METAFICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA

UĞUR YANKI ÜÇKARDEŞLER

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

2022

METAFICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA

Thesis submitted to the

Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Literature

by

Uğur Yankı Üçkardeşler

Boğaziçi University

2022

Metafictional Representations of Trauma

The thesis of Uğur Yankı Üçkardeşler

has been approved by:

Assist. Prof. Burcu Kayışçı Akkoyun _____
(Thesis Advisor)

Dr. Aylin Alkaç _____
(Thesis Co-Advisor)

Assist. Prof. Başak Demirhan _____

Assist. Prof. Ayşegül Turan _____
(External Member)

September 2022

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Uğur Yankı Üçkardeşler, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

Signature……

Date ……

ABSTRACT

Metafictional Representations of Trauma

This study explores the representation of trauma in three metafictional novels that deal with trauma in the last half century: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969/2009), Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* (1999/2000) and Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* (2019). While there is extensive research tracing the various themes in literary depictions of trauma, there is a gap in the studies of metafictional novels that fails to adequately address the connection between metafiction and representation of trauma in literary texts. Therefore, this study fills this gap in the existing scholarship with its focus on the metafictional representations of trauma. Building on the existing interdisciplinary approaches to trauma studies and metafiction, this M.A. thesis demonstrates how metafiction is an apt narrative strategy to convey the inherent resistance in traumatic experience to representation through the discourses of totalizing meta-narratives. By exposing how trauma manifests itself on the psyche of the victim, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Survivor* and *The Testaments* reveal that its representation also requires unconventional means of narration. All three novels not only self-reflexively question the limits of narrativity in representing trauma but also attempt at alternative narratives that are self-aware of the difficulty inherent in the task of representing trauma and actively include the reader in the creation of the testimonial text.

ÖZET

Üstkurmaca Romanlarda Travmanın Temsilleri

Bu çalışma, özünde travmayı ele alan üç üstkurmaca romanda travmanın temsilini araştırmaktadır. Bu romanlar Kurt Vonnegut'un *Mezbaha 5* (1969/2009), Chuck Palahniuk'un *Gösteri Peygamberi* (1999/2000) ve Margaret Atwood'un *Ahitler* adlı romanlarıdır. Travmanın edebi tasvirlerinde çeşitli temaların izini süren kapsamlı araştırmalar olsa da üstkurmaca ile travmanın edebi metinlerdeki temsili arasındaki bağlantı yeterince ele alınmamıştır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma travmanın üstkurmaca temsillerine odaklanarak mevcut boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Travma Çalışmaları ve üstkurmaca alanlarında mevcut disiplinlerarası yaklaşımlar üzerine inşa edilen bu yüksek lisans tezi, travmatik deneyimlerin doğalarından dolayı genellemelere dayanan anlatı söylemleriyle temsil edilmeye direnç gösterdiğini ortaya koymak için üstkurmacanın en uygun anlatı stratejisi olduğunu önermektedir. *Mezbaha 5*, *Gösteri Peygamberi* ve *Ahitler*, travmanın etkisini mağdurlarının üzerinde nasıl gösterdiğini açığa çıkararak, doğası gereği tutarlı bir anlatıya dönüştürülmeyi reddeden travmayı anlatılaştırmanın olanaklarını sorguluyor. Her üç roman da yalnızca kendi yapılarını ve anlatılaştırma ile travma arasındaki içsel çelişkiyi özdüşünümsel olarak sorgulamakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda alternatif anlatılar önermektedir. Bu deneme, travmayı temsil etme amacının doğasında var olan zorluğun farkında olan bir anlatı oluşturarak okuyucuyu travmaya sebep olan olayın tanıklığına dahil eden bir metin oluşturmayı hedeflemektedir.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am forever indebted to my professors, friends and family that supported me throughout my academic pursuit that led me to completing this thesis. I would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to my thesis advisors, Assistant Professor Burcu Kayışçı Akkoyun and Dr. Aylin Alkaç, for being patient with me and offering invaluable feedback throughout my studies. I am also incredibly thankful to Assistant Professor Başak Demirhan, for kindly accepting to participate in my thesis committee and inspiring my interest in Palahniuk's novels. Additionally, I would like to offer special thanks to Assistant Professor Ayşegül Turan for offering her valuable feedback as an external member for this thesis and for paving the way that led me to where I am with her classes throughout my undergraduate studies at Istanbul Kültür University. I also want to thank Vehbi Koç Vakfı for financially supporting me for 2 years during my studies at Boğaziçi University.

I also must mention Professor Işıl Baş and Assistant Professor Esin Akalın, whose teachings had remarkable impact on formulating my ideas behind this thesis. Similarly, I again offer my gratitude to Dr. Aylin Alkaç for her remarkable effort during our directed reading course which was especially important in forming the core idea behind this thesis.

I would like to express my profound appreciation and undying love to my partner, Hilal Bilgili, whose emotional support throughout the past 1.5+ years kept me moving forward. Finally, I cannot express how lucky I am to have had a father who was so selfless. I hope you are proudly looking down from heaven. And to my dear mom, you are my biggest inspiration and the strongest woman I know.

Dedicated to my dear mom & dad,

Fortitudo per familiam.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Crossroads between trauma studies and fiction 6

1.2 Metafiction and trauma 17

CHAPTER 2: *"POO-TEE-WEET?"*: RECOUNTING THE TRAUMATIC PAST ON A METAFICTIONAL PLANE IN KURT VONNEGUT'S *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE* 25

2.1 Self-reflexively addressing trauma 30

2.2 Tralfamadorian abduction of narrative 35

2.3 The "expressionless" in the narrative 40

CHAPTER 3: THE EXTREME PURSUIT OF TESTIMONY IN CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S *SURVIVOR* 46

3.1 The politics of narrativizing trauma 54

3.2 Confronting trauma and the latency effect: A story within a story 57

CHAPTER 4: WORKING-THROUGH TRAUMA IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE TESTAMENTS* 67

4.1 Past and present of trauma: The self-reflexive urge to testify 71

4.2 Fragmented narrativization of Gilead: Disassociation within the form 73

4.3 The individual and collective trauma of Gilead 76

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION 86

REFERENCES 92

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Kurt Vonnegut writes "All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true" (1969/2009, p. 5) in the opening lines of his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*. By both claiming to be testifying about truths of war and self-referentially questioning his own reliability, this line resonates with the inherently difficult task of representing the grueling truths of trauma within a fictional narrative. The word 'fiction' itself causes one to believe what they are reading is not reality but a mere reconstruction of it. The conventional narrative mode of fiction, often identified with realism in the novel, involves the reconstruction of reality within fiction by assuming a distance between the author and his work. This distance enables the author, derived from the root word for authority, to construct a narration of events that is omniscient, chronological, and based on causal reasoning. It is no wonder that this form of writing is intimately associated mainly with 19th century literature which is a period of culmination for the Enlightenment era beliefs in reason and progress that propelled modernity and led to the elevation of narratives that underlined themes of inevitable and constant progress for society. Modernity project was essentially based upon a utopian vision of the future and moving forward without dwelling on the past. The subsequent decades filled with tragedies of war and trauma falsified this sense of progress and facilitated what may be called the postmodern condition of the World, the biggest symptom of which is a lack of belief in anything and everything: the undermining of grand narratives of modernity project that aspired towards the complete emancipation of humanity. A fiery skepticism was born out of this reaction, which was not only towards the older 'order' of things, as in modernity and

enlightenment, but also self-referentially towards postmodernism itself. While decentralization, extreme subversion, criticism of grand narratives, ambivalence and deconstruction of social constructs led to putting an end to the search for universal meaning, this very same position also questioned itself in order not to become what it sought to undermine: yet another totalizing discourse.

One of the most prominent ideas that promoted this notion of "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p.25) was Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. Baudrillard revealed the many ways in which reality and its simulation blend together in our world to such an extent that a binary opposition between reality and simulation becomes questionable. Baudrillard (1981/1995) writes in *Simulacra and Simulation:*

> Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. (p. 10)

Through the blending together of Disneyland (simulacra), and everything that exists outside simulation is created. There is no way to tell where 'reality' within the simulation ends and where imagination begins. Instead, Disneyland's existence and contrast to the banality of the "real" confuses the consciousness and creates a perceived reality. By reproducing its distinction from a perceived reality, Disneyland becomes a simulacra. It becomes a copy of something that has no origin, thus appearing as real in its own right. The world outside Disneyland becomes hyperreal simply because Disneyland exists. We thus become forcibly unable to distinguish in between, a condition that ended up with an infinite questioning of all epistemological and ontological discourses of our world.

Thus, postmodernism and its self-referential irony, suspicious outlook, and desire to expose simulacra and simulations have only arrived at one conclusion -a conclusion which is a non-conclusion engulfed in ambiguity and inconclusiveness. What postmodernists did not anticipate, however, is that against their best efforts, postmodernism and its philosophy itself became what it sought to destroy. Linda Hutcheon, (2002) one of the progenitors of postmodern thought wrote about this situation in "Postmodern Afterthoughts":

> the postmodern does indeed appear to be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past. Now fully institutionalized, it has its canonized texts, its anthologies, primers and readers, its dictionaries and its histories. We could even say it has its own publishing houses. (Routledge would be my candidate.) . . . For decades now, diagnosticians have been pronouncing on its health, if not its demise, with some of the major players in the debate weighing in on the negative side: for people like Terry Eagleton and Christopher Norris, postmodernism is certainly finished, even *passé*; indeed, for them it's a failure, an illusion. (p. 5)

So, what does this say to us? If we are to take Lyotard's (1979/1984) definition of postmodernism "as incredulity toward metanarratives" (p. 25), what does this degradation of postmodernism through becoming institutionalized mean for metanarratives? Are they reliable again?

To a certain extent yes, as many theorists did partly redeem the validity of metanarratives to repurpose them for renewed, less oppressive uses. For example, Ruth Hayhoe (2000) wrote in her article titled "Redeeming Modernity" that "metanarratives could be a helpful vehicle for reflecting on the self and listening to others and are not necessarily 'totalizing' expressions": "On a practical note, we often take for granted benefits of modernity that have become as natural as breathing and lack appreciation of the intense efforts in other societies to carry forward their own modernity projects." (p. 424). For Hayhoe and many others, modernity, when its metanarratives are appropriated correctly and efficiently, still had value.

Metanarrativity could be used as an effective tool to create a framework which provides a practical ground to build upon by way of postmodern self-reflexivity. Larry A. Hickman (2007) underlines this by drawing from John Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism in his book *Pragmatism as Post-postmodernism:*

> In short, we live in a world that is both precarious and stable. Ours is a world in which a certain amount of knowledge is necessary if we are to avoid disaster, and in which even more knowledge is required if we are to flourish. Common-sense knowledge, based on observation, and scientific knowledge, based on experimentation, are key ingredients in this mix, but they are not enough. (p. 23)

Resolving the tension between the modernity project and postmodern skepticism then, Hayhoe and Hickman aim to find a middle ground on which both parties can exist. Hutcheon argued that "postmodernism was never simply a matter of style; it inevitably also involved the ideology of representation, including self-representation" (2002, p.6). As such, while maintaining this self-reflexive attitude of postmodernism, these approaches aim to allow for the creation of relative truths that are not as oppressive as grand narratives. Thus, this agenda of a postmortem of metanarratives aims not to construct a totalitarian social project that promises an elevation of humankind but a new and intensified emphasis on the broader picture to help and guide the individual. This broader picture is not to be reached by grounding itself on a blind belief in the modernity project, grand narratives and what they enforce, but by basing itself in common-sense driven, and self-reflexive micro narratives that depict non-totalizing truths about the state of any given matter. Thus, modernist all-encompassing truths are no longer feasible. Reason and science do help but as Hickman stated above, they too are not enough. Similarly, postmodern experimentations and their endless non-conclusions are also not viable.

But what was it that created this tension in the first place? The Enlightenment initiated the process of secularization in Europe, marked by the famous quote from Nietzsche (1882/1974): "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" (p. 181). This was not an entirely positive outcome. The belief system, which was a fundamental part of European culture was in jeopardy. God was replaced with a belief in reason and science. Progress, individualistic emancipation, and welfare of all humanity were the central goals of the modernity project. Industries grew, technology evolved. Life became easier for the average individual. However, the rapid shift in society led to a violent reversal of this progress. Zygmunt Bauman (1988) wrote about this in "Sociology after the Holocaust": "The European industrial system went awry; instead of enhancing life, which was the original hope of the Enlightenment, it began to consume itself" (p. 475). The insatiable rush of industrialization culminated in two world wars. Bauman refers to Henry Feingold to underline the destructive relationship between industrialization and war:

"[Auschwitz] was also a mundane extension of the modern factory system. Rather than producing goods, the raw material was human beings and the end-product was death" (1988, p. 476). Instead of progress, emancipation and thriving life on earth, modernity project was now producing decline, subjugation, and death. The unspoken terrors of war, genocides, racial and colonial atrocities that marked the failure of the modernity project in the 20th century caused the reaction of what came to be known as postmodern critique. Furthermore, these terrors brought to attention the long-lasting effects of individual and collective trauma and how they manifest themselves in narrativization of our lives in historical records, art and literary works.

Where does trauma and its relationship to literature lie within this conundrum then? In the past few decades, the field of trauma studies has established itself as a

field of study in literary theory. The field explores the implications of individual and collective trauma and its representation in fiction. The long-lasting effects of the traumatic event, the role of memory, and cultural identities are some of the main issues dealt with in these studies. While psychoanalysis seems to be the origin, it is an inter-disciplinary field of study. Poststructuralism and its rejection of categorizations and binary oppositions, postcolonial theory, and the reclamation of the agency of the oppressed, feminist theory, which rejects assigned gender roles and patriarchal values, are some of the prominent critical approaches that inform trauma studies. To explore the relationship between non-traditional narratives and trauma however, we must first establish trauma theory's current positioning in order to understand how experimental narratives can become useful for representing trauma.

1.1 Crossroads between trauma studies and fiction

The emergence of trauma studies relied on the Freudian theories that dealt with hysteria and argued for a severe event or experience which continued to cause symptoms in the individual after the event and its immediate effects have passed. The difficulties Freud's patients had in accessing the related memories and recognizing the original event in order to narrativize and come to terms with it remained an important question to explore in the aftermath of the modernity project. The number of individual and collective cases of trauma that surfaced in the 20th century and trauma's resistance to language, recollection and narrativization became significant concerns of the field. Trauma studies is thus inevitably concerned with the limits of language, the gap in the memory of the individual related to the event and the fragmentation of meaning where trauma is present.

In *Studies in Hysteria* (1895/1981), Freud and Breuer claim that hysteria comes from an earlier experience of a traumatic event that was repressed by the individual. It is not just the event itself that is traumatic but also (and mostly) its recollection. Because the event still causes harm to the victim, working through and discussing it is necessary to become free of its effects in the present time. Significant at this point is the presence of a 'latency' period or a delayed reaction to the event. Only after a present event brings to consciousness the previously repressed event can the trauma begin to be confronted and remembered. Freud and Breuer conclude that:

> the precipitating event in some way still continues to exercise an effect years later, not indirectly through a chain of intermediary causal links, but as a directly releasing cause, in something like the same way that a psychical pain remembered in waking consciousness will still produce the secretion of tears later on: *hysterics suffer for the most part from reminiscences.* (p. 7)

It is remembering that causes pain to the victim psychologically and attributes an emotional value to the repressed event. The repressed memory by itself is not the cause for the symptoms. The act of remembering it triggers the symptoms and heightens the effect of the event. When faced with remembrances, the ego splits into pieces "in the form of 'double conscience' . . . present to a rudimentary degree in every major hysteria" (Freud & Beuer, 1895/1981, p. 227). This notion that when faced with trauma the mind creates a gap, which is followed by a latency period and is subsequently ended when a present event triggers the repressed memory and wreaks havoc on the psyche, confuses memory and causes dissociation by fragmenting the consciousness of the victim is still a major influence within the field of trauma studies.

Later in the 90s, numerous theoretical works surfaced that aimed to explore trauma's place in literature and society. Cathy Caruth's critical works brought attention to the unrepresentable nature of trauma and its symptoms, exposing the

attached contradictions it creates with the role of language in the creation of meaning. Caruth claims that the traumatic event fragments consciousness, making its verbal representation impossible in the process. The irreversible damage to the psyche shatters the victim's identity and the traumatic event escapes towards an irretrievable memory that cannot be captured by 'conventional' omniscient narrativization. The nature of the event destroys the mind's ability to understand, process and then represent it in language. Since the event cannot thus be narrativized and reminisced fully, it continues to have a toll on the mental state of the individual. The pathological effects on the psyche that Freud stressed prevent the event from becoming a part of regular narrativization of life. Thus, the mind and its coherence in the recollection of related memories are negatively affected by the suffering too. This calls for a creation of unique narrativization in order to overcome the irrepresentability. Such a narrative has to take into consideration the indirect effect of trauma on the mind.

Caruth discusses this indirectness of the traumatic event in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (1996) by stating that both personal and collective historical traumatic events are never directly accessed:

> it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma —both in its occurrence and in the attempt to understand it— that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). (p. 11)

Experiences and references become irrelevant because their subject is unable to narrativize them. Caruth's post-structural engagement with Freud's work draws attention to the fact that both individual and larger historical traumatic events are never retrieved in a straightforward testimony. Instead, they are only known to have happened through a perforated web of references that appear in the form of repetitive

absences in memory. This inability to place trauma within consciousness is its defining aspect. As Caruth writes:

> If fright is the term by which Freud defines the traumatic effect of not having been prepared in time, then the trauma of the nightmare does not simply consist in the experience within the dream, but in the experience of waking from it. It is the experience of waking into consciousness that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of the trauma. And as such it is not only the dream that surprises consciousness but, indeed, the very waking itself that constitutes the surprise
> (p. 64)

Trauma enigmatically creates a vicious circle of language and consciousness: while trauma demands to be narrativized so that healing can occur, its resistance to language makes narrativization difficult. In a sort of double enigma, the subject is both faced with a near death experience and the continuous survival experience which are both unassimilated. The survivor repetitively fails to claim the moment of trauma (as they become disassociated from the moment), and they continuously fail to recall the memory of the event in the aftermath. The urge to assign meaning to the past clashes with the inability to comprehend and narrativize it. Because the traumatic event cannot be recorded in the memory, it resists narrativization; reminiscences cannot generate uninterrupted accurate testimonies - instead, they can only be evoked as inaccurate approximations. Through postmodern tools of unreliability, ambiguity and slippery temporality, the natural characteristics of trauma can inform the form of the content in fiction. The fallibility of memory corrupted by trauma can be represented through unreliable narrators. Ambiguity in the narrative can speak to the elusiveness of the traumatic event. Finally, the slippery temporality of the narrative can symbolize the gaps in the victims' attempts to testify.

That the traumatic encounter prevents access to knowledge of the past also applies to collective traumas of history. In her close reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Caruth suggests that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's

own" (1996, p. 24). History effects all within a given collective and connects the various traumatic memories within the individuals. In Caruth's words: "History is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (p. 24). Thus, trauma shapes and bends our understanding of time and history itself. The immutability of the wound inflicted on the collective resists comprehension through narrativization and the traumatic event of the past and its effect on the collective can affect the contemporary individual within that same collective. Thus, history and its categories fall short of taming traumatic events. On the other hand, collective trauma shapes the way in which we refer to and record history, -as individuals and collectives testify to events such as the Holocaust, referrals to such events in historical accounts continually proliferate and change. Dissociation and latency of the trauma is also apparent within shared trauma. According to Caruth, the dissociative nature of trauma is like "a break in the mind's experience of time" (p. 61). The emotional symptoms follow, and the inability to capture and make sense of the event does not prevent the trauma from encircling and entrapping the experiencers' mind. The correlation between the individual and collective responses to traumatic experiences suggests that attempts at accurately representing violent events of enormous magnitudes like genocide, war and systemic oppression in a conventional historical narrative are futile, as such representations are doomed to fail in representing the true nature and extent of these events.

The unrepresentability that Caruth underlined in her work remained an important starting point for the studies that followed in her footsteps. The interlocked relationship between the individual and the collective, and the dissociation and latency following traumatic events continued to be at the forefront of criticism in the field together with another important aspect of trauma, which is the urge to testify to

the event, and how such testimony can happen. Yale literary critic Shoshana Felman and psychoanalyst Dori Laub's collection titled *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992) focused on this aspect. Published five years before Cathy Caruth's work, Laub and Felman's collection tackled the problem of testimony to trauma and issues surrounding being a listener to a victim's testimony. The work also called into question the issue of addressing trauma that spurs from the phenomenon of the "event eliminating its own witness" (1992, p. xvii) as the traumatic nature of the event fragments the memories of itself and the victim becomes unable to testify accurately and efficiently. This issue of addressing would later be further explored in Felman's other works. Laub's chapter in the collection discussing the notion of becoming a witness to trauma and 'vicissitudes' of listening explores how the process of starting to know the unknowable requires intense and distinctive processes as the witness to the testimony "faces a unique situation":

> In spite of the presence of ample documents, of searing artifacts and of fragmentary memoirs of anguish, he comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a record that has yet to be made. Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence.
> (p. 57)

Because the event is unrepresentable in the experiencer's mind, no amount of hard evidence can bring the event into existence in the present. Precluding knowledge about the event, trauma in the victim's mind must be acknowledged first by recognizing the absence within temporality. The victim, however, cannot do this by themselves:

> the trauma—as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock—has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is,

> therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the "knowing" of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (p.57)

The listener, therefore, becomes "a co-owner of the traumatic event." By participating in the resurfacing of the event, they partake in the struggles of the victim: "The listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony" (p.58). Thus, it becomes apparent that a listener is one of the crucial parts for testimony to happen.

It is important at this point to briefly mention an exemplary witness testimony that Felman close reads in her *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (2002). She focuses on the witness testimonies of the Holocaust survivors that were given during the Eichmann trial. She explains that unlike the earlier Nuremberg trials where only documentation and 'hard' evidence were used, Eichmann trial focused on human testimonies more than two decades later. Felman argues that by bringing 'fragile' survivors to the stand, the trial empowers them with legal authority so that they become able and willing to convey their stories. The testimonies of the victims are thus transformed from being fragmented experiences into a collective and recognized traumatic experience called the Holocaust. For Felman, the speeches of the witnesses are a success. Eichmann trial is accepted to be the trial that brought the isolated accounts of the atrocities committed against the Jewish people together as one collective event that we now call the Holocaust. As Felman writes:

> It was beyond human powers to present the calamity in a way that would do justice to six million tragedies. The only way to concretize it was to call surviving witnesses, as many as the framework of the trial would allow, and to ask each of them to tell a tiny fragment of what he had seen and experienced . . . Put together, the various narratives of different people would be concrete enough to be apprehended. (2002, p.134)

Among the several testimonies, Felman focuses on one specific witness and the incident that occurred during his testimony, -the testimony of a writer that went by the pseudonym 'K-Zetnik'. Felman informs us that "K-Zetnik is a slang word meaning a concentration camp inmate, one identified not by name but by the number the Nazis tattooed on each inmate's arm" (p. 135). His testimony was unique in that he physically collapsed and lost consciousness during its delivery. Felman reads this as the trauma witness' fall into silence. For her, the successes of the testimonials during the trial are mostly the result of this single 'failed' testimony, a testimony that is interrupted, unfinished and ends with silence. K-Zetnik's collapse resonates through the whole trial and with the other testimonies symbolically, and is recorded by the judge as an influential moment in the closing statements:

> K-Zetnik's *legal muteness*–his inability to tell a story in the trial–is part of the impossibility of telling that is at the trial's heart . . . But K-Zetnik's testimony does not simply tell *about* the impossibility of telling: it dramatizes it-*enacts it*-through its own lapse into coma and its own collapse into a silence. (pp. 160-161)

K-Zetnik's testimony brings the silence of those that died to the court room. His collapse also brings to attention the collapse of witness in wake of collective and massive traumatic events. The issue of addressing a traumatic event is thus laid bare and it becomes the strength of the testimony.

K-Zetnik testified not only for the survivors, but also for the dead whose voice cannot be heard anymore. Felman explains that the "expressionless" (those that have lost their life in the traumatic event) is invoked through K-Zetnik whose fall is brought on by the dead: "The expressionless at least partially recovers the living humanity and the *expression* of a human face. . . . the *expressionless* turns into *storytelling"* (2002, p.14). The emphasis on storytelling of the expressionless by Felman indicate a strong connection to metafictional works that deal with trauma. In

the same way that the dead speak through and come into life through K-Zetnik, the expressionless within fiction come to life and speak through the narrator(s). Metafiction conveniently emphasizes this phenomenon and allows the testimony of trauma to become recognized. Moreover, the representation of trauma within a fictional setting is achieved by exposing the rupture between language and consciousness, capturing the absence and latency of trauma through plays on temporality and unreliability, and finally by allowing the expressionless to manifest through a dialogic relationship with the listener -in this case, the reader- audience.

Metafiction serves a further purpose at this point, by relating the mind dissociated from temporality and narrativity to self-reflexively exposing the process of narrating. Thus, metafictional works expose the inability to comprehend the traumatic event and initiates the process of testimony. Metafictional interruptions serve as a useful tool here. They allow the narrative to convey to the reader that language and consciousness are broken and cannot be represented in a conventional narrative. Thus, by exposing the process of creating the narrative, metafiction allows the reader to become a witness to the effects of individual and collective trauma. Furthermore, metafiction is an apt narrative strategy to represent both individual and collective trauma as metafictional works break away from and expose limitations of modernist values and conventional narratives which are based on a sense of progress and linear chronological temporality. As trauma's biggest symptoms are interruptions and becoming stuck and unstuck continuously in time, a narrative strategy that is non-traditional and metafictional allows the fictional work to represent the non-linearity and incomprehensibility effectively. Yet, works that deal with trauma are still tied to the real but unrepresentable experiences of the individual and the collective group. Therefore, a narrative that attempts to represent trauma

must ground itself on truths about events that are albeit non-omniscient. Thus, I argue that metafiction comes in at a point of functional and symbiotic juncture between modernity and postmodern ambiguity. Metafictional works that deal with trauma establish a middle-ground between postmodern ambiguity and grand narratives of modernity by providing testimony that can lead to non-oppressive truths about individual and collective trauma: the kind of truths that the use of human witnesses like K-Zetnik's brought out in the Eichmann trial. K-Zetnik and the other witnesses' accounts dismantled the Nazi Party's grand narrative of a racially "pure" nation and exposed the failure of the modernity project's claims of progress and emancipation. Metafictional trauma fiction aspires to undertake the same dismantling of grand narratives while self-reflexively avoiding a claim to provide a universal truth for how to depict trauma and prevent traumatic events from happening in the future. Furthermore, metafictional works substitute the need for a listener through a dialogic narrative that aims to make the reader the listener to the testimony. Thus, the exhausting process of testifying begins.

A different, perhaps a more intriguing aspect of the self-reflexivity can be found in more recent discussions about the field of trauma studies. Lucy Bond and Stef Craps' (2020) book titled *Trauma* explicitly shows us the connection between self-reflexivity and trauma in the fourth chapter of the book titled 'Future of Trauma' when they:

> reflect a certain unease about trauma theory becoming a field: a concern that a set of valuable and complex ideas and insights may be congealing into a rigid method or creed and thereby losing the capacity for self-reflection and the original investigative or ethical impulse.
> (2020, p. 103)

Bond and Craps see the necessity of continuous 'self-reflection' when theorizing on trauma because trauma does not fit into 'rigid' structures that point towards an all-

encompassing meaning through narrativization. Such rigidness is impossible to attribute to trauma because it resists and escapes boundaries of meaning. And yet, there is also an 'investigative or ethical impulse' to theorizing about trauma according to Bond and Craps; both these impulses require a set of truths to be based upon. In other words, these impulses must be guided by some sort of belief, otherwise, who is to say whether something is or is not ethical? These guiding 'truths', however, do not have to be rigid (or totalizing) as I have explained at the beginning of the thesis. I argue that works of metafiction that deal with trauma exist on a plane between this rigidity and fluidity and outline non-totalizing truths about traumatic events. Metafictional works are not completely arbitrary in their experimentation with plot points in the narrative because trauma is by nature based on real experiences of historical facts or at the very least, they stem from real world experiences. Thus, metafictional works that deal with trauma must address the rigidness of the traumatic events while overcoming the impossibility of narrativizing trauma by utilizing fluid and dialogic self-reflexivity.

Thus, with this thesis, I aim to explore the position of metafiction with regards to works that present (the aftermath of) such devastating events and the fictional accounts of witnesses, which could shed light on the traumatic experience like K-Zetnik's account. Focusing on metafictional narrative techniques employed in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969/2009), Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* (1999/2000), and Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* (2019), which are three works from 1960s to the present day, I aim to show a convergence between form and content, which reveals the unstable nature of trauma through literature, and initiates the process of recognition of trauma. Vonnegut's novel and his metafictional style enables him to testify to the events he witnessed and gives voice to those that died

during the bombing of Dresden. Palahniuk's protagonist Tender Branson's self-reflexive life story about the inability to exhibit agency under the oppressive weight of religion, capitalist society, and mass media demonstrates the urge to testify to trauma and shows the inherent difficulty in the process of narrativizing these experiences. Finally, Atwood's metafictional story about a theocratic and patriarchal society depicts three survivors with struggling voices, who manifest the power of testimony through realizing the power of language while contending with their past and present identities.

1.2 Metafiction and trauma

Robert Scholes starts his article simply titled "Metafiction" (1970) by quoting from the American novelist W. H. Gass: "Many of the so-called anti-novels are really metafictions" (p. 100). Gass' remark subverted the argument that metafiction is simply a reaction and rebellion to the structuralist tendency of realist fiction that had mostly dominated the novel genre in the 19th century. Instead, metafiction fuses fiction and criticism together and creates a dialogic relationship between the text and the reader. But what then has 'metafiction' achieved by reversing the parameters? The novel genre was almost always preoccupied with the issues and events of the 'real' world even when they are represented through non-realist strategies. Whether fiction is a way to cope with or to bring light to individual or collective traumatic events in society, works that tackle these elements of tension have always had to engage with the problem of narrativizing trauma as well. Due to its nature, depiction of trauma has always been a struggle between repetition of gaps and ruptures in memory and an acceptance and rejection of 'reality'. Schönfelder (2013), conveys why literature is an important gateway to exploring topics that defy reason: "The

literary imagination, with its ability to fictionalize and symbolize, can create a space in which experiences that appear to defy understanding and verbalization . . . can be explored from multiple perspectives" (p. 29). Because metafiction goes beyond the confines of conventional narratives, its ability to "fictionalize and symbolize" and explore "multiple perspectives" is not constrained within causality, linearity, and reliability. Thus, "experiences that appear to defy understanding and verbalization", like individual and collective trauma, should lend themselves well to metafictional techniques as trauma distorts conventional narrativity.

William H. Gass coined the term 'metafiction' in his book titled *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970/1989). He described metafictional tendencies as the "hastened" increase in "the use of philosophical ideas in the construction of fictional works". As "the novelist now better understands his medium" (p. 24), theoretical issues became a part of the ever-growing pool of *topos* in fiction. Gass' approach to fiction brought with it an intensified emphasis on self-reflexivity and vagueness. Robert Scholes' (1970) article expanded upon the position that Gass had established. He identified four different types of fiction: fictions of forms (romance), fictions of existence (novel), fictions of ideas (myth) and fictions of essence (allegory) (1970, p. 102). For Scholes, metafictional experiments of these four types brought formal, behavioral, structural, and philosophical criticism directly into the fiction itself and allowed fiction to question itself. The novelist realized that his rendering of the 'real' world in the fictional one is yet another construct. Even language itself was recognized as a contained and walled-off system of limitation upon fiction. Metafictional works that attempt to break these constraints peaked after the 1950s. Because after two world wars, the oppression of late capitalism and culture industry, and the incredible struggle the feminist movement went through to secure basic

rights for women, modernist belief in progress fell apart together with the trust in grand narratives that are conventionally limited to be linear and omniscient.

But how does trauma relate to these metafictional experiments in narrative? When Schönfelder (2013) remarks on literature's relevance to the subject of trauma in her book, a connection to Scholes' critique becomes apparent: "Literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma, which is often personalized and contextualized, fictionalized and historicized, as well as psychologized and metaphorized at the same time" (2013, p. 29). Without explicitly mentioning them, she credits all four critical forms that Scholes (1970) observed in metafictional experiments. Every aspect of our understanding on how our world operates is the subject matter of fiction, and metafictional works directly tackle these issues without creating a distance between the real and fictional or the author and reader. Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction* attributes such pursuits to an increase of cultural sensitivity to "how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world" (1984/2001, p. 3). This increased sensitivity demands a more nuanced approach to narrative that can facilitate the juxtaposition between the implications of a constructed world and the reality that inspires its construction. Schönfelder comments on metafictional occurrences that tackle this juxtaposition in Mary Shelley's (1959) novella, *Mathilda,* by pointing out the breakdown of coherence, causality and chronological recollection that echoes the increasing cultural awareness that Waugh observes. Schönfelder goes on to say that "the novel's narrative puzzles . . . can be read as highlighting the traumatized subject's pressing need for a story or narrative" (2013, p. 298). This need is dealt within metafictional works through breaking down individual and collective trauma through multi perspectives, self-reflexivity, doubling of narrative, and invitations for the reader to

co-create the testimony. However, the most important metafictional narrative technique in depicting trauma is what Patricia Waugh described as creating a "language of fiction" that "is always to some extent dialogic" (1984/2001, p. 6). Because testimony requires a listener, who becomes uprooted when faced with the unspeakable horrors of traumatic experiences and thus creates recognition of the event, the narrative becomes a collaborative relationship between the work and the audience. The work self-reflexively acknowledges its position as fiction and exposes its status as a novel. The reader then becomes aware of both the inherent difficulty in narrativizing trauma, and the crushing reality of the traumatizing event, its aftermath, and the insatiable urge of the victim to testify. Waugh further talks about the dialogic nature of narratives in *Metafiction:*

> The novel assimilates a variety of discourses (representations of speech, forms of narrative) – discourses that *always* to some extent question and relativize each other's authority. Realism, often regarded as the classic fictional mode, paradoxically functions by suppressing this dialogue. The conflict of languages and voices is apparently resolved in realistic fiction through their subordination to the dominant 'voice' of the omniscient, godlike author. (1984/2001, p.6)

In this thesis, I will use the terms 'conventional narratives' or omniscient narratives to talk about the form of narrative Waugh refers to in the quotation above. Conventional narratives, because of their omniscience and their untouchable barrier between the author and the reader, make it impossible to depict trauma. The victim's memory is unrepresentable because the victim does not have an omniscient authorial voice. Thus, metafictional novels that depict trauma tend to construct a fictional illusion only to lay it bare moments after, which forces the reader to participate in the narrative to actively seek out the victim's testimony. This process, in turn, allows for a convenient narrative that can fictionally address trauma while making sure to recognize the shortcomings of the medium. Furthermore, conventional narratives

also base themselves on linear progression of a story with a conflict that pushes the characters towards a climax and the subsequent conclusion chronologically. This sort of progression is inevitably tied to a movement of cause and effect. Trauma, on the other hand, cannot be explained by causes or effects as the victimized psyche is disassociated from the event. Metafictional storytelling utilizes stories within stories, explicit addressing of the reader and self-conscious characters that allow for interruptions in the progression of the story, breaks in temporality, and unreliable, fragmented narrative that can represent the symptoms of a traumatized psyche.

There are many articles and books that theorize metafiction and its techniques, and there are many works that attempted to interpret trauma's relationship with literature. However, there appears to be a *lacuna* in theorizing the significant relevance of metafiction to representing trauma. It is crucial then to investigate this gap to see how some works of fiction have represented individual and collective trauma by utilizing metafictional techniques. In the following section, I will examine the origins and development of metafiction, and then explain how the three novels I will be discussing relate to the subject matter of this thesis. Chapter 2 will focus on how *Slaughterhouse-Five* directly addresses its reader from the perspective of the author to convey the insatiable urge to testify to the traumatic event, and self-reflexively discusses the difficulties of narrativizing trauma. These narrative techniques offer a convenient narrative conveyed through the representation of an alien race called the Tralfamadorians. They enable Vonnegut to find a middle-ground between modernity and postmodernity by pointing towards a narrative that finds a middle ground between individual testimony and collective recognition of war trauma. Chapter 3 will look into Palahniuk's *Survivor*, focusing on the protagonist Tender Branson's extreme urge to testify to the trauma caused by

religion and commodification that negates control over one's life and destroys the possibility of individualistic identity and voice. Tender's confession/testimony, which is recorded on a plane's black box, opportunely creates a space free of oppression and allows a narrative that can speak to both individual and collective trauma. Chapter 4 will explore Atwood's *The Testaments* by showing how the tripartite narrative converges towards the collapse of the patriarchal theocracy of Gilead from multiple perspectives. The three protagonists' self-reflexive testimonies that address the reader and demand their participation in recognition of the traumatic environment create an effective narrative of the intergenerational collective trauma. Finally, chapter 5 will conclude the thesis by outlining the symptoms of trauma discussed throughout the thesis and the metafictional techniques used in these three novels to reiterate how they allow for a narrative that generates a non-oppressive representation of individual and collective trauma.

On this basis, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* form a group of metafictional works that display various and also similar approaches to trauma. These three novels cover a period beginning from 1969 with Vonnegut's novel, leading to the brink of the new millennium with Palahniuk and ending with Atwood's work published in 2019. This period also marks the post-war era that has culminated in the collapse of the modernity project. The various individual and collective trauma handled in these texts provide substantial insight into the traumatic consequences of the grand narratives of modernity. Vonnegut's text portrays the grand narrative of progress which lead humankind to extreme violence and horror. Palahniuk explores the grand narrative of religion and oppressive capitalism that steal agency from the individual and marginalize those who rebel. Atwood exposes the grand narratives of religion

too, but she particularly focuses on the traumatic impact of nostalgic patriarchy on gender equality.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five* Vonnegut breaks the boundaries between the author and the reader by directly writing about the difficulty in narrativizing the unspeakable trauma. Furthermore, the protagonist Billy Pilgrim's ability to move through space and time disrupts narrative and breaks the structure of the novel genre, which not only frees him from the guilt for surviving when thousands died but also empowers him to be able to provide testimony. The distrust created here alludes to the distrust of memory in recollecting trauma and to the unrepresentability of the horrors of war.

Palahniuk's *Survivor* portrays the emotional trauma that the grand narrative of religion causes with the fictional Creedish Cult. However, the underlying emphasis is on cultural trauma emerging from the capitalist tendency to spread, market, and sell these blanket ideas in forms of products where Tender, a victim of the cult, becomes the ultimate product. Meanwhile, the readers see through the marketing campaign from Tender's past. The metafictional play doubles as the whole recollection of Tender's life is set at the beginning of the novel as a black box recording of flight destined to crash.

Finally, Atwood's *The Testaments* underlines the traumatic consequences of inequality between genders. Through three first-person accounts of major events in Gilead, fallibility of memory becomes the major theme through which individual trauma is represented. The monotone and empty attempts to rationalize the inequality and disempowerment of women and its repetitive failure is conveyed to the reader by directly addressing and demanding their participation in recognition of the trauma. These moments disrupt the story of the events in Gilead bringing the reader to the

metafictional realm in which the frustration in dealing with trauma and its repetitiveness can be felt by the reader with full force.

CHAPTER 2

"POO-TEE-WEET?": RECOUNTING THE TRAUMATIC PAST ON A METAFICTIONAL PLANE IN KURT VONNEGUT'S *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969/2009), also known as *The Children's Crusade, a Duty Dance with Death*, is one of the most widely acclaimed anti-war books of the late twentieth century. The novel's narrative revolves around the depiction of the bombing of Dresden, which Vonnegut personally experienced during World War II. The core question in Vonnegut's novel is whether literary fiction can have any role in addressing and testifying to massive acts of violence and by extension, showing the effects of individual and collective trauma on the psyche. As I have argued in the introduction of this thesis, addressing trauma is surrounded by difficulties. The psyche of a victim is often filled with an urge to testify, and yet the victim has trouble remembering details and becomes disassociated from the traumatic event. Additionally, attempts at testifying require a listener/reader because their involvement is needed in the act of recognizing the traumatic event. *Slaughterhouse-Five* tackles these issues throughout its narrative by utilizing metafictional techniques. First, utilization of an author-character figure with first-person narration that directly addresses the reader allows the reader to actively participate in creation of testimony. Second, telling a story within a story about an alien race, the Tralfamadorians, allows the protagonist to deal with survivor's guilt by offering a different temporal and spatial understanding of reality that negates the need for making sense out of trauma. Finally, instances of monotone and unreliable narrativity that interrupt the flow and force readers to participate in the narrative

provides a voice to those who can no longer speak as the witnesses and victims of the traumatic event.

Vonnegut's own voice embedded in an author-character figure is what he starts and ends with in the first and the last chapter of the novel. This allows him to distance himself from the painful experiences of Dresden. Furthermore, he creates and maintains a secondary narrative distance that is rather complex by creating a protagonist whose story is told from the beginning of the second chapter and spans the entirety of the novel. Thus, Vonnegut removes himself twice from the traumatic experiences he is representing in his novel. The complete structure of the novel can be understood, albeit not always easily, in four different types of narration: Vonnegut's (or the author-character's) first-person present tense; the present tense of Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of the novel, in which his sudden visit to New York and its outcome is covered; a formal and relatively conventional past tense of historical narrative that covers Pilgrim's war memories, eighteenth wedding anniversary and the plane crash he was in after the war; and the instances in which Pilgrim is in contact with the Tralfamadorians, which interrupts his war experiences and bends time and space. All of this is further complicated by the many autobiographical similarities that exist between Billy Pilgrim and the author-character which extends to Vonnegut himself. Both Pilgrim and Vonnegut were born in 1922, their fathers were hunters, and both are tall; they were captured during the Battle of the Bulge, sent to Dresden, where they were held as prisoners in a repurposed slaughterhouse; they both survived the bombing of Dresden and worked in the corpse mines; both got discharged in 1945, returned to complete their college education, and got married after returning home. Billy thus becomes a double mask, not only for the author-character in the novel (who is already a veil for

Vonnegut himself), but for Vonnegut too. This distance allows Vonnegut to address his traumatic experiences by basing his fiction on autobiographical background while remaining twice removed from it. Furthermore, the distance allows Vonnegut to completely break the temporal and spatial limits of Pilgrim's narrative in the episodes that make use of the last type of narration mentioned above (Tralfamadorian episodes). This sort of narrative causes a sense of unreliability about the author-narrator of his story. However, this unreliability gains a new meaning when these episodes are read as Pilgrim's way of making sense of the latency effect that trauma has on his psyche and as an attempt at representing difficulties in testifying to trauma. Before going further, a reconstruction of events in a linear fashion is needed to put the problematic nature of the flashbacks caused by the Tralfamadorian episodes in perspective.

A linear outline of events would begin with Pilgrim's optometry training and the death of his father in 1944. Soon after, he is drafted into the army and sent to Europe to fight in World War II. After losing contact with his unit during the Battle of the Bulge, he becomes a prisoner of war under the Germans. He is held in Dresden when the bombings happen, and the city is largely destroyed by Allied powers. Pilgrim and his fellow prisoners survived because they were held sixty feet underground in a former slaughterhouse. When the bombings end, Pilgrim and other prisoners are forced to clean up the burnt remains of people that were not as fortunate as them. After his return from the war, Pilgrim resumes his optometry training but has trouble adjusting to civilian life. Three years into his new life, he abruptly admits himself to a mental institution. He eventually marries and becomes an optometrist. Then, at his eighteenth marriage anniversary party, Pilgrim experiences a nervous breakdown while listening to a barbershop quartet whose demeanor reminds him of

his guards at Dresden. He then begins to believe he is abducted by an alien race, the Tralfamadorians, and increasingly becomes disassociated from his job and family. This process ends with him publicly professing about the Tralfamadorian understanding of time and space. Pilgrim's narrative looks erratic and unreliable, especially because it is delivered in a non-linear manner. But when the traumatic nature of the events he goes through is considered, there seems to be logic in the narrativization of the mental breakdown of Vonnegut's protagonist. Vonnegut thus achieves a narrative that reveals how traumatic experiences effect the individual psyche. This level of insight surely comes from Vonnegut's own experience in the war, as his author-character figure acknowledges in the novel. Vonnegut frames the urge he felt to complete his "Dresden book" (1969/2009, p. 2) and the difficulties he faced during the process through his author-character, and I aim to address the crossroads between metafictional writing and trauma that finally enabled him to do so after many years of trial and error. This crossroads in Vonnegut's narrative mainly rests upon the three metafictional techniques that allow him to represent trauma which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Before moving on, it is important to mention the vast amount of scholarship Vonnegut and his masterpiece inspired. Leonard Mustazza, in the introduction of a collection of essays about *Slaughterhouse-Five*, points out the cultural significance of the opus, calling Vonnegut's book a work that "is set during one historical era but speaks to the political concerns of its contemporary audience" (2010, p.3). Obviously, the book's time of release during the height of protests in America against the Vietnam War sets *Slaughterhouse-Five* for success. However, Vonnegut is dealing not only with present concerns of the time, but also with concerns that has haunted him since his experience of the historical era Mustazza refers to. In the same

collection, Donald J. Greiner, Jerome Klinkowitz, and Maurice J. O'Sullivan, Jr. point out the autobiographical aspect of the novel and outline Vonnegut's various attempts at coming to terms with the bombings of Dresden. Where their argument is insufficient, I argue, is emphasizing the connection between the autobiographical themes and the metafictional techniques that allow such a connection between the author and his work. James Lundquist discusses how the Tralfamadorian style of storytelling "enables him to overcome the problems of change, ambiguity, and subjectivity involved in objectifying the events surrounding the fire-bombing of Dresden" (2010, p.193). Wayne D. McGinnis reads the novel's unreliable temporality as a mimicking of the relationship between death and time. T. J. Matheson focuses on the novel's formal techniques, particularly about how the first chapter sets up the themes of the entire novel. All these connections made by scholars between the novel's techniques and themes are valid. However, the metafictionality of the novel as the driving force behind what enables Vonnegut to address trauma mostly remains unrecognized. Peter C. Kunze and Robert T. Tally Jr.'s introductory essay on Vonnegut's humor in the special issue of *Studies in American Humor* shows us a glimpse of the author's attempt at addressing traumatic events through metafiction:

> Vonnegut's sense of humor is also crucial to the novelist's project of making sense of the world. Vonnegut makes sense through humor, which is, in the author's view, as valid a means of mapping this crazy world as any other strategies. And it is often more effective than the strategies made available from those great sense-making systems of science or religion. (2012, p.9)

Science or religion's way of making sense of the world crumbles under the weight of an event as troubling as the bombing of Dresden. The trauma the bombings caused are inexplicable through regular "sense-making systems". Kunze and Tally Jr. suggest that Vonnegut's humor is his way of making sense of the traumatic event,

which turns out to be better than science or religion. However, Vonnegut's humor is not unconventional for novelty's sake, or simply absurd for absurdity's sake; his humor is his way of making sense out of trauma or rather negating the urge to make sense out of the incomprehensible act of violence he witnessed. His humor is metafictional and interruptive, and it serves as a tool to remind the reader that they are reading a novel. Recurring sentences of bird sounds or saying "So it goes" in the face of death or the absurd barbershop quartet that interrupts the narrative are some of Vonnegut's humorous metafictional tools that allow him to create a narrative capable of representing the incomprehensibility of trauma when science and religion inevitably falls short in adequately providing a sensible explanation to the traumatic event. This inability to offer reasoning to traumatic events through traditional means together with the abruptness and absurdity of Vonnegut's humor is designed to make the reader uncomfortable and reflect upon the nature of trauma's consequences on the individual and the collective. Thus, I aim to add to the existing scholarship by focusing on how metafictional narrative techniques like this succeed in serving Vonnegut's work as tools for representing trauma.

2.1 Self-reflexively addressing trauma

In the first and last chapters of the novel, Vonnegut's first-person narrative self-reflexively reminds the reader that they are reading a novel and underlines the urge to testify to the slaughter that happened while drawing attention to the difficulties and dangers surrounding the confrontation with the traumatic event. Vonnegut poses a question from his first-person perspective about the aftermath of a violent event: "And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like '*Poo-tee weet?*"' (1969/2009, p. 13) This comedic expression, for Vonnegut, is borne of the

incredibly overwhelming stillness and silence that follows the massive destruction caused by Dresden bombings in World War II. Because witnesses to the event are unable to make sense of it and put it into words, the only sound that remains is that of the birds. Vonnegut's author-character describes the difficulties in recording what Vonnegut himself also experienced within the confines of fiction. For him, the birds' sounds symbolize the urgency of testifying to the traumatic event. When everyone falls silent, unable to speak, the birds still sing, reminding Vonnegut that a response is still possible. However, this also speaks to the impossibility of representing trauma. The only sound that can remain is unintelligible, suggesting that human language and consciousness fail to testify to the unspeakable horrors. Thus, the only possibility is to represent trauma through its unrepresentability, just as nature continues to simply exist indifferently to human plight. Further on, before Vonnegut's author-character begins to tell the protagonist Billy Pilgrim's story, he echoes the same sentiment:

> People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not going to do it anymore.
> I've finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun.
> This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt.
> It begins like this:
> *Listen:*
> Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.
> It ends like this:
> *Poo-tee-weet?*
> (Vonnegut, 1969/2009, p.14)

Vonnegut was not supposed to come back from war. He was not supposed to look back. Yet, he did come back and the urge to look back overwhelmed him, just like the same feeling overwhelmed Lot's wife who was saved by an angel from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in *Genesis 19*. She was told not to look back, and she was turned into a pillar of salt for doing so. Vonnegut alludes to this biblical story implying that even though looking back is hard and dangerous, it is

unavoidable and necessary to work through the trauma. Salt is essential for life; it adds flavor to food, and conserves it for the future. It can also conserve bodies through mummification; it is a symbol of purification; it wards off evil and was used in the past to protect from unwanted spirits. Yet, salt can also be destructive; as it can cause corrosion, dry up and make water unsafe to drink, can kill weeds by seeping into the root and disrupting the water balance. Similarly, Vonnegut's visit to the past can be both illuminating and dangerous. By facing his traumatic experience, he can absolve himself of the guilt of surviving the destruction of Dresden, which was perpetuated by the allies that Vonnegut was also a part of, and yet he can also get immersed in his trauma by getting obsessed with trying to make sense of something unsensible. A balance must be found, or he risks losing his sanity to the traumatic event. Therefore, he must tell his story, and then move on with his life to write about more "fun" ventures. The birds still sing after a catastrophe, and they will continue to do so. In order to avoid getting stuck in time and wilting away, he has to catch up with the birds, and for that, he has to come to terms with what he witnessed. Yet by doing so, he nonetheless risks becoming stuck in the past. Thus, he chooses the nature's way of speaking indifferently and indirectly in the aftermath of catastrophic violence even if it means being an unreliable narrator as it is the only way he can even attempt to speak about what he has witnessed. This duality is what Vonnegut emphasizes in the opening and the closing chapters of the novel. However dangerous it is, the nature of the traumatic event is impossible to evade and yet, trying to recollect the event is equally challenging.

Vonnegut self-reflexively communicates to us that this is a novel, and it begins with the dictum "*Listen:".* The urge to tell his story demands an urgent call to action. Like K-Zetnik who testified during the Eichmann trial, Vonnegut's

protagonist whose story is told by the author-character requires to be listened to so that the recognition of the testimony can commence. Only when listened to, can Billy Pilgrim "come unstuck in time". This point of association with Vonnegut, Pilgrim and the author-character blurs the lines between the three. As Pilgrim's story is being listened to, both the author-character and Pilgrim begin to become "unstuck" and initiate the process of testifying. And it is revealed by author-character that the testimony ends with "*Poe-tee-weet?",* as a reminder of the present, exposing the dissociative power of the trauma over the mind of the individual who was presumably 'stuck in time' before beginning the process of testifying to his trauma. The birds then, urge Pilgrim to become unstuck so that he can move forward. This sound of the birds is prominent throughout the novel, not only reminding both Pilgrim and the reader of the present moment but also urging them to reflect on their past. As I have mentioned earlier, Pilgrim admits himself to a mental institution for veterans three years after the war. Before then, he was sleeping "without dreaming for a while, and then he traveled in time". Interestingly, the first thing he hears are the birds again. '*Poo-tee-weet?*"' one asked him" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 50). Pilgrim gives no answer to the birds, because he still has not testified to the horrors he experienced even if they have called and urged him to do so. By the end of the novel, when Pilgrim is no longer a prisoner of war, one bird again says to Pilgrim: '*Poo-tee-weet?"'*. This last occurrence can be read as both hopeful and pessimistic since Pilgrim did testify to his trauma, but we do not know whether this has helped him or not. What is for certain though is that it marks the end of Vonnegut's, the narrator's, and Pilgrim's testimony. The urge to testify was satisfied; now it is in the hands of others to listen to it.

At another instance, author-character articulates this urge more explicitly. He writes: “When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen” (Vonnegut, 1969/2009, p.1). He continues by referring to the difficulty of addressing his trauma: “But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—not enough of them to make a book, anyway. And not many words come now, either, when I have become an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls, with his sons full grown” (p.2). Articulation of the events he has witnessed is challenging, yet he reveals that he was unable to disregard the urge to do so throughout the years. Dresden had stayed with him through his many birthdays, “Pall Malls” and parenthood. To express this temptation and difficulty, he draws on a limerick and a song:

> There was a young man from Stamboul,
> Who soliloquized thus to his tool:
> "You took all my wealth
> And you ruined my health,
> And now you won't *pee*, you old fool”
> . . .
>
> My name is Yon Yonson,
> I work in Wisconsin,
> I work in a lumbermill there.
> The people I meet when I walk down the street,
> They say, "What's your name?
> And I say,
> "My name is Yon Yonson, I work in Wisconsin . . .”
> (Vonnegut, 1969/2009, p. 6)

The repetitive rhymes convey the persistent urge to return to the massacre and write about it as well as the fear of its turning into a vicious cycle that could derail his psyche. Furthermore, after everything that had happened, Vonnegut’s memory cannot even produce its basic function of remembering. The deep feeling of frustration, coupled with the insistent return to memory that does not or cannot lend

itself to narration, shows the tension between the need to address trauma and the inability of reaching the related memories. The latter song conveys further insight into Vonnegut's struggle with remembering. Besides expressing the frustration and repetitiveness of trying to address the traumatic event, this song also conveys a sense of captivity a traumatized victim feels. The simple question of "What's your name?", fundamentally tied to one's identity, refers back to the repetitive phrase of the song. Thus, the identity of Vonnegut-as-author is also a prisoner to the traumatic event he has witnessed, and he is in a constant, grueling fight to emancipate himself from it. With these self-reflexive and metafictional instances, Vonnegut displays the complications regarding the process of addressing traumatic events. He deliberately exposes the years of contemplation and his negotiation with the urge to testify to the levelling of Dresden. Within this context, Billy Pilgrim becomes the non-linear narrative tool which the author utilizes to attest to what he himself experienced. Here Vonnegut reveals explicitly that we are reading a novel, and at the same time renders a metafictional narrative that can testify to a real-world event in a fictional setting possible. Thus, Vonnegut's novel refrains from claiming to be a part of the grand narrative of 'history' that claims the bombing of Dresden was necessary and justified. Instead, the narrator, protagonist and the author all become a part of the same non-oppressive testimony, which needs its listener/readers' recognition.

2.2 Tralfamadorian abduction of narrative

Dori Laub in *Testimony* states that "the victim's narrative -the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma- does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence . . . in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p.57). The absence mentioned by Laub is the

absence of the traumatic event in the individual's psyche. The victim is unable to reach and narrate the trauma, which consequently causes a disassociation from reality that causes fragmentation in their memory and breaks the linear understanding of time. In the same way, the absence of linearity in Pilgrim's narrative is an attempt to begin testifying to massive trauma through explicitly showing that dissociation. Although the unspeakable horrors that the Dresden bombings caused are known and recorded in 'history' with documents and narratives, the absence of linearity in Pilgrim's version of events when he publicly expresses himself initiates "the narrative which is being listened to -and heard-" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p.57) much more effectively than any document could. Consequently, "the listener . . . is party to the creation of knowledge *de novo* . . . a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p.57). As we have witnessed, just as Vonnegut has trouble making sense of the firebombing of Dresden, his protagonist Billy Pilgrim also struggles to come to terms with what he has experienced during World War II. It should not then be far-fetched to conclude that Pilgrim also feels a similar tension between the urge to testify to his experiences and a tendency to evade and repress the related traumatic memories.

The instinct to evade the trauma should be no surprise when we look at some instances of what Pilgrim experiences. While walking to a prisoner camp, he witnesses Roland Weary, a fellow prisoner of war, dying "of gangrene that had started in his mangled feet. So it goes" (1969/2009, p.40). Later, Pilgrim gets crammed "into a boxcar with many other privates" (p.35). He also survives the bombings only to observe the shocking aftermath of the destruction and then sees another prisoner be inexplicably executed for the simple crime of stealing a teapot: "He was arrested for plundering. He was tried and shot. So it goes" (p.105). The

events that Pilgrim witnesses are in their nature the opposite of what his surname would suggest. He is not on a linear, peaceful journey of pilgrimage to a holy place; instead, he experiences hell on earth. It is no wonder Pilgrim obsessively returns to these incidents as if they were happening in the present time. This is similar to Vonnegut's author-character's allusions to a limerick and a song that resonate with the repetition compulsion as a part of dealing with trauma. But what is the significance of the Tralfamadorians regarding Pilgrim's way of expressing what he has witnessed? Why does he need an alien understanding of time and space to be able to testify to his trauma?

To start with their symbolic meaning, he describes Tralfamadorians' appearance in a letter he sends to a radio station: "The letter said that they were two feet high, and green, and shaped like plumber's friends. Their suction cups were on the ground, and their shafts, which were extremely flexible, usually pointed to the sky. At the top of each shaft was a little hand with a green eye in its palm" (1969/2009, p.16) Pilgrim's plagued mind has a lot of blocked memories of evil atrocities. It is thus not a coincidence that the aliens that abduct Pilgrim are shaped like plunges that are made for unblocking drainage. Their shape at the top which is like a hand with an eye in the middle strikingly resembles the symbolic *hamsa* known in the Jewish culture to be a protective charm against evil. Their appearance is parallel to their function in Pilgrim's life. In other words, the Tralfamadorians that abduct Pilgrim and teach him their alien understanding of time help him work through the sheer shame and horror he was subjected to throughout the war.

The connection between Pilgrim's trauma and the Tralfamadorians is further evident in the similarities between his abduction and his experiences in the war. Pilgrim is stripped naked when he arrived at the German prisoner camp, and the

Tralfamadorians also make him strip. The Germans would refuse to explain why they would punish one prisoner specifically and not punish another. Similarly, the Tralfamadorians also refuse to answer why they have specifically kidnapped Pilgrim. The Germans lock up Pilgrim in a slaughterhouse while the Tralfamadorians confine him to a zoo. So, there are obvious parallels between the historical narrative and the Tralfamadorian episodes, but in the latter narrative, Pilgrim can rewrite and reclaim the dreadful events he experienced in the war. For instance, during the war Pilgrim was stripped of his clothes and later ridiculed for wearing a woman's coat: "Billy was carrying his little coat as though it were a lady's muff. It was wrapped around and round his hands. He was the central clown in an unconscious travesty of that famous oil painting, "The Spirit of '76"" (1969/2009, p.71). Archibald Willard's famous painting mentioned here conveys feelings of patriotism and pride. In an ironic twist, he feels the opposite of what the painting conveys while serving his country, feeling ashamed of his identity and body at the same time. But in the Tralfamadorian world, he "began to enjoy his body for the first time," and the aliens "supposed that he was a splendid specimen" (p.56). He is desired by the 20-year-old porn star that the aliens brought with him. He is also incredibly healthy and able to have a child with his paired partner easily. The whole experience in the alien planet is the stark opposite of what he went through during the war. This can be read as symptoms of madness as in Pilgrim evading the trauma caused by war through creating an alternate reality and becoming further disassociated from reality. However, I argue that this is how Pilgrim begins to reclaim his memories: By subverting the emotional and physical manifestations of trauma within a new narrative, or in other words, telling a story within a story, Vonnegut allows Pilgrim's process of healing and testifying to begin. Because trauma resists conventional

storytelling, his only escape is to turn towards unconventional methods of narrativizing trauma. It is this sort of pragmatic subversion that constitutes the first steps on the path to recovery.

Another gift the Tralfamadorians bestow upon Pilgrim is their understanding of time and space. The past, present and future exist on the same plane and all at once in their philosophy. One of the aliens explains it as such:

> I am a Tralfamadorian, seeing all time as you might see a stretch of Rocky Mountains. All time is all time. It does not change. It does not lend itself to warnings or explanations. It simply is. Take it moment by moment, and you will find that we are all, as I've said before, bugs in amber. (1969/2009, p.43)

In this perspective regarding time, "warnings" and "explanations" do not matter. This way of seeing things lends itself well to dealing with trauma because one of the main problems in addressing trauma is the inability to explain and narrativize the events that caused them. The analogy of "bugs in amber" is parallel to the "pillar of salt" Vonnegut establishes in the opening chapter of the novel. Mummified 'history' or "bugs in amber" does not delve into the past, present or the future alone. They simply exist in all those planes at the same time, as is. This way of understanding time allows for a denial of free will in favor of fate, which can be traced back to classical Greek tragedies such as *Oedipus*, in which despite all warnings the tragic outcome still comes to fruition. Similarly, Tralfamadorian understanding of time frees Pilgrim of moral responsibility and guilt, and becomes the coping mechanism needed to address the utter fragmentation caused by the war trauma. Pilgrim does have regrets: he "didn't want to marry ugly Valencia. She was one of the symptoms of his disease. He knew he was going crazy, when he heard himself proposing marriage to her, when he begged her to take the diamond ring and be his companion for life" (p.53). Yet, his choices in life were not particularly immoral. He "was a chaplain's assistant in the war . . . He was powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends" (p.18). His

occupation later in life was optometry; an occupation that involves helping people see and experience life better, which ironically, he could not. He had a family and provided adequately for them while failing to provide comfort for himself.

So why is Pilgrim still haunted by the past? Because he feels guilt for surviving when tens of thousands have died. He feels guilt that 'his side' of the war caused those deaths. He feels guilt for having a 'normal' life and being "extremely well-to-do" (1969/2009, p.104). By letting go of free will, he subsequently lets go of his guilt for surviving, being indirectly a part of massive violence or benefiting financially from the war when it ends (the same can be said for Vonnegut or the author-character). This duality between free will and fate is also apparent in the structure of Vonnegut's novel. The two chapters in the first-person voice of Vonnegut's author-character and the two instances where the author-character and his 'war buddy' O'Hare are among the prisoners of war and in the Dresden corpse mines help to situate the novel in the real world, -a world that Pilgrim cannot see. But the majority of the novel is based on Pilgrim's point of view and thus, the narrative blends historical events with fiction, which in turn blends the same historical events with an unreliable and surreal fantasy of an alien world.

2.3 The "expressionless" in the narrative

Another aspect of Vonnegut's novel is the way in which it gives a voice to those who have died during the bombings. Vonnegut achieves this in a subtle but powerful way that utilizes absurdly indifferent descriptions that are indirectly conveyed to Billy Pilgrim and subsequently through him to the reader. For example, although Pilgrim was in Dresden during the bombings and the subsequent firestorm, he learns what happened by eavesdropping on whispering soldiers. In other words, Vonnegut's

narrative diminishes the immediacy of massive violence by relying on rumors for describing it. This disrupts ordinary expectations from a testimony of events which should be based on direct recollections of the memories by one or more of the victims or hard evidence such as documents. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* , on the other hand, the description of the bombings is based on a secondary source which consists of whispering between guards. The guards' conversation is as follows: "There was a fire-storm out there. Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn." (1969/2009, p.87) This conversation that is whispered, spoken in a foreign language, and translated presumably by the author is remembered many years after it happened. Such information based on hearsay and recalled after a long passage of time may be considered questionable. The language used itself attests to this. The repetition of "everything" ("everything organic, everything that would burn") underscores the extensiveness of the massacre to such a degree that the narrator is unable to dwell on the specifics of the horrible details, the charred bodies, buildings reduced to dust etc. It also relieves Pilgrim from re-living those moments, re-visiting the past. But more importantly, it subtly includes those that have lost their voice. They are eaten by "one big flame". The non-specificity of the language used speaks to the horrific and visceral reality. The idea of "everything organic" burning away implies not a limited loss of life but the loss of 'all' life. Such a loss is incomprehensible to human consciousness. It amplifies the fact that beyond Pilgrim's testimony, there is so much more that was lost to the flames. I argue that these instances in which indirect witnessing is utilized are there to metafictionally force the reader to become a co-owner of testimony which I have established earlier in the quote from Laub and Felman. The narrative's indirectness in describing the traumatic aftermath explicitly represents the incomprehensibility of violence at such

a magnitude and conveys it to the reader through indirectness as it is the only possible means of representing the unrepresentable.

The narration also utilizes figures of speech symbolizing the inability to encapsulate the loss. “The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now nothing but minerals” (1969/2009, p.87). Just as one cannot look directly at the sun, Billy Pilgrim cannot look directly at the destruction of Dresden, or picture everything that was turned to dust. He can only describe what it is ‘like’ because its actual reality is impossible to factually and directly convey through accessing his memories. Thus, he needs to be indirect in his approach to testifying. This sort of evasion is common in eyewitness accounts of traumatic events. Dori Laub writes in *Testimony* about the Holocaust that “the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims” (1992, p.80). Are we then supposed to think that Pilgrim’s account is incomplete? What is the purpose of the uneasiness and unreliability in the narrative that demonstrates a lack of adeptness in capturing the loss in its totality?

This style of unreliable narrative is Vonnegut’s way of purposefully ignoring the conventions of the novel format and creating an uneasiness that speaks to the reader the way K-Zetnik’s fall spoke to the judges in the Eichmann trial. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, K-Zetnik’s fall can be seen as the “expressionless” taking control and not only speaking through him but also physically manifesting the horrors of Auschwitz. Similarly, Vonnegut’s monotone, indirect and absurd narrative is designed to strikingly remind us of the massive horror of the bombings of Dresden. The reader is forced to participate in the imagining of the horrors. Thus, the reader is no longer only a reader of some piece of fiction but is a part of the creation of testimony for a collective traumatic event.

Furthermore, the narrative is indirect and points towards an absence because it is designed to make the reader face the unfathomable loss of voice that causes discomfort. There lies its power and beauty. It is worth remembering that Vonnegut describes himself as speechless when thinking about the bombing of Dresden. At the beginning of the novel, he writes:

> I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too, that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big. But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—not enough of them to make a book, anyway. And not many words come now, either (1969/2009, p. 5)

Referring again to K-Zetnik's testimony in the Eichmann trial which has been explained before, the "expressionless" manifest their voice by making Vonnegut's narrative fall silent in awe of the massive act of violence. It is also apparent that the words that do eventually come out of Vonnegut are unstable as well as when he opens the novel with the following sentence that underlines the tension between language and trauma: "All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true" (1969/2009, p.5). "Pretty much true" is another phrase that is designed to make us uneasy. This uneasiness is not only about the self-reflexivity of Vonnegut's narrative but also about its echoing the voices that belong to those that can no longer reflect on the traumatic events. The urge to provide testimony is there, amplified by the immense loss of life, despite the flawed vehicle of narrative fiction. By claiming and exposing the unstable nature of the narrative, Vonnegut attempts to harness the shortcomings to provide a deliberately disruptive narrative that captures the voice of those that suffered during the war.

In conclusion, precisely because Vonnegut's narrative struggles to look directly at the bombings of Dresden, *Slaughterhouse-Five* provides different ways of thinking and acknowledging how we live, die, fight, and heal. It makes us think

about how we frame traumatic events of the past. Pilgrim's account of events reminds us that the traumatic past is not dead, and it is not witnessed properly because of its nature. Therefore, a linear understanding of time and space will not suffice to process or represent it. The past exists on a plane that stretches all the way to the present where Pilgrim sees the bizarre barbershop quartet that reminds him of the guards when he was a prisoner of war. Because linear understanding of time supposes that the past is dead and gone, a different approach is needed, similar to the 'alien' one in the novel. Thus, Vonnegut provides us with a metafictional and complex narrative structure that self-reflexively exposes the dualistic relationship between the urge to testify and the challenges of providing a testimony. A multi-leveled non-linear story that attempts to present a philosophy that sees past, present, and future existing all at once and absolves the victim from the emotional consequences of addressing the traumatic event is the only available way of confronting the massive collective trauma. Finally, his indirect and unreliable approach to the massive destruction left in the aftermath of the Allied bombings underlines the voiceless victims and allows those victims to speak through Pilgrim's narrative.

These metafictional techniques let Vonnegut to inform the reader about the visceral reality of war based on his own experience while refraining from creating a narrative that is omniscient. As his traumatic experience denies him a complete comprehension and recollection of the horrors he witnessed, a metafictional approach to narration allows Vonnegut to convey the difficulties of representing trauma to the reader. Thus, the Tralfamadorian episodes that Pilgrim experiences gain significance by becoming a tool of healing that allows the recognition of trauma on the collective level. As a result, Vonnegut's metafictional techniques create a suitable narrative that

bridges the rigidity of modernity and the ambiguity of postmodernity and find a middle ground in between by depicting the traumas of war on an historically informed plane that is still self-reflexively aware of its own fallibility.

CHAPTER 3

THE EXTREME PURSUIT OF TESTIMONY IN CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S *SURVIVOR*

This chapter investigates how Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Survivor* (1999/2000) underlines the extremity of narration (and action) needed to satisfy the urge to unravel the systemic trauma that oppressive religious and capitalist structures force upon members of society both on an individual and on a collective level. While the extremity of narration in *Survivor* is embedded in its metafictionality, the extremity of action is embedded in the setting that the protagonist finds himself in to testify to trauma. Set in America, the novel follows the life events of its protagonist, Tender Branson, who is a member of a religious suicide cult named the Creedish Cult. The doctrines of the Creedish Cult are explained throughout the novel, and the following instance explains what happens to the children born in the colony:

> According to church doctrine only the firstborn son, Adam, would ever marry and grow old in the church district. When we turned seventeen the rest of us, me and my seven brothers and five sisters, would all go out for work. My father lives here because he was the firstborn son in his family. My mother lives here because the church elders chose her for my father. (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p.274)

While the firstborn son remains in the colony to marry, and a wife is chosen for them by the elders, the remaining children are educated in various jobs (mostly in the service industry) and sent out to the world to partake in a form of modern slavery. They are expected to remain reclusive from society and keep a low profile, and all the money they make from their domestic labour are to be sent back to Nebraska where the colony resides on an area that spans 20000 acres. Although it ends on an ambiguous note, *Survivor* speaks to its audience by imagining a compelling conclusion borne of the destructive consequences of religious and capitalist grand

narratives mentioned above that pushes an oppressed individual to hijacking a plane just so he can testify to his traumatic life and reclaim his voice. By analysing Tender's presumably final act of rebellion (recording his story to the black box of Flight 2039) against the Creedish doctrines as testifying to trauma, this chapter seeks to illustrate that *Survivor* aims to expose the larger collective trauma that society is subjected to through the systemic structures of capitalism. I argue that such an *exposé* of capitalism and religious extremism can only be possible in a metafictional narrative which effectively conveys to the reader that these grand narratives supress identity and free will through oppressive structures which ultimately require a self-reflexive testimony to overcome.

A survey of critical perspectives on *Survivor* shows that there is a shifting focus on the novel's various qualities such as its notions of parody, cultural critique, and dark humour. Eduardo Mandieta (2005) observes Palahniuk's emphasis on the cultural shift in America and underlines the culture industry as a commodifier of everything, even religion (p. 398). Mandieta draws upon Adorno and Horkheimer's term 'culture industry' (Kulturindustrie in German) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) through which they propose that products of popular culture are similar to goods produced in factories. Radio programmes, magazines, newspapers, and movies are all mass-produced and made available to the public in order to manipulate the masses into apathy. Mandieta also emphasizes the domestication of the body through religion and discusses the fallacy of beauty in a culture of mass production, which becomes a pursuit of the impossible (pp. 398-400). David Simmons and Nicola Allen (2012) on the other hand, focus on the commodity fetishism of the American culture and how "the 'false needs' of the Culture Industry are not sufficient to satisfy the individual" (p. 123). They claim that only through sexual intimacy can an individual

break the wheel and remain outside the systemic oppression. It should not be forgotten that Palahniuk's works were mostly written after a period of what is now called The Satanic panic. During the 80s and the 90s, mass panic emerged about allegations of cults and ritualistic abuse following the infamous Manson family during the 60s and 70s. The Satanic panic now has morphed into anti-government conspiracy theories, but the main themes of mass panic and distrust of government structures culturally remain the same. Even Palahniuk's personal website is ironically called *The Cult.* Jesse Kavadlo, in a collection of essays about Palahniuk's works, argues that there is a method to his madness in *Fight Club* and *Survivor*, two stories that have a cult in their centre:

> Together with *Survivor*, *Fight Club* presents "terror's response," in DeLillo's words, but also, even more subversively, the implicit counter-narrative: that redemption may be in the palm of the reader's hands, in the form of storytelling itself . . . After all the falling buildings, falling planes, and falling men, Palahniuk's plots, despite DeLillo's pronunciation in *Libra*, move toward life. However bleak Palahniuk's worlds may seem, even after planes crash, even after buildings fall, the story—and storyteller—survive. (2012, p.114)

Kavadlo's comments provide us an insight into the connection between trauma in *Survivor* and Palahniuk's metafictional style. Redemption is in the reader's (or listener's) hands and survival is possible even after a collapse of planes, buildings or as I have mentioned before, the collapse of a witness such as K-Zetnik. However, in order to reach out to the reader and invoke an urge in them to look at their own selves, the narrative needs to be self-reflexive. As such, Palahniuk's narrative speaks directly to the reader through its characters as a guide for survival within the culture industry. Thus, I aim to contribute to the existing literary scholarship on Palahniuk's novel by focusing on how the novel's metafictional narrative exposes the trauma that the capitalist structures cause by playing with the form, self-reflexivity, and telling a story within a story. To do so, I will analyse the moment of recognition of the trauma

within the novel, the urge to testify that arises after the recognition, and how Tender's reclaiming of his identity and voice becomes a testimony about the collective trauma of society.

Before going further, it is important to look at the series of events in *Survivor* in a chronological order similar to the way I outlined the events of Vonnegut's novel in the previous chapter. The novel intentionally does not follow a chronological depiction of events to reflect the erratic nature of testifying to trauma. The fragmented narrative instead forces the reader to construct the linear order of events and thus take part in recognition of testimony. The following details in the story are what ultimately leads Tender Branson into a situation in which he finds himself hijacking a plane and recording his life story into the black box on board. Tender, born only three minutes and thirty seconds after his brother Adam Branson (the firstborn brother) into the Creedish Cult, grows up in the colony until he turns eighteen. He is then sent out to the outside world to work for the economic benefit of the Creedish Cult. Tender begins his story ten years after his church engages in mass suicide, an event which is referred to as The Deliverance. The surviving members have been killing themselves ever since, believing that they are delivering themselves onto God. It is important to note that even though the Church that decided his entire life for him is gone, Tender still has not determined a path that is his own as he has internalized the doctrines he grew up with and known nothing else since birth.

During a period in which he is contemplating suicide after The Deliverance, Tender's phone number is accidently posted on a newspaper as a suicide hotline. Tender engages with the callers, telling some to kill themselves and some not to, ultimately postponing his own suicide in the process. This is his first rebellious act

that gives Tender a voice which effects his life and sends him down an even more traumatic path. Even though he has the distance of a phone line between him and the callers, he is still breaking the cult's doctrine of remaining reclusive from society. The hotline gives him a position as someone to be listened to, -someone that makes decisions without being forced by an authority. He tells a man named Trevor Hollis, who is plagued by recurring nightmares about disasters, to kill himself. Soon after, Tender finds his obituary in the paper and decides to visit his grave. There, Tender meets Trevor's sister, Fertility Hollis, and is consequently fascinated by her charm and wants to see her again.

Later on the same day, he meets with his caseworker assigned to him as part of the government's Survivor Retention Program, which monitors the survivors of suicide cults. The caseworker and the government program she represents are the figures that replace the position of the Creedish Church after The Deliverance. The caseworker's relationship with Tender is dictated by a book called "*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* . . . DSM for short" (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p.207), which is widely used by real life clinicians and psychiatrists in the United States to diagnose mental illnesses. As a surviving member of a suicide cult, the caseworker assumes that Tender has some sort of psychiatric problem and uses the DSM to diagnose Tender with a different illness each week. Tender would act out the symptoms of that illness throughout the week and the cycle would continue. As he explains: "It got so the caseworker could throw the DSM on the floor and whatever page it fell open to, that was how I'd try to look for the week" (p.207). The reader witnesses through Tender's relationship with the caseworker that the developing discourse of psychotherapy is the new authoritative grand narrative in Tender's life once the Creedish Church self-destructs. This relationship, like his relationship with

the Creedish Cult, negates any sort of control over his life and decides how he should act. The absurd conformity that Tender exercises towards the symptoms of psychological disorders outlined in the DSM offers a metafictional critique on a discourse that exists in the real world through parody and forcing the reader to question their own blind belief in discourses such as psychoanalysis.

Later, the caseworker reveals to Tender her worry that a member of the cult might have turned into a serial killer, killing the surviving members of the church that would not commit suicide. Meanwhile, Tender keeps engaging with Fertility, both through the suicide hotline where he remains anonymous and also in person. He learns from Fertility that Trevor was psychic, and that he could see future disasters, which was why he committed suicide. Fertility reveals to Tender that she has the same psychic abilities. During one of their dates, they meet a man who tells them uncanny jokes about mass suicide. Tender realizes that the man is his fraternal twin brother, Adam, but when confronted, Tender chooses to deny that they are brothers.

Shortly after, Tender learns that he and Adam are the last surviving members of the Creedish Church. He realizes that Adam must have been the killer that the caseworker was worried about. Many public agents and journalists call his phone for his story or to represent him as Tender is the last publicly known surviving member. At this point, the caseworker suffocates on a chemical solution, which was prepared by Adam with the hopes of killing Tender. The police suspect Tender, but he claims innocence and escapes, taking an offer from an agent and flying to New York. The critique of culture industry I mentioned earlier comes into play as the agent gives him a makeover, pumping him with steroids, tanning sessions, teeth capping, dermabrasion and so on, making Tender conform to beauty standards in the industry. Tender's fame grows, and he becomes a religious messiah superstar. At some point,

the agent tells him that he needs to perform a miracle in order to stay relevant. Fertility gives Tender a prophecy to make on TV. Tender does so and his fame grows even more once the prediction comes true. This cycle continues until the agent plans to marry Tender with someone during the Super Bowl halftime show, which will be crowned with yet another miraculous prediction. Throughout this episode, the agent is the figure that replaces the caseworker as the oppressive force deciding how Tender's life would go. And the agent modifies Tender's image over and over, reproducing him like a commodity in a production line. As Tender rises to fame, he reiterates that he is just waiting for the opportunity to commit suicide. However, his life is so overly controlled by the agent that he cannot even attempt it. Tender says: "If the publicist ever put killing myself on my schedule I'd be dead" (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p. 114). Once again, he finds himself controlled by a force that denies him any possibility of free will and refuses to listen to his input on matters.

Before the Super Bowl, the agent dies under mysterious circumstances. As the police are coming to arrest Tender on stage during the half time show, he predicts the end result of the game to the crowd and the whole stadium starts to riot. During the chaos, Tender escapes together with Adam and Fertility. They find themselves in a Ronald McDonald House for a while, then travel across the country. The Ronald McDonald House has a symbolic meaning as these houses exist in the real world as a support program for children: Tender, despite his age, is still a child considering that he has lacked any control over his life up to this point. After a while, Adam and Tender part ways with Fertility, who tells them the location of a car that will be unlocked. During the drive north to the Canadian border, Adam tries to make Tender face the terror they were subjected to as they grew up in the colony. Adam recounts how the church elders would make the children watch as mothers gave birth so that

they would fear sex. Reminiscent of Simmons & Allens' comments on the necessity of sexual intimacy for overcoming oppressive and traumatic forces, Adam believes that having sex is the only way to cure Tender as it is the ultimate act of rejecting the Church doctrine and establishing control over his own life. As Tender resists, Adam continues to provoke him with other horrifying details until Tender loses control of the car and crashes. After the crash, Adam makes Tender crush his head with a rock continuously and tells him that he will tell Tender when to stop. He never tells the latter to stop and eventually dies. Fertility picks Tender up and they travel to Oregon. She tells Tender that she has to do a quick job assignment as a surrogate mother when she is in fact barren. In actuality, Fertility is a sex worker and 'the job' happens to be for Tender's ex-employers. During the night, Tender sneaks in and has sex with Fertility. He still lacks control over his life at this point. He has been manipulated into killing Adam, and he has sex with Fertility not solely because he wants to but because Adam planted the idea.

In the morning, Fertility reveals that she is pregnant and that she is leaving for Sydney. Ironically, as someone who can predict the future, getting pregnant after having sex with Tender when she is supposed to be barren is the only outcome she is unable to foresee. Before leaving for Sydney, she forgets her planner, which Tender reads and finds out that someone will hijack the plane and crash it. Tender chases after Fertility, finds her at the airport's boarding gate, grabs the gun belonging to Adam and forcefully boards the plane. He searches for the hijacker for a while until it dawns on him that he is the hijacker. This is the starting point of the novel which also marks the starting point of Tender's testimony. All these events are recalled by Tender on the plane he has hijacked which is destined to go down. Tender realizes the opportunity he has as the plane is under his total control, and the black box he is

recording his testimony to cannot be manipulated. The narrative conveys to its readers that as an unfortunate victim of the culture industry and the Creedish Cult, his lost identity and voice can be reclaimed through an extreme narrative setting that is temporally fragmented and on the verge of a collapse due to the trauma he is going through.

3.1 The politics of narrativizing trauma

Survivor takes a different approach to narrativization and mirrors the psyche of an individual dealing with trauma in its form. One narrative subversion Palahniuk uses is to intentionally number the pages of the novel from the end to the beginning. The first page of the novel is numbered 289, and the novel starts from the 47th chapter whereas it ends with the 1st chapter, and the last page is numbered 1. In line with my overall approach to trauma established in the introduction of this thesis, Palahniuk's play on the format of *Survivor* represents the manifestation of trauma on two levels: First, it emphasizes the latency effect of trauma that prevents testifying to the original event until something triggers the victim in the future. Second, it underlines that the recognition and narrativization of trauma can only start when a testimony is given and is listened to. Because trauma evades narrativization until those conditions are met, Palahniuk chooses to begin Tender Branson's narrative at the point in which he starts recording his testimony. As opposed to the conventional understanding of narrative in which events unfold chronologically, Palahniuk opts for a non-linear subversive narrative that represents trauma also in its form. The title of the novel suggests the same: Tender's narrative begins after he recognizes that he is a survivor of trauma. It is important to understand the nature of these metafictional approaches to narrative in Palahniuk's novel to gain a substantial insight into the relationship

between Tender Branson's traumatic life that leads to his black box recording and his testimony as a point of emergence for the recognition of the larger collective trauma.

In *Survivor,* the doctrines of the Creedish Cult determine a member's life from the moment they are born. Except for the firstborn (who is always named Adam), all the boys are named Tender, as they are "workers who tend" (1999/2000, p.240) and all the girls are named Biddy as they are expected to "do [their] bidding" (p.240). The aim of this doctrine is to deny any identity that Tenders and Biddies may build for themselves. Palahniuk's narrative plays with this notion of lost identity and voice through its unique orality: short and quick sentences that produce an almost rhythmic back and forth tempo that sets the tone of Tender's testimony of events and maintains a fragmented and disruptive temporality. This, I argue, is because the psyche of a traumatized individual cannot conceptualize the events as a whole. Instead, Tender Branson has to talk about fragments of his life, which are constantly disrupted with episodes that detail incredibly mundane descriptions of various tasks that he was presumably taught as part of his education. Tender's tendency to disrupt his story with these episodes could be regarded as an anticipatory measure for what Dori Laub (1992) calls "listening defences" that listeners who become a party to the testimony of trauma partake in:

> Foreclosure through facts, through an obsession with factfinding; an absorbing interest in the factual details of the account which serve to circumvent the human experience. Another version of this foreclosure, of this obsession with factfinding is a listener who already "knows it all," ahead of time, leaving little space for the survivor's story. (1992, p. 73)

Thus, it can be said that Tender Branson pre-emptively describes facts about the mundane details about his labour in order to claim legitimacy for his testimony. Laub argues that "imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming

life task" (p.78) for the victim. However, there is no set amount of testifying and being heard that is guaranteed to satisfy the victim:

> no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought*, *memory* and *speech*. (1992, p.78)

Consequently, Tender's obsession with details of manual labor within his testimony is his attempt to capture his elusive memories of trauma and render them credible. His memories are filled with absences, and they lead him from one recollection to the other. Tender deals with this absence by providing these descriptions. How to properly eat a lobster, how to get rid of wrinkles on the forehead, what steroids to use with what dosage, how to remove sweat stains, how to use human fat to make soap, how to remove cherry stains and all the other trivial information are Tender's way of appealing to validity. Under these descriptions lie the truly horrific nature of trauma. These disruptions in Tender's recollection of events surprise the unsuspecting listener and remind them that they are a part of the testimony. Equally, the listener's obsession with facts is met by Tender with these interruptions that bring legitimacy to the testimony. Additionally, these descriptions allow Tender to stall his testimony, evading the climactic confrontation with trauma. This confrontation is naturally impeded by inner resistances as the difficulty of testifying to trauma manifests itself, eventually leading to a collapse. Within its form, Palahniuk's narrative metafictionally underscores the ironic contradiction between the insatiable urge to testify and the unconscious resistance to provide that testimony.

Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* displays the urge to testify right at the beginning of its narrative. The novel begins with the repetitive utterance of "Testing, testing. One, two, three. Testing, testing. One, two, three." (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p.289).

This utterance can be read in two ways. One is as conveying the same frustrating feeling in Vonnegut's novel of accessing the traumatic events stored in memories that are fragmented, and constantly struggling with the ironic contradiction between the urge to testify and experiencing difficulty to do so. The second is as indicating the witness's need for assurance that there is somebody listening, similar to K-Zetnik's need to be on the stand to testify. K-Zetnik collapses when this assurance is interrupted directly by his oppressor whereas Tender is empowered by the fact that he has hijacked a plane and is recording his testimony to the black box on the plane. He cannot be interrupted then, yet he may never know if his recording will ever be discovered. The extreme urge he feels to tell his story has pushed him to the literal extremity of hijacking a plane. Thus, Tender is able to tell his story in his own words and terms, yet there is always the possibility of his testimony falling on deaf ears: "Maybe this is working. I don't know. If you can even hear me, I don't know. But if you can hear me, listen. And if you're listening, then what you've found is the story of everything that went wrong" (p.289). The word "listen" is striking here, just as it was in Vonnegut's novel. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, this word underlined the urge to testify to trauma and the need for a listener to initiate a testimony. Similarly, whether or not he is being listened to, Tender is overwhelmed with the urge to tell his story. He wants to be listened to, and we as readers are his listeners. But why is it that Tender so desperately wants to be listened after everything had happened? Why now that he had hijacked a plane?

3.2 Confronting trauma and the latency effect: A story within a story

I argue that one instance in the narrative causes Tender to face his trauma and that is the discussion he has with his brother on the way north. During the car ride, Tender

and Branson start to talk about home, as they are expected to pass by there. As the last known member of the cult, Tender had inherited the over 20,000 acres of land that the colony stood upon, and the agent's team turned it into "Tender Branson National Sensitive Materials Sanitary Landfill" (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p.96). Tender describes how this idea has been realized in his testimony to the black box:

> What else I want people to know before my plane crash is I didn't dream up the idea for the PornFill. The agent is always pushing paper in front of me and saying, sign this. He tells me, sign here. And here. Here. And here. The agent tells me to just initial next to each paragraph. He tells me, don't bother reading this bit, I won't understand. That's how the PornFill happened. (pp. 100-99)

The narrative here exposes the lack of voice and agency in Tender's life. As a commodified persona, he is a tool of the agent's company, signing on to whatever plan, book, TV program they devised for him.

> It was not my idea to take all twenty thousand acres of the Creedish church district and turn it into the repository for this nation's outdated pornography. Magazines. Playing cards. Videocassettes. Compact disks. Worn-out dildos. Punctured blowup dolls. Artificial vaginas. The bulldozers are out there twenty-four hours a day pushing mountains of that around. This is twenty thousand acres. Two-zero-zero-zero-zero acres. Every square foot of Creedish property. Wildlife is displaced. The groundwater is contaminated. (p. 99)

The grand narratives of capitalism and religion that guide the agent's company in the creation of Tender's religious superstar persona is based on commodification at its core. Through Tender's fame, which is amplified by the fake appearance of beauty, the corporate machine creates a non-existing problem -a need to purge pornography. The sole purpose of this is to generate income in two ways: first by creating a false need for a landfill and collection program, second by creating more demand for more pornographic products as the landfill puts existing products out of use. The grand narratives of late capitalist commodification and the culture industry work together in *Survivor* to label these products as harmful to society. This labelling is instantly

exposed to be false as Tender underlines that these products in the landfill are "outdated", "worn-out" and "punctured". Tender's testimony adds that while this capitalistic endeavour claims to solve an issue, it creates another one. "Twenty thousand acres" worth of natural environment gets destroyed in the process while the animals are displaced, and the vegetation is destroyed.

The capitalist oppression not only steals Tender's voice and identity, but also forces upon him a different one that is fake and produced solely for profit. As Tender explains:

> Before the flight recorder tape runs out, people need to know who to blame. It's the agent. The Book of Very Common Prayer. The Peace of Mind television show. The American PornFill Corporation. The Genesis Campaign. The Tender Branson Dashboard Statuette. Even my botched Super Bowl halftime special, the agent brain-stormed them all. And they all made tons of money. But what's important is none of them was my idea. (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p. 99)

In a few sentences, Tender denies all his public fame, identity and voice because they are imposed upon him. He testifies that none of these products were ideas created with his own free-will. His persona has been orchestrated to make "tons of money". What makes this testimony powerful and effective is the fact that it is a metafictional story within a story. Tender is directly testifying to the reader. The reader is hearing the voice of Tender who is on a plane soon to crash and burn, which makes any attempt at changing his story impossible. And this is a testimony/confession of someone in an enclosed environment stripped of all outside influence. Outside the plane, he is always oppressed into becoming a part of the capitalist machine because his identity and voice have been stripped off him during his childhood. Tender never had a chance to exercise agency in his life. He was always influenced by someone or something. First, it was the Creedish Cult that dictated his understanding of life. Then, it was the caseworker that diagnosed him with different mental illnesses. Once

the caseworker was dead, it was the agent that determined his schedule. In the setting of the plane, however, these powers that manipulated him do not exist. Metafictional storytelling that addresses the readers at the beginning of the novel amplifies this reclaiming of identity and voice, and makes us, the readers, the witnesses of the testimony and a party in the recognition of the traumatic effects of grand narratives.

At the same time, Palahniuk's choice of narrativizing Tender's story non-linearly and long after his traumatic childhood echoes the latency effect that trauma has. Cathy Caruth (1996) writes, in *Unclaimed Experience*, about how the latency effect manifests itself on the victim:

> what is truly striking about the accident victim's experience of the event, and what in fact constitutes the central enigma revealed by Freud's example, is not so much the period of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself: the person gets away, Freud says, "apparently unharmed." The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. (1996, p. 17)

As the traumatic events happen, Tender is similarly absent from the scene in the sense that he cannot comprehend what is happening to him. He only begins to realize and come out of the latency once he is deliberately triggered by Adam. During their ride, before they approach the former grounds of the Creedish Church that is now a landfill for used pornography, Adam reveals that he was the one to call the police, which led to the mass suicide, and starts to remind Tender the horrors of the Church:

> Adam says, "There were no black Creedish. The Creedish elders were a pack of racist, sexist white slavers."
> I remember feeling safe.
> Adam says, "Everything you remember is wrong."
> Being valued and loved, I remember.
> "You remember a lie," Adam says. "You were bred and trained and sold."
> And he wasn't. No, Adam Branson was a firstborn son. Three minutes, that made all the difference. He would own everything. The barns and chickens and lambs. The peace and security. He would inherit the future, and I would be a labor missionary, mowing the lawn and mowing the lawn, work without end. (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p. 41)

As Adam dismantles the grand narrative based on religion and community behind the Creedish Church, Tender tries to resist returning to the trauma. Tender's every attempt at evasion is met with equal force by Adam until the former recognizes that a difference as small as three minutes is what destined him to a life of slavery. This is the point at which Tender confronts his trauma for the first time. As the ride continues, Adam pushes Tender further and asks if he remembers what the church elders did to all the children of the cult to make them afraid of sex. Tender denies anything was done to him and begins to cry (1999/2000, p. 35). Until this point, Tender was evading his past which is influenced by different oppressive authorities that only aimed at profit by using him. Adam intentionally triggers a confrontation with their shared traumatic past in the cult and says:

> "The night my wife had our first child," Adam says . . . "the elders took all the tenders and biddies in the district and made them watch. My wife screamed just the way they told her. She screamed, and the elders preached and wailed how the wages of sex was death. She screamed, and they made childbirth as painful as they could. She screamed, and the baby died. Our child. She screamed and then she died."
> The first two victims of the Deliverance.
> It was that night Adam walked out of the Creedish church district and made his phone call.
> "The elders made you watch every time anyone in the church district had a child," Adam says. (p.34)

In order to make sure that Tender can face his trauma, Adam testifies to his experience of the cult. This moment is followed by a collapse, similar in its symbolic meaning to K-Zetnik's collapse during the Eichmann trial: "He says, 'By now, sex must look like nothing but torture to you.' He just spits it out that way. Truth, The Fragrance. And at that instant the smoke clears. And we crash head-on into the concrete wall." (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, p. 34). The moment that the "truth" is revealed explicitly about the traumatic nature of Tender's upbringing and completes his testimony, "the smoke clears." The collapse of Adam as he dies after the crash

resonates with what happens at the end of the novel with Tender's collapse together with the plane. Tender survives the car crash because metafictionally he has not yet fully confronted his traumas and given his testimony. The car crash is symbolically similar to the effect that K-Zetnik's fall had on the trial. K-Zetnik's fall initiated the recognition of the horrors during World War II as a larger collective event that would be called the Holocaust. This crash similarly marks the beginning of the acknowledgement of the larger collective trauma. It shows the horrific traumatic environment that capitalist structures and the oppression of cultish formations both of which feed into each other can create. Once the dust settles, and Tender kills Adam and buries him, he recounts the epitaphs around the graveyard: "Gone but Not Forgotten. In Heaven with their mistakes may they dwell. Beloved Father. Cherished Mother. Confused Family. May whatever God they find grant them forgiveness and peace. Ineffectual Caseworker. Obnoxious Agent." (pp. 28-29). The trigger that Adam intentionally causes clears Tender's mind and begins the process of recognizing how his life was in the control of the oppressive structures of the cult and capitalism. The traumatic effects of these forces of control perpetuate and feed into each other creating an inescapable hell for all individuals. Tender is not the only one that was traumatized by these structures. His father, mother, other members of the cult, the caseworker, the agent, Tender's fans that believed in a farcical persona are all traumatized by the commodification machine of capitalism and cultural fascination with extreme religious beliefs without even realizing.

Before analysing the climactic end of Palahniuk's novel, it is important to summarize the narrative strategies used to tell Tender's story leading up to the hijacking of a plane as I have outlined in this chapter. *Survivor* approaches narrativization backwards because the traumatized psyche returns to the event only

when a future trigger causes remembrance. Palahniuk's intentional backwards numbering of pages and chapters is an attempt to convey the nature of belatedness in narrativizing trauma to the reader. The narrative demonstrates that the experiencer of trauma is detached from the moment and their identity is fragmented. When trauma is faced, and testimony is given, the narrativization of events can begin. The fragmented identity is represented with the rhythmic short sentences that span the whole novel, and the instructions for various mundane tasks that interrupt the reporting of events exemplify how the mind continues to evade trauma while also creating a detailed backdrop to enhance the credibility of what is being told. As a result of these strategies, the reader becomes uprooted as they confront the oppressive structures of the culture industry. This way of narrativizing Tender's testimony attempts to alleviate the blame that might have been placed on his shoulders for being complicit in the exploitative and hurtful results of Tender's life such as the suicide of Fertility's brother, the death of the caseworker, the agent and Adam, Tender's false religious persona, the PornFill, and the hijacking of a plane.

The climactic end of the novel is set in motion once Adam triggers remembrance of Tender's trauma and clears his mind, making the evasion of the traumatic memories no longer possible. When Tender finds himself as a hijacker of a plane in pursuit of Fertility and starts to record his story to the black box as Fertility tells him to do, he can finally testify and be heard:

> And so here is my confession. Testing, testing, one, two, three. And according to Fertility, if I could only figure out how I could escape. I could escape being up here. I could escape the crash. I could escape being Tender Branson. I could escape the police. I could escape my past, my whole twisted, burning, miserable, snarled story of my life so far. Fertility said, the trick was to just tell people the story of how I got to this point, and I'd figure a way out. If I could just walk away and leave my old life story behind. (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, pp. 3-2)

Fertility is a psychic that knows everything that will come to pass. As such, she exists outside the structures of society governed by the oppressive powers of grand narratives that are legitimized through a discourse of reason and progress. Similar to the Tralfamadorians in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* she exists outside temporal constraints and has to let go of feeling guilt as it is the only way she can survive with knowing other people's misfortunes before they happen. As we know from what happened to his brother, holding onto such guilt could lead to self-destruction. Therefore, Fertility knows that Tender's story had to culminate in the extreme act of hijacking a plane to be free of influence and tell his story in an uninterrupted and complete manner so that he can stop feeling guilty for surviving. Fertility possibly also knows that Tender will survive. To live without attention and harm, Tender needs to falsify the public opinion that he is a mass murderer. That means a testimony is needed, a testimony that the public would believe and reflect upon, which in turn will set Tender free of the identity that is imposed on him throughout his life. At the climax of Tender's testimony in the last chapter of the novel, his metafictional anxiety to testify to everything in all its correctness becomes apparent as he obsessively regurgitates his urge to be listened to:

> Maybe this is working. I don't know. If you can even hear me, I don't know. But if you can hear me, listen. And if you're listening, then what you've found is the story of everything that went wrong. This is what you'd call the flight recorder of Flight 2039. The black box, people call it, even though it's orange, and on the inside is a loop of wire that's the permanent record of all that's left. What you've found is the story of what happened. And go ahead. You can heat this wire to white-hot, and it will still tell you the exact same story. […] I'm going to keep saying it, but it's true. I'm not a murderer. And I'm alone up here. […] And at this altitude, listen, and at this speed, with the plane empty, this is my story. And my story won't get bashed into a zillion bloody shreds and then burned with a thousand tons of burning jet. And after the plane wrecks, people will hunt down the flight recorder. And my story will survive. And I will live on, forever. … Testing, testing, one, two, three. So here is my confession. Here is my prayer. My story. My incantation. Hear me. See me. Remember me. Beloved Fuck-up. Botched Messiah. Would-be Lover. Delivered to God. I'm trapped here, in a nosedive, in my life, in the cockpit of

> a jetliner with the flat yellow of the Australian outback coming up fast. And there's so many things I want to change but can't. It's all done. It's all just a story now. Here's the life and death of Tender Branson, and I can just walk away from it. And the sky is blue and righteous in every direction. The sun is total and burning and just right there, and today is a beautiful day. Testing, testing, one, two– (Palahniuk, 1999/2000, pp. 2-1)

He again expresses his urge to be heard by saying "listen" and explicitly demands attention from collective society and by constantly appealing to his listeners in a metafictional way and repetitively exclaiming "Testing, testing, one, two, three". Thus, Tender can let go of his traumatic past and begin the recognition of collective trauma. Because the black box cannot be tinkered with, it is outside manipulation, and the structures of capitalism cannot influence the story it tells. Tender continually emphasizes that this story is his now that he is free of influence. The end of the novel is the only instance in which Tender does not indulge in any hearsay but speaks with his own voice. While the novel's narrative is replete with sentences that begin with "caseworker says" or "agent says", here at the end of his testimony, Tender speaks in his own first-person voice. Once "It's all done", he finally "can walk away from it". His description of the weather right after having completed his testimony represents how after testifying, he becomes free of the metafictional anxiety of revealing the 'whole' truth. The sky is "righteous in every direction" and the sun "is total and burning and just right there", and it is a "beautiful day". Both the sky and the sun are correlated with being "right", which echoes the fact that having given testimony, his story is now right too. Now that Tender has finally testified to his trauma, he has a future to look forward to. Right after this, however, Tender's recording is interrupted with the crash of the plane, in other words, the collapse of the witness. Similar to the earlier car crash, when trauma is faced openly and completely, the victim collapses. But this time, his collapse speaks to the larger collective trauma. His testimony is

finally expressed in his own voice, witnessed by its listeners, and is laid bare to the society.

Thus, Palahniuk manages to create a narrative that depicts the oppression of religion and commodification on the individual and the collective without imposing an alternative universal truth of its own. By reversing its formatting of page numbers in its publication and reversing chronological approach to narrative, Palahniuk creates a narrative that can represent trauma's effect on the individual psyche in its form, which also demands active participation of the reader in recognizing the collective trauma caused by the oppressive structures of late capitalism and religion. The mode of telling a story within a story explicitly calls to attention that we are reading a testimony. The repetitive interruptions and language that create a sense of urgency conveniently allow us to recognize the larger, collective trauma which Tender's story underlines. Palahniuk's narrative knowingly refrains from providing a reliable conclusion and instead aims to point towards healing through testimony with its metafictional representation of trauma.

CHAPTER 4

WORKING-THROUGH TRAUMA IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE TESTAMENTS*

This chapter analyses the three different narratives in the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's novel *The Testaments* (2019) as an attempt to narrate the unnarratable through characters that are flawed and indecisive. As I stated in Chapter 1, due to its effects on the psyche, trauma evades comprehension and therefore narrativization. Atwood's three separate narratives that make up the novel show the horrifying environment that is the fictional setting of Gilead as a sequel to the earlier critically acclaimed novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Set in a near-future world, both novels depict the aftermath of a staged attack devised by a religious fanatic group called the "Sons of Jacob" that assassinated the President of the United States and most members of the Congress in a swift power grabbing coup d'état. Atwood's imagined world is not completely fabricated and detached from the conditions of our 21st century society. As Atwood states, her imaginary totalitarian world aims to reflect the reality of our world today and our historical past through what she calls "speculative fiction":

> One of my rules was that I would not put any events into the book that had not already happened in what James Joyce called the "nightmare" of history, nor any technology not already available. No imaginary gizmos, no imaginary laws, no imaginary atrocities. God is in the details, they say. So is the Devil. (2017)

Gilead is not an extremely unimaginable future; its patriarchal environment which segregates, limits, subdues and oppresses women feels real. The protagonists and their reactions to trauma appeal to us, the readers, as completely human. Therefore, Atwood marries the idea of creating a fictional work with recognizing and testifying

to real individual and intergenerational trauma. Since the protagonists of Gilead and the trauma they go through is so deeply rooted in the experiences of our real-world society, Atwood chooses to use metafictional narrative that makes the readers question their own position on the issues raised by the novel. Atwood's narrative is set 15 years after the events of the aforementioned novel, *The Handmaid's Tale.* Dealing with Atwood's narrative in *The Testaments* is a complex process as her protagonists are imperfect and unreliable and require the reader to have prior knowledge about the earlier novel to effectively understand the extent of trauma the characters are dealing with. Furthermore, Atwood engages readers in a continuous process of critical reading and self-reflection by repeatedly exposing them to various instances of inconsistent behaviour and the impact of fear in decision mechanisms of its characters. Furthermore, her protagonists partake in reconsidering their circumstances critically by appealing to the reader, which allows both the characters and readers to challenge their own situations and compliance with oppressive powers of religion and patriarchy.

The three separate narratives of Aunt Lydia, Agnes, and Nicole all depict protagonists that experience and give meaning to their situations in different ways. The protagonists are not necessarily reliable, as their memories are distorted due to trauma and the readers are forced to read between the lines and connect their various disjointed and incomplete flashbacks to comprehend their motives and acts. Understanding them is further complicated by the fact that the characters both feel an insatiable urge to testify and struggle with their inner resistances to remember their traumatic experiences. The characters of *The Testaments* are not protagonists of a linearly told stories either. They are unreliable; they deliberately lie to the reader and sometimes to themselves, even becoming hysterical in some instances. In addition,

they are often lost in their traumatic surroundings, amongst the constant messages produced by oppressive grand narratives of the religious and patriarchal organization of Gilead. None of the three narratives read as belonging to protagonists of conventional narratives, and neither are their narrativizations traditionally realist and linear. Aunt Lydia was one of the villains in the earlier 1987 novel; Agnes is a product of the oppression in Gilead; and Nicole is often plagued by fury and bewilderment regarding Gilead. In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1987), Aunt Lydia was the headmaster of the Red Center who supervised the women being indoctrinated with Gilead's depraved ideology, and gave speeches about how women should be submissive to men and solely dedicate themselves to bearing children. These centers would prepare women to serve the elite couples of Gilead that have trouble conceiving children by being forced to having ritualistic sex with the husband they are assigned to. Offred, the protagonist of the earlier novel, tried to escape Gilead when the coup happened but got captured and separated from her husband and daughter in the process. The readers do not know her real name as all the Handmaids are named 'of' followed by the name of the Handmaid's commander. In the sequel, we learn that Nicole's real mother is Offred. It is further speculated that Agnes is the maternal half-sister of Nicole, who is the lost daughter of Offred. Thus, the three narrators of *The Testaments* are intrinsically connected to each other, and their traumas are on common grounds. Furthermore, the novel is metafictionally related to its prequel as the readers' understanding of the extent of tragedy Gilead has caused for the three protagonists relies on their familiarity with the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The limited number of articles on Atwood's recent sequel agrees on the perspective that while the previous novel was in a sense a cautionary tale, *The*

Testaments is much more urgent in its call to action. Oana Celia Gheorghiu and Michaela Praisler argue that "*The Testaments* could be Atwood's contribution, overtly militant, to a women's 'march against patriarchal abuse' comparable to that which took place on January 21, 2017, one day after Trump's inauguration" (2020, p.91). Nowadays, this concern is further justified following the overturning of Roe v. Wade which is jeopardizing women's reproductive rights in The United States. Gheorghiu and Praisler suggest in the same article that the diary format of Aunt Lydia's narrative is a path to destabilizing the patriarchal oppression of totalitarianism:

> Aunt Lydia writes herself in diaries addressed, metafictionally, to an unknown reader; she writes *her-story*, which becomes the history of the totalitarian Gilead itself, and *brings women to writing* by creating an order of feminine power in its own right – one that would regain *language and power*, or the power of language, whichever comes first. (p.94)

Interestingly, the retrieval of language and power for women is done through testifying to trauma that metafictionally addresses an implied reader. This is, I argue, because an oppressive environment like Gilead where grand narratives of nostalgic patriarchy and religion has caused massive trauma can only be dismantled by reversing the omniscience of those grand narratives. As such, the women need to create their own micro narratives, their 'her-stories' based on testimonies that self-reflectively question their own authority.

Daný van Dam and Sara Polak point toward a different metafictional connection in the earlier parts of the novel. They argue that "Atwood holds up a kind of metatextual mirror for the reader, stressing the significance of the written word" (2021, p.175). In a visit to Ardua Hall, within Aunt Lydia's private collection, she 'displays her choice selection of forbidden books: "Jane Eyre, Anna Karenina, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Paradise Lost, Lives of Girls and Women – what a moral panic

each one of them would cause if set loose among the Supplicants!"' (Atwood, 2019, as cited in van Dam and Polak, 2021, pp.175-176). Van Dam and Polak point out that all these mentioned classics revolve around women protagonists who act out against oppression, and "as such, a parallel can be drawn between these fictions and the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* … the implicit connection parallels Atwood's writing work and Aunt Lydia's role as a writing narrator, creating a metafictional link between the two" (2021, p.176). Thus, I argue in this chapter that these and many other metafictional instances in *The Testaments* are Atwood's attempt to narrate the unnarratable trauma that oppressive forces of religion and patriarchy cause for women and to reclaim the language and power which these forces continue to supress today.

4.1 Past and present of trauma: The self-reflexive urge to testify

Apparent both in the title and the narrative form of the novel, Atwood's aim is to underline the characters' need to testify to their trauma. Aunt Lydia's narrative in the novel often metafictionally addresses the reader directly, allowing readers to understand and empathise with her, and thus her act of writing a memoir involves the reader in the recognition of the traumatic events. Readers' cooperation in the process of providing a testimonial text is accentuated by the novel's direct inclusion of an implied reader where self-reflexive insertions about the inherent difficulties in narrative reconstruction of trauma is discussed. At the end of the novel, Aunt Lydia addresses the readers directly: "How can I have behaved so badly, so cruelly, so stupidly? you will ask. You yourself would never have done such things! But you yourself will never have had to." (Atwood, 2019, p. 391). Aunt Lydia's direct appeal

to the reader is to reconsider her status as a villainous person and to encourage the readers to consider their own conditions.

Traumas of the protagonists in *The Testaments* are all tied to their past, and since this is a sequel, their traumas take place in the previous novel. Particularly, Aunt Lydia's recollection of events amplifies the difficulty in trying to survive in her present time whilst also dealing with her past. Past traumatic memories affect Lydia's mind, leaving her with a fragmented and disoriented sense of self. However, having had a traumatic experience is not always a negative situation in Atwood's novel; it is also an opportunity to begin changing the self, by working through the suffering and pain. Lucy Bond and Stef Craps quote from LaCapra in *Trauma* and discuss the possibility of coming to terms with surviving and working through trauma: "working-through is a process of 'gaining critical distance on [traumatic] experiences and re-contextualizing them in ways that permit a reengagement with ongoing concerns and future possibilities'" (LaCapra, 2001, as cited in Bond and Craps, 2020, p.78) Aunt Lydia is the embodiment of the possibility of working-through: the antagonist in *The Handmaid's Tale* now finds an opportunity to redeem her actions in *The Testaments* by rebelling against the oppressive forces that caused her trauma. By coming to terms with her trauma and abuse that turned her into an antagonist, Lydia utilizes her reclaimed power and resentment to destroy Gilead that traumatized her and many others.

Comparably, Agnes's narrativization of events urges the readers to challenge their views on Gilead and question if it is possible for a nation to cherish its children, while violating many of the adults' human rights. At the start of her testimony, Agnes assumes that the reader is well-versed in how the systemic structure of Gilead operates, - admitting to the reader how these structures are traumatizing:

> You have asked me to tell you what it was like for me when I was growing up within Gilead. You say it will be helpful, and I do wish to be helpful. I imagine you expect nothing but horrors, but the reality is that many children were loved and cherished, in Gilead as elsewhere, and many adults were kind though fallible, in Gilead as elsewhere. (Atwood, 2019, p. 16)

Agnes's narrative involves the listener/reader in the creation of her testimony of trauma by directly positioning us as an inquirer and self-reflectively presuming what our expectation might be from her testimony. She claims to be truthful and thorough by stating how there was also something positive in Gilead's rules, and that children were kept safe from harm. However, she also admits that "Gilead ought to fade away—there is too much of wrong in it, too much that is false, and too much that is surely contrary to what God intended—but you must permit me some space to mourn the good that will be lost" (p.16). Although Agnes knows that portraying the conditions in Gilead in a positive light, or at least not much different from the outside world, will seem deranged to the listener, she urges the reader to listen no matter how "bizarre the conditions of that childhood may seem to others" (p. 16). She understands the wrong in Gilead and its collective traumatic effect while also mourning for the loss. Thus, Agnes exists both in her traumatic past and in her present testimony as she attempts to deal with her trauma by recognizing and claiming the good and the bad together. This can be read as a victim's attempt to move towards healing through testimony and an appeal to the listener to recognize the collective trauma: everything, the good and bad, intrinsic to Gilead also exists "elsewhere", even outside the fictional work of Atwood.

4.2 Fragmented narrativization of Gilead: Disassociation within the form

The complex tripartite narrative of *The Testaments* is partly due to Atwood's concern to represent both individual and intergenerational trauma by merging them together.

Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and its sequel, *The Testaments* are character-driven, which helps recognize how specific details of an individual trauma is almost always connected to larger social structures or ideologies through their traumatized protagonist. Gilead is a fictional nation, and the audience's knowledge about Gilead is compounded gradually by the fragmented narrative that Atwood offers. The collective trauma in *The Testaments* is the result of what happens when a nation resorts to nostalgia for an extremely conservative organization of society based on patriarchal values as a guiding principle for the future. The Sons of Jacob, the governing body of Gilead, base their doctrines on a form of the Old Testament that brings forth a restrictive, segregationist society. Thus, the national identity of Gilead is based on a fragmented old piece of writing that was dissected, conceptualized, reinterpreted in thousands of ways. Having a fragmented and unstable basis, Gilead similarly causes a fragmentation in the survivors' psyche as they fail to make sense of the consequences of restricting and oppressing women, a prominent indication of their backwardness.

Furthermore, Atwood's narrative exposes the fragmenting effect of trauma in its descriptions of the physical environment. These descriptions become central to the representation of trauma in the novel in that the physical disruptions and remembrances turn into a tangible source for the exposure of fragmentation intrinsic to the traumatized collective. Everything is streamlined and effortless in the social structure of Gilead, from its forced clothing laws to its buildings; everything appears to be in a neat order. Nevertheless, this appearance is broken occasionally, and the readers are promptly exposed to the contradictory scenes of a body hanging from the walls, or a public execution in daytime -a return to the medieval times presenting itself as progress. To convey the fragmentation the characters experience when faced

with such a hypocritical societal structure, Atwood utilizes various techniques. First, the narrative is fractured between three different perspectives, each providing differing views on the traumatising effects of the social order in Gilead. Multiple different narratives amplify the chaotic manifestation of trauma on the mind of the individual and emphasize the evasiveness of trauma, which creates gaps between the different narratives. The audience is left to their own devices to fill in the blanks in the characters' narrativizations of trauma and by extension becomes party in recognition of their testimonies as they satisfy the victims' need to be heard.

Second, the fragmented nature of the narrative highlights the absences inherent in memories revolving around trauma. Agnes and Nicole's testimonies, and Aunt Lydia's written memoir, provide the readers with sequences of separate scenes and fragments of recollections from a first-person point of view. The described events are detailed, yet their fragmented nature calls into question the reliability of the traumatized individual's memory. This underlines the difficulty of giving testimony to trauma. In Agnes' "Transcript of Witness Testimony", traumatic events of her childhood are described in detail as if they are happening in the present time. Furthermore, the narrative moves back and forth between the past and the present, and the three different narratives move towards converging in the same conclusion at differing paces. The nonlinear storytelling emphasizes the disorder that trauma imposes upon the individual psyche during the process of coming to terms with it. With flashbacks and interrupted fragments of storytelling, Atwood keeps the reader engaged and facilitates their participation in the narrativization of testimony.

Lastly, apparent both in the title of the novel and in Agnes and Nicole's narratives titled "Transcripts of Witness Testimony", *The Testaments* in its entirety represents the act of testifying to trauma. Through the testimonies of Agnes, Nicole

and Aunt Lydia, Atwood bonds individual experiences to the larger intergenerational traumatic experience. The testimonies are given and left for others to be heard and acknowledged, thus speaking to the next generation. This process in turn creates an opportunity for an intergenerational recognition of the extreme experiences and pain that individuals or larger collectives are subjected to. The following generations are tasked by the testimony to find meaning in the events that happened which created their traumatic environment and inseparably influenced their present identity. The continuous passing down of intergenerational trauma happens in the novel through Agnes and Nicole as they are the children of Offred, the protagonist of the earlier novel. While working through their own trauma, they struggle to comprehend and cope with what their mother experienced, which led to Agnes and Nicole being subjected to the same oppressive environment of Gilead now.

4.3 The individual and collective trauma of Gilead

Cathy Caruth (1992) explains the inevitable nature of trauma that "seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (1992, p. 4). These unattended wounds have permanent effects on the individual psyche. Each of the three narrators in *The Testaments* has a specific trauma of their own, but as they are perpetuated by the oppressive structures of Gilead, their traumas are inevitably intertwined. These intertwined pasts of individuals inescapably converge upon an urge to reach towards the unreachable truth. Before their moment of testimony, the traumatic events remain concealed, as if they never took place. The testimony is what allows the individuals

to recognize their own trauma and truth, which in turn initiates the recognition of the larger, collective trauma.

Aunt Lydia's narrative in *The Testaments* focuses more on coping with and healing from trauma rather than focusing on the traumatic events. Lydia, along with other Aunts, is tasked with upholding the doctrines of the Gilead rule since the aunts are widely conceived to be the foundation upon which the system stands, immediately below the male militaristic leadership. From the perspective of other characters, Aunt Lydia is framed as a harsh, maternal figure. She seems caring on the surface while she is a devout defender of the regime's laws. Her contradictory outlook is similarly apparent in the events that led her to becoming an Aunt as well. Lydia becomes an Aunt both because of her own compliance and the forceful oppression of the Gilead rule. Similarly, her response to her trauma is caught between a feeling of guilt and a desire to survive and react against the oppression of nostalgic patriarchy.

The event that sets off Aunt Lydia's traumatic journey is her arrest during the Gileadean takeover. She witnesses the execution of several women during her imprisonment and spends days in solitary confinement until she finally submits and accepts the offer to become an Aunt in the new order. She was arrested in the first place simply because of her law degree and profession as a family court judge (Atwood, 2019, p. 40). Her occupation essentially revolved around arguing about social issues, and her arrest is the first traumatic event as it steals a big part of her identity:

> What was there to say? It was clear that cries for help would go unanswered. There was no point in shouting or flinging ourselves against the walls of the van: it would simply have been a futile expense of energy. And so we waited. (p. 72)

Aunt Lydia's only possible reaction at the time was to surrender. As recurrently mentioned earlier, victims of trauma have difficulty in comprehending the event at the time of its happening and for some more time afterwards. It can then be said that Aunt Lydia's surrender is due to a sensory overload caused by the sheer oppressive violence of the event. Her retelling of the imprisonment is devoid of any emotion but has plenty of detail, which further supports the inability to comprehend trauma and the self-reflexive appeal to assurance. Lydia's narrative includes these inconsequential details as an attempt to gain the listener's confidence despite the problematic nature of trying to convey an event that is inexplicable. This is similar to the appeal to confidence in Tender's narrative which interrupted the flow of the narrative with monotone descriptions of various acts of labour as I discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, Lydia describes the neatly calculated organization of the executions she witnessed in detail.

During their imprisonment in a stadium, women prisoners are forced to watch a mass execution of women deemed not worthy of remaining in the newfound Gilead order. It is worth quoting Lydia's account of the traumatic event that permanently altered her at length to see the shift in her narrative style:

> At four o'clock we were treated to a spectacle. Twenty women of various sizes and ages, but all in business attire, were led into the centre of the field. I say led because they were blindfolded. Their hands were cuffed in front. They were arranged in two rows, ten and ten. The front row was forced to kneel down, as if for a group photo.
> A man in a black uniform orated into a microphone about how sinners were always visible to the Divine Eye and their sin would find them out. An undertone of assent, like a vibration, came from the guards and attendants. Mmmmmm…like a motor revving up.
>
> "God will prevail," concluded the speaker.
> There was a chorus of baritone Amens. Then the men who'd escorted the blindfolded women raised their guns and shot them. Their aim was good: the women keeled over. (Atwood, 2019, p. 118)

To make matters worse, the next occasion of mass execution would be performed by newly converted women of Gilead. Aunt Lydia considers these women to be "monsters" (p. 143). However, after being put into solitary confinement for further torture, she finally submits:

> In addition to that, and as if in acknowledgement of it, there was a fresh garment laid out for me. It was not quite a cowl and it was not quite made of brown sackcloth, but close. I had seen it before, in the stadium, worn by the female shooters. I felt a chill.
> I put it on. What else should I have done? (p. 149)

Consequently, she participates in the execution of other women in order to solidify her position as an Aunt; in other words, she becomes a "monster" to survive. This is the point at which Aunt Lydia becomes completely disillusioned with her previous identity. She commits an act that she once considered despicable and in turn becomes permanently defined by that moment. When she is merely a witness to the executions, she simply reports in detail what she saw and narrativizes it through analogies like "a group photo", "a motor revving up", while also comparing the converted Gileadean women executioners to "monsters". Later when she herself tragically becomes a 'monster', she can only offer a few words about it. The line "I felt a chill" is supposed to feel uncanny and inexplicable as trauma often is. Right after this account, Lydia feels the need to appeal to the reader directly, attempting to narrate the unnarratable trauma she experienced only metafictionally. Even then, her participation in the executions is still insinuated. However, by metafictionally appealing to the reader, Atwood's narrative allows Lydia to self-reflexively describe her struggle to the reader by working-through what she has done.

Additionally, this traumatic memory in Lydia's narrative acts as an example of the haunting effect trauma has on the victim. As discussed earlier, the traumatic event is suppressed in the victim's psyche; however, it keeps returning after a latency

period and continuously haunts the victim. Similarly, Lydia's traumatic indoctrination into Gileadean Aunthood keeps returning in flashbacks: "I had a flashback, not for the first time. In my brown sackcloth robe I raised the gun, aimed, shot. A bullet, or no bullet? A bullet" (Atwood, 2019, p. 378). Again, Lydia's metafictional appeal to the reader illustrates the difficulty of recognizing the traumatic event as she directly asks us whether a bullet came out of the gun or not. This type of narrative forces the reader to become a part of the testimony that requires a listener to witness the collapse of the victim. Symbolically, the flashback depicts an execution and the presumed collapse of the now executed victim. The account of the collapse (both the executed woman's and Lydia's instant fall into silence) gives voice to the voiceless victims of Gilead and begins the recognition of the collective trauma of both the dead and the survivors.

In Gilead, the oppressive grand narratives of religion and patriarchy continuously harm women by silencing any attempts at testifying and by perpetuating harmful and oppressive practices that subject women to physical and psychological violence. Women are forbidden from holding property or jobs. If they are barren, they are forced into cleaning toxic nuclear waste outside the walls together with people that are gender fluid. If they are fertile, they are indoctrinated by the Aunts to become baby incubators for elite families. Thus, trauma is embedded in the foundation of Gilead. It can even be said that Gilead is defined by the trauma it perpetuates. It is a totalitarian system of governance that came into power through a coup, based on extreme religious doctrines which segregate, enslave and violate the women within it. The traumatic events in such environment are traumatic precisely because trauma and testimony have no place within the oppressive structure -the same structure that assimilates the traumatized collective's self-understanding by

demolishing and repurposing their identity. The collective identity is thus reshaped forcefully into a system in which upwards mobility in the hierarchy is almost impossible, while downwards movement can happen for any simple reason at any time. For instance, in the *Handmaid's Tale*, Offred is constantly in danger of imprisonment for having a relationship outside the ritualistic rape she is subjected to by her assigned general. Agnes' narrative underlines the effects of collective trauma and constant danger of punishment which demonstrate that the everyday life experience of people in Gilead is intrinsically tied to continuous trauma.

The reader follows her narrative beginning from age six, in which she recounts various events she witnesses as a Commander's child in Gilead. For the reader, these instances make it immediately clear that life in Gilead involves being surrounded by trauma inducing events that have been normalized and assimilated into the imposed culture. For example, Agnes refers to executions casually: "Later we would be allowed to go to Salvagings and Prayvaganzas in our white dresses and veils to see people being hanged or married, but we weren't mature enough for that yet, said Aunt Estée" (Atwood, 2019, p. 22). Once again, the testimony speaks both for the dead victims, through the collapse in the hanging, for the survivors who are traumatized by the forced marriages and for children who are subjected to witnessing visceral and medieval executions. Agnes's whole narrative is comprised of a series of epiphanies about how the Gileadean norms are completely abnormal and backwards. Towards the end of the novel, Agnes becomes aware of the traumatising environment that she was in as a young adult, when she describes the beginning of Nicole's (her identity is hidden as Jade at this point in the novel) days in Gilead:

> Jade's introduction to the ways of Gilead was somewhat harsh, as the next day she was present at a Particicution. It may have been a shock to her to witness two men being literally ripped apart by Handmaids; it can be

> shocking even to me, although I've seen it many times over the course of the years. (p. 272)

While Agnes explicitly acknowledges the continuous normalization of trauma in Gilead very casually, Nicole's point of view of the same event is completely the opposite:

> The following day we were given those ugly brown outfits, and the next thing I knew we were being herded off to a sports stadium where we were seated in rows. No one had mentioned sports in Gilead—I'd thought they didn't have any—but it wasn't sports. It was a Particicution. They'd told us about those back in school, but they hadn't gone into too much detail, I guess, because they didn't want to traumatize us. Now I could understand that . . . It was gruesome; it was terrifying. (p. 304)

Nicole, who was previously unexposed to the collective trauma, immediately recognizes the traumatic events happening within Gilead for what they are. However, she slowly becomes involved in the collective trauma as she becomes a witness. Nicole is unknowingly a party to the intergenerational trauma of Gilead as well; she is the lost 'Baby Nicole' that Gilead alludes to in their propaganda campaigns. She had been born in Gilead from a Handmaid mother whom she never met, was smuggled to Canada at a young age, and grew up in a country that used Gilead as a cautionary example. She had already been traumatised by something she was not involved in until now. These accounts given to the readers underline how trauma assimilates the individual and yet recognition of trauma begins with the witnesses' testimony as even though Nicole had heard indirectly about the Particicutions, she realizes their true traumatic nature once she witnesses them herself and later testifies to them. As for those that lose their lives in these traumatic events, the testimony allows them to reclaim their voice through Nicole. Trauma is explicitly mentioned here as an ordinary part of everyday life in Gilead. Nicole tells the implied reader that she had learned about Particicutions in Canada and that her teachers "hadn't gone into too much detail". When she witnesses the Particicutions directly, the only

detail she can give is a generalized statement about how they are "gruesome" and "terrifying", similar to Billy Pilgrim's descriptions about the bombing of Dresden. Trauma in Gilead, no matter how constant it is, resists narrativization.

Overall, the violently forced return to an ideology based on primitive nostalgia for a conservative and patriarchal organization of society is a major part of the collective trauma in *The Testaments*. What was known to be the culture of millions of people was forcefully warped and corrupted as the former social order of United States was lost. Their internalized, historical cultural identity contradicts the cultural environment in which they find themselves. They are in a perpetual cultural disorientation. Aunt Lydia experienced life before Gilead, and Nicole grew up outside of Gilead. The culture they are living in, and the culture embedded in their identity clash with each other. Those that know of a possibility for a culture outside Gilead are disillusioned and cannot comprehend the culture they are forced to live in. This incomprehensibility is reflected in the metafictional appeals to the reader/listener of the three testimonies, which deal with the unnarratable nature of trauma by exposing the immediacy in the witnessed event that self-reflexively demonstrates the fragmentation of the victims' psyche.

To conclude, in *The Testaments,* three differing narrations of trauma that are ultimately intertwined with each other expose the inherent difficulties in depicting trauma. The damaged psyche of the traumatized individual becomes fragmented and disoriented. Consequently, the testimonies they provide are also shattered and defy linearity by constantly moving back and forth in time. Yet, this is the only way in which the victim can testify to the events as trauma resists representation through omniscient conventions of narration. So, the three narrators self-reflexively negotiate with the readers about their testimonies' inevitable shortcomings as a coping

mechanism. Hence, the narrative includes the reader in the process of recognizing both the individual and the larger collective trauma that Gilead causes.

The absences that fragmented narrativization create in the three testimonies represent the latency effect of trauma that manifests itself by evading the consciousness of the individual. The individual cannot access the memories of the traumatic events fully. They only have fragments of memory that resurface in their psyche as they begin to recognize trauma. This incongruity causes the reader to actively be part of the creation of the narrative by imaginatively filling in what is missing. The fact that the three narratives of the women are presented as testimonies to the same traumatizing circumstances brings them together and connects them to the larger underlying intergenerational trauma. Intergenerational effects of trauma that Gilead caused are exposed through the different perspectives coming together as an intertwined whole. The reader is metafictionally expected to go beyond *The Testaments* and learn about the previous novel's events in order to understand the complete consequences of the collective trauma that Gilead has created for the three protagonists.

Furthermore, by showing Lydia's dark past, the novel suggests that healing is possible through testifying and working through the trauma. Aunt Lydia's imprisonment and the torture she faces during the process show how her identity was slowly ripped away by the trauma. This oppressive force of Gilead turns her into what she fears during her imprisonment: a monster. She becomes a part of the machine of oppression to survive. Lydia's confession is partly her way of coping with the guilt she feels, and letting go of her trauma by turning it into resentment that leads to action towards the system that caused it in the first place.

Finally, Agnes' narrative shows how much the collective trauma becomes internalized by the inhabitants of Gilead. Her remembrances of public executions and the emotionless normalization of traumatic events show their inhumane effects on the traumatized mind. Nicole's perspective on the same events demonstrates how much the collective trauma has been embedded in the lives of the victims of Gilead and how collective trauma assimilates the outsiders as well. Thus, Atwood's complex, self-reflexive narrative testifies to a traumatized fictional world, which foreshadows a scenario that could just as easily happen in the real world. In doing so, Atwood makes the readers question their own situations and reminds them that they could quickly be dispossessed of the values they hold dear at any moment if they stop fighting against it. And the way to fight, for Atwood, is to testify and make our social structures accountable, a process which begins with the creation of new knowledge about the true nature of events and allows both the dead and the living to reclaim their lost voices. As such, Atwood creates a metafictional narrative that appropriates the innate difficulties in depicting trauma and shows its readers the importance of testimony and self-critique for the recognition and healing of trauma.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of trauma in earlier chapters, symptoms of individual and the collective trauma can be summarized in seven points: First, the victim becomes disassociated from the moment of trauma as the immediacy and violence (physical, psychological or both) of the event makes the process of registering and narrativizing the experience impossible. Second, latency effect amplifies the impossibility of accessing the event even though it continues to haunt the psyche afterwards. Third, because of this evasive yet haunting nature of the traumatic event, the individual feels an insatiable urge to testify to their trauma. Fourth, memories of the event come back in forms of flashbacks, fragmented recollections, and partial remembrances. Fifth, these episodes of return may trigger a collapse which leads to recognition of the trauma and initiates a testimony. Sixth, the victim feels a need to have a witness to their collapse and a listener to their testimony who, with their involvement in the process of testifying, facilitates the recognition of the traumatic event, which was formerly unreachable. Finally, through the collapse and the testimony, the voices that were silenced in the originary event are also reclaimed and included in the recognition of the larger, collective trauma.

In this study, I have focused on metafictional works that attempt at representing trauma, and its symptoms which I have listed above. In *Slaughterhouse-Five, Survivor,* and *The Testaments,* the difficulty of narrativizing trauma are self-reflexively explored and the implied reader/listener is implored to take part in the recognition of testimony. The discourse of aggression inherent in imperialism and colonialism, late capitalism, extreme religious ideologies, and patriarchy are exposed

to be false in these novels through the exploration of traumas they cause for individuals and societies. The symptoms of trauma become manifest in the characters' attempts at narrativizing their traumas. This manifestation allows the protagonists to avoid being consumed by their traumatic memories. Their narratives involve testifying to the destructive events they experienced, creating an opportunity for them to reclaim their voices and the voices of those that lost their life. The resulting narrative creates non-totalizing truths about the events of the fictional world which is connected to the real world through its metafictionality. Thus, the tension between modernity and postmodernity is resolved in these novels by allowing for a narrative based on a non-omniscient representation of the real world that metafictionally pushes the reader to reach their own conclusions about the traumatic effects of grand narratives. The characters' disassociation becomes a focal point of the narration of trauma, allowing the fragmented memories and non-linear recollection of events of the traumatized to be part of the testimony and demanding active participation from the readers in constructing the testimony. The urge to testify and the testimonial quality of the text are also self-reflexively exposed by creating a narrative that tells a story within a story, sometimes even including the author figure as a character directly in the novel. The narrative constantly addresses the reader, which in turn includes them in the recognition of the trauma and enables the victim to reclaim their voice by positioning them as an ally. In some instances, the problematic nature of narrating the unnarratable is openly considered by the narrators as they are aware and willing to admit their position as unreliable and expose the incapacity of conventionally omniscient narratives with their linear causality to represent the incomprehensible nature of trauma.

In this study, I analysed Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* and Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* as they deal with the representation of trauma by challenging the boundaries of the conventional narratives and exploring the narrative potential of metafictional strategies which allows the narrative to underline its own shortcomings. The cataclysmic effects that trauma has on the individual are the starting point for the need and process of narrativization in all three novels. Cathy Caruth (1996) describes the "temporal understanding of trauma as experiencing too late: the notion of dissociation of the psyche around the event—the splitting off of a "traumatic memory" from the rest of consciousness" (1996, p. 141). The immediate elusiveness of the "traumatic memory" as the event is experienced is what blinds the individual and makes them unable to recount the event. So, some works that deal with trauma focus on this gap and strive to bridge it in the memory of the traumatized by utilizing metafictional techniques. Vonnegut, Palahniuk, and Atwood approach this gap by playing on the narrative form, disrupting temporality, self-reflexively addressing the reader to draw attention to the traumatized psyche's unreliable and unstable status, and finally by including the reader in the creation of the testimony which allows for a collective recognition of the traumatic event. The free-flowing narratives that attempt to resolve the inherent evasiveness of trauma with flashbacks, different perspectives, and fragmented recollections in the three novels imitate how trauma manifests itself on the psyche of the individual while the self-reflexive testimonies continuously engage the reader and demand their participation in the recognition of individual and collective trauma.

All three novels question the characters' reliability and ability to testify to trauma and at the same time uncover their insatiable urge to recount their story. As Vonnegut's, Palahniuk's and Atwood's fictional plots move towards the collapse of

the witness, the characters work through their resistances and gradually confront their traumas by acting out. Billy Pilgrim acts out by publicly recounting his experience with the Tralfamadorians; Tender Branson hijacks a plane and records his testimony to the black box; Aunt Lydia utilizes her position to undermine Gilead, revealing to Agnes and Nicole that they are sisters and helping them escape Gilead with evidence about Gilead's corruptness. The collapse of the witness happens in all three novels too: Vonnegut's protagonist Billy Pilgrim collapses when he hears the barbershop quartet; Palahniuk's Tender Branson collapses at the end of his story with the plane crash; Atwood's Aunt Lydia collapses when she confronts the fact that she has participated in the executions in order to survive. She later collapses both literally and metaphorically with her self-inflicted morphine overdose at the end of the novel. Like the testimony of K-Zetnik, who collapses when his testimony is interrupted as mentioned in the introduction, their testimonies are given until the moment of interruption, and their last exclamation becomes the collapse that gives voice to the expressionless who had been silenced permanently.

In the second chapter, I examined the American writer Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* which depicts the horrors of the bombing of Dresden during the World War II and follows an individual's, Billy Pilgrim's, process of working through the trauma and providing testimony, which also initiates the recognition of the larger, collective trauma. In the opening and final chapters of *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Vonnegut chooses to speak directly to the readers and engages in a self-critique about the difficulties of narrativizing the unnarratable. He also underlines that trauma evades his memory, and yet he has not been able to resist the urge to testify on his experiences during the World War II throughout the many years since he returned from it. He uses a story within the story structure that depicts a fictional alien race

called Tralfamadorians which understand the past, present and future as existing simultaneously. Narrating the events thus absolves Pilgrim (and hence presumably Vonnegut), from the guilt he feels for surviving and thriving, and allows him to testify freely, without having to worry about the absences in his memory.

The emphases on the word "listen" in both Vonnegut and Palahniuk's novels, which is one of the focused points of my third chapter, echo each other in being a major symptom of trauma -the urge to testify and a need for an audience that will be a party to the recognition of their testimony. This similarity also becomes apparent in the use of repetitive sentences in both novels that demand the active attention of the reader. Atwood's novel retains this attention by leaving absences in its tripartite narrative that requires the audience to put the pieces together and take an active role in the creation of the testimony.

All three novels also speak to both individual and collective trauma. Vonnegut's narrative approaches the aftermath of the Dresden Bombings in monotone descriptions of the surroundings and puts into perspective the incredible amount of destruction and loss of life. The narrative also utilizes reports of hearsay that is recounted many years after the event had happened, which exposes the inherent inability to face the horrors openly. This perspective allows the readers to realize the larger collective loss that the victims experienced and gives voice to those that cannot speak. *Survivor* employs the same narrative strategy of incorporating hearsay, which Tender uses when recounting his life story to the black box. This allows him to deny free will until the moment he begins to testify and reclaim his identity and voice. It also allows him to underline and expose the larger collective and cultural trauma that the American society faces: The commodification of everything, from children to pornography, is laid bare in an unavoidably public

testimony through the flight recorder. Atwood depicts the collective trauma by showing how perspectives of those that were born into Gilead and those that were subjected to the horrors of Gilead mid-life differ from each other. Agnes who had known only the culture of Gilead in her life is unable to realize the horrifying nature of the events happening around her as they are happening while Aunt Lydia and Nicole as characters that become exposed to the Gileadean oppression later on in life, cannot conceptualize the extent of their traumatizing past until recording their testimonies.

Slaughterhouse-Five, Survivor and *The Testaments* are works that do not claim to offer a complete answer about how to represent trauma in literature, or how possible future traumatic events can be avoided. They are not completely optimistic or pessimistic in their outcomes either. What these novels do reveal, however, is that due to trauma's evasive and resistant character, a narrative that goes beyond novelistic conventions and even subverts them is necessary for its representation. In these novels, the path to narrativizing trauma and creating testimony passes through the victims' expressions which are self-reflexive, unreliable, and challenging to comprehend. Such narratives call into attention both the urge to testify to trauma and the difficulties inherent in doing so in their form. This treacherous path is filled with fragmented psyches that are disassociated, and a metafictional approach, which can self-reflexively expose these problems and make the readers aware of the nature of trauma, becomes necessary to allow them to participate in the recognition of the testimony. As such, metafiction is a convenient narrative strategy to represent trauma so that the testimony offered can claim some historical authority and reveal non-totalizing truths about events.

REFERENCES

Atwood, M. (1985). *The Handmaid's Tale*. London: Virago.

Atwood, M. (2017, March 10). Margaret Atwood on what *The handmaid's tale* means in the age of Trump. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com

Atwood, M. (2019). *The testaments*. New York, NY: Nan A. Talese.

Baudrillard, J. (1995). *Simulacra and simulation* (S. F. Glaser, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press. Available from https://www.press.umich.edu//9900 (Original work published 1981)

Bauman, Z. (1988). Sociology after the Holocaust. *The British Journal of Sociology, 39*(4), 469-497. doi:10.2307/590497

Bond, L., & Craps, S. (2020). *Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Feldman Kołodziejuk, E. (2020). Mothers, daughters, sisters: The intergenerational transmission of womanhood in Margaret Atwood's *The handmaid's tale* and *The testaments*. *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries, 17*(1), 67-85. doi:10.4312/elope.17.1.67-85

Felman, S. (2002). *The juridical unconscious: Trials and traumas in the twentieth century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Freud, S., & Breuer, J. (1981). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Studies on hysteria* (Vol. 2). (J. Strachey, Ed., J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey, & A. Tyson, Trans.) London: The Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1895)

Gass, W. H. (1989). *Fiction and the figures of life*. Boston, MA: D.R. Godine. (Original work published 1970)

Gheorghiu, O. C., & Praisler, M. (2020). Rewriting politics, or the emerging fourth wave of feminism in Margaret Atwood's *The testaments*. *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries, 17*(1), 87-96. doi:10.4312/elope.17.1.87-96

Harris, C. B. (1976). Time, uncertainty, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: A reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five. The Centennial Review, 20*(3), 228–243. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23738361

Hayhoe, R. (2000). Redeeming modernity. *Comparative Education Review, 44*(4), 423-439. doi:10.1086/447628

Hickman, L. A. (2007). *Pragmatism as post-postmodernism: Lessons from John Dewey*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Hutcheon, L. (2002). Postmodern afterthoughts. *Wascana Review of Contemporary Poetry and Short Fiction, 37*(1), 5-12. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1807/9479

Kavadlo, J. (2012). With us or against us: Chuck Palahniuk's 9/11 (*Fight club, Survivor*). In C. Kuhn & L. Rubin (Eds.), *Reading Chuck Palahniuk: American monsters and literary mayhem* (pp. 103-115). New York, NY: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869529

Kunze, P. C., & Tally, R. T., Jr. (2012). Editors' introduction: Vonnegut's sense of humor. *Studies in American Humor, 26*, 7-11. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/23823826

Lyotard, J. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.), In *Theory and history of literature* (1st ed., Vol. 10). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Available from https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/the-postmodern-condition (Original work published 1979)

Mendieta, E. (2005). Surviving American culture: On Chuck Palahniuk. *Philosophy and Literature, 29*(2), 394-408. doi:10.1353/phl.2005.0029

Mustazza, L. (Ed.). (2010). *Critical insights: Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut*. Hackensack, NJ: Salem Press.

Nietzsche, F. W. (1974). *The gay science: With a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of song*. (W. Kaufmann, Trans.) New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1882)

Palahniuk, C. (2000). *Survivor: A novel*. New York, NY: Anchor Books. (Original work published 1999)

Scholes, R. (1970). Metafiction. *The Iowa Review, 1*(4), 100-115. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20157652

Schönfelder, C. (2013). *Wounds and words: Childhood and family trauma in romantic and postmodern fiction*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Simmons, D., & Allen, N. (2009/2012). Reading Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* and *Haunted* as a critique of 'the culture industry'. In C. Kuhn & L. Rubin (Eds.), *Reading Chuck Palahniuk: American monsters and literary mayhem* (pp. 116-125). New York, NY: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869529

Van Dam, D., & Polak, S. (2021). Owning Gilead: Franchising feminism through Margaret Atwood's *The handmaid's tale* and *The testaments*. *European Journal of English Studies, 25*(2), 172-189. doi:10.1080/13825577.2021.1950362

Vonnegut, K. (2009). *Slaughterhouse-Five*. New York, New York: Random House Publishing Group. Retrieved from https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/184345/slaughterhouse-five-by-kurt-vonnegut/ (Original work published 1969)

Waugh, P. (2001). *Metafiction: The theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*. London: Methuen. (Original work published 1984)