HISTORY, MEMORY, TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH AND IRISH FICTION

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List of Abbreviations

Pat Barker

R	*Regeneration*
ED	*The Eye in the Door*
GR	*The Ghost Road*
AW	*Another World*
DV	*Double Vision*

Sebastian Barry

WEM	*The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*
LLW	*A Long Long Way*
SS	*The Secret Scripture*
OCS	*On Canaan's Side*

Kazuo Ishiguro

PVH	*A Pale View of Hills*
WWWO	*When We Were Orphans*

John Banville

TNL	*The Newton Letter*
E	*Eclipse*
S	*Shroud*
AL	*Ancient Light*

Why Barker, Barry, Ishiguro and Banville?

The present study has its origins in a conference on interiority for which I wrote my first text about Kazuo Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. The discussion that followed made me return to this novel and the more I read it, the more I felt that I experienced something disturbing, which I now know to be the "witnessing of trauma". Facing Ishiguro's novel, I had an uncanny feeling of being placed in the position of a witness, even a therapist, whose task is to bear witness to the trauma of the protagonist narrator. I wrote those intuitions up into an article about the trauma of the text (Piątek 2011a) only to discover later the confirmation of my ideas in the work of Shoshana Felman, Irene Kacandes and Jill Bennett, who all discuss art mimicking trauma and the reader's role as a witness.

With time the article on an early novel by Kazuo Ishiguro evolved into this book, which examines various forms in which contemporary British and Irish writers engage with the past. Starting from a hypothesis that our culture is marked by an uneasiness about the past, I demonstrate how the literary explorations of the past lead to the examination of wounds, whether personal or national. For this purpose I distinguish between literature that engages with public history, which takes a broad perspective, and literature that engages with private history by applying a modernist microscopic vision. In the literary material selected for this study, either the writer adopts a broad perspective, he or she investigates public history and collective trauma, or he or she is preoccupied with an individual in crisis in the context of private history and therefore explores individual memory and its role in reinte-

grating the fragile sense of self. In the former category the writers focus on public history, in the latter on individual memory. Nevertheless, as I attempt to show, both types of texts couple the examination of memory, be it individual or collective, with various stylistic devices used to represent trauma. As I have discovered in the course of my research, contemporary fiction moves beyond mere representation of trauma and engages in a form of a therapeutic project in which the reader plays an important part as co-witness and enabler of the process of working through trauma.

The distinction between public history and individual memory is reflected in the analytical part of this book, which is divided into two sections, with each section containing two chapters. Thus under the heading of "History and Trauma", I discuss selected works of Pat Barker and Sebastian Barry, two contemporary writers interested in the effects of violent historical events on nations and individuals. Under the heading of "Memory and Trauma", I discuss selected works of Kazuo Ishiguro and John Banville in order to demonstrate their way of dealing with the suffering of individuals; their search for consolation and redemption in memory. The analytical part is, however, preceded by a theoretical chapter in which I place the notion of trauma in a broader historical and theoretical context. As I argue, our culture's preoccupation with trauma is linked to its obsession with memory, which, in turn, stems from the debate about the relationship between history and fiction.

Since I have come across an astonishingly large number of novels touching upon the notion of trauma, I had to be selective and for the sake of clarity, I would like to explain what this study is not. It is not a classification or an inventory of different types of traumatic events as represented in fiction, for it was not my ambition to discuss novels dealing with a wide range of traumatic experiences. Therefore, the reader may have an impression that something has been left out. Although, for example, child abuse appears in Pat Barker's *The Regeneration Trilogy*, and is definitely an issue in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*, it was not my objective to find more examples[1] and discuss them side by side.

What is more, this book is not an attempt at comparing and contrasting British and Irish fiction. I have decided to write about the

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[1] Other examples of British and Irish novels dealing with the trauma brought on by child abuse may be: Sebastian Faulks's *Charlotte Gray* (1999), Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* (2007), Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (2007), and Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013).

novels of Sebastian Barry and John Banville because they engage with nation, history and memory in such diametrically different ways that they provide a very broad spectrum for analysis. However, this is not a book about Irishness or Britishness of fiction, nor a comparison between the two; in fact, Barker and Barry, just like Ishiguro and Banville, have more in common than Barker and Ishiguro or Barry and Banville. Thus although in each of the two sections I discuss the work of one British and one Irish writer, which results in a symmetrical structure, I am not going to pretend to have achieved anything else but very superficial symmetry. In fact, as I state in chapter one, it is clear that today such theories as trauma and memory studies penetrate across borders, are widely available and assimilated regardless of nationality.

I have also made a conscious decision not to discuss Holocaust fiction, although as I write in chapter one, extermination of the Jews was an unprecedented historical event and a foundational trauma for the Jewish nation. What is more, it is an experience which until this day affects new generations, the descendants of survivors still suffer from transgenerational trauma. As I explain in some detail in chapter one, trauma theory stems from the historical and psychological explorations of the Holocaust. We are all familiar with the debate about whether it is ethical to write fiction about the Holocaust.[2] I have written about this elsewhere[3] and would find it morally dubious to include "Holocaust Fiction" as just one of many chapters in this book. The theme appears in John Banville's *Shroud*, but is not the main focus of my analysis. Another possible route which I have tried to avoid, is to evaluate or compare the traumatic experiences. My aim is to discuss the literary means of expression that writers use to convey trauma in their novels, not to compare the cases or to find the worst or best *sic* victim. Finally, although some of the novels analysed here have been translated into the Polish language and examined by literary critics in Poland and abroad, I believe that by discussing them jointly and by focusing on the interplay between history, memory and trauma, I have managed to offer a new, original interpretation of those texts.

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[2] See Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and Literary Imagination*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1975; John E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

[3] See Beata Piątek, "Imagining the Unimaginable: The Holocaust in Fiction," in *Between Two Cultures: Poland and Britain.* Peter Leese (ed). Poznań: The British Council in cooperation with Motivex, 2004, 131–41.

Chapter 1

Why History, Memory and Trauma?

"Only by acceptance
of the past will you alter its meaning"
T.S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*

Three topics occupy a prominent position in contemporary cultural and literary studies in the English-speaking world. They are interconnected to such an extent that they may be treated as offshoots of one another. They are history, memory and trauma. The debate about history focuses on the possibility of establishing the objective historical truth in the form of knowledge about the past as it really was.[1] As early as in the 1960s in Britain, E.P. Thompson promoted the notion of "history from below" which gives a voice to the voiceless. In his, by now canonical work of social history, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), E.P. Thompson moved beyond the facts and figures contained in the archives and examined the aims and beliefs of those who had hitherto been considered the underdog of history. More recently the postmodern critique of "the totalizing aspects of historical discourse" (Klein 2000: 128) has created space for a more human-centred and subjective history, history as a lived experience which is informed by memory, where the historians become less interested in the reliability of memory, than in memory work itself (Ricoeur 2004). The debate about and obsession with memory is, to a large extent, an outcome of

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[1] It was the German historian, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), who set the standards for modern historical writing. He used a wide variety of primary sources to write narrative history, in which he tried to show the past as it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) without any contaminating influences of the present. Contemporary theorists and writers take his assumption about the possibility of such history to task.

the debate about the nature of history and the phenomenological approach to historiography, which consists of capturing the way in which people perceive, remember, forget and reinterpret their own pasts. In the words of one historian: "'memory' is the historical signature of our generation" (Winter 2000: 13). In British fiction a spectacular wave of the return to the past was observed in the 1990s (Bradbury 1993: 404) and the phenomenon shows no signs of waning in 2014. In addition, the historiographic debates in the English-speaking world since the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* in 1973, have been concerned with the formal affinities between history and fiction, both of which thrive on memory. Out of the preoccupation with history and memory arises the topic of trauma, which originally emerged in the United States in the wake of the Vietnam War in the 1980s (Mc Nally 2005, Kaplan 2005), but has since been the object of study by historians, anthropologists, psychiatrists, literary, film and cultural critics. Trauma, and its officially recognized psychiatric symptoms known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, have become part of normal parlance and a regular topic of newspaper articles and media reports since the September 11th attacks in the USA and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, the current 100th anniversary commemorations of the outbreak of the Great War are certain to occasion even more discussion about how trauma is represented and interpreted.

One general hypothesis of the present study is that these three obsessions of contemporary culture result from our ambivalent attitude to the past. Randal Stevenson identifies the growing interest in what he calls "the mechanics of memory ... [and] the powers of trauma within personal identity", with a widespread symptom of "uneasiness about the past" in Britain (2010: 136). Andreas Huyssen as early as 1995 devoted a book-length study to the problem of our culture's relationship with memory which, as he observes, is privileged over history in literary theory as a better link with the surrounding culture. He claims that "the current obsession with memory" is not merely a sign of the times, but a symptom of a crisis of "that structure of temporality that marked the age of modernity with its celebration of the new as utopian, as radically other" (Huyssen 1995: 7). Huyssen points out a paradox in the cult of and preoccupation with memory in a culture which, owing to its frenetic pace, has become amnesiac. He explains contemporary culture's preoccupation with memory as an attempt to offset the technological processes which accelerate our pace of living and transform the world around us. In his words:

> [memory] represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive [...] to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload (Huyssen 1995: 8).

I would like to focus on two concepts in the above extract, that is, the archive and information overload. It is worth noting that most of the technological innovations which seem to facilitate the production of knowledge about the past, have only made our engagement with the past more problematic. Photography, film, and especially the electronic media have supplied the modern archive with more data, evidence and testimony than anyone can process; in consequence we have been confronted with an information overload which does not necessarily bring us any closer to establishing a reliable vision of the past. If anything, the wealth of material only proves, that any attempt at investigating the history of a nation, a conflict, or a war must lead to many different perspectives and conclusions. In other words, it is not accidental that history became a notoriously fuzzy discipline in the twentieth century and that the guarantee of objectivity which seemed to be inscribed in its nature has come under scrutiny. Pierre Nora, whose work is presented later in this chapter, sees our obsession with the archive as a mark of a crisis of *les milieux de mémoire*; as he observes, "the less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs" (1989: 13).

My objective in this book is to examine contemporary fiction as, to use Nora's term, "outward sign" of memory; I am particularly interested in the way in which trauma is represented and interpreted in British and Irish novels against the background of history and memory. I inquire into how public history and collective traumas produce fiction which functions as a collective memory of a nation, a generation, a minority; and how private history and personal trauma are portrayed and communicated in the novel. In both cases, I use critical tools derived from trauma theory to demonstrate how the text places the reader in the position of a witness of trauma, and how the narrative offers a form of redemption or working through for the victims. Since, as I have discovered, in all the novels discussed in this book, history and memory enjoy a fairly ambivalent status, i.e. their reliability and objectivity is called into question, the first chapter contains an overview of the critical debates about the relationship between history and fiction, memory as a residue of the self, cultural memory and traumatic memory as

well as the history of the notion of trauma, with emphasis on the work of Freud and the contemporary trauma theory.

History versus Fiction

If we accept the role of literature as a *lieu de mémoire* as Nora would have it (1989), or an instrument of cultural memory which guides whole nations or communities in what to remember and how to remember, then the relationship between history and literature becomes of paramount importance. Although it is widely accepted that it was Hayden White, who was the first theoretician to argue in *Metahistory*, that the historian and the fiction writer use very similar tools in their work and that they both produce narratives arranged into plot structures, in fact, the debate about the similarities and differences between history and fiction is much older. Beverly Southgate, who approaches the question from the perspective of an academic historian, demonstrates in his book *History Meets Fiction* (2009), how from ancient times historians have defined their art in strict opposition to that of poets or dramatists on the basis of a distinction drawn by Aristotle for whom history describes the past as it really was, while poetry describes the past as it may have been. According to Aristotle, the historian works with objective facts and therefore arrives at the truth, whereas the poet resorts to his imagination and arrives at a plausible version of past events, or the universals (*Poetics*, Book 9), therefore for Aristotle poetry is the more philosophical of the two.

Nevertheless, the boundary separating history and literature has been observed to be eroding for centuries. Southgate, on the one hand, quotes examples of early historians, who, by modern standards, were really writing fiction, like Goeffrey of Monmouth, who describes in minute detail a battle between King Arthur and Lucius Tiberius, which never took place (2009: 28). On the other hand, he also identifies a minority Romantic tradition of writers and philosophers, beginning with Rousseau, who were questioning the factual and objective nature of historical writing. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau claims that he sees little difference between "romances and your histories" as "it is inevitable that the facts described in history should not give an exact picture of what really happened; for they are transformed in the brain of the historian, they are moulded by his

interests and coloured by his prejudices" (quoted in Southgate 2009: 29) – the correspondence between Rousseau's ideas and those of Hayden White, writing over two centuries later, is striking. Lord Bolingbroke in his *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (1752) is equally skeptical about the truth claims of history: "the very best is nothing better than a probable tale, artfully contrived, and plausibly told, wherein truth and falsehood are indistinguishably blended together" (quoted in Southgate 2009: 29). Similar sentiments can be found in Thomas Carlyle's essays *Sartor Resartus* (1836), where he expresses very modern doubts about the validity of facts, the role of imagination in history writing and "the labyrinth and chaos" of "Human History" (quoted in Southgate 2009: 30). Southgate wants to see postmodernism as a contemporary extension of Romanticism, in its continuing tradition of skeptical questioning of any absolute distinction between history and fiction. At the same time, he admits that postmodern theorists, like Hayden White, are able to provide more sophisticated arguments derived from linguistics and the study of narrative. As White argues, anyone who writes a narrative is fictionalising; both novelists and historians produce stories by selecting and ordering data, which they then emplot in one of the possible frameworks provided by the given culture (1973).

Southgate goes on to demonstrate that the flow of information and inspiration between modern historiography and theory of literature (cf. the influence of Hayden White on literary theory), has resulted in the transfer of the historiographic debate to the world of fiction. Although Southgate presents a rather superficial and highly selective analysis of several novels of Penelope Lively, Graham Swift and Julian Barnes, nevertheless, he makes a very valid point about the role of those novels in popularizing current academic discussions about the nature of history, its power to establish objective knowledge about the past, contingency, chronology, memory and identity.

Similar conclusions can be found in the work of Bożena Kucała. In an article published in a volume which originated from a seminar with Hayden White in 2012, Kucała presents a concise but informative account of the relationship between history and fiction with main emphasis on the postmodern historical novel, which she discusses in the light of White's theoretical approach. Kucała's article is an excellent complement to Southgate's book, and his historical perspective. While Southgate, a professional historian, concentrates on how the 18th and 19th-century authors anticipate White's position when they write about the eroded border between fiction and history, Kucała's field is

literature and especially historiographic metafiction in the 20th and 21st centuries. She observes that while historical writing in the 20th century remained predominantly faithful to the form of realist narrative, the novel sustained an extremely complex formal evolution over the same period of time (Kucała 2012). As far as the thematic preoccupation is concerned, history has always been an important subject in the novel, only Modernists deliberately rejected public history as a theme in their novels, though they certainly made up for that with their microscopic vision of the private history through the focus on an individual mind, experiments with chronology and explorations of memory. Postmodernists, in turn, seem to have colonized the territory of history producing countless pastiches of the period novels, rewriting the classics, offering alternative versions of historical events and constantly probing, questioning, and investigating (Anderson 2011). Drawing on White, Kucała registers a paradox in the expectations of the readers reared on this postmodern approach to history:

> The historical narrative may appear truthful if it challenges itself, if it exposes the fictionality of its form [...] [t]herefore, the ontologically varied postmodern novel may, from a historian's point of view, be a more adequate representation of the past than the traditional 19th-century historical novel (2012: 48).

Southgate's historical perspective presented above confirms this hypothesis entirely.

It may be worth adding, however, that Kucała's analysis does not entirely do justice to contemporary historical writing. Although she follows White, who in the same volume refers to the "fetishism of facts and nothing but the facts" in conventional historiography (2012: 16), she does not fully acknowledge the changes which have taken place in historical writing in the past thirty years. Some of the developments in historical writing in the second half of the twentieth century were encouraged by White's own theoretical writings and concern both what the historians perceive to be a suitable object of inquiry, and the form in which they present the results of this inquiry.

An example of a historian who departs from the 19th-century model of a realist narrative grounded in the archive is Raphael Samuel, the founder in 1976 of the journal *History Workshop*, who incorporated into history the everyday lives of women, the poor, ethnic minorities and other previously neglected groups. In his three-volume *Theatres of Memory* (1994), a collection of essays, Samuel claims that memory is not

merely a storage system, but a dynamic, shaping force closely related to historical thought. What is more, he also claims that memory is historically conditioned, i.e. it is not passed from generation to generation in an unaltered form, but it is subject to modifications resulting from historical circumstances. Like E.P. Thompson before him, Samuel endorses history from below and a democratic version of the national past by encouraging grass-roots movements such as living history groups and reenactment societies. Another example of this new historiography may be Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), a fusion of historical and sociological study of class and sexuality in Britain after the war, derived from Steedman's own biography. In a less radical way, but in a similar vein, Simon Schama opens his *Landscape and Memory* (1996) with his own family's history. Each of those highly influential books departs from the transparent, objective account of verifiable facts, each author is very much present in the text, which, in turn, like postmodern fiction, lays bare its own textuality. Not accidentally, all three authors acknowledge a symbiotic relationship between history and memory and rely on personal memories as well as on the archives as their source without treating the former as inferior to the latter. Their attitude to historical writing clearly is an endorsement of Frank Ankersmit's view, who says that, "How we *feel* about the past is no less important than what we *know* about it – and probably even more so" (2005: 10, emphasis in the original). In my discussion of the way in which history appears in contemporary fiction, I would like to acknowledge the influence of those historians who approach history writing with similar emotional engagement as fiction writers, and who, which is even more important here, do not try to conceal their emotions.

Literary critics have been aware of this process of mutual influence between historical and fiction writing for some time now. Steven Connor proposes to abandon the argument about truth telling capacities of fiction and to look, instead, at "what the novel *does*, intellectually, affectively, imaginatively, politically, with and in history" (1996: 132, original emphasis). Similar concerns lie at the centre of David Malcolm's (2000) study of British fiction between 1978–1992; rather than verify the truth claims of the novels of Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro, Graham Swift and Timothy Mo, which he analyses, Malcolm chooses to focus on the intersection between public and private history and the writers' awareness of the historiographic debates about textuality, reliability and objectivity of the historical accounts. I would like to follow this path and examine the ways in which contemporary writers engage in historiographic

reflection from a literary perspective. Some, like for example Pat Barker and Sebastian Barry, try to undermine the accepted, mainstream versions of national history; they interrogate the content of collective and cultural memory, they use fiction as an instrument of historical revisionism. However, writers question and subvert the official version of the past not only by presenting historical events from the point of view of minorities and the marginalized, but also by presenting the very processes of history writing as problematic and ambivalent. That latter claim applies to the work of Kazuo Ishiguro and John Banville among others.

Although not all of the novels examined in this book fall into the category created by the renowned Canadian theorist of literature, Linda Hutcheon, i.e. not all of them are examples of historiographic metafiction (1988), I refer to her work because she writes in detail about postmodern art and theory which challenge the separation of the literary and the historical (1991 [1988]: 105). According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is "intensely self-reflexive and yet laying claim to historical events and personages" (1991 [1988]: 5); it foregrounds the "self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (1991 [1988]: 5). In the created world which is "both fictive and yet historical" (Hutcheon 1991 [1988]: 142), historical metafiction problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge by inscribing subjectivity into history. Drawing on the current historiographic debates (cf. Pomorski 1983/1984), historiographic metafiction dwells on the distinction between "events" and "facts". As Pomorski explains, modern historians recognise the event as an ontological category, i.e. events are "understood in the context of human actions"(1983/1984: 31). Whereas, the fact is the event's epistemological equivalent, i.e. facts "assume prior cognitive processes" (1983/1984: 31).[2] As Hutcheon observes, events have no meaning in themselves; they become facts through the decision, or choice of a historian (1991 [1988]: 122), and therefore, facts of history are necessarily discursive (1991 [1988]: 150). That assertion leads in historical metafiction to the reflection on "how language hooks onto reality" (Hutcheon 1991 [1988]: 150). What is more, the discrepancy between facts and events lies at the heart of the distinction between history, which deals with facts, and memory, which constitutes the ontological being of an individual in the world.[3]

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[2] Translated from the Polish original by the author.

[3] I would like to thank Dr hab. Anna Branach-Kallas from the Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń for drawing my attention to the distinction between events and facts.

Memory Studies

For the ancient Greeks, memory was inherently related to all forms of knowledge. After all, the goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, was the mother of the muses, and therefore the origin of all arts and sciences including Clio's history. However, our modern ideas of memory owe more to the Romantics than to ancient Greeks. The Romantics made the art of memory introspective, focused on the individual self and divorced from science. By aligning memory with intuition, they placed memory in the opposite camp to history, an opposition which was taken for granted throughout most of the twentieth century (Samuel 1996).[4]

I will outline only briefly the history of ideas of memory from its position as an art in ancient Greece to the modern ideas about the role of memory in shaping the sense of self, and in consequence, human consciousness and identity.[5] In the ancient world remembering and rea-

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[4] One of the outcrops of the memory boom of the final decades of the previous century is a proliferation of anthologies collecting primary sources and critical comments which offer useful syntheses of humanity's intellectual engagement with memory. In 2007 Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead edited such an anthology for the Edinburgh University Press with a wide selection of texts arranged chronologically from Plato through Henri Bergson to Paul Gilroy and Edward Said. The extracts are grouped thematically and prefaced with highly informative essays on such topics as "Classical and Early Modern Ideas of Memory" or "Gender", "Race/Nation" and "Diaspora". In 2009 Vintage published a similar volume, edited by Harriet Harvey Wood and A.S. Byatt, which differs from the EUP publication in that it also contains a number of specially commissioned essays on various aspects of memory from contemporary authors such as the poet Craig Raine on the one hand, and the neurobiologist Steven Rose, on the other. The editors have also decided to include extracts from literary texts such as the work of Shakespeare or Proust side by side with Plato and Aristotle.

[5] I do not discuss the neurological aspects of memory here, although the "memory boom" is also discernible in the abundance of scientific publications in this field. The May 2014 issue of *The New York Review of Books*, for example, contains an article by Jerome Groopman reviewing five new books: Sue Meck with Daniel de Visé, *I Forgot to Remeber: A Memoir of Amnesia*; Larry R. Squire and Eric R. Kandel, *Memory: From Mind to Molecules*; Stanley B. Prusiner, MD, *Madness and Memory: The Discovery of Prions – A New Biological Principle of Disease*; Margaret Lock, *The Alzheimer Conundrum: Entanglements of Dementia and Aging*; David Stuart MacLean, *The Answer to the Riddle is Me: A Memoir of Amnesia*. As the titles demonstrate and Groopman confirms, the scientists' primary concern is with the medical aspects of the failure of memory brought on by accidents or the prolonged life span in the affluent societies.

soning were considered to be interconnected activities and therefore memory was an art held in high esteem. Memory was trained and exercised, knowing a text was synonymous with being able to recite it from memory. One of Plato's *Dialogues*, *Phaedrus* contains an anecdote about the origins of writing, which, according to Socrates, was invented by the god Theuth in Egypt. When Theuth presented his invention to the king of Egypt as a "recipe for memory" which will make the people of Egypt wiser, the king accused him of misunderstanding his own invention: "If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks" (Plato 2007: 27). This idea that memory is threatened by writing, including historical writing, will be taken up in the twentieth century by Pierre Nora and Paul Ricoeur in their discussions of the relationship between memory and history.

Aristotle distinguishes between conscious memory, that is active recollection, which he calls ἀνάμνησις (Lat. *anamnesis*), and simple evocation, an unbidden memory which he terms μνήμη (Lat. *mneme*). His *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* contains the metaphor that will be later used by Freud among others, of memory working like a seal which imprints an image on the soul. Aristotle also recognizes the affinity between memory and imagination and provides the first description of a false memory in Antipheron of Oreus and "other mad people" who "used to speak of their images as things that had occurred and as if they were remembering them"; they contemplated what was "not a copy as if it were" (Aristotle 2007: 32).

For the Romans, memory was an active process consisting of collection and recollection, i.e. storing and retrieval; its mastery constituted the basis of knowledge, which was reflected in the ability of the learned to recite long fragments of texts from memory. In *De Oratore*; Cicero describes mnemonic techniques for learning how to remember complex arguments and cases, these techniques were later perfected in the medieval memory training in the monastic orders. *Memoria* was a medieval art of reading which consisted of "digesting" the text till one became its author; as Jennifer Richards observes it was "an art and a way of being in the world, a way of organising the 'self' and of managing the relationship between 'self' and others" (Richards in Rossington and Whitehead 2007: 23).

The first authors to reflect about the role of memory in the construction of the sense of self were John Locke and David Hume. Locke

identifies the importance of memory for anchoring a sense of individual continuity over time. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1700), he describes mental self-consciousness as the mind's awareness of its own ability to revive the ideas and perceptions it had stored. William Wordsworth uses Locke's ideas in *The Prelude*, to develop his concept of "spots of time", i.e. moments of experience in which something ordinary becomes profoundly significant. Remembering the experience restores the mind; thus in Wordsworth, memory is endowed with a "renovating virtue" (*The Prelude*, Book Twelfth, ll 208–225).

Hume's contribution to the theory of memory lies in his consistent pairing of memory with imagination; in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739–40) he allows for the possibility that an idea of memory may fade into an idea of imagination, or the other way round: an idea of imagination may acquire such a force as to pass for an idea of memory. He also recognizes that human selves are far from coherent, and imagination with the help of memory gives us an impression of there being a unity in our different perceptions over time, thus we create an idea of a unified selfhood, which for Hume is only an illusion. His ideas about memory are extremely modern in that he recognizes the difficulty of "knowing" the past and its impact upon the present. He also acknowledges the role of feeling in recalling an event (Hume 2007: 80–83).

All of these aspects of memory and its relationship with imagination are currently discussed within memory studies and explored in fiction. The novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, John Banville, Sebastian Barry are merely examples of first-person narratives in which individuals try to come to terms with their lives by examining the past. The motifs of unreliability of memory, self-deception and merging between imagination and memory are quite commonly used by writers to delve into the problems of identity and epistemology: Who am I? How have I arrived at this stage in life? Have I done the right thing? How can I know myself and anyone else?

Rossington and Whitehead recognize that contemporary critical theory frequently resorts to the ideas of memory which can be found in the work of the late modern thinkers (2007: 92). Indeed their selection of authors and texts illustrates an important development in the late modern period – the analysis of memory in the context of history. The section on late modernity opens with Karl Marx's essay mocking the *coup d'état* in 1851, exposing it as "hollow toying with historical

memory" (Rossington and Whitehead 2007: 92).[6] Nietzsche's essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" advocates a rupture with the past, emphasizing the role of forgetting in individual happiness: "the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture" (Nietzsche 2007: 104). Both Marx and Nietzsche see history as a burden from which man must break free.

The study of individual memory was developed by Henri Bergson, who in his book *Matter and Memory* (1896) distinguishes between "habit memory", which consists in automatic behaviour achieved through repetition, and "pure memory", which refers to the way personal memories are stored in the unconscious. *Matter and Memory* is an important text for anyone writing about memory and modern consciousness because it also contains a discussion of duration as an alternative to chronological time, which created the sense of psychological time, so important for Proust and other Modernist writers. In the same volume, Bergson presents his concept of intuition as a method of inquiry into the absolute, which he understands as an experience of sympathy with which one enters the object of inquiry (Lawlor and Moulard 2013).[7]

With Nietzsche and Bergson in philosophy, we can say that we enter the modern debate about memory in which it is understood as a link with the past in the private and public spheres of life and therefore a subject of intense inquiry by scholars and writers alike. To move from the private to the public sphere of life in the discussion of memory, however, we must make a conceptual transfer from an individual to a collective memory. The concept of collective memory was first introduced in France by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. Although his work was not translated into English until the late twentieth century, it had been

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[6] In the essay "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1852) Marx denounces the political *coup* of 1851, which established Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte as the Emperor of the French, as a masquerade borrowing the power of the remembered historical event (the first Napoleon assuming power) in order to place a mediocre individual in the role of the hero. He advocates turning away from history since "the tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living" (Marx 2007: 97) and in his opinion, the revolutions of the nineteenth century should be looking to the future and not to the past.

[7] This understanding of intuition will be later developed by Emmanuel Levinas into a unique form of empathy which I discuss in the section on trauma theory and apply to the analysis of the novels of Pat Barker and John Banville.

familiar in the English-speaking world indirectly through the work of Pierre Nora, whose *Lieux de mémoire*, a seven-volume collaborative project published in France between 1981 and 1992, available in English in three volumes as *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (1996–8), is one of the foundation texts of modern memory studies. Nora's term, translated in English as "memory sites" has since gained currency beyond history departments; it is widely used in anthropology, literary and cultural studies. The original project started from a seminar about the construction of the French past, which explored the questions of nation, nationalism and national identity as well as the relationship between history and memory. Nora claims that history and memory have not always been in opposition, but that the twentieth century brought about "a collapse of memory" (1989: 7); that history was made necessary because people no longer lived in memory, but became conscious of the pastness of the past, and now need the aid of written documents to recall it. The historian claims that "at the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory" (1989: 9). According to Nora *lieux de mémoire* come into being when *milieux de mémoire* disappear, we need "memory sites" as the "exterior scaffolding" of memory which we no longer experience "from the inside" (1989: 13). The author labels his project "history of the second degree", which is less interested in what actually happened than in its perpetual re-use and mis-use (1996: xxiv). The sites of memory consist in various events, historical and fictional figures, artefacts and forms of commemoration so varied as for example: the tricolor, libraries and festivals, the *Dictionnaire Larousse*, Joan d'Arc, the battle of Verdun, Tour de France and Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Once the spontaneous memory is gone, the nation venerates those "symbolic objects of [their] memory" (Nora 1989: 12).

By transporting the past into our everyday lives, sites of memory become the foci for cultural memory, a concept which has become popular in the last twenty years, but which was first introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s in his writings about collective memory.[8] Nora's project was in fact rooted in Halbwachs's understanding of memory as a collective, social phenomenon rather than an individual one. Jonathan Crewe returns to Halbwachs's ideas in *Acts of Memory*, a col-

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[8] Although Maurice Halbwachs was writing about collective memory in the 1920s, his *On Collective Memory* was published posthumously in 1950 and translated into English only in 1992.

lection of essays he co-edited with Mieke Bal in 1999. As he observes, according to Halbwachs, any memories that an individual has formed and articulated must be a function of socially constructed forms, narratives and relations; memory is always subject to social manipulation and revision; it is closer to a collective fiction than to a neurological imprint of events (Crewe 1999: 75). Mieke Bal in the same volume writes about memory as a cultural phenomenon pointing out that cultural memorization is an activity occurring in the present, it constantly modifies and redescribes the past even as it continues to shape our future (1999: vii). What is particularly relevant for the present study, both Bal and Crewe recognize that historically, literature has always taken central position as a form of cultural memory, yet it still remains underestimated in its mainstream discourses.[9]

Cultural memory is a broad term and an area of interdisciplinary research bringing together the humanities, social studies and natural sciences. Some critics challenge the notion of cultural memory claiming that since we have concepts such as "myth", "tradition", "culture" and "individual memory" there is no need to add to this repertoire (Berliner 2005). But its proponents argue that it is precisely the interdisciplinary character of the study of cultural memory that enables disciplines as varied as psychology, history, sociology and literary studies to engage in a stimulating dialogue (Erll 2008).

This book demonstrates in the section "History and Trauma" how contemporary fiction functions as a form of cultural memory, by bringing historical and historiographic debates to public attention, and thus redescribing the past. In the "Memory and Trauma" section, I show how current research in memory studies informs the novels dealing with private history.

There is, however, one more philosophical work on the subject of memory and history which must be mentioned here, although it does

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[9] In her Introduction to *Acts of Memory*, Mieke Bal explains the relationship between memory and fiction: "Because memory is made up of socially constituted forms, narratives and relations, but also amenable to individual acts of intervention in it, memory is always open to social revision and manipulation. This makes it an instance of fiction rather than imprint, often of social forgetting rather than remembering. Cultural memory can be located in literary texts because the latter are continuous with the communal fictionalizing, idealizing, monumentalizing impulses thriving in a conflicted culture." (1999: xiii). In the same volume, Jonathan Crewe asserts that "the historic functioning of literature as cultural memory can hardly be disputed" (1999: 76).

not make a direct impact on the present study. *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), is the final volume in Paul Ricoeur's output, in which the distinguished philosopher tries to make up for what he himself perceives as a negligence of memory in his previous writings. While most authors discussed above focus on the fallibility and unreliability of memory, Paul Ricoeur emphasizes its positive aspects; he sees memory as our direct link to the past and a building block of history. *Memory, History, Forgetting* is divided into three parts: part one is a phenomenological discussion of memory, part two is an epistemological study of history and part three focuses on the hermeneutics of the historical condition. All three parts are united by the theme of problematics of representation of the past.

Ricoeur's book is of peculiar relevance for my work, as it clearly demonstrates our contemporary culture's engagement with memory, nevertheless, its practical application in the analysis of contemporary fiction is limited due to the author's idiosyncratic approach to the themes of memory and history. Ricoeur is unique among contemporary intellectuals in his earnest concern with the search for truth about the past. Unlike most philosophers and historiographers writing at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Ricoeur regards memory as a capability (2004: 21) and since, as he admits, we have no other resource to the past, he decides to focus on memory's powers, rather than its deficiencies. Therefore, although he presents an extremely thorough survey of the way Western philosophy has engaged with memory, he chooses to almost completely ignore those aspects of remembering and forgetting which seem to occupy a central place among the concerns of contemporary writers namely: memory's unreliability and the psychological mechanisms of a failure of memory. In his search for the truth about the past, he sees the possible threat to truthfulness in the abuses of memory, but for Ricoeur, these are of an ideological and political nature, rather than psychological mechanisms.

Having declared that psychoanalysis deals with pathologies which he will not consider, Ricoeur makes the only exception in order to discuss Freud's *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through* (1914), where he points out the difficulties of working through blocked memories. Ricoeur does not use the term "trauma" or "traumatic memories" although this is what Freud means when he writes about the subject's inability to remember and the compulsion to repeat the wounding action; instead, Ricoeur highlights the element of "work" in working through, which, as he puts it, is "a work of remembering" (2004: 71).

He also discusses *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), where Freud presents mourning as natural and healthy, and involving the acceptance of the reality of loss. When mourning is completed "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud quoted in Ricoeur 2004: 72), whereas melancholia is autodestructive, it reduces and diminishes the sense of self and eventually leads to neurosis.

Ricoeur refers to Freud's work in an attempt to overcome the problems faced by many philosophers writing about collective memory, namely those resulting from the *cul de sac* of individual memory. How can we transfer what we know about the mechanisms of individual memory onto communities and nations? Ricoeur transposes Freud's categories to the plane of collective memory and defines collective trauma as wounded collective memory (2004: 78). While individual trauma is frequently induced by personal loss, collective wounds may result from loss of power or loss of territory; attempts at collective mourning are visible in public funeral ceremonies. Following Hobbes, Ricoeur notes that since all history is related to violence, collective memory is full of wounds which need to be worked through, otherwise they may lead to "excesses of memory", i.e. acts of violence which derive either from what Freud calls compulsion to repeat or from a need to act out a painful experience. What is significant is that Ricoeur rejects Halbwachs's approach, who on the one hand insists that all acts of memory are collective and on the other tries to treat individual memory and collective memory as analogous. Instead, Ricoeur proposes to approach memory as a social phenomenon on the basis of its foundation in language, where language unites the subject with others. What is more, once the memory is articulated it enters the narrative path, which is social by nature. For Ricoeur, articulated memory becomes testimony and enters the public sphere; as testimony it becomes the basic document of history (2004: 80–124).

Although he seems to eschew all reference to trauma theory with the one exception of Dominic LaCapra, his recognition of the role of witnessing and testimony brings him quite close to this territory especially in the final part of his book, where he acknowledges the relevance of trauma therapy in historical writing about such liminal experiences as the Holocaust. In his opinion history should help the living remember the past and work through their losses; through remembering as through mourning, loss can be integrated and only then can the living go on living. True remembering enables us to reconcile the past with the present and therefore it should be the goal of all commemoration.

Ricoeur's approach to history may seem a little old-fashioned to the modern reader, when he undertakes to comment on the ethical obligations of a historian and compares the ethical aspects of his work to that of a judge (2004: 314–33). As he observes, both must be impartial, both are concerned with proof and the credibility of witnesses, but while the judge must come to a conclusion about the actions of a particular human being and pronounce a verdict, the historian mustn't do that. For the work of the historian is subject to critique and revision, "the writing of history is perpetual rewriting" (2004: 320), he must provide an "explanation", not an "exculpation" (2004: 326); the historian has a moral responsibility to the citizen.

Ricoeur also recognizes that sometimes it is better to let go of history, to forget the past in order to overcome the instincts of resentment and revenge. But as I have already emphasized, he focuses on the powers of memory and what history should be, which places him outside the mainstream memory studies even if his work is an extraordinary instance of phenomenology of memory. I realise that it is a paradoxical conclusion about such an imposing text which contains the most detailed account of our culture's intellectual engagement with memory from ancient Greeks to Pierre Nora, but from the point of view of literary criticism, *Memory, History, Forgetting* remains a work of philosophy whose concerns are quite isolated, mostly because few modern writers share Ricoeur's idealistic vision of history and memory.[10]

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[10] Ricoeur also distinguishes between history and fiction on the basis of referentiality and truthfulness and refuses to enter the debate about the subjectivity of history. He is therefore highly sceptical of Hayden White's theories and emphasises the immanent difference between historical narration and fictional narration, which according to him lies in the pact with the reader. In fiction the reader enters an unreal world, he is willing to suspend his disbelief, whereas in a historical text the reader expects to be led into the world of events that really did happen, he expects a truthful discourse. For Ricoeur history is distinguished from fiction by means of the referential moment, whereas its strongest link with memory is through testimony, which in turn is related to witnessing.

Trauma: Terminology

As a number of critics writing within various fields of memory studies point out, the most fertile area of research is that related to traumatic memory or memory of trauma (Antze and Lambek 1996; Radstone 2000; Kaplan 2005).[11] Here we must note that the latter phrase is a contradiction in terms – since by definition trauma is an event so extreme that it cannot be properly registered by consciousness, therefore it remains unassimilated and does not submit to the normal processes of memory storage or recall, nor can it be forgotten. In the words of Cathy Caruth, "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (1995: 4, original emphasis). The fact that the experience remains unassimilated is manifested through its return in the form of unbidden memories: flashbacks, hallucinations and nightmares. The word "trauma" is a Greek term for "wound" and has been commonly used in psychology and psychiatry since the 19th century; it only entered the discourse of historiography and theory of literature in the second half of the 20th century via the US-based field of Holocaust studies (Kaplan 2005).

There are at least two terminological problems connected with the way the word "trauma" functions in contemporary culture. One is related to its usage in psychiatry, literary studies and memory studies, and results from the ambiguity inherent in the term which denotes both an event so extreme that it leaves the subject wounded psychologically, and that psychological wound, which is the condition of the subject. The event and its result in the human psyche are intrinsically connected because there is no such thing as an objectively traumatic event; an event becomes traumatic only when it results in the psychological trauma of the subject, i.e. it is the human reaction that defines the experience as traumatic (Erikson 1995: 183–4).

The other terminological problem is connected to the ubiquity of the word "trauma", its everyday usage and in consequence, trivializa-

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[11] In the Introduction to *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, the editors, Paul Antze and Michael Lambek admit that they "have been particularly caught by the place of trauma both in memories of the past and in theories about memory. [...] Increasingly, memory worth talking about – worth remembering – is memory of trauma. How this has happened and what we are to make of it are central themes of this book" (1996: xii).

tion of the term. In the USA it came to be used in non-specialist language after the Vietnam war;[12] in Europe it began to be commonly used after the atrocities of the Balkan war in the 1990s were reported in the media. Since then it has seeped into the everyday language (not only English), and is commonly used to denote any kind of stressful or unpleasant experience; in the popular press, any distressing experience from divorce to moving house, may be described as traumatic. It is essential that we do not confuse this trivialized meaning of the word with the one which originates from psychiatry.

If we examine closely the contexts in which the term appears in the media, it is possible to deduce that with time "trauma" has come to be used interchangeably with "stress". Psychiatrists and sociologists insist that trauma does not necessarily have to be "a violent event that injures in one sharp stab", which would distinguish it from "stress" which usually refers to a "series of events" or a "chronic condition" (Erikson 1995: 185). Kai Erikson maintains that the psychological injury may result from "a sustained exposure to battle, as well as from a moment of numbing shock, from a continuing pattern of abuse as well as from a single searing assault" (1995: 185). What is crucial from the psychological point of view is that the event, whether prolonged or momentary, will be converted into an enduring state of mind, and the traumatized mind will hold on to it and relive it over and over again.

Another aspect of the concept which is vital for trauma theory is that by definition, trauma entails the problem of representation – since it is such an extreme experience which lies beyond the mental representation of the world of the given subject. Hence the shock and impossibility of assimilation and, in consequence, impossibility of translating the experience into a coherent story. Therefore the experience remains stuck in the mind, as it does not lend itself to normal memory processes, it returns to haunt the subject, but it will neither be forgotten nor recalled at will.

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[12] Thomas Laqueur compares the frequency with which the word "trauma" appeared in *The New York Times*: between 1851 and 1960 it was fewer than 300 times, between 1960 and 2010 it was 11,000 times (2010: 19).

Before Trauma Theory

In the medical and legal professions, the notion of trauma appeared several years before Jean-Martin Charcot introduced its use in psychiatry in the second half of the 19th century. The term was initially used to describe belated symptoms in passengers who had survived some of the first railway accidents and complained of internal pains even though they did not display any physical signs of injury. "Trauma" was first used in the medical evidence given in the legal cases when those passengers tried to sue the railway companies for damages.[13] Pioneering psychiatric work in the study of trauma was done by Charcot at the hospital La Salpêtière in Paris, where Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet were his students in the 1880s. Charcot used the term in his study of hysteria, where, incidentally, most of his patients were women (Herman 1994: 10). In 1895 Sigmund Freud and a Viennese physician Joseph Breuer published *Studies on Hysteria* in which they introduced the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, sometimes translated into English as "deferred action", "belatedness" or "afterwardness", to describe an affect arising only to the memory of an experience, not during the experience. They also observed that traumatic neuroses and hysteria often originate in psychological trauma and its memories and that the memory of the traumatic event is stored in the unconscious and re-enacted at a later time when the patient is confronted with a similar occurrence. According to Freud and Breuer, "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (2001 [1895]: 7).[14] In the same volume they declared that the somatic and psychopathological symptoms vanished as soon as the memory and its affect had been expressed verbally, which marks the beginning of Freud's concept of the "talking cure" (2001 [1895]: 6).

Freud's early theory is frequently called "seduction theory" because originally he claimed that the traumatic event frequently consists in

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[13] Laqueur refers to a book published by a British surgeon, John Erichsen in 1866. Erichsen appeared in courts as an expert witness and persuaded the juries that the injuries the plaintiffs had sustained were neurological and not psychological. In the decade after the publication of Erichsen's book, English railway companies lost 70 per cent of the law suits brought against them and paid out £11 million in damages.

[14] For a detailed discussion of Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* and its implications on memory see Nicola King's *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (2000).

the seduction of an infant by an adult, that initially the memory is not assimilated because the child does not understand the sexual act. It returns as deferred action only in puberty when the patient begins to comprehend the meaning of sexual acts. In 1899 Freud modified his claims by rejecting the seduction theory, i.e. he no longer insisted that childhood memories of sexual acts with adults are memories of actual events, but rather that they are memories of forbidden sexual desires, unconscious sexual fantasies; thus, the revised theory introduced the well-known Oedipus complex.[15]

Freud returned to the study of trauma during World War I, when he discovered that the symptoms of the shell-shocked soldiers were very similar to those he had observed in hysterical bourgeois women.[16] Although Freud did not treat any shell-shocked soldiers, he did write about their treatment insisting that only a small proportion were "malingerers" and testified as an expert in an investigation of neglect of military duty during the war (Kaplan 2005: 29–31). After the war, he continued writing about trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), an essay famous for introducing the notion of two drives which propel human unconscious; one toward pleasure and the raising of excitation, which will be known as the sex drive, and the other towards unpleasure and diminution of excitation, which will be known as the death drive. It is in this essay that he describes a game he observed his grandson playing; he calls it *fort-da* and uses the example to illustrate how humans resort to repetitive behaviour in order to deal with the traumatic experience of loss. Freud describes the one-and-a-half-

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[15] As Richard McNally explains in great detail in *Remembering Trauma* (2005), Freud's withdrawal of the claim that his patients had been sexually abused in childhood is still a subject of controversies in psychoanalytical circles. In 1981 Jeffrey Masson, the project director of the Sigmund Freud Archives declared that he discovered Freud's letters proving that he had decided to abandon the seduction theory not for clinical reasons, but for lack of personal courage – after all, the theory was based on a claim that there was an epidemic of incest among the Viennese bourgeoisie. Masson claimed that Freud modified his theory, replaced actual abuse with fantasies about having sex with the father, in order to avoid public scandal. Since then, historians of psychoanalysis have debunked Masson's thesis, but it is endorsed by the defenders of the recovered memory therapy, because it illustrates "how the forces of patriarchy can silence the voices of survivors" (McNally 2005: 168).

[16] Various medical reactions to the symptoms of British soldiers, the dilemmas of military doctors torn between their conscience and the expectations of high command, as well as the predominant therapeutic methods: electric shock vs talking cure are discussed in great detail in Peter Leese's *Shell Shock* (2002).

year-old boy playing with a wooden reel attached to a piece of string, which the child throws over the edge of the cot so that it disappears from view, shouting *fort* – gone. Then the boy pulls the string and welcomes the reappearing reel with an enthusiastic *da* – there. Freud interprets the game as "the child's great cultural achievement" (2004: 432). In his opinion, the boy compensated himself for allowing his mother to go away without protest by "staging the disappearance and return of the object" (2004: 432). Freud further explains the point of turning an unpleasant experience into a game as taking an active part in the situation: at first the boy was passive and overpowered, but by turning the real circumstance into a game, he became active and, at least in the game, he was in control of the situation. Freud goes on to call this attempt at mastering the traumatic experience repetition-compulsion (2004: 435). This mechanism will later be confirmed by the psychiatric practice of dealing with victims of trauma and especially violent abuse, who not only tend to repeat their experience but also frequently victimise others in later life – this phenomenon is known as intergenerational transmission of abuse (Lamont 2010).

According to Cathy Caruth, Freud's most comprehensive and influential discussion of trauma appears in *Moses and Monotheism* (1938), his last book written partly in Vienna under Nazi rule, partly in exile in London (Caruth 1996: 10–20). The book is an inquiry into the history of Judaism and presents an alternative version of the story of exodus from Egypt. In Freud's version Moses is not a Hebrew, but an Egyptian, who led the Hebrews out of Egypt in order to preserve the monotheistic religion waning after the pharaoh's murder. Thus Freud changes the reason for the return to Canaan; in Caruth's words, "it is not so much a return to the freedom of the past as a departure into a newly established future – the future of monotheism" (Caruth 1996: 14). What is more, Freud claims that after they returned from Egypt, the Hebrews murdered Moses, then they repressed the deed and after two generations assimilated the acts of Moses to the acts of another man also called Moses, the priest of Yahweh. Freud claims that the murder was then obliterated from the cultural memory of the Jews and that the memory re-emerged in the next generation. Cathy Caruth identifies the following to be the central question of Freud's book: "What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma?" (1996: 15). In reply to this question she offers a claim that "a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (1996: 18). Caruth's analysis of *Moses and Monotheism* is the foundation for modern trauma theory

and, in particular, the ways in which it perceives the relationship be-
tween history and trauma.

As Kaplan observes, Freud's writings may be subject to much con-
troversy; their status as scientific theory is very precarious due to the
limited number of patients and little documented therapeutic success,
nevertheless, they anticipate much that clinicians working on combat
fatigue and PTSD are now researching (2005: 32). Here the work of
Freud's contemporary and a classmate of Bergson, Pierre Janet, must
be mentioned, especially that it remained largely forgotten and was
rediscovered only recently by Bessel van der Kolk, a psychiatrist and
theorist of traumatic amnesia. As van der Kolk demonstrates, we owe
the distinction between narrative memory and traumatic memory to
Janet. The famous case of Irène, described by Janet, lies at the origins
of his claim that traumatic memory can be dissociated from awareness
but expressed in non-narrative terms. Irène was a young woman who
spent several months looking after her dying mother. When the moth-
er died Irène lost all interest in life, and became incapable of work-
ing. Although she attended the funeral, and at one level knew that her
mother had died, she could not remember the moment of her death or
anything about the final months when she was caring for her mother
day and night. Yet, she had spells when she re-enacted the drama of
the night her mother died. Janet claimed to have cured her by apply-
ing hypnosis and then recovering the dissociated traumatic memories,
which he later helped her translate into narrative memories. Being able
to articulate the memories in a coherent narrative cured Irène from
her amnesia and the compulsion to re-enact the traumatic experience
(van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 159–62). Van der Kolk and van
der Hart point out that Freud had abandoned Charcot's and Janet's
findings and that he tended to confuse repression and dissociation
when writing about the origins of trauma (1995: 168). They object to
such a confusion, emphasizing the fundamental difference between
the two mechanisms, i.e. the fact that repression implies that the sub-
ject is actively pushing the traumatic memory away, whereas, "there
is little evidence for an active process of pushing away of the over-
whelming experience" (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 168). In-
stead, many survivors of trauma report that they felt removed from the
scene; that they were looking at the scene from a distance, frequently
from above, which is a dissociative reaction. Nowadays dissociation is
a term used very broadly in psychiatry; a defence mechanism which
attenuates awareness of otherwise overwhelming emotional informa-

tion, it may manifest itself in various forms depending on the extent of shock and resilience of the subject. Most common dissociative symptoms are: emotional numbing, being in a daze, derealization – a strange dreamlike sense that one's surroundings are unreal, depersonalization – a sense of being disconnected from one's body, a sense that time is either slowing down or speeding up and inability to remember aspects of what happened (McNally 2005: 172).

Van der Kolk and van der Hart highlight Janet's pioneering work in the area of memory processes; they believe that he made claims almost a century ago which are only now being confirmed by neurobiologists. For example, he claimed that memory's basic function is the storage and categorization of incoming sensations and that memory is much better at storing the quality of experience and the feelings associated with it rather than specific events (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 169). Janet also claimed that new pieces of information are constantly combined with old knowledge to form flexible mental schemas and once a particular event becomes integrated in a larger scheme it will no longer be accessible as an individual entity and hence, the memory will be distorted (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 171).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

It is significant that most further developments in trauma research after Freud and Janet are directly or indirectly linked to the treatment of soldiers affected by military conflicts or the survivors of the Holocaust.[17] In the USA, the Vietnam war produced large numbers of veterans who displayed psychological symptoms which led to clinical studies and, eventually in 1980, the introduction of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychological Association (Davies 2010). Although the *Manual* does not speculate about the causes of mental disorders, it only lists criteria for diagnosing them, PTSD is an exception in that

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[17] In Poland the pioneer in trauma studies was Professor Maria Orwid, a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, who co-authored the first Polish publications on the trauma of the Holocaust survivors and, together with Antoni Kępiński, set up the first therapeutic project for the survivors of the Holocaust in 1959–64. Professor Orwid wrote more than fifty articles in psychiatric journals on trauma and its treatment.

it contains a causal factor in its definition, i.e. it is stated that PTSD is caused by exposure to a traumatic "stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone" and which "is generally outside the range of usual human experience" (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* 1980 quoted in McNally 2005: 8). The *Diagnostic Manual* of 1980 described three groups of symptoms caused by exposure to trauma:

- Re-experiencing symptoms: flashbacks, reliving the trauma as if it were happening in the present.
- Numbing symptoms: blunted emotions, feelings of estrangement from others.
- Miscellaneous symptoms: hypervigilance for threat, sleep disturbances, memory impairment, guilt about having survived when others did not. (McNally 2005: 9)

On the basis of the above symptoms, we can see that PTSD is a disorder of memory above all. Its ratification as an official psychiatric diagnosis prompted the establishment of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* in 1988 and stimulated research, which together with clinical experience, motivated changes in the diagnostic criteria for PTSD in subsequent editions of the *Diagnostic Manual* in 1987 and 1994. The changes involved the recognition of an additional symptom: "inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma", and one more stressor: "a developmentally inappropriate sexual experience without threatened or actual violence or injury" (quoted in McNally 2005: 10). These are radical changes because they include sexual abuse in childhood as a stressor causing PTSD, what is more, the victim's inability to remember the event is interpreted as a symptom of the traumatic disorder. Thus dissociative amnesia came to be recognized as a symptom of trauma. McNally provides a detailed account of the wave of lawsuits filed in the USA in the 1980s and the 1990s by adults, who during therapy for other problems such as depression, relationship difficulties or eating disorders, discovered that they had been sexually abused in early childhood. This may be explained by the fact that since, by definition, trauma resists narration, the efforts of the therapist to elicit memories in the form of narrative may lead to distortions or even complete fabrication of memories. The lawsuits predominantly filed against fathers or other close relatives, in turn, resulted in the founding of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in 1992. The organisation provided support and legal advice to the accused family members and charged the therapists with producing an epidemic of false memories, since with the use of

hypnosis they "helped" their patients retrieve most bizarre memories (McNally 2005: 13–15). The debate about the False Memory Syndrome still raises many controversies and impinges on the way many people react to the trauma induced by sex abuse in childhood.

Trauma Theory from the 1990s Onwards

In the course of the last two decades we have observed a real explosion in publications devoted to psychic trauma and its representation. Academics and professionals in such diverse disciplines as law, psychiatry, historiography, media, anthropology, Holocaust studies, cultural studies and literary studies write about the difficulties of representation of trauma, the need to work through the experience through narration, the therapeutic potential of telling of the story and the need to witness to this act of testimony. What is today recognized as trauma theory originated in the work of such literary scholars as: Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, Dori Laub – all former students and co-workers of the father of American deconstruction at Yale, Paul de Man. The beginnings of the poststructuralist theory of trauma are linked with Holocaust studies, as Hartman and Laub were involved in the Fortunoff Video Archive Project at Yale (Kaplan 2005: 35) and the first theoretical explorations concerned the recorded testimonies of the witnesses and survivors of the Holocaust, hence their preoccupation with witnessing, testimony and ethics of representation. One of the foundational theoretical books in trauma theory is *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), a volume of twelve essays and interviews edited by Caruth, where five texts are directly related to Holocaust testimony. Another significant feature of this and several subsequent publications in the field of trauma theory is interdisciplinarity; the texts in this volume extend in their scope far beyond literary studies, to the fields of film studies, sociology, psychiatry and pedagogy.

Caruth addresses the problem of representation of trauma in her *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), where she made the famous, if by now a little overused, statement that since traumatic experience eschews linguistic reference, then trauma defies representation. However, she does not rule out reference altogether. She focuses on trauma's inherent unrepresentability, which makes it radically disruptive and there-

fore an "unclaimed experience". Like Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) before her, Caruth observes that at the core of trauma lies the subject's inability to witness the experience from within. She goes on to say that "the understanding of trauma in terms of its indirect relation to reference, does not deny or eliminate the possibility of reference" but she insists, precisely, "on the inescapability of its belated impact" (1996: 115). In other words, for Caruth, referentiality in trauma is indirect and belated. Following on van der Kolk's writing on Janet, Caruth also focuses, rather narrowly, on dissociation as the main mechanism in trauma formation. According to Caruth and Felman the issues of representation, memory and witnessing raised by trauma theory suggest that the question of referentiality must be intrinsically literary. Literature becomes for Caruth a site for belated enactment and witnessing of what can be referred to as an unclaimed moment of trauma. She argues that the language of trauma is inherently literary by pointing out that Freud drew on literary texts (Sophocles and Shakespeare) in order to illustrate and develop his theories, "because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relations between knowing and not knowing" (1996: 3). She suggests that the epistemological crisis functions as an interface between psychoanalysis and literature: "it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (1996: 3). In the Foreword to *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub declare that World War II and the Holocaust constitute a trauma "whose consequences we are still actively evolving" (xiv). Their primary concern in this volume of multidisciplinary essays is with literature and ethics; violence and culture. Their approach is informed by the questions they formulate in the Foreword: "What is the relation between literature and testimony, between the writer and the witness? What is the relation between the act of witnessing and testifying, and the acts of writing and of reading, particularly in our era?" (Felman and Laub 1992: xiii).

This may explain why Felman, Caruth and other critics who follow in their footsteps frequently assume an approach to the literary text akin to that adopted by a therapist in relation to the patient. They focus on belatedness and the missed experience, they search the text for silences and examine its language as a potential vehicle for muteness. They emphasize the demands that the text makes on the reader requiring participation in the form of co-witnessing.

In the present study I refer to the work of two literary scholars, Irene Kacandes and Anne Whitehead and an art critic Jill Bennett, whose work is inspired by trauma theory. Irene Kacandes in *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion* (2001) points to a rise of "secondary orality" in contemporary societies which has engendered a culture of "call" and "response". She claims that we are living in times when "forms of communication are pushed to the fore" (2001: 32), that modern technological developments (from radio, through television to Skype) have brought on a mode of communication which generates relationships and privileges interaction over content. Kacandes points to the popularity of radio and television talk shows as cultural manifestations of secondary orality. From that sociological concept and the work of a linguist, Robin Tolman Lakoff, who as early as in 1982 analysed written texts which are specially marked to be read as "oral", i.e. immediate, emotional, colloquial, Kacandes develops her own idea of "talk fiction" which she defines as follows:

> I call my phenomenon Talk neither because the written page sounds like oral speech nor even because it signals difference that should be interpreted as informal or spontaneous – and therefore as resembling speech more than writing – but rather because talk fiction performs what many experts identify as the central function of speech: it creates relationship and invites interaction (2001: 23).

She distinguishes four main modes of talk fiction: storytelling, testimony, apostrophe and interactivity.[18] Kacandes devotes the chapter entitled "Testimony" to novels concerning traumatic experience, which in her approach are called "witness narratives" (2001: 90). Kacandes acknowledges that the nature of trauma demands revised notions of "exchange", "experience" and "story", and that the recovery of the victim involves overcoming silence and withdrawal to witness to what happened. The recovery requires the translation of what was experienced as a break in time into what Janet called "narrative memory", which involves telling the story. This action is facilitated by the presence of a sympathetic listener, a co-witness. She insists that the process of remembering trauma is a social act and therefore "the story must be co-constructed" (2001: 95). Like many other critics following Fel-

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[18] To some extent Kacandes's idea of "talk fiction" can be traced back to Steven Connor's "addressivity" of a text, which he defines as "what opens or orientates a text to its actual reception in particular acts of reading, as well as the visible impress of this expectation on its language and form" (1996: 10).

man and Caruth, Kacandes notes that trauma narratives are characterised not only by depiction of violence, but more importantly the texts are marked by stylistic devices that "communicate gaps, silences, and even whole stories that cannot be told, or cannot be told fully" (2001: 95). She insists that in such texts we must investigate the communicative circuit consisting of an ennunciator (victim or witness), a story, and an enabler for the story (analyst, reader). Kacandes proposes to investigate literary "talk" as testimony through six circuits of narrative witnessing. The first circuit is intrapsychic witnessing (C-1) when the character witnesses to the self about his or her own experience – here Kacandes offers Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith as an example of a character unable to witness to his own experience since he is unable to integrate his own experience of WWI (2001: 100). The next circuits are: interpersonal witnessing (C-2) when two characters cowitness to trauma experienced by one of them; surrogate witnessing (C-3), when two characters cowitness to a third character's trauma; textual witnessing (C-4) when narrator and narratee cowitness to trauma of/in the text; literary-historical witnessing (C-5), when text and its contemporary reader cowitness to the trauma of/in the text; to transhistorical-transcultural witnessing (C-6) when the text and its later or foreign reader cowitness to the trauma of/in the text (2001: 97). As we move up the list of circuits we discover that they contain other circuits within them, for example C-4, textual witnessing occurs on the level of discourse and encompasses all the lower circuits. The reader's reply takes place through C-5 and C-6. She also observes that some texts make an explicit request for a co-witness through pronouns of address, whereas other texts use textual strategies such as anachrony, ellipsis, repetition, and fragmentation in order to mimic traumatic symptoms.

Another literary critic and, by now, authority in the field of trauma studies whose work is used in this study is Anne Whitehead. In *Trauma Fiction* (2004) she registers a flow of inspiration between fiction and theory which works in both directions. She claims that contemporary fiction has been influenced by trauma theory, which is manifested in a shift of interest from what is remembered, to how it is remembered and that, in consequence, fiction has been changed by its encounter with trauma theory, which is reflected in how trauma is conceptualised and represented in fiction. Whitehead analyses Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, Pat Barker's *Another World* and the writings of W.G. Sebald among others, in order to establish certain characteristic features of what she claims to be an emerging genre of

trauma fiction. Her book is divided into two parts: "Theme" and "Style". The critic does not claim that trauma fiction is distinctive merely on the basis of the thematic preoccupation on the part of the authors, but she identifies certain literary techniques and stylistic devices frequently sought to represent trauma. Whitehead also points out the affinities between certain stylistic devices recurring in trauma fiction and those apparent in the testimony of trauma survivors, in particular, Holocaust survivors, noting that both kinds of texts tend to be fragmented and broken in form, that they are marked by gaps and repetitions and that they require the presence of an empathetic listener or reader (2004: 34). Thus both Kacandes and Whitehead emphasize the role of the reader in witnessing to the trauma in the text.

Another author who problematises the question of representation and narration of trauma is an Australian art critic, Jill Bennett. She advocates a cautious approach to the realistic representation of trauma, because realism does not suit the politics of testimony and as she states: "such a politics requires of art *not* a faithful translation of testimony" (2005: 3). Instead, she proposes art that does not communicate, but that transmits experience, where trauma is not experienced through cognition but through affect and emotion (2005: 8). She recognizes Dominic LaCapra's empathic unsettlement as the most appropriate form of engagement with trauma and describes it as "an experience of simultaneously *feeling for* another and becoming aware of a distinction between one's own perceptions and the experience of the other" (2005: 8). LaCapra introduces the concept in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*:

> The study of traumatic events poses especially difficult problems of representation and writing both for research and for any dialogic exchange with the past which acknowledges the claims it makes on people and relates it to the present and the future. Being responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably of victims, implies not the appropriation of their experience but what I would call empathic unsettlement, which should have stylistic effects or, more broadly, effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or rules of method. [...] At the very least, empathic unsettlement poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility) (2001: 41–2).

LaCapra's empathic unsettlement clearly bears close affinity to the Levinasian empathy in its respect for the alterity of the experience of the other. In *Totality and Infinity* (1969), Emmanuel Levinas critiques totalitarian thought and traditional Western philosophy pointing out that in Western culture, Otherness is neutralised by the attempt of the I to transform the Other into the Same. To overcome this, he advocates an empathy which stems from a face-to-face encounter with the Other, in which we recognize and respect the absolute alterity of the Other (2012). Like Bergsonian intuition, Levinas's empathy encourages us to enter the object of inquiry, but Levinas goes further by identifying and curbing our natural desire to possess and transform the world. This ethics is particularly valuable in delineating the limits of witnessing in trauma literature, it enables the readers to witness the trauma of another human being without trying to take it over by insisting on the need to respect the subjectivity of the Other.

In this book, I subscribe to the approach of literary critics such as Kacandes and Whitehead, historians like LaCapra, and art critics like Bennett, who all resort to some aspects of trauma theory in their writings on literary texts. I extend my analysis of trauma in the text to trauma of the text and demonstrate the capacity of certain types of narratives to generate the affect of trauma in the readers through empathic unsettlement on the one hand, and narrative techniques of fragmentation, incompleteness and gaps, on the other.

Critical Voices: The Pitfalls of Trauma Theory

Today trauma theory is an established critical category of literary studies, which nevertheless, does not escape criticism and challenge. The emergence of trauma theory at Yale in the 1990s cannot be divorced from a crisis of post-structuralism which had "become very abstract" (Kaplan 2005: 35). Kaplan goes on to say that addressing the phenomenon of trauma at the time when interest in World War II and its victims was renewed must have seemed "one way for the critics to link high theory with specific material events that were both personal and which implicated history, memory and culture generally" (2005: 35). Elaine Showalter argues in her book *Hystories*

(1997) that trauma studies have offered additional legitimization to the disturbing trend in psychotherapy which encouraged recovery of traumatic memories, which in turn resulted in veritable epidemics of all kinds of weird traumas, not only of sex abuse in childhood, but of such extraordinary experiences as being abducted by aliens or followers of a religious cult. Showalter points to the emergence of a "victim culture" in the USA, a culture which seeks cause and cure for disappointments or even "simple unhappiness [...] firmly [...] outside the self" (1997: 4).

Susannah Radstone, whose work on memory is widely recognized within the field of cultural and film studies, has come forward with probably the most comprehensive critique of trauma theory. She points out the limitations of the exclusive focus on dissociation in trauma theory[19] as well as its emphasis on the unassimilable external event which causes trauma (Radstone 2000: 87). She notes that it is a theory whose adherence to linear models of temporality and to the relation between an external event and its registration within the inner world make it particularly appealing for academic disciplines operating an opposition between memory and history (Radstone 2000: 88). In her own critical writing, Radstone is a proponent of a psychoanalytic theory as it developed after Freud; she follows Laplanche and foregrounds the inner world's mediation of the external world. She interprets the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* to imply that traumatic memory is not a "registration of an event, but an outcome of a complex process of revision shaped by promptings from the present" (2000: 89). The writer emphasizes the role of unconscious processes in memory formation and in consequence the relationship between memory and fantasy. In her opinion trauma theory's rejection of unconscious agency leads to its "broader vision of a Manichean universe peopled by good, passive, innocent victims and bad, active, guilty perpetrators" (2000: 89) and the establishment of the "victim culture" identified by Showalter. She goes on to quote Ian Craib, who in *The Importance of Disappointment* (1994) objects to the fantasy of achievability of self at total peace with itself, which is promoted and nurtured by some forms of psychotherapy. Craib accuses the psychotherapists of encouraging their patients

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[19] Radstone criticises Caruth and other trauma theorists for focusing on dissociation and amnesia, which has had far-reaching effects in the politics of memory including the explosion of the False Memory Syndrome, a phenomenon which has been discussed earlier in this chapter in the section on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

to adopt false selves. He associates the adoption of false selves with the increasingly fragmented and ungraspable nature of external reality, however, he insists that "there are no such things as undifferentiated and pure traumas" (Craib quoted in Radstone 2000: 90) and the impact of the external world will always be met by the agency of the inner world, i.e. memory cannot be separated from fantasy. Following Craib, Radstone claims that in the fragmented and confusing contemporary environment "there arises a culture which fosters conspiracy 'victim culture'" and that it may "be better understood as *symptoms* of rather than as *analyses* of traumatic memory" (2000: 94).[20]

Another influential critic of trauma theory, writing from within the theory, is Dominic LaCapra. He sounds a few words of caution directed at Caruth's theory when he warns against vicarious victimhood, i.e. excessive identification with the victim. Instead, as has already been mentioned, LaCapra advocates Levinasian empathy and respect for the victim's otherness (2001: 47). In fact, LaCapra's critique constitutes a significant contribution to trauma theory, for he draws an important distinction between absence and loss; where absence does not have to involve loss and affects humans on a transhistorical level, absence may consist in a loss of innocence or an Oedipal scenario, but not a particular event. Whereas loss takes place on a historical level and involves a specific event; it may be the death of a loved one or the losses brought by the Holocaust on the Jews. Unlike absence, loss may be narrated (2001: 47–9).[21] LaCapra warns against the conflating of absence and loss, since it may result in "obfuscating or rashly generalising" of the significance or force of particular historical losses, or producing "dubious ideas" that everyone is a victim, that all history is trauma or that we all share a "wound culture" (2001: 64). What is more, from the distinction between absence and loss, LaCapra derives the notions of structural and historical trauma. Structural trauma is related to absence, ambivalent and experienced by all,[22] whereas historical trauma

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[20] Susannah Radstone is currently working on a book entitled *Getting over Trauma*.

[21] LaCapra illustrates his argument with the example of Beckett, whom he considers to be a writer addressing the problem of absence. As he notes, Beckett's narratives do not include specific events, seem to be abstract, evacuated, disembodied and therefore communicating a strong sense of absence and structural trauma (2001: 49).

[22] This is how LaCapra writes about structural trauma in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*: "[structural trauma] may be evoked or addressed in various fashions: in terms of the passage from nature to culture, the eruption of the pre-Oedipal

is related to particular events (2001: 79). When a historical trauma becomes a basis for the collective identity of a nation or a group, like Holocaust for the Jews, or slavery for the African-Americans, LaCapra calls it a founding trauma. These distinctions are extremely important in the analysis of contemporary fiction; in the novels of Pat Barker and Sebastian Barry, the events of World War I and Irish Civil war respectively function as founding traumas for the British and the Irish.

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or pre-symbolic, the entry into language, the encounter with the Real, the inevitable generation of the aporia and so forth" (1998: 47).

HISTORY AND TRAUMA

Chapter 2

Pat Barker
– The Trauma of World War I

John Brannigan notes in his monograph on Pat Barker (b. 1943) that in the early days of her literary career, the author was labeled as "a regional, social realist writer, preoccupied largely with the de-industrialised, working-class culture of the north-east of England" (2005a: 2). Although with *Regeneration* (1991), a historical novel about the Great War, she seems to have entered a completely new territory, one can discern throughout her work certain recurrent themes such as: various forms of dereliction, social class, gender. Barker's novels always bring to the fore "memory as a site of cultural and political disquiet" and "fictionalise the story of victims" (Brannigan 2005a: 4). Another prominent motif in the work of Pat Barker is trauma haunting children and adults, be it a raped girl in *Union Street* (1982), a child murderer in *Border Crossing* (2001), or a World War I veteran in *Another World* (1998). In my analysis I am going to focus on five novels written between 1991 and 2003, *The Regeneration* trilogy, *Another World* and *Double Vision* (2003) in order to demonstrate how Barker's preoccupation with the themes of history, memory and trauma evolved over the years. I analyse the author's debate with history and myth of World War I in *The Regeneration* trilogy, where Barker effectively portrays the Great War as cultural trauma. Whereas in *Another World* the Great War scars the younger generation through transgenerational trauma, in *Double Vision*, by creating a world permeated with violence, the author comes dangerously close to devaluating trauma and subscribing to victim culture.

The Regeneration Trilogy:
Historical Revisionism and Cultural Trauma

The Regeneration trilogy consists of three novels published individually: *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), *The Ghost Road* (1995)[1], with the last volume awarded the Booker Prize. The three novels share characters, both historical and fictional ones, and deal with public and private dilemmas stemming from the Great War; all protagonists face conflicts between a sense of duty and individual convictions and beliefs. The action is set in the final seventeen months of the war; it opens with Siegfried Sassoon's historical protest against the war, which the poet wrote in July 1917, and closes with the death of Wilfred Owen and fictional Billy Prior during an attack on the Sambre-Oise Canal in the first days of November 1918. By making William H.R. Rivers, an anthropologist and psychiatrist, the central character of the trilogy, Barker seems to narrow down her historical inquiry into the Great War to the themes related to shell shock and traumatic neurosis, and at the same time justifies the realistic mode in which she writes about these phenomena.

The trilogy has raised a considerable controversy over its engagement with history. What seems to be a traditional, realist historical novel at first sight, turns out to be daringly experimental upon closer reading. First of all, Barker writes about the war from less familiar perspectives – she focuses on the home front and popular attitudes to such seemingly marginal issues as masculinity, pacifism, homosexuality. However, the main controversy results from her decision to deliberately view the war through the lens of late twentieth-century debates on gender, sexuality and class, which results in her strong emphasis on social change before, during, and after the war and an idiosyncratic approach to historical sources. She combines extensive research of such historical sources as the psychological and anthropological writings of Rivers and his friend Horcart, the poems and letters of the war poets: Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Edmund Blunden and Robert Graves, as well as their wartime memoirs, with explorations of late twentieth-century commentary on the Great War such as Elaine Showalter's feminist critique of the attitudes to shell shock in *The Female Mala-*

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[1] I am using the Penguin one-volume edition of 1998, but will mark references in the text using abbreviated titles of the individual novels.

dy (1985)[2] or Eric Leed's account of war neurosis in *No Man's Land: Combat and Malady in World War I* (1979). On the one hand, she uses historical characters and attempts to portray them with a certain degree of faithfulness to the actual documents that are available to her; some of the conversations between historical characters are copied from the letters almost verbatim; particular episodes in the trenches are adapted from the memoirs of Sassoon, Graves and Blunden; and Billy Prior's character is recognizably based on the figure of Blunden. But on the other hand, Barker enters into an intertextual dialogue with those sources, she makes her characters probe and question them as received versions of history of the Great War and frequently she undermines the mythology of World War I by including a recognizable, yet, distorted version of this mythology in her narrative. In consequence, Barker has been accused of sacrificing solid history for the sake of fashionable feminist ideology and postmodern historiography (Shephard 1996; Löschnigg, 1999).[3]

In critical literature this controversy is handled particularly well in Karen Patrick Knutsen's outstanding analysis of the *Regeneration* trilogy: *Reciprocal Haunting: Pat Barker's Regeneration Trilogy*.[4] Knutsen claims that Barker's novels constitute "an interactive link in an intertextual chain of communication about the Great War" (2008: 11). In her discussion of the relations between the trilogy and other literary

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[2] As Showalter notes in Chapter 7 entitled: "Male Hysteria: W.H.R. Rivers and the Lessons of Shell Shock", the symptoms of shell shock are more or less identical to those of hysteria and neurasthenia attributed to women in the nineteenth century. She also draws attention to the parallel situations of powerlessness, loss of control, enforced submission to authority, which were experienced by women in the nineteenth century and men in the trenches. "When all signs of physical fear were judged as weakness and when alternatives to combat – pacifism, conscientious objection, desertion, even suicide – were viewed as unmanly, men were silenced and immobilized, and forced, like women to express their conflicts through the body" (Showalter 1987: 171).

[3] Ben Shephard in the *Times Literary Supplement* criticises Barker for failing "to recreate the past in its own terms". In his opinion "Her exploration of 'the contemporary codes of gender, class and sexuality' is rooted in post-feminist pieties and the chic abstractions of modern historians" (1996: 12–13). Martin Löschnigg claims that her preoccupation with gender-oriented studies of shell shock results in "a somewhat one-sided representation of the phenomenon of 'shell shock' [...] which continues a mythification of shellshock victims" (1999: 226).

[4] I quote from the dissertation published at Karlstad University, Sweden in 2008, the edited version of the text was published by Waxmann Verlag, Germany in 2010 under the same title.

and historical texts on World War I, the critic uses two theoretical concepts: Foucault's discourse, understood as a means of control of social practices and Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and the dialogic. She draws on Foucault's critique of history as Grand Narrative in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and juxtaposes the vision of history as totalizing world-view to history concerned with "categories of discontinuity and difference", history as "discursive practice" (Foucault quoted in Knutsen 2008: 14). As she suggests, "we see divergent strands of discourse and discourses from different time periods interacting in the narrative [of the trilogy]" (Knutsen 2008: 15). In the discussion of Barker's use of various sources, Knutsen applies the concept of dialogue as presented in Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* and in a later essay "The Problem of Speech Genres", where he writes about the novel as a secondary speech genre, with each work functioning as a link in an ongoing chain of communication. "Like the rejoinder in a dialogue, [the work] is related to other work-utterances: both those to which it responds and those that respond to it" (Bakhtin quoted in Knutsen 2008: 18).

Barker does not acknowledge Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1977 (1975)) among the sources listed in her Author's Notes, but she seems to enter into a dialogic relationship with Fussell by using texts quoted in his groundbreaking work, as well as developing his ideas, and, occasionally, arguing with him. *The Great War and Modern Memory* was an extremely influential source for anyone writing about World War I in the last two decades of the twentieth century, because Fussell was the first critic to point out how the memoirs and poems of Sassoon, Graves, Blunden and Owen have contributed to the myth of the war and established certain patterns not only of writing about the war, but of remembering it. In what follows, I demonstrate that *The Great War and Modern Memory* functions as an intertext for the *The Regeneration* trilogy, which Barker initially uses as inspiration and a source of motifs, yet I also show that she goes on to interrogate the tradition of British war writing, that his work seemed to canonize. In other words, she questions the patterns of memory Fussell had established,[5] and enters into an ideological

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[5] In *The Great War and Modern Memory* Fussell argues that the war fundamentally changed British culture by inducing despair and disillusionment with the culture and civilization that led to the slaughter. Other historians like Eric J. Leed in *No Man's Land* (1979), and Samuel Hynes in *A War Imagined* (1991) developed this argument further by pointing out that the war was a modernizing experience, i.e. that it proclaimed the modern age with its cynicism, relativism and despair. This

debate with the myth of the Great War,[6] in consequence, she revises the British literary canon.

In the early stages of *Regeneration*, Barker draws on Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), which Fussell quotes in the first chapter of *The Great War and Modern Memory*, "A Satire of Circumstances" as an example of the "little ironic vignettes" organized by the art of memory:

> A young and cheerful lance corporal of ours was making some tea [in the trench] as I passed one warm afternoon. Wishing him a good tea, I went along three fire-bays; one shell dropped without warning behind me; I saw its smoke faint out, and I thought all was as lucky as it should be. Soon a cry from that place recalled me; the shell had burst all wrong. Its butting impression was black and stinking in the parados where three minutes ago the lance-corporal's mess-tin was bubbling over a little flame. For him, how could the gobbets of blackening flesh, the earth-wall sotted with blood, with flesh, the eye under the duckboard, the pulpy bone be the only answer? (Blunden quoted in Fussell 1977 [1975]: 32).

The extract may easily be recognized as a source of Billy Prior's memory recovered after Rivers hypnotizes him. Barker has clearly expanded the original story provided by Edmund Blunden by padding it with detail, but the basic facts remain unchanged:

> He had first trench watch. He gulped a mug of chlorine-tasting tea, and then started walking along the outermost position on their left. A smell of bacon frying. In the third fire bay he found Sawdon and Towers crouched over a small fire made out of shredded sandbags and candle ends, coaxing the flames. He stopped to chat for a few minutes, and Towers, blinking under the green mushroom helmet, looked up and offered him tea. A quiet day, he thought, walking on. [...]

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view has been contested by a host of the, so called, anti-fussellian historians. Most notably, Joanna Bourke has observed that Fussell's "disillusionment thesis rests too heavily on a small number of writers and artists [...] who may or may not be regarded as representative" (1996: 19). The renowned American historian of WWI, Jay Winter has demonstrated in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995) that people responded to the war by looking backwards rather than forwards in time.

[6] An illuminating discussion of the myth of the Great War and a debate with this myth in Canadian fiction can be found in *Uraz przetrwania: trauma i polemika z mitem I wojny światowej w powieści kanadyjskiej* [The Trauma of Survival: The (De) Construction of the Myth of the Great War in the Canadian Novel] (2014) by Anna Branach-Kallas, to whom I am immensely grateful for her remarks about Barker's interrogation of the myth.

He'd gone, perhaps, three fire bays along when he heard the whoop of a shell, and, spinning round, saw the scrawl of dusty brown smoke already drifting away. He thought it'd gone clear over, but then he heard a cry and, feeling sick in his stomach, he ran back. [...] A conical black hole, still smoking, had been driven into the side of the trench. Of the kettle, the frying-pan, the carefully tended fire, there was no sign, and not much of Sawdon and Towers either, or not much that was recognizable.

[...] He reached for a shovel. Logan picked up a sandbag and held it open, and he began shovelling soil, flesh and splinters of blackened bone into the bag. [...]

They'd almost finished when Prior shifted his position on the duck-boards, glanced down, and found himself staring into an eye. Delicately, like somebody selecting a particular choice morsel from a plate, he put his thumb and forefinger down through the duckboards. His fingers touched the smooth surface and slid before they managed to get a hold. He got it out, transferred it to the palm of his hand, and held it out to-wards Logan. He could see his hand was shaking, but the shaking didn't seem to be anything to do with him. 'What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?' (*R* 93–4).

For Fussell the irony lies in the contrast between the cheerful, almost domestic scene of making tea and the completely unexpected, violent death of the lance corporal. In this instance, Barker does not try to al-ter her source material, she retains the ironic effect and even, to some extent, the same wording: "gobbets of blackening flesh" are reflected in the "gob-stopper", which is a ball shaped candy, and therefore carries the meaning of blocking the mouth. Towers' blue eye will be a recurrent image in the trilogy as a nightmare that haunts Prior in flashbacks and as a symbol of surveillance and invigilation in the second volume. The traumatic memory of the "gob-stopper" will bring on a physiological reaction in Prior's body – mutism.

Fussell observes in a number of letters and memoirs of soldiers a "deep hatred of civilian England" (1977 [1975]: 86) combined with an inability to communicate the horrors of war to their families. He adds that "even if those at home had wanted to know the realities of the war, they couldn't have without experiencing them: its conditions were too novel, its industrialized ghastliness too unprecedented" (1977 [1975]: 87). Barker confirms Fussell's observation; the fiction-al Billy Prior experiences a sudden moment of resentment towards the "pleasure-seeking crowds" on the beach near Edinburgh, he not only feels "like a ghost" (*R* 114) in his uniform, but also actively de-spises the civilians around him, including his girl-friend Sarah. How-

ever, the novelist enters into an ideological polemic with Fussell and complicates this relation between the soldiers and civilians by examining the attitudes to the pacifist movement. What is more, she adds social class to the picture. In the second volume, *The Eye in the Door*, Billy Prior works in the military secret service and tries to help his childhood friends, now imprisoned for their pacifist campaign. He feels obliged by class loyalty to help Beatty Roper, a neighbour who looked after him as a child, and whose daughter Hettie was his sweetheart. His sense of class solidarity is further reinforced when Prior discovers that Beatty had been framed by a dishonest agent-provocateur. But at the same time he hates pacifists, who, like Beatty's son, William, have chosen a prison sentence rather than joining the army. When Billy learns that William's protest against the army involves refusing to put on the uniform in a freezing cell, he resents "having his sympathies manipulated" (*ED* 274). He immediately compares William's fate to that of his soldiers and protests implicitly: "*I lost three men through frostbite*" (*ED* 274, original emphasis).

Social class is an important factor marking Prior out as Barker emphasizes his in-betweenness; he does not belong with the officers, who recognize him as a "temporary gentleman"[7] (*ED* 240) by his accent and his clothes, while at the same time, he is too posh for his childhood friends. As his father complains, he is "neither fish nor fowl" and "he should've stuck with his own" (*R* 52). Such social liminality allows the author to use Prior as her mouthpiece to abolish the myth of the war erasing class distinctions. Barker places several dilemmas in the way of her characters; in the case of Billy Prior the choice is between loyalty to his social class and loyalty to his friends back in the trenches. Respect for the working class and commitment to war need not be mutually exclusive, but by making all his childhood friends into militant pacifists, Barker places Prior in a morally ambivalent position. He is torn between his instinctive hatred of the middle class, his desire to help Beatty Roper, whom he perceives as a victim of a provocation and his suspicion of the pacifists like Patrick MacDonald, whom he sees as traitors. His mental disorder – split personality – will "help" him solve the dilemma: Billy Prior will betray Patrick MacDonald during one of his fugue states.

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[7] "Temporary gentleman" was a term used about the officers in World War I recruited from the working class background; Prior serves as an officer rather than rank and file soldier due to his grammar-school scholarship and clerical job before the war.

Prior suspects all members of the professional middle class whom he encounters of class prejudice, including Rivers. One of the first things he tells Rivers about France refers to the snobbery he encountered in the trenches: "It's made perfectly clear when you arrive that some people are more welcome than others. It helps if you've been to the right school. It helps if you hunt, it helps if your shirts are the right colour" (*R* 60). In the course of the conversation, Prior becomes more agitated and confrontational, which is his usual manner with Rivers: "The only thing that really makes me angry is when people at home say there are no class distinctions at the front. Ball-*ocks*" (*R* 61). Rivers seems to be above the kind of snobbery that Prior complains about, yet he does register the accent when Prior recovers his voice: "Hearing Prior's voice for the first time had the curious effect of making him *look* different. [...] A little, spitting, sharp-boned alley cat" (*R* 45). He also notices the working-class mannerism, "our Billy", in Mrs Prior's speech despite her "carefully genteel voice" (*R* 53). Noticing class distinctions does not have to entail prejudice, but Prior draws Rivers into a conversation about the difference in the symptoms of shell shock in ordinary ranks and the officers, which reveals the psychiatrist's conviction that the distribution of physical and neurotic symptoms is connected with "the officers having a more complex mental life" (*R* 88). The different symptoms in shell-shocked officers and ordinary ranks are confirmed by contemporary historians; while the officers mostly displayed psychological symptoms, such as anxiety neurosis, the ordinary ranks were affected by physical symptoms, such as paralysis or mutism (Bourke 1996; Leese 2002). In the final volume, when their relationship grows a little closer, Prior points out resentfully that Rivers quickly starts addressing the patients who are his social equals, like Sassoon or Manning, by first-name, whereas with him he persistently uses his surname.

Barker uses the character of Sassoon as an illustration of the difference that class makes in war experience. He is sent to Craiglockhart as a result of his written protest against the war. While it is clear for him and for Rivers that an ordinary soldier would have been court--martialled in the same circumstances, Robert Graves arranges through friends that a Medical Board declares him insane and sends him for psychiatric treatment. Craiglockhart is a very different facility from those where ordinary soldiers are treated, the patients are free to move and even leave the grounds. Sassoon spends his days writing, playing golf with another patient and, invited by Rivers, he joins the Conservative

Club in nearby Edinburgh. In other words, he enjoys a relatively comfortable life. This is contrasted in the second volume, *Eye in the Door*, with the fate of Beattie Roper and her son William, who share with Sassoon his conviction that the war is pointlessly cruel, that it must be stopped immediately, but because they are poor and working class they are victimised by the state, imprisoned and subjected to various forms of torture. While for the upper-class officer his pacifist declaration results in six weeks in a hospital in the countryside, for the uneducated woman from a backstreet of Salford the same views expose her to a political provocation, a corrupt trial and a two-year prison sentence.

Another motif discussed in *The Great War and Modern Memory* with which Barker enters into a dialogue is the role of the pastoral English countryside in the memories of soldiers. Fussell opens his chapter seven, "Arcadian Recourses" with a claim that "If the opposite of war is peace, the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of pastoral" (1977 [1975]: 231). He points out ruralism as a peculiar British characteristic and, after Raymond Williams, ascribes it to "a tradition of Imperialist exile from home" (1977 [1975]: 232). Thus pastoral and rural images serve in the memories of soldiers as invocations of home with all its implications of peace and safety. Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" with the images of England's "flowers to love" and "ways to roam" can serve as the best example of the pastoral as a form of worship of the idealised homeland (Brooke in Hussey 1967: 55).

In Barker's second volume of the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door*, this notion of pastoral England is examined and undermined by Billy Prior, who again brings the notion of class into the picture. When visiting his parents in Salford, he reflects on the familiar landscape around his home only to register a stark contrast between his images of home and those of other officers:

> This patch of waste land always reminded him of France. Sump holes reflected a dull gleam at the sky, tall grasses bent to the wind, pieces of scrap metal rusted, rubbish stank, a rusting iron bedstead upreared itself, a jagged black shape that, outlined against the horizon, would have served as a landmark on patrol.
>
> One of the ways in which he felt different from his brothers officers, one of the many, was that their England was a pastoral place: fields, streams, wooded valleys, medieval churches surrounded by ancient elms. They couldn't grasp that for him, and for the vast majority of the men, the Front with its mechanization, its reduction of the individual to a cog in the machine, its blasted landscape, was not a contrast with the

life they'd known at home, in Birmingham or Manchester or Glasgow or the Welsh pit villages, but a nightmarish culmination (*ED* 307).

In this instance, Barker clearly endows her fictional protagonist with a very modern class consciousness, which makes him argue with the commonly held beliefs about the role of the pastoral in the visions of England entertained by the soldiers, from a clearly post-Fussellian perspective. In a way characteristic for her writing, the novelist returns to this motif in *Double Vision*, when she compares Stephen's arrival in Yorkshire to a soldier's return home and points out that "It's part of English mythology, that image of the soldier returning, but it depends for its power on the existence of an unchanging countryside" (*DV* 201). Stephen finds "the countryside in crisis" since in *Double Vision* the countryside is traumatised by the epidemics of foot-and-mouth disease. As the animals are culled and burned on the pyres, all the activity is thwarted, the farmers are devastated, but with them all the local businesses as well. So even the rural landscape that hitherto seemed to epitomise the pastoral is transformed by death on the mass scale.

Another aspect of social history represented from a very modern perspective in *The Regeneration* trilogy is sexuality; as Barker brings to the fore issues of homosexuality and homoerotic feelings of the officers for their men. The prominent historical figures in the novels, Sassoon, Owen, Graves, Rivers are homosexuals, while Billy Prior is bisexual, sadistic and highly promiscuous. Barker examines popular attitudes towards homosexuality by entangling a minor character in *The Eye in the Door*, Charles Manning in the notorious "Pemberton Billing affair," or rather casting him as a victim of Noel Pemberton Billing's wartime campaign against homosexuals in Britain. In an article published in his journal *Imperialist* in 1918 Billing, an arch-conservative Member of Parliament, claimed that the enemy planned to weaken the British nation by encouraging homosexuality and that the Germans were in possession of a list of names of 47,000 prominent British figures who were homosexual and therefore could be blackmailed into cooperation with the enemy (Hoare 1997). He was sued for libel by an actress, Maud Allan and the ensuing court trial resulted with "chaos in the courtroom and hysteria in the newspapers" (Author's Note in *Eye in the Door* 423).

In the second volume of the trilogy, Charles Manning, a senior clerk in the Ministry of Munitions is harassed by anonymous letters containing newspaper cuttings with references to "the cult of the clitoris" (*ED* 242), which makes him aware that "obviously somebody was [watch-

ing]" (*ED* 243). Manning gradually comes to link the newspaper cuttings which arrive in the mail with his friendship with Robert Ross, Oscar Wilde's literary executor, and the fact that his name must be on "the list of the 47,000," nevertheless he quickly rejects the possibility of "drop[ping] Ross" (*ED* 244) and recognizes that "[i]t was a question of courage in the end" (*ED* 244). In Manning's reactions to his situation, Barker builds a parallel between the experience of being under bomb attack in the trenches and that of being a blackmailed homosexual. "[Manning] found himself moving between pieces of shrouded furniture like his own ghost" (*ED* 245). This reduction of the self to the "ghost" appears throughout the trilogy as a symptom of war neurosis. Here Manning feels as threatened as he felt in the trenches: "[s]uddenly, the full force of the intrusion into his home struck at him, and he was cowering on the pavement of Oxford Street as if a seventy-hour bombardment were going on. [...] The sensation was extraordinary, one of the worst attacks he'd ever had" (*ED* 245). Barker's modern approach to homosexuality, which was decriminalised in Britain only in 1967, is manifested through the fact that all the subsequent references to the "Pemberton Billing affair" clearly present those involved in the homophobic conspiracy as either insane, or, at least, ridiculous. Captain Spencer, "the man who saw the Black Book" (*ED* 283) approaches Manning after the performance of Wilde's *Salome* to warn him of the "women in this city whose clitorises [are] so grotesquely enlarged, so horribly inflamed, they can be satisfied ONLY BY BULL ELEPHANTS" (*ED* 283, original emphasis). Rivers mocks the medical expert whose recommendation that homosexuals "are monsters", who "should be locked up" (*ED* 331), is reported in *The Times*, but he also feels threatened by the witch hunt. In response, his friend, Henry Head highlights the paradoxical turn of the trial: "it was hilarious when that woman told the Judge his name was in the Black Book" (*ED* 331). Rivers mentions the Pemberton Billing affair for the first time in the first volume of the trilogy in a conversation with Sassoon, when he tries to warn him in Craiglockhart that he should not entertain any hopes for greater tolerance in wartime:

> in war you've got this *enormous* emphasis on love between men – comradeship – and everybody approves. But at the same time there's always this little niggle of anxiety. Is it the right *kind* of love? Well, one of the ways you make sure it's the right kind is to make it crystal clear what the penalties for the other kind are (*R* 181, original emphasis).

The same conversation and a similar explanation is repeated in *The Eye in the Door*, only this time Rivers is talking to Manning, not Sassoon, but he remembers the previous conversation and Sassoon's protest against conformity: "Well, I can't live like that. Nobody should live like that" (*ED* 340). Sassoon's fictional protest against being pushed into the closet is closer to the late twentieth-century attitudes than those of his contemporaries. As is the portrayal of Charles Manning's double life, which is presented as having no adverse effects on his family happiness; his wife seems to be full of understanding and empathy for the pestered men. What both Rivers and Manning emphasize is the absurdity of the homophobic campaign, its function as a red herring: "Any serious consideration of the terrible state of affairs in France was pushed into second place by the orgy of irrational prejudice that was taking place at the Old Bailey [...] people didn't want reasons, they wanted scapegoats" (*ED* 340).

In the same conversation with Manning, Rivers quotes the strict Freudian view of the war neurosis: "the experience of all-male environment, with a high level of emotional intensity, together with the experience of battle, arouses homosexual and sadistic impulses that are normally repressed. In vulnerable men – obviously those in whom the repressed desires are particularly strong – this leads to breakdown"[8] (*ED* 338). This theory is illustrated by Prior's case, his homosexual and sadistic impulses are linked to the experience of war, from which he seeks refuge in the heterosexual relationship with Sarah. In his homosexual relationships he is attracted to men in uniform which seems to arouse his predatory and sadistic impulses. Whereas his passion for Sarah brings him comfort and rare moments of security.

Fussell's chapter eight, "Soldier Boys" opens with a section called "Mars and Eros", devoted to the homoerotic elements in the Great War

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[8] This opinion can be found in an article by Dr Ernest Jones, the president of the British Psycho-Analytic Association published in 1921. The article titled "War Shock and Freud's Theory of the Neuroses" is quoted by Joanna Bourke in her book *Dismembering the Male*: "The manhood of a nation is in war not only allowed, but encouraged and ordered to indulge in behaviour of a kind that is throughout abhorrent to the civilized mind, to commit deeds and witness sights that are profoundly revolting to our aesthetic and moral disposition. All sorts of previously forbidden and buried impulses, cruel, sadistic, murderous and so on, are stirred to greater activity, and the old intrapsychical conflicts which, according to Freud, are the essential cause of all neurotic disorders, and which had been dealt with before by means of 'repression' of one side of the conflict are now reinforced [...]" (1996:116).

poetry and memoirs. It contains a paragraph offering an explanation for those phenomena very similar to the one Barker makes her psychiatrist provide:

> given the deprivation and loneliness and alienation characteristic of the soldier's experience – given, that is, his need for affection in a largely womanless world – we will not be surprised to find both the actuality and the recall of front-line experience replete with what we can call the homoerotic. I use the term to imply a sublimated (i.e., "chaste") form of temporary homosexuality. Of the active, unsublimated kind there was very little at the front. What we find, rather, especially in the attitudes of young officers to their men, is something more like the "idealistic," passionate but non-physical "crushes" which most of the officers had experienced at public school (Fussell 1977 [1975]: 272).

This affection of the officers for their men is portrayed in Barker's trilogy as a peculiar combination of maternal feelings with a feudal sense of responsibility for the inferior orders and homoerotic fascination with young bodies. Sassoon feels "fatherly" (*ED* 388) attachment to the soldiers he has trained, he calls them "*my* men" (*ED* 384 original emphasis), but he is also disarmed by their youth and beauty. Prior is much more skeptical – "I wasn't born to the delusion that I am responsible for them" (*GR* 533), which makes him sound like a corrective to the rather affected Sassoon, but he looks after his soldiers too. From the letters he censors, he knows of the worries that trouble them (*GR* 558–9) and finds a new boot for Wilson when a nail sticking from his old boot injures his heel. The boot is filled with the rotting flesh "of the previous owner" (*GR* 570).[9]

Prior's reflections at the sight of his soldiers in the bath are another example of a dialogue with the traditional approach to British war imagery; at first he feels sexual excitement, he has had sexual fantasies of dominating a naked lover while remaining fully clothed, then he reflects on the vulnerability of their nakedness and notes their undernourished bodies, finally he draws a parallel between the pathos of their bodies and the mutilated bodies of the saints "behind every altar, blood, torture, death" (*GR* 531). This scene may be read as one more instance of Barker's revision of the myth of the war as it is presented in Fussell, who includes a separate section on "Soldiers Bathing", which opens with this statement:

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[9] The image is borrowed from the fictional memoir of Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928).

Watching men (usually "one's own" men) bathing naked becomes a set-piece scene in almost every memory of the war. And this conventional vignette of soldiers bathing under the affectionate eye of their young officer recurs not because soldiers bathe but because there's hardly a better way of projecting poignantly the awful vulnerability of mere naked flesh. The quasi-erotic and the pathetic conjoin in these scenes to emphasize the stark contrast between beautiful, frail flesh and the alien metal that waits to violate it (1977 [1975]: 299).

Like her portrayal of the pastoral landscape of home, Barker's fictionalized version of the "soldiers bathing" is tinged with the modern perspective on war which she assumes in her novel. Prior's eye is not "affectionate", but predatory and the flesh he looks at is "frail", but far from "beautiful". Yet, as if he were making a comment on Fussell's statement, Prior reflects on the pranks of a particularly short soldier in oversized drawers: "it suddenly struck me that soldiers' nakedness has a quality of pathos, not merely because the body is so obviously vulnerable, but because they put on indignity and anonymity with their clothes" (*GR* 531). The role of the uniforms in what she calls "male bonding", as well as scenes in Undressing Rooms and men bathing are discussed in great detail by Bourke (1996: 124–71).

Thus in *The Regeneration* trilogy the novelist engages in a dialogue with the accepted, patriotic version of the history of the Great War and adopts a revisionist attitude to the myth of the war. She not only presents an alternative to the way the war is remembered as an event which erased the class distinctions, created job opportunities for the women, enhanced the pastoral images of England and fostered camaraderie between the officers and their soldiers, but she deliberately rewrites and revises the canonical images which had helped establish that myth. It must be remembered that Pat Barker is not an amateur in the field of history, she studied international history at the London School of Economics and she is clearly aware of the current historiographic debates. It is not an accident that she has chosen to interrogate the ways in which the myth of the Great War and British literary canon represented class, sexuality and gender. By targeting these themes, the novelist clearly indentifies with the postmodern and feminist approach to history.

Interestingly enough, Fussell, who writes that "to be in the trenches was to experience an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint" (1977 [1975]: 51) does not dwell on shell shock. Showalter writing a decade later builds an entire theory of shell shock as male hyste-

ria with the same causes as the female hysteria, i.e. being physically constrained, only occurring in a different location (1987: 170–95). In fact, Barker's fictional preoccupation with this phenomenon predates the wave of historical studies of shell shock that arrived in the new millenium,[10] although the novels appeared in the decade when the Great War was very much in the centre of attention: the war poets were taught at school and the television broadcast many documentaries about the war (Brannigan 2005a: 371). Shell shock is just one of the manifestations of trauma, which lies at the centre of Barker's narrative. It is a medical and psychological condition, but also a military and a political problem. What is more, the novel portrays trauma of history which affects individuals as well as whole nations; informed by contemporary theory of trauma, Barker shows that the Great War undermined certain basic values of British society and consequently has become a cultural trauma for the nation. Individual trauma is caused by the horrors of trench warfare (shell shock) and violence at home, bigoted popular attitudes to homosexuality, or even strict upbringing in the case of Rivers.

Barker incorporates various diagnoses, psychological theories of causes of trauma and debates about the topic into her text in a most realistic mode, since her main protagonist is a neurologist and psychiatrist working first at Craiglockhart, a progressive facility for officers, and then in a London hospital. Shell shock is Rivers' daily bread: he interviews patients about their experience; forcing them to remember the most horrifying details is part of his therapy. In consequence the readers are confronted with a large number and variety of individual cases.

Rivers persuades his patients that "horror and fear [are] inevitable responses to trauma of war and [are] better acknowledged than suppressed" but he realizes that in this way he is "setting himself against

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[10] The first full-length English language historical monograph on shell shock in World War I was published in 2002 by Peter Leese, *Shell Shock; Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War*, to be followed by a veritable explosion of the monographs on related topics towards the end of the decade: Paul Lerner's monograph of shell shock among the German soldiers, *Hysterical Men; War, Psychiatry and the Politics of Trauma in Germany 1890–1930*, Cornell University Press, 2009, and Mark Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Men's Nervous Illness*, Harvard University Press, 2008, Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Manchester University Press, 2009, Jessica Meyer, *Men of War; Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

the whole tenor of their upbringing" (*R* 44), since he identifies the emotional repression resulting from the particular model of manliness those men were brought up to endorse as the main cause of their breakdown: "Fear, tenderness – these emotions were so despised they could be admitted into consciousness only at the cost of redefining what it meant to be a man" (*R* 44–5). Thus, trauma is linked with questions of gender and masculinity. Rivers has been observing patients suffering from shell shock for a long time and, after moving to London and working with pilots, he has reached some conclusions about the causes of the nervous breakdown in soldiers:

> it was prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness that did the damage, and not the sudden shocks or bizarre horrors [...]. Any explanation of war neurosis must account for the fact that this apparently intensely masculine life of war and danger and hardship produced in men the same disorders that women suffered from in peace (*R* 196).

Barker makes Rivers express Elaine Showalter's views more than once in the trilogy, here, he echoes her claim that men in the trenches were forced to suffer the same confinement and repression of emotions as women in Victorian times. The term "shell shock" was invented to account for the same symptoms as those that in women were diagnosed as hysterical, but the condition was seen as peculiar to women (Showalter 1987: 129–30)[11] and therefore demeaning for men, in particular for soldiers. In the final part of the trilogy, Billy Prior confirms Rivers' theory when he returns to France, he feels the soldiers are "cramped in holes in the ground waiting for the next random shell to put [them] out" (*GR* 529).

Few of the cases of shell shock described in the trilogy have been brought on by one particular event. The only exception is David Burns, one of the patients at Craiglockhart, who had landed head-first in a rotting corpse, and has suffered from nightmares and serious eating disorders. Rivers' therapy is not successful with him as Burns is constantly suppressing the memory of the event and, in consequence, he has turned the experience into a myth. A large number of cases of war neurosis treated by Rivers are related to a perceived failure of manli-

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[11] As Eric Leed puts it, "the causes of neurosis lay in the dominance of material over the possibility of human movement. In the real sense the neuroses of war were the direct product of the increasingly alienated relationship of the combatant to the modes of destruction" (1979: 164).

ness on the part of the soldier, e.g. Harrington, who begins to recover from total collapse after he remembers that he was not a coward, but on the contrary, he had risked his life collecting all the belongings of his friend who had been blown to pieces (*GR* 562). Manning's neurosis was brought on by his act of euthanasia, shooting of Scudder, who was drowning slowly in the mud (*ED* 348–9). Wansbeck suffers from olfactory hallucinations and is haunted by the ghost of a prisoner whom he murdered because he was exhausted after twelve days non-stop in the front line. In all these cases the men are tormented by acts which contradict the expectations of heroism. They were placed in the circumstances which forced them to act in a manner clashing with their ideals.

Leed also notes that accepting neurosis as a "legitimate exit" (1979: 165) from war immediately made it a political problem. There was a considerable resistance in the military circles, who realized that they faced a serious difficulty of keeping the soldiers in the war (Leed 1979: 166). To a large extent Barker's trilogy is a novel about the need to admit the existence of trauma as a condition, as a political and military question, not only a medical problem. Hence the popularity of disciplinary treatment side by side the analytic treatment. Barker presents the disciplinary treatment by making Rivers visit Doctor Yealland, another historical figure, a Canadian doctor who used electric shock therapy to cure symptoms of shell shock.[12] Rivers sees Yealland as a sadist whose method consists of "unrelenting projection of authority" (*R* 197), and no attempt at improving the psychological condition of the patients. Much later in the novel, Rivers will joke about his method saying that Yealland cures his patients from nightmares of the trenches by replacing those with nightmares of electric shock. Even watching Yealland at work is a nightmare for Rivers, it becomes a horror that will add one more moral dilemma to his already long list: he feels empathy for Yealland's patients and instinctively would like to protest, but his professional ethics demands that he should restrain his feelings.

As Leese points out: "[t]he overwhelming impression is that doctors were barely able to cope with the various mental cases that they encountered [...] and collective military interests were invariably more important than the fate of the individual" (2002: 97). This impression is

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[12] Yealland's method is described both by Leed and Showalter and both authors agree that he tortured his patients into submission, though other historians point out that we really do not know how commonly used his method was (Leese 2002: 74).

sustained in Barker's novels and it results in another dilemma for Rivers, who soon comes to realise that he treats the victims of shell shock only in order to have them sent back to the trenches and eventually killed and that in this respect, his actions are no different from those of Dr Yealland. It is also clear in the novel that shell-shocked soldiers are viewed with suspicion, that Rivers with his empathy and effective analytical method is not a representative of a vast army of doctors, but an exception to the rule.

Shell shock is problematic not only for the military and medical circles. An expression of popular prejudice against mental illness is clear in the attitude of Billy Prior's father, who comments on his feelings for his son during a visit at Craiglockhart: "he'd get a damn sight more sympathy from me if he had a bullet up his arse" (*R* 53). In another episode, shell-shocked patients are hidden away in a back room of an Edinburgh hospital that Sarah visits with a friend. She stumbles into a conservatory where a large number of amputees sit in wheelchairs; unlike the other patients they do not even notice her youth and beauty, their stares are "blank" and overwhelmed by fear.[13] Sarah is furious with the war and the fact that the disabled soldiers are hidden from view: "[i]f the country demanded that price, it should bloody well be prepared to look at the results" (*R* 143).

Wartime trauma is placed side by side childhood trauma in *The Regeneration* trilogy; Billy Prior is unable to recall the incident which resulted in the death of Sawdon and Towers until he is hypnotized. Rivers gradually discovers that Prior has learned how to repress memories and even fully dissociate his conscious self from the world around him, when as a child he witnessed his father's abuse of his mother and, as he says, he was "too little to do anything about it" (*R* 56). There is a very clear parallel drawn between the helpless confinement of the soldiers in the trenches and the helplessness of a child unable to defend his mother. Paradoxically, though not altogether unexpectedly, Rivers also is a product of a restrictive upbringing, which in his case has resulted in an analogous repression. A childhood trauma has resulted in the blocking of visual memory and a neurosis whose symptom is a stammer. The paradox is highlighted by the fact that he is diagnosed by Billy Prior.

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[13] The scene brings to mind Wilfred Owen's poem "Mental Cases", with the memorable description of shell-shocked veterans as: "men whose minds the Dead have ravished" (Owen in Hussey 1967: 99).

Pat Barker seems to rely on trauma theory in her descriptions of symptoms and treatment of trauma. Caruth defines trauma "as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena"; she also places "belatedness and incomprehensibility" at the heart of the experience of trauma (1996: 61–2). Like Caruth, the novelist makes the temporal dislocation central to the experience: Prior, Manning and most other patients cannot remember the traumatic event during their sessions with Rivers, they have no access to the memory, yet they experience nightmares or hallucinations, in other words, are haunted by the past. The therapy used by Rivers in the novel is very similar to Pierre Janet's method of transforming the traumatic memory into narrative memory or Freud's talking cure. The past refuses to be past until it is recovered and worked through. Consequently, Rivers helps his patients by helping them remember the traumatic event and then analysing the circumstances in order to persuade them that they did the right thing, or, like Wansbeck, could not be held responsible for their deeds. However, Barker treats the individual traumas of the shell-shocked soldiers only as a starting point for a much broader claim about the past haunting the present, about the war haunting the nation.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominic LaCapra writes about "fidelity to trauma", i.e. a resistance to working though trauma and engagement with life in those victims who have "invest[ed] trauma with value" and treat it as "a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial" (2001: 22). He goes on to write about a tendency in modern culture to invest trauma with sublimity:

> Even extremely destructive and disorienting events, such as the Holocaust or the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, may become occasions of negative sublimity or displaced sacralization. They may also give rise to what may be termed founding traumas – traumas that paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group [...] (LaCapra 2001: 23).

Neil J. Smelser uses very similar terms to define cultural trauma:

> a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is: (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening the society's existence or violating one or more of its cultural presuppositions (2004: 44).

Unlike psychological trauma which is rooted in personal memory, cultural trauma is rooted in collective memory. As collective memory immediately raises questions about who owns it and how it is defined, Alexander notes that establishing collective trauma is a contested process which requires a narrative frame (2004: 12) as well as the agency of "carrier groups" (2004: 11), i.e. those who actively establish the trauma. We can read Barker's representation of the Great War as a representation of the "founding trauma" of British society. Knutsen demonstrates that Barker portrays World War I as an event "threatening the society's existence" and undermining its central "cultural presuppositions" such as institutionalized religious faith and patriarchy. As she points out:

> Because the trilogy presents the past diachronically it traces the establishment and maintenance of the Great War as cultural trauma; historical, interpretive and affective contestation is played out in the on-going dialogues between the characters and in the use of intertexts. We see changes and transformations in the way the war is perceived that reflect how the war violated some of the fundamental cultural presuppositions of British society (Knutsen 2008: 62).

For Knutsen this violation is most obvious in the way in which the first novel of the trilogy undermines institutionalized patriarchal religion. The critic traces this process through different readings of the trope of "regeneration" in the novel. The word may carry positive connotations of renewal, rebirth as well as more destructive ones. In gardening, regeneration may require cutting back of old or diseased parts of a plant. Samuel Hynes in *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* describes a pervasive feeling in Britain at the turn of the century that British society is in need of such regeneration, that the upper classes are decadent, whereas the working classes are physically degenerate, and that the war might rejuvenate the nation (1991: 64). This belief is expressed in the first novel of the cycle by Major Huntley, an enthusiast of rose growing and eugenicist movement, Huntley frequently points out the threat that degenerate working classes pose to the society. One of the patients at Craiglockhart, Fothersgill sees destruction as necessary for the regeneration of mankind, his reaction to the news of high casualty figures is: "the Celestial Surgeon is at work upon humanity" (*R* 166). However, the most prominent image related to the destructive aspect of regeneration involves the neurological experiment that Rivers and Head carried out in their youth in Cambridge. The experiment involved surgical severing of the nerves in Head's

forearm so that the two scientists could observe the process of nerve regeneration. In the process they distinguished between two stages: "protopathic" when the patient is highly sensitive, but unable to pinpoint the source of pain, and "epicritic" when he can locate the source of pain more precisely. With time, however, they must admit that the nerves never heal completely, which negates the possibility of regeneration through destruction.

The experiment required a sacrifice on the part of Head, who never regains full sensitivity in a triangle on his hand. The challenge to the idea of sacrifice as a prerequisite of regeneration is central to Barker's representation of religion and faith in the trilogy. When Rivers attends a church service, he looks at the stained-glass window with the scenes of crucifixion and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, "the two bloody bargains on which civilization claims to be based" (*R* 133) and reflects on the bargain of the latter scene:

> The one on which all patriarchal societies are founded. If you, who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons. Only we're breaking the bargain, Rivers thought. All over northern France, at this very moment, in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, not one by one […] (*R* 133).

The biblical stories of sacrifice appear as intertexts in the trilogy in a few more places. The notion that the human sacrifice in the trenches may bring regeneration is seriously questioned. Rivers, whose father was a vicar, renounces institutionalized faith. His reflections on the parallels between God, Abraham and the symbolic fathers of British soldiers lead him to question the patriarchal system on which social hierarchy is based. Gradually, he becomes more and more disillusioned about the military command and the motivation of those who are responsible for the war. The theme of loss of faith is developed further in the character of Billy Prior, who apart from being regularly raped as a boy by Father Mackenzie, still remembers the images from church as full of "blood, torture, death" (*GR* 531).

The patriarchal system is undermined by Barker on several levels. First of all, Rivers functions as a father figure for his patients, especially Sassoon and Prior. However, as his professional role is to cure them so that they may return to active service, he is portrayed

as an Abraham, who sacrifices his sons. Additionally, the father-son relationships in the trilogy are frequently coloured by Oedipal motifs; both Sassoon and Prior express their distrust and often hatred towards the men of the older generation. Rivers' recollections of his childhood are marked by his mixed feelings about his father, a vicar of conservative views, whom he finally opposed by giving a speech about Darwin, which was a challenge of patriarchy as well as religion. Barker also links patriarchy to the belief in war in the figure of Hallet, whose father is a patriot and a firm believer in the war as a noble cause. Young Hallet never questions his father's convictions until he is wounded in the head and dies in prolonged agony. As his family watch him die in the London hospital, Hallet tries to communicate something. His face is too disfigured for the repeated words to be comprehensible, but Rivers deciphers the phrase as "It's not worth it". Hallet's words are immediately taken up and repeated like a mantra by the other wounded soldiers, but his father insists: "Oh, it is worth it, it *is*" (*GR* 588, original emphasis).

By demonstrating that the mass slaughter of World War I eroded such fundamental tenets of British society and culture as patriarchy and religious faith, Pat Barker presents the war as a cultural trauma.[14] Her trilogy functions as "a symbolic residue left by the event" (Alexander 2004: 6), i.e. far from being an objective record of the historical event, it is one more intertext in the process of negotiation and debate about the war. In her later work, the author continues the theme of the past haunting the present by exploring, amongst others, transgenerational trauma.

The Past Invading the Present – Transgenerational Trauma in *Another World*

The first novel published by Pat Barker after *The Regeneration* trilogy continues some familiar tropes, provides fictional responses to the critics of her previous work, and enters new territory. Although the action of *Another World* (1998) is set in late 1990s, World War I remains

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[14] To comprehend the role of WWI as cultural trauma in Britain it is worth following the commemorations of the centenary of the war in 2014–2018.

the central historical event of the novel owing to the life story of the protagonist's grandfather, Geordie, which dominates the plot. Geordie is dying from cancer at the age of 101, but he is convinced that it is his old bayonet wound that hurts and bleeds because in the last months of his life the nightmares come back, flashbacks haunt him and make his nights "terrible to endure. Terrible to witness."[15] At nights the death of his brother, Harry, returns as a traumatic memory. Like Burns in *Regeneration*, Geordie is reliving the event: "it's not like he's remembering it, it's like he's actually seeing it" (*AW* 69). For Geordie the past invades the present in the most palpable way, by refusing to be past. As Nick, the protagonist, reflects on the day of his funeral, Geordie did not know of post-traumatic stress disorder, although he lived with its symptoms all his adult life and "he knew what it did to the perception of time. The present – remote, unreal; the past, in memory, nightmare, hallucination, re-enactment, becoming the present" (*AW* 270). Nick cannot shake off his grandfather's last words: "I *am* in hell" (*AW* 270, original emphasis). Like *The Regeneration* trilogy, this novel is also equipped with a professional, who can provide glimpses of the useful psychological knowledge: Nick is an academic teacher, the psychological jargon is part of his idiolect and his world.

Barker also continues in this novel a theme already mentioned in the trilogy, namely that of the moral dilemmas inherent in the war as legitimizing killing. When Prior realizes that he has no control over his actions in the fugue state, he worries that he might even murder someone, but then his cynical self quickly dismisses any possibility of the moral dilemma: "murder was only killing in the wrong place" (*GR* 454). In *Another World* during an interview with Helen, a historian, Geordie talks about his difficulties in settling in when he returned from the war: "No experience of anything that mattered. Job? I knew how to kill people. Not a lot of demand for that" (*AW* 151). Barker had made her fictional Wilfred Owen in the trilogy express doubts about his Christian faith and killing of the enemy; she implied that the two cannot be reconciled. However, in *Another World* the dilemma is even more drastic since Geordie's trauma is related to fratricide. Slowly, the readers discover that his nightmares stem from a dubious act of euthanasia. Geordie killed his wounded brother in No Man's Land, but, as he hated his brother, he cannot be sure that it was an act of mercy and not murder. In *The Eye in the Door* Manning is traumatised by a mercy killing

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[15] Pat Barker, *Another World*. London: Viking, 1998, 63.

he committed on a soldier drowning in mud (*ED* 348–9), but Geordie's torment is much worse as he is not certain about his own motivation and the image of his brother's screaming mouth returns every night to haunt him.

The reader has the impression that Barker follows the reviews of her novels, since she clearly responds to those who had criticized her for her modern approach to history by introducing the figure of Helen, a historian interviewing Geordie: "She tried to get Geordie to frame his war experience in terms of late-twentieth-century preoccupations. Gender. Definitions of Masculinity. Homoeroticism" (*AW* 83). Thus, Helen is a fictional character, who attempts to write a history of the Great War from the contemporary perspective in the same way as Barker does in *The Regeneration* trilogy. It is an unmistakable sign of the author's distance to herself and the practice of historical revisionism that Geordie resists Helen's prodding even though he is "remaking his memories to fit in with public perceptions of the war" (*AW* 83). The twentieth-century preoccupations remain precisely that, quite alien to the veteran immersed in the past.

Barker charts new territory when she uses the psychological notion of transgenerational trauma. The term was coined by Nicolas Abraham in the 1970s and has since been developed predominantly in relation to the families of the Holocaust survivors. Some psychologists claim that transgenerational trauma re-emerges in the third generation: "like a ghost, the trauma of the first generation shadows the development of the second generation, while the third assimilates it into themselves" (Cavalli 2012). Abraham and Torok state that "what haunts us are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (1994: 171). Thus, a person can suffer from symptoms which do not spring from his or her life experience but from the traumas or secrets of the parents or ancestors. Abraham introduces the concepts of "phantom", "haunting" and "phantasmatic haunting" and uses a rhetoric of ghosts to suggest a foreign presence in the self (1994: 171–6). Barker introduces the story of the Victorian family, the Fanshawes, in order to write the contemporary narrative of fratricide as a ghost story; the house is haunted and the children seem to act under the spell of an apparition, a ghost of the girl who probably helped her brother murder their younger brother. The ghost of the girl appears to Nick and to the children and may be interpreted as a "phantom" who transmits the trauma of fratricide across the generations, and even across the families. This element of the plot enters into an intertextual dialogue with Henry

James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and leads to reflections on the innocence and corruption of childhood (Monteith 2002: 90). But more significantly, the novelist establishes a link between Geordie's dark secret and the violence of Gareth and Miranda, Nick's stepson and daughter towards their half-brother, Jasper.

A similar interpretation is put forward by Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż in her excellent analysis of *Another World* (2012). Although she does not refer to the notion of transgenerational trauma, the critic prefers to use the term "post-memory" and reads the novel as "an intricate network of thematic links between children's violence and war, and between the history of Geordie and the history of the Fanshawes" (Sokołowska-Paryż 2012: 176). Apart from the obvious parallel between the deeds of the Victorian siblings and the cruelty of Gareth and Miranda to Jasper, Sokołowska-Paryż observes that Geordie's killing of his brother in No Man's Land fits into the same pattern of fratricide. However, as she states, while the Victorian ghosts frighten Nick and his family because they see how their actions mirror those from the past, Geordie's world remains fundamentally different and never merges with the "now", which:

> aptly captures the common acknowledgement of war as a temporal disruption, a break in historical continuity. Domestic violence and murder are perpetually present in time, war is not. It is "another world" understood only by those who had lived in it and experienced its otherness (Sokołowska-Paryż 2012: 182).

Geordie started talking about his war experience only when he was in his sixties; for his daughter and his wife it was veiled in silence. Nick remembers seeing his horrible wound and his grandfather refusing to talk about it. According to the letter of psychological analyses, Nick, representing the third generation, should be the one who has assimilated trauma. Instead, his entire family is haunted by the past; which makes one of the reviewers note: "There can't be many fictional families that have started off in such a state of harassment and distress" (Unsworth 1999). It is tempting to read Nick's failed masculinity as a symptom of trauma. He seems to have failed in all his duties to his family except for those related to his grandfather. Nick feels that he is a hopeless father, step-father, and husband; the only person for whom he manages to find time, energy and, most importantly, empathy, is Geordie. His main flaw as a man, father and husband results from his refusal to confront the truth about the reality around him. He cannot face the implicit hatred

and aggression in his family which almost ends tragically. There are several moments in the story when he refuses to recognize certain troubling signs: "the hostility between them doesn't necessarily spring from personal dislike, or so Nick tells himself" (*AW* 10) or he prefers not to act: "Gareth's capable of some very cruel games, but there's nothing he can do about that at the moment" (*AW* 36).

Anne Whitehead draws attention to the recurrent image of the mirror in Barker's novel with a highly relevant quote from Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* (1975): "To see through eyeglasses brings the discovery of another world and distorts normal vision. The derangement is similar to that provoked by the mirror" (Todorov quoted in Whitehead 2004: 20). Geordie still uses a metal mirror which he had with him in the trenches; as the surface is scratched, the reflected image is invariably distorted and unclear. Whitehead focuses on Geordie's metal mirror, which as she claims "in its subversions and distortions" reveals to him "the other world of the war and the trenches" (2004: 20). When Nick looks in the same mirror, he fails to recognize his reflection; his defamiliarised face may signify the "power of his grandfather's trauma" over the grandson (Whitehead 2004: 20).

I would like to add to Whitehead's discussion of "another world" revealed by the mirror some reflections on the motif of distorted vision in the novel. Gareth, who is clearly psychologically damaged, is frequently described as making people feel uneasy by the way he looks at them: "his eyes wince behind his glasses, no more than an exaggerated blink, but it tweaks her nerves" (*AW* 4). When Nick and Miranda are about to enter the house, he sees Gareth "staring down at them" and the fact that "He doesn't smile or wave" (*AW* 13) adds to the atmosphere of discomfort and anxiety. But most strikingly, Gareth spends his days staring at the computer screen playing violent games. When frightened, he lies down on the floor and plays with a toy soldier, which then looks real "because you can't see how small he is" (*AW* 170). Just as the soldier looks real because the boy lies down with his face next to him, his little brother on the beach seems unreal when watched from the cliff above: "He looks very small and pink, trotting along, like a piglet" (*AW* 188). The physical distance changes not only dimensions of objects in Gareth's line of vision, but it also affects their ontological status, as the soldier becomes real when watched in a close-up, his brother becomes "an ant" (*AW* 190) when watched from a distance. When he hits his brother on the head and the toddler starts bleeding, the situation gets out of his control. His decision to go on throwing the stones resembles

that of Ian McEwan's deranged protagonist in "The Butterflies":[16] "He doesn't look like Jasper now, he's crying and his head's bleeding and Gareth's terrified of him, terrified of what he's done, so terrified it's easier to go on than to go back" (*AW* 191).

In fact, there are several "other worlds" in Barker's novel. Gareth's other world is saturated in violence, be it the virtual violence of the computer games and *Terminator 2*, or all too real violence of his old school and the new comprehensive that he is to start in September. Here Gareth's world overlaps with broader reality outside the family home, for their new house is situated near a derelict housing estate, an area so dangerous that the drivers do not stop there on the red light. While this kind of a neighbourhood is not new in Barker's fiction, and she uses it quite effectively to deepen the general sense of crisis in the world she creates, it is rather disturbing that she makes her middle-class protagonist, an academic psychologist, ignore the threat that the prospect of attending a comprehensive school in this area must pose for a child like Gareth. Especially that Nick seems well aware of the dangers lurking in the outside world: "like everybody else, he lives in the shadow of monstrosities" (*AW* 3) and panics when he loses sight of his children on two occasions.

Barker's decision to project the monstrosities of the Great War onto other times and other circumstances results in a text which may be classified as a manifestation of the "wound culture" discussed in chapter one above. Dominic LaCapra warns against theorists "conflating structural and historical trauma, thereby situating historical losses on a transhistorical level" (2001: 13). Following LaCapra, Whitehead expresses some ethical doubts about the approach which may lead to "losing the specifics of an event in a generalisable condition" (2004: 5). Further on she observes that "[t]rauma theory can seem to imply that everyone is a victim, that all history is trauma and that we share a pathological 'wound culture'" (2004: 14). This charge seems to apply to *Another World*, where, indeed all characters seem to be victims of circumstances, they all feel victimized and guilty at the same time. Geordie's trauma from the trenches of WWI is placed on a par with the experience of a teenager bullied by his peers in a comprehensive school. Although,

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[16] "The Butterflies" is a short story from McEwan's first collection, *First Love, Last Rites* (1975). Its protagonist and narrator is a young man, whom the reader gradually recognizes to be retarded. He lures a little girl to a remote spot by a canal with no murderous intentions, but when he exposes himself the girl becomes frightened so he drowns her in a desperate attempt at keeping her quiet.

as I have pointed out in chapter one, the experience of trauma is highly subjective and depends on the individual psychological resilience, in this case, the comparison of the experience of Geordie and the misfortunes of all the members of Nick's family may indeed, lead to trivialization of trauma. In *The Regeneration* trilogy, the Great War is portrayed successfully as a cultural trauma and a foundational myth for British society, whereas, in *Another World*, the trauma of war is transmitted to the third and fourth generation and is manifested in murderous instincts of frustrated teenagers. In *Double Vision* it even becomes a general condition.

Double Vision: The Omnipresence of Violence

In *Double Vision* (2003), Pat Barker takes up new themes, as well as further explores some of the problems which the readers have encountered in her previous novels. She writes a novel set in the countryside of the North-East and thus, for the first time she moves her characters out of the derelict city. She also focuses on middle-class intellectuals and artists, rather than the under-privileged working class of her early novels. The horror of war is very much the subject of this novel, but it is the Gulf War of 1991, the war in former Yugoslavia in 1991–5, the terrorist attacks in New York of 9/11, and the war in Afghanistan. All of these conflicts emerge in the memories of one of the main protagonists, Stephen Sharkey, who quits his job as a war reporter and retires into the countryside in order to write a book about the representation of war. As the book is to be illustrated with the photographs taken by Ben Frobisher, his work partner killed in Afghanistan, Stephen visits his widow, Kate, who lives in the area. These two characters take centre stage in the novel, which has the effect of combining the theme of trauma with the omnipresence of violence and human vulnerability. Like in her previous novels, Barker does not resort to formal experiments in order to communicate the troubled state of mind of her characters. She chooses a third-person homodiegetic narrator, and floats between characters, with occasional shifts into free indirect discourse that give the readers access to the consciousness of the characters. Although *Double Vision* is a contemporary novel of manners, with the usual repertory of broken marriages, professional crises, and love affairs, there are a few

moments when the text seems to veer in the direction of a crime novel or a thriller. The novel opens with Kate's road accident and a mysterious driver who only looks at her trapped in the wrecked car instead of calling an ambulance. Later in the novel she will feel threatened by her temporary assistant, Peter, who, because of his criminal past, will be suspected of being involved in a burglary and violent assault on Justine, his former girl-friend. When Stephen Sharkey meets Peter, he "senses instability"[17] and instinctively dislikes him, which leads the reader to expect some sort of confrontation between the two men competing for Justine's love. Barker seems to offer the possible paths her narrative might take, and then she abandons them; the confrontation we expect never takes place. In the end her main focus is on how vulnerable we are, and how reaching out to the other human being may offer some redemption in the world where violence is inevitable.

In *Double Vision* trauma is domesticated and ubiquitous, which is reflected in the form of the novel. The text does not attempt to talk to the reader, involve the reader as witness or imitate the symptoms of trauma through dislocations of time. The final pages left blank can hardly be identified as a failure to represent trauma; if they are to constitute a graphic illustration of the unrepresentability of trauma, then the device fails to shock or even move the reader, especially that a few other traumatic experiences are described in fairly straightforward prose. The novelist seems to resist any temptation to mimic trauma; she describes Stephen's nightmare of Sarajevo and Justine's sense of dissociation after she had been attacked, but there is no formal experiment at the level of discourse, no significant gaps in the narrative, no fragmentation or temporal distortions.

Instead of structural experiments, Barker places loss at the centre of the plot,[18] as all the main characters are affected by particular traumatic events: Stephen by the horror of various wars and conflicts, Kate by the loss of her husband, Justine by criminal assault. Moreover, the overwhelming sense of loss is communicated by the central position that Ben occupies in the plot, although he died in Afghanistan a year before and appears only in memories and scenes of retrospection. Kate looks after his archive, Stephen plans to use his photographs in his book about the representation of war. The book is a memento of

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[17] Pat Barker; *Double Vision*, London: Penguin Books, 2004, 127.

[18] I am using the word in LaCapra's sense, i.e. to denote a real historical event, as opposed to "absence", i.e. haunting nonexistence.

their friendship and cooperation as well as a way to escape from his job of a war correspondent which has already destroyed his marriage and threatened his mental health.

Ben constitutes an intriguingly absent central figure whose professional dilemmas address the ethical questions related to representation of violence and atrocity. Stephen recalls their conversations in New York during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As a photographer, Ben realized that the terrorists attacking the World Trade Centre had staged the act of violence as "a photo-opportunity" knowing well "that we can't escape from a need for a visual record" and "they've used that against us, just as they've used our own technology against us" (*DV* 101), yet he could not resist the urge to take photos, even though by doing this he was fulfilling the scenario written by the terrorists. When Stephen and Kate discuss the "ethical problems of showing the atrocities", the work of Francisco Goya proves to be relevant, "there's always this tension between wanting to show the truth, and yet being skeptical about what the effects of showing it are going to be" (*DV* 119). They recognize the tension in Goya's pictures as well, which demonstrates that the dilemma goes back further than history of photography. Ben shared Goya's moral doubts about portraying war atrocities, nevertheless, like Goya, he "went on doing it" (*DV* 119). Ben attempts to deal with the dilemma by refusing to stay out of the picture – in a photograph of an execution in Afghanistan he includes his own shadow in the photograph. In this way, following Susan Sontag's argument about the treacherous nature of photographic mimesis, he warns the audience that they are not looking at an objective piece of the real world but a statement, an interpretation (Sontag 2001 [1977]: 4).[19]

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[19] In her famous collection of essays, *On Photography* (2001[1977]), Sontag compares photography to the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave in order to emphasize the illusion of direct access to reality it creates: "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and therefore, like power." She goes on to point out that photography creates this illusion to a much greater extent than other forms of artistic representation: "[...] print seems a less treacherous form of leaching out the world, of turning it into a mental object, than photographic images, which now provide most of the knowledge people have about the look of the past and the reach of the present. What is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation, as are handmade visual statements, like paintings and drawings. Photographed images do not *seem* statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire" (2001 [1977]: 4, my emphasis).

Barker admits to writing under the influence of Sontag's last book on representation of war and violence, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2004). She devotes an entire episode to exploding the illusory objectivity of the photographic image. The episode occurs when Stephen reports from the Hague on the trial of Slobodan Milosevič. First, he observes what he calls a "gruesome game of snap" (*DV* 130) between the prosecution and Milosevič, with each side competing with the number of photographs allegedly documenting atrocities committed by the Serbs, or on the Serbs. Then, he juxtaposes the drastic photographs used as evidence in the trial and the censored images presented to the audiences of the news programmes; like the pilots of US bombers, the audiences only saw "puffs of brown smoke" and were "doubly screened from reality [...]. Nothing as vulgar as blood was ever allowed to appear" (*DV* 131). Finally, he falls victim to the potential for manipulation in the photographic image, when he is made to alter his report so that it fits an allegedly "terrific photograph of Milosevič entering the tribunal" (*DV* 135). The photograph shows the chief prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, laughing triumphantly over the cowering figure of Milosevič. Only Stephen happens to know that the picture is a mere coincidence – del Ponte did not even notice Milosevič, she was sharing a joke with colleagues. "So much for photography as the guarantor of reality" (*DV* 135), is Stephen's bitter reflection. Yet, for the readers it is easy to understand why the editor would want a photograph like that to go with a text about the opening of Milosevič's trial – the manipulated image is a projection of the feelings of the international public. Although it is a violation of the ethical principles of journalism, we can indentify with the motivation behind it. This situation has a parallel in the novel when Ben takes a photograph of the body of a rape victim in Sarajevo. When they first discover the girl, Stephen's immediate reaction is to cover her mutilated body, he is traumatised by the sight which later becomes a haunting nightmare; Ben has no camera, and the girl's violated body seems too gruesome to Stephen to even be considered as a photo opportunity. So it comes as a double shock to him, when he finds a photograph of the girl in Ben's studio and realizes that Ben must have not only gone back with a camera, but also he must have restored the body to the original position. Stephen is "shocked on her behalf" and feels that she "had been violated twice" (*DV* 121). Although he knows that Ben's motivation was to show the truth of the situation, he finds it hard to accept this act of defiling the body. However, Ben is no longer available for a discussion and the whole issue remains open and unresolved. The readers are invited to pause

and think about the circumstances in which the photographs of atrocities, which feature abundantly in everyday press and the photographic competitions such as World Press Photo, are taken.

In *Double Vision* violence and trauma are omnipresent to such an extent that the countryside ceases to be a pastoral safe haven. In *The Regeneration* trilogy, Barker undermined the pastoral using the discourse of social class; Billy Prior's home was closer to the derelict landscape of the front than to the pastoral England of Rupert Brooke. Here the landscape is rural and beautiful, but it is marked by death and therefore menacing. Kate remembers that Ben photographed "nothing but landscapes" in between his gruesome assignments;

> they were supposed to be peaceful, these photographs, a break from the subjects he spent most of his life pursuing, but they weren't. You always knew, looking at these empty fields, these miles of white sand with marram grass waving in the wind, that somewhere, close at hand, but outside the frame, a murder had been committed (*DV* 64–5).

The country roads are full of roadkill, nature cannot win with the drivers speeding. Dead animals are an object of Stephen's nephew, Adam's, gruesome fascination. Stephen and Justine watch an owl hunting transfixed till the girl observes, "Isn't it odd? [...] You always feel lucky when you see something like that, and yet it's bloody horrible, really" (*DV* 104). Finally, Justine falls victim to violent assault when she surprises burglars in Robert's house, a traumatic experience for the young woman and the ultimate proof for the reader that the countryside is far from idyllic and no more secure than inner-city streets.

Death and trauma are also inflicted upon the landscape through the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and the mass culls of livestock. Various characters mention it in passing as "having destroyed the market for weekend breaks" (*DV* 48), a source of Angela's tragedy (*DV* 16), "a stopper on [the local] business" (*DV* 110) that left behind "boarded-up shops and cafés, empty fields, strips of yellow tape [...]" (*DV* 201) and the lingering smell of burning carcasses. Characteristically Barker does not focus on the farmers as victims of the epidemics; Angela's mourning of her pet sheep has a satirical tinge, and it is the countryside as a whole that is traumatised. The images of the pyres as well as the smell lingers on in the memory of all the locals; being traumatic memories, they refuse to be relegated to the past and haunt the present.

Despite its ubiquitous violence *Double Vision* offers more hope of redemption than the other novels discussed in this chapter. Barker builds hope for the future on the capacity of the individual to empathise with other human beings. The author explores the theme of empathy and its various degrees through her characters. While little Adam with Asperger's syndrome suffers from a deficiency of empathy and he does not recognize the other people as others, Peter, Kate's temporary assistant, is the reverse – he identifies with her to an extent that borders on pathology. Through the stories of Kate and Stephen, Barker emphasizes the importance of reaching out to the other human being. Apart from the figure of Christ for the cathedral, Kate is also working on a group of plaster figures who have "compelled her imagination" (*DV* 66) since 9/11, the terrorists. In focusing on the terrorists, rather than the victims, Kate assumes an ethical stance advocated by Judith Butler, who in her influential book *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* criticizes the limited perspective dominating the collective memory of 9/11 in the USA. Butler claims that the collective experience of such a traumatic event emerges within a particular narrative frame which determines the questions that are asked and historical inquiries that are made. The critic points to the first-person perspective adopted by all American narratives of 9/11 and states that it "reasserts impenetrable boundaries between self and others" (2004, xii). Butler calls for the artists to approach the event from the perspective of the Other. Kate's plaster figures form an attempt at reaching out to the Other, as in a truly Levinasian epiphany she recognizes their alterity: "they were lean, predatory, equally ready to kill or die" (*DV* 66). When seen through Peter's eyes later in the text they are "frightened and frightening" (*DV* 122). Kate makes an effort to imagine what it must have felt like to be the terrorists.

John Brannigan, in his monograph on Pat Barker, argues that *Double Vision* "engages critically and imaginatively with the politics of post-9/11 vulnerability" (2005: 153). As he states, 9/11 signifies a "paradox of representation" which is communicated in the epigraph from Goya: "One cannot look at this. I saw it. This is the truth." Goya is facing a dilemma, he must decide if he is ready to show the horrors of war. They are unspeakable, but they are the truth and, as Brannigan claims, "Art must bear witness to horror" (2005: 155). The problem Barker addresses is "how a subject attends to the other as subject" (Brannigan 2005: 158). Kate learns the lesson from Goya and attends to the Other with compassion. What is more, she treats her imaginary encounter

with the Other as an opportunity to learn something about herself. Whereas, Peter and Adam, with their defective perceptions of others, demonstrate the damaging consequences of excess and lack of empathy. Stephen's professional concern about how to represent the Other in war as a subject, and not, an object, adds yet another dimension to this complex meditation on empathy.

From Cultural Trauma to Victim Culture

In his critical inquiry into post-war British fiction and its complex relationship with history, *The English Novel in History 1950–1995* (1996), Steven Connor distinguishes between "fiction about history and fiction about its own historically relative construction of history" (1996: 142–3). He calls the two types "historical" and "historicised" fiction respectively. He arrives at the distinction by asking, among others, a question about "what the novel does" with and in history (1996: 10). I would like to apply Connor's question to the novels examined in the present study. The novels discussed above demonstrate an interesting trajectory in the development of Pat Barker's preoccupation with history and trauma. *The Regeneration* trilogy engages with history and especially the myth of the Great War; the text seeks to question, probe and subvert the accepted versions of history of British society in WWI. Barker rejects the myth of the war as a great democratic force by dwelling on the class distinctions in the trenches and back at home, she draws attention to the fact that England was pastoral only for the privileged classes. Most importantly, she establishes the function that WWI plays in collective memory as a cultural trauma which was foundational for British cultural identity. Finally, her text adds to the body of cultural memory; the trilogy has affected the way the British people remember the Great War today.

Then in *Another World*, Barker employs the concept of transgenerational trauma to explore the ways in which one family may be haunted by the trauma of WWI. In this novel, the author already shows signs of succumbing to "victim culture", when she makes the old wound function like a curse haunting the new generation and, in consequence, offers the readers the past as an explanation for the social and moral crisis in the present.

Finally, in *Double Vision* we deal with trauma transfer,[20] i.e. we read the current traumas through the lens of the historical trauma of war. In an attempt at portraying the omnipresence of violence in the contemporary world, the author collapses all violence into one and comes very close to trivializing the experience of trauma. The resulting vision of the world is one that LaCapra (2001) and Radstone (2000) would see as ethically dubious, with all characters portrayed as victims in a hopelessly violent reality. The author seems to have written herself into an ethical and aesthetic *cul de sac*, out of which, however, she definitely managed to emerge in *Life Class* (2007) and *Toby's Room* (2012).[21]

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[20] Ilka Saal uses the term "trauma transfer" in her analysis of J.S. Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* to point out how one historical event, universally recognized as traumatic may be used to conceptualise other cataclysms. Saal identifies "trauma transfer" to be a narrative strategy which involves reading the current trauma through the lens of previous trauma and notes that, for example, the memory of the Holocaust has been used by journalists, politicians and writers to mobilise NATO intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo, and that it is employed by Foer to frame the narrative of the 9/11 attacks.

[21] Both novels return to the theme of WWI, present a mixture of fictional and historical characters and explore the role of art in war.

Chapter 3

Sebastian Barry: From Historical to Historicized Fiction

> "All was a blank, black sheet of murderous nothing"
> *A Long Long Way*

Sebastian Barry, who is recognized as one of the greatest living Irish writers, was born in 1955 into a family whose forefathers belonged to a minority of Catholics that were loyal to the British crown. He is the author of children's fiction, poetry, novels and plays and nearly all his work stems from the painful history of his family. As Fintan O'Toole succinctly put it, Barry "has been weaving a private mythology from vestigial memories of his own 19th- and 20th-century ancestors, creating in the process a kind of anti-history of anomalous lives that elude the apparent simplicities of the orthodox narrative of the Irish past" (2005). As he sees his mission in giving a voice to those who were marginalised in the official history of independent Ireland, those that he describes in his early novel, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* as "scraps of people [...], blown off the road of life by history's hungry breezes",[1] Barry has frequently been labelled a revisionist. The writer does not deny his political sympathies, his novel about the First World War is dedicated to Roy Foster, who famously denounced "the Irish story" as nationalist myth. On the other hand, he claims that he does not search for those marginalised characters, "But by the accident of being born in Ireland into families who had

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[1] Sebastian Barry; *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty.* London: Faber and Faber, 2006, 284.

lived in Ireland through this past century, everywhere I looked I found people mired in history" (Barry in Wroe, 2008).

Sebastian Barry's preoccupation with Irish history is not unique, on the contrary, one of the comments frequently made by the critics of contemporary Irish fiction is that the Irish writers devote their energies to "slaying the shrivelled dragons of DeValera's Ireland" (McCrea 2007) rather than explore the complexities of the present reality. Nuala O'Faolain, Roddy Doyle, Patrick McCabe, Jamie O'Neill could be cited as examples of distinguished Irish writers whose fiction is marked by the difficult historical legacy of the early days of Irish independence. I have chosen the novels of Sebastian Barry for this discussion of the relationship between history, memory and trauma because his work demonstrates an interesting process of evolution from a rather simplified and one-sided engagement with history, through gradual rise of historiographic questions, to the issues of memory and trauma.

The writer has a tendency, quite common in contemporary Irish fiction, to return to the same events and write about them from the perspective of different characters. The four novels discussed in this chapter, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* (1998), *A Long Long Way* (2005), *The Secret Scripture* (2008) and *On Canaan's Side* (2011) may be analysed as two cycles. Eneas McNulty and his family appear in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *The Secret Scripture*,[2] while the narrator of *On Canaan's Side* is a younger sister of Willie Dunne, the protagonist of *A Long Long Way*. However, I discuss these novels chronologically, i.e. in the order of the dates of publication, focusing on the development and change in Barry's attitude to Irish history and historiography in general, in order to demonstrate how gradually, he abandons a politicised, narrow vision of history to eventually produce a polyphonous, alternative history of Ireland.[3] What is particularly intriguing and relevant for the present study is how Barry's vision of Irish history becomes problematised when he incorporates the reflection on the nature of memory and trauma into his novels.

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[2] A new novel about the McNulty family is due to be published in early April 2014, when this book is submitted for publication. The novel titled, *Temporary Gentleman* records the life of the oldest brother, Jack McNulty, who spent a large portion of his life in the colonial service in Africa.

[3] I have written about two of these novels, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *The Secret Scripture* in an article "Irish History in the Novels of Sebastian Barry" published in *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagiellonicae Cracoviensis*, Vol. 6, 2011, 157–67.

An Irish Aeneas in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*

Upon the publication of *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, Sebastian Barry was praised for the sensitive evocation of the sense of place and "anchoring the lyrical and mythical dimensions to his work by locating his fictions in named and real places" (Woodward 2008). Eneas McNulty is exiled from his hometown of Sligo, he attempts to return to it three times in the seventy years of his life, and on every occasion "the streets and houses of his boyhood [answer] the roaring sickness in his blood" (*WEM* 168). As the quote demonstrates, Barry's prose is highly poetic; in this novel he resorts to the language of Irish oral tradition, right from the first fairy-tale sentence: "In the middle of the lonesome town, at the back of John Street, in the third house from the end, there is a little room" (*WEM* 3). His protagonist is born almost together with the new, twentieth century, "some of which he will endure, but none of which will belong to him" (*WEM* 3), to a couple of loyalist Catholics, who both work making clothes for the inmates of a Sligo asylum. The longer Eneas endures life, which is not easy, the more he sees Sligo as an asylum, indeed the whole world seems to be populated by inmates. In the figure of Eneas McNulty, Barry creates the first of his Everymen characters, a "humanist naïf" (Hunt Mahony 2006: 3), a hopelessly innocent man, whose innocence the author makes credible by "coupling [his] unshakeable belief in the goodness of others with [his] adherence to [his] own belief system" (Hunt Mahony 2006: 3).

It is the way the author deals with history, however, that has produced critical controversy. *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* narrates the life story of an Irishman from Sligo against the background of major historical events of the twentieth century, and it is possible to identify in the text the features of a classical historical novel as defined by Lukács, who says that "what matters [...] is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events" (1983: 42). Eneas McNulty might even be classified as a "middling" character, i.e. the kind of protagonist that Lukács admired in Walter Scott's novels as opposed to a "hero" (1983: 33). What is more, the novel bears some affinities with the Homeric epic, which, according to Lukács, is the primary genre of the historical fiction; not only is the protagonist named after Aeneas, but he is an exile, his life

is a journey in search of home, or more precisely, a failed attempt at returning home.

The controversy was triggered by the political bias colouring Barry's portrayal of Irish history. As Elizabeth Cullingford points out, the text would have been more powerful had it been "less driven by [its]anti-republican thesis, less concerned to refute a one-sided version of history by offering an equally one-sided and sometimes factually misleading rebuttal" (2004: 36). In her article Cullingford accuses Barry of manipulating historical facts and of "sanitizing" the image of Catholic unionists (cf. Piątek 2011). While it would be absurd to expect slavish adherence to historical fact in the work of fiction, all of the inaccuracies that Cullingford identifies are indeed loaded with political bias. For example, when he works as a fisherman off the English coast in 1939, Eneas sees a ship whose passengers seem to look "like prisoners" (*WEM* 131). He buys a newspaper to find out that indeed it was a ship with German Jews who had already been refused asylum in the USA, Britain and now Dublin. Cullingford has researched the history of the ship in question and claims there is no evidence that the ship "sought asylum in Dublin" and that therefore "Barry distorts the historical record in order to damn De Valera" (2004: 31).[4] It is striking even to a reader ignorant of Irish history that all the nationalist characters are evil, while all those loyal to the British crown are good and innocent. Anyone with a minimal grasp of Irish history must cringe at the portrayal of the Auxiliary Forces, the Black and Tans as "boys that ran out into no-man's-land and took positions that only bodiless gods could have, and rescued men from the teeth of slaughter" (*WEM* 57). It is highly probable that during the Great War, in France they "saw sights worse than the dreariest nightmares" (*WEM* 57), yet Barry's insistence that their activities in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish war consisted of guarding peace and being cruelly slaughtered by the bloodthirsty republican rebels is just as unacceptable as the heroic version of nationalist history which he so obviously seeks to revise.

In this world of binary opposition of good loyalists and bad republicans, the author is determined to have his protagonist "mired by his-

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[4] Cullingford has identified the ship as the *St. Louis*, which in May 1939 carried 937 Jews from Germany. The ship was refused entry into Cuba, the United States and Canada, and eventually had to return to Europe, where various Jewish organizations negotiated with the governments of France, Belgium, Britain and the Netherlands to secure the admission of the Jewish asylum-seekers on board. For more details see: "Voyage of the St Louis", United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005267 [20 March 2013].

tory" and keep him innocent of violence at all cost. Thus when Eneas volunteers to join the navy during WWI, he ends up on a merchant ship, which allows him to avoid fighting. After the war, ostracised by the local nationalists, he faces unemployment and is forced to join the Royal Irish Constabulary. Although the Anglo-Irish war breaks out, Eneas never fires a gun; he merely transports corpses of those brutally murdered by others. During WWII he is one of those who were not miraculously evacuated from Dunqirk, but, nevertheless, he manages to escape from the carnage on the beach by simply walking south. Then, rather than fight the Germans in occupied France, Barry makes him tend a vineyard. It is not an accident that Eneas never kills anyone despite the fact that he is a veteran of three wars. He abhors killing to such an extent that when the IRA make killing of one of the Black and Tans a condition for him being taken off the black list, he prefers to leave Ireland and spend the rest of his life in exile. In a way his life is an ironic comment on, or an alternative to Pearse's idea of blood sacrifice[5] – Eneas would rather be killed himself than sacrifice the blood of others. This seems to be borne out by his thoughts on his contribution to the war effort, when he reflects with pride on what he has done as a soldier: "What better thing than to spruce a French farm, better than maiming and killing, he hopes" (*WEM* 157). In this way, Barry creates in Eneas an Irish anti-hero, who refuses to kill for his country.

If the text were to be read as a realist novel, then the figure of Eneas would have to be criticized as unbearably naive and impossibly innocent, flouting the rules of psychological verisimilitude. But the poetic language and the biblical images transport the readers into another genre and the text reads like a folk ballad: "bright boys and wide boys and bitter-hearted older men with tribes of brats and hard wives too are milling about up on the Showgrounds of a Sunday night and under their floorboards are real guns and in their souls the foul pith of rebellion" (*WEM* 54). In this context the hard-working, kind-hearted and simple-minded Eneas functions as a legendary character who refuses to assume the status of a hero, which brings us back to the origins of the historical novel discussed by Georg Lukács. The Marxist critic claimed

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[5] Patrick Pearse was one of the leaders of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who believed in a messianic and sacrificial notion that the Irish cause was congruent with Christ's sacrifice, he saw bloodshed as "cleansing and sanctifying" (quoted in Foster 1988: 477). His idea of "blood sacrifice" as a necessary proof that the Irish deserve their freedom was highly influential amongst the rebels during the Easter Rising of 1916.

that the historical novel was a product of romantic nationalism, that it was carried by a sense of progress with nation state as the desired objective and that as such, the historical novel frequently served nationalist propaganda (1983 [1963]). I believe that it is possible to read *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* as a reversed nineteenth-century historical novel, or an intertextual dialogue with the classical form of the genre. While the European historical novel in the nineteenth-century progressed towards national emancipation, in Barry's historical novel independence invariably brings about violence, corruption and individual tragedy. This bitter truth concerns not only Ireland; Eneas builds canals in Africa and witnesses the birth of Nigerian independence, which in this narrative is also violent and destructive. For Barry's protagonists, independence, decolonisation and establishing of the nation state lead to bloodshed, corruption and retaliation. Barry's handling of history in this early novel is quite peculiar and clearly coloured by his family history and his politics.

Although the author seems to acknowledge that prolonged fear, anxiety and exposure to horrors of war must have some psychological effects on his characters, he does not recognize them as traumatic, or rather does not dwell on the theme of trauma. When Eneas returns home from the navy, he encounters the young veterans of WWI with "blank eyes" and "bleak hearts as devious as cancer" (*WEM* 50), while his father knows "a silent boy" who was ruined "by the ferocity of that war" (*WEM* 55). In the ranks of RIC, Eneas serves together with the Black and Tans, who have "blank light of death and drear unimportance of being alive in their eyes" (*WEM* 58) and who will eventually commit suicide destroyed by the "crushing horror of the times" (*WEM* 59). Likewise, when Eneas is persecuted by the IRA death threat, he is affected by prolonged fear and anxiety, "to the left and right of him is terror and terror," and he becomes "a very strange man" so that his mother worries that "he is in danger of gathering to himself" and that he "will be the curse and the bogeyman of the district" (*WEM* 86). This perception of symptoms of trauma may be read as coming from the point of view of simple people like Eneas and his family. However, it is obvious that the author is not interested in exploring the subject further when he places the shell-shocked Eneas in a mental hospital in Sheffield during World War II. Eneas was apparently shell shocked during the massacre of the British forces in Dunqirk, but before he suffers from hallucinations and the physical symptoms of shell shock, he spends several months farming the vineyard in France, free from any symptoms of war neurosis.

The spell in hospital is significant mostly as marked by the violence of the orderlies towards the patients.

The motif which in this novel functions as a substitute for trauma is that of silence. The family origins of Mrs McNulty are veiled in silence and clearly a cause of great distress to her. It takes a long time and a few malicious hints from the people of Sligo before Eneas manages to extract the details from his reluctant mother; he learns that she is an illegitimate child adopted by her father's butler. She has tried to keep this a secret from the small town community, and although she has not been successful, secrecy and silence have become her way of dealing with problems. Thus, the McNultys do not speak about Eneas's death sentence, or the troubled marriages of his brothers, they only exchange "silencing looks" (*WEM* 176). Although, as Mrs McNulty explains to her son: "Least said, soonest mended. Telling won't help it. Silence is the job" (*WEM* 197), by this time in the novel it has become clear that she is wrong, as the family secrets have only led to failed relationships and misery. In fact, it is possible to read Barry's McNulty family with their thwarted relationships and insistence on not discussing problems as a metaphor of Irish history. Like the history of Ireland, the history of the McNulty's is replete with taboo topics. Like the Irish, the McNulty's try to avoid these topics in the hope that untouched, the wounds will heal. These taboos and the resultant traumas, both at the national and family level are explored in Barry's subsequent novels.

A Long Long Way: The Irish in the Trenches

The novel about the Irish involvement in the Great War, *A Long Long Way* (2005), marks Barry's departure from the ideologically biased version of history. There are no evil nationalists in this tragic story of Willie Dunne, the son of Thomas Dunne from Barry's play *The Stewart of Christendom*. The most problematic historical event in *A Long Long Way* is the Easter Rising. When the son of the chief superintendent of Dublin Metropolitan Police expresses doubts about the executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising, his father disowns him. The Rising is not glorified, but it is not condemned either. Barry successfully portrays the tragedy of young men who volunteered to fight in France in the

hope that after the war the British will deliver the promise of Home Rule and who, when visiting home for Easter in 1916, are forced to suppress the Rising. The novel has won acclaim from the critics for the way the author conveys "sheer physical pain and the speechless horror of the trenches" as well as the protagonist's "complex feeling of home-lessness" (Kenny 2005). It has been put in line with such notable WWI novels as Pat Barker's *The Regeneration* trilogy, Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* and Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong*.

Barry continues in *A Long Long Way* to explore the theme of the forgotten minorities in Irish history as well as the history of his own family. Thomas Dunne, the superintendent of Dublin Metropolitan Police, is a character loosely based on the figure of his own great-grandfather. Barry's play *The Steward of Christendom* (1995) features the elderly Thomas Dunne confined to a mental institution in Balting-glass in 1932, who in moments of mental lucidity reminisces over the crucial events of his career and personal life: the Dublin Lock-out in 1913, the handing over of Dublin Castle to Michael Collins in 1922, and his attempts at raising four children after the death of his wife. Thomas Dunne is visited by his daughter Annie and the ghost of his son Willie. Annie will be the protagonist of a 2002 novel, *Annie Dunne*, whereas Willie Dunne's participation in World War I will allow Barry to pursue yet another aspect of Irish history that had hitherto been marginalized.

One of the reviewers notes that, "In the annals of Ireland's march to independence, the role played by men such as Willie Dunne was simply too painful to bear scrutiny, and so they were forgotten" (Taylor 2005). This view is confirmed by the historian, Roy Foster, who, having stated that "the First World War should be seen as one of the most decisive events in modern Irish history", feels the need to add that "independent Ireland would later adopt a policy of intentional amnesia about the ex-tent of Irish commitment to the war effort" (1988: 472). The editor of *The Irish Times*, Fintan O'Toole explains "the conditions in which such a novel could be written" by listing the Irish writers who, having ex-perienced the war, either "sublimated their experiences almost beyond recognition" like George Fitzmaurice, or, if they chose to write about the horrors of what they saw, like Liam O'Flaherty in *Return of the Brute* (1929), were left out of the canon of Irish writing altogether (O'Toole 2007). According to O'Toole, World War I remained an almost virgin ter-ritory in Irish literature until the 1980s. Indeed, if the acknowledgments included in Barry's novel are anything to go by, one might conclude that

even Irish historians have only recently started writing extensively about the Irish participation in this war.[6]

Sebastian Barry writes about the First World War as an Irish tragedy and an imperial tragedy. Willie Dunne's motivation in joining the army resembles that of Eneas McNulty in that, like Eneas, Willie knows nothing about politics and is driven by an honourable impulse to defend Belgium, although, more importantly, he wants to live up to his father's expectations. He must somehow make up for the fact that he has not grown tall enough to join the police. Willie encounters Irishmen who have volunteered to fight by the side of the British for the sake of mutually exclusive goals. Most of the men in his regiment, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, are John Redmond's volunteers, in other words, they have signed up in response to the call by the Irish MP to join the British in the war effort in the hope that the Home Rule Bill negotiated in 1914 will soon be implemented.[7] In Belgium they fight side by side with volunteers from Ulster, who, in turn, hope that their sacrifice will earn them a guarantee that their counties will be exempt from Home Rule. However, the Irish are not the only colonial volunteers, they are placed in a broader context of the Empire and the world, already from the opening pages of the novel:

> And all those boys of Europe born in those times, and thereabouts those times, Russian, French, Belgian, Serbian, Irish, English, Scottish, Welsh, Italian, Prussian, German, Austrian, Turkish – and Canadian, Australian, American, Zulu, Gurkha, Cossack, and all the rest – their fate was written in a ferocious chapter of the book of life, certainly (*LLW* 4).[8]

As if attempting to remove the English from the centre of attention, the text repeatedly returns to the long list of nationalities involved in

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[6] In the Acknowledgements, Barry lists ten historical sources on WWI and Ireland, all published between 1992 and 2002.

[7] Foster notes that "the war clarified the position of the Irish Parliamentary Party. It could take the opportunity to demonstrate lofty independence, or it could prove that Home Rule was fully compatible with loyalty to Crown and Empire. Redmond chose to bet heavily on the latter strategy, and given that he had extracted a Home Rule Bill from Asquith he may not have felt that he had much choice. He offered full Irish support for the war effort, and suggested that all troops be withdrawn for active service, leaving Ireland to be guarded by the Volunteers, north and south" (1988: 472).

[8] In emphasising the international character of the armies fighting in World War I, Barry shows the influence of the contemporary historians of the conflict. See, for example Bourke; *Dismembering the Male*.

the war: "Recruiting sergeants of all the British world wrote down names in a hundred languages, a thousand dialects. Swahili, Urdu, Irish, Bantu, the click languages of the Bushmen, Cantonese, Australian, Arabic" (*LLW* 14). During the first gas attack the Irish occupy positions adjacent to an Algerian unit, "the colonial men" (*LLW* 45). After the attack on Guillemont the road is being repaired by "about two thousand Chinese", who continue working despite an ongoing bombardment to the amazement of the Irish: "It had a filthy fascination, to see the coolies digging and hacking as if ignoring their peril." Although the Irish see the coolies as subhuman, a colonial mass rather than individual human beings, eventually even they admit that "they were fucking heroes" (*LLW* 179).

The imperial dimension of the war is also made prominent through the portrayal of the English officers as invariably bigoted and condescending towards the soldiers, particularly towards the non-English soldiers. When Willie brings a message from his CO informing the headquarters that half of his company have been killed in the recent German attack and they need to be relieved from duty, the English major's spontaneous reaction is: "What's wrong with you fucking Irish? Can't you take a bit of gas?" (*LLW* 117). When staff officers appear at an Irish boxing match they sit apart from the rest and wear their "evening dress uniforms", a rare occasion which provokes a sarcastic comment from Christy Moran, the Irish sergeant-major: "These were creatures rarely seen who nevertheless designed and planned the battles, if did not fight the actual buggering things" (*LLW* 193). Christy Moran has no illusions about his role and that of his compatriots in the war right from the start:

'The same fucking army that always done for us. Held me head down in all of history and drowned me and me family, and all before, like fucking dogs, [...] English bastards, bastards the lot, [...] And I'm out here, I'm out here fighting for the same fucking King' (*LLW* 26).

When in spring of 1916 Willie sings *Ave Maria* at a party for his company, his heart is torn by the events he witnessed in Dublin and his sentiments have been moulded by his sergeant-major:

he sang for these ruined men, these doomed listeners, these wretched fools of men come out to fight a war without a country to their name, the slaves of England and the kings of nothing – in Christy Moran's secret, bitter words (*LLW* 134).

In *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, the readers can sense that the author deliberately looks at history through the eyes of an Everyman, whose agency is only fortuitous. In *A Long Long Way* his insistence on filtering the history of the Irish in the First World War through the experiences of an unsophisticated individual bears some resemblance to E.P. Thompson's historiographic approach, the "history from below". It is almost purged of the "great men" and relatively low on recognizable historical events but high on rank and file soldiers' experiences of the trenches, terror in battle, fear of poison gas and, more than anything else, the heightened sense of incomprehension in the face of so much violence and death. Although in *The Regeneration* trilogy, Pat Barker uses the discourse of class, she does not provide the perspective of the rank and file soldiers – she uses the vehicle of Billy Prior, her "temporary gentleman", i.e. an officer recruited from the working class, to expose the class divisions in the army. By contrast, Sebastian Barry focuses entirely on the private soldiers, who come from the working class of Dublin or the farming communities in the south and west, but few of them are as innocent and naive about the world as his protagonist, Willie Dunne, although paradoxically, he is the only representative of the middle class. When Jesse Kirwan tries to explain to him who they were ordered to fight during Easter in Dublin, Willie turns out to be completely unaware of the existence of, and the conflicting motivation of the National Volunteers, the Irish Volunteers and Ulster Volunteers (cf. Foster, 1988: 473). When he declares, "I am a volunteer too – I volunteered for the army", Jesse is exasperated: "You can't be this thick. Look it boy" (*LLW* 95). It is striking that Willie seems to retain his innocence despite the horror he is exposed to. His chronic confusion enhances the effect of history from below in the novel; as an eye witness he lacks the necessary perspective to see the events as forming a larger plan. Or rather, on his way to the front he still believes in the existence of the larger plan which he was lectured about in the training camp, for example, he expects "the cavalry engagements" (*LLW* 23), yet with time he becomes less confident about it.

The Easter Rising is the only recognizable historical event and, as such, stands out in the account. Barry places it at the end of Part One, from then on Willie's world starts falling apart, his most frequent reaction to the reality that surrounds him is "I don't know." The fluctuating attitudes to the Rising, as well as the change in the evaluation of its leaders illustrate the precarious nature of historical facts. To the officer who commands Willie's unit those in the General Post Office are "the

enemy" (*LLW* 88), so Willie assumes they must be German. When Jesse reads the Proclamation distributed in the streets he recognizes them as "our fellas" (*LLW* 90), but Willie cannot come to terms with the phrase "Our gallant allies in Europe" (*LLW* 95) clearly referring to the Germans. When they return to Flanders and discuss the newspaper reports of the executions of the leaders, one of the fellow-soldiers, Pete O'Hara feels the need to define their relative positions: "we're the fucking enemy of the fucking rebels" (*LLW* 138), nevertheless, the soldiers feel uneasy about the executions. Eventually Pearse's idea of blood sacrifice transforms "the enemy" into martyrs; his claim that "bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing" (Pearse in Foster, 1988: 477) is corroborated by Irish history and confirmed in Barry's novel. The rise of the Fenian leaders to the status of national heroes coincides with Willie's fall from grace. When on furlough in Dublin, he is stoned and spat at by Catholic boys because he is wearing a British uniform. Their cry: "fucking Tommies, go home" is all the more painful as he has just left his home, turned out by his own father. Willie is waved off to war as a hero, yet in Flanders he goes through horrors only to discover that back at home he is no longer considered a hero. It was his sympathy for the young rebel he saw shot in Dublin that provoked his loyalist father's anger. Events beyond his powers of comprehension have deprived him of his happiness and his father's affection.

Such powerlessness in the face of history on the part of characters is a recurrent motif in Barry's fiction. His characters frequently seem to be duped by history, since they learn only after the fact that they had made a wrong choice in life. The author insists on their innocence and lack of political insight, which was hard to justify in the previous novel, but here it brings to mind Paul Fussell's claim that "the Great War was more ironic than any other [because] its beginning was more innocent" (1977 [1975]: 18).[9]

In his final chapter "Persistence and Memory", Fussell offers a reading of the memoirs of the war poets through Northrop Frye's critical perspective of Theory of Modes which distinguishes between five modes of fiction: mythic, romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic. The distinction relates to how the protagonist is portrayed in respect to the

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[9] In the opening section of his book, Fussell quotes a poem published by Philip Larkin in *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), titled "MCMXIV", in which the poet contemplates with tenderness a photograph of a queue of men outside the recruiting station in 1914. The closing line of Larkin's poem: "Never such innocence again", might well be used as an epigraph of *A Long Long Way*.

rest of humanity; his "power of action may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (Frye 1957: 33). The hero's power of action is greater than ours in myth, romance and high mimetic mode of epic or tragedy. In low mimetic mode the hero's powers of action are like ours. The mode in which the hero's power of action is less than ours is the ironic, where "we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration or absurdity" (Frye 1957: 35). A standard character in the ironic mode is a man to whom things are done (Frye 1957: 33–43). This is the impression that Barry's characters make on the readers; they are helpless in the circumstances beyond their control, the army service is bondage and their deaths are absurd rather than heroic.

In contrast with *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, *A Long Long Way* contains direct references to history and the activity of historians. In a passage describing the soldiers poised in the trench awaiting the signal to attack, the narrator emphasizes the element of heroism that joining the army must have required: "No man could come out to the war without some thought of proper duty" (*LLW* 110). He then assumes Willie's point of view as he observes his companions crouching:

> [...] in their complete insignificance [...] This was not a scene of bravery, but it seemed to Willie in his fear and horror that there was a truth in it nonetheless. It was the thing before a joke was fashioned about it, before an anecdote was conjured up to make it safe, before a proper story in the newspaper, before some fellow with the wits would make a history of it (*LLW* 111).

The quote above marks the beginnings of Willie's self-consciousness as a participant in a historical event as well as the first signs of the self-consciousness of the text. Other soldiers also make comments about their role in the Grand Narrative of history when they compare their war to that from Tolstoy's novel. The book lover Timmy Weekes notices that "In his war you could still go home and fall in love with a lady" (*LLW* 231) and that the battles were different because "when everyone was dead on the other side, you had a victory" (*LLW* 232). Whereas in their war it is impossible to tell the difference between a victory and a defeat, the only battle that has been announced as a victory is one in which, nevertheless, they "were fucked to hell" (*LLW* 232). The soldiers also articulate ironically self-conscious reflections about literature such as: "they don't write books about the likes of us. It's officers and high-up people mostly" (*LLW* 232). With this remark from the fictional characters the author is drawing attention to the fact that his own text is distinguished from

the main body of historical novels about WWI by focusing on the fate and experience of the ordinary soldiers.

The narrative contains numerous life stories of minor characters; as they bury the executed Jesse Kirwan, Father Buckley tells Willie the story of Jesse's mother leaving her religious sect and parents in order to have her own family and children, even Willie objects to the emotional burden of this story which "sounded like a fable [...] not a truthful account. [...] Willie didn't want the story hanging from his heart for the rest of his days. [...] The story hung from his heart for the rest of his days" (*LLW* 162).[10] This episode is followed by O'Hara's gruesome confession about the rape of a horribly mutilated woman. When Willie reacts with violence, O'Hara attempts to trivialise the event, make it less true: "'It's just a story, Willie, a story of the war'" (*LLW* 168). In an act of emotional self-defense from this excessive violence Willie tells O'Hara to "keep [his] story" (*LLW* 168). Story-telling and, in consequence, the distinction between fact and fiction becomes thematised in *A Long Long Way.* As Willie is too ignorant or innocent to tell the difference, other people's stories become a burden to him.

The experience of the common soldiers is narrated in a language which underlines the fictional character of the text. Barry's narrative reads like a fable, his idiom is archaic and highly poetic, he frequently uses biblical vocabulary and imagery. The faces of the soldiers killed by poison gas were contorted like the faces of "the truly fallen" (*LLW* 50), the gas was sent by the Germans "to work perdition on them" (*LLW* 51). Willie and Father Buckley after the first gas attack stood "in all that vale of tears" (*LLW* 52); soon the places of the dead were filled with "flocks and flocks and flocks" of "King George's lambs" (*LLW* 54). By resorting to such obvious stylization, the implied author builds a distance between the reader and the events he recounts. The war becomes aestheticized. The biblical language can be justified by the fact that Willie is a loyalist Catholic; it is only right that he should use the familiar language to describe the experience of hell on earth. But it is also used by the narrator, who moves in and out of Willie's consciousness. The narrative voice is that of an oral tale, of folk-lore with occasional departures into almost Beckettian sparseness, like in this silent exchange of

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[10] The story of Mrs Kirwan is based on another suppressed family account, that of Barry's great-grandmother, Fanny Hawke, and was dramatised in his plays *Fanny Hawke Goes to the Mainland Forever* (1989) and *Prayers of Sherkin* (1990).

incomprehension between Willie and Father Buckley in the aftermath of the first gas attack:

> They stood there [...], one man asking another how he was, the other asking how the other was, the one not knowing truly what the world was, the other not knowing either. One nodded to the other now in an expression of understanding without understanding, of saying without breathing a word. And the other nodded back to the other, knowing nothing. Not this new world of terminality and astonishing dismay, of extremity of ruin and exaggeration of misery (*LLW* 52).

Barry's depiction of the war does not recoil from images of extreme violence and brutality. Fintan O'Toole praises his skill at using poetic language to write about the horrors of war. In O'Toole's words, Barry "is utterly unflinching, not just about the physical violence of the war but about the psychic violence too. Yet he manages to maintain his linguistic poise, rolling out sentences that, even as they connote the greatest obscenity, retain in their shape the possibility of compassion and redemption" (2007). Barry's narrator frequently uses highly archaic and elevated diction next to lines of dialogue in the soldiers' coarse vernacular or descriptions of most gruesome details of death. The effect is a clash between high rhetoric and ugly reality which brings to mind Wilfred Owen's poem, "Dulce et Decorum Est". Like in Owen's poem this clash serves to challenge the very concept of heroism or noble purpose and emphasizes the extreme brutality of the experience.

In *The Regeneration* trilogy Pat Barker interrogated the myth of the Great War – Barker frequently undermined the notions of classlessness in the trenches or distorted the pastoral visions. Barry embraces the mythologised images; he uses them as building blocks in his construction of the reality of the trenches without attempting to question or revise them. For example, like many before him, Barry writes about the barbed wire in horticultural terms, as if the wire that offers cover like a hedge and needs to be tended like one, indeed were a living plant, so on a wiring party the soldiers closely inspect "the sad brambles that would never bear berries in any known September of the world" (*LLW* 33). As Fussell notes, the pastoral is frequently used "in assisting ironic perception" (1977 [1975]: 238), in the quote above irony is implied in the knowledge the readers have of the red berries of blood that are bound to cover this barbed wire sooner rather than later. Nevertheless, by using the familiar image of the wire as a hedge, Barry writes within the pastoral frame of the Fussellian mythology of the Great War.

Another commonly depicted pastoral scene is that of the soldiers bathing. In Barker's novel its pastoral tone was undermined and heavily coloured with the sadistic desire of the officer, here it is a perfectly innocent moment of camaraderie; without the uniforms "no one was so obviously a private or an officer" (*LLW* 39). Lying naked in the grass the soldiers talk with their Captain about work on the farm that needs to be done in spring. With the blue river, "the blue of old memory" (*LLW* 40) and "the glistening blue bullet of a kingfisher fir[ing] along and away" (*LLW* 39), the scene does not erase the war completely, yet it has the magic power of transporting the soldiers home. Unlike Pat Barker, Sebastian Barry does not dispel the pastoral idyll.

From the first encounter with the horror of battle, incomprehension is the dominant mode in which Willie interacts with the world around him. In his case not knowing and not understanding are symptoms of trauma and, at the same time, elements of what Frye defined as the ironic mode. In *A Long Long Way* trauma is much more prominent than it was in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, although Eneas goes through several potentially traumatic experiences. Here, Barry is writing within the, by now established, tradition of writing about the war as trauma, using poetic language to describe shell shock and the imagery of haunting, with the soldiers frequently referred to as ghosts. Trauma will affect the form of the novel in *The Secret Scripture*, here it is an element of the depicted world without being reflected on the level of form. Soon after the first gas attack, which killed several of his companions and their CO, Captain Pasley, Willie notices the effects on his psyche: "he couldn't shake off the feeling of being knackered, knackered somewhere deep in himself" (*LLW* 58); this feeling is accompanied by a sense of being haunted by "a black shadow [...] some afflicted figure" (*LLW* 58) and the sense that the sorrow "had gone rancid in him" and that it was "a little seed of death" (*LLW* 59). From now on he sees his companions as "horribly empty men" (*LLW* 61) and when he goes to Dublin on furlough, the sentry at the Castle look at him "like the ghost of the war" (*LLW* 70). Like many other soldiers, Willie has been stigmatised by the horror of war, but not only that. When he goes back to Dublin on furlough his unit is ordered to fight on the first day of the Easter Rising, he is almost shot by a young man, who then dies in his arms. Paradoxically this is the closest encounter with death that Willie has experienced so far; he has witnessed the tortures of his companions poisoned by gas, but this is the first man who literally dies in his arms and leaves his blood on Willie's uniform. The fact that Wil-

lie "carried the young man's blood to Belgium" (*LLW* 97) may be read as yet another allusion to Pearse's idea of blood sacrifice, indeed the memory of this death will haunt Willie until the end of his days.

Shell shock is part of the reality of the trenches, the usual symptom being trembling of the whole body.[11] Father Buckley disappears from the trenches for a week when his trembling gets too bad (*LLW* 108), about three dozen men whose arms were flailing and "heads shooting here and there out of control" (*LLW* 192) have to be sent to London for treatment, but the details of treatment or its effectiveness are not discussed. A recurrent image is that of the damage that the war and fear inflict on the soldiers' minds: "It was a wonder they had thoughts at all still in their heads. Brains poached and scrambled by noise, terror and foul deaths" (*LLW* 137). Even when the soldiers emerge victorious from battle and are acknowledged as "heroes of Guinchy", they feel that "they were ghosts in their hearts. And their heads were all screaming, screaming inside" (*LLW* 186). As one of them notes, "the old Somme has taken the most of us away" (*LLW* 200). I would like to emphasize the poetic power of Barry's representation of trauma visible in the extracts quoted above. The wording is very simple, almost clumsy; in consequence it reflects both incomprehension on the part of the affected men, and the inadequacy of language in the face of trauma.

For Willie Dunne the trauma of war is aggravated by the anxiety over his father's rejection when he dares contradict him about the Easter Rising. Here, Barry is writing within a long tradition in Irish literature, where the trope of troubled relationships between fathers and sons has been familiar for over a century (cf. Crotty 1992).[12] The fact that Thomas Dunne's reaction to Willie's doubts about the executions is excessively strict may be read as a critique of patriarchy on the one

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[11] The symptoms of shell shock identified by Peter Leese in his monograph include: "withered, trembling arms, paralysed hands, stumbling gaits, tics, tremors and shakes, as well as numbed muteness, palpitations, sweaty hallucinations and nightmares" (2002: 3).

[12] Referring to a father-son metaphor in relation to a struggle for selfhood in modern Irish writing, Patrick Crotty points to a number of writers and poets who have made the father-son relationship central to their writing at some point in their career: Patrick Kavannagh, F.R. Higgins, Richard Murphy, Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, James Simmons, Michael Longley, Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon and Thomas McCarthy. According to Crotty, the writers "try to come to terms with [their] class or tribal background by defining [their] attitude to [their] father[s]" (1992 n.p.).

hand. But it is also possible to see this difficult relationship reflected in the politics of the nation; like the Dunne family, the Irish are divided by attitudes to nationalism and loyalty to the British crown. Barry's text amalgamates the private and the public history into one tragedy. In the subsequent novels, the writer's concept of history becomes more problematic and the notion of trauma penetrates the structure of the text.

The Trauma of Irish History in *The Secret Scripture*

In 2008 Sebastian Barry published another novel set in Sligo in the time frame approximate to the one of *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and featuring the McNultys as prominent characters. *The Secret Scripture* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize like *A Long Long Way* in 2005, and it won numerous other prizes: Costa Book of the year in 2008, James Tait Memorial Prize and Prix Fémina Etranger in 2009. Although in this novel Barry continues the exploration of, by now, familiar themes of destructive family secrets and nationalist politics, he seems to be writing in response to the critical voices blaming him for the simplified, black and white vision of Irish history. While in his previous novels history merely produced the external circumstances which destroyed the lives of his protagonists, in *The Secret Scripture* history as a discipline is subject to scrutiny. The writer moves in the direction of historiographic metafiction, or what Connor calls "historicised" fiction (1996), by placing in the centre of the text two protagonists engaged in the process of writing history. For the first time the story is narrated in the first person: Roseanne Clear is a centenarian patient of the Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital, busily producing an account of her own life in an attempt to become the "author of [herself]"[13]. She assumes that "No one even knows [she has] a story" (*SS* 4), not realizing that her psychiatrist, Dr Grene is simultaneously trying to reconstruct her story out of old medical documents, depositions and archives. While Roseanne writes down her life story, or rather what she remembers and decides to write down, in her "Testimony of Herself", the psychiatrist keeps a diary, his "Commonplace Book", in which he records the events of his private life and work in which Rose-

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[13] Sebastian Barry, *The Secret Scripture.* London: Faber and Faber, 2008, 4.

anne is gradually taking up an increasingly large amount of space. The two texts enter into a dialogue, they complete each other, what is more, they both contain self-conscious reflections on the act of writing and especially on the process of history writing, on the unreliability of memory and deficiency of authors. All of these questions are new to Barry's novels and they allow him to modify his position *vis-à-vis* Irish history.

On the one hand, Barry's plot is free from the melodramatic opposition between the good and the bad that plagued *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty,* where the nationalists were represented by cruel O'Dowd, corrupt by power and money. Here, the political positions are much less stereotypical and one-dimensional; the IRA rebels do kill Roseanne's father, but they are portrayed as hysterical and confused youngsters rather than cold-blooded murderers. They are executed by "the Free Staters", and when one of them, John Lavelle, manages to save his life, he becomes attracted to Roseanne despite the suspicion that she had betrayed them. The young rebels are referred to as the "boys", whereas the Black and Tans appear only once, nevertheless, in their more commonly accepted guise, taking "a few pot shots" (*SS* 198) at John Lavelle's wife and children in 1921.

Another reason why Irish history seems less black and white in this novel, lies in the character of Roseanne Clear, who narrates the events and comments on the political situation. Unlike Eneas McNulty and Willie Dunne, Roseanne is a very shrewd observer of the world around her. Like Eneas, she falls victim of ostracism and especially Catholic bigotry, but even as a child, she sees the contradiction between the priest's words and his actions, she understands the minute complexities of the social hierarchy of Sligo and soon learns to look at the political upheavals around her with much more discernment than Barry's earlier protagonists. The very fact that she decides to write her life story for the unspecified future reader is an act of courage and empowerment. Although she claims that she has "no heroic history to offer" (*SS* 56), soon the content of her "Testimony" proves the opposite. She strikes the reader as a powerful character, a woman conscious of her beauty, who is resolved to determine her life. Also, in contrast to Eneas and Willie, Roseanne is not a victim of historical circumstances, but of Catholic bigotry impersonated by her mother-in-law and the local priest, Father Gaunt, "A man who in his every utterance seemed to long for the banishment of women behind the front doors of their homes" (*SS* 142). Dr Grene notes the priest's remarkable "hatred of women" and especially "the sexuality of women" (*SS* 238) recorded in his depo-

sitions concerning Roseanne's case. Father Gaunt takes offence when this 16-year-old, orphaned, Presbyterian rejects his plan to marry her off to a much older man. He treats her as a menace to the male population of Sligo, and years later, obtains an annulment of her marriage with Tom McNulty on the grounds of fabricated proof of nymphomania and insanity, hence her incarceration in the lunatic asylum of Sligo and then Roscommon.

It is worth noting that Barry obtains a much less biased historical perspective by focusing on individuals, rather than communities; so John Lavelle, who in the previous novels would have been a natural enemy of Roseanne since her father was in the RIC and she may have betrayed him to "the Free Staters", falls in love with her and makes his son (whose mother was shot by the Black and Tans) take care of her till the end of his days. Similarly the figure of Father Gaunt is an indictment of a depraved individual priest, not the Catholic community as a whole.

Barry's attack on the figure of a priest and, indirectly, the institution of the church, is not exceptional in contemporary Irish fiction. In fact, as critics point out, "the depiction of the church as a repressive, pernicious force in Irish society" (Howard 2006: 410) is a natural reaction of writers to multiple scandals which have completely eroded the moral authority of the church in Ireland. John Waters, a journalist and critic, writes about the Irish Catholic church as characterised by a "deep suspicion of women" (quoted in Howard 2006: 411). Barry seems to be writing in response to those critics who, like Desmond Taynor, have pointed out the limitations of the Irish writers' obsessive preoccupation with the questions of the national identity, the Protestant – Catholic divide and in consequence forgetting "that there are two genders" (Taynor 2002: 129). The novelist takes up the theme of the repressive moral policy of the church and having dealt with the figure of the "humanist naif" in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, Barry focuses in *The Secret Scripture* on the fate of the children and women immersed in the "mire of history". Thus Roseanne appears as one of many women who were confined to mental hospitals or other institutions, only because they failed to conform to the strict morality imposed by the church. Her father remembers his own grandfather supervising some works in a Protestant *sic* orphanage in which he saw "the sea of babies" in an unheated room, who were, as the nun told him, "lying in here to die" (*SS* 75); as illegitimate babies they were not meant to live. The novel implies that Ireland has a long tradition of religious institutions performing the repressive and disciplinary function, imposing the strict morality without any space for doubt or mercy.

   In this novel the author moves between individual and collective trauma, but in any case women seem to be most vulnerable, if not most victimised. Apart from the trauma of her father's death Roseanne falls victim of persecution by the Catholic priest and sexual abuse in the mental hospital. But she is not the only traumatised woman, her own mother is gradually becoming insane, Jack McNulty's alcoholic wife cannot recover from the death of her newborn child, Dr Grene's adoptive mother commits suicide after years of depression and the same may be said of his wife, Bet, who cannot come to terms with her childlessness and eventually dies from a condition she has deliberately refused to have treated. Apart from those obviously traumatised women, the text deals with some minor female characters whose lives are thwarted by the social norms of the small Irish town, like Mrs McNulty; or who, like her daughter, have had their lives limited and constrained by their families' excessive devotion to the Catholic religion. This very dark vision of the fate of women in twentieth-century Ireland may be read as a literary illustration of the theoretical claims of an American therapist Laura Brown. Writing about trauma from feminist perspective, Brown objects to the official definition of trauma in the Diagnostic Manual, which defines the event causing trauma as an event "that is outside the range of human experience" (DSM quoted in Brown 1995: 101). She points out that one third of women living in the USA have experienced sexual abuse, which therefore cannot be treated as an event "outside the range of human experience", nevertheless, it is a stressor which may cause trauma. Brown claims that unlike men, who fight in wars, women frequently suffer from "insiduous trauma" caused by "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and the spirit" (1995: 107). Most women characters in *The Secret Scripture* are affected by insiduous trauma.

   Although the notion of freedom is still associated with danger and carries with it strong anxiety, yet the context is shifted from the national freedom, which in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* resulted in exile for Eneas from Ireland, and for Harcourt from Nigeria, to personal freedom. Since the psychiatric hospital in Roscommon is to be closed down, Dr Grene must assess if his patients are eligible for release back into the community. The idea that a centenarian with no family, who has spent most of her life in the institution may be granted her "freedom" is indeed quite frightening, and provides a completely new context for problematising the notion of freedom. Dr Grene is not entirely

optimistic about the prospect, he also places it in the political context: "creatures so long kennelled and confined find freedom and release very problematic attainments, like those eastern European countries after communism" (*SS* 17).

The Secret Scripture is a historical novel with several attributes of historiographic metafiction.[14] Within the time frame roughly corresponding to that of *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, a number of historical figures and historical events feature in the background of Roseanne's story: Eamon de Valera, John Paul II, Mary McAleese (the longest serving president of the Republic of Ireland 1997–2011), the two world wars, Blueshirts, Easter Rising, German bombing of Belfast. These identifiable figures and events combined with the fact that Dr Grene wants to find Roseanne's "true history" (*SS* 127) take the narrative into the realm of historiographic metafiction. Both narrators engage in historiographic debates by interrogating the nature of history and its reliability, by reflecting on the power of the author of a historical account. Roseanne has experienced the unreliability of history as her own account of the events that led up to her father's death whose circumstances differ considerably from the version recorded in various official documents. It takes the readers some time to see through her lies and false memories, but, given the vested interests of the authors of those documents,[15] by the time we learn that Roseanne may be lying, we no longer trust any of the sources. And we accept Roseanne's initial claim that "history [...] is not the arrangement of what happens, in sequence and in truth, but a fabulous arrangement of surmises and guesses held up as a banner against the assault of withering truth" (*SS* 56). Dr Grene not only observes manipulation in the documents he has discovered, but also, what he calls "a wrongful desire for accuracy" (*SS* 290). However, soon he notices, to his horror, that he is guilty of the same kind of manipulation, when in his attempt to reconstruct the true story from the "competing histories" of Roseanne's testimony and Father Gaunt's deposition, he supplies some detail that was not included in either document. Having experienced the trappings of his-

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[14] Cf. Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism,* where she defines the works of historiographic metafiction as: "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (1991 [1988]: 5). I write about historiographic metafiction in chapter one in "History vs Fiction".

[15] Most of those documents were either composed at the time of political turmoil, e.g. the Irish Civil war, or by biased authors, like Father Gaunt.

tory writing, Grene comments on his competing sources: "from both of them can be implied useful truths above and beyond the actual verity of 'facts'" and he goes on to doubt the possibility of "factual truth" (*SS* 292). Finally, his reflections on the nature of history seem to mirror those expressed by Roseanne in the beginning of her testimony:

> [...] I am beginning to wonder strongly what is the nature of history. Is it only memory in decent sentences, and if so, how reliable is it? I would suggest, not very. And that therefore most truth and fact offered by these syntactical means is treacherous and unreliable. And yet I recognize that we live our lives, and even keep our sanity, by the lights of this treachery and this unreliability, just as we build our love of country on these paper worlds of misapprehension and untruth (*SS* 304–5).

Such reflections make Barry's *The Secret Scripture* the most historiographic of all his novels to date. Both narrators may be said to encounter historical reality through their attempts at defining their relationship to their past, or as Frank Ankersmith says, in their attempt to "write [themselves] by writing history" (1998: 193).

Roseanne's reflections on unreliability of history are closely linked to the unreliability of her own memory. The confrontation of her testimony with other documents and accounts quoted in the novel, reveals numerous blanks in her account. Although she does not mention sexual abuse she had suffered in the Sligo asylum, when she reaches the moment of confinement to the institution, her testimony states: "Now memory stops. It is entirely absent. I don't even remember suffering, misery. It is not there." (*SS* 276). She has clearly dealt with the trauma of abuse through an extreme form of dissociation, i.e. amnesia (McNally 2005: 101–2). Her memories of childhood are marked by misremembering, repressed or transposed memories. Roseanne insists that her father was not a member of the hated police force, the Royal Irish Constabulary, although she describes him as wearing a uniform that may be identified as an RIC uniform and the Sligo archives confirm Father Gaunt's claim that indeed, he did serve in the RIC. She witnessed his murder in the tower of the cemetery at the age of 15, but in her traumatised mind the event was repressed and the memory was transposed to an earlier time. This trauma will mark her entire life in the course of which she will develop a defense mechanism, "a wall made of imaginary bricks and mortar against the horrors and cruel, dark tricks of time that assail us" (*SS* 4). When Dr Grene asks her to recall the events that led up to her confinement in the psychiatric hospital she initially

refuses to talk, then offers what he calls "a beautiful description of traumatic memory":

> I do remember terrible dark things, and loss, and noise, but it is like one of those terrible dark pictures that hang in churches, God knows why, because you cannot see a thing in them (*SS* 106).

Trauma takes central position in this novel not only because its main character and several minor characters have been traumatised, but because Dr Grene, the psychiatrist quite early on recognizes Roseanne's symptoms and in consequence his quest for her "true story" is accompanied by his reflections on trauma and the fate of women like Roseanne in Ireland. The inevitable conclusion is that Irish history in the twentieth century was traumatic. Dr Grene thus sums up one of his longer historical reflections on de Valera and the church: "It is a wonder the country ever recovered from these early miseries and traumas" (*SS* 236).

Trauma is also visible in the structure of the novel; Roseanne's testimony is a record of traumatic memory as described by Kacandes (2001),[16] it is fragmented, repetitive, incomplete and haunted by the transposed memory of the experiment with hammers and feathers, which replaced the memory of her father's murder. In the early fragment of her account, Roseanne recalls a scientific experiment she observed, which involved her father throwing some feathers and hammers from a window in a tower. As she remembers it, the experiment was of a dubious nature; it is not quite clear what it was supposed to demonstrate, but she returns to the memory repeatedly. Only, when we compare this memory with Father Gaunt's deposition, a possible explanation emerges: Roseanne's father did not commit suicide as she believes, but he was murdered in the tower by the IRA as a traitor, hence the feathers. Roseanne witnessed the murder from below and was knocked out by a falling hammer. The head injury as well as the shock prevented her from registering the event. The circumstances of her father's death never appear in her testimony, they are eventually discovered by Dr Grene, but the trauma is signalled by incompleteness and incongruity of her story.

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[16] Kacandes observes that traumatic memory in the text may be signalled by "anything that can communicate gaps, silences and even whole stories that cannot be told, or cannot be told fully" (2001: 95). She also lists textual strategies which mimic traumatic symptoms as: "anachrony, ellipses, repetition" (2001: 111).

Roseanne is also self-conscious about the precarious nature of her own memory:

> It makes me a little dizzy to contemplate the possibility that everything I remember may not be – may not be *real*, I suppose. There was so much turmoil at that time that – that what? I took refuge in other impossible histories, in dreams, in fantasies? I don't know (*SS* 209, original emphasis).

With time, Barry's approach to history moves a long way from the dogmatic certainties of *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*; in *The Secret Scripture* history of Ireland is traumatic for all the nation, not only the loyalist minority. Additionally, the author abandons the tendency to pit the suffering of one character against the others, which led to a rather embarrassing competition between victims in that early novel. His most recent novel, *On Canaan's Side* continues the motif of women as victims of history, but it moves outside Ireland, which results in a very similar effect to that achieved by Pat Barker in her recent fiction. Namely, like Barker, Barry implies that the world we live in is seeped in violence.

On Canaan's Side: "Four Killing Wars" in the Life of One Woman

The novel published in 2012 was awarded a Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction "set at least 60 years in the past";[17] the judges praised Barry for achieving precisely what Walter Scott did, which is, "shifting perception on a period in history" (Flood 2012). The story is intertwined with *A Long Long Way*, as the narrator, Lilly is the youngest daughter of Thomas Dunne and sister of Willie. But her exile from Ireland is brought about by similar choices on the part of her fiancé as those made by Eneas McNulty in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* – like Eneas, Tadge Bere joins the Black and Tans for lack of a better job. Additionally the fact that Lilly decides to write down her life story at the age of eighty-nine connects the narrator with Roseanne Clear from

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[17] This condition echoes the subtitle of *Waverly*: "Sixty Years Since". For more details see: http://www.bordersbookfestival.org/walter-scott-prize [20 May 2014].

the previous novel. Like in *The Secret Scripture*, Barry writes history indirectly by making his protagonist engage in life writing (Kuhn 2000). Apart from the historical events and elements of the plot that seep over from Barry's earlier novels into *On Canaan's Side*, the novel also reads like a continuation of those texts due to an intertextual dialogue with the critics that Lilly Bere engages in. Several of her reflections on her father's actions and her fiancé's choices may be read as explicit replies to those who, like Cullingford, were critical of Barry's version of historical revisionism and questioned his loyalist bias.

As Tim Adams in *The Observer* puts it, "Lilly is stained with Irish politics from birth" (2011), she realizes that her adored father was a controversial figure, that, if her brother had returned from France, like Tadge, he would not have been welcome in the Free State, no matter how heroically he fought in the trenches, and that the IRA have placed a death sentence on her head merely because she is her father's daughter and Tadge's fiancée.

The title is ironic, as America, where they seek refuge from the IRA hit men, fails to be the land of Canaan, the Biblical promised land of the Jews escaping from Egypt. Lilly and Tadge are traced after a few months, her lover is murdered in front of her and she is left to live the life of terror for several years. Nevertheless, she appreciates the kindness of strangers which she experiences in America: when homeless and starving in Cleveland, she is rescued by a black man and his daughter, Cassie; when her second husband deserts her shortly before the birth of their son, his colleague places her in the care of his sister. When she enters the house of the Kennedy-like Wolohans, she is appreciated and offered more friendship and care than a cook might expect. In other words, Barry's humanist programme is manifested in simple acts of kindness that his heroine receives from other people and then returns. However, those individual acts of kindness are in a sharp contrast with the inhumanity and brutality of racial segregation and political violence, which Lilly witnesses in the US of the 1960s.

Lilly's entire life is determined by public history; when she seems to be comfortably settled her son, Ed and her grandson, Bill are traumatised by their war experience in Vietnam and the Gulf war respectively. While Ed is drafted, Bill volunteers to join the army, but both go to war out of a sense of duty to their homeland and humanity, a sentiment they share with the protagonists of the previous novels: Eneas and Willie. Ed returns from Vietnam psychologically damaged and withdraws

from the world – he is "like an empty house with a ghost in it"[18]. Likewise, his son, Bill, finds it impossible to come to terms with his experience in Kuweit, where he participated in a victory which "seemed [...] like his own defeat" (*OCS* 237). Bill commits suicide soon after he returns from Kuweit. The traumatising events of war remain outside the scope of Lilly's narrative, she only reports what she could see in the eyes of the returning men. When she was younger, she asked Mike Scopello, her husband's colleague, what he had got the medal in World War II for, and his reply was characteristically elusive: "Tanks. Wounds received. Nothing" (*OCS* 156). After that she never obtained any more detailed information about the war from her son or grandson. Lilly does not need to ask, because like the readers of her story, she has seen it all on TV. The text does not dwell on the experience of the soldiers, it can afford to take their trauma for granted because the Vietnam war and the Gulf war were conflicts whose disturbed veterans could no longer be ignored, their cases were described in professional journals and, in consequence, they contributed to establishing the status of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a recognized psychiatric condition. Soon, popular films like *The Deer Hunter* (1978) brought the cases of the Vietnam veterans destroyed by war to the centre of public attention.

Although Lilly claims that the process of remembering and writing down the story of her life, which she begins on the day of Bill's funeral does not have "much to do with the grief of the present except it gives [her her] bearings" (*OCS* 6), her writing clearly is of therapeutic nature. Her story is a memoir of loss and an account of a psychological struggle with grief. Lilly tries to fend off despair by focusing on the acts of kindness she has received and on sympathy with the grief of others. When she says about her former employer, Mrs Wolohan that, "Her sense of the delicious is maybe part of that effort, not to dwell on terrible things" (*OCS* 130) she may as well be talking about herself. For like Mrs Wolohan, Lilly seems "to block it out" in order "to continue on" (*OCS* 130). In those two recent novels, *The Secret Scripture* and *On Canaan's Side*, Barry's capacity for empathy with the suffering of women reaches new measures. Like Roseanne in the former novel, Lilly and Mrs Wolohan are remarkable for their resilience and capacity to survive the misfortunes and pain inflicted on them, as Barry would have it, by the historical circumstances. It is significant that those historical circumstances are presented in those novels as remaining entirely beyond the control

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[18] Sebastian Barry, *On Canaan's Side*. London: Faber and Faber, 2011, 215.

of the characters. Unlike Eneas and Willie Dunne, whose powerlessness in the face of history was enhanced by their ignorance, Roseanne and Lilly are wise women who have learned to understand the brutal reality in which they live. Although they are remarkably independent and able to fend for themselves when their men abscond or are killed, nevertheless, they are the ones who suffer as daughters, wives, mothers and grandmothers.

Lilly's memoir is also a confession, she declares in the beginning that she "cannot depart without some effort to account for this despair" (*OCS* 7) and quite early on, i.e. four days after the death of her grandson, she comes to a conclusion that outlines her position *vis-á-vis* the public history and especially the discordant image of her father that must emerge from the official history of "new Ireland":

> It is always at the back of my mind the things I have read since about the time of the war of independence, the capture of rebels, and they being held somewhere in the castle, and I fear tortured, and I wonder did my father engage in that. [...] I do not know how much such histories are weighted against the losers, in this case men like my father, loyal to kings and the dead queen, but I am sure there was evil and cruelty on both sides. I am not so great a fool as to imagine otherwise. [...] But even if my father were the cruellest, bloodiest, darkest man of all history, which he was not, my simpler heart, the bit of myself that perhaps invented him as a child, created in my mind an idea of him, [...] misses him greatly (*OCS* 41–2).

Here, Barry not only returns to the events that he wrote about in the play *Stewart of Christendom*, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *A Long Long Way*, but he uses Lilly's confession to address the issues raised by critics, who, like Elizabeth Cullingford for example, pointed to the political bias distorting his version of history (cf. Piątek 2011). If we examine the development of the writer's portrayal of the conflict between the republicans and loyalists chronologically, we can observe that the individuals on both sides become more and more complex and problematised. The novelist abandons the melodramatic polarization between the good loyalists and bad republicans for the sake of a subjective, but, nevertheless, less schematic vision of history. While the two narrators of *The Secret Scripture* seemed to take Cullingford's criticism to heart and respond to it in all earnestness by emphasizing their own unreliability and helplessness in the face of the forces of history, Lilly goes even further, by openly admitting that her father may have been "a monster" to some people, but she "will not deny him" (*OCS* 42).

Another clear reference to Cullingford's criticism may be discerned in Lilly's reflections on Tadge's decision to join the Auxilliary police. She remembers the origins of their colloquial name "Black and Tans" in their provisional uniforms "half army and half police, which is why they were dubbed the Black and Tans. It is like a dirty phrase. A curse. An expletive. Well, I know it" (*OCS* 44). The final concession, just like the sentence: "I am not so great a fool [...]" in the long quote above, is addressed to the reader, whom Lilly assumes to have her own opinion on Irish history. Therefore, Lilly engages in an imaginary dialogue, a debate with the reader in which she defends the choices made by her father and brother. Her confession brings the reader so intimately close to their life stories that the intimacy complicates any possibility of moral judgement on the part of the reader. Her story is a testimony which invites the reader to witness her experience.

Barry makes history very personal in this novel, in fact, public history is replaced with Lilly's story which is self-conscious and defiantly subjective. Since Lilly feels that her relatives have been wronged by history (she insists that they had good intentions, only they found themselves on the wrong side of history), she rejects history as such. When she arrived in America with Tadge she hoped that "It was easier for us there certainly, because there was no history" as opposed to Ireland "where one thing is always being knocked against another thing" (*OCS* 71). In this way, the novelist creates a much more complex historical fiction to commemorate his distant relatives than he did in the novel written twenty years before.

There is an intriguing correspondence between Pat Barker's and Sebastian Barry's recent novels. Like Barker, Barry also arrives at great generalizations about the source of evil in the contemporary world, which for both writers lies in war and violence. Both writers are almost naive in their pacifist message, and both present the process of writing one's story as therapeutic. While her story is therapeutic for Lilly, the novel is therapeutic for the modern reader: war is evil, but Barry does not inquire into the nature of war, he is as empathetic as his heroine – in the end everyone is absolved, even Mr Nolan, the reformed IRA murderer. Barry's larger message is conveyed by Lilly's neighbour, Mr Dillinger, when he explains the nature of the DNA to Lilly and points out that genetics has proved that "we are all the same family" and therefore "all these wars, all these teems of history, all this hatred of difference, and fear of the other, has been a long, elaborate, useless, heartbreaking nonsense" (*OCS* 58).

From *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* to *On Canaan's Side*, Sebastian Barry has moved from writing biased, revisionist history of Ireland to constructing bridging narratives, i.e. fiction engaged in the process of overcoming the history of violence between warring communities.[19] The politics of memory lies at the heart of those narratives; only if we resist the manipulation of collective memory and refrain from the commemoration of violence, will we bring the escalation of violence to an end. In order to do that, Barry proposes to see every character as an individual struggling to retain their moral integrity in the face of violent historical events.

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[19] "Bridging narrative" is a term introduced by Illan Pappé, a Palestinian historian in an article entitled "The Bridging Narrative Concept" in a volume of essays: Robert I. Rotberg (ed). *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. Pappé defines this as "a conscious historiographical effort that is [...] intrinsic to the more general reconciliation effort" (2006: 13).

SECTION II

MEMORY AND TRAUMA

Chapter 4

Kazuo Ishiguro – The Movements of the Mind Remembering

Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954) comments on his own work in an interview: "Sometimes people base their whole lives on a sincerely held belief that could be wrong. That's what my early books are about: people who think they know" (Ishiguro in Hunnewell 2008). Ishiguro's restrained and tactful handling of some of the most painful universal questions has earned him the reputation of one of the most prominent writers in the English-speaking world. There is critical agreement about the dominant themes in his work: loss, trauma, nostalgia for the past, self-deception, identity in crisis, search for the meaning of life despite a sense of failure and the brittle nature of human relationships that, nevertheless, function as the only remedy for the individual facing all of the above. Ishiguro's universal themes are further enhanced by his language, which, as the critics unanimously declare, tends to hide meaning rather than reveal it (cf. Wong 2000; Childs 2005; Matthews and Groes 2010; Waugh 2011).

Recently critics have started discussing Ishiguro's work in the context of modernist tradition. Patricia Waugh in an essay entitled "Kazuo Ishiguro's Not-too-late Modernism" (2011) addresses the question of the novelist as an international writer. As Waugh notes, nowadays the so called "international novel" is defined by characteristics laid down in Rushdie's early fiction such as the "tropes of migrancy, nomadism and hybridity" (2011: 14). Rushdie, however, is a representative of "the second wave of fictional internationalization" (Waugh 2011: 14) according to the critic, who claims that Ishiguro's work does not belong to this group as it does not bear the marks of "postmodernizing

experimentalism and flamboyant hybridity" (2011: 15). Instead, his novels are characterised by "depth",[1] a concept normally associated with literary modernism – a literary period in which Waugh places the origins of the "international novel" in Europe. The critic points to the "literary internationalism" (2011: 14) with which novelists such as Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster responded to the sense of a new order brought on by the rise of consumer capitalism and new technological inventions. Waugh proposes to locate Ishiguro's oeuvre on the trajectory of English High Modernism and the more surreal, European modernism. As she states, his early novels are closer to English High Modernism of Conrad and Forster in their preoccupation with the "dark places of psychology [...] self-deception [...] and the undeveloped heart" (2011: 16). Whereas his later novels are closer in atmosphere to the kind of surrealist modernism we find in Kafka, as they are characterized by "the exaggeration of dissociation [... and] a kind of hyper-reflexive introspection producing expressionist landscapes divorced from bodily and material situations" (Waugh 2011: 16). Waugh classifies the writer as "an almost *too late, late* modernist" (2011: 16, original emphasis).

The affinities between Ishiguro's work and modernist writing are also explored by Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes. In the Introduction to the critical volume on Ishiguro they edited in 2010, they quote extensively from Georg Lukács's critique of modernism "The Ideology of Modernism" (1957) in which he attacks Kafka, Joyce, Beckett, T.S. Eliot and others for "the negation of outward reality" and "disintegration of personality" in their writing (Lukács 1972: 479–80). Lukács, in turn, illustrates his point about the attenuation of reality in modernist fiction with a quote from Robert Musil's comment on his novel *The Man Without Qualities* (1930):

> I have not, I must insist, written a historical novel. I am not concerned with actual events [...]. Events, anyhow are interchangeable. I am interested in what is typical, in what one might call the ghostly aspects of reality (Musil quoted in Lukács 1972: 480).

Then Lukács continues to emphasize the significance of the word "ghostly" as a symptom of modernist attenuation of reality. He claims that

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[1] In Waugh's own words: "'depth', along with feeling, and the concern to overcome modes of 'dissociation of sensibility', was the preoccupation of English High Modernism" (2011: 15).

In Kafka, the descriptive detail is of an extraordinary immediacy and authenticity. But Kafka's artistic ingenuity is really directed towards substituting his *angst*-ridden vision of the world for objective reality. The realistic detail is the expression of a ghostly un-reality, of a nightmare world, whose function is to evoke *angst* (Lukács 1972: 480).

I have quoted Lukács's comments on modernist fiction at length because they carry a striking relevance for Ishiguro's novels, especially *The Unconsoled* (1995) and those he has written since. Like the modernists, Ishiguro insists on fictionality of fiction, he is fascinated with memory and explores the painful past of his protagonists in narratives whose fragmented structure bears a strong resemblance to that of the modernist novels. In what follows, I demonstrate that, like Musil above, Ishiguro is interested in the "ghostly aspects of reality", however, I attempt to dispute Ishiguro's own claim that his novels are not historical (Ishiguro quoted in Matthews 2010) by drawing attention to the significance of the historical events which are present in, or conspicuously absent from the background of his novels.

A Pale View of Hills: Buried History and the Trauma of the Text

It is not surprising that Salman Rushdie wrote with some dismay that "*A Pale View of Hills* was set in postwar Nagasaki but never mentioned the Bomb" (1992: 246). Given what an average European knows about the extent of damage and suffering inflicted on the civilian population by the explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, it is quite understandable that Rushdie expected extensive descriptions of mayhem and enormous human tragedy. Whereas, as Baillie and Matthews demonstrate, although the novel is saturated with references to World War II and the dropping of the atomic bomb (2010), these references never extend beyond brief remarks, shards of memories. Nevertheless, all the characters which appear in Etsuko's memories from Nagasaki have been affected by the war. Some of those representing the older generation, like Ogata-San or Mrs Fujiwara, are determined not to look back and to move on, to look forward into the future. The ten-year-old Mariko has been traumatized by what she saw during

the bombing of Tokyo – five years on,[2] she is still haunted by the ghost of the woman she saw drowning her baby. Etsuko, the narrator, has lost her entire family and a man she loved, but, as she announces in her opening paragraph, she prefers "not to be reminded of the past"[3] and indeed throughout her narrative she successfully evades any mention of her experiences after the explosion (or the circumstances of her divorce and migration to England). When her father-in-law reminds her of her troubled condition, at first she has no memory of those days and then she worries that his family must have thought she was "a mad girl" (*PVH* 58). The war appears on the margin of her memories in casual remarks like those about the housing estate built on the site of a village destroyed by the bomb (*PVH* 11) or the presence of the American soldiers and the relative "calm and relief" in Nagasaki "after what had gone before" (*PVH* 11). Later on in the text, however, the references to the horrors of war experience begin to thicken and are no longer so understated. Sachiko's story of what her daughter, Mariko saw in Tokyo (*PVH* 74), the death of Mrs Fujiwara's husband and four sons (*PVH* 111) and the memorial "of those killed by the atomic bomb" in Nagasaki Peace Park (*PVH* 137) stimulate the readers' imagination without actually describing any drastic details. The text does not exploit the physical horrors of war; at first they may seem to be tactfully elided, but in fact, the elisions result from the narrator's deliberate repression of her painful memories.

The war is most visible in the reactions of the characters. The narrator has obviously been traumatized by the explosion of the atomic bomb and the subsequent loss of her family, in consequence she is confused about her own sense of self, but also beset by ambivalent feelings about her role as a woman and a mother. The dilemmas which Etsuko faces stem from very concrete historical circumstances in which she is placed by the author. While her nation, humiliated by the capitulation, must discard the imperialist tradition and adopt a new democratic system imposed by the American occupying forces, Etsuko is torn between the traditional patriarchal values and the way of life represented by her father-in-law and Mrs Fujiwara, and the new opportunities of Western life-style and independence represented by Sachiko. While the war was a traumatic and humiliating experience, the fact that it may bring

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[2] Mariko's age, as well as the approximate year in which the Nagasaki part of the story takes place, may be calculated on the basis of Etsuko's mention of "fighting in Korea" (*PVH* 11) – the dates of the Korean war are 1950–1953.

[3] Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills.* London: Faber and Faber, 1982, 9.

along a liberating effect makes it even more disturbing for the nation and the individuals alike. Although Salman Rushdie may be right in that the novel dwells on history less than one might expect, yet upon closer reading we must observe that the universal themes that Ishiguro will return to in his other novels: love, loss, loyalty and duty are so intricately intertwined with the historical events in this text that it is impossible to distinguish between public and private trauma. For example, the notion of public trauma reaches beyond the destruction brought about by the bombings and the explosion of the atomic bomb; public and private efforts at regeneration are frequently mentioned in the descriptions of the setting and in conversations between characters. However, public trauma is also related to the loss of imperial power and a sense of humiliation especially acutely experienced by the older generation who had been active in the decades preceding the war and are now being held responsible for driving the nation into the conflict, and so they feel betrayed and victimised. It is not only the presence of American soldiers that brings this message painfully home, but even more importantly, the changes in public morality and lifestyle; discarding of the now compromised values of loyalty to one's superiors and patriarchy in the family. Ogata-San is devastated by the fact that one of his former pupils dares publish an article critical of his political beliefs and professional methods, what is more, he is broken-hearted over his son's evasive response when the old man tries to egg him on to react honourably to this attack on his father. He is also shocked at the new morality that allows the wives to be so disloyal that they have independent political views and vote differently from their husbands. In Ogata-San, Ishiguro creates for the first time the character who is forced by history to look back on his life and who at all costs tries to avoid the rather disconcerting conclusion that he may have wasted it by being loyal to the wrong cause. Other incarnations of this character include the figure of Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* (1989).

As the novel opens with a conversation between the protagonist and her grown-up daughter about the recent suicide of her older daughter, when Etsuko's mind switches into the retrospective mode the readers expect that she is going to reveal her daughter's story. This part of the story is, however, deferred, or never released by the woman, who, instead, dwells on her memories of the summer before Keiko was born. As she recalls more and more details of the unlikely "friendship" with Sachiko, it becomes gradually evident that Keiko's story is too painful

to be remembered, but it must be told, so she tells it indirectly by appropriating the story of another woman, the immature and unstable Sachiko, whose neglect of her daughter's emotional needs verges on abuse.

For most readers the identity of Sachiko and the function of this character constitute the central puzzle of the novel. Signals that Sachiko and Etsuko may be the same person in two guises appear quite early on in the text, but it takes more than one reading to assemble a coherent version of the past and even then it is hard to claim that only one version exists. The clues consist mostly of pronoun references: Etsuko recalls the neighbours complaining about Sachiko's unfriendliness and in the next paragraph she says that "it was never my intention to appear unfriendly" (*PVH* 13). Much later in the text, she tries to persuade Sachiko's daughter that she may be happy if she goes to America with her mother and her boyfriend and in the middle of a sentence she makes the promise that "we can always come back" (*PVH* 173). Additionally, the piece of rope that the girl is frightened of links this scene with another one which Etsuko remembered some time before and alerts the reader to the possibility that Etsuko might be unreliable, that she misremembers certain painful events.

The writer proposes to read Sachiko as Etsuko's *doppelgänger*, "a way to show how people move through loss and death" (Ishiguro quoted in Mason 1989: 337). Cynthia Wong resorts to Georges Poulet's reception theory which "describes a process by which people split into two distinct selves as they read into or reread aspects of a significant story". Wong goes on to say that "Poulet's distinction of a self that experiences life and an "other" self that interprets those experiences provides a useful paradigm for understanding Etsuko's dual role in her own narrative" (2000: 28). Baillie and Matthews express a similar hypothesis about Sachiko and Mariko, whom they see

> as a mirror, even as scapegoats, onto which Etsuko projects, or through which she explores, her own anxieties about her identity and actions as a woman and as a mother, and ultimately as the agent who breaks utterly with her past and with her conventional role in society (2010: 49).

All of the above interpretations recognize a split in Etsuko's personality; I have already proposed to read this split as a symptom of trauma and her narrative as an instance of traumatic memory (Piątek 2011a). The character of Sachiko may be also interpreted in the light of what the psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton calls a "second self" (quoted in Car-

uth 1995a: 137), a form of doubling in the traumatised person, which includes ethical contradictions. As Lifton observes, the recovery from trauma will only be possible when that double is successfully reintegrated (quoted in Caruth 1995a: 137).

Furthermore, I propose to approach the text of *A Pale View of Hills* through the critical perspective presented by Irene Kacandes in *Talk Fiction* (2001). As Kacandes declares in the opening of her book, she uses the label "talk fiction" for "works of 20th-century narrative literature that promote a sense of relationship and exchange in readers that we normally associate with face-to-face interaction" (2001: 1). She divides "talk fiction" into four main modes: storytelling, testimony, apostrophe and interactivity. Testimony is the mode that she associates with novels concerning traumatic experience; she calls them "witness narratives" that engage the reader in "cowitnessing" (2001: 90) as mentioned in chapter one. Cowitnessing is a form of enabling the traumatic memory to be transformed into a narrative memory (Janet in Van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995) and thus it enables the traumatized subject to construct mental schemes that make sense out of the experience, which will eventually lead to working through trauma. As Kacandes notes, some texts make an explicit request for a cowitness through pronouns of address, others use textual strategies such as anachrony, ellipses or repetition to mimic traumatic symptoms (2001: 111).

Ishiguro's use of these textual strategies in *A Pale View of Hills* has been discussed elsewhere (Piątek 2011a), but I would like to return to this discussion briefly in order to point to the trauma of the text which places the reader in the position of a cowitness, which in this case is closely related to that of a therapist. First of all, as for the identity of Etsuko/Sachiko in the narrator's retrospections I propose to read both characters as products of Etsuko's troubled mind. What she presents as memories, which all circle around family duties, obligations of women and motherhood, may be read as scripts conforming to the norms of her culture.[4] While she tries to narrate the story of her daughter's trauma and depression, the narrator creates two fictitious characters. She constructs Etsuko as a projection of what she thought was expected

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[4] "Cultural script" is a term I have borrowed from linguistics. Anna Wierzbicka defines cultural scripts as "representations of cultural norms which are widely held in a given society and which are reflected in language [...] they present a certain 'naïve axiology', that is, a 'naïve' set of assumptions about what is good and what is bad to do – and what one can or cannot do" (2002: 401).

of her as a wife and mother, and Sachiko as a projection of how she thought she was perceived as a mother. The model of cultural scripts accounts for the fact that neither the Etsuko nor the Sachiko of the retrospections seems to be a plausible representation of the narrator's past self. As other critics have pointed it out, Etsuko cannot have been such an obedient and uncritical wife as she seems in her recollections; if she were, she would not have been able to leave her husband and her country (Mason 1989: 338). Likewise Sachiko, who is a flat character in her childish selfishness and cruel neglect of her daughter, cannot suddenly become the composed Mrs Sheringham within the rules of psychological verisimilitude.

Secondly, the discourse of Etsuko's recollections mimics the symptoms of trauma through textual strategies listed by Kacandes above. The unstable identity of Etsuko/Sachiko is a textual manifestation of a common psychological symptom of trauma namely, dissociation. As I have mentioned in chapter one, dissociation may take on very different manifestations depending on the extent of traumatic impact and the resilience of the subject, split personality disorder and amnesia are among the most severe forms of dissociation (Mc Nally 2005: 102–3). Amnesia is signalled in the text of *A Pale View of Hills* by ellipses, i.e. the numerous gaps in the story that the reader must fill in: the horrors of war, Etsuko's love affair and departure from Japan, her daughter's depression. These elisions become particularly conspicuous when Niki asks for an old postcard from Japan so that her friend planning to write a poem about her mother "can see what everything was like" (*PVH* 177) – the brief remark highlights the fact that we have no idea what everything was like, as well as it is poignantly ironic about the mimetic possibilities of poetry and art in general. In her analysis of Camus' *The Fall*, Shoshana Felman writes about the crisis of testimony: "the narrator of *The Fall* is struggling to articulate what is behind the urgency of the assertion that 'nothing happened'. But the question is then What! What Happened?" (1992b: 194). For Felman *The Fall* is a failed confession, which "enacts the Holocaust as a radical failure of representation" (1992b: 198). Felman's reading of Camus throws some light on the indeterminacy, contradictions, gaps and uncertainties in Ishiguro's novel. The narrator's experiences cannot be recorded in a straightforward, logical and chronological narrative because what she has experienced was too shattering to be thus articulated. The structure of the narrative foregrounds the enormity of the trauma which the narrator clearly has not worked through yet. Her inability to

come to terms with the past and construct a narrative memory of the events is also signalled by silence.

Other symptoms of trauma are nightmares and hallucinations, which are manifested in the text of *A Pale View of Hills* through repetition on the lexical level and on the level of the plot. Lexical repetitions are mostly related to certain phrases that are supposed to warrant Etsuko's optimism about her motherhood like "keep your mind on happy things" (*PVH* 24) and "think about the future" (*PVH* 25, 111), "I couldn't be happier" (*PVH* 24, 34), "look forward"; that last item is repeated throughout the text, but during an excursion to the Hills outside Nagasaki, in 50 lines of text, Etsuko and Sachiko repeat it nine times (*PVH* 111–2), which draws attention to the phrase and produces a sense of unease in the reader.

That sensation is further enhanced by the Bakhtinian double-voicing, i.e. a gap between the surface structure of a dialogue and the meaning that it seems to convey. Most of the dialogue in the retrospective narrative is stilted, the formal exchanges of polite inquiries seem to be a cover up for an undercurrent of hysteria, which may be discerned beneath. Repetition on the story level results in constant recurrence of the motif of a rope and a girl threatened by the rope or hanging from a rope: Etsuko remembers twice the scene of looking for Mariko in the dark, on both occasions the girl is frightened of a piece of rope (*PVH* 83, 173); in the contemporary narrative, Etsuko is reminded of a dream by the sight of a girl on a swing and then she realizes that the dream was a nightmare and the girl was not on a swing (*PVH* 96); Etsuko remembers that Nagasaki was horrified by a series of murders of children, she mentions a girl found hanging from a tree twice (*PVH* 100, 156), all of which demonstrates that, contrary to her declarations, her mind constantly returns to Keiko's suicide by hanging.

Etsuko's memories are a puzzle, they are fragmented, repetitive and glaringly incomplete. In order to construct a more or less coherent story out of that puzzle the reader must perform a task very similar to that of a therapist listening to the testimony of a trauma victim, i.e. watch out for inconsistencies, note the significance of the repetitions, fill in the gaps that she has veiled in silence, in other words, cowitness Etsuko's trauma.

Of all the novels discussed in this study, Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* is most vividly marked by trauma; as the trauma in the text is mimicked by the trauma of the text. Hence the demands on the reader, who is not only invited to cowitness the narrator's trauma, but also to participate

in the process of working through her trauma since the true meaning of her past experience needs to be constructed. Her traumatic memories, fragmented and incomplete, must be transformed into narrative memories, and it is a process which the reader must perform in order to make sense of her story.

When We Were Orphans:
Mummification of Childhood

Critical interpretations of *When We Were Orphans* (2000) focus on the rewriting of Dickens, troping of Great Power collaboration, the use of the topos of childhood and the novel's parodic take on the narrative form of the detective story (Sim 2010: 67; Machinal 2010). All of these features will also emerge in my discussion of history, memory and trauma in this novel. I put forward a claim that *When We Were Orphans* is more overtly engaged with history than any of the previous novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, I also intend to demonstrate that trauma in this text is signalled by language and on the level of narrative, which is deliberately confusing, incomplete and inconclusive. History is present in the text in many guises and on many levels. Like in all the other novels by this author, we are dealing with a first-person narrator examining his relation to world historical events. Similarly to Stevens from *The Remains of the Day*, Christopher Banks has a limited perspective of reality, "which contributes to the process of mystification of contemporary history" (Machinal 2010: 89). However, this process is further enhanced by generic distortions; *When We Were Orphans* is a detective novel which subverts the principles and ideology of the genre; by deconstructing the model of detective fiction, the novel exposes the fictionality of the myth of British imperialism. This takes place at a very deep level in the text, while on the surface, the novel demonstrates more historical research on the part of the author and more historical detail than any other of his novels so far. That is primarily the result of the choice of setting and time frame in the novel. Like *The Remains of the Day*, the novel is presented as a written record of the past that the narrator, Christopher Banks, starts to keep in 1930 and completes in 1958. In the first part, he goes back in retrospections to his schooldays in England, which

coincide with World War I and to 1923, when he had just graduated from Cambridge. In the second part he reaches back to the memories of his childhood in Shanghai; although the date is not specified, it may be calculated as the first decade of the twentieth century. Parts three, four, five and six are written in 1937 and contain mostly the record of contemporary events with retrospections going back a few months in part three and only a few weeks in parts four, five and six. In those parts, the action moves back from London to the International Settlement in Shanghai, which is suffering from the Japanese attacks at the peak of the Sino-Japanese war.

Here the historical Shanghai is depicted in greater detail than any other setting in the previous novels. The vivid descriptions of the opulence of the International Settlement and the contrasting labyrinth of narrow alleys in the Chinese part of the city are quite striking in the second part of the novel in Christopher's childhood memories. Although the readers are reminded that, for example, the "memory of [Christopher's] house is very much a child's vision"[5] and, especially, the images of the Chinese districts are wild exaggerations related to Christopher by Akira determined to impress his friend, yet the abundance of detail, not only visual, but also topographical, i.e. "the splendour of the residences in Bubbling Well Road" (*WWWO* 51), the road "along that part of Soochow creek bordering the Chapei district" (*WWWO* 54), "the Italian Café in Nanking Road" (*WWWO* 56), contributes to the creation of a reality much less attenuated than that of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, for example. What is significant, when Banks decides to return to Shanghai in the 1930s, although he initially expects that "the city will have undergone many changes", he is also certain that Akira will be there to take him around and that "he will know just the right places to eat, to drink, to take a walk" (*WWWO* 124). When he finally arrives in the city, about a quarter of a century after he had left it, he does not find it changed, or at least does not comment on this until he is taken to the house that he grew up in, which is changed beyond recognition. What is more, when in part six, he goes into the Chinese district to look for the house where his parents are allegedly held prisoners, his experience of the labyrinth of narrow alleys is very similar to what Akira was describing to him bragging about his exploits as a boy. This is only one of the aspects of the process of mummification of childhood in the novel, the fact that time seems to have stopped in Shanghai when young

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[5] Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans.* London: Faber and Faber, 2000, 51.

Christopher Banks left it before World War I so that when he returns as a mature man, he can step into the same river again.

The historical accuracy of the detailed descriptions of the narrow alleys of Chapei, together with the details of urban war and street fighting between the Chinese and the Japanese in the autumn of 1937 remain in striking contrast to the thought processes and behaviour of Christopher Banks. While the historical and topographic background in Shanghai of *When We Were Orphans* seems more realistic than in any of the previous novels, the narrator is even more self-deceiving and irrational than any of Ishiguro's other narrators. The war described in the novel can be identified as the historical Battle of Shanghai; the city fell to the Japanese forces after three months of fierce resistance with heavy losses on both sides, urban house-to-house fighting and heavy bombing of Shanghai. In the face of Japanese invasion the Kuomintang of Chiang-Kai-shek were forced to unite their forces with the Communist Party. The Japanese bombed the city from the cruiser, *Izumo*, moored near the Bund, the principal boulevard running along the river. In an attempt to bomb the Japanese cruiser, the Chinese Airforce bombed the International Settlement on August 14th 1937, and, as a result, almost 700 civilians were killed in the attack. The most intense struggle including street fighting in the narrow streets of Chapei took place between August 23rd and October 26th 1937 (Hsiung and Levine 1992: 143). The date of part six of Banks's memoir is October 20th 1937, so the fictitious Christopher goes into the warren of Chapei and witnesses the horrors of the war in the densely populated city at the time that coincides with the historical events. The higher the apparent verisimilitude of his account of the bombed city, cries of the wounded soldiers, and rats scuttling among the dead bodies, the more irrational Banks's insistence that he will free his parents with the help of the Japanese soldier in whom he insists on recognizing his childhood friend, Akira.

> Amidst the wreckage, we could see blood – sometimes fresh, sometimes weeks old – on the ground, on the walls, splashed across broken furniture. Worse still – and our noses would warn us of their presence long before our eyes – we would come across, with disconcerting regularity, piles of human intestines in various stages of decay (*WWWO* 264).

A little further on their slog in the rubble, Banks and "Akira" come upon the body of a boy: "one of his legs had been blown off at the hip, from where surprisingly long entrails, like the decorative tails of a kite,

had unfurled over the matting" (*WWWO* 271). Banks records these traces of violent street fighting in all their gory detail, but, like in the scene above, his mind refuses to recognize them as such. It is here that Lukács's comment about Kafka quoted in the beginning of this chapter returns with increased relevance: "The realistic detail is the expression of a ghostly un-reality, of a nightmare world" (1972 [1957]: 480). As Peter Childs aptly notes emphasizing the oneiric and surreal elements in this part of the novel, it may, in fact "take place in Banks's mind as he becomes less and less in touch with outside reality: much of the story as in *The Unconsoled*, appears to be an externalization of the narrator's inner turmoil" (2005: 126). The solid details of the external reality serve as a contrasting backdrop to Banks's increasingly irrational perception and expectations of the others. I will return to Banks's perception of the world in a section in which I discuss the influence of childhood trauma on his life, but must note that in the extracts quoted above, the narrator displays typical symptoms of dissociation. His mind has blocked the information which is too distressing to be processed.

Much as the Sino-Japanese war is allowed to take centre stage in parts four, five and six, World Wars I and II, which take place within the story time of the novel, are absent from its discourse in a highly significant way. The Great War is mentioned only once, when Christopher is unable to decide whether the magnifying glass he got as a birthday present for his fourteenth birthday from Robert Thornton-Browne and Russell Stanton was a teasing joke or not:

> But sadly, I have no way now of ascertaining what they had in mind, nor indeed how, for all my precautions, they had ever gleamed my secret ambition. Stanton, who had lied about his age in order to volunteer, was killed in the third battle of Ypres. Thornton-Browne, I heard, died of tuberculosis two years ago (*WWWO* 9).

Other than in this passing remark, the Great War is only implied as the trauma from which the world is emerging. Right from the first social occasion in 1923 that Banks recalls in his memoir, he encounters people who take his ambition "To root out single-handedly all the evil in the world" (*WWWO* 16) with a pinch of salt, and like the elderly gentleman at that first party he attends in London, they approach it as a passing phase, but nevertheless admit that "Perhaps we've allowed things to slide for too long" (*WWWO* 16). The speech that Sir Cecil Medhurst makes at the Meredith Foundation dinner in his honour in 1930 may serve as an ironic premonition of the discrepancy between

his reputation and his actual abilities. For the "great statesman", who is praised for his role in building the League of Nations talks with confidence and optimism, assuring his audience that "mankind had learned from its mistakes, the structures were now firmly in place to ensure we would never again see on this globe a calamity on the scale of the Great War" that "the forces of civilisation had prevailed" (*WWWO* 42). Later in the evening Sir Cecil expresses completely different concerns to Christopher, he admits anxiety about the evil ones "conspiring to put civilisation to the torch" and the fact that they are "much too cunning for your ordinary decent citizen" (*WWWO* 43). One way in which we can account for this discrepancy in the opinions expressed by Sir Cecil is Christopher's unreliability, for the way that Sir Cecil talks about the unspecified, abstract evil "lurking around the corner" (*WWWO* 43) is very similar to a number of other conversations with policemen whom Christopher encounters during his investigations, and members of the public that he meets at banquets. They will all point to the role of the detectives in fighting evil and gradually it will be him, Christopher Banks whom they see as the saviour of all civilisation. By the time the readers arrive at part six of his memoir, in which his irrational behaviour reaches a climax, they are in no doubt that all that he had reported so far must be heavily coloured by his own distorted vision of the world and the conversations are projections of his deluded belief in his public role. Indeed psychiatry recognises a similar condition in the survivors of trauma, Lifton calls it "survivor mission" (quoted in Caruth 1995a: 138); Maria Orwid diagnosed it in the survivors of concentration camps, who threw themselves into the maelstrom of political and social activity trying to protect the world from evil (2009: 126).

Part three is written down in April 1937 and contains a retrospection to the summer of 1936, when Christopher attends a lecture at Royal Geographical Society entitled "Does Nazism pose a threat to Christianity?", followed by a discussion "concerning the German army's move into the Rhineland" (*WWWO* 136). The episode is a covert comment on the ignorance of the British elites and their underestimation of the threat posed by Hitler's aggressive politics. Ishiguro makes the comment in a characteristically understated manner: for once the lecturer does not really focus on Nazism but on universal suffrage in Britain and how it has weakened Britain's international position; then Christopher Banks fails to take any interest in the ensuing discussion about Hitler's violation of the Treaty of Versailles despite his numer-

ous declarations that his mission is to save civilisation from disaster. The scene is an echo of *The Remains of the Day*, where one of Lord Darlington's guests humiliates Stevens in an attempt to demonstrate that universal suffrage does more harm than good to British politics. What is more, like in that previous novel, the general impression of the British elites in this scene is that they fail to appreciate the dangers of fascism. Although the narrator does not show much interest in, or understanding of the international situation, the readers are invited to read the thickening allusions to and remarks about the "crisis in Europe" (*WWWO* 137) as pertaining to the political tension preceding the outbreak of World War II.

Another echo of *The Remains of the Day* appears in Ishiguro's indirect criticism of the Great Powers' indecisive politics towards Japanese invasion of China. Again they failed to see the threat of the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Japan signed in 1936 and, in fact, condoned Japanese aggression in the hope that Japan would help control the growth of Soviet influences in Asia (Hsiung and Levine 1992). Ishiguro's criticism of the international community and its stance on the Japanese invasion of China is presented metaphorically in the scene of a lavish banquet in Shanghai barely interrupted by the explosions in Chapei. One of the guests assures Christopher that they are quite safe in the International Settlement and compares the sight of bombs falling on the other side of the creek to "shooting stars" (*WWWO* 160), the other guests talk lightly about the high rate of casualties in the Chinese district. This provokes a sense of "revulsion" (*WWWO* 162) in Christopher, who blames the international community for "a pathetic conspiracy of denial of responsibility" (*WWWO* 162). When the protagonist walks through the wreckage of Chapei, the sentiment becomes "anger" and "fury" "towards those who had allowed such fate to befall so many innocent people. I thought again of those pompous men of International Settlement, of all the prevarications they must have employed to evade their responsibilities down so many years" (*WWWO* 241). By this stage, however, Christopher's credibility as narrator has been eroded to such an extent that his attack on the international community sounds at least ambiguous and could easily be read as a projection of his own sense of guilt.

Nevertheless, the metaphorical indictment of the European powers' negligent policy in Asia is further enhanced by the transformation sustained by the character of Sir Cecil Medhurst, who arrives in Shanghai with a political mission to help solve the conflict, but once there, he

turns into an abusive drunkard and compulsive gambler, who has no intention of taking any action. Back in Britain, he represents the diplomatic elites and gives public speeches on the international organisations and their efforts to save the civilisation, whereas in Shanghai he spends all his time and money in gambling dens. To some extent it is possible to interpret his degeneration as a reflection of Christopher's own peculiar attitude; like Christopher, Sir Cecil has great plans and ambitions, like Christopher, he undertakes to save the world, but again like Christopher, he never carries out the ambitious plan. A rather unsettling interpretation would see him as a victim of Shanghai – the oriental city demoralizing the Westerners. Christopher's father and Uncle Philip could serve as other examples of Europeans who arrived in Shanghai with noble intentions, but with time succumbed to the demoralising power of the city.

Apart from the descriptions of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 and the brief mention of a debate in the Royal Geographical society discussed above, World War II is significantly absent from the discourse of the novel, i.e. from the memoir of Christopher Banks. Even a glance at the structure of his memoir is enough to note the great gap in the narrative. The penultimate part is written in Shanghai on 20th October 1937 and the final part is written in London in 1958. It contains a retrospection to 1953 when Christopher travelled to Hong-Kong to see his mother. That the mother was found not through Christopher's efforts, but only because China was deporting all the foreigners, is the most striking fact on the level of the protagonist's personal history and will be discussed further on in this chapter. On the level of public history the careful wrapping of WWII in silence is highly significant, it is a narrative provocation, gaping at the reader like a wound.

In several interviews Kazuo Ishiguro has repeated that he treats history as a backdrop, that he is only interested in the dramatic effect it provides, and that he uses history only as location for his stories (Matthews 2010; Wong 2001; Burke Frumkes 2001). He emphasizes the role of imagination in his writing also when talking about the Shanghai of *When We Were Orphans*. As he told the interviewer, "it wasn't ever my intention to write a historical novel – it was the myth of Shanghai I found interesting" (Burke Frumkes 2001: 24). As he confessed to another interviewer, he constructed the mythical Shanghai having consulted old family photographs (his grandfather lived in Shanghai and his father was born there), as well as books on Shanghai and especially old guide books from the 1930s (Hunnewell 2008). The result is an

imagined landscape much richer in topographical detail and therefore more realistic than the setting of his other novels, or even than the London of the same novel.

Setting the action of *When We Were Orphans* in Shanghai allows Ishiguro to pursue and develop the themes of imperialism which were also quite prominent in his previous novels (Wong 2001: 320). In this novel the writer uses a prime example of British belligerent imperialism. As a result of two wars fought in the 19th century, the British secured extraterritorial status for their trading companies in five Chinese ports. In other words, the British companies won the exemption from Chinese law and thus gained the right to sell the opium produced in India. As the writer observes in an interview, British imperial policy in China was even more ruthless and brutal than in India and other colonies, since China was not even a colony; it did not benefit from any of the reforms that the British implemented in the Empire, it was only subject to exploitation, its poor addicted to opium (Hunnewell 2008).

The main historical fact from which Ishiguro develops the dramatic tension in the plot is the trade in opium. Christopher Banks's childhood tragedy results from his parents' embroiling with the trade, i.e. his father's career in the British company selling opium to the Chinese and his mother's adamant anti-opium campaign. Their marriage breaks up when the father cannot imagine supporting the family in any other way and feels that he cannot live up to his wife's expectations. Then the mother is kidnapped by a Chinese warlord whom she had offended in an argument about opium. The crucial factor is the hypocrisy of the British company whose business is selling opium to the Chinese and which places a ban on employing house servants from Shangtung on the grounds of the high ratio of opium addicts in the province, which, in their opinion, must affect their hygienic standards and honesty. The echo of Christopher's mother's outrage at the company representative who mentions the word opium in this context will haunt him throughout his life. For, at first he remembers her shouting: "Tell me, how is your conscience able to rest while you owe your existence to such ungodly wealth?" (*WWWO* 60) at the representative of the company which employs his father; with time, however, he admits that the words may have been addressed to his father and may have referred to the life of their family (*WWWO* 68). Finally, in part six he learns that he owes his comfortable life in London to the same proceeds, only made even more "ungodly" by his mother's sacrifice. It is this revelation that is read by the critics as Ishiguro's intertextual allusion to Dickens' *Great*

Expectations;[6] like Pip, Christopher learns that his mysterious benefactor is not an old aunt, but a criminal. What is more, the readers are invited to project Christopher's mother's accusation on the international community enjoying a lavish lifestyle in Shanghai and even further afield, on the whole British society at that time.

The myth of Shanghai is connected with the reputation the city acquired between 1843 and 1943, when it was a treaty port, a place so dangerous that its name entered the English language as a verb meaning "to kidnap".[7] These connotations of Shanghai with exotic danger, crime and espionage have been explored in culture since the 1930s, especially in detective fiction and film noir (Wasserstrom 2012).[8] Therefore Shanghai as the setting of crime fiction in literature and film provides a meaningful context for Ishiguro's engagement with another aspect of literary history in *When We Were Orphans*. The Chinese city and its International Settlement provide a particularly suitable location for Ishiguro's spoof detective novel. As Hélène Machinal demonstrates in her highly informative article on the tension between classical detective story and Ishiguro's novel, the writer uses the classical genre in order to expose its ideological implications. Machinal observes that *When We Were Orphans* carries numerous generic attributes of a classical detective story, which are further enhanced by allusions to the figure of Sherlock Holmes. For example, she identifies Banks's habit of mentioning his various undocumented investigations: "the Mannering case [...] the Trevor Richardson affair" (*WWWO* 9), "the Roger Parker murder" (*WWWO* 30), "the Studley Grange business" (*WWWO* 31), as

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[6] Incidentally, Dickens's last and unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* includes the motif of opium smoking: John Jasper, the apparent villain, visits an opium den in London at key moments in the plot.

[7] Shanghaiing refers to the practice of drugging the crew of a ship in order to board it and kidnapping the men to serve as sailors (cf. *The Compact Edition of The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, Vol. II, 2768.

[8] The first novel that helped establish the myth of Shanghai was André Malraux's *La Condition Humaine*; published in 1933, which dealt with a socialist revolution in China and featured terrorists, Russian revolutionaries as well as French merchants, gambling dens, opium smoking and prostitution. According to Christopher Hitchens, it was the first European novel which "pointed up the increasing weight of Asia in world affairs; [and] described epic moments of suffering and upheaval, in Shanghai" (2005). Kazuo Ishiguro has also written a screenplay for a film set in Shanghai in the interwar period called *The White Countess*. The film, directed by James Ivory, starring Ralph Fiennes, Natasha Richardson and Vanessa Redgrave, was released in 2005. For more details see: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0384686/ [13 May 2014].

"a Holmesian trait" (Machinal 2010: 81). Banks self-consciously models himself as a detective on Sherlock Holmes; he uses his methods from rational deduction to the magnifying glass, he rents lodgings in central London that resemble those of Holmes, and like Holmes he is a bachelor entirely devoted to his profession. But also on another level, he is constructed as a parody of Sherlock Holmes, which is particularly visible in his exaggerated sense of self-esteem and self-importance and quite striking when he takes out the magnifying glass in the middle of a war zone in Chapei.

Banks's reliability as the narrator evolves; at first, paradoxically, the readers are led to trust him through a series of his self-conscious reflections on the fallibility of his own memory – thus he seems reliable because he seems to be able to evaluate his memory quite rationally and objectively. However, as the narrative progresses, various characters including Osborne, the Colonel, and Morgan, contradict Banks about his version of the past events, which invariably annoys him beyond all measure. Additionally, discrepancies between Banks's self-image and the way others perceive him begin to erode the detective's credibility. His motivation is at odds with what the readers of classical detective stories may expect; as Machinal points out, Banks's "childhood and his own commitments and desires, introduce specific and personal elements to the story that jar with the model of the great, impersonal and disinterested detective" (2010: 82). Besides, the narrative form used by Ishiguro, i.e. the first-person narrative, clashes with the specific requirements of the genre, where traditionally the readers have no access to the detective's thoughts. One of the elements of suspense in the stories of Conan Doyle is the detective's enigmatic behaviour, whereas the final resolution consists of his explanation of the process of detection or deduction. In Ishiguro's novel, most of the readers' expectations are frustrated; Banks announces himself as a great detective and refers to the numerous cases he claims to have solved, but he never reveals any details of those cases or his investigations. What is more, he conflates his personal case, i.e. the disappearance of his parents in Shanghai circa 1910, with his mission to save the world tittering "on the brink" of a disaster.

Finally, the most important distortion of the generic norms in this novel consists in the lack of closure. The readers expect the narrative of a detective story to close with a scene in which the detective restores order to the fictional world by removing the source of evil, impersonated by the criminal, from the community. However, in the world of *When We*

Were Orphans when the readers finally learn what happened to Christopher Banks's parents, it is not through his investigation. Banks is told the brutal truth by Uncle Philip, the professional traitor. Far from restoring order to the fictional world, the information that he has been financially supported by the opium trading warlord who had enslaved his mother, forces the protagonist to reconsider his whole life and his sense of identity. It also makes the readers revise the significance of his narrative. Here Machinal compares *When We Were Orphans* to a Greek tragedy, and Banks's discovery of his status to Oedipus's *anagnorisis*: the discovery of his true identity and origins which brings about a change in his fortune. As the critic notes,

> Being, and being seen to be, a detective, which is the substance of Banks's identity and self-presentation (along with his orphan state), was predicated on a necessary ignorance of the true sources not only of his wealth but of the wider social and political structure in which he moves. [...] Once the origin and identity of the detective is at stake, and once the historical and international contexts so specifically excluded from these tales are readmitted, it becomes impossible to sustain either the logic or the comforts of the genre (2010: 86–7).

When asked about the detective story in the novel, Ishiguro talks about his own childhood fascination with detective mysteries and a more recent, more profound understanding of the context of the golden age of detective fiction, as he noticed the heyday of the genre came in the aftermath of World War I, so the genre that in a highly artificial way promised to eradicate all evil was a particularly attractive form of escapism for the generation that witnessed the war (Ishiguro quoted in Hansen 2000).

To add some spice to the historical background of Ishiguro's attempt at calling attention to this inglorious chapter of British history, after the novel appeared in 2000, the publishers, Faber and Faber were approached by John Swire & Co., a trading company, who took objection to Ishiguro's use of the name Butterfield and Swire, their former Shanghai subsidiary. The company threatened legal action for blackening their name and as result of an "amicable settlement", the name of the company employing Christopher's father was changed in all the subsequent editions to a fictitious one Morganbrook and Byatt (Sim 2005: 108–9). It is ironic that once the writer, who usually specializes in fiction set in attenuated reality, created a fictional world based on historical detail, the detail should backfire instantly.

The whole incident is also a good illustration of how seriously history in fiction is taken.

When interviewed in 2001, Ishiguro in a characteristically self-effacing way talks about the influence of Proust on his writing. While, as he says, he has not managed to read the whole of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the opening sixty pages of the first volume have made a profound impression on him and taught him how to "mimic the movement of memory in somebody's head" (Ishiguro quoted in Burke Frumkes 2001). Like all his novels so far, *When We Were Orphans* is written through the filter of memory and like the previous first-person narrators, Banks is not a reliable narrator, although, as I have demonstrated in the section above, the reader discovers this fact only gradually through the discrepancies between his version of the past events and those of other characters. His initial credibility is established through his apparent ability to evaluate the fallibility of his memory objectively; he explains that his motivation for writing down his memories is an impression that they "have lately begun to blur" (*WWWO* 67); more than once he opens a new chapter with "I do not remember now [...]" (*WWWO* 69). Since what he remembers and what he represses is crucial to our understanding of his complex and peculiar psychological construction, this discussion of his memory will be linked to the analysis of the narrator's psychology.

The tone of self-importance that Banks uses throughout the narrative draws attention not only to the clash between how he sees himself and how others perceive him, but also to the fact that throughout his life he has been an extremely self-conscious performer. Banks is strikingly self-conscious, at first about being English in Shanghai, then about being brave when his parents have disappeared, and about fitting into the world of the English boarding school, even about serving tea for the first time in his new lodgings, and, finally, about being a detective in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes. His performance is based on imitation; he looks for what he considers to be a perfect model and tries to act accordingly. In consequence, he is sometimes subject to ridicule, but he has developed the defence mechanism of repression to such perfection that he not only erases painful memories, but he also refuses to register mockery in the present. When at a society wedding, the groom's brother tries to defend him from some "drunken oafs", Christopher feels harassed by him rather than those who make nasty jokes about him because this intervention will not allow him to ignore the incident (*WWWO* 141). Additionally, Christopher's constant perfor-

mance exposes his superficial and precarious sense of identity. He does not really have a sense of self, only models to which he aspires.

Like Ryder in *The Unconsoled*, Christopher Banks projects his anxieties onto other characters: he worries that Jennifer, his adoptive daughter, does not grieve the loss of her parents properly, that she is too brave, therefore, he encourages her "to let [her] guard down a bit" and not "put up a show" (*WWWO* 132) because he knows all too well that the "whole world has collapsed around [her]" (*WWWO* 149). When Morgan reminds him that at school they were "two miserable loners" (*WWWO* 183), Christopher protests vehemently and decides that "it was simply a piece of self-delusion on Morgan's part – in all likelihood something he had invented years ago to make more palatable memories of an unhappy period" (*WWWO* 184). Or, when the Chinese driver cannot find the way to the house where he believes his parents are still incarcerated, Christopher explodes: "You pretend to know far more than you do. You're too proud to admit to your shortcomings" (*WWWO* 227). All of those diagnoses strike the reader as highly appropriately describing Christopher himself and his way of dealing with painful experiences.

So far the movements of Banks's memory are no different from those of Ryder or Stevens. However, in *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro goes further in creating a narrator whose vision of the world is distorted – he himself creates a distorted world. Christopher Banks not only constantly returns to the memories of his childhood in Shanghai – his childhood dominates his entire life. The loss of his parents in mysterious circumstances constitutes a traumatic experience which arrests him in his development. Wai-chew Sim describes the process as "mummification of childhood" (Sim 2005: 107); the traumatized boy, now as an adult, refuses to leave the safe bubble of childhood. The past becomes the sole motivation for his actions: his determination to become a detective and to solve "the case" merely continues the games he used to play with Akira. In fact, the first mention of Akira and playing detectives in part one, describes Christopher in a situation which is not very different from that of Irène, Pierre Janet's traumatized patient,[9] who had no active memory of her mother's death, but kept reenacting the scenario of the night she died. Van der Kolk and van der Hart quote Janet's words which are particularly relevant for the case of Christopher Banks:

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[9] A detailed discussion of this case and its implications for traumatic vs narrative memory may be found in chapter one of the present study.

It is only for convenience that we speak of it as a 'traumatic memory'. The subject is often incapable of making the necessary narrative which we call memory regarding the event; and yet *he remains confronted by a difficult situation in which he has not been able to play a satisfactory part, one to which his adaptation had been imperfect, so that he continues to make efforts at adaptation* (Janet 1919–25 quoted in van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 160, my emphasis).

Christopher mentions Akira for the first time in the scene in which he remembers his first weeks in England when he stayed at his aunt's house and performed "the various detective scenarios" (*WWWO* 10) which they had developed in Shanghai. He not only reenacts those scenarios as a boy, but as an adult he seems equally immersed in the past and haunted by the feeling of guilt, which most probably triggers his sense of public duty, the mission to save the world. He seems quite ridiculous when he reaches for his magnifying glass in order to save the world. Yet if we read the increasing incidence of weird exchanges which he describes through the prism of Janet's diagnosis, who writes about patients attached to trauma and explains that "their personality development has stopped at a certain point and cannot expand any more by the addition or assimilation of new elements" (Janet 1893 quoted in van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 164), suddenly those surreal elements begin to fall into place. The world constructed through Banks's narrative is the world of a childhood fantasy, since his account includes the police inspector expecting him "to slay the serpent" (*WWWO* 136), and Grayson in Shanghai planning the welcoming ceremony for his parents according to the scenario Christopher had prepared with Akira some thirty years back (*WWWO* 158–9).

What may be disorienting for the readers, especially in those early episodes mentioned above, is the fact that not only Christopher Banks's perception of the world is distorted but that the external world seems to comply with his vision. As the author explained in an interview upon the publication of *When We Were Orphans*:

I didn't want to write a realistic book with a crazy narrator. I wanted to actually have the world of the book distorted, adopting the logic of the narrator. In painting you often see that [...] where everything is distorted to reflect the emotion of the artist who is looking at the world. [...] The whole world portrayed in that book starts to tilt and bend in an attempt to orchestrate an alternative kind of logic (Ishiguro quoted in Machinal 2010: 80).

Indeed, this is how the world of the novel functions, especially from part three, written in April 1937, when Banks decides to travel to Shanghai to solve "the case". His various encounters with diplomats, members of the public, the Chinese family residing in what used to be his childhood home, are constructed according to the logic of a naive childhood fantasy. Banks performs the role of a distinguished detective; he is approached with great reverence and no one questions the connection between his parents' case and the international situation, or why the parents should be still kept in the Chapei almost thirty years after they disappeared, or why the Chinese family should vacate their house as soon as Banks's parents are found, just like no one points out that it would be more reasonable to find the parents first and only then organise the celebrations. In other words, Banks's fantasy is surreal in the way in which his childhood games were surreal and based on wishful thinking, and almost all the characters that inhabit that world are complicit in the game.[10]

In the meantime, Banks fails to notice that Sarah is suffering abuse on the hands of her illustrious husband, Sir Cecil Medhurst. Moreover, when she finally begs him for help, he deserts her at the last moment and, in a characteristic way, chooses to follow his enigmatic case and save the world rather than help the very real human being in need of his assistance. The incident with Sarah illustrates several quirks of Banks's personality which are also consequences of his childhood trauma. Banks's arrested development is particularly visible in his inability to engage emotionally with those close to him, his notorious shunning of all personal commitment. The behavioural reenactment concerns not only being a detective, but also abandoning others, withdrawing his help when it entails emotional engagement and using his public duty as an excuse. When he abandons Jennifer, he tries to persuade her nanny that it is "in [their] best interests" that Jennifer could not "love and respect a guardian who she knew had turned away from his most solemn duty" (*WWWO* 146). When Sarah asks him to go with her to Macao, he faces a chance of getting over his trauma, and his initial response is a sense of relief. He "experienced the sort of giddiness one might when coming suddenly out into the light and fresh air after being trapped a long time in some dark chamber" (*WWWO* 212) and feels that her offer has brought him "some kind of dispensation" (*WWWO* 212). But

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[10] Ryder, the protagonist of *The Unconsoled* inhabited a similarly surreal fantasy in which other characters were complicit as well.

then immediately "another part" of him senses "some test" in this suggestion and he resorts to his usual talk of his professional duties: "After all, the whole world's on the brink of catastrophe. What would people think of me if I abandoned them all at this stage?" (*WWWO* 212). Banks is always self-conscious about "the people", some unspecified audience for whom he is performing his part, seldom does he think about individuals to whom he had made promises. When he abandons Sarah with her bags by the river with the words "look I'll be straight back" (*WWWO* 223), he disappears in the warren of Chapei and in the course of the next 24 hours he briefly thinks of her once.

However, the most spectacular case of abandonment and prevarication is that of his parents: Banks first mentions his intention of investigating his parents' disappearance in part two, written in April 1931, but he immediately qualifies his statement: "I would have done so already had the demands on my time not been so relentless" (*WWWO* 113). It takes him six years to travel to Shanghai and start the investigation, then he does not solve the case, but is told by Uncle Philip of his father's death and his mother's enslavement and her captor's death. And although he immediately declares: "I shall find her. I shan't give up" (*WWWO* 296), he never fulfils his promise. His mother is found in an institution in Hong-Kong only because the Chinese communist authorities expelled all the foreigners. She has been there for two years by the time Christopher is informed about it and even when he finally makes the trip to Hong-Kong, he waits three days before he visits her. Then he begs forgiveness for not finding her and feels great relief when she says she loves Puffin (a name she used to call him as a boy), even though she cannot recognize him.

The traumatic experience casts a shadow over Banks's entire life, he is arrested in his emotional development, regresses into a childhood fantasy, he refuses to leave the safe bubble of childhood and is forced to repeat in his own life the pattern of abandonment that harmed him so badly. His delusion reaches a climax during the 24-hour search for his parents in the warren of war-torn Shanghai in October 1937. During the moments of emotional strain he is overwhelmed by the feeling of guilt, in his deluded state he takes responsibility not only for his parents' disappearance, but also for the international crisis and the bloody conflict that he witnesses. This feeling of guilt goes back to his conversations with Akira in which the boys make up a theory about the source of tension between their parents, and decide that the mother and father stop talking to each other when the children "disappoint them deeply"

(*WWWO* 73). Akira confirms the theory with a story about the children constituting the element that holds the whole world together. It is this story of children acting as the string that binds the world together that is the origin of Christopher's irrational sense of responsibility for the world peace.

There is a moment towards the end of the novel that seems to promise redemption or another chance for Banks to get over his trauma – when the Japanese colonel talks about our childhood as "a foreign land",[11] Banks responds with surprising insight: "It's where I've continued to live all my life" (*WWWO* 277). And when Uncle Philip mentions the approaching war, he not only rejects the responsibility in the childlike exclamation: "But that's not my fault"; he goes further and makes a much more liberated remark: "In fact, it's no longer my concern [...]" (*WWWO* 296). These two instances of self-reflection from outside the bubble of childhood seem to herald a distanced view of his actions so necessary for Christopher to recover a sense of self. However, the final meeting with Jennifer obliterates any hope for change; on the contrary, since they both allude to her suicide attempt, it becomes clear that rather than work through his own trauma, Banks has managed to pass it on to his charge. In the final pages of the novel he seems no less deluded about himself than he was in the beginning.

Only by interpreting Christopher Banks's emotions and mental inertia as a reaction to childhood trauma can we make sense of his actions and relationships. But even so, the experience of reading Ishiguro's text is unsettling for the reader. Like *A Pale View of Hills*, the text employs the narrative strategy of gaps, fragmentation and distortion of narrative logic to place the reader in the position of a cowitness of trauma.

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[11] Ostensibly paraphrasing a Japanese court lady, because L.P. Hartley had not written *The Go-Between* (1953) yet.

Chapter 5

John Banville – Crisis of the Self

In a review of *The Untouchable* in 1997, George Steiner hailed John Banville (b. 1945) as "the most intelligent and stylish novelist currently at work in English" (quoted in Jeffries 2012). The *oeuvre* of this eminent, Irish writer is so complex, dense and full of allusions to the work of other writers: Beckett, Proust, Nabokov, Dostoyevsky, as well as references to literary theory and art history, that John Banville has been called more than once a "writers' writer" (McCarthy 2007). His novels examine profoundly philosophical questions concerned with the nature of reality, the role of science and art in representing reality, the relationship between imagination and memory and their role in the human endeavour to come to terms with the past. Banville's characters' reflections on the nature of reality frequently lead to further examination of the relationship between self and reality and the epistemological question of the possibility of knowing oneself and knowing the other. The motifs of the mirror, as well as that of the twins or the sense of doubling and splitting, which the experience of having a twin sibling entails, frequently appear in Banville's novels. What is more, these motifs find reflection in biographical fact: John Banville has been enjoying a double life as an author of detective fiction under a pen name Benjamin Black since 2006.

Critical reception of Banville's fiction has focused so far on the large philosophical themes which he explores and on the question of the modernist or postmodernist character of his work. Another issue that has stirred considerable critical debate is that of national identity, i.e. of Banville's Irishness. While Rüdiger Imhof (1998) discusses Banville as an international writer highlighting the postmodern concerns in his novels and downplaying his Irishness, although it is quite promi-

nent in the early novels, Derek Hand (2002) claims that Imhof bases his reading on a stereotypical understanding of Irishness and Irish culture, as backward and provincial. More recently, critics have focused on Banville's indebtedness to Beckett (D'hoker 2006), a legacy that the author acknowledges with an uncharacteristic enthusiasm. Peter Boxall's book on Beckett's influence on contemporary fiction, among the analysis of the work of W.G. Sebald and Thomas Bernhard, contains two chapters on Banville (2012). Boxall demonstrates very persuasively that Banville's Irishness is very similar to Beckett's Irishness in that it "is founded upon the disappearance of Ireland" (2012: 29), that both writers express living in cultural suspension through "failure of reference" (2012: 29). At the same time, the critic manages to place the work of John Banville within a tradition that goes back through Beckett, Elizabeth Bowen to Maria Edgeworth, whose *Castle Rackrent* (1800), the prototype Big House novel, is a prominent intertext in Banville's *Eclipse* (2000). Boxall centers his analysis on the concept of dorsality and the symbols of the back door, back gate and back road as used by all these writers to comment on Anglo-Irish tradition. As he states, in all these writers the failure of cultural reconciliation between the Irish and the English traditions "has produced a curious shroudedness in reference to Ireland [...] as if it can be named only through the suspension of the name" (Boxall 2012: 24). Thus, Boxall demonstrates how paradoxically Banville's refusal to write ostensibly about Ireland places him in line with other Irish writers.

Although the present study focuses on the analysis of three novels which form one of the less thoroughly discussed cycles in Banville's oeuvre: *Eclipse* (2000), *Shroud* (2002) and *Ancient Light* (2012), it is necessary to mention briefly the history of this writer's engagement with History before we move on to the novels dominated by memory.

History was a prominent subject in the early fiction of John Banville: while in *Birchwood* (1973), he played with Irish history and Irish literature, by openly subverting the Big House novel tradition, later in the decade, he escaped from the historical present and the violent reality of the Troubles in Northern Ireland into the historical fiction of what was to become his science tetralogy: *Doctor Copernicus* (1976), *Kepler* (1981), *The Newton Letter: An Interlude* (1982) and *Mefisto* (1986). The original plan to write novels based on the lives of four great European scientists: Copernicus, Kepler, Newton and Einstein was modified in the process of writing and only the first two novels are fictional biographies of scientists. *Doctor Copernicus* is based on meticulous

research and shows great attention to historical and scientific detail. In *Kepler*, as Banville admits, he "invented freely" (Banville in McKeon 2009), he included much less detail of the scientific theory than in the first volume, but the setting and language correspond with the readers' expectations of the 17th century historical reality.[1] Linda Hutcheon classifies both novels as examples of historiographic metafiction and frequently refers to *Doctor Copernicus* and *Kepler* whenever she wants to cite texts which problematise the nature of reference or challenge science "as a dominant totalizing system" (1991 [1988]: 150). *Mefisto* is a complete departure from the original plan, as the protagonist is a fictional mathematical genius living in an Irish town, and the plot of the novel corresponds more closely with that of *Birchwood* than with the rest of the tetralogy. This may be the reason why some critics do not even write about a tetralogy any more, but prefer to focus on the first three novels, even though *The Newton Letter* at first sight does not seem to belong with the first two novels either.

Since the tetralogy has been extensively discussed by critics (McMinn 1991; Imhof 1997; Hand 2002; McIlroy 2006), the present study will only focus on *The Newton Letter* as a turning point in Banville's approach to history and his metafictional and historiographic commentary on the role of the historian and writer, or the historian as writer. In the tetralogy, Banville combines reflections on science with reflections on the nature of history and historical writing. Derek Hand quotes Banville in one of the interviews from that period: "Since I've started writing novels based in historical fact I've realised that the past does not exist in terms of fact. It only exists in terms of the way we look at it, in the way that historians have looked at it" (Banville in Sheehan 1979, quoted in Hand 2002: 26).[2] This is a radical attitude which, nevertheless, may be said to connect John Banville to Sebastian Barry, whose ethical struggle with Irish history was discussed in chapter two. Both writers see history as precariously depending on the identity and beliefs of the historian or the teller of the tale, but the artistic consequences of this discovery are

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[1] In an interview for *The Paris Review* in 2009 Banville stated that "research deadens fiction" and he went on to comment about the historical part of the science tetralogy: "About Kepler and Copernicus, people often say, You captured the period so well! I always want to ask, How do you know? You weren't there either" (McKeon 2009).

[2] Banville's opinion corresponds with Hayden White's views, which in those days may have been very controversial albeit "more resonant in literary than in the historical circles" (Hutcheon 1991 [1988]: 143).

quite different for each novelist. While Barry insists on telling the story of those whom he considers to be marginalised from his subjective point of view, Banville chooses to turn away from historical fiction *per se*, though history will always underpin the stories of his protagonists.

The Newton Letter is a self-reflexive parody of the writer's own endeavour – the anonymous narrator retreats into a rented cottage somewhere in rural Ireland in order to complete a biography of Newton, but he suffers an existential crisis and leaves the manuscript unfinished when he becomes engaged in the lives of his landlords. As a historian, the narrator feels very confident about his ability to reconstruct the family story from little details which he believes to be endowed with unambiguous cultural meaning. But he does not realise until late into the story that his version of the family story is coloured by his interpretation of these facts, which, in turn, relies on a stereotypical vision of rural Ireland. His expectations derive from the kind of literature he has read. Thus the narrator assumes that the inhabitants of Fern House must be Anglo-Irish Protestants, because that fits in the pattern of the Big House novel, which he unwittingly imposes on the reality he observes. He jumps to conclusions with great confidence and even when he is obviously wrong in his assumptions, he refuses to acknowledge it. On his first approach to the house he mistakenly identifies the young girl as the lady of the house and forty-year-old Charlotte as a teenager, "I had got them nearly right, but the wrong way round",[3] is a characteristic comment. Each new guess is introduced with even more confidence: "I saw the whole thing now, of course [...]" (*TNL* 521). He writes off Edward Lawless as a "waster [...] fortune hunter" (*TNL* 521) and a drunk, on the basis of some scraps of information and Edward's appearance. Rather than ask Ottilie, with whom he has reluctantly engaged in a love affair, he presumes that the little boy must be her child. When one of the visitors raises a toast to August 27th, he assumes that as Protestants they must be commemorating the death of Lord Mountbatten,[4] while in fact, Bunny wants to celebrate his assassination and that of 17 British paratroopers killed in a separate attack

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[3] John Banville, *The Newton Letter* in *The Revolutions Trilogy: Doctor Copernicus*, *Kepler*, *The Newton Letter*. London: Picador, 2001, 509.

[4] Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India and later head of the British armed forces was murdered on 27 August 1979 by the Provisional IRA, who planted a bomb on his fishing boat in Mullaghmore, County Sligo. On the same day the IRA ambushed and killed 17 British soldiers at Warrenpoint, County Down (http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/27/newsid_2511000/2511545.stm) [11 November 2013].

on the same day in 1979: "Long live death", she says (*TNL* 535). But even then, when his assumptions turn out to be so obviously wrong, the historian is reluctant to admit it even to himself. Finally, Ottilie, shouts at him in exasperation: "You don't know anything. You think you're so clever, but you don't know a thing" (*TNL* 550). On the surface level, Ottilie exposes his blindness to facts of the lives of the people around him, or rather, his misinterpretation of those facts. As it turns out, Edward is suffering from bowel cancer, Charlotte is devastated by grief and tranquilizers, Michael is their adopted child, they are Catholics, not Protestants. The narrator's blindness is partly caused by the fact that he has come to the Fern House with a preconception of what kind of family he might encounter there, a myth of Anglo-Irish patricians which he has acquired by reading novels, partly by his self-confidence and arrogance.

Thus, the first reading of the figure of the failed historian is a mockery of his ability to interpret the facts that he witnesses. How can he write with any degree of authority about the life of the 17th-century scientist if he is unable to make sense of the world around him? On a deeper level it is possible to read the figure of the anonymous narrator of *The Newton Letter* as an alter ego of John Banville, the writer of fiction, the author of biographies of 17th-century scientists. Then Banville's attack on the historian becomes a self-reflexive commentary on his own creative efforts and the irony is directed at his own attempts to write biographies of historical scientists.

After such bitter reflection on the possibility of knowing the past, it is not surprising that the author has renounced the historical novel, even in the form of historiographic metafiction. That does not mean, however, that history does not appear in Banville's novels. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how public history has been replaced by private history and how an individual examining his own memory has taken the place of the historian in the recent fiction of John Banville. Like Kazuo Ishiguro, Banville seems to subscribe to Paul Ricoeur's thesis that "the narrative constructs the durable character of an individual" (1991: 77).[5] Both writers create narrators who strive to assert their individuality by producing more or less coherent life stories. In

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[5] In his much quoted essay "Narrative Identity", Ricoeur makes three assertions about our sense of self: "a) knowledge of the self is an interpretation; b) the interpretation of the self, in turn, finds narrative, among other signs and symbols, to be a privileged mediation; c) this mediation borrows from history or, if you prefer, an historical fiction, comparable to those biographies of great men where both history and fiction are blended together" (1991: 73).

the work of Kazuo Ishiguro discussed in chapter four above, and in the recent novels of John Banville, the narrators' attempts are thwarted by unreliability of memory and the wounds of the past, which create gaps in their stories, or render parts of their stories incomprehensible. In this way the novels of Ishiguro and Banville enact another claim which Ricoeur derives from his initial thesis about identity and narrative, namely that the "crisis of identity of the character" is reflected in the "crisis of the plot" (1991: 78). What is more, it is also possible to draw an analogy between the preoccupation of Banville's narrators and that of modern historians as seen by Linda Hutcheon – both try to establish a relationship between the past they write about and the present in which they write; both try to "order the fragmented experience into knowledge" (Hutcheon 1991 [1988]: 71).

The novels for the present analysis have been selected on the basis of their forming a trilogy, though I must immediately emphasize that it is a Banvillean trilogy, i.e. a series of novels recycling the same themes, events and characters, which, however, had not been meticulously planned as such and therefore the texts are not free from factual inconsistencies or contradictions. *Eclipse* and *Ancient Light* are narrated by Alexander Cleave, an Irish theatre actor, who first anticipates a tragedy and then mourns the death of his daughter, Cass. *Shroud* is set in the same time frame as *Eclipse*, but it transports the readers to Italy, where Cass spends the last months of her life. In *Eclipse*, Cass is conspicuous by her absence; in a similar way, Alex Cleave is hauntingly absent from *Shroud*. The structure of the novels is highly intricate, with various motifs and relationships between characters repeated in modified versions. All three novels are reflections on the nature of the self, on what it means to exist, on the relationship between the self and reality and the self and the other. Banville's protagonists ask these questions in the face of death, they all mourn someone, or are being haunted by the fact of having failed to mourn in due time; they are poignantly aware of the inevitability of death. As in the successive novels the narrators more or less successfully rely on memory to supply them with material from which to construct their life stories, questions of reliability of memory and the dubious role of imagination in the process of recall, begin to come to the fore.

Eclipse: Stranded in the Past

Eclipse is the novel in which the character of Alexander Cleave, a middle-aged, Irish actor appears for the first time. He has suddenly left his career, his home and his wife, Lydia after a professional crisis during a performance of von Kleist's *Amphytrion.* He tries to recover from what seems to be a nervous breakdown in his childhood home in a small town, where he immerses himself in childhood memories, worries about his daughter's mental problems, and is haunted by feelings of guilt towards his parents he never mourned, and a whole array of apparitions, real as well as imagined. When the Cleaves learn that their daughter, Cass has committed suicide in Italy, the trauma, whose impact could be sensed in Alexander's monologue throughout, in retrospect transforms various, hitherto oblique, events into portents of their tragedy.

The recurrent comment from reviewers of *Eclipse* is one about the virtual absence of plot in this novel (Clark 2000, MacFarlane 2000, Wood 2000). Robert MacFarlane's review in *The Observer* is even entitled, "With Prose Like this, Who Needs a Plot"; and James Wood writing in *The Irish Times* compares the novel to Sartre's *Nausea* and states that its "subject is really consciousness, which makes it rare indeed in contemporary fiction" (2000). Critical evaluation of *Eclipse* has focused on motives familiar to Banville's readers: the window (Tarien Powell 2006) and the mirror (Schwall 2006), and on the novel's intertextuality (D'hoker 2006; Boxall 2012). Peter Boxall's study of Beckett's influence on contemporary fiction offers a particularly noteworthy analysis of the plethora of literary influences in *Eclipse*. Boxall traces the protagonist's drive to return to his mother's house and his ambivalent feelings about his mother to *Molloy*; he also identifies the landscape of the novel, the provincial town as Beckettian (2012: 40–3). The view from the mother's bedroom bears a strong resemblance to the view from the window in Beckett's novella *Company* (Boxall 2012: 40).[6] The critic also identifies Banville's use of the spec-

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[6] Additionally, Boxall claims that Banville performs a rare feat by bringing W.B. Yeats and Beckett together in this novel, as he draws on Yeats' poem "The Tower" for the semantic connection between solar eclipse and memory (2012: 47). The ageing speaker in the poem reflects on the powers of memory: "And that if memory recur, the sun's/Under eclipse and the day blotted out." (Yeats 1992 [1928]: 239, II, ll 103–4).

tral as an influence of Elizabeth Bowen and Henry James, noting that Banville borrows the motif of the window as a threshold separating the inside and the outside, reality from the world of imagination, from Bowen, who, in turn, borrowed it from Henry James (2012: 43–4). The prominent presence of Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* as intertext in *Eclipse* has already been mentioned in this chapter in the context of Banville's ambivalent attitude to the Irish literary tradition. According to Boxall, *Eclipse* is a loose retelling of *Castle Rackrent*: in Edgeworth's classic an absentee landlord returns to his house in Ireland, which he has left in the care of a faithful servant, Thady Quirke. Banville borrows not only the situation, the name of the servant, but even the entire scene of drinking with the servant and discussing the documents of the house. In Edgeworth's novel the Anglo-Irish family have neglected the estate and in the end are tricked out of their possession by the servant's calculating son, Jason. In the closing of *Eclipse*, Alex Cleave decides to give the house to Lily Quirke. Boxall points out that Banville invokes the classic Big House novel to remind the readers of Maria Edgeworth's dream of a new post-union Ireland as a state enjoying a cosmopolitanism, a union of cultures that she was hoping would erase the old animosity between the Irish and the English, a dream that never came true. Thus, the strong intertextual presence of *Castle Rackrent*, a novel about the decline of Anglo-Irish ascendancy, adds to the numerous ironic comments about Irish culture in *Eclipse*.[7]

Nevertheless, the anonymous locality in which the novel is set is far from cosmopolitan, the same may be said about Cleave's acting career despite his claims to the contrary. When he tries to impress Lily, he lists all the great parts he has played:

> I tell her of my triumphs and travels, my Hamlet at Elsinore, my Macbeth in Bucharest, my notorious Oedipus at Sagesta – oh, yes I could have been an international star, had I not been at heart afraid of the big world beyond these safe shores [...]. I demonstrate the lurch I devised for my Richard the Third at Stratford – Ontario, that is [...].[8]

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[7] Let me add another piece of information that seems to be more than a mere coincidence: a search for "cleave" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, apart from the expected meanings of "split" and "adhere", an ambiguity which the author explores a great deal in the novel, rendered as the first meaning "sb. Irish – a basket, cage, chest" and a quote from *Castle Rackrent* to illustrate the usage "a couple of cleavesful of the sods of his farm" (cf. *The Compact Edition of The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, Vol. I, 431).

[8] John Banville, *Eclipse.* London: Picador, 2001 [2000], 100.

His, so called, "triumphs" actually bring Irish provincialism to light. His theatrical career is built on the leading roles in Shakespeare's plays, with which the Irish company travelled abroad, but clearly these are not the stages one associates with the theatrical limelight. The mention of "Stratford, Ontario" is an instance of typical Banvillean comedy, understated and highly ironic at the same time. Cleave mentions an Irish play (i.e. written by an Irish author and set in Ireland) only once in the novel and it is associated with a most embarrassing memory, which he announces as "one of those scorched patches from [his] past that [he] would far prefer to leave in the cool dark of forgetfulness" (*E* 83); it is a memory of the amateur production which marked his debut as an actor:

> The piece was one of those rural dramas that were still being written at the time, all cawbeens and blackthorn sticks and shawled biddies lamenting their lost sons beside fake turf fires (*E* 83).

Several years after the artistic failure of the performance "before an audience of gaping provincials" (*E* 83), the memory is still alive and equally painful. Given the author's disparaging attitude to what the critics call "an Irish novel",[9] we may assume that the contempt for this fake Irishness expressed by the would-be cosmopolitan Alex Cleave is a feeling that John Banville shares with his protagonist (McKeon 2009). Again, the irony of the comment lies in the fact that such version of literary Irishness, one "written with a brogue" (McKeon 2009) did not die out in the 1950s, as Cleave would like to believe, but continued to linger on until very recently. It is the kind of Irishness from which John Banville has been trying to cut himself off very successfully. It is worth noting, however, that through such a wealth of allusions, the literary history of Ireland is constantly present in the novel and offers a scathing, even if implicit, commentary on the contemporary condition of Ireland and Anglo-Irish identity. After all, Cleave, the great Irish actor has built his career on the Irish stage, acting in the English language in Shakespeare's plays. As he says, in the extract quoted above, he could have become world famous if he dared venture "beyond these safe shores" (*E* 100). Ireland is safe in the sense that it does not pose a great challenge to the artist, but at the same time it offers no space for development, in other words, it is provincial.

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[9] In an interview for *Paris Review*, Banville defines the "Irish novel" as "one written with a brogue" characterised by "the usual charm of the Irish", which is "entirely fake" (McKeon 2009).

While history seems to be virtually absent from the surface of the text and emerges only in the rich intertextual fabric of the novel, memory completely overwhelms the protagonist and the reader as it becomes the dominant mode of interaction between Alex Cleave and the world. In Alexander Cleave, Banville portrays a man suffering from a nervous breakdown, who is trying to retreat into the past, into the world of his childhood in order to get over an identity crisis. Like Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Banville does not portray reality, instead he excavates his narrator's consciousness and memory for the material from which he constructs the text. The narrator's sense of self has been shattered by a nervous breakdown possibly resulting from a professional crisis. His decision to move back into the house in which he grew up in an unnamed provincial town seems to be more than an escape from the embarrassment of his collapse on stage; his family life is as badly damaged as his career. Thus, Alexander Cleave is yet another of Banville's male, fantastically self-centred, completely isolated, and unbelievably off-putting narrators.

The opening paragraphs are always highly significant in Banville's fiction. *Eclipse* begins with Alex reflecting on a sense of inauthenticity of his self. Right from the start of the novel he feels "as if someone had fallen silently into step beside [him], or inside [him], [...] someone who was else, another, and yet familiar" (*E* 3). This sense of another presence will be further enhanced by the ghosts haunting his old house, i.e. spectral figures of his dead father and a mysterious woman with a small child. It will also be ironically undercut by the presence of secret lodgers in the house, which he discovers only a few days into his stay. The irony underlines Alex's immersion in the world of his past and his isolation from the external reality. He takes the obvious signs of the Quirkes' occupation of the house for the sounds and traces of ghosts. That Alex finds it easier to deal with ghosts than to face the living, is a diagnosis the reader is led to make behind his back. As he severs the ties with his wife, he develops a kind of surrogate relationship with the house. The house is personified, and Alex feels that it summons him and that it "attends [him], monitoring [his] movements" (*E* 53), "the house out of blank unrecognizing eyes watched [him] approach" (*E* 113). Yet at the same time the house constitutes a physical embodiment of the past; climbing the steps, Alex feels as if he were "climbing into the past" (*E* 17). Once he is inside the house, he is possessed by the past, "memories crowd in on" him (*E* 55); the house physically isolates him from the external world, from his wife, from work. The threshold of the house as

well as the windows provide a barrier between the external reality and his interiority, which is a form of shelter, escape from that reality. But at some point he identifies with the house: "I am a house walked up and down in by an irresistibly proprietorial stranger" (*E* 17).The house is haunted by the ghosts of the past and his memories which are dominated by those of the last months of his parents' lives. Although his father died when Alex was a boy, he is surprised at how vivid those memories are. It is the present, which, by contrast, seems "pallid and weightless" (*E* 50); his father is much more alive to him now than when he was actually alive, as if the very process of becoming a memory makes events and people more vivid and more present. Since he remembers their final days with such extraordinary vividness, Alex also remembers his emotional detachment from his parents. He comes to realize that since he did not grieve for them when they died they might be haunting him, as if, in "revenge [...] demanding the due of mourning" (*E* 50) that he did not pay at the proper time. The themes of loss and grief take central place in all the three novels discussed here, but, although the protagonist of *Eclipse* seems to be affected by trauma, it remains unclear until the final part of the novel what particular event has shattered his sense of self; his collapse on stage and his guilt-ridden relationship with his parents are offered as possible answers to that question.

Another haunting presence in *Eclipse* is Alexander's daughter, who is currently living abroad. She suffers from some mental disorder and is a little too fittingly called Cassandra, after the insane Trojan princess of Greek mythology. Alex's relationship with his daughter as he remembers it is closest to love, though it is marred by her fits and obsession with herself. The symptoms of her disorder, as described in *Eclipse*, involve extreme self-centredness and self-consciousness – in fact, Alex has a similar problem, only her symptoms are more extreme. Like the dying parents, she returns in his memories of her troubled childhood as a burden and a constant source of a sense of guilt. Memories of his failures as a father are interspersed with uncanny moments of anticipation of a tragedy – he seems to be connected to his daughter with some seventh sense; at the moment when she decides to take her own life, he has a feeling that "something dreadful has happened" (*E* 145). Throughout his stay in the house he sees signs, harbingers of the events to come. When he sees a dead fledgling, which must have died as a result of a fall from the roof of the house, and a seagull visibly distressed, he assumes the bird to be a father. The sight of the sea brings to his mind thoughts of what it must feel like to be drowning. In the final part

of the novel, the reader learns that on the day of the solar eclipse his daughter committed suicide in Italy by jumping off a church on top of a cliff into the sea.

Alexander Cleave bears a name which announces his sense of a split self, at the moment of crisis he is convinced that he has felt incomplete all his life. His career in the theatre was an attempt at making up for this deficiency, as if acting, putting on other personalities, pretending to be someone else could compensate for the "vacuum where the self should be" (*E* 33) – here the correspondence between Alex and Ishiguro's Christopher Banks is quite striking. Alex's obsessive musings on his sense of self and authenticity of being bring back a childhood memory which he identifies as the moment when he became aware of himself; it was a non-event, merely a memory of being out in the street on a March or November day. Interestingly enough, he became aware of himself as "something that everything else was not" (*E* 32), i.e. he built his sense of self on the negation of the world around him – this is Banville's allusion to "external negation", which Sartre invokes to explain the relationship between the self and the Other (Sartre 1992 [1943]: 312).[10] Paradoxically, Alex tends to deny difference and autonomy to the other human beings. Cass's mental disease consists in her believing that everything that happens in the world is somehow related to her, her disease makes her dependent on her father, and although he does not realize it, it is an exaggerated, pathological form of his own egotism. There is a bond between the father and daughter which makes him sense that something is about to happen. On the day of solar eclipse he takes Lily out to see a circus performance, just before the light changes they sit on a bench in the scorching sun and Alex is emotionally transported to Italy, where as we find out later, Cass is planning her suicide at this moment. Alex presents his relationship with his daughter as if she were a part of himself. This appropriation of the other human being is even more striking in his reflections on his marriage to Lydia, whose real name is Leah, but since he misheard her name sometime in the beginning of their relationship, for Alex, his

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[10] Sartre uses the term "external negation" in *Being and Nothingness* (1992 [1943]); he identifies it as a misconception of realism and idealism, which define being through negation of the Other: I am A, because I am not B. Sartre rejects this presupposition as suggesting that the Other is only an "indifferent exteriority" who cannot affect me in my being (1992 [1943]: 313–14). Such understanding of self explains Cleave's pathological callousness to others, which will be explored further in this chapter.

wife has remained Lydia. He not only believes himself to be a centre of the universe, but like God, he gives names. He also remembers the precise moment when he changed his attitude to Lydia, it was connected with a daydream vision of her "suspended in a fathomless dark space" (*E* 158) which made him realise that she is mortal. The realisation came to him as a shock and made him aware of

> her absolute otherness, not only from me, but from everything else that was in the world, that was the world. Up to then, [...] I had conceived her, as I did so much else, to be a part of me, or at least of my immediate vicinity, a satellite fixed and defined within the gravitational field of the body, of the planet, of the red giant that is my being (*E* 158–9).

Banville endows Alexander Cleave with a distorted capacity for empathy. His ability to empathise with another human being has been replaced by a tendency to appropriate the other human beings. He is callous towards his wife to the point of cruelty, yet he conceives of her as a part of himself.

Two critics have written about empathy and the Other in Banville's fiction. Mark O'Connell writes about what he calls the "empathic paradox" – he recognizes Banville's narrators as deeply solipsistic and narcissistic, but nevertheless, he identifies moments in the novels when they try to overcome their narcissism and move to a more empathic position. These moments are marked on the textual level by the use of the third-person narration (2011). O'Connell supports his analysis with a psychoanalytic theory of Heinz Kohut, whom he identifies as one of the most important theorists of narcissism. According to Kohut, people learn empathy in early childhood, in the narcissistic phase when they do not distinguish between self and the mother (O'Connell 2011: 429). Paradoxically, empathy, "the capacity to think and to feel oneself into the life of another person" (Kohut 1984 quoted in O'Connell 2011: 429) is rooted in the narcissistic phase of development. O'Connell claims that "empathy involves an imaginative leap similar to the work of the novelist – to imagine what it is to be another person is in a sense to create a character" (2011: 430). In fact, all of Banville's recent fiction is devoted to that attempt, its possibility or its lack. In *Eclipse* the problem is only announced, Alexander Cleave treats the people around him as if they were products of his imagination. In *Shroud,* Alex's anagramatic double, Axel Vander goes as far as to write the third-person account of his encounter with Cass from her point of view, in other words, he not only enters her mind but he creates her as a character.

Another critic, Elke D'hoker applies Levinasian ethics of the face-to-face encounter with the Other to Banville's novels and identifies his narrator's empathy as pathological. Following Levinas's philosophy based on the ethics of the Other as presented in his book, *Totality and Infinity*, D'hoker claims that to imagine the inner life of another – as opposed to respecting that other's absolute strangeness and separateness – is somehow to expropriate that person's selfhood and assimilate it to one's own mental categories. According to D'hoker, in Banville, imagination is marked by "an authoritarian tendency to deny difference and recuperate the other to the same" (2004: 169). This tendency is best illustrated in Alexander Cleave's inclination to perceive the others as part of himself. The possibility that his wife is a separate human being comes to him as a surprise; the context is a day-time vision akin to a hallucination, which is prompted by a text about unicorns, the mysterious and mythical creatures. It takes an active effort on Cleave's part to perceive others as individuals. Lily is the first person whom he recognizes as "herself, unique and mysterious for all her ordinariness" (*E* 122–3), although initially she was to him only a negative reflection of his daughter. In *Ancient Light*, young Alexander's failure to grant his lover, what Levinas calls, her alterity, makes him misinterpret the motivation and behaviour of the first woman he loved. In other words, it is possible to demonstrate that Banville's narrators illustrate the emotional and ethical dangers of the form of empathy which runs counter to the Levinasian model and leads to some form of appropriation of the other. For Levinas, identification with the other does not result in empathy, on the contrary, it excludes the possibility of a meaningful encounter with the other. The experience of Alexander Cleave and Axel Vander may function as a dramatisation of Levinas's ethics; they are both extremely selfish and possessive; their relationships with others are distorted by their inability to see the other human beings as separate and independent. Their condition is further reflected in the mental disorder which Cass Cleave suffers from. Like her father, Cass is extremely self-centred, but in her case, the condition is more acute and involves a pathological compulsion to identify with the surrounding world.

Another philosophical influence identifiable in *Eclipse* is Sartre's existentialism. Alexander Cleave's obsession with authenticity of the self owes a debt to Jean Paul Sartre's famous analysis of "the Look". Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness* (1992 [1943]) about the first-person perspective that we adopt when we are engaged unreflectively in some

activity. We are absorbed in the world and do not experience ourselves as having an outside, a nature or character. However, as soon as we become aware of someone looking at us, we become aware of a third-person perspective, we become ugly or funny, we are not ugly in ourselves, we are ugly in the eyes of the other. According to Sartre, the look of the other reveals who we are in the objective sense (1992 [1943]: 347–9). Alex is addicted to stalking strangers in the street, and his fascination with others unselfconsciously absorbed in an activity bears strong marks of Sartre's existentialism: "In watching someone who is unaware of being watched one glimpses a state of being that is beyond, or behind, what we think of as the human; it is to behold, however ungraspably, the unmasked self itself" (*E* 102).

Like in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, in Banville's work trauma is an undercurrent expressed more perceptibly in the structure of the narrative than in the plot. One of the manifestations of trauma of the text are distortions in the chronology of the narrative (Kacandes 2001; Whitehead 2004). In *Eclipse* chronology is dominated by the narrator's retrospections, proportionally the majority of the story time is devoted to the memories of his childhood, then the next large section is taken up by the childhood of his daughter, Cass. Retrospection is not a distortion, but a natural movement of the mind that remembers, however, Alexander's retrospections are not arranged into a coherent, linear narrative. Even he himself notices and comments on their randomness. Moreover, he repeatedly makes remarks which allude to the distortion of temporality; the time of his consciousness no longer provides a linear continuity, the past, present and future seem to collapse into one another: "there is no present, the past is random, and only the future is fixed" (*E* 77). On the day of the solar eclipse, which, as we discover later, is the day of his daughter's suicide, he feels that "things are running together, collapsing into each other, the present into the past, the past into the future" (*E* 167); he anticipates the trauma and experiences it as a crisis of temporality.

On the level of the plot, these distortions in temporality are reflected in the alienation of the narrator and protagonist from the present, from the world of here and now. His persistent refusal to engage with the reality of the everyday life, i.e. the fact that he leaves his wife and career behind in Dublin without any explanation or any effort to make the situation clear, is one of the symptoms of his crisis. And, although his immersion in the past is an attempt at creating a coherent narrative of his life, he does not seem to succeed. On the contrary, his musings ob-

sessively circulate round the theme of death and grief, the belated grief for his parents and anticipatory grief for his daughter. His immersion is so complete that when it reaches its peak on the day of the eclipse he declares, "I have died" (*E* 167), and completely identifies with the ghosts that haunt his house: "We were a little family together, the woman, child, and me the surrogate father" (*E* 167).

There is such pervasive sense of loss and grief in Alex's narrative combined with an obsessive return to the motive of failed fathers, that it creates a suspicion of an elision in the reader; there is something unspoken in the text, a gap, that Alex feels as well: "Is there the future trying to speak to me here?" (*E* 62). The gap which, although not completely filled and explained, becomes less mysterious in the final section of the novel, when the news of his daughter's suicide has reached Ireland. Alex is briefly shaken out of his narcissistic gloom when he and Lydia travel to Italy to identify and bring back Cass's body. When he returns, however, his symptoms and feelings are not very different from those he experienced in the beginning of the novel, but now he has a reason to act as he does: "I avoid all that outside stuff, though when I can. It is too much for me. The world has become a wound I cannot bear to look at" (*E* 191).

The solar eclipse of the title is an uncanny experience. The moment when the sun is obliterated by the moon drowns the world in a darkness which is not completely dark and creates a point of liminality, when the border between the real and the unreal, the living and the dead, is for a moment teetering on the edge. On the day of the eclipse, when his daughter decides to commit suicide, as we will learn from *Shroud*, Alex takes Lily, by now functioning as his surrogate daughter, to the circus, where for the first time he reaches out to another human being. He decides to rescue her from the hands of the abusive hypnotist in a disinterested gesture of human sympathy. While doing so he declares her to be his daughter, as if symbolically making up for his previous shortcomings as a father. This decision is ethically ambiguous. Lily is the only other person whom he recognizes as the Other in the sense advocated by Levinas – he respects her alterity and seems to gain his freedom in the process (Levinas 2012 [1969]). Although his claiming Lily to be his daughter could be interpreted as an act of appropriation, it is significant that in this instance, Alex offers himself as a father in a gesture of giving rather than possessing. This rare act of generosity on his part leads to some form of redemption, as after the circus incident he arrives at a sense of reconciliation with himself. Therefore,

I choose to read this scene as an act of empathy in the Levinasian sense, which awards the subject a sense of freedom and peace with himself. The fact that Alex declares Lily to be his daughter in order to rescue her from the hands of the hypnotist, who is about to humiliate her in public, may also be interpreted as an act of vicarious taking care of his real daughter.

Just before the actual eclipse, Alex, who is listening to Lily talking about her dead mother, is mentally transported to some Mediterranean place:

> I suppose it must have been this deserted atmosphere, the noon-tide stillness, and the tree and the glare of the whitewashed lavatory wall beside us and the faint understink of drains, that made it seem that we were somewhere in the far south, somewhere hot and dry, on some harsh coast, with peeling plane trees and cicadas chirring under a merciless sky (*E* 174).

The next sentence is an italicized quote from a T.S. Eliot's poem 'Marina' "*What seas what shores what granite islands*", which in the original, not quoted by Banville, continues, "towards my timbers / And wood-thrush calling through the fog / My daughter" (1963: 105–6). Thus, a careful reader who is prepared to do a little research into the quoted texts is rewarded with yet another hint that the tragedy Alex anticipates concerns his daughter, that it is probably taking place right now, by the sea, somewhere in the south of Europe.

Shroud: "a talking shell, an empty costume"[11]

Eclipse is a novel overwhelmed by memory and permeated by the trauma of loss. The death of Cass Cleave remains a mystery to the reader as much as to her father, who, having learnt that Cass was pregnant, discovers that there must have been a man involved in the final months of his daughter's life. In *Shroud* (2003), Banville transports us to the south of Europe and gives us access to the story from the point of view of this man, Axel Vander. There is a strong correspondence between *Eclipse* and *Shroud* and between *Shroud* and *Ancient Light*; the novels

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[11] John Banville, *Eclipse*, 186.

are interlocked on various levels, with characters and events mirroring one another. The obvious connection between Alex and Axel are their anagramatic names, they are both preoccupied with reflections on the nature of the self, and both are concerned with a quest for their authentic selves, their lives have been dominated by an urge to perform in front of an audience.

In *Shroud* the question of the authenticity of the self is taken to new dimensions of complexity. The narrator, Axel Vander, is a theorist of literature, an ardent follower of Nietzsche, who has built his academic career on the philosophy which denies the existence of the self, truth and reality. He is pitted against the figure of a psychologically deranged young woman who interprets every event in the world as directly relating to her. Axel Vander and Cass Cleave are bound to each other by an incriminating secret in his past which she has discovered by accident. Although Vander makes a point of denying the reality of will, truth, reason, conscience and the self repeatedly in his narrative,[12] and like many other of Banville's amoral narrators, he seems to wallow in his own cynicism when he brags about his academic position in America, which he acquired despite the fact that he wrote about texts he had not read or that his methodology of thinking was "based on the conflicts of [his] own intricate, and in large part, fabricated past" (*S* 61), yet, gradually this monstrous protagonist is perturbed by more intimate reflections. It turns out, that like Alex Cleave, Axel Vander is a man haunted by his past, by the ghosts of his parents and siblings whom he failed to grieve properly when they perished in the Holocaust, and by the ghost of Magda, his wife, whom he euthanased when she became prematurely demented. Beneath the *façade* of the demonic nihilist, Cass Cleave unwittingly discovers a man obsessed with authenticity of his self and tormented by fear that the secret of his past will be revealed. For Cass, in turn, her own self is so real that she cannot endure it any more. Vander declares that all his life is a lie and a performance, that man's apotheosis consists in becoming one with his mask and yet, he is defeated by her, he falls in love with her despite himself and is "dazzled by her otherness" (*S* 335). From the confessional tone of his narrative we can infer that he hopes to achieve redemption through his love for her.[13]

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[12] John Banville, *Shroud.* London: Picador, 2003, 6, 27, 102, 286.

[13] For a detailed analysis of *Shroud* as a confessional novel see: Bożena Kucała, "John Banville's *Shroud*: A Deconstructionist's Confession." *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, Vol. 48, Nos 2–3, 2013, 93–103.

The text of the novel, written in the familiar form of a first-person narrative, is addressed to Cass, whose voice joins the already numerous group of ghosts and dead or dying people in Vander's life. It would be a gross exaggeration to claim that Vander is transformed by his love for Cass, although he falls in love with her in a truly Levinasian moment when he perceives "the impenetrable mysteriousness of her being entirely other" (*S* 335). Instead of, as Levinas would advocate it, accepting her alterity, his immediate urge is to possess her, to become himself through "bodily clamber[ing] into herself" (*S* 335). He does that metaphorically, by writing the third-person narrative which presents the events from her point of view. By imagining her consciousness and her experiences, Vander the narrator and the writer commits an act of appropriation and perverts the notion of empathy. The claim that the third-person narrative in *Shroud* is written by Vander and not merely by an anonymous heterodiegetic narrator has been put forward by Mark O'Connell (2011). It is also indirectly hinted at by Adam Mars-Jones, who notes that in the middle of the novel Banville allows the "two points of view to collapse into each other" (2002). The moment is significant because it occurs at a point in which the memories of Vander's two evil deeds coincide: as the third-person narrator apparently representing Cass's point of view describes Vander trying to cut himself off from his anti-Semitic past, he switches into the first-person remembering the scene of feeding his demented wife with sleeping pills:

> He drew his hand from under the bedclothes and held it up for her to see. 'With this I wrote those articles you found,' he said. 'Not a single cell survives in it from that time. Then whose hand is it?' He, I, I saw again the empty bottle on its side, the mauve pills in my palm. I closed my eyes (*S* 193).

The hand who wrote the articles, as well as the hand raised for Cass to see and the hand which held the sleeping pills is the same hand. What is less obvious, but here quite evident, is the identity of the third-person narrator focalised through Cass, in fact, it is Vander, who through becoming her focaliser and her author fulfils his desire to "clamber into herself" (*S* 335).

Such destabilisation of the narrative logic draws the reader's attention to the textuality of this confessional narrative, it underlines its fictionality. If the story from Cass's point of view is a product of Vander's despotic imagination, then, we are reminded, so is Vander himself. He too is a product of Banville's imagination. The implied author makes

a cursory appearance in the same section of the novel, with Cass looking after Vander, who is still bedridden after his liver collapsed under the excess of drink: "She bent and put her mouth against his ear, saying something in a hot whisper, saying something I could not make out. Her burning breath. Saying something" (*S* 197). It is possible to read the "I" as another instance of the collapse of Cass's and Vander's points of view, i.e. he could feel her "burning breath" but not "make out" her words. But it may also be a heterodiegetic narrator trying to maintain the reader's suspension of disbelief and claiming that he is merely describing a scene which he does not fully control.

Although John Banville declares in interviews that he is not interested in writing fiction about writing fiction (Hand 2002), this drawing attention to fictionality of the text in *Shroud* paradoxically reminds the reader of the novel's complex relationship with history. Like the protagonist of *The Untouchable,* the character of Axel Vander is inspired by a historical figure whose double life caused a considerable scandal. The historical model for Vander is Paul de Man,[14] the founder of the American school of deconstruction, whose life and career came under scrutiny a few years after his death, when he was discovered to have written a series of anti-Semitic articles in Nazi-occupied Belgium.[15]

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[14] In physical appearance Vander resembles, or maybe even is, Beckett's Molloy. Like Molloy he is blind in one eye and limping.

[15] For details of the Paul de Man scandal see: James Tuttleton's "Quisling Criticism: The Case of Paul de Man" in *New Criterion*, April 1991 (available online at https://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Quisling-criticism-the-case-of-Paul-de-Man-5464. Tuttleton's article is a review of David Lehman's *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (1991). Lehman's discussion with Peter Brooks about Evelyn Barish's biography of de Man: *The Double Life of Paul de Man* (2014) in the pages of *New York Review of Books* in spring 2014, proves that the controversy surrounding de Man's life and motives is still rife. While Peter Brooks wants to see the life of Paul de Man as "a story of remarkable survival and success following the chaos of war, occupation, postwar migration, and moments of financial desperation" (*NYRB*, April 3, 2014), David Lehman defends Barish, who "shows (and as others of us have pointed out and documented over the years) [that] de Man was a cheat, a liar, a forger, a thief, a bigamist, a cad, a swindler, a moocher, not to mention an enthusiastic Nazi propagandist, whether out of conviction or opportunism" (*NYRB*, May 8, 2014). Lehman insists that de Man's critical approach eschewing history and biography from the analysis of the text, was in fact, motivated by his urge to erase his own history. Shoshana Felman, who was one of de Man's disciples, places an essay in his defence in between her two essays on Camus in *Testimony.* In her highly controversial argument, Felman compares de Man's itinerary to that of Camus and claims that his silence functioned as a mode of bearing witness to his wartime experience.

Banville refers the readers to the life and work of Paul de Man in his acknowledgements (he also mentions Louis Althusser, another famous intellectual, who gained ill fame having murdered his wife), but he endows the fictional character with an even more convoluted life story. The fact that (unlike de Man) he is a Jew, adds an additional twist to his admiration for the Nazi ideology, an admiration that he still declares in his old age, when we encounter him. Then Cass discovers not only that the famous literary theorist, Axel Vander wrote anti-Semitic articles during the war, but that the man who calls himself Axel Vander, was in fact Vander's friend in Antwerp, that he assumed his identity when the real Vander died. The question of authorship of the articles remains unsolved in the novel, nevertheless the fake Vander admits that he shared his friend's anti-Semitic views. What is more, given that the narrator, the fake Vander, is notoriously unreliable, "a virtuoso of the lie" (*S* 284) as he proudly states, it is not certain who the real Vander was and how he died, the circumstances of his death are kept secret. The narrator cites various rumours which include a suicide over a woman as well as a heroic death of the real Vander as a Resistance fighter. The fake Vander offers a version of events in which he had lost touch with his friend some time before his death and assumed his name at the point in life when he had almost miraculously avoided transportation to a concentration camp. This would be an understandable decision in a man whose life is threatened only because he is who he is, i.e. a Jew, but he insists that the gesture of assuming the name of his friend was prompted not so much by the desire to be him, as by the desire not to be himself, and that he desired to "escape the hereness of [his] self, not the thereness of [his] world" (*S* 285) in other words; it was not his Jewishness that he was determined to shed, but his individuality.

What puzzles some reviewers of *Shroud* is the feeling of guilt which begins to haunt the fake Vander almost immediately after he takes on the name, identity, and even some academic interests of his dead friend. "It is not clear what is shameful about his secret," states Benjamin Markovits in *The London Review of Books* (2003); Bruce Bawer in *New York Times* wonders why the narrator should consider the information that he used his friend's name to escape from Europe "shameful and potentially career-destroying" (2003). Both reviewers make a valid point – the fake Vander frequently mentions the fear of discovery, he lives a reclusive life, and even contemplates murdering a visiting French academic, who claims to have known Axel Vander in the

Resistance. In my reading, the key to the puzzle lies in the final part of the novel in a brief remark of Doctor Zoroaster,[16] another Holocaust survivor, who tells the narrator that he had met the Vanders on their way to the concentration camp and was told that their son had been betrayed and destroyed by a friend. It is one of those elements of the jigsaw puzzle with which all the other pieces fall into place. The fake Vander has lied about not knowing the circumstances of his friend's death, his guilt and self-hatred stem from much more than just stealing Axel Vander's name.

Additionally the fact that Banville makes his protagonist Jewish, embroils him in the history in another fundamental way. He is an anti-Semite and a murderer, a fraud and a thief but all this does not make him any less of a survivor of the Holocaust. Through the character of Vander, Banville defies the victim culture, which automatically ascribes the victim with moral superiority and innocence – he may be a victim of Nazi persecution of the Jews, but it is hard to imagine a character further from being innocent. The narrator subverts the notion of victimhood, he assumes that the stigmatisation of the Holocaust places him above morality:

> Everything had been taken from me, therefore everything was to be permitted. I could do whatever I wished, follow my wildest whim. I could lie, cheat, steal, maim, murder, and justify it all. More: the necessity of justification would not arise, for the land I was entering now was a land without laws (*S* 259).

The echo of Sartre's writing on choice, incidentally, also triggered by the war, can be heard in Vander's words (1992 [1943]).

Banville goes to great lengths to construct his narrator as a callous, calculating monster. He achieves it through a series of vignettes in which the fake Vander relates with relish how he stole from those who had helped him in his flight from occupied Belgium, or how he got rid of the stray dog that Magda had taken in (*S* 23), and finally his completely impassive decision that Magda "must go" (*S* 93). This image of the narrator as completely deprived of any capacity to feel for others is established early on in the novel and enhances the intensity of the signals of trauma which begin to emerge in his world as the narrative progresses. Beneath the *façade* of monstrosity lies a human being tormented by nightmares

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[16] The name of this character may be read as another intertextual allusion to the work of Nietzsche, who borrowed the name of Zarathustra from the Persian name of the founder of Zoroastrianism.

and memories of his dead wife and of his "lost people" and, after his meeting with Cass, also by a premonition of her imminent death.

The narrator seems to have repressed the experience of the Holocaust. He offers Cass a posthumous confession – an account of his life in Antwerp under the Nazi occupation, in which the tension keeps growing until the day of mass deportation, the prevailing feeling is fear and even the body protests against the "insupportable strain of living always in fear" (*S* 225). Despite his claim that he is "done with the past" (*S* 106) and his conviction that he can control his memories and simply refuse to remember, he must eventually admit that

> The past, my own past, the past of all the others, is still there, a secret chamber inside me, like one of those sealed rooms, behind a false wall, where a whole family might live in hiding for years. In the silence, in solitude, I close my eyes and hear them in there, the mouse-scuffles of the little ones, the grown-ups' murmurings, their sighs. How quiet they go when danger draws near. *Shush!* Something creaks. A child's wail is promptly stifled (*S* 237).

The swift transition from the image of the past as a secret chamber to the image of a room behind a false wall with a whole Jewish family hiding from the Nazis is one of the few moments in the novel in which the Holocaust is evoked through the familiar images. Another one comes quite early on in his narrative, when he reflects on the circumstances that brought him to America: "I should have been borne the opposite way, like so many others into the heart of the calamity, the toppling towers, the fire storms, the children shrieking in the burning lake" (*S* 89–90). Banville does not dwell on these images, they serve as signals of what his protagonist has repressed, but to the reader they evoke an entire chain of associations and familiar images. These images usually transport us into the Manichean world of victims and persecutors, where the persecutors are frequently demonised despite Hannah Arendt's protests,[17] and victims are assumed to

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[17] Mark Lilla's review of Margarethe von Trotta's biopic *Hannah Arendt* (2013) focuses on the reluctance within the Holocaust studies to complicate this Manichean vision of the victims and perpetrators. Von Trotta's film centers on a short period in Arendt's life – the months she spent attending Eichmann's trial and then writing up the report commissioned by *The New Yorker*. Her insistence that Eichmann was not a demonic mastermind of the Final Solution, but "a weak, clueless, cliché-spewing bureaucrat, who never realized what he was doing" (Lilla 2013) caused ferocious polemic.

be innocent and morally superior. Banville shatters these assumptions: Vander is both victim and persecutor at the same time. His pro-Nazi views do not allow him to escape persecution, neither does his status as the victim make him innocent – he is morally despicable despite being a victim. This may not be a very direct contribution into the discussion about victim culture as it is generated by trauma theory, but it certainly is a valuable one. Banville demonstrates in Vander that the suffering inflicted by trauma does not necessarily make the victim noble.

The other character in the novel whose life had been marked by the trauma of the Holocaust is Magda. Like the narrator, her husband, she refuses to remember or discuss her experience until a newsreel with images from the concentration camps in Europe "had jogged something in her" (*S* 65) and triggered a compulsion to talk. Magda's trauma is manifested amongst other things in the distorted temporality of her memories:

> Her recollections of flight and escape were fitful, lit in flashes: the sharp white stones on a mountain track; massed, dark trees moving past in the headlights of a lorry in which she lay hidden under sacking [...]. It was as if she had made the perilous journey not in linear time, but in great leaps, from stopping place to stopping place, between each of which she had somehow been absolved from consciousness (*S* 65).

In Magda, Banville portrays a life stigmatised by trauma: she is withdrawn and reluctant to speak or act. Despite her superior intellect and erudition, she has never contemplated an independent life or career. She gives the impression of being reduced as a character; Vander does not report any activity, desires or emotions on her part, so that she seems to be more of an object than a person. Yet, when she dies, she assumes a spectral presence in his life, similarly to the way the father becomes important for Alex Cleave, she is more present in his memory now that she is dead.

Like Alexander Cleave in *Eclipse*, the fake Axel Vander is haunted by his past and unable to construct a coherent narrative of his life. Significantly we never learn his true name, the one he discarded before he assumed Vander's identity. And Vander, in Dutch means as little as "of the", which can be read as yet another ironic comment on the narrator, who vociferously denies the reality of the self in his academic performance, but, as it gradually turns out, devotes his life to discarding one sense of self and building another one.

Ancient Light: the Invention of the Past

In *Ancient Light,* like in the two previous novels by Banville, the past overshadows the present. Right from the opening paragraph, which is loaded with significance as is usual in a Banville novel, we are promised a confession of another unlikely love affair which took place thirty years before. "Billy Gray was my best friend and I fell in love with his mother"[18] is the first sentence, which carries the weight of words that had been turned inside the narrator's head for a long time and has finally made it to the page, as if accompanied by a sigh of relief "now I've said it!". The story of this almost Nabokovian seduction of a fifteen-year old by his friend's mother is written by Alexander Cleave with meticulous and loving attention to detail. His memories of the affair, which take up more than half of the text of the novel, are much more poetical, vivid and palpable than the account of his life in the present, nevertheless, the reader soon discovers that it is merely a cover story with which he tries to repress the grief and trauma of his daughter's suicide ten years before. Thus the memory of the past is folded in two: the narrator returns to his childhood memories of a situation which he did not fully comprehend at that time, but the memories of a more recent puzzle constantly intrude into his narrative. On numerous occasions, the protagonist may be engaged in the process of recollection of his experience with Mrs Gray, only to break into a reflection on his daughter and suddenly reveal that all these thought processes take place during a conversation with Billy or Dawn, whom he compares to his daughter.

In 2005 Banville won the Man Booker Prize for *The Sea*, a novel whose structure and plot followed a very similar pattern: Max Morden returns to the seaside village where he used to spend his summers as a child in order to mourn his wife. Unable to deal with this more recent loss, he recalls in great detail his infatuation with Connie Grace, a mature woman whose children he befriends in order to get closer to her. This strange friendship comes to a tragic end when Max misunderstands something he has overheard and informs the children of their father's love affair.[19] In both novels the protagonists draw erroneous conclusions, misinterpret the motivation of other

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[18] John Banville, *Ancient Light.* London: Penguin Books, 2012, 3.

[19] For an analysis of *The Sea* see B. Piątek, "'The Waxworks of Memory' or the Search for Meaning of Life in John Banville's *The Sea*."

people and come to understand the extent of their delusion only several years after the fact.

Ancient Light continues the preoccupations and themes of *Eclipse* and *Shroud*: Alexander Cleave is still as uncertain about the nature of the self or the possibility of knowing another person as he was in *Eclipse.* He remembers his first love affair not only as sexual initiation, the discovery of a woman's body, but also as a discovery of another human being as "not-I" (*AL* 35) and, in consequence, discovering himself "through another" (*AL* 42). This is a revelation that Alex recalls more than once: "she was not I, she was wholly another" (*AL* 43). He is convinced that he owes to Mrs Gray the way in which his relationships with others have developed throughout his life: the loved ones are an extension of himself and the rest are strangers (*AL* 165). At the same time, like his younger self in *Eclipse*, he admits to himself that he does not know those he loves or loved in the past, least of all Lydia, his wife, but then he decides that it is because "she has become part of me, a part of what is the greatest of all my enigmas, namely, myself" (*AL* 139).

Alex is not a reliable narrator, his account of the decade of mourning their daughter, with Lydia, contains evidence of an understanding between them and empathy on his part, "this mournful telepathy" (*AL* 21), which contradicts his claim about the impossibility of knowing the other. Nevertheless, as the retrospection of the relationship with Mrs Gray unfolds, it becomes increasingly obvious that as a fifteen-year old, Alex neither knew his partner, nor was mature enough to try to understand her motives.

With time, as the present sorrow seems to seep into the dominant narrative of the past, Alex's ruminations on the impossibility of knowing another human being, on the otherness of others, on the mystery of the self and his tendency to treat his loved ones as extensions of his own enigmatic self appear to be triggered by his incomprehension of his daughter's motives, or, for that matter, ignorance even of the circumstances of her death. The secret of her suicide and the identity of the father of her unborn child make it impossible for the parents to complete mourning. Although Lydia is overcome by a fear that Cass may be "a captive in the land of the shades" (*AL* 20), in fact, it is she and Alex who are suspended in limbo, overcome by the great sorrow which they "tread [...] below the surface and try to hold it there" (*AL* 18), but clearly to no avail, as they are unable to move on with their lives.

Another common thread which runs through all the three novels under discussion is the theme of doubling, one of Banville's staple motives, which in *Ancient Light* appears in many different guises: Alex continues his reflections from *Eclipse* on doubling inherent in the acting profession. The text contains parodic allusions to the author's own double and a whole array of relationships which reflect and double each other as well as the relationships depicted in the previous novels. Alex's relationship with Mrs Gray is a distorted reflection of Vander's relationship with Cass. What is more, Alex has been offered the leading part in a biopic of Axel Vander. In the film he is overshadowed by the fame of a young celebrity Dawn Davenport, cast in the role of Vander's much younger lover. Although outside the film set Alex acts like a father to Dawn, finally, when they go to Italy, he unknowingly repeats Vander's actions when he lies down on DD's bed. These numerous repetitions on the level of the plot enhance the atmosphere of the uncanny in the novel.

Resuming his line of thought from *Eclipse* and also reflecting Axel Vander's from *Shroud*, Alexander Cleave spends considerable amount of time ruminating on the ethical implications of his profession which demands that he should pretend to be someone else, impersonate someone. Vander takes great delight in his academic performance; in the absence of a stable sense of self, he not only impersonates the man whose identity he has stolen, but also a great academic, an evil genius, he acts as he imagines such a man should act. In *Eclipse* Alexander links his fragmented and unstable sense of self to his acting profession. When in *Ancient Light* he is offered a part in film for the first time, he discovers that the technical requirements of the medium aggravate the problem much more than acting on stage, "that not only my actor self but my self self is made into a thing of fragments and disjointure, not only in the brief intervals when I am before the camera but even when I have stepped out of my role – my *part* – and reassumed my real, my supposedly real identity" (*AL* 113–4). Soon Alex discovers that the film making process, unlike the theatre production, does not allow the actor an opportunity of impersonating someone in a 2–3 hour performance, film does not allow for such coherence and continuity.

Working in tandem with a female star, Dawn Davenport, makes Alex poignantly aware of how much the cinematic image differs from the object or person that it portrays. His observations focus on the difference between the screen version of DD and her real self, which he

finds to be "a scaled down replica [...] duller, slightly dowdier, or just human" (*AL* 96). Alex's first impression of this movie star in real life generates a list of physical flaws that are not visible on screen: she is covered with fine down that makes her "look as grimy as a street urchin" (*AL* 90), yet the paleness of her skin makes it look like the skin of "a plucked chicken" (*AL* 90), her hands are "too large" (*AL* 91) and she does not eat in order to keep her body as "impossibly thin, as they all have to be these days" (*AL* 90), whereas, on the big screen she is projected as a universal sex symbol with her flesh "blanded over" and "resistant as plastic" (*AL* 91). Susan Sontag pointed it out about photography, but it applies to film as well, namely that they are treacherous media because they seem to portray reality objectively, they produce an illusion of mimesis, while in fact they are as subjective as any other medium, only less obviously so (Sontag 2001). The power of illusion in *Ancient Light* is also signalled by the scene in which Alexander confuses his life with the film script and Dawn Davenport with his daughter (*AL* 137).

On another level this confusion may be explained by the fact that both Alexander's life and the film script are written by the same man. The appearance of the author's double in the text, i.e. the author of Vander's biography and the film script called *The Invention of the Past*, who hides behind the initials J.B., provides ample opportunity for self-conscious parody of Banville's own writing and public persona as well as a parody of his critics. Alex is appalled by the pretentious style of Vander's biography, the long list of his reservations is double edged, because it is written in precisely the style which it deplores:

> Is it an affectation, or a stance deliberately taken? Is it a general and sustained irony? Rhetorical in the extreme, dramatically elaborated, wholly unnatural, synthetic and clotted, it is a style such as might be forged – *le mot juste!* – by a minor court official at Byzantium, say, a former slave whose master had generously allowed him the freedom of his extensive and eclectic library, a freedom the poor fellow all too eagerly availed himself of. Our author – the tone is catching – our author is widely but unsystematically read, and uses the rich tidbits that he gathered from all those books to cover up for the lack of an education – little Latin, less Greek, ha, ha – although the effect is quite the opposite, for in every gorgeous image and convoluted metaphor, every instance of cod learning and mock scholarship, he unmistakeably shows himself up for the avid autodidact he indubitably is. Behind the gloss, the studied elegance, the dandified swagger, this is a man racked by fears,

anxieties, sour resentments, yet possessed too of an occasional mordant wit and an eye for what one might call the under-belly of beauty (*AL* 80–1).

What is more, the paragraph quoted above is also a humorous gist of the reviewers' critical objections to John Banville's prose style, which they frequently describe as "fancy", "byzantine" (Benfey 2012), "mannered" (Acocella 2012), or "overcontrived" (Shepard 2001). Reviewers like to remind the readers that the writer has no formal university education and that, as Acocella put it, "His arrogance is legend" (2012) or that in his writing "cleverness is on display" (Adams 2012). Most newspaper reviews of *Ancient Light* in the British and American press contain a list of obsolete words from the novel that the reviewers have never seen in print before. There is a critical consensus on the excessive allusiveness of Banville's work and the baroque structure of his novels. One must beware of identifying the author with his fictional characters, or especially the narrators in his novels, the pretentious style of the long passage quoted above is primarily the attribute of Alexander Cleave, the narrator. Nevertheless, we must also remember that by writing predominantly in the first person, Banville has created a certain diction which has become his trade mark and which is not unlike the style of *The Invention of the Past* by J.B. as described by Alexander Cleave above. In *Shroud* a similar dose of self-parody appears when Axel Vander speaks with contempt about the writers he taught in the beginning of his academic career in America, and then contemplates the possibility of writing fiction himself, with characteristic pride and confidence in his talents: "I would have been a great artist, a master of compelling inventiveness, arch, allusive, magisterially splenetic, given to arcane reference, obscure aims, an alchemist of word and image" (*S* 62). Although we remember that Vander is a writer and the text of *Shroud* is his narrative and his literary product, through ironic allusions to the real life persona of the author, John Banville, these remarks increase the distance between the reader and the text.

The ironic distance between the reader and the text is also enhanced by Banville's frequent resorting to apotheosis in the ekphrastic paragraphs. In *Shroud*, Vander is described as resembling Jesus, or performing gestures which we recognize from religious paintings. John Kenny points out that "Christian hope" is one of the themes of the novel (2002:19); Kucała goes further and claims that "Vander both evokes the possibility of redemption and denies it" (2013: 99). He hopes to be redeemed through his love for Cass and offers her an account of his life

in the form of a confession, but as Kucała observes: "For a confession to be effective, Vander would have to transcend the limits of his dubious self and find a legitimate listener" (2013:100). By addressing his confessional narrative to Cass, who is already dead, Vander performs yet another empty gesture.

In *Ancient Light*, the author draws on religious imagery in a much more frivolous context. Mrs Gray is described holding Alexander in her arms in a pose redolent of a pieta; Alexander refers to her as "My Lady of the Bicycle" (*AL* 7), and "my Venus Domestica" (*AL* 6). Religious imagery accompanies their illicit love-making: the rumbling of the boy's bowels is "the work of transubstantiation" (*AL* 7), an elastic band leaves a mark on Mrs Gray's body like a "crown of thorns" (*AL* 7). The blasphemy is tinged with humour in a hilarious scene of confession, which Mrs Gray, being religious, obliges Alexander to make. As the boy stumbles through words, uncertain how to articulate the enormity of his sin, the priest eagerly offers him a whole repertory of much more perverse deeds, thus exposing his own depravity.

Like *Shroud*, *Ancient Light* is a novel with a most unlikely love affair at the centre of its plot. In both cases the characters involved are separated by age difference, which makes the relationships bordering on the abusive: Vander points it out that he could be Cass's grandfather, Mrs Gray realizes that she has broken the law by seducing a boy who is not "even shaving yet" (*AL* 44). The older partners are in control of the situation, while the younger partners are not fully aware of, or responsible for their deeds: Cass suffers from a mental disorder, whereas Alex is emotionally still a child. Both Vander and Mrs Gray use their younger partners sexually to postpone a catastrophe in their lives. Vander tries to prevent Cass from exposing him as an impostor; Mrs Gray has been diagnosed with cancer, which Alexander discovers only fifty years after hear death.

Those two relationships are almost too obviously dramatisations of Freudian complexes; the Oedipal elements in the boy's relationship with his best friend's mother are more than evident, young Alex frequently expresses his wish to see Mr Gray dead. Electra's complex, i.e. a father-daughter relationship with pronounced erotic undertones, is another element of the plot of *Ancient Light* which is carried on from the previous novels. The text repeats the motif which had already appeared in *Eclipse*, i.e. Cass as a little girl comes up with an idea that she and her father should get married and have a daughter so that Alex has someone to look after him when he grows old. In *Shroud*, this motif is reenacted by

Cass looking after Vander in the hotel room. In *Ancient Light*, Alexander remembers Cass's idea; then as if confirms it mentally when he assumes that the tramp whom he meets regularly in various stages of degeneration, but occasionally cleaned up and detoxed, must have a daughter. He also acts as surrogate father to the recently bereaved Dawn Davenport, when he offers to take her away after her suicide attempt. Thus, they not only reenact in real life the fictional cinematic scenario in which they act as Vander and "his Cora" (*AL* 96), but also the father-daughter relationship. And this happens on two levels at least, because Alexander is looking after DD with love and affection that he only had for his daughter before, while they follow in the footsteps of Vander and Cass and literally reenact scenes that had taken place in *Shroud*, only this time Alexander is in the role of his daughter; like Cass he suffers from insomnia, like Cass he takes care of DD and lies by her side on the bed fully dressed. These relationships are mirror reflections, or doubles of one another, the effect is of a circular plot or a traumatic reenactment. Both in *Eclipse* and in *Ancient Light*, Alexander remembers his ministrations to his daughter, whose mental disorder made her a difficult and demanding child, his narrative carries a tone of guilt, even before Cass's suicide he felt that he was an inadequate father, though his memories seem to demonstrate the opposite.

Ancient Light is above all a novel about the relationship between memory and imagination and the possibility of redemption through memory. Like Ishiguro's Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills*, Alexander Cleave is trying to come to terms with a recent trauma by revisiting the past. He is highly self-conscious about the writing process, sceptical about the reliability of memory and prepared to admit that he misremembers as much as he remembers. Ten years before, in *Eclipse*, the memories of the loss of his parents served as a "shroud" from the external world and the memories of the recent nervous breakdown. Now, ten years from his daughter's suicide, he makes a conscious effort to revisit the love affair of half a century before in order to escape the limbo of grief. To write down the story of his first sexual fascination and first experience of love is a therapeutic project, an attempt at working through trauma of loss. His daughter's death is a fact which neither Lydia, nor Alexander have accepted – she suffers from regular nightmares, he still finds it hard to write it down that Cass is dead (*AL* 20), as if hoping that it is not real.

Alexander's narrative is full of self-conscious comments expressing his doubts about the power of memory, the accuracy of his recollec-

tions. Yet at the same time it is a very convincing imitation of the move-
ments of a mind engaged in the process of remembering as it moves
between the present, the past and future in the past. Its chronology
depends on the whim or sensory stimulation, the narrator gives hints
which build suspense, but then he leaves the reader guessing and, like
Proust's narrator, produces lengthy digressions. The reader's appetite
for sensation is teased already by the opening confession of the narra-
tor, the revelation that he fell in love with his best friend's mother, but
then the details are withheld. The description of the first meeting, or
rather the first glimpse of the underwear of a woman on the bicycle is
followed by an internal prolepsis – mention of the scandal which broke
out when the affair was discovered and a lengthy digression, almost an
essay by the now experienced narrator on the effect of women's under-
wear on men. In this way Banville constructs a narrative which imitates
the working of memory, i.e. achronological, fragmented, frequently re-
visiting one event, obsessively turning over details of a date, season,
time of day, finally admitting contradictions and inaccuracies.

Paradoxically, or maybe not, the self-conscious narrator, full of
doubts and reservations about his own reliability, need not necessar-
ily arouse suspicions in the reader. In this respect, Alexander Cleave
is the opposite of Ishiguro's Christopher Banks, who raises suspicions
precisely because he insists on being in control of the world around
him and fully reliable. Alexander declares from the first pages of his
account:

> Images from the past crowd in my head and half the time I cannot tell
> whether they are memories or inventions. Not that there is much differ-
> ence between the two, if indeed there is any difference at all. Some say
> that without realising it we make it all up as we go along, embroidering
> and embellishing, and I am inclined to credit it, for Madam Memory is
> a great and subtle dissembler (*AL* 3).

The readers become totally immersed in his account due to the qual-
ity of his "embroidering and embellishing", i.e. the sensuous but unsenti-
mental descriptions of the woman's body, the attention to details of the
external world received through the senses: the smell and taste, the ray
of sunshine falling through a hole in the roof. Banville plays with the
readers by dropping regular hints about Alexander's unreliability, like
his comparing Mr Gray to "Gary Fonda in the *The Grapes of Noon*. Surely,
I am inventing again, like so often" (*AL* 222), nevertheless, our trust in
him remains sufficiently unwavered for the final revelation to come as
a surprise. It is very important for the sake of suspense that we may see

the fifteen-year-old Alexander as immature and driven by hormones, baffled by Mrs Gray and unable to comprehend her, but we do not expect him to be so blind and deluded about the reality around him as in the end he turns out to have been then.

The final revelation consists in a meeting with the last surviving member of the Gray family, Kitty Gray, who had caught him *in flagrante* with her mother fifty years before. Kitty tells him that, contrary to what he remembers, there was no scandal, she never told anyone, except Billy; her mother did not leave the town in disgrace, but spent the final months of that year waiting for him. But most importantly, she reveals that Mrs Gray had been diagnosed with cancer and that her daring and defiance of the moral norms was connected with the imminence of death. A few sentences from Kitty throw a completely new light on the account we have just read, but interestingly enough, they do not make Alex any less reliable; he has told us what he remembered and how he remembered it, only he has learned that he was completely ignorant of the reality around him. All the same writing the narrative as therapeutic project seems to have worked, Alex and Lydia have opened up to Dawn Davenport by offering her shelter and support. Alex is planning to find the truth about Cass's death, they have managed to move on in their grief and mourning. Alex has found some form of reconciliation with the present by admitting that: "all my dead are all alive to me [...] the past is a luminous and everlasting present; alive to me yet lost, except in the frail afterworld of these words" (*AL* 242).

As readers, we are left with a strong sense of unreliability of memory. Even if we manage to construct a coherent narrative of our lives, it does not guarantee us access to the past. In Banville's fiction the question about the possibility of knowing another human being is answered in the negative. Although Alexander was able to recall the tiny detail of the love affair from his youth, although he remembered his own emotions with an extraordinary intensity, as it turns out, he was completely oblivious to the feelings of the other human being.

Conclusion

One of the conspicuous themes in fiction today is an intricate relationship between history, memory and trauma.[1] If we accept the distinction between public and private history, i.e. if we acknowledge the effort of an individual examining his or her past as a historical endeavour, then we must recognise history as virtually omnipresent in contemporary fiction. While memory, whether collective or personal is an indispensable instrument of historical inquiry, such has been the historical specificity of the twentieth century that the collective memory of nations or communities is founded on traumatic events. In the words of Geoffrey Hartman "trauma demarcates time, producing a breach in its homogenous course"; it is "the turn that changes everything" (2003: 267–8). It is trauma that constitutes the dramatic break in public and personal history, the event that marks a history of a community or an individual life with the "before" and "after".

In chapter one of the present study, I have traced the historical and theoretical background of the relationship between history, memory and trauma. One of its basic premises is the distinction between the event, as an ontological concept, and the fact as its epistemological equivalent (Pomorski 1983/1984). From this distinction between events, which constitute human memory, and facts, which are selected and processed by a historian arises the postmodern skepticism about the possibility of writing objective history (Pomorski 1983/1984;

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[1] The English-speaking writers are not exceptional in their preoccupation with this theme. Thomas Benhard, Bernard Schlink, W.G. Sebald, Jonathan Littel, Jaume Cabré have all written novels about individuals trying to come to terms with the wounds inflicted by history.

Hutcheon 1991 [1988]). For postmodern writers history and memory are contested territories. The main theoretical focus in chapter one, however, is on trauma studies, an interdisciplinary approach to culture which is still relatively little known in Poland. Although we must remember that in psychiatry one of the pioneers of trauma studies was a Polish psychiatrist, Maria Orwid, Polish academics have only recently begun to apply this theory to literature and culture. Important studies written in Poland include: Aleksandra Ubertowska's *Świadectwo – trauma – głos: Literackie reprezentacje Holokaustu* (2007) about the trauma of the Holocaust in Polish literature, and two books written by my fellow academics working in the area of anglophone literature and culture: *Reimagining the War Memorial, Reinterpreting the Great War: The Formats of British Commemorative Fiction* by Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż (2012), and *The Trauma of Survival: The (De)Construction of the Myth of the Great War in the Canadian Novel* by Anna Branach-Kallas (2014).

In this book, I have analysed the selected novels of four writers whose engagement with history seems to represent the opposite ends of the spectrum. Pat Barker and Sebastian Barry have a political axe to grind and represent historical revisionism in fiction, whereas, Kazuo Ishiguro and John Banville seem to abandon public history for the sake of private history. By observing that these four writers share a preoccupation with trauma, I have added a new aspect to the critical readings of their work.

In Section I of this study, "History and Trauma", I analyse the historical novels of Pat Barker and Sebastian Barry to demonstrate how both writers adopt a revisionist approach to the foundational traumas of their nations. As Branach-Kallas declares, trauma studies have reopened the discussion about World War I – a historical trauma which had been overshadowed by the atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust (2014). In *The Regeneration* trilogy Barker interrogates the literary canon and iconography of the Great War as it had been established by such cultural historians as Paul Fussell. By applying contemporary historical interpretations to the issues of class, gender and sexuality, Barker deconstructs the myth of the Great War, presents the war as a cultural trauma, i.e. an event threatening the existence of the society (Smelser 2004). The immense popularity of the trilogy and subsequent film adaptation of the first volume have helped engrave Barker's novels into the cultural memory of the British nation – Barker's fiction has changed the way the British remember the Great War (Brannigan 2005a).

Sebastian Barry, in turn, adopts a revisionist approach to the foundational traumas of the Irish nation. By depicting the victimisation of inconvenient political minorities such as loyalist Catholics in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, *A Long Long Way* and *On Canaan's Side*; and the fate of women in Ireland in the twentieth century in *The Secret Scripture*, the writer undermines the heroic version of the history of Irish independence. Unlike Pat Barker, who is a trained historian and therefore, self-conscious about her project throughout, Sebastian Barry only gradually adopts a postmodern approach to history and fiction writing. After his biased and exculpatory version of the twentieth-century history of Ireland in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* was severely criticised, he opted for historiographic metafiction in *The Secret Scripture* – a novel in which the reliability of memory and history is shown to be equally problematic. Adopting such mode of writing enables Sebastian Barry to resist the temptation to approach the past from the position of a judge who pronounces a verdict (Ricoeur 2004). Instead, in a truly postmodern gesture, the writer problematizes the possibility of historical knowledge and focuses on the question of *whose* history survives (Hutcheon 1991 [1988]). *The Secret Scripture* and *On Canaan's Side* offer intriguing portrayals of overlapping of individual and collective trauma. In both novels the history of Ireland, wars and political upheavals of the twentieth century are presented as traumatic for the nation in general, and for women in particular. By focusing on the experience of women, Sebastian Barry reminds the readers that although they seldom occupy prominent positions in the drama of history, they suffer the consequences of violence as victims and the breaved.

All the historical novels discussed in Section I, explore the impact of war or other violent events on nations or groups, i.e. they deal with collective traumas. However, a collective trauma is made up of the suffering of individuals (Orwid 2009), and the writers under discussion depict the fate of individuals too, they dwell on the psychological wounds inflicted by war and violence on the human psyche. There is an intriguing difference in the way in which Barker and Barry approach the phenomenon of shell shock. While Barker discusses the phenomenon from multiple perspectives; her fiction is informed by the history of medical, psychiatric, military and political attitudes to the problem, Barry chooses a point of view of an ignorant soldier and renders his confusion and torment in highly poetic language. Such disparity in the ways in which the two writers have chosen to write about shell shock may result from

the considerable discrepancies in the status of World War I in the British and Irish historiographies. The war, which in British culture and history is now remembered as the greatest and most bloody conflict of the twentieth century, for the Irish still remains overshadowed by the blood sacrifice of the Easter Rising (Foster 1988). The Irish soldiers fighting alongside the British in Flanders had been obliterated from collective memory by nationalist ideology, my analysis presents *A Long Long Way* as an attempt at restoring their place in that memory.

The critical discussion of the novels of Pat Barker and Sebastian Barry has confirmed my initial hypothesis that since trauma is an experience too damaging for the psyche to be normally assimilated, remembered and narrated (Felman and Laub 1992; Caruth 1996; LaCapra 2001), it may be a rhetorical figure particularly well-suited for the kind of historical fiction which deals with the dark secrets in the past of nations and communities. Literature as cultural memory has an important ethical function. Since the historical trauma may be transmitted through the cultural unconscious (Abraham and Torok 1994), the guilt and shame of the secret histories needs to be uncovered and properly mourned, otherwise nations may be haunted by the crimes of their ancestors. Engaging with trauma, literature performs a commemorative function (Ricoeur 2004; Sokołowska-Paryż 2012); it allows nations to revisit the past and heal the wounds.

However, historical revisionism is not free from pitfalls: Pat Barker's *Double Vision* is a disconcerting manifestation of victim culture – a vision of the world permeated by violence and populated by victims, each nurturing his or her traumatic past. In *On Canaan's Side* Sebastian Barry falls into a similar trap, rather than argue that loyalists were persecuted in independent Ireland, as he did in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, he constructs a fictional world in which everyone is proclaimed a victim of history – the ex-Black-and-Tan soldier assassinated by the IRA and the gunman who shot him. In a fictional world in which trauma is omnipresent, all protagonists are victims and the boundaries between victims and perpetrators have collapsed, overgeneralization of trauma may lead to trivialization.

Although, as I argue in Section II of this book, public history is not a primary concern in the fiction of Ishiguro and Banville, yet it is not completely obliterated, but functions as a backdrop to the private histories of individuals exploring their own past in order to come to terms with the trauma of loss. Ishiguro denounces any affinities with historical fiction, nevertheless, as it becomes apparent in chapter four,

despite the attenuated reality in which he places his self-deluding protagonists, his novels are very firmly set in the historical context. The narrator of *A Pale View of Hills* not only lost all her family and her fiancé when the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, she was also traumatised by the experience. Likewise, the protagonist of *When We Were Orphans* never gets over the trauma he suffered as a child – the disappearance of his parents is related to British imperialist policy in China; European powers are implicated in the Sino-Japanese war, which features prominently in the plot of the novel. Although much critical attention has been devoted to Ishiguro's explorations of individual memory, very little has been said about traumatic nature of his protagonists' memories. My analysis of *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans* offers a new reading of those novels.

John Banville's trilogy discussed in chapter five, exemplifies a whole range of engagements with history. Although the writer examines the private history of individuals suffering from loss of the loved ones and their grief, two of the novels allude to public history as well. *Eclipse* may be read as an interrogation of the Irish literary tradition; through intertextual allusions to Irish classics and the figure of the narrator – a Shakespearian actor, the author enters into a debate about the Irishness of Irish culture. *Shroud* is most firmly rooted in history through the narrator protagonist who is modeled on the figure of Paul de Man and, like the illustrious critic, implicated in the persecution of the Jews in Nazi occupied Belgium. Only in *Ancient Light*, the author eschews public history from the narrative which explores the relationship between memory and knowledge.

Both Ishiguro and Banville use the motif of acting, performing other selves to mark their protagonists' difficulties in coming to terms with their deficient sense of self; they search the past in order to construct a coherent sense of self, but are seldom successful. Ishiguro's narrators project their anxieties on others, deceive themselves and refuse to confront the past as it really was. Banville's protagonists project their present emotional states on the past and produce very coherent memories which turn out to be false when confronted with the memories of others.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub writing about the Holocaust as a crisis of history and the watershed of our times claim that literature can do justice to trauma when the "*crisis of history* [...] is translated into a *crisis of literature*" (1992: xviii, original emphasis). By drawing on the work of trauma theorists and literary critics such as, Felman, Caruth,

LaCapra, Whitehead and Kacandes, I have proposed to read the novels of Ishiguro and Banville as testimony of a crisis and, in consequence, I have demonstrated that both writers place their readers in the position of witnesses to trauma. They achieve this effect not only by examining the wounded psyche of their protagonists, but more importantly, by mimicking the symptoms of trauma in the structure of their narratives. In a mode closely resembling the testimony of trauma survivors, the narrator-protagonists present the reader with inconclusive, achronological, fragmented and repetitive confessions. The narrator of *A Pale View of Hills* suffers from numerous symptoms of trauma: dissociation, psychic numbing, split personality disorder, hallucinations. However, none of these symptoms are described in the text as such, they must be deciphered by the reader from the narrative which bears all the features of traumatic memory as defined by psychiatrists (Van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995). The symptoms are mimicked in the form of the narrative and the process of deciphering them forces the reader to participate in the process of transforming the traumatic memory into narrative memory. On the level of the plot, the writers bring trauma to language by constructing narratives that lack the certainty of determining what happened. In consequence, the reader is forced into the role of a witness whose task is to construct the story out of the fragments provided and thus to engage in the process of working through the trauma as a sympathetic listener.

All the novels discussed in this book prove that by engaging with trauma, literature asks fundamental ethical questions about nations and individuals. Moreover, as psychiatrists and critics writing on trauma have observed, literary fiction is a particularly well-suited medium for explorations of trauma (Felman and Laub 1992; Abraham and Torok 1994; LaCapra 2001; Orwid 2009). Felman declares in the introduction to her book *The Judicial Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*: "Literature is a dimension of concrete embodiment of language of infinitude that, in contrast to the language of the law, encapsulates not closure but precisely what in a given case refuses to be closed and cannot be closed. It is to this refusal of trauma to be closed that literature does justice" (2002: 8). By exploring the collective traumas of nations and communities writers like Barker and Barry, make a contribution to the cultural memory of those nations. They unearth painful secrets, which cannot be assimilated into the collective memory unless they are articulated and worked through. Ishiguro and Banville, on the other hand, deepen our understanding

of the human condition by examining the individual mind engaged in the process of remembering. They resort to gapped, repetitive, fragmented and self-contradictory confessions to mark the symptoms of trauma in their protagonists. In both cases, fiction brings the reader closer to the experience which, unfortunately, has become crucial for the understanding of the human experience of history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Orwid 2009).

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