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**Retracing Violence and Trauma in the 20th Century
American Novels: William Faulkner's *The Sound and
the Fury* (1929), and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell
to Arms* (1929)**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge, the present thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due reference has been made. This thesis contains no material that has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

Youcef Chehri

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Youcef Chehri', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dedication

To my parents, sisters, and my other half.

Acknowledgements

I may one day look back at this work and say that I devoted too many years to forging a thesis that took nearly half a decade to conduct, only to finally reach a point where I could say that I am satisfied with its outcome. Yet, I am reminded that this prolonged devotion and engagement was inseparable from the very reason that compelled me to immerse myself in a field so vast and profound, one that reshaped my understanding of a concept that has preoccupied scholars across psychology, cultural studies, and humanities at large, *trauma*. This concept remains persistently relevant and has firmly inserted itself in the common parlance of our age.

A significant portion of my scholarly interest has been deeply connected to the compelling characteristics, mechanisms, mysteries, and lore surrounding memory. Memory gradually became central to the emergence of many premature ideas that I carried with me during my Master's degree preparation at the University of Mostaganem, and which were further refined and deepened during my training as a doctoral student at the University of Mascara. This intellectual trajectory allowed me to merge memory and narrative, creating a critical spark that shaped my objective to retrace trauma, while also leading me to realise that any attempt to grasp such a concept must begin with the collective before subjecting individual experiences to close scrutiny.

Therefore, this work would not have been possible without the support and guidance of a number of remarkable individuals who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the realisation of this thesis. First and foremost, I am profoundly indebted to my former supervisor, Dr. Lila Messaoudi, whose intellectual rigour, patience, and invaluable guidance during the early stages of my research laid the foundation for my research trajectory. Her insights and encouragement played a crucial role in shaping my critical thinking.

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Finally, I extend my thanks to all my friends, colleagues, and fellow researchers. Many thanks to the board of the examiners for taking the time to read my work and reflect on it, their interest in this project fills me with great honour. I am grateful for the sense of community that was paramount in the many moments of doubt and hardship. This thesis is as much a product of intellectual inquiry as it is of collective support.

Abstract

The human psyche wades in the sea of trauma with a drowning body by dint of cultural, historical, political and economic grounds. The former enlarges the psychological wound making it fester into violent and/or disturbed identities. It is well-established that the notion of trauma has confronted us not only as a mere pathology, but also as a mystery with regards to the psyche's relation to reality. This study aims at finding a link between violence and trauma, for that it chronologically investigates its effects on identity in reference to modernist postbellum American works via; William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Each in their own right helped weave a comprehensible and overarching representation of sundry types of violence and trauma. Therefore, through these designated works, and the review of the literature on the notions of violence, trauma, and identity, this research attempts to explore the history of trauma, modern interpretation of the different types of violence, and elucidates the radical change in modern life with its long-term impact on the identity of modern society. Grounded in analyses of power and culture, this study employs Slavoj Žižek's tripartite model of violence to scrutinise the chasm between subjective outbursts and the systemic, "objective" forces that sustain social oppression and war. The findings reveal that while violence and trauma fracture the self, they also operate as generative forces. Rather than restoring identity to pre-traumatic state, trauma reshapes it through an ethical labour of memory, resulting in a model of post-traumatic persistence grounded in endurance, responsibility, and bearing witness to historical rupture.

Keywords: Trauma, violence, identity, power, post-traumatic persistence, modernism.

Résumé

La psyché humaine évolue dans une mer de traumatismes, tel un corps en train de se noyer sous l'effet de facteurs culturels, historiques, politiques et économiques. Ces derniers élargissent la blessure psychologique et la transforment en identités violentes et/ou perturbées. Il est désormais admis que le traumatisme ne se présente pas uniquement comme une pathologie, mais aussi comme une énigme épistémologique concernant le rapport de la psyché à la réalité. Cette étude vise à établir un lien entre la violence et le traumatisme en examinant chronologiquement leurs effets sur l'identité à travers des œuvres américaines modernistes de l'après-guerre, à savoir *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) de William Faulkner et *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) d'Ernest Hemingway. Chacune de ces œuvres contribue, à sa manière, à une représentation globale et cohérente des diverses formes de violence et de traumatisme. À partir de ces textes et d'une revue de la littérature consacrée aux notions de violence, de traumatisme et d'identité, cette recherche s'attache à retracer l'histoire du traumatisme, à proposer une interprétation moderne des différents types de violence, et à mettre en lumière les transformations radicales de la vie moderne ainsi que leurs effets durables sur l'identité de la société contemporaine. Ancrée dans une analyse des rapports de pouvoir et de culture, l'étude mobilise le modèle tripartite de la violence de Slavoj Žižek afin d'examiner l'écart entre les manifestations subjectives de la violence et les forces systémiques « objectives » qui soutiennent l'oppression sociale et la guerre. Les résultats montrent que, si la violence et le traumatisme fragmentent le soi, ils fonctionnent également comme des forces génératrices. L'identité n'est donc pas restaurée à un état pré-traumatique, mais reconfigurée à travers un travail éthique de la mémoire, donnant lieu à un modèle de persistance post-traumatique fondé sur l'endurance, la responsabilité et le témoignage d'une histoire brisée.

المُلخَص

تخوض النفس الإنسانية غمار الصدمة وكأنه جسد غارق في بحرٍ تشكّله العوامل الثقافية والتاريخية والسياسية والاقتصادية، إذ تعمل هذه الأخيرة على توسيع الجرح النفسي وتحويله إلى هويات مضطربة و عنيفة. ولم يعد مفهوم الصدمة يُقارب بوصفه مجرد حالة مرضية، بل كإشكالية معرفية تتعلق بعلاقة النفس بالواقع. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن العلاقة بين العنف والصدمة، وذلك من خلال تتبع تأثيراتهما على الهوية بصورة زمنية في إطار الأدب الأمريكي الحداثي ما بعد الحرب، بالاستناد إلى روايتي ويليام فوكنر *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) وإرنست همنغواي *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)، حيث تسهم كل منهما، بطريقتها الخاصة، في تقديم تمثيل شامل لمختلف أشكال العنف والصدمة. وانطلاقاً من هذين العملين، ومن مراجعة الأدبيات المتعلقة بمفاهيم العنف والصدمة والهوية، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تاريخ الصدمة، وتقديم قراءة حديثة لأنماط العنف المختلفة، وتوضيح التحولات الجذرية في الحياة الحديثة وانعكاساتها بعيدة المدى على هوية المجتمع الحديث. واستناداً إلى تحليلات السلطة والثقافة، تعتمد الدراسة نموذج سلافوي جيжек الثلاثي للعنف لفحص الفجوة بين الانفجارات الذاتية للعنف والقوى البنيوية «الموضوعية» التي تدعم القمع الاجتماعي والحرب. وتخلص النتائج إلى أن العنف والصدمة، رغم تفكيكهما للذات، يعملان في الوقت نفسه بوصفهما قوى مولّدة. فبدل استعادة الهوية إلى حالتها ما قبل الصدمة، يعاد تشكيلها عبر جهدٍ أخلاقي للذاكرة، بما يفضي إلى نموذج للاستمرار ما بعد الصدمة، قائم على التحمل، والمسؤولية، والشهادة على التاريخ المكسور.

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List of Abbreviations

APA. *American Psychiatric Association*

DSM. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder*

EU. *European Union*

OED. *Oxford English Dictionary*

PTSD. *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*

WHO. *World Health Organization*

General Introduction

General Introduction

That's like saying the carpenter is obsessed with his hammer. Violence is simply one of the carpenter's tools. The writer can no more build with one tool than the carpenter can.

—William Faulkner, “Interviews” (1956) in response to allegedly being “obsessed with violence”

Traumatic memory... is wordless and static.

—Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (1992)

One significant characteristic of the human condition is the constant struggle to cope with life and its series of traumatic events. Some may claim that human existence is one great unlimited tragedy where humans are the thespians who are bound to suffer under the horrid circumstances of existence at play. The French social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss observes that human existence is cursed by a tragic desire to escape the trauma of our ‘autochthonous origins’, namely, the desire ‘to buck our finitude’ and to deny death. Therefore, humans’ experience collide with atrocities, violent events, and calamities that later resurface at the level of the human psyche in a form of a response, creating by that an internal injury known as *trauma*. Therefore, traumatic reactions are indicators of the circumstances faced by people which are often human made.

Etymologically speaking, trauma is the Greek word for ‘wound’ which used to describe physical injuries. Nowadays, the term is more likely to be used to refer to emotional wounds. In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or a group of events that are not fully grasped as they occur but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. As was opined by Cathy

Caruth, who explains this belatedness, the notion of trauma usually confronts us as a mere pathology, but in fact, it goes beyond this limited description as it constitutes an enigma when it comes to the psyche's relation to reality. Since it is generated and provoked by violent events, human's response to them is to banish them from consciousness. For instance, the experience of a soldier faced with massive deaths, who suffers this atrocious and traumatic sight in a numbed state, relives it later on in repeated nightmares. However, trauma remains unavailable to human consciousness. For that, Freud used the German word *Nachträglichkeit*, to explain the state or condition of being after the event or having hindsight, an après-coup, and an afterwardsness in the response to trauma which may appear in the form of delayed mental images as a result of violence.

In the guise of the ramification of the increasing occurrence of war experiences and other catastrophic responses during the twentieth century, and that being a part of modernity, physicians and psychiatrists in the late 19th and beginning of the 20th century began to reshape and refine their perception of physical and mental experience including most recently the responses to a wide variety of other experiences, such as rape, child abuse, auto and industrial accidents that are now often understood in terms of the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, against oneself, another person, or a group or community resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, and deprivation. Thus, violence is regarded as an international health issue for the damage it causes. Victims of violent events bury those horrible events as a reaction to psychological distress. The conflict between the will to deny horrific events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner. Therefore, high concern about human psychology was raised in different disciplines such as sociology, literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis.

With all the violence that was taking place in the world, the 20th century is described as an age of massacre. For that, according to Anthony Sampson World War I was a transformative period in the most negative way possible, presumably alluding to the psychological effects on human identity and the reception of change after the fact. This dark side of the 20th century is essential to grasp the shortcomings of modernity, human behaviour and events that resulted as a consequence of shared shellshock (78). Therefore, Sampson recognises that such a striking transformation was apparent in warfare. What makes war and violence a part of modernity, one might ask, is the profound disillusionment of modern man. After a radical change in many fields, modern society found itself grappling with new ideas, systems, and social structures. While it once was built on religion and morality, modern society drifted and veered away from moral and religious dictations. The latter was firmly articulated in Nietzsche's preface to *The Will to Power* (1888). Nietzsche expressed great concern with the condition of Europe where he prophesied a catastrophe that was going to befall Europe and eventually, the world. It is what he termed as 'the advent of nihilism', a future of meaninglessness. Urging by that, psychoanalysis of this shared cognitive response, a response that banishes those experiences from consciousness, and which inevitably calls for a re-evaluation of violence and its different natures.

Due to cultural, historical, political and economic grounds, human identity was moulded into many forms that evidently reflect the ramifications of the different stations of human history in relation to Trauma. With that being said, this research will examine the reasons that enlarge this psychological wound making it fester into violent and/or disturbing identities. For that, it is well-established that the notion of trauma has confronted human beings not only as a mere pathology but also as a mystery with regard to the psyche's relation to reality. For instance, the modernist period in American literature emerged from a crucible of historical, social, and psychological upheaval. The early twentieth century, marked by rapid industrialization, the

collapse of traditional epistemologies, and, most profoundly, the unprecedented scale of global conflict in the First World War, generated a crisis of experience that overwhelmed existing literary forms. The literature of this era, characterized by formal experimentation, narrative fragmentation, and an intense focus on subjectivity, was fundamentally a literature of response. It was born of an understanding that the classical novelistic language, rooted in causality and cohesive narrative, could no longer adequately account for the new modes of psychic injury and social rupture being described.

In line with this view, an emphasis was placed on two American writers who through their texts channelled a literature of response, and a literature that epitomises trauma in narrative and structure. In order to examine the poetics, the politics, and the psychologies of trauma as well as violence and their effect on the construction of identity, a number of indispensable questions are raised in this study:

- How does the history of trauma reveal the inconsistencies in trauma theory?
- In what ways does American Modernist fiction transform the unspeakability of traumatic violence into a structural principle of narrative form, and how do these formal ruptures facilitate the articulation of a post-traumatic identity?
- How does violence function as a persistent, atmospheric force rather than a singular event, and how does "spectral" violence shape the characters' psychological and social realities?
- How do stylistic techniques such as silence and temporal dislocation serve as direct somatic responses to injury, and what do they reveal about the limits of narrative witness in the face of catastrophe?

This thesis investigates how two pivotal figures of American Modernism, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, grappled with the invisible scar of their era, trauma. One

could propound that each work will help retrace violence and trauma, and discover the idiosyncrasies particular to each work during the twentieth century. Both were published during the same year, however, each book constitutes a different setting with particular themes and language that describes it. William Faulkner's *The Sound and Fury* is a book that depicts the gradual disintegration of the aristocratic Compson family in four fractured and fragmented narratives that detail the destruction and downfall of the Compsons from four different points of view. The story is told through four contrasting narrative styles which are typically referred to as sections across an 18 year time period beginning in June 2nd 1910 and ending on Easter weekend April 6th, 7th and 8th 1928. At the centre of each of these sections is a different narrative consciousness. The first three section are told from the perspective of the three Compson brothers, while the final section is told from the perspective of what is best described as Faulkner. To give more context, *The Sound and the Fury* was written and set in the postbellum American South in the period after Reconstruction era (1867-77). It was a watershed period as the country, namely the South, was entering into a transformative period in terms of values and politics as it was considered to be a redefining moment in American history in the absence of slavery. However, this transformation did not move smoothly as certain Southern old-landed families refused to participate in this process. Instead, they clung to their traditions and values represented in the notions of honour, nationalism, purity, and virginity, which the Compson family is a perfect example of this group of traditionalists. Therefore, *The Sound and the Fury* documents the decline of these families. The Compsons, for Faulkner, are direct descendants of the planter-aristocrats.

Faulkner employs a number of narrative techniques, including unreliable narrators, interior monologues, stream of consciousness and unconventional syntax, which eminently reflect the modernist creative and innovative spirit, as well as the psychology behind using these new techniques. Based on Ezra Pound's dictum to 'make it new', modernist writers harnessed

the apprehension and angst resulting from the radical change that materialised and befell the twentieth century to their advantage. *The Sound and the Fury* is a suitable example for how the new form of most modernist novels came about to be distinctive in their writing structure and language. Faulkner's conception of time, for instance, is particularly expressed in a nonlinear manner. The latter caused a lack of unanimity among scholars about the influences that played a role in Faulkner's conception of time in his novels, particularly the novel at hand. Some scholars link it to the theory of duration formulated by French philosopher Henri Bergson. There were a number of Modernist writers who were influenced by Bergson including Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot. Generally speaking, it is evident that most Modernist writers tend to showcase their influences in their writings whether as intertextuality, biblical allusions, philosophy or symbolism. The title of Faulkner's novel expresses Faulkner's concern with time which he takes its name from a soliloquy given by the titular character of William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (1623). In the play, Macbeth reflects on time and the meaninglessness of life. In the fifth act, when the usurper receives the news that his wife has killed herself:

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time.
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (101)

What is particular about this stanza in relation to the novel of *The Sound and the Fury* is that *Macbeth*'s words echo throughout the novel, especially, in Faulkner's characters of the Compson family. Michael Gorra reflects on this echoing and close relation in the preface of her Norton Critical Edition of *The Sound and the Fury*, she states that the narrator of the second part in the novel, Quentin Compson, sees himself as "a shadow caught by the pretty creep of time; his brother Jason, in the novel's third section, stands as the loud voice of anger itself." (viii). Gorra draws another correlation through the character of Benjy, who is one of the Compsons' brothers, and is a man who is not able to speak and cannot distinguish past from present. For Gorra, he represents the "idiot" of Shakespeare's lines, for the fact that he is hard to understand as a narrator because his speech seems to signify nothing.

On the other hand, Ernest Hemingway, in his war novel *A Farewell to Arms* depicts the existential disillusionment of the Lost Generation, this novel in particular is remarkable for its autobiographical element in that it has been praised for its realistic unromanticised depiction of war. Its realism has often been attributed to Hemingway's personal experience in wartime service. Similarly to the protagonist Henry, during World War I, Hemingway worked as an ambulance driver for the American Red Cross. And like Henry, he served on the Italian front and suffered a severe injury on the Austro-Italian front. Although Hemingway spent less time and had a more limited role in World War I than his protagonist, the resemblance between his experience and Henry's is nonetheless striking. Using a simple writing style and plain language, Hemingway tended to omit inessential adjectives and adverbs, rendering the violence of the Italian front in sparing prose with this he was able to reach a sort of immediacy which adds a more realistic depiction of actions as they unfold in the story. As it was published during the period between World War I and World War II, a time when war novels were very popular in the United States and around the world., Hemingway's characters are disillusioned with the

war. With that, Hemingway set the precedent for future war novelists Evelyn Waugh, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and others whose work expresses a cynical attitude toward war and violence.

By focusing on Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), this study argues that their formal innovations, the poetics of silence, the fractured time-schemes, and the multiplicity of narrative perspectives, are not merely stylistic markers of Modernism, but are the structural manifestations of traumatic violence. Critically, this research traces a trajectory in their work that moves beyond the representation of fragmentation and destruction, revealing a sustained ethical impulse towards the reconstruction of identity through the persistent labour of memory.

The body of scholarship on trauma theory, developed extensively by Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Shoshana Felman, provides the essential framework for this inquiry. Trauma is understood not merely as a pathological symptom, but as an experience that resists full symbolization, haunting the subject through repetition and temporal dislocation. However, the existing critical conversation often treats trauma as distinct from the systemic or historical forces that generate it. This thesis addresses a critical lacuna by emphasizing the necessary entanglement of trauma and violence. Violence is not confined to the spectacle of the catastrophic event (war, death) but persists as a spectral, systemic structure, the "dark matter" that underpins social and psychological reality by theoretically emphasising Slavoj Žižek's typology of violence from his book *Violence* (2008).

The key contribution of this study lies in connecting the historiographical and theoretical genealogies of trauma and violence to the specific aesthetic decisions of Hemingway and Faulkner. We contend that the modernist crisis of language is inextricably tied to the ethical crisis imposed by violence. If violence is the act that shatters meaning and coherence, then the

resultant trauma is the enduring condition that demands a new, fragmented, and ethically attuned narrative form. The thesis shifts the focus from what the authors wrote about, such as war, family decay, to how their modernist forms function as a medium for both enacting and attempting to work through the enduring effects of catastrophic violence.

The central argument of this thesis is twofold, American Modernist fiction, particularly in the works of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, transforms the unspeakability of traumatic violence into a structural principle of narrative fragmentation and temporal break; however, these formal ruptures ultimately function as the necessary conditions for articulating a post-traumatic, ethical identity defined not by recovery or closure, but by the ongoing, persistence of memory and the responsibility of narrative witness.

This argument challenges interpretations that view Hemingway's sparseness or Faulkner's complexity merely as expressions of nihilism or total collapse. Instead, it positions their structural radicalism as an ethical intervention. By refusing the traditional comforting structures of linear narrative and unified subjectivity, they compel the reader and the character into the "working through" of trauma, transforming narrative fragmentation from a sign of destruction into a potential site of reconstruction.

Therefore, it is rather necessary that this study is conducted using a multidisciplinary approach which facilitates explaining as well as grasping different theoretical concepts to delineate the often convoluted jargon and history of trauma. The focus in this study is placed on historical facts, psychoanalytical, and linguistic scholarships as to cover the complex nature between violent events and trauma survivors, psychoanalysis and trauma, text and psychological wound. The task of covering such a heap of erudition and complex concepts presents itself as knotty and intricate, but at the same time imperative to the understanding of

the import carried in the underexplored dialogues of research in this area of study. Such task, therefore, demands a clear map to further explore trauma and violence in this proposed context.

The thesis is organized into four thematic interconnected chapters that move from the theoretical foundation to detailed textual analysis and culminating in an argument for ethical and narrative persistence. *Chapter One: The Wound and its Dimensions* establishes the theoretical bedrock of the study through a historiographical survey of trauma. It traces the concept's evolution from the physical injury of "railway spine" in the modern medical discourse to the psychological and psychoanalytic models of Charcot, Janet, and Freud, and finally to its assimilation into literary and cultural studies. Ultimately, this chapter argues that trauma is a historically and culturally constructed concept, setting the stage for its interpretation in the specific context of American Modernism.

For the richness of the topic and as to move swiftly with a confident array of theoretical concepts that challenge the hackneyed understanding of trauma and violence, *Chapter Two: The Spectral Form of the Wound: What Came First, Trauma or Violence?* delves into the intricate relationship between trauma and violence. In order to do that, it moves beyond a simple definition of violence as an event, exploring its systemic, political, and philosophical implications. Drawing on critical models (such as Žižek's tripartite framework), the chapter argues that traumatic violence is enacted in the *form* of modernist texts, creating a spectral presence where the wound precedes and persists beyond its immediate cause. It lays the groundwork for analysing how formal rupture itself becomes a response to violence.

In the quest to provide a more tangible theoretical and analytical connection, *Chapter Three: Retracing Trauma and Violence in Hemingway and Faulkner* performs the close textual analysis of the two primary texts, focusing on the moment of disintegration. This chapter also examines the specific techniques, Hemingway's poetics of silence and the crisis of witnessing

in *A Farewell to Arms*, and Faulkner's temporal dislocation and polyphonic fragmentation in *The Sound and the Fury*, that articulate the unspeakability and structural repetition of trauma. It demonstrates how the subject is fractured under the weight of historical and personal violence.

Finally, *Chapter Four: Reconstructing Identity Amid Trauma and Violence* shifts the focus from destruction to *reconstruction*. Building upon the formal ruptures identified in Chapter Three, this chapter argues that the fragmentation of the self paradoxically creates the conditions for a new, ethically engaged identity. It explores how the persistence of memory, the act of narrative endurance, and the confrontation with vulnerability (as seen in Frederic Henry's survival and the Compson siblings' recollections) constitute an ethical labour. This chapter ultimately redefines identity in these novels as an active process of "becoming" that affirms continuity in the face of collapse.

By structuring the analysis in this manner, the present thesis seeks to offer a corrective to trauma-centric readings that sometimes overlook the powerful ethical and restorative dimensions of these modernist texts. Hemingway and Faulkner, writing from the heart of historical rupture, offer more than a diagnosis of fragmentation; they offer a complex meditation on survival. Their work insists that the possibility of meaning is not destroyed by violence, but is painstakingly, continually, and ethically remade in the act of telling, silencing, and most importantly, *remembering*.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WOUND AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Chapter One: The Wound and its Dimensions

I.1. Introduction

This chapter offers a historiographical survey of trauma, tracing its dual origins in medical discourse and moral sensibilities, and examining how these origins have informed subsequent approaches to psychological injury, cultural memory, and narrative representation. The first part places trauma within the context of modernity and the Industrial Revolution, highlighting how railway accidents and the ensuing debates on “railway spine” inaugurated new forms of medical inquiry into nervous shock. The second part follows the shift from bodily to psychological models, considering the contributions of Charcot, Janet, and Freud, whose theorisation of hysteria, dissociation, and repetition compulsion laid the foundation for psychoanalytic understandings of trauma. The third section addresses the integration of trauma into cultural and literary studies, focusing on the works of Caruth, LaCapra, Felman, and others who framed trauma as both an epistemological and an ethical problem, emphasising testimony, representation, and the crisis of narrativisation. By retracing these trajectories, the chapter establishes the theoretical framework required for the subsequent discussion of trauma’s relation to violence in literature and culture.

I.2. A Historiography on Trauma

The study of trauma has evolved across psychoanalysis, literary theory, and historiography. Beginning with Freud’s model of belated psychic injury, trauma theory was later expanded by poststructuralist thinkers like Cathy Caruth, who emphasised the crisis of representation. Scholars such as Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman explored trauma through testimony and witnessing. While Dominick LaCapra introduced a historiographical distinction between *acting out* and *working through* trauma, more recent works by Michelle Balaev, Roger Luckhurst, Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen, and others have examined how trauma

and memory is inscribed into narrative form, exposing its structural impact on literature, culture and the flaws in trauma theory. The question of trauma remains a question of coping and working through, but to work through this concept a retracing of its roots is paramount to understand the wound without scabs, in its rawest form.

I.2.1. The Genealogy of Psychological Trauma

Ever since the inception of the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the 1980 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* (DSM) by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the concept of psychological trauma has exploded drastically to engender its discipline and subdisciplines. According to Charles Figley, originally, traumatology was considered to be the study of trauma and its physical effects, as well as the methods to modify them (xxiii). Therefore, its primary focus was on the diagnosis and treatment of severe and acute physical injuries sustained by individuals; such as from a gunshot, stabbing, or a car accident, etc. which require immediate medical attention. Once a circumscribed speciality within emergency medicine, the field of trauma now extends to psychology and many other disciplines. Therefore, it is worth noting that the interpretation and treatment of trauma from emergency medicine, then to trauma psychology, resulted in a palpable shift that extensively covered the two sides of trauma that were once only limited to physical injuries.

With the induction of the newly adopted definition of the term, trauma began to represent the remnants left on the mind after exposing oneself to tragedies, and catastrophic painful events. The latter marked a movement from physical injury to psychological injury. In other words, from the seen to the unseen (Valent xxvii). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the physical wound may heal, however; the psychological wound, which is often a residue of the ramifications of physical injuries, might be indelible and require a special kind of care (Caruth 3). For that, since the

nineteenth century, trauma has converted to representing the lasting psychological effects on individuals caused by events that bring about extreme distress to its victims.

Nicole Sütterlin opined that trauma has indeed become “a key interpretive category of our time” (11). Like Sütterlin, Roger Kurtz asserts, “we live in an age of trauma” (1), Ruth Leys, who also shares the same sentiment, views the concept of trauma as “one of the signal concepts of our time” (10). One can deduct that such statements label this age as “traumatic”, and/or an age that is obsessed with the term and the concept of trauma overall (Learner and Micale 1). In their book *The Myth of Normal* (2022), Gabor Maté & Daniel Maté reflect on this obsession by stating that health and wellness have become a fixation in this modern age (1-2). The latter may suggest that there is an aberration that must be addressed. As pop-psychology deepens its foot in this field of the human psyche, it is rather inevitable that trauma became a conspicuous term in people’s jargon.

In reflection to the definition of trauma as being a psychological response to overwhelming events, there are many buzzwords that appeared around the term such as; “systemic trauma”, “trauma culture”, and “post-traumatic era”. All in their respect represent this age that is rapidly processing trauma as a normal psychological defect. However, this normalisation have helped to some extent describe, so to speak, the state of this age. Nevertheless, it also prompts an urgency to understand the many angles the term consists of. Moreover, this new interest in trauma, whether productive or counterproductive at times, has smoothened its sharp edges and moved us closer to understand the depth, the import of the term, and its various conditions.

It is salient to recognise that behind any social phenomenon an idea or a theory that explains it, or attempts at least to do that. The nature of the history of many social phenomena is often showcased through a distinctive climate where it highlights a particular event or group of events that characterise them. Trauma, if considered a social phenomenon in this case, has cemented a feeling of loss and fear when it was first recognised as a response to traumatic events. Therefore, it is critical to trace back the events behind such overarching feelings if one wants to move closer to

answering those inquiries. So as to look back at the events that started it all, we are obliged to peruse the dual genealogy of trauma. The first genealogy concerns the history of medicine, and the other the history of moral values and sensibilities (Davis and Meretoja 3). Therefore, recognising the duality in the history of trauma will facilitate digesting the depth it possesses as well as the evolution that the term has undergone to reach its present state.

The existence of trauma as a concept can arguably be traced back to early Greek tragedies and epic poetry (Figley 455). From Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*, and the seminal work of Aristotle, *The Poetics*, we cannot help but observe a primitive concern towards the human psyche as we learn about catharsis as a purgative effect and as an emotional release experienced by the spectators after watching a tragedy (Figley, 445; Kearney 52). This early interest, however, did not give ripeness to the term just yet; it only underscored a concern with the human condition that we might coin as *proto-trauma* literature. It was not until an ingenious historical period took place. This significant period is known for its groundbreaking inventions and life-altering events that shaped and reshaped the modern world; whose effects are still as tangible as they once were. The Industrial Revolution marked a period of industrial upheaval, it was a transition from agrarian, handicraft economy to one that was shifting to industry and machine-dominated manufacture in a radical manner. Although the start and end of this shift is widely debated by scholars, the period approximately spanned from 1760 to 1840 ("Industrial Revolution.").

The term "Industrial Revolution" was first popularised by the English economic historian Arnold Toynbee (1852–83) to describe Britain's economic development. The birthplace of this revolution, as David McDowall describes in his title, was in its "years of self-confidence" during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Throughout the Victorian era, revolutionary inventions were emerging and marking by that a watershed in the history of Britain. Those innovative inventions contributed immensely in the advancement of life in many sectors in the British society

thanks to different breakthroughs and technologies particularly in agriculture, transportation, and various important industries such as, the textile industry, etc. These technological alterations fundamentally transformed society and introduced unprecedented novel ways of working and living. This process began in the 18th century then it spread to other parts of the world. McDowall further illustrates that “Britain had become powerful because it had enough coal, iron and steel for its own enormous industry!” (138). Such advancement set the tone for a future that became radically changed by innovation in Britain and beyond.

The Victorian epoch was cluttered with wonders that tied the globe together in one great metropolis nothing like any generation before it owing to the telegraph, the telephone, and the railway (Drinka 60). This prosperous state, however, came about with a price. Along with its many advancement, the Industrial Revolution had several side effects that affected various aspects in society. A suitable example of its shortcomings is the Railway system, which, surprisingly, defined the age and the future of a society that crashed with technology, and was radically derailed from the tracks of traditional life resulting in unforeseeable physical and psychological damages.

Ralph Harrington explores the ramification of railway accidents where he states, “just as the Victorian railway was a vast, dramatic, and highly visible expression of technology triumphant, so the railway accident constituted a uniquely sensational and public demonstration of the price which that triumph demanded violence, destruction, terror, and trauma.” (31). Considered a symbol of modernity and technological development in the nineteenth century, the railway is intrinsically linked to the history of trauma for the shocking effect left on the Victorian public who was constantly bombarded with sudden news of railroad collisions which created fright among the public who was completely vulnerable in face of rapidly moving inventions (Sütterlin 12). It can be argued that the railway accidents symbolise the dystopian side of technology during a golden age that seemed utopian at first.

I.2.2. Aftermath of the Railway Accidents and its Relation to Trauma

The aftermath of the railway accidents is what later defined and brought the term “trauma” to light (Luckhurst 21). It is well recorded that the first systematic medical explorations of what would later be termed “trauma” began arguably in or between the 1860s and 1870s, when a mysterious condition called “railway spine” was first introduced by some medical practitioners who ascribed it to victims of railroad accidents consequently formulating the notion of “nervous shock” (Learner and Micale 10). By the 1870s, one of those medical practitioners, the Parisian neuropsychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot, came across baffling cases in his wards. He observed that men and women who were on train trips developed symptoms similar to hysteria following a shock or a trauma, either psychological or physical, which Charcot referred to as “traumatic hysteria” (30). Many individuals, who were victims to railway accidents, demanded compensations for the crippling symptoms caused by the railways (Drinka 110). As a result, accidents in railways began to be perceived as a “modern” phenomenon because it typified the condition of the modern man in face of modernity that brought about advancement, as well as mayhem. Ralph Harrington and Williams elucidate this deep impact railways left on its victims. Harrington states:

It denied its victims any chance of controlling their own fate; it crystallized in a single traumatic event the helplessness of human beings in the hands of the technologies that they had created but seemed unable to control; it was a highly public event that erupted directly into the rhythms and routines of daily life; it was no respecter of class or status; it was arbitrary, sudden, inhuman, and violent. (36)

Evidently, new technologies of travel and communication created a detrimental type of living that brought forth harm to the nervous system and the mind. Rosalind Willimas in her work *Notes on the Underground* (1990) goes on even further to call out this phenomenon as a “democratization of disaster”, highlighting this strange, absurd and inevitable relationship between technological advancement and human sacrifice (64). Therefore, railway accidents came to represent a dialectical

relation of human progress and human destruction. For that, modernity became linked to pathologies of the body and the mind. Because many medical practitioners believed that the spine and the brain must have been injured after enduring those accidents calling it “spinal concussions” by John Erichsen, cases of the victims that were linked to railways, therefore, gained the nicknames of the “railway spine” and the “railway brain” (Sütterlin 12; Drinka 110).

In reference to those concepts that were being introduced in the medical field in the nineteenth century their diagnoses were closely referential to what is known now as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Post-traumatic symptoms were brought together for the first time giving a one single aetiology (Micale 127). This unitary diagnosis helped engender new studies on post-accident symptomology, thus, gradually, the emphasis shifted from the spine and brain to the mind being the site source of pathologies (Harrington, *The ‘Railway Spine’ Diagnosis and Victorian Responses to PTSD*, 11). Therefore, the term trauma was gradually taking form after several stations and interpretations by different scholars and researchers who showed a great interest in the somatic as well as the psychological side of the human beings.

From John Erichsen (1866) who linked railway spine syndrome to physical causes, specifically spinal concussion, to Herbert Page (1883) who contradicted this connection, objecting to the phrase concussion of the spine, where attributed it to emotional and neurological factors such as fright, fear and "nervous shock" instead (Figley 455; Lerner and Micale 10). Then to German neurologist, Hermann Oppenheim who introduced the term "traumatic neurosis" to describe cases where individuals appeared physically unharmed after a shock-like impact, but experienced motor and sensory issues like paralysis and convulsions (Figley 210). The latter marked the introduction of the Greek term for "wound" or "injury" into psychiatry, suggesting that profound life experiences could inflict neurological and psychological wounds akin to physical injuries. However, the mutation of trauma from body to mind was located in the roots of hysteria (Boukhalifa 22).

Jean-Martin Charcot classified traumatic neuroses under hysteria, a fashionable diagnosis at the time. While Charcot attributed hysteria to hereditary factors, he associated traumatic neurosis or "traumatic hysteria" with physical accidents. Over time, he increasingly emphasised the role of emotional factors or "nervous shock," a term he borrowed from Page, as causal factors (Charcot 30). Charcot's work contributed to the transition of trauma from being seen as a somatic disorder to a neurological and eventually a psychological condition, a process described as the "psychologization" of trauma. (Micale 123).

The discovery of the concept of trauma is accredited, therefore, to Charcot, whose influence gave rise to a key concept in psychological trauma when one of his students, Pierre Janet, who in his dissertation *L'automatisme psychologique* (1889), introduced an elaborate model of the psyche. Janet identified the mechanism of "dissociation¹" as the process by which the mind "splits off" an event that is so violent or shocking that it cannot be integrated, or synthesized into consciousness (Sütterlin 13). Dissociation became a key feature in trauma as a psychological ailment. Van der Kolk, Weisaeth and Van der Hart described it as "the core pathogenic process that gives rise to posttraumatic stress" (53). However, this contribution was undermined for the reason that new interpretations casted it under the shadow. Judith Herman relates this overlooking, or what she called "amnesia" (7), to the advent of the new discipline of psychoanalysis established by Janet's nemesis Sigmund Freud. The two were highly critical of each other despite the similarities. Thus, calling this discipline "new" is problematic, Janet writes:

A foreign physician, Dr S. Freud from Vienna, came to the Salpêtrière and was interested by these last studies. He ascertained the reality of the facts and

¹ Not to be confused with psychosis which is the difficulty to distinguish between reality and unreality. Dissociation involves an emotional detachment from reality. For further inquiries see: Dell, Paul F. "*The Multidimensional Inventory of Dissociation (MID): A Comprehensive Measure of Pathological Dissociation.*" *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 7, no. 2 (2006): (77–106). For Janet, dissociation is a reaction to stress in a person who has a mental functioning weakness that lead to hysteria. Therefore, trauma to Janet was not a response or a defence against dissociation, but rather a stressor that worsens the weakness and mental deficiency of hysteria.

published some new observations of the same kind. In those he mainly modified the terms I used: he called psychoanalysis what I had called psychological analysis, he named complex what I had named psychological system in order to designate the whole group of psychological phenomena and of movements, whether of the limbs or the viscera, which remain associated together and thus constitute the traumatic memory; he understood as a repression what I had ascribed to a narrowing of consciousness, and he gave the name of catharsis to what I had indicated as a psychological dissociation or moral disinfection. But above all he transformed a clinical observation and a therapeutic treatment with a definite and limited field of use into an enormous system of medical philosophy. (41)

This passage evidently describes a critical tension in the genealogy of trauma and other concepts. It suggests that Freud did not originate the study of psychological trauma, but rather expanded early clinical insights, particularly those associated with Janet. While Freud's renaming of concepts such as repression and psychoanalysis contributed to a more cohesive theoretical framework, Janet implies that this shift is a movement away from empirical, clinically grounded observations toward a more expansive and abstract system of thought. Essentially, it is evident that Janet's influence on Freud is highly discernible, namely, in his early work *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) with Joseph Breuer. Despite the dispute about the inauguration of psychoanalysis, the contribution of Janet in the foundation of the discipline of psychoanalysis cannot possibly be discredited.

After World War I, Freud revisited the concept of trauma from a very different perspective than his old one that emphasised that trauma as a primary aetiology of hysteria and argued that traumatic neuroses originated in sexual assault from childhood² (Clark 156). This time, due to the

² A hypothesis developed by Freud on the origins of hysteria in a paper entitled *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896) after writing a letter to his confidant Wilhelm Fliess informing him that he has revised his initial hypothesis in which he postulates that hysteria is conditioned by a sexual experience before puberty. Therefore, "hysteria is the consequence of a presexual *sexual shock*. Obsessional neurosis is the consequence of presexual *sexual pleasure* later transformed into guilt" (qtd. in Clark 156) which came to be known as "seduction theory" (in German: *Verführungstheorie*).

significant number of soldiers suffering from nonorganic nervous disorders as a result of war, known as "shell shock." Freud understood that these soldiers were not experiencing physical effects from exploding shells but rather extreme fear. In his explanation of "war neuroses" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud described this traumatic impact as a "breach in the psyche's protective barrier" (29). He argued that due to the overwhelming nature of the event, patients could not synthesise the experience into their psychological framework and were compelled to relive it through dreams following "a compulsion to repeat" (33).

Moreover, Freud's concept contributed to the understanding of PTSD symptoms in modern psychiatry. The idea of repetition compulsion manifested as intrusive memories. Freud's notion of a "talking cure" (Freud 5-6) that narrativised the traumatic experience, laid the foundation for contemporary trauma therapy. The latter emphasizes integrating Janet's concept of the dissociated memory into a personal narrative (Van der Kolk et al., 309). Moreover, this concept contributed in forming the basis for the relationship between trauma and narrative, and trauma and literature, as it began to be explored in literary trauma studies. Essentially, the interest in personal narrative in psychoanalysis gave rise what we know now as trauma theory.

I.3. Narrativization of Trauma: The Advent of Trauma Theory in Literary Studies

The striking shift from railway spine to trauma theory is owed to its psychologisation, and theorisation in psychoanalysis by Charcot then Freud and others. Trauma theory represents a new mode of thinking which promoted it to be a critical approach that enables new modes of reading and of listening. Geoffrey Hartman writes on the advent of trauma theory in literary studies where he posits, "a theory emerges focusing on the relationship of words and trauma and helping us to 'read the wound' with the aid of literature" (537). Scholars who dedicated their time to study trauma in cultural and literary contexts realised that to read the "wounds" you must refer to "words". i.e. language (Sütterlin 18). Therefore, as relative as it may appear as a notion, this interrelation between

wounds and words opened a space to dissect, in a more dialectic manner, trauma's presence in literature vis-à-vis culture and memory. To do that, deconstructionism was highly favoured in the quest for grasping the depth and the import of trauma in literary works, which in their turn, served as a compass and were harnessed as a tool to deconstruct the tapestry of trauma where it relatively underscores those existing nuances within individual and collective memory.

Inspired by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, a cohort of literary critics such as Paul De Man³, J. Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom, and Geoffrey Hartman⁴ from the University of Yale took a great interest in the notion of deconstructing language, i.e. "words", in relation to trauma, i.e. "wounds". Thus, a new school of thought called the Yale School of deconstruction was founded to cement a new awareness which according to Hartman was "ethical as well as clinical" (541) the latter suggested an urgency for change at the academic level where it was needed.

In a chapter within Roger Krutz's *Trauma and Literature* (2018) entitled *Deconstruction: Trauma Inscribed in Language*, Tom Toremans posits that the "deconstructionist theorization of trauma was firmly embedded at Yale University, where a number of the key foundational figures of trauma theory were based." (51). Within the same lines, Toremans speaks on the emergence of trauma theory in the 1990s referring to it as an "ethical resuscitation". Toremans makes reference to Susannah Radstone who elucidates the significance of trauma theory in helping the field of humanities move beyond the impasses and crises in knowledge posed by many theories. One of

³ A significant figure in literary theory and a dear friend of Derrida's, De Man was an important reference to many trauma theorists despite the controversy around his name. The de Manian influence, as Toremans proposes, was a stepping-stone to the foundation of the concept of trauma in literary studies (see Cathy Caruth's Introduction in *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) p.5; Colin Davis's *Trauma, Poststructuralism and Ethics* (2020, p. 38). His great interest in "Romantic aesthetic ideology and his incisive critique of traditional literary theory profoundly influenced the early articulation of trauma theory" (52)

⁴ In their famous anthology *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979), which served as a manifesto for this new thought, Hartman in his introduction contended that he does not see himself or Bloom as deconstructionists and that they have criticised it on many occasions (ix). Hartman was more "a reluctant fellow traveler" (Vermeulen 2). Part of this criticism is an attempt to distinguish themselves from Derrida and De Man's deconstruction models and from their fellow critics, because according to Hartman, he is more reliant on pathos in his writing style as a driving force for literary language. A common point of reference, one would argue, is their shared poststructuralist views. See Žižek, Slavoj. "A Plea for a Return to Différance (With a Minor Pro Domo Sua)." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 32, no. 2, Jan. 2006, pp. 226-49.

these theories is deconstruction (11). The ethical resuscitation or “turn” was highly needed in critical theory namely after De Man’s affair (LaCapra 199).

In 1987, now a full time professor at the university of Leuven in Belgium, Ortwin de Graef was writing his doctoral dissertation on De Man where he came across articles written by the young critic at the time when the Germans occupied Belgium between 1941 and 1942. In two newspapers, a French newspaper *Le Soir*, and a Flemish newspaper called *Het Vlaamsche Land*, who were known for publishing pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic articles, De Man’s writings as a 22 year old in those newspapers were sympathetic towards the German occupation (McQuillan 97; Ball 7; Menand 88-89). This discovery by de Graef shortly was shared with American scholars at Yale and friends who admired him. As a result, the De Man affair spurred a huge controversy in academia and was a shock to many of his colleagues (Davis, *Trauma, Poststructuralism, and Ethics* 37-38).

As a result, canonical texts of trauma studies showcased a noticeable ethical turn after the aforementioned discovery, such as; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s *Testimony Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Dominick LaCapra’s *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994), and Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Colin Davis propounded that what is particularly striking about those works is that they all contain a chapter devoted to Paul de Man, thus it is possible to argue that De Man affair was a defining feature of their intellectual stance⁵.

Another common point of convergence between those scholars in trauma studies, Davis asserts, is that they all refer to *history*, as seen in their subtitles, which indicates an ethical awareness and a common point of reference to the history of trauma. One of those points is the recurrent dialogues and discussions of the Holocaust (38-39). In *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (2004),

⁵ On the De Man controversy see: Paul de Man, *Wartime Journalism, 1939–1943*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil H. Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, rev. ed., translations ed. Avital Ronell and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

Roger Eaglestone remarks that philosophers, cultural thinkers and historians “are now considering the complex and contentious relationship between the Holocaust, colonialism and genocide” (Visser 277) and that in this process, “the Holocaust remains the centre of gravity” (Eaglestone 42, 65). Not to conflate all these works under one umbrella or undermine their scholarship; however, it is argued that this moral urgency appeared to be a shared element and a converging point in those texts in relation to trauma and cultural studies.

I.4. Blurring the Lines of Trauma Studies: Geoffery Hartman’s Effect (1995)

It is evident that the “new awareness”, which is referred to here by Hartman, is what came to defined trauma studies and its newfound concern with the recovery of historical referentiality. Therefore, it is substantial to cite Hartman’s seminal paper entitled *On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies* (1995) to further emphasise this new clinical mode of intellectual and moral regrouping. Hartman posits that with this new awareness, “there is more *listening*, more *hearing* of words within words, and a greater openness to *testimony*” (541). This openness is argued to be deconstructionist in nature, and is built upon a post-structuralist reading standpoint (Davis 38).

Perhaps the keyword in Hartman statement, one would suggest, is *testimony*. Testimony here, as Meg Jensen elucidates, refers to an eye-witness narrative (67), a literature that testifies for the legitimacy of the history of traumatic experiences and tragedies. Jensen draws a reference to the influence of Freud’s theories in psychiatry, namely, the component of healing through talking and venting, in which psychiatrists during The First World War encouraged soldiers to share testimonies and stories of what happened. As a way to desensitise them to the traumatic memory, soldiers were often asked to repeat those stories (66).

It is argued by trauma theorists that the eyewitness testimony bears the imperative that *we* must know, *we* must remember, and *we* must face the past and its implications “even as it states the impossibility of ever truly grasping the violations that the witness has undergone” (Wallen 262).

While many scholars, such as Hartman, thoroughly explored in their texts depictions of traumatic incidents in canonical literature, many of the aforementioned critics and leading theorists in trauma studies, through their unprecedented interest in history, were interested in reflecting on “the complex connections between testimony and history.” (Jensen 67). To do that, Caruth, LaCapra, Felman and Laub harnessed archival testimony and accessible narratives of trauma that offer survivors’ testimonies of the Holocaust.

The new knowledge produced by the works of the following theorists contributed in generating an understanding of the often elusive contexts of trauma and its effects on history, culture, but most importantly, memory. Cathy Caruth, for example, forges her work by devoting a great deal of her scholarship in understanding Freud and Lacan. She suggests that “the indirect referentiality of history is also, one would argue, at the core of Freud’s understanding of the political shape of Jewish culture, in its repeated confrontation with anti-Semitism” (19). Therefore, the past becomes a central element of scrutiny in trauma theory cementing by that the first wave in trauma studies.

I.4.1. Cathy Caruth and Other Voices in Trauma Studies

Once supervised by Hartman in her doctoral dissertation, and a student of de Man, Cathy Caruth presents a particularly ground-breaking model for its time which scrutinises trauma in literary studies, solidifying in her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) the foundation of trauma in literary and cultural studies. What is particularly fascinating about her work is its focus on illustrating trauma through literature and her dedication in understanding trauma beyond the common conception which is it being a mere pathology (Caruth 91), and that a catastrophic past is bound to repeat itself (1-2).

The latter is a statement that is strikingly reminiscent of the well-known dictum by Karl Marx from his essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) that of “history repeats

itself..." (398). Caruth uses Freud's work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922) to analyse his premise of what he terms as "traumatic neurosis" in a more comprehensible manner. Caruth in her introduction explains that the repetition of suffering or the catastrophic traumatic experience, according to Freud, is fateful and not a direct consequence of the individual's acts (1).

An Italian epic poem by Torquato Tasso entitled *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), which is translated in English to *The Liberation of Jerusalem (Or Jerusalem Delivered)*, was used by Freud to explain that the experience of a trauma repeats itself. The hero Tancred through his actions fatally wounds his beloved Clorinda in a duel to then, Tancred wounds Clorinda again, whose soul was imprisoned in a tree he slashed with his sword causing blood and a blameful voice let out by his beloved. In this dramatic scene, it can be observed that there is a compulsion for repetition of the act that should not be repeated. However, according to Caruth, this pattern, as explained by Freud, is explicably persistent, the experience of a trauma repeats itself against the survivor's will, unwittingly and unexpectedly (2). Such repetition, as seen in Tasso's epic poem, is a re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind. In other words, it is an unresolved past trauma.

Furthermore, in Chapter five from her book, Caruth emphasises traumatic repetition by delving in a seminal work by Freud entitled *Die Traumdeutung* or *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Freud introduces a dream of a father who was sleeping besides his sickbed child. After he died, the father, filled with exhaustion, decides to retire to an adjoining room where he left the door ajar so he could have a view of the room where his son's corpse lies surrounded by tall candles while an old watchman sat next to the body murmuring prayers. The father sleeps for few hours and he dreams of his son standing by his bed, crying reproachfully "Father, don't you see that I'm burning?" The father woke up and noticed a glaring light from his son's room; he hurried to inspect it and found that the old watcher was asleep, the sheets and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body were burned by one of the candles (Freud 256).

Caruth discusses the delayed response of the father to reality where she poses the question “why dream rather than wake up?” (94). In such case in which the dream is direct, the question is answered by Freud through referring to the theory of wish-fulfilment. By transforming the dead child into a living one, Freud suggests, the dream fulfils the father’s wish that his son be still alive. Therefore, despite the reality of the child’s burning, and for the sake of the fulfilment of the wish, the father prolonged his sleep. Freud concludes, “the dream was given precedence over waking reflection because it was able to show the child still living...if the father had waked first...he would have shortened the child’s life by this one moment” (256-257). As Caruth suggests in her implication of Freud’s interpretation that the acknowledgement of the death of the father’s child can perhaps appear only in the form of a fiction or a dream. Through this insight, Caruth highlights the relation of the psyche to reality. In this case, the dream delays the reality of death and reveals the desire that tries to overcome the reality through the fiction of a dream (95).

To borrow from Karl Marx once again, “history repeats itself”, he continues to say, “the first time as a tragedy, the second time as a farce” (398). In reflection to Tasso’s epic poem and the dream of the burning child, one can reiterate differently that trauma repeats itself, the first time as a tragedy, the second time as dreams and daydreams. Therefore, taking into consideration Freud’s premise of Dream theory and Caruth’s explanation of the repetition of series of painful events that victims are subjected by, seem to be both a traumatic response to the events endured by Tancred and the father. One is endured through repetition and other through the delaying of reality. In other words, trauma, generally, is not graspable until it returns later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena as a form of belated response (Caruth 91).

However, the concept of trauma introduced by Caruth faced its fair share of criticism in the twenty-first century for its limitations. Caruth claims in her interpretation of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) that “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we were implicated in each other’s traumas,” (24) which, according to Michelle Balaev, is

a universalist or transhistorical view on trauma. Balaev critiques what she terms as a universalist model of trauma, which posits that traumatic experience engenders similar psychological and narrative outcomes such as; identity fragmentation and dissociation, regardless of individual or cultural context. By citing the tendency to connect individuals and collective experiences, Balaev underscores how the transhistorical framework flattens the specificity of historical, cultural, and personal conditions (*Trends in Literary Trauma Theory* 152).

The inability to locate or identify the significance of a traumatic event is, therefore, caused by the latency or the dissociative break in time which makes the traumatic past unrepresented. Caruth contends that trauma is only identified in the way it is not known in the first instance then to later return to haunt the survivor (17). The latter makes the Caruthian understanding of trauma appear traditional on account of its depoliticization and universalisation of the traumatic experience which Marinella Rodi-Risberg calls “an event-based model” (118).

Ultimately, the conflation of historical and transhistorical trauma in Caruth model, says Rodi-Risberg, risks not only universalising psychic pain but also undermines the importance of specific history (111). This criticism highlights the problem within the traditional model of the first wave of trauma studies, which what Dominick LaCapra describes as a tension between historical trauma (such as the Holocaust) and structural trauma (such as a condition that produces anxiety) (82). A theoretical pluralism that pushes directly against the traditional Caruthian model is now developed in criticism. This vein of criticism includes works by Michelle Balaev, Ann Cvetkovich, Greg Forter, Amy Hungerford, and Naomi Mandel. Balaev leads the way for new wave in trauma studies as she explains the new model that opposes its predecessor where she states:

The pluralistic model of trauma challenges the unspeakable trope in seeking to understand not only the structural dimensions of trauma that often develop in terms of trauma’s dissociative effects on consciousness and memory, but also the cultural dimensions of trauma and the diversity of narrative expression. By moving away

from a position that centralizes pathological fragmentation, the pluralistic model suggests that traumatic experience uncovers new relationships between experience, language, and knowledge that detail the social significance of trauma. (366)

The pluralistic model looks at the limitations in the Freudian-Caruthian model critically to move from a centralised model to a more emphasised model on trauma's specificity according to the particular personal or historical events that indicate the versatility of psychoanalytic trauma theory. Having said that, our analyses and discussions in chapter three and four, both models will be taken into consideration to ensure an accurate application on the designated literary works.

I.5. Trauma Literature and the Representation of the Wound

The dimensions of trauma in this vast space of realities, past, present, and future demonstrate that its effects on individuals cannot be easily gauged unless they are closely analysed and put under thorough observation. As it has been already established, traumatic events that are experienced tangibly, significantly affect individuals' psyche, therefore, their memory and identity. The latter is a concept that spurs an important dialogue about the impact of trauma on victims of similar experiences. Furthermore, dialogues on trauma aim at understanding the ramifications of psychological wounds through their different responses by divulging their depth from multiple points of view.

Essentially, literature, as a form of art and human expression, offers an experimental ground to study narratives and metanarratives by zooming in and out into society and the human psyche in order to understand how people are affected by specific traumatic events (Davis and Meretoja 1). Cathy Caruth expresses the same thought as she ties literature with psychoanalysis in their shared interest in understanding traumatic experiences, she states:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not

knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. (3)

Whether in the form of fiction or nonfiction, trauma literature showcases a conscious awareness of the concept of trauma (Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* 1). As a result, it led to the creation of a new contemporary genre dedicated to understanding this psychological wound.

Laurie Vickroy, in her book *Reading Trauma Narratives; The Contemporary Novel and the Psychology of Oppression* (2015), contends that '[trauma literature] demonstrates knowledge of psychological processes and includes literary elements and figurative language reflecting the causes and consequences of traumatic reactions' (3). Thus, the knowledge that is harnessed in literary works that directly or indirectly explore the concept of trauma at large, whether depicted as an idea or through a literary element, nay as a motif, helps elucidate the causal nexus between the traumatic event and its response. Vickroy further illustrates within the same lines that writers of trauma literature endeavour to immerse readers in the characters' states of mind by harnessing different narratives. Those literary narratives coalesce gaps, uncertainties, dissociations, and the visceral details of how it is perceived living through traumatic experiences. Therefore, readers are exposed to scenarios of social and historical significance.

By emphasising historical or group traumas, authors investigate the origins of trauma from a cultural perspective in the contexts of racial, sexual, and class oppressions, etc (Vickroy 1). On the other hand, readers connect and draw a parallel with these given contexts relevant to their personal experiences and biases. However the reception may vary, the depiction of trauma often evokes a particular feeling revealed in the relationship between the reader and the text. Such exchange stimulates a need to vicariously live through the characters' experiences within the fictional or nonfictional traumatic world and context that are constructed by the author (Kearney, 51-52).

Perhaps a question that might arise when exploring trauma literature or trauma fiction is how is a wound put into words? Or one might even go further and question if fiction should represent trauma at all. According to Robert Eaglestone, this question is moot and is open to debate because of the different interpretations of trauma and the problem of reference (287).

Drawing from Paul de Man's philosophical notion that raises the question of how it is that language can represent anything, Eaglestone recognises the linguistic challenge in expressing or rather naming traumatic events. He contends that, "the representation of trauma is a kind of "limit case" of language, the representation of an event so overpowering that just naming it is already to be profoundly engaged with it" (288). Eaglestone illustrates his argument by giving the example of some heavy terms such as "genocide" and "sexual abuse". Thus, from this point of view, Eaglestone emphasises that our engagement with trauma and its aftermath as humans means that the questions that we mentioned are part of our ethical involvement with the world and others, and not a mere examination of the function of language.

Trauma in its structure in writing, more often than not, can be found in testimonies retold by people who have witness traumatic events. Eaglestone emphasises that in testimonies we are able to identify a range of generic characteristics. The characteristics include a wide range of techniques such as the movement of the story backwards and forward through narrative time. The latter can refer to linearity and none linearity of narrative. The use of dramatic irony, narrative frames which both clarify and also cover up the events depending on the context given by the author; different registers of writing taken from different genres. Those literary genres, according to Eaglestone, are "autobiographical, historical, memorial, novelistic", within these different genres, authors use textual interruption, a refusal of closure, and the use of epiphanies to reveal the meaning of crucial incidents (288). Nevertheless, fiction although different than testimony they are not separate parts, but rather part of the same realms for the fact that writers of testimonies are influenced by their experience in reading fictional texts (Eaglestone 289).

Many can argue that in modern fiction, trauma is fictionalised and devoid of any romanticism to ensure a faithful representation of the dynamics, the effects, the causes, and the history behind it. Thus, it appears in the character's struggle and suffering within the reality at hand. Often in those stories, characters are portrayed to be tormented by their past or present which usually is stemmed from deep-seated psychological issues that are considered to be a consequence of several psychological wounds. A great example of these elements can be found in James Joyce's *Eveline* (1914), which is a modern short story from his famous collection of short stories entitled "*Dubliners*" (1914). The titular character Eveline dreams of a life beyond the shores of Ireland, where she could start a new life away from her father's abuse and from bearing the responsibility of replacing her late mother as a permanent custodian and caretaker. The protagonist of the story decides to elope with her lover Frank to Buenos Aires which may translate to "good airs" insinuating a desire to flee from a polluted life to a place that symbolises a new environment that is antithetical to the "bad airs", thus, leaving behind her bleak and sullen life in Dublin. However, when the day came around, Eveline was motionless and unable to get on the boat with him. Eveline demonstrates a kind of paralysis as she stands 'passive, like a helpless animal' (Joyce 26).

A feminist reading of the story, however, suggests a revised interpretation of the real intention behind this paralysis. Laura Reinares suggests that the (anti)heroine Eveline rather stood there like "a cautious woman" questioning in a detailed article the intentions of Frank with the young Irish girl (531). To support her argument, Reinares refers to the historical context and different interpretations of the story. Katherine Mullin provides a compelling evidence on the dark side of the wave of immigration in Europe which opens discourses on white-slave trafficking around the time when Joyce was still revising *Eveline* for publication (Reinares 529). Although there is a high credibility that Frank could in fact have attempted a new life in Buenos Aires, a deeper look at the discourses had in 1914 and a scrutiny of the historical context, raises questions about the glamorized picture that Frank paints of himself and his intentions (Feshbach 225).

Notwithstanding the fact that the scene of Eveline's paralysis, in particular, is open to various interpretations, the significant notion about this arbitrary, sudden, a plot-twist of a moment in the story, is the 'inaction', the conscious or unconscious inability to act. The latter is a response indicative to the presence of some kind of trauma.

In order to understand such (in)action we are obliged to dig through Eveline's life and childhood. She is an alienated character who has suffered the loss of her mother and brother and was coerced to take on the role of an adult at a young age, as well as having to deal with the same disrespect and abuse that her mother endured. Be that as it may, Eveline displays the symptoms and crises of a trauma victim, a trauma that has been transmitted from her mother. This type of trauma according to Meera Atkinson is 'transgenerational'. Atkinson observes that 'trauma transmissions...involve subjective and familial experiences of trauma in which shame, fear, anger, and other affects reinforce a sense of being bound to a body and subjectively and socially confined within it' (9), those transmissions in the case of Eveline prompt a response that is characterised in her inaction.

I.5.1. Techniques and Tropes in Trauma Literature

A hallmark of the twentieth-century novel is its great interest and focus on the introspective aspect when telling a story. Introspection in fiction is often termed Rufus dialogue, interior monologue, or self-talk, and verbal report, thus it can appear under various aliases. The flourishing state of introspection was presumably under Titchener and Cornell in 1900-1920 (Boring 169) which also marks the availability of consciousness for observation and analysis, not only to scientific psychology but to literary criticism and theory as well. For that reason, modernist writers began to use this property to depict the period that was filled with traumatic events and a general loss of self and identity, and which in its turn, generated many different reactions (Campbell 5-6).

However, during such critical period an important concept, that was not available to introspection, arose beyond the dialogue on consciousness in which the concept of the *unconscious*

was reintroduced, and popularised by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. This concept helped recognise human feelings that were unavailable to consciousness. Therefore, the modernist novel started to give more attention to the unsaid and relied heavily on various psychological concepts. Within the same spirit of innovation and inclusion, modernist writers projected in their primary or side characters the struggle to live in modern society and added to that the trauma responses that represented the modern period of the twentieth century. According to Vickroy, trauma narratives add to these depictions through the perceptual angle of the narrator or the character called 'focalisation' (3).

Focalization is a term coined by the French narrative theorist Gérard Genette in 1972 (Edmiston 729) which refers to how information is restricted in storytelling. In his triadic typology, Genette delineates three types of focalization: Internal, external, and zero focalisation. Internal focalization refers to the focus of the narrative on the thoughts, emotions, and psyche of the characters. External focalisation focuses on the characters' actions, behaviour, and the setting which is a property we may find in filmmaking where the camera eye represents this type of external focalisation. Zero focalization, on the other hand, is self-explanatory in the fact that it is non-focalized which means that it is not restricted. In a non-focalized text, the narrator is omniscient: unlimited spatially and unrestricted in psychological access to the characters (Edmiston 730). The latter may propound a need to question the reliability of literary narratives and language in describing trauma.

The communication of trauma is somehow a unique and privileged position that is possessed by literature and literary narrative. In addition, because it bears the responsibility of communicating humans' psychological pain, literature is deemed to be a suitable medium that is able to transmit the depth of traumatic experiences through its literary language in contrast to non-literary nonfigurative language serving as a testimonial medium to psychological wounds (Hartman 541).

According to Sütterlin, Joshua Pederson identified three main literary techniques to portray trauma. He asserts that poststructuralist scholars harnessed those techniques to analyse experimental, fragmented, and non-linear texts in literature and film. Sütterlin enumerates and illustrates these techniques and tropes into the following: *Absence*, *indirection*, and *repetition*.

Literary trauma narratives are known to be resistant to direct representation, instead of implementing direct strategies that reflect the disorienting nature of traumatic experiences. One such strategy is *absence*, whereby the text gestures toward trauma through gaps, silences, narrative omissions, instead of explicit statements. An example of this trope was contended by Caruth in her interpretation of Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), whereby she emphasised how it conveys trauma precisely through what is left unsaid and unshown (*Unclaimed Experiences* 25-26). Second, *indirection* appears when a text seemingly focuses on unrelated events that nonetheless obliquely reference trauma. Felman and Laub give a good example of this in their interpretation of Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947) as an allegorical displacement of Holocaust trauma making it an indirect representation that stands in for historical atrocity (Sütterlin 20). Finally, trauma can also be encoded through the trope of *repetition* as narrative compulsively circle back to the traumatic event. Hartman's reading of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) demonstrates how recursive structures such as, flashbacks and loops, echo trauma's belated and unspeakable nature (Pederson 101). All these tropes reveal how trauma is often not narrated instantaneously but is formally enacted through disruption (absence), deferral (indirection), and return (repetition), reflecting trauma's inherent resistance to direct depiction and portrayal.

Sütterlin does not stop there, she further adds to these tropes the technique of *splitting*: the splitting of the narrative voice such as the doubling of the narrator's perspective with his doppelgänger, where she gives the example of Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815). For her, the focus on strategies of splitting showcases a move away from the psychoanalytical paradigm,

represented in the trope of repetition from Freud's concept of repetition compulsion, toward a "psychotraumatological framework" inspired by Janet's models of dissociation and *dédoublement* (Sütterlin, *E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Development of Trauma* 75). This psychotraumatological approach helps explain fragmented subjectivity in texts that represent trauma. The latter suggests that splitting operates as a symptom of dissociation resulting in a breakdown of unity in the self and in storytelling itself.

Joyce, for instance, as same as his fellow modernists, employs these poststructuralist techniques to depict trauma. Absence and repetition are inevitably present in *Eveline* (1904). Absence, in the usage of paralysis as a motif, and repetition in the intentional redundancy in recalling Eveline's past and reflecting to her childhood, her sense of hopelessness and loss in Dublin. The story of Eveline is one of the many examples of how trauma is depicted in modern literature. There is a heterogeneous array of literary works that approach different types of trauma, therefore, further investigations of different contexts and their effects may help understand and raise questions about these situations, and finally, help us avoid them in the future.

In her seminal essay *Trends in Literary Trauma Theory* (2008), Michelle Balaev posits that, "the trauma novel demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments" (149-150). In this noble quest, trauma novels contribute to the understanding of the profound loss and intense fear experienced at individual or collective levels. Trauma novels not only contribute to unveiling the challenges and problems that project life as it is but also contain a series of existential ideas that broaden the understanding of and the reflection on the human experience.

I.5.2. Traumatic Narrative: The Holocaust and Beyond

Through exploring the relationship between trauma and narrative, one starts to move closer and closer to weld the two terms by bringing them together and come to realise that they are almost as long as the history of trauma itself. This close relationship between trauma and narrative, says Joshua Pederson, was reconfirmed as Holocaust survivors began speaking of the responsibility to tell their stories and give voice to the people who did not survive to tell their stories. These testimonial accounts were also reconfirmed, as Vietnam veterans told their stories of the horrors of war and domestic abuse support groups in which women shared narratives of the cruelty inflicted on themselves and their children (97). Therefore, narrative and trauma are bound by historical event. As trauma made its way through the scene of literary studies and literary theory questions were asked that perhaps trauma “can only be reclaimed by literary knowledge” (Caruth and Hartman 641).

Exploring the profound connection between trauma and narrative is said to provide valuable insights into the human experience. Trauma, defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing event, can have a profound impact on an individual's sense of self, their relationships, and their perception of the world. The way in which trauma is processed and expressed through narrative can be a powerful tool for healing (Freud 2). Nevertheless, there are many challenges that stand in the way of this relationship to flourish between narrative and trauma. The main challenge faced is the impossibility of narrating the incomprehensible as traumatic events can present a kind ungraspable quality, which Cathy Caruth explained extensively in her fifth chapter from *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). Caruth posits:

Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight— thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is

inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (91-92)

Caruth demonstrates the paradox in the experience of trauma and its unavailability to narrative, namely, its relation to memory and its (un)narratability. This shortcoming is likely to misrepresent the truth of trauma and lose precision in its depiction in the process of writing. In a much earlier work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Caruth opposes the narrativisation of trauma for its lack of accuracy in depicting the traumatic experience, where she delineates that, “The transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and other’s knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall.” (157). Therefore, it is salient to recognise these challenges in producing trauma.

In the context of the Holocaust narrative and war narrative, the concept of historical trauma as a public narrative takes on a profound significance. Historical trauma is defined as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experience.” (Brave-Heart 7). This definition frames and situates the Holocaust not merely as a historical event, but as a transgenerational trauma that persists to affect survivors and their descendants. In addition, the intergenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma, as explored in various studies, highlights the enduring impact of historical trauma on subsequent generations. As addressed in Yahuda et al., “the emotional scars of Holocaust survivors appear to influence the psychological wellbeing of their children, suggesting a mechanism for intergenerational transmission of trauma that is both psychological and biological” (1109).

The relationship between historical trauma, narrative, and health underscores the importance of acknowledging and addressing the lasting effects of traumatic events such as the Holocaust. By recognizing the power of storytelling and the role of narrative in shaping

individual and collective identities, one can better understand the complexities of trauma transmission, resilience, and healing in the context of war narratives like the Holocaust. the relationship between trauma and narrative is a complex and multifaceted one. By understanding the role of narrative in trauma recovery, coping, identity reconstruction, and collective healing, one can gain a deeper appreciation for the resilience and adaptability of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

I.6. Narrative as Structure of the Unconscious

Jacques Lacan famously said in his essay *Écrits: A Selection* (1966) “The unconscious is structured like a language” (159). Tying this foundational idea to narratology reveals that narrative mirrors unconscious processes like dreams and Freudian parapraxes who have structures the same as narratives. Therefore, for Lacan, language speaks the subject which means that narratives engender contradictions, slippage, and fragmentation. In other words, the narrator may not be in control of the story, the story is in control of itself.

Further reflections on Lacan in relation to narrative is his occupation with the mirror stage in his famous lecture *The Mirror Stage* (1949). Lacan describes the infant’s exultant recognition of its own image in a mirror as a “méconnaissance” or a misrecognition which contributes to the foundation of the ego (*Écrits* 6). The subject, Lacan argues, constructs a sense of self not from inner unity, but from an external image. The latter signifies that the ego is formed through an identification with the external image. Lacan states, “What is at stake in this process is the formation of the *I* as we experience it in the mirror image, but which is in fact alienating” (*Écrits* 76). This image is an imaginary coherence that masks the underlying incoherence and fragmentation of the Real. In other words, the image appears whole, stable, and coherent, but it is fundamentally alien to the subject’s own chaotic, fragmented experience of embodiment. As a result, the subject is permanently divided. The Mirror stage, therefore, serves to establish a fundamental relationship between the subject and its constructed reality. Identity formation

occurs through the infant's misrecognition of itself in its mirrored image, a process that initiates both identification and alienation. The subject comes to recognize the image as itself, while simultaneously sensing that it is not its true, embodied self. This constitutive misrecognition introduces a structural lack that persists throughout life.

Within literary texts, this unresolvable structural lack expressed by Lacan is often articulated through characters' desires (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 154), which remain perpetually unfulfilled. Psychoanalytic and literary critical approaches expose how authors inscribe these desires into narrative structures, thereby privileging certain characters as vehicles through which this lack is expressed or negotiated. Such analysis enables a deeper understanding of character motivation and the asymmetrical distribution of narrative significance. This psychic structure has significant implications for characters' construction in literature. Characters, too, are not coherent individuals with unified identities. As Ellie Ragland asserts, Lacanian subjectivity is "always alienated from itself through its imaginary self-image and the symbolic structure in which it speaks" (*The Logic of Sexuation* 45). To summarise, characters in novels are, rather, composed of unstable identifications, incomplete desires, and failed symbolisation.

As applied in literary narrative, this propounds the idea that fictional characters, which are far from being stable psychological entities, are inevitably caught between Imaginary identifications, Symbolic positions, and Real ruptures. Lacan emphasises that the subject "finds its unity only in an exterior image, and that this unity is always fictional" (*Écrits* 78). This insight, as drawn from his theory of the Mirror Stage, foregrounds the foundational alienation at the heart of subjectivity. When the external image is shattered, by social rejection, or traumatic experience, the subject is confronted not with wholeness, but with the Real. Lacan defines this as that "resists symbolization absolutely" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 55). It is precisely at this juncture that trauma enters the scene. Trauma, in Lacanian terms, is not merely

an overwhelming event but an encounter with the limit of representation. Therefore, for Lacan, trauma is not an external event that overwhelms the psyche, it is; rather, an encounter with the Real. Slavoj Žižek agrees with Lacan, where he argues that trauma is not simply a response to an external event, but a confrontation with the Real “the impossibility around which every symbolization fails”, the former disrupts the coherence of the symbolic order (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 122). The Real lies outside of symbolisation, as previously mentioned in Lacan’s *Seminar XI*, and cannot be fully represented or integrated into discourse (*Seminar XI* 49).

I.6.1. Structural Rupture in Trauma Narrative

In trauma theory, in works that are fundamentally influenced by Lacan, such as Caruth, Felman and Laub, and LaCapra, trauma is understood as a form of rupture that mirrors, dramatizes, or intensifies the original structural break in subjectivity. When the Imaginary coherence of the self-collapses and the Symbolic representation fails to provide meaning, the subject experiences trauma as a structural rupture. In Lacanian terms this is considered a failure of language, temporality, and identity. Caruth articulates this as the “collapse of understanding”, in which trauma is defined by belatedness and its resistance to integration (*Unclaimed Experiences* 6). Similarly, Felman and Laub observe that trauma produces “a radical disruption in knowing and being,” and this where witnessing becomes impossible, for the reason that the Self is rendered divided and unstable (*Testimony* 62-63).

In literature, this rupture is often showcased at the level of form: fractured timelines, unreliable narration, contradictory voices, and narrative silences, all of which project the inability of language and plot to fully articulate traumatic experiences. As Luckhurst contends, trauma narratives deploy “flashbacks, mosaics and loops”, therefore, these structural dislocations echo belatedness and unspeakability of trauma itself (*The Trauma Question* 177-

78). This instance is the moment when the Symbolic order fails to contain or explain the experience, so the Imaginary unity collapses. The subject is left fragmented, speechless, or caught in repetitive returns to the traumatic scene as mentioned before by Freud (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 33). This structure explains why trauma narratives so often contain and feature unstable identities, fractured narration, and temporal disjunction. Traumatic texts are marked by the subject's confrontation with the Real. In this sense, trauma is not only a psychological wound but a rupture, a formal crisis in the fabric of narrative, the self, and language.

I.6.2. Language and Unspeakability: the Limits of Expression in Trauma Narratives

One of the most persistent questions in trauma theory concerns the tension between the need to speak and the impossibility of speaking. Noticeably, trauma narrative, by its very nature, is structured around the paradox of expression. Humans, and trauma victims to be exact, possess a desire to retell their histories. The latter is described as a compulsion to testify to an event that goes beyond normal discourse as it exceeds the limits of language. Poststructuralist theory, particularly as articulated by Roland Barthes, provides a critical framework for understanding the paradox of wanting to express and speak to bring about a narrative on trauma, and the inability to do so. In this case, according to poststructuralist theory is not merely as a psychological incapacity, but as a structural condition of discourse itself. Barthes's reflections on authorship and textuality dismantle the assumption that the subject possesses transparent access to experience or that language can directly transmit interior truth. In *The Death of the Author* (1967), Barthes argues that writing signifies "the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin," since language, rather than the individual, is the site where meaning is generated (142). Expression is thus never an unmediated act of self-revelation; it is always constituted through cultural and linguistic codes that precede the speaker. In *Image–Music–Text* (1977), Barthes expands this notion by describing language as "a tissue of quotations

drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (146). From this perspective, the human subject does not master language, but is instead spoken by it. Language, thus, becomes uncontrollable.

Barthes’s view of language as both enabling and constraining illuminates the condition of the traumatized subject, whose experience often resists articulation. The unspeakability of trauma arises from repression or psychological blockage as well as from the structural limits of discourse. Trauma ruptures the symbolic order that grants meaning to experience, leaving the survivor with fragments of memory and sensation that cannot be fully integrated into coherent narrative form. In this sense, the traumatized subject finds themselves in a Barthesian predicament. The predicament of being able to speak only through the very system that guarantees the failure of complete expression. The inability to testify thus becomes an inherent linguistic dilemma, not merely a psychological one.

Shoshana Felman’s and Dori Laub’s theory of testimony develops this idea within trauma studies. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Felman and Laub describe testimony as a form of speech that both demands and destabilizes subjectivity. For them, trauma creates a “crisis of witnessing” in which the event’s enormity overwhelms the frameworks of representation. The act of bearing witness exposes the fragility of language: the survivor must speak in order to survive, yet each attempt to do so risks collapsing under the weight of what cannot be said. Felman observes that testimony is not the transmission of knowledge from one subject to another, but a performative act that enacts the impossibility of full understanding. Like Barthes’s author, the witness’s voice is decentred; what emerges is the inability of the mastery over experience the trace of its fragmentation. In this sense, Felman’s conception of testimony resonates with Barthes’s theory of writing as a site of dispersal rather than origin, both expose the instability of voice and the failure of language to contain experience.

While early trauma theorists such as Felman and Caruth often treated unspeakability as a universal characteristic of trauma, Michelle Balaev's *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (2014) reconsiders this notion through a pluralistic lens. Balaev argues that the unrepresentability of trauma should not be viewed as absolute but as context-dependent, varying according to cultural, historical, and narrative conditions. Rather than assuming a singular model of the traumatized voice, Balaev emphasizes how literary form and cultural discourse shape the possibilities of expression. Fragmentation, nonlinearity, and metaphor, formal features once read as symptoms of trauma's unspeakability, can instead be understood as aesthetic strategies that make visible the struggle for articulation. For Balaev, language is not merely a site of failure but also of creative negotiation: even when trauma resists direct representation, it can be refracted through symbolic and narrative means. In this way, her pluralistic model modifies Barthes's linguistic determinism by allowing for agency within constraint. Expression remains partial and mediated, yet literature opens a space where the unspeakable becomes perceptible through form.

Irene Visser extends this discussion by interrogating the universalist tendencies of trauma theory and by situating unspeakability within postcolonial and cross-cultural contexts. In *Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies* (2011), Visser cautions against treating silence and inexpressibility as transhistorical constants. She argues that the rhetoric of unspeakability, if left unexamined, can reproduce hierarchies of voice and power, silencing non-Western experiences by casting them as permanently voiceless. In postcolonial narratives, unspeakability may arise not from the inner fracture of the psyche but from the external constraints of history, politics, and representation. Visser therefore reframes the problem: rather than assuming trauma's universal ineffability, we must consider how colonial violence, cultural memory, and narrative form interact to shape what can and cannot be said. The trauma narrative,

in this light, becomes an act of resistance as much as revelation, exposing both the wound of experience and the boundaries imposed by language and history.

Bringing Barthes, Felman, Balaev, and Visser together reveals that the unspeakability of trauma operates on several interconnected levels. For Barthes, the limits of expression are inscribed in language itself, meaning is always deferred, dispersed, never fully possessed. For Felman, this structural condition becomes ethically charged, the impossibility of speech transforms testimony into a site of both necessity and failure. Balaev broadens the frame, demonstrating that unspeakability is not an inherent property of trauma but a contingent one, shaped by literary and cultural conventions. Visser finally repositions the question within global politics, showing that unspeakability can also reflect imposed silences, where language and history intersect to regulate whose pain is heard. Together, these perspectives disclose that trauma's unspeakability is not merely a symptom of psychic rupture but a revelation of language's fragility, of culture's mediations, and of power's exclusions.

In trauma narratives, therefore, the silence surrounding the event should not be mistaken for absence. It is a formal and ethical presence, a trace of what resists assimilation into narrative coherence. The fragmented chronologies, repetitions, gaps, and dissonances that characterize trauma writing mirror Barthes's description of language as a "tissue of quotations," always haunted by what lies beyond it. In these works, the very failure of expression becomes expressive: language falters, yet in its faltering it testifies. Through this interplay of speech and silence, trauma literature performs what poststructuralist theory predicts, that human beings are both capable and incapable of expression, forever suspended between the demand to articulate and the impossibility of complete articulation.

I.7. Conclusion

Trauma as a term has undergone a series of events. Therefore, a historiography to understand the profound significance of psychological trauma is prerequisite. Histories of trauma usher us through its genealogy, which in its turn elucidates the present connotation of psychological trauma in this age, and more specifically popular parlance. The radical change in society during and after the Industrial Revolution marked a contamination in the collective psyche of modern society. The term became ubiquitous, however, at an expense of losing its weight calling for a reclamation. Herman characterised the history of trauma as fraught with “episodic amnesia”, asserting that trauma “has been periodically forgotten and must be periodically reclaimed” (7). The attention placed in trauma studies is, more or less, an act of reclaiming the forgotten history of trauma. The latter contribute in understanding the depth and the import of the term from railway spine to trauma theory. What began as a medical response to industrial modernity, gradually developed into a psychological and psychoanalytic category that studied it closely as a foreign concept. Fast forward into history, it expanded to be a critical lens for cultural and literary inquiry. Such evolution showcases how trauma is a historically unforeseeable and sporadically constructed concept, defined by both its contexts of emergence and its theoretical formulations.

By mapping out these genealogies, the chapter has shown how trauma moved from the body to the mind, and from psychology to narrative and culture. The latter makes trauma acquire significance as a clinical phenomenon and as well as a structure of memory, testimony, and representation. Such an understanding is essential for the study of trauma in literature, where questions of voice, silence, temporality, and form come forward to examination. The groundwork done in this chapter will serve as the basis for the following chapter, which will examine the intersections between trauma and violence. In this quest, it will help ask how these two categories overlap, diverge, and together shape both lived experiences and its literary representation.

CHAPTER TWO

**THE SPECTRAL FORM OF THE
WOUND, WHAT CAME FIRST
TRAUMA OR VIOLENCE?**

Chapter Two: The Spectral Form of the Wound, What Came First Trauma or Violence?

II.1. Introduction

The question “what came first, the chicken or the egg?” is more than a riddle of origins, it is an inquiry on causality, repetition, and entanglement. It transcends metaphor and questions a complex nature. In the context, of psychoanalysis and trauma studies, a parallel question might be asked, “what came first, trauma or violence?”, or does violence emerge uniquely from a deeper, unresolved trauma that precedes it? Thus it is paramount to acknowledge that violence is often perceived as an act, a moment of destruction, and a catastrophic spectacle. Yet in the context of trauma violence is reconceived, not merely as a catastrophic event, but as a structure that persists, repeats, and evades immediate recognition. This chapter explores this obvious tension, not to resolve it, but to tame, clear out, and inhabit its complexity.

Trauma, as established in the previous chapter, resists linear narration. It is belated, recursive, and often unspeakable. Violence, on the other hand, is typically imagined as immediate, direct, and visible. However, in much of American literature, particularly in the twentieth century, trauma and violence become inseparable as the literature of this period suggests that the two are mutually constitutive and inextricably entangled. Therefore, it challenges this binary by revealing violence as the medium through which trauma is both expressed and obscured. Violence often emerges as the structure through which trauma is expressed, while trauma may serve as the invisible essence that drives acts of violence, whether personal, familiar, or systemic. The relationship between them is neither strictly casual nor symmetrical. It is cyclical, embedded, and at times indistinguishable.

To conceptualise this dynamic, the chapter engages in several critical frameworks. It will heavily centre Slavoj Žižek’s typology of violence, which offers a method for reading

the hidden and often invisible dimensions of violence in literary form, as well as John Galtung's distinction of types of violence from visible and invisible. Judith Butler's theory of grievability interrogates the ethics of recognition, asking which lives are rendered mournable and which are excluded from public acknowledgment. Hannah Arendt's political philosophy, particularly her distinction between violence and power, illuminates the bureaucratic normalisation of harm in the modern state. Meanwhile, Noam Chomsky's critique of institutional discourse underscores how violence may operate through language, not despite it. Collectively, these frameworks establish a multidimensional lens through which will be used to analyse the literary mediation of violence and its intimate relation to trauma in literary modernist American texts. Ultimately, the discourse that comes in interplay between trauma and violence demands a reading practice attuned to their structural, affective, philosophical and ethical dimensions. Rather than locating a singular origin in the question above, these pathways compel us to confront the forms through which violence dovetails with trauma and is naturalised, perpetuated, and inscribed in the fabric of literary representation in American modernist literature.

II.2. Understanding Violence and its New Forms

Violence is a convoluted phenomenon and a multifaceted concept that can be understood in a plethora of ways. Therefore, it resists singular definition, for it emerges across a range of social, psychological, and symbolic dimensions that demand critical interpretations. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, violence denotes a "behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something" (OED, 2023). Etymologically speaking, the word stems from Anglo-French and Old French *violence* (13c.), and directly from Latin *violentia* which means "vehemence, impetuosity," from *violentus* "vehement, forcible," and said to be related to *violare* which means to "treat with

violence". While this definition captures the overt, visible, and physical dimension of violence, many scholars argue that such view is overly narrow which makes it two-dimensional presenting a rather myopic view instead. Ultimately, this fails to define the term with its many implications, and it falls short to showcase its other dimensions.

In 1969, the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung introduced the notion of "structural violence", describing it as a condition in which "actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" due to systemic inequality (*Violence, Peace, and Peace Research* 168). For Galtung, social structures intentionally inflict pain on individuals indirectly through demarcating access to essentials and requisites of a good life which limits any opportunity for individuals. This form of violence is indirect and often invisible, and mostly evident in systemic disparities, variability as manifested in poverty, racism, gender inequality, and the lack of access to education or healthcare. This concept has been wildly taken up in subsequent research. Paul Farmer et al., for example, applies Galtung's theory in global health, arguing that structural violence elucidates the reason why "some lives are valued and others are not" within the global medical systems (307).

Similarly, Nancy Scheper-Hughes explores the concept of structural violence in relation to the political economy of suffering, particularly among marginalised populations in Latin America (889). More recently, scholars such as Johanna Oksala extended the theory by linking structural violence to neoliberal governance through analysing how neoliberal rationality intensifies structural violence. Drawing heavily from Michel Foucault, she argued that contemporary forms of biopolitical control are a "new configuration of violence that targets populations rather than individuals", through the withdrawal of public services, deregulation, and the erosion of welfare systems. (39)

Unlike direct violence, which is personal and manifest, structural violence, according to Galtung, is institutionalised and normalised. This type of institutionalisation is sustained

not by active aggression, but by the passive maintenance of unjust and flawed systems. In later work, Galtung adds the notion of *cultural violence*, which refers to the symbolic and ideological forces that exist and, in a way or another, controls and shapes society, such as religion, language, art, and science. Galtung asserts that these social forces legitimise both direct and structural violence by rendering them morally acceptable or even natural (*Cultural Violence* 291). For example, colonial narrative that depicted indigenous people as “savage” legitimated conquest and systemic dispossession. Galtung’s framework might be outdated considering how systems of oppression adopt different ways to exert power. However, this is particularly valuable as it reveals how violence may operate through implicit structures, not merely through visible acts. The latter opens brackets for a versatile dive in trauma with relation to systems of oppression, and power relations.

II.2.1. Violence through the Lens of Philosophy and its Political Dimensions

Another retracing of violence is introduced by Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy which further explains and contributes to the discourse around the structural dimension of violence in her distinction between violence and power. In *On Violence* (1970), Arendt argues that “violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it” (56). In this regard, Arendt maintains that violence can destroy power but cannot create it, because it is a tool of destruction, not a source of legitimate authority. For Arendt, violence and power are opposites. She states, “Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance” (56). Violence, for Arendt, is instrumental and a means to an end. Whereas, power arises from collective action and consensus. A government that depends primarily on violence displays weakness, not strength. A regime secure in its legitimacy,

supported by the people's consent, has no need for constant coercion⁶ (Arendt 45). The latter can help explain the instability of authoritarian regimes around the world. In Arendt words, their dependence on violence erodes the very possibility of durable power (10). Recent scholarship has applied Arendt's thesis to contexts of contemporary governance. Practices such as excessive police militarization or mass surveillance have proven to have the opposite effects of what these certain regimes aims at. Hence, the practices adopted do not reflect stable authority but, rather, reveal its crises (Ingram 29; Owens 74). Arendt's perception of violence is embedded in the idea that violence is an instrumental and a contingent means (46) that can undermine and annihilate power, but it cannot generate it.

Another view can be found at the heart of liberal politics, particularly, in Judith Butler's theory of grievability in her work *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009). In this book, she interrogates the ethics of recognition by exposing how political frames condition which lives are considered valuable and mournable (Farmer 307). Butler propounds that lives that are considered ungrievable are excluded from public acknowledgment, creating an epistemic violence that precedes and legitimates physical violence (*Frames of War* 15). Butler goes on to say that "the category of grievability itself precedes a subject's right to live" (19). In earlier work, *Precarious Life* (2004) Butler elaborates that some lives are grievable while others are not, and this differential recognition constitutes an ontological hierarchy (pref. xv). This notion has been applied powerfully in migration studies. Maurice Stierl, for example, shows how mourning for migrants lost at sea serves as a protest against their invisibility (173). Karina Horsti examines how EU bureaucratic systems render missing migrants non-grievable

⁶ Arendt gives the example of a father losing his authority over his child because of using violence. She illustrates, "(A father can lose his authority either by beating his child or by starting to argue with him, that is, either by behaving to him like a tyrant or by treating him as an equal)". (*On Violence* 45)

through institutional erasure (948). Giorgia Mirto et al. analyse “ambiguous loss” and how it impedes mourning when institutional recognition is withheld (103).

The denial of grievability, as Butler emphasises, “makes the lives of the ungrievable more easily targeted and destroyed” (25). The recognition of the ungrievable itself is a site of power and contestation, it showcases where systemic violence is naturalised and normalised through the politics of representation.

II.2.2. Žižek’s Tripartite Model of Violence and other Reflections

Like Galtung, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek develops a typology of violence that challenges the tendency to focus only on visible acts. His *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008) offers a layered framework that insists that we pay attention to not only to eruptions of force, but also to the systemic and symbolic mechanisms that sustain them. Žižek argues that the most apparent forms of violence often distract from the invisible and that there are insidious mechanisms of power that are embedded in language and systems worthy of exploration. In his introduction entitled *The Tyrant’s Bloody Robe*, he notes that at the forefront of one’s mind, the most obvious signals of violence are usually acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, and international conflicts (1). Žižek calls for an analytic approach where he demands that one should learn “to step back” as to retrace, to disentangle oneself from the fascinating lure of visible violence, which he calls “subjective violence”. The latter, according to Žižek, is a violence that is performed by a clearly identifiable agent. For that reason, he emphasises the immense need to perceive the contours of the background which generates these reactionary outbursts. He propounds, “A step back enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance” (1). Žižek’s tripartite model includes two other types of violence in addition to subjective violence which is only a portion of a triumvirate that composes of objective kinds of violence.

Objective violence is another form of violence which was predominantly underlined in the book. It includes *symbolic* and *systemic* violence. For Žižek, symbolic violence is embodied in language and its forms. He distinctly quotes Martin Heidegger who considers language, in an existentialist sense, a shelter of being. Humans, therefore, live in it and therein lies their existence. It is rather necessary to look back into this reference that shapes a part of his philosophy to locate and analyse the significance of this view on language and its symbiotic relationship with humans.

In *Letter on Humanism* (1947), Heidegger claims that language is the house of Being. “In its home human beings dwell,” adding that thinkers and poets “are the guardians of this home,” (217). This view grounds truth in disclosure through language itself. Therefore, For Heidegger, language is more than a neutral, innocent communicative tool, it is rather the existential locus where Being reveals itself, and within which human existence (Dasein⁷) is fundamentally constituted and preserved. Pol Vandavelde interprets the metaphor as expressing how language enables beings to matter historically and existentially. For him, language is both what brings beings into relational understanding and what allows them to “be” as intelligible within temporal contexts (Vandavelde 255).

Jacques Derrida, however, destabilises such dwelling. In his seminal work *Of Grammatology* (1967), he insists that meaning is mediated by distinctive traces, hence the oft-cited line “il n’y a pas de hors-texte,” rendered in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s translation as “there is no outside-text” (Derrida 158). In other words, meaning is never fully present, but mediated through *différance*, the endless play of differences and deferrals. This insight complicates Heidegger’s metaphor, if language is indeed a house, it is one with

⁷ Dasein is a philosophical term used by Martin Heidegger which signifies “existence” (Stambaugh xiv). Heidegger referred to Dasein as the mode of existence or “being” that is particular to human beings and the struggle to navigate through morality, personhood, and the dilemma of living with other humans and simultaneously “being” alone with oneself.

shifting walls and unstable foundations. Such instability opens the possibility for violence as language can never be purely transparent, but always carries with it silences, exclusions, and distortions (Butler 19).

In addition to the discourse on symbolic violence, particularly, in relation to language, it is appropriate to include Noam Chomsky's intellectual contribution to the dialogue around violence. His contribution lies in his sustained critique of the structural and discursive mechanisms through which power is exercised. As already alluded to in Arendt's notion and her distinction between violence and power, she also makes the distinction between violence and terror where she states, "Terror is not the same as violence; it is, rather, the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control." (55), terror is a refusal of consent to the governance of the people, thus, violence solidifies into terror which is manifest in totalitarian and Nazi regimes as seen in history. However, Chomsky's concern was linguistic at the heart of the problem. In *Power and Terror* (2003), Chomsky draws attention to the asymmetry between the language states use to describe their own actions and the language used to designate the actions of others. While the United States frames its military interventions as "defence" or "humanitarian," the same actions, if performed by adversaries, would be unequivocally condemned as "terrorism" (Chomsky 25–27). This linguistic asymmetry and clear hypocrisy highlights Chomsky's central claim. For him, violence is not only a matter of physical coercion, but also discursive legitimization. By shaping categories of "legitimate" versus "illegitimate" violence, "Us" versus "Them", states normalise systemic harm under the guise of protection and order.

Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (co-authored with Edward S. Herman, 1988) develops this argument through the "propaganda model," which describes how mass media serve as instruments of elite control. The book demonstrates how violence can be obscured

or rationalised through selective reporting, framing, and omission (Chomsky and Herman 2-3). For example, the deaths of civilians in U.S. backed conflicts often receive little coverage compared to the deaths caused by America's official enemies. The muffled and digressive discourse around this concept is what Chomsky notices and makes the distinction between "worthy" versus "unworthy" victims (Chomsky and Herman 35-36). As seen by Judith Butler's theory of grievability, in which some lives are publicly mourned while others remain invisible.

Contemporary research in the twenty-first century further illustrates these concerns that were emphasised by many well-known scholars and researchers in their interpretations of violence and the present-day politics. For example, Antony Loewenstein in *Disaster Capitalism* (2015) speaks of the commodification of war, terror, and poverty which in parallel reflects the dynamics that Chomsky had long critiqued even in neoliberal economies seen and felt by experts, namely, the intimate relationship between violence, power, and economic exploitation (Loewenstein 56). This reinforces Chomsky's claim that violence must be understood not merely as direct force, but as embedded in the structures of global capitalism.

In addition, Chomsky's insistence on the moral responsibility of intellectuals connects his linguistic critique of violence to political ethics. In his essay, *The Responsibility of Intellectuals* (1967), Chomsky asserts that intellectuals have a duty to expose state violence and resist the euphemisms that obscure it. He states, "it is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies." (40). Although, he considers this an obvious case of truism, he believes that modern intellectuals do not seem to understand the responsibility they have in society, hence, Chomsky insists that when one considers the responsibility of intellectuals, one's basic concern must be their role in the creation and analysis of ideology (52). Thus, intellectuals must not associate themselves or partake in obscure language and

falsifications. Here, violence becomes not only a matter of state practice, but also of collective complicity fostered through discursive consent.

Žižek distinguishes that objective violence is inherent in language itself and asserts that this type of violence “is not only at work in the obvious...cases of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms: there is more fundamental form of violence still that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of certain universe of meaning” (*Violence* 1). Therefore, symbolic violence is embodied in language and cannot simply be visible unless put under the microscope as to look through its context and sub-context in relation to violence. Kenneth Burke’s seminal work *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* in 1966 underscores the inherent role of language in shaping social reality. For Burke, language is not merely an impartial medium of communication, but a form of “symbolic action” that reflects and deflects human motives, generating hierarchies and allowing the existence of different structures of power (44-5).

In his famous notion of “terministic screens”, which he defines as a rhetorical device that influences how individuals perceive and respond to a situation (King 121), Burke emphasises that the words we use direct and control one’s attention toward certain aspects of reality, while simultaneously obscuring others, thereby conditioning how violence and power are understood. He provides an analogy about two photographs to explain this device, “They were different photographs of the same objects, the difference being that they were made with different color filters” (45). He goes on to explain that, with the different filters, different aspects of the object, such as texture and form, could be viewed (45). This insight finds resonance in Žižek’s analysis of violence. Ultimately, Žižek posits that the act of naming and framing within discourse is never innocent, for it reproduces power relations and masks systemic injustices (*Violence* 2).

By the same token, what Burke describes as the deflective and selective nature of terministic screens aligns with Žižek's claim that ideology operates precisely through the symbolic, where language normalises domination and conceals systemic violence (Fairclough 63). For example, Žižek gives a potent example of a shameful historical event known as Abu Ghraib torture during the George Bush's presidency committed by the American military. Much like the Guantanamo Bay, the exposure to those images, such as "The Hooded Man"⁸ (see fig. 1 in Appendix C), and many horrific pictures, put forward a clear message. Žižek opposes Christopher Hitchens's description of the evil acts committed by the American soldiers as being acts of "mutineers, deserters, or traitors in the field" (Hitchens, *Prison Mutiny*), for Žižek, Abu Ghraib torture was not a case of American exceptionalism, nor a case of arrogance towards a "Third World" people. He observes that "in being submitted to humiliating tortures, the Iraqi prisoners were effectively *initiated into American culture*" (149-150). Thus, according to Žižek the photos seen of the humiliated Iraqi prisoners on TV, online, or in the front pages is precisely a direct insight into American values.

Moreover, for phrases such "collateral damage", or the case when a Palestinian is killed in the West Bank or Gaza, media outlets opt for obscure language by using less gut-wrenching terms to minimise the effect of the situation and deflect the reality of the aggression. Instead, one will find headlines such as "a Palestinian boy dies in the West Bank" as opposed to an Israeli boy, the headline would be constructed in a more compassionate manner, and the victim may even have a name unlike the "Palestinian boy". The choice of words is important here, because it normalises the event and dehumanises the other (Van Dijk, *Ideology and discourse: A multidisciplinary introduction* 44).

⁸ Also known as The Man on the Box, is an image showing a prisoner at Abu Ghraib prison with wires attached to his fingers, standing on a box with a covered head. The photo has been portrayed as an iconic photograph of the Iraq War, the defining image of the scandal and "symbol of the torture at Abu Ghraib" (see Fattah, Hassan M. "Symbol of Abu Ghraib Seeks to Spare Others His Nightmare". *The New York Times*. 2006)

A suitable example can be found in Teun A. Van Dijk's analysis of news discourse and ethnic minorities in his work *Racism and the Press* (1991) which reveals how the media reinforces racism and unequal power relations by marginalising and negatively portraying minority groups. The framing and phrasing through language exemplify what Burke would call a "terministic screen", it deflects the reality of civil death in the case of the example of "collateral damage", while Žižek would interpret it as an act of symbolic violence that sustains the ideological machinery of modern warfare. He posits:

When we perceive something as an act of violence, we measure it by a presupposed standard of what the 'normal' non-violent situation is – and the highest form of violence is the imposition of standard with reference to which some events appear 'violent'. This is why language itself, the very medium of non-violence, of mutual recognition, involves unconditional violence. (Žižek 55)

Žižek's insight on symbolic violence is evidently derived from psychoanalysis. For him, language pushes our desires beyond limits (55-56). Therefore, language and desire are closely linked and are responsible for the perception of violent events. According to Simone Weil, violence occurs when a person refuses to let his or her desire be circumscribed by reality, or thwarted by another's existence. observes Simone Weil, "to make anything my own - but other people get in the way of that. I have to take up arms to get these obstacles out of the way" (297). The unconditional violence Žižek makes reference to is ultimately a ramification of the use of invisible force through language, where it directs individuals' desires and perception towards what is violent and what is not. Žižek reveals the intrinsic link between language and violence, demonstrating how linguistic structures are not merely descriptive but complicit in the perpetuation of systemic and symbolic forms of harm. Žižek makes the claim that the clashes between civilisations (Arab vs American) is not a clash between barbarism

and a respect for human dignity, it is rather a clash between “anonymous brutal torture and torture as a media spectacle⁹” (*Violence* 150).

The second type of violence, which is directly linked to the symbolic type, and the most pervasive according to Žižek is “systemic violence”. Systemic violence is a catastrophic consequence of the “smooth” functioning of economic and political systems that produce massive harm without a visible perpetrator. Michael Shapiro emphasises that systemic violence “operates in the background as the very condition of possibility for political order” (41). Its role in global inequality is very evident. By foregrounding the structural dimension of violence, Žižek’s idea of systemic violence is central to his framework and compels for a recognition that what appears to be at bay or neutral is often sustained by invisible coercive forces.

II.2.3. The Uncanny: Systemic Violence or the “Dark Matter”

It is well established that objective and subjective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint (Žižek 2), for the fact that they are of complete different natures. Subjective violence represents what is visible to the eyes and the senses. While, objective violence represents the invisible and the inaccessible side that generates violence anonymously. As Žižek contends “it may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be ‘irrational’ explosions of subjective violence” (2). Therefore, Žižek emphasises that the notion of objective violence needs to be thoroughly historicised as it takes new forms and shapes in an age of capitalism (10). The invisible forms of harm inscribed in language, ideology, and social structures are what

⁹ Žižek borrows from Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster, 1996 and paraphrases Walter Benjamin who says that every clash of civilisation really is a clash of underlying barbarism. The original quote is “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” (*On the Concept of History*, 248)

occupies the framework of Žižek's theory, i.e., *reflections*. He argues that systemic violence is "the violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence but also the subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation" (8). For him, this form of violence is paradoxically more pervasive than spectacular acts of aggression, precisely because it is normalised and often rendered latent. Žižek believes that systemic violence is directly linked to capital. He observes:

...it is the self-propelling metaphysical dance of capital that runs the show, that provides the key to real-life developments and catastrophes. Therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than any direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their "evil" intentions, but is purely "objective", systemic, anonymous. (11)

The uncanny quality of systemic violence stems from its invisibility¹⁰. It is everywhere, shaping human lives and producing crises, yet it cannot be pinned on a visible perpetrator in capitalism. Alienation is; therefore, a result of this hidden effect as foregrounded by Marx, this feeling is the uncanny, the strange, and the unfamiliar. Alienation, as theorised by Marx, produces a form of structural violence that estranges the worker from both the product of labour and from their own human essence (Weil 33) . In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx explains that the labourer "is alienated from the product of his labour which becomes an alien object confronting him" (Marx 72). This estrangement is not merely economic, but existential and severs the worker from their *Gattungswesen* or "species-being," the essential human capacity for free, creative activity (Marx 75). This alienation represents the uncanny effects Žižek alludes to in his conception of objective violence.

¹⁰ Žižek goes further to call it a "dark matter" of physics (2), for the reason that it represents the counterpart of an all-too-visible subjective violence.

As Marx later observes in *Capital* (1867), when commodities appear lively and equipped with a spectral life of their own, “the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses” (*Capital* 165). This is what Marx famously calls “commodity fetishism,” which is a phenomenon where human labour is hidden and displaced into objects. The uncanny estrangement of labour is itself a form of violence as an insidious erosion of human dignity and agency, turning the worker into what Marx terms “a crippled monstrosity” of their own potential (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 79). In this sense, alienation can be read as both a traumatic structure and a mode of everyday violence embedded in capitalist social relations.

For that, Žižek explains this state by referring to the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real. Reality is the visible which is the social reality of people who are actually involved in interaction and the productive processes, while the Real is the invisible or the unavoidable “abstract”, as Žižek calls it a “spectral logic of capital” that determines the mechanisms of social reality. This conceptualisation resonates with Frantz Fanon’s analysis of colonial violence. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon insists that colonialism is “violence in its natural state” (31), not because of the brutality of the conquest, but because of the colonial order is structured through dispossession, exclusion, and economic exploitation. Therefore, like Žižek, Fanon sees beyond the “normal” state of violence, colonial violence is not reducible to acts of individual colonisers (reality), rather, it is systemic, institutional, and embodied in every aspect of colonial life. Fanon shows that oppression persists through anonymous structures such as, through law, land ownership, and cultural hegemony (the Real), all together help perpetuate inequality without requiring direct force.

Žižek's Marxian emphasis and inflection decentre subjective violence from the equation of aggression as he highlights capitalism as an indirect force in the perpetration of crimes, genocides, and human struggle (Violence 2, 8, 12). Žižek insists that "the problem is that this 'abstraction' is not only in our financial spectators' misperception of social reality, but that it is 'real' in the precise sense of determining the structure of the material social process" (10). In this regard, the "evil" Žižek often eludes to in his book dances in a spectral form and pursues its objective of profitability in "blessed indifference" to its effects on social reality (11). David Harvey's work on capital's internal contradictions highlight this notion. In it, he contends that capitalism is inherently crisis-prone as he propounds that it "never solves its crises, it merely moves them around" (*The Enigma of Capital* 6). From financial collapses through history to ecological destruction, these crises often appear as natural or inevitable, obscuring the underlying systemic violence that produces them. Galtung defines this as "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is" (*Violence, Peace, and Peace Research* 168). In other words, when social structures prevent individuals from reaching their full potential, they are perpetuating a form of violence as destructive as overt force.

In *On the Violence of Systemic Violence: A Critique of Slavoj Žižek* (2012), Harry Van der Linden acknowledges the force of Žižek's intervention but raises crucial objections. His initial concern is conceptual. The categorisation of systemic violence, Van der Linden contends, is overly expansive. By designating all social injustice, from economic inequality to institutionalised racism, as "violence," Žižek risks diluting the concept to the point of analytic imprecision (34). Van der Linden's second objection is normative. Žižek often invokes Walter Benjamin's notion of "divine violence" to suggest the necessity of rupture, an extra-legal force that suspends the existing order (Žižek 170-171). According to Žižek, only a radical break can dismantle systemic violence. He states that his underlying premise is that

there is an inherently mystifying element in a direct confrontation with violence (3). Van der Linden considers this problematic, since Žižek's framework risks legitimating revolutionary violence on the grounds of pervasive systemic harm. Instead, Van der Linden insists that violence maybe morally justified only in response to direct and coercive violence, and primarily when the overt force is used defensively against the state (51). In this respect, this view is consistent with just war theory as highlighted in Michael Waltzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977) where aggression is deemed the primary crime of war and defensive force permissible only under strict conditions of necessity and proportionality (49-53).

Another critique of Benjamin's divine violence was by Judith Butler in her chapter entitled *Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life in Benjamin's "Critique of Violence"* (2006) is a reading that underscores Van der Linden's concerns. Butler argues that Benjamin's notion of "divine violence" must not be read as a sanction for coercive upheaval, but rather, as an undoing of the legal order without reproducing its coercive mechanisms "lethal without spilling blood" (209). Butler emphasizes this in her work by noting that "divine violence is not violent in the sense of instrumental force. Rather, it is the destruction of law's very foundation in violence" (Butler 204). In this reading, divine violence is not assimilated to ordinary notions of violent action, instead, it functions as a transformative interruption of sovereign power.

In a much recent work, Hayden Weaver argues that Judith Butler's attempt to reconceptualize Walter Benjamin's notion of divine violence as a "non-violent" force misrepresents Benjamin's original idea and fails to engage Jacques Derrida's crucial objection that divine violence can be appropriated to justify political atrocities. Weaver traces Butler's three engagements with Benjamin (2006, 2012, 2020) and shows that she sanitises divine violence by emphasising its bloodless, "law-destroying" character while overlooking Benjamin's insistence that divine violence is annihilating and operates beyond the

ends/means continuum of law (52). Weaver highlights Derrida's critique, which warns that the unknowable, "most just" nature of divine violence makes it a dangerous concept that can be invoked to legitimise horrors such as the Holocaust or colonial genocide (Derrida 291-98, Weaver 55). Because Butler does not adequately answer Derrida's three aporias of justice, free decision, conscious decision, and the paradox of immediacy, according to Weaver, her claim that divine violence can be a non-violent emancipatory tool remains unconvincing (54). Weaver concludes that divine violence should be confined to the divine realm, preventing its instrumentalization for political ends, and that Butler's liberal, peripheral reading of Jewish law further weakens her argument by relying on a selective, non-coercive interpretation of commandments (59).

Weaver's critique, nonetheless, overlooks Butler's sustained engagement with nonviolence beyond her reading of Benjamin, especially in *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020), where Butler elaborates a relational and non-sovereign conception of nonviolence that directly addresses the supposed tension Weaver identifies. Judith Butler's reinterpretation of Walter Benjamin's "divine violence" as a non-violent, law-destroying force has attracted a growing body of scholarly support that directly challenges Hayden Weaver's critique. In *The Force of Non-Violence* (2020) Butler argues that divine violence should be read as a strategic suspension of juridical violence. It does not rely on bloodshed but on the radical "un-making" of the legal order that perpetuates oppression.

By foregrounding the "law-destroying" character of divine violence, Butler proposes a mode of resistance that is both ethically demanding and politically effective, answering Derrida's aporias without resorting to the kind of indeterminate, "most just" violence that Weaver warns against. In this respect, Butler, ultimately, does not deny the disruptive or forceful aspects of nonviolence. Instead, she insists on understanding nonviolence as a

practice of “non-sovereign relationality”, where the negation of violence is not equivalent to passivity but rather a performative act of resistance (Butler 27).

Circling back to Žižek and the uncanny as a valid description of the spectral form of objective violence, Žižek states that “what we should do today when we find ourselves bombarded with mediatic images of violence. We need to ‘learn, learn, and learn’¹¹ what causes violence.” (7). Perhaps one of the main takeaways from Žižek’s theory of violence is that violence is more threatening when it is in its invisible form. The level of complexity in objective violence; therefore, demands regrouping and studying. Žižek encourages readers to curb their reaction, he encourages them, rather, to “wait and see” by means of a patient critical analysis, resisting the temptation to engage immediately (6). Much of what was said by Žižek and others raise a plethora of inquiries about the reverberations of violence and its traumatic outcome. Although, Žižek, explicitly, says that a *dispassionate* conceptual development of the typology of violence must ignore its traumatic impact (3). One could argue that in order to further advance the initial query of the causal relation between trauma and violence, it is paramount to engage in linking the two concepts to help understand the relationship and the different philosophical interpretations and literary narratives on trauma.

II.3. Conceptualising Violence in Relation to Trauma through the Concept of the “Evil”

Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (2015) refreshes our memories about the study of psychological trauma where she traces a framework that helps understand the concept in relation to violence. For Herman, to study psychological trauma one has to “come face to face

¹¹ This was extracted from a well-known Soviet joke about Lenin. Under socialism, Lenin’s advice to young people, his answer what they should do, was “Learn, learn and learn”. (Žižek 7)

both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature.’ (7). Taking Žižek’s advice, it is important to ponder upon and learn about violence. The latter is not uniquely exclusive to violence but also human vulnerabilities and the so-called “evil”, and mainly, what it means to study it through violence vis-à-vis trauma. Before delving into the trauma that is embedded in violence, it is worth noting that the question of evil in philosophy has often been addressed in relation to violence, as evil frequently manifests itself through violent acts that disrupt both individual lives and social orders. Jean-Marie Muller in her text for UNESCO she contends:

It is essential to define violence in such a way that it cannot be qualified as “good”. The moment we claim to be able to distinguish “good” violence from “bad”, we lose the proper use of the word, and get into a muddle. Above all, as soon as we claim to be developing criteria by which to define a supposedly “good” violence, each of us will find it easy to make use of these in order to justify our own acts of violence. (25)

Muller confidently warns against making the distinction between “good” and “bad” violence. Thus, in allowing ourselves to make such distinction, humans create more space for violence. Hannah Arendt, introduces the notion of the “banality of evil” in her report on Eichmann trial¹², where she suggests that evil does not necessarily emerge from malign intentions, but from a lack of a sound rationale, thoughtlessness, and obedience within an environment that exerts systemic violence (Arendt 137). Her analysis illustrates how violence, when it is bureaucratically organized, can appear ordinary, yet still result in catastrophic evil¹³. This view complicates the traditional understanding in metaphysics of evil by showing its deep roots in political and structural practices of violence. Immanuel Kant,

¹² The trial of Adolf Eichmann was the trial of the one of the major Holocaust perpetrator who was captured in Argentina by Israeli Mossad agents; Eichmann was a senior Nazi party member and served at the rank of Obersturmbannführer in the SS.

¹³ In this case it is the cause of the Holocaust of Jews and genocide. See: Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. 2006.

who is influential to Arendt critique of Adolf Eichmann, speaks of “radical evil” as a corruption of the moral law within human nature, where individuals knowingly subordinate moral law to self-interest (Kant 32). For Kant, violence is not merely an external act, but an expression of this inward moral failing, making evil inseparable from wilful deviation from rational duty (Žižek 166). Similarly, Butler in her press article in *The Guardian* entitled *Hannah Arendt's challenge to Adolf Eichmann* (2011), she argues that what becomes banal is not “evil”. According to Arendt, says Butler: “what had become banal—and astonishingly so—was the failure to think.” (Butler).

In relation to the human existence and agency, Simone Weil is a voice who frames violence as a force that dehumanises human beings turning them into objects and stripping them of agency. Thus, reducing them to subhumans, thus, sharing Marx’s notion of alienation (Weil 33). For her, evil resides precisely in this dehumanisation, where violence is not only physical, but ontological. In this manner, the consequences of this ideology culminate in destroying the subject’s capacity to be fully human.

Friedrich Nietzsche further the discussion around evil and its relation to violence by challenging the labels of “good” and “evil.”. Nietzsche links them to resentment, which is a psychological state that comes as a result of repressed feelings of envy and hatred which cannot be satisfied¹⁴. Thus, he also makes reference to the power struggles in morality (Nietzsche 36). Taking Nietzsche’s view into consideration, violence, for Nietzsche, is not necessarily evil, it is part of life’s expression of power, while the labelling of violence as “evil” emerges from moral frameworks established by the weak to constrain the strong. This questions the normative idea that is accepted by many on the concept of evil, as well as, the

¹⁴ There is a biblical influence in this diagnosis found particularly in Cane and Abel’s story. Žižek also make reference to this “desire” that cannot be quenched, “jouissance” (pp. 55, 56, 78, 166). Simone Weil emphasises this as she posits, “Violence stems from a boundless desire colliding with the bounds set by the desires of others” (*Œuvres complètes* 297).

philosophical association between evil and violence. Nietzsche's view suggests that "evil" is a cultural classification, rather than an ontological reality. Conversely, Paul Ricoeur treats evil as a hermeneutical problem that requires interpretation through symbols, myths, and narratives. For Ricoeur, violence becomes a concrete manifestation of the "stain" of evil in history, carrying both destructive reality causing trauma and symbolic meaning (Ricoeur 12). Violence, in this sense, is both act and signifier of humanity's struggle with the persistence of evil. Thus, in philosophy, evil is less an abstract metaphysical category than a lived and enacted reality that constantly finds expression in violence, from the systemic to the personal, and from the banal to the catastrophic.

Therefore, the imposed trauma and the carried out violence are not discrete phenomena, rather, trauma emerges as both symptom and aftermath of the strategies of violence. The interplay between these two shapes narratives, subjectivities, and cultural memory. Trauma is not merely a responsive state, it is the psychic and narrative imprint of violence's structures and operations. Beyond the "human nature", wherever trauma lodges, it marks a place where violence has endured or been internalized, resisted, or repressed. This can be seen in many interpretations and contributions in trauma studies.

For instance, trauma studies that acknowledge structural violence, as it was first introduced by Galtung, shift the focus from individual pathology to social causation. For example, Angela P. Harris's work on intersectionality examines how marginalized communities, particularly Black women, internalise chronic trauma rooted in poverty, racism, and sexism. She posits that "racialized subjectivities carry scars that are not individual but historical" (23). This observation by Harris conveys that trauma is explicitly the lived response to systemic violence, and is not an isolated event.

Testimony studies also illustrate how violence is reproduced through trauma. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub contend that trauma resists straightforward narration; therefore, the

survivor must bear witness to the event's unreadability, "to witness means to enlist the listener in the work of adding what is missing from the actual occurrence" (Felman and Laub 70). In Holocaust narratives, for instance, trauma becomes a participatory performance, one that calls for collective responsibility, not guilt. But this act of witnessing can also reinforce the violence by re-exposing the trauma repeatedly without resolution, especially in cultures that commodify suffering for spectacle (Loewenstein 56).

In contrast, Dominick LaCapra encourages a mediated "working through" of trauma rather than a compulsive repetition ("acting out") opposing Cathy Caruth and also scholars in witnessing studies (Ball 15; Leys 283). LaCapra cautions that without critical narrative framing and phrasing, trauma may perpetuate cycles of violence, and she also calls for building a moral ground where victims are given more respect and are honoured (LaCapra 43). In the words of Karyn Ball, LaCapra recommends the term "historical trauma" to distinguish actual events from the "structural trauma" (15) which psychoanalysis theorists such as Slavoj Žižek attribute to intrusions of "the Real.", a term Žižek capitalises in his books ¹⁵, Karyn Ball reads Dominick LaCapra as a historically minded counter to universalising, and Lacanian accounts of trauma associated with Žižek. After noting LaCapra's formative role in consolidating Holocaust and trauma studies (14–15), Ball writes that LaCapra "criticizes Zizek's figuration of the "traumatic real" because it converts trauma into a general disposition inseparable from any modern subject's disavowal of responsibility for the social consequences of unconscious repetitions," and that he seeks to "segregate" structural from historical trauma "to preserve the moral import of events that lead to widespread and typically intergenerational forms of suffering" (15). For Ball, the ethical stakes are explicit: "At stake is the moral necessity of respecting the dead and bereaved while holding perpetrators accountable" (16) which goes hand in hand with LaCapra's objective. At

¹⁵ See: Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso Books, 2009

the same time, she marks limits in LaCapra's schema: "On an experiential level, LaCapra's distinction between historical and structural trauma is not sustainable," even if his analysis remains "helpful as a corrective to melancholic idealizations of absences treated as losses," a polemic that also "betrays a certain prejudice against the supposed excesses of poststructuralist theory and deconstruction" (16).

Ball also highlights LaCapra's adaptation of transference, occurring "at the intersection of the personal, political, and textual", to diagnose how scholars' attachments can distort accounts of traumatic history (15). Taking them together, these claims position LaCapra against Žižek's abstraction by insisting on historical specificity and responsibility, without denying the phenomenological entanglement of structural and historical forms of wounding (16). In examining post-genocidal literature from Rwanda, LaCapra observes that repetition without reflection fosters reactivation of social divisions (LaCapra 147). The endurance of trauma by victims of violence with its many types, becomes a junction in which violence reshapes collective memory.

Michelle Balaev also insists that trauma's meaning emerges from cultural systems and historical legacies, not just from individual experience. Like LaCapra, she critiques universal models of trauma for erasing the specificities of race, colonialism, and class (Balaev 52). Balaev's framework enables a reading of Indigenous authors whose narratives of intergenerational trauma map onto systemic dispossession, showing that trauma can be inherited and reaffirmed within institutional neglect, thus echoing Butler's concept of grievability, where certain deaths are marginalized or unrecognized within political imaginaries.

Moreover, Irene Visser in *Trauma theory and postcolonial literary studies* (2011) critiques the Eurocentric dominance of trauma theory¹⁶, noting that its reliance on Holocaust paradigms and psychoanalytic frameworks universalizes psychic fragmentation and marginalizes other cultural responses to trauma. She stresses that “trauma theory’s privileging of Holocaust trauma and psychoanalysis risks universalizing Western patterns of alienation while excluding non-Western responses” (Visser 271.). For Visser, postcolonial texts reveal alternative trajectories, such as resilience, communal cohesion, and even empowerment in the wake of violence (Visser 272-73).

This critique dovetails with Judith Butler’s notion of grievability, which exposes the selective recognition of suffering in Western discourse. Butler argues that “specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living” (Butler 20). In tandem, Visser proclaims that there are some forms of trauma response, precisely those outside Euro-American contexts, are considered illegible within dominant trauma theory. Therefore, looking at both arguments from Butler and Visser helps reveal how the discourse of trauma is structured by exclusions that mirror broader geopolitical asymmetries of power and recognition, thus, calling for the blurring of the lines between trauma theory in culture studies and the concept of objective violence in particular.

II.3.1. Blurring the lines Between Trauma and Violence: The Affect and the Post-psychoanalytic Discourse

The line between trauma and violence may seem transparent and that the terms merge perfectly within each other. However, such assumption may lead to more confusion when both of them concur in the field of psychoanalysis. As previously mentioned, trauma theory

¹⁶ See: Craps, Stef, and Gert Buelens. “Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels.” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, no. 1–2, Spring & Summer 2008, pp. 1–12.; Rothberg, Michael. “Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response.” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, no. 1–2, Spring & Summer 2008, pp. 224–234.

is not exempted from critiques. For example, Roger Luckhurst suggested in *The Trauma Question* (2008) that the ongoing marginalization of Freud's theories may cause the decline of trauma theory (211; Leys 11). Karyn Ball observes that "among the paradoxical offspring of an increasingly post-psychoanalytic trauma studies has been a turn toward affect, which is itself indebted to multiple developments and forces within cultural studies" (Ball 18). What she identifies as "paradoxical" is that, while trauma theory initially emerged in close conversation with psychoanalysis, particularly with Freud's concepts of belatedness and repetition, and Caruth's Lacanian emphasis on the unrepresentable, it has, in the movement of the "post-psychoanalytic," rediscovered the significance of embodied, pre-cognitive registers. Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings* (2003) exemplifies this turn, positing that trauma should not be understood solely through catastrophic events, but also through "everyday emotional life" and the cultural "archives" that preserve affective responses to injury and exclusion (Cvetkovich 7). The latter one may argue is what preserve history or what left of it.

By highlighting the affective dimensions of trauma, Cvetkovich expands its scope to include different violent cases of sexism, racism, and homophobia, suggesting that trauma resides not only in memory, but also in the collective circulation of feeling i.e., affect. Through the same feminist lens, Lauren Berlant's influential work *Cruel Optimism* (2011) construct a framework for thinking about trauma as bound up with attachments to objects and futures that are simultaneously sustaining and damaging. For Berlant, trauma is not always the result of a singular violent rupture, but may instead emerge from "the slow wearing out of populations" through structural precarity (systemic violence) and deferred hope (Berlant 95).

Sara Ahmed adds to this conversation by emphasising how trauma becomes implanted in "affective economies" in which emotions like fear, hate, or pain circulate socially and

politically. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed proclaims that trauma attaches itself to particular bodies and communities, rendering some figures as perpetual bearers of injury in ways that re-inscribe violence rather than resolve it (46). By the same token, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank further articulate the affective dimensions of trauma by resisting purely linguistic and representational approaches. They insist on “affect” as pre-linguistic intensity which highlights how trauma is often felt as a somatic charge or atmospheric resonance before it is symbolized (Sedgwick and Frank 99). This marks a crucial divergence from Caruth’s emphasis on trauma as the belated arrival of an event that is unavailable for the mind and yet to be assimilated, pointing instead to the immediacy of embodied response.

Consequently, through Ball’s identification of a turn toward affect underscores the field’s diversification as well as; blurring the lines between trauma and objective violence in which its effects are felt through different dimensions and levels. Trauma studies, therefore; no longer pivots exclusively around psychoanalysis, but intersects with cultural studies, queer theory, and political philosophy, thus it deepens its juxtaposition to objective violence. One may argue, that the “paradox” Ball notes lies in the fact that this move beyond psychoanalysis still circles back to its central concerns, the irreducible and imperishable intensity of traumatic experience, while offering more historically and politically attuned vocabularies for describing how trauma shapes collectives, identities, and social worlds.

Within law and memory studies, Michael Rothberg proposes the concept of “multidirectional memory,” where the memory of one group’s trauma resonates with others. Holocaust and African American experiences, for instance, can inform each other’s memory without competition. Rothberg’s model reframes trauma not as solitary suffering, but as generative across cultural boundaries, demonstrating how violence, and its memorial presence, can be reconceptualised as relational trauma. The entanglement of trauma and

violence reveals trauma as both injury and testimony, inscribed in bodies, histories, and narratives. Trauma can institutionalise violence when channelled into violence repetition, e.g., cycles of retaliatory acts based on ancestral wounds. Or trauma can rupture violence when transferred into testimony, memorial, and collective reckoning. Literature, with its capacity for refusing closure, becomes a crucial space for negotiating trauma's inheritance and violence's contingency.

Literary mobilisation of trauma nurtures the entanglement of trauma with violence. Among the many examples one may give is in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), the narrative represent a haunted structure. The latter is greatly felt in Sethe's nostalgia which is disrupted by the ghost of her dead daughter, forcing a confrontation with slavery's violence that has shaped familial memory. The novel's fragmentary temporality, repeated images of blood, and spectral presence reflect trauma's disjunctive grammar, echoing Caruth's claim that trauma returns in collapse of temporality "the event that one cannot yet know" such that "its most radical surprise lies in the way it first arrives" (Caruth 11). Morrison's text thus turns history into symbolised memory and into a re-narration of violence through the aesthetic of trauma narrative. To illustrate this mood of writing, it is salient to go back in time as to retrace this persistent feeling and response of different authors. Correspondingly, there are sundry literary works in the American modernist literature that corresponds with the themes of violence and trauma which explains the zeitgeist of that time spurring the interest of many scholars.

II.4. Traumatic Violence and Modernist War Narratives in American Literature

The history of American modernism is closely related to the pervasive presence of violence, on the battlefield and beyond. Namely, within the social fabric of the American society it is well observed that violence is an integral part of what it is to be American. The

First World War, marked a historical break that redefined the modernist age which seemed to adopt new ways of thinking. In the preface to his famous essay *Make it New* (1934), Ezra Pound frames a modernist imperative to “make it new”, a principle for revitalising art by breaking away from the conformity of traditions. The latter described the ethos of literary modernism in that age, particularly, leaving a profound imprint on literature, culture, and memory (Perloff 73). Rightfully so, such change is granted given the context where war was a stage, or rather a stressor in the inspiration to adopt different ethos. As Paul Fussell argues in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), the scale of mechanised violence during the Great War produced a crisis of representation that permanently altered narrative form (178). Caroline Cox in *Invisible Wounds: The American Legion, Shell-Shocked Veterans, and American Society, 1919–1924* (2001) contends that “writers were only one part of the larger society that during and after the First World War had to find a new understanding of mental illness as a result of the high incidence of war neuroses” (281). American writers, for instance, many of whom came to light during or immediately after the war with new innovations as a result of the zeitgeist that predominated the artistic sphere, violence was not an external theme, but rather an existential condition that shaped subjectivity and disrupt the very structures of language and narration (White 26; Eysteinnsson 12). Certainly, American modernism should be understood, not only as a stylistic innovation, but also as an aesthetic movement that gestated traumas in its confrontation with historical catastrophes.

Thus, violence in American modernism manifested at multiple levels. At the historical level, the devastation of trench warfare, the prevalence of “shell shock,” and the trauma of mass death destabilised traditional ideals of heroism and progress. Although the topic of war and its bad omens had been previously and repeatedly expressed by naturalists and realists alike such as; William Dean Howells in his short story *Editha* (1905), the horrors of warfare seemed to be persistent in later works by many American author both directly and indirectly.

However, some scholars believe that there was at least some level of stability in the past with less bloodshed. As Modris Eksteins notes, war constituted “a symbolic break between an old order of stability and a new world defined by fragmentation and rupture” (*Rites of Spring* 241). At the formal level, this rupture found expression in experimental techniques such as disjointed timelines, unreliable narration, and syntactic fragmentation. The aesthetic of rupture mirrored the psychic dislocation of violence, thus promoting trauma into the very structure of modernist texts.

The American modernist engagement with violence can be observed through the lenses of “The Lost Generation”. Writers such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Richard Wright, John Steinbeck, reflected on war’s physical and psychic scars, while also gesturing toward systemic and historical violence that haunted the American cultural landscape. The “Lost Generation,” a term often quoted and linked to Gertrude Stein who was very close to many American expatriates in France such as Hemingway¹⁷, encapsulated the psychological effects on young men who went through the World War and came back as “une generation perdu¹⁸” (Svoboda 127). As this term is often associated with expatriate disillusionment, it forthrightly articulated the sense of personal alienation and recognised violence as a defining element of modern existence. In this context, modernist war narratives are not merely records of conflict, but they are a point of historical reference in which literature wrestles with the psychic and cultural legacies of violence.

The First World War is the one of first events that comes to mind when historical referentiality is present at the core of narrative discourse around violence in literature. This event has often been described as the foundational catastrophe of the twentieth century

¹⁷ Hemingway was tempted to name his celebrated novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) after Stein’s “you are a Lost Generation” which she quoted from a garage mechanic she met in Paris. Frederic Joseph Svoboda asserts that Hemingway “explored titles that would reflect the sense of a generation forever scarred by its experience: The Lost Generation, Perdu, Lost.” (108). The latter ended up being a quoted in his epigraph of the novel.

¹⁸

(Kennan 3), and in the context of American modernism, it was the crucible in which new literary forms emerged. Unlike earlier conflicts, World War I introduced a scale of mechanized destruction that shattered Enlightenment ideals of progress and rationality. Trench warfare, chemical weapons, and the relentless industrialisation of killing created what Eric Leed calls “a landscape of the absurd,” in which traditional categories of meaning were turning old-fashion and can no longer hold or sustain this change (64).

The consequences of war may vary. However, one of the main consequences was the medical and cultural recognition of “shell shock.” The latter is a condition that revealed and enclosed the psychological impact of extreme violence. Early physicians such as W. H. R. Rivers and Charles Myers described the symptoms as including nightmares, mutism, paralysis, and recurring flashbacks, phenomena that anticipate later psychoanalytic accounts of trauma (Leed 181). Shell shock exposed the inadequacy of traditional heroic paradigms by demonstrating that violence leaves both physical scars and psychic wounds that resist closure. This breakdown of the heroic subject found its way into literature, where characters often exhibit fractured consciousness, unstable identity, or belated responses to past horrors. In this sense, modernist representations of war violence anticipate what Cathy Caruth defined in her seminal work as trauma’s paradox in which the event that is experienced belatedly and cannot be fully integrated into consciousness (*Unclaimed Experience* 4).

II.5. American Writers and the Poetics of Trauma

The crisis of representation in American literature, as previously mentioned by Paul Fussell in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), manifested in the nonlinearity of time, fragmented perspectives, and experimental uses of language that reflects the instability of traumatic memory. For this reason, Modernist form can be understood as both a stylistic innovation and a response to trauma’s disruption of subjectivity and narrative. Ernest

Hemingway exemplifies this poetics of absence through his “iceberg theory.” His pared-down and simplified style, with its strategic omissions, parallels trauma’s defining characteristic of belatedness and silence. Stories such as *Soldier’s Home* (1925) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) stage trauma through what remains unsaid, embodying Cathy Caruth’s claim that trauma is experienced as “a break in the mind’s experience of time” (*Unclaimed Experience* 61). Similarly, William Faulkner’s modernist experimentation where it is apparent in the nonlinear structures, shifting voices, and stream-of-consciousness narration enacts what Dominick LaCapra calls the tension between “acting out” and “working through.” In novels like *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), narrative fragmentation both repeats trauma compulsively and gestures toward the possibility of re-narrativising it (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 65).

However, American modernist trauma is not confined to representations of war. Gertrude Stein’s radical experiments with syntax and repetition in *Tender Buttons* (1914) destabilize the relationship between language and meaning itself, a formal dislocation that resonates with Lacan’s notion of the Real as that which resists integration into the Symbolic. Similarly, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), though written by an expatriate American, registers the collective breakdown of language in the wake of war, assembling a cacophony of fragmented voices that dramatize the impossibility of coherent cultural memory. These works collectively enact what Lucy Bond and Stef Craps describe as trauma’s structural embeddedness, whereby “narrative itself becomes the site of trauma’s expression” (*Trauma* 22). The attempt to understand and deconstruct the mechanisms of narrative in American modernist literature will likely indicate that there is a close connection between authors with their text and style. The technique used by American authors can be argued to be trauma responses to war and status quo of their time.

II.5.1. American Post-memory: Modernist Literary Techniques as a Trauma Response

Memory is a central concept in the study of history and is an integral part to the documentation of trauma narratives. In the attempt to represent and faithfully report trauma of victims we are faced with challenges of memory in response to the unassimilated wound persevered by victims of violence in literature and outside of it. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominick LaCapra propounds that “trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence,” in its turn, it unsettles the assumptions one builds about knowledge and truth resulting in that “the study of traumatic events poses especially difficult problems in representation and writing” (41). Writers such as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, took upon their shoulders to translate the disruptions of war and historical violence into poignant works of literature. Writers, therefore, has the utmost responsibility of mirroring the world they live in whether being agents of change or explorers of the human condition as impacted by many factors; political, existential, and ecological. In the case of American literature, it is argued that, usually, twentieth century authors, and artists alike, used fragmented styles, silences, and experimental structures in their writings for a particular reasons. All together, they represent a trauma response to the world they live in and the world before them (Bond & Craps 22).

The disarticulations mentioned by LaCapra are evident in the manner of treating violence as an external event to be represented. In their works, modernist writers register it as a force that dislocates language, memory, and identity. One of the defining techniques of modernism is *fragmentation*, which serves as a formal analogue to the shattering of subjectivity under conditions of violence. The continuity of narrative and coherence of identity appeared untenable during the wake of the war. William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), although it is not considered a war novel per se, concretises this

fragmentation by breaking narrative into multiple perspectives. Each narrative is destabilised by temporal disjunctions, disconnections, and psychic ruptures. As highlighted by James Phalen in his book *Reading the American Novel 1920-2010* (2013):

Faulkner both draws on and alters the horizon of resources in modernism: he fractures chronology, immerses us in the stream of consciousness of abnormal characters, and seems for the first half of the novel less interested in telling a story than in assembling fragments of one. (106)

Faulkner; therefore, typifies the fragmented narrative that is present in many works of modernist literature at the time and the fractured selves in his abnormal characters. *Ellipsis* and *silence* are also another aesthetic hallmark of modernist writing shaped by violence (Whitehead 6). Evidently, the latter is exemplified through Ernest Hemingway's minimalist style where only a fraction of meaning is visible above the surface of the text, leaving the rest submerged and unsaid (Cohen 89). Arguably, this economised style known in the iceberg principle mirrors the ways trauma resists direct articulation, as survivors often speak in fragments, silences, or displaced narratives. In his collection of short stories *In Our Time* (1925), such as in "Soldier's Home," Hemingway concretises this aesthetic of omission. Therefore, silence and fragments become markers of the unspeakable which it links directly to the unspeakability found in trauma victims; thus, turning trauma into narrative form (Pederson 101). Equally important is *repetition*, which is quite reminiscent of the Caruthian model that is heavily inspired from the concept of "repetition compulsion" derived from Freud. In texts marked by war and violence, motifs recur obsessively, as if circling around an unassimilable wound. The fugal structures, with their recursive returns to originary scenes of loss or violation, likewise enact an inability to master history.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory", which is the transmission of traumatic memory across generations through cultural narratives and images, though developed with reference to Holocaust literature, helps illuminate American modernism's engagement with cultural trauma. Hirsch stresses that postmemory is "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (22). While not post-Holocaust, American modernist texts anticipate such dynamics by transforming individual wounds into collective narratives of dislocation. Hirsch underlines this connection, noting that after the war "artistic innovation was inseparable from cultural mourning" (227). Thus, American modernism does not merely depict violence as historical content; it structurally inscribes violence into its very forms. Fragmentation, ellipsis, and disrupted temporality function as aesthetic strategies through which literature bears witness to violence's persistence. In this sense, modernist texts stand at the intersection of private trauma and collective remembrance. By situating formal innovation within cultural memory-work, American modernism anticipates later theoretical insights into trauma and demonstrates how violence became not only a subject but also a constitutive force of literary modernism.

II.6. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to untangle the complex entanglement of trauma and violence, to help illuminate their recursive interdependence. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Žižek, Butler, Arendt, Chomsky, and others, this chapter have demonstrated that violence exceeds its immediate, visible manifestations, extending into structural, symbolic, and systemic domains that both shape and are shaped by trauma. The philosophical insights explored in this chapter reveal that violence is neither reducible to acts of force nor separable from the discourses that legitimate and naturalize it. As seen, Butler's notion of grievability which exposes the epistemic violence inherent in whose lives are recognised as mournable, while Arendt insists on violence's incapacity to generate true power. Žižek's distinction between

subjective, symbolic, and systemic violence highlights the invisible mechanisms of domination that structure everyday life. These frameworks, combined with critiques of evil and alienation, establish that violence is not simply spectacular but spectral, not only immediate but embedded. Trauma, as the psychic, affective, and narrative trace of this embeddedness, resists closure and requires new aesthetic strategies for articulation.

This chapter delineates that American modernist literature emerges in the challenges faced by authors to represent the psychological wound as an aesthetic response to a historical age saturated with violence. Therefore, the disarticulations and disjunctions, as highlighted by LaCapra and others, appear in the form of fragmentation, ellipsis, and repetition are not merely formal experiments; they are the structural imprint of trauma, reflecting the instability of subjectivity and memory under conditions of war and systemic rupture. As seen in the examples of Hemingway's silences and pithy style, Faulkner's fractured narratives, both showcase trauma's unspeakability and its recursive temporality. Meanwhile, Stein, Eliot, and others demonstrate the crisis of language itself opening more interpretations that comes hand in hand with the poststructuralist notion of language in trauma studies. In many modernist texts, trauma caused by violence is more enacted in form than represented, suggesting that modernism is inseparable from the persistence of historical trauma. The exploration of trauma and violence in American modernism; thus, highlights literature's dual role as a witness to history's ruptures and as a site where new forms of cultural memory are forged. By immersing trauma within the forms in which it is represented, modernism testifies to the presence of violence and generates more interpretations and theoretical insights in literary criticism. The latter prepares the ground for the following chapter, where the focus will turn more directly to how the dynamics of trauma and violence manifest in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), tracing the ways literature negotiates memory, loss, and the unstable possibility of working through in relation to trauma and cultural studies.

CHAPTER THREE

**RETRACING TRAUMA AND
VIOLENCE IN HEMINGWAY AND
FAULKNER**

Chapter Three: Retracing Trauma and Violence in Hemingway and Faulkner's Novels

III.1. Introduction

Following the theoretical mapping of trauma and violence in the previous chapter, this chapter turns to the literary space where those concepts find their most vivid expression, specifically, in modernist fiction. The early twentieth century, marked by unprecedented global conflict and moral disillusionment, demanded a new literary language capable of articulating experiences that resisted comprehension. In this context, trauma became not merely a subject, but a structural principle, shaping form, temporality, and narration itself. Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), both published in the same year, emerge as paradigmatic responses to this crisis of representation. Each writer translates the unassimilated pain of modernity into a distinct aesthetic of fracture, Hemingway through silence and restraint, and Faulkner through multiplicity and dissonance.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how these two major modernist works transform the experience of trauma into narrative and formal innovation. Building on theoretical perspectives from Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet, Cathy Caruth, and Dominick LaCapra, this analysis approaches trauma as a disruption of temporality and symbolization, an event that exceeds the subject's capacity to narrate it. For Hemingway, the trauma of war produces a language of omission, thus it becomes an aesthetic of silence that makes absence itself a mode of testimony. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry's laconic narration and suppressed emotion reveal how trauma speaks most truthfully through what it cannot articulate. Faulkner, on the other hand, turns linguistic collapse into an entire narrative architecture. In *The Sound and the Fury*, time fractures, perspective splinters, and language disintegrates, staging trauma as both a psychological condition and a stylistic revolution.

By pairing these two writers, this chapter traces the shared modernist conviction that trauma redefines the possibilities of narrative form. Both authors register the impossibility of restoring coherence after catastrophe, yet they also transform that impossibility into an ethical practice of witnessing. Silence, fragmentation, and repetition become the literary equivalents of trauma's belated return. The chapter, therefore, explores how trauma is represented, and how it *structures* representation, how the breakdown of language, chronology, and identity becomes the very means through which the unspeakable finds form.

In doing so, this chapter argues that Hemingway and Faulkner together embody the transition from trauma as personal affliction to trauma as modern condition. Their works testify to a world in which war and loss have not only altered human consciousness, but also reshaped the structures through which art seeks to understand it.

III.2. Silenced Trauma and the Problem of Witnessing in Fractured Narratives

Trauma theory situates itself with a paradoxical challenge that defies the very basis of representation and narration. From one perspective, trauma compels narration and urges the subject to articulate the wound. On another perspective, it resists narration because of its unspeakable nature which makes it only available subconsciously in the forms of nightmares and repeated actions (Caruth 4-5). Similarly, while trauma produces a formal demand for testimony, it simultaneously breaks and interrupts the conditions under which testimony becomes possible; thus, fracturing language, memory, and representation. Evidently, in a literary fashion, trauma usually does not surface in direct forms of narration, it is rather indirect and appears in the silences, fragmentations, contradictions, gaps, or dissonances that distort narrative coherence. This incoherence that is produced as a result, opens up many interpretations on the effect of traumatic events within a given context. Ernest Hemingway's *A*

Farewell to Arms (1929) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) are exemplary modernist texts in which trauma is inscribed simultaneously in the structure of narrative form, and even more apparent thematically. It is salient to establish a theoretical framework that exhibits how trauma distorts narration in its direct and indirect representation by authors, and to consider how modernist stylistics participate in this paradox of testimony before delving into the each work from the aforementioned authors individually.

Cathy Caruth's foundational contribution to literary trauma and cultural studies which takes up the gauntlet and provides a starting point for understanding trauma's belatedness and its narrative consequences. In *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Caruth argues that trauma is not reducible to the overwhelming force of a violent event; rather, it is defined by the structure of its incomprehensibility at the time of occurrence and its belated return which marks a delayed response to reality (91). The traumatic event, Caruth emphasises, is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known," and thus returns later in the form of haunting symptoms, compulsive repetitions, or disjointed memories (Caruth 4, 91). Trauma, in Caruth's terms, is an "unclaimed experience," one that resists assimilation into existing frameworks of knowledge. This signifies that trauma is unavailable to senses and mind because it is refused to be claimed until it returns later into different responses. Taking this understanding into account, narrating trauma; therefore, entails a paradoxical attempt to speak what cannot be fully known. Caruth's theorization fits directly onto modernist literary practices such as; Hemingway's deliberate omissions and Faulkner's fractured temporality which epitomises how trauma finds expression through the distortions of narrative form.

This emphasis on belatedness and rupture by Caruth directly links to the question of witnessing and the legitimacy of narrative in witnessing . As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue before about testimony being the central method through which trauma becomes narratable, this modality is, however; fraught with difficulty. Drawing from his own experience

as a Holocaust survivor, Laub believes that testimony is always structured by a double bind: the survivor must speak in order to bear witness, yet the traumatic event resists integration into language, leaving testimony marked by incompleteness and silence (Felman and Laub 61-2). Laub, as he encourages to bear witness, he gives an example a woman who was a Holocaust survivor and who was willing to vent about her trauma in interviews from the Video Archive of Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, asserts a powerful statement which concretises the method of testimony in relation to trauma, Laub says, “she was testifying not simply to empirical historical facts, but to the very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination. The historians could not hear, I thought, the way in which her silence was itself part of her testimony,” (62). Silence is an integral part of trauma which will be well documented in the following sections. Moreover, testimony is not a solitary act but a dialogic encounter, implicating a listener. For the testimony to occur, listening is one of the main driving force for encouraging a faithful representation of traumatic events and their psychological impact. In doing so, bearing witness is provided a safe space for it to arise. The listener assumes the role of “secondary witness,” bearing the burden of receiving an account that is itself fragmented and incomplete.

Laub assumes this position of a peripheral witness and recognises that the listener faces a unique situation. For him the listener, “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.” (57). Laub in this attempt to “record what has yet to be made”, recognises that in order for the victim’s narrative to be recorded, the victim is also testifying to an “absence”; an event that has yet to come into existence because the trauma has not been witnessed yet, and here comes the role of the listener or hearer. For that, Laub emphasises that the listener is “a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*,”. This delineates the process of witnessing and testifying, ultimately, the listener becomes “a co-owner of the traumatic event” (57-8). In literature, the reader often assumes this position. For example,

through the character of Frederic Henry. Hemingway narrates his experiences during the war in an aloof and often detached, understated simple style that refuses explicit confrontation with violence, while Faulkner's Benjy Compson, for instance, produces a narrative that testifies without comprehension, leaving the reader to reconstruct meaning from fragments. In each case, silence in narrative and its disconnections demand that the reader serve as witness to the text's unreadability.

Drawing from Dominick LaCapra who accentuates that trauma invites distortions and the real problem lies in the inscription and binding of trauma, recognising that "no genre or discipline 'owns' trauma as a problem or can provide definitive boundaries for it." (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 96). He refines this discussion by distinguishing between two modes of responding to trauma, "acting out" and "working through." Acting out entails the compulsive repetition of the traumatic event, a reliving that does not allow for critical distance or transformation. In contrast, working through involves a conscious attempt to engage with the trauma, to narrativize it in a way that enables mourning and ethical response (65). However, for the exclusivity of these mutual modes or methods, LaCapra recognises that they coexist within both historical and literary discourses. Thus, in literature, one can observe that acting out takes many forms such as, repetition, narrative gaps, or temporal stasis, while working through is faintly seen in the effort to construct meaning, however provisional and temporal it is.

Moreover, to deepen the theoretical framework for this analysis the psychoanalytic framework provided by Lacan helps in understanding the acts of witnessing, working through, and acting out by situating trauma in relation to the registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. For Lacan, the Real designates that which resists symbolisation (*Seminar XI* 49), because it is simply not available for such symbolisation, therefore, it becomes the domain of experience that cannot be fully integrated into language. Much of this concept is hijacked and adopted by poststructuralists such as Derrida and others. In the attempt to find a link to

trauma, this register of the Real marks a rupture that disrupts the Symbolic order and destabilises the subject's Imaginary coherence. In literary texts, the Real manifests in narrative breakdowns, contradictions, or silences that signal the intrusion of the unspeakable. These indicators can be found in Hemingway's silences and omissions, and Faulkner's disjointed narratives. With their collapse of temporal and causal order, both function as irruptions of the Real, where language fails to capture the horror of violent events such as the war. Reading these modernist texts through Lacan highlights the inexpressibility of psychological wounds through language. One can argue that trauma is not simply an ineffable event that presents itself outside of representation in narrative, but is, in fact, an active break within representation inscribing it as rather an "absence" that reshapes narrative form.

In this context, Andrew Farah's recent study *Hemingway's Brain* (2017) provides a particularly illuminating perspective on the entanglement of trauma, biography, and style. In this quagmire, Farah dedicates a chapter entitled "Trauma Artist". He describes Hemingway as a trauma artist, emphasizing how his repeated exposure to concussions, combat injuries, and psychological distress shaped his literary method (26-7). This perspective highlights the extent to which Hemingway's art of omission is inseparable from trauma. It is quite apparent that his laconic style is both a symptom of trauma and a mode of survival. Meanwhile, Faulkner's close engagement with trauma functions through various stylistic measures, but at the same, shares the same underlying rationale. He effectuates trauma at the level of form through his radical narrative experimentation, shifting perspectives, dislocated temporality, syntactic disruption. The opening section of *The Sound and the Fury*, narrated through Benjy's disordered consciousness, illustrates what Laub might call testimony without comprehension: a narrative that bears witness without understanding, leaving the reader to piece together meaning from fragments.

Brought together, Hemingway and Faulkner contribute in demonstrating that modernist literature registers trauma in divergent and converging ways, first through silence, through excess, and second, omission and disjunction. This framework prepares the ground for a close reading. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* will be analysed as a text in which war trauma is inscribed through silence, repression, and the minimalism of Frederic Henry's narration. Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* will be examined as a novel that dramatizes familial and historical trauma through narrative fragmentation, Benjy's incomprehensible testimony, and Quentin's compulsive repetitions. Placing these readings within trauma theory, by drawing from Caruth, Felman and Laub, LaCapra, Lacan, and Freud, this section will demonstrate how American modernist literature anticipates and embodies the theoretical insights of trauma studies. Hemingway and Faulkner will help reveal that trauma is not only thematically represented, but formally enacted, making narrative silence and unreadability central to the poetics of trauma.

III.3. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929): War Trauma and the Silence of Witnessing

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899–1961) is widely considered one of the most studied literary figures in American modernism. Hemingway's personal life, which seeped through his art, both projected a tension between discipline and disillusionment. The latter was a shared sentiment among American writers at the time and described the age with a sense of loss in the air. Hemingway grew up in a conservative, upper-middle-class household in Oak Park, Illinois. His unique, yet, extremely American upbringing defined his early exposure to the wilderness of Northern Michigan which helped in him fostering a lifelong preoccupation with endurance, violence, and confrontation with nature (Reynolds 17). Rejecting a formal college education,

Hemingway began his career as a reporter for *The Kansas City Star*¹⁹ (see fig. 3 in Appendix E), where he adopted the paper's stylistic creed of "short sentences, vigorous English, and positive statements," which later became hallmarks of his prose (Hutchisson 22).

During World War I, Hemingway served as an ambulance driver in Italy, an experience that left him wounded and permanently altered (see fig. 4 in Appendix E). Both of his worldview and his fiction were heavily informed by the brutality and the absurdity of the war which instilled in him a belief that courage and stoicism were the only meaningful responses to a world that is stripped of hope and transcendence (Reynolds 28). In 1920s Paris, as an expatriate, Hemingway was surrounded by writers such as Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, which ossified his reputation as part of the so-called "Lost Generation." However, as James M. Hutchisson observes, behind the public image of the adventurer and man of action lay "a profoundly introspective and wounded sensibility," one constantly negotiating between heroism and vulnerability (125).

A Farewell to Arms, published in 1929, exemplifies the evident struggle and the trauma carried by Hemingway as a result of his experiences and close contact with war. The novel synthesises many biographical and philosophical concerns combining them into a restrained narrative of love and loss. It recounts the story of the main character Frederic Henry, an American man serving in the Italian ambulance corps during World War I, whose romance with the English nurse Catherine Barkley unfolds amid the disintegration of moral and social order. In the world constructed by Hemingway in the novel, love represents a temporary refuge from the chaos of war, but ultimately succumbs to the same futility that defines the battlefield. Therefore, violence and turmoil destroy this refuge and kills it. Andrew Farah observes that Hemingway "drew on his recall of his own World War I injuries to elaborate Frederic Henry's

¹⁹ A newspaper published since 1880 and based in Kansas City, Missouri. It is the newspaper where young Ernest Hemingway honed and sharpened his writing style.

traumas (*A Farewell to Arms*)” (27) this later defined the remaining creative prowess in his other works which arguably possess a residue of his personal traumas. The novel’s sparse style, fragmented dialogue, and emotional understatement exemplify what critics later termed the “iceberg theory,” where meaning lies beneath surface of simplicity. Through its juxtaposition of intimacy and catastrophe, *A Farewell to Arms* stands as one of Hemingway’s most enduring meditations on the limits of human endurance and the inescapability of loss.

III.3.1. Trauma Through the Unsaid: Hemingway and the Poetics of Silence

The human capacity for self-expression is very limited which makes it noticeable and hard to be ignored. Such confinement was a central concern for decades in the philosophy of mind and language, and it continues to raise new concerns in relation to cultural and sociological dilemmas. There is a famous statement that perhaps encapsulates this concept pronounced by the Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in his groundbreaking work at the time *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) which defined analytical philosophy and logical positivist movement, marking a radical linguistic turn in the 20th century. In it, Wittgenstein asserts that, “*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*,” (74), implying that what cannot be expressed or described in words lies outside the boundaries of our comprehension and outside of our world. Reality, therefore, is constrained by the language we use. Like many poststructuralists emphasised, observing the limitations in language is a step towards understanding the complex nature of language and communication. This notion can also be reflected on the unspeakability and belatedness vis à vis trauma. According to William Benjamin, most modernist authors strive to “convey an incommunicable experience” (Kuminova 41). Therefore, shifting the focus to what could have been said, rather than what is said on the surface, stir us closer to grasp the import that is fraught with trauma and its diverse responses.

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is often well-known for its clarity. The simplicity that is common in Hemingway's works is indicative of a far more complex side that is left unsaid. For that, the power of the style applied in this novel, lies not in simplicity, but rather in what it is left unsaid. James Phelan in his book *Reading the American Novel* (2013) explores the reason why Hemingway appears to have a distinctive style in comparison to his predecessors and peers. He delves deeper into the narrative used in *A Farewell to Arms* and distinguishes Fredrick Henry's voice, he posits: "Hemingway's narration illustrates the important difference between the rhetorical understanding of style, on the one hand, and voice, on the other, because Hemingway's style is remarkably consistent even as the voice of Fredrick Henry changes." (87). Phelan in his admiration and remark to Hemingway's style, he further explains that style here refers to the diction and syntax of a discourse, and when an author has a relatively stable lexicon with a frequent use of the same syntactic patterns, for Phelan, "he has a recognisable style". Thus, Hemingway exemplifies this consistent habit in his authorship. However, this cannot be applied to his depiction of trauma, which in my view, takes a rather fluid and humane form, especially, when it attempts to hide what needs to be said and expressed.

What can be observed continually is that the prose circles the inexpressible and the unspeakable aspect of narrative which in turn becomes an absence, and absence becomes silence. Silence transforms in this fashion into a mode of representation. From the first line, "In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains" (Hemingway 3), in this opening, the world is filtered through detached observation. The war then enters indirectly, through traces: "Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees" (3).

The diction used remains neutral, but the detail of "powdered leaves" registers the contamination of the natural world by an external violent event. The trauma of war is there, but

submerged, expressed through image rather than statement. This trauma is highly profound, precisely, the wound is twofold in this context. With this context the dimensions of trauma even exceeds the psychological effects of violence, causing an ecological wound additionally. Ultimately, Hemingway emphasises this ecological violence in several occasions throughout the novel. In one of the passages he describes the effects of war on the scenery which once was initially filled with life, but was then haunted by death and mayhem. He posits:

The forest of oak trees on the mountain beyond the town was gone. The forest had been green in the summer when we had come into the town but now there were the stumps and the broken trunks and the ground torn up, and one day at the end of the fall when I was out where the oak forest had been I saw a cloud coming over the mountain. (6).

This passage summarises the toll and the consequences of the war whose effect extended to nature, changing its shape and maiming its beauty. Recent scholarship, particularly Anthropocene studies²⁰, distinctly highlights this type of violence.

A violence against nature is a violence against the human and the nonhuman (Kenndy 506). Sussane Knittel offers an interesting view in a paper entitled *Ecologies of violence: Cultural memory (studies) and the genocide–ecocide nexus* (2023), where she brings cultural memory and ecological violence forward to build a nexus between genocide and *ecocide*. Certainly, her view is built on “collective guilt”, as seen in Hannah Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil which reflected much of the sentiments after World War II and the Holocaust. Recognising the evil is not enough, according to Knittel, the new wave of complicity offers a

²⁰ Anthropocene studies are occupied with the study of ecologies and the effects of humans on the planet. See: Craps, Stef. “Putting the Anthropocene on Display: An Inspiration Guide.” (2024) and Craps, Stef. “Ecological Apologies: Reckoning with Grief, Guilt, and Multispecies Justice.” *Environmental Politics*, Special Issue *Eco-emotions: Theory, Politics, Testimony*, edited by Danielle Celermajer and Mihaela Mihai, Sept. 2025

better approach in which it is considered as rather an entanglement that needs to be managed, negotiated, contained, and controlled (Knittel 1567; Mandel 696). Therefore, the Anthropocene explicitly links “climate change, ecological violence, historically and geographically, to histories of colonialism, genocide and other forms of mass violence.” (Knittel 1561).

One can argue that *A Farewell to Arms*, unintentionally, brushes over the surface of ecological violence. However, with great awareness, this may be misinterpreted for the fact that Hemingway is certainly an enigmatic person whose infamous for hunting wild animals. While expressing ethical conflicts (Heidegger 39), Hemingway’s contradiction, in my view, may impose some difficulties in applying the concept of the Anthropocene on his novels without making reference to the ethical grounds in relation to ecological violence. As he represents the perpetrator and not the victim in a multispecies narrative. Complicity and responsibility is what should be pondered upon. Nonetheless, Hemingway in several passages showcases violence and human complicity in inflicting pain in many levels whether physically, psychologically, or ecologically.

Away from the Anthropocentric narrative, the traumatic pattern intensifies when Frederic Henry narrates his injury in a visceral, emotionally charged manner, detailing a traumatic flagrant moment that happened all of sudden. The following passage captures the emotional layers and the graphic scene that describes the wound:

I ate the end of my piece of cheese and took a swallow of wine. Through the other noise I heard a cough, then came the chuh-chuh-chuh-chuh — then there was a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind. I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died. Then I floated, and instead of going on I felt myself slide back. I breathed and I

was back. The ground was torn up and in front of my head there was a splintered beam of wood. In the jolt of my head I heard somebody crying. I thought somebody was screaming. I tried to move but I could not move. I heard the machine-guns and rifles firing across the river and all along the river. (Hemingway 51)

The passage starts in a mundane setting of a sensual world, “I ate the end of my piece of cheese and took a swallow of wine.” Hemingway grounds the reader immediately in the body and appetite, the rhythm of ordinary life. But the moment the bomb explodes, the sensory order collapses almost completely. The narrator enters a dimension of violence and fragments, into a sequence of perception fractures “I tried to breathe but my breath would not come ... I felt myself rush bodily out of myself.” This traumatic disassociation rendered in prose by Hemingway forces the narrator and the reader to experience his body as both inside and outside himself, what he describes as a state of being “bodily in the wind.”.

The horrific and violent element of this scene is described through a sequence of repetition. For example, the repeated “out and out and out” mimics the shockwave of the blast, stretching the sentence into the kind of syntactic breakdown that trauma theory identifies as the formal signature of the unspeakable as mentioned by Caruth, Laub, and Felman. What happens after the traumatic event; however, sums up the detrimental effect on the psyche of the narrator and the rhythm of story after the fact. Frederic, bedridden, speaks with a great level of levity to his Friend Rinaldi who wanted to lift up his spirit by anointing him a hero, “I was blown up while we were eating cheese.” (Hemingway 59). Such statement may be read as nonchalant reaction, however; this sentence contains a clear juxtaposition of domestic calm and instantaneous destruction indicating the fracture trauma produces. In the act of processing such event, the narrator’s subjectivity momentarily leaves his body abruptly. Caruth describes trauma as “the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge” (4). This scene in particular represents a

confrontation with an event that is so abrupt and sudden for Frederic Henry to even process. Hemingway's sparse and clipped syntax captures precisely the impossibility of placement or process, thus the narration becomes a record of an experience that cannot be simply assimilated.

As the novel progresses, Hemingway's "iceberg" principle is seen throughout his prose, his belief that meaning lies in what is omitted, shapes both the structure of scenes and the rhythm of language. The river scene, when Frederic escapes execution by diving into the Tagliamento, extends this silence into the space of survival, "You do not know how long you are in a river when the current moves swiftly. It seems a long time and it may be very short. The water was cold and in flood and many things passed that had been floated off the banks when the river rose. I was lucky to have a heavy timber to hold on to," (201). The syntax again resists interiority. The moment of decision, in a life or death situation, passes without flourish. The act itself is described as pure motion, unmediated by thought. This reduction of experience to action, stripped of commentary, is not emotional flatness but the precise registration of shock. In Hemingway's world, speech cannot coexist with crisis; words return only after the event, and even then haltingly as previously seen after the accident (*A Farewell to Arms* 51).

It is worth noting that Hemingway's restraint in narrative through his main character Frederic Henry is not limited to scenes of battle. In quieter passages, away from the noises of violence, such as the hospital conversations between Frederic and Catherine, silence becomes a vocabulary that is used to express what cannot be expressed, functioning as an emotional vocabulary. Their dialogues are repetitive, often banal, circling desire and fear without resolving either in many of the chapters. These silences culminate in the novel's devastating final scene. After Catherine's and their baby's death, Frederic's voice collapses into quiet finality: "But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and

walked back to the hotel in the rain” (Hemingway 293). The ending of the novel created many criticism for the fact that Hemingway himself struggled to end it. Michael Reynolds documents this in his autobiography on Hemingway, he asserts that Hemingway “wrote forty-seven endings to *A Farewell to Arms*. Each was an attempt to resolve the story of Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley in a way that was true to the novel’s tragic vision.” (Hemingway 30). Such indecision opens many speculations and raises questions about such choice. However, the ending, ultimately, represents a total restraint and showcases the unspeakable element in Hemingway’s writing. This is evident in the emotional freeze into an object, and motion replaces meaning as he walks back to his hotel. Perhaps what makes the ending interesting and poignant is that it does not offer any moral resolution, no cathartic closure. Hemingway refuses both sentimentality and over-explanation. In this case, grief is expressed only through negation making the reader feel a dissatisfaction with an emotional scarring. Furthermore, from a Lacanian reading standpoint, in this silence the reader is left with what may be considered an aesthetic detachment.

Nevertheless, psychoanalytically speaking, it is rather a recognition of what cannot be symbolized. In Lacanian terms, the novel encounters the Real which is the traumatic core that seeks representation. A salient element in this representation, as shown, is language. Precisely in the novel, language hovers at the edge of a void rendering it impossible and unable to be symbolised within the Symbolic order. Frederic’s speech is marked by ruptures for the reason that his experience exceeded what language can hold. Thus, the novel’s minimalism mirrors a deeper psychic fracture. *A Farewell to Arms* demonstrates that omission is important in the depiction of trauma. The unsaid is the space where trauma, memory, and witness converge in conjuncture.

III.3.2. Testimony, Witnessing, and the Crisis of Expression in *A Farewell to Arms*

A central concern in memory studies is that of testimony and witnessing. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway transcends traditional narration and transforms narration itself into an act of fragile witnessing. When scrutinising Frederic Henry's voice in the novel, which often is spare, repetitive, and seems as if it is withholding emotion, it resembles to a great extent the hesitant cadence found in testimony. The paradox of testimony described by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub to testify is to commit oneself, and to the impossible, for testimony always seeks to articulate an experience that literally cannot be fully known or represented" (*Testimony* 5-6). Hemingway's narrator represents precisely this space of impossibility. His first-person account bears witness to the Great War's devastation, and reveals the collapse of the very structures that would make such witnessing coherent.

What can be observed in Frederic's storytelling is that it is marked by a deep ambivalence and hesitance toward speech. While his language appears to be precise, for the terse style used by Hemingway, but such precise decision in language showcases an evasive underlining sentiment. Therefore, clarity masks the unspeakable. When he recalls his wounding, "I was blown up while we were eating cheese" (Hemingway 59), the sentence operates as an anti-testimony. While the "witness is a witness of the truth and what happens during an event" (Felman & Laub 81), Frederic Henry resists revealing, thus he reports without revealing. His testimony lacks seriousness making the incident narrated with a great level of levity that is stripped of interior response.

The narrative numbness displayed by the character echoes the dynamics of trauma that was outlined by Cathy Caruth, who argues that trauma "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes

itself again, repeatedly” (4). Frederic’s account, given retrospectively, repeats the event without processing it, as a result his storytelling becomes a compulsive return rather than a cathartic release. Hemingway’s style thus dramatizes what Dominick LaCapra calls “acting out”, a mode of repetition that remains caught within trauma’s temporal loop (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 65). Frederic’s narrative unfolds in precisely this rhythm. His descriptions of the front, the retreat, and Catherine’s death are recounted in the same neutral register, as if every scene were already past feeling. The narrative’s steady tone erases emotional gradation, suggesting that the trauma of war has flattened not only experience but language itself.

This flattening reaches its most striking form in Frederic’s attempts to communicate with others. During the retreat from Caporetto, the chaos of command and the disintegration of hierarchy render speech meaningless. Orders are given and ignored; communication breaks down amid noise and fear. The narrator’s voice mimics this breakdown through repetition and abruptness: “We were stopped often for the column ahead was held up. There were noises of bombardment and shells came near enough so that we saw the flashes” (Hemingway 178). The paratactic structure, clauses joined without subordination, mirrors the fragmentation of both thought and authority. The simplicity of these sentences does not signal control; it is the linguistic trace of shock, a syntax of survival.

Felman and Laub describe testimony as a “mode of bearing witness that includes the listener as participant” (57). In *A Farewell to Arms*, this role falls to the reader. Hemingway’s narration excludes the conventional consolations of memory and explanation, leaving only fragments of observation. The reader must reconstruct meaning from omission, becoming a secondary witness to Frederic’s unspoken grief. When Catherine dies, the narration reaches its ethical limit: “It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain” (Hemingway 293). The voice that has narrated war,

loss, and love finally collapses into gesture. The rain absorbs language, and silence becomes the only form of truth the text allows.

Hemingway's silences should not be mistaken for stoicism. They are instead the marks of what Felman calls "the crisis of truth" in trauma literature. It is the moment when language can no longer function as representation, only as a trace (*Testimony* 15). Frederic's narration, stripped of rhetorical excess, exposes the inadequacy of words to contain catastrophe. Yet in that inadequacy lies its testimonial power. By refusing to aestheticize pain, Hemingway makes the novel itself a space of witnessing. The gaps between sentences, the ellipses, the laconic transitions, the lack of commentary, are not stylistic choices alone but rather ethical gestures toward what cannot be said.

The scene of Catherine's death crystallizes these nonaesthetic choices. Hemingway gives no description of the body, no explicit expression of sorrow, only the flat statement of departure. This silence corresponds to what LaCapra calls "working within trauma", an attempt not to master loss but to live alongside its persistence. In this sense, Frederic's narration testifies not by speaking the truth of trauma, but by showing that truth's resistance to speech. Therefore, in this tableau that seems to evoke an end, sorrow, and shock, the absence of explanation is what bears witness. Frederick stands there transfixed.

However, in the act of reading, we complete that testimony. Hemingway's minimalism demands interpretation, but the reader's task is not to decode hidden meaning; it is to acknowledge the impossibility of closure. As Caruth observes that the history of trauma can only take place through the listening of another (*Unclaimed Experience* 11). *A Farewell to Arms* stages precisely that relationship. Its restraint does not withhold emotion; it invites us to hear what cannot be voiced.

Another example of unspeakability could be found in the hospital scenes in *A Farewell to Arms* which expose the tension between the need to speak and the impossibility of doing so. Frederic's recovery after his wounding is marked by the clinical language of measurement and procedure, temperature charts, wounds dressed, nurses' movements, rather than by reflection or memory. His exchanges with Catherine Barkley often slip into hollow repetition: "'You're my religion. You're all I've got,'" she says, and Frederic echoes, "'You're all I want'" (Hemingway 226). Their dialogue is rhythmic but empty, looping around the same declarations as if meaning were being rebuilt word by word. Trauma has stripped language of nuance; it remains only as gesture, as the attempt to bridge the unspeakable gap between subject and world.

Frederic's testimony falters not simply because he cannot articulate what he has seen, but because the war has corrupted the conditions of meaning themselves. As Dominick LaCapra observes, trauma "puts representation itself into crisis" (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 106). The structure of Frederic's narrative, its sequence of terse observations, abrupt transitions, and withheld commentary, mirrors that crisis formally, i.e., structure. When he recalls the Caporetto retreat,²¹ for instance, the narration dissolves into fragments of movement and sound: "We were stopped often for the column ahead was held up. There were noises of bombardment and shells came near enough so that we saw the flashes" (Hemingway 178). These declarative clauses, each ending where it begins, deny both causality and hierarchy. The language bears witness by registering what cannot be integrated into narrative continuity.

Felman and Laub argue that the testimony of trauma "addresses another, in order to be heard" (79). In Hemingway's novel, this "other" is absent; Frederic tells his story to no one in

²¹ It refers to *The Battle of Caporetto*, also known as The Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo, the Battle of Kobarid, or the Battle of Karfreit. The battle was fought between the Kingdom of Italy and the Central Powers on the 24th of October 1917 in the Isonzo front of World War I. The German-Austrian offensive forced a massive retreat of Italian forces from the Isonzo front to the Piave River.

particular. The narration, like a confession to an unnamed listener, remains suspended in a space of address without reception. This absence of audience intensifies the sense of isolation that defines the novel's moral landscape. The reader becomes the necessary witness, the one who must complete the act of testimony that the text itself cannot finish.

Hemingway's minimalism, then, is not the suppression of emotion but a structural invitation to participation. Frederic's silences enact what Felman calls the "crisis of listening": the reader must supply the empathy, the interpretive work, and even the grief that the narrator cannot articulate. When he says of Catherine's death, "It was like saying good-by to a statue" (Hemingway 293), the image's stillness transfers emotional burden to the reader. The scene's absence of commentary does not signal indifference; it registers an encounter with what Caruth calls "the unclaimed experience" of trauma, the event that resists being fully owned or narrated (*Unclaimed Experience* 4).

This aesthetic of restraint resonates with more recent trauma theorists who challenge the assumption that testimony must be direct or confessional. Lucy Bond and Pieter Vermeulen argue that contemporary trauma narratives often operate through *post-witnessing*: a mode in which the act of bearing witness acknowledges its own belatedness and mediation. In their view, "testimony no longer guarantees access to the real, but instead stages its own failure as the condition of ethical engagement" (*The Post-Genocidal Mind* 10). Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* anticipates this position decades earlier. Frederic's narrative is not an unmediated record of experience but a self-conscious acknowledgment of language's inadequacy. His silence becomes an ethical form of speech, a refusal to aestheticize pain or transform suffering into spectacle.

The war, for Hemingway, is not simply an external event but a rupture in language. Words such as "honour," "sacrifice," and "glory," once belonging to the Symbolic order of meaning,

lose credibility in the face of mechanized violence. The latter falls in the register of the Real because it resists symbolisation and lies outside language thus it cannot fully be expressed. Frederic observes early on that “abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages” (Hemingway 184). The novel’s ethical force lies in this recognition in which testimony must abandon abstraction to remain truthful. By rejecting the grand narratives of heroism and focusing instead on sensory fragments, the rain, the dust, the taste of cheese, Hemingway converts the failure of language into a moral stance. The truth of trauma, he implies, resides not in explanation but in detail, not in rhetoric but in presence.

This crisis of expression ultimately defines Frederic’s role as a witness. His narration offers not closure but recurrence. Even after Catherine’s death, his voice remains curiously level, circling back to movement and physical gesture: “After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain” (Hemingway 293). The act of walking substitutes for speech; it is testimony without language. Rain, which throughout the novel is associated with death foreshadows this ending. It returns as a persistent condition that cannot be escaped. Catherine articulates a fear she has in her conversation with Frederic:

‘It’s raining hard.’
‘And you’ll always love me, won’t you?’
‘Yes.’
‘And the rain won’t make any difference?’
‘No.’ ‘That’s good. Because I’m afraid of the rain.’
‘Why?’ I was sleepy. Outside the rain was falling steadily.
‘I don’t know, darling. I’ve always been afraid of the rain.’ (Hemingway 113)

This fear expressed by Catherine appears to be unjustified or almost unreasonable. However, Frederic, upon asking for the reason for such fear, Catherine rearticulates her ending explaining by that her fatal logic when she says, “I’m afraid of the rain because sometimes I

see me dead in it.” (Hemingway 114). The ending in a way confirms that fear retroactively. Rain, in *A Farewell to Arms*, does not signify renewal, but the permanence of loss. LaCapra’s distinction between “acting out” and “working through” clarifies this gesture. Frederic’s walk enacts a ritual repetition, a motion through space that cannot yet achieve symbolic distance. However, in that repetition lies a muted form of endurance, a way of carrying trauma forward without pretending to resolve it.

Hemingway’s writing thus anticipates a central paradox in modern trauma studies. One may argue in this case that the truest witness may be the one who cannot speak fully. Silence is not absence, but a mode of ethical presence. Felman and Laub describe the survivor’s story as “a process of constructing a narrative that can bridge the gap between the event and its representation” (85). Frederic’s narrative, with all its gaps, hesitations, and understated rhythms, demonstrates that such a bridge may never be complete. His failure to articulate trauma becomes itself a form of testimony, the record of an encounter with what exceeds articulation.

By converting silence into form, Hemingway redefines the literary witness. It is rather apparent that *A Farewell to Arms* does not seek redemption or moral clarity, it constructs a narrative that acknowledges its own fracture. Frederic Henry’s voice survives through persisting not by explaining every detail, it chooses silence to witness. His restraint, his refusal to dramatize pain, and his insistence on understatement all testify to the enduring presence of trauma within the texture of narrative itself. In Hemingway’s poetics of silence, the crisis of expression becomes its own language and the tool in which narrative restraints represent the language of what remains after the failure of utterance.

III.4. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*: Modernist Temporal Dislocation and the Grammar of Trauma

William Faulkner (1897-1962) stands among the most distinctive figures in twentieth-century American fiction and one of the literary titans of his time (*see fig. 2 in Appendix D*). Born in Mississippi, he transformed his regional background into a mythic landscape, Yoknapatawpha County, through which he explored the endurance and decay of the human spirit. His novels are haunted by memory, guilt, and the irreversible weight of history. In 1950, Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, honoured for his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern novel and his depiction of the human condition, particularly, the humane heart in conflict with itself. Many of his achievement as an author do not lie in what he depicts, but in how he writes to depict his settings and themes. He is famously known for using fragmented structures, shifting perspectives, and layered voices. These tools and techniques redefined fiction, especially through the concepts consciousness and time.

Among his works, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is the most structurally daring and emotionally charged. The novel chronicles the downfall of the Compson family through four distinct sections, each revealing a different vision of loss and despair. Each section represents four narrators. Readers are introduced to the tale in the first section which is narrated through the lens of a 33-year-old nonverbal invalid, Benjy. His disordered narration collapses the forced boundaries of time and exposes life as an endless repetition of pain. The second section is narrated by Quentin who is a Harvard student. Completely different than his brother Benjy, this narrative is filled with feverish interior monologue, dramatizes his moral despair and his inability to reconcile with the past and the failures of the present. The narration carries on through the mouthpiece of another brother Jason. His bitter narrative strips away sentimentality, leaving behind a modern world governed by resentment and greed. Finally, the

closing section is told through an omniscient narrator that turns toward Dilsey, the Compsons' Black servant, whose endurance and faith offer a quiet counterpoint to the family's ruin.

There is certainly a technical oddity in *The Sound and the Fury* and a difficulty, particularly in the opening two sections, that is intentional. An obvious element that seems to centre around the novel, intentionally, is related to time. The word "clock" was repeated 30 times and was mostly used to censure the concept of time as being tied to a human invention, the clock. Faulkner's metaphysics is, therefore, "a metaphysics of time." (Sartre 317). Jean-Paul Sartre was among the first to grasp the significance of Faulkner's method. In his essay *On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner* (1939) first translated to English by Annette Michelson, Sartre notes that "Man's misfortune lies in his being time-bound." (317). In an expected existential reading, Sartre highlights that we often confuse temporality with chronology since man is who invented dates and clocks. Therefore, for him, we must abandon this invented useless measure in order to arrive at "real time". The latter is an opinion that he shares with Faulkner's character Quentin who says, referencing his father: "clocks slay time...time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clocks stops does time come to life." (*The Sound and the Fury* 71). This passage from the novel refers to Quentin's breaking his watch. According to Sartre, this gesture has a symbolic value as it gives the reader access to a time without clocks (318).

Therefore, for Sartre, Faulkner's manipulation of time reveals a world in which memory overwhelms action; the characters live not in time, but within its repetitions. For that reason, Faulkner's time, especially present, and since the reader does not have access to the future in the novel, is catastrophic. It is not chronological, it is temporal, it moves slow, almost inert. As Sartre phrases it: "It seems as though Faulkner has laid hold of a frozen speed at the very heart of things; he is grazed by congealed spurts that wane and dwindle without moving" (318-9).

The latter alludes to an immobility that Faulkner furnishes the story with through his imaginative and unspeakable present.

Cleanth Brooks expands this reading by stressing Faulkner's balance between chaos and endurance. In *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963), Brooks describes *The Sound and the Fury* as "a tragic poem of disorder and endurance" (256). He emphasizes that Faulkner's technical experimentation, his fractured chronology and multiple voices, is never gratuitous, it mirrors the very disintegration it seeks to portray. Through this interplay of fragmentation and persistence, Brooks argues, Faulkner transforms a story of private loss into a universal meditation on survival. Part of the reason why Faulkner makes such choices in his novels, and *The Sound and the Fury* in particular, begins by his view on the impossibility of ideal communication.

In his 1929 review for the *Providence Sunday Journal*, Winfield Townley Scott identified what he perceived as a defining weakness of modernist fiction which is a profound failure of communication. He argued that such writers exhibit "an utmost complete lack of communication," concluding that Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* ultimately "tells us nothing." Scott further criticized the novel's form, describing it as "rambling, often capital-less or periodless or punctuationless... [a] jumbled, confused and wandering text" (Scott 81; Kuminova 44). While dismissive in tone, Scott's observations underscore a genuine difficulty encountered by early readers of Faulkner's work.

Indeed, it is difficult to deny the disorienting nature of the novel's opening section. Readers are first confronted with the consciousness of Benjy Compson, a cognitively disabled character whose perception is unstructured by chronological time. Benjy's narration presents a series of events from the Compson family's history without temporal markers or causal sequencing. In this section, Faulkner initially employs italics to signal shifts into the past: "Wait a minute," Luster said. "You snagged on that nail again. Can't you never crawl through

here without snagging on that nail.' Caddie uncaught me and we crawled through..." (Faulkner 2). Although the narrative moment originates in 1928, Benjy's present experience of being caught on a fence triggers a memory from Christmas 1902, when Caddie similarly frees him.

As the section progresses, however, the function of italics becomes increasingly unstable. Rather than consistently marking recollection, italics later denote the present moment: "We passed the carriage house, where the marriage was. It had a new wheel. 'Git in, now, and set still until your maw come,' Dilsey said. She shoved me into the carriage" (6). Here, a present-day walk with Luster collapses into a memory from 1912, when the family travels by carriage to visit Mr. Compson and Quentin's graves. This oscillation between past and present, without narrative clarification, intensifies the reader's sense of temporal confusion. Compounding this difficulty is the near-total absence of conventional exposition; characters, relationships, and settings are introduced without explanation, requiring readers to reconstruct meaning retrospectively.

In response to these challenges, one contemporary reviewer proposed a radical solution: "[L]et the reader start the book on page 93 [Quentin's narration], putting off the introduction to the end" (Kuminova 45). While such a reordering might make the novel more accessible, it would undermine Faulkner's artistic intentions. Preserving modernist techniques is essential for the preservation of artistry which is a significant element in the modernist project. Such conservation enables the strategic use of suspense and foreshadowing, requires active reader engagement, and foregrounds the inherent limitations of language as a vehicle for meaning. Faulkner deliberately disrupts traditional literary conventions with his choice of not committing to narrative clarity and linear progression, thus transforming confusion into a formal expression of psychological fracture and communicative failure. In this way, *The Sound and the Fury* exemplifies modernist experimentation and interrogates the very possibility of coherent narration itself.

A similar insight appears in Irving Howe's *William Faulkner: A Critical Study* (1952), where he argues that the novel "turns the ruin of a family into the ruin of a civilization" (120). For Howe, Faulkner's imagination reaches beyond the Compsons to expose the moral and spiritual collapse of the modern South. The decay of the family, he suggests, becomes an allegory of cultural exhaustion and of modern humanity's loss of faith. Those different readings reveal *The Sound and the Fury* as a work of immense moral and formal power. Through its fragmented structure, its shifting perceptions of time, and its insistence on endurance amid ruin, the novel defines Faulkner's vision of human experience. Reading the novel reaffirms that its meaning must be wrestled from chaos.

III.4.1. Benjy Compson: The Innocent Witness and the Temporal Collapse of Trauma

Benjy Compson's narrative in *The Sound and the Fury* opens the novel with a radical disruption of chronological time, syntax, and voice, a stylistic decision that embodies the logic of trauma. His section, told entirely through sensory impressions and associative leaps, unfolds without temporal hierarchy; past and present coexist in one continuous stream of perception. Faulkner's fragmented narration becomes not merely experimental modernism, but a structural enactment of the wounded psyche, what Cathy Caruth describes as the "belatedness" of trauma, the event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly.

From its first line, Benjy's section situates the reader within this recursive temporality: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting" (Faulkner 1). The present-tense immediacy collapses any distinction between now and then. The fence, a recurring motif, becomes a metaphorical threshold between perception and comprehension, presence and loss. Each repetition of sensory cues, firelight, cold, the word "Caddy", summons a network of involuntary memories. When Benjy hears golfers calling "caddie," the sound

instantly triggers his mourning: “Caddy smelled like trees” (Faulkner 4). What should be a neutral stimulus reopens the wound of her absence. The structure of repetition here is not intentional recollection but compulsive reliving: an echo of Freud’s “repetition compulsion,” where trauma returns not as narrative memory but as lived reenactment (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 18–19).

Pierre Janet’s early observations on dissociation illuminate Benjy’s condition even more precisely. Janet described traumatic memory as “a fixed idea,” separated from the normal flow of consciousness, recurring in flashes and sensations rather than coherent narration (*L’automatisme psychologique* 1889). Benjy’s consciousness performs exactly this, it is not recollective but mechanical. The narrative leaps back and forth in time according to sensory stimuli: “Caddy smelled like trees,” “the bright shapes began to stop and I could hear them again” (Faulkner 4). The repetition of these fragments is not only linguistic, but also neurological. Thus, Benjy’s mind appears to be a site of arrested time, where trauma’s “fixations” make narrative sequence impossible.

The affective core of Benjy’s trauma lies in Caddy’s absence, which he cannot name but endlessly relives. Her image is constructed entirely through scent, sound, and touch, “Caddy smelled like trees” (Faulkner 4), a pattern that transforms memory into sensory haunting. His experience of the world is dominated by this logic of substitution. Every smell or sound substitutes for an event that cannot be recalled consciously. Caruth argues that such belated experience “does not simply signify the inability to recall; it signifies the ongoing impact of the event itself” (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). For Benjy, this impact is formalised: Faulkner’s use of italics to mark temporal shifts embodies the intrusion of past into present. Time, in Benjy’s narrative, is trauma itself, a wound in chronology that continually reopens.

Faulkner’s stylistic innovation here performs what Dominick LaCapra calls “acting out,” a repetitive reliving of trauma without distance or symbolic processing (*Writing History*,

Writing Trauma 65). Benjy cannot “work through” his loss because he lacks the linguistic and cognitive frameworks that would allow it. For that reason, Benjy’s narration creates a sense of suspense through the novel as an opening section, which would be completely lost if the novel began with a coherent narrator. His language puzzles the readers and forces them to work through the story to sort through his narration and solve the Compson family mystery. When he cries by the fence or moans at Caddy’s loss recalling events, his body becomes the text of trauma, what Dori Laub calls the “speechless cry” that precedes testimony (*Testimony* 64). Such as when he recalls: “Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry,” (Faulkner 14). Benjy’s narrative therefore represents the most primal form of witnessing. Readers begin to see a pattern between events through the lens of the least comprehensive narrator, the picture, however, starts to gradually become more focused.

Faulkner’s handling of perspective forces the reader into a position analogous to the psychoanalyst or the secondary witness. The reader must reconstruct coherence out of fragments, performing the labour that Benjy himself cannot. This dynamic mirrors the psychoanalytic model of trauma transmission where the unspoken is passed to the listener (the reader in this case), who becomes responsible for its meaning. As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub note, testimony is “not a mode of knowledge but of relation” (85). Faulkner’s readers thus become participants in Benjy’s trauma, decoding sensory repetition into narrative understanding, a process that implicates the reader ethically as both interpreter and witness.

Yet, while Benjy’s trauma is personal, it also encodes the collapse of a larger symbolic order. His repetitive grief for Caddy doubles as the Compson family’s grief for a lost South, the disintegration of its patriarchal, moral, and racial hierarchies. The trauma of personal loss overlaps with the cultural trauma of historical decay. Benjy’s incoherence, then, becomes the formal symptom of both. As Judith Herman observes, “trauma shatters the sense of connection between individual and community” (*Trauma and Recovery* 51). Benjy’s world is one of pure

perception without meaning, and that loss of shared language signifies not only mental injury but social collapse.

Ultimately, Faulkner's decision to begin his novel with Benjy's voice is a profound ethical gesture. By foregrounding the consciousness least capable of symbolic articulation, he redefines what it means to represent trauma. The novel opens not with mastery, but with fragmentation. Faulkner does not open with coherent knowledge, but with witness. Therefore, separating his readers into real and imaginary (Kuminova 47). In doing so, Faulkner anticipates what Lucy Bond and Pieter Vermeulen later call "the poetics of unknowing", a narrative form that acknowledges the impossibility of representing trauma directly while still bearing its trace (*Memory Unbound* 7). Benjy's section, then, is not a failed narrative, it is rather the only possible one, a story of trauma told through the dislocation of time, syntax, and sense.

Benjy Compson is the "innocent witness," who transforms trauma into a grammar of repetition and absence. His voice is Faulkner's purest form of testimony, one that embodies Caruth's paradoxical insight that trauma "demands the awakening of a listening that can hear the speaking wound" (*Unclaimed Experience* 8). In Benjy's cries, in his circular memories of Caddy, the novel gives sound to that wound, even as it refuses to translate it into narrative closure.

III.4.2. Quentin Compson: The Failure of Language and the Crisis of Masculine Identity

If Benjy's section renders trauma as sensory recursion, Quentin's narrative exposes it as linguistic and temporal collapse, the psychic implosion of a subject who cannot reconcile moral law, desire, and memory. His section, set on the day of his suicide at Harvard, stages trauma as an intellectualized breakdown. One can argue that through this intellectualisation, consciousness becomes both the medium and the battlefield of loss. The prose, similarly to Benjy, dense with stream-of-consciousness monologue and typographical disarray, mirrors the

disintegration of the self that Faulkner repeatedly aligns with the collapse of patriarchal and Southern values. In Quentin, trauma takes the form of obsession, a fixation on his sister Caddy's sexuality that mirrors the Freudian compulsion to repeat.

The opening pages of his section dissolve the boundaries of time and grammar, as if language itself were fracturing under the weight of his memory, "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (Faulkner 63). The sentence moves between the external "shadow," "curtains" and the internal "I was in time again" without transition. Quentin's reference to "hearing the watch" fuses temporal awareness with auditory intrusion, time is not measured but suffered. The watch, a gift from his father, becomes the novel's central symbol of inherited trauma. Mr. Compson's nihilistic remark, that the watch was not the instrument but the symbol of your bondage (Faulkner 64), describes time (his father's watch) as both inheritance and curse. Trauma, in this sense, is not only personal but genealogical. It is transmitted as ideology.

This inheritance functions through what Lacan would call the "Symbolic order", the network of language, law, and paternal authority that structures subjectivity. Yet, for Quentin, this order is collapsing. His father's cynical relativism "no battle is ever won" (Faulkner 63) dismantles the moral framework that Quentin desperately clings to. His ensuing breakdown manifests as a futile attempt to restore coherence through language. His obsessive repetitions of being bound by time, referencing his father as source of wisdom and also pain illustrate the very impossibility of cessation. The more Quentin attempts to stabilise meaning, the more syntax fragments. As LaCapra writes, trauma "is not simply an event but the collapse of frameworks of understanding" (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 41). Quentin's language performs this collapse; words become rhythmic incantations, marking a rupture from communication.

Caddy's sexual transgression, on the other hand, operates as the trauma that Quentin both represses and re-enacts. His obsession with her purity, "I said I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames" (Faulkner 66), accentuates dramatically the desperate search for control over an unbearable truth. The act, imagined or real, becomes a substitute for the trauma of Caddy's loss and the family's moral disintegration. Freud's notion of the repetition compulsion clarifies Quentin's behaviour. Unable to grasp or be in full control of the event, he replays it compulsively through fantasy and speech. Each repetition is an attempt to transform the traumatic into the symbolic in order to make sense of the unspeakable, yet every effort only reiterates his failure.

Faulkner's syntax enacts the breakdown of the symbolic order. Punctuation dissolves; the boundary between interior and exterior vanishes. Sentences flow into each other without syntactic resolution. A constant worry about time, an anxiousness that deepens with every page as the story moves forward through the lens of Quentin:

There was a clock, high up in the sun, and I thought about how, when you don't want to do a thing, your body will try to trick you into doing it, sort of unawares. I could feel the muscles in the back of my neck, and then I could hear my watch ticking away in my pocket and after a while I had all the other sounds shut away, leaving only the watch in my pocket. (Faulkner 69)

The movement is hypnotic and suffocating. The prose mimics the looping temporality of trauma, what Caruth describes as the "endless testimony to the impossibility of knowing" (*Unclaimed Experience* 6). Each clause circles the trauma without ever naming it, and the reader becomes trapped within Quentin's recursive interiority, the textual equivalent of psychic claustrophobia.

The temporal crisis that defines Quentin's section also functions as a moral allegory for the South's inability to move beyond its past. As critics like Cleanth Brooks have noted, Quentin's fixation on purity reflects the nostalgic pathology of a decaying civilization. Yet trauma theory gives this cultural allegory a psychological depth. Furthermore, Quentin's paralysis is not nostalgia but dissociation, which is the mind's defence against disintegration. Pierre Janet's description of the traumatized subject as "an automaton of the past" (212) captures Quentin's condition precisely. His every thought loops back to Caddy, to the river, to the image of the watch, to "time again." His suicide is the culmination of this looping, the only act that promises stillness.

Quentin's death, however, is not resolution. In his last scenes, Faulkner's language slows into a sensation, "the water was clear and still in the shadow" (Faulkner 97), detailing a chilling ending, "I could not see the bottom, but I could see a long way into the motion of the water before the eye gave out, and then I saw a shadow hanging like a fat arrow stemming into the current." (Faulkner 98). The latter, one would argue is a stylistic echo of Benjy's sensory register. The trauma that began as intellectual obsession ends in bodily dissolution. Language, having failed to contain meaning, yields to the pre-verbal. The moment collapses Lacan's *Imaginary* and *Real*, where the self sees itself vanish into an unmediated event, water, motion, absence. Quentin's suicide thus becomes what Dori Laub terms "the event without a witness" (*Testimony* 75), it annihilates both speaker and listener, leaving only a trace through its broken syntax.

The ethical resonance of Quentin's narrative lies precisely in its failure. His story exposes the limits of modernist narration as a mode of witnessing. Unlike Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, whose restraint becomes ethical silence, Quentin's linguistic overflow testifies to an equal impossibility of speech. His fragmented monologue dramatizes the tension between the

need to tell and the futility of telling, between Caruth's "speaking wound" and the wound's resistance to symbolization. The reader's task, once again, is to bear witness to that failure.

Through Quentin Compson, Faulkner transforms trauma into a linguistic phenomenon, a structure of repetition, fragmentation, and dissolution that implicates both the character and the act of writing itself. His suicide marks not the end of trauma but its persistence: a silence that continues to echo in the reader's mind. In Faulkner's world, testimony survives not in words but in the ruins of language.

III.4.3. Jason Compson: Rage, Cynicism, and Escaping Trauma

Jason Compson's narrative marks a jarring tonal rupture in *The Sound and the Fury*. After the sensory openness of Benjy and the moral anguish of Quentin, Jason's section is a torrent of aggression, sarcasm, and control. His voice appears to reject trauma altogether, but the violence of his cynicism reveals itself as trauma's displacement. Reading Jason thoroughly, situates him as the Compson who refuses to grieve. He replaces mourning with manipulation, guilt with greed, and empathy with efficiency. His cruelty functions as a defence against the psychic ruin that has engulfed his family.

The narrative voice that Faulkner constructs for Jason is stripped of introspection. His language is pragmatic, transactional, and caustic. He sees human relations in terms of profit and loss: "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (Faulkner 153). This aggression is not random, it is a mechanism of control in a world that has deprived him of symbolic authority. The Compson name has lost its Southern prestige; Jason compensates by asserting domination through money. He meticulously embezzles the checks meant for his niece, Miss Quentin, and hides them "in the locked drawer at the back of the store" (Faulkner 204). His control over her funds becomes a grotesque parody of paternal protection.

Unable to articulate his resentment or loss, Jason replays it through cruelty and sarcasm. He directs his hatred at women, Caddy, Miss Quentin, his mother, and at the African American workers he supervises, reinforcing a patriarchal and racial hierarchy that no longer holds meaning. His vicious humour, "...I says you'd better be sure and not let me know you're gone because I'll sure have him on number seventeen that night and I says I think I know a place where they'll take her too and the name of it's not Milk street and Honey avenue either." (Faulkner 189), beneath the ridicule lies impotence: he cannot restore what is already disintegrated.

Žižek's concept of *systemic violence* clarifies Jason's pathology. In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Žižek distinguishes between subjective violence (direct aggression) and systemic violence (the invisible structure of oppression embedded in ideology). Jason's cruelty exemplifies the latter: he reproduces the capitalist logic that has replaced the old Southern code of honour. His obsession with money and work becomes a perverse ethics (Faulkner 203, 206, 207). In one of the scenes with his employer Earl, Jason gets exposed for stealing money from his mother:

'I believe I know more about where that automobile came from than she does.'

'You think so, do you?' I says.

'When are you going to spread the news that I stole it from my mother?'

'I don't say anything,' he says.

'I know you have her power of attorney. And I know she still believes that thousand dollars is in this business.'

'All right,' I says. 'Since you know so much, I'll tell you a little more: go to the bank and ask them whose account I've been depositing a hundred and sixty dollars on the first of every month for twelve years.' (194)

This dialogue represents the imposition of control that conceals moral collapse. Jason is unable to incumber his aggression. He is blinded by a bitter and materialistic understanding of life disabling his empathy and reinforcing an apathy that he cannot simply locate.

Freud's writings on the *fort-da* game illuminate the deeper structure of Jason's aggression. Freud describes the child's repetitive play with presence and absence, the throwing away ("fort") and retrieval ("da") of an object, as a symbolic mastery over loss (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 14). Jason's cruelty toward Miss Quentin, for instance, mirrors this ritual. He withholds her money, then taunts her, reasserting his power over the very absence that wounds him. His sadism can arguably be a coping mechanism and an unconscious re-enactment of loss disguised as possessing control and authority.

Jason's narrative is saturated with obsessive detail, the precise accounting of money, time, and insult. These details act as cognitive anchors for a psyche on the verge of collapse. Jason's orderliness is pathological; it transforms trauma into a bureaucratic ritual. When Miss Quentin eventually escapes with his stolen savings, Jason's breakdown is not only financial but existential. The scene of his futile pursuit, "I ran up the hill and into the lane and saw the dust where the car had been" (Faulkner 277), mirrors Benjy's futile wailing and Quentin's suicidal escape. Jason, too, is trapped in repetition, condemned to chase an absence.

Faulkner's stylistic choices reinforce this psychic economy. Jason's section is linear, syntactically clear, and superficially rational, the opposite of Benjy's temporal collapse or Quentin's stream-of-consciousness. Yet this surface order is deceptive. The relentless coherence of Jason's narration is a symptom of repression, not stability. His sentences, sharp and mechanical, deny ambiguity: a linguistic armour against affect. As trauma theorist Ruth Leys notes, "the repetition of trauma can manifest as a compulsive return to the literal" (*Trauma: A Genealogy* 295). Jason's obsession with the literal, with numbers, transactions, facts, is the mark of his wound.

Faulkner's portrayal of Jason also deepens the novel's exploration of witnessing. Whereas Benjy and Quentin internalize trauma, Jason projects it outward, inflicting suffering on others. His violence turns inward trauma into outward domination, transforming personal loss into social aggression. In this sense, he becomes the novel's embodiment of what Žižek calls "the obscene underside of the Law": the enforcement of order through cruelty. Jason enacts the moral residue of a fallen South, the afterlife of systemic violence that persists when belief itself has vanished. Yet Faulkner does not render Jason purely monstrous. His bitterness has an ethical trace, it is the last vestige of feeling distorted by historical and personal decay. When he rages that "no man ever had a hand in it but me" (Faulkner 249), the self-pity beneath his bravado exposes the loneliness of a man trapped by inherited failure. His anger, however destructive, is also a form of testimony, the cry of one who cannot articulate loss except through domination.

Jason's section completes the novel's anatomy of trauma by transforming silence into aggression. If Benjy mourns through repetition and Quentin through language, Jason mourns through control. Each represents a different response to unassimilated suffering, and Jason's is the most socially recognizable: the conversion of grief into ideology. His voice anticipates the modern subject who, in Žižek's words, "no longer believes but acts as if he believes" (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 30). Jason performs normality, but his normality is the mask of trauma.

Through Jason Compson, Faulkner demonstrates how trauma can metastasize into social behaviour. The wounds of history, the fall of the South, the erosion of meaning, the collapse of patriarchal certainty, do not vanish; they transform into cynicism, exploitation, and violence. Jason's cruelty, then, is not the opposite of suffering but its displacement. His voice is trauma speaking through denial, a testimony that reveals itself only in its refusal to admit pain.

III.4.5. Faulkner's Polyphonic Testimony and the Ethics of Fragmentation

Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* stages trauma as a crisis not only of consciousness but of narrative form. Across the four Compson voices, Benjy's pre-linguistic grief, Quentin's suicidal recursion, Jason's aggressive displacement, and Caddy's haunting absence, the novel dismantles the very conditions of coherent storytelling. What emerges is not a unified chronicle of decline but a polyphonic testimony: an assemblage of failed narratives that together articulate the persistence of the unrepresentable.

Each narrator embodies a distinct mode of traumatic temporality. Benjy relives trauma without sequence or symbolization, trapped in the pure immediacy of sensation. Quentin intellectualizes it, converting loss into syntax until language itself collapses under pressure. Jason represses it through rage and control, converting inward fracture into outward domination. And Caddy, never given a voice of her own, remains the absent centre, the lost referent around which all the others circle. Her silence operates as the Lacanian *Real* of the text: the point that organizes meaning precisely because it cannot be spoken. The repetition of her name, her smell, and her image across the novel constitutes what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub describe as "a testimony to the impossibility of testimony" (*Testimony* 75).

Faulkner's fragmented structure transforms trauma from theme to method. The disjointed chronology, shifting perspectives, and syntactic ruptures enact the dissociative logic that Freud, Janet, and later Caruth identified as central to trauma's temporality. Time in Faulkner is never linear but recursive, haunted by return. The modernist experimentation that once seemed purely stylistic thus acquires an ethical dimension: fragmentation becomes a mode of witnessing. As Cathy Caruth observes, "the truth of trauma may lie not in its content but in its very incomprehensibility" (*Unclaimed Experience* 6). Faulkner's novel insists that narrative coherence would betray that incomprehensibility; only dislocation can do justice to the wound.

At the same time, *The Sound and the Fury* expands trauma beyond the individual psyche to the historical and cultural. The disintegration of the Compson family mirrors the collapse of the Old South's symbolic order, an entire civilization unable to work through its own historical guilt. In this sense, Faulkner anticipates what Dominick LaCapra later calls "structural trauma," where the social fabric itself becomes the site of repetition and denial (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 79). The Compsons' private disarray thus becomes an allegory for a nation's collective breakdown, a historical trauma transmitted through familial and linguistic decay.

The novel's power lies in its refusal of closure. There is no final reconciliation, no redemptive synthesis. Instead, Faulkner allows the fractured voices to coexist in tension, each exposing a different register of suffering. This aesthetic of fragmentation aligns with the ethics of trauma representation articulated by later theorists such as Lucy Bond and Pieter Vermeulen, who argue that "to represent trauma ethically is to resist the temptation of totality" (*Memory Unbound* 12). Faulkner's refusal to resolve his polyphony into a single perspective enacts precisely that resistance. His novel listens, rather than speaks; it bears witness by giving form to the impossibility of form.

Ultimately, *The Sound and the Fury* transforms the act of reading into an act of witnessing. The reader must assemble meaning from fragments, endure disorientation, and occupy the silences left by the text. In this process, Faulkner accomplishes what modernist literature at its most radical seeks to do: to convert formal innovation into ethical practice. Through its broken grammar and divided voices, the novel insists that trauma can be neither mastered nor forgotten. It can only be re-encountered, each time differently, each time incompletely. In Faulkner's modernist vision, fragmentation is not failure but fidelity. The broken narrative is itself the testimony, the only possible language for a world that has survived its own ruin.

III.5. Conclusion

This chapter has examined how Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) transform trauma into narrative form, making rupture itself a mode of meaning. Both novels, published within the same year, articulate the modernist struggle to represent an experience that shatters language and temporality alike. In their distinct ways, Hemingway and Faulkner write out of the same historical and psychic landscape: the disillusionment following World War I and the fragmentation of human consciousness it produced. Yet, their strategies for depicting that fragmentation differ, one turns inward toward silence, the other outward toward chaos, revealing two complementary paths through the same terrain of suffering.

In Hemingway, trauma manifests as absence, the hollow centre around which meaning circulates. His pared-down style, famously described through the “iceberg” metaphor, transforms omission into expression. What remains unspoken acquires more force than what is said. Frederic Henry's language contracts under the pressure of unspeakable experience, rendering trauma through ellipsis and understatement. Each silence, each fragment of plain description, becomes a site of ethical witnessing, what Cathy Caruth calls “a language that bears witness through its very breakdown” (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). The unspoken in Hemingway is not void but density: the submerged narrative of pain, grief, and survival that readers must recover through interpretation. Through silence, Hemingway redefines testimony, not as speech, but as the moral labour of listening.

Faulkner, by contrast, converts trauma into excess. In *The Sound and the Fury*, meaning disintegrates not through reticence but through proliferation. His polyphonic structure gives trauma multiple voices, each fractured and incomplete. Benjy's disordered temporality, Quentin's suicidal introspection, Jason's rage, and Caddy's spectral absence together form what

Dominick LaCapra terms “a chorus of acting out,” where trauma replays itself across different psychic registers (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 65). Time loops back upon itself, syntax collapses, and the narrative refuses linearity. Faulkner transforms psychological disorder into literary architecture: trauma becomes the grammar of his modernism. What Hemingway omits, Faulkner multiplies; what one suppresses through silence, the other reveals through fragmentation. Yet, both enact the same truth, that trauma cannot be mastered through narrative but only traced through its distortions.

Read together, these two works suggest that trauma in modernist fiction is not a theme but a structural condition, a mode of being and writing in an age of loss. Hemingway’s stillness and Faulkner’s chaos each expose the limits of representation and the necessity of form as a moral response. Their prose embodies the paradox that to tell trauma truthfully, one must also betray narrative coherence. As Lucy Bond and Pieter Vermeulen argue, “to represent trauma ethically is to resist the illusion of totality” (*Memory Unbound* 12). Both writers practice this resistance through style: Hemingway through omission, Faulkner through dissonance. In doing so, they redefine literary realism itself, no longer as mimesis of the visible world, but as the rendering of the invisible fracture within consciousness.

The ethical stakes of their art lie in the transformation of failure into form. Hemingway’s restraint and Faulkner’s fragmentation turn incapacity into structure, silence into testimony, and disintegration into a mode of fidelity to experience. Their novels refuse consolation and closure, yet through that refusal they achieve a deeper truth: that trauma’s reality lies not in recovery but in recurrence. They teach that memory, language, and identity remain perpetually unsettled, haunted by the return of what resists understanding. The act of narration becomes both exposure and endurance, the survivor’s paradoxical task of speaking the unspeakable while knowing that language will always fall short.

Yet within that acknowledgment of destruction lies a latent movement toward reconstruction. The breakdown of coherence in these texts also marks the beginning of renewal. In Hemingway, the silence that follows devastation opens a space for endurance, for a stripped, elemental self that persists after meaning collapses. In Faulkner, fragmentation becomes a creative act, a remapping of identity across multiple voices and fractured temporalities. The disintegration of the old order, both personal and historical, clears the ground for the reimagining of subjectivity itself. Trauma, paradoxically, becomes generative, the very force that compels narrative innovation and ethical redefinition.

Thus, as this chapter has shown, *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury* are not simply records of trauma but meditations on its form, texts that turn psychic devastation into aesthetic discovery. Their characters live within ruins, yet their authors transform those ruins into art. In their hands, modernism becomes not only a response to trauma but a search for new forms of being and knowing after the collapse of certainty.

The next chapter, therefore, moves from destruction to reconstruction, from fragmentation to reformation. It will explore how trauma and violence, while devastating to the self, also generate the conditions for identity's rebirth. If this chapter traced the *disintegration* of the subject under the weight of trauma, Chapter Four turns to the slow, uncertain process of *reconstitution*, examining how identity, scarred by memory and marked by loss, begins to reassemble itself. Through Hemingway and Faulkner's characters, the following discussion will interrogate how modernist literature imagines survival not as return to wholeness, but as a continual negotiation between brokenness and becoming, the fragile persistence of the self after the storm.

CHAPTER FOUR:
RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY
AMID TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE

Chapter Four: Reconstructing Identity Amid Trauma and Violence

IV.1. Introduction

The previous chapter examined the unspeakability of trauma and the ways in which Faulkner and Hemingway translate trauma into silence, fragmentation, and narrative disjunction. Those formal ruptures reveal the limits of language as well as the conditions of its reemergence. Although paradoxically, the inability to articulate suffering in *The Sound and the Fury* and *A Farewell to Arms* functions as a potential space for reconstruction. The latter allows for a silence that anticipates the possibility of voice and articulation. Building upon this premise, this chapter turns to the aftermath of trauma, exploring how identity is reconstituted within and beyond the residues of violence.

Judith Herman observes that recovery can take place only within the context of relationships and it cannot occur in isolation (*Trauma and Recovery* 133). Her insight suggests that trauma recovery involves more than a return to one's prior state, it entails the formation of new subjectivities shaped by empowerment, the creation of new connections, allowing space for memory, and agency, to be the author and arbiter of recovery. Within this context, identity becomes a continuous process that demands constant negotiation rather than an achieved stability. Both Faulkner and Hemingway portray characters whose sense of self is not restored or intact after violence, but it is reimagined through it. Their fragmented voices, emerging from silence, mark the beginnings of a reconfigured subjectivity grounded in vulnerability, resilience, and the struggle to reclaim meaning in their lives.

Drawing on poststructuralist thought, particularly Judith Butler's understanding of the self as performative and Gilles Deleuze's conception of subjectivity as a "fold" of experience, this chapter approaches identity as an ongoing act of becoming. The traumatized subject is never

whole; rather, identity forms through reiterative acts that bear the traces of loss. Violence, therefore, does not merely destroy identity but becomes the very medium through which it is transformed. In this sense, Hemingway and Faulkner engage with trauma as a generative condition where silence provides a space for self-articulation.

This chapter, then, investigates how identity unfolds in the wake of trauma through the interplay of memory, language, and ethical self-recognition. It traces how the subject, once fragmented by violence, seeks coherence through narrative, even as that coherence remains unstable. Ultimately, it argues that both *The Sound and the Fury* and *A Farewell to Arms* present identity as a dynamic process, a negotiation between the enduring wounds of the past and the ever-renewed effort to exist beyond them.

IV.2. Empowering the Fragmented Self: From Silence to Self-Articulation in Faulkner and Hemingway Novels

Self-articulation for trauma victims is a complicated ambition. Since trauma “robs the victim of a sense of power and control” (Herman 159), the empowerment of the fragmented self becomes paramount to encourage self-articulation for the victim, and for this to happen one must be able to discern the unsaid as a sign. A major eyecatcher in modernist literary works is the nonlinearity of narrative, whether in form, the grammar that fuels it to adhere to the modernist ideals, or the temporal shifts which is found in the anachrony that includes analepsis, where the author moves backward in time (flashbacks), and prolepsis where the author moves forward in time (flashforwards). Gérard Genette in his seminal work *Narrative Discourse* (1983) extensively posited that every anachrony constitutes a narrative that is “temporarily second”, meaning that the narrative is subordinate to the first narrative, which becomes a sort of narrative syntax (48). Therefore, the silence that dominated narratives of trauma in Faulkner and Hemingway do not remain static. As it was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the

narratives used by these two authors may vary in style and delivery, however, silence is a factor that brings them close, tying them together to represent the unsaid through structural forms. Instead, silence becomes the foundation upon which new, articulations of self, however fragile they are, begin to emerge. What was previously considered a symptom of unspeakable pain transforms into a tentative language of reconstruction. Both writers position their characters within a liminal space where fragmentation of voice, memory, and perception becomes a means of expressing what cannot otherwise be spoken.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner's modernist experimentation with multiple perspectives and disjointed temporality showcases the fractured interiority of his characters. His choices are not subtle they hold meaning that requires exploration. Despite critiques of the opening chapter, Faulkner's use of the mentally handicapped character, Benjy, is a way to challenge readers, and that would not have been possible if he did not opt to showcase Benjy as a first narrative. Olga Kuminova argues against some critics' suggestions to change the sequence of narration, she considered such an imposed change and reworking would "constitute a betrayal of the innovative, challenging, heteroglossic way in which the novel is written" (45). Indeed, reworking such intentional sequence destabilises and ruins the modernist ideal to "make it new".

Such preservation, as mentioned before, is necessary for maintaining the concept of the impossibility of communication in the modern era that is charged and filled with heaps of traumas and struggle to communicate meaning without needing a witness. Therefore, it is the narration's difficulty that helps weed out the average readers from the "exceptional readers...to be able to do without what it positions as 'common' and 'vulgar pragmatic props' that regular communication requires" (Kuminova 43). While this view can appear to be elitist, it is significant to bear in mind that bearing witness requires an intellectual capacity to "listen", to read between the lines and devote oneself to understanding the imports of a testimony. As Dori

Laub puts it, the listener to trauma, needs to know “the lay of the land” (58). Therefore, readers alike, are listeners to the testimonies in such advanced narratives, however cryptic they are, their task is to decode meanings that refuse to reveal themselves straightforwardly.

Quentin Compson’s narrative, for instance, is structured by circular memory, repetition, and ellipsis, revealing a consciousness caught between silence and the desperate need to make sense of loss. Quentin’s narration becomes equally impossible, like Benjy’s narrative. As it was written the day he commits suicide, his narrative is outright subjective making him unreliable for readers who would find a difficulty in trusting his version of the story. His fragmented thoughts, oscillating between the immediacy of pain and the impossibility of articulation, form an attempt to speak through the very failure of speech.

Quentin’s breakdown of syntax and logic signals an effort to preserve meaning within disintegration. The narrator’s subjectivity is one of the hallmarks of modernist writing, it aims to confuse the reader with biases, lies, and varying perspectives. As seen in the third section, the reader follows the narrator’s tale, Jason Compson. He personifies the title of the “unrealisable narrator”. He is the most untrustworthy Compson. Jason asks Caddie: “don’t you trust me?”, ‘No’ she says, “I know you. I grew up with you” (173). Jason, therefore, is not trusted by Caddie who knows him and sees his evil intents. Readers would not believe Caddie immediately until they immerse themselves in Jason’s narrative which is filled with hateful, racist, narcissistic, misogynistic, manipulative, bigoted, and abusive characteristics. The start of his section sets the tone of his narrative:

Once a bitch, always a bitch, what I say. I says you’re lucky if her playing out of a school is all that worries you. I says she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now, instead of up there in her room, gobbing pain on her face and waiting for six niggers that can’t even stand up out of a chair unless they’ve got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her. (Faulkner 153)

The same opening “Once a bitch is always a bitch” (224) is repeated again at the end of the chapter as he carries his hateful rhetoric until the end of his narrative point of view. Based on this passage it is obvious to place a judgement on the character of Jason. Jason’s character is bitter and chauvinistic, his behaviour is inhumane and constitutes him as a perpetrator of trauma in the story because of his prejudice, abusive and misogynistic tendencies against his niece Miss Quentin (Caddy’s illegitimate daughter). His mistreatment towards her is a clear displacement of anger, insecurity, and resentment. His resentment stems from his hate towards his sister Candence. Therefore, Miss Quentin becomes a punching bag for Jason who represents the materialistic side of the family and one of the reasons that led to the ruin of the family. As a perpetrator of trauma, Jason represents Southern masculine identity, from his loss of his job opportunity (Faulkner 162) and his resentment towards Caddy’s perceived dishonour denote a narcissistic wound tied to his identity as a southern man. Amidst this chaos, the reader becomes a witness to the testimony of trauma later in the last chapter after “listening” carefully to all narratives by taking into account the silences, the actions, and the change in tone and patterns. Recognising these patterns empowers trauma victims to move from silence to self-articulation.

Similarly, Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* utilises trauma in a transformative manner into a minimalist aesthetic where absence and understatement bear more depth than a verbose description. As we have already established, Frederic Henry’s restrained narration, mainly through his “iceberg style”, represents what Dori Laub calls “the crisis of witnessing,” wherein the survivor can only approach the traumatic real obliquely (Felman and Laub 68). His emotional reticence and detachment do not simply indicate repression or aloofness, they initiate an understanding of a self that is in the process of rebuilding, searching for coherence through pithiness. The latter, reveals a voice that begs to be revealed through the sparse language available after catastrophe. The silences that permeate Hemingway’s prose, therefore, are thresholds through which identity begins to re-emerge.

Judith Herman's model of trauma recovery explains this process. Herman emphasises that "The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor" (*Trauma and Recovery* 133). In Faulkner and Hemingway, empowerment takes shape through the gradual reclaiming of narrative agency. When Quentin's and Frederic's voices fracture, the text itself becomes the witness to their becoming. Through repetition, ellipsis, and displacement, the novels reveal that speech after trauma is never seamless, it is partial and stammering. This quality is profoundly human, which makes the experience viewed through these narratives the epitome of the internal human struggle in face of trauma.

Deleuze's notion of the subject as a "fold" further illuminates this dynamic. The fold, as a metaphor for subjectivity, suggests that identity emerges through the continuous infolding of external and internal forces, trauma, memory, and language. One would argue that Faulkner's temporal layering and Hemingway's narrative economy both enact such folds, each narrative movement is an attempt to fold silence into meaning, and absence into articulation. Silence becomes a space of resistance. Fragmentation becomes the aesthetic and ethical condition of speaking again rather than destruction. The traumatized self, unable to narrate in conventional terms, constructs identity from the shards of language, memory, and time. In this sense, Faulkner and Hemingway attempt through their writing to depict the persistence of being and the capacity to remain, to survive and to speak within the ruins of speech itself.

IV.3. Reconstruction of Identity after Violence: Understanding the Perpetrator of Trauma

Rebuilding identity and the sense of "self" is more complex than it appears. People subjected to prolonged, repeated trauma develop a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in a progressive form which results in invading and eroding their personality. Judith Herman makes distinction between the effects of trauma on victims with a single acute trauma and victims with

a chronic type of trauma. She observes that, “while the victim of a single acute trauma may feel after the event that she is ‘not herself,’ the victim of chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocably, or she may lose the sense that she has any self at all.” (86). Therefore, it is highly important to bear in mind that identity’s reconstruction is not linear and is, in fact, delicate depending on the level of the acuteness of trauma, hence many psychologists treated trauma differently (see table 1).

Table 1

Phases of Trauma Treatment and Personality Integration

Syndrome	Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three
Hysteria (Janet, 1889)	Stabilization, symptom-oriented treatment	Exploration of traumatic memories	Personality reintegration, rehabilitation
Combat trauma (Scurfield 1985)	Trust, stress-management, education	Reexperiencing trauma	Integration of trauma
Complicated post-traumatic stress disorder (Brown & Fromm 1986)	Stabilization	Integration of memories	Development of self, drive integration
Multiple personality disorder (Putnam 1989)	Diagnosis, stabilization, communication, cooperation	Metabolism of trauma	Resolution, integration, development of post-resolution coping skills
Traumatic disorders (Herman 1992)	Safety	Remembrance and mourning	Reconnection

Adapted from: Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992, p.156

Note: The Table synthesises stage-based models of trauma treatment proposed by Piere Janet (1889), Scurfield (1985), Brown and Fromm (1986), Putnam (1989), and Herman (1992)

The most apparent form of abuse that hinders the formation of the self is the repetition of trauma. Herman highlights this point by stating that the methods that establish control of person over another person are often based upon the systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma. She defines them as “the organized techniques of disempowerment and disconnection.” (77). Those methods for Herman, are methods of psychological control solely designed to instil terror and helplessness, and to destroy the victim’s “sense of self” in relation to others. Herman, in her observation, refers to violence as a means of terror, a tool that is used to terminate, destroy, exploit, and create frictions and conflicts. However, being a universal method of terror, violence is not used as frequently as one may think.

The perpetrator of trauma does not use violence as a first option, but rather as a last resort. In retrospect, Arendt’s definition that distinguishes violence and terror is relevant to enrich this dialogue. Thus, it is salient to comprehend that “Terror is not the same as violence; it is, rather, the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control.” (*On Violence* 55). The usage of terror is, therefore, not dependent on the use of violence. Fear is a factor that is used to spread terror into the victims of trauma. As Herman reiterates: “The threat of death or serious harm is much more frequent than the actual resort to violence.” (77). The latter is a method adopted by perpetrators to create a grave disconnection in the self and the identity of their victims.

A suitable example of victim versus perpetrator can be found in Faulkner’s character Jason. Although Faulkner does not believe that Jason was created for symbolisation, he does highlight his inhumane comportment. Jason, for him, represented “complete evil”, he also recognised, in an interview he did in Japan, that Jason is “the most vicious character” he

has ever thought of and created (Meriwether & Millgate 146). In a class conference he gave at the University of Virginia (1957-1958), as he was asked about the significance of the character of Jason and if it had any imports, he stated:

I think that Jason Campson...is completely inhuman, but in a way he is, I hope, a living man. I have known people in actual life who were hopeless, who in terms of the humanities, in terms of the verities of man's condition, compassion and pity and courage, unselfishness, he was inhuman, but he was still a living man. He was not created to be a symbol of anything. He was simply created because suddenly he has a place in that particular scene that I was writing about, in that particular problem of human beings I was writing about. Not to symbolize anything at all. (Blotner & Gwynn 132)

Critical readings of *The Sound and the Fury* have often emphasised the Compson family victims of historical decay, psychological fragmentation, and cultural collapse (Howe 120). This approach, however, risks overlooking the fact that trauma is not only suffered but enacted which is a crucial structural dimension of Faulkner's novel. Jason Compson exemplifies the transformation of inherited injury into authoritarian aggression. Jason asserts himself violently in the house because he is enabled by his mother Caroline (Mrs Compson) making his foolish actions justifiable and even permissible as she anoints him the title of "head of the house" (Faulkner 236). Such enabling and normalisation allows perpetrators to inflict pain and misery undeterred. Unlike Benjy, whose consciousness registers trauma without mediation through sensory triggers, or Quentin whose identity disintegrates under its moral weight having been close to Caddy and being obsessed with her innocence at a very young age, Jason, on the other hand, converts familial decline into domination. His character, one would argue, demands an engagement not only with victim-centred trauma theory, but also with theories on perpetration, ethical injury (if we can define it as such), and the transmission of violence which create a cycle of trauma.

LaCapra's concept of "acting out" explains that there's a compulsive repetition of trauma in which the subject remains trapped within unresolved affect, "working through" entails critical engagement and ethical processing (70). Jason represents the first concept of "acting out". Driven by humiliation after losing a job opportunity, Caddy's sexual transgression, and the broader erosion of the Southern aristocratic identity, Jason does not stop to mourn or critically examine the events that happen to him and around him. Instead, what he continually ignores resurfaces in repetitive gestures of cruelty such as when he steals the money Caddy sends for her daughter Miss Quentin, polices his niece's movements, and sustains a household climate filled with emotional coercion and abuse. As mentioned in chapter three, trauma, in relation to the character of Jason, is not metabolised into reflection. Since there is a lack of reflection the trauma response is cruelty. Simply, Jason's trauma is displaced into domination. Such domination generates more trauma, thus making Jason a perpetrator of trauma as a result of his lack of reflection of his deep-seated psychological wounds.

Through an analysis of perpetrator psychology, Robert Jay Lifton offers a rather interesting lens into the minds of perpetrators, aider and abettors when spreading terror, acting violently, and committing crimes. In *The Nazi Doctors* (1986), Lifton introduces the concept of "doubling," which is a psychic division that enables individuals to perform acts of violence while preserving an alternative self-image (418). For Lifton, "doubling" was a psychological vehicle for the Nazi doctor's "Faustian bargain"²² with the diabolical environment in exchange of the contribution in killing Jews. When examining the character of Jason, his narrative voice reveals a split. He presents himself as a rational, pragmatic, and justified. However, his character is prone to evil more than it is for good. His apparent rationality conceals a defensive

²² The term originates from 16th-century German folklore about Doctor Faust, who is a scholar traded his soul to the devil for 24 years of absolute knowledge and pleasure. In its modern usage, it describes a pact where an individual sacrifices their soul, morals, or core values for short-term, worldly gains such as for wealth, power, or knowledge. Lifton uses this term to further explain his concept of "doubling".

partitioning of the self. Through *doubling*, one would argue that Jason sustains an image of moral order while inflicting emotional violence within the domestic sphere that he lives in due to many factors. The latter does not justify his actions, it is important to understand the psyche of the perpetrator who affects and is affected by the shared history of trauma.

Hannah Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil" comes to mind in the attempt to understand the perpetrator. Arendt vehemently argued, contrary to some beliefs, that evil may manifest not as a monstrous pathology, but as a thoughtless adherence to routine structures of authority. She does not justify the acts of evil, she pauses to look into it, to deconstruct the notion of evilness (287). Jason's violence is not gravely criminal, it is disturbingly ordinary. He does not commit spectacular acts of brutality, instead, he administers daily humiliations, economic control, and emotional isolation and abuse. Therefore, his insistence on financial order, racial discrimination, and patriarchal domination, emphasises the shield he built to combat his existential instability. His lack of imagination (much like Eichmann), is a source embedded in self-interest, and this alone does not necessarily promote him a "villain". His "extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement" (Arendt 287) was the defining element in his growing apathy and inhumanity.

Importantly, Jason's aggression must also be understood as a response to moral injury. While moral injury is often discussed in military contexts as seen in army and soldiers during and after the war; however, the same concept has a broader application that concerns the damage to one's ethical self-conception. For instance, Jason's resentment toward Caddy's sexual transgression is a matter of "dishonour", which is closely tied to the Southern identity, and his obsession with economic restitution reveals a level greed that constitutes the capitalist spirit (Weber 9-12) and fragile masculine identity rooted in lost prestige. Rather than confronting vulnerability, Faulkner's character Jason externalises shame into punitive authority. His fixation on money becomes a compensatory and coping mechanism, a substitute for symbolic capital

and familiar legitimacy. In psychoanalytic terms, this dynamic resembles reaction formation, thus the exaggerated control masks an internal chaos. Through him, one could argue that Faulkner dramatizes, to an extent, the cyclical transmission of violence. Jason is a perpetrator of trauma through terror as a result of a wound he fails to locate or even recognise all together. His lack of reflection signals a trauma response. Consequently, his unprocessed injury does not dissipate, but recognises itself into power.

IV.3.1. Reconfiguring the Subject: A Diagnosis of the Modernist Dilemma

After recognising silence and fragmentation as the markers and indicators of the initial stage of trauma's aftermath and that the trauma victim's recovery requires restoring power and control over themselves, there are still questions that loom around such as; what comes next? How does one move on from this? Or do we carry on with the same values and disciplines used in divulging trauma and its aftermath? Perhaps, all these inquiries are necessary to begin the next stage, the stage of reconfiguring the subject. This stage is what Judith Herman calls "the second stage" (175-176) which composes of remembrance and mourning, and what one would like to call: "the stage of reconfiguration". This process of reconfiguring the subject begins when memory transforms from a site of suffering into one of ethical self-recognition.

In this stage, trauma ceases to exist as a purely destructive force and becomes the ground upon which identity and agency can be renegotiated. Therefore, instead of fixating on the effects, this stage offers a way out from the bubble of victimhood to the safe shores of healing. However, in order to grasp this depth, referring back to the modern problem, which was a direct reason to these aftermaths, is a prerequisite to move swiftly to the next stage.

In modernist literature, a staggering emphasis is placed on the human condition for a reason, namely how fragile the human psyche is, therefore; humans, in modernist art, experience the world "subjectively through a 'psychic field' of sensations, perceptions, images

and objects.” (Walz 10). This dimension is difficult to be ignored since most of the narratives created by modernist authors revolve around humans despite the dehumanisation in modernist art, and their position in the world as conscious beings affected by the environment they live in, and the conditions they are exposed to. Such conditions inevitably leave indelible traces on a person’s behaviour and affect their psychological state. The latter propounds, what the American historian Eugene Lunn calls “the demise of the integrated individual subject or personality” (Lunn 37).

In contrast to romantic and realist literature of the nineteenth century, where characters are presented with structured personality features; developing their individuality through social interactions, characters in modernist literature are not coherent or well-structured. The formation of their individuality takes on a process to fully form. This unpredictability of experience, more specifically, “the problematic nature of experience” in the modern novel replaces the experience of the human nature as a dominant subject. Irving Howe in his book *The Idea of the Modern* (1967) observes that: “abandoning the assumption of a life that is knowable, the novelist turns to the problem of establishing a bridgehead into knowability as the precondition for portraying any life at all. His task becomes not so much depiction as the hypothesizing of a set of *as if* terms, by means of which he may lend a temporary validation to his material.” (33). Therefore, characters in the modern novel, according to Howe, can no longer be predicted like they were in the nineteenth century novel, because characters were fixed and almost similar to “synthetic entities” with a set of available traits making them easy to understand. Ultimately, the depiction of characters in the modern novel is distorted and fragmented, which explains the reason why modernist narratives are difficult to follow and grasp from a first reading. It is through such dehumanization that one can locate the reason of the modern cultural collapse which also explains the zeitgeist of modern life (Lunn 37-8).

Moreover, throughout the traumas inflicted during such period, the focus placed on the Subject, one could argue, is rather a ramification of the modernist failure to find a metaphysical centre, a unified meaning that steers them to stability and not away from it as a result. In a poem entitled *The Second Coming*, from his collection of poetry *Micheal Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), William Butler Yeats writes, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold “ (19). This verse captures to a great extent the dilemma within modernism and the modernist intuition (Longenbach 327). Such verse, however, should not be read as a historical lament after World War I, but as the literary symptom of a philosophical crisis that had been unfolding for centuries. Long before modernist writers dramatized fragmentation in narrative form, David Hume had already destabilised the modernist search for a metaphysical foundation upon which the “centre” of Western thought depended. In this sense, modernism does not necessarily invent the collapse mentioned, it inherits it.

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Hume attempts to give an answer to the questions of the self. When you look inside yourself in search of your “true self”, what do you find? Hume declares:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are remov’d for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions remov’d by death, cou’d I neither think, nor feel, nor see, no love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I shou’d be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect entity. (165)

In his reflection, Hume discusses that when he looks inward to find the self, he encounters only particular perception such as, heat or cold, pleasure or pain, love or hatred, but never a

stable self. The self, therefore, is not a unified substance, but a “‘bundle’”²³ of perceptions in a constant flux. This argument challenges Cartesian certainty and dismantles the metaphysical centre of subjectivity itself. If the self is not stable, continuous entity but a succession of impressions, then identity is already fractured at its core. What Hume articulated philosophically, Yeats articulated poetically. The centre, in metaphysical terms, has traditionally referred to the stable ground either found in God, reason, substance, or the unified self. One would argue that in Hume’s empiricism there is a clear erosion of this ground. Therefore, Hume does not find necessity in causation, nor permanence in identity. Instead, he points directly to the habits, associations, and psychological projections to answer the question of what is the self. This understanding of the self makes the attribution to its coherence not ontological, but rather closely related to narrative. The self is something that the mind constructs in order to manage the flux Hume refers to in his bundle theory.

Modernist literature radicalises this Humean insight at the level of form. In the works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and William Faulkner, narrative unity is disintegrated the same as metaphysical unity in philosophy. Fragmented temporality, interior monologue, and disjointed chronology reflect Hume’s bundle theory of the self. Consciousness in the modern novel is not presented as a stable core organising experience, it appears as a stream of impressions which are discontinuous and instable. Irving Howe explores this in his analysis of the modernist character. Howe asserts that, “Character, for a modernist like Joyce, Mrs. Woolf, and Faulkner, is regraded not as a coherent, definable, and well-structured entity, but as a psychic battlefield, or an insoluble puzzle, or the occasion for a flow of perceptions and sensations.” (34). Howe links this modernist characteristic to the tendency to dissolve character into a “stream of atomized experiences” as a way to withstand the opposite tendency found such

²³ Bundle Theory of the self was originated by Hume who posits that the “self” is merely a changing bundle of perceptions and experiences with no underlying, permanent substance (Hume 165).

as; in realism and romanticism in which character is “severed from psychology and confined to a sequence of severely objective events.” (*The Idea of the Modern* 34). As an artistic expression, modernists would fall among the neo-impressionist model for their use of pointillism, and in this case it is rather a *novelistic pointillism*. Writers, therefore, apply precise, unmixed, or pure sensory, dialogue, or description, and it is through the accumulation of small and vivid details that they rely on the reader to mentally blend these individual sensory “dots” or moments to form a coherent image and an emotional understanding, the same way neo-impressionists rely on optical mixing, the viewer’s eye blends these dots at a distance to form meaning.

A good example of pointillism in literature can be found in the structure of fractured subjectivity in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. The self does not appear as a coherent narrator controlling time and memory, rather, memory is erratically invasive, it erupts unpredictably, collapsing past and present. This narrative instability reiterates Hume’s claim that identity is nothing more than a series of perceptions linked by habit. The modernist form thus reflects the premise of the absence of a metaphysical centre in the subject. This absence alludes to a fracture in the psyche one that we may find in the aftermath of trauma making the centre hallow and the self’s journey to heal arduous and taxing.

IV. 3. 2. New Ethics of Survival at the Reconfiguration Stage in *The Sound and the Fury* and *A Farewell to Arms*

Faulkner and Hemingway move beyond the basic depiction of the wound to exploring the subject’s capacity to live ethically with it. The ethical strand here stems from assimilating the wound and its dimension as a form of survival. Survival, in Faulkner and Hemingway’s fiction, is neither denial nor recovery in the conventional sense, but a continual act of *remembering* without being destroyed by memory.

Although her approach was highly clinical and is not often reflected on literature per se, Judith Herman's engagement with the recovery from trauma articulates this shift precisely: "This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story." (*Trauma and Recovery* 175). This integration is not about closure, but it is rather intended for coherence. Through this integration an ethical and psychological reordering of the self after fragmentation emerges to create a pathway for reconfiguration. Since the traumatic memory is "wordless and static", Herman recognises that the survivor's account of the traumatic event can be repetitious, emotionless, and stereotyped, thus the trauma story can be described as being in a "prenarrative"²⁴ state which is an untransformed state Herman accentuates. In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, this process can be glimpsed in Dilsey's endurance. Dilsey's character typifies a moral and emotional centre that persists amid the Compsons' disintegration. Dilsey declares: "I've seed de first en de last, [...] "I seed de beginnin, and now I sees de endin" (Faulkner 252-3). Her quiet dignity embodies what Dominick LaCapra calls "working through," a mode of engaging with trauma that resists repetition while acknowledging loss (LaCapra 144). Dilsey's faith is highlighted in many occasions in the novel and is grounded in memory and continuity. Positioned as the last narrative, Dilsey's continuity counterbalances Quentin's despair. Her identity, therefore, endures because it is anchored in ethical recognition rather than in nostalgic fixation.

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* likewise reconfigures trauma through the ethics of survival. When observing Frederic Henry's narrative one notices that it is marked by emotional restraint as a result of the absence of safety that would allow for a remembrance and mourning. However, his narrative, gradually, moves toward an acknowledgment of loss that allows for moral consciousness. His desertion from the army can be considered an ethical form of survival

²⁴ See: Mollica, Richard F. "The Trauma Story: The Psychiatric care of Refugee Survivors of Violence and Torture." *Post-Traumatic Therapy and Victims of Violence*, edited by Frank M. Ochberg, Routledge, 2013, pp. 295-314

wherein his subsequent isolation with Catherine Barkley represent both flight and renewal. The necessity for renewal is considered important for trauma recovery. Herman emphasises that “the acutely traumatized person needs a safe refuge. Finding and securing that refuge is the immediate task of crisis intervention.” (162). Frederic and Catherine’s escape to a safe haven represents a self-seeking coherence beyond the machinery of violence. Although the narrative takes on a morbid ending, his understated narration of Catherine’s death, “It was like saying good-bye to a statue” (Hemingway 293), is not a gesture of indifference, it is rather a gesture of ethical endurance. In this ending there is a recognition of the limits of expression and the permanence of loss. In Hemingway’s sparse prose, memory becomes both the burden and the proof of survival.

The ethical dimension of this reconfiguration also resonates with Hannah Arendt’s notion of *natality*, the capacity of human beings to begin anew despite the presence of violence and historical catastrophe. Arendt writes that “the miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, the birth of new men and the new beginning” (*The Human Condition* 247). Both Faulkner and Hemingway embody this principle in their portrayal of endurance as a moral act. The act of living, of narrating one’s suffering, however incompletely, becomes an assertion of agency against the annihilating forces of history and war.

In this light, trauma is not merely remembered but transformed into ethical consciousness. The subject’s identity, though still fragile, begins to find grounding in relational and moral frameworks, Dilsey’s faith, Frederic’s love, even Quentin’s failed search for moral order, all reflect attempts to reorient the self within a world fractured by violence. The reconfiguration of the subject, therefore, is not an erasure of trauma but an acknowledgment that identity, to persist, must include the trace of its own wounding. One would suggest that this process of reconfiguration is not linear but differential. Each act of remembrance folds the past into the

present, producing new intensities and new configurations of being. The traumatized subject is, thus, an assemblage, a self in flux that derives meaning from the oscillation between rupture and repair. Through this ethical re-engagement with memory, Faulkner and Hemingway portray identity as a dynamic act of survival: to exist, to remember, and to begin again despite the knowledge of loss.

IV.4. Performance of Identity through Language and Gender

In the aftermath of trauma, language becomes both the site of struggle and the means through which identity is negotiated. Having emerged from silence and fragmentation, the traumatized subject turns to language as a space of reconstruction. Yet, as Faulkner and Hemingway demonstrate, this reconstruction is never neutral. It is inscribed through the body, gender, and the social codes that govern intelligibility. In their works, speech and silence, masculinity and vulnerability, authority and loss intertwine to form identities that are not innate but performed within historical and emotional constraints.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity is particularly illuminating in this context. Butler asserts that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (*Gender Trouble* 45). Applied to trauma narratives, this framework reveals that identity itself, whether gendered, moral, or national, is not recovered after violence but enacted through reiteration and resistance. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry's masculine identity is shaped by war's performative scripts such as; stoicism, control, and emotional restraint. Hemingway, however; destabilizes these very traits, portraying Frederic's gradual recognition of emotional dependency and loss as a redefinition of masculinity. His understated narration, often seen as minimalist, operates as a "performance" of control concealing deep affective rupture. The economy of Hemingway's language becomes, a manifestation of fragility, a masculinity remade through the acknowledgment of vulnerability.

In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, gender performance intersects with silence and fragmentation in different ways. Quentin's obsession with purity and moral order reflects a collapsing Southern ideal of manhood, one haunted by historical guilt and repression. His failure to reconcile his internal contradictions, the intellectual, the moralist, the son, exposes identity as performance rather than essence. Meanwhile, Caddy's absence, though voiceless, structures the entire novel. Her body and sexuality become the site upon which male identity is inscribed and disintegrated. Through her, Faulkner exposes the gendered politics of trauma: the woman rendered voiceless becomes the very measure of masculine despair.

Stuart Hall's notion that identity is "not a fixed essence but a positioning" ("*Cultural Identity and Diaspora*" 226) reinforces the idea that both Quentin and Frederic inhabit subjectivities produced through language and relation. Their identities are not intrinsic but contingent, mediated through cultural and discursive frameworks. The self becomes an effect of positioning, between silence and expression, masculinity and tenderness, repression and vulnerability. In this sense, both authors dismantle traditional gender hierarchies by revealing how trauma renders those performances unstable. Additionally, Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity provides another lens through which to understand this instability. For Ricoeur, identity is constructed through narrative employment, "The story told tells the self who it is" (*Oneself as Another* 246). Faulkner and Hemingway each dramatize the fragility of this process. Quentin's stream of consciousness and Frederic's fragmented retelling of events both suggest that language fails to stabilize identity; instead, it continually reconstitutes it. Every act of narration is an attempt to bind experience into coherence, even as that coherence constantly unravels.

Moreover, Deleuze's conception of subjectivity as a "fold" complicates the notion of identity as singular or unified. The self is never whole but is produced through the inflection of forces, social, linguistic, and affective. In both novels, trauma acts as the force that folds the

subject inward, generating new layers of meaning and contradiction. Quentin's obsessive repetitions and Frederic's terse sentences are folds of memory and affect, linguistic performances that reveal the self's interior landscape as dynamic rather than closed.

Language, then, is not simply the instrument of identity but its very condition of possibility. Wittgenstein defines language as a "gesture whereby I mean something" (*Philosophical Investigations* 114), thus the latter emphasises the role of intentional behaviour in the process of shaping identity. It shapes how the traumatized subject comes to perceive and perform the self. Gender, in turn, becomes the field where this linguistic struggle materializes most vividly. Hemingway's controlled prose and Faulkner's dense interiority both foreground the limits of masculine expression, the tension between the socially imposed silence of men and the psychic need to articulate vulnerability. By destabilizing masculine norms, both writers open a space for an alternative ethics of identity, one that recognizes fragility not as failure, but as the ground of authenticity. Ultimately, this performative understanding of identity reframes trauma not only as loss but as potentiality. The subject, wounded yet speaking, occupies a liminal zone between social inscription and self-invention. Language and gender performance become acts of survival, reiterative gestures through which the traumatized self affirms its presence in the aftermath of violence.

IV.5. Temporal Displacement and the Rewriting of the Self

Self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness represent one of the dimensions of modern art and its core in modern aestheticism. However, such claim becomes challenged. As it describes the occupation of modernism with self-expression and that language shapes narratives, and how human identity becomes central for the movement, in modernism, humans possess characteristics, but they no longer possess an "organic core" (Walz 10). Simultaneously, such focus allows human identity to be the composite effect of all the external forces on the fragile

human psyche. When language provides the site of identity's reconstruction after trauma, time defines its pace and rhythm. In *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury*, the self is never represented as stable or continuous but as fragmented across temporal planes. Both Hemingway and Faulkner approach trauma through disrupted chronology, revealing how time itself becomes a medium of psychic dislocation and recovery. The past refuses to remain past, it returns obsessively, shaping the subject's present consciousness. This temporal dislocation underscores what Cathy Caruth describes as trauma's "belatedness," the condition of an event experienced too late to be fully known (*Unclaimed Experience* 7). For both Quentin and Frederic, time is not a linear unfolding but a haunting repetition, a structure of return through which the self is continually rewritten.

In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the very structure of the novel embodies this temporal fragmentation. Each section presents a subjective experience of time that resists chronological order. Quentin's section, in particular, dissolves temporal boundaries: past and present collapse into one another, memory intruding upon perception until the distinction between "what happened" and "what is happening" disappears. This narrative dislocation mirrors his psychic disintegration. His inability to order time reflects his inability to order the self. In Ricoeur's terms, "*time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.*" (*Time and Narrative* 52); yet for Quentin, narrative fails to humanise time, it exposes its violence. His fragmented temporality becomes the dramatization of trauma's persistence, thus presenting time as wound.

Hemingway's temporal poetics, by contrast, operate through restraint and delay. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic's narration retrospectively constructs meaning from experience. The novel's past-tense narration and cyclical rhythms embody the impossibility of closure: each return to memory reopens rather than resolves the trauma. Hemingway's minimalist style,

marked by ellipsis and understatement, functions as a temporal distancing device, an effort to contain the past while acknowledging its grip on the present. As trauma theory suggests, narration becomes an act of survival, a means of negotiating belated experience through controlled repetition. The past intrudes silently through what is *not* said, as much as through what is.

Deleuze's notion of the "time-image" illuminates how both writers move beyond classical narrative temporality. In the "movement-image," time is subordinated to action; in the "time-image," action gives way to the direct presentation of time itself (*Cinema* 235). Faulkner's fractured narration and Hemingway's reflective retrospection both enact this transition. The reader encounters time not as sequence but as coexistence, multiple durations folding upon one another. Quentin's memories coexist with his final moments; Frederic's love story with Catherine is narrated from a future already marked by loss. This temporal simultaneity transforms both novels into spaces where the subject exists within overlapping temporalities, living, remembering, and mourning all at once.

Temporal displacement also carries ethical implications. For LaCapra, the act of "working through" trauma involves a re-temporalization of the self: the subject must distinguish between then and now without collapsing them (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 144). Both Hemingway and Faulkner depict the difficulty of this process. Quentin cannot achieve temporal differentiation; he remains trapped in repetition, unable to historicize his pain. Frederic, by contrast, narrates retrospectively, his telling becomes a gesture of distance, however fragile. Through storytelling, he begins to situate trauma within narrative time, transforming repetition into remembrance.

Even as these authors explore the possibility of narrative mastery, they resist offering resolution. Time, in both works, remains porous and unstable. Faulkner's Southern world is haunted by ancestral memory and collective guilt, while Hemingway's war-torn Europe is

defined by perpetual mourning. The self is therefore written not in the linear unfolding of progress but in the circular rhythm of recurrence. Memory does not restore identity; it reopens it. The act of writing, or narrating, becomes a temporal loop through which the subject continually confronts and recreates itself.

Ricoeur's concept of "narrative refiguration" helps articulate this dynamic. The narrative act does not merely represent time but configures it, turning the lived experience of fragmentation into a readable form. Both Faulkner and Hemingway engage in this act of refiguration, transforming the chaos of traumatic temporality into a fragile, aesthetic order. Yet this order is provisional, never final. The past remains unassimilated, always threatening to return.

Ultimately, temporal displacement emerges as both the symptom and the means of rewriting the self. Through disordered time, trauma asserts its persistence; through narrative time, the subject resists obliteration. Faulkner's temporal collapse and Hemingway's narrative retrospection are not opposites but parallel gestures toward survival, two ways of holding together what trauma has torn apart. Time, fractured yet ongoing, becomes the ultimate space where the self is not healed but continually rewritten.

IV.5.1. Ethical Dimensions: Witnessing, Memory, and the Responsibility of the Narrator

As trauma narrative transitions from silence to articulation, and from fragmentation to self-refiguration, a profound ethical question emerges: what does it mean to bear witness to suffering, both one's own and that of others? The act of narration in Faulkner and Hemingway exceeds aesthetic reconstruction; it becomes an ethical gesture, a responsibility toward the past and its lingering wounds. To narrate trauma is not merely to represent pain but to preserve its memory against erasure. Judith Herman asserts that "the survivor's task is not only to remember but to make remembrance communal" (*Trauma and Recovery* 181). Both *The Sound and the*

Fury and *A Farewell to Arms* engage this responsibility in distinct ways. Quentin Compson's fragmented monologue resists communication, locking pain within a solipsistic loop; Frederic Henry, however, transforms solitude into testimony. His retrospective voice carries the ethical charge of witnessing, not through confession but through the very tension between what can and cannot be said. Silence, in this sense, becomes ethical: a refusal to falsify experience through coherence.

This notion aligns with Giorgio Agamben's reflections on testimony in *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999). Agamben distinguishes between the "witness" who speaks and the "Muselmann," the figure who cannot speak yet embodies the truth of trauma. Similarly, Faulkner and Hemingway situate their characters between these two poles: the speaking survivor and the silent sufferer. The ethical challenge of their writing lies in representing the unspeakable without appropriating it. Quentin's language collapses under the weight of what it cannot express; Frederic's minimalist narration gestures toward absence. Both modes of narration honour the silence of trauma rather than resolve it.

To further illuminate this ethical space, other voices in trauma and identity studies have emphasized the relational nature of narrative responsibility. For example, Karen Horney's early psychoanalytic writings on the "divided self" anticipate the modern understanding of trauma as a disruption of integrity. In *Neurosis and Human Growth*, she suggests that healing begins when the self "abandons its inner pretence and learns to face reality, however painful" (Horney 89). This movement, from self-deception to confrontation, finds resonance in both Quentin's obsessive introspection and Frederic's subdued retrospection. This insight underscores how both authors resist the redemptive closure typical of traditional narratives. The ethical act, then, lies not in offering resolution but in sustaining the openness of pain, a form of fidelity to the truth of suffering.

From another perspective, Hannah Arendt's concept of *action* and *natality* provides a hopeful counterpoint to trauma's repetitive temporality. For Arendt, every act of speech introduces a new beginning, a chance for renewal within a damaged world (*The Human Condition* 177). In Hemingway's narrative, Frederic's act of writing retrospectively becomes such a beginning: though born from loss, his testimony asserts the persistence of life and language. Faulkner's fragmented form likewise embodies this natality, each voice within *The Sound and the Fury* reintroduces the possibility of meaning amid despair.

The ethical imperative of witnessing, therefore, cannot be separated from the aesthetic forms through which it is enacted. Deleuze reminds us that "the ethics of writing lies in creating the conditions for what cannot be said to be heard" (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 45). Faulkner's dissonant temporality and Hemingway's minimalism perform this ethics formally, they *create spaces* where silence itself becomes meaningful. The fractured narrative structures are not merely stylistic but ethical instruments, they protect the integrity of trauma from narrative domestication.

Felman insists that testimony is a "mode of address" requiring an audience capable of being affected (*Testimony* 57). These perspectives reposition the reader as an ethical participant rather than a detached observer. To read Faulkner and Hemingway is to partake in the fragile dialogue between witness and listener, where silence is an instrument which the reader use to mark a fidelity. Ricoeur's notion of "narrative responsibility" draws these ideas together. In *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), he asserts that narrative carries an obligation to the dead, an ethical promise to remember without possessing (Ricoeur 89; Ball 16). Faulkner and Hemingway honour this obligation through restraint. Their texts neither monumentalize trauma nor dissolve it in catharsis; they sustain its tension, allowing memory to remain open, incomplete, and human.

In this sense, the closing gesture of both narratives is not an act of reconciliation per se, it is rather an act of endurance. For that reason, as it has been observed in the designated works, the ethical subject that emerges from trauma is one who continues and carries memory forward. Despite knowing the fragility it possesses, the subject refuses to fall into oblivion. Through this endurance, Faulkner and Hemingway transform violence into a moral encounter with history, and trauma into the quiet persistence of the human voice.

IV.6. The Collective Dimension of Identity

Identity, though often theorized as a deeply personal and subjective phenomenon, is never constituted in isolation. Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes that the self is profoundly shaped by the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which it emerges. In the aftermath of trauma, whether individual or collective, identity formation cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the relational and communal frameworks that sustain it. As Maurice Halbwachs argues in *On Collective Memory*, “Memory is always constructed within a social framework” (38). The act of remembering, therefore, is not solely a private endeavour; it is embedded within the networks of shared experience, communal narratives, and cultural symbols that inform both perception and selfhood. In literature, particularly modernist narratives grappling with violence and disruption, this collective dimension illuminates how characters negotiate personal identity amid broader social and historical forces.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner demonstrates the profound influence of familial, cultural, and regional contexts on identity. The Compson family’s decline is inseparable from the social and moral disintegration of the postbellum South. Quentin, Jason, and Benjy do not merely exist as isolated subjects; they are enmeshed in a web of social expectations, historical legacies, and familial memory. Their identities are constituted in dialogue with these inherited pressures, revealing what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the interplay between habitus and social

structure, where individuals internalize societal norms and historical conditions, even as they respond to them in idiosyncratic ways. Trauma amplifies this dynamic: the psychological burden of familial collapse and societal decay intersects with the characters' personal crises, highlighting the porous boundary between self and society.

While the preceding sections have traced trauma and identity through the fragmented consciousness of individual subjects, it is necessary now to broaden the scope and consider the collective dimension of identity, the historical, cultural, and national forces that shape and are shaped by personal experience. Both *The Sound and the Fury* and *A Farewell to Arms* were published in 1929, a moment that stands at the threshold between two crises: the aftermath of World War I and the looming spectre of the Great Depression. This temporal coincidence is not incidental. It marks both novels as products of a world struggling to reassemble meaning after the collapse of old certainties, moral, political, and spiritual.

In this shared historical moment, Faulkner and Hemingway write not merely of personal trauma but of a collective malaise that defines the early twentieth century. The fragmented individual in each novel becomes a microcosm of broader social disintegration. As T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) had earlier declared, modernity itself was haunted by "a heap of broken images." Both Faulkner and Hemingway inherit this landscape of ruins, transforming it into a meditation on how the human subject negotiates identity within a collapsing moral order.

Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* encapsulates the decline of the Old South through the disintegration of the Compson family. The Compsons' trauma is inseparable from historical decay: the collapse of patriarchal honour, racial hierarchy, and economic stability. Quentin's obsessive attachment to Southern ideals, chastity, purity, lineage, reveals how identity becomes ensnared in the symbolic debris of a lost world. His suicide, therefore, reads not only as personal despair but as the death of an entire cultural imagination. As Richard Godden observes,

“Quentin’s crisis is not a failure of self but the internalization of a historical collapse” (*Fictions of Capital* 88).

Faulkner’s concern with the intersection of personal and collective trauma anticipates what later theorists such as Dominick LaCapra describe as “empathic unsettlement,” a mode of historical understanding that refuses closure or mastery (*History and Memory after Auschwitz* 41). Through the fragmented narrative of the Compson family, Faulkner enacts this unsettlement: the past is not mastered but lived through, re-enacted in the present. The very structure of *The Sound and the Fury*, its looping temporality and multiple voices, functions as an allegory of collective memory, dramatizing how the historical wound of the South continues to shape contemporary identity.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway situates individual suffering within the trauma of the First World War, the defining catastrophe of modern consciousness. The disillusionment that pervades Frederic Henry’s narration transcends personal loss; it reflects a generation’s crisis of faith in reason, progress, and authority. The war’s mechanized violence shatters the Enlightenment belief in human mastery, reducing existence to what Paul Fussell calls “ironic awareness” (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 8). Hemingway’s sparse, understated prose mirrors this ethical exhaustion. His minimalist style does not simply record trauma, it becomes the collective idiom of a disenchanted age.

Kali Tal argues that postwar literature reveals “the shift from heroic to traumatic consciousness,” where identity is defined less by triumph than by survival (*Worlds of Hurt* 15). This shift is evident in both writers’ protagonists: Frederic’s withdrawal from military duty and Quentin’s retreat into death each signify the impossibility of reconciling personal ethics with collective myth. Their failures to belong, however, expose the violence embedded within national identity itself. Hemingway’s retreat from patriotic rhetoric and Faulkner’s critique of Southern nobility both dismantle the ideological foundations of collective memory. Homi

Bhabha's notion of the "unhomely" further illuminates this dynamic. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that the modern subject inhabits a space "in-between," where private and public histories collide (13). Both novels inhabit this unhomely zone: the characters are estranged not only from their nations but from the symbolic languages that once defined belonging. Quentin's nostalgia for a lost South becomes a pathology of memory, while Frederic's attempt to build a private refuge with Catherine ends in the sterile isolation of grief. For both, identity is suspended between history and its ruins. Some critics have extended this argument by linking modernist fragmentation to cultural memory. María del Pilar Blanco, in *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* (2012), interprets Faulkner's spectral temporality as a form of "hauntological memory" that reveals "the persistence of unresolved historical debts" (Blanco 74). In Hemingway's fiction, similar hauntings occur through the absence of narrative closure, the war remains unfinished, its echoes resounding in Frederic's empty retreat. These spectral presences transform the text into a site of collective remembrance, where history refuses to end.

In this sense, Hemingway and Faulkner perform what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory that replace living tradition when the organic link between past and present has been severed (*Between Memory and History* 7). Their novels become such sites, literary memorials to a disoriented modern world. The fragmented form, far from being merely aesthetic, functions as an ethical act of preservation. By refusing to impose coherence, the texts maintain fidelity to the fractured reality of modernity itself.

Finally, the fact that both works were published in the same year (1929) underscores their shared engagement with a transitional historical consciousness. This was the year when the illusion of postwar stability gave way to the global economic collapse, signalling the definitive end of the liberal optimism that had preceded the war. It is therefore fitting that both novels should centre on rupture, displacement, and the search for new forms of meaning. The

simultaneity of their publication, across different national and cultural contexts, points to a shared human predicament: the struggle to reconstruct identity in the wake of historical devastation.

Through this lens, Faulkner and Hemingway cease to be regional or national writers; they become chroniclers of a collective existential condition. Their traumatized subjects, Southern aristocrat and disillusioned soldier alike, speak to a universal crisis of belonging. In reimagining the individual within history's ruins, both authors transform trauma into cultural testimony. Their fictions become acts of collective remembrance, confronting not only what has been lost but also what might still be reclaimed, the fragile continuity of human identity amid the debris of time.

IV.7. The Fragmented Self and the Search for Meaning: Identity as Reconstruction

The simultaneity of *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury*'s publication in 1929 marks a decisive moment in modern literature's engagement with trauma and the shattered self. Emerging in the aftermath of World War I, a conflict that ruptured collective faith in rationality and progress, both Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner expose identity as a process of reconstruction rather than continuity. As Paul Ricoeur argues in *Time and Narrative* (1984), the act of narrating history is itself a refiguration of identity, an effort to bind the fragments of experience into a meaningful whole (139). Both writers enact this through stylistic fragmentation, silence, and disrupted temporality. Hemingway's Frederic Henry, stripped of purpose and certainty, represents the dissolution of the stable masculine self. His identity becomes a negotiation between survival and meaning. The act of desertion, often read as cowardice, may be interpreted, through Judith Herman's trauma framework, as a necessary withdrawal from continuous exposure to violence: "Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage

is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life.” (Herman 155). Frederic’s retreat to the mountains and his intimate bond with Catherine thus signal not the failure of the soldier’s identity, but the reconstitution of a self beyond collective ideology.

Faulkner, on the other hand, transforms fragmentation into a narrative method that mirrors psychic dislocation. The Compson brothers embody fractured modes of consciousness, Benjy’s sensory temporality, Quentin’s obsessive circularity, and Jason’s corrosive materialism, each an incomplete attempt at reassembling meaning in the wake of familial and historical decay. In this sense, Faulkner’s modernist experiment echoes Deleuze’s notion of “becoming” rather than “being.” As Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*, “the self is only a contraction of habitual movements” (Deleuze 94), suggesting that identity in Faulkner’s world is an endless repetition of trauma’s residues rather than a stable essence.

Furthermore, the year 1929 marks not only a literary but a historical convergence. The onset of the Great Depression amplified the sense of disintegration already present after the war. In this climate, both Hemingway and Faulkner confront the same paradox: identity as both an act of survival and a form of resistance against erasure. Frederic Henry’s identity evolves in the interstices of love and loss, silence and confession. His narration, stripped of excess emotion, enacts what Cathy Caruth calls “the impossibility of fully knowing one’s trauma” (*Unclaimed Experience* 6). Arguably, the sparse tone gestures toward healing, it is through restraint that Frederic articulates endurance. Similarly, Quentin Compson’s obsessive temporality is both a symptom of trauma and a futile attempt to impose order on chaos. His final act, his suicide, can be read as a collapse of narrative itself, but also as the ultimate fragmentation of selfhood.

In this sense, both texts demonstrate that identity emerges through rupture. As Dori Laub insists, “The event must be spoken, however impossible, for the self to be reclaimed” (Laub

64). Both Hemingway's minimalist prose and Faulkner's disjointed narration dramatize this tension between voicelessness and expression. Each character's struggle is not to *remember* coherently but to *exist* amidst discontinuity. Ultimately, the 1929 moment unites both authors under a shared aesthetic of fracture. Identity, in their narratives, is not a recovered whole but an ongoing reconstruction, an act of narrating through loss. As trauma theorist Kali Tal asserts, "Survivors use narrative to claim their own experience in the face of systems that deny it" (Tal 7). Hemingway and Faulkner both situate their protagonists within this fragile assertion of selfhood, an identity that survives not through mastery but through endurance, narration, and silence.

IV.8. From Destruction to Reconstruction: Healing and the Ethics of Recollection

The narrative movement from destruction to reconstruction in *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury* ultimately unfolds as a meditation on memory, its burdens, its distortions, and its redemptive potential. Having endured fragmentation and loss, both Hemingway's and Faulkner's protagonists confront the necessity of remembering, not merely as an act of nostalgia but as an ethical confrontation with the past. In this sense, memory functions not as static recollection but as a living process through which identity is continually negotiated. As Maurice Halbwachs notes in *On Collective Memory*, "It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 38). The self, therefore, does not remember in isolation but as part of a social and historical matrix.

In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, memory operates as both the source and symptom of identity disintegration. Quentin Compson's consciousness is burdened by a haunting awareness of time and decay; his inability to reconcile the past with the present results in a perpetual repetition of trauma. Faulkner's use of temporal disruption, his refusal of

chronological coherence, forces the reader into the same instability that defines Quentin's interior life. The novel's fragmented structure thus dramatizes Halbwachs's insight: memory is collective, yet the individual may be estranged from that collectively when its social coordinates collapse.

In contrast, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* presents memory as an uneasy negotiation between silence and articulation. Frederic Henry's narrative emerges retrospectively, shaped by the temporal distance between the experience of war and its retelling. His tone, stripped of sentimentality, mirrors what Cathy Caruth terms "the belated understanding of trauma" (*Unclaimed Experience* 17). For Caruth, trauma is not experienced fully in the moment but returns later as a haunting demand for narrative. Frederic's act of storytelling thus constitutes both testimony and mourning. His recollection of Catherine's death, rendered in brief declarative sentences, refuses dramatization precisely because language fails to capture the depth of loss: "But after I got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue" (Hemingway 332). The emotional restraint in this passage becomes, paradoxically, the measure of his grief.

In both texts, memory functions as an ethical act, a way of bearing witness. Hannah Arendt's reflections in *The Human Condition* illuminate this moral dimension: "Without remembrance, there can be no responsibility; without responsibility, no continuity of self" (Arendt 91). Memory, for Arendt, is not mere retrospection but a practice of accountability. Both Hemingway and Faulkner situate their protagonists within histories of violence that demand moral response. In Faulkner's South, the decay of the Compson family reflects the broader failure of a culture unable to reckon with its historical sins. Quentin's obsessive fixation on purity and time can thus be read as a displaced attempt to preserve moral coherence in a world where such coherence has collapsed. In Hemingway's war-torn Europe, Frederic Henry's disillusionment parallels a collective amnesia, the loss of faith in the ideals that once justified

violence. His narrative, however, resists forgetting; by speaking, however inadequately, he reclaims the ethical necessity of remembrance.

In Faulkner's world, this continuity is shattered, the South's cultural memory is one of guilt and decay. Yet Faulkner reconstructs this very memory through narrative form, transforming silence and ruin into the possibility of meaning. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway's minimalist style performs a similar cultural function: it transforms collective trauma into aesthetic endurance. His prose enacts what Paul Fussell calls "the irony of war," where language itself becomes the site of survival (178).

The ethics of recollection, then, lies in the tension between remembering and the impossibility of complete understanding. Judith Herman reminds us that "traumatic memories are not narratives; they are fragments of experience that return unbidden" (*Trauma and Recovery* 175). Both Hemingway and Faulkner embody this fragmentation formally, the disjointed syntax, temporal shifts, and silences all testify to what cannot be spoken. Yet within this failure lies the ground of moral and narrative identity. To remember incompletely is still to resist the erasure of experience.

Furthermore, the act of remembering in both novels becomes an act of defiance against historical violence. The year 1929, marking both novels' publication, represents a turning point in Western consciousness: the collapse of economic stability mirrored the moral collapse left by the war. As historian Modris Eksteins argues, "The Great War had already ruptured the line between past and present; 1929 merely confirmed the bankruptcy of meaning" (212). Against this backdrop, Hemingway and Faulkner transform private memory into a form of historical witnessing. Their characters' struggles, Frederic's narration and Quentin's obsession, reflect the modernist imperative to reclaim humanity from the ruins of history.

It is also worth noting that both authors subvert the idea of a redemptive memory. In Faulkner, recollection leads to dissolution; in Hemingway, it offers no closure. Yet both articulate what Dominick LaCapra calls “working through” as distinct from “acting out.” LaCapra asserts, “To work through trauma is not to forget or to transcend it, but to engage it critically, to distinguish past from present without denying the affective ties that bind them” (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 144). Frederic’s narrative gesture and Quentin’s self-destruction embody two extremes of this dynamic: the former attempts to work through, the latter remains trapped in repetition. In either case, the ethics of recollection remains central, the moral weight of acknowledging what violence has undone.

Moreover, the process of remembering redefines identity itself. The self, in these novels, is not constituted by stability but by the capacity to integrate loss into continuity. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur suggests, “Narrative identity is the synthesis of the heterogeneous” (141). Both Hemingway and Faulkner, through radically different aesthetics, articulate this synthesis: Frederic’s narrative of endurance and Quentin’s fragmentation both represent attempts to bind rupture into form. Memory becomes the terrain where trauma, identity, and history converge, a moral space in which the individual’s struggle mirrors the century’s broken consciousness.

Finally, the ethics of recollection in *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury* transcends personal recovery; it gestures toward the restoration of moral meaning in a disenchanted world. The act of remembering, however fragmented, however painful, is itself a reconstruction of self and world. Through the memory-laden narratives of Frederic Henry and Quentin Compson, Hemingway and Faulkner transform trauma into testimony, and violence into the possibility of moral reflection. Their works, published in the same historical moment, reaffirm literature’s enduring task: to preserve the fragile continuity of identity in the aftermath of catastrophe.

IV.8.1. *The Sound and The Fury* and *A Farewell to Arms* as a Fuels toward an Ethics of Endurance

The narrative trajectories in *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury* culminate in an understanding of identity as a continuous process of endurance, one that refuses closure yet insists on meaning. Both Hemingway and Faulkner, writing in 1929 amid a disillusioned postwar world, articulate the condition of the modern self as fragmented but not annihilated. Their protagonists endure not through triumph, but through persistence: the act of narrating, remembering, or even collapsing under the weight of history becomes itself a moral gesture, a resistance to silence.

This movement toward endurance reflects a fundamental shift in twentieth-century consciousness. Violence and trauma, as explored in earlier chapters, dismantle the illusions of coherence; they expose the fragility of human experience. Yet, as Judith Herman asserts, “Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (*Trauma and Recovery* 214). Both Hemingway’s Frederic Henry and Faulkner’s Quentin Compson reveal that identity, fractured as it may be, is sustained by relational memory, between self and other, past and present, loss and survival. The ethics of endurance thus emerges not from overcoming trauma, but from inhabiting its afterlife with awareness and responsibility.

Jan and Aleida Assmann’s concept of “cultural memory” deepens this understanding by situating recollection within a shared symbolic order. Aleida Assmann defines cultural memory as “a mode of thought that preserves experiences through symbolic forms and thus stabilizes cultural identity over time” (Assmann 35). In Hemingway, this endurance manifests through narrative restraint. Frederic’s sparse recollection of Catherine’s death transforms private pain into a universal testimony of love and loss. His stoic voice, often misread as emotional detachment, embodies what Elaine Scarry calls “the difficulty of expressing physical and psychological pain” (*The Body in Pain* 12). By narrating through simplicity, Frederic asserts

the dignity of survival, language becomes both a memorial and a means of repair. His identity, reconstructed through storytelling, affirms that endurance is itself a moral act: the quiet perseverance of the wounded self in a world emptied of certainty.

Faulkner, in contrast, transforms endurance into a formal challenge. The shattered voices of *The Sound and the Fury* dramatize the impossibility of full coherence; yet within this impossibility, Faulkner constructs an ethical demand on the reader, to listen, to reconstruct, and to witness. The act of reading becomes participatory, echoing Dori Laub's claim that "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event" (Laub 57). Through the fragmentation of the Compson family, Faulkner exposes the moral responsibility of both narrator and reader to engage with the ruins of memory. The endurance here lies not in the characters' survival, many do not survive, but in the text's relentless insistence on narrating what resists narration.

Hannah Arendt's conception of moral responsibility resonates powerfully within this framework. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), she distinguishes between mere survival and ethical endurance, suggesting that "the refusal to think and remember is itself the beginning of moral collapse" (Arendt 287). Hemingway and Faulkner, each in their own mode, refuse this collapse. Their works insist on the act of remembering as the foundation of selfhood, even when memory is unbearable. To endure, in their modernist vision, is to think, to remember, and to speak despite fragmentation. It is to claim the broken self as still capable of meaning.

The convergence of 1929, the year of both novels' publication, serves, in my opinion, as a symbolic hinge in this moral and aesthetic discourse. As the Great Depression began, history itself seemed to echo the psychic disintegration of Faulkner's and Hemingway's characters. Yet the fact that both authors turned to storytelling in such a moment suggests a profound belief in literature's restorative potential. Gilles Deleuze's notion of "becoming" captures this ethos: "To endure is to continue to become, to produce difference where the world imposes repetition"

(*Difference and Repetition* 110). In that sense, endurance becomes not passive survival but creative persistence, a reimagining of identity through the very materials of loss.

Ultimately, this chapter has shown that both Faulkner and Hemingway reframe the relationship between trauma, violence, and identity within an ethics of endurance. Identity does not return to wholeness after rupture; instead, it evolves within the ruins. Trauma and violence may destroy coherence, but they also reveal the depth of human capacity to remember, narrate, and resist oblivion. The fragmented self is not a failure of being, it is a testimony to the will to persist in meaning-making. As Judith Butler reminds us, “We are bound to others before we can say who we are; and that binding is both our possibility and our vulnerability” (*Precarious Life* 22). The ethics of endurance thus lies in accepting the fragility of selfhood as the very ground of human connection. Through silence, fragmentation, and memory, Hemingway and Faulkner illuminate not the end of identity, but its ongoing re-creation, a process that mirrors the century’s own struggle to find coherence after violence.

In this light, endurance becomes a moral philosophy, a refusal to yield to the void, a commitment to remembering, and a quiet assertion of humanity’s capacity to continue. The modern subject, scarred yet speaking, survives not by overcoming trauma but by bearing witness to it. Both *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury* leave us, finally, with this paradoxical truth, that meaning is born not from stability, but from the fragile, persistent act of living after catastrophe.

IV.9. Conclusion

Chapter Four has traced the movement from trauma’s disintegration to the fragile reconstruction of identity in *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sound and the Fury*. What began as a narrative of silence and fragmentation has gradually evolved into an exploration of how identity, though fractured by violence, persists through memory, narration, and moral endurance. Both

Hemingway and Faulkner demonstrate that the aftermath of trauma is not simply a reverberation, it is an ongoing process of becoming, one in which the individual must continually renegotiate selfhood in relation to loss, time, and history.

While Chapter Three revealed the unspeakability of trauma through silence, rupture, and temporal distortion, Chapter Four has illuminated what follows that silence: the attempt to reassemble meaning. In this effort, identity is not restored to a prior wholeness but reconstituted in and through fragmentation. As Paul Ricoeur observes, “Narrative identity is not that of an immutable substance; it is the identity of the self-reinterpreted through the act of narrating” (*Oneself as Another* 148). The same principle guides both Faulkner’s and Hemingway’s characters: Frederic Henry narrates to survive the memory of loss, while Quentin Compson disintegrates beneath the weight of memory he cannot master.

By placing identity within the interstices of trauma and recovery, both authors transform private suffering into a reflection of collective consciousness. Their works, published in the same year (1929) capture a civilization standing at the crossroads of despair and renewal. In their differing but parallel modernist aesthetics, Hemingway and Faulkner turn the chaos of history into a language of endurance. Hemingway’s economy of expression and Faulkner’s polyphonic fragmentation are not opposing styles but complementary responses to the same historical wound: the crisis of meaning in the twentieth century.

Moreover, this chapter has shown that identity’s reconstruction is inseparable from memory and ethics. The past, as Halbwachs and the Assmanns remind us, lives within the social and cultural frameworks that sustain remembrance. When those frameworks collapse, as they do in the aftermath of war or moral failure, the act of remembering becomes an act of resistance. In bearing witness, whether through Frederic’s restrained narration or Quentin’s obsessive recollection, both writers engage in what Dominick LaCapra terms the ethical labour of

“working through” trauma. The result is not recovery in the therapeutic sense, but rather a moral awakening to vulnerability, responsibility, and endurance.

Thus, the culmination of this chapter lies in its redefinition of identity as an ethical, temporal, and narrative process. Trauma and violence are not merely destructive forces; they are catalysts that compel the self to confront its finitude and its capacity to endure. Through this confrontation, Hemingway and Faulkner articulate a profoundly human vision, one that refuses closure yet affirms continuity through the fragile persistence of memory.

Ultimately, identity in their works emerges from what is continually remade through language, recollection, and endurance. Both novels, in their modernist depth, transform suffering into meaning, silence into voice, and rupture into form. In doing so, they suggest that the self, however fragmented, remains the central site where the moral imagination confronts the legacy of violence and the possibility of renewal.

General Conclusion

The journey undertaken by this thesis has navigated the complex landscape situated at the confluence of American Modernism, trauma and cultural studies, and ethics. By critically engaging with Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, this study has demonstrated that the structural progressiveness characterizing these seminal works is not merely an artistic signature of the early twentieth century, but a profound and necessary formal response to the unprecedented scale of historical and psychological catastrophe. The main and central discussion in this thesis is that narrative fragmentation and temporal rupture, born of traumatic violence, function as the necessary conditions for articulating an ethical identity defined by the persistence of memory. The latter has been rigorously explored across all foundational chapters of both theoretical engagement and textual analysis.

The aforementioned argument provided in this study represents a critical and necessary departure from interpretations that prioritise the nihilistic, fatalistic, or purely destructive aspects of the aesthetic breakdown of modernism. Therefore, to view these designated texts solely as monuments to postwar pessimism or social decay risks missing the profound ethical work being done within their fractured syntax and often chaotic chronology. Instead, this study foregrounded the regenerative potential within formal collapse. The conclusion consolidates these findings, synthesising the movement from theoretical groundwork to textual exegesis, and finally, to the articulation of a post-traumatic ethical framework that positions Hemingway and Faulkner as central figures in the development of a distinctly American literary engagement with the trauma of modernity. Their works ultimately do not testify to the end of meaning, but to the arduous process of beginning again.

The initial chapters of this thesis were dedicated to constructing a robust theoretical apparatus capable of interpreting the complex nature of the modern wound, tracing its historiographical lineage from the physical shock of "railway spine" to the psychogenic models

developed by the founders of psychoanalysis. This analysis underscored that trauma is not a static concept but a dynamic, historically and culturally constructed condition that fundamentally challenges classical notions of linear experience and stable subjectivity. If trauma is understood as an event that resists symbolization and returns through compulsive repetition, then the aesthetic imprint it leaves upon the text becomes an essential site of critical inquiry.

However, the study pivoted to address the causality of the wound, moving beyond the affective symptom to focus on the intricate and often blurred relationship between trauma and systemic violence. The central finding here is that violence must be understood beyond the visible spectacle of the catastrophic event, be it the massacre at the war front or the act of suicide, to encompass the systemic, constitutive violence, what was termed the "spectral form" or the "dark matter", that underlies social and familial structures. This pervasive, often invisible, violence saturates the very air of the American South in Faulkner and the military bureaucracy in Hemingway.

This theoretical move was critical because it allowed us to read the formal ruptures in modernist texts not merely as reactions to the *memory* of trauma, but as the structural embodiment of the insidious, ongoing nature of systemic violence itself. The texts' fragmentation serves as a direct, ethical engagement with the comprehensive failure of historical and social coherence. The failure of the nineteenth-century novel's form mirrors the moral and political failure of the social structures that produced World War I and sustained the racial and patriarchal decay of the Compson family. This established the foundational premise: the crisis of form is fundamentally a crisis of ethics.

This research engine of the thesis meticulously traced the moment of disintegration in the primary texts, revealing how both authors employed their unique modernist styles to render the

unspeakable nature of trauma. The aesthetic choices are not accidental, but deliberate mechanisms for achieving an authentic testimony in the face of linguistic breakdown.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway developed a poetics of silence that is, in itself, a traumatic language. Frederic Henry's clipped, sparse narration and his deliberate avoidance of affective language are interpreted not as emotional detachment or nihilistic retreat, but as an authentic testimony to the crisis of witnessing. The text's omissions and understatements, the famous "iceberg theory", function as an ethical refusal to sanitize or sentimentalize the brutal realities of war and loss, particularly the meaningless rhetoric of abstract concepts like "glory" and "sacrifice." This silence compels the reader into the traumatic gap, forcing a necessary co-participation in the difficult process of meaning reconstruction. The reader must supply the emotional weight and the historical context that the narrator refuses to state, thereby making the act of reading a moral engagement with the *unsaid*.

Conversely, in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner utilized temporal collapse and polyphonic narration as the aesthetic grammar of trauma par excellence. The sections dedicated to Benjy and Quentin Compson demonstrate how the shattered mind translates psychological devastation into narrative disjunction. For Benjy, the complete collapse of sequential time embodies the perpetual, unmasterable present of the traumatic event. Everything is now, and the wound is constantly fresh. For Quentin, the obsessive repetition of memory, his desperate final day structured around the constant return to the fate of his sister Caddy and the decay of the Compson lineage, reflects the impossibility of achieving mastery over a traumatic past. Faulkner's fragmentation is maximalist, creating a kaleidoscope of broken perspectives that collectively testify to a systemic failure larger than any single consciousness. This methodological contrast demonstrates that whether through the compression of silence or the expansion of chaotic voices, fragmentation serves the same ethical end: to make the reader confront the text's brokenness as a reflection of historical truth.

The most ambitious move of the thesis executed a decisive shift in analysis: moving the focus from formal destruction to ethical reconstruction. This phase of the argument contended that the self, having been reduced to fragments and silence by overwhelming forces, is paradoxically compelled into the ethical labour of remembrance. The very formal ruptures, the brokenness of the texts, interpreted as generative forces.

Identity in these novels is not found; it is continually *remade* through the difficult, ongoing act of bearing witness, confronting vulnerability, and attempting to weave loss back into a coherent life story. Frederic Henry's solitary survival, stripped bare of all illusions and attachments, and the persistent, if flawed, recollection attempts by the Compson siblings, become acts of moral endurance. Their refusal of total closure, the recognition that the wound remains, transforms their survival into a morally conscious process. This fundamentally redefines identity, positioning it not as a static whole, but as an ethical, temporal, and narrative process that affirms continuity "in the face of collapse". It is through this sustained labour of memory and recollection that suffering is painstakingly woven back into a tapestry of enduring, though scarred, meaning. The scars are permanent, but the living tissue around them confirms the self's capacity to persist.

The comprehensive analysis put forth by this thesis provides a critical intervention in multiple fields of literary and cultural inquiry, offering three distinct scholarly contributions that redefine the relationship between aesthetic form and ethical response in American Modernism.

The first major contribution is the insistence upon the necessary entanglement of trauma and systemic violence. By applying models of structural violence to literary analysis, this thesis moves beyond purely psychological readings to offer a more robust ethical and political framework. We have demonstrated that formal fragmentation is not simply an expression of an

internal state, but a direct stylistic reflection of the failure of macro-structures, the nation-state, the military, the patriarchal family. The aesthetic breakdown in Hemingway and Faulkner is thus read as a necessary political response to the failure of moral and historical order, confirming that the modernist aesthetic is deeply embedded in, and actively comments upon, the enduring presence of unmastered historical rupture.

The second, and perhaps most significant, contribution is the argument that modernist formalism constitutes an ethical practice. The aesthetic difficulty, the clipped syntax, the objective correlative, the stream of consciousness, is recontextualized as a moral tool. The fragmented forms employed by both authors compel the reader into a state of active engagement that mirrors the therapeutic and moral process of "working through" trauma. By refusing the easy consumption of a linear, cohesive plot, the texts demand that the reader confront the limits of representation and actively fill the narrative gaps left by the traumatic event. This transforms the act of reading into a moral engagement, making the aesthetic difficulty of Modernism an ethical stance: a refusal of comfort and an insistence on a sustained, difficult encounter with the reality of violence.

The third intervention is the crucial corrective that articulates the generative power of collapse. By highlighting the movement towards reconstruction and ethical persistence, we challenge readings that categorize these novels solely under the banner of destruction or terminal despair. The disintegration of the classical, unified subject under the pressures of war and decay paradoxically creates the *tabula rasa* for a new form of identity. This identity is not defined by recovery, but by the ongoing process of becoming, a fluid, morally conscious persistence that acknowledges the scar without succumbing to the wound. Collapse is not the end of the subject, but the violent, necessary beginning of a redefined, enduring self that carries the weight of memory as a fundamental ethical responsibility.

The methodology employed throughout this thesis, is a qualitative method that prioritised reading the narrative form as the literal inscription of trauma, rather than just its container, represents a valuable contribution to literary methodology. By treating the syntax, the time-shifts, and the narrative voice as analytical units of trauma itself, we move past surface-level thematic interpretation. For instance, stream-of-consciousness is analysed not merely as a psychological portrait, but as evidence of dissociative fragmentation, the mind's mechanism for managing overwhelming experience. This commitment confirms that the greatest insights into the literature of trauma are found not in what the characters *say*, but in the very *structure* of their saying, or their carefully managed silence.

This research culminates in proposing a conceptual shift from the model of "recovery" to the state of Post-Traumatic Persistence. The concept of recovery implies a return to a pre-traumatic state of wholeness, a neat narrative closure that the texts themselves rigorously reject. Persistence, by contrast, acknowledges that the traumatic event and its systemic causes are permanently inscribed upon the self and the narrative. Post-Traumatic Persistence is defined as the morally attuned state of ongoing becoming, an identity that operates with an awareness of its own vulnerability and its ethical responsibility to the past. It is a regenerative state where the scar remains visible, but the ongoing process of meaning-making continues. This intellectual framework offers the most accurate lens through which to view the profound humanism of Hemingway and Faulkner.

The aesthetic ruptures analysed here also carry significant political weight. American Modernism reflects a crisis in American identity itself, the failure of utopian promises and the impossibility of a cohesive national narrative following the Great War and amidst the moral shadow of the South's history. *A Farewell to Arms* exposes the fraudulent language of duty and patriotism, replacing it with the simple, desperate ethics of private love. *The Sound and the Fury* systematically dismantles the myth of the noble Southern past and the inviolability of the

patriarchal family structure. Thus, the aesthetic breakdown in both texts can be viewed as an implicit political critique, suggesting that the old structures and the old ways of ordering society were morally compromised. The pursuit of new forms is, therefore, a radical political act of seeking an uncompromised, honest language in the wake of systemic failure.

While this thesis has established a powerful argument concerning narrative form and the ethics of memory, the complexity of the subject opens several significant avenues for future scholarly inquiry, each requiring dedicated research.

A necessary extension lies in a more dedicated, granular analysis of the gendered trauma and narrative silencing experienced by female characters, specifically Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms* and Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. These figures often exist in a state of double-bind: they are victims of systemic violence (war, patriarchy) yet are often rendered voiceless or symbolically charged within the narrative structures primarily driven by male consciousness. Future research should investigate how gender imposes unique limitations on the ability to perform the ethical labour of memory within these structures, and how the silences surrounding these female figures differ from the voluntary restraint or compulsory muteness of the male narrators. This would reveal crucial insights into the gendered politics of trauma representation in Modernism.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to trace the argument for reconstruction and persistence into the authors' later fictional output. Does the ethical posture established in *A Farewell to Arms* endure in Hemingway's post-war novels, or does it give way to a different kind of post-traumatic stasis? Does Faulkner sustain the generative fragmentation of *The Sound and the Fury* in later works like *Absalom, Absalom!*, or does he find new, perhaps more conventional, methods of confronting the weight of Southern history? This longitudinal study could determine

if the fragile ethical identity found here was a momentary breakthrough or a lasting philosophical framework.

Finally, the American experience of trauma is distinct. This study could be significantly expanded comparatively by placing the findings alongside European Modernists, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence to better understand the distinct national and cultural memory formations surrounding historical rupture. A transnational perspective would highlight whether the unique aesthetic features of the American texts, Hemingway's minimalist "tough-guy" ethic, Faulkner's regional Gothic, are a product of generic modernist crisis or specific American political and social violence. Such an inquiry would deepen our understanding of how trauma is globally shared yet locally inscribed in literary form.

The intellectual foundation of this thesis, built on a rigorous analysis of systemic violence and trauma in narrative, including significant focus on Žižek's tripartite model of violence and various arguments and theories surrounding trauma, allowed this study to firmly establish narrative fragmentation as an ethical response to objective political and social failures. By dissecting violence into its subjective, objective, and spectral forms, the thesis demonstrated that the aesthetic breakdown in American Modernism is a direct structural engagement with the pervasive, unseen forces that shatter human experience. This thesis culminates in an affirmation of the profound moral imagination that drives American Modernism. The literary legacy of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner stands as an undeniable testament, the catastrophic violence of the world, whether enacted on a European battlefield or within a crumbling Southern mansion, may shatter the foundations of the self, but it cannot ultimately silence the human imperative to seek and forge meaning. Their modernist forms, born from rupture and forged in the crucible of historical crisis, provide a profound testament to the power of narrative to transform a history of suffering into a principle of endurance. In their hands, the ruins of the early twentieth century, the shattered syntax, the chronological chaos, the profound silence,

become the very ground upon which an ethical response is constructed. They found the language not of simple recovery or definitive closure, but of an enduring, ethically conscious persistence, suggesting that even the most fragmented of voices can, through the relentless and persistent labour of memory, forge a path towards a fragile but undeniable renewal. The self survives not by forgetting, but by the moral courage to *remember* and to continue the hard, essential work of telling. The legacy of American Modernism is therefore not one of despair, but of profound, hard-won ethical survival.

Appendix

Appendices

A: Plot Summary of *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner

The Sound and the Fury by William Faulkner follows the story of the decline of the Compson family. A once-prominent Southern aristocratic household, the family goes through a difficult patch and is told through a fragmented narrative structure which comprises four distinct sections.

The first section is narrated by Benjy Compson, a cognitively disabled man whose perception of time is nonlinear. His narration moves between past and present, revealing the emotional centrality of his sister, Caddy Compson, and the family's gradual disintegration following her moral and social fall.

The second section follows Quentin Compson on the day of his suicide in 1910. His narrative reflects a psychological crisis shaped by his obsession with Caddy's loss of purity and his inability to reconcile his ideals of honour with modern reality. His fragmented thoughts emphasised themes of time, memory, and existential despair.

The third section is narrated by Jason Compson IV, whose perspective is more linear and the most clear, but is marked by bitterness and cruelty. Jason's fixation on financial control and resentment toward his family culminate in his conflict with his niece, Miss Quentin (Caddy's daughter), who ultimately escapes with money he had hoarded.

The final section adopts a third-person perspective centred on Dilsey Gibson, a Black lady and the Compson's loyal servant. Set on Easter Sunday, this section contrasts the moral endurance and stability represented by Dilsey with the complete collapse of the Compson family. In general, the novel traces the disintegration of a Southern family through shifting narrative voices and temporal fragmentation, with Caddy's absence functioning as the central organising force of the text.

B: Plot Summary of *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway

A Farewell to Arms by Ernest Hemingway is a semi-autobiography which narrates the experience of an American ambulance driver serving in the Italian army during World War I. The novel follows Fredric Henry as he navigates war, war, and disillusionment.

Stationed in Italy, Fredric begins a romantic relationship with Catherine Barkley, a British nurse mourning the death of her fiancé. Their relationship initially develops as a form of emotional escape from the realities of war.

In a near death experience, Fredric is later wounded in an accident and was hospitalised in Milan, where his relationship with Catherine deepens into a genuine emotional dependence. Upon returning to the front, he witnessed the chaotic Italian retreat following the defeat at Battle of Caporetto. Amid the chaos and the disorder, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with the war and its senseless violence, thus giving up his old beliefs and lack of ideological commitment.

During the retreat, Fredric is nearly executed by Italian military police, suspected officers of treason. He then successfully escapes by jumping into a river, an act that symbolically marks his separation from the war and expresses his anti-war beliefs. Catherine and Fredrick then reunites with each other, and the two flee to Switzerland in search of peace and a life removed from conflict.

The final section of the novel focuses on their temporary refuge and shared hope for a future together. However, their hopes are shattered when Catherine dies during childbirth, and their child is stillborn. The novel concludes with Fredric alone. Taken as a whole, the novel traces Fredric Henry's progress from detachment to emotional investment and ultimately to existential disillusionment. The novel emphasises themes of war, love, loss, and the fragility of human meaning.

C: The Hooded Man (Abu Ghraib Photograph)



Figure 1 – *“The Hooded Man,”* Photograph of Iraqi prisoner Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh tortured by U.S soldiers in Abu Ghraib Prison, 2003. The image foregrounds the anonymisation of the detainee and the staging of the body under coercion, rendering violence both visible and abstracted.

D:

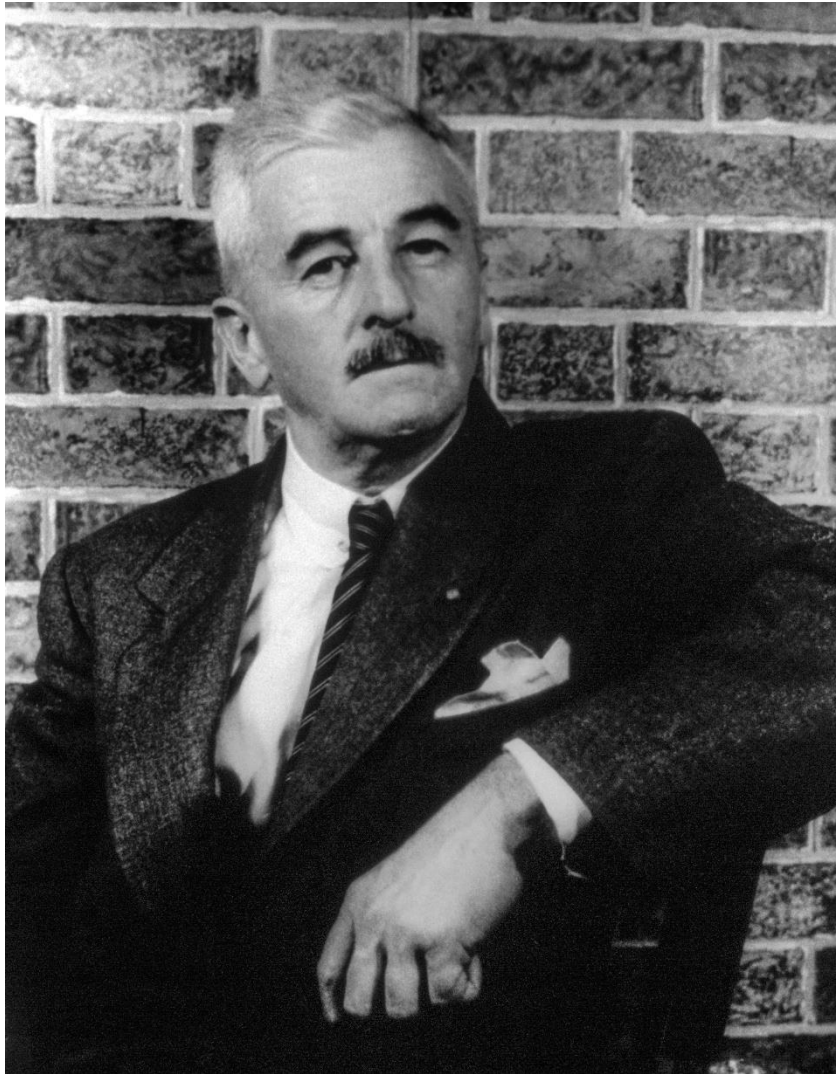


Figure 2. William Faulkner, photograph by Carl Van Vechten, 11 December 1954. From the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Van Vechten Collection. Wikimedia Commons.

E:

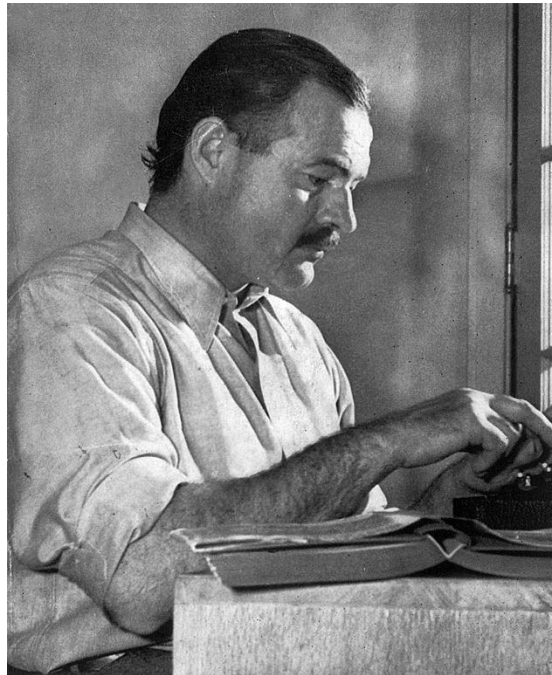


Figure 3 Ernest Hemingway at a typewriter, photograph by Lloyd Arnold, 1939. From the Ernest Hemingway Photograph Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Wikimedia Commons



Figure 4. Ernest Hemingway recuperating from wounds in Milan, 1918. . From the Ernest Hemingway Photograph Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Wikimedia Commons.

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