



T.C.

**ÇANAKKALE ONSEKİZ MART UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

**VIOLENCE, VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND POLITICS OF
NARRATIVE IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S *ROOM* AND EIMEAR
MCBRIDE'S *A GIRL IS A HALF-FORMED THING***

MASTER'S THESIS

ELİF KAPLANLAR

Advisor

ASST. PROF. ÖZLEM TÜRE ABACI

ÇANAKKALE – 2024



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Elif KAPLANLAR tarafından Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Özlem TÜRE ABACI yönetiminde hazırlanan ve **16/08/2024** tarihinde aşağıdaki jüri karşısında sunulan “**Violence, Vicarious Trauma and Politics of Narrative in Emma Donoghue’s *Room* and Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing***” başlıklı çalışma, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü **Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı’nda YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ** olarak oy birliği ile kabul edilmiştir.

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü Tez Yazım Kuralları'na uygun olarak hazırladığım bu tez çalışmasında; tez içinde sunduğum verileri, bilgileri ve dokümanları akademik ve etik kurallar çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, tüm bilgi, belge, değerlendirme ve sonuçları bilimsel etik ve ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduğumu, tez çalışmasında yararlandığım eserlerin tümüne uygun atıfta bulunarak kaynak gösterdiğimi, kullanılan verilerde herhangi bir değişiklik yapmadığımı, bu tezde sunduğum çalışmanın özgün olduğunu, bildirir, aksi bir durumda aleyhime doğabilecek tüm hak kayıplarını kabullendiğimi taahhüt ve beyan ederim.

I hereby declare that all information in this master's thesis “Violence, Vicarious Trauma and Politics of Narrative in Emma Donoghue’s *Room* and Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*” has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Elif KAPLANLAR

16/08/2024

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Elif KAPLANLAR
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ÖZET

EMMA DONOGHUE’NUN *ROOM* VE EIMEAR MCBRIDE’IN *A GIRL IS A HALF-FORMED THING* ROMANLARINDA ŞİDDET, İKİNCİL TRAVMA VE ANLATI POLİTİKALARI

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Modern travma romanına örnek oluşturan Emma Donoghue’nun *Room* (2010) ve Eimear McBride’in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) romanları savunmasız anlatıcı ve alışılmışın dışında anlatı formları aracılığıyla travmatik deneyimin çok katmanlı doğasını vurgular. *Room*, fiziksel hapis, yabancılaşma ve cinsel istismar temalarını beş yaşındaki Jack’in bakış açısı ve sembolik anlatısı aracılığıyla incelerken; *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* ise şiddet, cinsel istismar ve bölünmüş kimlik temalarını, hikâyeyi bölük pörçük bir deneysel biçimle aktaran ergen bir anlatıcının objektifinden resmeder. Bu romanlar, biçimsel açıdan anlatılması zor travmatik deneyimleri aktarma konusunda dile meydan okur ve anlatıcıların psikolojik gelişimini farklı anlatısal öğeler vasıtasıyla ele alır. Bu tez, Dominick LaCapra ve Cathy Caruth’un kuramsal çerçevelerini temel alarak seçili romanlarda travma kavramının çok boyutlu yapısını, hayatta kalma travması ve ikincil travma kavramlarını metinsel örneklerle incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tezin analiz bölümleri, karakterlerin travmatik olaylar sonrasında hayatta kalma çabalarına, kolektif bilinç içerisinde travmatik aktarımların resmedilişine odaklanır. Anlatı biçimlerinden, anlatıcı türünden ve travma anlatılarının temel özelliklerinden yola çıkarak bu tez, travmatik deneyimin, savunma mekanizmalarının ve genç kurgusal karakterlerdeki savunmasızlığın; sözel, anlatıya dayalı ve tematik dışavurumlarını anlamayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Modern Travma Romanı, Hayatta Kalma Travması, İkincil Travma, Travma Anlatısı, Emma Donoghue, Eimear McBride.



ABSTRACT

VIOLENCE, VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND POLITICS OF NARRATIVE IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S *ROOM* AND EIMEAR MCBRIDE'S *A GIRL IS A HALF-FORMED THING*

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As examples of the modern trauma novel, Emma Donoghue's *Room* (2010) and Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) highlight the multilayered nature of traumatic experience through vulnerable narrators and unconventional narrative forms. *Room* explores the themes of physical confinement, alienation and sexual abuse from the perspective of a five-year-old narrator, Jack, while *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* portrays the themes of violence, sexual abuse and fragmented identity through the lens of an unnamed adolescent narrator, the girl, who conveys the story in an experimental half-formed style. Through the perspectives of these narrators, the selected novels challenge the language in terms of conveying inexpressible traumatic experiences and portray interrelated factors as stressors in the narrators' psychological development and their style of expression in the narrative. Based on the theoretical frameworks of Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth, this thesis aims to form a connection between the selected novels in terms of traumatic complexes and hauntings by exploring the concepts of trauma of survival and trauma of witnessing. The analysis chapters focus on the survival attempts of the characters after traumatic incidents and portrayal of traumatic transference within the collective memory as well as encompassing the trauma of witnessing through the lens of the narrators. Drawing on the narrative styles, type of narrators and major tropes of trauma narratives, this thesis aims to understand the verbal, narrative and thematic manifestations of the traumatic experience, coping mechanisms and vulnerability in underage fictional characters.

Keywords: Modern Trauma Novel, Trauma of Survival, Vicarious Trauma, Trauma Narrative, Emma Donoghue, Eimear McBride.



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The concept of trauma, corresponding to the physical wounds, has undergone a fundamental transformation in terms of its meaning until the foundation of psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud's preliminary works in the 1900s. Freud's discipline of psychoanalysis, along with his analyses of the functions of the unconscious mind, attach theoretical significance to the term. Freud's studies provide a diagram illustrating human psychology within a scientific framework. Alongside the terms that depict the layers of human psychology, Freud's approach to the field introduced a variety of concepts concerning psychological disturbances. Despite the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis in early trauma studies, modern trauma theorists rejected relying solely on the Freudian approach while investigating traumatic experiences. In particular, Freud considered trauma as a complex phenomenon rather than a cultural discourse and his observations lacked a detailed examination of the female perspective. In this sense, modern trauma theory has adopted Freud's terminology, yet broadened the limits of the concepts validating trauma's socio-cultural value.

Cathy Caruth, a first wave literary trauma theorist, introduces the concept of trauma of survival and explores the disruptive nature of trauma in language and the psyche, and offers an optimistic perspective in the cases of extreme experience. Caruth's trauma of survival prioritizes life drive contrary to Freud's conclusions that traumatic repetitions result in death and destruction in the face of a traumatic event. Trauma of survival, challenging the psychoanalytical perspective on repetitions, puts emphasis on the role of survival as an uncharted territory and its empowering quality for psychological healing. Apart from individual trauma, pluralistic trauma theory addresses the intricate relationship of trauma with the feeling of empathy considering individual identity as part of collective memory. In this respect, Dominick LaCapra's pluralistic approach to trauma theory forms the basis of collective trauma and defines individual identity within a cultural framework. LaCapra's 'empathic unsettlement' focuses on the transference of the traumatic experiences and provides an insight into the complex nature of trauma when combined with others' extreme experiences, as in the example of historical events and their effects on witnesses and descendants. Traumatic experiences, whether individual or collective, damage the victim(s)'s psychology from the perspective of modern trauma theorists.

Trauma narratives centre on the concept of trauma and its detrimental aspect in expression and explore literary texts in relation to the major tropes in trauma theory alongside narratological elements. Given the psychological, and at times physical, mutilation of traumatic experiences, the focal point of trauma narratives revolves around portraying inexpressible feelings caused by trauma's destructive nature, both thematically and linguistically. According to Anne Whitehead a "traumatic event is not experienced or assimilated fully at the time that it occurs, but only belatedly in its insistent and intrusive return, and hence is not available in the usual way to memory and interpretation" (2004: 12). Traumatic occurrences, drawing on Whitehead's definition, prevent a straightforward testimony and render the victim metaphorically and physically tongue-tied. In this respect, the themes of sexual abuse, alienation, witnessing and confinement might be observed in trauma narratives conveyed through an experimental style to reflect the fractured mind of the traumatized. Moreover, trauma narratives represent a form of a ruptured unconscious mind in literary form.

Emma Donoghue's *Room* (2010) and Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) share similar themes in terms of exploring trauma in contemporary fiction. Both novels are narrated by underage narrators who experience extreme conditions that traumatize them. In *Room*, through an interpretive language reflected by symbolism, a child narrator conveys the story of his and his mother's captivity and eventual freedom. The novel also delves into the themes of sexual abuse, violence and alienation. Similarly, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* is narrated by an adolescent narrator who struggles to maintain her psychological balance and is deeply traumatized by the sexual abuse she experiences. The character's unstable psychology, because of the sexual abuse and problems in family environment, is portrayed through the fragmented language embedded in the narrative. However, the novels also offer different approaches while examining language and thematic preferences. Therefore, previous studies have examined the journey of these characters with a focus on the theme of confinement, generic analysis, feminist approach and psychoanalytical perspective.

A generic analysis, as one of the approaches to the novels, might reveal cultural hints and motifs reflected in the texts. Both novels have been categorized as Bildungsroman, revealing "the troubling dyadic figure of the traumatized child and pathological adolescent" (Fogarty, 2015: 13). Contemporary Irish Bildungsroman tradition is based on the image of

an underage character who challenges the adult understanding through pain, trauma and fragmentation. However, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*'s fragmented language complicates the generic classification of novel a Bildungsroman since it represents both a disconnection with reality and an interruption which prevents the main character moving forward to womanhood (Abdel-Rahman Téllez, 2018: 12). Hence, the main character's "story of unbecoming" destroys itself with sexual traumatization, violence and fragmentation (12). To put it another way, the character's failure to grow into a woman is presented through a half-formed narrative with the themes of religion, depression, violence and sexual abuse, resulting in a failed Bildungsroman. In addition to the thematic approaches to Irish Bildungsroman, linguistic analysis has also been employed as a tool to understand the complexity of the novel. When compared to James Joyce's works, Bazarnik argues that McBride's style lacks "Joycean richness in vocabulary" and as a result of this lack, the novel transforms into an "anti-Bildungsroman" (2018: 77). Along with the lack of long sentences, the anti-Bildungsroman elements in the novel include McBride's experimental style in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* which can also be inferior to that of Joyce (77). In this respect, the generic analyses of the novels reveal an unconventional image for *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* with its experimental style and challenging themes while *Room* adheres to the conventions of contemporary Irish Bildungsroman tradition.

The traumatic experiences of the protagonists in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* and *Room*, 'the girl' and 'Ma' respectively, have been analysed from a feminist perspective to show how they suffer from the disadvantages of patriarchy and male control mechanisms. As an example, from a feminist perspective, Antosa depicts the main character in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* as a detached girl from real life who struggles to find an authentic voice and place in male-oriented world (2015: 149). This character's coping mechanism prevents her from "overcome[ing] trauma" after the sexual abuse, and that the language transforms into a tool to express the girl's detached and fragmented identity (159-160). Furthermore, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* explores the place of women in Irish traditional society and questions the role of motherhood in relation to the concept of womanhood. De La Peña contends that the novel draws an image of "abusive mothers in traditional Irish society" who challenge the free will of young women and cause further "anxiety and trauma" within the young girls' psyche (2022: 292). In the novel, an abusive mother complicates the young girls' process of finding her own identity and further diminish her resilience toward other traumatic events (293). This problematic motherhood is part of Irish tradition forming the

base of teenage trauma and increasing inherent problems and further traumas (293). On the other hand, *Room* complicates a feminist reading in relation to spatial and physical interactions related to power. In the novel, 'Old Nick' and his "discipline and subjugation" techniques function as power and control (Demir, 2024: 233). Old Nick's disciplinary tactics are forced upon the characters 'Jack' and 'Ma' (233). Moreover, Old Nick's control relies on psychological manipulation and physical domination, especially in the case of the character, Ma (234). Hence, 'Old Nick' represents patriarchy which subjugates vulnerable groups and undermine female identity.

The concept of confinement is a dominant theme, especially in Donoghue's *Room*, which results in different conditions for each character. Gebauer argues that Jack's narration is an example of "cognitive dissonance", which is closely associated with his imprisonment and environmental changes that cause an extreme stress for him (2021: 271). In other words, the use of language in *Room* reveals the child's alienation from a mature understanding of the world which provides an insight into a child's perspective (270-271). This approach to the theme of confinement encapsulates a stylistic and linguistic examination of the novel. However, Citra and Wulan analyse the theme of confinement through the perspective of the character 'Ma', with an emphasis on her role as the carer in confinement, which may place additional stress on her. In the novel, Ma's role as a mother is described as an overwhelming experience alongside the abuse she endures: "mother as an educator, mother as a carer of family's physical and mental health, mother as a company and mother as a communicator" (Citra and Wulan, 2022: 134). These observations are based on the mother's caring and protective behaviour in the face of the dangers and her resilience empowered by the presence of her son (136-137). Alongside the linguistic aspect and the theme of motherhood, Fujikawa observes that Ma and Jack's confinement and freedom are different experiences which also affect the characters separately (2020: 7). Jack's alienation starts with his escape to an alien world, whereas Ma's experience of returning to a familiar place as a new person affects her differently. In this sense, different characteristics and consequences of extreme isolation can be observed in *Room*.

Employing the attachment theory and Jacques Lacan's arguments, Najeeb et al. draw attention to the unhealthy bonding between the mother and the son in Donoghue's *Room* (2024: 458). They find this relationship problematic since Jack lacks individuation and an understanding of himself as a separate being from his mother (458). Jack's "reluctance" to

leave the room is directly related to his bond with Ma and how he feels about a possible loss of this bonding in the outside world (458-460). Jack's bond with Ma affects Jack's psychological development process and also his comprehension of the concept of gender. In the case of the gender, Murphy points out the traces of queer child in connection with castration desire (2022: 57). Jack's feminine qualities such as adopting feminine roles in private sphere, mistaken for a girl by the others and being born with a pinkish skin contrary to his stillborn, blue-coloured sister appear as queer patterns in the character development (57). In this respect, Jack's environment and Ma's reactions shape his identity throughout the story. Moreover, psychoanalytical perspective reflects these consequences of living in an extreme isolation and its effects on human psyche.

Through thematic, linguistic and generic analysis, both novels give insight into different struggles of vulnerable groups and the extreme effects of psychological trauma. Apart from the previous approaches to the novels, this study focuses on developing a deeper understanding of the traumatized mind and its linguistic expressions by means of exploring narratological devices. These narratological devices enable a detailed examination of the characters and also show that the novels delve into the traumatic expressions of underage narrators and their psychological problems through linguistic and thematic signifiers. Moreover, this thesis attempts to analyse trauma narratives through the lenses of vulnerable groups and explore their sufferings in finding a place for themselves in the world after experiencing traumatic events. The sufferings of these characters are observed through the arguments of contemporary trauma theory in order to trace psychological hints embedded in the language and to highlight how literary texts, written by women writers, reflect the testimonies of trauma victims. This study, therefore, aims to provide an insight into representations of trauma in different age groups and to reveal a female approach to the concept through narratological decisions of women writers of the selected novels.

The introduction of the thesis is followed by the theoretical background and three analysis chapters based on major themes in modern trauma novels. Chapter Two is divided into six subtopics covering the historical references and different types of traumas including trauma narrative and its elements. These subtopics include (1) trauma theory and historical references, (2) trauma of survival, (3) empathic unsettlement and vicarious trauma in pluralistic trauma theory, (4) transgenerational trauma, (5) the trauma of sexual abuse, violence and the involvement of confinement, and (6) the trauma narrative and

child/adolescent narrators. The analytical sections include a brief introduction followed by a comparative analysis of concerned themes and tropes. Divided into three chapters, the analytical sections offer a close reading of the novels based on the following concepts: firstly, trauma and narrative politics, secondly, vicarious trauma (trauma of witnessing), and lastly, testimonial narratives of survival from physical and sexual violence in the selected novels.

The theoretical framework of the thesis mainly relies on Cathy Caruth's trauma of survival and Dominick LaCapra's pluralistic approach to traumatic memory. Chapter Two provides brief historical references to the concept of trauma, mainly referring to the foundation of psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud's preliminary works. Freudian apparatuses of pleasure and reality principle are examined in an attempt to explore earlier definitions of trauma. Considering these apparatuses, the concepts of life and death drive are further investigated in order to understand Caruth's approach to the concept of trauma of survival. Caruth's arguments concerning the healing quality of traumatic reoccurrences are discussed in relation to past definitions of the concept. Furthermore, Dominick LaCapra's empathic unsettlement is introduced in an attempt to explore the concepts of transgenerational trauma and trauma of witnessing. Through the examination of trauma as a part of the collective memory, LaCapra's perspective broadens the limits of trauma and provides a cultural paradigm for the concept. Alongside the place of trauma in cultural discourse, the features of trauma narratives and narratological elements are examined based on the arguments of Suzanne Keen and Anne Whitehead. Barbara Wall's arguments on underage narrators are reconsidered to question the contradictions adult writers face when they refer to children and adults as the voice of a child.

Chapter Three discusses the fractured narrative in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* through the narration of an adolescent girl. The novel unfolds the girl's recollection of the past and encourages the reader to participate in the protagonist's journey through an experimental stream-of-consciousness style. It also portrays a psychologically troubled young girl's attempt to find her own identity by defying her mother, her struggle to cope with her brother's terminal illness and sexual abuse she experienced. Through an analysis of the linguistic structure in the novel, it is possible to trace a correlation between the ruptures in the narrator's memory and the half-formed narration portrayed in the novel. In this sense, considering trauma narratives, language reveals how psychologically unstable narrators can be unreliable and how a traumatized mind loses its proper function in testimonies. Secondly,

Room's symbolic language and the child narrator are analysed to understand the nature of trauma narratives. In the novel, a five-year-old child attempts to explore the limits of reality while he suffers from secondary traumatization and alienation. The novel problematizes the questions of how to convey the traumatic experience through a child's voice that is not completely removed from the adult perspective and how to find the balance between the child voice and adult writer without compromising the child image. This chapter further examines the inner world and imagination of the protagonist in order to reveal the traces of trauma through symbolic references and consistency in the voice of the narrator.

Chapter Four revolves around the themes of confinement and vicarious trauma (trauma of witnessing) to investigate their role on the collective and individual traumatic memory in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. In the novel, transgenerational trauma is introduced with the portrayal of the character, the grandfather. This character demonstrates a pattern of religious obsession and paternal oppression on his daughter, the protagonist's mother, through the practice of aggression. The same obsessions can be observed in the mother as she deals with the protagonist's nonconformist behaviour. This chapter investigates the traces of collective trauma through a close look at this complex family relationship and transgenerational practices. The relationship of the protagonist with her terminally ill brother leads to extreme psychological confinement as the manifestation of the themes of witnessing decay and death. In *Room*, the theme of confinement transforms into a physical form of isolation in addition to psychological seclusion. Conveyed through a child narrator, the novel provides a testimonial narrative in which a child witnesses his mother's sexual victimization. Kidnapped and imprisoned by a man in her adolescence, the main character, Ma, suffers from physical and psychological isolation living in a shed and feels alienated from the outside world. Yet, her son, Jack, born into confinement, considers the room his home until their escape. These characters' confinement and alienation differ in practice, especially after the escape, since Jack struggles in an unfamiliar world after being torn apart from his home, 'Room', whereas Ma attempts to adapt to a familiar environment after returning to it as a different woman who is now deeply traumatized by the imprisonment and constant sexual abuse. In other words, the chapter, from this point on, questions the nature of alienation and confinement in addition to examining the concept of home.

Chapter Five focuses mainly on survival through traumatic repetitions of sexual abuse cases in the selected novels. In *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, a young woman's

attempt to overcome trauma by means of extreme violence is observed. With the aim of retaining power, the protagonist engages in random sexual encounters, further damaging her psyche with violent repetitions and leading her to commit suicide. The chapter explores the protagonist's traumatic survival process, questioning the extent to which healing is possible. Despite the mother's failed suicide attempts in *Room*, she resists 'death drive' and total destruction because of her family bond, especially motherhood. Aside from the healing quality of family, the destructive aspect of extreme bonding with one's child in confinement is investigated within the context of depersonalization. This chapter provides an insight into the process of overcoming trauma after injurious experiences which result in both survival and death based on extreme cases of abuse and bonding.

This study offers a close reading of the concepts and tropes in relation with the literary representations of trauma and testimonial narratives by revisiting the main arguments in interdisciplinary trauma studies and literary trauma studies. The study does not intend to include an in-depth psychoanalytical approach to trauma and a technical analysis through concepts from the field of narratology. It rather aims to employ the theoretical concepts in contemporary approaches to trauma theory and narratives. Despite being the foundation of modern trauma theory, the failure of psychoanalysis in finding the answers for psychological struggles of the individuals in modern society encouraged this thesis to employ contemporary arguments while analysing the selected novels. As the main aim of the analysis is to foreground how narrators from vulnerable age groups might contribute to the modern perspectives on trauma novels, the narratological analysis mainly includes the types of narrators used in both novels and the manifestations of trauma in narrative discourse.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Trauma Theory and Historical References

Trauma theory is based on comprehending and examining traumatic occurrences by making use of literary and historical sources. The term trauma can be traced back to ancient Greece, where it was described “as [physical] wounds” rather than its contemporary interpretation of psychological and emotional strains (Huppertz, 2019: 3). The pain and suffering caused by physical injuries can be associated with mental pain experienced by the trauma sufferer. Therefore, the contemporary definition of trauma extends the concept to connect physical conditions with psychological disturbances. Susan R. Suleiman defines a traumatic event as a concept which “produces an excess of external stimuli and a corresponding excess of excitation in the brain” (2008: 276). Suleiman’s neurological definition shows that traumatic situations can elicit extreme emotions, and physical manifestations of these sensations can be observed through brain activities. In addition, James Berger elaborates on a larger scale as an “interpretation of cultural symptoms—of the growths, wounds, scars on a social body and its compulsive, repeated actions” (1997: 572-573). In other words, the concept of trauma refers to not only a medical condition, but also a cultural, social and transgenerational paradigm.

Alongside the contemporary definitions of trauma, psychoanalytical interpretation of trauma might inform this study in terms of tracing narrative qualities of trauma and understanding how traumatic narrative is structured in literary texts. Psychoanalysis is associated with the works of Sigmund Freud, who pioneered the field in 1900s during his medical career as a neurologist. At the time, he was influenced by the work of others, as much as he influenced his colleagues in the field (Fancher, 1973: 24-25). Josef Breuer was one of these figures who collaborated with Freud between 1886-1892 on many cases showing signs of trauma, which became the foundation for their collective work of *Studies on Hysteria* (Smith, 1999: 22). The book exhibits the research performed by Freud and Breuer to investigate how hysteria manifests itself in traumatic situations and damages a person's psyche. Breuer and Freud analyse the disturbance level of the psyche, which might be observed through the bodily side effects left by a traumatic occurrence, and the patients

tend to exhibit various symptoms such as “neuralgias and anaesthesias of ... various kinds, ... contractures and paralyses, hysterical attacks and epileptoid convulsions, ... various forms of disturbance of vision, constantly recurrent visual hallucinations etc.” (1955: 4). The study might also establish that physical disturbances and psychological symptoms are interrelated elements that impact an individual’s both physical and mental integrity; moreover, unresolved psychological disruptions can manifest as mental illness and jeopardize a person’s health. In this respect, treating certain medical conditions requires an examination of the patients’ traumatic experiences.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud further explains how the pleasure principle is in clash with the reality principle which results in unsatiated inner drives and manifestation of psychological disturbances. Freud, in this work, also discusses additional meanings of these principles and how traumatic neuroses manifest themselves as a part of this mechanism. The text’s investigation of these psychic apparatuses characterizes trauma as a concept which forms the basis of contemporary trauma theory. According to Freud, the surprise element and the possibility of a physical wound are the prominent factors of traumatic neuroses (2003: 84). In this sense, psychological disturbances originate from the fright of the individual at the time of an extreme event while an inherent physical injury can enhance the negative effects. Freud’s argument suggests that primitive urges might be disturbed by dangerous situations; in threatening situations the desires are ungratified and produce intensive negative emotions. As a result, the basic human needs remain unsatisfied and individuals struggle to maintain mental health.

The traumatic experience can be considered a process rather than a reaction to a single event. Based on Freud’s repetition compulsion phenomena, Bassel A. Van Der Kolk touches upon this issue, by indicating that the traumatic memories can haunt the victim through reenactment of the event by means of disturbing sensations, horrific nightmares or the combination of these concepts (1989: 389). The traumatic event, therefore, haunts the victim even after the incident by means of episodic returns. Moreover, Freudian psychoanalysis associates these repetitions with ‘death drive’ and an urge for destruction until the sufferer loses mental stability and starts to show signs of disorders or suicidal tendencies. In other words, the victim’s psyche urges them to return to the traumatic event in an attempt to overcome the trauma. Paul L. Russell refers to this condition as “a paradox” and a “self-destruction versus ... healing” (2006: 34). By mentioning self-destruction,

Russell also refers to the Freudian death drive. Furthermore, traumatic events might lead the victims into a loop in which healing is only possible if the trauma is revisited countless times through dreams, thought process and re-enactment of the traumatic event. As a result, the psyche's attempt to overcome trauma by re-enacting the event degrades the mental stability of the victim instead of providing relief. Consequently, the process of trauma, therefore, may cause symptoms of mental disorders in which the psyche's attempt to heal is destined to fail because of the trauma's destructive nature.

Freudian representation of trauma and the terms he introduced to the field enables a deeper understanding of psychological and neurological characteristics of trauma; however, Freud's obsession with sexual desire and the lack of a female and cultural approach led modern trauma theorists to adopt a multidimensional perspective in order to correspond to the problems that modern individuals experience. Michelle Balaev describes psychoanalytic theory as "the basis of criticism that interprets representations of an extreme experience and its effects upon identity and memory" and broadens the definition of trauma by referring to the modern interdisciplinary approach which includes the fields of "poststructural, sociocultural, and postcolonial theory" (2018: 360). Balaev further discusses the first wave criticism of trauma theory and refers to its connection with literature by explaining the aim of the criticism as "analy[sing] emotional suffering in texts as well as the language of loss, disruption, and fragmentation" (p. 363). Modern trauma theory, according to the arguments of Balaev, combines a traditional framework with several fields in an attempt to understand trauma through new methods and contribute to the field with new perspectives regarding multidimensional contextualization. Drawing a connection between trauma and language, Balaev also view the literature as one of the contemporary means of expressing trauma through words (p. 363). Nicole A. Sütterlin's interpretation of trauma encompasses "the transformation of a medical concept into a cultural paradigm," and it draws a parallel with Balaev's modern understanding of the concept of trauma and the function of the psyche (2020: 15). In other words, modern trauma theory can enrich the meaning of trauma by making use of several fields and remodelling a medical condition in order to define the term within the context of both a cultural and an individual framework.

2.2. Trauma of Survival

Modern trauma theory recognizes the concept of trauma as both a medical condition and a social discourse; moreover, the theory “grows ... out of the complex interaction of suffering, law, ethics and medicine” (Davis and Meretoja, 2020: 3). The modern perspective offers a multidimensional approach, highlighting various cultural and individual frameworks in the field. Trauma studies, as one of these branches, has established “a deep engagement with literary theory” and provide a contemporary approach to the field with an aim to give voice to the “unspeakable” aspects of the stories of the traumatized individuals (Kennedy, 2020: 55). Literary texts, therefore, serve as a means of expressing the inexpressible facets of traumatic events that haunt the individuals even after the experience. In this regard, literature might give an insight into the ways in which people experience trauma within testimonial narratives and language might be analysed as a tool to explore the limits of traumatic experiences.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth shows the link between the concepts of survival and trauma, which coexist in the face of a horrific event, by defining trauma as “an effect of destruction but also ... an enigma of survival” (1996: 58). Caruth’s concept of the trauma of survival offers a new perspective on trauma theory and challenges Freudian interpretation of trauma by showing how the psyche reacts afterward. In other words, by focusing on the experience, Caruth reinterprets Freud’s handling of patients with neuroses and rejects his prioritization of the role of libido in examining the causes of trauma. Caruth defines the relationship between trauma and survival as an “unmediated relation between consciousness and life-threatening events, [and] the very paradoxical structure of indirectness in psychic trauma” (1996: 60). The traumatic quality of survival resides in the inexplicable nature of the event of trauma itself. Moreover, trauma might be the result of a failure to recognize the external threat; in fact, it might be completely unknown to the psyche. Caruthian perspective then draws attention to the process of making the unknown more familiar until it creates disturbances within the psyche.

In Caruthian framework, post-trauma process and repetitions might have positive connotations contrary to the arguments of psychoanalysis. Caruth applies the concepts of life and death drive in relation to the concept of survival, drawing attention to the trauma victim’s willingness to survive by overcoming trauma through a tenacious effort (Ong 2014: 102). In other words, Ong argues that an individual’s biological well-being is directly related to their

‘life drive,’ while the condition of survival has an anti-life connotation since it coexists with death and destruction (102). Therefore, in the face of a traumatic event, repetition might represent a step to overcome trauma, and it also means re-enacting the event of death and destruction. However, unlike Freud, who theorizes that repetitions are the causes of neuroses, Caruth considers repetitions as a remembrance of the act of survival which encourages the traumatized to take steps forward through the healing process (p. 103). Consequently, Caruth’s concept of the trauma of survival encapsulates the traumatic event and the struggle to adapt to the new reality by interpreting the process as a step that eventually heals the wounds of trauma.

The compulsion to repeat appears as a symbol in testimonies, which highlights the difficult nature of telling the victim’s traumatic story. Caruth also focuses on language and trauma fiction regarding the link between testimony by stating that the testimony “not only [shows] the nature of violent events but [also] ... resists simple comprehension” (1996: 6). The language, therefore, might be a tool to express the complex feelings that trauma leaves on individuals, including those who witness the testimony. However, by “resisting simple comprehension” the testimonies also become “unrepresentable” (6). Caruth’s arguments address the difficulties in depicting traumatic situations as the traumatized individual might struggle to define what happened in terms of time, setting and emotions; thus, the repetitions serve as flashbacks and memories in a testimony. Moreover, Caruth’s analyses might also show that the repetitions do not simply reflect truths, but rather represent fragments of memories which require examination. In this respect, Caruth’s focal point encompasses both an individual’s survival and the entire process as a social discourse.

The trauma sufferers might struggle to share their experiences of trauma from an objective point of view because the fragmentation caused by the emotional stress can prevent a straightforward expression of the event. Caruth stresses the difficulty of telling the stories of the traumatized because the traumatic experience “is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, ... [and] can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (1996: 18). Hence, Caruth also focuses on the unexplainable quality of trauma and the impossibility of unravelling the truth in the face of trauma. Moreover, language can lose its capability to define an individual’s feelings and emotions after facing an excessive event; therefore, it might be difficult to encounter an intact testimony. Surviving trauma coexists with the concept of resilience, which designates how a victim responds to a

traumatic experience. Caruth's definition of resilience encompass the "attempt to assume one's survival as one's own" in traumatic situations (64). By claiming survival, the victim can focus on moving forward which also affects adaptation process (64). Therefore, the ability to adapt to the new reality might be associated with the process of survival.

Moreover, the concept of resilience might not inherently have a positive or negative connotation; instead, it affects where the victims stand in this dichotomy. Being exposed to extreme experiences might trigger a defence mechanism in the victims which results in further victimization or being a potential victimizer (Fosha, 2002: 5). Moreover, the individual's traumatic experiences might affect how they respond to trauma. Caruth's reinterpretation of 'life drive' in the face of repetitions, in this regard, suggests that a person's will to adapt to reality after trauma might also be linked to their level of resilience. In Caruth's perspective, it is possible to employ a positive attitude while experiencing repetitions. In other words, trauma can change individuals' perspectives by advancing them toward healing no matter how destructive the experience was.

2.3. Empathic Unsettlement and Vicarious Trauma in Pluralistic Trauma Theory

Contrary to the traditional approach, which primarily focuses on the individual, pluralistic trauma theory offers a collective point of view that encapsulates both individual and collective experiences that transcend time and undermine mainstream racial and political preconceptions. Pluralistic trauma can be defined as a trauma which can be experienced even centuries later by an individual with a similar historical, social and political background. The traumatic memory, in other words, is not limited to the details such as date, setting or place, instead, it can be transferred to future generations. Moreover, "trauma narratives can recreate and abreact the experience for those who were not there—the reader, listener, or witness can experience the historical experience first hand" (Balaev, 2008: 152). In this respect, trauma has no limits or boundaries concerning the transference of the experience since extreme emotions caused by trauma can be conveyed through empathy towards the listener. A historical trauma, similarly, can be transferred to the individuals, who have no first-hand experience through empathy. Therefore, in specific cases, historical trauma might reshape a modern individual's cultural identity through empathy and allow the sharing of experiences by people from different eras. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra

argues that trauma affects individuals on a larger scale when certain events leave a traumatic mark on the collective memory which “paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group” (2014: 23). In this regard, trauma might be deeply rooted in a cultural and historical experience, and some cultures may be more prone to feeling the effects of the traumatic experience. As an example, collective memory might form a collective identity through shared experiences and process of remembering, as in modern African Americans, who feel similar to their slave ancestors, although they have never experienced enslavement (Eyerman, 2004: 60-61). Collective trauma, therefore, can persist in the memory of individuals from the same or similar cultures.

Trauma, whether individual or collective, is a disturbing experience which threatens the integrity of the self and fragments the reality of the individual. Furthermore, it might be difficult to control and reflect the emotions that trauma leaves as a mark while attempting to overcome the disruptive experiences. Traumatic experiences might also affect people who witness the process from a distance. Dominick LaCapra enhances the meaning of empathy by coining the term “empathic unsettlement [which] poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places [the self] in jeopardy [by] harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events” (2014: 41). The concept of empathy highlights the attempt to feel and see things from other individuals’ perspectives. However, beyond the positive meaning of empathy, the negative quality of the concept is suggested by LaCapra’s definition of empathic unsettlement as “feeling one’s way into another, even reexperiencing what the other has experienced” (2018: 48). Moreover, LaCapra’s argument might function as a new perspective in understanding negative emotions caused by trauma through empathy.

Empathic unsettlement challenges the perspective of individuals by revealing problems related to history and representation. LaCapra describes unsettling emotions while showing empathy as a “‘therapeutic’ transformation, even a kind of conversion experience, in our use of language, our imagination, our emotional responses, and related forms of life.” (2018: 62). Empathic unsettlement, in a way, might reevaluate the historical narratives by establishing a connection between the identity and the collective memory. The term also highlights an individual’s attempt to embrace an engagement with another’s memory and identity. LaCapra further approaches the term empathy as “a form of virtual ... experience related to emotional response [which] comes with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other is not one's own” (2014: 40). Considering LaCapra’s

arguments, empathy might trigger unsettling emotions while experiencing others' memories, which can be an overwhelming experience to the receiver. To put it another way, the feeling of empathy allows an individual to be traumatized by the event although this person has no real experience of trauma.

LaCapra relates empathic unsettlement to the concepts of historiography and representation in the portrayal of challenging historical events and remembering of a collective trauma. LaCapra suggests that "all texts or artifacts have their blindnesses and are symptomatic of ideological and more generally contextual forces in society and culture—but not in the same way or with the same effects, whether actual or possible" (2009: 15). He underlines the complexity of representation because historical narratives are deprived of objectivity and a comprehensive understanding of historical experiences (15). Therefore, the representation of historical experiences entails both psychological and political disputes within the context of historical narratives. This distinction is further exemplified by LaCapra in close contact with "Holocaust studies" and "[t]estimonies [which] are significant in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with—or denying and repressing—the past" (2014: 86-87). LaCapra, in other words, suggests that different national and historical problems which are intertwined in fashion and national identities formed through victimhood might be analysed through the concept of empathic unsettlement. Additionally, LaCapra refers to the collective memory as a concept encapsulating the individual identity which is shaped by historical traces (87-88). Empathic unsettlement, therefore, offers a psycho-political perspective while examining the relationship between individual and collective memory.

Empathic approaches gain importance in the writing, producing and interpreting historical events which are largely disseminated through collective memory and group identification. LaCapra's comment on the use of empathy through traumatic memory as a tool to reconfigure an unbiased portrayal of a historical event is significant in understanding it as the base of "collectivity [which] comes to represent its past in its relation to its present and future." (2014: 96). In contrast to historical educators who utilize empathy as an analytical tool to unravel historical events, LaCapra's concept might aim to analyse empathy and sympathy from a theoretical perspective in an attempt to understand and analyse historical representations within the framework of literary trauma studies. According to LaCapra, "memory that confronts the traumatic dimensions of history is ethically desirable

in coming to terms with the past both for the individual and for the collectivity” (2014: 95). LaCapra’s definition of empathy entails both individual and collective memory because ‘coming to terms with the past’ requires recalling historical events through personal experiences. Moreover, LaCapra also puts emphasis on the significance of feelings since the emotional impact of trauma might distort the language and hinder a collective or individual representation of the event. LaCapra defines this complicated nature of trauma as “a distortion [which] disrupts genres or bounded areas, and threatens to collapse distinctions” (96). In this context, the concept of empathic unsettlement approaches history from a literary perspective, in which representation might fail due to the destructive nature of trauma, and it reaches beyond individual identities which are formed by a collective memory.

The vicarious trauma encompasses negative and positive conditions of being afflicted by others’ traumatic experiences. LaCapra employs the term to describe “the dubious appropriation of the status of victim through vicarious or surrogate victimage” (2014: 70-71). ‘Surrogate victimage’ also refers to internalizing other people’s traumas through empathy. However, LaCapra further distinguishes empathy from ‘vicarious experience’ by stating that the former encloses “cognition but is not limited to it” whereas the latter is defined as “unchecked identification” (40). LaCapra’s approach reveals a close connection between the terms, yet empathy is defined as a willing internalization process while vicarious experience refers to the uncontrollable result of this deep identification. In other words, individuals who are willing to establish empathy for the victims unintentionally transform into surrogate sufferers.

Alongside the vicarious experience, LaCapra also draws a parallel between empathy and secondary traumatization by considering the secondary traumatization as a result of ‘empathic unsettlement’ which requires “unmediated identification” (2018: 113). According to LaCapra, empathy might “problematize identity” with the forementioned identification process (133). As a result, the individuals who are exposed to the other people’s sufferings might internalize their mental problems without recognition. Similar to ‘vicarious experience’, ‘secondary traumatization’ stems from forming a deep connection with the trauma sufferer and causes the witness to adopt emotional distress which belongs to the actual victim. Both terms are used to define extreme ‘empathic unsettlement’ in which a voluntary act of empathy results in an unmediated and overwhelming experience involving

internalization with the victim. These concepts enable an understanding of the unavoidable consequences of close contact with the victims of trauma.

2.4. Transgenerational Trauma

Pluralistic trauma theory focuses on the collective identity while examining the individual's struggle to adapt to a new reality after facing traumatic events. Trauma might persist in the collective memory through generations; thus, it is transferred to the individual's identity. In trauma theory, the concept of transgenerational trauma refers to the generational transference of trauma by means of different practices. Gabriele Schwab refers to the transgenerational trauma as "a collective crypt" affecting the descendants of the traumatized with long intervals of revisits. (2010: 46). In this sense, trauma can be stored in the individual memory until it is triggered to be transferred into future generations. Transgenerational trauma, therefore, refers to a collective traumatic memory which is conveyed through practice. Tihamér Bakó and Katalin Zana argue that transgenerational trauma prevents future generations to form an individual identity because they deeply internalize their ancestor's sufferings (2020: 13). Specific traumatic events might define the identity of a group, as they persist in other generations as a result of the parents' tendency to transfer trauma through practices in the family. By destroying the individual identity, transgenerational trauma plays the role of a carrier which burdens the trauma victims with the emergence of ancient practices.

Transgenerational trauma allows certain traumas to persist under the disguise of different practices that transform through generations, such as aggression, silence and absence. Maurice Apprey theorizes the transference of aggression from one generation to the next by stating that "[a]t the outset something is injected from an anterior source; ... something that is stored in this time warp carries a mandate for an errand to be carried out" and that "[a]ctive and passive have by now become interchangeable" (2017: 21). Specific behaviours and emotions might be inherited as a result of previous practices of the ancestors. Moreover, certain behavioural patterns which are stored in a person's memory from other generations might emerge when the situation triggers trauma from the memory. As a result, the victim who is exposed to transgenerational trauma can become the victimizer who transfers trauma to next generations. Transgenerational trauma, by drawing on Apprey's

definition, might also blur the judgments regarding the identity of the oppressor and the oppressed within the framework of pluralistic trauma theory.

The condition of silence can be further examined in relation to the consequences of transgenerational trauma. Rob Baum discusses the concept of silence in relation to the experiences of Holocaust survivors suggesting that “silence becomes not just the form but also the content of the transmission, a content passed between generations, and a form that replicates itself in the re-telling (or its absence)” (2013: 38). By analysing the behaviour of the survivors, Baum reveals similar patterns of silence in the families which are the survivors or the descendants of the Holocaust. Moreover, the study touches upon silence as a symbol which can become a representation of pain and death among the survivors (38-39). In other words, what the original survivors of the Holocaust might have done to avoid reenactment of trauma can become a symbol for the next generation who internalized silence as a part of their identity. Similarly, Jeffrey Prager maintains that transgenerational trauma hinders identity development among the Holocaust survivors by depriving the victims from “occupying a specific location in time and space” (2016: 18). The concept of silence, in this respect, transforms into a practice of transgenerational trauma because the victims are denied of telling their story or fully comprehending the individual trauma they suffer from the historical event. Moreover, incomprehensibility of trauma not only affects the victims who struggle to understand and convey their story, but also prevents future generations to recount the nature of the event by teaching them to remain silent in the face of mentioning the subject of suffering. Therefore, the practice of silence leaves a mark on these generations as an open wound which never heals.

The practices of transgenerational trauma can affect intergenerational relationships between individuals of an interrelated past. The individuals who are exposed to the same historical event can be affected by the different aspects of the conflict. In other words, the oppressed and the oppressor experience different interpretations of the same event regarding the reenactment of the historical event. In this respect, collective trauma might challenge the intergenerational relationships regardless of the ethnic factors. Marilyn Charles, for instance, expresses that the feelings of shame and guilt concerning the Stolen Generation still persists in Australia, therefore, making it difficult to overcome the tension between both sides, and complicating to form healthy social relationships across the cultures (2015: 191). Considering Charles’ arguments regarding the Stolen Generation and the practice of

colonization, trauma can also persist in the victimizer's collective memory and be transferred to the next generation. Moreover, transgenerational trauma, either as the victim or the victimizer, might prevent overcoming the feeling of shame even centuries after the original historical event. As a result, this problematic situation hinders the process of making peace with the past by complicating communication under the mask of silence on both sides.

2.5. Trauma of Sexual Abuse, Violence and the Involvement of Confinement

Trauma of sexual abuse refers to the traumatic symptoms of the victims who suffer from psychological disturbances after experiencing abuse in an attempt to undermine the victim's free by using sexual means. Trauma theory examines individuals who display severe psychological fragmentation after a sexual assault and attempts to understand the perspective of the victim and the event as part of the psychological discourse. Arnon Bentovim states that "sexual abuse consists of the victimizing action on the part of the abuser. 'Sexualization' is the traumatic response characteristic of the individual who is not giving consent or cannot give consent" (1995: 39). The concept of sexual abuse, therefore, describes both the abuser's intent to penetrate through another person's body and the physical and mental resistance of the victim against the forced act. Bentovim and Davenport further describe sexual abuse as "an event which in the same intense or violent way ruptures the protective layer that surrounds the mind, with equally long-lasting consequences for psychic organization" (1992: 33). Sexual abuse, in other words, is a violent act of destroying and harming another person's physical and psychological integrity, leaving permanent damage to the victim's mental and physical health. Moreover, it is based on the urge to establish a full control over a person's will. This violation provides a feeling of accomplishment on the abuser's side while paralyzing the victim to the point of total incapacitation of the feelings. Therefore, the victim struggles to develop the necessary psychological resilience to overcome this physical and psychological attack.

The definitions of sexual abuse can hardly correspond to all victims regarding the diversity of the circumstances and motives. However, David Finkelhor and Angela Browne, while examining childhood sexual abuse, attempt to theorize sexual abuse under the term "traumagenic dynamics" which include "[t]raumatic sexualization, [b]etrayal, [p]owerlessness" and "[s]igmatization" (1985: 531-533). Firstly, 'traumatic sexualization'

indicates the development of dysfunctional sexuality because of the sexual abuse; in a way, children learn to use sexuality as a tool of manipulation (531). Secondly, in 'betrayal,' children experience abuse from a close-circle individual, as a result, struggle to trust their environment after the incident (531-532). Thirdly, the dynamic of 'powerlessness' describes the sense of impotence because the survivor fails to prevent abuse, which can damage the victim's self-esteem (532). Lastly, 'stigmatization' refers to the adoption of negative remarks regarding the abuse, which attribute the guilt to the victim and further trigger the feeling of shame (532-533). Traumagenic dynamics theory is based on the idea that the traumatic behaviour is developed during the childhood period. By focusing on the childhood period, the theory promises to give insight into the mental process of children who experience physical abuse while elaborating on the root causes of trauma concerning the psyche of the victimized. The theory might also be applied to other age groups because traumatic sexualization can emerge in any period and haunt the victim. Therefore, although the cases of sexual abuse differ from one another, there might be similar behavioural patterns regardless of the age and background of the survivors.

The adverse effects and underlying reasons of sexual abuse might be examined through an interdisciplinary approach to the subject since the definition of the concepts of violence and sexual abuse can be blurry when different factors are involved. For instance, the World Health Organization's report on violence and health encompasses the issues of the health sector's unfamiliarity with the problems pertaining the concept of violence as a "cultural product" which aims to deprive the victim of free will (Kappler, 2012: 20-22). In other words, sexual violence, at its core, could be explained as the dominance over the will of another person by using force. The abuser might also take advantage of the health system's lack of recognition concerning the classification of the violence cases. Therefore, the system contributes to the victimizer's intent on hiding behind formalities and escaping from the justice. From a feminist perspective, Christine Griffin (1971) indicates that heterosexual love is associated with female submission under the male dominance in the culture (as cited in Edwards, 1987: 13). In other words, patriarchal societies place women on a vulnerable position under the male dominance and distort the concept of romantic love by associating eroticism with female submission. The patriarchal norms, in a way, promote an obedient female figure who cannot comprehend the difference between abuse and the mainstream patriarchal norms. Therefore, women who suffer from sexual abuse might lack the realization of the situation as a result of male dominance. Consequently, the victimization of

women can become both a psychological and a political issue by focusing on the oppression of women in patriarchal social structures. Vulnerable groups might also become objects of hate, violence and sexual abuse, which damages the psychological and physical integrity of individuals.

Alongside the social discourse around the concepts of sexual abuse and violence, trauma theory focuses on both the victim's psychological state and underlying reasons for violent sexual drives within the framework of psychological discourse. The American Psychiatric Association classifies perverted sexual drives as "deviant arousal[s]" in a typical manner while stating that the molestation of children and adolescents is categorized differently, and that the conditions of "pedophilia" (feeling sexual attraction to the children) and "ephebophilia" (feeling sexual attraction to adolescents) are categorized as "paraphilias" ("sexually arousing fantasies under deviant circumstances") (Rowan, 2006: 4). The terminology of the deviant sexual fantasies might fail to encapsulate behavioural tendencies of the people who are afflicted with the condition. In other words, the "[i]ndividuals who have sex with children without the exclusive urge and/or fantasy would not technically ... be pedophiles or ephebophiles" yet, "[a] true pedophile or ephebophile ... might have urges and fantasies about sex with children and never act on them" (4). Drawing on the arguments concerning the underlying reasons for violence, especially when considering underage individuals, violent and deviant behaviour might leave a mark on the psyche of the victimized. Along with the harmful aspect of traumatic events, both the assailant's purpose and the victimization process of the sufferer reveal trauma's complex nature while exploring the term and its limits.

Extreme situations, as in the example of sexual abuse, might cause individuals to feel isolated since trauma victims tend to display withdrawal from their social environment after the incident. George A. Bonanno et al. contend that psychological withdrawal and the difficulty in adapting to the social environment can be observed in the cases of child sexual abuse (2007: 827). Therefore, sexual abuse victims, especially when abused at an early age, can struggle to adapt to their previous life routine and develop psychological withdrawal. Consequently, people who experience trauma from sexual abuse might display an inability to maintain social interactions, thus tending to suffer from a complete social withdrawal. In other words, the victims' self-isolated behaviour can lead to psychological confinement, which further deteriorates the once traumatized psyche. Regarding the behavioural patterns

in the case of male childhood sexual abuse, Kimberly A. Tyler's findings demonstrate that males who are exposed to sexual abuse show an escalating tendency for resorting to violence in any period of their life in addition to an extreme withdrawal triggering further psychological problems (2002: 574). Namely, the correlation between being a victim of sexual abuse and displaying withdrawal, along with the other abnormal behaviours, may reveal how the victims of sexual abuse show the symptoms of early-developed trauma. However, the concept of confinement not only refers to psychological withdrawal but also indicates physical isolation in which social communication with other people is limited if not completely absent.

Physical confinement, sometimes accompanied by psychological confinement, refers to the state of isolation from normal human conditions in the society while psychological confinement stems from mental isolation. Physical confinement might result in psychological isolation in specific cases; one of the most recognizable situations related to physical confinement is imprisonment or solitary confinement. The individuals who are in prison, as an example, live in isolation for a designated period, and the loss of connection to the real world can deteriorate their mental health. Terry A. Kupers' study, related to solitary confinement, reveals that women in prison are more vulnerable to physical isolation because in confinement and "the experience of solitary confinement can reenact past traumas, including sexual and physical abuse as children and domestic violence as adults" (2017: 121). Confinement, in other words, further traumatizes the victims by depriving them of directing their focus on various escape mechanisms and prevents avoiding traumatic flashbacks. In "The Impact of Isolation on Mental Health", Ruchama Marton touches upon the adverse effects of solitary confinement through the arguments which underline that solitary confinement causes psychopathological symptoms such as "[d]eep psychotic reactions, [e]motional instability and [d]isturbances of body image" (2011: 285-286). Physical confinement may fortify the symptoms of a previous trauma as well as cause further disturbances related to lack of normal human interactions. Therefore, under the circumstances of physical isolation, reenactment of earlier traumas can be inevitable and force the victim's resilience beyond its limits.

2.6. Trauma Narrative and Child/Adolescent Narrator

The term narrative refers to the structure of storytelling which is intended to be conveyed to a designated audience. Moreover, in fictional works, the narrative consists of a sequence of elements which contribute to the form and content of the work. Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires depict the function of narrative as “giv[ing] expression to feelings, but within the framework of a story and its telling” (1988: 1). In other words, narrative depends on telling a story; thus, the elements which can contribute to the ‘telling’ constitute the narrative structure of fictional texts. The term fiction, on the other hand, can be described by Suzanne Keen as “[t]he species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters” (2003: 1). Keen’s dictionary definition might highlight the emphasis on the concept of fabrication regarding the story content. As a further description, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan defines narrative fiction as “the narration of a succession of fictional events” (2002: 2). Furthermore, by adding to the arguments of Rimmon-Kenan, in literary works, the sequence of events is arranged according to the genre of the work since some genres might require unorthodox techniques such as using fragmented language or deviating from grammatical rules in order to convey the message to the audience. Trauma narratives, as one of these sub-genres, might manifest the use of disruptive narrative form or more experimental narration techniques.

Trauma narratives, closely interlinked with trauma studies, focus mainly on how traumatic memory or experience fragments language, obscures meaning in order to show disintegration of the trauma sufferers’ psyche. Psychological theories and studies inform the literary output in examining the rupture within language and narrative form and enable a more systematic approach to the analysis of literary manifestations of trauma. In “Trauma Within the Limits of Literature” Geoffrey Hartman describes the aim of trauma studies as “[exploring] the relation between psychic wounds and signification” (2003: 257). Moreover, the concepts of trauma and literature can be closely interrelated since language carries hidden meanings which can reveal psychological traces of the writer. Robert Eaglestone also draw attention to how traumatic incidents might be traced through linguistic analysis since trauma “and time ... [are] inextricably tied to language not only through the sinews of tense, but also through the deeper existential questions that it asks” (2014: 18). Trauma, in this regard, can be observed in literary works through analysing the use of language or its absence.

The destructive quality of trauma, in a way, can be represented through the unconventional, and often fractured, narrative style. Sonya Andermahr suggests that trauma narratives are “characterised by a fragmented, modernist aesthetic, which foregrounds unrepresentability and aporia” (2013: 15). Therefore, the focal point of trauma narratives can be portraying traumatization both in style and content as the story unfolds through spatio-temporal distortions. Furthermore, trauma fiction entails a paradox in which an unexplainable event slowly unravels itself in order to be conveyed. In other words, trauma fiction reveals an attempt to narrate an inexpressible experience. Consequently, trauma narratives require a different approach in terms of narration style. In her seminal book *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead refers to defamiliarizing nature of trauma narrative, arguing that “if trauma is at all susceptible to narrative formulation, then it requires a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence” (2004: 6). Conventional narration techniques which follow more straightforward narration with a reliable narrator might fail to represent the extreme emotions triggered by trauma, such as the inability to express feelings and thoughts. These haunted narratives depart from the conventional techniques in order to represent incoherent minds of the traumatized characters (7). Moreover, the testimonial quality of trauma fiction encourages the reader to engage in the fragmented reality of the victim. To put it another way, the victim’s experience of trauma is not fully internalized by the individual; therefore, memory resists to the narrative form (12). Trauma fiction is devoid of straightforward images and depictions because of its inexpressible quality. Hence, trauma narrative is structured through repetitive moments of haunting which refers to the unresolved past (12-13). Trauma narrative also evades closure and maintains constant delays in narrative form. The narrative ruptures reveal how traumatic experience interrupts the logical flow of an unconscious mind. In portrayal of these extreme events, departure from conventional techniques might offer a deeper understanding in trauma fiction.

Trauma can also be associated with the concept of memory since trauma narratives require a recollection of the past. Paul Antze describes memory as a concept which “implies identity, the self caught between its roles as subject and object of memory, the telling and the told” (2016: 19). Memory, in other words, might be the source of understanding what is indicated, disguised or symbolized within a narrative. Moreover, traumatic memory has a literal quality in terms of recalling events through flashbacks. In *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives*, Alan Gibbs further elaborates on this quality of traumatic memory by stating that “another unique element of traumatic memory is the exactly literal quality of

recollection in the flashbacks and nightmares of trauma sufferers”, regarding the inexpressible nature of the traumatic event, “trauma in art and literature is considered ... to be unrepresentable, or only representable through the employment of radically fragmented and experimental forms” (2014: 13-14). The traumatic memory of the victims might be aligned with trauma narratives regarding the recollections and difficulty of expressing them. Additionally, trauma fiction offers a fragmented and more unconventional style in order to reflect the difficulty of telling the inexpressible in traditional narrative forms.

Trauma narrative, as mentioned in the section above, aims to portray traumatic memory through flashbacks, hints and other symbols by making use of certain stylistic devices and linguistic experimentation. In *Reading Trauma Narratives: The Contemporary Novel & the Psychology of Oppression*, Laurie Vickroy describes postmodern narratives “typically convey[ing] a fractured view of self, blown about by forces beyond one’s control, living outside chronology, and disconnected from the past” (2015: 18). Furthermore, trauma narratives can adopt this function in order to reflect the fragmentation caused by mental stress. This fragmentation also relates to the concept of absence, which is characterized by the loss of the ability to express thoughts. Martina Kopf touches upon the role of absence, which emphasizes the “interruptions in communication” and the lack of “symbolic order” (2010: 49). Therefore, the concepts of memory and absence are intertwined in displaying symptoms of trauma in trauma fiction. In other words, absence signifies the rupture within memory and a break from the limits of language which represent trauma’s resistance to expression. Consequently, trauma narratives prioritize reflecting traumatic memory by making use of new methods, including the use of broken language and form, avoiding any chronological order and closure, or placing sudden temporal and spatial shifts.

In narrative fiction, the narrator whose point of view reveals the plot and narratological details acts as the voice of the story. The characteristics of the narrator might also greatly influence how the story is delivered to the audience. Therefore, narrating a traumatic story from the perspective of a child or teenage narrator may be considered as a debated choice in narrative fiction since the experience and knowledge of a child or a teenager might be limited when compared to an adult. In *The Narrator’s Voice: The Dilemma of Children’s Fiction*, Barbara Wall suggests that by using child and teenage narrators, “verisimilitude has not been easy to achieve” as “[c]hildren not only lack experience but also the words in which to describe and analyse experience” (1991: 248). As a consequence, a

writer of trauma fiction might grant the child narrator with the privilege of adult experiences since children lack the necessary comprehension of trauma contrary to adults. Additionally, avoiding the tone of an adult is a problematic concept while writing from a child's perspective as an adult (13). In this sense, the reader's engagement in the text might be influenced by the voice of the writer because any failure to maintain the identity can result in unnatural pretence. Moreover, the writers, especially those who address children, feel obliged to create a persona which ultimately fails to reflect the child reader, the adults and even themselves (16). In this respect, addressing children or teenagers can easily transform into an act of mere imitation. Therefore, using the voices of the children and adolescents require a balance on the side of the writer of the text.

Šárka Bubíková approaches the debate from a different perspective by focusing on the children's naivety encapsulating their inherent ability in blending into their surroundings easily and their lack of ill intent (2012: 265). In other words, a child narrator might not be capable of conveying the story like an adult, yet the voice of a child might offer perspectives without distortions. However, the difficulty of recalling the childhood period, when compared to adolescence period or adulthood, can cause child narrators to be stuck between unrealistic or limited perspectives while conveying the story. In this sense, underage narrators, having a unique perspective of their environment, might offer an alternative for both revealing a child's and a teenager's point of view and not completely drifting from reality.

The perspective of the narrator influences the story and forms a connection between the reader and the text. In specific genres, this connection can be challenged regardless of the age and other qualities of the narrator. In trauma fiction, the narrator, either a child or an adult, might reflect the detachment caused by a traumatic experience through unreliable behaviour. By elaborating on the characteristics of an unstable narrator in fiction, Wayne C. Booth indicates that a narrator who does not conform to the rules of the text, by speaking or acting in a "deceptive" fashion, is "an unreliable narrator" (1983: 158-159). An 'unreliable narrator,' therefore, can pose inconsistent behaviour with the intention of misleading the reader. However, psychologically unstable narrators might not aim to deceive the audience; in fact, they cannot express themselves with words after experiencing an extreme event. In addition to the description of Booth, James Phelan and Mary P. Martin (1999) analyse narrative unreliability based on six types: "misreporting, misreading, misevaluating,

underreporting, underreading, and underregarding” (as cited in Zerweck, 2001: 152). The unreliability, therefore, refers to a broader scope of qualities which can be observed in the narrator’s fashion of storytelling, and it might also affect how a narrator delivers the story while connecting the reader with the text. Moreover, in trauma fiction, the unreliable characteristics of the narrator, regardless of age, makes it difficult to understand the story. All in all, examples of trauma fiction having unreliable narrators challenge the comprehension of the reader through traumatic fragmentations and unstable behaviour.



CHAPTER THREE

TRAUMA AND NARRATIVE POLITICS

Focusing on the language and trauma, this chapter aims to provide an insight into the thematic and linguistic aspects of trauma narratives. Building on Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* and Suzanne Keen's *Narrative Form*, the chapter also portrays trauma as a stylistic form in addition to exploring the narratological hints embedded in the narrative structure. These narratological hints encompass the metaphors used in the works and linguistic preferences of the writers. By revealing these aspects, the chapter analyses the concept of trauma in relation to the discussions of narrative form and experimental tactics that the writers in question employ.

Based on Whitehead's approach to trauma narratives as "a literary form depart[ing] from conventional linear sequence", Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* and Emma Donoghue's *Room* are analysed considering the unorthodox aspects of trauma narratives (2004: 6). McBride and Donoghue employ distinct narrative styles that reflect the differences between a child's interpretive world and an adolescent's fractured inner space. The analysis of the symbolic language used in *Room* might give insight into a child's experience and portrayal of trauma along with his interpretations of his mother's trauma, enabling a deep engagement with the extreme experiences of underage vulnerable individual. On the other hand, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*'s experimental stream-of-consciousness technique is explored through Keen's approach on "character and mind representations" focusing on the representation of unconscious mind (2003: 55). Keen's definition of 'quoted monologues' draws a parallel with the novel's fragmented narration style and its sudden breaks from the rules of the language (61). In this respect, the chapter aims to explore different qualities of trauma narratives with a close focus on the perspectives of child and adolescent narrators who are both trauma sufferers.

3.1. A Half-formed Narration through a Teenage Narrator in Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*

The paradoxical nature of trauma narratives, while telling the story of the unspeakable, can be observed through the fragmented narration in McBride's novel. The narration focuses on the memories of a traumatized teenage girl and her reactions to the events prior to her

suicide. The girl, in a way, narrates the story of her life until the point of her suicide attempt. The novel's main character refrains from revealing her name to the audience, hiding her identity because of shame and guilt. It is also possible that she is alienated from her identity and her psyche struggles to form a stable personality for her to name. As Whitehead explains, traumatic memory is not fully comprehensible, instead, the victim can only acknowledge the event after the traumatic incident (2004: 6). So, her perspective of the events and the narration technique might give an insight into the symptoms of trauma. Furthermore, the girl's narration of the events from her life represents the psyche's reaction to the extreme events she experiences as a child and teenager.

In the girl's case, an emotional crisis of standing on the threshold of life and death triggers her traumatic memories, which forms the events in the novel. As a result, the story is narrated with a fragmented language which complicates following constant dialogue shifts: "You'll soon. You'll give her name. In the stitches of her skin she'll wear your say ... Dividing from the sweet of mother flesh that could not take me in again" (McBride, 2013: 3-5). Moreover, the girl's challenging relationship with her mother and the religious persona her mother forces on the girl might be the reasons for denying a name which the mother gave her. Apart from the complexes related to the mother, all family members in the novel lack a name, thus, a unique identity. Therefore, the girl's self-alienation enhances to the point of feeling estranged from her complete environment. The girl, in a way, feels the need to tell her story, yet she hesitates to be a part of it, hiding behind mere descriptions.

The novel displays the hints of stream-of-consciousness technique through which a teenage girl's traumatic memories are represented in fragmented images. This technique provides a psychological depth to the story by implementing the characters' unconscious (Keen, 2003: 71). Syntactic deviations, semantic confusion and misused punctuation marks in sentence structure formally display the broken thoughts of an unconscious mind. Additionally, the disorder of thought process might provide a psychological realism in order to achieve determined effect (99). In this sense, the broken language that dominates the whole novel reflects the girl's trauma of sexual and psychological abuse:

You and me having slug scum races from the doorway to the source where is it. Get that dirty thing out of this house I don't know where they get in. We wondered ever, seeking slug nests in the sofa. Under the grate and found a lizard running hell for

leather in the ash ... Never. Ever. Touch. That. Dirty. Thing. It'll. Give. You. Warts.
That. Is. Di. Sgust. Ing ... Don't. Pick. Up. That. Dirty. Cat. (McBride, 2013: 9)

The sentence structure follows an order when the girl reminisce about the brother, whereas, remembering the mother triggers her anxiety, disrupting the grammatical coherence with sudden stops and inaccurate spelling while conveying the part: "Di. Sgust.". In other words, the narrative form of the novel aims to portray the psychological chaos within the unconscious (Balaev, 2008: 159). The girl's psychological conflict and anxiety are reflected through the use of structural disorder. The language also shows how the girl is traumatized by the mother's behaviour because even remembering an earlier conflict causes her extreme stress, which prevents a straight recollection of the past. Considering the nature of trauma, the traumatic memory of the girl reflects a deep confusion and resentment especially towards the mother. Therefore, the form of language symbolizes the girl's unstable psyche, and her emotions fluctuate constantly by remembering the psychological stressors.

The psychological depth of the novel is based on the girl's stance in the novel both as a character and the narrator. As a character, the girl contributes to the testimonial narrative which aims to convey trauma. Keen underlines that the "[c]haracters, those anthropomorphic entities who carry out the plot actions of narratives, strongly resemble real people" (2003: 57). In other words, the characters in fiction reflect real life actions through textual denotations. These textual interpretations include representations of an unconscious mind by means of character or narration. "Quoted monologue," as one of these representations, gives insight into a character's mental state without following a straight grammatical speech pattern (61). This form allows the readers to experience the unstable mental processes of the character. In the novel, the narration employs a "quoted monologue" style since the girl also narrates the story as a psychologically unstable narrator. Therefore, sudden shifts in grammatical structure blur the boundaries between her memories and real-life experiences:

Not there, I walked around and around. That house had up hill down dale. Steps and mud. Those wellies red. Umbrella. Wondrous being dry. See fat drops plop and run like a river down for flies ... That time it was always raining ... Puddles and puddles very good for sailing peanut barge shells over. Like over and over the sea. Or this is Lough Corrib or this is the Nile. (McBride, 2013: 27)

A sudden shift from past tense to present tense complicates the boundaries between a past reminiscence and the story time at present. In other words, the dialogue, which appears as a

memory, transforms into a real-life experience. This shift might also symbolize the girl's venture into her unconscious mind. The shift, in a way, allows the readers to observe the girl's mental stress and portrays an experimental style which mimics the process of a troubled unconscious mind. Therefore, the tense shift indicates a trouble while recollecting past events rather than explaining merely past experiences. Blurring the line between reality and delusion, these sudden shifts also represent a break from reality into the girl's unconscious which further increases the level of her instability as a narrator.

The mental instability of the girl raises the question of her reliability as a narrator. In the plot, the mother is characterized as a despotic figure who favours the brother and challenges the girl with her psychological instability. On the one hand, as a narrator, the girl's own psychological problems can be reflected upon the mother instead of portraying the memories of the girl. In other words, the reader might be tricked into seeing the mother as a tyrant who pushes the girl to the point where she further damages her body. Additionally, the girl's psyche can attempt to protect herself by reconstructing the events in a way that she has no choice but to act as she does, believing that she only attempted to overcome her trauma. On the other hand, the girl might be narrating the story objectively, although traumatic memory prevents a straight narration. The girl, in a way, struggles to tell her story rather than distracting the reader or deceiving herself. Wayne Booth underlines that the unreliable narrator does not necessarily have to pursue the goal of deceiving or lying to the reader (1983: 159). In this sense, the girl might be merely conveying her suffering with the traces of major trauma. However, the degree of a narrator's reliability can be easy to recognize when the text includes distinctive inconsistencies (159-160). The girl's testimonies concerning the mother's favouritism in the childhood period might be problematic because it contradicts with the portrayal of an abusive mother: "Attentive loving mother. I remember. I have seen. Such a pride and joy in him ... But there it is she says sprigging away. Don't pull it you, giving slap hand for me" (McBride, 2013: 7). The girl's depiction of the mother draws an image of a mother who loves her son no matter what while reflecting an abusive persona to the girl. This representation contradicts with the memories in which the girl and the brother are both being abused by the mother: "Your hands can't keep her off ... And hits you on your ear. On your cheek. That hard ... Slap you harder. Slap and slap and slap. Push you in the corner ... Slap again she. Slap again" (17). This extreme physical violence presents an inconsistency in the girl's depiction of the mother. Moreover, she further psychologically abuses her son by using the words "imbecile" and "stupid",

referring to the brother's low IQ which is caused by a brain tumour (17). This contradiction refers to an unreliability regarding the image of the mother in the girl's early ages. As a child who craves for a healthy relationship with her mother, the girl might have misinterpreted the mother's pity on the brother as favouritism. Although these emotional shifts present a contradiction, the girl's aim poses no ill intent. To put it another way, the girl, as a narrator, intends to reveal her suffering through her memories, and it can include lying to herself; therefore, her intention might not include tricking the reader, instead, her mental instability complicates to understand her memories. Therefore, the girl's emotions can be unreliable, yet her memories have traces of truth in them.

Traumatic memory is reflected through the images which also symbolize the unconscious of the character. According to Balaev, such memory is conveyed through metaphorical representations in fiction (2008: 149). In the girl's case, religious symbols represent both her struggle to adapt her life after trauma and her identity crisis. The girl, as a teenage narrator, often struggles to define her identity while conflicting with her mother who insists on tailoring a religious persona onto her. Torn apart by her ideals and the mother's dictations, the girl uses a lot of religious metaphors to express her conflict regarding her identity:

Still, good to see him going bloody to death, though pink. Busy I was with a million gushing cuts to draw, make them worsen, giving scabs. Where's the pain in that one? But I'd like to hear him crying, screaming most of all. How bad was it Jesus? (McBride, 2013: 20)

The bloody depiction of Jesus symbolizes both the girl's defiance against the mother's pressure of religion and the damage on her identity. Moreover, the sentence structure shows an order which the girl often lacks and might display a hint of internalization of religion. This depiction, in a way, proves the contradiction of an idealized persona and her already inherent religious character.

Exploring her identity in a religious community, the girl questions the religion's reliability along with her place in such a restraining society. Through emphasizing religious contradictions, the girl also criticizes the morality norms of the religious community which appear to be a façade:

Her heart may be pierced with a thousand spears but she'll offer it as penance that's a bit proud don't you think? And the one whose husband's a desperate drunk. Like

his father before him you know the type, vicious. That'd kill you in it by mistake ...
Her black eyes. Is he on the bottle? they say and pray for sometimes giving up and
the forgiveness of his sins. (McBride, 2013: 23)

The girl's sarcasm on the religious community's hypocrisy symbolizes the impossibility of salvation through religion in women's case. Remembering this memory, the girl also realizes that the concept of redemption excludes women who are burdened with the norms of patriarchal society. Orsolya Szűcs emphasizes that the female body, which should be protected and is vulnerable to abuse, evokes negative connotations among religious communities (2021: 268). In this sense, the girl reexperiences her weakness as a young woman who is forsaken and denied salvation.

The concept of religion appears as a stressor which fragments the girl's identity while depriving her of the redemption that she desires. In the scene when she refers to herself as a sinner assuming a more religious self, she employs references to baptism: "The brownny foam. Baptise. Creep up my throat. Above my head. Wash away all blood. I'll under" (McBride, 2013: 201). The blood symbolizes both a violation of her body with sexuality and the sexual abuse she is exposed to. However, she fails to cleanse herself from her sins regardless of the continuous attempts of baptism. This failure to feel unburdened by her conscience is associated with religion, despite which she is unable to find peace and a sense of belonging. Therefore, religion represents a state of being torn apart by inner conflicts in the girl's fragmented psyche.

The narrative form of trauma texts might be affected by the narrator's or characters' personality. These characteristics have an impact on the language and the narration technique. In this sense, as the girl progresses through the adolescent period, she frequently finds herself in conflict with the mother. As a result of sexual abuse and her uncle's psychological manipulation, the girl is susceptible to depression and withdrawal as well as displaying the hints of defiance. Stijn Van Petegem et al. defines "reactance theory" as a concept which encompass adolescents' tendency to "engage in prohibited actions" towards "the authority of controlling parents" (2015: 903-904). This defiant behaviour emerges as a reaction to the violation of freedom by despotic parents. Therefore, in the face of enforced behaviour, teenagers tend to stay adamant to the parents' request, showing the "boomerang effect" which includes acting as the opposite of what is demanded (904). As a teenage narrator, the girl, similarly, behaves as the opposite of what the mother is expecting from

her. The mother's despotic approach to religion repulses the girl to the point where she develops a defence mechanism, promiscuity, which is condemned as one of the greatest sins by the mother. The girl's promiscuity represents a rebellion against the mother's expectations of her as a proper Christian. In other words, the mother creates exactly the opposite of what she desires because of her abusive approach. Consequently, as a teenager, the girl's frustration is reflected with her internal conflict and further alienation from her environment (904). This inner conflict damages the girl's psyche, blurring the line between taking control of her life and violating her body as a reaction to the authority:

Go. Away. Breeting. Skitch. Hear the way he. Sloows. Hurts m. Jesus skreamtheway he. Doos the fuck the fuckink slatch in me. Scream. Kracks. Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy fucky shoves upo comes ui. Kom shitting ut h mith fking kmg I'm fking cmin up you. Retch I. Retch I. Dinneradntea I choke mny. Up my. Thrtroat I. He come hecomehe. More. (McBride, 2013: 193)

The severe disruption of language with unintelligible words such as "skreamtheway", "ut h mith fking kmg" and "Dinneradntea" while having a random sexual encounter might indicate a total collapse of the psychological integrity since the girl realizes that the violent sexual encounters she prefers in an attempt to gain control of her body are in fact sexual assaults on her body. This realization reflects the emotional cost of "reactance" which causes alienation from the personal characteristics (Petegem et al., 2015: 905). The sudden stops in the sentences might symbolize disruptive quality of trauma resisting verbal expression. In other words, the girl's inability to convey the reenactment is reflected through sudden breaks from the flow of speech. The words used by the girl such as "Hurts", "Kracks", "Done" and "Scream", a sort of an onomatopoeic diction, also forces us to imagine the pain she feels at the moment of violent encounters. Through intentional grammatical violations and conscious spelling mistakes, visualizing the girl's stuttering on the page space, it is possible to discover how language loses its meaning against violence and pain and also shows its incapacity to represent the reality. Drawing on these arguments, the girl's mental injuries are reflected through a broken language and a fragmented narration which resembles to stream-of-consciousness technique. Moreover, her mental disturbances might be observed in the experimental style of language used in the novel. Additionally, this experimental technique gives insight into the unconscious of the girl, as a teenage narrator, while offering a picture of a young, traumatized mind.

3.2. Representation of Trauma through a Child Narrator in Emma Donoghue's *Room*

In children's books, a child narrator often tells the story to the reader, especially a child audience. The writers of these kind of novels have to play the role of a mediator who connects a child's inner world with adult material and present the story to their target readers. Conveying the story through a child narrator might pose a struggle when the intended audience is largely adult rather than children because an adult reader may sense the adult voice of the writer behind the pretence, and it can cause a lack of authentic voice (Wall, 1991: 249). This potential of failure while finding a balanced voice for the narrator gives the writer a significant role in finding the balance between fabricating a child's inner world with the experiences and perceptions of an adult. Reflecting a child's imagination in fictional works also requires a detachment from self-consciousness in order for writers to achieve a "dual awareness" which encapsulates adult and children perception (22). In trauma narratives specifically, it might be difficult to find a balance between the voice of the child narrator and the experiences of an adult by means of an adult lens. In this respect, Jack's voice as a narrator carries the hints of adult experience because a child's perception of trauma can limit the reader's engagement with the theme of the novel. Therefore, Jack's narration often lacks direct experience of traumatic events, instead, implicit references and symbols reflect his experience. This narrative technique allows the reader to connect with the theme of the novel while avoiding objectivity, as Jack's distance from the traumatic content prevents a total loss of the child's voice.

Trauma narratives conveyed through the perspective of a child might challenge the reader with symbolic narratives and disconnected thoughts. Although trauma narratives, in their fashion, tend to follow experimental style which highlights the themes of fragmentation, detachment and depression, a child's inner world might offer a different angle concerning the traumatic experience. A child's perspective can be more symbolic and abstract while depicting experiences which requires interpretation. Therefore, straight dialogues and expressions are replaced with implicit references when a child conveys the story. In this case, Jack's narration of the events of their life in the room and after the escape includes his imagination and interpretation of the events he and Ma experience. Jack's use of language follows a clear and straightforward style with minimal grammatical issues. This

clarity might also refer to a conflict where a child's voice is lost under the authority of an adult writer. According to Björling, "[t]he ability to organize narrative material ... seems to incur a level of sophistication which young children have not yet achieved. Consequently, narrative fiction conducted in the voice of a child is experienced from the start as a device" (1983: 7). In this sense, the reader is fully aware that Jack is the child voice of an adult authorial figure. However, this awareness does not prevent us from experiencing the imagination and perspective of a child narrator because Jack is portrayed as a smart five-year-old boy who lacks the understanding of most of the adult concepts, creating an imaginary world for himself in confinement. Ma's sexual abuse and the effects of trauma are conveyed through the depictions of Jack from a child's perspective. In the narrative, therefore, Jack's imagination and behavioural tendencies reflect the traces of trauma by providing a different angle in observing the traumatic experience.

Centring on narratological traces in the novel, both psychological stress and Jack's perspective of the world in such environment affects Jack's narration style. Considering Barbara Wall's argument regarding the child voice lost under the authority of the adult writer as 'a mimetic act', Jack's tone follows a balanced path despite occasional deviations (1991: 249). One of these deviations can be observed in the novel when Jack recognizes Dr. Clay's change of tone: "That's his poem voice." (Donoghue, 2010: 393). As a five-year-old child, Jack's comprehension of poetry to the point where he recognizes its metaphorical traces appears unconvincing. Yet, Margarete Rubik considers Jack's voice as a child to be authentic depending on Jack's "grammatical mistakes" which reminds the reader that the narrator is still a child, apart from being smart (2018: 230). In addition to the balanced approach to child narration style, this trauma novel resists following a conventional fragmented narration. Instead of employing a fractured style as a reflection of trauma, extreme feelings are conveyed through Jack's symbolic narration encouraging reader to interpret the meaning. Similarly, Lucia Lorenzi emphasizes that understanding the novel requires an "interpretive work" on the side of the reader because of its symbolic narration (2016: 24). This 'interpretive' style reflects Jack and Ma's traumas and the former's perception of the events including his imagination.

The environment Jack lives in consists of an isolated shed which is built with the aim to imprison Ma. The interior of the room includes the utilities that are important to meet basic human needs such as a small kitchen, a bed, a tub, and a toilet. However, the room

appears as a prison rather than a home, as Jack and Ma are not allowed to visit the outside world. Ma and Jack's isolation from the outside world is reflected through the implicit references of Jack, especially coloured by his imagination, because as a child narrator, Jack lacks direct experience of the concepts in the novel. Therefore, Jack considers the room his playground, and the objects in the room become his friends in this child's game. In narration, objects such as "Bed", "Rug", "Melted Spoon" are depicted in uppercase letters as if they were living beings and part of the room (Donoghue, 2010: 3-4). This use of language implicitly reflects the psychological isolation Jack suffers from. Franklyn N. Arnhoff and Henry V. Leon emphasize that severe dysfunction and deficit can be observed in subjects who are exposed to extreme isolation (1964: 182). In Ma's case, extreme isolation makes her a willing participant of Jack's playground. Her enjoyment of this game is limited to her adult understanding: "Ma plays with Tank too but not as long. She gets sick of things fast, it's from being an adult" (Donoghue, 2010: 49). Jack's reference to adulthood portrays Ma's isolation and her failure to maintain psychological integrity. In other words, Jack considers Ma's boredom as a regular quality of an adult, yet the frequency of boredom might refer to Ma's depression caused by abuse and isolation. Moreover, Jack describes Ma's depression as being "Gone" and interprets her stress as lack of sleep: "She won't wake up properly. She's here but not really. She stays in Bed with the pillows on her head" (74). Jack also resembles Ma to a "zombie" and stresses that he dislikes when Ma is "Gone" (75). Ma's psychological struggle is reflected through Jack's understanding of the situation through the repetition of the word, "Gone". Lacking the knowledge of trauma and depression, Jack filters these concepts through his childish lens and attempts to rationalize the events in his own terms.

Jack's childhood innocence prevents him from comprehending depression; therefore, he paradoxically rationalizes Ma's behaviour from his own limited point of view. In a way, Jack's ambivalent narration provides an insight into the psychological dysfunctions of Ma as well as revealing his coping mechanisms. In Jack's case, extreme isolation results in attributing humanlike qualities to inanimate objects: "I look down at Rug with her red and brown and black all zigging around each other" (Donoghue, 2010: 4). Jack attributes a personality to a rug, considering 'her' a friend with whom he shares a home. Furthermore, Jack's circle of friends includes cartoon characters who exist on the screen, seem real to him, but are intangible: "Dora is a drawing in TV but she's my real friend, that's confusing." (78). Jack's reality is shaped through his understanding of the room and Ma's alternate reality. By

questioning Dora's existence, Jack gives clues about his lack of healthy social development. In a healthy environment, children can bond with each other as playmates and explore the world around them. Jack, however, lacks this mundane flow of life in a confined environment. Therefore, his attributions may function as symbols for psychological problems that stem from isolation.

The use of language in trauma narratives might symbolize underlying psychological problems through the dialogues and behavioural depictions of the characters. In other words, the traumatic experience is reflected through language with the aim of exploring the impact of trauma (Balaev, 2018: 360). Therefore, language conveys the psychological disturbances of the characters within a fictional text. Jack's use of language, similarly, symbolizes his and Ma's psychological conflicts while giving insight into a child's narrative style. However, a child narrator's perspective and use of language might differ from that of an adult. In this sense, Jack's use of language, as the narrator of the story, reflects his perception as a five-year-old child, while also revealing his complexes concerning the abuse he and Ma endure. Jack's mental problems originate from extreme isolation he is exposed to and the revelations concerning reality. Ma's revelations about the outside world upsets Jack's mind:

I jump onto Floor all on my own. "Liar, liar, pants on fire, there's no Outside."

She starts explaining more but I put my fingers in my ears and shout, "Blah blah blah blah blah." (Donoghue, 2010: 108)

The concept of reality which is misconstrued by Ma is beyond Jack's comprehension after internalizing the outside world as an imaginary concept. Ma's revelations, therefore, shatter the image of reality which encompass Jack's inanimate friends in the room. 'Jumping onto Floor' represents a sanctuary from the dangers of the unknown. Jack, in a way, confides in Floor, his playmate, in an attempt to be protected from the concept which threatens them both: Outside. The uppercase 'outside' symbolizes the destruction of Jack's safety, and as a child who grows up in a prison shed, Jack lacks the understanding of real-life concepts. Therefore, 'Outside' plays the role of a villain who threatens Jack and the safety of his home. Similar to other inanimate objects, Jack considers Outside as a person, yet this person appears as a nemesis. Moreover, Jack's perception of the events also reflects his shock concerning Ma's revelations. This revelation might leave a traumatic mark on Jack's psyche since his understanding of reality is threatened by unknown data. Although Jack's denial of truth can be considered as a normal behaviour among children, traumatic shock might also

play a role in Jack's rejection of reality. Consequently, Jack's denial symbolizes his defence mechanism to protect his psychological integrity by means of staying intact against the unknown change.

The idea of home in the novel appears as a complicated concept when Ma and Jack's unique experiences before and after their escape are considered. The room is nothing more than a prison for Ma since she is abducted and forced to live in the shed in complete isolation. However, Jack's conception of the world is based on the room and the reality Ma creates for him. As Judith Sixsmith discusses, the concept of home inspires a sense of safety and belonging (1986: 294). Considering a child's need for safety and protection, the home environment is a very important concept for children because it provides a sense of security against dangers. As Jack is completely attached to the room like a mother's womb, their escape from it means being torn apart from his home unlike Ma's sensations about it:

"Probably a bit homesick, aren't you?"

"Homesick?" Ma's staring at her.

"Sorry, I didn't—"

"It wasn't a home, it was a soundproofed cell."

...

If Room wasn't our home, does that mean we don't have one?" (Donoghue, 2010: 258)

Jack keeps questioning many of the concepts such as in the example of home. Asking questions repeatedly might symbolize Jack's alienation from the outside world after being forced to leave the room. Furthermore, Jack always refers to the room with an uppercase letter 'R', indicating his feeling of belonging by means of attributing a liveliness to the word. 'Room' represents Jack's home, safety, and a sense of belonging to the familiar residents, objects, of the place. After being displaced from the room, Jack longs for the same feeling of belonging he has had in the room and been constantly overwhelmed with a lot of new information. In this alien world, Outside, to which Jack feels no connection, his prior knowledge of reality is also challenged. For instance, the first thing Jack desires to receive as a gift from his uncle is 'The Dora bag', named after one of his favourite cartoon characters, and he resembles the bag to 'Backpack' in the room (Donoghue, 2010: 304). 'The Dora bag' symbolizes a piece of home for Jack and reminds him of his peaceful, simple days in the

room; moreover, it becomes a sanctuary from an alien world in which he feels no sense of belonging. 'The Dora bag,' in a way, creates a dichotomy between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and Jack's conflict between feeling at home and displaced could be observed in his enthusiasm for the bag.

Jack's psychological problems manifest themselves under the disguise of an obsession towards inanimate objects, and the representations of the objects change with Jack's psychological conflicts. Furthermore, the objects also symbolize Jack's psychological resilience and his willingness to adaptation: "'Good-bye, Wall.' Then I say it to the three other walls, then 'Good-bye, Floor.' I pat Bed, 'Good-bye, Bed.' I put my head down in Under Bed to say 'Good-bye, Eggsnake.' In Wardrobe I whisper, 'Good-bye, Wardrobe.'" (Donoghue, 2010: 401). Jack's desire to revisit the room encompass his willingness to let go of his past and embrace a new reality because the feeling of nostalgia for the room prevents Jack's adjustment process to the outside world. This feeling of nostalgia also symbolizes his resilience in the face of traumatic events. Therefore, by saying farewell to the room, Jack also hints to the reader that he embraces the new world and is willing to change accordingly.

Lastly, by focusing on Jack's interpretations of the events in the novel, *Room* represents traumatic events through symbolisms made by a child narrator. Carolin Gebauer emphasizes that the narration "imitates linguistic register of" Jack in order to reflect the underdevelopment of language (2021: 258-259). Through imitations, the novel conveys traumatic occurrences, encouraging the reader to question what lies beneath a child's interpretation of the events. Centring on Jack's function as the narrator in the novel, Eka Nurhayati states that Jack's perspective promotes an "understandable" character who "questions" the hidden details behind reality (2017: 11). Drawing on these arguments, Jack as a narrator provides a deep understanding of how trauma affects a child in a unique symbolic style encouraging the reader to witness his journey and participate in his struggle to interpret the world around him. Moreover, Jack's narration might offer an imaginative perspective on his trauma instead of directly integrating fragmentation into the language.

CHAPTER FOUR

VICARIOUS TRAUMA (TRAUMA OF WITNESSING) AND CONFINEMENT

This chapter investigates the concept of vicarious trauma in the selected novels in an attempt to uncover secondary traumatic stress and how it is linked with the theme of confinement. Providing a pluralistic perspective to modern trauma theory, LaCapra's notion of 'empathic unsettlement' focuses on collective memory as the pillar of individual identity (2014: 80-81). Through the trauma of witnessing, the aftereffects of exposure to a traumatic event and the role of empathy can be examined in relation to LaCapra's approach to the notion of "feeling one's way into another" (2018: 48). Analyses of the novels in terms of collective trauma and the theme of confinement reveal how trauma might persist in collective memory through transference and how psychological and physical confinement are interconnected with this memory.

Against the backdrop of LaCapra's approach to the trauma of witnessing in Emma Donoghue's *Room*, the chapter unravels the paradoxical relationship between the concepts of alienation and confinement among the main characters of the story. From five-year-old Jack's perspective, his witnessing to his mother's sexual victimization and its repercussions in their changing environment are demonstrated. Along with the themes of alienation and confinement, Jack's coping mechanism with these overwhelming concepts as a personification with the inanimate objects is explored. Aside from *Room*'s interrelated concepts in terms of witnessing, Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* offers transgenerational memory as a means of discovering the traces of collective trauma. By examining the novel's environment, the chapter also presents complex intertwined nature of empathy and transference. The protagonist's suffering as a witness of transgenerational trauma and the process of her brother's prolonged terminal illness in relation to being a victim of transgenerational transference are the focal points of the chapter. The narrator's worsening psychology as a result of psychological confinement offers a perspective to unravel the complicated nature of traumatic memory. Both novels reveal collective hauntings in relation to similar themes of empathic unsettlement and confinement. Yet, focusing also on the different aspects of these themes and their relationship with the events in the selected novels, the chapter has been structured to trace the diverse nature of collective memory in relation to individual identity and its place in modern trauma theory.

4.1. Transgenerational Patterns in Vicarious Trauma and Psychological Confinement in Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*

Vicarious trauma essentially refers to internalized emotions which originally belong to another person. Vicarious trauma can be based on past events as well as present repercussions of past actions. LaCapra refers to the relationship between the past and the present by examining individual experiences as part of collective memory and discussing that trauma can be transferred through the memories to future generations (2014: 13). The transference of trauma in McBride's novel can be observed in the experiences of the girl concerning her family relationships. The girl's mother is portrayed as a despotic figure who forces religion upon her children in order to earn the title of 'a proper Christian mother'. However, the mother's obsessive behaviour originates from her father's same obsessive approach, creating a pattern of trauma that lasts for two generations. As a result, the girl suffers from both witnessing the traumatic pattern between her mother and grandfather and experiencing transgenerational trauma because of her mother's constant reflections. Furthermore, the girl also witnesses her brother's terminal illness and his experience of being bullied by his peers, which creates overwhelming emotions and feelings of desperation. Consequently, she experiences a lack of communication with her family members, suffers from psychological confinement and shows signs of withdrawal and mental isolation.

The girl as the homodiegetic narrator observes her life story through the events of the novel; however, the first hints of trauma of witnessing can be observed when her father abandons his family. The girl, as an observer from her mother's womb, experiences the abandonment even before she was born:

And our father was. Where? Somewhere there. I think ... He says I can't be waiting for it all the time. I'd give my eyes to fix him but. The heart cannot be wrung and wrung ... He left her with a fifty pound note. Take care! (McBride, 2013: 4-5)

Alongside her own experiences of trauma, she also witnesses her other family members' trauma after paternal abandonment through a growing sense of empathy. In a way, her psyche internalizes the event by forming a bond with the collective memory of her family members. As LaCapra argues, repeated actions can lead to trauma through "transference" (LaCapra, 2014: 15). This 'transference' of overwhelming emotions affects the girl as if she

witnessed her father's abandonment firsthand. As a result, the girl is double traumatized, both by witnessing the effects of her father's abandonment and the act itself.

As an observer of the story, the girl's vicarious trauma carries the hints of transgenerational patterns which often manifest itself in the form of a generational conflict. The girl's constant struggle with her mother, which prevents healthy communication and leads to further psychological confinement, stems from a similar generational conflict between the mother and the grandfather. The grandfather is depicted as a devout Christian who is obsessed with religion and values religion above everything. Therefore, he expects his children and grandchildren to follow the path of Jesus since it is the only right way for him. However, he is blindfolded by his obsession of religion to the point of rejecting anything which contradicts with his religious practices:

Well now, say a Hail Mary and we'll forget about it but the next time you go you tell the priest. Go on then. Hail Mary. Go on Hail Mary full of... Grace. You pick it up. The Lord is... How can you forget? Do you not say the rosary in this house? Then how can you not know the Hail Mary? No, this'll not do. This is a terrible carry on. (McBride, 2013: 14)

The grandfather's understanding of the value of people amounts to their religious knowledge. In other words, the mother and grandchildren may only receive his compassion only if they become devout believers and practice it. Barbara Simonič et al. indicates that religious abuse correlates with specific patterns of withdrawal, obsession, or aggression in the family (2013: 339-340). Religious abuse, in a way, can manifest in different forms regardless of the good intent. The grandfather's withdrawal of compassion functions as an act of aggression and ultimately transforms into a form of psychological and physical abuse on both his daughter and the grandchildren. Moreover, physical punishment for lack of religious belief can also refer to an understanding of discipline (Simonič et al., 2013: 340). To put it another way, the mother's failed attempts to teach religion to her children is directly related to the grandfather's intolerant approach and failure to transfer religious ethics to his daughter. Consequently, it affects the mother's behaviour towards her children by exhibiting the same discipline practices on the children, producing a transgenerational trauma pattern.

The grandfather's role in the transmission of trauma patterns is multifaceted, ranging from being a ruthless critic to a provocateur when he forces his discipline methods onto the mother. Additionally, Eloísa Dall'Bello discusses the grandfather's ruthlessness by drawing

attention to the fact that he blames the mother even for the abandonment of her husband (2019: 69). In this sense, the grandfather might believe that he has failed to raise her daughter properly. Drawing on these arguments, the grandfather scares the children by using their mother as a tool of control and authoritative parenting: “Now I’ll have to tell your mother and you’ll get a beat on your bot. Because I’m her Daddy so if I say it she has to give you a smack” (McBride, 2013: 15). The grandfather avoids practicing extreme violence on his grandchildren himself, instead, he insists on the idea that the mother should be the one who teaches discipline to her children. By provoking the mother, the grandfather simultaneously teaches them to be a proper child and his daughter to be a good Christian mother through what he inherited from earlier generations. However, this strategy backfires because the children start to grow hate towards the grandfather, resisting his ways, especially when he argues with and insults the mother: “Oh you don’t fool me. You’re not bothered about anyone even your family ... It’s like talking to that brick wall. You were always a selfish. No. Don’t please Daddy me now” (McBride, 2013: 15). The girl witnesses the generational conflict between the mother and the grandfather which escalates to the point of criticizing the motherhood and the mother’s marital choices as well as revealing the roots of transgenerational trauma:

Have you no morals? I mean what kind of way is that to rear your son? But of course you’re so clever. I forgot. Too good to marry a man who’d want his children to believe in God ... You’ve always looked down your nose at me and my beliefs ... Your superior husband, where is he now? ... What way is that to rear a girl? Look at her. Forward rolls in a skirt. It’s disgusting. It’s perverted. Underwear on display ... I never reared you that way. (McBride, 2013: 15-16)

The grandfather’s abusive language and behaviour in this scene towards the mother stem from an early generational conflict between him and his daughter. In other words, the grandfather’s depictions of the mother as a teenager and young adult draws a picture of a rebellious daughter who tends to follow her own path rather the path her parents draw for her.

Similarly, the mother’s resistance to her parents could be compared to the girl’s resistance to the mother, yet the mother —intentionally or unintentionally— internalizes the grandfather’s parental approach and is unable to break the cycle of physical and psychological violence in the household:

Do you see what you've done? Are you pleased with yourselves? ... Take one and two. Crack my eyes are bursting from my head with the wallop. Blood rising up my nose. Drips my head forward. Drip of that. She gets my hair. Listen. To me. Listen. What you've done. Shaking me smack and smack my head. Dirty brat. Shivering. Sharp with rage. Get away from me and push me over to the banisters. (McBride, 2013: 17)

The mother's practice of extreme violence represents both her reflection of failure as a mother in the eyes of her father and a demonstration of transgenerational pattern which also symbolizes an attempt to regain her authority by practicing the parenthood model of the grandfather. Gloria N. Gayol defines the transference of behaviour patterns and family systems to future generations as "ulterior transactions" which refers to psychological and social internalization of the parents and family (2019: 284). In this sense, the mother internalizes the discipline model of the grandfather at some point in her life as an 'ulterior transaction,' although in her youth, she tends to stand firm concerning the ways she is forced to practice. Therefore, a similar generational conflict is observed in the current generation because the mother exercises the same methods as the grandfather to a child who resembles to her youth. As a result, the girl suffers from her mother's unstable behaviour because of the transference of trauma and is threatened by the same toxic pattern both as a witness and victim of the cycle of trauma.

The mother's transgenerational reflections escalate in the girl's adolescence period because the latter chooses to follow her own instincts rather than practicing the mother's ethics concerning religion. On the one hand, the mother approaches the girl with the intent of showing her the right way out of her maternal instinct. As a single mother, she struggles to uphold the balance of her parental role in the family. On the other hand, she adopts the same despotic behaviour as the grandfather in an attempt to discipline the girl:

Now miss. What are you playing at? What? Come back here splashing orders saying who's doing what. Oh thinking you're so grand. Off up there at some college ... Well aren't you great. And who asked you to or told you or wanted you to? You self-righteous Madam. Looking down your nose at me and your brother. I can tell. (McBride, 2013: 95)

The mother conveys a transgenerational behaviour pattern by using the same words and approach as the grandfather. Although the mother, in her youth, experienced and suffered

from a similar generational conflict, she tends to act the same way as her father rather than trying to understand the underlying problems in the girl's behaviour. Referring to the transference of trauma through generations, Bakalářskou Práci mentions that the grandfather's presence as a revelation of entrapment which forces the girl and the mother crushed under the same "false promises of a tradition" (2023: 16). This traditional behavioural pattern results in the girl's recession of psychological resilience and causes her to withdraw even further into psychological isolation:

She says don't think you can come here with your tantrums. And it's not like you've done a lot. What? For us. In the past ... I see you well, think you'll make up with him. On the death bed. I know you she says very well you selfish stupid lazy girl ... I've only so much patience and I've bitten my tongue too long. You have shamed yourself and me and your brother most of all. I can't even look at you ... You are disgusting. You are. Sick in the head ... So now your good kind brother is gone and God forgive me but it's true. I almost wish it was you lying there in that box. You. And not. My. Son. (McBride, 2013: 95-201)

The brothers' health condition triggers the mother to the point of insulting and verbally attacking the girl. She constantly blames her daughter almost for everything that is beyond her control. Just like the grandfather, the mother employs a similar pattern of abusive language, calling her daughter 'selfish,' 'stupid,' 'sick in the head,' and 'lazy'. The mother's reflections might be linked to her religious beliefs that the good deeds will be rewarded, and the sins will be punished. To put it another way, in the mother's perspective, the girl's promiscuous acts can be the reason for brother's deteriorating health. Therefore, attempting to understand the girl's behaviour amounts to committing the same sin for the mother. Hadi S. Gharehaghaji and Shahriyar Mansouri suggest that the girl's "ruptured" identity "intensifies" by her belief and sense of guilt that she is committing a great sin by being promiscuous, and emphasize that she is trapped within the concepts of "family, tradition, religion, even her very individuality" (2021: 19). Considering the mother's abusive behaviour, this conflict might originate from grandfather's parental approach which includes the understanding of being a devout Christian also means being a good and lovable person. This transference affects the girl's psychology by enhancing her self-loathing and withdrawal. Elisabetta Dozio et al. argue that the parents who suffer from the parental PTSD can exercise behaviours which result in "physiological and emotional dysregulation, trauma

related beliefs, and avoidance/withdrawal” among their children (2020: 2). This cycle can be observed in the girl’s psychological confinement which stems from her mother’s conflict with the grandfather. Therefore, the transgenerational pattern doubly traumatizes the girl and isolates her from the family by both the mother’s treatment and witnessing the grandfather’s constant nagging.

Vicarious witnessing of the brother’s extreme emotions triggers the girl’s withdrawal to the point of psychological confinement. The brother’s terminal illness affects her psyche since their childhood because he is the only person who can tolerate and show affection to the girl. Therefore, the girl can feel the desperation of the brother through their special bond:

Listen in to doctor chat. We done the best we could. There really wasn’t much. It’s all through his brain like the roots of trees ... Puke it cells up all day long ... Weeks for you. Weeks it. Scared and bald and wet the bed. (McBride, 2013: 3-4)

Witnessing how the veil of life and death is thin through the illness of the brother causes the girl to have empathic unsettlement as well as the fear of losing a loved one. The girl’s desperation about death encompasses both her inability to help her brother and her ability to feel empathy for him. Ann M. Holmes and Partha Deb mention that the family members of the individuals who suffers from chronic illnesses are under the risk of experiencing immense emotional disturbances (2003: 21). In the girl’s case, the brother’s unstable symptoms and physical traces of the surgery are the constant reminders of how death is inevitable: “Death falling through the room, sucking all words from air for us. And for quiet of five minutes we are just. The blasted moment. Crushing our every bone. Please God don’t make me ever raise my face up.” (McBride, 2013: 174-175). The girl is traumatized by witnessing both her brother’s fight with the disease and his feelings of despair against the concept of death. To put it another way, the process of waiting the brother to regain his health transforms into a futile effort of denying the inevitable.

Apart from the battle with death, the brother’s physical appearance is scarred because of the surgeries, and the brain tumour lowers his IQ, which attracts the attention of bullies at his age: “See your blood pouring down the aisle to them. Snapping. Chewing at your hands and feet. Ha ha ha breathe out Spastic. Spastic fall over. Can’t spastic walk? I feel you on the inside, that blast of it.” (McBride, 2013: 36). The girl feels guilty and embarrassed simultaneously because she can feel empathy for the brother as if she was the one who is bullied. However, her guilt also originates from her avoidance of intervening the bullying:

“I could roar. I could cry. I do not. Anything at all. Just stand feel it worse and worse. Thinking of the scald and full of shame. Was it yours or mine?” (McBride, 2013: 50). The shame of not standing with the brother weighs heavily on the girl’s conscience because the brother always supports her against their mother’s tantrums in addition to the fact that the brother’s days are numbered because of his illness. Therefore, the girl’s withdrawal escalates with each bullying incident since she loses faith in humanity and feels guilty for allowing it. In her mental isolation, the girl is used to witnessing extreme emotions and feeling empathic unsettlement as an observer who can feel the other’s trauma yet fails to act on it.

4.2. The Traces of Abuse, Alienation and Physical Confinement in Emma Donoghue’s *Room*

In the novel, the concept of vicarious trauma could be observed through a close focus on the themes of alienation and physical confinement based on Ma and Jack’s experiences in the room. Jack is a constant observer of Ma’s sexual abuse, and he attempts to make sense of the situation which is difficult to comprehend for a child of his age. Ma’s trauma is portrayed through Jack’s witnessing of the sexual abuse and his mother’s physical captivity. Moreover, Jack filters his perception of reality through the mothers’ experiences and his limited perspective on the inner and outer space. However, their life in captivity transforms into a struggle to adapt to a new reality with their escape and Jack attempts to make sense of both the new reality and his mother’s difficulty in adapting. Jack explores a new reality while Ma feels alienated to the world she is born into. According to Ankita Das and Rajni Singh, there is a contrast between Ma’s familiarity to the concept of the outside and Jack’s unfamiliarity with the reality, and this contrast results in a unique experience for both sides (2018: 788). In other words, Jack and Ma share the characteristics of suffering from alienation and confinement, yet their reactions differ regarding their condition in these concepts.

The traces of abuse in vicarious trauma might be observed through the experiences of Jack who witnesses Old Nick’s abuse of Ma. Jack is an indirect witness of Old Nick’s abuse because, as a child, he cannot comprehend the concept of sexual abuse. Yet, the signs of abuse are still apparent for Jack to interpret the situation as a bad incident which causes empathic unsettlement:

Ma carries me into Wardrobe, she tucks Blanket around my neck, I pull her looser again. My fingers go choo-choo along her red line ... When Old Nick creaks Bed, I listen and count fives on my fingers, tonight it's 217 creaks. I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don't know what would happen if I didn't count, because I always do. (Donoghue, 2010: 44-46)

As a child who tries to make sense of the situation, Jack attempts to rationalize what he witnesses through empathic responses; however, it is quite clear that his grasping of the situation will always remain incomplete. However, Ma's hiding him in the wardrobe when Old Nick visits and the strange noises he hears thereafter are the patterns which Jack's psyche interprets as disturbing coincidences. Although Jack never eyewitnesses the sexual abuse, the noises which are associated with the act remains in his unconscious. Therefore, his psyche develops a solution to hide the truth behind a game of counting as stated above, attempting to overcome his disturbance concerning the unknown. Despite lacking comprehension of sexual abuse, Jack can still sense the peculiarity of unnatural situations informing him that something is wrong: "'You're dirty on your neck.' ... Actually that's not dirt, I don't think ... I see her neck again, the marks that he put on her, I'm all done giggling" (65-66). The scars on Ma disturbs Jack, especially when he connects the bruises with Old Nick's visit. LaCapra, when explaining the limits of empathy, underlines the variable nature of identifying "empathic unsettlement" because the stories can be understood through various aspects of observing (2018: 48). In this sense, Jack's empathic unsettlement is based on his observations and interpretations of the signs around him. Therefore, he can be considered as a witness of Ma's sexual abuse regardless of his capacity of understanding the world as a five-year-old child.

Vicarious trauma includes the experience of witnessing the signs of disturbance. In other words, the feeling of disturbance can originate from the interpretations regarding the traumatic event. Jack often attempts to rationalize his feelings or define them in his own terms when he fails to escape from the scene through his imagination:

I listen very hard. In comes the cold air. If I had my head out of Wardrobe, there'd be Door opening, I bet I could see right into the stars and the spaceships and the planets and the aliens zooming around in UFOs. I wish I wish I wish I could see it. (Donoghue, 2010: 59)

Jack's first reaction to the unknown appears as an escape attempt by delving into an imaginary world of images he is familiar with from the TV. To put it another way, Jack's psyche is unable to make connections between his knowledge and the event he experiences; therefore, he chooses safety, the familiar, over the unknown. Jack's attempt carries the hints of empathic unsettlement since the feeling of disturbance enhances with the failure to ignore what he witnesses:

I could sit up and crawl out of Wardrobe, they wouldn't even know. I could draw a picture of them in Bed or something. I wonder are they beside each other or opposite sides ... Then I have a terrible idea, what if he's having some? Would Ma let him have some or would she say, No way Jose, that's only for Jack? (Donoghue, 2010: 59)

From Jack's perspective, the breastfeeding forms a special bond between him and Ma. Mamak Shariat and Nasrin Abedinia argue that breastfeeding fulfils both biological and emotional needs of an infant and is a form of transmitting love between the mother and her baby (2017: 8). In Jack's case, this act represents a privilege reserved for his exclusive reach and functions as a sacred symbol of their bond. The jealousy of sharing milk with Old Nick also refers to Jack's naivety regarding the concept of sexual abuse since this act symbolises Ma's victimization. Yet, lacking the comprehension of abuse, Jack's imagination transforms sharing milk into an act of betrayal committed by Ma. Jack, in a way, reflects vicarious trauma through his interpretations and deductions informed by his five-year-old perception.

The concepts of confinement and alienation can be observed through Jack's observations in the novel which include Ma's reactions to the same concepts. To put it another way, the theme of alienation and the concept of confinement function in reverse concerning the experiences of Jack and Ma. Sam Fujikawa focuses on the "opposite conditions" of Ma and Jack by indicating that Ma's understanding of the room differs from Jack's on the concept of confinement because she understands the outside world while Jack has no real comprehension of it (2020: 7). In the case of the physical confinement, Ma's experience of imprisonment causes her to feel alienated from real world in a small cell that appears as the room, whereas Jack's confinement and alienation emerge with their escape from the room because he was born into imprisonment. Although Jack considers the room his home and comfort zone, the unnatural conditions of the place affect his perception of reality:

I saw one in TV that has a woman hanging on it by ropes. Women aren't real like Ma is, and girls and boys not either. Men aren't real except Old Nick, and I'm not actually sure if he's real for real. Maybe half? (Donoghue, 2010: 22)

Jack has difficulties about distinguishing what is real because Ma introduced the TV as a concept of alternate reality. Ma, trying to provide a healthy development for Jack, invents a way to introduce the real world to Jack through the images on the TV. However, apart from her best intentions, it is challenging for Jack to differentiate between the fictitious version of the real world depicted on the TV and real events:

“Listen. What we see on TV is ... it's pictures of real things.”

That's the most astonishing I ever heard ... How can TV be pictures of real things? ... Dora is a drawing in TV but she's my real friend, that's confusing ... Skateboards are TV and so are girls and boys except Ma says they're actual, how can they be when they're so flat? (Donoghue, 2010: 73-78)

Although the room is the only home Jack recognizes, the unnatural living conditions render Jack unable to perceive the most mundane details concerning the outside world. According to James Little, Jack's attribution of liveliness into animate and inanimate objects enables him to create his own story yet promotes 'vibrant materialism' (2022: 10). Engaging only with material objects aside from communicating with Ma, Jack lacks the necessary exposure to social communication and real-world experience to form an understanding of reality. On the other hand, Ma acts as a mediator between the dangers of knowledge and safety of ignorance by means of providing Jack a partial reality which hides the fact of their imprisonment. Ma, in a way, struggles to maintain a balance between her maternal instinct to protect her son and her intention to escape from captivity through Jack's help. Despite the psychological effects of imprisonment, Ma resiliently endeavours to protect her son while simultaneously grooming him for the outer world.

The inanimate objects, as toys, can function as learning instruments which help the children develop socially and intellectually by stimulating imagination (Oravec, 2000: 81). However, in Jack's case, most of the objects in the room are depicted as if they were sentient beings:

There's a cat in the second picture, in the third it's on the pile of rocks. Rocks are stones, that means heavy like ceramic that Bath and Sink and Toilet are of, but not so smooth. Cats and rocks are only TV. (Donoghue, 2010: 22)

Cats and rocks are only images on TV for Jack because he never encounters these concepts except for seeing them on TV, yet 'Bath', 'Sink' and 'Toilet' are parts of the room as Jack and Ma. Therefore, the objects in the room are not only utilities but also the residents of the place. Marcus Y. H. Tan associates Jack's "personification of inanimate objects" with his psychological problems in relation to his unorthodox lifestyle in the room (2018: 49). Considering his isolation from the outside world and his witnessing of trauma, these objects provide him a safe place to escape from his stressors. The room, in a way, appears as the playground of Jack, and the inanimate objects become his friends in this child's play. "Melted Spoon" is one of these objects Jack attaches meaning to and he carries with him even after his escape. It symbolizes the sense of home and safety which Jack lacks in the outside world. Moreover, the objects directly related to the room evoke positive emotions in Jack and he forms a special bond with the materials in the room. Jack's naming of his genitals as "Silly Penis" also shows that he considers himself as a part of the imaginative community of inanimate objects in the room while the room itself represents his closed society. To put it another way, confinement shapes Jack's perception of reality since his reality is limited with the interactable objects in his environment.

The escape from the room offers a new perspective to the themes of confinement and alienation because Ma and Jack experience a drastic change in their routine. In Jack's case, he steps into an alien world and is forced to adapt to a new reality of which he has no understanding. Therefore, he struggles to make sense of even the basic conditions of daily life and ethics:

When she takes Bronwyn's underwear down it's not like Penis, or Ma's vagina, it's a fat little piece of body folded in the middle with no fur. I put my finger on it and press, it's squishy.

"But listen, we don't touch each other's private parts, that is not OK. OK?"

I don't know private parts. (Donoghue, 2010: 307-308).

Jack lacks social decorum since Ma and Jack had no privacy and social communication with the outside world in the room. From Jack's perspective, the difference between living in the

room and the outside world is merely a change of location; therefore, he cannot comprehend the delicacies of social interactions.

Jack's extreme unfamiliarity with social structure might be associated with Robert M. Zingg's description of feral man who lives in an extreme isolation from civilized society (1940: 487). Zingg's feral man either grows up and lives in the wild or is nurtured by animals (93). These individuals face hardships adapting the civilized society after living in the wild for many years. Moreover, they have to unlearn the savage routine in order to gain an understanding of the human behaviour patterns and habits (505). As a result, the feral man tends to behave like a combination of an animal and human until reaching the point where the human behavioural pattern is fully understood and internalized. Similar to the feral man, Jack needs to unlearn the reality Ma introduced him in the room in order to adapt to the real world. Otherwise, Jack's behaviour can be considered primitive by other people and prevent him from fitting into any social circle. Therefore, the more the real world overwhelms Jack, the more he feels alienated from reality:

When I was four I thought everything in TV was just TV, then I was five and Ma unlied about lots of it being pictures of real and Outside being totally real. Now I'm in Outside but it turns out lots of it isn't real at all. (Donoghue, 2010: 345)

Jack's struggle to adapt to the outside world stems from his perception of reality and the conditions of living in isolation. In other words, Jack is overwhelmed by the concept of reality which is constantly changing in accordance with his experience. Jack's first understanding of reality is that the room is the safe place where he and Ma live, while the TV offers a fictional reality. Ma's revelations concerning the images on the TV showing a different kind of reality, and the fact that there is an outside world, make it difficult for Jack to comprehend it. Apart from these revelations, learning about an alternate reality and being forced to live in it, pushes Jack's limits of understanding and causes him to feel alienated from this outside world, blurring his comprehension of reality.

Lastly, Ma's experience of confinement has a double aspect: her physical confinement in the shed and her psychological alienation after the escape. Noémi Albert refers to Ma's realization of difficulty in adapting to the outside world as 'double victimization' and emphasizes that Ma's "idealized" image of the outside world is in clash with reality (2019: 401). In the early years of her confinement, Ma's feeling of alienation is focused on her longing for the outside world. After Jack's birth, she diverts her attention from the real world

and prioritizes her son's safety. In a way, Ma focuses on keeping her mind occupied with their survival in the room until the escape brings the realization of how much Ma has changed since she was abducted: "Ma shows Dr. Clay her homework, they talk more about not very interesting stuff like depersonalization and *jamais vu*" (Donoghue, 2010: 241). Ma's alienation includes an estrangement from a familiar environment including her earlier self. Alan S. Brown defines "*jamais vu*" as a sense of unfamiliarity which is triggered by familiar elements and contends that it includes "recognition unaccompanied by an expected sense of familiarity" (2004: 108-110). In this sense, Ma's *jamais vu* is triggered by returning to a familiar environment after experiencing extreme trauma in isolation. Furthermore, *jamais vu* is characterized by changes in the familiar environment which triggers a sense of unfamiliarity (108-109).

Ma undergoes a profound process of transformation, both physically and mentally; therefore, she struggles to adapt to her previous environment, which appears her as another lifetime. Returning to the place she once called home as a stranger, Ma struggles to adapt to the life she left behind:

"It's perverse," Ma is telling Dr. Clay, "all those years, I was craving company. But now I don't seem up to it."

...

Ma nods. "Yeah, but it's not how I remember myself."

"You had to change to survive."

Noreen looks up. "Don't forget, you'd have changed anyway. Moving into your twenties, having a child—you wouldn't have stayed the same." (Donoghue, 2010: 392-393)

Focusing on Naghmeh Fazlzadeh et al's remarks concerning Jack and Ma's alienation, Ma's "physical place" conflicts with her "psychological space" causing overwhelming emotions and a feeling of estrangement (2021: 450). After their escape, the media's interest on Ma's story related to abduction and her family's concern for their wellbeing suffocate her since she is deprived of the space that she needs for absorbing all these events and discovering her feelings about the situation. In the novel, Dr. Clay refers to Ma's anxiety and her estrangement as "secondary traumatization" in relation to the media's growing interest on their story (Donoghue, 2010: 383). In other words, she undertakes a "secondary exposure to

traumatic content/s” due to media interest and victimized once more after being exposed to a process recuperation out of her control (Živanović and Marković 2021: 261). The media’s constant pursuit of Ma and Jack becomes a constant reminder of the victimization process, which complicates and hinders Ma’s adaptation to the outside world. Correspondingly, public space turns into a place of confinement rather than that of liberation due to media interest.



CHAPTER FIVE

TESTIMONIAL NARRATIVES OF SURVIVAL FROM PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Cathy Caruth's concept of 'trauma of survival' forms the basis of this chapter in an attempt to explore contrasting nature of the process of healing from a traumatic event and the concept of resilience in the selected novels. In the chapter, Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* is examined in relation to the trauma victim's failure to overcome trauma through self-forced re-enactments while Emma Donoghue's *Room* provides a contrasting plot in which the sexual abuse victim succeeds in clinging to life despite constantly revisiting the traumatic event. In a comparative manner, the variable nature of 'life drive' and 'death drive' is explored including the significant role of resilience on extreme experiences, the possibility of healing or eventual self-destruction within the context of trauma theory.

As testimonial narratives, the novels delve into the question of how traumatic events are conveyed despite the crippling effect of trauma. Shoshana Felman refers to testimonial narratives as "alignment between witnesses" since they depend on retelling the traumatic story (1992: 3). In this sense, testimonial narratives encourage the reader to bear witness in recounting the traumatic story by another observer. Dori Laub further emphasizes that the testimonies lack the capacity to reflect the truth of the event since "trauma precludes its registration" in telling (1992: 57). Despite the struggle in recounting the authentic story of the victimized, the testimonies provide insight into inexpressible situations. Similarly, *Room* portrays Jack's testimonial narrative in the case of his mother's exposure to sexual abuse and other psychological problems pertaining to the events in the novel. Through Jack's witnessing of his mother's suffering, the novel also attempts to convey his mother's victimization. On the other hand, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, with its unique and experimental approach to telling the story of the traumatized, displays the protagonist's recounting her life story as a witness to her inexpressible memories. Both novels provide an insight into extreme cases of trauma such as sexual abuse and violence in a testimonial form. By analysing both protagonists' testimonies, this chapter reveals how extreme traumatic situations could be traced in trauma fiction and unconventional narratives problematize the inexpressible nature of traumatic experience.

5.1. Promiscuity and Obsession of Power through Violence in Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*

Surviving through trauma involves a process of adapting to a new reality while simultaneously struggling to maintain psychological integrity. In the context of survival, healing and destruction are intertwined as a mean of struggle to process what happened or what will happen during and after the traumatic experience. The memory repeatedly revisits the traumatic event(s), challenging the limits of the victim. In traditional trauma theory, recollections of traumatic events are associated with death and destruction. Trauma, in its nature, haunts the victim to the point of exhaustion, rendering the victim psychologically vulnerable. On the other hand, repetitions enable the sufferers of trauma “to claim one’s own survival” since visiting traumatic event also reminds the victim of her/his ability to survive it (Caruth, 1993: 25). By revisiting the traumatic experience, therefore, the victim ensures the survival of the self over the destructive event. However, the lines between life and death can be blurry, depending on the victim’s psyche. As in the case of the girl, the threshold between life and death is portrayed through extremist acts of survival and a total loss of control over her body and mind. The girl’s paradoxical relationship with healing and destruction is also related to her psychological resilience, which is constantly tested in the narrative. The resilience of the victim could be seen in her/his capacity to cope with and respond to the traumatic experience (Hormann, 2018: 92-94). The girl, suffering from multiple traumas, struggles to maintain normal behaviour and develops destructive reaction in response to the loss of control. A close analysis of the girl as a traumatized adolescent allows the readers to understand how teenage trauma might manifest in unconventional reactions to overcome psychological problems.

The trauma of survival is associated with the emergence of the traumatic memory to the point of haunting the victim with episodic returns. The traumatic event, in nature, continues to inflict pain upon the victim, challenging the limits of resilience. This Freudian psychological phenomenon relies on the “return of the repressed” traumatic memory until the psychological demise of the victim (Freud, 1989: 92). However, trauma of survival, from Caruthian perspective, also means that the repetitions remind the victim how the event resulted with survival; therefore, in trauma of survival, “the death drive”, which seeks destruction, is in constant conflict with the life drive of the victim to survive through the pain of trauma (Caruth, 1996: 58). Furthermore, the victim’s survival instinct depends on her/his

psychological resilience, which may result in either worsening of severe depression or the process of healing.

The girl, in this sense, is portrayed as a destructive character even prior to experiencing sexual abuse, which might have negative influence on her resilience level. The concept of violence, either psychological or physical, is a dominant part of her life. Psychological violence, however, originates from the clash between her religious beliefs and her misfit character concerning religious doctrines: “How much secret pleasure to stare at uncle in my mind’s eye ... What. Is lust it? That’s it. The first splinter. I. Give in scared. If I would. Stop. Him. Oh God. Is a mortal mortal sin?” (McBride, 2013: 50-51). As a teenage girl, she is aware of the changes in her body due to the hormones, and at the same time, develops a unique sense of self and the world around her. On the other hand, her fluctuating hormones cause her to feel regret about thinking on the concepts which contradict with her religious beliefs. The shame of being attracted to her aunt’s husband increases the self-blaming and psychological violence she exposes herself to. Domeena C. Renshaw considers the feeling of shame in incestuous sexual desires as a common feeling and adds that the “incest taboos also extend to relatives other than members of the immediate family” (1983: 1933). The uncle’s presence as a family member evoking the feelings of lust becomes a burden on the girl’s conscience along with the changes contradicting her mother’s beliefs. Furthermore, the girl’s tendency for obsession manifest itself in the form of hate towards herself, in fact, she only blames herself for the constant abuse she experiences. The destruction she creates is focused on her, craving to find a flaw in order to be fully unleashed.

Trauma is a complex concept including the extreme experiences which trigger the defence mechanism in an attempt to protect defensive barrier of the psyche. This mechanism functions as a psychological instrument which protects the psyche from an excessive and unknown data (Caruth, 1996: 60). In this case, trauma occurs when the defensive barrier fails to protect the psyche from an external threat (60). The traumatic aspect of the experience also lies in the victim’s unfamiliarity with the true nature of the event. Traumatic flashbacks, therefore, are the reminders of “the truth of an event” and “the truth of its incomprehensibility” which reconstruct the traumatic experience and remind the victim of its complicated nature (Caruth, 1995: 153). In this sense, re-enactments function as an attempt to recognize the unknown which penetrates through the psyche. The girl’s experience of sexual abuse is, similarly, both violent and unfamiliar: “What was that I did?

I think of it in bed at night as. On my own I. Think will it always hurt? Will I always bleed?” (McBride, 2013: 61). As a thirteen-year-old, the girl has no understanding of the concept of sexuality except for her recently changing hormones, in fact, she cannot comprehend if this experience is the normal way of having sexual intercourse or something extremely twisted happened to her. The girl’s trauma, at this point, resides in both the ‘incomprehensibility’ of the act and the violence she endured.

The psychological reactions of the girl to sexual trauma highlights the greater susceptibility of young women to destruction rather than healing, especially in the case of an earlier trauma. The death drive manifest itself in the form of promiscuity in the novel. Based on Freud’s ‘repetition compulsion’, Silvia Antosa discusses the girl’s tendency to destroy her body in an attempt for healing by stressing that these re-enactments of sexual intercourse transform into a violent obsession which destroys her further (2015: 159-160). In these re-enactments, the girl’s passive-aggressive tendency transforms into a fully developed obsession on obtaining control through the destruction of her body. By relying on sexuality, the girl ignores the possibility of further traumatization:

I open my eyes. Do you know how to fuck? What? His red face. So it’s like this is what it’s like. ... He did for a little while and it feels like nothing inside me. He gulp say sorry sorry at the end. And I say I didn’t think you’d be a virgin. Jesus. Well someone had to do it for you. Booky booky me and pulled my skirt down pick bark off. ... Saying yes is the best of powers. ... (McBride, 2013: 69-71)

These random sexual encounters provide her a false sense of self-reliance and results in a forced re-enactment of sexual abuse which she experienced at the age of thirteen. According to Jennifer L. Manlowe, a sexual abuse victim’s “control and ownership over ... body to enact the abuse” might be the result of an attempt to numb the pain or an attempt of distraction (1995: 37). Similarly, the girl’s overall behaviour concerning the aftereffects of trauma displays an unconventional aspect, since she rejects avoiding sexual encounters instead of avoiding the act; however, this obsession of power is also her defence mechanism against a total loss of control during the sexual assault. Aside from the underlying reasons for her urge to control and ignore, in the girl’s case, Freud’s focus on ‘death drive’ concerning trauma is in clash with Caruth’s perspective of dominance of ‘life drive’ because the ‘life drive’ in the girl can be observed through her attempt to overcome trauma by escaping reality and trying to obtain control. However, her attempt to survive through trauma

is threatened by the destructive nature of revisiting the disturbing event multiple times. As a result, the girl's survival instinct is in constant conflict with the nature of her survival.

Hypersexuality can manifest as a symptom of psychological dysfunction in the individuals who experience sexual abuse. The severity of this disorder depends on the victim's history of trauma. Mark F. Schwartz refers to this problem as "compulsive reenactment" which stems from "childhood dilemmas" and transforms into a "compulsive symptomatology" (1996: 196). The girl's hypersexual tendency, similar to the arguments of Schwartz, is related to her trauma of sexual abuse. In the girl's case, the uncle is the first person she feels attracted to, which shows her confusion about what is ethically right or wrong when sexual desire is considered. The feelings of shame, pain and pleasure are combined with fear, interfering the healthy development of bonding with another. Consequently, the girl's affection and bonding transforms into an uncontrollable impulse of attention seeking which is destined to fail because of her dysfunctional sexual development. On the one hand, the girl pursues a bond with a trusted companion because of the lack of protection she feels both before and after the abuse. This behaviour pattern is also related to her life drive which helps her heal from dysfunctional comprehension of affection and sexuality. The girl, in a way, attempts to alter the memory of abuse by having random sexual encounters which, in theory, rectify the mistake of allowing the uncle to abuse her. On the other hand, bonding with another person is extremely difficult for the girl because a relationship requires mutual trust and affection, and the girl lacks both. The abuse renders the girl unable to reconnect with her true feelings, causing self-hatred and further emotional dysfunction. As a result, her attempt to survive, by tricking herself into believe that one of these random sexual encounters can eventually be a substitute for her first sexual experience, transforms into a destructive compulsion of 'death drive'. Apart from her trauma memory, Marshall Lewis Johnson associates the girl's sexual addiction with her rebellious behaviour towards the mother against her religious oppression (2020: 12). Johnson's focal point includes the girl's rejection of "conservative Catholicism" in an attempt to recognize herself both as an individual and a woman in a patriarchal society (12). Through the girl's hypersexuality, the novel portrays a direct assault on a young woman's free will and her struggle with finding her identity against religious repression. In this respect, this psychological dysfunction encompasses her rebellion against authority and her coping mechanism concerning the uncle's sexual abuse.

The psychological dysfunction of the girl can be further observed through David Finkelhor and Angela Browne's 'traumagenic dynamics' theory (1985: 531-533). The girl feels betrayed by the uncle because, as an adult, he is aware of the girl's attraction and decides to exploit her naivety. In addition to the role of abuser, the uncle is a close family member, which complicates to comprehend the true nature of the abuse. The uncle's betrayal can harm the girl's psyche more than a stranger's or an acquaintance's sexual assault since the children tend to trust blindly in their family members. In the uncle's case, he is also the first person who attracts the girl's interest, transforming a teenage crush into a twisted fantasy from the girl's perspective. Moreover, the sexual abuse renders the girl 'powerless' and damages her confidence. The act of sexual assault is accompanied by assertion of 'dominance' by depriving the victim of free will, psychological and physical integrity. This circumstance results in a total loss of dignity and self-confidence. However, the guilt of allowing the abuse haunts the girl under the disguise of confidence in being a young woman who internalizes her role as a woman in a patriarchal society. As a result of this traumatic process, the girl learns to use her feminine prerogative through sexuality as a means to acknowledge her low self-esteem and to overcome her traumatic symptoms. Emer Lyons associates the girl's promiscuity with her tainted sexuality by the uncle and reveals that the girl's attempt to assert her dominance over authority figures in her life demonstrates an effort to make sense of her life (2021: 230-231). In this respect, exploiting the power of sexuality transforms into a symbol of protest and a result of violent sexual abuse simultaneously.

Violence toward the self and others can be observed in the behaviour of victims of sexual abuse. Freud defines hysteria and its occurrences as "outbreak of attacks" resulting from psychological disturbances (1989: 96). Through obsessive behaviour, these complexes manifest themselves as obsessions (96-97). Similarly, in the case of the girl, the theme of violence, either psychological or physical, persists through the girl's memories. Furthermore, it transforms into a symbol of obtaining power through sexual intercourse. In other words, the girl's psyche attempts to assert dominance with random sexual encounters; however, this healing attempt transforms into a destructive obsession when the violence exceeds the will to survive through trauma:

I met a man. I let him throw me round the bed. And smoked, me, spliffs and choked my neck until I said I was dead. ... I met a man who hit me a smack. I met a man who cracked my arm ... I met a man. And I lay down. And slapped and cried and

wined and dined. I met a man and many more and I didn't know you at all. (McBride, 2013: 96-97)

The violence escalates with new encounters, and the threshold between life and death drive becomes blurrier, in fact, the girl's survival instinct, intertwined with her destructive side due to violent re-enactments, starts to fade with violence. Healing with the help of recollection of the survival fails in the case of the girl. As an already traumatized young woman, she is succumbed to 'death drive' with each repetition she forces herself to. In this sense, the girl is trapped in a loop in which she destroys herself by her attempt to overcome trauma. Consequently, the girl's inadequate level of resilience complicates and undermines her process of survival.

In certain cases, violence might be viewed as an expression of underlying trauma. The girl's violent tendencies emerge after the sexual abuse, yet this violence, in a way, represents both self-punishment for disregarding Christian doctrines and her failure to prevent uncle's abuse. The girl's promiscuity might be linked with her identity crisis in which she struggles to find her place because she realizes that her religious persona is not her identity, in fact, her mother tailored her identity in accordance with religion. As an adolescent, she desires to find herself by experimenting her womanhood. However, her methods of exploring femininity transforms into self-blaming sessions because, regardless of the mother's intent, religion is a part of the girl's identity. Focusing on Irish tradition, Shadia Abdel-Rahman Téllez establishes a connection between the girl's religious conflict and discovering sexuality through rebellion against religion (2018: 5). The shift from "girlhood" to "womanhood" through hormonal changes also represents a rapid physical transformation which renders the girl fractured (5). Considering the girl's already existent stress regarding her perspective of religion, her discovery of her femininity grows into a problematic transformation both physiologically and mentally resulting in identity crisis. Moreover, this identity crisis worsens by the uncle's abuse and leads to repetitive instances of self-blame. In the girl's perspective, feeling attraction towards the uncle is a sin and she deserves to be punished for her indignity. In other words, the girl internalizes the concept of sex as "momentary assertions of power and sustained self-harm", lacking any kind of pleasure (Cahill, 2017: 159). She struggles to distinguish between abuse and sexual encounter because of her traumatic first experience, and part of her psyche continues to blame herself for her feelings toward the uncle.

The girl's promiscuity may also be an expression of psychological problems which are rooted in her psyche from early childhood. The promiscuous acts of the girl can be caused by "[l]ack of psychological control, [l]ow self-esteem, [l]ack of character formation ... and [i]mmorality at home" (Hasibuan and Purba, 2020: 82-84). The girl's family environment includes an absent father figure, a terminally ill brother who has a brain tumour since early childhood, and a mother figure who is obsessed with religion and reflects her depression to her children. The lack of a father figure, when combined with having a neurotic mother, distorts the girl's comprehension of love and affection. In this case, the girl's promiscuity also reflects her bonding problems which are rooted in her psyche before the abuse. The brother is the only person the girl feels a deep connection with, yet her concerns about the brother's deteriorating health causes a sense of fear and anxiety of losing him. Similarly, Anne Fogarty associates the girl's violent tendencies with her dysfunctional family structure by stating that her "self-destructive sexual escapades" is escalated after brother's relapse (2022: 84). Therefore, the family environment of the girl diminishes her resilience with absence, illness and depression, rendering her more susceptible to violence.

The victim's attempt to survive after sexual abuse, as a direct assault on a person's self-control, can be linked with regaining control which is lost during the abuse. In the case of the girl, seeking punishment under the disguise of regaining control is combined with the defence mechanism for survival. Therefore, having sex with the uncle seems to be the only alternative for the girl to assert her dominance over him:

All his body I cannot see. Forced inside me. Clamp on me like armour was made of steel. I remember ... Have him. Do. And I give him. Such a wide space to fill ... Don't believe don't believe with him inside me. Where I am? I don't believe anymore. Just. I'll walk out from this. Most awful sin and it won't make a change knock a beat from my heart. Go away. Go away thought. Him. I want you. There is something. (McBride, 2013: 131-132)

The substitute random men are replaced with the real abuser in an attempt to replace the traumatic event with a regular sexual intercourse in which the girl feels dominant. Although this act of replacement carries the intention of healing, the self-hatred distorts the illusion and the experience turns into the re-enactment of sexual abuse. This repetition also refers to a permanent sexual dysfunction concerning the girl's feelings during the act. The conflict arises from her desire to dominate the uncle's body to feel powerful again. According to

Melissa N. Slavin et al.'s research, child sexual abuse victims can develop "compulsive sexual behavio[u]r" which leads to "sexual addiction" (2020: 76). This repetitive pattern in the girl's case is directed towards the real assailant. This further complicates her obsession of power, her victimization by the uncle and the religion's place in all of it. In other words, the guilt of abandoning religion by violating her body weighs on her conscience to the point of destruction. The girl's obsession of power is reflected through violence and promiscuity, and this dysfunctional bonding causes her more harm than helping her overcome trauma.

The experience of sexual abuse haunts the victims until recovery, or it might lead them into abandoning hope for adapting the life after trauma. According to Léa Poirson et al, sexual abuse victims undergo resilience process which might integrate them into life and "reconnect" with people (2023: 11). This adaptation process can vary due to the resilience level of the victim, depending on the psychological endurance of the psyche (12). In this sense, the girl's dysfunctional family and traumatic experiences in childhood decrease her resilience level, as a result, her psychological integrity deteriorates. Moreover, her connection with the mother is severed when her brother dies, and she is forced to face losing both her brother and mother on the same day. After losing everything she values, including her innocence, the girl surrenders to 'death drive' by committing suicide:

And under water lungs grow. Flowing in. Like fire torch. Like air is. That choke of.
... Where uncle did. No. Gone away. Where mother speak. Is deaf my ears. ... Alone.
My name is. Water. All alone. ... Brown water turning into light. There now. That
just was life. And now. ... (McBride, 2013: 203)

The girl's survival process transforms into a battle in which she is defeated repeatedly by her fears and conscience because her 'life drive' recedes with each re-enactment that she is exposed to. Chu He refers to this conflict by stating that "[the] line between self-preservation and self-destruction is always porous" and indicating that life drive's attempt to regain control over life can be "hijacked by death drive" at any moment "to plunge ... [the girl] into deeper guilt, shame, self-destructive cycles" (2019: 82). The girl's 'death drive' dominates her 'life drive' in every attempt to survive through trauma. Furthermore, the girl's growing comprehension of her memory including sexual abuse traumatizes her even further. In other words, extreme experiences can be more destructive when the victim fully comprehends the abuse. As a result, "a substantial proportion of first suicide attempts [of the sexual assault victims] occur in adolescence" (Devries et al., 2014: 1332). In this sense, the girl's suicide

can be associated with her comprehension of the traumatic event and her deteriorating resilience over the years of her psychological development. The girl, in a way, loses the balance of 'life' and 'death drives' until the point of her destruction, and surrenders to 'death drive' in the end.

5.2. Surviving through Motherhood and the Concept of Depersonalization in Emma Donoghue's *Room*

The trauma of survival depends on the coping mechanism of the victim, known as resilience, which determines how the victim responds to trauma. Therefore, the level of resilience designates where the victim stands in terms of life and death drives. The concept of resilience can also be defined as a "positive adaptation" under stressful circumstances (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2013: 13). In other words, the psyche attempts to focus on life drive in order to survive in stressful situations. The representation of how a woman's resilience to survive persists through the abuse and isolation by means of motherhood can be observed in one of the main characters of the story, Ma. Although Ma is an adult, she is kidnapped while she is an adolescent and exposed to constant sexual abuse. Ma's traumatic experience might affect how she exercises her motherhood, whereas motherhood also functions as a defence mechanism which strengthens her resilience. Ma clings to life through her maternal bond with Jack, yet their dysfunctional bonding negatively affects Jack's healthy psychological development. Therefore, the relationship between psychological integrity and motherhood can be analysed through the experiences of Ma and Jack in the face of physical and sexual abuse.

In the novel, motherhood plays a significant role in empowering Ma's resilience. Emphasizing the complex nature of motherhood in the case of Ma, Miriam Borham-Puyal considers maternity as a stressful "adaptation" process which requires "a growing ... maturity," while encouraging survival (2020: 86). Drawing on this dual nature of maternity, Ma's love for Jack gives her the courage to present her demands to Old Nick, yet it causes her great stress regarding the possibility of harm that can come from the abuser:

"Why am I hid away like the chocolates?"

I think she's sitting on Bed. She talks quiet so I can hardly hear. "I just don't want him looking at you. Even when you were a baby, I always wrapped you up in Blanket before he came in." (Donoghue, 2010: 32)

Hiding Jack into the wardrobe, Ma aims to protect Jack from witnessing sexual abuse of Old Nick. On the one hand, she defends her son from any harm, even if it means submitting herself to Old Nick's abuse. This is the ultimate sacrifice she makes in an attempt to protect Jack from physical or sexual abuse that can potentially come from her abuser. Although the price for Jack's protection is both the mental and physical integrity of Ma, it also provides security to her child. Through prioritizing Jack, Ma focuses on 'life drive' against the re-enactments of trauma. Marisol M. Ladrón emphasizes Ma's effort to provide for Jack gives her a sense of 'fulfilment' in an extreme space (2017: 87). In this sense, Jack also symbolizes her resilience which provides her with psychological stability and a purpose to cling to life.

Alongside providing for Jack, the motherhood becomes a means of asserting dominance over Old Nick's oppression, thus strengthening Ma's resilience. Dillu M. Rose considers Old Nick as the colonizer of Ma's body, yet indicates that he lacks total control and competence "to intervene in her power of mothering" (2013: 44). To put it another way, motherhood transforms into a tool to dominate Old Nick in exchange for her body. Considering this argument, the concept of motherhood functions as a control mechanism against the vulnerability of continuous sexual abuse:

"Should have reminded me, I could have brought him something. What's he now, four?"

...

"Want to come out of there and try on your new jeans?"

...

"He's nearly asleep," says Ma.

...

"OK, OK," Old Nick is saying. "Can I've a slice?"

"It's getting stale. If you really want—"

"No, forget it, you're the boss." (Donoghue, 2010: 45)

Old Nick's sarcastic approach concerning to Ma's role as the 'boss' also symbolizes the privileges that Ma ensures in order to provide Jack with normal development. On the one hand, Ma is forced to be the object of Old Nick's perverse fantasies, yet as a woman with no connection to the outside world, Ma understands her vulnerable situation and tries not to provoke Old Nick. Hence, Ma's effort to endure his abuse encompasses Jack's interest and safety as well as her protection in order to maintain the role of motherhood. On the other hand, Ma's maternal instinct enables her to dictate personal boundaries to Old Nick concerning his bond with Jack. As a result of Ma's exploitations regarding the abuser's deviant fantasies to guarantee the safety of her son, Old Nick approaches Jack as a precious toy of a little girl, not as a father. Elaborating on Ma's resistance to Old Nick, María Elena Jaime De Pablos stresses that Ma's survival means a direct rejection of Old Nick's domination along with her unshaken belief of an escape (2022: 36). In this way, Ma's survival instinct and her love for Jack gives her the strength to oppose Old Nick psychologically while plotting against him with Jack. Through motherhood, Ma maintains her power over Old Nick and strengthen her will to survive until a possible escape.

The concept of resilience is threatened by 'death drive' and sudden psychological outbursts because a new adaptation process might be a stressor for the victim by reversing stability. In the room, Ma can escape from reality by focusing on Jack's safety, thus continue to survive the sexual abuse. However, after their escape, this abrupt change of condition deprives Ma from being a guardian of Jack since others around them substitute Ma's caregiving duties. Accordingly, Ma's psyche is forced to focus on the trauma of sexual abuse which deteriorates her psychological integrity when she is finally liberated from captivity. Faced with increasing media attention, which constantly reminds her of the room and her traumatic memories, Ma finds it difficult to focus on maternal roles and surrenders to 'death drive':

Ma, "you did sick on the pillow."

She doesn't switch on, she doesn't groan even or roll over, she's not moving when I pull her. This is the most Gone she's ever.

"Ma, Ma, Ma."

She's a zombie, I think. (Donoghue, 2010: 312)

The escape does not provide the freedom that she desires while she was captivated. However, it indicates a drastic change in relationship dynamics and denotes a new adaptation process for Jack and Ma. Referring to their habitual routine before the escape, Saba Sarah highlights that this change of environment and relationship dynamics discourages Ma and leads her to attempt suicide (2019: 49). Given that Ma's resilience is dependent on Jack, this sudden shift in the balance prevents Ma moving forward with her life after the escape and keeps her away from fulfilling maternal duties for survival.

Despite surrendering to 'death drive', Ma survives through suicide and her acceptance of her survival is represented through both her failed suicide attempt and the recovery process. In other words, the act of suicide transforms into a fine line between 'death' and 'life drives' after Ma's survival from suicide. Jessica L. Griffin Farrow emphasizes that Old Nick's "constraints" show their presence after the escape in "psychological" form, yet Ma's love for Jack persists through their "journey" (2018: 12). Despite suffering from extreme trauma, Ma's love for Jack guides her through healing against trauma's destructive forces:

She gives me the phone again, I listen to Ma say sorry a lot.

...

"I was tired," she says. "I made a mistake."

"You're not tired anymore?"

She doesn't say anything. Then she says, "I am. But it's OK." (Donoghue, 2010: 337)

Upon hearing Jack's voice, Ma's regret over the suicide attempt manifests itself in countless apologies. Ma's determination to overcome her traumatic past experiences is also highlighted in her acceptance of her psychological instability, allowing her to take a step forward in her life with Jack. By referring to Ma's traumatic stress, especially after the escape, Himmah S. Mursyidah indicates a positive path which can be possible among "anxiety sufferers" through "reconciliation with the memories in the past" (2013: 5). In this sense, the confrontation with death functions as a means of reconciliation with the traumatic past, advancing Ma towards the 'life drive'.

Portraying motherhood as a concept which facilitates adaptation process and encourages 'life drive', the novel also hints at the concept's negative impacts on Jack's individuation process, thus resulting in depersonalization on Jack's side. Philip Gerrans

defines depersonalization as a situation in which “[t]he mind makes the inference that the entity that sustains affect, the self, is no longer present” (2018: 403). To put it another way, depersonalization indicates the “loss of a sense of self” (403). Approaching the term as a disorder, Paula Thomson and Victoria Jaque also define the concept as “[a] sense of estrangement from self and the world” (2017: 144). This condition can be observed in the novel through Ma’s extreme bonding with Jack, which maintains its presence even after the escape. In the scene in which she is being interviewed, Ma draws a strong line indicating that Jack only belongs to her: ““Jack’s nobody’s son but mine”” (Donoghue, 2010: 293). It is possible that Ma also struggles to differentiate where her motherhood roles end and her personal space begins, as the room prevents her from having a private space of her own. Moreover, through Ma’s extreme internalization of Jack, his perception of self is also affected:

“I ran on the street.”

“When you were escaping, right.”

“Because we didn’t belong to him.”

“That’s right.” Dr. Clay’s smiling. “You know who you belong to, Jack?”

“Yeah.”

“Yourself.”

He’s wrong, actually, I belong to Ma. (Donoghue, 2010: 261)

Jack’s inability to recognize himself as a separate person is a direct result of their extreme bonding. Similarly, Zuha Najeeb et al. associate Jack’s struggle of individuation with a “complete union with Ma” lacking the awareness of self-identity and indicates that this bond also enhances Jack’s social anxiety when Ma is absent (2024: 458-460). In this respect, the concept of motherhood which gives a safe place to Jack in the room transforms into an impediment concerning his psychological development after the escape.

Challenging the positive aspects of the motherhood in Ma’s story, Ma’s survival instinct clashes with Jack’s depersonalization after the escape and prevents him from recognizing himself as a separate individual. Ann M. A. Short underlines the difference in Jack and Ma’s relationship between inside and outside the room by stating that, after the escape, Ma struggles to form a private space for herself along with encouraging Jack to have

his own space (2018: 175). It becomes challenging for Ma to set boundaries and assert her authority as a mother after they are being displaced from the confines of the room; similarly, Jack cannot easily form a separate sense of self:

“Get off me. I’m late already.” Her hands are pressing my shoulders but I hold on even more. “You’re not a baby. I said get off—”

Ma’s shoving so hard, I suddenly come loose, her shove hits my head on little table craaaaaack. (Donoghue, 2010: 287)

This conflict represents a psychological and physical separation which disappoints and confuses Jack. Short further mentions this dilemma as Ma’s way to “negotiate a new life”, which also means “the mark of a new relationship with her son” (2018: 175). Beyond this moment of separation, Ma’s attempt to form a more natural relationship with her son while setting boundaries is often questioned by Jack:

“I read a book at college that said everyone should have a room of their own,” she says.

“Why?”

“To do their thinking in.”

“I can do my thinking in a room with you.” I wait. “Why you can’t think in a room with me?”

Ma makes a face. “I can, most of the time, but it would be nice to have somewhere to go that’s just mine, sometimes.”

“I don’t think so.” (Donoghue, 2010: 380)

Ma’s effort to separate herself from her son is interrupted by Jack’s indifferent attitude towards changing relationship dynamics. This reluctance symbolizes Jack’s resistance to change and to form a new identity separate from Ma.

In conclusion, motherhood plays a significant role in both Ma and Jack’s survival process. As Ma prioritizes her maternal role, she finds strength in providing Jack safety. Motherhood also allows her the means to negotiate with Old Nick and exercise her passive aggressive rebellion against his domination. With Jack’s presence, Ma attempts to bear Old Nick’s constant sexual abuse while plotting their escape simultaneously. Thus, motherhood becomes an implicit instrument of Ma’s survival which advances her towards the ‘life drive’.

Yet, the same concept which empowers Ma transforms into an obstacle for Jack's psychological development. Along with hindering individuation, this kind of excessive bonding with the mother complicates Jack's integration into a new environment as a separate individual. In this regard, placing motherhood on a line which constantly blurs the positive and negative effects of the concept, the relationship between Jack and Ma represents a unique combination that encourages survival in extreme conditions.



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to understand the complex nature of trauma and explore the thematic and narratological preferences within a testimonial narrative conveyed through the perspective of child/adolescent narrators. Focusing on the themes of sexual abuse, witnessing, violence and confinement, the analysis revolved around the struggles of trauma victims, as well as unique narrative techniques used in Emma Donoghue's *Room* and Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. The novels encourage the readers to embark on a journey between fragmented and symbolic meanings in the language in order to bear witness to the characters' sufferings and their traumatic memories. In this respect, the concept of trauma explored through an interdisciplinary approach reflects different levels of psychological deterioration and destabilization by the lens of underage traumatized narrators. Hereby, the thesis offers an insight into the complexity of traumatic experience by means of exploring different traumas and provides a perspective into the child and adolescent trauma. The study also contributes to the field by focusing on the testimonies of vulnerable groups portrayed through women writers.

The thesis provides a multidimensional approach to modern trauma theory by exploring its developmental process which originates from Freud's psychoanalytical works. Freud's psychoanalysis and the terms he introduced, such as 'death drive' and 'life drive', form the basis of Caruth's 'trauma of survival' and provides an insight into the modern understanding of trauma theory. Caruth's approach to traumatic hauntings and repetitions as the forms of survival rather than mere psychological deteriorations, as Freud implied in his works, broadens the limits of trauma as a modern concept. Caruth's focus on the identity and the survival instinct informs this study in unravelling the psychological complexes based on the traumatic event and the victim's resilience. Redefining the concept of trauma and 'traumatic repetitions', Caruth's focal point explores 'life drive' as the primary source of traumatic occurrences and its significance for understanding trauma as a concept which reminds the sufferer of destruction and survival simultaneously and for recognizing the stance of the concept of resilience in the face of trauma. LaCapra's term 'empathic unsettlement' encompasses 'trauma of witnessing' and 'transgenerational trauma' as the forms of cultural paradigms since the historical events and the collective memory plays a

significant role in the development of an individual identity. LaCapra's concept was used in this study to discuss how empathy transforms into a form of traumatic experience and overwhelms the individual with traumatic material both in practice and through witnessing. Approaching trauma as a cultural discourse instead of a mere medical condition, modern trauma theory examines the collective and individual identities as intertwined concepts encapsulating traumatic memory.

I also aimed to explore the features of trauma narratives in terms of narratological structures and elements. Keen's *Narrative Form* enabled a close reading of the major characters' traumatic experiences through a focus on linguistic and technical aspects. The experimental and fragmented forms of narration in *Room* and *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* symbolize the fracture within a traumatized mind. The complexity of telling the story of the unexplainable is observed in the language and form of the novels in question. In the light of contemporary arguments in trauma theory and qualities of trauma narratives, Wall's narratological approach to underage narrators focus on the connection between the writer and readers. The voice of the child in writing can be lost under the authority of the adult writer. In this case, the child voice loses its credibility and the connection between the reader and the context might be severed, or the child voice transforms into an unnatural combination of adult and a child. Therefore, Wall's arguments reveal that using underage voice requires a balance on an adult writer's side in order to avoid unnatural pretence. Drawing on these discussions, child and adolescent narrators in the selected novels are observed in terms of their use of language and their expressions of traumatic stress while the narrative maintains a balance in using underage voice. The narratological analysis centred on the language used by the narrators, fragmented nature of the narrative and also symbolic representation of characters' testimonies. This study combined narratological analysis with trauma terminology in an attempt to reveal how a child conveys traumatic stress through an exclusive use of symbolic language and how an adolescent girl struggles to tell her story of identity crisis and extreme abuse through broken expression.

McBride introduces an experimental style that challenges the limits of the language in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* through a fractured and fragmented narration. The language, devoid of any grammatical order, reflects a traumatized adolescent's inner world with a technique similar to stream-of-consciousness. Portraying the damage trauma leaves on their identity, the characters in the novel, including the narrator, are not given any names. This

lack of identification, constant ruptures in speech, deliberate grammatical errors and confusing use of punctuation marks depict a traumatized mind struggling to form an identity and come to terms with the effects of trauma. The girl's identity crisis stems from the generational conflict with the mother who has been constantly bullied by her father. The trauma haunting the family is revealed to be a religious obsession that affects two generations. The girl, both as an observer and a victim of this trauma, struggles to form an identity of her own while challenging the rules of the mother. The themes of identity and womanhood are replaced with hunger for power and obsession of control after the girl's experience of sexual abuse. The novel, from this point onwards, portrays how an already traumatized adolescent attempts to overcome sexual trauma and cope with witnessing the terminal illness of her brother which leads her into psychological confinement. Along with already existent psychological struggles, random sexual encounters function as a mean to maintain power through sexuality, yet the girl's tendency to violence complicates the process by transforming it into a vicious cycle damaging her to the point of death, instead of undergoing a process of recuperation. In addition to blurring the threshold between death drive and life drive, McBride's contemporary trauma narrative includes the dichotomy of survival and deprivation. Encompassing extreme experiences and the fractured narration technique, the novel delves into the unconscious of a troubled mind by positioning the reader as an observer accompanying the girl while witnessing the events of her life.

In *Room*, Donoghue explores the themes of motherhood, abuse, alienation and confinement through the perspective of a five-year-old narrator, Jack. Challenging the limits of the reality, Donoghue builds a narrative out of the imagination and symbolic world of a child and encourages the reader to disregard her adult persona while engaging with the text. The novel provides a testimonial perspective as Jack discovers the world around him and outside the room, witnesses his mother's trauma of sexual abuse and is further traumatized after being displaced from the room. Jack's lack of experience is represented in a symbolic language which encompasses the references to the concepts he struggles to understand. Jack, as a witness of Ma's victimization, often uses his imagination to escape from this abusive and confining environment. Ma, on the other hand, clings to life by focusing on protecting Jack from the abuser. Motherhood, as a means of survival, offers Ma the hope of escape, but also turns into an escape mechanism. Jack's relationship with Ma becomes an obstacle to Jack's psychological development since he struggles to recognize himself as a separate individual from his mother.

Along with the depiction of motherhood as a concept which empowers a traumatized woman to be resilient, Donoghue attributes a destructive quality to the concept in Jack's case, depriving him of the ability to form an individual identity. The novel also subverts the meanings of alienation and confinement through exhibiting Jack's alienation in the outside world and Ma's struggle to adapt to her old life after the escape. Jack's alienation includes his failure to adapt to a new reality which contradicts with his former understanding of the world. The room and the objects to which he is desperately attached transform into the symbols of Jack's struggle and trauma in an alien world. Considering the significance of motherhood as a concept strengthening Ma's resilience, Donoghue's trauma novel places life drive in a position which eludes death and opposes the suicidal impulses.

The analyses of the novels in this study include a comparative approach to the themes and language concerning the concept of trauma surrounding the themes of sexual abuse, confinement and witnessing to trauma. Considering the concepts of life drive and death drive, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* and *Room* provide an insight into the opposite angles of the trauma of survival. In *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, the destructive quality of trauma of sexual abuse is portrayed through a teenager's fragmented narration. McBride's protagonist suffers from psychological deterioration throughout the story and fails to overcome traumatic hauntings by committing suicide. Similarly, *Room* depicts a female character who is kidnapped, exposed to constant sexual abuse and has suicide attempts both prior to the events of the story and after the escape; however, the character survives through these extreme experiences as opposed to the protagonist in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. Meanwhile, the concept of family in McBride's novel diminishes the psychological integrity and resilience of the protagonist while providing Donoghue's character with encouragement to adapt and survive. Concerning the narratological perspective, the language in McBride's novel departs from a grammatical order in its portrayal of the disoriented mental state of the narrator. Along with the estrangement with the family, the protagonist's psychological confinement and worsened depression can be observed in the use of language, as well as the stream-of-consciousness technique. In Donoghue's novel, language follows a straightforward, yet more symbolic path in order to reflect the imagination and inner world of the child narrator.

Moreover, in contrast to McBride's protagonist who feels psychologically isolated from her environment, Donoghue's child protagonist and female character experience both

physical and psychological confinement. Combining physical and psychological confinement, Donoghue portrays the alienation process as a struggle to adapt to a new environment, whereas McBride's focal point predominantly includes a self-inflicted isolation. The theme of confinement, therefore, is seen as a disruptive quality in both novels, whether in a physical or psychological form. Apart from the traumatic first-hand experiences, witnessing to others' traumas affect both narrators in the selected novels. In *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, the protagonist witnesses and suffers from transgenerational trauma including the terminal illness of her brother. Similarly, *Room*'s protagonist, as a child, witnesses his mother's victimization through sexual abuse. Both characters struggle to comprehend and accept the situation, each developing different escape and defence mechanisms. Structuring the novels as testimonies, both women writers investigate similar themes in different narrative forms and approach trauma from the perspectives of narrators of vulnerable age groups.

Future studies on these novels might engage with a thorough narrative analysis to offer a technical perspective on the concept of trauma and its traces in language and other narratorial devices. A comprehensive feminist reading of the novels might also provide further insight into the recuperation process of female characters and how they explore their unique selves in a patriarchal society. Additionally, an intersectional approach to the novels might reveal the interrelated factors especially on the concept of violence. Through the examination of violence in relation to race and class, the novels might offer political traces deeply rooted in Irish society.

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