mark.

The anecdote is significant insofar as it problematizes the view that a journalist's job "is to collect the details. Just what's there. Be an impartial witness[,]" which arguably ignores the critical and ethical agency of the reporter and relegates the profession, as the protagonist suggests, to the position of "a camera," a mere mechanical device, or a detached computer. The narrator makes clear the fact that he

is frustrated by the doxa propagated by the journalism school and the mainstream press. His compulsive urge to catalogue, which usually takes the form of recurring sentences such as "the details about […] are," while accentuating his repetitive compulsion, thus, at the same time, highlights his struggle with what is expected of him as a journalist in an environment where ethics and responsibility are discarded from the profession and the reporter's agency as an individual is erased. Having trouble with the idea "that the news and you are always two separate things[,]" his experience as a college student prompts him to remark that "[i]nstead of ethics, I learned only to tell people what they want to hear[,]" which is arguably significant since it points out that the modus operandi of the mass media paves the way for disingenuous and misguided uses of communication technologies. Thus, the narrator's complaints about and frustration with the dogmas of the mass media underline the fact that if detached from ethics and truth, media could but only tell what is wished by the public to be told, as against what is needed to be heard.

As to the narrator's contemplations and repetitive expressions, his question as to whether he has "free will" or "do the mass media and our culture control us, our desires and actions, from the moment we're born" further captures his discomfort with the misguided and thoughtless journalistic practices which permeate what Kirby Farrell terms "media capitalism" reigning in the American press. Juxtaposed with his compulsive murders, including that of his editor, Duncan, the remark also could be taken to point out "anxieties about free will, identity, and ethics in contemporary society" (2014: 621), as Collado-Rodríguez asserts.

The narrator's exasperation is indeed deep and reflected in his irritation with the noise his neighbors' TVs and radios emit. Observing that "[t]here's always some noise worming in. Singers shouting. Dead people laughing. Actors crying. All these little doses of emotion[,]" he likens the resultant commotion to an "arms race of sound[,]" and ascribes this situation to the fact that people "just need more of it, more channels, a larger screen, more volume[.]" Even though his accidental murders of his neighbors via singing the lullaby while showering underline his irritation with their uncritical consumption of the products of the media, Collado-Rodríguez's claim that "his first victims become his purportedly noisy neighbors" (2014: 625) is simply incorrect as

the murder of his editor, Duncan, predates the bath-scene, and thus the deaths of his neighbors.

The narrator further calls the members of the society he lives in "sound-oholics[,]" "quiet-ophobics[,]" "distraction-oholics[,]" or "focus-ophobics[,]" a series of sentences repeated throughout the novel. These expressions, while pointing out his disturbed mental state and comprising his urge to repeat, also symbolize an individual's discomfort with being constantly bombarded with various types of visual or auditory stimulants radiated by the media. In fact, the protagonist is so distressed by this situation that he starts to vacillate between reality and virtuality, between what is real and what is represented, which is mirrored in his remark that

> Either an ancient cursed Egyptian mummy has come back to life and is trying to kill the people next door, or they're watching a movie.

The above expression, an alteration of which punctuates the novel, with its either/or logic, is evocative of dissociation, which, according to Farrell, characterizes both trauma and the media's attitude towards trauma. Farrell notes the "frequency of dissociation in post-traumatic stress," and asserts that "the news regulates doses of adversity and death, mediating horror through dissociation." Even though society avidly consumes traumatic themes distributed by the media which markets suffering "safely distanced and for sale[,]" because these themes, as they are packaged by the press, "frame, and distance us from, horror[,]" Farrell suggests that

> We engage them in a spirit of doublethink, registering the data with safely mediated feeling.

By the same token, the Orwellian tone attached to Farrell's critique of the mass media's coverage of traumatic themes suggested by his use of the word "doublethink" finds its echo in the narrator's claim that

> Old George Orwell got it backward.

> Big Brother isn't watching. He's singing and dancing. He's pulling rabbits out of a hat. Big Brother's busy holding your attention every moment you're awake. He's making sure you're always distracted. He's making sure you're fully absorbed.

In fact, albeit apprehensive, the narrator's line of thought implies that he would welcome the "plague unique to the Information Age[,]" which is the culling song. By forcing the enactment of a "quarantine against communication[,]" whereby news would have to be sanitized and "[a]pproved for consumption[,]" lest it contain the lullaby or a form of it, the leak could have the potential to prevent the "Big Brother [from] filling us," in consequence of which "people could think[,]" and that "maybe our minds would become our own." Further, the allusions to Orwell's **1984** in the narrative are suggestive of authoritarianism and draw compelling parallels between mainstream media and what Farrell terms "Orwellian telescreens – capturing the souls of" their audience. In this regard, I agree with Collado-Rodríguez's claim that

> Big Brother does not manifest his power by means of surveillance but as an instrument of entertainment, to keep the people drugged and trapped in the various addictions created by the media (2014: 628).

Moreover, the "contagious" aspect of trauma, a "salient characteristic of post-traumatic experience," according to Farrell, is brought into question by the narrator as well. During the scene where he inadvertently kills his neighbors by singing the poem out loud, the narrator observes that

> Being a journalist is about telling. It's about bearing the bad news. Spreading the contagion.

The passage cited above, while underlining the responsibility that being a journalist entails, by adding "contagion" into the equation, accentuates the fact that the press could bring individuals in contact with traumatic phenomena and allow these traumatic images or representations to be radiated with higher speeds. Like a contagion, trauma could arguably proliferate more swiftly in the modern era which is, as Farrell

observes, accompanied by the "communications revolution in cable, satellite, and computer technologies[.]"

Thus, constituting more than mere scruples about his profession, the narrator's meditations bring forth a powerful critique of the media's handling of traumatic themes.

Conclusions

Despite continuous advancements in the field, the original framework put forth by Freud has continued to inform scholars studying trauma and its effect on individuals or communities. Initially constituting a puzzle that had the potential to disrupt his theories based on the pleasure principle, as has been seen, Freud's appending the phenomenon and giving it a place in his psychoanalytic framework, while highlighting the intricate nature of the psychology of trauma, also underlines the originality of Freud's insight into the matter. The fact that the psychoanalyst observed trauma initially in patients suffering from psychological ailments stemming from shocks caused by their upsetting encounters with railroad travel, a rapidly emerging innovation at the time, accentuates the curious relationship between technology and trauma. His assertion that trauma is a stimulant powerful enough to breach "the protective shield" (1961: 23) whose occurrence is predicated on a "lack of any preparedness for anxiety" (1961: 25) stresses the immense disruptive power of the phenomenon, and points towards the role played by the absence of apprehension or concern in the inducement of trauma. Meanwhile, his assertion that the traumatized individual is "obliged to repeat the repressed material" instead of "remembering it as something belonging to the past" reveals the central place memory occupies vis-à-vis trauma, and aptly characterizes the trap the survivor is stuck in: not being able to differentiate memories and images from the synchronous experience of daily life, the individual is forced to face rapid alterations in temporality, the time of "now" and the time of "then" (1961: 12). Further, by positing that certain ritualized reenactments of the traumatic event do serve a purpose and fit in with the individual's post-traumatic life, that the said rituals are actually after "the mastery they are in search of" (1961: 29), that is, they attempt to enable the individual to distance himself/herself from the initial horror of the traumatic event by repeating it in order to diminish the radical alterity of the trauma, Freud provides spectacular insight into the nature of the traumatized individual's repetitive compulsions.

Following **DSM**, the first of the constitutive texts appeared, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and**

History. The authors situate trauma and witnessing closely and proclaim that the current milieu harbors a "radical historical *crisis of witnessing,"* and highlight literature's role in undertaking the difficult task of articulating suffering and bearing witness to trauma. "Literature[,]" according to Laub and Felman, "becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated" (1992: xviii).

Testimony in Laub and Felman's framework is closely related to ethics and narrativity, and the authors explain this by remarking that witnessing "is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative to others: [it is] to take responsibility – in speech" (204). Thus, in order to put their traumatic experience into a coherent, meaningful context, the survivors, according to Laub, "did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive" (78), and by the same token, he remarks that "[t]he 'not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny" (79). In order to overcome the loneliness and the lack of witnesses to suffering that the post-traumatic experience entails, the survivor must bear witness to his or her trauma, only after which the "narrator (the survivor) [may] reclaim[s] his position as a witness: reconstitute[s] the internal 'thou,' and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself" (85). Finally, Felman sheds light on a phenomenon hitherto neglected, vicarious or contagious (Farrell, 1998: 12) aspect of trauma with her "class in crisis" anecdote. Having been shown footage of concentration camp survivors' testimonies, the class she taught "broke into a crisis," became "obsessed" and disoriented by the suffering of the interviewees (1992: 47). While this anecdote demonstrates that trauma could be contagious or vicarious, Felman's advice to her students, that they need to "look for connections" highlights the therapeutic potential of integrating and contextualizing traumatic memories, and thus creating a coherent narrative after the disruption caused by the traumatic shock (51).

Edited by Cathy Caruth, the compendium **Trauma: Explorations in Memory** comprises the 2nd constitutive text outlined in this study. Though a pioneer in the field, Caruth's introductory essays, together with her monograph, prove to be problematic, and two factors need to be considered here. The first factor is Caruth's insistence on incomprehension, for she claims that the meaning of the traumatic event "may reside

not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple *comprehension*" (1995: 153) (italics mine). Moreover, refusing to understand and analyze trauma and traumatogenic factors, according to Caruth, "is also a fundamentally creative act" (155), and further that what is considered traumatic has become "too inclusive" (4). The second factor is Caruth's sacralization of trauma, as evinced by her following quote, whether it is

> Not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past? (179).

These views, while stressing the power and alterity of trauma, also glorifies passive acceptance of the phenomenon instead of analyzing and scrutinizing traumatogenic facets of modern societies.

Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart's postulate, that memories could be separated into two groups: "narrative memory, which is a social act," and traumatic memory which is "inflexible and invariable," despite proving to be problematic for future scholars, highlights the seminal position occupied by narrativization in the process of recovery. Indeed, articulating traumatic experiences, according to the authors of the essay, is of such importance that they claim recovery may only occur if the survivor does not "suffer anymore from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks [...] Instead the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality" (176).

Claude Lanzmann, in turn, remarks that the motivation behind his documentary, **Shoah,** was "to link up, to accomplish the whole work of rememoration[,]" and using Freud's terminology, to "work through" trauma (211). The term appears for the first time in the article **Remembering, Repeating and Working Through,** and together with "acting out," provide a valuable lens with which survivors' post-traumatic reactions may be examined.

According to Freud, individuals who have experienced trauma in their childhood act out their suffering and reexperience the event to the extent that the patient

"reproduces it not as a memory, but as an action. Without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it" (1958: 150). Further, remembering, which would enable the individual to acknowledge that the traumatic memory is in the past is encountered by a resistance, and "[t]he greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering" (1958: 155). Working through is presented by Freud at this crucial point, since, to be able to overcome this resistance and continue the process of recovery, the patient must be given time to "become conversant with this resistance," thus paving the way "to work through it, overcome it" (1958: 155). Thus, in Freud's framework, working through and acting out duo constitutes a dichotomy, while the former paves the way for an effective recovery, the latter constitutes an obstacle to it.

Echoing Laura Brown's views, which have been outlined above, and Douglas Crimp, who advocates for a socially-oriented approach to trauma, such as in the case of AIDS survivors, whose pain stems mostly from societal discrimination, Kai Erikson asserts that "[t]rauma […] has a social dimension" (1995: 185), and further highlights how trauma "can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can" (186). He calls this type of communities "a gathering of the wounded" (187) in which "similarly marked" (186) individuals take refuge. Remarkable for boldly and clearly stating that trauma must not be viewed as a solely personal phenomenon detached from social or communal concerns, Erikson also points out that there exists a relationship between technology and trauma, similar to Freud's initial insight, and puts forth that after experiencing a shocking encounter with complications and accidents related to technology, the individual "can begin to lose confidence in the use of logic and reason as ways to discern what is going on" (196), following which a myriad of "old exuberances" such as "millennial movements, witchcraft, the occult, and a thousand other systems of explanation" may be embraced by the individual because of their potential to provide a safe refuge against this background (196).

Robert Jay Lifton, in turn, posits that "extreme trauma creates a second self" (137), and echoing Henry Krystal's observation that the traumatized individual must exercise "effective grieving" and "self-acceptance" against "psychic splitting" (85), that is, dissociation, advises reintegration of the traumatic memory and highlights the manipulable character of trauma. According to Lifton, suffering could be abused in

order to generate further pain and violence, and he remarks that "false witnessing" may occur, by which, he claims, a group victimizes and persecutes what is considered "the other" (140).

The final work comprising what is in this study called "constitutive texts" is Cathy Caruth's monograph, **Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History.** Similar to her introductory essays in the previous compendium, Caruth focuses on incomprehension and further draws parallels between trauma and history, going so far as equating them, and asks what it means "precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma?" (1996: 15).

Incomprehension, similar to her essays, occupies a major role in Caruth's framework. She posits that "it is in the event of this incomprehension and in our departure from sense and understanding that our own witnessing may indeed begin to take place" (56), and further that, at the core of trauma lies "the legacy of incomprehensibility" (58). Despite highlighting literature's role apropos its relationship with trauma by remarking that "[it] is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (3), Caruth's approach to literature proves to be elusive and problematic. Her question that whether playing "with the reality of the past" is a "sacrilege," her insistence on incomprehension, her claim that the scope of trauma studies has become "too inclusive" and the elusive position assigned to literature, as evinced by her claim that literature must implement "a language that is always *somehow literary*: a language that *defies*, even as it *claims*, our understanding" (5) (italics mine), leave little place for analyzing and scrutinizing traumatic phenomena, further diminish the role of literature in articulating traumatic suffering, and are at odds with the value of narrativity vis-à-vis recovery. Since, together with Felman, Caruth "introduced trauma studies as such" (Kaplan, 2005: 73), Caruth's framework, which is in this study called "Caruthian orthodoxy," is of immense importance and has heavily influenced the route trauma studies have later taken, yet, given the problematic aspects of her thought, later scholars were to criticize Caruth's theories and advocate for a broader and more inclusive perspective which would consider and point out underlying causes that play a major role in the inducement of trauma.

Some of these later scholars comprise what Michelle Balaev calls the **Pluralists,** a group of trauma scholars advocating that "literature is more diffuse, varied, and less

programmatic than the classic model affords" (2014: 5). According to Balaev, the insistence on unrepresentability (3), and "the traditional concept of trauma as unspeakable" (4) are factors that render Caruthian Orthodoxy problematic, and this view is shared by Barry Stampfl as well, who holds the position that the notions of sacred and sacralization of traumatic events are religious rhetorical devices, and asserts that "the trope of the unspeakable actually gives permission to turn away," thus precluding analysis (18). Similarly, Laura Vickroy puts forth that trauma must not be viewed as a solely-personal phenomenon and that trauma studies would benefit from "seeing trauma as collectively and situationally-driven," following which "the possibilities for telling [would] increase" (140).

Another scholar who concurs with the Pluralists on the "programmatic" nature of Caruthian orthodoxy is Alan Gibbs, who criticizes "[t]he restrictive modes of representation approved by dominant trauma theory" (2014: 242), and puts forth that Caruthian theory "is far too rigid, partial, and exclusionary" (12). Gibbs further maintains that a "trauma genre emerged" (2), which operates in tandem with the mainstream critical practice, resulting in "a narrow, derivative, and only superficially experimental genre of works" (242). This "self-reinforcing circuit" (2) of fiction and theory, in turn, while overlooking "the variety of trauma writing in contemporary literature, American and worldwide" (31), also disregards more "popular" types of fiction, and harbors a bias for the "avant-garde" (242).

Here, with Gibbs' views, a side-question that has been presented in the introductory part of this study is answered. The reason behind the "relative dearth of analyses of Palahniuk's work conducted with the theoretical and critical lens of trauma studies," is, counterintuitively, his status as a popular writer whose works regularly confront "New York literary establishment" (Keesey, 2016: 19). Considering certain critics' remarks that the author promotes "embracing rather than abhorring rebellion and transgression" (Keesey, 2016: 13) and eschews delicate sensibilities, which prompts certain other critics to find his work "appetite-suppressing[,]"[1] the avante-

[1] "Not for a Full Stomach (or an Empty One Either)"

garde bias in trauma studies is arguably the reason behind the lack of a substantial scholarly work on Palahniuk's fiction implementing the critical lens of trauma studies.

Since for Kaplan 9/11 was "perhaps the supreme example of a catastrophe that was experienced globally via digital technologies" (2005: 2) her analysis of 9/11 is closely related to her critique of certain misguided practices in mainstream media such as "sensationalized reporting" (2005: 22) which prompts "empty empathy" in the viewer, which is "empathy elicited by images of suffering provided without any context or background knowledge" (2005: 93). Kaplan further points out that "[m]ost of us generally encounter trauma vicariously through the media rather than directly" (2005: 87) and suggests that vicarious trauma be more diligently researched by theorists. She also highlights that equally important is how trauma is "'managed' by institutional forces" in which respect she concurs with Gibbs (2005: 1).

Gibbs remarks that via the "media's selective and incessant repetition of images in the days following the attacks" (2014: 126), the trauma of 9/11 was abused to transform "a shared sense of grief in[to] an ideological national unity based on blind patriotism" (136), thus enabling the policy-makers to orchestrate "a domestic crackdown on civil liberties" via the Patriot Act (21).

Commenting on the aftermath of the attacks, Kaplan asserts that "9/11 produced a new subjectivity" (2005: 4), and observes how the nation coped with the pain. "I watched the Ground Zero memorial service for the families of the victims and was moved[,]" she suggests, "America has learned to mourn and to respect mourning, and that's a good thing" (2005: 17), following which, "a certain process of working through, of providing a fitting 'witness' to the tragedy, has taken place" (2005: 147).

Dominick LaCapra, in his **Writing History, Writing Trauma,** reformulates Freud's working through and acting out duo and while critiquing mainstream trauma studies, also provides immensely valuable insight into trauma and its relationship with literature. A poignant critique he presents is against what he terms "traumatropism[,]" which has been outlined above.[2]

[2] See subchapter 1.12. for a detailed discussion of the phenomenon.

Acting out is defined by LaCapra as a reaction to trauma whereby "the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present," which could ultimately have the potential to render the individual "tragically incapable of acting responsibly or behaving in an ethical manner involving consideration for others as others" (2014: 70), and further enable behavior which could be "destructive and self-destructive" (143). Alongside acting out, LaCapra situates mourning, a social practice, he asserts (69), echoing Krystal's effective grieving, and working-through (65), which would, according to LaCapra, allow "for critical judgment and a reinvestment in life, notably social and civic life with its demands, responsibilities, and norms requiring respectful recognition and consideration for others" (70). Mourning, he maintains, is not "isolated grieving or endless bereavement but [is] a social process that may be at least partly effective in returning one to the demands and responsibilities of social life" (23). LaCapra further presents certain kinds of "nontotalizing narrative and critical, as well as self-critical, thought and practice," as "modalities" of working through (67), which is inherently "articulatory" (22), which would enable the individual in his journey from "victim to survivor and social agent" (xi), to obtain "critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal." Equally important in LaCapra's framework is the fact that working through, as he reformulates it, distancing himself from the "therapeutic conceptions of psychoanalysis" (143), does not equal "any facile notion of cure," or "closure, totalization, full cure, full mastery[,]" and that the duo does not constitute a "dichotomy" (144), that the two are "intimately related parts of a process" (143).

While rejecting "redemptive" type of narratives, which "circumvents, denies, or represses the trauma that called it into existence, for example, through unqualified objectification, formal analysis, or harmonizing" (98), LaCapra asserts that "forms of modern art and writing, as well as some of the most compelling forms of criticism provide relatively safe havens for exploring the complex relations between acting out and working through trauma, often seem to be traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma" (23). Traumatic writing is further defined by LaCapra as "experimental, gripping, and risky symbolic emulation of trauma […] ("writing" in the broad sense that extends to all signification or inscription)" (105).

It is of high significance to observe here that Palahniuk's approach towards literature bears a striking resemblance to LaCapra's "traumatic writing." Considering Palahniuk's preference for producing "dark and risky"[3] works, that he, in a sense, transforms his "personal suffering" (2005: 28), into the narratives he weaves and that he sees literature as "a safe laboratory for exploring ourselves and our world" (2005: 37), Palahniuk's philosophy directly parallels LaCapra's perspective.

The final part of the theoretical framework of this study is comprised of Kirby Farrell's thought as expressed in his **Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties** and **The Psychology of Abandon: Berserk Style in American Culture.** A central point in Farrell's framework is the close relationship between trauma and socio-cultural factors apropos the '90s, a period of time of high significance considering the cultural climate **Fight Club** depicts. Moreover, Farrell observes a "cultural crisis"[4] (1998: ix), or a "cultural crash" in the US during the late 20th century (184).

Farrell excellently demonstrates how culture is implicated in trauma by remarking that "when trauma disturbs the ground of experience, cultural values lose their life-supporting conviction" (85), and that the prevailing mood during the time period under consideration exhibits a "disturbance in the ground of collective experience: a shock to people's values, trust, and sense of purpose[.]" Among the culprits which have collectively exacerbated this cultural crisis, Farrell includes societal, cultural and economic issues such as the "'war' on drugs, […] epidemics of AIDS, rape, domestic battering, teen violence" (3), the diminishing sense of American invulnerability following the "Vietnam debacle, the Soviet collapse" and the suffocating capitalist economic system reigning in the US which has "demanded sacrifices at the bottom while redirecting major economic benefits toward those at the top, creating an unprecedented federal deficit" (159), and which has showcased "gross inequalities in class and gender; predatory economic behavior," which has worsened the "distressing situation of working people in postindustrial America" (196), and which is especially

[3] "Is it fistfighting, or just multi-tasking?"
[4] The references below are all to the same source.

dire for service workers in an economic culture which "makes service an industry and does not value it" (245).

Another escape mechanism Farrell criticizes is what he terms "media capitalism" (341) with the concomitant "obsessive headlines" adorning newspapers and TV, behind the allure of which lies the fact that "violence sells" and that it "serves a sharpened appetite for stimulation" (17). His approach to media is closely related to dissociation, a "salient characteristic of post-traumatic experience," Farrell suggests, alongside the Freudian **Nachtraglichkeit;** contagiousness/vicariousness (12) and "death anxiety[,]" and he claims that, using an Orwellian concept, "[w]e engage them in a spirit of doublethink, registering the data with safely mediated feeling" (17). The disingenuous and shallow quality of the entertainment and media culture in the US, according to Farrell, which markets traumatic themes "safely distanced and for sale" (338), "attenuates our subjectivity," and "reflects the plasticity of 1990s culture" (30). And his concept of "berserk" or "going berserk" is directly related to the American fascination with mediatized images of suffering, trauma and violence.

According to Farrell, there exist three major "modes of coping with post-traumatic stress" and these are "social adaptation and relearning, depressive withdrawal or numbing, and impulsive force (berserking)" (7). Thus, trauma, just as it could constitute a "cry for distress" (14) or a "criticism of life" (187), may comprise "a justification for aggression" (14), engendering in the individual "the intoxicating ideation of rage" (289) and a "willingness to abandon all restraints on violence" (320). Farrell excellently summarizes the nature of the phenomenon by asserting that "victimization converts to vindictiveness as fluidly as the central nervous system may turn flight to fight" (193). He further asserts that the practice is "culturally conditioned" (290) and that "American slang is rich in terms that evoke the overthrow of inhibition" (291), which highlights the fact that at the very heart of the "social experience in America" resides violence (195). Finally, the concept of berserking, as formulated by Farrell perfectly fits in as a subgroup of LaCapra's concept of acting out. As an anti-social, "destructive and self-destructive" behavior which could prevent the individual from exercising "consideration for others as others," berserking arguably stands out as a violent and explosive reaction to traumatic stress.

Moreover, Farrell, echoing Lifton's remarks on the manipulable character of trauma, asserts that certain practices such as the infliction of pain and torture to enhance "group bonding" (21), or hero worship could be used to exploit suffering to further a particular agenda (83). Thus, Farrell's approach to the problem is in full concordance with LaCapra' concept of "founding trauma" in which "[a] crisis or catastrophe that disorients and harms the collectivity or the individual may miraculously become the origin or renewed origin of the myth and serve an ideological function in authorizing acts or policies that appeal to it for justification" (2014: xii).

As has been established in chapters 3 and 4, both **Fight Club** and **Lullaby** contain severely traumatized protagonists whose narrations comprise the respective novels. Vis-à-vis **Fight Club,** the narrator's insomnia, rapid flashbacks, dissociation, death anxiety and repetitive phrases signal his trauma and the narrative is mostly comprised of his acting-out his pain. Working as a retail campaign coordinator for a major car manufacturer, the initial blow to his psychic integrity, as evinced by the narrator's repeated expression that "[e]verything is falling apart" (108), stems directly from the "cultural crisis" (ix) Farrell detects in the US during the '90s, which harbors "gross inequalities" between classes and where working citizens face a "distressing situation" (196). The nature of the predatory economic system under consideration, with its streamlined, rational and pecuniary formulas for measuring human lives, apropos its traumatic effect, corroborates LaCapra's observation regarding the pseudo-redemption obtained via "technical rationality" (2014: 178).

Moreover, the protagonist's trauma ceases being a solely-personal phenomenon, and echoing LaCapra's concept of "founding trauma" (xii), constitutes the basis for Project Mayhem and the group's terroristic acts, whose formation provides a perfect literary example of Erikson's "gathering of the wounded" (1995: 187). The group's explosive, terroristic operations and organized fights thus constitute their attempts at acting out their hopelessness. Comprised mostly of blue-collar members, their trauma stems from their feeling trapped in a socio-economic system which "makes service an industry and does not value it" (245), thus, the violent nature of their activities, from murder and bombing to assault, also signals the fact that they are consumed, as Farrell posits, by the "intoxicating ideation of rage" and are "going berserk" in a futile attempt to vent their angst (290). Not being able to put a stop to the increasingly destructive

tendencies of Project Mayhem, the protagonist attempts to take his own life, yet fails, and is seen recuperating in the final scene of the novel, while plans are still being devised, and the members are equally keen on bringing an end to civilization. Thus, as the story of one individual's struggle with "insidious trauma," that is, the cumulative result of being incessantly bombarded with "traumatogenic effects of oppression," which, in the end, throws into sharp relief certain distressing factors endemic to American society, which, as Laura Brown suggests, "subjects so many of its inhabitants to traumatic stressors" (1995: 107,108), **Fight Club** exquisitely depicts how an individual living in the '90s in the US is dispossessed of any means to articulate and ameliorate his or her trauma, and thus how, indeed, "[t]he 'not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny" (Laub, 1992: 79). Further, by strikingly demonstrating how trauma could indeed be manipulated, such as the infliction of wounds on the new recruits, that is, torture to enhance "group bonding" (Farrell, 1998: 22), or the fascist structure that is the direct result of the ideological demagoguery of the "second-self" (Lifton, 1995: 137) of the narrator, the narrative stands as a powerful reminder of the dangerous implications of manipulating trauma for furthering political and ideological agendas.

Apropos **Lullaby**, the narrator's trauma stems from his having accidentally murdered his wife and daughter by reciting to them the "culling song" (36), the magical nature of which directly reflects the fact that, per Erikson's observation, "old exuberances" such as "millennial movements, witchcraft, the occult, and a thousand other systems of explanation" provide a safe refuge for an individual whose harrowing encounter with technology prompts the survivor "to lose confidence in the use of logic and reason as ways to discern what is going on" (1995: 196). Given the silence of science in the face of SIDS, the emergence of certain magical elements in the narrative is thus thrown into sharp relief against the narrator's frustration with medical technology which is not able to provide a viable account of his child's death.

Following the shock of the deaths of his wife and daughter, the narrator is thus traumatized, and his repetitive expressions and flashbacks accentuate his pain. A salient motif in the novel, the narrator's ritualized stomping on model houses further reflects the fact that the protagonist, by first building and then destroying plastic buildings, is trying to distance himself from his initial trauma, and is thus yearning for

"the mastery [he is] in search of[,]" the mastery of remembering the event as a memory, instead of reexperiencing it (Freud, 1961: 29).

Moreover, the "dysfunctional family" (102) comprised of the narrator, Helen, Mona and Oyster provides another example of Erikson's concept of the gathering of the wounded. Vis-à-vis Helen, her trauma mirrors the narrator's in that both have lost their child due to SIDS. Mona and Oyster, in turn, given their frustration with the distressing situation of the environment which reaches such a colossal scale that they are able to justify murder and slavery, are suffering from Kaplan's concept of "climate trauma" (2016: ix). Further, the couple's preoccupation with Native American culture, and Mona's false claim of being an "Indian" (111) demonstrate that, not being able to absorb and process the guilt of belonging to the white, colonizing culture, they are attempting to "go native," or undergo "indigenization," per Kaplan's observation (2005: 107). Considering the narrator's remark that "[w]e're all of us haunted and haunting" the traumatized character of the members of the group is further acknowledged by the protagonist himself (6).

Meanwhile, the narrator compulsively murders various individuals, in other words, he "acts out" his trauma, or "goes berserk." Yet, the protagonist is able to move beyond his tragic situation, by articulating and putting into words his pain, as Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart postulate, he manages to give his trauma "a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality." In the end he does not "suffer anymore from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks[,]" precisely because "the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened" (1995: 176).

Both his union with Helen, whereby he articulates and shares his pain, his witnessing another father bereft of his family and his following mourning phase comprise the protagonist's attempt to work through his trauma, and enable the narrator to move from being a "victim to survivor and social agent" (LaCapra, 2014: xi). His newly acquired ethical stance is further evinced by his avowal to counter the destructive plans of Mona and Oyster.

Moreover, **Lullaby,** given the compelling critique it brings to certain misguided journalistic practices, brilliantly problematizes and prompts discussion about the relationship between media and trauma. By underlining the dissociative and

contagious aspects of the transmission or mediation of traumatic images, Palahniuk remarkably raises questions about the role played by the American mass media vis-à-vis the 9/11 attacks.

Further, the Orwellian references and allusions to authoritarianism, together with the critique of the mass media in the narrative are evocative of the restrictive and illiberal character of the "domestic crackdown on civil liberties" (2014: 21), which, according to Gibbs, the Patriot Act has prompted with the aid of "the media's selective and incessant repetition of images in the days following attacks" (126) which enabled the policy-makers to exploit and transform "a shared sense of grief in[to] an ideological national unity based on blind patriotism" (136). Thus, the critical stance towards media that permeates the narrative exceptionally prompts a discussion at a time most needed.

Hence, both novels incorporate traumatic themes and are narrated by severely traumatized protagonists. In both cases, the narrator communes with other distressed and suffering individuals who collectively comprise a gathering of the wounded. In this context, the narratives, per LaCapra's concept, constitute perfect examples of "traumatic writing" which is "experimental, gripping, and risky symbolic emulation" and "writing in closest proximity to" (2014: 105) trauma, and since the novels do not "circumvent[s]," "deny," or "repress[es]" trauma, and instead boldly portray the results and vicissitudes of extreme suffering, they never become "redemptive" narratives (98).

Yet **Fight Club** and **Lullaby** fundamentally diverge vis-à-vis their narrators' post-traumatic process: while the former lacks any elements pertaining to working through trauma, and is almost wholly comprised of acting-out related, "destructive and self-destructive" (LaCapra, 2014: 143) behaviors, the latter incorporates a narrator-protagonist who is, in the last analysis, able to obtain "critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal" (2014: 66). By articulating his traumatic suffering, witnessing and empathizing with similarly-traumatized individuals, and mourning, the narrator of **Lullaby** is thus able to work through his trauma, and his narration is comprised of both elements of acting out, or berserking, and working through. Consequently, the shift in the novels' approach to and portrayal of the post-traumatic process is directly indicative of the "new

subjectivity," which, according to Kaplan, 9/11 engendered in the American psyche (2005: 4).

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