

Traumatized Girlhood and The Uncanny:
Studies in Embodied Life Writing

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the work of specific female autobiographers or memoirists who have written about their endured emotional or physical wounds inflicted by trauma. Throughout history, women's writings and experiences have been commonly devalued or excluded from those autobiographical texts within the traditional canon. Further, traumatized women have traditionally been regarded as pathologically divided victims who suffer holes in their psyches. Their stories about traumatized childhood and adolescence are thus treated as insignificant or dangerous and are easily silenced. As a result, life stories of traumatized women have been commonly considered as unfit texts for students to read in class (especially because of concerns about possibilities of (re)traumatizing readers), and thus are commonly omitted from the English curriculum.

Considering that the literary world still is dominated by white male writers, this study examines not only traumatized women writers but also women writers who represent "difference" as well as have suffered trauma. This dissertation's analyzed authors and texts include: Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*, Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*. These women writers variously demonstrate, through their embodied trauma writings, how easily a seemingly integrated/unitary self can be shattered, how unexpectedly the status quo can be destabilized by certain events in their life-writings, and how subversively the history of the female body can be rewritten. The life-writings by

these women, who are non-heterosexual, non-white, and from the lower class, and/or who have lived with disabilities/illnesses, are far from that typical autobiographical writing that emphasizes tests of manhood, or beautifies the linear development of the masculine subject. In other words, they never emphasize their triumph over trauma, do not celebrate self-sufficiency or self-reliance, and are not interested in claiming any authority of their own personal experiences. Rather, they highlight the understanding of their own incompleteness, fragmentation, and self-contradiction, which serves to uncover the fictiveness or myths of self-control or self-mastery typically found in narratives by male and often white-only writers.

In their life writings, the traumatized adolescent selves are continuously reshaped and discursively constructed, not as helpless victims of terrifying events, as is frequently assumed, but as those with rebellious, transgressive, and *uncanny* power, who can disturb patriarchal social norms or regulations in their life writing and come to terms with trauma in their own ways: Duras's eroticizing trauma in *The Lover*, Menchú politicizing trauma in *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, Kaysen's depathologizing trauma in *Girl, Interrupted*, Satrapi's and Bechdel's visualizing unrepresentable trauma in *The Complete Persepolis* and *Fun Home*.

This study employs poststructural theories that “challenge the unity and coherence of the intact and fully conscious ‘self’ of Western autobiographical practices and the limits of its representations” (J. Miller, 49) to examine traumatized girlhood. In particular, based on feminist poststructural critiques of modernist, Enlightenment assumptions about autobiographical perspectives and voices, the following questions are examined in this dissertation: What words or images do this study's examined authors utilize as a way to (re-)construct a self out of trauma? What understandings or insights do these authors achieve — or not achieve — while working to come terms with their traumas? In what ways might — or might not — these authors' memoirs or life writings serve or disrupt a palliative/therapeutic

role in what often is termed the healing process? What places, if any, might such autobiographical works focused on women's experiences of trauma have in the English curriculum within the secondary classroom? And lastly, what and who constitutes the English literature canon, and what debates continue to characterize efforts to expand this canon to include voices of the marginalized?

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Acknowledgements

In retrospect, it was not easy to complete this work, especially at varied difficult stages of my life. Thus, to me, completing this work did not mean just adding another degree to my resume. It meant a lot more than that to me. It was a “battle” with myself, or a “race” against myself in various ways. There were moments when I thought that I could not move forward any further and I felt like I’d reached my limit on this project and wanted to give up. There were numerous ups and downs while writing this dissertation. This journey was far from a linear, stable progression or development through higher stages. Rather, I would say that it was a highly challenging task for me. I believe that my dissertation experience will serve as a precious asset for me in dealing with any hardships and barriers that I might encounter in the future with perseverance, tenacity, and assiduousness.

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Introduction

Our own existence cannot be separated from the account we can give of ourselves.

It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity.

We recognize ourselves in the stories that we tell about ourselves. (Ricoeur 214)

Rational

As a teenager, one of the most enjoyable things for me to do was reading autobiographies/memoirs. I remember that they were mostly written by white male writers, such as Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* or Ralph Waldo Emerson's *We Are the Builders of Our Fortunes: Success through Self-Reliance*. I cannot deny that what was described in their life-writings influenced my adolescent self, serving as guidance for my life. These books taught me that struggling for success, making progress in self-improvement, doing ceaseless hard work, and enduring any hardship or adversity are all part of human nature. To be honest, I wanted to become like these writers, so tried to learn from what these male autobiographers/memoirists had been through and how they overcame their hardships. However, as I tasted the bread of tears and could feel and understand the reality of life, which consists of a string of ups and downs, I realized that what I enjoyed the most about life stories — how to become a self-made person, how to live self-sufficiently, and how to achieve self-stability/reliance — derived from the experiences of the predominantly upper middle-class, heterosexual, and white men. I could see that they are somewhat artificially fabricated based on gendered (male-centered), Western concepts of the self or selfhood.

Life-writings by women who are not heterosexual, non-white, and from the lower class and/or who have with disabilities/illnesses opened my eyes to a world far from emphasizing tests of manhood or beautifying the linear development of the masculine subject. I have come to be attracted to life stories of those who have been voiceless or muted, pushed to the margins of the majority society or isolated from the dominant culture. To me, perhaps because I am a woman too, their life stories are more sincere and honest, telling truth about ourselves and our lives, which are laid bare and vulnerable to any kind of disruption and interruption. They do not celebrate self-sufficiency or self-reliance and are not interested in claiming any authority of their own personal experiences. Of course, the self that women writers describe in their life-writings is also discursively constructed. I am interested in ways that they construct an unstable, contradictory, and fluid selfhood in their life stories as a way to resist white Western men's views of the self, which is autonomous, rational, unitary, stable, and coherent. I will discuss this issue in detail later.

In particular, traumatized women have traditionally been regarded as pathologically divided victims who have holes in their psyches. Their stories about traumatized childhood and adolescence are thus treated as insignificant or dangerous (because they might retraumatize the readers) and thus are easily silenced in a society. At times, their stories have been considered as unfitting texts for students to read in class, and therefore are commonly omitted from the English curriculum. However, as I've read life-writings by women who went through trauma, I have come to realize that many of these women see their traumatized adolescent selves not as helpless victims of terrifying events, as is frequently assumed, but as agents with a rebellious, transgressive, and uncanny power who can come to terms with trauma in their own ways and, by doing so, also disturb patriarchal social norms or regulations. Women writers who have experienced traumas in the past demonstrate well how easily a seemingly integrated/unitary self can be shattered and how unexpectedly the status

quo can be destabilized by certain events in their life-writings. They also tell us about how the quotidian aspects of trauma can penetrate and affect the everyday lives of many marginalized women. More importantly, they never emphasize their triumph over trauma, but rather highlight the understanding of their own incompleteness, fragmentation, and self-contradiction, which I believe serves to uncover the fictiveness of self-control or self-mastery typically found in narratives by male writers. What I've discovered while reading the life-writings of women with trauma, which I've mentioned above, drove me to the study of women's life-writings about their traumatized younger selves.

Research Questions

My discussion thus far is intended as a brief framing of this dissertation's research: this is, my exploring the stories of female autobiographers or memoirists who have endured emotional or physical wounds inflicted by trauma. Through their embodied trauma writings, the female subjects, previously forced to be silent, not only work to regain the women's agency of their bodily experiences, but also reconstruct their own voices as storytellers within and without dominant discourses. Considering these issues, I examined my assumptions that their narratives are inextricably entwined with memory and the selective process of remembering,

- 1) How do the women writers verbally and/or visually represent (un-)representable traumas and the traumatized female selves?
 - 1a) What words or images do they utilize as a way to create a story out of trauma?
- 2) What understandings or insights do they achieve — or not achieve — while working to come terms with their traumas?
- 3) In what ways might — or might not — their memoirs or life writings serve or disrupt a palliative/therapeutic role in what often is termed “the healing process?”

- 4) What places, if any, might such autobiographical works focused on women's experiences of trauma have in the English curriculum and secondary classroom?

Perspectives on the “English Curriculum”

According to Arthur N. Applebee, recent years have been characterized by renewed debate about the appropriate content of the English curriculum. While ethnocentric and gender considerations made a contribution to encouraging “a more inclusive and culturally representative canon that reflects the diverse identities and cultural backgrounds of readers,” traditional/conservative educators resist any move that would weaken the canon's authority (Pike 356). Ignoring the contribution of women and of people from other cultural traditions, traditionalists, for a long while, argued that the English curriculum should be white, male, and Eurocentric. They reinforced the values of a traditional liberal education, arguing that the curriculum in English has already been diluted too much (Applebee 27).

A small circle of critics in Cambridge in the 1930s, of whom Leavis (1948), Richards (1929), and Eliot (1932) are the best known, defined and supported the canon. Leavis maintained that only an intellectual elite was able to make judgments about such literature, and that “our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past” is rightly in their hands (Pike 356). More recently, an influential lobby still supports the reinstatement of traditional US “values” associated with the Christian faith, the family, and patriotism. It reacts against multilingual provision in schools by emphasizing the English language and a traditional literary canon (Pike 356). For example, a recent study found that of the 11,579 individual selections reported in a public school sample, 81% were by male authors, 98% were by white (non-Hispanic) authors, and 99% were written within the United States (63%), United Kingdom (28%), or Western European (8%) tradition (Applebee 28). Although there have been efforts to broaden the canon over the past several decades, “the study found only

marginal increases in the percentage of selections written by women (from 17% in 1963 to 19% in 1988) or by writers from alternative cultural traditions (from 0.6% to 2%). In contrast, there was a great increase in the percent of selections by US authors (from 49% to 63%) (Applebee 28).

According to Applebee, works written by women still make up only 16% of the reading which students are asked to do for their English courses in grades seven through twelve, and works written by nonwhite authors consist of less than 7%. The major works which are the heart of the curriculum for many teachers are still some plays by Shakespeare, some poems from the Augustans, some contemporary works of “good” authors, some classical myths and legends, some prose and poetry of the romantic era, and some selections from the United States tradition (31). Thus, “canonicity” has contributed to excluding works by nonwhite authors and women, and that is why their works continue to be at the margins of a culture (Applebee 32).

Given this still-prevailing attitude about what and whose knowledge is of the most worth in the English secondary classroom, I entered this study with a strong assumption that reading life stories of people from outside the mainstream and not from white males can give students a valuable chance to look into the lives of those on the margins of society. I further assumed that adding works written by women, who are members of racial and/or sexual minorities, can enrich the existing school and university curriculum. As I entered into this study, my assumptions obviously also included my conviction that students’ horizons can be broadened by the study of non-canonical texts by women, and that through these reading experiences, they can achieve a better understanding of themselves as well as these women’s lived experiences. I believe that including more non-traditional works written by minority women writers can contribute to expanding reading lists based mostly on canonical texts by male writers. In this way, a list of works regarded as “the canon” can be constantly rewritten

and revised: The canon can be reconstituted by embracing unfitting stories by women writers.

With regard to forms and purposes of women's autobiography in the field of education, and in considering, in particular, feminist poststructural critiques of modernist, Enlightenment assumptions about autobiographical perspectives and voices, Janet Miller claims that women's autobiography raises a question of "static and essentialized versions of our 'selves' " (54). That is, a poststructural version of autobiography as a "partial tale" acknowledges the vagaries of memory as well as of constantly shifting subjectivities that challenge essentialized versions of the "fully knowing and knowable self." Such poststructural interrogations of Enlightenment-inflected versions of autobiography thus "disrupt . . . 'normalized and descriptive' identities" (J. Miller 55). J. Miller believes that writing and reading autobiographical works with "permanent openness and resignifiability" can challenge the "fixed, immutable, locked into normalized and thus often exclusionary concepts of what and who are possible" (54).

Thus, poststructural perspectives about women's autobiography can be used to help us "refuse closure and also recognize the constructing and reconstructing of experience and identities as interpretive" (56). In particular, by considering such perspectives about women's life-writings about traumatized childhood and adolescence in class, students have a chance to reflect on their assumptions about autobiography, in general, as well as about differing and often contrasting writings about women, trauma and the possible roles of reading and writing about these as appropriate for the study in the secondary English classroom. While reading such texts, my assumption, entering into this study, is that students might better understand contradictions, complexities, and multiplicities embedded in lives plagued with traumas, and thus, perhaps ultimately become more accepting of their own incompleteness, fragmentation, and self-contradiction.

My hopes for this study, then, included carving spaces in which I could explore

possibilities and difficulties in including traumatized women's stories into the English curriculum and classroom. Such a desire was and continues to be accompanied by my hopes that such inquiries also might provide textual contexts whereby students and teachers can think about what constitutes the canon, who decides the canon, and why the canon should be sufficiently expanded to include voices of the marginalized.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

Women and Autobiography

In Greek, *autos* means “self,” *bios* “life,” and *graphe* “writing” (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 1). Combined in this order (“self life-writing”), *autobiography* can be defined as a written account/story of the life of a person written by that person.¹ Although Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (c. AD 398-400) is looked upon as “the origin of modern Western autobiography” (Anderson 17), autobiography has been known as a distinct literary genre since the late eighteenth century (Anderson 1). According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography*, before the term autobiography was coined, there existed other terms such as memoir, the book of my life, confessions, or essay of myself, all referring to the practice of self-referential writing (2). Since the end of the eighteenth century, terms such as testimony, autoethnography, and psychobiography have been produced to “designate new kinds and contexts of self-referential writing” (2).

Smith and Watson explain that “*autobiography* became the term for a particular generic practice that emerged in the Enlightenment and subsequently became definitive for life-writing in the West” (*Reading Autobiography* 2). To be specific, the concept of autobiography, now the most commonly used term for life-writing, was acknowledged and celebrated “as the highest achievement of individuality in western civilization,” which

¹ I used the term “autobiography” interchangeably with “memoir,” “life-writing,” and “life narrative” except in the cases that require the use of a specific term. While I am well aware of the differences among these terms, these terms are functionally interchangeable, thus, I believe that arguing over which term should be chosen is not necessary for advancing the study of life-writing. According to Smith and Watson, *memoir* is the word to refer to the record of one moment or specific period of experience rather than one’s entire life span, *life-writing* means “written forms of the autobiographical,” and *life narrative* is a general term for “written, performative, visual, filmic, and digital forms of the autobiographical” (4).

coincided with the appearance of the figure of the “Enlightened individual” endowed with “notions of self-interest, self-consciousness, and self-knowledge” (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 2-3). That is, autobiography served as a means to represent the Western mode of the retrospective life narrative and popularize the notion of the autonomous/sovereign self.

However, Smith and Watson point out that this term has its own limitations, in that it “privileges the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life-writing” (*Reading Autobiography* 3). They remark that in Western history, the autobiographical “I” has been “a sign of the Enlightenment subject, unified, rational, coherent, autonomous, free, but also white, male, Western,” and “this subject has been variously called ‘the individual’ ‘the universal human subject’ or ‘the transcendent subject’ or ‘man’ ” (“Introduction” 27). In the West, autobiographical practices have contributed to the consolidation of bourgeois subjects who saw themselves as individuals — rational, autonomous, and universal — and at the same time, to the dissemination of the West’s master discourse, which determines who belongs to centers, margins, and boundaries (Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and The body* 18).

The canonization of life writings by white male writers indicates that many other kinds of life writings by the marginalized and dispossessed — such as “the slave narrative, narratives of women’s domestic lives, coming-of-age and travel narratives, among others” — have been considered as less important or untrue (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 3). The right to take up the pen for autobiographical writing is denied to some groups of people, such as “women, ethnic minorities, those who are not Christian and heterosexual, those who don’t live within northern American and western European culture, those who do not employ traditional narratives of action, adventure, and tests of manhood as the driving force of their autobiographical plots” (Benstock 4). In other words, the self, “based on

notions of the organic development of the implicitly masculine subject,” “requires the strenuous repression of its Others” (Anderson 55). Because of this exclusionary aspect of autobiography, people who are pushed outside the dominant culture due to their lack of public status — for instance, the slave, the illiterate, the child, the mental patient, or the formerly colonized — always find it difficult to appeal to the authority of their experiences. These voiceless or muted narrators “from a community not culturally authorized” have to find a way to speak publicly (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 34).

Throughout history, especially because of their gender identity, women’s writings and experiences have been commonly devalued or excluded from the canon of traditional autobiographical texts. According to Liz Stanley, women are rarely “admitted to the canon as specified by male writers on autobiography” (61). In a similar vein, Smith also remarks in *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* that women writers’ relationship to “the pen as an instrument of power” and their “access to the public space” have been severely obstructed in a male-dominated society (7). Spreading the idea that women have no “autobiographical self” and have no “public” story to tell (Smith, *Poetics* 50), patriarchal ideology has imposed restraints on women’s writing practices. Although “stories of resistance and difference have always been in circulation,” women’s autobiographical narratives have been frequently silenced in or excluded from public discourses, since women writers are believed to be unable to demonstrate the universal subjecthood of liberal humanism (Rishoi 4). In addition, since “women [writers] do not conform to the normative prescription of theme and structure,” the mass of women’s lives and their autobiographies have been ignored (Smith, *Poetics* 8-9).

If the autobiographer is a woman of color or a working-class woman, she remains doubly or triply silenced/marginalized. According to Smith, this autobiographer not only “finds herself resident on the margins of discourse, always removed from the center of power within the culture she inhabits,” but also encounters the even more complicated situation of

the intersections of race, class, nationality and gender (*Poetics* 51). Her doubled or tripled marginality further reinforces her “nonpresence” and “unrepresentability,” and makes her position as a speaker even more insecure and precarious (Smith, *Poetics* 51).

In general, Western societies have delegitimated narratives from anyone except elite white males. Enjoying a symbolic relationship with “liberal humanist selfhood which posits a similarly seamless account of the autonomous individual,” the scientific discourse/knowledge of elite white males has been valorized as historically significant and meaningful (Rishoi 5). It has been assumed that scientific knowledge, positioning itself as the true knowledge, “presents a coherent narrative without gaps or contradictions that might be construed as false proofs or faulty argumentation” (Rishoi 5). Meanwhile, women’s voices have been publicly constructed as insignificant and trivial, and assumed to be unable to reflect universal truths. Even though “women write autobiographically by choosing other languages of self-writing such as letters, diaries, journals, biography” (Smith, *Poetics* 44), their stories have remained outside the dominant culture’s boundaries (Smith, *Poetics* 9). The practices of women’s autobiographical writing have not been taken seriously or considered “appropriately ‘complex’ for academic dissertations, criticism, or the literary canon” (Smith and Watson, “Introduction” 4). Some autobiography critics still claim that women’s stories should be relegated “to the margins of critical discourse” due to their emotional appeals and lack of coherence (Smith, *Poetics* 15). In sum, while scientific theory and objectivity are valorized and respected because they are stereotypically seen as a male domain, the private/personal and emotional are ridiculed because they are viewed as a female domain. For such reasons, male writing about the self has been given “a privileged place in the canon,” but female writing about the self has been offered “a devalued position at the margins of the canon” (Smith, *Poetics* 47).

In fact, unlike those of elite white males, the stories and experiences of people from

racially, sexually, and physically marginalized groups have been regarded as unverifiable and worthless, and thus their narratives have been socially suppressed and disqualified (Rishoi 4) by the Western dominant traditional definition of what constitutes a self-story and by whom it can be written. In relation to this, French philosopher Michel Foucault argues in “The Discourse on Language” that every member of a society is aware of “the rules of exclusion” which concern “what is *prohibited*” in the production of discourse (216, italics original). The discourses, institutions, and institutional rules that constitute knowledge are produced through this principle of exclusion. Foucault emphasizes that discourse² (or knowledge) is selected, organized, and redistributed by mechanisms of power driven by the dominant paradigm in every society (216). If discourses are regarded as dangerous or threatening to the dominant power, they are repressed, silenced, and obliterated by what Foucault calls the rules of exclusion, which are “concerned with the principles of classification, ordering, and distribution” (220). In a word, the power structure in a society controls or manipulates the production of knowledge and its dissemination. Power and knowledge linked under the dominant paradigm reinforce and complement each other.

Foucault’s perspective of knowledge and power indicates that the discursive exclusion of women’s experiences has gained strength from institutional reinforcements such as schools, the publishing/broadcasting industry, and other practices which “exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse” (Foucault 219). Since women’s discourses based on their own experiences, not on science, have been thought of as potentially dangerous and threatening to the continued dominance of Western liberal ideology, women’s narratives and texts, unless they endorse and support dominant ideology,

² Foucault defines discourses as more than signs that refer to things. He states, “[d]iscourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (49, italics original).

have been barred from inclusion. Circulating the idea that women's experiences and points of view do not reflect universal truths and that they are not rational or scientific, those with institutional power have been able to justify the systematic institutional exclusion of women's discourses and experiences. Through the rules of exclusion, "difference is established" and "inclusiveness is achieved" (Scott 777).

However, according to historian Joan W. Scott, who puts emphasis on "the shortcomings, incompleteness, and exclusiveness of mainstream history," feminist historians have started to problematize concepts such as objectivity, neutrality, and rationality, which are upheld by male-centered historical and cultural accounts, and "[have] unmasked all male historians' claims to objectivity and rationality as an ideological cover for masculine bias" (786). Feminist historians have tried to demystify the assumptions that "objectivity," upon which positivist epistemology³ is grounded, is free of social context, and that anything from personal experience is a contradiction of scientific knowledge. Additionally, during the 1970s and 1980s, many feminist activists and critics also encouraged women to speak out and give words to their experiences and feelings repressed "in the patriarchally organized home" (Smith, *Reading Autobiography* 84). Thanks to these feminists' efforts to fight against "[women's] socially sanctioned position of silence and submission," the privileging of the masculine subject "I" has been held in check (Anderson 32).

Recognizing that "the Western autobiographical canon was constructed from the writings of *elite* men" (Steedman 25, italics original), feminist literary theorists and critics have scrutinized the long-term European project of conflating historically, politically, and socially derived male models of selfhood with a universal identity. Feminists have argued

³ Positive epistemology looks upon observable evidence as the only form of defensible scientific findings and sees anything from experience as the exclusive source of all authoritative knowledge. Thus, it assumes that only facts derived from the scientific method can generate legitimate/valid knowledge claims.

that such models in masculine self-writing inevitably endorse perspectives and life experiences of privileged upper-class white men, while ostracizing, sidelining, and isolating those of women situated under patriarchy. They've stressed that there are many ways to tell about oneself, so there shouldn't be only one universal story and one universal self.⁴ Owing to the constant efforts made by these theorists and critics, "the autobiographical canon has been greatly extended, and the autobiographical *theory* derived from it is more likely to be fashioned out of women's writing than that of men" (Steedman 25, italics original).

In fact, as Christy Rishoi explains, since autobiography requires only narrative skills to tell one's own story and involves less literary expertise than poetry, fiction or drama, it has become the most accessible, useful, and efficient literary genre for people from marginalized groups to tell their stories (4). Through the process of writing autobiography, the marginalized demonstrate power to explore, interpret, and articulate their own lives in their own ways. Rishoi's claim can be controversial, but to an extent, it cannot be denied that autobiography can give these underprivileged people a chance to become the authors of their own lives, which have been rendered invisible, marginal, and insignificant in society.

Many feminist literary critics insist that women's autobiography has dismantled "the patriarchal hegemony of literary history, poetics, and aesthetics" and exhibited "histories, criticism, and theories from a different perspective" (Smith, *Poetics* 17). Maria Tamboukou argues that "emerg[ing] from the grey spheres of history," women's self-writings have given a voice to women's experiences and knowledge, which have been "long unattended and discredited" (30). Exploring a relationship between subjectivity and autobiographical

⁴ Carolyn Steedman explains in "Enforced Narrative: Stories of Another Self" that the number of writings of women, and of non-elite men *and* women, in print and in circulation, has been constantly increasing. In addition, "a vast and proliferating body of postcolonial criticism has [also] directed attention away from the subject of Europe, towards the subaltern and marginalized subjects of the contact zones" (25).

practice, Smith says in *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body* (1993) that women, excluded from official discourse, write autobiography “as a means of talking back” (20). Considering the role of autobiography to help the marginalized break out of silence, Leigh Gilmore emphasizes in *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation* that women writers can be born again in the act of autobiographical writing, experimenting with “reconstructing the various discourses — of representation, of ideology — in which their subjectivity has been formed” (85). For this reason, Smith and Watson assert that women’s autobiographical practices have opened up the possibility that the female self and her narrative can emerge in history (“Introduction” 5). For women who have been labeled as invisible “objects” by patriarchal cultures, autobiography is a place “to express themselves as [visible] ‘subjects,’ with their own selfhood” (Cosslett et al. 5-6).

Susan Stanford Friedman also pointedly states that the act of writing can give power to women, “endowing [women’s] subjective experience with authority and meaning” (90). Women can bring to the front their experiences rendered invisible or invalidated in a male-dominated environment by writing them into existence. In addition, by reading other women’s autobiographical writings, women who are not even writers can also experience other women’s life experiences “as ‘mirrors’ of their own unvoiced aspirations” and feel empowered (Smith and Watson, “Introduction” 5). In a nutshell, writing and reading women’s life-writing have resulted in bringing women into the public sphere as actors and facilitated the rediscovery of “women’s experiential histories, stories, and traditions of storytelling” hidden in official history (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 84).⁵

⁵ For example, *Women’s Autobiography*, known as the first major academic feminist theorizing of autobiographical writing, was released in 1980 and raised awareness of the existence and significance of women’s autobiographies (Stanley 91). This book, as a representative of all contemporary academic feminism, contributed to making the re-evaluation of women’s lives and experiences “important and worthy of serious study” (Stanley 91).

According to Bart Moore-Gilbert, women's life-writing tends to demonstrate a conception of selfhood which is social, interpersonal, and relational. Women writers usually see their selves as relational, not isolated. Regarding this, Gilmore says in *Autobiographics* as follows:

[M]en are autonomous individuals with inflexible ego boundaries who write autobiographies that turn on moments of conflict and place the self at the center of the drama. Women, by contrast, have flexible ego boundaries, develop a view of the world characterized by relationships . . . , and therefore represent the self in relation to 'others.' (xiii)

Giving up the desire for mastery over others, women writers value intersubjectivity: others are an integral part of "my" life, and "my" identity formation cannot be separated from others. They highlight that "my" own and other selves are interconnected, and therefore it is impossible to be truly autonomous and independent from others. This is the opposite of canonical examples of autobiography, which mainly focus on the formation of an autonomous, self-centered personhood, and are not centered on relationships with others.

As Moore-Gilbert remarks, "[w]omen's life writing is [also] characterized by a rejection of the model of sovereign, centered, unified selfhood allegedly constructed in western male autobiography" (xviii). While the male subject of canonical autobiography is represented as the enlightenment-based whole and coherent human being, in women's life-writing, female subjectivity is characterized as dispersed and decentered. Regarding this, Smith claims that women writers see "the politics of fragmentation" as a way to challenge masculinist notions of selfhood (*Subjectivity* 155). Lee Quinby also suggests that women

writers tend to construct “a subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous” in order to counter the modern era’s dominant construction of individualized selfhood (299).

Moreover, while bodies are rejected in canonical male autobiography, “many women life-writers — and their critical advocates — have insisted on the constitutive role of a reconceptualized discourse of embodiment to women’s subjectivity” (Boore-Gilbert xviii). These women writers are, of course, well aware of “the dangers of confirming patriarchal stereotypes which equate Woman with Body” (Boore-Gilbert xviii). Yet, while not repeating or perpetuating the notion of an essential connection between woman and body, women writers attack, by means of “embodied writing,” patriarchal ideology, which has devalued and degraded women’s bodies.

One of the recurrent characteristics of women’s autobiography is that the writers subvert conventional literary genres and forms, pursuing a mixture of genres as a way of fashioning alternative identities. According to Stanley, the mixture of fact and fiction in women’s autobiography serves as the basis of its exclusion from the autobiographical canon, which values a presentation of the whole truth; nevertheless, women writers have no objection to blending the two (59-60). By rejecting traditional literary forms, women writers display a transgressive, ambiguous, and complex female selfhood, which can disrupt womanhood or femininity constructed in patriarchal discourse.

One thing that should be made clear is that the reason women writers employ these features, which are hallmarks of women’s autobiography, has nothing to do with gender essentialism. As J. Miller has thoughtfully put it, in fact, “many feminist theorists of autobiography are grappling with how to conceptualize ‘self’ and ‘woman,’ not as permanently essentialized or naturalized through language and culture, but rather as sites for cultural critique and social change” (50). Feminist theorists of women’s autobiography thus see the writing of multiple, contradictory, fragmented, incoherent, unstable, decentered,

ambiguous, incomplete, relational, and embodied identities not as a transparent, apolitical reflection of women's essential nature, but as a means of resisting the centripetal power of rational, singular, unified, chronological, and coherent male selfhood based on western rationalism.

Women autobiographers do not adopt the masculine ideal to try to take from men the central position. Speaking from their positions at the margins, women writers construct the female self as fragile, unstable, incomplete, disobedient, relational, embodied, and contradictory, revealing the very constructedness of the taken-for-granted male selfhood. In presenting the relational, incoherent, and fragmented female self, women autobiographers have problematized the universalist assumptions of the autobiographical self built upon the white male-centered perspective, subverting conventions of canonized autobiographies. For political purposes, they *strategically* reappropriate the ideology of essentialist selfhood, which naturalizes the idea of an autonomous, unitary, atomized, and individualistic self for man, and, on the other hand, a fragmented, discontinuous, unstable, decentered, relational, and embodied self for woman. By exhibiting how women can construct fragmented, fragile, dispersed, multiple, fluid, displaced, and interdependent identities in women-centered and women-defined discourses, these women writers not only undermine the masculinized view of selfhood, but also succeed in reclaiming women's selfhood on their own terms.

Women's experiences recorded in autobiographical narratives are reconstructed through the processes of *selection* through which some moments have been remembered, but others have been forgotten. As Smith and Watson mention, "memory is a complex and problematic area amongst the constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity" (*Reading Autobiography* 15). The act of remembering or forgetting is active, because new meanings are created through diverse interpretations of past experiences selected by the autobiographer. Although memory drives autobiography, it is the autobiographer who

decides which memory should be selected or omitted. As Scott maintains that “experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted” (797), what counts as experience requires personal interpretation. She stresses that experience “is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political” (797). In a word, “experience is a subject’s history” (Scott 793), and a subject is constituted through experience. In line with Scott, Gilmore asserts that “autobiography demonstrates that we can never recover the past, only represent it” (86). Regarding selective memory, Stanley also remarks that “when it comes to the past, memory actually withholds the key, for we inevitably remember *selectively*” (62, emphasis added). Stanley says as follows:

[M]emory’s lane is a narrow, twisting and discontinuous route back through the broad plains of the past, leading to a self that by definition we can never remember but only construct through the limited and partial evidence available to us — half-hints of memory, photographs, memorabilia, other people’s remembrances. (62)

Recovering the past in autobiography is not just a reliving of the original experience, but it reconstructs the earlier experience through unique, creative interpretations. In this respect, in autobiography, the past is not just the original past, but it is the selected memory of filtered experiences. According to Anthony Paul Kerby, although one remembers a certain event which has taken place in the past, the recollection of the event entails “the further task of discerning a chain of events or a story to which they belong” (83). Through a retelling of the past from the perspective of the present, the autobiographical self actively appropriates the past with a selective and imaginative recollection, which leads to the creation of a new interpretation of the past. Since access to the past is guided by current interests, the past is not

reconstructed as it actually was. The meaning of the past is not fixed and final, but is subject to being continually refigured, revised, and updated in the present, depending on current needs, interest, and desire. As Kerby puts in, the past should be thereby seen as part of our lives: “life is unfinished, so is the meaning of the past” (31).

In connection with the interpretative aspects of recollection, Smith argues that “autobiography becomes both the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences, after they have taken place, by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary, omission” (*Poetics* 45). Gilmore also highlights that “autobiography is characterized by a particular act of interpretation: lived experience is shaped, revised, constrained, and transformed by representation” (85). That is, since memory inevitably and necessarily has limits, fictive devices are always needed for creating accounts of the self, which makes the autobiographical self “necessarily partial” (Stanley 62). Stanley thus sees autobiography “as artful construction within a narrative that more often than not employs a variety of methods and tools which imply referentiality” (128).

Regarding autobiography, of childhood in particular, Kate Douglas states in *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma and Memory* that “memory necessarily forms the backbone of autobiographical writing about childhood” (21). She highlights that “childhood memories are at best fragile and fragmented and at worst impossible to retrieve” (21). Due to memory loss, memory gaps, and false memory, it is impossible that “autobiography holds a mirror up to a person’s childhood and reflects back the events as they happened” (Douglas 22). Since all of childhood memories are fraught with ambiguities and complexities and are not fully accessible to the writer, the writer must refashion something of childhood experiences into narrative (Douglas 21).

In this sense, the autobiographical self is not an a priori essence or a true presence, but rather should be seen as that which is constituted through the processes of storytelling. The

self cannot be detached from the narrative it constructs, i.e., a sense of self is generated from the story (Kerby 6). As Stanley argues that “auto/biography is not and cannot be referential of a life” (128), the autobiographical self is not referential to an ontologically prior subject, but it is constituted through narrative. In brief, “two ‘selves’ are involved in the writing of a life: the self then, and the self now, doing the writing” (Cosslett et al. 8). According to Gilmore, “the autobiographical subject is a representation and its representation is its construction . . . it is produced not by experience but by autobiography” (25). Gilmore explains how the autobiographical subject constitutes herself through writing as follows:

I offer the term *autobiographics* to describe those elements of self-representation, which are not bound by a philosophical definition of the self-derived from Augustine, not content with the literary history of autobiography, those elements that instead mark a location in a text, where self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation emerge within the technologies of autobiography — namely, those legalistic, literary, social and ecclesiastical discourses of truth and identity through which the subject of autobiography is produced. (42)

Regarding the self that is “generated . . . in and through its own narrative, in its own recounting and hence understanding of itself” (Kerby 41), Smith remarks in *Poetics* that writing autobiography is “a process through which the autobiographer struggles to shape an “identity” out of amorphous subjectivity” (5). That is, autobiography is “a discursive regime” where counter-discourses are produced and unruly subjects emerge (Tamboukou 34).

Given that “the act of writing is itself implicated in the construction of self” (Rishoi 112), we should understand that “the autobiographical self is not ‘the manifestation of an interiority that is somehow ontologically whole, seamless, and ‘true.’ ” In a word, “[t]here is

no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating” (Smith, “Performativity” 108). The selected “I” is the “product” (re)made through the selection of memories of the past, and the identity of the I in autobiography is the “I” made by the person who is writing. To use Smith’s words, the self constructed by the autobiographer is thus “a cultural and linguistic ‘fiction’ constituted through historical ideologies of selfhood and the processes of storytelling” (*Poetics* 45). Reframing Judith Butler’s gender performativity in terms of autobiographical performativity, Smith explicates in “Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance” that the interiority or self “that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection” is in fact “an *effect* of autobiographical storytelling” (109, italics original). According to Smith, “the life as lived experientially is itself performative. The living of a life becomes the effect of the life as narrated” (“Performativity” 111). Because of this performativity, if one is persuaded by poststructural theories, truthfulness in autobiography becomes much more complex and problematic in women’s autobiographical writings.

Reappropriating Foucault’s concept and analysis of the role of writing in *Technologies of the Self*, Tamboukou associates the role of women’s self-writings or women’s strategies for writing the self with technologies of the female self (32). These technologies of autobiography include “self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation” (Gilmore 42). Dismissing the notion of the universal subject of knowledge, the female practitioner of self-technologies sees herself not as a unified, coherent, and self-contained subject, but as a texture of multifaceted, complex selves or threads of interweaving various subjectivities (Tamboukou 156). In other words, women writers don’t return to the same (masculine) subjectivity in order to overthrow male supremacy and domination. The self narrated in women’s writings is “discontinuous, incoherent, irregular, and full of personal concerns” (Tamboukou 32). Citing Tamboukou’s words, “such conflicts, paradoxes and contradictions

have been at the heart of feminist theorizations of the subject” (156). This fragmented, contradictory, and incoherent female self, which is represented in women’s autobiographical practices, is constructed in opposition to the linear, stable, chronological, and monadic self of the male autobiographical tradition⁶ (Tamboukou 32).

In women’s autobiography, the female subject, which is fluid, incomplete, plural, fragmented, and embodied can be seen as *nomadic*. In line with the influential work of Deleuze and Guattari, Rosi Braidotti supports the notion of nomadism in order to introduce different theorizations of female subjectivity. Nomadism does not mean a situation of being, but “a creative concept of becoming” in Deleuzian thought: “nomadic shifts designate therefore a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge” (Braidotti 27). They do not necessarily represent homelessness or displacement. Being is always open to becomings and becoming is a process. Deleuzian becoming is against “teleological order and fixed identities,” but “in favor of a flux of multiple becoming” (Braidotti 246).

In Braidotti’s reconfiguration of Deleuzian nomadism, the nomadic subjects refer to “subjects in transition” characterized by “repetitious, cyclical moves, rhythmic displacements” (Braidotti 58). Focusing on subversive potentialities of these nomadic subjectivities, Braidotti views nomadic consciousness as a form of political resistance, since these subjects can go through “a multiple and constant process of transformation” (246). She claims that in relation to and in interaction with the marginal/nomadic subjects, mainstream

⁶ According to Anderson, diary writing, part of the autobiographical genre, has had a significant impact on women’s lives, creating a space to become transgressive authors in private. The “female form” of the diary, i.e., “the unchronological and unprogressive form of the diary” challenges “the traditional ordering of narrative and meaning.” This form not only reflects women’s different experiences, but also represents a deliberate strategy that women use for “an escape into a potential or protean form of subjectivity” (32).

subject positions can be undermined or challenged (5). Through nomadic interventions, “dogmatic, hegemonic, exclusionary power at the very heart of the identity structures of the dominant subject” is dismantled, and in this way, “margins and center destabilize each other” (Braidotti 9). Drawing on Braidotti’s feminist theorization of nomadic subjects, Tamboukou points out that “the nomad passes through, connects, circulates, moves on; she make connections and keeps coming back” (157). The nomadic feminine subject is not united into established social structures, but attempts to challenge the discourses and practices that have determined the conditions of her existence (Tamboukou 157).

According to Jasmina Sermijn et al. who apply Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome to narrative selfhood and “view [narrative] selfhood as a rhizomatic story,” selfhood as a rhizomatic story is far from “a fixed authentic, pre-discursive self that exists independent of the speaking”: “Each time we speak, at the same time a new self in multiple ways is born” (638). They explain Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome as follows:

A rhizome is an underground root system, a dynamic, open, decentralized network that branches out to all sides unpredictably and horizontally. A view of the whole is therefore impossible. A rhizome can take the most diverse forms: from splitting and spreading in all directions on the surface to the forms of bulbs and tubers. . . . From whichever side one enters, as soon as one is in, one is connected. There is no main entryway or starting point that leads to “the truth.” “*The truth*” or “*the reality*” does not exist within rhizomatic thinking. There are many possible truths and realities that can all be viewed as social constructs.

(637)

As Sermijn et al. have explained, in rhizomatic thinking and writing, fixity and coherency are denied while multiple connections and ruptures are emphasized (648). Within the multiplicity, without any clear hierarchy, structure, or order (638), unity or fixity is nothing but an illusion (641). Thus, the self within the rhizomatic story is a verb, not a noun, namely, something always in the “dynamic construction process” (638). Not restricted “within one coherent meta-story,” the narrative self as a rhizome “see[s] itself in all its shifting, contradictory multiplicity and fragility” (642).

As a nomad, the female self in women’s autobiographical writings moves along rhizomatic paths of becoming, takes diverse subject positions, embodies otherness, and navigates the multiple routes of her life. Grappling with incompleteness and fragmentations of their experiences, the women writers whom I examined here create the nomadic female self, which is constantly placed in a non-stop ongoing process of becoming where feminine subjectivity becomes a site of transformation and the passage to becoming.

The Coming of Age Narrative

It is eighteenth-century philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau who first defined the concept of adolescence as a distinct and valuable phase of life. Rousseau argued his 1780 philosophical romance *Emile* that adolescence can be characterized by moral and sexual anxiety, as well as emotional mood swings (Rishoi 54). Still, according to Rishoi, Rousseau’s discourse of adolescence is problematic since it is gendered, namely, male-centered. Rousseau assumed a male adolescent in *Emile* as a normative model of adolescence, ignoring adolescent girlhood.

Martin Swales also remarks that the *Bildungsroman*, or the coming-of-age story, is “animated by a concern for the whole *man* unfolding organically in all *his* complexity and richness” (14, emphasis added). Noting that the notion of *Bildung* depends on discourses such

as cultivation, refinement, (upward) movement, or awakening in the Western literary tradition, Swales argues that the concept of *Bildungsroman* is founded on “a European male modernist tradition emanating from Enlightenment ideals of integrated universal selfhood” (Rishoi 60). To put it concretely, the *Bildungsroman*, accentuating the idea of masculine maturation driven by a linear progress of higher stages, does not take into account the lived realities of individuals who are not white, male, and European. For example, during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, childhood and adolescence started to be seen not only as “a separate developmental stage to adulthood,” but also as “an essential and inevitable part of all life writing” (Douglas 8). Nevertheless, until the eighteenth century, unlike boyhood, girlhood was not acknowledged, and thus was rarely mentioned in autobiographies (Douglas 8). Girlhood was ignored and excluded in major historical, psychological, and literary discourses of adolescence, which valorize only the white male adolescent experience of becoming an autonomous individual with free will.

However, since the late 1960s and 1970s, psychologists, social theorists, philosophers, anthropologists, and literary theorists have contended that the paradigm of adolescent development is based only on the model of white, middle-class, male adolescents, which is unproblematically universalized. Critically analyzing the illusion of “the completion of self” sustained by the phallogocentric assumption of the *Bildungsroman*, they have claimed that the male-oriented paradigm, established upon a strong belief in upward progress, overlooks other possibilities of the *Bildungsroman* or the plurality of the ground of *Bildung*. In the 1970s, deconstructing and destabilizing the old simplistic, monolithic paradigm of male-centered adolescence, many feminist theorists began to scrutinize the experience of being female (Rishoi 54). Feminists tried to create new models and possibilities of girlhood/womanhood influenced by multiple factors such as ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, religion, and temporal and geographic location (Rishoi 54).

Rishoi remarks that “women who write coming-of-age narratives construct these oppositional subjectivities only *in retrospect*” (8, emphasis added). The act of writing one’s coming of age experience is the same as “the act of ordering the conflicts and confusion related to the construction of identity in adolescence, a feat not easily accomplished *in medias res*” (Rishoi 8, italics original). Looking at the past, women writers do not envision their past selves as unified, linear, coherent, and self-contained subjects, but unfold the multiplicity of discontinuous fragmented experiences in their autobiographies.

Adolescence is, by definition, a time when an adolescent experiences an unstable, incoherent, fluid, and contradictory identity. It is also commonly considered a time of rebellion and resistance. Employing this definition, women’s coming-of-age narratives are actively opposed to any assertion of autonomous, unified, self-centered, and coherent selfhood. The notion of the unitary self as a transcendental source of meaning is problematized in these narratives. Instead, women writers foreground contradictory desires, anxiety, pain, and confusion in order to disrupt normality and fashion the contingent, self-contradictory, and transgressive female subjectivity (Rishoi 9). For women writers who attempt to deconstruct negative constructions of womanhood, the act of writing the self is not a simple matter, but rather a process of configuring the feminine as a “becoming.” Through coming-of-age narratives, women writers de-essentialize “the male-defined discourse of womanhood,” creating ongoing and multifaceted identities in their own ways (Rishoi 13).

Women’s coming-of-age narratives thus can avoid the gradual development of a coherent universal subject by moving away from acceptance of mainstream values and resisting social integration. These narratives dismantle “the teleology of a unified self by constructing subjectivity as provisional” (Rishoi 63). Unlike the traditional *Bildungsroman* in which, as an ideal model of *Bildung*, the male protagonist marks his reintegration into society at the textual end of the journey, female protagonists of coming-of-age narratives

choose to become outsiders, remaining sidelined or marginalized (Rishoi 63).

Moreover, women's coming-of-age narratives favor an unending, fragmentary, and heterogeneous mixture of discourses. Refusing complete closure and deconstructing wholeness or coherence, women's coming-of-age narratives adopt an incomplete textual ending, which indicates the fluid, ambiguous, complex, or provisional nature of female identity in the process of coming-of-age (Rishoi 63). The feminist revision of the *Bildungsroman* emphasizes slippages, gaps, fissures, and interstices, which mirror "feminine heterogeneity that cannot be contained within the seemingly seamless narrative totality and thus undercuts the phallogentric promise of subjectivity" (Cho 28). In this way, women writers may display differences between the journey to manhood and the journey to womanhood in the growth of children into adulthood.

Embodiment Writing

Because of the bodily intimacy inherent in any lived trauma, women who write about trauma place great importance on their bodily experiences in embodied writing. Embodied writing refers to writing about any of the thoughts, feelings, or emotions one may feel during a bodily experience. While giving voice to the female body in writing, a woman writer can get to know her own body not as an object, but as a part of the self. Embodied writing is work that rewrites the history of the female body.

Throughout western history, the relationship between the mind and the body has been a defining dichotomy, like the relationships between reason and passion, depth and surface, sense and sensibility, outside and inside, self and other, or transcendence and immanence. Yet the dichotomous bifurcation of such opposed characteristics is not neutral, but in fact hierarchical. The dualistic oppositions of body/mind, passion/reason, nature/culture, and feminine/masculine were hierarchically organized (Braidotti 167). Through this hierarchal

division, one (the mind) becomes the privileged term while the other (the body) is its suppressed, subordinate, and negative counterpart. The body is thus regarded as what is not the mind, i.e., as something “unruly, disruptive, in need of direction and judgment, merely incidental to the defining characteristics of mind, reason, or personal identity through its opposition to consciousness” (Grosz 3).

In a patriarchal society, through the coupling of the mind with maleness, and the body with femaleness, women have been related to animality and nature, while men have been identified with rationality and science. Since the physical or bodily has been thought, in a male-centered society, to be corrupt, passive, and inert, women have thus been devalued and treated as disruptive and primitive, which justifies male dominance over women. In a word, the universal subordination and devaluation of women is deeply rooted in the association of women with nature.

Regarding this point, Smith elucidates in *Subjectivity, Identity and The Body* that men define themselves in opposition to the corporeal, while treating women as “the Other” whose bodies are “a symbol potentially of human decay and transience, of limitation generally” (133). While the transcendental masculine “I” represents a disembodied mind or subjectivity, women are thought to be stuck in the corporeality or materiality of bodies. Smith and Watson state as follows:

Any theorizing of the body in the West takes up the history of the polarization of thought and feeling that assigned the “natural” and “feeling” body to women and the higher capacities of reason to man, a polarization especially pronounced in Enlightenment thinking and its philosophical legacies. (“Introduction” 35)

While women have been thus associated with the purely corporeal “Other”-ized body, self-

governing male selves have been linked to transcendent objectivity, Enlightenment and rationalism. In “Autopathography: Women, Illness, and Life writing,” G. Thomas Couser also underlines that the valorization of “male” over “female” experience can be found in the suppression of bodily illness and disability as a literary subject (166). Couser says that illness or disability is seen as linked to the body, and the body is seen as inferior to the mind, and thus “[illness or disability] has not been a prime literary subject” (172).

Autobiographical narratives of illness or disability have been muted in life-writing for the same reason that the body has been repressed (Couser 165). That is to say, “injury and illness remind us, in various unwelcome ways, that we have bodies, that we *are* bodies” (Couser 165, italics original), and this fact justifies a degree of marginalization and discrimination against bodily ills or disabilities, due to the masculinist valorization of the mind over the body (Couser 167). Especially, when illness/disability strikes a woman, she is at risk of being doubly marginalized, because the female body with ills or disabilities is considered even more embodied than the able, healthy female body (Couser 172).

Yet Smith and Watson argue that “the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge as well as a textual surface upon which a person’s life is inscribed” (*Reading Autobiography* 49). Since “memory itself is embodied” and “autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects,” “life narratives are a site of embodied knowledge” (*Reading Autobiography* 49). Through embodied writing, women autobiographers *deliberately* and *strategically* deny the inscription of traditional female selfhood onto their bodies, and seek their own discourses about the bodily experiences that have been systematically silenced in patriarchal culture and society. For them, autobiography can be a site for exploring the body upon which their memories can be ascribed.

Women writers’ attempts to reveal an underlying truth through their bodily experiences have contributed not only to unsettling the patriarchal ideology that causes epistemological

violence against women's bodies, but also to shedding new light on their bodily experiences. Women's writing about the body aims to construct female subjectivities that transcend the hierarchical division of the mind and the body. Challenging the subordination of the body to the mind and shifting the living body and lived bodily experiences from the margin to the center, women writers are empowered to reject male-defined womanhood and interpret their life experience on their own terms.

However, it should be pointed out that women's writing on/about the visceral body and embodied experiences has nothing to do with the reproduction of biological essentialism/reductionism or the reproduction of an essentialized femininity which is commonly used to reinforce women's inferiority to men. By foregrounding embodiment and corporeality as a discursive strategy of resistance to the prevailing masculinist perception of women's bodies and bodily experiences, women writers make a definitive choice to connect themselves to the body. They construct the female body as fluid, unruly, unstable, disruptive, multiple, and permeable, with gaps and discontinuities that cannot be kept under patriarchal domination and subordination. By writing back against masculinist notions of the female body as corrupt and inferior, women writers generate women's knowledge founded on their experiences and create *woman-identified womanhood*.

Telling Trauma

It is Sigmund Freud who "developed a theory of psychological trauma that has become a major source for the practice of traditional literary trauma theory" (Balaev 4). Freud laid the groundwork for the conceptualization of trauma (Leys 18). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920)⁷ written during the events surrounding World War I, he gives us a profound explanation of the complexity of trauma in our century. Exploring a direct

⁷ *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* will be cited as *BPP* in parentheses.

relationship between trauma and historical violence, Freud formulates a nascent theory of trauma based on the peculiar incomprehensibility of human survival.

Freud thinks of the mind as an organism shielded by a protective barrier. This barrier protects the mind from any upsurge of large quantities of harmful stimuli from the external world, which threaten to shatter the psychic organization. He thus offers a definition of trauma as a situation in which the mind cannot handle a stimulus in the normal way since it is too powerful. Freud claims that “the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection . . . with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli” (*BPP* 46).

We may, I think, tentatively venture to regard the common traumatic neurosis as a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli. This would seem to reinstate the old, naive theory of shock. . . . [It] regards the essence of the shock as being the direct damage to the molecular structure... of the nervous system, whereas what we seek to understand are the effects produced on the organ of the mind. . . . And we still attribute importance to the element of fright. It is caused by lack of any preparedness for anxiety.
(*BPP* 49)

Freud explains that trauma is “powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (*BPP* 45). In such cases, harmful stimuli can intrude into the mind, which is unprepared for such an attack, thus causing unexpected emotional shocks to the individual (*BPP* 49). In other words, a traumatic event, which is not registered by the conscious mind at the moment it takes place, can appear to pose a bodily threat, but actually, causes psychological harm. It is repressed, but repeatedly comes back in the form of recurring dreams and repetitive behavior to haunt the survivor. As Cathy Caruth puts it, Freud’s notion of trauma is “the

response to a sudden or unexpected threat of death that happens too soon to be fully known and is then endlessly repeated in reenactments and nightmares that attempts to relive, but in fact only miss again, the original event” (*Unclaimed Experience*⁸ 139).

In the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud states that psychic disorders result from the overwhelming imposition of historical events on the individual psyche. Witnessing the striking occurrence of war neuroses in the wake of World War I, Freud asks why repetitive nightmares and relivings of battlefield events occur in traumatic neurosis. For Freud, the reason that war survivors repetitively dream about the traumatic events of the war needs to be explained further since it is contrary to his previous idea that “dreams are fulfillments of wishes” (*BPP* 51).

Now, dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright. The traumatic experience is constantly forcing itself upon the patient even in his sleep is a proof of the strength of that experience. The patient is, as one might say, fixated to his trauma. (*BPP* 13)

Freud wonders why war survivors uncannily and compulsively experience painful and repetitive flashbacks, i.e., repeat the life-threatening, catastrophic events of the war in their dreams. In *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1926), he also mentions this compulsion to unconsciously repeat and reenact trauma: “[H]e repeats [trauma]; without knowing, of course, that he is repeating, and in the end, we understand that this is his way of remembering” (qtd. in van der Kolk and van der Hart 167).

Freud explains why his patients are unwittingly and unwillingly fixated on their trauma

⁸ *Unclaimed Experience* will be cited as *UE* in parentheses.

in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. According to Freud, human beings have a strong instinctual tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain in order to immediately satisfy biological and psychological needs. As Freud points out that “unpleasure corresponds to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a *diminution*” (*BPP* 3, italics original), the pleasure principle is related to the basic needs to reduce pain, anxiety, fright, and discomfort caused by extra stimuli. In short, the pleasure principle is a theory that can illuminate why people have a basic tendency to reduce an unpleasurable tension or anxiety and seek stability or equilibrium.

In Freud’s view, the case of war survivors does not seem to fit the pleasure principle because they ignore their instinctual needs to pursue pleasure and stability. Repeating what’s been repressed inside, they seem to increase the quantity of unpleasurable tension and fear. According to Caruth, Freud argues that “unlike the symptoms of a normal neurosis, whose painful manifestations can be understood ultimately in terms of the attempted avoidance of unpleasurable conflict,” the repetition of painful experience hints at “the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way” (*UE* 59). It seems to Freud that what war survivors do to themselves displays “masochistic trends of the ego,” because they put themselves, seemingly compulsively, into uncomfortable, anxious situations that are reminiscent of the painful trauma (*BPP* 14). Freud thus assumes that the tendency to compulsively repeat or reenact traumatic experiences might be caused by what is independent/transcendent of the pleasure principle whose purpose is simply to experience pleasure and avoid displeasure. In other words, Freud believes that there might exist a more primitive, elementary, and instinctual principle beyond the pleasure principle (*BPP* 27). In fact, as Caruth points out, what Freud primarily demonstrates in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is why and how trauma is repeated and reenacted (*UE* 59).

Freud explains what is beyond the pleasure principle by telling the story of the first

game invented by a little boy of one and a half. Living under the same roof as the child and his parents for some weeks, Freud observed “the puzzling activity” that the child constantly repeated after his mother left him alone (*BPP* 15). When the boy was alone, he repeatedly threw a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it over the edge of his curtained cot. Whenever he saw the reel disappear into the cot, he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out “o-o-o-o” (interpreted by Freud as meaning “*fort*,” the German word for “gone”). The child then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string, hailing its reappearance with a joyful “*da*” (the German word for “there”) as an expression of interest and satisfaction (*BPP* 17).

Freud’s interpretation of the game is as follows: the wooden reel symbolizes the boy’s mother, his repeated activity of throwing the reel over the cot and pulling it again by the string represents “the disappearance and return of his mother” (*BPP* 17). The child was repeatedly reenacting the departure and return of his mother with the wooden reel. Freud describes this very early child’s game as “a game of departure or of return,” regarding it as an evidence to show the repetition compulsion. Stressing that the *fort* (departure) part of the game was repeated untiringly by the child although it reminded him of the traumatic event of mother’s absence, Freud raises this question: “How then does his repetition of this distressing experience as a game fit in with the pleasure principle?” (*BPP* 17).

Freud introduces the reality principle to explain what is beyond the pleasure principle. According to Freud, “from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, [the pleasure principle] is from the very out-set inefficient and even highly dangerous” (*BPP* 6). Comparing the pleasure principle with the reality principle, Freud expatiates on the reason why we need to defer the immediate gratification of our desires. If, driven by the id, we act only on the pleasure principle and seek the immediate gratification of all needs, demands, and urges for pleasure, we might find ourselves out of control. For this reason, as we grow up, we learn the necessity of delaying

the immediate gratification of our desires and enduring the pain caused by the constraints and obstacles of reality. In other words, the reality principle, which is the exact opposite of the pleasure principle, and which is ruled by the ego rather than the id, leads us to act according to the rules of proper social action and engagement. The ego acts to ensure that the demands or needs of the id are satisfied in safe, realistic, effective and appropriate ways. Freud contends as follows:

An ego thus educated has become ‘reasonable’; it no longer lets itself be governed by the pleasure principle, but obeys the reality principle, which also at bottom seeks to obtain pleasure, but pleasure which is assured through taking account of reality, even though it is pleasure postponed and diminished. (*BPP* 12)

Freud insists that there is another kind of pleasure derived from obeying the reality principle and, specifically, from postponing the immediate gratification of needs. Applying the two principles to the child’s *fort/da* play, which is “re-experienced under the compulsion to repeat what is repressed into unconscious,” Freud highlights that the child’s play in fact demonstrates “unpleasure for one system and simultaneously satisfaction for the other” (*BPP* 27). Freud’s answer to the question of how “a compulsion to repeat overrides the pleasure principle” (*BPP* 32) is that “the child may, after all, only have been able to repeat his unpleasant experience in play because the repetition carried, along with it, *a yield of pleasure of another sort*” (*BPP* 20, emphasis added).

It may perhaps be said... that [his mother’s] departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it was in the latter that lay the

true purpose of the game. But against this must be counted the observed fact that the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending. (*BPP* 18)

According to Freud, the child felt pleasure when he saw that which he had thought to be gone forever return from the void (*BPP* 18). His pleasure was derived from making it possible to tolerate the disappearance of the other and expect its reappearance. By repeating unpleasant experiences, the child could better “master a powerful impression by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively” (*BPP* 57). Regarding the question of how the child can draw satisfaction from repeating the actions that have caused unpleasant feelings, Freud thus concludes that “each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of” (*BPP* 58).

Going back to the case of the war survivors, Freud finds out that the survivors hadn't fully understood the traumatic events at the exact moment they occurred in the past. The traumatic events are not completely experienced by them until it is over. They must endure “the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life” after the event (Caruth, *UE* 62). Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, translated as “deferred action,” “belatedness,” or “afterwardness,” refers to this peculiar temporal structure of trauma (“one moment too late”), “which implies a recurrent tension between the traumatic impact and its delayed response” (Nadal and Calvo 3). Owing to trauma's unfinishedness or belatedness, the survivors are to confront the primary shock over and over again, and eventually, they are fixated on the trauma.

Yet, like the child who succeeded in transforming trauma into pleasure, the war survivors' repetitions of the traumatic events in their dreams can be understood as a means of achieving mastery over the feelings of shock, fear, anxiety, fright, and apprehension aroused

by the flood of stimuli which have broken through their defenses. Freud states that “these dreams are endeavoring to *master* the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis” (*BPP* 32, emphasis added). Caruth explains that what Freud sees in people’s suffering from war neuroses is the intricate relationship between trauma and survival. By repeating the threat of death in the past, the survivors confront “the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to [his/her] own life,” which Caruth interprets “as the act of survival” (*UE* 60). According to Caruth, in Freud’s work, the endless return of traumatic experiences in dreams and flashbacks of neurotics mirrors their desires to “master” what has never been completely understood or completely integrated into the self in the first place (*UE* 60). In a word, due to the very incomprehensibility of trauma, trauma survivors return to the overwhelming experiences that disturb them, and they desire to master them.

Anne Whitehead explains in *Trauma Fiction* that “repetition works as a process of binding, which seeks to create a constant state of energy and which will permit the emergence of mastery and the restored dominance of pleasure principle” (125). The reason the individual continually returns to the traumatic situation is to gain the energy needed to master the amount of stimulus that has breached their defenses, simultaneously establishing a protective shield against trauma after the event (Whitehead 119). To use Caruth’s words, for Freud, “the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but more importantly, in having *survived, precisely, without knowing it*” (*UE* 64, italics original). Freud ultimately sees the repetition of trauma as a way to survive, i.e., achieve a cathartic recovery. He thus suggests that a patient should constantly “abreact” the traumatic experience in hypnosis or “talk” to a therapist (Balaev 4). Stressing the importance of presenting the traumatic material in verbal form, Freud believes “recovery of traumatic memories to be both possible and necessary for healing” (Reviere 11).

Like Freud, literary trauma scholars have defined the traumatic event or experience “as a timeless void” that shatters/fragments one’s identity. According to these scholars, the traumatic event is never fully incorporated into consciousness and registered as a memory. It eventually leads to “a fractured pathological self and memory” (Balaev 6). These scholars claim that people who develop problems after trauma are likely to be enervated, debilitated, or incapacitated, not because of the traumatic experience itself, but because of their inability to integrate it properly into their consciousness of self and their sense of reality.

Pierre Janet, who specializes in the field of dissociation and traumatic memory, argues that as cited by van der Kolk and van der Hart, traumatic memory is different from narrative memory: traumatic memory unconsciously repeats the past, while narrative memory narrates the past as past (160). Janet argues that in order to make sense out of experience, people use ordinary or narrative memory. Familiar and expectable experiences can be integrated into the existing mental structures of which ordinary or narrative memory consists (160). However, frightening experiences are not easily and entirely integrated into the existing cognitive schemes (160). In this case, the memory of these unintegrated experiences “becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control” (160). This memory is thereby “not available for retrieval under ordinary conditions,” and is thus what Janet calls traumatic memory (160). Janet argues that the dissociation caused by traumatic experiences prevents the ego from binding psychic elements “in a single, integrated flow of consciousness” (Reviere 15). That is, the traumatic experiences overwhelm one’s ability to take adaptive and effective action, obstruct verbal understanding/processing, and fragment the normal ego (Reviere 13). Just as Freud believes that in Bessel A. van der Kolk and C. R. Ducey’s words, “the presence of mute, unsymbolized, and unintegrated experiences” results in the repetition of trauma (271), Janet also holds the view that the failure of proper integration of frightening/overwhelming experiences into the narrative memory scheme leads to the

formation of traumatic memories.

Janet assumes that “intense emotional reactions to traumatic events” are caused by “the severing of the normal connections of memory, knowledge, and emotion” (Herman 35). For Janet, the traumatic event/moment, which is stored in a different part of the brain and “encoded in an abnormal form of memory” (Herman 37), can never be properly incorporated into consciousness or registered as a normal memory until traumatic memory is transformed into narrative memory. Janet suggests that “patients must be helped to dissolve their amnesia by telling the story of the traumatic event in order to be cured” (Leys 111). Like Freud, Janet also claims that accessing traumatic memories through a verbal narrative is key to recovery. Emphasizing that trauma recovery requires an assimilation/integration of the traumatic memories within oneself, Janet insists on the need to narrativize/verbalize the traumatic experiences in order to integrate these events into “normal/narrative memory” (Balaev 5). To sum up, in Janet’s view, therapy should aim to help the patient talk about his/her painful past.

In *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Judith L. Herman explores the evolution of the psychological definition of trauma and the stages of recovery. Herman’s definition of trauma is built upon Freud’s view of trauma as something unexpectedly breaking through the protective barriers of the mind. According to Herman, traumatic events “shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others” (51). Herman defines trauma as an extraordinary event which “generally involves threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death” (33). She says, “[trauma] overwhelms the ordinary human adaptations to life” (33). When one confronts this kind of event, one would experience extreme and overwhelming helplessness, fear, loss of control, and terror. Traumatic events or experiences fragment one’s identity in relation to others, and shatter basic human relationships, i.e., the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. In other words, trauma calls into question “the ordinary systems of care that give

people a sense of control, connection, and meaning” (Herman 34). In addition, according to Herman, trauma dismantles/destroys one’s fundamental assumptions or belief systems about “the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation” (51). To sum up, trauma “casts the victim into a state of existential crisis” (Herman 51).

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman proposes three stages of trauma recovery: “safety,” “remembrance and mourning,” and “reconnection” (155, 175, 196), and this approach is indebted to the work of Janet. In the first stage, one identifies the problem. In the second stage, the work of reconstruction occurs, which involves delving into and confronting whatever remains in the psyche of the traumatic experience. At this stage, the victim must be encouraged to speak the horrifying truth of her past, i.e., “speak of the unspeakable” in depth and in detail in order to reconstruct or reorganize what happened in the past (Herman 175). In the process of reconstruction, the trauma story undergoes a transformation, becoming “more present and more real,” which proves “the restorative power of truth-telling” for the survivor (Herman 181). In the third stage, the traumatic memory is assimilated or integrated into the mind and life of the trauma survivor (Herman 205). Herman sees the third stage as an opportunity to discover new meaning in one’s traumatic experience, which transcends the limits of personal tragedy. Although the survivor has mourned the old self that trauma destroyed, at this stage, he/she can create a new identity and future (Herman 196). In other words, the rebuilding of a new self and the restoration of human connections occur in the third stage.

Although Herman acknowledges that “the impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate throughout the survivor’s lifecycle” (211), she underscores the fact that the ultimate goal of psychotherapy is to help the survivor recount the trauma story so that he/she can integrate it into his/her normal life. Herman considers narrative reconstruction to be the most important way for the survivor to overcome trauma (Hawkins 121). In Herman’s view,

narrative recall is the key to unlocking the memory frozen by trauma. Placing great emphasis on narrative recall, i.e., the talking cure, she asserts that the adverse effects of trauma on the survivor can be reversed “through the use of words” (Herman 183).

Herman argues that narration of the remembered trauma not only has a personal therapeutic value but also a public or collective value, since personal testimony is inherently political and collective (181). With regard to this, she states that “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (2). Although Herman believes that putting the story into words is “a necessary part of the recovery process” (196), she concludes that “resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete” (211). To put it differently, “to some degree, everyone is a prisoner of the past” and accepts his/her limitation as part of the human condition (Herman 235).

In line with Herman, Kali Tal claims in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading in the Literatures of Trauma* that a life-threatening event “displaces [one’s] preconceived notions about the world”; the responses to trauma include cognitive chaos and the possible division of consciousness (15). Tal⁹ suggests that since trauma lies outside of the bounds of “normal” human experience, representing trauma accurately/perfectly is not possible without recreating the very event (15). That is, “since the traumatic experience precludes knowledge and hence representation,” trauma is only “an approximate account of the past” (Balaev 6). In Tal’s view, the creation of a story to be told to others is not only helpful for the trauma survivor, but also beneficial for the larger society (21). Out of the need to retell/repeat the story of the traumatic experience, the trauma survivor writes a literature of trauma, making trauma “real” to the victim, the community, and the larger public (Tal 21). In this respect, Tal says that a

⁹ Tal insists that the traumatic event “must be experienced first-hand, and not vicariously perceived or mediated through any textual conduit, such as a book or a movie” (Horvitz 5-6).

storyteller has a mission or a responsibility as a survivor to bear the tale in his/her society: “Each one also affirms the process of storytelling as a personally (re-)constitutive act, and expresses the hope that it will also be a socially (re-)constitutive act” (121). For Tal, the whole point of trauma testimony is to “change the order of things as they are,” as well as to “prevent the enactment of similar horrors in the future” (121).

Psychiatrist van der Kolk, who is noted for his research in the area of post-traumatic stress, upholds the concept of trauma as prelinguistic and unspeakable. According to van der Kolk, since the traumatic event is so catastrophic and overwhelming, the memory of trauma is radically dissociated from symbolization, meaning, and the usual processes of integration and normal recollection (“Trauma and Memory” 281). The traumatic memory belatedly returns as fragmented sensory or motoric experiences. It possesses the patient in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, and other reenactments (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176). Like Freud, Janet, and Herman, van der Kolk also claims that since traumatic memories are dissociated from consciousness, they cannot be arranged/organized in words, which gives them their unspeakable quality.

In “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma,” van der Kolk and van der Hart argue that the traumatized live in two different worlds: the realm of the trauma and the realm of their current, ordinary life. This condition often drives them to commit suicide or perform other self-destructive behaviors (176). van der Kolk and van der Hart insist that “traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language” (176). Underlining the importance of narrativization of trauma for complete recovery, they suggest that the traumatized should look back at what happened and complete it through storytelling so that they can successfully integrate the traumatic memory into their ordinary lives (176). van der Kolk and van der Hart argue that the person who

achieves whole recovery suffers no more from the reappearance of traumatic memories, since this person “has given it [trauma] a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality” through storytelling (176).

In the chapter “Introduction” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Caruth remarks that trauma is “experienced not as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment” (10). In this chapter, Caruth introduces the definition of trauma, which originates from the diagnostic category of PTSD:

The pathology consists . . . solely in *the structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (“Introduction” 4-5, emphasis added)

According to Caruth, a traumatic event is not fully known and not available to consciousness, since it is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly at the moment it takes place. Trauma is an experience which no one can claim as his or her own. That is why Caruth refers to trauma as unclaimed experience. As a traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, Caruth says that “it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (*UE* 17), which indicates one’s necessarily delayed/belated response to trauma. Based on Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, translated as “deferred action,” “belatedness, or “afterwardness,” Caruth focuses on “the paradoxical temporality of trauma, which implies a recurrent tension between the traumatic impact and its delayed response” (Nadal and Calvo 3). In a word, defining trauma as “stand[ing] outside representation,” Caruth observes an

epistemological fissure between traumatic experience and its representation (*UE* 17).

Reconfiguring Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* as deferred action, Caruth exclusively emphasizes the temporal aspect of trauma, i.e., the idea that a threat to life is experienced by the mind one moment too late because of "the individual's lack of preparedness" (Leys 271). Reworking Freud's "deferred action" as "belatedness" (Whitehead 6), Caruth's understanding of trauma is founded on a non-linear temporal relationship with the past. Arguing that "the experience of trauma . . . consist[s] . . . in an inherent latency within the experience itself" (*UE* 8), Caruth contends that "the traumatic re-experiencing of the event thus carries with it what Dori Laub calls 'the collapse of witnessing,' the impossibility of knowing that first constituted it" (*UE* 10). This experience can only be perceived as a fissure, gap, hole, or an absence of any direct representation in the "collapse of understanding" (Caruth, "Introduction" 7). In fact, "the collapse of understanding" is situated at the heart of Caruth's understanding of trauma.

Caruth's interest lies in the unassimilated/unclaimed nature of trauma that belatedly returns to haunt the trauma survivor. Regarding the unassimilated nature of trauma, Caruth mentions that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature — the way it was precisely not known in the first instance — returns to haunt the survivor later on" (*UE* 4). To borrow Deborah M. Horvitz's phrase, Caruth thinks that "to assimilate completely the full impact of trauma contemporaneous with its occurrence defies its very nature" (16). To put it another way, portions of trauma will always remain unassimilated and trauma memories will turn up in the forms of symptoms such as anxiety or depression: "trauma's reverberations [will] persist" (Horvitz 17).

According to Caruth, the traumatic experience is unrepresentable because the brain, as the carrier of coherent cognitive schemata, cannot properly process the traumatic event at the

very moment the event takes place. Since the experience of trauma has not yet been fully assimilated by the individual, it cannot be possessed in the forms of memory or narrative. As Whitehead argues, “[Caruth’s] trauma represents a mode of haunting” (13) because, for Caruth, trauma, with its constant repetitions and returns, possesses the subject. Trauma is ever-present and never-forgotten. It always comes back to the survivor. The traumatic event is experienced only belatedly in its insistent and intrusive return. Because of its haunting quality, trauma is only known/understood through its repetitive flashback.

Caruth argues that trauma is not just a pathology or “a symptom of the unconscious,” but it can reveal a profound crisis of history (“Introduction” 5). Caruth says in “Introduction” in *Trauma*,

It is indeed this truth of traumatic experience that forms the center of its pathological symptom; it is not a pathology, that is, of falsehood or displacement of meaning, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess (5).

For Caruth, trauma is not just a symptom of the unconscious, but of history itself. Caruth’s idea mentioned above “becomes an important source for the theorization of trauma in literary studies, especially as a source to support the notion of intergenerational or transhistorical trauma” (Balaev 13). In regard to the trans-disciplinary nature of trauma theory, Caruth remarks,

The history of trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the

listening of another. The meaning of the trauma's address *beyond itself concerns*, indeed, not only individual isolation but *a wider historical isolation* that, in our time, is *communicated on the level of our cultures*. ("Introduction" 11, emphasis added)

Whitehead points out in *Trauma Fiction* that "Caruth knowingly risks the accusation of losing the specifics of an event in a generalizable condition, but far from seeking to minimize or downplay suffering, her work represents an important attempt to think through the hiatuses and dislocations which necessarily inhabit trauma" (5). As Whitehead says, in Caruth's view, trauma, beyond its concerns, serves as a link between cultures. Considering that "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time," Caruth believes that trauma and its memory can be transhistorically passed across generations through acts of remembering based on a shared ethnic, racial, national, or cultural background (*UE* 9). The impossibility of verbalizing trauma in a comprehensible, graspable narrative form does not exclude the possibility of a transmissible truth. Rather, Caruth argues that by refusing a coherent, logical narrative, a space can open for "a testimony that can speak beyond what is already understood" (*Trauma* 155).

For Caruth, trauma is timeless, transhistorical and intergenerational. Trauma experienced by one individual can be passed on to another individual one or more generations later through verbal or written acts of remembering. The effect of trauma leaks across generations, affecting racial or cultural identities of contemporary individuals. Trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual who lives centuries later, owing to the everlasting, overarching, and universal characteristics of traumatic experiences. In short, collective trauma can be experienced by an individual and

individual trauma can be experienced by a group, due to transhistoricity and intergenerationality of trauma. Caruth thus says that “narratives can re-create and abreact the historical traumatic experience for those who were not there” (Balaev 13).

Transhistoricity and intergenerationality of trauma necessitate a particular kind of listening and collaboration between the speaker and the listener. Trauma does not require a simple understanding of the pasts of others, but requires of the listener the responsibility of listening not only to an account of the event, but to the speaker’s traumatic departure from it: “to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves” (Caruth, “Introduction” 11). Caruth maintains that “this speaking and listening — a speaking and a listening from the site of trauma — does not rely on what we simply know of each other, but on what we don’t yet know of our own traumatic pasts” (“Introduction” 11). In other words, the listener should assume the ethical responsibility of bearing witness to what testimony cannot represent directly, and of overcoming the isolation/gap generated by the nature of the traumatic event. Caruth believes that in this way, traumatic history can exceed the individual’s concerns and become everyone’s. According to Whitehead, although Caruth’s trauma theory risks making everyone a victim of trauma by suggesting that all history is trauma and that we share a pathological “wounded culture” (14), a range of contemporary novelists use Caruth’s notions of belatedness and transgenerational haunting “as a powerful and effective means of representing, the lasting and ongoing effects of traumatic events” (29).

Based on the psychological research of experts such as Herman and van der Kolk, who examine the link between trauma and dissociation, Caruth agrees that trauma leads to the abnormal division of consciousness (called dissociation) and induces fragmentation of one’s identity. As other trauma theorists have suggested, she also stresses the necessity of re-creating the traumatic event through narration as a way of assimilating trauma into normal memory.

Influenced by the psychoanalytical tradition, trauma studies have long upheld the idea that trauma is defined as a sudden event that afflicts the subject from without, an unexpected and catastrophic event, a single devastating blow which shatters the protective shield of the psyche. Trauma is also thought to resist immediate understanding, integration, and representation. This idea has been regarded as universally true for any individual and applicable to any culture and society, even though it fails to explain the destructive effects of the ongoing dynamics of social injuries such as racism, sexism, misogyny, ableism, and homophobia.

For example, as examined in detail above regarding the transhistoricity of trauma, Caruth, supporting the traditional definition of trauma, famously claims that we cannot think of trauma in terms of singular historical or cultural contexts. Caruth maintains in her highly influential work of trauma, *Unclaimed Experience*, that by listening to the trauma of another, new forms of community, as well as cross-cultural solidarity between disparate historical experiences, can form (56). As an example of this, Caruth discusses *Hiroshima mon amour*, a film about a casual romantic encounter between a Japanese architect and a French actress. The actress meets the Japanese man while working in Hiroshima on a film about peace. Transcending the boundaries of race, class, gender and ethnicity, their relationship is based instead on traumatic experience. They share their differing perspectives on war and explore the nature of memory, experience, and representation (*UE* 56). Caruth says of the film,

It is indeed the enigmatic language of untold stories — of experiences not yet completely grasped- that resonates, throughout the film, within the dialogue between the French woman and the Japanese man, and allows them to communicate, across the gap between their cultures and their experiences, precisely through what they do not directly comprehend. Their ability to speak

and to listen in their passionate encounter does not rely, that is, on what they simply know of one another, but on what they do not fully know in their traumatic pasts. In a similar way, a new mode of seeing and of listening- a seeing and a listening from the site of trauma- is opened up to us as spectators of the film, and offered as the very possibility, in a catastrophic era, of a link between cultures. (56)

Caruth explains that the story in the film disseminates the idea that trauma can play a significant role in building a bridge between cultures. In a word, this film shows how a new mode of seeing and of listening from the site of trauma opens up “the very possibility, in a catastrophic era, of a link between cultures” (UE 56).

According to Petra Kuppers in *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on the Edge*, Caruth’s thinking about trauma and its disruptive psyche “open up a path for difference” (89). Kuppers points out that we cannot speak for the Other. Doing so might be to engage in a form of epistemological violence against the Other by pressing them into dominant schemes of thinking (88). When we speak for the Other, we are likely to regard the Other as penetrable, knowable, perceivable, inferior, and voiceless objects, and interpret/explain their stories from our perspectives, which, in Kupper’s view, helps reinforce the imbalanced us-and-them binary power relationship and further otherize the Other. Yet Caruth’s explorations of trauma and memory, which “detail trauma’s status in relation to reference, namely the relationship between immediate experience and language,” can provide a key to solving the epistemological problems raised by political and ethical paralysis (Kuppers 89).

Caruth stresses that in the trauma narrative, “the story is not fully there, not fully owned by discourse, and is not within the mastery of the individual” (Kuppers 89). According to

Kuppers, with this idea, Caruth analyzes the film *Hiroshima mon amour* “as narrative of missed immediacy, of translation, passings and misunderstandings” (89). She believes that this film shows how “a new communication can emerge in and through the sites and bodies of trauma, a communication in which shared distances, not sameness, act as points of connection” (89). Quoting Caruth’s argument in *Unclaimed Experience* that “a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not” (11), Kuppers thus argues that Caruth shows that the halting narrative/story of the Other cannot be fully owned and claimed immediately. In Kuppers’s view, stressing the processes of “meditation, distance, repetition,” which intervene in the immediate understanding of the event, Caruth asks us to think about a different path towards the Other and their stories (89).

However, Stef Craps, who attempts to expand trauma theory beyond Eurocentrism in the global age, emphasizes that Caruth’s idea of cross-cultural encounters in this film might reaffirm/reinforce Eurocentrism. Craps correctly points out that in the film, only the French woman’s traumatic story of Hiroshima is heard, while the story of the Japanese man remains largely untold. Craps thus considers this film problematic in that it describes the non-white man as the racial or cultural Other who is destined to listen to the European woman’s struggle to come to terms with her trauma, all while functioning as a catalyst for and facilitator of this process (48). To put it another way, although Caruth takes the interaction between the French woman and the Japanese man as an exemplary model of cross-cultural witnessing theory, this film in fact fails to give the Japanese man a chance to articulate his trauma. It seems to Craps that the Japanese setting and character are not endowed with a certain degree of substantiality, but serve merely as foils for the French woman’s trauma. From Craps’ perspective, Caruth’s interpretations of trauma “gloss over the lop-sided quality of the cross-cultural dialogue established in *Hiroshima mon amour*” (48).

Craps explains that while literary scholarship is accused of being indifferent or oblivious to “what goes on in the real world” (the world outside the text: history, politics, ethics), “particularly in its deconstructive, poststructuralist, or textualist guise,” trauma theory is acclaimed as “an essential apparatus for understanding the real world and even as a potential means for changing it for the better” (45). She goes on to say,

[t]he founding texts of the field largely fail to live up to this promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement. They fail to at least three counts: they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority culture: they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma. As a result of all of this, rather than promoting cross-cultural solidarity, trauma theory risks assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices, and structures that maintain existing injustices and inequalities. (46)

Craps states that by focusing too much on the Holocaust as the paradigm for understanding individual and communal trauma, trauma theorists or scholars have excluded or marginalized other ongoing and atrocious events, which contributes to the perpetuation of existing injustices and inequalities faced by non-Westerners. Criticizing the existing tendency not only to view the traumatic experiences in the non-Western world as invisible and trivial, but also to understand non-Western events in terms of the Western model of traumatic suffering, Craps suggests that we should not only break with this Eurocentric approach to trauma, but also broaden the spectrum of trauma theory by paying attention to various traumas that non-Western or minority populations go through every day (48). Craps argues that, as a way of

making trauma theory more inclusive and less Western-centric, traumatic experiences occurring in non-western cultures should not be marginalized, and that the definition of trauma and recovery developed in the West should not be uncritically assumed to be universal and self-evident.

Regarding this, Michelle Balaev claims that Caruth's transhistorical theory of trauma "tends to produce a reductive view of the variety of responses to trauma and the processes of memory and identity formation found in literary representations" (19). According to Balaev, in fact, an abreactive model of trauma established by such claims — "traumatic experiences become encoded in an abnormal type of memory," or "some traumatic experiences produce disruption and discontinuity in the perception of self and reality" — endorses the idea that the terror of trauma causes the temporal-linguistic gap, i.e., "speechlessness," and that this speechlessness is the universal response to trauma (14-15). He also argues that this model of trauma, upon which Caruth's theory is founded, simplifies the notion of trauma as "a literal, repetitious event that is imagined as a disease that can be transmitted to others" (12). As Ruth Leys also points out, Caruth's model of trauma might characterize a traumatic experience as pathological and infectious (271), implying that the pathological, infectious qualities of trauma risk making everyone a passive victim of historical trauma.

According to Balaev, even though "the notion that trauma shatters identity and pathologically divides consciousness has become a popular trope for the scholar to define trauma" (23), this notion is problematic since it "privileges the view that all emotional responses to a traumatic event are similar and primarily pathological" while ignoring the diversity of responses to trauma (26). For example, overlooking the diverse responses to (and consequences of) traumatic experiences, van der Kolk's characterization of trauma indicates that terrifying events affect all people in the same fashion due to the neurobiological basis of trauma. Balaev strongly asserts that "although trauma may disrupt an individual's sense of an

integrated self” (36), a “breakdown” in identity and speechlessness cannot be the “direct” and “only” response to trauma (11). Balaev suggests that “people react differently to traumatic events” (10) and “different types of traumas produce different responses” (15). In a word, the unspeakable quality of trauma should not be taken as an irrefutable scientific truth.

Balaev maintains that the pluralistic trauma model “involves a reordering of perception, [which is] a process that does not necessarily produce an epistemological void” (26). Citing Laurence Kirmayer’s claim that “the direct linkage of trauma and dissociation appears simplistic in the face of research demonstrating the effects of temperament, family history, psychopathology, and current context on dissociation” (180, qtd. in Balaev 11), Balaev avoids using dissociation or psychic splittings as a shorthand for traumatic experience. He makes it clear that defying all representations is not an intrinsic or inherent quality of a traumatic experience.¹⁰

Many literary critics have looked upon silence as a proof of the unspeakability of trauma. They have insisted that the self should be verbal in order to be known and cured. In “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Structure,” Laub stresses the need for survivors to tell their stories “in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation” (70). Laub says that if the stories are not told/reclaimed, the traumatic events “become more and more distorted in their silent retention” and their untold stories “pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life” (64). As survivors repress their stories and leave them distorted in their unconscious memory, they come to wrongly believe that they were also accountable for the atrocities they witnessed (Laub 65). For this reason, highlighting “the human will to live and the human will to know even in the most radical circumstances designed for its obliteration and destruction” (69), Laub asks us to give testimony to the event

¹⁰ Balaev stresses that the difficulty of speaking about a traumatic experience is broadly related to “variable factors, including individual, social, and cultural factors,” which have an influence on the remembrance and narration of the traumatic experience (10).

even though we have to face loss and pain again and again (74). Holding the idea that the traumatic event “plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one’s life,” Laub believes that “repossessing one’s life story through giving testimony” can be “a form of action, of change” (70).

Similarly, in *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others*, James W. Pennebaker argues for translating traumatic experiences into language. He explains that trauma can shatter and threaten people’s basic beliefs about the world (193) and that traumatized individuals go through intense anxiety, fear, depression, or denial, even after the event (194). As a way to recover from trauma, Pennebaker suggests that “writing or talking about upsetting experiences produces improvements in physical and psychological health” (112). He claims that not talking/writing about distressing experiences is psychologically and physically unhealthy and undesirable. If traumatized people resist translating their thoughts and feelings into language, i.e., fail to resolve their traumas, they continue to be haunted/overwhelmed by them. In Pennebaker’s view, confronting traumas through narrativization can not only lower the mental and physiological stress levels of the traumatized, but also allow the traumatized to assimilate the disturbing events into their existing belief systems or world views (194). According to Pennebaker, writing and talking about frightening experiences helps the traumatized “organize and structure the seemingly infinite facets of overwhelming events,” and in this way, the events ultimately become controllable and manageable (Pennebaker 112). In Pennebaker’s view, by breaking the silence and writing/talking about one’s thoughts and feelings about major upheavals, the traumatized can more clearly understand and deal with many facets of overwhelmingly complicated events. Accentuating the therapeutic value of writing/talking about traumatic experiences, Pennebaker stresses that “once people can distill complex experiences into more understandable packages, they can begin to move beyond the trauma” (193).

However, Balaev says that the “talking cure” is not the only avenue for understanding the traumatic experience (28). Since the use of talk therapy is founded on a Eurocentric concept of the person as an independent individual isolated from social context (Summerfield 24), he argues that narrative recall or talk therapy might not always be effective for treating people from non-European or non-Western cultures (28). He explains that silence or speechlessness does not represent an epistemological void or passiveness of the traumatized. Instead it can work as a strategy for the survivors to obtain agency or authorship over their traumatic experiences (20). He also points out that through the omission of detail and the emphasis on silence, trauma narrators make their listeners or readers imagine the fear of trauma.

Many feminists have pointed out that the Western-focused definition of trauma as an unexpected experience “outside the normal range” of human experience tends to overlook the quotidian aspects of trauma that are found in the everyday lives of many marginalized people. However, according to Horvitz in *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women’s Fiction*, feminists launched a public awareness campaign about the regular sexual and domestic violence faced by women and children in the 1960s, when “the progressive political climate of the most recent women’s movement” was established (11).

As one of these feminists, in “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma,” Laura S. Brown tries to destabilize the limited male-centered notion of normality and abnormality. She puts stress on the necessity of looking beyond western, male experiences of trauma to the many non-western, female experiences that have not been regarded as truly traumatic. Supporting “a feminist vision of right relationship, in which mutuality and respect are the norm rather than power and dominance” (109), Brown insists in her article that “traumatic events do lie within the range of normal human experience,” and thus the presence of daily, subtle, and insidious trauma should be also considered “real”

trauma (110).

According to Brown, the distressing events that girls and women of all colors, men of color in the United States, lesbian and gay people, people in poverty, and people with disabilities encounter in their daily lives have been treated as invisible and “not really” traumatic (102-03). “The private, subtle, secret, and insidious” events occurring in the daily lives of women and other non-dominant groups have been excluded from the definition of trauma in society (102), “regardless of their felt and lived impacts” (105). Thus, she insists that in order to have a broad understanding of trauma, we need to ask questions about “how we have understood that which constitutes a traumatic event, how some experiences have been excluded and turned inward upon their victims, and who are then blamed for what has happened to them” (102). Examining how our images and concepts of trauma as an out-of-the-ordinary event are narrowly constructed “within the experiences and realities of dominant groups in cultures” (102), Brown urges us to “change our vision of what is ‘human’ to a more inclusive image and move to a radical revisiting of our understanding of the human condition” (110).

Brown’s perspective on trauma helps us not only to acknowledge that we might be next, i.e., that we are all vulnerable to trauma, but also to “move out of our comfortable positions — as those who study trauma, or treat its effects, or categorize its types — to a position of identification and action” (108). She believes when we acknowledge the imminence of trauma in our daily lives in relation to social context (108) and accept many layers and different types of traumatic experiences, we not only destabilize our status quo, but also become more actively involved in the process of social change (111).

To sum up, the dominant conceptions of trauma, influenced by white male western centrism, treat trauma as an individual/personal matter, turning a blind eye to the wider social context/situation into which the individual is placed. Concentrating too narrowly on the level

of the individual psyche, the existing definition of trauma does not include various experiences taking place every day at the societal level, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism, sexual abuse/harassment, economic domination, and other forms of structural, political oppression. In other words, the psychological model of trauma based on pathological essentialism is not culturally sensitive or inclusive, since it lacks detailed and sophisticated political/cultural analyses on trauma. Due to the failure to see these problems within their larger social and political contexts, people affected by these events are generally pathologized as helpless victims, and believed to be curable only through psychological counseling and narrativization. In a word, instead of the transformation of a wounding political, social, and economical system, the psychological recovery of the traumatized individual is emphasized. As Craps suggests, if this is the case, the hegemonic trauma discourse can “serve as a political palliative to the socially disempowered” (50).

Trauma and Life-Writing

Trauma might induce a crisis of assumptions about one’s body, speech, life narrative, and relations to others. On the other hand, this experience can lead the survivor to embrace new ideas of identity or subjectivity. Coming to the consciousness in fragments, traumatic memories insist on their presence despite the passing of years, causing profound crisis in the survivor’s life. In women’s life writings, the past is not something that can be mastered by or reconciled with the female subject split by trauma. Consequently, a key component of the subject’s therapeutic reconstitution is that the life narrator comes to accept the necessity of letting go of her own impulses toward self-mastery and ownership.

According to Smith and Watson, in trauma narratives of the Holocaust, racial discrimination, sexual abuse, torture, AIDS, disability/illness, and so on, the life narrator struggles to remember and discover various ways of telling about the suffering, pain,

frustration, woe, distress, and agony caused by traumatic events, which resist language and understanding (*Reading Autobiography* 27). In Smith and Watson's words, "language fails to capture, or engage or mediate the horrors of the past and the after effects of survival" (*Reading Autobiography* 28). The life narrator may face the problem of recalling the inescapable memory, but can recreate a past life by "negotiating its fragmentary intrusions with increasing, if partial, understanding" (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 27-28). The narrator struggles to reassemble fragments of traumatic memory to survive. However, the storyteller ultimately gains an increased understanding of both the past life and traumatized self by recreating/reconstructing them in new ways.

As William C. Spengemann has pointed out, autobiography is self-revelation through self-creation, "the self [being] continually reshaped by efforts to explain, discover, or express [itself]" (167). For the narrator suffering from traumatic or obsessional memory, the act of telling can be "therapeutic in resolving troubled memories and acknowledging how the process of writing has changed [her] and the life story itself" (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 28). While talking about traumatic experiences, the narrator can embrace different identities and reconstitute new subjectivities. In other words, life-writing can be the locus where a fragmented, fluctuating, and fluid self is realized in-process, and the definition of the fixed self might no longer be available. Through personal writing, the narrator can recreate/reconstruct the self that has lived through a traumatic event.

Demystifying the unified life story and collapsing the coherent self, the "I" of this narrative rewrites a new, ever-changing self into being. The women narrators whom I examined in this study clearly demonstrate these points: there exists no coherent, unified, and stable self that predates stories. These narrators reassemble fragments of memory, experiences, and identity into new forms of subjectivity which is always fragmented in time.

The meanings of their stories are never static or frozen in the past. Their traumatic

memories are never pathologically fixed or separate from normal memories, but they are malleable to alteration, revision, or reevaluation over time. These fluid memories can be deconstructed, revised, and recreated each time they are remembered by the narrators. In this sense, as Balaev explains, remembering can be thought of as “a fluid and selective process of interpretation, rather than only as a literal, veridical recall” (xiv). Whitehead also points out that “memory is not indigenous to a place, but must be created through the ongoing intervention of human agents and through a will to remember” (77). According to these scholars, mechanisms of memory selection and the needs of the present can affect how the past is remembered and retold.

Through trauma life-writing, adult women writers, refusing to be retraumatized, are empowered to speak and write about their past events in their own ways and try to exercise over their experiences the agency that was denied to them as a child or young adult. After the events have occurred, the previously disempowered group of people can write back — as a form of resistance — in order to reinterpret the revised version of the events. The writers can perhaps eventually enhance their understanding of the complexities of their traumatic experiences. For this reason, for these writers, the autobiographical form, such as memoir, autobiography, or life-writing, can function as “a therapeutic provider, moral guide, or testimony” (Douglass 155).

Methodology

As seen above, the traditional, event-based model of trauma, which characterizes trauma as a single, extraordinary, overwhelming, catastrophic, unrepresentable, inescapable, inaccessible, unintegrated, and unassimilable event, has established a reductive view of trauma and consciousness. Nevertheless, this model is to some extent valid and relevant to our discussion of trauma today. In addition, the therapeutic benefits of the talking cure for

trauma should be recognized as important and valuable for the traumatized. Although the traditional model of trauma and the use of talk therapy for recovery might not offer a broad theoretical framework to help us comprehend various traumas that non-Western and minority groups suffer in their daily lives at a societal level, it should not be considered outdated and useless. In fact, writing/reading a memoir or an autobiography about a traumatic event is a good example of healing through storytelling.

However, I attempted to be cautious about assuming that “the direct causality between a traumatic event and pathologic dissociation [which] is based upon the idea that there exists a structural deformation caused by an extreme experience that inhibits recall and induces symptomatic behavior” (Balaev 36). I did not uncritically accept the idea that a traumatic experience is dichotomously stored in a separate area of the brain, which justifies the view of the traumatized subject as a passive victim or carrier of disease, who has a problem recalling and possesses symptomatic behaviors.

By acknowledging the validity of each trauma model and respecting the contribution that each model has made to our deeper understandings of trauma, I analyzed trauma narratives using the psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and feminist frameworks that each text invites or necessitates. Instead of preferring one approach over the other, I instead tried to be open and attentive to the diverse perspectives of trauma. To achieve an enriched understanding of various representations of and multiple responses to traumatic experiences, I employed an appropriate theoretical framework, which I still believe did fit well with each specific trauma story.

As mentioned earlier, women’s experiences recorded in autobiographical narratives can be reconstructed through the processes of memory selection. The act of remembering or forgetting is itself active, as new meanings or desires are generated through the diverse, creative interpretations of past experiences. In connection with this, Kerby mentions that

“narrative not only delivers over the past but is also the medium of our aspirations and desires, imaginatively expressing, in the stories we tell ourselves . . . , a possible future with its attendant joys and hardships and, hence, possible selves” (54). Given that what is remembered is determined by the needs/desires of the storyteller who narrates the past in the present, I focused on what meanings the women narrators attempt to draw from the past trauma through memory selection or revision. I examined how the women narrators alter the meanings of the traumatic events in the past for the purpose of reconstructing their adolescent subjects, not as passive victims pathologically divided by trauma, but as uncanny subjects who have the subversive, transgressive power to challenge patriarchal authorities as well as disrupt dominant cultural pedagogies imposed on women/girls.

To discuss issues of the (re-)construction of the female adolescent self as fluid, multiple, and uncanny, based on women writers’ memory selection or revision, I relied on the poststructuralist approach, which “challenge[s] the unity and coherence of the intact and fully conscious ‘self’ of Western autobiographical practices and the limits of its representations” (J. Miller 49), as the main theoretical framework. Theories that I adopted for this study also include feminist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and queer and disability theories, each of which intersects with poststructuralist ideas and approaches. It was challenging for me to use these varied foci and theoretical orientations/perspectives together in order to examine traumatized girlhood. Yet these theories were all necessary, because the traumatized uncanny girlhood that I explored in this study cannot be separated from gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, social class, disability, and other issues related to these varied theoretical concerns. These theories enriched the discussion of the reshaping of the female self and the reconstruction of adolescent identity in women’s life-writing.

Chapter 2. The Uncanny

Freud's "The Uncanny"

"The uncanny" conceptualized by Freud in 1919 has been a popular concept "in various disciplines of the humanities, ranging from literature and the arts, to philosophy, film studies, theory of architecture and sociology, and recently even crossing over to the "hard" field of robotics and artificial intelligence" (Masschelein 1). Freud defined the uncanny as the feeling of unease, anxiety that arises when something familiar suddenly becomes strange and unfamiliar. Freudian concept of uncanny refers to an instance where something can be both familiar, yet unfamiliar, strange, and alien. In this regard, Hugh Haughton points out that the uncanny is "about a particularly intense experience of strangeness," but at its heart, the uncanny, like charity, begins at home (xlii). Freud's notion of the uncanny derived from German etymology.

The uncanny is based on the lingual origins of the German word "unheimliche," opposed to "heimliche" which is defined as "homely" in the cozy-intimate sense of the word. Unheimliche, translated as uncanny, is not exactly the opposite of homely. It refers to a sense of estrangement within the home, the presence of something frightening, threatening, tempting and kept out of sight that lies within the bounds of the intimate, familiar. Freud mentions in *The Uncanny*, "we are reminded that the word heimlich is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight" (132). Contrasting the German adjective unheimlich with its base word heimlich, Freud claims that the uncanny makes us feel simultaneously attracted to, yet repulsed and distressed by the object due to its paradoxical nature (*The Uncanny* 124). Freud elucidates the interconnection between familiarity and strangeness as follows:

Unheimlich is clearly the opposite of *Heimlich*, *heimisch*, *vertraut*, and it seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar. But of course, the converse is not true: not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening. All one can say is that what is novel may well prove frightening and uncanny; some things that are novel are indeed frightening, but by no means all. Something must be added to the novel and the unfamiliar if it is to become uncanny. (*The Uncanny* 124-25)

Freud's examination of linguistic usage of the German word *unheimlich* shows a paradox as mentioned above: What can be frightening is not only concealed, unknown, and threatening, but it can be actually intimate and close to home. In a word, according to Freud, *unheimlich* forms a subspecies of *heimlich* (both homely and secret) and is contained within the semantic field of the familiar.

The examples of the uncanny include castration fear, double, recurrence, involuntary repetition (e.g. compulsion to repeat), coincidences, the physically fragmented, life after death or being buried alive.¹¹ According to Nicholas Royle, who provides a detailed historical account of the emergence of the uncanny and a series of close readings of diverse aspects of the uncanny, the uncanny is related to "the strange, weird, and mysterious, with a flickering sense of something supernatural," and it involves "feelings of uncertainty in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced." The uncanny is "a crisis of the proper,"¹² "a crisis of the natural,"¹³ "a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of

¹¹ For further explanations for these terms, see Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003

¹² It entails a critical disturbance of what is proper such as the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name, the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events

something unhomely,” “a matter of something gruesome or terrible, above all death and corpses, cannibalism, live burial, the return of the dead.” The uncanny not only involves *deja vu*, which is “a feeling of something beautiful but at the same time frightening,” but also has to do with “the sense of a secret encounter,” and “a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality.” It is “a feeling that happens only to oneself, within oneself, but it is never one’s ‘own,’ thus may be interpreted as “a foreign body within oneself, . . . the very estrangement of inner silence and solitude.” The uncanny is also “a sense of repetition or ‘coming back’ — the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat.” It is bound up with “the most extreme nostalgia or ‘homesickness,’ ” i.e., “a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire to die, a death drive” (Royle 1-2).

Freud stresses that “the uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being *repressed*” (*The Uncanny* 148, emphasis added). According to Freud, basically, the uncanny, unconsciously reminds us of our own Id. It is connected to our forbidden and thus repressed impulses/desires, which our super-ego considers as a threatening, dangerous force. Our super-ego is ridden with Oedipal guilt, and is afraid of symbolic castration by severe punishment for deviating from societal norms. Freud remarks that what we project our own repressed desire or hidden impulses upon become an uncanny threat to us, and become a scapegoat we blame for all sorts of perceived miseries, calamities, and maladies.

As Freud says, “there is no doubt that this [the uncanny] belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes the fear and dread” (*The Uncanny* 123), fear and anxiety might

(Royle 1).

¹³ It refers to a crisis of one’s own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world (Royle 1).

arise as a result of something repressed, which has resurfaced. In other words, when something that should have been kept concealed is discovered, a sense of anxiety arises. Regarding this, according to Freud, we feel a sense of uncanny when a certain trigger brings back repressed childhood conflicts or childhood trauma. Freud claims that the uncanny is something familiar, something formerly-established in the mind, but has become alienated and defamiliarized through “a process of repetition” (*The Uncanny* 125). The uncanny only emerges as a return of what has been repressed. In other words, the uncanny does not mean something completely different, but is related to always the return of the same.¹⁴ Freud explains that the uncanniness is “essentially an involuntary recurrence of the old and familiar” (*The Uncanny* 150). He also associates the uncanny with “repetition compulsion.” Freud says that we get the feeling of uncanniness when we have a guilt-laden past that we avoid confronting. In terms of psychoanalysis, the traces of (repressed) past beliefs and experiences remain present in our mind.

E.T.A. Hoffmann’s (1776-1822) “The Sandman” (1817) is an excellent example to explain the psychoanalytic elements of the uncanny. The story is about the life of Nathaniel, a young student who is warned about the sandman. He believes that a dreadful fate awaits him. His fear and anxiety are caused by a menacing old man whom he has believed since childhood to be the Sandman. According to the protagonist’s nurse, this mythic creature throws sand in the eyes of children who are awake at night. The Sandman takes the eyes to his iron nest on the Moon, and uses them to feed his children. Nathaniel grows to associate this nightmarish creature with the sinister figure of his father’s real life associate Coppelius. Nathaniel observes Coppelius and his father conducting alchemical experiments. He believes that Coppelius is implicated in his father's death, since Nathaniel’s father is killed by an

¹⁴ Freud chooses the passages from “The Sandman” that support his main argument about the uncanny as the return of repressed childhood complexes (primarily Oedipal fear of castration).

explosion during one of Coppelius's visits. As a student, Nathaniel buys a spy-glass from the optician Coppola. Nathaniel sees the automaton Olympia through this glass and falls madly in love with her. In fact, Olympia has been produced by Spalanzani (double of the father) and Coppola (the double of Coppelius). Nathaniel observes that Spalanzani and Coppola fight over the automaton and the eyes are pulled out of the robot's head. Nathaniel is seized by a fresh wave of madness at this moment. After Nathaniel recovers, he plans to marry his fiancée Clara. One day, they ascend the tower of the town hall and Nathaniel sees Coppelius through Coppola's spyglass. He goes insane again and tries to cast Clara down from the tower. Hearing her screams, her brother rescues her. Nathaniel catches sight of Coppelius, jumping off the tower to his death with a cry of "Yes! Lovely eyes — lovely eyes." When he is lying on the pavement, the Sandman has vanished in the crowd (Freud, *The Uncanny* 136-38)

According to Freud, "[E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman'] was a quite naive story, but its effect was extraordinarily uncanny" (*The Uncanny* 151). Ascribing the uncanny effects of "The Sandman," Freud stresses the uncertainty in the story as the uncanny (*The Uncanny* 139). In other words, the uncertainty about whether the events in the story are real or not gives us a sense of the uncanny. He also points out that the source of the uncanny in this tale is the eponymous figure of the sandman himself who tears out children's eyes: "the sense of the uncanny attaches directly to the figure of the Sandman, and therefore the idea of being robbed of one's eyes" (*The Uncanny* 138). Turning to the psychoanalytic experience, which reminds us "that some children have a terrible fear of damaging or losing their eyes," Freud explains that "anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is quite often a substitute for the fear of castration" (*The Uncanny* 139). Freud's idea of the fear of damaging eyes (penis) can be traced back to an old childhood fear of castration, which has been repressed and forgotten. As Freud remarks that Nathaniel's fear of the "sandman" is incomprehensible, but

at the same time, strangely familiar, the Sandman¹⁵ who is replaced by the castrating Oedipal father (*The Uncanny* 140) produces an uncanny effect, representing the return of repressed infantile material as a reminder of our psychic past. In a word, what is uncanny here is the return of something in our psychosexual history that has been forgotten into the unconscious.

Indeed, according to Masschelein, in fact, in recent years, by drawing attention to earlier studies by the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, the philosopher Friedrich Schelling, or the theologian Rudolf Otto, to name a few, several scholars have tried to prove that Freud's essay is not the actual origin of the conceptualization of the uncanny (3). Still, based on the idea of Royle, Masschelein points out that Freud's essay "The Uncanny" remains the founder of discourse in the Foucauldian sense of the term because subsequent theorists have not superseded his centrality in the debate" (4). In a word, it was Freud who contributed to placing the word "unheimlich" to the status of a concept and making it popular.

At the same time, the uncanny in contemporary discourse is not caught by the boundaries of a strict psychological framework. Although the uncanny is thought of as the Freudian uncanny, it can no longer be considered limited to a psychoanalytic concept. Associated with various types of narratives and motifs, and with various methods of reading, the Freudian uncanny has gone through significant changes, and now is politically used as an important concept in literary criticism, as well as psychoanalysis, postcolonial studies, queer/feminism studies, and disability studies (Masschelein 4).

According to Saul Newman, trauma which has been repressed returns to disturb our normal, everyday experience of reality, and this trace of a repressed trauma which always returns to haunt the social order is "the experience of the uncanny" (131). Since its persistent

¹⁵ The optician Coppola is the lawyer Coppelius and so also the Sandman (*The Uncanny* 139).

and recurrent haunting comes back in displaced and disguised forms, we might misrecognize it as something new, unfamiliar, but actually, it may be what has been repressed within us.

Judith Butler — The Melancholic Gender and the Queer Uncanny (Judith Butler’s Criticism of the Oedipus Complex)

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler emphasizes that gender identity is not “natural,” but socially and culturally constituted. Butler, who strongly believes in the discursive constructedness of gender, challenges Freud’s conception of gender identity. Freud’s formalism of gender identification is based upon object-cathexis and its displacement, which, for Butler, seems rather insufficient in explaining negative gender identification, i.e., homosexuality. Butler, as a poststructuralist gender theorist, sheds light on what Freud is missing, i.e., gender identification of homosexuality in the production of gender within the heterosexual frame, and provides a new account of gender formation. Butler’s crucial argument in *Gender Trouble* is that “gender and sex identities are formed in response to prohibition” (Salih 54-55)

Freud explains this process of ego formation in “Mourning and Melancholia” and *The Ego and the Id*. In *The Ego and the Id* and “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud introduces his theory of gender formation. In Freud’s theory, there are two important words: One is the “aim” which refers to sexual desire itself, feeling, and the other is the “object” which refers to the thing at which the desire is directed (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 1-2). Sometimes, deviations in our aim and object can occur when we desire one person/thing, but later shift this desire to another person/thing. Regarding Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex, deviations, i.e, shifting the object of desire, play an important role in child’s sexual development. According to Freud,¹⁶ the child is born with the original bisexuality, which

¹⁶ Freud explains in *The Ego and the Id*, that at first, both the girl and boy child take the same

indicates that the child also desires father and mother. In other words, each child desires both parents, which Freud calls the complete Oedipus complex. Freud considers the child's desire of the parent of the opposite sex as the positive Oedipus complex, but their desire for the parent of the same sex as the negative Oedipus complex. Freud elucidates that "ego formation" is based on a melancholic structure because the child is forced to give up his/her desire for the parents in response to the taboo against incest (*The Ego and the Id* 30-31).

In "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Freud defines similarities between the two reactions to loss. Saying that "the correlation of melancholia and mourning seems justified by the general picture of the two conditions," he compares two phenomenon: mourning and melancholia /depression. Owing to similar environmental influences (they are both the reaction to the loss of a love object), they both share a similar outward affect on the subject. For example, inhibition, absorbedness of the ego, and the disinterest in the external world are equally found in both, mourning and melancholia: "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity" ("Mourning" 244). That is, the painfulness of both the mourning and melancholic process results from the fixation of libidinal cathaxes onto an object of love, which is no longer visible or available.

Although mourning and melancholia have some similarities, Freud alerts us to focus on fundamental differences between them. Freud's close observation of melancholia reveals that melancholia has some features, which are absent in mourning. According to Freud's mourning theory, mourning comes to a decisive end when the mourning subject disconnects

sexual development. Both of them fully desire mother, but give up that desire after recognizing that the father is an obstacle for realizing their desire for the mother, which gives rise to the Oedipus complex. As a result of this recognition, they show the ambivalent relation with the father: they regard the father as a rival whom they want to kill for obtaining the mother's love, and at the same time, as the one whom they identify with in order to become him (35).

its emotional attachment to the lost object and reinvests the free libido in a new object. He notes that:

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again. ("Mourning" 234-44)

Whether the subject encounters a literal death or a symbolic loss, the mourner can name an experience of grief and a process of working through during which he/she severs emotional ties to the lost object. After this work of mourning is completed, "the ego (ultimately) becomes free and uninhibited again" ("Mourning" 245). When the mourning work has been accomplished, "the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object" ("Mourning" 253).

Although melancholia may also be the reaction to the loss of a loved object, for the melancholic subject "the object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love" ("Mourning" 245). Even though the melancholic subject might feel that a loss has occurred, he/she cannot name clearly what has been lost, or even cannot realize what he/she has lost in him/her ("Mourning" 245). It would suggest that the loss in melancholia is an unconscious process, while the loss in mourning is a conscious one. Comparing to mourning "in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious," Freud thus claims that "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss, which is withdrawn from consciousness" ("Mourning" 245). In Freud's words, "the unknown loss" brings about "the melancholic inhibition" ("Mourning" 245).

On Freud's theory of melancholia, one of the distinguishing features of melancholia is that a lost object has been reinstated within the ego and becomes part of the ego. When the object tie is ruptured owing to hurt, disappointment, or actual loss, the libido that had been invested in the lost object is withdrawn into the ego, instead of being displaced onto a new object ("Mourning" 249). In the process of mourning, the old object will be replaced with a new object as the ego succeeds in freeing its libido from the lost object. However, in melancholia, the ego incorporates the lost one into the very structure of the ego to "establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object" ("Mourning" 249).¹⁷ Instead of getting over the loss, the melancholic response is to take the lost object into the ego by identifying with it. The object does not exist outside of the ego, but becomes internalized within the ego. Freud states as follows:

If the love for the object — a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up — takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operations on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. ("Mourning" 251)

According to Freud, the subject regresses from an attachment to a narcissistic extension of his ego with the incorporation or internalization of the object. When an object tie is ruptured owing to hurt, disappointment, or actual loss/death, instead of being displaced onto a new object, the libido which had been invested in the lost object is withdrawn into the ego, which Freud calls narcissistic identification ("Mourning" 249). In the language of Freud's libido theory, "object libido has been transformed into narcissistic libido" (Erwin 273). In

¹⁷ Freud says, "[t]he character of the Ego is a precipitate of abandoned object cathexes and it contains the history of those object-choices" (*The Ego and the Id* 31).

The Ego and the Id, Freud says that this primary narcissistic-object-extension is associated with the oral-cannibalistic stage, since the subject desires to have the object by devouring it and metabolizing it into itself. To put it differently, as “object-cathexis and identification are hardly to be distinguished from each other” in the primitive, oral phase of the individual’s existence, the libidinal object becomes identified with the ego itself in melancholia.

Describing it as “a reinstatement of the object within the ego,” Freud claims that “this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its object” (*The Ego and the Id* 30-31). As Butler points out in *Gender Trouble*, “internalization of the lost object is a strategy of the ego for psychological survival of the loss” (84). The ego devours the features of the object, forcing itself upon the Id’s loss by saying: “ ‘Look, you can love me too — I am so like the object.’ ” (*The Ego and the Id* 32)

Because of the internalization of a lost object of love within the ego, the melancholic subject comes to have the self-critical attitude. While in mourning, the world outside the subject becomes poor and empty, the ego itself becomes unworthy and reproachable in melancholia (“Mourning” 246). Since the loss is his/her actual ego itself, all the ambivalences toward the objects are now toward the ego itself. The ego is considered as an object and treated as the object of hatred and criticism. In melancholia, because of a loss of self-regard, the subject reproaches or vilifies herself/himself, and expects to be cast out and punished. His/her ego is presented as “worthless, incapable of any achievement, and morally despicable” (“Mourning” 246).

In other words, the melancholic’s self-reproaches which properly belonged to the lost object, have been shifted into the sufferer’s ego. The ego is now critically judged as if it were the forsaken object (“Mourning” 249). Sadism and hatred for the lost object fall upon the self, which causes the melancholic’s lowered self-regard and feelings of worthlessness. From Freud’s view, “the dramatic and often exasperating self-vilification of the melancholic”

mirrors unconscious sadistic pleasure (Erwin 272). Freud sees the conflict between the ego and its loved and hated lost object as the conflict between the superego and “the ego as altered by identification” (“Mourning” 249). Hence, in Freud’s view, the ego ideal (superego) becomes sadistic and hostile toward the ego as an outsider, treating the ego like an object of hate and disgust.

Since in melancholia, the subject does not know what he or she has lost and is even sometimes unaware of having lost anything at all, Freud thinks of it as a pathological condition resembling depression. Yet, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud no longer regards melancholia as a pathology or mental illness that requires medical treatments, but he now defines all ego formation “as a melancholic structure” (Salih 51). As Edward Erwin puts in, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud broadens the theory of “the process of ego development to encompass character formation,” considering the ego “as a palimpsest, or an embodiment of personal history” (273). In other words, considering “the ego is built of accumulated identifications with abandoned and lost objects” (Erwin 273), Freud believes that the process of internalizing and sustaining a lost object inside is essential for establishing the format of the ego.

As mentioned above, identification is a crucial concept which is central to “Freud’s theories of the structuring of the mind into Ego, Superego, and Id,” and “it denotes process and effects of identifying with others, often as a response to loss” (Salih 53). As Freud states that “an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego — that is, an object — cathexis has been replaced by identification” (*The Ego and Id* 30), the process of ego-formation entails the transformation of a child’s primary object-cathexes into an identification. Initially, the child’s primary object-cathexes is one or other of his/her parents, but incest taboo forces these desires to be given up. Like the melancholic subject who takes the lost object into the ego as a way to preserve it, the child internalizes the lost object into

the ego and keeps it as an identification. If the child's primary desire is for the mother, the child will introject the figure of the mother into the ego as an identification with her.

Conversely, if the child's primary desire is for the father, the child will internalize the figure of the father into the ego as an identification with him. As Freud sees it, the boy commonly internalizes with his father and reinforces his identification with him, while the girl commonly identifies with her mother. He mentions that the child's internalization of the parent of the opposite sex less commonly takes place.

Freud gets around the child's pattern of internalization with his/her parent by attributing the direction of the infant's desire to what he calls "dispositions." Freud's disposition can be interpreted as the child's innate desire for a member of the opposite or the same sex. Freud considers object-cathexes as the result of primary dispositions, i.e., whether one is innately masculine or feminine. In Freud's theory, each child has both a masculine and a feminine disposition, which he calls "the constitutional bisexuality of each individual" (*The Ego and the Id* 34). Which parent the child chooses to identify with depends on the relative strength of these two masculine and feminine dispositions (*The Ego and the Id* 36). Commonly, the boy identifies with the father and consolidates the masculinity in his character, while the girl identifies with the mother and consolidates the femininity in her character (*The Ego and Id* 36). Freud explains that at the very moment of making the choice, the child consolidates his/her gender identity. Freud sees that gender identity is formed this way.

Butler is interested in the concept of "dispositions," which Freud introduces to explain the child's innate desire for a member of the opposite or the same sex. Freud's theory of gender formation is based on dispositions toward heterosexual desire, which in Butler's view, serves as a prohibition against homosexuality as well as incest taboo. Butler sends refutation to "Freud's somewhat tentative postulation of innate sexual dispositions" (Salih 54). Freud's the Oedipus complex model assumes that the masculine disposition is naturally oriented

toward the mother, while the feminine disposition is toward the father. Yet Butler calls into question Freud's conceptualization/explanation of the child's bisexuality as (feminine and masculine) dispositions inherently given. She attempts to dismantle Freud's idea that a newborn baby is naturally born with these dispositions before any intervention of social taboos.

Butler also refutes Freud's theory that the child's desire is fundamentally heterosexual. She claims that Freud sees the child as bisexual from the beginning. However, what Butler cannot agree with in Freud's conceptualization of bisexuality is "the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche" — the conceptualization that within a single psyche, the "feminine" part of the boy desires the father, while the "masculine" part desires the mother (*GT*¹⁸ 82).

The conceptualization of bisexuality in terms of dispositions, feminine and masculine, which have heterosexual aims as their intentional correlates, suggests that for Freud, bisexuality is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche. The masculine disposition is, in effect, never oriented toward the father as an object of sexual love, and neither is the feminine disposition oriented toward the mother (the young girl may be so oriented, but this is before she has renounced that "masculine" side of her dispositional nature). . . . [W]ithin Freud's thesis of primary bisexuality, there is no homosexuality, and only opposites attract. (*GT* 82)

From Butler's perspective, although Freud believes that the child is born with the dispositions of bisexuality, he still regards two gender/sexual identities as heterosexual. The feminine part

¹⁸ *Gender Trouble* will be cited as *GT* in parentheses.

of the boy, not the masculine part of him, desires the father. A masculine heterosexual identity which desires the female, and a feminine heterosexual identity which desires the male reside in the psyche. In a word, a masculine homosexual desire and a feminine homosexual desire are ignored in Freud's theory. Butler argues that based on a heterosexual norm, Freud theorizes the idea that the feminine disposition is naturally linked to a desire for the male, while the masculine disposition is linked to a desire for the female. Butler adds that there is no homosexuality, i.e., no love between masculinity and masculinity, or between femininity and femininity within Freud's thesis of primary bisexuality. Butler thus concludes that Freud's bisexuality is no more than the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche (*GT* 82).

Although Freud mentions bisexuality, he still places the heterosexual conception of desire at the center of his account of dispositions. For Butler, "homosexual desire is prohibited from the outset" (Salih 58). Butler explains that boys give up the desire for their mother, and tend to identify with their father because of societal pressure, not because of castration anxiety as Freud also suggests. According to Butler, in the case of the prohibition against homosexual incest, "the loss is sustained through a melancholic structure" (*GT* 94). Freud's Oedipus complex theory indicates that the loss of the heterosexual object leads to the displacement of that object, but it does not displace the heterosexual aim itself. On the other hand, in the case of the loss of the homosexual object, Freud's theory suggests that both the loss of the aim and the object are required. To put it another way, the object is not only lost, but the homosexual desire is also fully denied, such that "I never lost that person and I never loved that person, indeed never felt that kind of love at all" (*GT* 94). Butler thus argues that "the melancholic preservation of that love is all the more securely safeguarded through the totalizing trajectory of the denial" (*GT* 94).

Butler claims that gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the

prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition within the ego (*GT 85-86*). According to Butler, “this prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire” (*GT 86*). In a nutshell, the resolution of the Oedipus complex affects gender identification, through the taboo against homosexuality as well as the taboo against incest (*GT 86*). As a result, the child “identifies with the same-sexed object of love, thereby internalizing both aim and object of the homosexual cathexis” within the ego (*GT 86*).

Butler highlights that the melancholic identifications are ways “of preserving unresolved object relations, and in the case of same-sexed gender identification, the unresolved object relations are invariably homosexual” (*GT 86*). While “in melancholia, the loved object is lost through separation, death, or the breaking of an emotional tie, . . . in the Oedipal situation, the loss of the loved object is dictated by a prohibition attended by a set of punishments (castration)” (*GT 87*). Regarding the melancholia of gender identification, Butler explains that “the internalization of an interior moral directive” obtains “its structure and energy from an externally enforced taboo” (*GT 87*).

Butler insightfully elucidates that it seems that the taboo against homosexuality must be repressed before the heterosexual incest taboo. The incest taboo effectively produces “the distinction between primary and secondary dispositions,” describing and reproducing “the distinction between a legitimate heterosexuality and an illegitimate homosexuality” (*GT 97*). Butler makes clear that “the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual ‘dispositions’ by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible” (*GT 87*). According to Freud’s theory, the young boy and young girl enter into the Oedipal drama with incestuous heterosexual aims, which indicates “that they have already been subjects to prohibitions which ‘dispose’ them in distinct (heterosexual) sexual directions” (*GT 87*).

However, Butler does not accept the dispositions “that Freud assumes to be primary or constitutive facts of sexual life,” and argues that they are not fundamental, inborn traits, but

“effects of a law which, internalized, produces and regulates discrete gender identity and heterosexuality” (*GT* 87). Employing the castration complex in a different way, Butler introduces a different fear of “castration,” which makes the boy identify with his father. Butler claims that this “castration” is in fact “the fear of ‘feminization’ associated within heterosexual culture with male homosexuality” (*GT* 80). When the boy gives up parents as love-objects, he internalizes one of them (either father or the mother) within his ego to compensate for the loss. The boy chooses to identify with the father because of a societal threat of the stigma of being gay (*GT* 80). In opposition to Freud’s claim that babies are born naturally with sexual dispositions, Butler states that these dispositions are traces of a history of enforced, repressive sexual prohibitions, which are untellable or unspeakable for their own naturalization.

Freud describes “ego formation” as a melancholic structure because the infant is forced to give up its desire for its parents in response to the taboo against incest, but Butler asserts that the taboo against incest is preceded by the taboo against homosexuality. She says as follows:

The taboo against incest and implicitly, against homosexuality is a repressive injunction which presumes an original desire localized in the notion of “dispositions,” which suffers a repression of an originally homosexual libidinal directionality and produces the displaced phenomenon of heterosexual desire.
(*GT* 88-89)

Butler reveals that the dispositions are in fact “trained, fixed, and consolidated by a prohibition which later and in the name of culture, arrives to quell the disturbance created by an unrestrained homosexual cathexis” (*GT* 87). She thus believes that the prohibitive law

“both produces sexuality in the form of ‘dispositions’ and appears disingenuously at a later point in time to transform these ostensibly ‘natural’ dispositions into culturally acceptable structures of exogamy kinship” (*GT* 88). Butler argues that if the incest taboo determines and regulates the production of discrete gender identities, which requires the prohibition and sanction of heterosexuality, homosexuality then emerges as a desire, which must be produced in order to remain oppressed/repressed (*GT* 105). Namely, the repressive law against homosexuality effectively produces homosexual desire and regulates heterosexuality. Butler stresses that it functions not only “as a negative or exclusively code,” but also “as a sanction,” or “as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable, the legitimate from the illegitimate” (*GT* 89).

Bringing to the surface the prohibition against homosexual incest through which heterosexual identity is formulated, Butler “contests the fixity of masculine and feminine placements with respect to the paternal law” (*GT* 91). Butler shrewdly observes that a homosexual love sustains heterosexuality “through a melancholic structure of incorporation, an identification and embodiment of the love that is neither acknowledged nor grieved” (*GT* 95). While it is possible to grieve the consequences of the incest taboo in a heterosexual culture, it is not possible to grieve the taboo against homosexuality. Butler thus considers the response to the taboo against homosexuality as melancholia rather than mourning. According to her, “the heterosexual refusal to acknowledge the primary homosexual attachment is *culturally* enforced by a prohibition on homosexuality, which is in no way paralleled in the case of the melancholic homosexual” (*GT* 95, emphasis added). Freud’s heterosexual melancholy is culturally structured, and sustained “as the price of stable gender identities related through homosexual desires” (*GT* 95). For Butler, all gender and identity is formed on a primary, forbidden homosexual desire, thus all genders and sexes are melancholic.

The Queer Uncanny

According to Paulina Palmer, homophobia remains rampant in our society, “from vicious queer bashing to school bullying, from heterosexist jokes to the minstrelization of openly gay television personalities”: *secrecy* is the feature of the lives of lesbians and gay men (148). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out the hypocrisy and double standards against the queer that frequently operate in phallogentric culture, and reveals how male homosexuality is signified as an open secret that society has to treat as unspeakable (671).

Butler also mentions in “Imitation and Gender Insubordinate” that female same-sex relations (lesbianism) is commonly signified “as a domain of unthinkability and unnameability in society” (312). Regarding the invisibility of lesbian existence and marginalization of lesbian relationships, according to Andrienne Rich who popularized the term “compulsory heterosexuality” in her 1980 essay on “*Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*,” one’s heterosexuality is not chosen, but rather forced through society. In a word, compulsory heterosexuality works as a political institution (637). As Diana Fuss also points out in “Inside/out,” heterosexuality achieves the status of the compulsory by presenting itself as a *practice* governed by some internal necessity (2). Rich says that compulsory heterosexuality has been maintained by destroying records and letters which prove the realities of lesbian existence (649). In other words, compulsory heterosexuality emerges through the act of male dominance inherent in social institutions, and serves “as a means of assuring male right of physical, economic, and emotional access” (647). In this respect, Rich strongly argues in her article that compulsory heterosexuality results in female disempowerment by suppressing the growth/liberation of sexualities regarded as abhorrent, queer, or deviant (647-48).

As gay men and lesbians who have been culturally invisible have increased their visibility and spoken for human rights and gay rights, prejudice/hostility against queer

subjects has come to the surface in private and public spaces. The philosophical opposition between heterosexual and homosexual has always been constructed on the inside/outside binary structure of sexual orientation, i.e., “fundamentally a structure of exclusion and exteriorization” (Fuss, “Inside/Out” 3). This inside/outside structure of “alienation, splitting, and identification together produce a self and an other, a subject and object, an unconscious and a conscious, an interiority and exteriority” (Fuss, “Inside/Out” 2). According to Fuss, “the language and law that regulates the establishment of heterosexuality as both an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system is the language and law of defense and protection” (“Inside/Out” 2). In other words, heterosexuality assures its self-identity as *inside* by “protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality” (Fuss, “Inside/Out” 2). Heterosexuality is then viewed as the natural inclination or tendency by both sexes, and anyone who differs from the normalcy of heterosexuality is deemed deviant, abhorrent, or queer.

However, the border between heterosexuality and homosexuality is not stable. heterosexuality can never completely deny its terrifying homosexual Other, and equally, homosexuality cannot be fully free from the constant social pressures of heterosexual conformity (Fuss, “Inside/Out” 3). That is, “each is haunted each other, but here again, it is the other who comes to stand in metonymically for the very occurrence of haunting and ghostly visitations” (Fuss, “Inside/Out” 3). Heterosexuality inhibiting inside can only recognize homosexuality inhibiting the outside through negative images. Regarding this, Fuss points out that society oppresses homosexuality by relegating the lesbian and male gay subject to the figure of “specter and phantom” (“Inside/Out” 3).

The topic of “secrets” and “disclosure,” which is prominently found in discussion of the uncanny, plays a significant role in theoretical and fictional texts with lesbian and gay themes. Many characters in gay/lesbian novels show feelings of guilt about their

homosexuality and try to hide it (Palmer 2). This is because society sees lesbian and gay sexuality as taboo, and thus homosexual desire is considered as something that has to be repressed for the sake of cultural continuity. According to Palmer, the queer sexuality or experience, and society's response to it are related to Freud's the uncanny (3). The uncanny character or theme assumes an important role in queer fictional texts, and it is also not unusual to find metaphors and motifs of homosexuality with uncanny connotations in these texts (2). As Royle elucidates how "*uncanny* feelings are very often generated by strange sights, unveilings, revelations, by what should have remained out of sight" (45, emphasis added), queer characters cause a sense of uncanniness.

As Palmer has aptly observed, many people whom society think of as the Other and abject, such as blacks, the disabled and the elderly, displays visible signs of difference, but homosexual people generally do not reveal their visibility with any mark/sign. In a word, homosexual people are unmarked. In this aspect, Iris Marion Young stresses that the invisibility of lesbians and gay men reflects the phenomenon of homophobia and the feelings of "border-anxiety" in society (147). Since gay men and lesbians do not have physical or mental signs that can differentiate the homosexual from the heterosexual, conversely, it means that anyone can become a queer. Borrowing Fuss's term, "most of us are both inside and outside" ("Inside/Out" 5). The universal possibility of being queer makes the boundary between homosexual and heterosexual permeable and penetrable, and makes many heterosexuals feel anxious about their own homosexuality. The fear of homosexuality is caused by "the very real possibility and ever-present threat of a collapse of boundaries, an effacing of limits and a radical confusion of identities" (Fuss, "Inside/Out 6). To put it otherwise, the unexpected sight of a lesbian or gay couple can trigger a sensation of profound uncanniness about one's own homosexuality. In order to overcome anxiety and fear, heterosexual people have constantly treated the queer individual and their physical presence

as alien, abhorrent, and threatening (Palmer 16). It is like the self defends its border against an other who represents “the self-same lack” as a way to deny “the recognition of the lack within the self” (Fuss, “Inside/Out” 3).

As another concept that represents the queer uncanny, according to Palmer, “the spectre and phantom, . . . , carry connotations of ‘excess’ since their appearance exceeds the material” (7). Palmer explains that the role of the uncanny as a signifier of “excess” is to “challeng[e] the conventional view of reality as unitary” and “prompt the subject to question mainstream, common-sense versions of it” (7). Perceptions and phenomena which transcend reasonable or rational explanation, such as fantasy or dreams, are related to the inexplicable uncanny outside language. In this regard, queer theorists see homosexuality, because of its invisibility and transgressive dimensions, “as evoking (from a phallogocentric viewpoint) connotations of excess” (Palmer 7).¹⁹

Ideas of uncertainty, ambivalence, and ambiguity are also related to the queer uncanny. Regarding the closeted, oppressive lifestyle that sexual and gender minorities are forced to lead, Harold Beaver observes that many gay and lesbian people live with ambiguity, and states that homosexual people “live not in an alternative culture, but in a duplicate culture of constantly interrupted and overlapping roles” (105). Namely, they lead a life slipping back and forth across a wavering line (Beaver 105). Palmer also mentions that “the term ‘queer’ itself hinges on ambiguity, while employed colloquially as a tool of homophobic abuse, it also operates somewhat precariously in the manner of a reverse discourse, as a tool of gay resistance” (8). In the same breathe, Les Brooks argues, “ambiguity is central to queer’s self-identity” (qtd. in Palmer 8).

¹⁹ ‘Doubling’ is also one of motifs that is also concerned with the uncanny. Doubling is “a compulsion to repeat and the different forms of mimicry and performances” (Palmer 8). Palmer explains that “mimicry and performance feature in queer theory with reference to the way in which gay and lesbian roles comment paradoxically on heterosexual roles” (8).

The queer are commonly described as monsters traditionally carrying connotations of the grotesque and the perverse. The homosexual and lesbian are represented as the monstrous in a homophobic discourse. The monster provokes hybridity and ambiguity. The hybridity and border-crossing monster dismantles the binary oppositions between male and female, human and animal, or man and demon. Likewise, the queer subjects challenge the binary between male and female, heterosexuality and homosexuality, and masculinity and femininity. Associated with the monstrous, these people do not respect borders, positions, norms and rules, thus they are blamed for disrupting the social system and order. As Elisabeth Bronfen observes, “the uncanny always entails anxieties about fragmentation, about the disruption or destruction of any narcissistically informed sense of personal stability, body integrity, immortal individuality” (113), the monstrous queer are uncanny. The uncanny queer are “stigmatized as unnatural and unspeakable and described as posing a threat to family stability” based on heterosexuality (Sedgwick 202). They arouse in the heterosexual fears about his own sexual orientation, by making the border between homosexuality and heterosexuality permeable, and unsettling the notion of a stable sexual identity (Palmer 153). In other words, the queer resist categorization based on the binary gender system, making it uncontrollable, imperceptible, unidentifiable, thus threatening and subversive.

These days, the uncanny queer subjects with monstrosity are not depicted or described just as marginalized or stigmatized outsiders or strangers in society. Instead, they are seen as sexual minorities with the subversive potential of the power of the marginal, who can strategically reappropriate their queer monstrosity as a way to threaten or challenge dominant ideas of gender and sexuality borders. In conclusion, the queer uncanny can provide new ways of problematizing notions of ontological stability and notions of normality. It gives us an opportunity to call into question socially constructed definitions/interpretation of gender and sexuality, and reconsider definitions of the human itself.

Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha —The Uncanny Colonial Subject

As a colonial psychiatrist, Fanon tries to apply Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalyses to the specific colonial context to explain the psychic structure of the oppressed, which is overdetermined by economic class relations. Fanon's black slave is the uncanny and phobic object (a problematized double) belonging to Lacan's the real. However, in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the subversive political aspects of the uncanny are absent. Fanon constantly describes the black slave as merely a victim/fetish, who always suffers an inferiority complex and a sense of alienation. However, the black skin, unable to be completely covered with white masks, can be reappropriated as a strategy of political subversion to contaminate/destabilize purity and authenticity in colonial discourses and white authority. That is, it might be used as a tool to split the white master's psyche and collapse the self-sufficient colonial subjectivity/subjecthood. Fanon does not seem to give much consideration to the possibility that black skin in white masks, remaining outside the signifying chain, has the revolutionary potentials to destabilize the master's authority and colonialist discourses, and bring about political transformation in society. In fact, in order to elucidate the complex dynamics embedded in the master-slave dialectic in colonial and postcolonial contexts, Fanon should have paid more attention to the ambivalent and disturbing qualities of the white-masked black skin.

From Fanon's perspective, Freud's, Adler's, Jung's, and Lacan's approaches to psychoanalysis/psychology are ahistorical, non-racial, and individual-oriented, since these western theories do not consider the racial hierarchies that preserve unequal power relationships between the white master and the black slave. Thus, Fanon announces that "the discoveries of Freud are of no use to us here" (104). For Fanon, in some circumstances, "the socius is more important than the individual" (105). Stressing in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "[a] Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro, [and that] this self-

division is a direct result of colonist subjugation” (17), Fanon attempts to racialize psychoanalysis based on the specific colonial context.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon focuses on why the black man cannot embrace his black skin, but desperately desires to be white. He reveals a painful truth, that “the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards” (8). In fact, Fanon confesses a shameful self-portrait that he himself wants “to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*,” to be “loved like a white man” by a white woman, and to “marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness” (63, italics original). He explains that whenever “the Negro comes into contact with someone else, . . . the question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I” (211), which causes the black man psychological problems, such as a sense of isolation, inferiority and deprecation, or psychological displacement and mental derangement. As Diana Fuss points out, Fanon’s theory of colonial psychology exposes how the black man “is subjugated to the white man through a process of racial othering” (295).

As Fanon says that “the black man has two dimensions; one with his fellows, the other with the white man” (17), the black man cannot compare himself with the white man who operates as its own Other without any dependency upon the sign “Black.” That is, the white man, “claiming for itself the exalted position of transcendental signifier” (Fuss, “Interior Colonies” 297), functions as father, leader, and God for the black man. Rejecting an Adlerian comparison (“Ego greater than The Other”), Fanon says that since “the Antilleans have no inherent values of their own [and] they are always contingent on the presence of The Other (white)” (211), the relationship between white and the Antilleans cannot be compared with a reciprocal relationship between Hegel’s bondsman and lord. While Hegelian dialectic is founded on an absolute reciprocity between two — “each consciousness of self is in quest of absoluteness” —, Fanon does not believe that it is possible for white and black to recognize

themselves as mutually recognizing each other (217), because the black slave is not recognized by the white master as a man with consciousness (8) and his freedom completely depends on the white master. Since the Negro has never risked his life fighting for his own freedom, the black slave cannot be recognized by the white master as an independent being with self-awareness. In a word, “the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (Fanon 110).

Fanon remarks that “there is not an open conflict [for mutual recognition] between white and black” (217), and that the only hope for the black slave in a white mask is to become a white man someday. In this sense, Fanon’s black slave is closer to Nietzsche’s slave, who does not have any will to power to fight for his freedom, than to Hegel’s bondsman who “turns away from the master and turns toward the object” (Fanon 221). Taking issue with this non-reciprocal, unequal relationship between white and black, Fanon “proposes that in the system of power-knowledge that upholds colonialism, it is the white man who lays claim to the category of the Other, it is the white man who monopolizes otherness to secure an illusion of unfettered access to subjectivity” (Fuss, “Interior Colonies” 296).

Applying Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage to the colonial situation, Fanon discloses the severe self-alienation and self-division that the black man experiences. Lacan describes the mirror stage as a stage of identification in his essay called “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.” According to Lacan, we are born into a condition of lack, which is the fundamental condition of being human, and the ego is nothing but a fictive sense of unitary selfhood, which is created in “the mirror stage.” Our sense of being a unique individual as “the Ideal I” (“The Mirror Stage” 1286) emerges in the mirror stage when we begin to see ourselves as separate individuals, as both subject (self that looks) and object (self that is looked at). The mirror exerts a magic

function to transform the perception of a fragmented body into the vision of a whole body. When the infant stands in front of the mirror, it forms an identification with the image in the mirror. As Lacan says, “the mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation” (“The Mirror Stage” 1288). While looking into the mirror, we never recognize ourselves as a fragmented being, but only see another potential image of our selves. Thus, Lacan adds, “this Gestalt . . . symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its *alienating destination*” (“The Mirror Stage” 1286, emphasis added). What Fanon pays attention to in Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage is the gap between the actual self and the mirrored Ideal-I.

According to Fanon, for the delirious Antillean, “the mirror hallucination is always neutral”: “When Antilleans tell me that they have experienced it, I always ask the same question: ‘What color were you?’ Invariably they reply: ‘I have no color’ ” (162). In a word, “the black, the dark, the Negro vanish from [his] consciousness” (Fanon 194). This is because the Negro, who has to read stories of savages told by white men, sees himself not as a black man, but as an Antillean. This fact indicates that the black man in a white mask “formulates and crystallizes an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white” (Fanon 148). As a result, he experiences self-division or self-fragmentization: “an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage spatter the whole body with black blood” because of the disavowal of his own blackness (Fanon 112).

So, what solution does Fanon suggest in the condition that black men are dehumanized by the white men? Fanon refuses to be stuck in merely “here-and-now, sealed into thingness” (218), instead, demands that, for “reciprocal recognitions,” a black man’s desire should be considered, and his negating activity should be noticed as he seeks “something other than life” (218). Fanon wants to create “a new humanism” (7), i.e., “the ideal conditions of existence for a human world,” (231) in which “there is no white world, there is no white

ethnic, any more than there is a white intelligence,” and everyone can be recognized as a ‘man’ (229). Yet Fanon’s “man” does not mean anything fixed, stable, and motionless, but his man is always in process of endlessly creating himself (229).

According to Homi K. Bhabha, what is revolutionary in *Black Skin, White Masks* is that Fanon does not put forward “a unified notion of history” or “a unitary concept of Man” (“Remembering” 184). That is, denying the myth of “the social virtues of historical rationality, cultural cohesion, and the autonomy of individual consciousness” (Bhabha, “Remembering” 185), Fanon, “from the tradition of the oppressed,” reveals “forms of social and psychic alienation and aggression-madness, self-hate, treason, violence,” and surfaces the black presence that can damage “the representative narrative of Western personhood” (Bhabha, “Remembering” 182, 184, 185). Bhabha stresses that Fanon’s efforts to explain, by reappropriating the European psychoanalytic tradition, the history of the Negro not only serve to produce the “intricate irony” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, but lead us to contemplate “the [psychic and social] experience of dispossession and dislocation which speaks to the condition of the marginalized, the alienated, those who have to live under the surveillance of a sign of identity and fantasy that denies their difference” (“Remembering” 194).

However, it is doubtful whether Fanon really sees the social not as “a homogeneous philosophical or representational unity,” but as a “slippage,” which “is always an unsolved ensemble of antagonistic interlocations between positions of power and poverty, knowledge and oppression, history and fantasy, surveillance and subversion,” which in Bhabha’s eyes, is the very reason why we should turn to Fanon today (“Remembering Fanon” 194). Despite all the credit Fanon deserve in Postcolonial studies, the problem is that Fanon tends to be “too quick to name the Other, to personalize its presence in the language of colonial racism” (Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon” 190). He constantly reinscribes the images of black men as “battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects,

and slave-ship” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 112). Fanon’s fixed view of the black man as a fetish for the white man is clearly revealed when he also elucidates how “the black man (contra Lacan) begins and ends violently fragmented” (Fuss, “Interior Colonies” 296) in a white racial phantasm. Confined in “the static ontological space of the timeless ‘primitive’ ” (Fuss, “Interior Colonies” 296), Fanon’s black man is deprived of his own subjectivity and “sealed into that crushing objecthood” (Fanon 109). Serving as “a protean imaginary other for white” and “a stationary ‘object’ for itself,” the black man does not experience “the migration through the Other necessary for subjectivity to take place” (Fuss, “Interior Colonies” 296). For example, hearing racial interpellation such as “Dirty Nigger!” or “Look, a Negro!” he finds himself becoming simply “an object in the midst of other objects” (Fanon 109). When a white child cries saying to her mother, “Mama, see the Negro! I am frightened!” his black body finally bursts apart (Fanon 112). Taking for granted the violence of the racist interpellation of black people, Fanon, without any hesitation, concludes that the black man is destined to be “forever in combat with his own image” (194).

In fact, this frightening monster-like black man, who represents “ugliness, sin, darkness, immortality in the collective unconscious” (Fanon 192), recalls Freud’s theory of the double/uncanny (the return of the repressed). According to Freud, the uncanny refers to something familiar, which may have been with us since childhood, but at the same time something unfamiliar, which assumes the vague and ambiguous terror of strangeness. The black man’s ugliness, darkness, primitivity, and immortality are the return of the white man’s own immoral, dark, corrupt, detestable, and abhorrent self, which is rejected/repressed: this uncanny Other is a double of the self. Freud explains that the super-/ego projects all the negative traits that it cannot accept onto this primitive image of the double, due to castration anxiety about punishment for violating societal norms. Hence, the double is experienced later as something uncanny because this creepy, weird object calls forth the long-forgotten and

repressed from the past. The uncanniness of Fanon's black boy mirrors what is forbidden by the white children's super-/ego and repressed in her unconscious when she encounters the black boy.

Yet, obsessed with the colonial discourse that everything which is not black is white and that the colonized is a population of degenerate, corrupt, debased types, Fanon himself seems to believe that white masks/the colonizer self and black skin/the colonized Other can be neatly divided between the self and the Other. According to Bhabha, " 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness," which is a crucial feature of colonial discourse "in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction," in fact, operates as "a paradoxical mode of representation" ("The Other" 94, 101). A stereotype "connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition" ("The Other" 94). Bhabha claims that 'stereotype,' which is supposed to be based on the concept of fixity to establish a clear difference and hierarchy between the colonizer and colonized, is itself "a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation," which is anxiously repeated in colonial contexts ("The Other" 100). Thus, the colonizer, as well as the colonized, fail to have a fixed and stable identity depending on the fixed/stable images of the Other, being "caught in the ambivalence of paranoiac identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution" (Bhabha, "Remembering" 191).

When a white girl cries, "Look, a Negro . . . Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" and then "returns to her mother in the recognition and disavowal of the Negroid type" (Bhabha, "The Other" 109), the white girl also equally experiences self-division or fragmentatization at the moment of encountering the uncanny black skin covered with a white mask, which Fanon does not consider. Assuming the colonized as entirely knowable and visible, Fanon does not seem to calculate the traumatic impact of the return of the repressed — "those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which

are signal points of identification and alienation, senses of fear and desire in colonial contexts” (Bhabha, “The Other” 104).

While Fanon’s uncanny, phobic white-masked black skin serves only as a pathetic object for being stigmatized/discriminated against by the colonizer, for Bhabha, the impact of the uncanny/ambivalent colonized Other’s returning the gaze at the colonial subject cannot be ignored. Bhabha states that occupying two places or three at once, this “depersonalized, dislocated, colonial” subjects, i.e., the uncanny- and phobic object “[can] become incalculable object, quite literally, difficult to place,” threatening white supremacy through “the pathos of cultural confusion” (“Remembering” 192). In a word, Bhabha suggests the possibility of politicizing the uncanny, ambivalent black skin, which can never be completely concealed by white masks, thus making white skin itself dis-/unfamiliar in the colonial context.

Bhabha’s sense of the hybrid, ambivalent, and postcolonial perspective/experience not only explains the split in the colonized subject, but also all the hesitations, uncertainties, and ambivalences with which colonial authority and its figures are imbued (Huddart 80). He describes in *The Location of Culture* how the uncanny colonized subject can dismantle the self-confident colonial authority through mimicry, a strategy of “doubling” or “difference-in-repetition.” In short, Bhabha regards the marks of anxiety and ambivalence in the colonial situation as that which can empower the colonized who is forced to live in the colony, as an agent.

Bhabha examines the ways in which modernity’s forms of knowledge are equal to colonial knowledge. In the case of colonial knowledge, the colonized uncannily looks back at the colonizer, which destabilizes his authority. In the same way, the postcolonial perspective/gaze uncannily returns to unsettle or mock the self-definition of Western modernity, which imagines itself to be different/distinctive from other cultural formations

(Huddart 89). For Bhabha, modernity, based on evolutionism, utilitarianism, and evangelism, cannot stay the same all the time, but loses its sovereignty in the encounter with the contingencies of cultural difference. That is, although modernity's discourses repress their historical origins, and in particular, the historical depth of the colonized, in order to justify colonialism, they cannot avoid confronting their postcolonial doubles. Modernity seems to be stable, progressive, and coherent, but Bhabha uncovers the fact that it actually "depends for its identity on a repressed and unspoken circuit running through different places and cultures" (Huddart 94).

In this regard, Bhabha's postcolonial criticism helps us reflect on the discursive structure of Western colonial domination. Bhabha sees postcolonial criticism as an analysis from the margins of modern nations because the margins of the modern nations, like the situations of colonized peoples, provide subversive resources that challenge or transform our rigid sense of the grand narratives of modernity. Bhabha considers these margins as an uncanny echo of histories that modernity might prefer to hide. He compares the childhood of an individual, which has been repressed but haunts and disrupts everyday existence, to the beginning of modern Western history, which "is repressed but inevitably breaks through the veneer of civilization" (Huddart 78). In other words, modernity has repressed its dark colonial origins, which include a foreignness within its identity from the very beginning. It is the foreignness within the self that is uncannily revealed. Interrogating the superficial self-sufficiency of Western modernity's narratives, Bhabha thus concludes that Western knowledge is homely/canny and, at the same time unhomely/uncanny.

According to Bhabha in *Location of Culture*, the uncanny is also the unhomely. For Bhabha, to be unhomed is not to be homeless, but to be in the condition of "extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations," which is related to the experience of displacement, *uncannily* crossing the border between home and world ("Introduction" 13, emphasis added). Bhabha

says, “in that displacement, the borders between home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (“Introduction” 13). Bhabha evokes the uncanniness of the migrant experience through “a ‘*half-life*,’ like the partial presence of colonial identity,” and difference-in-repetition, which is “a way of *reviving* that past life, of keeping it alive in the present” (Huddart 79-80, italics original).

According to Bhabha, much of this migration is linked to long histories of travel, trade, and colonialism. The experience of migration, exile, diaspora, or cultural displacement replaces old ideas of belonging and identity, particularly nationalist ideas. Bhabha explains these complex issues through the idea of the migrant’s uncanny. The uncanny describes the aboriginal experience of the land. For example, European colonization makes those who are bonded to the land think that the land is theirs, but uncannily not theirs. For Bhabha, the uncanny can be applied more powerfully to the homeliness of the colonizer, that is, “the foreignness necessarily central to the apparently original and self-sufficient source of colonization” (Huddart 85). In this regard, David Morely also suggests “a progressive notion of home, Heimat and community, which does not necessarily depend, for its effective functioning, on the exclusion of all forms of otherness, as inherently threatening to its own internally coherent self-identity” (qtd. in Huddart 85).

In relation to the dual quality of all identity, Bhabha argues that culture has a dual identity, too. For Bhabha, culture is never stable, linear, fixed, coherent and self-sufficient. Culture is homely, coherent, stable, and meaningful because of those who belong to the culture. On the other hand, it is also unhomely, unfamiliar, never-pure, and ambiguous, because it is always changing and is always being made meaningful by newcomers.

The narratives that construct culture seem stable, unified, progressive, homogeneous, self-definitive, and coherent, yet they are always drawn into continual slippages,

discontinuities, or fissures of meanings caused by strange displaced relationships with other cultures. Regarding the migration experience, Bhabha states that migrants represent the dual nature of culture since they are always situated in relation to both an original culture and that of a new location. Bhabha discusses the uncanniness of *culture* in the following passage:

Culture is *heimlich*, with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives, its homologous empty time, its seriality, its progress, its customs and coherence. But cultural authority is also *unheimlich*, for to be distinctive, signficatory, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated, interdisciplinary, intertextual, international, inter-racial. (“Arctulating” 195)

According to Bhabha, “culture’s double returns uncannily — neither the one nor the other, but the impostor — to mock and mimic, to lose the sense of the masterful self and its social sovereignty” (“Arctulating” 195). The repetition is not a return to the same, but in fact, is its own “displacement,” which “turn[s] the authority of culture into its own non-sense precisely in its moment of enunciation” (“Arctulating” 195).

In conclusion, connecting the uncanny to the dual quality of all identities in the study of colonialism, Bhabha complicates the divisions between Western and non-Western identities. The feeling of uncanniness is caused by a guilt-laden past which cannot be avoided. It is not something we can control directly, but is an involuntary recurrence of the old and familiar. In a word, what returns to haunt us is actually what we prefer to avoid. In this sense, the uncanny is close to Freud’s repetition compulsion (Huddart 82). Freud explains in detail how the uncanny works. Freud claims that the uncanny arises from the repression of childish beliefs or attachments. We have apparently overcome such beliefs or expelled unnecessary elements. However, this process always remains incomplete: any repression is necessarily

incomplete. The traces of past beliefs and experiences never go away, but remain still present in the mind. In this regard, according to Bhabha, any present identity cannot be self-sufficient, but remains only a partial identity/presence since the uncanny or improper always returns to remind us of the incompleteness of repression. Linking the uncanny to ambivalence, in-betweenness, and ambiguities in cultural, political, and historical spectrum, Bhabha requires us to reevaluate our identities and “reconsider how we are come to be who we are” (Huddart 83).

The Disabled Uncanny Body

The physically disabled body, which is constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency, abnormality, and deviance, becomes a repository for social fear or anxiety about vulnerability, unpredictability, contingency, or a lack of control (Garland-Thomson 6). That is, “disableism constructs disability as negative quite directly and literally” (Dolmage 22). Jay Timothy Dolmage points out that “ableism renders disability as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented as at once ideal, normal, and the mean or default” (22). In short, the definition of “physically-disabled” is influenced by legal, medical, political, cultural, and literary narratives.

Discursive misrepresentations of the disabled people as uncomplicated figures or exotic/monstrous aliens circulates in culture, mass media, photography, film and literature, flattening the actual experiences of people with disabilities. For example, bodily configurations of disabled literary characters operate as “spectacles” or make “rhetorical effects” that depend on disability’s cultural resonance (Garland-Thomson 9). The disabled people are commonly thought to be “in need of medical intervention and correction” (Mitchell and Snyder 1). Besides, according to Dolmage, disability is commonly considered as an “object of pity and/or charity,” physical deformities are seen as “insinuations of internal

deviance or lack,” and also disability is regarded as “symptomatic of a deviant society” (34-35). James Berge remarks that ableism imposes malevolent or infantilizing qualities onto disabled characters, depriving these people of any opportunity for subjectivity/agency and political power (571). Regarding disempowerment of people with disabilities, Susan Wendell also highlights that “much of the experience of disability and illness goes underground, because there is no socially acceptable way of expressing it and having the physical and psychological experience acknowledged” (40).

Many disability scholars assert that disability is not a physical or biological category, but it is a socially constructed one (Wendell 36). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, one of the well-known disability theorists, remarks that the disabled figure serves as “the vividly embodied, stigmatized other whose social role is to symbolically free the privileged, idealized figure of the American self from the vagaries and vulnerabilities of embodiment” (7). Garland-Thomson argues that “the meanings attributed to disabled bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but are in social relationships.” It means that “one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others” (7). In this regard, Garland-Thomson defines the normate as “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (8). “The centrality, naturalness, and neutrality” of the normate position is continuously reinforced in a normate culture (Dolmage 22).

Regarding this, disability scholars argue that disability has been treated not as a social issue, but as a personal/private matter related to individual will power, fortitude, and perseverance in society (Mitchell and Snyder 17). Wendell claims that the failure of social support for people with disabilities causes debilitating situations that discourage disabled

people from participating fully in major aspects of their lives and from expressing their potentials (41). Many of the struggles of people with disabilities result from having “those physical conditions under social arrangement that could, but do not, either compensate for their physical conditions, or accommodate them” (Wendell 42). Like socially constructed concepts of whiteness or of heteronormativity, the accepted notions of physical disability as an inferior state and a personal misfortune are socially constructed,²⁰ not essentially or biologically inherent.²¹

According to Wendell, culture makes significant contributions to producing the notion of disability (43). Disabled bodies are endowed with cultural Otherness. In this regard, Thomson says that “sociopolitical meanings/consequences of physical facts about typical humans,” such as having two legs or some capacity for sight or speech, are entirely culturally determined (7). For example, stairs cause a functional impairment for wheelchair users. Printed information only accommodates the sighted, but limits blind persons. Deafness cannot be a disabling condition in a community that communicates by signing as well as speaking. Moreover, cultural dichotomies categorize disabled bodies as inferior, out-of-control, ugly, or grotesque, while casting abled ones as superior, beautiful or perfect. Culturally generated and perpetuated standards, such as beauty, independence, fitness,

²⁰ “This socially contextualized view of disability is evident in the current legal definition of disability established by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This landmark civil rights legislation acknowledges that disability depends upon perception and subjective judgment rather than on objective bodily states” (Garland-Thomson 6).

²¹ Garland-Thomson says that their sociopolitical meanings/consequences of physical facts about typical humans such as having two legs or some capacity for sight or speech are entirely culturally determined. For example, stairs cause a functional impairment for wheelchair users. Printed information only accommodates the sighted, but “limits” blind persons. Deafness cannot be a disabling condition in a community that communicates by signing as well as speaking. Moreover, such culturally generated and perpetuated standards as “beauty” “independence” “fitness” “competence” and “normalcy” exclude, marginalize, discriminate, and disable many human bodies with disabilities, while validating and affirming others without disabilities.

competence, and normalcy, exclude, marginalize, discriminate, and disable many human bodies with disabilities, while validating and affirming other bodies without disabilities (Garland-Thomson 7). By demanding normalcy and enforcing norms, cultures stigmatize, mark out and marginalize bodies which do not conform to norms. In this sense, Wendell explains that “stigma, stereotypes, and cultural meanings are all related, and interactive in the cultural construction of disability” (44). Cultural dichotomies foster “not only the omission of experiences of disability from cultural representations of life in a society, but also the cultural stereotyping of people with disabilities” (Wendell 43). In a culture that idealizes abled bodies, disabled bodies only serve as constant reminders of what able-bodied people try to forget and deny (Wendell 91).

According to Ravi Malhotra and Morgan Rowe, “the interaction between body image and identity is circular and self-informing” (159). A person’s self-concept and self-worth worsen depending on the level of perception of discrepancies between the individual’s own body and the societally dictated ideal body (Malhotra and Rowe 160). Malhotra and Rowe point out that “it is through this comparison that the concept of normalcy and the ideal, normal body emerge,” and that these issues become more compounded for people with disabilities (160). That is, for disabled people, body image serves a particularly profound role in creating self-image, and disabled people are more likely to experience greater discrepancies between the actual body and the ideal body internally and externally (Malhotra and Rowe 160). Many disabled people, who cannot see their bodies as fitting the physical ideals of their culture, undergo severe frustration, shame, and self-hatred. Disabled people are thus described as miserable, hopeless, and unhappy people in literature, film, or television (Couser 181). It is very rare for them to be depicted as people who are able to enjoy normal lives. Most of these characters express deep frustration, anger, bitterness, despair, and self-loathing. Their anguishes are generally assumed to be an inevitable outgrowth of the

disability itself. Although social stigma is responsible for the pain endured by the disabled in their everyday lives, it is scarcely explored thoroughly or even acknowledged.

Moreover, the assumption that disabled people are asexual is deeply embedded in society and “centrally implicated in dominant constructions of physical disability” (Wilton 371). They are implicitly and explicitly assumed to be asexual. In fact, because of active censorship, in certain cases, their sexuality cannot be expressed at all, or only allowed to be expressed to the extent that it is constructed as “either threatening or entertaining” (Wilton 371). In this respect, Ruth Butler argues that, “fears of hereditary disease and images of incapable, weak and generally undesirable impaired bodies make disability and asexuality seem synonymous in ableist, hetero-patriarchal society” (209). According to Robert D. Wilton, psychoanalysis can help us see the intimate connection between the body and the self: “the connections between these corporeal geographies and the complex, anxiety-ridden process through which the ego identity is constituted and sustained in the world” (370). Many scholars have studied disability figures within psychoanalytic theory, examining anxieties triggered by the fragmented, disabled body. In other words, “psychoanalytic perspectives on loss as the centre of subjectivity” (death or castration) can provide insight into meanings ascribed to disability (Wilton 372). Wilton says that stigmas about or prejudices against disability have been closely associated with non-disabled people’s widespread aversion or hostility “to the vulnerability and, ultimately, the mortality of the human body” (372). The non-disabled do not want to acknowledge that no one can avoid the gradually disabling process of aging and the risk of sudden disability at any time. Our fears and anxieties are mirrored in the interpretation of physical disability as “a marker of human frailty, or of an inability to maintain control over the physicality of our bodies.” Wilton thus stresses that “the presence of ‘sickly bodies’ was identified as an uncanny reminder of human mortality,” which provides a cause for the oppression and marginalization of the disabled (371). In

delving into the origins of anxiety about or fear of disabled people, Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytic theories can give us a vital insight into disability oppression/stigmatization.

Disability and Freud's the Uncanny

Compared to disabled men and non-disabled women, disabled women experience more economical, social, and psychological disadvantages (Barnes and Mercer 86). Deborah Kent remarks that women with disabilities or illnesses have faced more restrictions than their non-disabled peers in obtaining career opportunities and pursuing personal goals (91). These women are even easily ignored in feminist analyses since non-disabled feminists have severed a sisterhood connection with them in an effort to advance more powerful, potent, energetic, independent, and appealing female icons (Fine and Asch 4). From the perspective of these non-disabled feminists, physically or mentally disabled/ill women threaten women's empowerment or liberation by reinforcing and perpetuating conventional stereotypes of women as being dependent, passive, helpless, weak, and needy. For this reason, feminism led by non-disabled feminists has not shown enough enthusiasm to address the experiences of disabled women, which ultimately brings women categorized as physically and mentally disabled/ill more isolation and marginalization.

According to Kent, "identification with female characters in books can have a profound impact upon a woman's emerging of herself" (92). The need to find heroines in literature may be especially important for young disabled/ill women who have a "double minority" status than non-disabled young women (Kent 91). However, there are few playwrights or novelists who have chosen to depict woman with disabilities or illnesses in their works (Kent 93). If there is such a book, this book often teaches the young disabled/ill woman to accept, as the definition of herself, stereotypes such as "victim," "dependent," and "person of no account," which are widely used to describe the disabled woman (Kent 91-92). Kent

elucidates this point by saying, “the disabled woman is typically shown to be incomplete not only in their body, but in the basic expression of her womanhood” (93). Kent also highlights that her disability or illness frequently serves as “the lingering reminder of some hideous accident or vicious act of violence” to the non-disabled (93). That is to say, many authors do not challenge the world’s view that the disabled/ill women are helpless, useless, pitiable, full of self-loathing, and undesirable. Thus, generally, young women with disabilities or illnesses are likely to internalize stereotypes or misrepresentations of disabled/ill women as both physically and economically dependent upon others.

According to Wendell, specifically, regarding ideals of female appearance or bodily compartments for women, “feminists have always criticized the idealization and objectification of women’s bodies, recognizing them as sources of exploitation and alienation” (92). Considering the exploitation and alienation of women’s bodies, Garland-Thomson points out that “both the female and the disabled body are cast as deviant and inferior” and are described in opposition to a norm assumed to own “natural physical superiority” (19). Because of the discursive equation of femaleness with disability, women’s bodies have been historically denigrated and derogated, and commonly regarded as mutilated and deformed. For example, in Freud’s view, since the woman has no penis, she is physically and mentally disabled. This idea reinforces dominant conceptions that both female and disabled bodies are fundamentally deficient. In a word, they lack what the man possesses. Because of this lack, it is natural that the woman should be consigned to a subordinate, submissive, and inferior social role. It reveals the misogyny underlying Freud’s theory that associates castration with other mutilations and bodily deformities.

Freud explains femaleness in terms of castration (Garland-Thomson 19). He highlights that castration anxiety continues to influence the psychological horizon in adult life even though the Oedipus Complex seems to be resolved in early childhood. The female body without a

penis is still thought of as monstrous, frightening, and worthy of contempt by men, which provides grounds for disability oppression, in particular. Freud argues for the existence of the castration complex and the Oedipus complex, finding the link between disability and castration in many areas of his work. Freud endows disability with symbolic significance. The disabled body is figured prominently in Freud's conceptualization of the castration complex. Freud explains that disabilities in the form of amputations, blindness, deafness, and other conditions can and should be regarded as symbolic substitutes for castration. Freud connects "castration" to other "losses" experienced by the body such as "baldness, hair-cutting, falling out of teeth, decapitation, dismembered limbs, the severing of hands and fingers, as well as blinding," which serve as symbolic representations of castration²² (Wilton 373).

Freud's connections between castration and disability can also be found in his work on the *unheimliche* or the uncanny. Tracing the origins of the uncanny to infantile stages of development, Freud claims that uncanniness derives from repressed infantile complexes, i.e., the castration complex. For Freud, physical disability is a source of uncanniness. In his analysis of the uncanny, the origins of the anxiety "expressed toward physical disability as a reaction to its construction as castration" is firmly grounded within the (non-disabled) self, provoked by "repressed psychological contents" (Wilton 374). Freud argues that a woman without penis may internalize contempt for her own body, while a man recoils from confrontations with mutilated bodies which reminds him of the uncanny, i.e., a return of the repressed/the threat of loss (Wilton 374).

Disabled women are often portrayed or described "as 'sweet innocents,' doubly

²² In particular, Freud's reading of the story of Oedipus also reveals his interpretation of castration as disability. In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Freud states that: "Castration has a place too in the Oedipus legend, for the blinding with which Oedipus punishes himself after the discovery of his crime is, by the evidence of dreams, a symbolic substitute for castration" (qtd. in Wilton 373).

castrated and passive figures,” which contributes to reproducing and perpetuating patriarchal and, by extension, ableist norms (Wilton 375). In the case of blind women, they become perfect objects of male desire/gaze because of their inability to look back. They easily become interesting objects to the evaluative male gaze/stare which frames their bodies as icons of passivity and submissiveness. Other disabled women are also positioned as “a symbol of sexual allure without the ability to resist, or serve as male fantasy of submission without the complication of the individuality and authority” (David 58). In addition, disabled women are commonly regarded as unfit for motherhood and discouraged from the reproductive role, while motherhood and nurturing are taken for granted for non-disabled women before pregnancy (Garland-Thomson 27). Indeed, disabled women are especially vulnerable to (a-)sexual objectification, misogyny, and ableism. Symbolic castration feminizes the male body, too. Disabled men are frequently thought of as powerless, passive and asexual (W. Miller 105). On the other hand, they are commonly represented as obsessive, monstrous avengers who “may seek revenge for their loss against a paternal authority, only to endure further punishment” (Wilton 375). In sum, disabled males are represented as suffering a loss/lack of manhood or accepting a dominant paternal authority, while disabled females are portrayed as castrated twice, who experience extreme dependency and vulnerability.

As Wilton says, “Freud’s castration complex describes, . . . and at the same time is implicated in, the positioning of physical disability as a naturalized Other” (375). The disabled person is treated as the Other who incites horror and contempt from abled people. Specifically, the Freudian castration complex suggests that the “threat of castration” is analogous to “the fear of death” (Wilton 376), which he defines as similar to castration anxiety, relating both to the ego’s fear of being deserted or forsaken. Freud’s castration complex suggests that from birth, one is simultaneously engaged in both degeneration/death and growth. For Freud, castration and death both threaten the integrity of the ego.

In the same way, for Freud, disability as a corporeal loss becomes a symbolic substitute for death. Ego's efforts to avoid confrontation with its own vulnerability and mortality result in the projection of its own troubling psychic material onto the external world. This projection perpetuates the reproduction of disabled people as the devalued Other (Evans 134-41). In this sense, Freudian scholars have claimed that the specter of human mortality is essential and central to an understanding of human subjectivity. According to this perspective, blurring the boundary between life and death causes uncanny anxiety because it leads us to confront the (strangely familiar) knowledge of our own mortality (Wilton 376).

Wilton remarks that "shifting the emphasis from castration (the loss of a body part) to death (the loss of the body in its entirety) provides an interpretive frame for the *uncanny* experiences described by Freud himself" (377, emphasis added). When the disabled Other becomes strangely familiar, a feeling of uncanniness is produced and we are reminded of our mortality. The disabled body calls to mind our own corporeal degeneration, which is a source of troubling anxiety. Disability is then seen as a substitute for death, and the fear about mortality is constantly projected onto the disabled Other. This persistent intertwining of disability with castration in Western discourse can "provid[e] a starting point for exploring the relationship of social identity to the body" (Garland-Thomson 20). This construction of the disabled body as the universally devalued Other tells us how the [dis]abled body can be culturally, socially constructed.

Freud's theory gives us the understanding of the construction of disability as a symbolic substitute for castration in Western culture. Within Freudian theory, disability is positioned as a tragic loss or lack, which draws a mixture of anxiety and pity from non-disabled individuals. Still, the taken-for-granted definition of disability as loss or lack in fact makes us reconsider the socially, culturally constructed nature of disabled sexuality. Lacan's reformulation of Freudian castration can explain this point well.

Disability and Lacanian theory

According to Bruce Fink, Lacanian subjects are symbolically castrated. To be more specific, according to Lacan, the symbolic order²³ is based upon lack, thus subjects are symbolically castrated in and through their entrance into “language” or the “symbolic.” In Lacanian terms, the subject loses a sense of oneness/wholeness that existed in the pre-symbolic stage (the mirror stage) when they enter the symbolic world: the cost of the formation of a subject carries a loss (Fink 100). Lacan elucidates that subjects are constituted by what they lack from the very beginning. Lacanian subjects, who are symbolically castrated, desire to regain the lost object, i.e., the wholeness. Yet, reclaiming a pre-symbolic wholeness is always not only unsuccessful, but also impossible, since subjects are fundamentally based upon the very lack. In other words, Lacan’s universal symbolic castration suggests that the fullness of the phallic male ego/body is nothing but an illusory completeness. To avoid facing one’s own incompleteness, knowledge of the loss or lack must be repressed in the symbolic (Lacan, *Ecrits* 1-7).

Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory deviates from Freud’s conception of castration. Lacan’s theory provides some insight into the socio-cultural construction of physical disability. For Freud, disability stands in for physical castration. In Freudian thinking, just as the female body is positioned as deficient, the disabled body is also seen as having a physiological deficiency from which psycho-social consequences flow. However, for Lacan, castration is replaced by *symbolic* castration, with lack inscribed onto the disabled body (Wilton 381). For Lacan, “the form of ‘the bloody scrap’ or ‘the pound of flesh’ cut from the body as a condition for entering the symbolic” is the corporeal cost of subjectivity (Wilton 379). Here, Wilton points out that “these terms function as metaphors to describe the *toll* exacted by

²³ Lacan formulates his own tripartite schema of the psyche with three Orders: The Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Imaginary is the site of the Ego, the Symbolic Order is ruled by the paternal Superego, and the Real correlates with the unconscious Id.

symbolic alienation” (379, emphasis added). This is how the disabled body comes to represent loss, chaos, and disorder (Wilton 379).

Lacanian theory suggests that physically disabled bodies, like female bodies, are seen as inferior or incomplete because of what they supposedly lack. Popular (mis)representations of disability as loss/lack in mass media, literature, and film accelerate the economic deprivation and social exclusion/marginalization of the disabled. Subjects can avoid the fear of death/loss in part through the illusory plenitude of the abled body. In other words, “the supposed integrity of the able-body, like the illusory wholeness of the phallic male, is sustained by the localization of the lack in the body of an-Other” (Wilton 381). As males make the female body a fetish object to avoid the fact of female castration, disabled bodies also become fetish objects for non-disabled people who deny the fact that abled bodies are lacking and incomplete. From a Lacanian perspective, fetishism comes out of an effort to cover the fact of male symbolic castration by inscribing/projecting the lack onto the body of the Other. To sum up, fetishism proves that certain (female, disabled) bodies are socially, culturally constructed as lacking (Wilton 380).

According to Wilton, while the privileged signifier is inscribed onto the physically fit and aesthetically pleasing body, i.e., a body without signs of decay or death, the knowledge of the body’s ultimate losses (castration and death) is projected onto the disabled body, and this type of body is considered as *symptom* (380). In Lacanian theory, it is the lack inscribed onto the body which is “sustain[ed] through the material and discursive processes of an ableist society” (Wilton 381). It provides us with “an understanding of these anxieties as originating in an effort to sustain an illusory ‘able-body’ produced through a (mis-)recognition of the corporeal self” (Wilton 382). Lacanian psychoanalysis proves the anxieties that surround disability within ableist culture, helping us see how the fear and hatred of lack or loss feed the violence and discrimination directed against the disabled.

Lacan's psychoanalytic theory examines the nature of anxieties as a source of oppression against the disabled, adding to our understanding of the motivations that justify the spatial marginalization/exclusion of disabled people.

The Body and Mind with Disability or Illness as the Uncanny

The uncanny moment occurs when people with disabilities or illnesses purposefully challenge dominant socio-cultural constructions of disability/illness and destabilize assumptions of body/mind integrity, which exists only in the imaginary. When disabled/ill people reveal the limits of the symbolic order and disturb the oppressive hierarchal boundary between the non-disabled and the disabled, they become uncanny. According to Wilton, the locales in which disabled or ill bodies disturb dominant representations can be places where uncanny moments are fostered (385). Many authors with disabilities or illnesses try to demonstrate the disabled figure's potential for challenging the institutions and political policies that deny people with disabilities or illnesses any opportunity for subjectivity and agency. These authors who resist conforming to ableist norms give a spotlight to the transgressive potential in the uncanny moments in their works. They protest against the tendency to universalize cultural norms that assume the able body/mind to be a source of privilege or advantage, and trivialize the disabled body/mind as an object of stigmatization (Wilton 381), and also counter the definition of disability or illness as inadequacy or illegitimacy.

The lived realities of disabled people conflict with prejudiced representations produced in ableist culture (Wilton 382). A burgeoning literature based on the real experiences of people with disabilities or illnesses offers a specific and distinct perspective on the meanings of the disabled or ill body/mind. This kind of literature reveals that many people with disabilities or illnesses try to demonstrate that these bodies or minds are not fundamentally

deficient, imperfect, abnormal or lacking, but they are already whole and just *different* from abled bodies or minds. In disability literature, the disabled/ill people clearly and bravely describe themselves as human beings who do not abhor their bodies/minds or mourn their loss, but live in and take pleasure from their bodies/minds in unique ways.

According to David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, many people with disabilities or illnesses attempt to dismantle stereotypes and misconceptions about disability or illness by writing their own stories. They have the purpose of “counteracting the dehumanizing effects of societal representations and attitudes” and criticizing “a flat, often hostile, and uniformly ableist culture” (9). Disclosing “the daily round of humiliations and insensitivities” that comprise their lives, these autobiographical narrators help readers have a better understanding of “a unique subjectivity that evolves out of the experience of disability [or illness] as a physical, cognitive, and social phenomenon” (Mitchell and Snyder 9). That is to say, first-person narratives of disability or illness provide “an alternative perspective on what it means to live with a disability [or illness] in a culture obsessed with forging equations between physical ability, beauty, and productivity” (Mitchell and Snyder 11). Couser also stresses that people with disabilities or illnesses are more inclined to narrate their stories, “tak[ing] their lives literarily into their own hands in part to establish their subjectivity in the face of objectifying treatment” (11). Thus, Couser claims that personal narrative can be a way “of resisting or reversing the process of depersonalization that often accompanies illness — the expropriation of experience by an alien and alienating discourse” (29). Many disabled/ill writers, who narrate their own experiences of disabilities or illnesses, are working hard to remove the flat characterization of disabled/ill people and unsettle the pervasive association of disability with castration and death, “which is centrally implicated in, and sustained by, the exclusion of disabled people from social space” (Wilton 383). Regarding this, Joseph P. Shapiro further explains,

Like homosexuals in the early 1970s, many disabled people are rejecting the stigma that there is something sad or to be ashamed of it in their condition. They are taking pride in their identity as disabled people, parading it instead of closeting it. This simple but iconoclastic thinking — that a disability, of itself, is not tragic or pitiable — is at the core of the new disability rights movement. (qtd. in Couser 179)

However, it is true that there are still many instances in which mentally or physically disabled people are discriminated against, sterilized, castrated, aborted or killed because of the ableist society's pursuit of the illusory plenitude of the abled body and mind that do not decay or die. The exclusion of the Other is facilitated by the organization of the social environment designed to mark disabled/ill people as powerless, pathetic, sexually unattractive, passive, unproductive, dependent, dangerous, and exotic. The removal of these people from institutional settings divulges a concerted effort to reaffirm the difference between the self and the Other. Social environments, which are designed to only accommodate the movements and activities of abled bodies or minds, draw reactions of pity and/or contempt on the part of the non-disabled, which, in turn, justify the outward projection of one's own *loss* onto others. Moreover, prenatal genetic testing and selective abortion reinforce the myth of the perfect body or mind, as well as the belief that life with any disability is not worth living (Wilton 384).

As mentioned above, disability or illness is epitomized by physical deformity, and frequently, used as a metaphor for corruption, perversion, and obsession. The continued silencing, marginalization, and exclusion of disabled/ill people are endorsed by a medical discourse that supports the idea that in order to cultivate a "healthy" ego, disabled/ill people

must accept their own “loss” (Wilton 382). Considering that “disability [or illness] is so naturally and habitually associated with negativity in our society” (Dolmage 33), we should ask ourselves important questions about how the complicated and fragmented self employs a projection of its own lack onto the body or mind of the Other. Still, the localization of our own lack in the disabled/ill Other only ends up threatening the integrity of our own self. Thus, we need to carefully examine the origins of anxieties toward various kinds of disability or illness in the complicated interrelationship between the self and its social, cultural environment.

Conclusion: Strangers to Ourselves

Drawing from Freud’s understanding of the uncanny, Julia Kristeva deals with the subject of “foreigners” from a political and ethical perspective in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*. She supports an ethic of cosmopolitanism and a recognition of the foreigner, the alien, and the outsider, both in the Other and in ourselves. Devoted to Freud’s notion of the *unheimlich* and extending Freud’s sense of foreignness, Kristeva urges us to recognize our own foreignness: “Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided” (Kristeva 181). Kristeva claims that recognizing our own otherness and foreignness can make us live with the Other and respect the irreconcilable:

My discontent in living with the other — my strangeness, his strangeness- rests on the perturbed logic that governs this strange bundle of drive and language, of nature and symbol, constituted by the unconscious, always already shaped by the other, of the foreign component of our psyche- that, on the basis of the other, I become reconciled by with my own otherness-foreignness, that I play on it and

live by it. Psychoanalysis is then experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable. (182)

According to Kristeva, the self has an uncanny relationship with the Other. Stressing that an Otherness is always already within the self, she states that “all subjects are from the beginning haunted by uncanniness” (Huddart 88). Although she emphasizes an openness to foreignness and the irreconcilable, she does not advocate that we should all be exactly the same. Kristeva’s idea is that we cannot assign foreignness to other groups and then treat them as outsiders or strangers. Instead, Kristeva requires us to realize how strange we are to ourselves, and to tolerate/welcome the strangeness of others that can so easily be seen as threatening to our identity:

The foreignness is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious — that “improper” facet of our impossible “own and proper.” . . . Freud brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less so to haunt them down, but rather to welcome them to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is ours. (192)

Kristeva says that while discovering our own disturbing otherness, we confront the “ ‘demon,’ that threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid ‘us’ ”(192). However, recognizing our uncanny strangeness can help us understand/accept the belief that, if I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners, and we are all foreigners. This is because, if we think “we are all foreigners, it is possible to talk about a general quality of foreignness that defines all

peoples” (Huddart 88). It is true that “to be a foreigner, in contrast to others, is obviously to be singled out” (Huddart 88). Yet Kristeva’s idea of the uncanny opens up the new possibility of tolerance for those considered to be disturbing foreigners, and it opens a space for us to reconsider “how we have come to be who we are.” Claiming that we cannot be identical to ourselves, but that, in fact, our identities are split internally, Kristeva helps us see uncanny foreignness not as something we should project outward onto others, but as a necessary part of us that constitutes our identities.

Chapter 3. Eroticizing Trauma in Margurite Duras's *The Lover*

Introduction

Marguerite Duras (1914–1997), a world-famous French novelist, playwright, scriptwriter, essayist, experimental filmmaker, is famous for an impressive array of novels, plays, and films (Li 91). Duras reveals some of her life experiences in her several works, which have drawn attention from mass audiences. Attracted by colonial propaganda and tales of exotica, Duras's family went to Indochina between 1900 and 1903 in the hope that they would change their fortunes there (Chester 457). Duras was born in Gia-dinh, near Saigon, a part of the French colony of Indochina, as the youngest of three children (Schuster 2). She had two older brothers and both of her parents were French provincial schoolteachers in Indochina. Her mother went to French Indochina in 1905 as a teacher for indigenous children and her father went there as a math teacher (Schuster 2). After her father died of amoebic dysentery in 1918, leaving Duras, her two brothers, and her mother completely destitute, her mother had to bring up the children under difficult circumstances in Indochina (Baisnée 127). The financial difficulties and emotional instability that her family experienced during this period undeniably influenced her works.

According to Leah D. Hewitt, Duras, in most of her works, focuses on “female characters who fascinate [readers] by virtue of their double nature as mesmerizing enigmas and familiar representations of women as mothers, daughters, wives, lover,” continually paying attention to “the relationships of women to their desire, their bodies, to language, and to the question of female subjectivity” (95). Pursuing “the scandalous subject matter of eroticism, violence, and sexual contact already found in the earlier works” (Hewitt 96), Duras also deals with feminine desire and female subjectivity in *The Lover*.

Her autofictional book *The Lover* is based on the largely semi-autobiographical tale of her family's struggle in Vietnam and a love affair between Duras as a 15-year-old French girl and a 27-year-old Chinese man.²⁴ Looking back on her impoverished childhood and adolescence in nineteen-twenties French Colonial Vietnam, Duras tells about traumatic experiences such as the madness, pain, murder, and violence she experienced. For her, trauma might have been something stuck in her memory as unspeakable and something threatening her ordinary life. Yet Duras does not portray the traumatized past self as a fractured, pathological self who has lost the language to code traumatic events. Focusing on illicit/sensual desire and the sexual liaison between an adolescent French girl and a wealthy Chinese man set in French colonial Saigon during the late 1920s, Duras eroticizes traumatic experiences to empower the young protagonist.

Regarding the representation of trauma and traumatized female subject, in this chapter, I will discuss the following questions. What memories does the narrator try to remember (or forget)? What memories are recreated/reconstructed by the narrator, and why? How does the narrator represent her traumatic past? In what ways does she reconstruct her adolescent self not as a helpless, passive victim of trauma, but as a rebellious, transgressive, subversive, and uncanny agent who can voice her own desire and disturb the boundaries of nation, age, gender, and sexuality? Related to these questions, I will also analyze how the narrative vacillation between "I" and "she" is used effectively as a means to eroticize her traumatic experiences. In addition to that, I will explore how the present tense is utilized as an important literary device to convey more vividly a sense of resurrection of past desire by emphasizing its presence and immediacy.

²⁴ The story of her adolescence appears in three texts: *The Sea Wall*, *Eden Cinema* and *The North China Lover*.

What is *Autofiction*?

Autofiction challenges and disrupts the traditional autobiography. Autofiction is commonly understood as a genre in which writers trespass boundaries between truth and fiction without restrictions, while maintaining their narrative believability.²⁵ Although there are different conceptions of autofiction, “a characteristic common to all of them is a certain *deliberate* element of fictionality” (Boyle 17, italics original).

It is the French writer and literary theorist/critic Serge Doubrovsky who first coined the term autofiction to describe his novel *Fils* (translated as both *Thread* and *Son*), which is in a mixed genre between fiction and autobiography. Doubrovsky invented the term autofiction to describe narrative that would be considered as fiction, but “where a narrator-protagonist is given the same name as the work’s author” (Boyle 18). Emphasizing that “the self can neither possess, nor pass on the truth of what it is,” Doubrovsky regarded the autofictional approach as “a necessary, honest stance towards the project of writing the self” (Boyle 18). In Doubrovsky’s view, the narrative self cannot achieve complete knowledge of the self due to epistemological limits on self-knowledge, but these limits allow a new form of self-writing to tell “a kind of truth alongside its fictions of the self” (Boyle 18). Doubrovsky believed that the “fragmentary form” or “manifestly incomplete account” that writers of autofiction frequently use can serve to signify “the contingent nature of truth” (Boyle 18). Regarding this, Shirley Jordan also points out that “autofiction is appropriate to the unsettled post-Freudian subject whose confidence is placed in the ‘act-value’ rather than the ‘truth-value’ of narrative” (76). Some critics might argue that autofiction cannot be regarded as a legitimate literary genre, since it puts more value on imagination than fact and “allows falsehoods to be published with impunity” (Boyle 18). However, Clair Boyle claims that the invention of

²⁵ When stories told in an autobiography are partially distanced from the true events of the author's life, they are also called semi-autobiographical.

autofiction should be seen “not just [as] an awareness, but a celebration of the fictionalization of the self in writing” (18).

For Duras, according to Thomas Spear, writing means “a filter which modifies and transforms reality,” that is, she does not see writing as “an autobiographical mirroring” (36). Duras is thus known as a writer who defies “any ordinary definition of autobiography as distinct from fiction,” trying to go beyond a simple opposition between truth and fiction (Ladimer 102). Subtly blending autobiography and fiction, Duras takes a different path from traditional autobiographers who usually expose real names and use a well-ordered chronological narrative to tell their past. Since there is no pretense that the author presents the exact truth, Duras’s *The Lover* is considered as a semi-autobiographical work that plays at the boundaries of fact and fiction. This autofictional novel, although revealing intimate details of Duras’s life, is not written to factually represent her past. Transforming her life into fictive narrative, Duras does not necessarily lead her story to truth. Dura’s past is not only grounded in the verifiable reality of her life, but it is also invented based on her creative imagination. Simply put, in *The Lover*, the story about her adolescent coming of age and adolescent self is not completely verifiable, but partly fictionalized or reinvented. As Cathy Jellenik underlines, Duras consciously plays “between fiction and confession, fantasy and memory within the text itself,” which produces “ambiguities and tensions in the narrative structure” that “subvert any single reading of *The Lover*” (117).

For example, in Duras’s *The Lover*, the author’s name is not found. According to Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography*, “in order for there to be autobiography, the author, narrator, and protagonist must be identical” (5). In contrast, Duras, a French feminist writer, questions this definition and never uses the name of the author to identify the autobiographical identity in the text. Duras’s protagonist in *The Lover* is referred to as the simple pronoun “she” or “I.” Namely, the narrative voice is split into first and third person. In

fact, not only does the author's name disappear, but also those of the whole family. Citing Valérie Baisnée's words, "one of the most important rituals of autobiography, the signature, thus disappears" in Duras's text (133). The very absence of names in Duras makes "all verification of reality impossible" (Baisnée 134). In addition, in Duras's text, the narrated past and the narrating present of her narrator coexist. Unlike other autobiographies, where the past tense is used predominantly, in Duras's case, the present tense, which adds another fictional element to the text, appears more frequently. Duras also shows the frequent shifts in the narrative point of view from the first to third person in her text. All the past and present events unfold on the same level, with mixed tenses and points of view, which disrupts the chronological order of the narrative.

Autofiction is favored by a number of women writers. To display an unfixed subject position, new women writers, including Duras, experiments "the sense of fracture and self-estrangement," "hybrid identities," "structural fragmentation," and "multi-voicing" in their autofiction.²⁶ Defying the readers' expectations about the autobiographical genre, Duras uses some of these narrative techniques such as the absence of real names, a non-chronological representation of time, and shifts in voices, which make *The Lover's* relationship to autobiography rather ambiguous or unpredictable.

As Shirley Jordan observes feminine autofictional practices in "Autofiction in the Feminist," authors' own excessive, violent, and traumatic experiences "are the more readily explored through autofictional distancing" (78). By mixing fact with fiction, authors can keep some distance from traumatic experiences as they look at them retrospectively. Likewise, through self-fictionalization or "autofictional distancing" (Jordan 78), Duras objectifies and externalizes her excessive, violent, and traumatic experiences in her semi-autobiographical

²⁶ See Shirley Jordan. "Autofiction in the Feminine." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 67.1 (2013): 76-84.

works. In a word, the autofictional “I” allows Duras, a trauma survivor, to come to terms with her traumatic experiences in a more manageable and less overwhelming or fearful way.

Traumatic Events

Duras’s autofiction revolves around a dark family history and her traumatic love story with a Chinese man set in 1920s French colonial Saigon. The dark story of Duras’s adolescence is also told in an earlier autofictional version, *The Sea Wall*, where she recounts more traumatically the family’s economic hardships and her scandalous, youthful affair with the Chinese man. Although Duras creates fictive identities in the two texts, they are closely related to her own identity.²⁷ *The Lover* is, in many ways, regarded as a retelling of *The Sea Wall*. In *The Sea Wall*, the young heroine Suzanne appears as a much more passive, powerless, and traumatized victim than her autofictional counterpart in *The Lover*. What is not told in *The Lover* can thus be traced back to *The Sea Wall*.

In *The Lover*, Duras recounts the story of a teenage schoolgirl who lived in Vietnam with her impoverished family: her widowed mother and her two brothers. Even though her family was white and French, her family was not a part of the colonial elite. Her family was too poor to keep their furniture and even sometimes had to eat garbage — storks, baby crocodiles (6-7). This financial situation is also specifically described in *The Sea wall*. In *The Sea Wall*, the widowed mother supported her children by playing the piano to accompany silent films at the Eden Cinema. With the money she saved for ten years, she bought the rights to a concession (land) from colonial authorities. However, the corrupt colonial administration of that time gave her a concession that was flooded yearly by the Pacific

²⁷ *The Lover* was also later rewritten by Duras in *The North China Lover* (1991) in the auto biographical mode.

Ocean, since she didn't bribe the authorities. This tragedy of the lost land brought about the family's financial and moral downfall, which forms the background of *The Lover*.

According to the narrator in *The Lover*, the protagonist's mother suffered from mental illness or depression. Because of despair and madness, which were worsened by her husband's death and the ensuing desperate poverty, she could not emotionally and financially take care of her children well. Whenever her moodiness and dejection "would make its appearance," she could not "go on, or sleep" (15). The protagonist's younger brother died of "bronchial pneumonia" (28), which brought about her deep sorrow. Her older brother, who was frighteningly self-centered, manipulative, and demanding, frequently abused her physically, got involved in several crimes, and later killed himself. The narrator describes her brother as a brute-like man who lived a mean and meaningless life of lies, theft, gambling, and bullying (7). In addition to that, she had her first sexual experience at age fifteen and a half with a Chinese man who was 12 years older than her. As a way to escape from the darkness of her family universe, as well as as a means to solve her family's poverty, the young protagonist maintained a scandalous relationship with the Chinese man, the son of a wealthy businessman, for a while.

The Lover, as the book's title already implies, focuses more on the scandalous sexual encounters with the Chinese man than any other events. The relationship with the Chinese man might have been a dehumanizing, unbearable, or humiliating experience for the young girl at that time, since it meant, to an extent, sexual and erotic service to another in exchange for money. Before meeting the Chinese man, she already knew what her mother, who lost her husband and money, expected from her body in order to pull the family out of poverty. The mother, described as a madwoman, was complicit in her child's licentious acts and tacitly approved of them. In this regard, as Renate Gunther says "Fluid Boundaries," "the mother/daughter relationship in Duras's text is emblematic of the vicious circle of female

disempowerment” (88): it is the abused, but also abusive, mother who led her daughter to experience sexual victimization and dispossession at a young age. Namely, her erotic affair is intermingled with this maternal violence.

In *The Lover*, there is no doubt that right from the start, money became deeply involved in or inseparable from the relationship between the two lovers. Before she got into the Chinese man’s black car, the girl knew that “he belongs to the small group of financiers of Chinese origin who own all the working-class housing in the colony” (33), which hints that she was already expecting monetary rewards from this man for becoming his lover. The Chinese man’s financial status played a significant role in initiating the relationship, besides the fact that she “was attracted to him” (37). The narrator confessed, “that’s how I desire him, with his money, that when I first saw him he was already in his car, in his money” (40). For her, his desirability was closely linked to his wealth. To his question about why she made love to him, the young girl answered that “it was a sort of *obligation* [to my family]” (39, emphasis added). She then let her lover call her “a whore, a slut” (42). Poverty, which “had knocked down the walls of [her] family” (45), drove the young French girl to follow the rich Chinese man. At that time, the young protagonist was well aware that she had to assume her dead father’s role and become the breadwinner by using her sexuality, since her mother and brothers were incapable of supporting the family. There is little doubt that money was seen as part of the lover’s identity by the girl, and her lover was thus situated in a position of being financially exploited in the forbidden relationship, which indicates a possibility of prostitution between the two.

Of course, she might voluntarily have chosen to follow the wealthy lover, since there was no physical coercion or violence by this man to take the young girl to his place. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, it seems that the responsibility to alleviate her family’s poverty came first for her, which reveals that her family’s poverty worked as a subtle form of

coercion on her choice to follow him. This fact leaves room for viewing this scandalous, sensuous relationship as rather somewhat traumatic and shameful, instead of always as romantic and full of pleasure for this young girl, who had no prior sexual experience before the Chinese man. It appears that there was at least some ambiguity oscillating between sexual desire and family obligation in the exchange of sex for money. That is why the narrator says that the young girl felt fear and sadness as well as intense sensual pleasure when she was with the Chinese lover (45).

I ask him if it's usual to be sad, as we are. . . . I feel a sadness I expected and which comes only from myself. I say I've always been sad. . . . Today I tell him it's comfort, this sadness, a comfort to have fallen into a misfortune my mother has always predicted for me when she shrieks in the desert of her life. (45)

Her sadness mirrors not only the burden of family obligation, but also a feeling of betrayal by her mother's and brother's complicity in her sexual acts with the man.

From the opening chapters of *The Sea Wall*, more clearly in her prostitudinal connection with Monsieur Jo. The adolescent Suzanne tried to resist the advances of this unattractive wealthy suitor who showed a strong, keen interest in her. Even though Suzanne hated this wealthy Chinese man, she assumed her prostitudinal position and passively accepted his visits, since she was well aware of her mother's and brother's plan to get money and gifts from this man. M. Jo was forced by her family to pay financial compensation for satisfying his sexual fantasies with Suzanne. For instance, when Suzanne was taking a shower in the bathroom, M. Jo begged her to open the door of the shower room so as to see her entirely naked (56). He promised that he would give her a new record player for accepting his desperate request (56). When she was about to reluctantly open the door to him,

she thought that she would “let the world see that the world prostituted her” (57). When M. Jo also suggested to her spending several days in the city with him and promised to give her a diamond in exchange for a three day visit, Suzanne abhorred his suggestion, but knew that his diamond, which “was worth the whole bungalow,” could save her family from poverty (84).

Connecting *The Lover* to its earlier autofictional story *The Sea Wall*, there is a possibility that “Duras’s first sexual relationship could easily be read as a female victimization scene — with the lure of the man’s wealth, a poor, adolescent girl is seduced by a much older rich man” (Hewitt 114). In *The Lover*, the scene of the young girl’s crossing the Mekong River on a ferry boat coincides with a significant change in her life: “I’m fifteen and a half. Crossing the river. Going back to Saigon I feel I’m going on a journey...” (9). Hewitt sees metaphorically the river-crossing as “the ritual passage from childhood to womanhood via sexual initiation” (112). Nina S. Hellerstein also explains that the sea is the symbol for sexual ecstasy or passion, and thus this scene has a symbolic meaning of crossing from childhood and dependence on family to “adulthood, independence and other forms of violent passion” (53). Yet, according to Hellerstein, this passage to adulthood is also described as the metaphor of the violent, dangerous river/sea, since “beneath the boat the river threatens death, destruction, insanity” (53). That is, the metaphor of the river/sea discloses that the relationship with the Chinese man, which became a major turning point for the young girl to cross from childhood/adolescence to adulthood, implies not only intimacy of sexual passion, but also dangerous and destructive forces.

The family’s and society’s hostile response to the young protagonist’s relationship with the Chinese man connotes violent and destructive forces of the relationship. After her family knew of this relationship, her mother physically and verbally attacked her, locked her up in her room, punched her, undressed her, smelled the Chinese man’s scent on her body, and shouted, “[my] daughter is a prostitute” (58). Thinking that her daughter was ruined by the

racially mixed relationship, the mother “[wept] for the disaster of her life, of her disgraced child” (59) and kept calling her “little white tart” (92). The reason the mother was so furious about her scandalous interracial adolescent affair with the Chinese man is because of his race. Even though it was the mother who loudly said to her daughter that money is the most important thing for happiness and already noticed her daughter’s intimate relationship with the man from China, she showed the contradictory attitude to the daughter by cursing her illicit love affair. As Baisnée states that “nearly all the recollections of the mother in *The Lover* are tinted with sadness, hatred or darkness” (158), the mother’s extreme self-contradiction, melancholy, violence, and madness must have been traumatic enough to strengthen her daughter’s wish to get away from her.

The Chinese man also told her that since she was so young, he could go to prison if they were found out (63). She might have been hurt to hear that her lover was also afraid of public judgment about his illicit relationship with her, and thus wanted to hide it. She also heard that the Chinese lover’s rich father was severely opposed to their relationship because of her lower social status, as defined by money, insisting that his son would be better off dead than married to “the little white whore from Sadek” (35). More desperately, the young protagonist was ostracized by everyone in the white community because of the shameful scandal (88). She was made an object of scrutiny by her fellow colonials in Saigon. Her friends saw her as “the white slut” whose body was “caressed by a filthy Chinese millionaire” every morning (89). The girl was vilified and condemned by not only her family, but also the local French colonials who saw her sexual contact with a non-white man as a threat to their white privilege and racial purity. That is, the young girl felt disgrace and shame about her body, which had gotten caught in a tangled web of money and sexual pleasure, and also suffered from marginalization and exclusion in her colonial community.

As seen above, the characteristics of the narrator's family include poverty, chaos, violence, madness, insanity, murder, hatred, death abhorrence, and incestuous desires. Given this, the relationship between the Chinese man cannot be seen as founded only on romantic passion. Rather, it started due to her family's desperate financial situation, which pushed her to earn money through prostitution. These events that the narrator went through in her youth must have been dark, unpleasant, and gloomy. They are thus told achronologically in a disorderly manner to represent the intrusiveness and fragmentation of her traumatic memories. In addition, there is also much silence in the form of blank spaces on the page and narrative gaps in the text. To quote Laurie Corbin, these blank spaces in Duras's text are used to show that "the entry into adulthood for Duras" is not smooth, but punctuated with ruptures, and that her story is open to "emptiness and incompleteness" (138). This wordless silence or pause not only exposes gaps in the narrator's memory, but also discloses her desire to leave some portions of traumatic memories unsaid/unarticulated. Silence tells us that her psychic wounds caused by traumatic events are beyond verbal articulation. Moreover, the same traumatic events, such as her younger brother's death, her mother's madness, and her older brother's crimes, are repeatedly recounted in *The Sea Wall* (1950), *The Lover* (1984), and *The North China Lover* (1991). Retelling similar stories indicates how the narrator's unspeakable, disorderly, and chaotic traumatic memories, buried in the unconscious part of the psyche, compulsively come back to her. To put it more concretely, "the narrative of her past evolves from deeply repressed feelings and not from the objective perspective of a fully — conscious author" (Baisnée 133).

Self-Empowerment within the Terms of Prostitution

Interestingly, instead of making the experience of prostituting herself unrepresentable/unspeakable, Duras's narrator eroticizes her trauma resulting from this

licentious relationship with the older Chinese man. Not portraying the young protagonist as the one victimized by prostitution and family poverty/violence, the narrator, in order to reconstruct her past self as rebellious and autonomous, represents the young French girl as a sexual liberator, who has the subversive power to voluntarily and intentionally initiate and dominate the erotic relationship. In this relationship, the hairless, emasculated, and weak Chinese man is depicted as a helpless prey to the insults of her family. As Hewitt pointedly states that “in all Durasian fiction, the figure of the prostitute is not just that of a victim, because ... the woman is not cut off from her own pleasure” (114), the protagonist in *The Lover* can be seen as a woman who gains power through her sexuality. Ironically, it seems that the more traumatized she is by the licentious relationship with the Chinese man, the more empowered she becomes.

Her romantic relationship with the Chinese man, in fact, indicates her crossing-boundaries: race, sexuality, and gender. Choosing to be the lover of the Chinese man is rebellious and transgressive in terms of age, racial rank, and social/economic status. In fact, before telling the love story, the narrator carefully builds up the image of the young girl as seductive, ambiguous, and transgressive, by stressing “the willful scandalousness of the adolescent’s attire” (Hewitt 112). In *The Lover*, the girl wears a hand-me-down silk dress (from her mother), low cut, “threadbare and almost transparent” (11), high-heeled gold lame shoes, and “a man’s flat brimmed hat, a brownish-pink fedora with a broad black ribbon” (12). Through the scandalous clothing, the narrator uses “the crucial ambiguity of the image” (12) to imply that the girl already willingly transgresses the boundaries between femininity and masculinity, and between adolescence and adulthood. Her clothing, which comprises an image of seduction and womanliness, contradicts “a frail, adolescent body whose physical traits are not yet anchored in sexual definition” (Hewitt 112). In addition, the young girl’s masculine hat also contrasts with her feminine dress and high-heeled shoes, which effectively

emphasizes her ambiguous/indeterminate, and thus transgressive, sexual identity. The narrator exhibits the girl's androgynous image "whose 'masculine' aspects directly counteract the negation of female subjectivity and desire" (Gunther 92). In other words, "[her] flirtation with gender ambiguity" is subversive, since it poses a threat to "the polarization inherent in the relational models of patriarchy" by blurring the distinctions between masculine and feminine, active and passive, and subject and object (Gunther 92).

When having the intimate relationship with the Chinese man, the girl initiates, orchestrates, and seizes control of sex and pleasure, while the weak Chinese man with a hairless body and smooth skin is far from strong and masculine.

The skin is sumptuously soft. The body. The body is thin, lacking in strength, in muscle, he may have been ill, may be convalescent, he's hairless, nothing masculine about him but his sex, he's weak, probably a helpless prey to insult, vulnerable. She doesn't look him in the face. Doesn't look at him at all. She touches him. Touches the softness of his sex, his skin, caresses his goldenness, the strange novelty. He moans, weeps. In dreadful love. (38)

In this scene, the Chinese lover is associated with feminine identifications, which challenges the stability of traditional gender codes. Even, at their first encounter in his bachelor's room, the young white girl's active, self-assured role is distinguished from the Chinese man's nervous advances. Furthermore, the young girl even likens her lover to a prostitute (42). She not only enjoys the sexual pleasure, but also evaluates his techniques, which clearly indicates the reversed role between them. The opposition of active/man and passive/woman becomes meaningless in the experience of sexual pleasure for the young girl, which corresponds with her ambiguous, transgressive, rebellious, and uncanny identity.

While making love to him, the young girl, mesmerized by the sexual ecstasy, cannot express herself in words and lets her voice be heard through her body. As Lin Li remarks, “Duras subverts the traditional view of women in her heavy emphasis on female sexuality and on the erotic” (93). Duras’s young protagonist is described as the empowered subject of her desire, not the object of the man’s desire. By eroticizing the traumatic experience of prostituting herself to the Chinese man, the girl can escape the victimization of the woman’s body as the object of male desire. To sum up, the narrator reappropriates prostitution and patriarchal structure from the inside for the purpose of dismantling the binary of aggressor/subject and victim/object.

The young girl is represented as the one who courageously denies her position in society, where her body is supposed to be passed between men and used according to men’s desires, pursuing her own sexual satisfaction. Visualizing the Chinese man as an exotic Other and eroticizing her prostitution experience as something pleasurable and seductive, she reconstructs her fifteen and a half year old traumatized adolescent self as a desiring subject full of passion, not just as a passive object of sexual desire for the man. In short, instead of focusing on despair, humiliation, or frustration caused by the licentious, transactional relationship with the Chinese man, she highlights the sexual ecstasy, intense pleasure, and erotic passion, asserting her transgressive female subjectivity.

What is most provocative about the narrator’s reconstruction of feminine power as highly seductive, but at the same time subversive, is that, first, she “takes on the [male] tradition, and assumes its modes of thinking” (Hewitt 99), and then dismantles them by strategically reappropriating the dominant (colonial) patriarchal discourses. Duras’s narrator inverts the patriarchal schemes of sexual domination by eroticizing/emasculating her Chinese

lover within a colonial discourse of Orientalism.²⁸ By eroticizing her traumatic experience, the young girl is refashioned as the one with the power to resist being relegated to the role of the male's sexual object.

Yet Pascale Bécél worries that “the image of a feminized Orient and the fixity of the axis East/West” is strengthened and reinforced in *The Lover*, whereas the narrator establishes an assertive construction of female self and achieves the subversion of the binarism of male/West and female/East (428). In the same line, Suzanne Chester argues that although Duras's narrator tries to escape the “racist doxa” endorsed by her mother and brother, she nevertheless ends up perpetuating a variety of Orientalist themes while transforming into the one who takes “a position of power and dominance in relation to her Chinese lover” (452).

However, Duras's protagonist did not seem to embody the symbolic power attributed to whiteness. There is no evidence in the text that the young French girl was aware of white privilege and enjoyed it. In the eyes of the conservative French colonial patriarchal society, her family had the lowest status in the hierarchy of colonial life. Duras's white protagonist was a woman from the lower class, who was already identified as the Other of patriarchal colonial society, and put into the traumatic situation of being prostituted to the non-Western male gaze and desire. Thus, what Duras's narrator is most concerned about seems to be how the young protagonist transforms self-abasement into self-empowerment. She tries to escape the social exclusion and economic marginality that deprive her of racial privilege, not through the reaffirmation of the hierarchy of one above another, but through the dismantling

²⁸ Edward W. Said argued in *Orientalism* (1979) that “the Orient is an idea that has a history and tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (5). According to Said, without any resistance, the East could be only constructed and defined just as the West gives the shape and meaning. That is, by making the East an inferior and feminine entity, at the same time the West as a powerful and masculine entity, “this western style for dominating, reconstructing, and having authority over the Orient” (3) served as a means to keep the West as superior to the East and contributed to the colonialization of the East.

of it. By having the licentious affair with the non-white lover, Duras's adolescent protagonist stands up against not only familial, social, and colonial taboos, but also racial discrimination. The adolescent feminine subjectivity, which is reconstructed as threatening and defiant in *The Lover*, unseats conventional binary structures of class, racial, sexual, and gender power. The protagonist's seductive, eroticized, and feminine sexuality is strategically constructed to resist the traumatic victimization or objectification of her body, and to reawaken the possibility that the sexist binary of patriarchal gender relations is not fixed, but can be subverted. Taking the subordinate position of woman to subvert it from within, the young protagonist in Duras's work ultimately takes on the transgressive, subversive, and uncanny feminine subjectivity through her relationship with the Chinese man.

Duras's narrator extends the definition of prostitution so that it becomes an apt metaphor for all social transactions. What is interesting in Duras's work is that the narrator portrays, in addition to the relationship between the girl and the Chinese man, a relationship between women — the protagonist and her French friend. In a word, homosexuality is used to further eroticize the relationship with the Chinese man. Remembering her friend H el ene Lagonelle, who was the only other white girl at the Saigon boardinghouse, the narrator places her female friend in the center of the triangular relationship. Overwhelmed by the beauty of her friend's body, the narrator expresses her own erotic impulses toward H el ene Lagonelle without reserve. Through a mediated desire, the narrator challenges the neat boundary between heterosexual and homosexual love, which makes her relationship with the Chinese man more erotic, sensational, and scandalous. Through this fantasized trio, the patriarchal binary structures of male/female and homosexuality/heterosexuality are deconstructed. Moreover, the narrator pursues another licentious, incestuous desire for her younger brother (105). By eroticizing her traumatic experience mixed with lesbian feeling and incestuous experience, the narrator, with the unconventional and nontraditional voice of a feminist,

pursues more unbridled sexual liberation, establishing her adolescent self as rebellious, transgressive, and uncanny.

In the scenes when the girl makes love to the Chinese man, the narrator describes her sensual feelings and the atmosphere of the room in the present tense as if everything were happening at this moment.

The sound of the city is so near, so close, you can hear it brushing against the wood of the shutters. It sounds as if they are crossing through the room. I caress his body amid the sound, the passers-by. The sea, the immensity swells, extends itself, returns. I asked him to do it again and again. Do it to me. He did it. He did it in the unctuousness of blood. And it really was unto death. It has been unto death. (43)

In *The Lover*, both present and past tense are used in the narrator's story in a sort of collage. Using the present tense frequently, the narrator tries to make the reader feel as if things took place right before his/her eyes. The narrator conveys more vividly a sense of the resurrection of past desire, highlighting its presence and immediacy. As Rachael Criso claims, "the choice of the present tense . . . suggests a vivid memory and acute immediacy" (42).

She also chooses a non-linear chronology instead of a traditional linear, progressive chronology. In an effort to avoid limiting any action to a simple logic of sequential events, the past conditional and the future perfect are interwoven in a temporal mode in *The Lover*, which destabilizes the relationship between the narrator's present and the narrated past. Time becomes a texture, that is, it is not a fixed, one-directional, and straight line. Additionally, shifting the narrative point of view from the first ("I") to the third ("she") person (e.g., describing the character's behaviors and appearance from the outside) does not indicate the

failure of her attempt to search for her identity. Rather, it helps to effectively eroticize her traumatic experience, causing the effect of voyeurism, which is supposed to increase sexual excitement and arousal. In other words, the narrative shift, as if working as a camera moving between the close-up shot and the long shot, causes the sexual scenes to appear more erotic and passionate. Interestingly, Duras's narrator does not make the spectacle exclusively feminine and the gaze exclusively masculine. The young girl is being looked at by herself, not being subjected to the conventionally feminized position of the observed by man. In this way, the girl is empowered by her ability to be both the spectacle and the one that gazes at the same time.

When Duras's narrator uses the strategy of "veiling and unveiling, that is to say, " 'I' veils itself as 'she,' and . . . 'she' just as frequently masquerades as 'I,' " the female protagonist in *The Lover* becomes the uncanny Other, which embodies the impossibility of "a rigid and secure separation of same and other, interior and exterior" (Willis 6). Rebelling against being defined as the quintessential Other in relation to man, she both objectifies the Other and exists as the Other singularly within herself, which evinces Duras's belief in "feminine internal [O]therness" (Jellenik 35). That is to say, Duras's female protagonist embodies "the possibility of being simultaneously subject/object . . . in a continual shift between self-subject and self object" (Corbin 139).

Embodying the Feminine

As observed above, through "the slippage of signifiers, the fragmentation of the subject, the disruption of chronological time," Duras challenges "masculine" logic and "inscribes the "feminine" in *The Lover* (Corbin 139). With the feminine "difference," Duras destabilizes notions of the unified subject who develops in a linear evolution, describing the "feminine" self as "multiple, autogenic, and unending" (Corbin 139).

She touches him, Touches the softness of his sex, his skin, caresses his goldenness, the strange novelty. He moans, weeps. In dreadful love. And weeping, he makes love. At first, pain. And then the pain is possessed in its turn, changed, slowly drawn away, borne toward pleasure, clasped to it. The sea, formless, simply beyond pleasure. (38)

In the quote above, “the sea, formless, simply beyond pleasure” that the young protagonist indulges in, shows feminine writing and language. Feminine texts refer to “texts that ‘work on the difference,’ strive in the direction of difference, and struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality” (Moi 108). Feminine writing, which cannot be defined and expressed with the patriarchal language, has the revolutionary potential to deconstruct all the hierarchies and bring about the liberation of women. In fact, Duras dismisses the notion of feminine writing or female essence in her early work, but comes to accept the idea of writing from the feminine core and “celebrate[d] the concept of female difference” in her later texts including *The Lover* (Jellenik 16). In *The Lover*, the narrator says, “the story of my life doesn’t exist. Does not exist. There’s never any center to it. No path, no line. There are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone, but it’s not true, there was no one” (8). Her sentences are not long and well structured, but rather short, fluid, and flowing. They demonstrate a feminist writing that defies masculine control and rigidity. While traditional male autobiographies commonly attempt to make sense of past events with a single and unified point of view, Duras’s writing, which does not have any linear structure flows/detours with the fluid movements of her desire, demonstrates feminine jouissance.

Julia Kristeva asserts that women's unconscious jouissance can be expressed not by dominant, ordered, logical, masculine language, but by feminine language, which she termed the "semiotic" (Garratt and Richard 98). Semiotic language, as an excess of the symbolic order, is not captured by the structure of patriarchal language. It belongs to the pre-Oedipal realm. This feminine semiotic language not only threatens masculine/patriarchal culture, but also serves as a medium through which women may be creative in new ways. Indeed, Duras in *The Lover* tries to resist phallogocentrism, i.e., the Law of the Father that has repressed/contained female sexuality and desire in the form of jouissance, which is "unassimilable to the Patriarchal Law in place" (Ramsay 47). Writing the experience of sexuality and love with language of her own, Duras emphasizes "the affirmative power of feminine desire as a disruption of a repressive social order that deprives women of the position of subject" (Hewitt 98). In the course of the love affair, the young girl gains the experience of self-discovery. "This experience of erotic self-discovery is perhaps the most fundamental form of liberation" for her and helps her create her own, independent world free from patriarchal domination (Hellerstein 47).

Conclusion

Duras's *The Lover*, which contains many autobiographical elements about her childhood and adolescence, through the characterization of the feminist "I," tells us the unique story of a pubescent girl from a financially struggling French family, who underwent traumatic events in colonial Indochina. By revealing her past, however painful it may be, the narrator eroticizes, not traumatizes, her illicit and scandalous liaison with a Chinese man in *The Lover*, which subverts the traditional view of a sexually victimized woman and enhances her present strength. Tracing back through the traumatized period, with a heavy emphasis on female sexuality and the erotic, the narrator reconstructs her past adolescent self as one with

rebellious and transgressive power, who can break from her family's constraints, and conventions and be liberated from the harsh realities of poverty, prostitution, and the patriarchal order of French colonial society. The narrator transforms her traumatized past self, who was dispossessed of pleasure, voice, and identity, into the desiring subject through her fictional autobiographical writing.

The traumatized young protagonist is described as one who demonstrates the power to defy familial, social, racial and colonial taboos through the erotic relationship with the wealthy Chinese man in *The Lover*. Not presenting the adolescent self as a victim by traumatic events, Duras's narrator represents the protagonist as the uncanny sexual liberator, who transcends the borders of age, race, gender, and sexuality for the purpose of establishing herself as an autonomous female subject. By eroticizing trauma, the narrator succeeds in creating a new adolescent self with an uncontrollable, unconventional, shifting, and multiple identity, through which as a feminist, she can speak and act.

Chapter 4. Politicizing Trauma in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*

Introduction

For the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú, the road to world prominence was not an easy journey, but a painful one. Menchú was born on January 9, 1959 to a poor K'iche' peasant family. The K'iche' people, descended from the Mayans, are one of twenty-two indigenous ethnic groups in Guatemala, and Menchú identified her racial and ethnic identity through the daily practice of K'iche' customs (3). Since Menchú was young, she was always conscious of the physical and psychological suffering that the native Indian people experienced at the hands of the repressive Guatemalan military government, as well as the exploitation and racial discrimination perpetuated by large *ladino* landowners, who owned a great deal of wealth and wielded huge power over indigenous Guatemalan Indians. Menchú witnessed in her childhood and adolescence how her beloved family members were discriminated against by ladies and murdered by soldiers, which inspired her to represent a voice for those who were silenced and voiceless. In a word, her family's tragedy formed the core of her ceaseless struggle for social justice.

While developing an awareness of the dreadful situation in which the poor Mayan Indians of Guatemala were placed, Menchú aggressively participated in social reform activities through the Catholic Church and worked for the promotion of women's rights, even when she was only a teenager. Menchú's activism led her to broaden her definition of family: first to all members of the K'iche' people, then to all indigenous Guatemalans (Wagner 4). Menchú, as an indigenous woman from Guatemala, has worked as an internationally acclaimed spokesperson for the rights of Guatemala's indigenous peoples. She has dedicated her life to publicizing and promoting the rights of uneducated and oppressed K'iche' people

during and after the Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996).

After publishing her testimonial biography, *I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala*, in 1983, Menchú became the first member of an indigenous people to win the Nobel Peace Prize (Gupta 81), winning the prize in 1992, the 500th anniversary of the European colonization of the Americas. In her testimony, she narrates her traumatic life and the plight of the Guatemalan people to an interlocutor, Venezuelan author and anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. Her book was translated into five other languages and made her an international icon at the time of the ongoing conflict in Guatemala.

Menchú's testimony, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, compiled and introduced by Burgos-Debray, graphically describes the clashes between *ladinos* and Indians, landowners and peasants, and the military government and the Indian resistance. She gives readers heart-rending, traumatic stories about indiscriminate violence, extrajudicial killings, massacres, child labor, imprisonment, malnutrition, disappearance, exploitation, physical threats, military torture, mistreatment, and persecution, all of which the Guatemalan Indians had to endure in their daily lives during an era of conflict and trouble. For this reason, it might be inaccurate to call Menchú's story a Western-style autobiography or a memoir, which usually focuses on and dramatizes one's life story. Even though her story seems to share many common traits with autobiography or memoir, it cannot be neatly placed into either of those two categories. In a word, her testimony, accumulating her own personal experience and those of her people, is written for the purposes of explaining the egregious human rights abuses to a larger public and of provoking others to action.

After winning the Nobel Prize, Menchú also became a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and established a human rights foundation. She has been working as an internationally acclaimed spokeswoman for the rights of marginalized indigenous peoples in not only Latin America, but throughout the whole world. Her voice is not an individual one,

but represents the voices of all oppressed groups, including all Guatemalans. Her story shares much in common with, and thus encompasses, the stories of all people who undergo similar experiences. Menchú, whose work has been aimed at promoting social justice and improving the quality of life for marginalized people, should be remembered as “a vivid symbol of peace and reconciliation across ethnic, cultural, and social divides” (Gupta 87).

Heartbreaking stories of her father’s, mother’s, and brother’s murders mark the key turning points in Menchú’s powerful coming-of-age story. While Menchú’s story contains tragic stories of murder, rape, torture, and slaughter, her book shows how “the protagonist’s progress as a politically aware person merges with the revolutionary momentum of society as a whole” (Grandin 7). Menchú does not tell her traumatic past in order to retraumatize herself or to emphasize her status as a powerless victim of indiscriminate violence, economic exploitation, torture, and aggression committed by ruthless oppressors. Rather, speaking in the collective voice of marginalized groups such as Indians and women, Menchú, with a clear political awareness, politicizes her personal trauma so as to salvage Mayan culture and end the massacre of her indigenous community. For her, testifying about her trauma to the world is a crucial political activity for promoting change in the current situation and reclaiming social justice in her society.

Considering the characteristics of her story before beginning to analyze the text, in this chapter, I will first briefly examine the distinctive features of testimony as a literary genre. I will then explore how Menchú not only presents herself (a young, poor, Guatemalan Indian woman) as a gap or a rupture with the symbolic order, i.e., the ambiguous, incalculable, non-translatable element, but also embodies herself as having uncanny Otherness, which cannot be repressed in the retelling of history. I will also examine how Menchú politically reappropriates her trauma by fabricating truth or altering reality in order to serve a collective purpose and to achieve the urgent aims she has in mind.

What is Testimony (Testimonio)?

Testimonio evolved in Latin America. It has received theoretical attention since the end of the 1980s. According to John Beverley, the word *testimonio* translates literally as “testimony,” which indicates “the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense” (31). In fact, *testimonio* suffers from confusion regarding the question of genre. *Testimonio* shares its territory with autobiography, autobiographical novel, ethnography, oral history, fiction, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novella-*testimonio*, nonfiction novel, and even photojournalism (Beverley 31; Marin 51). *Testimonio* resists being comfortably listed under any specific genre. Put another way, testimonial literature challenges “not only the standard forms, but also the very idea of literature” (Gugelberger and Kearney 11).

There are no well-developed theoretical frameworks for identifying “what *testimonio* is, how it should be read, produced, taught,” which has left *testimonio* open to “the application of norms that are irrelevant and arbitrary” (Pratt 41-42). Since *testimonio* has by nature a variable form which is “not yet subject to legislation by a normative literary establishment,” Beverley points out that “any attempt to specify a generic definition for it, is at best provisional, and at worst repressive” (31). According to Delia Poey, *testimonio* makes the reader/critic raise the question of how categories such as knowledge, literature, theory, and reading are constructed (58). In a word, *testimonio* destabilizes the “very notions of genre, literature, historiography, and the relationship of all of these to political practices” (Beverley 42).

In addition, although the testimonial has a varied history, it has existed at the margin of literature as a tool to represent particular subjects, who are “excluded from authorized representation” (Beverley 31; Marin 51). *Testimonio* opens the space for subaltern female, gay, child, criminal, indigenous, black, and proletarian “oral” identities, who do not have

power to represent – speak and write for – themselves (Beverley 19). The testimonial literature of oppressed people functions to record the political voices of the silenced and voiceless.

Testimonio has started to be recognized as a new narrative genre, i.e., “a form of minor literature particularly sensitive to the representation or expression of subalternity” (Beverley 48). For Latin American women, testimonio has become a crucial site for telling of their collective struggles and criticizing the systems which suppress their speech. Extending beyond personal interest, i.e., not attempting to stand out as distinctive, unusual, unique, or exceptional, Latin American women make their individual stories the story of a whole people. Thus, this new literature requires a new way of listening to and telling the lives of women from Latin America.

Non-white women on the periphery or the margin of the colonial situation retell Latin American history and reality from their own perspectives in order to write back to the Western canon. Through testimonial literature, they challenge both Western notions of truth and the unique and individual male narrator “I.” Women’s testimonial literature from Latin America, serving “as another counter-hegemonic interpretation of the West,” contributes to the strengthening of Third World writing and women’s writing (Gugelberger and Kearney 11). In this sense, testimony, a genre that coalesces the experiences of a community through a single voice, can be regarded as a “Third World cultural product.” Women’s testimonial literature from Latin America aims to give “a public voice”²⁹ to women who are easily overlooked, ignored, or silenced (O’Connor 283). Testimonio, or Third World auto/biography, is thus an ideal text in which the experiences of the un-lettered, the marginalized, the peripheral, the voiceless, and the oppressed women are brought to the center.

²⁹ George Gugelberger calls this genre a “desire called Third World literature” (1).

As testimonio has been involved in “the movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of that decade,” it has been able to serve as “a component of resistance literature” (Beverley 31). In its staging of voice at the margin, testimonio plays an important role in establishing the authority of oral culture. It resists “processes of cultural modernization and transculturation that privilege literacy and written literature as norms of expression” (Beverley 19). Testimonio, as something coming from the oral world of the poor but “materialized in the form of a transcript or text,” stands up for voice and experience brought into civic society and the public sphere (Beverley 19). Regarding the very resistant, hybrid nature of testimonio, Claudia Ferman argues that “testimonio constitutes the source of its subversive nature,” and the very subversive nature of the genre is produced “by the series of political gestures that the testimoniantes themselves undertake” (163). Because of its hybridity, testimonio has invited diverse approaches from literary criticism, political science, oral history, philosophy, and literature education, serving as an open text to be read according to different paradigms.

Postcolonial Ambiguous/Uncanny Identity

In the sixteenth century, Spanish conquistadors took over Guatemala, treating the Mayan people as slaves. Guatemala was a colony of Spain for three hundred years (Silverstone 20). The arrival of Spaniards in Guatemala brought about a system of class distinction that still exists today. In Guatemala, the population consists of a few white elites, or *criollos*, who are descended from the Spanish conquerors and who dominated Central America during the colonial and post-independence periods, *ladinos*, who are the mixed-race children of Spaniards and Indians and who make up a second class, and Indians, who are the descendants of the Maya and who form the bottom of the social order. Although more than half of the population consists of Indians, Guatemala’s major institutions, such as the army,

the police, the government, banks, factories, and large businesses, have historically been controlled largely by the *ladinos* and *criollos* (Wagner 20-21).

Contemporary Guatemala bears the scars of its colonial past. For centuries, the ramifications of Spanish colonization in Guatemala have plagued the social and political landscape of this country. According to Menchú, white people and *ladinos* have regarded their blood as superior to that of Mayan Indians, treating peasant Mayans not as human beings, but as a sort of animal (196). Marked as inferior to the ruling minority, Mayans have been severely discriminated against because of their language, clothes, and customs. They have also been forced to work on plantations under inhumane conditions similar to those of slavery. The indigenous people of Guatemala have not been able to take control of their own lands, and have been largely excluded from politics. They must often be content with earning wages so low as to guarantee they will remain unable to escape from poverty (Gupta 86). Ninety-nine percent of indigenous women have never received educational opportunities due to the gender discrimination that is rampant in their society (Gupta 86). In short, Mayan Indians in Guatemala have been exposed to overt prejudice, discrimination, economic exploitation, and disenfranchisement, even after the end of Spanish colonization. As Linda Green states, “the relationship between political violence and the deeply rooted and historically based structural violence of inequality and impunity that suffuses Guatemalan society, [was] expressed through class, ethnicity, and gender divisions and experienced by Mayas as virulent racism” (10).

In addition to that, “many of the ills that plague Guatemala today are a direct result of the policies, decisions and actions that various military juntas carried out” (Totten 282). Indigenous Indians in Guatemala suffered from kidnappings, rapes, and torture at the hands of the abusive military government (Grandin 14). Soldiers and their paramilitary allies committed numerous cruel atrocities, such as rapes, torture, kidnappings, and massacres

against indigenous Indians, under the pretense that they had supported the activities of guerrillas trying to subvert the government (Menchú 189). To eliminate the sources of support for the guerrillas, military camps were set up in the rural areas of Guatemala. Systematic massacres were carried out throughout the county, targeting Indians and peasants suspected of giving aid to the guerrilla actions against the government (Wagner 64-66). According to Susanne Jonas, “the army openly acknowledged [that the] goal was literally to ‘drain the sea’ in which the guerrilla movement operated and to eradicate its civilian support base in the Mayan highlands” (381). In the name of wiping out the guerrilla support network, the Guatemalan government used the army to commit ruthless, barbaric atrocities against anyone who helped those rebelling against the government, and even against anyone who disagreed with the government. Throughout the early to mid-1980s, hundreds of people were massacred; 400 villages were utterly destroyed, about one million people were displaced, roughly 200,000 children became orphans, and 80,000 women became widows (Totten 271).

Yet in this dark, traumatic situation, facing economic exploitation, racial stereotyping, and ethnic marginalization, Menchú displays an ambiguous/uncanny identity as a way to resist these oppressive forces. Her ambivalent identity is used as a strategy of political subversion to contaminate or destabilize purity and authenticity in dominant, authoritative discourses. Menchú demonstrates in her testimony that “Otherized” peoples always vacillate between Oriental discourses and counter-Oriental discourses, which frustrates the oppressors’ attempts to build up unified, coherent, and stable identities depending on the Other’s identities that they assume to be entirely knowable, penetrable, fixed, and translatable. In this way, Menchú implicitly sends us the message that the relationship between power and resistance is always bi-directional, not one-directional. In her text, she constructs herself as one who can unsettle the oppressors’ self-evident authority and self-sufficient superiority with her uncanny/ambiguous identity.

First, Menchú lays out a narrative in which malnourishment, imprisonment, torture, and death were everyday threats to her family. In 1979, according to Menchú's story, one of her brothers was detained, tortured for more than sixteen days, and burnt to death by the army in the town plaza. Menchú remembers that the military inflicted dreadful, inhumane, torturous acts on her brother (204). Her father, Vicente Menchú, who was a respectable community leader and a passionate activist, was kidnapped and tortured by the military for his involvement with the revolutionary movement. His skin was cut all over and most of his bones were broken during the severe torture (133). Her mother was also detained by the town's high-ranking army officers. After they took her down to the camp, they beat her, then moved on to more extreme forms of torture, and finally cut her whole body bit by bit (233). Her mother was then cast out into the mountains, where she died in extreme pain and terrible agony (234). Her body was left to be devoured by dogs and vultures (235). In her testimony, Menchú could not hide her anger and rage toward the soldiers, saying that they acted worse than animals (235). While narrating all the suffering and pain that her family members went through as powerless Indian victims, Menchú also describes the indescribable terror, anxiety, helplessness, and desperation that her family went through.

Menchú not only tells the traumatic story of the deaths of her family members, but also vividly testifies about how other innocent people of her community were tortured and killed by the army. In the case of a *compañera* from a nearby village, parts of her body, such as her ears and one of her nipples, were cut off by the soldiers and were bitten all over (208). Victims like this woman were scarcely recognizable as human beings because of their horrific wounds and the moisture oozing out of their bodies (207). Describing in detail the bodies ruthlessly torn apart on the street, Menchú reveals how the people of her community were helplessly victimized and suffered from the terrifying, dehumanizing acts of torture carried out by the military.

On the other hand, in her testimony, Menchú shows herself to be a proud, courageous, and empowered fighter, who is capable of exercising strong and powerful acts. By resisting efforts to categorize her symbolically within any fixed image or colonial discourse of the Other, she strategically reconstructs her past self as having an ambiguous, uncanny identity, as mentioned earlier. She clearly exhibits not only her subversive, resistant spirit against a repressive social system that alienates and marginalizes the sexual and racial Other, but also her people's power to defeat oppressive landowners and the military. Menchú also narrates the misfortune that her forefathers/ancestors experienced in the colonial period. She was told by parents and village leaders how her ancestors had been dishonored and murdered "by the white man, by colonization" (14-15). Asserting, "It is not the fault of our ancestors" (7), Menchú publicizes the heinous atrocities committed by the Spaniards. She claims that without the European conquest, Indians "would all be united, equal, and . . . would not have boundaries to the land" (14-15).

According to Menchú, this story has been handed down through generations via oral commendations. Since "the majority of Indians can't read or write, and don't even know that they have their own texts," sitting face to face to talk about stories of how ancestors resisted colonial oppression and domination has been the only way for the old generation to teach the past to younger generations. Menchú says, "This is, in part, recalling history and, in part, a call to awareness" (15). By passing on the story of collective trauma that her ancestors experienced to the young through her testimony, Menchú urges them to have political awareness, in order to refuse to remain powerless victims of systematic exploitation, torture, and extermination, and instead to fight against their oppressors.

Menchú highlights the ability of *compañeras* to take up arms and fight day and night, just as much as the men (261). Guatemalan Indian women, though they were linguistically, politically, and culturally objectified, actively participated in the revolutionary movement,

and worked desperately to address social issues such as economic exploitation, racism, and sexism. In her testimony, Menchú emphasizes the transformative, regenerative female power of disenfranchised women, instead of reinforcing their traditional, stereotypical roles or taking their passive, violated status for granted. As Menchú claims, “it isn’t possible to say that now [women are] setting up an organization so that women can rebel, work or study women’s problems” (261). She does not depict women as powerless, defenseless, or vulnerable victims of physical and psychological violence. Menchú focuses instead on the strength and bravery of female Guatemalan fighters, who studied social problems with the men (261) and assumed significant roles in the revolutionary struggle, despite the fact that they were of the working-class, peasants and teachers (274). Indian women are recreated by Menchú as subjects who are active and strong enough to transform patriarchal power structures.

In addition, Menchú displays how her people “have taken Catholicism as just another channel of expression” (9). During the Spanish colonial period in Guatemala, Spaniards tried to convert Indians to Roman Catholicism. As a result, about 80 percent of the Guatemalan population was converted to Catholicism (Silverstone 34). Yet Indians did not simply accept the Western religion as it was practiced by Europeans. Instead, maintaining their ancient rituals, indigenous people combined the Mayan and Roman Catholic religions in a unique way. According to Menchú, the reason that her ancestors could welcome Western Catholicism without feeling a strong repulsion or sense of difference was because Catholicism/Christianity was in harmony with the elements already found within Indian culture (94). Christianity adjusted to become a part of Indian culture. The Christian God, Mary, and Jesus confirmed Indians’ belief about the existence of their God, i.e., “a father for all” (94). The rebellion of people in the Bible was also considered as tantamount to that of Menchú’s villagers (154). Her people thought that the people appearing in the Bible represent

Indians (155). Using the image of Catholics and Christians, as well as the stories in the Bible, Menchú's people identified stories of people in the Bible with their own stories.

For example, according to Menchú, the Moses of Biblical days, “who tried to lead his people from oppression, and did all he could to free his people,” is compared with Mayan Indians, the Moses of today (155). The stories of Judith and David, who succeeded in defeating their oppressors, were used to teach the community how to defy unjust and illegitimate authority, defend themselves from their enemies, and better understand their dire situation (155). Studying the Bible deeply, Menchú and others of her village came to understand that being a Christian is to acknowledge the fact that they have a right to what they need (155). The stories of the Bible encouraged the humble and poor of the village to fight for themselves. Menchú shows how her people reappropriated the Bible as a document of rebellion in order to justify their fights against the oppressors.

Menchú and her people refused “a Church imposed from outside which knows nothing of hunger” (157). Interpreting the Bible for their own purposes in their own ways, Menchú displays the intricate mixture of Catholicism and her own culture (96). Arguing that the Bible could have a significant relevance to Indian culture and serve as the central weapon for resistance and social justice only after Indians imposed their own meanings on the stories in the Bible, Menchú highlights indigenous cultural independence and autonomy.

Menchú also makes clear that while believing in Christianity and accepting the biblical forefathers in the Bible as their own ancestors (95), her people still followed the rites of their own ceremonies. According to Menchú, the government took away many things from her people and tried to regulate them “through religion, through driving up the land, through schools, through books, through radio, through all things modern” (200). For this reason, her people did not consider Catholicism as the only way to God and did not perform only Christian ceremonies. That is to say, they were cautious that Catholicism could be used as a

weapon for the oppressors to take away what they had. Therefore, Menchú and her people, while identifying strongly as Catholics, were clearly conscious of the necessity of “feel[ing] very Indian, proud of their ancestors” (96). Simply put, Menchú’s and her people’s religious loyalties were a mixture of the Catholic and the K'iche'.

Menchú’s and her people’s efforts to subvert the authority of the colonizer and oppressors through the modification of the Christian Bible imported from the West is related to Bhabha’s concept of religious hybridity, which he mentions in “Signs Taken for Wonders.” Bhabha takes as an example the imposition of the English book (Bible) on the colonized people in India as a means of strengthening the colonizers’ power and authority. Bhabha argues that “as a signifier of authority the English book acquires its meaning after the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural and racial, returns the eye of power to some prior, archaic image or identity” (“Signs” 153). As Bhabha remarks, local Indians accepted the authority of the Bible, only after filtering Western Christianity through their own religious materials and belief systems. That is to say, when the local Hindus were forced to believe in the colonizers’ God and denounce their own traditional, local religions, they were not simply converted to the foreign, imposed religion. They believed Western Christianity only after modifying it through interactions and communications with their local religious framework. Referring to (religious) hybridity as “the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (“Signs” 159), Bhabha says that,

Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative. Hybridity represents that ambivalent ‘turn’ of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification- a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority.

(“Signs” 162)

Likewise, Menchú’s people, who brought about religious hybridity while disavowing colonial power, can be called hybrid. This hybridity embodies the uncanniness in Menchú’s people. It not only “inscribes an ambivalence at the very origins of colonial authority” (Bhabha, “Sly Civility” 135), but also dismantles the illusion of purity in colonial authority. From a postcolonial perspective, “hybridity,” which Bhabha defines as “the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (“Signs” 159), has the subversive power to disrupt the dominant colonial discourse by “estrang[ing] the basis of its authority — its rules of recognition” (“Signs” 162). Hybridization of colonial discourse and power prevents the colonizers from preserving transparent marks of authority, thus making colonial power unstable. Menchú tells the story of the Indians’ religious hybridity in order to demonstrate their power to cause a crisis for the colonial authority, which is established on a system of recognition, by displacing a central symbol of the colonizers.

Moreover, Menchú says that she can speak Spanish, but speaks it *imperfectly*. Menchú saw that since the people of her community did not speak Spanish, they could not express themselves, and thus were easily cheated, abused, and exploited by government authorities in collusion with *ladino* landowners.³⁰ Menchú saw the harsh reality that Mayan languages were treated as inferior to Spanish, and Indians who only spoke Mayan languages were mocked for being illiterate in Spanish. For instance, her family was cheated into signing documents

³⁰ There are several reasons for the high rate of illiteracy in Guatemala. Many parents did not want to send their children to school at all for the fear that their children would lose their Mayan heritage if they learned Spanish and the ways of the *ladinos*. In addition, children were needed to work and earn money for their poor families. Furthermore, many regarded education simply as a luxury (Silverstone 37). Menchú’s father was also suspicious of some kinds of schooling, thus opposing Menchú’s education. He believed that if she learned to read and write in Spanish at school, she would forget all the Mayan traditions taught by the community and parents.

written in Spanish, which they could not understand, leaving them landless. In addition to that, when Menchú's father was in prison, her family experienced great difficulties in securing his release from prison, because none of her family members could speak or write in Spanish.

Menchú realized that those in power utilized the lack of communication with Mayan Indians to their advantage, and they therefore prevented indigenous people from learning Spanish so as to maintain their hegemony: "It is a division which they have kept up precisely so that we Indians cannot unite, or discuss our problems" (161). Menchú started to learn Spanish, the language of power, the colonial language, out of the necessity to communicate directly with those in power, to tell the world of the sufferings of her people, and to receive help from the world outside. She had a clear objective to learn Spanish: "To tell the whole world what was happening in Guatemala and inform people inside the country as well" (216). Menchú strongly asserts that she speaks the language of the oppressors in order to talk back, not to assimilate into the dominant group of people. Reappropriating the oppressors' language in order to transform the repressive conditions, Menchú publicizes to the world what the oppressive government has done to the innocent, poor people of Guatemala. Her imperfect Spanish does not indicate the Spanish conquest of indigenous languages, but rather shows how it empowers her, serving as a political tool with which to condemn the horrendous brutality of the military government and the people in power.

Silence as a Political Tool

Describing/reconstructing herself and her people as the unknowable, ambiguous, and uncanny Other, Menchú tells her readers clearly from the beginning that she will intentionally omit some things from her testimony. She says repeatedly throughout her testimony, "I have secrets," saying that "this is part of the reserve that we've maintained to

defend our customs and our culture” (9). Menchú consciously withholds certain information from her readers, for fear that Indian *things* could be used against her people by academically trained and advised counterinsurgency specialists.

We Indians have always hidden our identity and kept our secrets to ourselves. This is why we are discriminated against. We often find it hard to talk about ourselves because we know we must hide so much in order to preserve our Indian culture and prevent it being taken away from us. So I can only tell you very general things about the *nahual*. I can't tell you what my *nahual* is because that is one of our secrets. (22)

Menchú's views on human and natural relations are based on a Mayan idea called *nahual*, which is inseparable from her people's cultural identity. Menchú vaguely explains that “every child is born with a *nahual*” and that the *nahual* is “the representative of the earth, the animal world, the sun and water” (20). Regarding the *nahual*, she also adds that “the *nahual* is our double, something very important to us” (20). However, since Menchú does not give a specific explanation of what the *nahual* is, readers cannot fully understand what her story represents.

According to Menchú, referring to the *nahual*, “Indians have been careful not to disclose any details of their communities, and the community does not allow them to talk about Indian things” (9). In the concluding part of her testimony, she repeats again that “Nevertheless, I'm still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets” (289). Menchú makes it impossible even for the most sympathetic readers to know the whole truth about the Other (Sommer 33). Continuously keeping at a distance from her

readers to maintain her cultural identity, Menchú frustrates readers' desire to identify with, translate, or analyze the Other. In a word, Menchú's audible silence makes readers realize that what they believe or know about the Other can only be partial and imperfect.

In this sense, her secrets represent something incomprehensible, unmanageable, unfathomable, perplexing, impenetrable, and inaccessible about Otherness, like Lacan's *the Real* or a void in the symbolic order, which cannot be signified, captured, named, or controlled by colonial discourses. Like *the Real*, Menchú's secret cannot and should not "be reabsorbed into the literary-representational system: the secret is the (secret) key to real as unguarded possibility" (Moreiras 206). It discourages readers from "an unproblematized appropriation" of the Other, as well as an easy manipulation and distortion of the Otherness in the Other. For the purposes of postcolonial resistance and liberation, Menchú politicizes her secret, i.e., *the Real*, as a way of preserving Indians' cultural autonomy and rights.

In the words of Doris Sommer, Menchú avoids "an unproblematized appropriation which closes off the distance between writer and reader," insisting on the political value of keeping readers at some distance (32). She does not intentionally give readers detailed, specific descriptions of Mayan ceremonies and concrete explanations of her people's lives, but rather creates gaps in her trauma narrative. For Menchú, silence can serve as a defense against incursions of Europeanized culture. Menchú's refusal to give us the satisfaction of learning her secrets about the Indian world leads readers to realize their hidden or overt desire to interpret, grasp, and have power over the Other. Her silence and refusal to talk, which are intentionally calculated, provoke readers' curiosity, but at same time, lead readers to fall into frustration. In this regard, Alberto Moreiras stresses that "the very unsayability of what must remain unspoken is what makes Menchú's word an epistemologically privileged text in the tradition of Latin American testimony" (205). Menchú forces us to give up the desire to put her secrets into our complete and stable knowledge framework, and instead to accept

foreignness/Otherness in other cultures as it is. In a word, using silence as defiance against the enslaving European culture, as well as a vehicle to empower the marginalized group and protect its plural and collective identity, Menchú makes an effort to preserve the cultural integrity of her community and maintain some distance from outsiders.

Thus, Sommer remarks that as we read Menchú, we realize that “we are either intellectually or ethically unfit for Rigoberta’s secrets” (36), and that a particular kind of distance is required in order to have respect for the Other (Sommer 37). In short, in Menchú’s testimony, her secrets are used not only as a tool to resist colonial discourses, which aim to construct the Other as entirely definable, penetrable, and visible, and thus undoubtedly controllable, but also as a means to assert Indians’ cultural autonomy.

Politicizing Lies about Traumatic Events

Menchú intentionally chooses to be an unreliable/ambiguous narrator, who blurs the boundary between fact and fiction. Due to this feature, Menchú’s testimony has been attacked for being an inauthentic text by several critics, including anthropologist David Stoll, a professor at Middlebury College in Vermont. Menchú’s critics claim that she overstated, exaggerated, or fabricated parts of her story in order to make it sound more traumatic or dramatic. Stoll asks, “what if much of Rigoberta’s story is not true?” in his book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1998) (viii). Stoll criticizes Menchú’s testimony for reinventing or fabricating some stories, rather than basing them on verifiable truth.

Having spent nearly a decade interviewing more than 120 people, including Menchú’s relatives, friends, neighbors, former teachers, and classmates, Stoll asserts that Menchú did not personally witness her brother’s death from malnutrition or the burning to death of another brother (70). For Stoll, Menchú’s testimony cannot be regarded as an eyewitness

account, in that she narrates experiences that she never in fact experienced. In Stoll's argument, due to these inaccuracies, dramatizations, exaggerations, falsehoods, and omissions in Menchú's accounts, Menchú is an unreliable representative of the beliefs of the indigenous people she claims to be speaking for. They were instead concocted to justify Marxist precepts and revolutionary political insurrections that indigenous Mayan people raised against the oppressive government and *ladinos*. Additionally, Stoll believes that these deficits in her accounts were intentionally used to help Menchú achieve international prominence as a human rights activist and a Nobel Prize laureate. Thus, after pointing out gaps in truth and flaws in eyewitness veridicality, Stoll concludes that Menchú cannot be seen as an objective and reliable narrator. In Stoll's view, "by virtue of being an interested party to the events that she describes," she distorts the truth in an attempt to become a symbolic icon of the Guatemalans (Beverley 5). To put it differently, Stoll is concerned that Menchú, in the name of making her story the story of all poor Guatemalans, exploitatively conflates individual and collective witnessing of specific events in her account, and thus, perhaps unconsciously, universalizes or generalizes in essentialist, reductive ways the various experiences of Mayans as the one story of the racial Other.

According to Beverley, Stoll raises questions about the authenticity and veracity of Menchú's story by "pick[ing] holes in her story, giving the *appearance* that she was not completely reliable" (4, italics original). Beverley explains that when describing the torture and murder of her mother and brother by the Guatemalan army, Menchú uses specific details in order to give the episodes "a hallucinatory and symbolic intensity different from the matter-of-fact narration one expects from testimonio" (39). Beverley adds that, while reading the traumatic events that happened to Menchú's family and people, readers encounter "the *Real*, the voice of the body in pain, of the disappeared" (77). Relatedly, as Diana Taylor shrewdly observes, "Torture works into the future; it forecloses the very possibility of future.

The torture site is transitional, but torture itself is transformative — it turns societies into terrifying places and people into zombies” (273). While reading the disturbing, sensual descriptions of the torture that Menchú’s family and her people experienced, and of the zombie-like status which they went through even after they survived it, readers are exposed to the unfathomable, unutterable horror caused by torture.

Besides, Menchú reiterates several times that her book is not an autobiography. It was written to be read not as her individual story, but as a collective traumatic story about the plight of her people during Guatemala’s 36-year civil war. In this respect, Greg Grandin says that “this combination of solidarity and insurgent individuality is the heart of Menchú’s memoir, and that’s what makes it a great, perhaps even immortal, book” (31). Calling other Indians “our brothers,” Menchú repeatedly stresses that what happened to her family is not limited to her family, but extends to the lives of all Indians (210). She strongly affirms, on the first page of her book, that “it’s hard for me to remember everything that’s happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too” (1). Here, Menchú purposely tries to reduce the gaps between her own private story and the stories of indigenous communities with whom she identifies.

Blurring any identifiable boundaries between the individual and the collective, that is, creating an ambiguous loop between the tortured as a group and herself, Menchú reveals the very destructive nature of torture, which causes people to lose their distinctive individuality. Grafting elements of other people’s experiences into her own account, Menchú’s storyteller “I” dismantles the singular, authoritative narrative voice that white, middle-class, Western male writers tend to use. In *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, while speaking for the community, her ancestors, and her contemporaries, she confesses that her story is intended to stand for “the reality of whole people”: her story is the story of the majority of the population of Guatemala,

rather than one of a particular, extraordinary person. Menchú always emphasizes the amorphous “we,” not the individual “I,” as subject, which indicates “the embedding of the individual in the community” (Schlau 266). Menchú’s testimony displays “the communal nature of Mayan society,” in which individual and group experiences can be intermingled through oral storytelling (Grandin 20). In brief, the testimonial self in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is a collective self, not an individual one, who is engaged in a common struggle against brutal forces.

I, Rigoberta Menchú illustrates what Beverley calls the “shifter,” a linguistic term which Beverley applies to the narrative “I” of testimony so as to characterize how the “I” is a “linguistic function that can be assumed indiscriminately by anyone” (35). The very meaning of what constitutes the autobiographical “I” and “we” in testimony is destabilized. The “I” moves not toward an individualistic, self-sufficient, self-ruling, and autonomous mode, but toward the formation of a “we.” Throughout the text, the “I” serves as an “affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode” (Beverley 17). In this way, Menchú’s personal suffering can be seen as an example of the dehumanizing conditions that the majority of Guatemalan people experienced. As Ferman remarks, “the testimonial subject presents herself as a plural subject, a part of whole, and thus presupposes the sense of historical representation” (157), allowing readers to learn a great deal about the poverty, torture, and other struggles that Menchú and her people faced in Guatemala.

In Indian culture, one’s story exists as a part of collective memory and experience. According to Raphael Samuel, “memory is historically conditioned, changing in color and shape according to the emergencies of the moment. . . . It is stamped with the ruling passions of its time” (8). To put it another way, memory plays a significant role in “the telling, writing, reading, and interpreting” of past events (Skłodowska 259). Samuel has argued that “memory is an active, shaping force” (x), as well as “a subjective, instinctual, and emotional force”

(ix). In fact, it must not be easy for Menchú to recall with perfect accuracy stories impacted by trauma. It is more likely that traumatic memory, upon recollection, unavoidably entails some losses and changes to represent the collective dimension of the story.

In this respect, Menchú's testimony does not necessitate scientific accuracy or narrative legitimacy. Her family's and neighbors' memories can also be hers, even though she did not witness each and every event, since her culture does not fully differentiate between collective/public memories and private/personal memories. In fact, there exist, at the core of her account, "the ongoing tension between forgetting and denial, the censorship of memory and trauma, the act of witnessing and the act of telling" (Skłodowska 265). Her account cannot be easily categorized as fact-based. It is distinguished from journalistic reporting, which requires neutral, credible descriptions of the world. In other words, her story is not grounded in empirically verifiable, objective facts, but in historical interpretations of collective traumatic events.

The fact that her testimonial account is not accurate, or that it lacks authenticity, does not mean that it is not worth reading. Instead, Menchú's text helps us "recognize both the artificiality and the artifactuality of life stories without diminishing the value of human experience" (Skłodowska 266). Daphne Patai highlights in "Whose Truth? Iconicity and Accuracy in the World of Testimonial Literature" that "when one of the oppressed — especially a third-world woman or a woman of color — tells her story, she herself is the authority on that experience" (275). The truthfulness of any specific contentions or allegations in Menchú's testimony "can thus always be validated by an implicit appeal to the broader experience of the group," not by scientific fact, which the scholarly world of North America often expects (Patai 275). In this way, Menchú exhibits how she resists Western versions of what is true or not. Distorting or even lying about her life story when it seems expedient, she succeeds in constructing a certain image of herself as the Other, one who is

nonsubmissive and disobedient to Western concepts of truth. Menchú politicizes her personal narrative of trauma by adding untruths to truths, dismantling the boundary between an individual's traumatic memory and the collective memory of trauma experienced by a people during a violent political crisis. In this way, politicizing the voice of the witness to traumatic events, Menchú not only avoids becoming a helpless, powerless victim of colonizers' atrocities, but also challenges Eurocentric ways of interpreting reality, fact, and truth.

Regarding the fictional elements in her testimony, Menchú's critics might claim that Menchú perpetuates negative stereotypical images of the Other as unreliable, untrustworthy, deceitful, sly, cunning, or dishonest. Yet misrepresentations, lies, gaps, and distortions in Menchú's account are intentionally devised, not just for her personal cause, but for her political vision, which makes her individual story represent the broader experience of the group. As Patai insightfully points out, the reason Menchú overstated her own agonies is because she was well aware that her actual sufferings were not enough to "make the kind of powerful impression she wants to leave with her readers" (279). Menchú sometimes needed lies that would serve her immediate political purpose. However, those who criticize Menchú tend to be too focused on the small details to see the big picture, i.e., her political purpose (Montero 76). In relation to this characteristic of testimony, Poey remarks that the speaker in testimony tells his/her story "with the intent of bringing about specific material change" by "politicizing the reader/consumer" (50). In addition, Ferman explains that "unlike a fictive text that presupposes various processes of identification, the positioning of the reader is absolutely central to the very act of reading *testimonio*" (157). To put it another way, readers can become marginal observers of the events in the testimony, who "feel linked in solidarity with its message" (Ferman 157). Her testimony can thus be termed "resistance literature," due to its "oppositional and revolutionary function" of mobilizing people to political action and challenging hegemonic institutions (Poey 50-51). As Beverley argues, Menchú's

testimony plays a role in engaging readers in the struggles of particular communities and involving them in human rights and solidarity movements (94). Simply put, Menchú's politicization of trauma in her testimony is designed to elicit immediate solidarity among people who are encouraged to participate in efforts towards social/political change.

Standards of accuracy, plot development, and narrative form used and expected in Western-style autobiography, which dramatizes one's life story by narrating personal development, cannot be applied to Menchú's testimony. In testimony, unlike in autobiography, there is no elite author taking charge, controlling and mediating the narrative. Additionally, testimony is distinguished from recorded participant narrative, such as oral history, in which the intentionality of the recorder is dominant and the resulting text is data. In testimony, the intentionality of the narrator is regarded as paramount and dominant. This is not to say that testimony does not at all represent an affirmation of the individual subject, i.e., the individual narrator's inner growth and self-transformation. However, in testimony, such personal change occurs primarily "in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle" (Beverley 41). Beverley claims that if testimony loses this connection with a group or an ethnic community that it belongs to, it no longer functions as testimony, but becomes autobiography, which is "an account of, and also a means of access to, middle- or upper-class status, a sort of documentary *bildungsroman*," which focuses on individual triumph over circumstances (41). Since the narrator in testimony "speaks for, or in the name of, a community or group," testimony can have "a nonfictional, popular-democratic form of epic narrative" (Beverley 33).

It is true that a Paris-trained anthropologist, Burgos-Debray, played the role of interviewer, recorder, transcriber, and organizer of Menchú's story. Burgos-Debray met Menchú as an interviewee in Paris one evening in January 1982 when Menchú came to Europe as a representative of a number of solidarity groups (xiv). They stayed together under

the same roof for one week, which brought them closer together and made them trust each other (xvi). Since Menchú couldn't speak Spanish perfectly, Burgos-Debray put her oral account into a written document through face-to-face communication, and ultimately helped Menchú receive international attention. Burgos-Debray also mentions that she significantly edited the transcript of Menchú's oral account, reordering the material based on her own sense of priorities.

Even though Burgos-Debray "altered neither the style nor the sentence structure" of Menchú's words (xxi), they were not faithfully translated, but were changed and edited by Burgos-Debray in order to make Menchú's oral narrative legible to western readers. "[T]o provide the basis of the division of the material into chapters" (xxi), the Western anthropologist made a thematic card index, re-ordered the story sequence, and eliminated some of the repetition in Menchú's narrative. She also corrected the gender mistakes in Spanish that Menchú inevitably and frequently made, inserted linking passages to make the manuscript read like one continuous narrative monologue, and divided it into chapters based on the themes she had identified (xxi-xxii). Furthermore, Burgos-Debray followed a chronological timeline to make the written text more accessible to readers, and added her own epigraphs to each chapter in order to make the Mayans' traditions and experiences more intelligible to readers.

Some might thus claim that Menchú's words cannot be regarded as hers, but as subordinate to the western transcriber. They might argue that Burgos-Debray dilutes Menchú's voice and exerts her discursive power over Menchú's narrative (Schlau 269). It is true that her testimony inevitably required the intervention of Burgos-Debray in order to reach a wider audience. Yet Menchú clearly understood that her story would be a powerful tool for breaking the silence about the atrocities committed against the Guatemalan people during the Guatemalan civil war, and for bringing about tangible change and hope for her

people through the politicization of her trauma. She was well aware of the “discursive power” of her testimony, and acted “as a manipulative narrator” for obtaining her political goals (Trinch 198). Burgos-Debray herself accentuates the fact that it was Menchú who “made more and more digressions, introduced descriptions of cultural practices into her story and generally upset my chronology,” even though she gave Menchú an outline of topics and imposed a sequential order on her narrative (xix). By her own admission in the closing lines of the book, Menchú selectively chose what to reveal and what to hide about herself and her people. While Burgos-Debray shaped/rearranged her narrative and transformed a dialogue between two women into a singular monologue, it was Menchú who took full responsibility for the individual narrative units.

The roles of an editor in the production of a testimony cannot be ignored, as seen above. However, Beverley points out that power hierarchies and positions of privilege and oppression still play a significant role for a narrator and an editor. That is to say, “the dubious assumption” that the “Other’s discourse can be rendered transparent and knowable in a decontextualized, ahistorical space,” should not go unquestioned (Beverley 47). Nevertheless, Beverley also claims that in the creation of a testimonial text, the control of representation of the Other does not follow only one way, i.e., it is not always in the hands of a western editor. For example, Menchú, as an activist for her community who had a strong desire and ability to express herself verbally, strategically exploited her interlocutor in order to make it possible for her story to reach and influence an international audience, which she sees as a political task. In her testimony, Menchú demonstrates her past self who is not only able to undermine western notions of truth and objectivity, but who is also able to have the authority over her own experience by selecting what is told or not told, as well as deciding how it should be told. In this way, Menchú, who was traumatized by many horrible events in her past, is transformed into a politically empowered woman through sharing her testimony.

As seen above, “the role of the editor in the production of a *testimonio*” (Poey 46) cannot be ignored. However, Poey points out that “power hierarchies and positions of privilege and oppression” still significantly affect both narrator and editor. That is, “the dubious assumption that the ‘Other’s’ discourse can be rendered transparent and knowable in a decontextualized, ahistorical space,” should not go unquestioned (47). Nevertheless, as Menchú shows, in the creation of a testimonial text, control over the representation of the Other is not always in the hands of a western editor. For example, Menchú, as an activist for her community with a strong desire to express herself verbally, and the ability to do so, strategically exploited her interlocutor in order to make it possible for her story to reach and influence an international audience, which she sees as a political task. In her testimony, Menchú positions herself as one who not only is able to undermine western notions of truth and objectivity, but who also has authority over her own experience, determining what is or is not told and how it is told. In this way, Menchú, who was traumatized by many horrible events in her past, is transformed into a politically empowered woman through the sharing of her testimony.

Conclusion

As Beverley puts it, “the Real that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* forces us to confront, in other words, is not only that of the subaltern as ‘represented’ victim of history, but also as agent of a transformative project that aspires to become hegemonic in its own right” (75). Overcoming her limited education, Menchú “embodies societal transformation for indigenous peoples” by using her extraordinary oratory skills as a weapon against hegemonic, patriarchal oppression (Kempen 126). As a K'iche' Indian woman, Menchú performs an incredible role as a rebellious element in her society in the revolutionary struggle against the oppressive political system. Disclosing the complexities of the postcolonial situation in Guatemala, she works for

the rights of indigenous communities, trying to serve the cause of the Guatemalan Indians. Building up her identity as a subject/agent that is both singular and plural, Menchú also dismantles the categories of center and periphery.

For Menchú, reviving the extremely painful, horrible, and frightening stories of the past must have been stressful and unpleasant. However, in shedding light on the injustice, poverty, and oppression that her family and people went through, Menchú chooses to speak out on behalf of her people, to become a voice for them. Vividly describing the discrimination and victimization that indigenous people have experienced, she raises readers' consciousness about sociopolitical problems. Menchú believes that telling traumatic stories around the world of the poor, disenfranchised, and dispossessed people of Guatemala will bring about social justice and change in this country. Thus, standing as a representative of these people, she situates her trauma in a political-social context, rather than putting it in a personal memory. By politicizing her trauma to the world, Menchú ultimately becomes an active and critical political agent, who openly criticizes the Guatemalan military and raises international awareness about the suffering of her people.

In her testimony, Menchú does not describe herself as a traumatized, passive, and victimized Other, in spite of her triply colonized, discriminated, and disadvantaged status due to her race, gender, and social class. Refusing to write from a position of victimhood, she instead claims "a position of authorial power" by politically and carefully crafting her words (Kempen 151). Menchú presents herself as a gap or a rupture within the symbolic order, i.e., the incalculable, irreducible, and uncanny element, dismantling oppressive colonial discourse and authority. Politicizing her trauma and transcending the position of just being a witness to events, she reconstructs herself as a brave, dauntless fighter, who lays bare and disseminates the truth about the infringements upon the human rights of silenced indigenous peoples of not only Latin America, but of the whole world. In this way, Menchú's testimonial narrative can

have an enormous international impact on the national, ethnic, and gender liberation of people who are discriminated against, marginalized, and oppressed, all around the world. Admittedly, the collective trauma and memory in Menchú's testimony reminds us of what Taylor states in "Trauma as Durational Performance":

If we focus only on the individual and the trauma we risk evacuating the politics. Standing there, together, bringing the buildings and routines back to life, we bear witness not just to the personal loss, but to a system of power relations, hierarchies, and values that not only allowed but required the destruction of others. (279)

In politicizing her trauma, Menchú helps us redefine the concept of trauma in relation to the wider socio-political context by which the individual is surrounded and influenced. Reading Menchú's testimony, we can see trauma not as an individual or personal experience, but as a collective, socio-cultural experience that can occur in the everyday lives of people who are vulnerable to racism, classism, sexual abuse/harassment, economic domination, and other various forms of political oppression. Menchú leads us to a more comprehensive understanding of traumatic experiences from both collective and individual perspectives, and encourages us to participate actively in the process of social and political change.

Chapter 5. Depathologizing Trauma in Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*: Reconstructing the Wounded Girlhood in *Girl, Interrupted*

Introduction

Susanna Kaysen recounts her experiences in the women's ward of a United States psychiatric institution in the late 1960s in *Girl, Interrupted*. In her memoir published in 1993, Kaysen focuses on a short period of time from 1967 to 1969 during her psychiatric institutionalization, portraying her traumatic experiences locked up in a Massachusetts asylum during her adolescence. After taking 50 aspirins as a suicide attempt, she had a twenty-minute interview with a psychiatrist, who diagnosed her with bipolar syndrome known as manic depressive disorder or manic depression. Kaysen was forced to sign herself into the women's ward at McLean Hospital, a psychiatric institute where she was institutionalized for nearly two years to be treated for depression.

As the title of Kaysen's memoir *Girl, Interrupted* indicates, her life was interrupted by the traumatic events in the past. The forced admission to the mental hospital for a psychiatric crisis, which was decided right after a brief interview with a male doctor whom she had never met before, must have been a catastrophic disruption in her life. In addition, while living inside the adolescent mental ward for two years, Kaysen observed and received cruel, degrading, and inhumane punishments that the doctors and nurses gave to the patients. Although Kaysen suffered from manic depression before entering the hospital, the experiences of isolation, humiliation, and cruel treatments inflicted on her by doctors and nurses, as well as the hostile and life-threatening hospital environment, must have driven her into more depression or psychological torture. In a word, the hospital was not a refuge that gave Kaysen safety and relief, but was like a prison, the experience of which denied her subjectivity and inscribed a break or crisis into her life.

Girl, Interrupted brings to the surface these traumatic experiences that female patients, including herself, suffered at the mental hospital, and criticizes the practice of psychiatric hospitalization that commonly targeted women. Based on a series of recollections and reflections on the traumatic events that she experienced in the psychiatric hospital, she reveals how a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder interrupted her life, questioning if there is any clear boundary between mental illness and the disillusionment of youth. In the memoir grounded in her particular, selective memories of adolescence, Kaysen reconstructs her adolescent self as unstable, unreliable, incomplete, fragmented, decentered, and incoherent, as a way of dismantling the masculine notion of unified selfhood and unsettling the patriarchal medicalization of the female body. Kaysen does not describe herself as passive and vulnerable to traumatic events, but recreates herself as transgressive and defiant in her memoir written twenty-five years after she was discharged. Using a feminine coming-of-age narrative which foregrounds the confusions and conflicts that young girls go through, Kaysen suggests her turbulent adolescent girlhood as a period of traumatic passage, and refashions her adolescent subject as one which has the uncanny power to resist patriarchal medical authorities and ultimately disrupt dominant sexist cultural pedagogies imposed on girls at that time.

Kaysen publicly tells about emotional and physical wounds caused by traumatic experiences in her memoir despite the risk of discrimination and stigma usually imposed on sufferers of mental illnesses. She does not choose to keep mute about her traumatic experiences, but breaks the silence disturbing the boundary between the private and public realms. In this way, she regains her own voice as a speaker previously forced to be silenced by a sexist, masculine society. By writing her traumatic experiences of the past with the coming-of-age narrative, she attempts to become an agency of her personal experience. While coming to terms with her traumatic events, Kaysen earns a rich knowledge about her

own experience of madness and its vicissitudes, which ultimately works as a therapy for her trauma.

Considering all of these aspects, in this chapter, I will attempt to analyze Kaysen's memoir as a trauma narrative in which she represents the feminine adolescent subject as unstable and rebellious, not as a passive victim pathologically divided by trauma. In addition, I also examine the way Kaysen can become an uncanny agent of her personal, subjective experiences with a mental illness while tracing back to and writing about her traumatic confinement at McLean. Lastly, I will explore how Kaysen's writing about trauma can have a therapeutic effect on her life.

The Coming-of-Age Narrative and Illness Identity

Kaysen's writing is built upon the coming-of-age narrative, which tries not to repress discourses that counter the affirmation of progressive selfhood. Favoring provisional subjectivity, her narrative revolves around the pain, confusion, and self-contradictory desires, which is necessary to accomplish a conflicted, contradictory subject position in the coming-of-age narrative. In *Girl, Interrupted*, Kaysen, as a troubled teenager with an unusual breadth of life experience, clearly presents her adolescent identity of an eighteen-year-old girl as unstable. Kaysen revealed in her memoir that at that age, she already dropped out of school, had an affair with her high school English teacher, and tried to half-heartedly kill herself. She did not want to go to college and committed self-mutilating behaviors and suicidal attempts. Kaysen confesses that at that time, her self-image was unstable: "I saw myself, quite correctly, as unfit for the educational and social systems. But my parents and teachers did not share my self-image. Their image of me was unstable, since it was out of kilter with reality and based on their needs and wishes" (155).

Kaysen even raises the question of whether she was even truly mentally ill in the past.

Looking back at the time at the hospital, she is still not sure whether she was truly crazy 25 years prior, although her doctors believed she was (159). According to Kaysen, she might have been just “flirting with madness the way [she] flirted with [her] teachers and [her] classmates (159). Kaysen believes that perhaps, during her adolescence she simply played on the border of insanity and sanity. Although Kaysen recovers enough to have a sensible assessment on the issue of her madness, which, from others’ viewpoints, appears to be “a mark of sanity,” she still doubts her current state of mental health and asks herself and other people if her behavior is crazy when she does “something out of the ordinary” (159). Skirting around the very ambiguity and uncertainty of the boundary between being sane and being mad, with humor and sarcasm, she reveals the thinness of that line.

In fact, Kaysen’s narrative is far from a narrative of triumph over adversity. Kaysen’s memoir does not aim to highlight triumph over traumatic circumstances. In contrast to the triumph narrative, Kaysen’s narrative is frank about the harshness of living with a mental illness or disorder, depicting the more complex reality of such a life. Her *Girl, Interrupted*, as an alternative to the triumph narrative, tells how the mentally ill protagonist or narrator embraces all aspects of her life and does not desperately try to deny her identity as a woman with a mental illness. Kaysen does not express a positive attitude throughout the story and ensure a triumphant, linear ending. Instead of fabricating a story in the form of a triumphant narrative, Kaysen remains true to herself and gives us a story about the unmanageable and devastating aspects of her mental illness, the loss of self-control, and ruptures in the self. In short, providing a gaze from the margins, she unveils the serious reality of how easily and unexpectedly one’s life can be interrupted and disturbed by trauma.

When it comes to people with mental illnesses, the triumph narrative, which has a beginning, middle, and end plot structure, is not suitable for representing many people with manic depressive illnesses. This is because the status or feelings of people with manic

depressive illness cannot remain constant and stable over time, but change radically from one moment to the next. In certain cases, their illness and pain cannot be expressed with an accurate sense of order and time. The linear triumph narrative thus cannot represent the reality of these people's lives and selves accurately or authentically. By not depending on this triumph narrative, but employing fractured, nonlinear, and disoriented narrative, Kaysen honestly recounts how her mental illness has shattered or interrupted her life, and how difficult and painful it was for her to bear the uncontrollable, complicated reality of mental illness. Through open-ended narrative, a fragmented plot line, and a heterogeneous mixture of discourses, Kaysen creates an ambiguity in her text which emphasizes the uncertain, unstable nature of her identity or subjectivity. Besides, Kaysen's story unfolds as episodic and topic-centered. There is no sense of chronology or order in her memoir, which directly reflects her chaotic, confused mind/identity. In sum, as a way to counter the power of the unitary, completed selfhood, Kaysen fashions more dispersed, ambiguous, discontinuous, and de-centered models of female subjectivity through her coming-of-age narrative.

Empowering Traumatized, Wounded Girlhood

Kaysen's trauma memoir is a record of a personal crisis based on turbulent girlhood experiences. However, *Girl, Interrupted* contains her sharp criticism of medical practices and cultural pedagogies through which she reconstructs her subversive, rebellious adolescent identity. By reorganizing or reinterpreting traumatic events, Kaysen implicitly criticizes McLean Hospital's dehumanizing conditions. McLean Hospital, which was one of the best-known private institutions in the U.S., advertised itself as providing patients with a higher level of care, more attention from doctors, and better facilities, compared to state institutions. Still, according to Kaysen's descriptions, the entrance to the hospital ward could just as easily be found in a prison; nurses, hospital staff, and "lunatics" were strictly separated; and patients

had to live a compulsory dormitory lifestyle in cell-like rooms, so they always complained about the lack of privacy (45-46).

At McLean, the only place, which patients could have a sense of privacy for a short time, was called a “seclusion room” located at the farthest reach of the main hallway. Just as Kaysen says, “The real purpose of the seclusion room, though, was to quarantine people who’d gone bananas” (47), it functioned as a holding tank for wild, out-of-control patients who were assumed to pose harm to others or cause disturbance (46). If patients were too rowdy or noisy, they were banished to the seclusion room with only the “chicken-wired-enforced window” in the door. They were involuntarily locked up for a few days to wear themselves out without any food in this room the size of “the average suburban bathroom” that was stained with their own excrement (46). On the other hand, they also chose to stay in this room for the sake of privacy, and yelled as much as they pleased for a while (46). However, according to Kaysen, “freedom was the price of privacy” (47), since even when they were blessedly alone for a short time in this room, they were more strictly confined and watched over by a nurse (47-48). In her poignant memoir, Kaysen represents the seclusion room as a microcosm of the entire experience of confinement in, and the degrading conditions of, the hospital.

Kaysen was not only held captive in McLean, but was also infantilized by the physical space of McLean. The hospital perhaps promised to provide proper safety, nourishment, and comfort, but Kaysen’s metaphor only indicates its limited mobility and isolation that patients in there experienced. At McLean, Kaysen witnessed how other female patients accepted their medicalized position as passive and became helpless objects of drug treatments forcefully provided by all-powerful medical physicians. She also saw that those who disobeyed the rules were physically tortured, given an electroshock, and forced to eat something that made them ill. Kaysen bluntly uncovers the pain and suffering that her fellow patients had to

endure at McLean. For example, she mentions, “We watched as Cythia came back crying from electroshock once a week. We watched Polly shiver after being wrapped in ice-cold sheets. One of the worst things we watched, though, was Lisa coming out of seclusion” (21).

Everything, including meals and phone calls, was monitored at the hospital in the name of protection, safety, and security. The staff confiscated any possessions, including earrings and belts, which might have been thought to inflict injury or harm. Field trips outside the hospital walls were rarely permitted. Regarding the claustrophobic, suffocating atmosphere and the prison-like life at McLean, Kaysen says, “We’d reached the end of the line. We had nothing more to lose. Our privacy, our liberty, our dignity: all of this was gone and we were stripped down to the bare bones of our selves” (94). Moreover, at McLean, she observed that doctors and nurses gave the patients the name of an animal and routinely responded to their questions with rage or silence. In her memoir, Kaysen tries to reveal that McLean served as a place to “submerge patients in an infantile state and thus properly (re)domesticate or (re)habilitate them” (84). All of the scenes she witnessed must have worsened her original psychic pain and further traumatized her.

Kaysen is stigmatized because of disordered behaviors and is categorized as the fearful Other, who is different from so-called us. For this reason, Kaysen seems to see it as necessary to shed light on social discriminations against, and inhuman treatments of, patients with mental illnesses, in order to contribute to changing prejudiced or distorted views of these people in society. She does this as a person who is not just an observer or onlooker from the outside, but an insider within that marginalized experience. Yet she does not end up just reporting to the outside these unfriendly, hostile, and unsympathetic situations for women patients. Rather, she threatens institutional authority and tries to become a subversive agent of her own personal experience.

For instance, confined to the mental hospital for the last two of her teenage years, Kaysen develops the ability to track the passage of time. In the chapter, “Checks,” Kaysen reveals how days on the ward were punctuated by periodic inspections by the nurses. Kaysen says:

Five minute checks. Fifteen-minute checks. Half-hour checks. Some nurses said, “Checks,” when they opened the door. Click turn the knob, swish, open the door, “Checks,” swish, pull the door shut, click, turn the knob. Five-minute checks.
(54)

The checks, representing the hospital’s strict rules, occurred every five, fifteen, or thirty minutes, and never stopped at night, dictating girls’ daily routines and interrupting their activities. Girls’ daily activities and whereabouts were appraised based on the exhausting check schedule, which never allowed girls to have “enough time to drink a cup of coffee, read three pages of a book, [or] take a shower” (54). Here the checks, conducted by the nurses with robotic regularity, stand for the distressing intrusiveness of life under confinement and control.

Kaysen confronts the nursing authorities or draconian control by demonstrating the subjective nature of her conception of time. Recalling that the sound of the turning doorknob, “*Click, swish, ‘Checks,’ swish, click*” murdered her own time (54), she describes the checks as like a “pulse,” a reminder of time slipping away. Yet Kaysen does not describe young Kaysen as one who was just passively and dejectedly subjugated to the nurses’ checks, but as one who was obviously conscious of, and sensitive to, time strictly measured by the authorities with its never-ending and maddeningly predictable punctuality. To put it another way, Kaysen attempts to conceptualize in her own ways her time lost in captivity: Kaysen

demonstrates how she exerts ownership over her powerlessness with her subjective reconceptualization of time.

The chapter, “Dental Health” specifically tells how obsessed with time Kaysen was. Upon waking from a routine dental procedure, she said that she wanted to know how much time she spent under anesthesia. To find out that answer, she screamed at the top of her lungs at the dentist, “it’s my time and I need to know how much it was!” (109).

I’d been asking about the time. I was ahead of myself. He’d

dropped me into the future, and I didn’t know what happened to the time in between.

“How long did that take?” I asked.

“Oh, nothing,” he said, “In and out.”

That didn’t help. “Like five seconds? Like two minutes?”

He moved away from the chair. “Valerie,” he called.

“I need to know,” I said.

“No hot liquids for twenty-four hours,” he said.

“How long?”

“Twenty-four hours.”

...

“It’s my time!” I yelled. “It’s my time and I need to know how

much it was.” (109)

Kaysen’s conversation with the dentist reminds her readers that her hypersensitivity to time’s passing resulted from her anxiety that she was living outside of time while the rest of the world was moving on. The reason Kaysen shouted at the dentist is because she believed that if she could track the progression of time, she could have some control over it. This incident shows that she tries to remake her adolescent self not as a helpless patient, but as a self-empowered agent who refuses to hand over her feebleness to the authority figure and reclaims her own subjective experience with illness from the authoritative medical discourse.

In a bold move, Kaysen offers actual copies of her medical documentations, hospital admission papers, and psychiatric notes, even though they are fiercely private matters about her life. Breaking down the wall between the private and public with these records, Kaysen does not hesitate to provide a record of her earlier suicide attempts, a nurse’s note describing her behavior, as well as her own description of an intense moment of her panic. Kaysen constantly adds her version of events to copies of internal McLean Hospital files as a way of interrogating and disrupting medical authorities, as well as giving her story a sense of objectivity and reliability. The records contain pieces of information such as Kaysen’s name, address, and details of her suicide attempts, but they offer little context and interpretation of her condition, and have nothing to do with issues of who she was and what problems she was facing at that specific time. These medical records only suggest that her doctors merely had a surface-level understanding of her problems and offered superficial treatment of her mental illness. By including several medical records from her time at McLean, Kaysen dismisses her psychiatric diagnosis, which was determined by whether or not she possessed an idealized construction of femininity, and challenges the dogma of the psychiatric medical establishment, which regulated and oppressed women.

Kaysen describes her diagnosis and hospitalization as “the charges against me” by the male doctor (150), assuming that the doctor’s decision to commit her might have been influenced by his fear and confusion toward young people, especially girls. Kaysen’s doctor interpreted juvenile resistance to adults’ expectations of girls to become an ordinary, decent, and good woman as a mental illness or disorder. Furthermore, Kaysen’s doctor authorized her release from the hospital after she accepted her boyfriend’s marriage proposal; he simply believed that her readiness to be married to a man could prove her complete recovery without examining her current condition carefully and thoroughly. Like many women who were locked up for not being feminine enough in a male-oriented society at that time, Kaysen was also treated as insane and was confined for failing to perform a narrowly prescribed role, i.e., the role of wife and mother and having no domestic virtues.

Regarding this issue, Jane M. Ussher remarks in *The Madness of Women* that the reason “most twentieth century women who [were] psychiatrically labeled, privately treated and publicly hospitalized” was not because they were actually mad, but because they were “deeply unhappy, self-destructive, economically powerless, and sexually impotent” (65). When women did not want to conform to conventional gender roles or did not exhibit heteronormative feminine traits, they were considered to be the most disturbed, and incarcerated in an asylum by psychiatrists (Ussher 75). In short, women were at risk of being stigmatized as mad or deviant “for simply being woman” (Ussher 65).

Likewise, Kaysen’s deviation from gender role stereotypes was considered psychologically unhealthy and caused her forced hospitalization, which diminished her sense of dignity as a human being. Writing her memoir, Kaysen sharply discusses how women are more likely than men to be regarded as insane or mentally ill, even though madness might be experienced by both men and women. That is, she is highly critical of how easily women are subjected to misdiagnosis and mistreatment by male medical experts who try to regulate

femininity. By doing so, Kaysen offers insights into how madness associated with femininity can thus be looked upon as a gender-based experience, as well as a form of socially and culturally constructed oppression.

In the chapter entitled, “Do You Believe Him or Me?” Kaysen points out the unreliability of the records, disclosing the contradictory accounts of her admission to the hospital. In fact, in the previous chapter, she concedes that, although she clearly recalls a twenty-minute interview with the doctor, the hospital records tell that the conversation lasted for three hours. Retracing every step that morning, she concludes that the records might be true. However, she presents a second document which supports her original point of view. Kaysen refutes the referring doctor’s claim that he interviewed her for three hours before he committed her to McLean. Confidently saying, “I can reconstruct everything” (71), Kaysen supports her claims by unearthing “The Admission Note,” which bears her signature. At the end of this section, she concludes: “There we are, between nine and nine-thirty. I won’t quibble over ten minutes. Now you believe me” (72). Establishing a different version of truth by saying, “I still think I’m right. I’m right about what counts” (72), Kaysen actually resists the ways “in which the gendered pedagogies embedded within psychiatric and cultural discourses attempt to construct her” (Marshall 122). By reconstructing every event which occurred during the specific time, Kaysen not only exhibits the power to discredit the doctor’s claims and the hospital documents, but also leads readers to side with her. Kaysen persistently and intentionally asks readers to believe her version of the story, not to invalidate her conception of time just because she was diagnosed with a mental illness.

Still, while insisting upon the integrity of her account, Kaysen never tries to assert any authority over her narrative or memories. In fact, she brands herself as an unreliable narrator by reminding her readers that her memories might not be trustworthy. Although Kaysen tries to contradict the official version of events and question the judgment of the authority figures,

her narration purposefully lacks creditability. Rather, it emphasizes the subjective nature of her judgment. In most cases, every story and conclusion in the memoir are conveyed through a subjective source of Kaysen's unreliable memories. She leads her readers to draw their own conclusions. In a word, Kaysen even dismisses her own voice of authority, leaving certain conclusions to her readers, which insinuates her denial of self-mastery over her narrative.

In the chapter, "My Diagnosis" Kaysen confronts the biased judgment of her doctor about her mental illness. She says, "If I said it, nobody would believe me," but, "He can say it because he's a doctor" (151). Acknowledging the power differential between a (male) doctor and a (female) patient, Kaysen problematizes the gender biases in psychiatry and casts doubt regarding the authenticity of the criteria of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders used by her doctor in his diagnosis of her Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). That is, Kaysen tries to uncover the gender bias embedded in the standardized questionnaires used to measure depression and other mental disorders in women.

Raising questions about gender-biased, one-dimensional psychiatric diagnosis and practices, Kaysen criticizes the doctor for having the power to make authoritative interpretations of her behavior as dangerous, abnormal, and pathological. Not dominated by the power of psychiatric discourse, Kaysen attempts to dismantle authoritarian psychiatric power with sharp observations of sexism in the doctor's judgment about her compulsive promiscuity. Although Kaysen agrees that much of her adolescent behavior fits the definition of Borderline Personality Disorder, she mentions that the designation might have been incomplete (150). As Susan J. Hubert remarks, Kaysen's response to her analyst's interpretations of her behavior underlines "the sexual bias as well as the absurdity of his remark" (99). Not accepting the sexist diagnostic categories as accurate explanations for her distress and rejecting being subjugated by patriarchal medical discourses, Kaysen bravely challenges the legitimacy or objectivity of her diagnosis.

In addition, in this chapter, “My Diagnosis” Kaysen explores the nature of mental illness in relation to how she was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. She is not even sure whether she was insane or not in the past, and thus cautions her readers that her doctors’ diagnosis possibly could not have told the sum of a personality (151). Moreover, Kaysen notes that BPD is more commonly diagnosed in, or applied to, women. Quite conscious of gender biases in psychiatric diagnoses, in her memoir, Kaysen asks herself why a number of the behaviors noted in the definition such as shoplifting, binge eating, and excessive shopping are more frequently identified with women, and why women with these behaviors are more often diagnosed with BPD than men (157). Analyzing the medical definition of BPD from a feminist perspective and discovering that certain diagnostic categories are designed to be more likely to be applied to women, Kaysen illuminates the interconnection between psychiatric fads/sexism and unequal frequency of diagnoses of women with mental disorders.

From the perspective of an adult, she pointedly and insightfully illuminates the socially and culturally constructed association between a woman’s sexual behaviors/practices and her mental health. That is, she tries to “denaturalize the links between feminine adolescence and mental instability” (Marshall 123). Expressing her criticism of psychiatric discourses, which are far from gender-neutral and discipline both girls’ bodies and minds, Kaysen demonstrates her rebellious, uncanny spirit against patriarchal, masculine institutional power.

Embodied Metaphor and Embodiment Writing

Depending on bodily intimacy with any lived trauma, Kaysen tries to recover female subjectivity through embodied writing. In the chapter, “Mind vs. Brain” Kaysen claims that mind and body cannot be divided in two. Kaysen thinks that the mind interprets chemical processes that take place in the brain, and creates her own theory, grounded in her own bodily

experiences, that mental illness appears when two levels of interpretation occurring in our heads cannot communicate with each other (139). Additionally, Kaysen presents her own opinion that there has been a gap between the therapeutic and neurochemical schools of thought, thus more cooperation between the two would be necessary for patients with mental illnesses so as to be cured.

Kaysen believes that mental illness has two types: “fast” and “slow” (75). As she says that fast and slow illnesses can seem the same to the casual onlooker, and it is hard for them to consider insanity divided into two types. Based on her own bodily experiences, she explains in detail how two types of insanity influence the body differently. The slow form of insanity, which Kaysen calls viscosity, makes every experience and perception thickened and dulled. Kaysen graphically describes the dulling of perception and the general sluggishness or drowsiness, which is the case when “experience is thick” (75). For instance, one perceives time slowly, and “the body temperature is low,” “the pulse is sluggish,” and “the immune system is half-asleep” (75). However, on the other hand, the fast type of illness increases a patient’s velocity. As Kaysen explains, “there is too much perception, and beyond the plethora of perceptions, a plethora of thoughts about the perceptions and about the fact of having perceptions” (75), a person suffering from a fast illness is likely to be overwhelmed by a never-ending series of a tidal wave of perception. Kaysen distinguishes between “slow” and “fast” types of illness, but concludes that the effect of each is the same, which is immobility and stillness: “Viscosity causes the stillness of disinclination, velocity causes the stillness of fascination” (77). Since Kaysen herself suffered from both kinds of illness, she can explain the nature of mental illness (Border DP) as she understands it with two analogies: viscosity and velocity, which indicates her power and ability to understand and articulate the symptom of mental illness not relying on medical discourses, but grounded in her own bodily experiences.

Women with mental illnesses served as a common metaphor for feminist insubordination and narrative subversion. Yet Kaysen's embodied writing contributes to helping readers view mental illness that women suffer from not as a literary metaphor, but as the concrete lived experience. In other words, Kaysen transcends employing women's madness as a feminist resistance/disobedience metaphor. As Elizabeth Donaldson remarks, the madness, "as feminist-rebellion metaphor," might work as an effective strategy for criticizing patriarchal systems or discourses which are violent against women's bodies. However, this metaphor actually tends to "indirectly diminish the lived experience of many people disabled by mental illness, just as the metaphoric use of terms like lame, blind, and deaf," and causes the misrepresentation of "the experience of living with those physical conditions" (Donaldson 102). In this regard, Kaysen's vivid accounts of bodily experiences related to mental illness direct readers to pay attention to not only "the social causes and construction of mad identity," but also "the material conditions of the body" (Donaldson 102), which broadens a theory of embodiment and mental illness. Unveiling an underlying truth through her bodily experiences, Kaysen destabilizes patriarchal ideology that causes epistemological violence against women's body, shedding new light on the body or bodily experiences of women with mental illnesses.

Trauma and Memoir

Kaysen's traumatic experiences must have induced the ruptures in her mind, body, and relationships to others, but she transforms incomprehensible experiences of the past into a narratable story about her fragmented self and her trauma. In *Girl, Interrupted*, Kaysen clearly demonstrates that there exists no coherent, unified, and stable self that predates stories. She reassembles fragments of memories, experiences, and identities into new forms of the female subjectivity, which is always fragmented in time. The meanings of her stories

are also neither static nor frozen in the past. Her traumatic memories are not pathologically fixed or separate from normal memories, but they are malleable to alteration, revision, or reevaluation over time. These fluid memories, which are not fully graspable or fathomable, can be constantly deconstructed, revised, and recreated each time they are remembered by Kaysen.

While trying to interpret meaning in traumatic events through her writing which she regards as her vocation in life, Kaysen exposes that the meaning of traumatic interruptions cannot be totally comprehended, verbalized, or conveyed, laying bare the complexities of her traumatic experiences. Kaysen's memoir of traumatized girlhood reveals contradictions, complexities, and multiplicities embedded in traumatic events, as well as her own incompleteness, fragmentation, and self-contradiction. Each episode that Kaysen narrates embodies "a traumatic break exceeding the narrative closure of crisis and recovery, descent and re-ascent," and the time that Kaysen lost due to the hospitalization, which "in the end exceeds all telling" (Clark 52). Through trauma life-writing, Kaysen, refusing to be re-traumatized, speaks and writes about trauma in her own ways and attempts to exercise agency, not centripetal ownership, over her traumatic experiences by giving her own interpretations to a revised version of the events, which was not granted to her as a child or young adult.

In her work, Kaysen, as the uncanny body/mind, in the uncanny moments, displays her transgressive potentials to compound the oppressive hierarchal boundary between madness and recovery, raising a critical view of the institutions and political policies which turn a blind eye to any agency or subjectivity over personal experiences of women with mental illnesses. Through the unique, uncanny power, she explores, articulates, and reconstructs her past self and traumatic break in new ways, which might be therapeutic for her trauma. Indeed, Kaysen's memoir does not confirm women's psychotic disorders as frailty or

weakness, but rather illuminates how women with “madness” can give an uncanny voice to their trauma – pain, depression, distress, and misery — through creative writing.

Conclusion

In the mass media, people with mental illnesses are frequently and unsurprisingly depicted as dangerous, evil, violent, or abnormal, which are characteristics that correspond well with the deeply rooted stereotypes in our society. Even though these portrayals are inaccurate and offensive, persons with mental illnesses are commonly represented as dangerous killers, merciless villains, laughable objects of ridicule, or lonely outsiders who are fundamentally different from others in TV, films, books, comics, magazines, and newspapers. The derogatory jokes or slangs about mental illnesses are casually used to entertain. All of this contributes to perpetuating unfavorable, discriminatory, and negative stereotypes of these people. With respect to this issue, Otto F. Wahl remarks in *Media Madness* that these dominating portrayals not only strengthen “a belief that those with psychiatric disorders are likely to attack and harm others in their communities” (94), but also justifies the idea that people with mental illnesses are unworthy for building certain relationship with ordinary people (95). Under such conditions, many mentally ill people with psychiatric labels are stigmatized as subhuman, and lead their lives struggling against social rejection and isolation.

Yet these stereotypes distributed and perpetuated by the mass media are in contrast to the fact since the majority of people with mental disorders or illnesses are far from being dangerous, threatening, and uncontrollable (Wahl 86). To correct the various misconceptions and misunderstandings which have been burgeoning across almost all forms of media without any restraint, people who suffer from mental illnesses have begun writing about their psychotic problems on their own terms from their own perspectives. As Susan Stanford Friedman states that the act of writing can “endo[w] [women’s] subjective experience with

authority and meaning” (90), her own writing offers Kaysen with the space where she can call into existence her subjective experiences of having a mental illness, which is socially and culturally rendered dangerous/untreatable or invisible/invalid, and regain her humanity.

According to Lean White, Kaysen’s memoir “functions as a form of discursive resistance” (5). Lean explains that her memoir is “an example of *subject* driven narratives countering the *object* driven narrative of a judgmental society and restrictive medical community” (5). By divulging the reality of how mentally ill women were disregarded and how power structures functioned to constrain them, Kaysen exhibits her potential to challenge patriarchal/authoritarian medical discourses and practices with a critique of gender biases in psychiatric diagnoses and inhumane psychiatric treatments. In addition, calling into question the notion of a universal, cohesive subject, as well as reconstructing her adolescent self as unstable, fragmented, transgressive, subversive, thus uncanny, Kaysen can see her wounded, traumatized adolescent self differently. As Katarzyna Szmigiero says that “the decision to put one’s story on paper is an act of healthy defiance” (79), Kaysen’s narrative not only offers a dynamic insight of the bodily experiences of mental illness, but also clearly serves as therapeutic purposes for her. Tracing back to the traumatic period from the perspective of adulthood, Kaysen does not portray her adolescent self as someone trapped by the patriarchal system and discouraged by the social, cultural oppression of women. Instead, by refashioning a troubled adolescent as the uncanny one who behaves rebelliously against and keenly castigates the institutional constraints of psychiatric treatments, Kaysen succeeds in establishing her transgressive, uncanny powers, which were lost in the past. Situating madness within the context of women’s lives, Kaysen’s autobiographical accounts of her traumatic experience with a mental illness casts light on the complexity of mental illness, and also helps us broaden and enrich the understanding of the psychological reality of many people who suffer from various mental issues.

Chapter 6. Visualizing Trauma

Celebrating the Subversive Liminality of Postcolonial Uncanny Bodies in Satrapi Marjane's *The Complete Persepolis*

Introduction

The breathtaking memoir *The Complete Persepolis*, written by Marjane Satrapi, is based on the author's own experiences from childhood through early adulthood in Iran during and in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Satrapi's graphic memoir, which is told from the unique perspective of a young Iranian girl called Marjane (or Marji),³¹ simply and impressively depicts the country's political, social, and cultural upheaval and mayhem, as well as her own family's turbulent life under the oppression of a totalitarian regime and the horror of war. *Persepolis* deals with two major historical events in Iran in the 1970s and 1980s: the domestic struggle between Iranians and their government during the Islamic Revolution, and the ensuing Iran-Iraq War.

In her memoir, Satrapi focuses on her own childhood and adolescence in revolutionary Iran, where she witnessed the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. Tracing back through these significant events, she narrates the trials and sufferings of Iranians, as well as the experiences of her upper-class leftist parents who protested against the despotic Islamic regime. Told from the naive, inexperienced perspective of a coming-of-age girl, Marji (or Marjane), *Persepolis* explores the crossing of the boundary between the public/political and the personal/private spheres, based on the female experience. In the text, Satrapi intertwines personal memory and public history, and shows how individual trauma cannot be separated from, but closely engages with, collective and political trauma.

³¹ *The Complete Persepolis* was originally published in two volumes. The character is called Marji until age fourteen, in *Persepolis 1*, and afterwards, in *Persepolis 2*, is called Marjane.

According to Joseph Darda, “[Satrapi]’s autobiographic proceeds to trouble the mainstream Western understanding of Iran in offering an alternate and personal historical account” (37). Offering an insider’s alternative perspective on political, religious, and social realities in Iran, Satrapi’s autobiographical work, which deviates from the patterns of the male *Bildungsroman* with its intention to educate and moralize, is “less about educating Western readers on Iranian history than it is about denaturalizing their prescribed understandings of Western Asia” (Darda 37). In *Persepolis*, Satrapi shows her sincere interest in dismantling the one-dimensional stereotypes of Iran and of the people, particularly women, who live in Iran and in Islamic countries in general, offering us a more comprehensive, complex, and accurate picture of the reality of her people.

Satrapi demonstrates a process of visualizing hidden, but never forgettable, trauma. Satrapi represents the unspeakability, unrepresentability, invisibility, and inaudibility of unforgettable traumas through the multifaceted visualizations of Marji’s witnessing of the private and public lives of Iranians during the revolution and the war, such as the torture and murders of family and friends, bombing, and political chaos. Yet Satrapi also shows the uncanny Other’s power to take both outright and subtle stands against the oppressive forces of Islamic fundamentalism, and at the same time enjoy their lives to the fullest, even in the face of political injustice, violence, and oppression. Satrapi portrays Iranians’ lives as full of love and joy, as well as pain, grief, and suffering. Specifically, Satrapi endows Iranian women with not only individuality and particularity, but also the transgressive potential to overturn the prevailing archetype of the emancipated Western woman and the subjugated Eastern woman by moving out of a shy, timid, inferior, and submissive position.

Considering all of issues mentioned above, in this chapter, I will examine how and why Satrapi reconstructs her past self in childhood and adolescence as fragmented and unstable. I will also examine how the author gives voice and face to her traumatized self and to other

Iranians, who have been silenced and subsumed into the dominant narrative, and ultimately joins in writing a new chapter of contemporary Iranian history from an unbiased perspective.

Visualization of Uncanny Traumatic Events

Marji's single eye, drawn alongside the chapter title "The Veil," reminds us that "we are aligned with Satrapi's penetrating vision and enabling retracing of that vision" (Chute 141). In a word, from the moment we start reading her story, Satrapi makes us see her book as a text of witness. Underneath the title is a row of two pictorial frames (3). According to Hillary L. Chute, the author's self-establishing in the first panel ("this is me when I was 10 years old") and the immediate disestablishment of her person in the following frame ("you don't see me") not only reveal "disjuncture between narration and image" since we can still see part of her even though she narrates that we cannot see her, but also signify "how the visual form of the graphic novel . . . can create a complex autobiographical fabric to represent" (141).

As Chute argues, Satrapi's work, "rooted in and articulated through momentous — and traumatic — historical events," shows "the ethical visual and verbal practice of 'not forgetting' " traumas (138). Indeed, in *Persepolis*, Satrapi vividly presents the *process* of not forgetting, i.e., the procedure of remembering something repressed in the unconscious through layers of visual and verbal narration. As one way to exhibit the visual and discursive process of "not forgetting," Satrapi "shows us the state of being of memory (as opposed to a single act of recall) by triangulating between the different versions of herself represented on the page" (Chute 144). For example, the fact that "Satrapi's older, recollective voice is most often registered in overarching narrative text, but her younger, directly experiencing voice is most often registered in dialogue," indicates Satrapi's desire to remember historic events by way of "a conversation between versions of self" (Chute 144). To put it another way, by

proliferating her selves on the page, i.e., verbally and visually inscribing multiple autobiographical “I”s, Satrapi demonstrates a way to return to and record the past through a constant negotiation among different voices.

Interestingly, to visually represent the depth of the memory, Satrapi uses only flat black and white colors, so there is no obvious shading technique in her work. Moreover, many panels have a minimal background, and a number of them are completely black. The simple blackness of the frames does not denote a scarcity or deficiency of memory, but rather the thickness of the memory. According to Chute, Satrapi’s minimalist style allows her to “presen[t] events with a pointed degree of abstraction in order to call attention to the horror of history, by re-representing endemic images, either imagined or reproduced, of violence” (145). Regarding her use of simple colors — black and white — Satrapi explains, “I write a lot about the Middle East, so I write about violence. Violence today has become something so normal, so banal — that is to say everybody thinks it’s normal. But it’s not normal. To draw it and put it in color — the color of flesh and the red of the blood, and so forth — reduces it by making it realistic” (qtd. in Chute 145-46). In other words, what Satrapi wants to do with her monochromatic and minimalist style is to make us see violence, which has become so normal and ordinary in her country, in a different way — not as normal or ordinary, but as extremely unordinary, and thus problematic. She asks us to problematize the normalization of and desensitization to horrifying political violence, from which her people have suffered in their daily lives. In other words, the author requires us to critically reflect on social and political problems in Iran in the very moment that we feel unfamiliar with her simple minimalist style and simple colors, which are out of tune with such traumatic experiences.

Satrapi’s art techniques, which help us painfully engage in historical traumas and recognize social and political problems from a new perspective, recall the “distancing effect,” “estrangement effect” or “alienation effect” coined by playwright Bertolt Brecht. According

to Brecht, performers should, in a theatrical context, “prevent the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, but consequently [lead] the audience to be a consciously critical observer”³² (91). To put it another way, Brecht wants his audience to alienate themselves from the characters and their actions as a way of empowering the audience as conscious observers, who can criticize or analyze social problems from critical and objective perspectives (91-92). He believes that if observers emotionally over-sympathize or over-empathize with characters, they cannot ponder the characters’ dilemmas or faults revealed in the dramatic plot, and thus will not achieve an intellectual understanding of the unfair world being represented. Brecht claims that a critical understanding of people and the world can create ruptures in the prevailing institutional ideology, opinion, and knowledge, and ultimately bring about change in society.

In the same vein, the radical disjuncture between Satrapi’s minimalist drawing style and her inexplicably painful traumatic experiences can be understood in terms of the alienation effect. Satrapi uses her drawing as a political statement to appeal not to readers’ feelings or emotions, but to their rational thoughts, in order to evoke social changes. This is similar to the Brechtian techniques of making strange what might usually appear normal. In this sense, a child’s putatively naive, simple perspective in *Persepolis* can never be regarded as literally simple, meaningless, or insignificant. Indeed, its child’s-eye rendition of trauma conveys the message that no perspective can as sufficiently and accurately represent traumatic events as can a child’s.

³² The distancing effect is achieved when “the audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place” (Brecht 91). The use of direct audience-address is one way of disrupting stage illusion and generating the distancing effect. In performance, as the performer “observes himself,” his objective is “to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work” (Brecht 92).

For example, in a page-wide panel that describes a man who has been killed by the regime and cut into seven discrete pieces (the head, waist, shoulders, and knees), Marji simply says, “in the end, he was cut to pieces” (52). With the child’s naive, innocent perspective, which is characterized as always lacking and limited, Satrapi deliberately alienates the readers from this shocking and painful scene, and reveals the inadequacy of representing a traumatic event in any realistic way, either verbally or visually. In other words, there is an inconsistency between the frightening actual situation (witnessing the several pieces of the cut body) and its minimalist, simplified visual representation. At this moment of defamiliarization, with this unsophisticated representation of horrible, bloody events, Satrapi calls our attention to the limitation of any visual, verbal representation of traumas and provokes our critical thinking about violence, which has become normalized in Iran.

In addition, the disarticulated, white body of the man, floating on an all-black background, recalls Freud’s uncanny (the return of the repressed). The uncanny can be seen as the rebellious element which, like Lacan’s “the real,” cannot be incorporated into structures of signification and brings disturbance or disruption into the symbolic order. Some might think that Satrapi understates the uncanniness of the uncanny by depicting extraordinary, traumatic events as so ordinary. To the contrary, her simple visual and verbal style can be seen as a tool to more effectively represent the uncanniness of the uncanny. The ordinariness of her style does not mean that bearing witness to traumatic events in everyday life has no significant emotional impact on the protagonist and others. Rather, this ordinariness, plainness, and simplicity reject the very idea that visual extravagance or complexity is necessary to accurately represent the effect of traumas. In a word, through the minimalist, two-tone-simplified graphic schema, the author expresses the impossibility of a visual, verbal representation that can exactly correspond to the realities of overwhelming trauma.

Satrapi does not try to visually elaborate on the traumatic events depicted in the chapter “The Shabbat.” Rushing home from the market, Marji discovered that a missile had exploded on her street. Her house was not damaged, fortunately, but the house of her neighbors, the Baba-Levys, was completely destroyed by the missile. When Marji and her mother, Taji Satrapi, walked together past the Baba-Levys’s house, they could only see the debris of the house. Suddenly, Marji spotted in the debris a bracelet that Neda Baba-Levy, Marji’s fourteen-year old friend, wore. In this way, she learned of her friend’s tragic death from an Iraqi bombing.

In the first panel of this scene, turning back toward the ruins, Marji looks with horror at Neda Baba-Levy’s bracelet sticking out of the rubble. In the next panel, we see Marji’s face with her hand over her mouth and her eyes bubbling with tears. She says in the text box, “The bracelet was still attached to . . . I don’t know what . . .” (142). In the following panel, Marji’s face is seen again with her hands completely covering her eyes, without any text box. And then, we see an entirely black space that occupies the whole panel, and the small text box at the bottom of the panel says, “No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger” (142). Here Satrapi intentionally uses this blacked-out frame to represent overwhelming fright or fear, which is central to traumatic neuroses. It implies that any other details of the scene are unnecessary for and irrelevant to the representation of Marji’s emotional and psychological shock, sadness, and fear. Freud says in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that fright “is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it” (12), and that “we describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (45). The unexpected death of her friend was too traumatic for Marji, so the defensive mechanisms of her ego must have been shattered. Satrapi thus refuses to represent in a visually sophisticated manner what Marji might feel at that frightening moment of witnessing

the destructive impact of war on ordinary people. Instead, by choosing to fill the whole frame with flat, ungraded black, the author expresses her doubt about whether a trauma can ever be accurately represented by exact words or a precise visual image.

Furthermore, Satrapi tries to also show, with her simple style, what Chute calls “the collective ethos of witnessing” (158). One of the most influential scenes happens in the chapter “The Return” when Marjane comes back to Iran from Austria in 1989. She recalls walking through Tehran, where many streets have been renamed for martyrs, saying, “it was very unsettling” (251). Marjane says, “I felt as though I were walking through a cemetery” (250). She is standing in the middle of the street as a black silhouette figure at the top of the frame. Below her, we see piles and piles of skulls buried underneath the street, which are facing all different directions, taking various postures, and tangled among ruined window frames. In this scene, Satrapi also suggests the unspeakability or inaudibility of traumatic events through her simple black and white contrasts, i.e., white skulls in the black earth. In the following frame, to the right of the subterranean skulls, we see a distressed Marjane trying to escape from white skull-faced ghosts. Satrapi narrates, “It was unbearable, I hurried home” (251). Apparently, these victims of the war, whose skeletons were buried, perhaps secretly, below the city, remind us of lost dreams of revolutionary movements that can never disappear or be forgotten without significant effort. Through the uncanny ghosts, the martyred dead, Satrapi shows how these lost dreams can constantly return in the form of the uncanny to haunt the ideological symbolizations of the present, unveiling the gap or hole in the symbolic order upon which they are based. As Freud’s uncanny or Lacan’s real causes “alienating effects” to us, these ghosts of the past that return to haunt Marjane can be seen as the return of the repressed, rebelling against the violent symbolic systems of society. Just as Slavoj Žižek remarks that a certain leftover (of the symbolic order/law) returns “in the form

of the obscene and revengeful figure” (23), Satrapi’s ghosts are like Žižek’s “living dead,” or “return of the dead,” which haunts us in the form of the presence of absence.

Body Politics

In *Persepolis*, Satrapi focuses on the body as much as on the mind. She focuses on her own physical transformations, in addition to her psychological and emotional transformations from a child into a grown-up woman (Worth 146). Like many women writers who try to rediscover the value of embodied experience, Satrapi also deals with embodied experience as a significant way to understand her traumatized self, which contributes to the unsettling of the hierarchical relation between mind and body.

Relating to the embodied experience that Marjane went through, Satrapi emphasizes a constructed connection between the veil and the body, particularly the female body. As Jennifer Worth argues, for Satrapi, “the body is not simply to be celebrated for its beauty or capacity for pleasure . . . , but recognized as an important locale for personal and political articulation” (150). In *Persepolis*, as an insider of Iranian society and culture, Satrapi uses the veil to challenge negative, flat stereotypes about Iranian women associated with the veil, offering readers more realistic pictures of these women. The mass media of the Western world commonly homogenize women in Middle Eastern countries as helpless victims of patriarchal religion and culture, and use images of their veiled faces and bodies to reinforce Western cultural superiority. Western mass media unproblematically and uncritically frame these women as succumbing to oppression and persecution, and focus on what they wear, i.e., the black veil, in order to accentuate how their voices are silenced and their agency has been relentlessly restrained by the misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy that are deeply ingrained in their society. In other words, their real lived experiences are ignored, and their bodies are portrayed merely as lifeless, pathetic objects in Western media coverage. This racially and

sexually biased representation of women from the Middle East poses some serious problems, in that it perpetuates the dehumanization of these women by concealing their body in black robes, and denies the existence of empowered women who are critical of patriarchal social systems and actively struggle to reclaim their human rights.

Thus, as a way of countering mass media's racist reporting on Iran and Iranian women, Satrapi, using her own authentic voice in *Persepolis*, dispels negative stereotypical images about veiled women, who are normally seen as imprisoned behind the bars of the black hijab, and tries to show the individuality, singularity, and particularity of these women by unveiling them, revealing what is underneath their veils. Depicting Iranian women in a positive light, Satrapi implicitly criticizes the Western monolithic view of, and unified approach to, Eastern culture and people by showing it to be limited, racist, and ethnocentric, and exposes the lack of a stable and rigid binary between the East and the West.

First of all, Satrapi intentionally breaks the presumed link between the veil and the subjugation of women, and demonstrates, from an insider's point of view, multi-layered and dynamic features of women in black veils. For example, in the chapter "The Veil," Satrapi depicts unveiled girls in the school playground who creatively use their veils as toys, pretending that they are, for instance, a jump-rope, reins, or a monster mask. In this scene, Satrapi shows how Iranian girls construct the function and meaning of the veil not as an instrument of oppression, but as an instrument of agency. Confronting the stereotype of Iranian women as submissive, defenseless, subjugated, and non-liberated, Satrapi underscores the audacity of these women to claim emancipation from the veil by reappropriating, on their own terms, the veil as a tool to fearlessly resist patriarchal oppression and religious harassment.

In the chapter "The Convocation," Satrapi also succeeds in raising awareness of particularity and individuality of Iranian women, who look similar or even identical to each

other due to the veils, or hijabs, that almost entirely cover their bodies in black from head to toe, by showing the differences in their hairstyles, body shapes, and eye shapes hidden underneath the veil (294). In fact, Western views do not recognize the diversity of Middle Eastern women: they are rarely seen as separate, unique, and complex individuals, but are treated as an undifferentiated black entity. In order to fight against such dehumanizing stereotypes, instead of repeating the simplified and homogenized images of Middle Eastern women found in Western media, Satrapi endows each Iranian woman with an individual and particular identity, and tells us that in reality, each woman, even in a veil, can exhibit her own distinctive style and unique value in unexpectedly creative ways.

In the chapter titled “Kim Wilde,” Marji takes off her hijab and wears Western-style jeans, Nike sneakers, and a denim jacket with a Michael Jackson badge (131). She also goes to parties, chooses a punk hairstyle, listens to pop music, and drinks alcohol, all of which are strictly forbidden by the regime (134). For Marji, Western culture is a symbol of teenage rebellion against the totalitarian Iranian regime and patriarchal religion. Assimilating herself into Western values and style reflects her determination not to perform the traditional role that her patriarchal regime and religion consider to be desirable and natural for women and thus impose on her. Still, Satrapi also displays how Marji can still perform the role of a traditional Iranian woman simply by covering her head with a scarf, while having a Western style otherwise. By portraying Marji as a fun-loving and defiant teenage girl, Satrapi leads readers to see Marji as the subversive and uncanny Other, who refuses to be identified with anything that is culturally and religiously ascribed to her and discovers a way to express herself even amidst the harshest political circumstances. Satrapi reconstructs her past traumatized self in childhood and adolescence as a rebellious uncanny, who disobeys restrictive norms enforced on women by the repressive regime and bravely embraces Western culture as a form of resistance. In addition, the author revises her past self as embracing both

Western and Iranian identities. Marji's wearing of both Western and Iranian styles simultaneously discourages Westerners' desire to fit her identity into a stable category, whether Iranian or European, and reveals the arbitrariness of national, cultural, and gender identity.

Marjane moved physically between Iran and Europe several times, each time undergoing bodily and mental transformations. At the age of fourteen, she escaped Iran's extreme Islamist regime and went to Austria for a better education and freedom. Yet she returned to Iran after having a difficult time in the West. While being exposed to both Western and Iranian culture, but belonging to neither, Marjane felt disconnected from both Western and Iranian political, religious, and sexual values, and developed double consciousness: "I was nothing. I was a Westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity. I didn't even know anymore why I was living" (272). Positioned as an outsider in both the West and Iran, she was torn between two different cultures. Through Marjane's state of being lost and adrift between her Iranian (Persian) heritage, her life under a fundamentalist regime, and her Western education, the author consciously demonstrates that national, cultural, and gender identities are performed, not essential and innate. Satrapi dismantles binary categories, such as West and East, femininity and masculinity, and white and colored, showing them to be historically, politically, culturally, and ideologically determined.

It is true that despite the artificial and constructed nature of national, racial, and gender categories, these categories have functioned to differentiate, discriminate against, oppress, and control the Other. Aware that these essentialist constructions of various identities have been used to provide justifications for the marginalization of the Other, Satrapi illuminates, through Marjane's bodily transformations following her geographical movements, the floating, ambiguous, and indefinable bodies of the uncanny Other, bodies that are likely to change according to the diverse social-cultural situations in which they are found. Split,

dislocated, and fragmentary Iranian subjectivity, instead of the fixed and unitary objectivity of the Western subject, is an effective and positive tool with which Satrapi resists the controlling and manipulating authority of Iran's theocratic regime, while also challenging the Western practice of stereotyping Iranian women's identities as helpless, vulnerable, and objectified victims. The multiple, ambiguous, and shifting identities of Satrapi's characters demonstrate the fictitiousness and constructedness of the one-dimensional hierarchical relationship between the oppressor/subject and the oppressed/object, and at the same time open the possibility for the marginalized to be freed from discrimination and exclusion. Repeatedly emphasizing that the body is a critical site of identity performance, Satrapi, in her graphic memoir, recreates the traumatized self in childhood and adolescence as a dynamic, complex, and open-ended *becoming* at the margins. She makes the liminal space not a place of segregation or exclusion, but a place of celebration for freedom and creativity: "she finally disappears into the liminal subject-in-process, an endless becoming" (Worth 159).

Conclusion

In her autobiographical work, *Persepolis*, through the eyes of the child protagonist Marji (or Marjane), Satrapi tells a story of growing up in the political turbulence of revolutionary Iran. She demonstrates how the graphic form can be an effective, unique platform for representing the unspeakability of overwhelming, shocking childhood traumas and the fragmentation of traumatic memories. By basing the graphic novel on the scenes witnessed and imagined by Marji (and Marjane), Satrapi, who has been forced to remain silent in society because of her race, gender, and class, can finally give voice to the traumas of her childhood and adolescence. That is, the graphic novel, as a genre that transcends verbal-only or visual-only media, offers Satrapi a means to voice her concerns and visualize her own traumatic experiences and those of other Iranians, which might otherwise have been

difficult to express. Through the graphic medium, traumas that are unspeakable, inexpressible, and unrepresentable can become visible, and thus be witnessed by readers. In this way, Satrapi's subjective personal traumas, which cannot be explained without their relation to politics, can thus serve as collective memories.

In addition, Satrapi helps us to see that, although the child's perspective is somewhat limited in its understanding or interpretation of the complex political circumstances of the adult world, it can nonetheless convey more intensely and honestly the brutality of war and oppression. It should also be noted that Satrapi's *Persepolis* subverts various stereotypes about Iran and Iranian people as subservient and exploited, and succeeds in humanizing the Iranian people not only by problematizing the unidimensional view of Iran's history, but by presenting alternative — unofficial and personalized — accounts of living in the country. Iranian people in *Persepolis* cannot be understood through one single dimension. Satrapi exhibits how Iranian people actively participate in street protests against the regime and use dark humor and satire as a subtle way to mock and destabilize its authority, rather than just remaining defenselessly victimized by its oppression and persecution. Retelling traumatic events that happened during the tumultuous times of the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war through two interconnected spheres — the private and the public —, Satrapi empowers not only the traumatized childhood and adolescent self, but also the traumatized people of Iran.

Through body politics, in order to displace the discriminatory boundaries which have been naturalized over time, Satrapi depicts Marji (and Marjane)'s postcolonial female body as the dislocated and indefinable Other, i.e., a subject threatening to, and uncontrollable by, the West. The uncanny Other disrupts the constrained space and signification made available by those in power, and becomes a site for ambivalent and unstable signifiers. The highly

marginalized body can thus be empowered to attain a political purpose and to disillusion the stereotypical body image of the racial and sexual Other.

The Fatherless Daughter's Infinite Search for Father in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

Introduction

While Satrapi's minimalist style of two-tone color in *Persepolis* effectively emphasizes the devastating normalcy and profusion of violence in Iran and produces an alienating effect, the relationship between the lesbian daughter and the gay father in Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* can never be read straightforwardly and unproblematically. Bechdel's father, Bruce, with a history of having multiple sexual encounters with teenage boys, always tried to hide his queer identity in public and conceal his homosexual life from people, which eventually drove him to kill himself. Having witnessed her father's repressed queer lifestyle since she was very young, Bechdel tries not to repeat the self-deception and self-denial that her father experienced, by taking the opposite path that her father took.

In contrast to Bruce, Bechdel courageously comes out of the closet and discovers her own voice by dismantling and reappropriating the symbolic language of a world that her father couldn't escape. In her memoir, documenting her own and her father's constant struggles with issues of transgressive gender identity as well as her complicated relationship with him, Bechdel demonstrates how she has finally found her own voice, i.e., the semiotic language needed to express (homo-)sexual desire and represent her past trauma. She is able to fully embrace her queer identity that her father considered to be shameful and dishonorable. In *Fun Home*, Bechdel has to weave back and forth through her father's closeted life to reveal an uncommon, queer father-daughter relationship. In doing so, she reaches a gradual,

ongoing, and empathetic understanding of her queer father that could not be realized by the young Bechdel in her childhood and adolescence, and successfully transforms her father's suicidal 'Fall' into her hopeful leap of "Faith" and "Trust" in the end. Creating her graphic memoir helps her recollect her traumatic experiences and work through them. In this sense, working on *Fun Home* can certainly be seen as a therapeutic act for Bechdel.

Fun Home is a book about a trauma, which does not follow a straightforward, linear chronological progress. Its story unfolds as a layered, recursive narrative in which events repeat and overlap each other. This repetitive movement illustrates how trauma returns to us. As a way of understanding and accepting her father, Bechdel, the fatherless daughter, recurrently returns to the past. Bechdel's trauma is thus represented as a visual and verbal repetition. Undeniably, in *Fun Home*, repetition and recursivity play a crucial role at every level.

Considering all the factors mentioned above, I will examine how Bechdel's gay father was secretly tormented by inner conflicts because of his closeted homosexuality, and why he failed to reclaim his own voice during his life. I will also explore how Bechdel, tracing back her father's past, reveals an uncommon, multi-layered relationship between a queer father and daughter. This examination can help us find answers for the questions about why and how the fatherless daughter succeeds in coming to terms with her own homosexuality (queer identity) in a different way than does her father, while going on an infinite journey to search for her father.

The Gap between the Father and the Daughter

Bechdel's family house, "the Fun Home" is a nineteenth-century Gothic Revival house "built during the small Pennsylvania town's one brief moment of wealth" (8). Fun Home is the nickname for the funeral home that her father, Bruce, inherited. While working as a high-

school teacher, he assumed another role as the funeral home's director and mortician.

Bechdel's family house, "the Fun Home" reflects Bruce's strong passion for perfecting the house. Bechdel writes in her memoir that her father restored the house to its original condition for eighteen years and performed "dazzling displays of artfulness" (9) by "cultivat[ing] the barren yard," "flower[ing] landscape," "manipulat[ing] flagstones that weighed half a ton and the thinnest, quivering layers of gold leaf" (10).

However, her father's archival projects only confirmed his penchant for false display, as Bechdel recounts that her father "used his skillful artifice not to make things, but to make things appear to be what they were not" (6). As Bechdel narrates, "it's tempting to suggest, in retrospect, that our family was a shame. That our house was not a real home, but the simulacrum of one, a museum" (17). The order of the house actually belied the chaos that her family had experienced: the Fun Home served as a tool to hide her father's duplicity and shame, as well as the messiness of her family interactions. Regarding this, according to Valerie Rohy, Bechdel's family house signaled distrust or "a deception at the core of family life: An exhibit is a mere representation, and a still life no life at all" (345). In short, the family's 1867 Gothic Revival house that her father meticulously restored with great passion over a long period of time, was, in fact, far from a reflection of happiness, pleasure and cheerfulness, but was rather an effective screen for the nervousness, shame, isolation, loneliness, and dissatisfaction that her family felt together at that time.

Miriam Brown Spiers states that Bruce could never succeed in connecting the symbol to the *thing* itself, i.e., the *reality*: he failed to "integrate the symbol into his life," whereas Bechdel is able to "put her theory of lesbianism into practice" (329). That is, Bruce "sacrifice[s] the search of his own (individual and social) truth to conformism and public respectability, and compensate[s] for his emotional and sexual deprivations with his obsession for beauty, with an exasperated form of aestheticism" (Iuliano 301). In other

words, Bruce, who was afraid of crossing social boundaries, could not accept the fact that all of the extra symbols of beauty and order in his house could never embody the reality of his family situation, which drove him into self-duplicity and self-denial.

It seems obvious that his eldest daughter was significantly affected by her observation, early in her childhood, of her gay father's falsehood in hiding himself behind the Fun Home, i.e., his symbolic world. Throughout her autobiographic memoir, Bechdel constantly depicts how thoroughly her life, before and after his death, has been influenced by her father's behavior. From an early age, Bechdel reacted to whatever represented her father.

From the beginning of *Fun Home*, Bechdel highlights a series of contrasts between her father and herself, saying that she was a "Spartan to my Father's Athenian" (15). Yet, these repeated images, which represent Bechdel's disagreements with her father, clearly reveal the significant role that her father played in her development as a woman, a lesbian, and an artist. For example, in a panel that depicts the butch (Bechdel)/nelly (Bruce) dichotomy, Bruce forcefully orders the young Bechdel to wear the "yellow turtleneck now" so as to look feminine and ladylike, while she frowns and protests to her father, "Who cares if the necklines don't match?" (15). Bruce's direct, obsessive intervention in Bechdel's performance of femininity continued into her adolescence. Another panel portrays how Bruce forces the adolescent Bechdel to wear feminine skirts or pearls. When she flatly refuses, he immediately responds, "What're you afraid of? Being beautiful? PUT IT ON, Goddamn it!" (98-99). A series of these incidents suggests that Bruce wanted his daughter to follow his own standards, but Bechdel was never interested in conventional heteronormative gender norms/roles, which Bruce forced her to perform. She instead tried to resist gender norms imposed on her by behaving like a boy and wearing men's clothes. At this moment, Bechdel draws our attention to Bruce's attempt to cover up his own homosexual desires and the femininity within himself, which he could not accept and confess publicly due to the

repressive social and cultural atmosphere of the 1950s, by imposing socially acceptable norms upon his own daughter against her will. Yet, ironically, in doing so, Bruce eventually inspired his daughter to recognize, feel comfortable with, and then gradually embrace her own homosexuality as a public identity. Although Bruce made an effort to entirely suppress homosexuality in his eldest daughter, he actually had a crucial influence on the construction of her queer identity.

In addition, seeing herself as the inverse of her father, Bechdel attended meetings of openly gay groups on campus, went to concerts played by openly gay performers, and bravely visited bookstores and libraries in order to obtain information about homosexual experiences, all activities in which her father could not participate thirty years earlier (107). She saw how her father hid his homosexuality beneath his life as a family man, English teacher, and funeral director, treating his family with contempt and indifference. Regarding her coming out as an emancipation from her parents, Bechdel did not repeat the self-deception and self-denial that her father exhibited to her in many secret ways, which clearly marks the difference between Bechdel and her father.

Trauma and Recursivity/Repetition

In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Caruth defines trauma as “experienced not as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment” (10). For Caruth, trauma possesses the subject with its constant repetitions and returns. Trauma is ever-present, never-forgotten: it always haunts the survivor. Thus the survivor experiences the traumatic event only belatedly in its insistent and intrusive return. Due to its haunting quality, trauma can only be recognized and experienced through its repetitive flashback.

Bechdel's *Fun Home* shows how trauma belatedly returns to us in the way that Caruth explains above. *Fun Home*'s narrative does not have a linear and chronological structure; instead, it has a cyclical structure, mirroring the way that trauma returns to us. For example, the hand-drawn photograph of Roy, who had an affair with her father, returns again and again in the memoir. In addition, Bechdel and her mother's phone conversation, in which Bechdel's mother revealed to her daughter that her father slept with Roy, repeats three times across the memoir. Bechdel also repeatedly returns to the moment when her father was hit by a truck (this scene has to be imagined by Bechdel since she did not personally witness the sudden, tragic accident). This image of the never-forgotten tragic accident even appears on the last page of the book, at the moment the narrative ends, proving its enormous impact on Bechdel's life from adolescence to adulthood. These recursive and repetitive images not only make visible the idea of the *repetition* of trauma itself, but also embody the unassimilated/unclaimed nature of a traumatic event.

Bechdel's impulse to repeat traumas is also expressed through her obsessional drawing. Bechdel has a strong urge to draw whatever she finds drawable or re-drawable, such as private photographs, her own diary entries, numerous maps, newspapers, many different kinds of books, typeset pages from novels and dictionaries, poems, old cartoons, passports, police records, court orders, course catalogs, typed-letters from her father and mother, and hand-written letters between her parents so on, which reflects her obsessive embodiment of the past. Here Bechdel uses "the pose method," which accompanies an arduous process: "she recreate[s] a scene in precise detail, photograph[s] it, and then draw[s] each panel based on the resulting photographs" (Spiers 317).

While drawing images obsessively, Bechdel realizes the unreliability or instability of words as a tool to represent her repressed traumas, which will also be discussed later. Bechdel unveils gaps or ruptures within the symbolic order through her embodied hand-

drawings. She privileges drawing “as a more direct mode of representation” of her traumatic experiences (Lemberg 131). Regarding recursivity or repetition in *Fun Home*, Caruth emphasizes in *Trauma* that graphic narratives can be an effective tool for representing trauma. As Caruth writes, “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (4-5), Bechdel reveals her trauma through the images that surface again and again.

Finding Voice

When Bechdel was ten years old, she became aware of the silences, the ruptures and the sexual secrets in her family’s life, and, affected by the repressive and tense atmosphere of her home, developed obsessive-compulsive disorder. “At some point during an obsessive-compulsive spell,” Bechdel was given a calendar-diary and encouraged by her father to document her everyday life (140). Since her father told her to “just write down what’s happening” (140), at first, her diary was filled with an ordinary series of daily events such as the weather, watching TV, making popcorn, doing homework, and playing new games. A few months later, starting to doubt the actual truth of her memories, she inserted the minutely-lettered phrase “I think” between her comments on her life, so as to show her cynicism toward the words she wrote. The phrase “I Think” reflects Bechdel’s obsessive-compulsive anxiety, and also “a sort of epistemological crisis” that she experienced as a consequence of OCD (141).³³ Discovering the troubling gap between signifier and signified (between word and meaning), she learned that the things she was writing might not be “absolutely, objectively true” (141). Facing the possibility that even her “simple, declarative

³³ Bechdel narrates, in her overarching text, that “the minutely-lettered phrase ‘I think’ begins to crop up between my comment”: “I finished [I think] ‘The Cabin Island Mystery.’ Dad ordered ten reams of paper! [I think] We watched *The Brady Bunch*. I made popcorn. [I think]” (141).

sentences” might be “utter lies at worst” (141), Bechdel continued to obsessively insert the phrase “I think” into her diary entries as her subjective interpretation of the world (142).

Bechdel then “created a shorthand version of ‘I think,’ a curvy circumflex” to save time (142) and drew an “upside-down V” over every page of an entire diary, which made her writing “fairly illegible” (143). Eventually, the curvy circumflex entirely occupied her diary entries and made them become “almost completely obscured” (148). She used the phrase “I think” and the curvy mark as a way to exhibit her doubt or distrust in her ability to represent with symbolic written words the reality that she perceives. In contrast to her father, who was obsessed with a masculinized commitment to objective accuracy, and could never free himself from the power of the symbol due to his lack of understanding of the troubling gap between word and meaning, Bechdel understood the presentational limitations of formalized (artificial) language as a tool to represent her experiences: “My feeble language skills could not bear the weight of such a laden experience” (143). In other words, challenging the power of language as a reliable and truthful mode of representation, she dismantles the idea that symbolic signifiers can tell the fundamental nature of the object or perfectly and accurately mirror her actual life.

After realizing the unreliability or instability of language, i.e., that she could not rely only on written words as a means to express her inner truths, Bechdel attempted to start drawing images. Realizing the unsolvability of the rupture between the word and the subject to which it refers, Bechdel tried to represent, at least partially through images, what remained unspeakable in her family and indescribable in her diary. As Chute points out, “*Fun Home* charts a process of recognizing the unsolvability of the gap between word and image and approaching the aporetic through comics” (189).

In fact, being conscious of the instability and unreliability of language even before she began writing her diary, the young Bechdel, who was a precocious child, was enthralled by

the images in her *Wind in the Willows* coloring book. She was particularly fascinated by the illustrations on the map of “the Wild Wind.” Bechdel recalls, “The best thing about the Wind in the Willows map was its mystical bridging of the symbolic and real, of the label and the thing itself. It was a chart, but also a vivid, almost animated picture” (147). According to Jennifer Lemberg, “unlike the dissonance of writing, these simplified images seem to exist in harmony with their subjects, and Bechdel carries this early understanding of drawing into her adolescence” (134). In other words, her awareness of the instability and unreliability of language led her to choose drawing as a channel to express her normal and abnormal life experiences as well as her homosexual desires and identity. Indeed, drawing seems to have played a critical role in resolving to some extent her confusion and anxiety about the gaps between signifiers and objects.

For instance, a series of images depicts Bechdel sitting alone at her desk and sketching a young male basketball player. In these panels, we can see that she is having difficulty finding a perfect language to represent her sexual desire as she tries to achieve orgasm by rocking in her chair. Suddenly, the new realization that she can express her own sexual fantasy fills her with “an omnipotence that was in itself erotic” (170). The next several panels show Bechdel’s hands drawing the young basketball player and also the lower part (legs) of her body struggling to reach orgasm. As Lemberg explains, the basketball player drawn by Bechdel functions “as a ‘surrogate’ that embodies aspects of her queer identity” (133). As Bechdel says, “In the flat chests and slim hips of my surrogates, I found release from my own increasing burden of flesh” (170, emphasis added). Bechdel’s drawing of the basketball player embodies her sexual desire, which cannot be precisely and successfully represented by or translated into written words. Bechdel also includes images of homosexual activities with her first girlfriend, Joan, in bed, and the two women’s naked bodies. While explicitly drawing her own homosexual activities, Bechdel does not draw the images of her father’s queer desire

or activities with his teenage partner, Roy, in precise detail. This difference reflects Bechdel's feminist perspective and ideas about the lesbian body and identity. Bechdel's interest lies in undoing negative assumptions about lesbian women's bodies, often stigmatized as ill, disabled, diseased, deviant, or contaminated, by demonstrating the rebellious and subversive powers of these uncanny bodies as an interruption, a dissonance, or a rupture of the symbolic order. In a word, Bechdel is interested in revealing the limitations of the masculine, phallogocentric nature of signifiers in expressing sexual reality or representing a lived experience.

Bechdel inserted a curvy circumflex, a hedge of qualifiers, encryption, and stray punctuation, and her drawings into the diary to express her sexual desires and represent her queer identity. These can be seen as connected to feminine writing and language that many feminists, such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, call *écriture féminine* — “women's writing,” which highlights the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text. *Écriture féminine* places experience before language, and underscores the idea that non-linear, cyclical writing can disrupt “the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system” (Cixous 253). Irigaray claims that it is impossible for women to know and represent themselves because they have been trapped in a world organized and controlled by male-centered concepts. She also asserts that masculine logic and language, which are ordered, stable, fixed, rational, and linear, cannot express women's sexual pleasure or passion, called *jouissance*, which is fluid, never-fixed, nonlinear, plural, and disordered (Jones 250). All of the non-linguistic elements that Bechdel draws into her diary all insinuate that she does not want to be oppressed by her father's symbolic world, but desires to create her own world (although repeatedly tracing and searching for her father is still an important task for her). For Bechdel, returning to the past is never just a repetition of repetition, but is a regenerative repetition with differences.

Regarding the fact that Bechdel mentions several male canonical forefather writers to explain the queer relationship with her father in her memoir, some critics might doubt her ability to create her own voice or narrative, since she appears to give her story authority by relying on male authors' narratives. However, in looking more closely at her story, we can notice that she clearly dismantles and reappropriates those texts as a way of legitimizing her own story. For instance, although Bechdel quotes one passage of about ten lines from one of the canonical texts, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, this passage is largely covered up by Bechdel's own text box, with an unusually large amount of white space (226). Without the insertion of Bechdel's text box over Joyce's words, we might not appreciate the meaning that she creates that is specific to her own story. However, thanks to the overlap of her text box with Joyce's passages from *Ulysses*, Bechdel is able to avoid simply citing the male author's text, and instead creatively and strategically retells this canonical text as a way to reconstruct her own narrative. In a word, Joyce is used as a tool with which or a foundation upon which Bechdel can fashion her own story. As Spier argues, "Bechdel is able to productively cite his work as a way of interpreting and legitimizing her own story"; the adaptation of the canonical narrative to her story "gives ownership of the page to Bechdel, not Joyce" (332).

Reconstructing Father

As *Persepolis*'s minimalist style itself serves as a tool to prevent us from emotionally over-sympathizing or over-empathizing with characters, similarly, Bechdel employs rectangular, simple, and minimal-styled frames, all of the same size, to depict the most anxious, nervous, and uneasy moment. When Bruce and Bechdel went out to a movie together, Bruce calmly came out to Bechdel by saying, "When I was little, I really wanted to be a girl" (221). Encouraged by Bruce's confession, Bechdel also tried to come out to her father. Bruce avoided talking about it directly, and remained silent for quite a while, as if to

show Bechdel that he did not understand her world. Although Bechdel succeeded in making him notice that she wanted to talk about their shared homosexuality by confessing her childhood penchant for cross-dressing, she reflects that this moment was “not the sobbing, joyous reunion of Odysseus and Telemachus” (221), but “more like fatherless Stephen and Sonless Bloom” (221), which indicates the insurmountable rupture and emotional dissonance in their relationship.

To portray this nervous moment, Bechdel divides the sequence into 24 panels over two pages and gives each panel the same size and structure. What we can see in these small, rectangular, identical panels is only two people — Bechdel and her father — sitting inside the car. In the panels, they do not make mutual eye contact at all, but expressionlessly stare straight ahead. Through this portrayal, we can clearly witness the tension and uneasiness that the gay father and lesbian daughter feel at this awkward and embarrassing moment. Each of twenty-four panels illustrates the effectively and dramatically repressed feelings and internal emotional conflicts that Bechdel and her father share.

However, Bechdel cannot deny her connection with her father. Denying a gay father means that she cannot accept her queer identity, which might be inherited by her father or influenced by him. Even though Bechdel never fully comprehends who her father is or why her father’s death happened, searching for her father’s presence in her life signifies her hidden strong desire to bridge the gap between herself and her father. The process will never stop: it will be an ongoing journey for her entire life. In the end of her work, Bechdel depicts the moment in which the young Bechdel’s arms extend towards her father and his arms towards her. Emphasizing the intimacy between father and daughter in the last page, she ends the story saying, “but in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt” (232). Her last narration indicates the father’s continuing presence and influence in her life. That is, it is Bechdel who chooses not to completely forget

her father, but to live with her trauma, and with a better understanding of it, in order to move forward.

Conclusion

In her autobiographical graphic novel, *Fun Home*, Bechdel shows the complex and intricate ways in which she and her father construct their queer relationship and identities. By describing herself not only as a remarkably similar daughter who shares some interest in literature with her father, but at the same time as a completely rebellious daughter who resists everything related to her father, Bechdel reveals constant tension between denial and acceptance of her own queer identity and homosexual desire.

Her father was far from a heroic figure for her, but rather was closer to an abject coward, who could never be honest, even to himself. However, she cannot deny her shameful, not-heroic, and never-respectful father, because it would mean denying herself. Thus, to understand her father's odd life as a closeted gay man, to come to terms with his suicidal death, and ultimately, to celebrate her own queer identity, Bechdel needs to remember and narrate all the stories related to her gay father, based on her selective memories, using her own voice and her feminine language. The necessity of searching for her father and delving into his past, in the present, gives her an opportunity to discover her ability to artistically represent her queer identity. By writing a graphic memoir that traces back to her queer father's past, Bechdel seems not only to find her own voice/narrative, but also to reach a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of, and true reconciliation to, her father. This is the very reason we cannot help sympathizing with both the gay, imperfect father, Bruce, and the fatherless daughter, Bechdel.

Chapter 7. The Canon Controversy

The Canon War

As higher education generally expanded in the nineteen twenties, so too did the proliferation of American literary anthologies. College-educated white men of Anglo-Saxon or northern European origins, who accounted for a “tiny, elite portion of the population of the United States,” and who worked as professors, educators, and critics, exerted power over the political, social, and cultural lives of not only male American citizens but also non-white U.S. immigrants as well as all women (Lauter 442). In the name of professionalizing the development of school curriculum, the old elite restructured “literary scholarship and teaching in ways that not only asserted a male-centered culture and values for the college-educated leadership, but also enhanced their own authority and status as well” (Lauter 442). In this situation, people who did not belong to the categories of “male” and “white” were subjected to being excluded from scholarly power structures (Lauter 443). This means that works by non-white and women authors were regarded as marginal and insignificant, and thus were not selected as assigned texts for English courses.

According to Applebee, recent years have seen renewed debate about the canon that supposedly is “appropriate” for the English curriculum (27). Traditionalists argue that the texts assigned in English courses should primarily be those of white, male, European authors, ignoring the substantial contribution of women and of people from non-European cultural traditions (Applebee 27). In the canon wars, the Western traditionalists claim that Western classic works of literature should be centered in the English curriculum, thus fighting against multiculturalists who are in favor of including more works by women and minority writers. Harold Bloom, one of most prominent defenders of the traditional canon, asserts in *The Western Canon* that works are selected as canonical, as Martha Ojeda puts it, “not because

they represent a particular ideology or teach moral values, but because they are aesthetically superior and have borne the test of time” (132). Bloom seems to believe that aesthetic qualities alone determine which works can be categorized as part of the canon, and that the works in the canon serve as models of superiority and excellence to be studied.

Traditionalists too support the centrality and dominance of Western civilization in secondary school and university curricula because they worry that classic Western history, literature, and culture have been severely threatened by the demands for curricular restructuring and revolution from feminists, ethnic minority scholars, and other multiculturalists (Banks 4).

Traditionalists, who consider teaching and learning classic canonical texts in school to be obligatory, stress that “students’ horizons can be broadened by the study of canonical texts, and any cultural difference between readers within a class or between readers and [classic, canonical] texts can be conceived of as a resource for *aesthetic* reading” (Pike 367, emphasis added). They also believe that the past is “necessarily relevant to readers’ own [current] lives and situations” (Pike 367). In what some argue also could be viewed as support of canonical texts, Wolfgang Iser notes that “one of the chief values of literature [is] that by its very indeterminacy, it is able to transcend the restrictions of time and written word and to give to people of all ages and backgrounds the chance to enter other worlds” (45). As a major contributor to reader reception theories, Iser also claims that the indeterminacy of the Western canon not only encourages today’s readers from diverse sociocultural backgrounds to bring different personal experiences and interests, particular assumptions, unique perspectives/beliefs, and idiosyncratic imaginations, but also leads readers to create new meanings and interpretations of the text — interpretations that they may also translate into various aspects of their own lives.

In contrast to traditionalists such as Bloom, multiculturalists do not buy into the concepts of universal and timeless truths and intrinsic quality in literary texts. They regard

the canonization of particular texts by white male authors as the marginalization of the experiences of people of color and of women. Multiculturalists point out that “the identities of women, ethnic minorities, and the working classes are not found to any great degree in many canonical texts, and that the teaching of English literature, on a global scale, can be seen as a legacy of British colonialism” (Maybin 252). They thus maintain that the English classroom should be multicultural, and multiple voices and perspectives should be respected and valued in an open and democratic classroom so that students can learn the knowledges, skills, attitudes, and abilities required to live in a pluralistic democratic society.

At the request of multiculturalists, not only have more diverse and multicultural texts representative of homosexuals and those with physical and mental disabilities as well as those written by women and non-white writers been added to the canon (Purves 3), but multicultural requirements, programs, and policies also have been implemented at many of secondary schools and universities (Bank 4). In response to the demand for reformulation of the canon by anti-traditionalists, a number of English reading lists have been slowly expanded to include more non-traditional literary works. For example, in 1965, according to a survey by the National Association of Scholars, the major authors most frequently assigned to students in English classes included Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Dryden, Pope and T. S. Eliot. However, in 1998, the same survey found that the works of Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and Toni Morrison had taken a prominent place in the curriculum. After that, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, Marjane Satrapi, Linda Sue Park, and others who were not white and male were also frequently discussed in the English classroom. Of course, there is still a long way to go, but these transformations should be regarded as a positive move.

In fact, to decide which literary texts should be designated as the most influential at a particular time period and space/place through selective canonization is never a neutral and transhistorical issue, but rather a unilaterally and politically determined one. As John

Guillory aptly points out in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, it is true that “the process of canonical selection is always also a process of social exclusion, specifically the exclusion of female, black, ethnic, or working-class authors from the literary canon” (6). To put it concretely, the processes of deciding which texts to include and which to exclude from the canon are linked to the representation or nonrepresentation of social groups, typically in relation to often essentialized categories of race, sexuality, gender, and class. Thus, the very processes of canon formation/selection, still most often determined by dominant power relations, can continue to be characterized as often excluding socially, culturally, and politically defined minorities (Guillory 8).

Since the literary texts that we read can have a significant influence on the forming and shaping of our identities and worldviews, which texts should be officially read and taught in the classroom obviously has been a topic of ongoing debates among students and scholars of academic disciplines. For instance, according to a 2016 article in *The Guardian*, undergraduates at Yale University launched a petition calling on the English department to no longer require English majors to spend two semesters studying the so-called “major English poets,” or canonical western male authors, including Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and John Milton, for example (Flood). What is most concerning about such a course requirement is that students are not asked to question why the works of almost exclusively western, middle-class, heterosexual white men are considered canonical, nor why works by non-white, female, LGBT, and disabled/ill writers are excluded from the standard canon.

Presumably, Yale is no exception regarding this issue. Just looking at this example, it thus suffices to say that even though the approved texts that make up the canon of Western literature has evolved over time and have offered us new “agendas” corresponding to current situations and interests, what still dominates today’s canon are inarguably white male writers’

works, which do not reflect the actual social, cultural diversity of particular times or places. Many students majoring in English are thus likely to focus more on the male-authored canon, and do not have enough chances to experience the works of women, people of color, queer, or physically and mentally disabled/ill writers, for example. These cases reveal that, while voices or experiences outside the white mainstream are treated as less important, the values, ideas, and ideologies that are endorsed by the dominant majority — usually white men who are economically and socially privileged — are taken for granted, accepted as timeless and universal, and often taught uncritically in literature classes.

In the same vein, as I have noted throughout this dissertation, women's life-writings have been regarded as less valuable and of low quality, and written iterations of women's experiences have been easily but systematically neglected, merely because they are written by women. However, for decades now, feminists, who work from a variety of theoretical perspectives, have not only worked to recover and valorize works by lost or undervalued women writers, but also have challenged essentialized conceptions of the category "woman" as they simultaneously have worked to incorporate myriad versions of women, as well as women's life-writings into the established canon (Robinson 86-87). In particular, poststructural feminists have problematized the dogmatic or ideological biases of canon formation/selection based on static and reified conceptions of gender, race, or sexuality, while simultaneously arguing that "the canon" itself is nothing but an imaginary list, i.e., it is an incomplete, unstable, and contested list. Poststructural feminists located within the realms of literary studies and criticism especially claim that "the literary curriculum is the site of a political practice" (Guillory 8), and thus academic institutions — higher and lower, public and private — should take initiative in the equal distribution of cultural capital, as well as the disruptions of "old" meanings of gender, sexuality, disability/illness, and race. As these poststructural feminists call for the re-formation (deconstructions and constantly fluid re-

configurings) of the canon, they especially have been and continue to be at the forefront of confronting the male-authored canon and fostering diversity in the canon. The male-dominated canon indeed has been open to works by women writers with double and triple minority status based on their sexuality, disability/illness, and race, for example. The very exclusionary historical construction of the literary canon in fact has been interrupted, disrupted and now is constantly reconfiguring to include and represent all angles and aspects of diversity that exist in the world.

In addition to poststructural feminists, the postmodern turn has played a crucial role in the reevaluating and broadening of the traditional canon endorsed by Western patriarchal culture. For example, the postmodern turn, signaled “emphasis on subjectivity, diversity, and decentralization of power,” and thus resisted the principle of anthologies that uphold “a hierarchical classification of literature as determined by an intellectual elite” (Mujica 208). Moreover, alongside the postmodern dismantlings of the concept of universal truths, of “meta-narratives” (Lyotard 123), the new historicists too not only criticized the exclusive, elitist nature of the conventional history of literature, but also revealed the constructedness of ideals that are generally propagated as essentially universal and timeless by the power elite (Mujica 208). New historicists argue that canonizing only Western male voices, and excluding all others, has helped to normalize or idealize the value systems or beliefs of the ruling classes to which the writers of the canonized texts belong, and in this way, politically construct and reaffirm race and gender hierarchies (Mujica 208). These theorists ask us to see the canon not as a fixed category, but as a fluid list of works that are replaceable and to which any text has the potential to be added.

Teaching Women's Life Writing in the English Classroom

For most of the history of the teaching of English, the major works of which the English curriculum consisted were some plays by Shakespeare, some poems from the Augustans, some classical myths and legends, and some prose and poetry of the Romantic era (Applebee 31). Even though works by women and non-white writers have been slowly added to the anthologized selections in a few decades, the literary world is still prominently populated by white writers — white voices. In a word, the literary canon as it is most often taught, especially in middle and high school classrooms, is still discriminatory when it comes to issues of gender, race, sexuality, ability, and ethnicity, in particular. There are three reasons for the relative scarcity of selections from women and racial and ethnic minority authors in the majority of English curricula in the U.S., for example: “Teachers remain personally unfamiliar with specific titles; Teachers are uncertain about the literary merit and appeal to students; Teachers are worried about possible community reactions” (Applebee 31). To put the last reason a different way, at least a portion of language arts instructors have difficulty introducing multicultural literature in their classes. Sometimes, this may be because they are afraid of challenging dominant social and cultural assumptions within their local communities that might be dominated by examples of heterocentrism, ableism, racism, and sexism. Thus, within particular local and contingent contexts that harbor such assumptions, those who are not white, able-bodied, male, and heterosexual often might be labeled as sick, abnormal, deviant, perverse, or contagious, for example.

Furthermore, having received “traditional” preparation in the reading and teaching of literature, some teachers — either willingly or unthinkingly — might perpetuate this sexist, racist, classist, and heterocentric canon. In these ways, obviously, for centuries the literary works by white, Western, male authors have been legitimized by their central position in

academic institutions, and therefore, works by nonwhite and female authors have been pushed to the margins of academia, and thus of Western culture as a whole (Applebee 32).

Further, as I have noted throughout this dissertation, among literary genres, women's life writing has been more thoroughly devalued as insignificant and unworthy of serious study by literary scholars and historians. From a masculinist perspective, women writers are seen as being concerned only with the private, personal self and trivial, domestic daily life, unlike male writers, whose interests supposedly transcend the individual self and extend to universal selfhood, universal truths, ethics in public life, political issues, and so on. That is, due to gendered reading practices, few female texts achieve canonical status, and are instead relegated to second-rate status, because of the perceived inability of women writers "to rise above 'the personal' and achieve a 'universal' vision" (Smith and Watson, *Life Writing* 355).

However, as I have worked to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, women writers have begun to use their life writing (i.e., taken the initiative in representing themselves and assumed the subject position) to talk back to patriarchal, heteronormative, racist, and ableist discourses. They reveal that the inherent, sovereign subject designated as universal and normative by white, bourgeois, Western male authors is nothing but a fictive concept. In contrast, many women writers have demonstrated that the subject is in fact always split and unstable, always in the endless process of reconfiguring itself through its relation to others. That is, women writers effectively reappropriate the concepts of nonlinear narrative, fragmented textuality, relationality and incoherent identity in order to deconstruct the notions of unified, stable, fixed, solitary, and rational masculine selfhood and linear self-growth, which are emphasized in male life-writing. Women with disabilities or illnesses, ethnic and racial minority women, and lesbians in the West and elsewhere — especially in the last few decades — have found new ways to write their own lives, and have thus demonstrated alternative notions of autobiographical subjectivity in order to deconstruct the authority of the

literary canon made up of Western male authors. Refusing to write like men, and rejecting the masculinist criteria by which writing is deemed worthy of being read and classified as the canon, women writers define their marginalized selves on their own and quite varied terms, apart from the dominant narrative produced by and propagandized in patriarchal, racist, and ableist cultures. In a word, these women writers are unfettered and unaffected by the male evaluation and interpretation of their autobiographical works. They speak in their own words, listen to their own multiple voices, and play by their own rules.

Various types of women's life writings that I examined in this study might be considered by traditionalists to be noncanonical. Duras's *The Lover*, Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*, Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, Bechdel's *Fun Home*, and Satrapi's *Persepolis* might not be seen as worthy of inclusion in the English curriculum by teachers who worry that these texts, which specifically foreground thorny issues of racial conflict, sexuality, class, or disability/illness, might (re)traumatize or upset their students, and that students themselves might feel uncomfortable about reading literary works from "unauthorized" writers in the classroom. Nevertheless, I clearly believe that teachers should help students (as well as themselves) challenge their likely deep-seated belief that studying English means interpreting and discussing only "classic literature" from the Western canon (Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, Orwell, and so on).

However, one of my main interpreted points in this study is that by reading women's life writings that focus on constructed, performed, plural, split, shifting, relational, and multidimensional selves, students might be led to attain an enriched understanding of the manifold and complex ways that gender, racial, and sexual identities are discursively and provisionally constructed and performed. Though such reading, students also have a chance to look at the pain and sufferings of others represented in the texts they read. Through the reading and discussion of such texts, teachers also might encourage students to resist being

silenced by oppressive systems and to become authors of their own histories, their own lives, as individual and political acts.

At the same time, teachers must be vigilant in not assuming their teacher roles and/or the reading of such literature itself as offering “therapeutic” value. Teachers are not professionally prepared to deal with possible psychological manifestations, including even further trauma in students, by requiring autobiographically situated writing focused on personal traumatic events. Thus, although I would hope that in revisiting, reflecting on, and re-envisioning fragmented memories of the past, students might not only lay claim to but also exert agency over their own stories, I cannot overtly endorse versions of literature reading in a secondary or college classroom as a possible therapeutic practice.

Many of the women writers whom I researched exhibit various ways that they engaged in internal struggles and negotiated fragmented and split selves by both examining and embracing traumatic experiences and unconscious desires/anxieties. Their stories possibly could help students acknowledge and embrace parts of themselves that they have rejected or repressed. After reading these autobiographical texts, students might recognize their own multiplicity or plurality in their numerous and conflicting identifications, desires, and anxieties, which are constituents of their subjectivities.

Coda

In this study, as a small but I hope meaningful step toward increasing diversity in the canon, I introduced various types of women's autobiographical writings. The writings that I chose to focus on throughout this dissertation do not necessarily seem to fit the regular practices of writing an autobiography, and thus are called "outlaw genres" of autobiography, such as testimony, autofiction, journal memoir, and graphic memoir. I argued that these non-traditional types of women's life-writings, which attempt to rebelliously disrupt traditional boundaries between forms and genres, reflect the non-reified, always shifting and often transgressive constructions of identities within the category women, which I elucidated throughout this study. I wanted to interrogate in what varied ways women life-writers, as a way of decentralizing the authority of men's traditional autobiographical writing, have experimented with different forms and genres. I also wanted to examine in what ways — by going against the grain of dominant modes of life writing — these particular writers have expanded the long-held singular notion of fully knowable versions of autobiographical writing toward more inclusive definitions and iterations.

In this study, adopting poststructural lenses on versions of feminism, disability/illness, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic studies as my main research methodological and theoretical framings, I interrogated how the women life-writers reconstruct the traumatized adolescent self and girlhood as fluid, provisional, multiple, shifting, and unstable, so as to collapse the fixity, cohesion, linearity, and universality of western, middle-class, male subjectivity. In understanding the multiple, contested voices and identities which emerge in women's life-writing, poststructuralism offered to me not only multi-perspectival angles on my interpretive processes as well as my interpretations, but also enabled me to gesture toward more radical political readings and critiques of women's autobiography/life-writing.

Obviously, poststructuralist critiques of modernist, Enlightenment assumptions about

autobiographical identities, perspectives, and voices have been especially relevant to my analysis of autobiographical identities, voices, and forms, which are constituted discursively, contextually, and intersubjectively. Through poststructuralist practices of reading and writing, I realized, as I read and examined, in detail, the specific women's writings that have constituted the heart of my dissertation's inquiries, that new subjectivities constantly erupted through a combination of slides, plays, and crossings at slippery moments in these particular women's life-writings. The women autobiographers' works that I interrogated enable me to further articulate ways in which there exist no intact, coherent, authentic, and autonomous selves/subjects that predate any autobiographically oriented stories. That is, in their life-writings, these women writers question assumptions as well as effects on individuals' lives of authentic, normalized, and essentialized forms of the modernist self. The writers whose works I have examined here instead have constructed female subjectivity/identity as constantly situated in and shifting through various contexts and as always open to the not-yet-known.

Specifically speaking, I interrogated these women's life-writings in ways that enabled me to put to use the poststructuralist idea that meaning (the signified) is always deferred to other signs, i.e., that the notions or meanings of the signified and the signifier can never be securely fixed, but are always deferred or suspended along a chain of signifiers (Eagleton 111). Rejecting a neat simplicity and arbitrariness in the relationship between signified and signifier, the women writers, with strong interests in the playing of language and discourse, thus show that the subject is discursively constructed through multiple and contradictory discourses/texts rather than as essentially given, as fixed and intact. Demonstrating in their writings that the "subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process" (Butler, "Contingent Foundations" 47), these women writers show how to disrupt the signifying processes through which the subject is constituted.

In relation to this insight, I thus too have argued throughout this dissertation that these particular women life-writers, who are uneasy with any totality, continuity, and cohesion, explore in their writings the incoherence, instability, tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities existing in multiple discursive systems. Expressing doubt about universal notions of objectivity, progress, and reason, these women writers pay attention to the process of how the subject is constructed as multiple, dynamic, and context-sensitive and discursively transformed into a new being, emphasizing the openness and heterogeneity of the text. In short, they are interested not in any static, monolithic structure, which can bind all things together at a certain level into hierarchal binary oppositions, but in the discursive transformation or discursive construction of the subject/identity in the text.

Further, the women life-writers whom I studied assert the relativity of truth, expressing implicitly or explicitly that there are no absolute, universal truths or transcendental signifiers in their works, just as poststructuralists do not believe in the existence of universal truths or “anchoring, unquestionable meaning” across cultures (Eagleton 113). Poststructuralists claim that truth and knowledge cannot be universal, but rather, are constructed according to a specific time, experience, location and dominant discourse(s). They argue that the classical notions of absolute and transcendent truth are, in fact, ideologies created by privileged groups — western, white, heterosexual, middle-class males, to be specific — in order to maintain their power.

According to Terry Eagleton, ideologies always attempt to draw rigid, hierarchal boundaries “between what is acceptable and what is not, between self and non-self, truth and falsity, sense and nonsense, reason and madness, central and marginal, surface and depth” (115). The problem is that ideologies favor one side of any binary opposition over the other, which serves to justify discrimination against and marginalization of the Other. Disclosing “how one term of an antithesis secretly inheres within the other” (Eagleton 115), i.e., how it

is impossible to make a stable hierarchical division between one and the Other, poststructural thinkers try to de-essentialize and destabilize the hierarchy of any dual opposition. Based on the recognition of difference, openness, and heterogeneity, poststructural theorists accept instability or uncertainty in structures as inevitable, and do not deny or belittle the existence of the Other, who is excluded and marginalized from the dominant culture. In poststructural thinking, the existence and experiences of people who are Othered or exoticized can be recognized as being as legitimate and valuable as those of the dominant groups.

Materializing the poststructuralist ideas mentioned above, the women life-writers whom I studied here intentionally trouble binary categories and resist the negative constructions of women in masculinist discourse. Demystifying the master or grand autobiographical narratives through which the modernist male individual is made into the heroic, successful, powerful, autonomous, and universal agent, they emphasize how non-unitary subjects can exist only in the sense of a continuous becoming and come into being in relation to others. They call into question the construction of the individual in the essentializing terms of humanist and modernist theories, and argue that the subordinate, such as homosexual, non-white, or disabled women, are discursively marked as the Other, as lacking and abnormal, by the dominant — white, heterosexual, able-bodied, males.

Thus, throughout my attempts to pull all these arguments together, I have argued that these specific women writers demonstrate the poststructuralist idea that power, scientific observation, and knowledge/truth are nothing more than discursively constructed stories, and that “what is true,” “who holds power,” and “whose knowledge is legitimate” are politically, culturally, and spatially determined discourses. In these women’s life-writings that embody the poststructuralist ethic of disturbing the status quo and remaining open to the Other, the Other is no longer represented as being permanently, comfortably, and inherently positioned/situated at the margins, but rather the irreducible alterity of the Other is fully

acknowledged, accepted, and valorized.

The poststructuralist framework also leads us to see autobiographical memories, as well as our selves, not as fixed and stable, but as malleable, subject to alteration, revision, and reinterpretation over time. The women life-writers whom I studied enacted, in their writings, how memories are never static or frozen in the past, but are constantly shifting and changing each time they are revisited and remembered by the narrators. As their childhood and adolescent identities are deconstructed and refigured according to different contexts and situations by the adult narrators in the present, memories of the past are selected and retold in ways that appear to suit the current needs and desires of the authors. To sum up, these autobiographical writers cobble together fragments of memory, experiences, and identity into new forms of subjectivity, which are always incomplete, fragmented in time and space/place, and realized in-process.

One thing we need to consider is that such autobiographical identities, which can never be permanently fixed by and understood under one unified, unitary meaning of the signifier, i.e., the ever-changing autobiographical self, are far from being nihilistic. Engaging with poststructural feminist theories does not mean to prohibit one from ever fixing one's identity, at least within particular historical moments and contingent contexts. Subjects/subjectivities can be strategically and politically re-woven, or fixed as a certain identity under the specific conditions into which these subjects/subjectivities are provisionally placed. In other words, women writers, as a way of exercising over their experiences the agency that was denied to them as children or young adults, reconstruct/recreate their traumatized selves as agents with a rebellious and uncanny power, who can come to terms with past traumas in their own ways and, by doing so, also subvert, deconstruct, and even emasculate patriarchal social norms and regulations as well as male-centered discourses.

In addition, as the title of my study indicates, I inquired into women's embodied

writing as my other primary interest. Due to the bodily intimacy inherent in any lived trauma, women autobiographers whose main focus is on trauma place great importance on their visceral experiences in their writing. Unlike the tradition of representing the transcendental masculine “I” as a disembodied mind or subjectivity, the women autobiographers whom I examined for this study emphasize the corporeality or materiality of their Other-ized bodies. While male selves have been linked to transcendent objectivity, rationalism, and the Enlightenment, these women writers in their life-writings about trauma connect the living body and lived bodily experiences to female subjectivity or selfhood, not in a reductive, essentialist way, but in a celebratory way.

I have argued that through embodied writing, these women writers have demonstrated how the body can serve not as a mere object, but as a site upon which a person’s life is inscribed, i.e., a site for exploring and generating autobiographical knowledge/memories. These authors have refashioned the female body as fluid, unruly, disruptive, and permeable, with gaps and discontinuities that cannot be put under patriarchal domination and subordination. Namely, what I have interpreted within these embodied writings is that these women life-writers strategically and purposefully create their own discourses about, and shed new light on, the female bodily experiences that have been systematically discriminated against and belittled in a mind-oriented patriarchal culture and society. They have done so, I have argued, as a way of resisting the predominant masculinist assumptions of women’s bodies and bodily experiences, and, ultimately, as ways of recovering a sense of agency over their bodily experiences.

In summary, then:

In Chapter 1, I introduced the characteristics of women’s life-writing compared to those of male autobiographical writing. I discussed why and how women writers, in their life-writings, construct the female self in all kinds of varied ways: as fragile, unstable,

incomplete, disobedient, relational, embodied, and contradictory, thus too revealing the very binary-dependent constructedness of the taken-for-granted male selfhood as universal, rational, constant, only true, purposeful, and stable. In this chapter, I also examined 1) the characteristics of women's coming of age narrative, 2) the process of reinterpreting and reconstructing past experiences through the filter of memory, 3) the relationship between bodily identity (corporeality) and female subjectivity, and 4) the relationship between embodiment writing and trauma in women's life stories.

In Chapter 2, based on the concept of Freud "the uncanny," I elucidated the subversive and transgressive potential of the postcolonial uncanny body, the queer uncanny body, and the disabled/ill uncanny body. I discussed how non-white, homosexual, and/or disabled/ill people, whose physical presences have been treated as alien, abhorrent, deviant, abnormal, and threatening, strategically reappropriate their queer monstrosity as a way to challenge the boundaries of gender, sexuality, and disability. I also interpret that, by doing so, they provide us with new ways of problematizing notions of ontological stability and normality in terms of race, gender, and disability/illness.

In Chapter 3, I examined how Marguerite Duras eroticizes her trauma in *The Lover*, which is based on a semi-autobiographical story about illicit sensual desire and a sexual liaison between a French girl and a wealthy Chinese man, set in French colonial Saigon during the late 1920s. The narrator transforms the act of prostitution, which must have been a dehumanizing, unbearable, and humiliating experience for the young girl, into an empowering one. However painful it may be, Duras's narrator eroticizes the scandalous liaison, rather than treating it as traumatic, thus subverting the traditional view of a sexually victimized woman. In this chapter, I focused on the ways in which the narrator in *The Lover* reconstructs her adolescent self not as a helpless, passive victim of trauma, but as a

rebellious, transgressive, and uncanny agent who voices her own desire and challenges the conventional boundaries of nation, age, gender, and sexuality.

In Chapter 4, I studied how the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú politicizes trauma in *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Menchú became an internationally acclaimed spokeswoman for the rights of marginalized indigenous peoples not only of Latin America, but also of the whole world, after publishing this testimonial biography in 1983. I found that Menchú does not tell her traumatic past to retraumatize herself or to emphasize her status as a helpless, powerless victim of violence and exploitation. But rather, speaking in the public, collective voice of marginalized groups such as Indians and women, Menchú, with clear political awareness, politicizes her personal trauma so as to salvage Mayan culture and end the massacre of her indigenous community. For her, testifying about her trauma to the world is a political act that is necessary for promoting change and social justice in her society.

In Chapter 5, I discussed how Susanna Kaysen reconstructs wounded girlhood by depathologizing trauma in *Girl, Interrupted*, her memoir based on the traumatic experiences of her adolescence in the women's ward of McLean Hospital in the late 1960s. In her memoir, Kaysen highlights the institutionalized girls' powerlessness, vulnerability, and helplessness in the face of the patriarchal institutional authorities. Yet, at the same time, by refashioning a troubled adolescent as the uncanny one, who behaves rebelliously against and keenly criticizes the institutional constraints of psychiatric treatments, Kaysen succeeds in developing transgressive power outside of an oppressive system, power that had been lost in the past. Depending on the bodily intimacy of lived trauma, Kaysen also tries to recover female subjectivity through embodied writing. Through this unique, uncanny power, she explores, articulates, and reconstructs her past self and traumatic breaks in new ways, which might be therapeutic for her trauma. Considering these factors, I discussed in this chapter

how Kaysen's memoir does not confirm women's psychotic disorders as frailty or weakness, but rather illuminates the way in which women with madness can give an uncanny voice to their trauma — pain, depression, distress, and misery — through creative writing.

In Chapter 6, introducing the two graphic memoirs *Fun Home* and *Persepolis*, I examined how these two graphic memoirists, Alison Bechdel and Marjane Satrapi, respectively, visualize their traumas through a visual medium. The relationship between a lesbian daughter, Alison, and her gay father in Bechdel's *Fun Home* is neither straightforward nor unproblematic. Her father, Bruce, was a high school English teacher, funeral home director, and closeted gay man whose life ended in suicide. Bruce, despite having had affairs with both men and teenage boys, always tried to hide his queer identity in public and only revealed his homosexual desire behind closed doors, an inner conflict which, Alison assumes, eventually drove him to kill himself. Witnessing her father's queer lifestyle since she was young, Alison, in search of her true self, tries hard not to repeat the self-deception and self-denial that her father experienced. In this chapter, I studied how Alison, in contrast to Bruce, courageously comes out of the closet and discovers her own narrative/voice by dismantling and reappropriating all the narratives from which her father could not escape. Even though Alison can never fully comprehend who her father is or why or how her father's death happened, searching for her father's presence in her life never stops: it is an ongoing journey that lasts her entire life.

In *Persepolis*, through the eyes of the child protagonist Marji/Marjane, Satrapi simply and impressively depicts the country's political, social, and cultural upheaval and mayhem, as well as her own family's turbulent life under the oppression of a totalitarian regime and the horror of war. Satrapi represents the unspeakability, unrepresentability, invisibility, and inaudibility of unforgettable traumas through the multifaceted visualizations of Marji's/Marjane's witnessing of the private and public lives of Iranians during the revolution

and in wartime. Through the graphic medium, traumas that are unspeakable, inexpressible, and unrepresentable become visible, and thus can be witnessed by readers. In this way, Marji's/Marjane's subjective personal traumas become a possible representation of aspects of collective memories. Satrapi retells traumatic events that happened during the tumultuous times of the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war through two interconnected spheres — the private and the public — in a way that empowers not only the traumatized childhood and adolescent self, but also the traumatized people of Iran. Considering these points, I studied how Satrapi gives voices and faces to her traumatized self and to other Iranians who have been silenced and subsumed into the dominant Western narrative, and ultimately joins in writing a new chapter of contemporary Iranian history from the perspective of both an insider and an outsider.

In Chapter 7, I examined the debate between traditionalists and multiculturalists about the canon of texts that supposedly is appropriate for the English curriculum, from middle and high school as well as through higher education. In the canon wars, the Western traditionalists, who endorse the concepts of universal and timeless truths and intrinsic quality in literary texts, claim that only works by white, male, European authors should be taught in English classroom. On the other hand, multiculturalists, who try to reevaluate and broaden the sexist, racist, classist, and heterocentric canon, argue that multiple voices and perspectives should be respected and valued in an open and democratic classroom. Siding with the multiculturalists, I suggested that students should have the chance to read women's life-writings that focus on plural, split, shifting, and multidimensional selves, so as to attain an enriched understanding of the manifold and complex ways that gender, racial, and sexual identities are discursively and provisionally constructed and performed according to present needs/desires and circumstances. I also discussed some possible pedagogical implications —

as well as warnings about — the reading women’s life-writings about trauma in the classroom.

I have interpreted the life-writing texts that I have examined as demonstrating how these particular women writers are not simply living with the scars of trauma on their minds, but are also slowly and surely constructing themselves as uncanny subjects, without forgetting the past that inhabits these constructions. Demystifying the unified life story and dismantling the rational, coherent self, the “I” of their narratives — these poststructurally inflected moves have enabled these women writers to re-weave new, ever-changing selves into beings who have lived through traumatic events. I argue that that anyone who witnesses, through reading, the painfully beautiful and brutally honest scenes of life in their life writings, rather than feeling overwhelmed by their artistic and literary superiority, may be moved to consider her own life in perhaps *new* ways. We are all equally vulnerable to trauma, but these women writers’ versions of autobiographical writing demonstrate subjects under constant construction, thus offering fresh considerations of autobiographical writing, per se, as well as trauma writing that enables the performing of the new.

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