

THE WRITING CURE: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE
CONTEMPORARY MEMOIR

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SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF YORK
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND RELATED LITERATURE
SEPTEMBER 2002

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rachel Bowlby for supervising this project, and Nicole Ward Jouve, Hugh Haughton, and Hermione Lee for nurturing my early interest in contemporary life writing. I am grateful to the British Academy/ Arts and Humanities Research Board for funding this thesis. Blake Eskin was kind enough to send me an unpublished manuscript of his book and Paul John Eakin and Gillie Bolton generously corresponded with me on email. Thanks also to Deborah Lipstadt for responding to my queries about Wilkomirski. I have been lucky to have the support of my friends Becky Axford, Piers Bearne, Jon Bircher, Karina Dent, Annabel Field, Miranda Field, Patricia Field, Richard Field, Ben Harker, Dave Morgan, Leona Morgan, Carolyn Morningstar, Ben Patchesa, Rebecca Promitzer, Hugh Stevens, and Emily Weygang. Special thanks go to Hugh Stevens for reading a chapter of the thesis at a crucial time. Finally, I owe my deepest thanks to my family for their financial and emotional support and continuing belief in me, and to Douglas Field whose support throughout has meant the world.

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between psychoanalysis and autobiography by focussing on contemporary manifestations of both. By reading a selection of contemporary memoirs in the context of the recovered memory debate and recent trauma theory, it demonstrates the ways in which psychoanalysis and autobiography implicated each other in unsuspected ways during the 1990s.

Chapter One focuses on the figure of the detective or archaeologist in a selection of contemporary memoirs. I concentrate on the recent auto/biographical emphasis on hidden histories and family secrets in relation to the recovered memory debate and to trauma theories informed by poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. The chapter goes on to explore the ways in which the revision of family narrative in 'detective memoirs' can be read as an implicit critique of autobiography as a truth-telling discourse, a confrontation with the impossibility of autobiography in the face of epistemological and narrative crises.

Chapter Two focuses on the concept of 'possession' in Cathy Caruth's and Shoshana Felman's work on trauma and testimony. Their corresponding theories of historical transmission (in place of realist attempts at

representation) is predicated, I argue, on the pathology of the witness and this chapter seeks to determine the implications of such a concept of 'privileged witnessing' for written accounts of trauma. By considering the 'possession' model of trauma and transmission in the context of Nicholas Abraham's and Maria Torok's theories of transgenerational haunting, Chapter Two then discusses the ways in which theories of possession and haunting might provide an alternative angle from which to consider the ethical questions posed by relational auto/biography.

Chapter Three examines the issues surrounding one of the most controversial memoirs of the 1990s, Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939-1948* (1995). Wilkomirski's memoir was widely thought to have been the result of recovered memory therapy, a practice that by the time of *Fragments*'s publication was almost unanimously considered disreputable and unreliable. Yet this chapter problematises the recovered memory connection and demonstrates how a reading of the case based on contemporary trauma theory as opposed to recovered memory yields interestingly different results. Considering Stephan Maechler's suggestion that Wilkomirski's 'fake' memoir may be the veiled expression of unspeakable childhood traumas rather than a willing attempt to deceive, this chapter asks what the Wilkomirski case can reveal about the tensions

between psychoanalytic and historical approaches to narratives of trauma. How might these tensions impact on other life-narratives that, for different reasons, contravene the historical record?

INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s broadsheet commentators in both the US and the UK were eager to announce the arrival of a new genre of life writing. The 'confessional memoir' was not only, it was claimed, a new genre, but a 'new and troubling genre', functioning as a symptom of a perplexing 'culture of confession' that would characterise the 1990s in the way that the 'culture of complaint' had characterised the 1980s.¹ We had become, as Michel Foucault anticipated in the 1970s, 'a singularly confessing society'.²

Often keen to pinpoint the exact moment of the genre's incipience, many broadsheet commentators were also eager to usher in the end of the movement along with the end of the Millennium. There was a suggestion that this genre was ephemeral, trivial, partaking of the *Zeitgeist* rather than being a legitimate literary development with both a past and a future. Andy Beckett, for example, wondered in 1998 whether the 'confessional industry' had 'gone too far'.³ He was referring to the then pending publication of Joyce Maynard's memoir about her relationship with J. D. Salinger

¹ Nicci Gerrard, 'Father, We Have Sinned . . .', rev. of *The Kiss: A Secret Life* by Kathryn Harrison, *Observer* 13 April 1997: 06, Michael Collins, 'Tears 'r' Us', *Guardian* 19 January 1998, Media: 4.

² Michel Foucault, 'Scientia Sexualis', *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990) 59.

³ Andy Beckett, 'This Woman Writes Books About Her Life. Now She's Writing One About Writing About Herself. . .', *Guardian* 11 September 1998, Arts: 6.

At Home in the World (1998), a memoir which, Beckett bemoaned, is as much 'a memoir about writing memoirs' as it is an overly publicised confession about 'fumbled sex with the famous recluse'.⁴ 'It was probably inevitable that the modern memoir craze would come to this', wrote Beckett, centring on Maynard's supposed meta-memoir as evidence that the confessional era which he claims began in the early 1990s, was now finally and blessedly in decline.⁵ Likewise, he considered the rapidly increasing availability of life writing courses around the country as examples not of a growing interest in reading and writing lives, but rather as an indication that the memoir craze was reaching saturation point, that it had 'gone too far' and would surely soon be at an end.⁶

Certainly, many broadsheet commentators were quick to tire of the memoir 'boom' even though several British memoirs began life as serialisations in broadsheets such as the *Independent* and the *Observer*.⁷ Michael Collins even

⁴ Beckett: 6.

⁵ Beckett: 6. For memoirs which could much more accurately be defined as 'meta-memoirs' see Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (London: Picador, 2000), Paul Morley, *Nothing* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000) and for a satirisation of the memoir genre see Bruno Maddox, *My Little Blue Dress* (London: Little Brown, 2001).

⁶ And yet in a January 2001 *Guardian* article we find Claire Armitstead discussing the contemporary memoir once again as though it were new: Claire Armitstead, 'My Life As A Story', *Guardian* 27 January 2001, 22 February 2002 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4124528,00.html>>.

⁷ Ruth Picardie and John Diamond were all columnists who turned their 'confessional' columns into miniature 'pathographies' when diagnosed with cancer as did Oscar Moore when diagnosed with Aids. All three columnists published memoirs as a result of the columns. Ruth Picardie, *Before I Say Goodbye* (London: Penguin, 1998); John Diamond, *C: Because cowards get cancer too...* (London: Vermillion, 1999); and

went so far as to suggest that by printing an extract of Blake Morrison's *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* (1993), the *Granta* literary magazine was responsible not only for the burgeoning memoir genre but also for the mass public mourning that followed Princess Diana's death in 1997.⁸ More recently the *Observer* has run an extract of Don Boyd's account of childhood sexual abuse in an English public school as promotion for his film *My Kingdom*, an indication not only that the urge to 'confess' continues across a variety of media and shows no signs of abating, but also that broadsheet previews continue to perform a crucial role in the circulation and publicity of 'confessional' accounts.⁹

In her overview of what she refers to as 'auto/biographical discourses', Laura Marcus writes that one of the constant theoretical problems of autobiography is 'the question of what constitutes autobiography proper, in opposition to popular "confessional" literature or memoir'.¹⁰ This seems to be the thrust behind many media accounts of the contemporary memoir. And yet in recent years, critics of autobiography have been concerned with

Oscar Moore, *PWA* (London: Picador, 1996). And the *Observer* serialised the columnist Kathryn Flett's account of her divorce before the story became a memoir: *The Heart-Shaped Bullet* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

⁸ Collins: 4. See Blake Morrison, 'And When Did You Last See Your Father?', *Granta* 41 (1992).

⁹ Don Boyd, 'A Suitable Boy', *Observer* 19 August 2001, *Life Magazine*: 22-27.

¹⁰ Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 3.

discovering and exploring the multiplicity of the genre rather than with policing the boundaries between the 'literary' and the 'popular'. Georges Gusdorf and Phillipe Lejeune are more likely to be examined for their delimiting rather than for their paradigmatic effects and as autobiography appears to be more and more of an unbounded enterprise, critics have approached it from new and unsuspected angles. Augustine is no longer considered 'the founding father of the autobiographical form' and the androcentric 'great man' tradition of autobiography has long superseded in the face of vital research into previously unremarked auto/biographical territories.¹¹

In sharp contrast to such critical approaches to autobiography, however, the media response to the 'confessional memoir' seemed to call for a renewed sense of the 'conditions and limits' of autobiography, for a firm 'distinction between those human beings who are capable of self-reflection and those who are not'.¹² Andy Beckett, for example, bemoaned the contemporary memoir's relationship to the 1970s and 1980s feminist politicisation of the personal; discussing Jo Stanley's book *Writing Out Your Life* (1997), he commented on the 'stern references to "consciousness-raising" and "the struggle"' and wondered

¹¹ Marcus 2.

¹² This phrase is from Marcus 21, and describes the ways in which the 'autobiography/ memoirs distinction' which was 'ostensibly formal and generic' has long been used to distinguish between those 'capable' of self-reflection and those incapable.

whether 'the self-assertions of middle-aged British housewives, however worthy' were 'really likely to sell'.¹³ In a similar vein--and eerily echoing the view that 'greatness' is a precondition for autobiographical writing--Kirsty Gunn remarked that 'British readers are only going to put up with someone talking endlessly about themselves if they're old, venerable or, at the last resort, well-connected'.¹⁴ And in a review of Tim Lott's *The Scent of Dried Roses* (1996), Jay Rayner complained about the ease with which unremarkable life-stories were beginning to find their way into print:

People do get depressed. People's parents do commit suicide. The only extraordinary thing here is that, in keeping with the current vogue for the confessional, Tim Lott has decided to write about it and that is simply not enough. [. . .] Out of desperation to find enough with which to fill a book, someone with no good cause to do so has written his life story.¹⁵

Kathryn Harrison and Tracey Emin have been the recipients of much of this kind of criticism, which is often marked by a lurking sense of class and gender discrimination.

¹³ Beckett: 6.

¹⁴ Kirsty Gunn, 'Swimming Was Her Life', rev. of *Crossing the Channel: A Memoir of Love and Loss* by Sally Friedman, *Observer* 29 June 1997: 17.

¹⁵ Jay Rayner, 'Tomb With A View', *Observer* 13 October 1996: 16.

Harrison's memoir *The Kiss: A Secret Life* (1997) recounts the consensual sexual affair she had with her father while in her twenties. *The Kiss* elicited a vehemently negative response both in the US (where it was first published) and in the UK. In a positive review of *The Kiss* in 1997 Nicci Gerrard wrote:

Harrison has been accused of extreme cynicism, of queasy bad taste, of jumping on the bandwagon of the confession-fest, of treating the world as her shrink, of being a bad wife, bad mother, bad woman, of even, she says, "almost having the affair so that I could write about it" [. . .]. Even her looks have been turned against her.¹⁶

In an infamous review in the *Washington Post*, Jonathan Yardley opined that '*The Kiss* is trash from first word to last, self-promotion masquerading as literature [. . .] slimy, repellent, meretricious, cynical'.¹⁷ And in an article titled 'Women Behaving Badly' Michael Schnayerson swiftly pathologises Harrison by citing a psychologist proposing that the memoir might be the result of unresolved traumatic experiences and that 'Harrison may be offering

¹⁶ Nicci Gerrard, 'Father, We Have Sinned...': 06.

¹⁷ Cited by Robert McCrum, 'Today's Private Wars', *Observer* 16 March 1997: 24.

herself up to the world the way she offered herself to her father'.¹⁸

Articles on the 'bad behaviour' of Harrison and others outnumber by far those such as 'Blaming the Victim' which appeared in the *Women's Review of Books* and which takes a more sympathetic approach.¹⁹ *The Kiss--along with Michael Ryan's Secret Life* (1996)--is sometimes cited as an example of the excesses of the north American version of the contemporary memoir as opposed to the more temperate UK manifestation.²⁰

Young British artist Tracey Emin's controversial installation *My Bed* elicited an equally impassioned response in both UK broadsheets and tabloids when it was nominated for the 1999 Turner Prize. Her display of soiled bedsheets and underwear served only to fuel suspicions that confessional art is nothing more than the washing--or not--of one's dirty linen in public, or of the indecent 'exposure' of one's self before an unsuspecting public. The TV talk-show connection was evoked here, as in so many discussions of the 'confessional memoir', with Matthew

¹⁸ Michael Schnayerson, 'Women Behaving Badly', *Vanity Fair* February 1997: 54-61.

¹⁹ Lisa Alther, 'Blaming The Victim', *Women's Review of Books* 14 (July 1997): 33-4. See also Susan Cheever, 'Innocence Betrayed', *New York Times Book Review* 102 (30 March 1997): 11.

²⁰ Notably, the French author Christine Angot's memoir about consensual incest *L'Inceste* (2000) barely received media attention at all in the US and the UK (although to be fair it has not yet been translated into English). See also Gunn: 17, which observes the difference between US and UK receptions of *The Kiss* and Ed Vulliamy, 'Pen And Shrink', *Guardian* 13 February 1997: 02, which suggests that *The Kiss* emerges

Collins commenting on the similarity between the titles of Emin's drawings ('from the early sketch *My Boyfriend Fucked Me up The Arse And I Enjoyed It*, to the appliquéd tent with the names of Everyone I Have Ever Slept With--1963-1995') and the titles of Ricki Lake shows ('*My Boyfriend Left Me To Date My Mother And Then Married My Sister*').²¹

Some criticism appears to be directed at the very notion of autobiography and certain memoirs have been pilloried on account of their distance from fiction. Thus Nick Hornby is lauded as one who 'at least presents a distance between himself and his subject for it to have the semblance of literature' and Andrea Ashworth's memoir *Once in a House on Fire* (1998) is described as 'faulty only in its repetitive (too many stepfathers, too much violence) plot'.²²

In her own 'confessional memoir' about her mother's Alzheimer's disease, Linda Grant wonders what critics might make of this genre in the years to come:

will it be that, in twenty years, literary critics will recall that odd period in the closing years of the last century, when there was a fashion for what was called "confessional" literature, and how strange a

from a 'successful' US literary tradition of 'babbling one's intimate innards' and that incest is more prevalent in the US.

²¹ Collins: 4.

phenomenon it was, and why did it die out so quickly? Or will they think, how peculiar that when the literary memoir finally appeared, such a fuss was made of it, and how it was branded as "confessional" as though it was new and had more in common with *The Oprah Winfrey Show* than, say, the great work of St Augustine, which is called, of course, his *Confession*.²³

By imagining how views on 1990s memoirs might have changed in twenty years time, Grant raises questions which are crucial to an approach to the subject now. Do contemporary memoirs merit serious critical attention? Are they 'literary memoirs' or 'popular confessions'? Is the contemporary or the confessional memoir a genre or a 'fashion'? Is it legitimate? Is it new? Does it belong with Augustine or *Oprah*?

Grant suggests that we may have to wait twenty years before literary critics can begin to offer answers to these questions and yet the critical response to contemporary memoirs has in fact been swift. Nancy K. Miller, in her part-memoir, part critical work *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* (1996), for example, draws on a corpus of memoirs from the early 1990s as well as several earlier models as do Paul John Eakin in *How Our Lives*

²² Kate Kellaway, 'She Loved Her Mother More Than She Loved Mashed Potato', rev. of *Once in a House on Fire* by Andrea Ashworth, *Observer* 29 March 1998, Books: 17.

²³ Linda Grant, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (1998; London: Granta, 1999) 301.

Become Stories: Making Selves (1999), Susanna Egan in *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999), and Nicola King in *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (2000). Interestingly, none of these contemporary critical accounts refer to the memoirs as specifically 'confessional'. In their discussion of recent memoirs alongside earlier examples and sometimes alongside fiction, these critics also desist from categorising contemporary life writing as a genre to be distinguished from earlier models and focus instead on the way in which memory and narrative operate in the texts or on the changing 'models of identity' they perceive.

As Grant's scare quotes around the word suggest, 'confessional' might serve less as a descriptive or generic term than as a means of distinguishing 'confessional memoirs' from 'literature' by conceiving of them as a simple adjunct to the confessional culture characterised most effectively by TV talk-shows such as *Oprah* and *Kilroy*. In a review of *The Kiss* Ed Vulliamy observed: 'The line between literature and the Oprah Winfrey show, on which people tell the cameras about their sexual and relationship problems, blurs; indeed, the self-obsessive authors are competing for airtime with Oprah's guests'.²⁴ Along with its followers *Jerry Springer*, *Ricki Lake* and others, *Oprah* is often regarded as an emblem of 'what Frederick Jameson

describes as "the whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock" of a country in decline'.²⁵ And their British counterparts *Esther*, *Kilroy*, and *Vanessa* are implicated in the spread of cultural decline across the Atlantic.²⁶

As Grant says, 'confession' is not a word used to describe something, but to 'brand' it with. In certain cases it seems inimical to the activities it purports to describe. The 1990s might even be seen less as the decade in which the 'frenzy to confess' was evident everywhere one looked and more as the decade in which almost any autobiographical engagement was labelled 'confessional'.²⁷ John Diamond raised this point in a response to Michael Collins's *Guardian* article 'Tears 'r' Us', in which Collins 'accused confessional columnists of believing they have a monopoly on suffering'. Diamond questioned the parallels Collins drew between certain confessional practices and others:

²⁴ Vulliamy: 02.

²⁵ Cited by Jane M. Shattuc in *The Talking Cure: TV Talk Shows and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 14.

²⁶ Shattuc claims that in 1994 the emphasis of talk shows shifted away from identity politics and towards 'a more apolitical and ironic treatment of social issues' Shattuc, 9. 'From 1967 to 1993', she writes, 'TV produced some of the most radical populist moments in its history as women (and men) rarely seen on national television (lesbian, black, bisexual, working-class) stood up, spoke about, and even screamed for their beliefs about what is culturally significant'. See also Janice Peck, 'The Mediated Talking Cure: Therapeutic Framing of Autobiography in TV Talk Shows', *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²⁷ Vulliamy: 02.

It wasn't just me, of course: we were all there. Here was Oscar Moore dying of Aids in the *Guardian* and Roth Picardie of cancer in the *Observer*; there is Linda Grant writing about her mother's Alzheimer's and Mark Honigsbaum contemplating his partner's abortion. [. . .] And in a cack-handed attempt to turn his sour complaint [. . .] into a full-fledged thesis, [Collins] attached the disease-affected columnists to the domestically inconvenienced (Kathryn Flett writing about her divorce), and those in turn--although I still can't work out how--to dead Diana, fictional Bridget Jones and the participants in the Oprah show.²⁸

Diamond takes issue with the use of the word 'confessional' wondering whether 'Having cancer or Alzheimer's or Aids is a sin? Or perhaps a crime?'.²⁹ And yet confession in the 1990s appeared to have little to do with its religious or juridical roots and, perhaps having more in common with *Oprah* than with Augustine, was more readily understood as an unprecedented degree of public self-exposure designed to elicit fame and profit rather than absolution or judgement.

The link between the 'confessional memoir' and therapy was widely believed to be self-evident.³⁰ This view was based on an ostensibly unproblematic conflation of confessional discourse and therapeutic discourse. As Leigh

²⁸ John Diamond, 'Sympathy Pains', *Guardian* 26 January 1998: 7.

²⁹ Diamond: 7.

Gilmore wrote in 2001 'In 1996 a *New York Times Magazine* special issue announced nothing less than the "triumph" of literary memoir and linked its ascendancy to the therapy-driven "culture of confession" with which it was a perfect fit'.³¹

The link between confession and therapy is not of course untenable, although it is problematic. The feminist consciousness-raising drive of the 1970s and 1980s which may well have been partly responsible for the massive popularity of the memoir form in the 1990s can itself be seen as a revision of 'an already existing theory of the personal and of the talking cure', a revision and yet not a replica of classic Freudian psychoanalysis (because it coincided with an attack on Freud's theories of female sexuality).³² There is of course a danger that an equation of contemporary memoirs with confession and that in turn with therapy might serve only to pathologise the authors of the memoirs or to pathologise the memoirs themselves, serving as another means of distinguishing this 'new genre' from literature proper. Harrison, as we have seen, was accused of 'treating the world as her shrink' and the

³⁰ See, for example, Angela Neustatter, 'Voyage Round Our Parents', *Guardian* 3 March 1998: 2 and Nicci Gerrard, 'Mothers Ruined', *Observer* 3 November 1996, Review: 01.

³¹ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 1-2. The article she is referring to is James Atlas, 'The Age of Literary Memoir is Now', *New York Times Magazine* 12 May 1996: 25-27.

³² Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, *Freud's Women* (1992; London: Penguin, 2000) 459.

memoir was read by some as a pathological symptom. The moralistic tone of some broadsheet commentaries is often accompanied by intimations of pathology as confession is figured as a rampant pestilence spreading uncontrollably from the US to the UK, oozing its way into every imaginable medium, and contaminating the culture.³³

If some contemporary memoirs fall into what appears to be a new genre of writing as therapy, this might have more to do with what Elizabeth Bruss refers to as 'contextual' issues than with the aims of the author or the formal qualities of the text.³⁴ Autobiography has traditionally fallen into a historical generic classification.³⁵ Yet it is notable that many of the memoirs and critical texts used in this thesis were found not in the biography or the history sections of bookshops, but rather in the rapidly growing self-help section.³⁶

³³ See, for example, Richard Horton, 'Health: A Literary Footnote', *Observer* 2 March 1997, *Life Magazine*: 46; Andrew O'Hagan, 'The Breath Of A Speaking Voice', rev. of *The Scent of Dried Roses*, *Guardian* 19 September 1996: 14; Gerrard, 'Mothers Ruined': 01; and Elaine Showalter, 'Ladies, Maladies: Nervous Switch', *Observer* 15 December 1996, *Review*: 13.

³⁴ Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 4-5.

³⁵ As Olney wryly observes: '(which is why librarians and bibliographers, being good, simple souls and devoted to systems of classification that go back far beyond the time when the study of autobiography came into vogue, like to view autobiography as nothing other than a subdivision of biography--which is itself classified as a variety of history)', James Olney, ed., *On Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 20.

³⁶ Notably in stores of the US chain *Borders* where you are likely to find Kathryn Flett's memoir shelved under 'Divorce' and countless memoirs of family deaths under 'Bereavement'. Because *Borders* do not have a nonfiction or biography section, the way in which they catalogue books from those categories is often interesting. While some

'We want confessions', Peter Brooks writes in *Troubling Confessions* (2000), 'yet we are suspicious of them'.³⁷ This encapsulates some of the problems with the reception of the 'confessional memoir' during the 1990s, some of the anxiety over the cultural space confessional discourse was allowed to occupy, and some of the perplexed and confused distinctions between the 'literary' and the 'confessional'.

In the case of the 'confessional memoir' the problem might simply have been one of terminology, or of emphasis. If we focus, for example, on the relationality of some contemporary memoirs, rather than on their supposed 'confessionality', they emerge as part of a literary development with roots in feminist revisions of the 'Gusdorfian' model of identity and life writing, and can be seen as pioneering not for their heightened candour but for the unprecedented scope of their generic blending. From this perspective, the contemporary memoir becomes more difficult to categorise as a genre in itself as so many memoirs imbricate several genres, such as sociology, psychoanalysis, history, autobiography, and biography. Moreover, it becomes increasingly difficult to conceive of the genre as 'contemporary'; examples of the relational model of identity and of auto/biography go as far back as

find their way into 'Fiction', others end up in various departments around the store, such as 'Religion' (for some Holocaust testimonies).

Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907), and similar exercises include Simone de Beauvoir's *Une morte très douce* (1969), and perhaps more influentially Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986).³⁸

The other problem is the ostensibly simple conflation of confessional discourse with therapeutic discourse. Not only is 'confession' not homogenous in itself--comprising notions of religious, literary, and juridical discourses--there are also important distinctions between 'confession' in a broad sense and what Brooks refers to as 'the confessional talk of psychoanalysis'. Although the connection between TV talk shows and therapy has provided fertile material for a Foucauldian analysis of confessional discourse in the 1990s, the complex relationship between confession, literature, and psychoanalysis may be at the root of the discomfort critics felt over the excessive 'confessional' performance of, for example, Kathryn Harrison.³⁹

Critics were not only dismayed by the content of Harrison's memoir, but also by its form--by the strangely somnambulant voice in which Harrison recounted her

³⁷ Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 3.

³⁸ Mary Mason traces the relational model of identity much further back to the very first known examples of women's life writing, see 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers' in Olney. Others place the advent of a new focus on relationality in 1978 with Nancy Chodorow's work on mothering and psychoanalysis. See for example, *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, eds. (London: Routledge, 2000) 6.

³⁹ Shattuc engages with Foucault in her study of TV talk shows.

experiences with her father. There seemed here to be a confusion between what Brooks, drawing on J. L. Austin's important work on speech acts, refers to as between the 'constative' and the 'performative' aspects of confessional discourse: 'One might want to say that confession, even if compelled, is always in some sense "true" as a performative, indeed as a performance, but this does not guarantee that it is not false as a constative, as a relevant "fact"'.⁴⁰ In Harrison's case it seems that an excess of the performative aspect of her confession-- characterised not only by the 'literariness' of the memoir but also by her appearances in *Vogue* and other high-profile magazines--led to a profound suspicion about the memoir's validity as a 'constative' act.

Indeed Brooks seeks to trouble the ostensibly unproblematic relationship between confession and truth-telling that some commentators on the 'confessional memoir' appeared to take for granted. Freud provided perhaps the most succinct description of the difference between psychoanalytic discourse and other kinds of confession: 'In Confession the sinner tells what he knows; in analysis the neurotic has to tell more'.⁴¹ The 'confessional talk of psychoanalysis' has a complex relationship to truth-telling and while legal and religious forms of confession tend to

⁴⁰ Brooks 21-22.

⁴¹ Cited in Brooks 113.

rest on the assumption that the past is knowable and narratable (and can be either disclosed or withheld) psychoanalysis is interested in 'more'--in a knowledge that is beyond the conscious reach of the analysand him or herself.

This thesis explores the relationship between psychoanalysis and a selection of contemporary memoirs that, to greater or lesser degrees, engage with this question of 'more'. Despite the preoccupation of both autobiography and psychoanalysis with what Adam Phillips in his essay on the relationship between them calls 'the telling of selves' the two disciplines have, as Marcus explains, failed to connect historically in the way we might expect. '[T]here has been', she writes, 'a sense of missed opportunities and failed relationships' despite the 'clear affinities' of autobiography and psychoanalysis.⁴² Psychoanalysis converged briefly with autobiography in the modern period, Marcus observes, when autobiographies tended to focus on formative childhood experience, the 'family romance' and revelatory fictions in place of facts.⁴³ Briefly sketching out the points at which psychoanalysis and autobiography have been placed in conversation with each other throughout the twentieth century, Marcus alludes to 'Lacan's concepts of specularity and doubling' which was

⁴² Marcus 214.

⁴³ Marcus 214.

influential not only for deconstructionist work on autobiography, but also to a feminist 'redefinition of the mother/mirror relationship, narcissism and specularity'.⁴⁴ While Susanna Egan's 2000 study of contemporary autobiography continues in this vein to stress the importance of the 'mirror' in autobiography, other recent studies such as Paul John Eakin's *How our Lives Become Stories* place the emphasis instead on 'relationality' which in Eakin's account is ungendered and approached from a markedly unpsychoanalytic angle.

Like Marcus, Eakin also remarks on the failed connection between autobiography and psychoanalysis, despite the efforts of some 1970s and 1980s autobiographers, critics, and theorists who sought to bring them together.⁴⁵ Critics and theorists, writes Eakin, sought 'to throw off the dead weight of convention', calling 'for a "new model autobiographer" who, psychoanalytically inspired, would discard the old-fashioned constraints of narrative linearity and embrace the freedom of free association proper to the psychoanalytic self'.⁴⁶ Eakin regrets that 'Such a reform [. . .] has been slow to take hold, for ten years later we

⁴⁴ Marcus 217-18.

⁴⁵ Among the autobiographers Eakin considers to be particularly influenced by psychoanalysis are, notably, Michel Leiris (*L'Age d'homme* 1939), Conrad Aiken (*Ushant* 1962) and Ronald Fraser (*In Search of a Past* 1984), Eakin, *Touching the World* 83.

⁴⁶ Eakin, *Touching the World* 83. Notably John Sturrock, see 'The New Model Autobiographer', *New Literary History* 9 (1977-78): 51-63.

find Philip Dodd praising *In Search of a Past* as "the most important contemporary English autobiography", still in the position of championing Fraser's use of psychoanalysis in autobiographical discourse as a novelty'.⁴⁷ Eakin considers that 'we could reasonably expect Freud's work on the unconscious [. . .] which involves a radical expansion of the received model of personality and postulates a "hidden" part of the "hidden" self, to have had revolutionary implications for our understanding of the self and its story. Surprisingly, in fact it has not'.⁴⁸

While the alliance of free-association and autobiography may always have been doomed to failure on the grounds that, as Phillips writes, free-association requires that the analysand 'become a very bad story-teller and make a nonsense of his life', Eakin seems to underestimate the impact of psychoanalysis on life writing generally and on contemporary life writing in particular.⁴⁹ As Phillips suggests in his essay on the relationship between psychoanalysis and autobiography, it is a mistake to assume--as the 'new model autobiographers' seemed to--that the differences between these two forms of self-telling are surmountable, that autobiography can perform the same function as psychoanalysis. Attempts to read autobiography

⁴⁷ Eakin, *Touching the World* 83.

⁴⁸ Eakin, *Touching the World* 83.

⁴⁹ Adam Phillips, 'The Telling of Selves', *On Flirtation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994) 68. Eakin does not engage with psychoanalysis in his study of contemporary life writing *How Our Lives Become Stories*.

unproblematically as 'therapy' are perhaps as doomed as attempts to replicate the analytic encounter on the page.⁵⁰

Shoshana Felman, in her introduction to *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (1980), maintains that many of the problems with psychoanalytic literary criticism are rooted in criticism's tendency to adopt the role of the analyst, to 'apply' theories to texts in the way that Freud applied his theories to his patients.⁵¹ Felman problematises the seemingly innocuous 'and' between literature and psychoanalysis and argues against the implied master-slave (or analyst-analysand) relationship between the two.⁵² She endorses 'implication' (in its etymological sense of 'being folded within') between the two disciplines rather than the more banal 'application' of one to the other.⁵³ In this way, the

⁵⁰ Two notable (and successful) attempts to do so are Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1995) and Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It* (1984), but even though Cardinal's book is an 'autobiographical novel', and Roth's might be close to autobiography, I think it is important that both are in the fiction category. Although, as Lejeune knew, there may be no formal difference between an autobiography and an autobiographical novel, there is a difference in terms of the 'act' of designating a book autobiography, which signals the way in which it is to be read. More recently, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love* (1999) is a non-fictional account of her therapy sessions, but this perhaps does not 'replicate' the analytic encounter as much as report (sometimes poetically, imaginatively) on it.

⁵¹ Peter Brooks, for example, writes of how 'Psychoanalytic literary criticism has always been something of an embarrassment. One resists labelling as a "psychoanalytic critic" because the kind of criticism evoked by the term mostly deserves the bad name it largely has made for itself', 'The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism', *The Trials of Psychoanalysis*, Françoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 145.

⁵² Shoshana Felman, ed., *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) 6-7.

⁵³ Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis* 9.

master discourse proposed by psychoanalysis is broken down and opened up to potentially invigorating re-readings.

This thesis explores the *implications* between autobiography and psychoanalysis by focussing on particularly contemporary manifestations of each: contemporary memoirs, the recovered memory debate, and contemporary trauma theory.⁵⁴ The chapters focus on three different figures: the detective, the ventriloquist, and the liar. These are not normally considered the conventional roles of the autobiographer but this thesis considers how each of them might highlight the ways in which autobiography and psychoanalysis implicated each other in unsuspected ways during the 1990s.

Chapter One looks at what I refer to as the 'detective memoir' in relation to trauma theory and to the RMT debate. The RMT debate proves a particularly useful context in which to consider contemporary autobiography and its relationship to psychoanalysis. The debate saw the convergence of the political and therapeutic effects of life-stories which, although retrieved in a clinical setting, often became legal testimony once they entered the public arena. Psychoanalysis, once the agent only of narrative truth or psychical reality, was called upon to produce narratives that would hold up in a court of law. At

⁵⁴ I also refer to the recovered memory debate as the RMT (recovered memory therapy) debate and to the period of debate as 'the memory

the same time, historians were attempting to rescue their discipline from the damaging effects of postmodernism which threatened to throw history into what has been called 'an extended epistemological crisis'.⁵⁵

During the 'memory wars' that raged during the 1990s psychoanalysis was emerging out of the consulting room and entering the courtroom, shifting the boundaries not only between the public and the private but also between the different kinds of truth production which are admissible as evidence or as legal and historical truth. The true/false polemics of the RMT debate ('the mind either has the capacity to repress vast numbers of events [. . .] or it does not') filter directly into the paradoxes at the heart of the debate, reviving and problematising some of the original and unresolved impasses of psychoanalysis.⁵⁶

In a recent article, Roger Luckhurst examined the ways in which the recovered memory model began to emerge in

wars', a phrase coined by Frederick Crews in *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (London: Granta, 1997).

⁵⁵ For an excellent overview of the effects of postmodernism on the discipline of history and on the future of history, see Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997). David Harlan, cited in Evans 3-4.

⁵⁶ Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria* (London: André Deutsch, 1995) 5. For a good discussion of the issues surrounding the RMT debate, see also Valerie Sinason, ed., *Memory in Dispute* (London: Karnac, 1998), Daniel Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (London: Basic Books, 1996), Joseph de Rivera and Theodore R. Sarbin, eds., *Believed-In Imaginings: The Narrative Construction of Reality* (Washington: The American Psychological Association, 1998), Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, The Myth of Repressed Memories: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), and Frederick Crews, *The Memory Wars*.

fictional writing during the 1990s.⁵⁷ Although Luckhurst's focus is on the RMT motif in fiction, the prevalence of the trauma-recovery model in 1990s literature indicates that the debate was more far-reaching than it might seem. Ann Scott writes that the recovered memory debate represented 'a climate of thinking about the self' and Luckhurst goes further in suggesting that the fascination with RMT 'lies in the emergence of a new structure of subjectivity, oscillating between memory and forgetting, with the prospect that another self, attached to a wholly occluded memory-chain, might lurk in the interstices of a life story'.⁵⁸

I suggest that the plethora of 'hidden lives' autobiographies that appeared in the 1990s emerged as part of a similar preoccupation. Margaret Forster's novel *The Memory Box* (1999), for example, followed her autobiographical treatments of the same theme *Hidden Lives* (1995) and *Precious Lives* (1998). Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead* (1999), Tim Lott's *The Scent of Dried Roses* (1996), Louise Kehoe's *In This Dark House* (1995), Mary Gordon's *The Shadow Man* (1996), Dan Jacobson's *Heshel's Kingdom* (1998), and Germaine Greer's *Daddy, We Hardly Knew*

⁵⁷ Luckhurst focuses on Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995; London: Black Swan, 1998) and Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (London: Flamingo, 1992).

⁵⁸ Ann Scott, *Real Events Revisited: Fantasy, Memory, and Psychoanalysis* (London: Virago, 1996) 65 and Roger Luckhurst 'Memory recovered/recovered memory', *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions*

You (1989) are all family memoirs in which the author plays the role of detective or archaeologist in order to uncover the buried secrets of their family histories. These memoirs each centre on the recovered memory dilemma par excellence: the possibility that 'In the instant of recovery [. . .] we can become strangers to ourselves'.⁵⁹ I resist the term 'confessional' in this thesis in order to consider the difference, as Peter Brooks suggests we might, between Rousseau's 'tell all' and Freud's 'tell more'.

Distinguishing religious or legal confession from psychoanalytic discourse, Brooks writes that 'the confessional talk of psychoanalysis suggests that confession can be less a definition of the truth than a search for it, a posing of the question: Who am I?'.⁶⁰

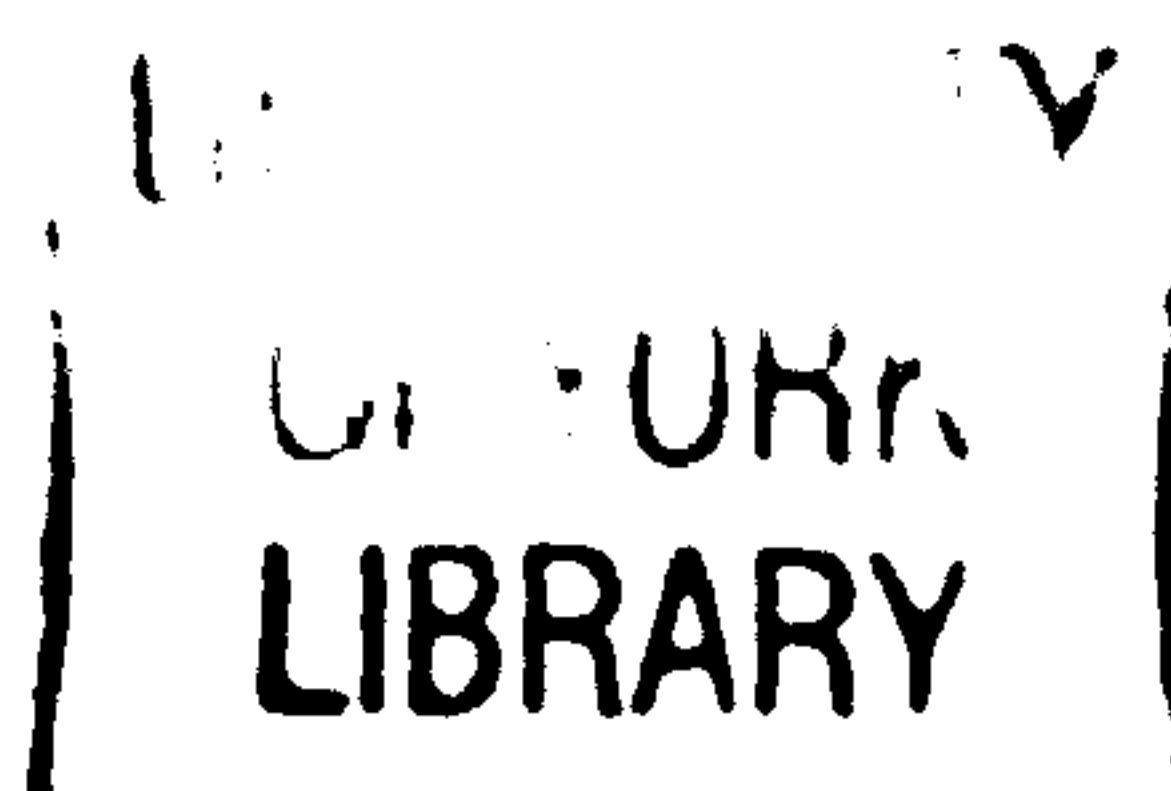
Recognising the centrality of trauma to contemporary understandings of psychoanalysis (and history), the contemporary memoirs discussed in this thesis might, I suggest, be more readily understood as testimony as opposed to confession: a mode of 'access to' the past rather than a 'statement of' that past.⁶¹

and Theories of the Present, Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks, eds. (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 1999) 86.

⁵⁹ Luckhurst 86.

⁶⁰ Brooks 141.

⁶¹ Based on Shoshana Felman's distinction, as discussed in Chapter One. A note on terminology here: sometimes I refer to memoir, sometimes to autobiography, and sometimes to testimony. I do not think contemporary memoirs are to be distinguished from autobiography 'proper', which is why I sometimes refer to them as such. When I refer to testimony, this is to make clear this particular function of the text. Because this thesis is so concerned with the RMT debate and with the political need for the possibility of 'true stories', I have found it useful to



Many contemporary memoirs are notable also for their blurring of the boundaries between genres. It is not unusual to find sections of memoirs which depart significantly from the auto/biographical mode. As many of them are also relational there is also a blend of autobiography and biography within them: the question 'who am I?' in these cases takes a necessary detour through the biographical question 'who was s/he?'. This blurring of boundaries between purportedly subjective and objective modes was also characteristic of the memory wars, where the psychoanalytic and the juridical merged, often uncomfortably.⁶² But it has also been a growing emphasis in life writing too, where we find a blurring of the lines between public and private and between the subjective and

always keep in mind the possible function of autobiography as testimony, as legal or historical 'evidence'.

⁶² Appignanesi and Forrester, for example, write of how 'The new therapies constructed to speak to the plight of rape victims and the adult consequences of childhood sexual abuse are continuous with forensic investigation, preparatory to a trial in court. As well as being helped by the therapist, that selfsame therapist is always grooming the patient or client for her appearance in court as a witness' 484. And in *The New Informants: The Betrayal of Confidentiality in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* (1995), Christopher Bollas and David Sundelson describe the ways in which the 1990s convergence of psychoanalysis and the law poses a grave threat to the practice of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. They detail the then recent (and predominantly north American) 'flood of disclosures from what was once a strictly private relationship': 'Nicole Simpson's therapist gives press interviews about her treatment; Anne Sexton's publishes transcripts of actual sessions; the Menendez brothers' appears in court as a prosecution witness against his former patients' x. Laudable developments in public policy such as the laws which exist in all 50 states which state that therapists have a legal duty to report on any incidence of child abuse past, present, or imminent, have led to a bizarre convergence of psychoanalytic and legal confession and to a climate in which 'what a patient says will now be used against them', Christopher Bollas and David Sundelson, *The New Informants: The Betrayal of Confidentiality in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995) ix.

the objective in the personal criticism of, for example, Nicole Ward Jouve and Nancy K. Miller, who, in the 1980s and early 1990s sought to merge autobiography and literary criticism while biographers such as Richard Holmes shifted the line between autobiography and biography in subtle but influential ways.⁶³ Carolyn Steedman and Ronald Fraser incorporated biography, autobiography, history, politics, sociology and psychology into their memoirs, as did Anne Karpf and Annette Kuhn in the late 1990s. Here we see not just a blurring of generic boundaries, but a shaking of the very foundations upon which notions of objective and subjective authority have been constructed. Such manipulations of the form mount an effective challenge to what Patricia J. Williams refers to as 'The propagated mask of the imagined literary critic, the language club of hyperauthenticity, the myth of a purely objective perspective, the godlike image of generalized, legitimating others' which in law are 'reified' as '"impersonal" rules and "neutral" principles, presumed to be inanimate, unemotional, un-biased, unmanipulated, and higher than ourselves'.⁶⁴ Just as personal histories were subject to (de)legitimation in courts of law during the RMT debate,

⁶³ Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (London: Routledge, 1991), Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1991). See H. Avram Veenser, ed., *Confessions of the Critics* (London: Routledge, 1996) for more examples of confessional criticism and an overview of the issues involved.

Williams suggests here the ways in which life writing might be employed to unsettle the very authority of law itself.

My exploration of the relationship between autobiography and psychoanalysis departs from other attempts to put these two areas in conversation with each other. Instead of Lacanian specularities or late-Freudian free-association, the RMT debate involved an engagement with the very origins of psychoanalysis and its relation to objectively verifiable histories.⁶⁵

Jeffrey Masson's influential and controversial book *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (1984) played an important early role in what was to become the recovered memory debate. It was credited with renewing an interest in Pierre Janet and Sandor Ferenczi but RMT is at its most beguiling in its simultaneous avowal and disavowal of Freud.⁶⁶ RMT detractors and supporters alike shared an ambivalence towards Freudian theory that suggested a desire to move from the unresolved ambiguities of Freud to the certainties of polemical positions. If

⁶⁴ Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (1991; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 11.

⁶⁵ Beyond discussions of the mirror and specularities, there is of course a place for Lacan in discussions of trauma, testimony, and language. I chose to concentrate on Freud, however, because what I find intriguing is the way in which certain Freudian impasses have resurfaced in the 1990s, and also because the two primary trauma theorists discussed in this thesis use Freudian psychoanalysis as the basis for their theories, as does recovered memory therapy, but with interesting differences of emphasis.

⁶⁶ For a very good overview of Janet's theories in relation to multiple personality disorder see Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

psychoanalytic theory was founded on the ruins of a buried truth, RMT purported to recover both the suppressed truth of childhood sexual abuse and the original therapy itself. Psychoanalysis, in this way, emerged as both the originator and the opponent of recovered memory therapy. Freud's model of trauma and recovery which was revived by the recovered memory therapists coincided with an attack on subsequent Freudian therapy and opened some of the unresolved impasses of psychoanalysis to further debate.

During the 1990s, memory and recovery were emerging as fertile material for novelists and autobiographers alike, but their emergence was shrouded in doubt, uncertainty and debate. The memoirs I discuss in this thesis are already in conversation with the combatants of the 'memory wars'. As Mary Gordon wrote in her 1996 memoir, upon entering the 'cave of memory' she found it was far from empty. Instead, the cave of memory in the 1990s was bustling 'like a tourist trap in high season'.⁶⁷

Although RMT and contemporary trauma theory were not usually discussed together during the 1990s, this thesis explores the parallels between them. Both are based on Freudian psychoanalysis, but on different aspects of it and with significantly different consequences. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth centres on Freud's work on traumatic neuroses

⁶⁷ Mary Gordon, *The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search for her Father* (1996; London: Bloomsbury, 1997) x.

and the 'returning traumatic dream' in order to illustrate the ways in which traumatic memory is not subject to the usual distortions of memory, but her psychoanalytic and poststructuralist approach also problematises the transmission of traumatic 'literal' truths, as does Felman's very similar approach. RMT, on the other hand, is based on what some refer to as 'pre-psychoanalysis': the early work of Freud in 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' and 'Preliminary Communication' (*Studies on Hysteria*) as a means of proving the thesis that memories can be repressed for many years before being recovered intact and that once recovered they are able to withstand legal or biographical verification. Both approaches are deeply concerned with the truth-status of recovered memories or testimonies of trauma.

This thesis explores the ways in which both implicate--sometimes problematically--autobiography both theoretically and practically. The trauma theories of Caruth and Felman focus on oral testimony and on the unwitting testimonial or autobiographical performances of fictional texts, but do not account for the problem of autobiographical writing and trauma. While their psychoanalytic approach allows for the possibility that testimony can be true even when it contravenes the normative discourse of truth-telling, the poststructuralist

aspect makes these theories less amenable to written accounts of trauma.

Chapter Two begins with a discussion of 'possession' in contemporary trauma theory before exploring the implications of 'privileged witnessing' for testimony and for relational life writing. Drawing on Freud, Caruth and Felman suggest that the victim of trauma is not in possession of his or her life story, but is rather possessed by it. And yet this pathology of post-traumatic stress disorder enables the 'literal truth' of the trauma to be transmitted historically. By exploring the ways in which the idea of the 'privileged witness' is predicated on pathology, this chapter explores the implications of such theories for written testimony. I then identify the parallels between these theories of possession and Nicholas Abraham's and Maria Torok's theories of transgenerational haunting in the context of some second-generation Holocaust testimonies. Abraham's and Torok's relational symptomatologies provide a useful angle from which to approach the ethics of relational accounts more generally. By re-reading Philip Roth's *Patrimony* (1991) in the light of these psychoanalytic theories, I seek to unsettle the notion of relationality as a normative model of identification. In the context of theories like Abraham's and Torok's, metaphors of possession or haunting in relational autobiographies might serve to authorise what

could otherwise be seen as unethical biographical exposures.

Chapter Three examines the issues surrounding one of the most controversial memoirs of the 1990s, Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939-1948* (1995). Wilkomirski's memoir was widely thought to have been the result of recovered memory therapy, a practice that by the time of *Fragments's* publication was almost unanimously considered disreputable and unreliable. Yet this chapter problematises the recovered memory connection and demonstrates how a reading of the case based on contemporary trauma theory as opposed to recovered memory yields interestingly different results. Considering Stephan Maechler's suggestion that Wilkomirski's 'fake' memoir may be the veiled expression of unspeakable childhood traumas rather than a willing attempt to deceive, this chapter asks what the Wilkomirski case can reveal about the tensions between psychoanalytic and historical approaches to narratives of trauma. How might these tensions impact on other life-narratives that, for different reasons, contravene the historical record? Brooks writes that 'the use of psychoanalytic truth as putatively legal truth represents a dangerous category error, a confusion of realms'.⁶⁸ But what happens, I ask here, when

⁶⁸ Brooks 129.

psychoanalytic truth is used as a putatively biographical truth?

CHAPTER ONE

The Detective

I'm the hunter, the detective. I'm here to find information.¹

1. Introduction

In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001) Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson include an appendix to demonstrate the ways in which 'autobiography' might serve only as a loose umbrella term to cover the multiple and proliferating genres sheltering beneath it. They identify 'Fifty-two Genres of Life Narrative', from 'Apology' to 'Witnessing', but acknowledge that a 'comprehensive survey' of autobiography's genres would be impossible to produce.² Several of the genres on Smith's and Watson's list have been emphasised in recent critical writing on autobiography: autothanatography, autopathography, and relational autobiography, for example, have all been identified as particularly contemporary manifestations of the genre.³ For Smith and Watson the fact

¹ Mary Gordon, *The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search for her Father* (1996; London: Bloomsbury, 1997) 59.

² Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 183-207.

³ See for example Nancy K. Miller, 'Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography', *Differences* 6.1 (1994): 1-27 and Susanna

that autobiography requires such constant redefinition and subdivision is less an effect of the unsuitability of the very term 'autobiography' to cover such a wide variety of texts and more a sign of the tendency of autobiographical subjects to question 'their complicity with and resistance to' 'cultural modes of self-narrating'.⁴ In this chapter I identify another autobiographical subgenre and seek to locate it between the poles of complicity with and resistance to contemporary discourses of truth-telling. I refer to this subgenre as the 'detective memoir'.

I focus here on a relatively small selection of detective memoirs, all of which are family memoirs which centre on the revelation of family secrets and on the relationship between family narrative and individual and cultural identity.⁵ The detective memoir is perhaps more accurately defined as a subgenre of certain other subgenres. Tim Lott's *The Scent of Dried Roses* (1996), for

Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) for discussions of autothanatography; G. Thomas Couser, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997) for a discussion of autopathography; Mary Mason, 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers', *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, eds. Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) and Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) for discussions of relationality.

⁴ Smith and Watson 183.

⁵ There are already too many contemporary detective memoirs to list here, but for a selection of memoirs not discussed in this chapter see Germaine Greer, *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You* (1989; London: Penguin, 1990); Louise Kehoe, *In This Dark House: A Memoir* (1995; London: Penguin, 1997); and Helen Fremont, *After Long Silence: A Woman's Search for her Family's Secret Identity* (1999; London: Piatkus, 2000). Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* (1995; London: Granta, 2000) is a detective memoir which I discuss in the following chapter.

example, is also an autopathography, as its focus is Lott's history of depression and his mother's hidden history of depression which led to her suicide.⁶ Mary Gordon's *The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search for her Father* (1996) could also be described as autothanatography; she is at once 'a mourner, a rememberer, a chronicler' as she attempts to uncover the secrets of her father who died when she was a child.⁷ All the memoirs I discuss in this chapter are allographies or relational autobiographies.⁸ Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (1999) is a second-generation Holocaust testimony which seeks to explore not only the relationship of her own history to that of her parents, but also the relationship between her parents' wartime histories and the 'official' record.⁹

Appignanesi's, Lott's and Gordon's memoirs are not detective memoirs in spite of their relationality, but rather because of it. It is precisely because the route into a personal past entails a detour through the lives of ultimately unknowable others that these autobiographers turn detective and hunt for 'evidence' about the past. The biographical quest(ion) with which each memoir begins: 'who was s/he?' gradually in each case transmutes into one that

⁶ Tim Lott, *The Scent of Dried Roses* (1996; London: Penguin, 1997).

⁷ Gordon 39-40.

⁸ Nancy K. Miller explains that 'allography' is 'the biography of another. But when the biographical subject is a member of one's own family, the line between the genres blurs', *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* (1996; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) 2.

seems more pressing: 'who am I?'. These autobiographers each take up the tools of the biographer, or even of the historian, in order to answer these questions.

The autobiographical quest into what Gordon refers to as 'the cave of memory' is paralleled by the biographical or historical quest into the archive and both are problematised as sources of evidence for historical reconstruction.¹⁰ I refer to these memoirs as 'detective' memoirs, but they might equally be referred to as 'archaeological' memoirs as they each share an emphasis on the recovery of buried histories, hidden truths, and 'occluded memory-chains'.¹¹ As Appignanesi writes: 'The journey is not a pleasure cruise, with its stopping points already marked out in good, linear fashion. In a sense it is more like an archaeological excavation'.¹²

The emphasis here is on *finding* rather than on *telling* a family story and this is one of the ways in which the detective family memoir challenges traditional concepts of autobiography. These memoirs are like autobiographies gone awry: the classic first chapter of forebears and origins does not give way to the tale of an individual's history; secrets and lies discovered at the outset instead throw the very identity of that individual into question. Paul John

⁹ Lisa Appignanesi, *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (1999; London: Vintage, 2000).

¹⁰ Gordon xx.

Eakin identifies the emphasis in recent life writing on 'the story of the story'.¹³ This is a crucial element, perhaps even the identifying feature, of the detective memoir, which focuses more on the 'act of bringing secrets to light' than on the straightforward telling of a life story.¹⁴ Annette Kuhn, for example, in *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (1995), asks: 'Am I making public what I have consciously known but never before revealed, or am I seeking knowledge that is as new to me as it is to you?'.¹⁵ Kuhn highlights here one of the major differences between so-called 'traditional' autobiography and the contemporary detective memoir, and identifies the problem with referring to these contemporary texts as 'confessional'. Shoshana Felman in her work on oral Holocaust testimony distinguishes between testimony as a mode of 'access to' the truth about the past and testimony as a mode of 'statement of' a history that is presumed known and narratable; I suggest that these memoirs also enact a process of 'access to' as opposed to 'statement of' the past.¹⁶

¹¹ Roger Luckhurst, 'Memory recovered/ recovered memory', *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*, eds. Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 1999) 86.

¹² Appignanesi 8.

¹³ Eakin 58.

¹⁴ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995) 2.

¹⁵ Kuhn 2.

¹⁶ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 16. By detective memoir I also mean not just those memoirs which, like Lott's, adopt the structure of a detective story, nor even those by authors who explicitly state, like Lott, Gordon, and Appignanesi that

The 1990s, as discussed in the Introduction, saw a revival of some of the most crucial unresolved impasses of Freudian psychoanalysis. The recovered memory debate and the attendant memory wars revolved around the concept of repression and specifically around the question of whether memories recovered in therapy could be recovered intact.¹⁷ This fed into a larger debate about the relationship between therapeutic narrative and historical narrative: is the purpose of therapy to 'recover' a true story, as recovered memory proponents would argue, or can analysis only ever produce 'explanatory fictions', stories which serve therapeutic benefits but which remain unreferential, inadmissible as historical evidence?

The tension in the RMT debate was thus between psychoanalytic and historical definitions of truth, turning on an equally fraught tension between two opposing models of memory and narrative: the recovery model and the reconstruction model. The recovery model, as Nicola King writes, 'assumes that the past still exists "somewhere", waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject,

they are adopting the role of the detective or archaeologist. I intend the detective memoir label to be more flexible, potentially including all the autobiographies or memoirs which focus on the 'access to' of life history and problematise the 'statement of' mode. The memoirs I discuss in this chapter are all to some extent meta-memoirs, as much about the act of writing lives than performances of that act. I focus on this aspect of the memoirs, but by doing so, and by focussing on their similarities, I do not want to elide their important differences, but rather to use these similarities in order to come to some conclusions about the practise and difficulties of contemporary British and US autobiographical writing.

¹⁷ Recovered memory therapy hereafter referred to as 'RMT'.

uncontaminated by subsequent experience and time's attrition'.¹⁸ The reconstruction model is based on a reworking of Freud's concept of '*Nachträglichkeit*' or 'afterwardsness' and 'imagines the process of memory as one of continuous revision or "retranslation", reworking memory-traces in the light of later knowledge and experience'.¹⁹

The tensions between these two models are not just confined to the RMT debate, but pertain equally to broader debates about the nature of history, narrative, and identity. There are parallels between these issues and recent writings on identity politics, specifically in discussions of essentialism and constructionism.²⁰ Recent trauma theory has also honed in on the tensions between recovery and reconstruction in testimony, attempting to reconcile the literalness of returning traumatic memory with its belatedness.²¹ Refractions of the debate can also

¹⁸ Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 4.

¹⁹ King 4. For more details on Freud's 'scattered references' to *Nachträglichkeit* see Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac, 1988) 111-14.

²⁰ The debates in identity politics on essentialism and constructionism have mainly dealt with issues of race, gender, and sexuality but have clear implications for life writing. The recent emphasis on constructionism in contemporary autobiographical theory (the notion of 'making selves') owes a great deal to such previous discussions. See Diana Fuss *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989) for an overview of the debates.

²¹ See, for example, Felman and Laub; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Cathy Caruth, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). For an account of trauma theory which takes issue with Caruth's approach, specifically on the issue of the literalness of traumatic memory, see

be identified in discussions of history and postmodernism. Richard Evans, for example, challenges postmodern critiques of historical writing by pointing out that the recovery model of history--the notion that the past can, as in Leopold von Ranke's famous phrase, be recovered 'wie es eigentlich gewesen'--has long been superseded by a notion of history as process, taking into account the 'continuous revision' of the reconstructionist model.²² Recent studies of the 'archive' have identified parallels between the persistent and problematic quests for origins in both psychoanalysis and history.²³ During the 1990s new developments in DNA led to heated debates about nature versus nurture and these memoirs can be understood as a response also to these developments.²⁴

Many of these debates are concerned with the referential and representational (im)possibilities of history in the face of 'epistemological crises' brought on

Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

²² Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997) 17. Evans points out that although Ranke's phrase 'wie es eigentlich gewesen' is usually translated into English as 'as it really was', this may be a mistranslation, as by 'eigentlich' Ranke could have been referring to an idea of essence rather than of referentiality.

²³ See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

²⁴ See Matt Ridley, *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999) for a good breakdown of the issues surrounding the first publication of the human genome. And see Julia Watson, 'Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree', *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) for a discussion of the similarities and differences between genealogical and autobiographical endeavours.

by the challenges of poststructuralism and postmodernism.²⁵ They are all, also, concerned with different types of 'access to' the past and with the political, ethical, and historical implications of the impossibility of providing a definitive 'statement of' that past. Writing of post-Holocaust representation, Felman refers to the 'crisis of witnessing', the 'crisis of truth', and the 'crisis of literature'.²⁶ These crises, like the debates they nourished, have spread beyond the specific concerns of Holocaust representation to implicate the very notion of historical representation itself. They also figured in the recovered memory debates of the 1990s where disputes over the referential possibilities of opposing models of memory recovery were forced to a conclusion in law courts across the United States.

It is no accident that a fresh focus on family secrets and hidden histories in autobiography coincided with the memory wars and the related debates on historical narrative.²⁷ The legalistic emphasis on 'evidence' in these memoirs also points to a growing concern with the notion of autobiographical referentiality and verifiability. This chapter considers not only the ways in which the detective memoir problematises the relationship between personal

²⁵ The phrase 'epistemological crisis' is cited in Evans 3-4, but this has become a commonplace term.

²⁶ Felman, Felman and Laub xviii and 6.

²⁷ Ian Hacking, for example, writes that 'Memero-politics is above all a politics of the secret', *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality*

history and history, but also pursues a connection between historical narratives and therapeutic ones. I suggest that the recent emphasis on autobiography as a mode of 'access to' the past indicates a burgeoning new alliance between psychoanalysis and autobiography.

And yet, as a theory, psychoanalysis suggests that the writing of a 'truthful' autobiography may well be impossible. As Adam Phillips writes in his essay on these two different forms of self telling: 'Without psychoanalytic interpretation there is no personal history, only its concealment'.²⁸ Autobiography, in this view, serves only as a cover story that keeps our most interesting memories out of sight. As Phillips maintains: 'those who want to continue misleading themselves about the past write autobiographies; those who want to know themselves and their histories have psychoanalysis'.²⁹ Freud famously cast himself in the figure of Holmesian archaeologist in order to legitimate his 'access to' restricted epistemological areas. What happens, the following section asks, when the autobiographer adopts these same roles and becomes the agent of his or her own epistemological discovery? When the autobiographer performs

and the Sciences of Memory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 214.

²⁸ Adam Phillips, 'The Telling of Selves', *On Flirtation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994) 66. See also the essays in 'Panel Six' of *Whose Freud? The Place of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*, Peter Brooks and Alex Woloch, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) for discussions of psychoanalysis and truth.

²⁹ Phillips 66.

the paradoxical roles of Oedipus: detective and suspect, archaeologist and bearer of hidden relics? This chapter explores the ways in which a new focus on 'access to' the past in these memoirs both enriches and problematises the relationship between autobiography and psychoanalysis, and considers the ways in which by (un)covering some of the same ground as psychoanalysis, detective memoirists also end up confronting some of the same problems.

This chapter focuses on the way in which the tension between recovery and reconstruction as models of memory, narrative, and identity are manifested in the contemporary detective memoir. In the following section I discuss the 'missings' of a selection of contemporary memoirs in relation to Shoshana Felman's account of her own autobiography as 'missing'. Felman's poststructuralist and psychoanalytic approach to the 'missings' of autobiography reveals the ways in which both psychoanalysis and poststructuralism might problematise some detective memoirists' modes of 'access to' the past and unsettle the notion of 'recovery' or of direct representation. By foregrounding family history, or crucial aspects of it, as buried, missing, or hidden, detective memoirs problematise--and are problematised by--the epistemological crises that were at the heart of other contemporary debates. I identify a parallel in these memoirs between family secrets and repression, a connection which is explicit in some memoirs

and implicit in others. Family secrets become metaphorical relics or fragments of evidence, crucial to the revision of family narrative and to the creation of a 'true story'.

Section three focuses on this question of evidence and by reading these texts in the context of the RMT debate explores the problematic truth-status of recovered memories, or discovered secrets. In sections four and five of this chapter I explore the ways in which the revision of family narrative in detective memoirs can be read as an implicit critique of autobiography as a truth-telling discourse, a confrontation with the impossibility of autobiography in the face of epistemological and narrative crises. The disavowal of a dominant family narrative emblematises and parallels the disavowal of 'traditional' autobiographical forms.³⁰ These memoirists all appear to argue that autobiography in what Kuhn calls the 'conventional sense' fails to function as an adequate discourse of truth-telling for the autobiographer writing under the influence of postmodernism, and sections four and five of this chapter explore the ways in which old,

³⁰ I highlight the word 'traditional' in order to question the notion that there is such a thing as a 'traditional' autobiography. Later I explore the ways in which certain contemporary memoirists, in disavowing their parents' style of autobiographical narration, implicitly suggest that they are also casting off something akin to a 'traditional' style of life-narration. This may be less an assertion that there is such a thing as a (unified) 'traditional' autobiographical style and more an example of the ways in which autobiography tends to define itself against earlier 'models' in the way that much recent criticism of autobiography tends now to define the genre against the androcentric 'great man' tradition or the 'myth' of a unified self. This is not a question of chronology, however,

'traditional' narrative models are cast aside as these detective memoirists go in search of a genre to accommodate their histories.

2. Missings: The Unknown Known and the Auto/biographical Quest

I cannot confess to my autobiography as missing, but I can testify to it.³¹

Martin Amis's memoir *Experience* (2000) forges a connection between family secrets and repressions. He calls them 'missings'. There are three 'missings' around which Amis organises his text, which is partly an elegy for his father. 'He is no longer here', he explains, 'and it will never be the same. He is missing'.³² He goes on to describe the photographs on his desk of a teenage girl, Lucy Partington, and of a child, Delilah Seale. He writes: 'These photographs are kept together, and for almost twenty years their subjects lived together in the back of my mind. Because these are, or were, my missing'.³³ We discover later that Lucy Partington was Amis's maternal cousin, and

because new theoretical stances may also be applicable to texts once considered 'traditional' themselves.

³¹ Shoshana Felman, *What Does A Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993) 17.

³² Martin Amis, *Experience* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000) 7.

³³ Amis 8.

that she was missing for twenty years before her remains were excavated from the serial killer Fred West's garden in Cromwell Street, Gloucester. Delilah Seale, we learn, is the daughter that for twenty years Amis did not know that he had fathered. Although these 'missings' are literal ones Amis suggests that these two relatives--one for years inexplicably missing and the other for years unknown of--had somehow always been present: 'for nearly twenty years they have lived at the back of my mind'. Amis connects this presence to his reasons for writing the memoir:

I do it because it has been forced on me. I have seen what perhaps no writer should ever see: the place in the unconscious where my novels come from. I couldn't have stumbled on it unassisted. Nor did I. I read about it in the newspaper.³⁴

It is not until 273 pages later that we discover the contents of the newspaper article to which Amis alludes here:

In the *Sunday Observer* the novelist Maureen Freely staged a straightforward retrospective of my fiction and noted the punctual arrival--just in time for my third novel, *Success* (1978)--of a stream of lost or wandering daughters and putative or figurative fathers,

³⁴ Amis 7.

and that these figures recurred, with variations, in every subsequent book. There was nothing I could do about this diagnosis. It chimed with something Patrick had said during our first talk on the telephone: "I expect it's been in the back of your mind." Yes, exactly: in the back of my mind.³⁵

'Missings' for Amis seem to represent the paradoxical position of knowing and not knowing around which psychoanalysis revolves.³⁶ Amis's 'missings' are something which are at once absent and yet mysteriously present, both literal and, in unsuspected ways, also psychical or internal. He appears to suggest that they are analogous to repressed psychic traumas: they have been 'at the back of his mind' in 'the place in [his] unconscious where [his] novels come from'. The unknown known has inscribed itself upon the body of his text, expressing itself as symptom; Freely's article is not just literary criticism, but also a 'diagnosis'. Amis's fictional writing (coming, as he says, from his 'unconscious') has unsuspectedly functioned as a medium for something which he both did and did not know. 'Missings', for Amis, are also something which he was unable to 'access' alone, without the help of literary 'analysis'.

³⁵ Amis 280.

³⁶ The concept of the unknown known pervades the whole of Freud's writings, but for a good example, see Freud and Breuer, 'Miss Lucy R.', *Studies on Hysteria*, PFL 3, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela

Amis's word 'missing' seems a particularly fitting term for the absences in other contemporary detective memoirs; distinguishing things that are missing from those that are simply lost, Amis emphasises the constitutive gap between losing and finding, between knowing and not knowing. So many contemporary memoirs are organised around--indeed start out from--such a position of not knowing.

Germaine Greer, for example, does not know that her father had concealed his true identity for the whole of her life. Mary Gordon is unaware that her father was both an anti-Semite and a Jewish immigrant with an entire extended family that he had taken pains to conceal throughout her (and most of his) life, nor does Louise Kehoe know that her father was Jewish and in exile from the Holocaust that claimed the lives of his parents. Paul Auster, too, finds his father 'unknowable', and begins his autobiographical quest with no inkling of his father's love affairs and the murder of his grandfather by his grandmother. Jenny Diski does not know whether her mother is dead or alive and prefers to maintain this state of not-knowing until she has undertaken her quest to the literal and metaphorical 'Antarctica'. Tim Lott discovers, after his mother's suicide, her long history of depression and schizophrenia. Andrew O'Hagan's missing grandfather is emblematic of his father's family's past that is 'missing' too. Anne Karpf

and Lisa Appignanesi do not know the details of their parents' wartime experiences, which, nonetheless, they regard as the central, yet unlived, experiences of their own lives.³⁷ Appignanesi describes how, in part, her memoir is a means of restoring her mother's past through the writing of a family narrative 'with all its births and deaths and missing persons in place'.³⁸

Sometimes missing autobiographical information is due to actual memory loss caused by illness and in some of these cases the detective autobiographer turns to external evidence in order to retrieve missing pieces of her life history. Fiona Shaw, for example, reads medical notes and the writings of friends in order to fill in the gaps in her history from a period of postnatal depression treated with electroconvulsive therapy. She explains that 'Having composed what was on my mind, with all its gaps and empties, I have occasionally interspersed my narrative with other people's voices'.³⁹ Travelling to London in order to speak to advisers on postnatal depression, Shaw describes the way in which she prepared 'as though embarking on a piece of investigative journalism, so disguising one

has 'never managed to give a better description' of the phenomenon.

³⁷ Karpf, for example, writes 'It seemed [. . .] as if I hadn't lived the central experience of my life--at its heart, at mine, was an absence' 146.

³⁸ Greer; Gordon; Kehoe; Jenny Diski, *Skating to Antarctica* (1997; London: Granta, 1998); Lott; Andrew O'Hagan, *The Missing* (London: Picador, 1995); Anne Karpf, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (1996; London: Minerva, 1997); Appignanesi 8.

³⁹ Fiona Shaw, *Out of Me: The Story of a Postnatal Breakdown* (1997; London: Penguin, 1998) 37.

project to myself inside the uniform of another'.⁴⁰ Linda Grant's mother's memory loss due to Alzheimer's disease likewise provides the impetus for Grant's detective work on her family history. 'Missings' in other detective memoirs refer not only to actual memory loss, but also sometimes to secrets wilfully kept by family members which function as though they are missing memories. In his memoir *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), for example, Paul Auster discovers the family secret of his grandmother's murder of his grandfather in old newspaper articles and explains that their double impact comes from the realisation that this knowledge has always been mysteriously present: 'I read these articles as history. But also as a cave drawing discovered on the inner walls of my own skull'.⁴¹

The archaeological or detective quests are in these cases both internal and external, both literal and psychical. Family secrets, 'missings', can be discovered in the archives, through interviewing family members, and also, as Mary Gordon writes, through 'enter[ing] the cave of memory'.⁴² Annette Kuhn makes explicit the connection between family secrets and repression:

Sometimes family secrets are so deeply buried
that they elude the conscious awareness even of

⁴⁰ Shaw 167.

⁴¹ Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982; London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 37.

⁴² Gordon xx.

those most closely involved. From the involuntary amnesias of repression to the wilful forgetting of matters it might be less than convenient to recall, secrets inhabit the borderlands of memory. [. . .] narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account--whether forgotten or repressed--as by what is actually told.

Kuhn does not merely 'shape' her account around 'what is left out', but emphasises that 'missings' are to be replaced by knowledge, whether this be something known and never before revealed or 'knowledge that is as new to me as it is to you'. 'Repression' and 'amnesia' may make possible a 'sense of belonging', but, Kuhn adds:

it is not, surely, to be concluded from this that the past is better left undisturbed. These "shadows" are a proper part of life, and must not--indeed they cannot--be split off from what is more agreeable or acceptable, and simply hidden from sight. For the repressed will always return, and more often than not in some infinitely more ugly guise. Bringing the secrets and the shadows into the open, allows the deeper meanings of the family drama's mythic aspects to be reflected upon, confronted, understood.⁴³

⁴³ Kuhn 6.

For Appignanesi, who confronts her parents' wartime histories fully for the first time in writing her memoir, secrets can haunt, and repression of memory can lead to a dangerous transgenerational repetition. Appignanesi explains how her parents' 'internalised war' lingered 'Like some ghost, it haunted our lives and appeared in odd places'.⁴⁴ Her parents had no 'discourse of traumatic illness available to them' and Appignanesi doubts that, with its inappropriate emphasis on 'cure', it would have helped them, but she concludes that the writing of a memoir which takes into account these discourses has enabled her if not to lift the lid entirely on repression then at least to make the 'hauntings clearer' to her.⁴⁵

Kuhn wonders: 'If family secrets are to be disclosed, does this suggest some personal revelation, confession even (an alluring prospect, to be sure)? Or is it a question more of what goes into the act of bringing the secrets to light?'.⁴⁶ The emphasis in Appignanesi's memoir is on buried memories of trauma and hers is not confession but a second-generation Holocaust testimony. And yet I would argue that with their emphasis on buried truths and missing pieces and on 'the act of bringing secrets to light' as well as in their knowing attempt to avoid the 'return of the repressed', detective memoirs might all be read as

⁴⁴ Appignanesi 217.

⁴⁵ Appignanesi 217.

⁴⁶ Kuhn 2.

testimonies of sorts, partaking of a cultural discourse of trauma even when specific traumatic events are, as in Kuhn's memoir, sometimes difficult to locate in these texts. Mary Gordon even goes so far as to suggest that the passage of time may in itself be a kind of trauma: 'What is unbearable is the world that went on before our births.

Perhaps that is the crime we are on the trail of'.⁴⁷

Detective memoirs share the concerns of contemporary trauma theory, asking 'how we in this era can have access to our own historical experience, to a history that is in its immediacy a crisis to whose truth there is no simple access'.⁴⁸

For trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, as I will show, the idea of history as crisis makes direct representation impossible. And whether 'missings' are to be understood as analogous to repression, or simply to refer to an irrecoverable past, then they are what ought to make direct *autobiographical* representation impossible. Phillips refers to 'the new kind of resolute suspicion that Freud's work creates about autobiographical narrative--the suggestion that we trust the untold tale, not the teller'.⁴⁹ The untold tale--the 'missings'--cannot, from a psychoanalytic perspective, be articulated through conscious speech, but only ever unwittingly, unconsciously, *symptomatically*.

⁴⁷ Gordon 163. See also King 12.

⁴⁸ Caruth, *Trauma* 6.

⁴⁹ Phillips 69.

Poststructuralism poses a similar challenge to autobiography, and this is something that Alice Kaplan explores in her memoir *French Lessons* (1993) where she reflects on the intellectual legacy of her former mentor Paul de Man: 'He was interested in autobiography', she writes, 'as an impossible genre, a kind of emblem of deconstruction, where the more you try to confess, the more you lie'.⁵⁰ 'De Man had failed me', she continues, alluding to her inability to ask de Man the questions she later wished she had asked about the relationship between his own life and work, and to the fact that she finds herself unable to find the answers to these questions in his writing which was always covered by a 'clean veil of disinterestedness'.⁵¹ And yet attempts in the 1970s by some critics to announce the end or the impossibility of autobiography, based on poststructuralist critiques of the 'subject', the 'death of the author', and deconstructionist efforts such as de Man's 'Autobiography as De-facement' seem only to have encouraged autobiographers and their critics to redouble their efforts. Since the revelation of de Man's wartime journalism in 1984, de Man has become the focus of substantial biographical interest, as even his most impersonal or de-personalising work is scrutinised for

⁵⁰ Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir* (1993; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994) 173. See also Jeremy D. Popkin, 'Autobiography Versus Postmodernism: Alice Kaplan and Elisabeth Roudinesco', *Auto/biography Studies* 12.2 (1997): 225-42 for a discussion of Kaplan's autobiographical response to poststructuralism.

biographical traces and motivations. Likewise, as Eakin points out, there is irony in the fact that Roland Barthes followed his postmodern, anti-referential 'autobiography' *ROLAND BARTHES par Roland Barthes* (1975) with *La Chambre Claire* (*Camera Lucida*, 1980): 'a searching exploration of the supremely referential art', photography.⁵² If the line between autobiography and fiction, or even between history and fiction, is as blurred as poststructuralism and postmodernism propose this need not, as recent criticism reveals, signify the end of autobiography or other genres of truth-telling. It may even make them all the more interesting.

Caruth seeks to negotiate a way around the ostensibly 'paralysing' effects of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis on historical representation. And Felman in *What Does A Woman Want?* (1993) attempts to apply a similar theory to the impossibility of autobiographical representation from a psychoanalytic and poststructuralist perspective. Caruth suggests that history is always unavoidably connected to trauma and that to conceive of history in these terms is to approach a way out of the poststructuralist and psychoanalytic impasse which makes direct representation an impossibility. She writes:

⁵¹ Kaplan 174.

⁵² Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 4. See also Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (1980; London: Vintage, 1993).

The possibility that reference is indirect, and that consequently we may not have access to others', or even to our own, histories, seems to imply the impossibility of access to other cultures and hence of any means of making political or ethical judgements.⁵³

She counters this, however, with an appeal to the relationship between poststructuralism and 'the peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma' which, she claims, may enable us to access not only our own histories but also those of other cultures.⁵⁴ It is through a recognition of the increasingly 'widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma' in its multiple and proliferating forms 'that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential'.⁵⁵ For Caruth, as for Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, trauma is bewildering, peculiar, and paradoxical because of its belatedness, its 'afterwardsness'. History, as understood via the workings of trauma, is referential insofar as the repressed returns in literal form; it is 'indirectly referential' because the literal return of the repressed is unassimilable, 'precisely not known in the first instance'.⁵⁶

⁵³ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 10.

⁵⁴ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 11. I do not discuss here Caruth's inclusive (and exclusive) pronouns, but they (and the assumptions attached to them) are in themselves problematic.

⁵⁵ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 11.

⁵⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 18 and 4.

Historical knowledge is reached, for Caruth, only belatedly, only indirectly, and she illustrates this through her readings of certain key figures of psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory, notably Freud and de Man. Her readings each offer the possibility of a 'belated' understanding of history and suggest meanings that were 'inaccessible' or unknown at the time of writing. It is through such reading, Caruth suggests, that 'we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where *immediate understanding* may not'.⁵⁷

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) Felman 'accesses' history in a similarly indirect way. Her reading of de Man, for example, seeks to perform what Kaplan claimed was impossible: to make connections between life, history, and theory that were perhaps unintentionally inscribed in de Man's theoretical writing. Her reading of Duras, too, is concerned with 'a story present in the text but whose writing cannot coincide with a writer's consciousness'.⁵⁸ This specific kind of reading enables 'history' to deliver its belated impact. And yet, strangely, it seems, Felman employs the same approach in her following study *What Does a Woman Want?* which takes as its focus not the indirect

⁵⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 11.

historical representation of the Holocaust, but her own autobiography, which she experiences as 'missing'.⁵⁹

The poststructuralist, psychoanalytic discourse Felman employed in *Testimony* is also brought to bear on this exploration not just of her own but of the missing autobiographies of all women.⁶⁰ This reading is supported by her suggestion, or conviction, that 'feminine existence' is a 'traumatized existence'.⁶¹ Just as a knowledge of personal history is seen as 'unavailable' to the Holocaust witness, so too Felman finds that women's lives are 'not entirely in their conscious possession'.⁶² And just as the Holocaust witness is 'possessed by' instead of being in 'possession of' his or her own testimony, Felman maintains that women's autobiography--despite the emphasis in the 1980s on women's 'confessional' writing--'has as yet *precisely to be owned*' by women.⁶³

In fact *What Does A Woman Want?* is a challenge to women's confessional writing, a self-conscious attempt:

to unsettle the very notion of autobiography, precisely insofar as we have settled into it (I feel) a little too impatiently and self-complacently, as though we could be sure that

⁵⁸ Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?* 16.

⁵⁹ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 14-15.

⁶⁰ She does acknowledge that her 'generic "we"' might pose problems 14.

⁶¹ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 16.

⁶² Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 13.

⁶³ Felman, *Testimony* 16 and Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 14-15.

we already have--in culture or in life--"a room of our own".⁶⁴

Yet where there is a 'missing' autobiography or testimony, for Felman, there is always an 'access to' that missing information. In *Testimony* 'access to' the past was enabled by the listening other, the analyst figure. And in Felman's subsequent study 'access to' the missing autobiography is sought 'through the *bond of reading*, that is, through the *story of the Other*'.⁶⁵

Felman objects to the 'stylistic trend' of 'getting personal', claiming that:

In spite of the contemporary literary fashion of feminine confessions, I will suggest that *none of us, as women, has as yet, precisely, an autobiography*. Trained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged to ourselves, we have a story that by definition cannot be self-present to us, a story that, in other words, is not a story, but *must become a story*. [. . .] we might be able to engender, or to access, our story only indirectly--by conjugating literature, theory, and autobiography together through the act of reading and by reading, thus, into the texts of culture, at once our sexual difference and our autobiography as missing.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 14-15.

⁶⁵ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 14.

⁶⁶ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 14.

Autobiography is inaccessible to women, Felman argues, but she proposes a kind of 'autobiographical reading' that may function as a form of 'access to' these missing life stories. Women's autobiography is, in this view, always testimony rather than confession: 'it must be testified to, in a struggle shared between a speaker and a listener to recover something the subject is not--and cannot be--in possession of'.⁶⁷ 'I cannot confess to my autobiography as missing', Felman concludes, 'but I can testify to it. I cannot write my story (I am not in possession of my own autobiography), but I can read it in the Other'.⁶⁸

And yet although Felman's 'autobiographical reading' suggests a way around poststructuralist and psychoanalytic impasses, it is problematic insofar as it maintains the impossibility of autobiographical writing--of 'recovery'--without the aid of some kind of analyst figure, whether literary analyst or psychoanalyst.

Felman's reading maintains the impossibility of direct representation in autobiography and emphasises both the 'inadvertency' of autobiographical performance and the fact that it takes analysis to locate the 'reference' that can only ever be written 'indirectly'.⁶⁹ Although in *What Does*

⁶⁷ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 16.

⁶⁸ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 17.

⁶⁹ Felman writes that 'Unlike men, who write autobiographies from memory, women's autobiography is what their memory cannot contain--or

A Woman Want? she places the autobiographical reader in the privileged position of analyst, it is clear that the autobiographical writer can never perform this function in her own text. It seems that in both of Felman's accounts, what is *missing* for both the female autobiographer and the Holocaust witness is the possibility of functioning as agent of their own testimony.

This approach is reminiscent of Phillips's psychoanalytic parody of the 'doubly disabled' autobiographer who is only ever able to mislead him or herself about the past, a position which not only betokens the impossibility of truthful autobiography but also pathologises that impossibility by making of psychoanalytic interpretation the only 'cure'. The 'doubly disabled' autobiographer can only be enabled through a transferential encounter with the other. Autobiography becomes, by extension of these arguments, if not quite impossible then at least something that it is impossible to perform knowingly, or alone.

Felman argues for the possibility of indirect autobiography and attempts to reveal, like Caruth does, the ways in which history may arise belatedly, even when immediate understanding does not. This is seen as a way around the ethical and political 'paralysis' thought to be the result of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic ideas

hold together as a whole--although their writing inadvertently

about the impossibility of autobiography. But it may well serve to perpetuate a different kind of paralysis by suggesting that the only possible autobiographical agency is one based on an analytic model.

Although Felman hints at the possibility of recovery through testimony, and at the possibility of arriving at a subject-position through reading the Other, it is not clear what this destination might look like, what form it might take. Felman's approach to autobiography is, it seems, *only* an approach, and does not allow for the possibility of an arrival, or even of a destination: at the end of the reading she is still wondering whether she has missed yet more of her own 'implications', suggesting that this mode of indirect autobiography, like analysis itself, is potentially interminable.⁷⁰ This is precisely the point of Felman's approach to autobiography, which is influenced by de Man's resistance to closure, to the 'totalizable account'.⁷¹

And yet it is not clear--or perhaps it is all too clear--where this leaves the 'confessional autobiographers' whom Felman summarily dismisses at the beginning of her text, or those who continue to want, or need, to collude in

inscribes it', *What Does A Woman Want?* 15.

⁷⁰ Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?* 122.

⁷¹ See Felman *Testimony* 5, where she makes this explicit. See *What Does A Woman Want?* 156-57 where Felman speaks of her destination in terms of an 'address', and 131 where she wonders 'who can help us of enable us, to survive our story?'. This question of address and enabling is specifically answered in *Testimony* by the psychoanalytic interviewer, the 'enabling listener'.

the 'myth' of direct representation. Although Felman addresses only the issue of women's autobiography in *What Does A Woman Want?* her reading has clear implications for the practice of autobiography more generally.⁷² What are the implications of Felman's readings for the detective memoirists, I wonder, who not only have 'missings' of their own with which to contend, but who also, through their archaeological and detective metaphors, express a desire to 'recover' the past? Felman suggests, in her swift dismissal of confessional autobiography, that a faith in autobiography's referential possibilities, the desire to 'recover' the past, might be no more than critical naïveté.

The tension between direct representation and indirect representation appears to be yet another manifestation of the recovery/ reconstruction binary: recovery is what poststructuralism declares impossible, while reconstruction may be akin to the potentially interminable process of indirect representation that Felman endorses. Nancy K. Miller suggests that such tensions in autobiography can be characterised by the work of two of autobiography's major critical figures, de Man and Lejeune, and yet she illustrates the ways in which their relative positions may not be as diametrically opposed as they seem. Lejeune does

⁷² Moreover, as I have demonstrated, 'missings' need not necessarily be gendered. The gendered nature of 'relationality' has also been challenged. Eakin, for example, challenges Mary Mason's earlier argument that relationality was the province of women's

not agree with de Man's argument that 'the figure determines the referent', nor with Barthes's insistence that autobiography's principal referent does not exist; or rather, Miller suggests, he agrees with these poststructuralist positions, but 'doesn't think it matters': 'In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing'.⁷³ 'Thus', writes Miller, 'de Man and Lejeune in a way agree, even though each one thinks the other is wrong'.

Drawing on Bruss as a kind of intermediary between Lejeune and de Man, Miller suggests that the autobiographer's stated desire to recover the past may be more a rhetorical trope than a genuinely (and naively) dreamed-of possibility. What makes authors 'engage in autobiographical acts is the desire to be read according to the expectations of autobiography as a "true story"':⁷⁴

In this sense, the truth claim of autobiography is no more (*but no less*) than its recorded desire (its pact or its "diacritical" intent) to be taken by others as a kind of truth,

autobiographies by providing a wealth of contemporary examples to the contrary. See *How Our Lives Become Stories* 46-53.

⁷³ Nancy K. Miller, 'Facts, Pacts, Acts', *Profession* 92 (1992): 11. See also Phillipe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', *On Autobiography, Theory and History of Literature* 52, trans. Katherine Leary, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 131-32.

⁷⁴ Miller, 'Facts, Pacts, Acts': 12. She gives Rousseau and Roth as examples, as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Jane Tompkins, of autobiographers who recognise autobiography's necessary fictionality, but engage in the act nonetheless. See also Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

within the conventions of autobiography's "institutional" facts. The pull of autobiography as a cultural act for readers [. . .] resides in the desire it figures to be read as autobiography, which we might also call autobiography's *truth effect*.⁷⁵

Thus, Miller's negotiation of autobiography's impossibility (which implicitly takes into account the 'missings' at the heart of this) allows for the coexistence of representation along with a recognition of its impossibility. Referring to the recent spate of memoirs dealing with parents' deaths, Miller notes an increasing focus on referentiality: 'In the face of postmodern indifference, these writers are passionately committed to the project of personal history'.⁷⁶

In her own part-memoir, part-critical account of others' memoirs, *Bequest and Betrayal* (1996), Miller illustrates the way in which this commitment might co-exist with an acknowledgement of the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist arguments which seem to make direct representation impossible. Here she accepts the 'indirect representation' position endorsed by Felman, admitting:

This book reflects the preoccupations of a literary critic who rereads and rewrites herself in the writing of others. In so doing I

⁷⁵ Miller, 'Facts, Pacts, Acts': 12.

practice a mode of what Susan Suleiman has recently named "mediated autobiography". I can only, it sometimes seems, read autobiographically.⁷⁷

And yet her memoir also includes italicised passages of her own autobiographical writing, which she deliberately places in conversation with the other texts, but which is not entirely dependent on her readings of them. Thus she does not locate her autobiography in the unwitting autobiographical performances of the texts she implicates. She reads them as autobiographies and responds in turn.

Amis's suggestion that his 'missings' had unwittingly articulated themselves across his fiction, and that it took somebody else to recognise them before he could acknowledge the 'diagnosis', seems to confirm Felman's theory of an 'unwitting' or 'inadvertent' autobiographical performance. Likewise, Philip Roth includes his own 'diagnosis' in his autobiography *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1989) in the form of correspondence with his fictional alter-ego Nathan Zuckerman, but here the situation is reversed as Roth claims in his letter to Zuckerman that it is the writing of *nonfiction* that 'can unlock meanings that fictionalizing has obscured'.⁷⁸ Roth also claims that his writing has functioned as a kind of therapy and that his

⁷⁶ Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* xiii.

⁷⁷ Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 3.

autobiography entailed 'demythologising to induce depathologizing'.⁷⁹ Via Zuckerman's response, however, Roth suggests that he is less than convinced by this professed faith in the autobiographical project to 'unlock meanings', to 'cure'. Zuckerman maintains that *The Facts* is a cover story, that 'what's on the page is like a code for something missing'.⁸⁰ 'I am [. . .] the key to disclosure' writes the fictional Zuckerman, suggesting that fiction, rather than autobiography, might prove the best (inadvertent) vehicle for 'the facts'.⁸¹

Amis and Roth both appear to confirm the impossibility of autobiography even from within their autobiographical texts, and yet this is not without some ambivalence. Although Zuckerman gets the last word in *The Facts*, his response stands as a counterpart to Roth's opening letter which argues for the possibilities of autobiographical discourse and these opposing standpoints frame the text which remains suspended between them. The reader is, arguably, free to agree with either Roth or Zuckerman on the status of the autobiography itself.

Amis suggests that the realisation that he had been writing unwitting or inadvertent autobiography into his fiction was 'forced' on him by Freely's critical diagnosis

⁷⁸ Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989) 6.

⁷⁹ Roth 7.

⁸⁰ Roth 162.

⁸¹ Roth 162.

and yet he keeps the last word for himself. 'The interpretation is incomplete' he concludes, and adds to the list of unwittingly transcribed 'missings' the mother of his daughter, who hanged herself in 1978: 'I find I have written a great deal about and around suicide'.⁸² Although Roth and Amis each acknowledge the possibility that their fictions had contained autobiographical 'slips'--and that sometimes it takes someone else to recognise this--both of their autobiographies function in part as a response to and a correction of biographical readings of their fictions. Roth, in particular, is at haste to point out the difference between 'the autobiographical writer that I am thought to be and the autobiographical writer that I am'.⁸³

'What does a woman want?' was a question Freud posed to Marie Bonaparte, and one for which he was unable, throughout his career, to provide an answer. Felman states that her aim in *What Does A Woman Want?* is to 'reclaim (reread, rewrite, reappropriate)' this question for women, which suggests an agenda of empowerment. Yet as a commentary on or a response to questions about women and about autobiography, her study seems potentially disempowering, perpetuating the idea that autobiographical acts can only be authorised by an analytic other.⁸⁴ By

⁸² Amis 280.

⁸³ Roth 3.

⁸⁴ And that women's autobiographical acts can only be authorised by a male analytic figure, or located between the lines of men's writing.

traversing genre boundaries Felman purports also to subvert gender boundaries, but her study fails to account for the ways in which genre may function as an indicator of desire--'the desire to be read according to the expectations of autobiography as a "true story"'--the fulfilment of which may serve both political and therapeutic ends. For the personal to be political, autobiography has to retain at least 'a degree of referential productivity'.⁸⁵

The 'missings' of contemporary memoirs are at the heart of autobiography's problematic 'referential productivity': they are at once the *raison d'être* of the autobiographical engagement and the source of its deepest impossibility. Although recent critics of autobiography have emphasised the reconstructive nature of contemporary memoirs over the 'recovery' model, the tension between the two is far greater than these studies suggest. The detective memoirist's desire to solve the 'crime' functions as a metaphor for the desire to recover the past and signals the memoir's truth claim, the desire to be read as a 'true story' even though the recovery quest is often

Although she discusses women's writing at the end of *What Does a Woman Want?* this is in order to pose the question of 'address'.

⁸⁵ Miller cites de Man here on the 'referential productivity' of autobiography in order to suggest that de Man and Lejeune may not be as opposed on the question of referentiality as is commonly supposed. And yet for de Man, the referentiality of autobiography is based on his suggestion that the 'illusion of reference' is a 'fiction' which 'then, however, in its own turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity': although it may function referentially, autobiography remains, in this view, a fiction. Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', *MLN* 94.5 (1979): 920-21.

thwarted.⁸⁶ By adopting the roles of detective and suspect, these memoirs offer an alternative to Felman's approach, which seems to deny the autobiographer the option of acting as agent of his or her own epistemological discovery.⁸⁷

And yet as the following section explores, the ostensibly naïve recovery model might well serve as a means of challenging the very concepts of recovery and reconstruction. Quests may be undertaken with a view to recovering a true story, but detective and archaeological metaphors allow the memoirist to reflect on the very sources of autobiography--on the status of the evidence unearthed--as well as on the paradoxical position of the autobiographer as both the seeker and the sought.

Exploring the parallel between family secrets, or 'missings', and repression, the following section will show how, by focussing on the hidden histories at the heart of family narrative, detective memoirs join in the conversation on the recovered memory debate. They do so with greater or lesser degrees of knowingness.

⁸⁶ This may explain why so many memoirs are structured as detective stories when for the most part we might assume that the detective work had been completed before the writing began. This is obvious in some memoirs, which have a distinctly deterministic timbre. In her memoir *In this Dark House* Louise Kehoe, for example, only reveals her father's hidden Jewishness at the end of the memoir, but 'clues' are provided throughout the narrative. In the light of the finally-revealed information, previously inexplicable events such as Kehoe's reaction to the sight of cattle trucks (43-44), finally slot into place.

⁸⁷ In a conscious sense, that is. Felman does suggest that women can 'awaken' to the 'birth, precisely, of our own autobiography' (151) and yet she conceives of 'autobiography' throughout as 'indvertent', or, when consciously driven, in writing that purports to be about something, or someone, else.

Appignanesi's memoir, for example, followed her collaborative study *Freud's Women*, to which she and John Forrester added a new afterword to this 1992 study in 2000 in order to take the implications of the RMT debate into account. Mary Gordon acknowledges that in searching the archive for her family history in 1994, she is participating in the *Zeitgeist* on two counts. Not only was an interest in genealogy at an all-time high, but she also finds that:

Everyone's talking about memory: French intellectuals, historians of the Holocaust, victims of child abuse, alleged abusers. It's a subject of conversation in the academy and on morning chat shows--even on A.M. radio. As I began to explore my memories I was caught up in the impossibility of memory as a reliable source.⁸⁸

Detective memoirists, as well as the combatants in the memory wars, are deeply concerned with this question of reliability and sources. Can memory be a source of evidence? And indeed, how might family secrets, repressions, 'missings', disrupt the referential production of memory? As Annette Kuhn asks: 'What happens if we take absences, silences, as evidence?'. The memoirs discussed in the following section employ different metaphors in the

⁸⁸ Gordon xx-xxi.

service of the archaeology/ detective motif. I explore the extent to which these metaphors reveal a tension between the models of recovery and reconstruction that were so marked in the recovered memory debate.

3. Evidence: Recovery and Reconstruction in the Memory Wars and Contemporary Memoirs

A crime had been committed. I was looking for evidence.⁸⁹

At the heart of the recovered memory debate was a heated dispute over the scientific validity of the concept of repression. Those seeking to discredit recovered memory therapists attempted to provide evidence of the untenability of the concept of 'robust repression' on which recovered memory therapy was supposedly based. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, there was on both sides of the RMT debate an apparent desire to move away from the ambiguities and ambivalences of Freudian psychoanalysis and into the certainties of more polemical positions. Nowhere is this more startling than in debates over repression.

In their anti-RMT study, *Making Monsters* (1995) Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters attack the RMT therapy proposal by making a distinction between the Freudian

concept of repression and that of the recovered memory therapist. On the one hand they continue to defend a polemical true/false position: 'either the mind has the ability to repress vast numbers of events [. . .] or it does not'; on the other they attempt to distinguish between degrees and varieties of repression.⁹⁰ Proof of the mind's inability to repress such 'vast numbers of events' would make recovered memory therapy unambiguously untenable. Ofshe and Watters argue that the recovered memory concept of repression is a distorted version of the Freudian concept. According to Ofshe and Watters, the RMT notion of repression is:

wholly new--a more powerful mechanism than ever imagined by Freud. While psychotherapy has long put forward the idea that we can consciously avoid thoughts of unpleasant experiences and thereby minimize the impact of those memories--in most references, this is how Freud initially used the term--the robust repression mechanism supposedly allows the subconscious to wilfully steal away from our conscious mind virtually any traumatic memory. With this mechanism, our mind not only avoids unpleasant ideas and memories, it blocks them completely from consciousness. Not only are memories of trauma hidden, but they lie frozen in pristine form, awaiting a time when the person is emotionally

⁸⁹ Gordon 162.

⁹⁰ Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria* (London: André Deutsch, 1995) 5.

prepared to remember. The final magic of this new robust repression mechanism is the belief among recovered memory therapists that these traumatic events can be "relived" during therapy. So real are these repressed memories said to be that therapists claim clients reexperience the event as if it were happening at the moment.⁹¹

Borrowing Ofshe's and Watters's term, Frederick Crews remarks that 'robust repression [. . .] went unremarked in the entire human record before the 1980s', yet he agrees that it is a 'souped up' version of a recognisably Freudian concept.⁹²

Ofshe's and Watters's observation that Freud originally used the term 'repression' to refer to a conscious denial of painful memories is unsubstantiated by Freud's actual first reference to repression.⁹³ In fact Strachey points out in an editorial footnote that Freud and Breuer's concept of repression 'carries no implication of conscious intention'.⁹⁴ Freud and Breuer's first reference to repression is arguably much closer to the 'robust new

⁹¹ Ofshe and Watters 25.

⁹² Crews 26 and 123.

⁹³ The 'original' reference to repression to which they are presumably alluding is in Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, 'Preliminary Communication: Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena' 1893, *Studies on Hysteria*, PFL 3, trans. and ed. James and Alix Strachey (London: Penguin, 1991) 61. Here can be found both an observation of the phenomenon of repression and the first use of the word in a psychoanalytic context. Hereafter referred to as 'Preliminary Communication'.

⁹⁴ Breuer and Freud, 'Preliminary Communicaton' 61.

mechanism' allegedly invented by the recovered memory therapists than Ofshe and Watters acknowledge:

Our observations have shown [. . .] that the memories which have become the determinants of hysterical phenomena persist for a long time with astonishing freshness and with the whole of their affective colouring. [. . .] these memories, unlike other memories of their past lives, are not at the patients' disposal. On the contrary, *these experiences are completely absent from the patients' memory when they are in a normal psychical state, or are only present in highly summary form.* Not until they have been questioned under hypnosis do these memories emerge with the undiminished vividness of a recent event.⁹⁵

'Moreover', they continue--alluding to a patient that we later discover to be 'Anna O.':

certain memories of aetiological importance which dated back from fifteen to twenty-five years were found to be astonishingly intact and to possess remarkable sensory force, and when they returned they acted with all the affective strength of new experiences.⁹⁶

Ofshe and Watters argue against recovered memory therapists' claims on the grounds that their 'robust

⁹⁵ Breuer and Freud, 'Preliminary Communication' 60.

repression' bears little resemblance to the original Freudian concept. While they may be right in suggesting that Freud did not deal with repression of 'vast numbers of events', they overlook important similarities between the two concepts of repression.⁹⁷ By focussing on quantities of repressed material, rather than on the quality of recovered memories, Ofshe and Watters may well have missed the information that would prove most beneficial to their argument. RMT is based on Freud's and Breuer's early theory that repressed memories can be retrieved intact, that, to borrow Ofshe's and Watter's term, repressed traumatic memories 'lie frozen in pristine form'. But it was on the question of the 'intactness' of repressed memories that Freud was later to vacillate.

Crews rightly indicates another Freudian impasse that is overlooked by RMT proponents:

they are unrestrained by certain ambiguities and outright contradictions implicit in the Freudian theory of repression. Freud's uncertainty, for example, whether events or fantasies make up the typical content of the repressed gets resolved in favour of events.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Breuer and Freud, 'Preliminary Communication' 60.

⁹⁷ By 'vast numbers of events' Ofshe and Watters refer to some analysts' claims that they had recovered repressed memories of prolonged abuse occurring over a number of years.

⁹⁸ Frederick Crews, *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (London: Granta, 1997) 162.

He attacks Ellen Bass's and Laura Davies's conviction that it is possible to extract 'repressed truths from the unconscious like so many bills from an automatic teller'.⁹⁹ The problem with RMT, he contends, 'is that it rests on Freud's 'stubborn faith [. . .] that messages from the unconscious are by and large incorruptible'.¹⁰⁰

Malcolm Bowie points out that Freud's detective and archaeology metaphors operate largely as rhetorical devices designed to support Freud's image as a discoverer and chronicler of facts existing in spite of him.¹⁰¹ 'There I go, discovering something again!', jokes Janet Malcolm, too, in parody of Freud's 'insistent depiction of himself as a sort of irrepressible stumbler upon solid scientific fact'.¹⁰² The archaeology metaphor is explicitly entwined with the theory of repression: repressed memories lodged beneath 'psychic rubble' can, through the process of psychoanalysis, be excavated. And yet although the archaeology metaphor remained a constant throughout Freud's work, the relics proved mutable.

While in the 1901 'Dora' case the work of analysis was figured as a process of reconstruction--akin to the reparation of 'priceless though mutilated relics of antiquity'--in the 1909 'Rat Man' case, the process was

⁹⁹ Crews 215.

¹⁰⁰ Crews 14.

¹⁰¹ Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 13-45.

reversed.¹⁰³ Freud pointed to the antiques in his room in order to emphasise to the 'Rat Man' that 'everything conscious was subject to a process of wearing-away, while what was unconscious was relatively unchangeable'. 'They were, in fact', Freud recounts, 'only objects found in a tomb, and their burial had been their preservation: the destruction of Pompeii was only beginning now that it had been dug up'.¹⁰⁴ The purpose of the analysis, as it became clear, was to excavate the preserved relics in order to initiate their destruction, whereas the purpose of 'Dora's' analysis was to reconstruct the broken relics in order to create a coherent whole. Freud held varying positions on the question of the intactness of repressed memories and it is difficult, if not impossible, to trace the development of Freud's thinking on the question of the retrieval of repressed memory.¹⁰⁵

Much seemed to depend, for Freud, on the particularities of each individual case (and on each particular theory he was attempting to prove). In 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood' (1910), Freud

¹⁰² Janet Malcolm, *The Purloined Clinic: Selected Writings* (London: Papermac, 1992) 9 and 20.

¹⁰³ Sigmund Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")' 1905 (1901), *Case Histories I*, PFL 8, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1990) 41. Hereafter referred to in the text and notes as 'Dora'. Sigmund Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis (The "Rat Man")' 1909, *Case Histories II*, PFL 9, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991). Hereafter referred to in the text and notes as 'Rat Man'.

¹⁰⁴ 'Rat Man' 57.

¹⁰⁵ See Bowie 13-45 for a thorough discussion of Freud's vacillation on the concept of repression.

emphasises the inevitable distortions of childhood memory, but also maintains that even a distorted memory of childhood (which is almost indistinguishable, he writes, from 'phantasy') can yield significant truths when interpreted.¹⁰⁶ In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) he gives an example of an astonishingly intact memory retrieved in literal form after many years in a dream.¹⁰⁷ And in a note to the case of 'Lucy R.' he gives the example of a hysterical woman in whom Freud managed, without hypnosis, to 're-awaken, after an interval of twenty-one years, [. . .] details of a forgotten experience in a sceptical person who was, in fact, in a waking state'.¹⁰⁸

Crews writes of how traditional psychoanalysis was in no danger of causing 'social harm' as long as it remained content with 'abandoning truth claims and recasting the therapeutic goal as mere reconciliation of the client to a less self-punitive myth about his or her identity'.¹⁰⁹ The RMT debate highlighted a tension that already existed in psychoanalysis: that between the therapeutic narrative and

¹⁰⁶ Freud, 'Leonardo de Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood' 1910, *Art and Literature*, PFL 14, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1990) 173.

¹⁰⁷ 'The Scientific Literature Dealing with Problems in Dreams', *The Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL 4, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 70-71. He goes on to cite several authors who have emphasised the potential of astonishing recall in dreams 74-76.

¹⁰⁸ Freud, 'Case Histories', *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-1895), trans. James and Alix Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 178n.

¹⁰⁹ Crews 20.

the biographical narrative, between 'myth' and 'truth'.¹¹⁰ Psychoanalysis was not originally intended to produce legal or historical truths, although for therapeutic narratives to be 'less self-punitive' they had to carry explanatory weight--they had to be considered more than mere 'myths' even if they were somewhat less than objectively ascertainable 'histories'. For recovered memory therapists 'psychic relics' functioned explicitly as 'evidence' and were essential not just for the recovery or healing process but also for the legal proceedings that often followed this. Thus the contested nature of repression was brought to bear on the most crucial issue of the RMT debate: the truth-status of psychoanalytically recovered life stories.

It is not only recovered memory detractors who find the RMT notion of 'recovery' untenable. In his carefully unbiased and unpolemical study of memory, Daniel Schacter writes that:

The idea of an unchanging imprint of exactly what happened at the time of a trauma brings us perilously close to the dubious notion that memory (or at least traumatic memory) is like a camcorder, preserving all aspects of an episode. We have seen that this idea is fundamentally misguided when applied to ordinary experiences and [. . .] it does not

¹¹⁰ Freud himself was keen to point out that he was a scientist rather than 'a man of letters', that is, that he was more concerned with scientific evidence than with stories, 'Dora' 94.

work well for traumatic experiences that people always remember. It would be surprising, even extraordinary, if it were to apply to traumatic experiences that are buried and then recovered years later. There is currently no scientifically credible evidence to support the idea.¹¹¹

Technological metaphors, like Schacter's camcorder image, are often used in order both to describe and discredit the claims of recovered memory therapists.¹¹² Crews contests the RMT proposal by emphasising the ease with which accurate but long-repressed memories can be retrieved. Roger Luckhurst, drawing on the work of Pierre Nora, suggests that 'The construction of national, regional or local sites of memory becomes vital once computers and videotapes store vast, undifferentiated quantities of 'memory' outside us, untouched by the investiture of human meaning'.¹¹³ And yet RMT detractors are keen to emphasise the scientific impossibility of such memory storage *inside*, the ways in which memory will always be damaged by 'the investiture of human meaning':

¹¹¹ Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1996) 266.

¹¹² See for example Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 85. Sometimes recovered memory proponents use the same metaphor, see Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) 175 where traumatic memory is compared to 'a series of still snapshots or a silent movie'.

¹¹³ Luckhurst 83.

RMT speaks of lost and retrieved files and replaying the memory 'movie' with its flashbacks, close-ups and zooms; detractors speak of the 'virus' of therapy, corrupted files and data manipulation. Both wish to stabilise memories as true or false by the very thing which, elsewhere, is seen as radically de-stabilising memory.¹¹⁴

Luckhurst concludes with a gesture towards the impossibility of stabilising 'memories as true or false', by arguing that an attempt to do so is borne of 'an anxiety induced by a forgetfulness that the history of memory itself twists and turns, is subject to constant mutations and revisions'.¹¹⁵ It is not only the history of memory, but memory itself that is subject to such constant revision, as both RMT detractors and theorists of autobiography, such as Nicola King, argue.

New technologies, as Derrida has written, may put a different slant on psychoanalytic theories. Freud's 'mystic writing-pad' metaphor of memory, for example, could hardly be more low-tech, and Derrida wonders whether psychoanalysis would have been a different creature altogether had Freud had access to more technologically advanced models for data (or memory) storage and

¹¹⁴ Luckhurst 91-92.

¹¹⁵ Luckhurst 92.

retrieval.¹¹⁶ Reading Freud's theory of the archive via Derrida's reading, Carolyn Steedman suggests that not only does Freud challenge the very notion of recovery, but also that he may be held partially responsible for the desire for it:

Perhaps, says Derrida, Freud's contribution to any theory of the archive is that there isn't one: that no storehouse, especially not the psychoanalytic archive of the human psyche, holds the records of an original experience to which we may return. Yet psycho-analysis has been responsible for some of this trouble with archives, for it wants to *get back*: it manifests a desire for origins, to find the place where things started before the regime of repetition and representation was inaugurated.¹¹⁷

Psychoanalysis, then, might always be located at this point of tension, between a desire for and a recognition of the impossibility of recovering origins, origins which, Steedman writes 'in a deluded way--we think might be some kind of truth'.¹¹⁸ I suggest that it is on precisely this same tension that contemporary memoirs seek to locate a discourse of truth-telling, seek to identify the ways in

¹¹⁶ Derrida 17. See also Sigmund Freud, 'A Note Upon the "Mystic Writing Pad"' 1925 (1924), *On Metapsychology*, PFL 11, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1990) 427-35.

¹¹⁷ Steedman, *Dust* 7.

¹¹⁸ Steedman, *Dust* 3.

which memory (and the archive) is able to provide 'evidence' about the origins upon which identities are founded.

Annette Kuhn, for example, explains the terms of what she refers to as her 'memory work':

The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain. From these traces, markers that point towards a past presence, to something that has happened in this place, a (re)construction, if not a simulacrum, of the event can be pieced together. Memory work has a great deal in common with forms of inquiry which--like detective work and archaeology, say--involve working backwards--searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence.¹¹⁹

Kuhn embraces the reconstruction model of memory, identity, and narrative. Although a reconstruction may be the result of archaeological or detective memory work, this reconstruction may always be provisional: there is no 'true' self to be 'recovered', only scraps or fragments of evidence open to a continuous process of interpretation.

Kuhn's tentative reference to the 'simulacrum' may suggest the possibility of an accurate reproduction even

¹¹⁹ Kuhn 4.

where recovery is not possible, yet she makes it clear that the aim of her memory work is not to recover 'intact' relics. '[A]s an aid to radicalized remembering', she writes, 'memory work can create new understandings of both past and present, while yet refusing a nostalgia that embalms the past in a perfect, irretrievable moment'.¹²⁰

Kuhn's memory work began when, aged eight, she 'edited' the family album. This work was, in part, an expression of ambivalence towards a mother who sought to censor the family history, casting herself, as Kuhn writes, as the daughter's 'only begetter' by excluding the father from the narrative.¹²¹ Writing of her mother's tendency to edit the family album in order to create a coherent, yet deceptive, version of the family history, Kuhn explains how she objects to her mother's 'tampering with evidence':

Family secrets are the other side of the family's public face, of the stories families tell themselves about the world, about themselves. Characters and happenings that do not slot neatly into the flow of the family narrative are ruthlessly edited out.¹²²

Although Kuhn's metaphor of editing appears to suggest the existence, somewhere, of an 'original' life-story, a kind of Ur-text obscured through years of censorship, she makes

¹²⁰ Kuhn 8.

¹²¹ Kuhn 18.

explicit the fact that there is no such relic to be located during the investigative or archaeological memory-work. And although her use of photographs as evidence might also indicate the possibility of referentiality, Kuhn makes it clear that photographs are as tainted, as unreliable, as memory: they are only scraps of evidence, traces of the past that can, nonetheless, be 'pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, remaking, making sense of, our selves--now'.¹²³

Salman Rushdie suggests that for displaced persons recovery of the past is impossible in an even more literal sense. Not only is the past lost forever, but the very 'site of memory' is gone. He writes of how 'our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind'.¹²⁴ For Rushdie, the fact

¹²² Kuhn 2.

¹²³ Kuhn 16. Such censorship operates, of course, on micro- and macrocosmic levels. An interesting international take on the 'editing' of family albums is discussed in *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*, Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leysdorff, and Graham Dawson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1999). In their introduction to the edition they write of the six decades of 'traumatic deprivation' of society in Soviet Russia. 'Informing became so widespread that Soviet Russia was a society in which even intimate family members concealed basic experiences from each other. [. . .] Sometimes even a husband or a wife did not know that their spouse had formerly been named as an "enemy of the people". Family stories had mysterious gaps; in family photograph albums pages were torn out, or a single face, or even just a tell-tale medal, scissored from a group scene' 16.

¹²⁴ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1992) 10.

that he is not 'gifted with total recall' provides something of a consolation. Employing a metaphor of archaeology, he writes of the reconstruction process which, although provisional and incapable of raising the past from the ashes, may still be an exciting and invigorating process.¹²⁵ For Rushdie the impossibility of recovery leads to the writing of fiction and yet he also admits that *Midnight's Children* (1995) was born of a desire 'to restore the past to [himself], not in the faded greys of family-album snapshots, but whole, in CinemaScope and glorious Technicolor'.¹²⁶

Pierre Nora's 'sites of memory' refer to the external memory constructions erected in the absence of a sustained community or collective memory, but these sites are as unreliable and as malleable as internal memory itself, as memoirists searching the archive and revisiting lost homelands discover.¹²⁷ Returning to her birthplace in Poland, visiting what she explicitly refers to as her 'sites of memory', Appignanesi notes the vast difference between pre- and post-war Poland, 'If it ever had been, Grodzisk was no longer the *shtetl* of imaginary homelands', she concludes.¹²⁸ Likewise, her parents' past 'is a

¹²⁵ Rushdie 11-12.

¹²⁶ Rushdie 10.

¹²⁷ See also Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 0.26 (spring 1989): 7-24.

¹²⁸ Appignanesi 102. This appears to be a knowing reference to Rushdie's essay of that title; Appignanesi collaboratively edited a collection of essays on Rushdie's fatwa and so is clearly aware of his

narrative in a foreign and forgotten language'.¹²⁹ At the end of Appignanesi's memoir, when the final document arrives from the •ód• Registry of Residents, informing her of the absence of her family from their records, Appignanesi concludes that 'The slate is clean. Official history refuses to coincide with family memory. Everything is open to invention'.¹³⁰

And yet these reconstructions may be closer to autobiography than the word 'invention' seems to allow, at least in a psychoanalytic sense. RMT detractors often placed the 'reconstruction' model of memory and narrative, as King points out, in opposition to the model of recovery on which RMT was supposedly based. Referring to a conference paper by psychiatry specialist George Ganaway, Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham write:

Serious problems arise, Ganaway warned, when therapists get caught up in their patients' emerging "memories" and accept them as historically accurate. He listed a whole string of clinical entities that are incorporated into reconstructed memories, including fantasy, distortion, displacement, condensation, symbolization, and confabulation (a process by which a person unknowingly fills gaps and holes in memory with inferences, plausibilities, and

work. See Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, eds., *The Rushdie File* (London: Fourth Estate, 1989).

¹²⁹ Appignanesi 81.

¹³⁰ Appignanesi 231.

guesswork). Mix into that mystifying stew a patient's suggestibility, high hypnotizability, and fantasy-proneness and you end up with, in Ganaway's words, "a potpourri of facts, fantasy, distortion and confabulation" capable of confounding even the most experienced therapists.¹³¹

Aside from the issue of suggestive or too-credible therapists, the focus here seems to be on the ways in which 'reconstructions' lead not to historically verifiable memories, but to 'confabulations' or 'pseudomemories'. And yet elsewhere Loftus and Ketcham use this as an example of the way in which normal (or non-traumatic) remembering operates and argue against recovered memories on the grounds that memory itself is inherently unreliable.¹³² Reconstruction, in other words, might simply be synonymous with remembering.

Other commentators do not distinguish between recovery and reconstruction so readily. In her study of traumatic memory *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) Judith Lewis Herman, for example, emphasises that 'reconstructing the trauma story'

¹³¹ Loftus and Ketcham 85. Ganaway, they explain, is 'a professor of psychiatry at Emory University and the director of a dissociative-disorders unit at a psychiatric hospital' 84. They refer to Ganaway's paper 'Alternative Hypotheses Regarding Satanic Ritual Abuse Memories' given at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in August 1991.

¹³² See for example Loftus's chapter 'The Truth That Never Happened' where she draws on a distinction between 'story truth' and 'happening truth' for which she uses her own memory as an example. She draws this distinction from Tim O'Brien's fictional account of Vietnam *The Things They Carried* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), which might suggest that

is an essential part of the healing process: 'Survivors challenge us to reconnect fragments, to reconstruct history, to make meaning of their present symptoms in the light of past events'.¹³³ But Herman, who conflates recovery and reconstruction, makes a truth claim for these constructions.

For Freud recovery and reconstruction were also not diametrically opposed, at least not in the papers he wrote towards the end of his career. Although he vacillated on the question of the intactness of repressed memories throughout his career, in his 1937 paper 'Constructions in Analysis' he maintained that psychical structures can be recovered intact, and that it seems unlikely that 'any psychical structure can really be the victim of total destruction'.¹³⁴ Moreover, in this paper, Freud makes explicit his theory that recovery is something which follows as a result of the reconstructive 'archaeological' work and maintains that because the psychic relics are intact, the end result of reconstruction will be recovery. The belief in the possibility of recovery is not understood here as a naïve belief in the possibility of resurrecting the past itself, *as it really was*, but rather signals the possibility of an end result, an explanation, a resolution,

the distinction he draws there refers to traumatic memory rather than, as Loftus suggests, to non-traumatic memory.

¹³³ Herman 3.

a cure. And yet Freud also makes a truth claim for these reconstructions/ recoveries and explicitly connects their value as historical truth to their corresponding therapeutic value.

King gives a brief reading of this paper in *Memory, Narrative, Identity*.¹³⁵ She reads Freud's comments on reconstruction as a gesture towards the impossibility of recovery and as a confirmation of her theory that memory is always subject to 'a continuous process of revision and retranslation'. Although when Freud writes that 'We do not pretend that an individual construction is anything other than a conjecture' he is not concluding his argument, as King suggests, but is referring to 'individual' parts of the construction.¹³⁶ He goes on to suggest that the reconstruction as a whole can be completed and not that it is left open to continuous revision. King's reading of *Beloved* suggests that 'cure' might be located in the continuous process of therapeutic talk, in what Morrison refers to as 'rememory':

¹³⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Constructions in Analysis' 1937, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXIII, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001) 260.

¹³⁵ King 16.

¹³⁶ Freud, 'Constructions in Analysis' 265. In fact at this point in the essay he is attempting to deal with the question of a patient's acceptance or otherwise of his suggested construction. Even if a patient disagrees with a part of the construction, Freud maintains, they may well agree with it once it has been connected to other parts of the construction and begins to make sense as a whole. An 'individual construction' is, he says, a 'conjecture', but the process of analysis is not, as King seems to suggest, to heap conjecture upon

Sethe's story becomes bearable when she is able to share it with Paul D--"to tell, to refine, and tell again"--, although here it is the fact of being heard, returning to the same event again and again that is therapeutic, rather than the construction of a logical story.¹³⁷

However, it is not clear whether the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* that King invokes lends itself unproblematically to a reconstruction model of memory and narrative that leads to a 'continuous process' of revision.

In Freud's concept of belatedness, afterwardsness, or *Nachträglichkeit*, an originary traumatic event might only be brought to light or understood once a second traumatic event serves as a catalyst for its realisation--hence the event's belated impact--but it is not at all clear that Freud advocates the continuous return to the same event as a therapeutic method, or a continuous process of reconstruction in favour of recovery.¹³⁸ To maintain a

conjecture, but to allow for some speculation on the way to achieving an end result.

¹³⁷ King 24, citing Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987; London: Vintage, 1997) 99. And yet in the extract King cites, it is not just the retelling that proves therapeutic, or in Morrison's words that makes the story 'bearable', but the fact of telling it to Paul D 'because it was his [story] aswell'.

¹³⁸ There are lots of examples of 'afterwardness' in this sense in contemporary memoirs. Discussing Susan Cheever's *Home Before Dark* Miller identifies an instance of this, but does not refer to it in psychoanalytic terms. Cheever describes reading her father's notebooks as a child, but not registering the evidence of his (otherwise concealed) homosexuality until she reads them as an adult years later, Miller 141. Likewise, Mary Gordon misses the impact of her father's published writings until beginning her investigation into his life during her forties. These are examples of afterwardsness or of belated knowledge, in keeping with King's notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, but the corresponding notion that life stories are always provisional, that there will always be a crucial aspect of the past that is not yet

dichotomous position on the question of recovery versus reconstruction is only to perpetuate an unworkable impasse. As Tina Papoulias writes: 'if it is a fallacy to suggest that the past can be apprehended "as it really was", it may be equally fallacious to suppose that an imaginative reconstruction of the past to serve one's ends is a satisfactory, or indeed a feasible alternative'.¹³⁹

What Crews refers to as Freud's 'stubborn conviction' that historically accurate memories can be recovered intact was subject to intense debate during the 1990s. During the memory wars, the recovery model of memory was attacked on its dubious, unscientific grounds while the model of reconstruction which was seen as the only alternative proved no more reliable as a form of 'access to' past experience.

Mary Gordon is ambivalent about these two memory models, and her memoir sits uneasily between them. While for Rushdie and Appignanesi it was the lack of reliable evidence about the past, the instability of memory sites, that added to a sense of displacement, for Gordon it is the *discovery* of her father's hidden history that leads to such dislocation. Her memory work (carried out in the archives

known, is worthy of scrutiny. By inscribing the 'unknown known' into their texts, Gordon and Cheever describe a kind of resolution, or a sense of coming into knowledge. King's emphasis on the therapeutic benefits of reconstruction may run the risk of abrogating the need for closure in life-narrative. Especially in accounts of trauma and oppression, as the RMT debate made explicit, there needs to be a point where the rememberer or the autobiographer can say: I didn't know that then, but I know it now.

and in the 'cave of memory') reveals that her father, who died when she was a child, had concealed his 'true' identity for her, and most of his, life. She learns that her father's life 'had been made up of lies, some tragic, some pathetic, all of them leaving [her] with the feeling that [she'd] been stolen from'.¹⁴⁰ David Gordon had never been to Harvard, or Paris, or Oxford, as she had been led to believe. He never graduated from high school. And David was not his given name: his name was Israel and he was not born in America, but in Vilna, a Yiddish-speaking Jew who immigrated to the United States in 1910. Discovering this, Gordon feels that she has 'lost her place in America'.¹⁴¹

Gordon knew that her father had converted from Judaism to Catholicism in the 1930s. She also knew that he edited and wrote for the pornographic magazine 'Hot Dog', but even though she'd read his writing, she had always failed to see that amongst his articles were anti-Semitic diatribes against Jewish writers written, she says, 'ten years after six million of his blood were murdered'.¹⁴²

'As I began to explore my memories', Gordon recalls, 'I was caught up in the impossibility of memory as a reliable source'.¹⁴³ Her memory proves fallible in the face of even the most basic and accessible of documentary

¹³⁹ Tina Papoulias in Lacy Rogers et al, eds.

¹⁴⁰ Gordon xxi-xxii.

¹⁴¹ Gordon xxii.

¹⁴² Gordon xvi.

¹⁴³ Gordon xx-xxi.

evidence. Photographs reveal not the Fred Astaire of Gordon's memory, but a grimacing, toothless figure with a pot belly. She keeps trying to 'rid herself of the false', but at the same time wonders if perhaps 'there is no such thing as the truth'.¹⁴⁴

Gordon is at once 'a mourner, a rememberer, a chronicler' and *The Shadow Man* a belated act of memory, mourning, and memorialisation.¹⁴⁵ In her memoir she suggests not only that the work of mourning may be something to which one must return until it is 'completed', but also that successful mourning is contingent on the ability both to remember and to recount as well as on a necessary belief that there is 'such a thing as the truth'. Realising that she had been complicit in the deception, Gordon casts herself in the paradoxical roles of detective and suspect, both 'the perpetrator and the victim of a crime'.¹⁴⁶ She becomes an archaeologist, 'undigging the bones he'd buried so thoroughly, so imaginatively, for so long'.¹⁴⁷ Miller's notion of the 'family plot' is given a more literal edge in Gordon's memoir because, literalising the archaeology metaphor, Gordon has her father's body exhumed and reburied in a plot of her choosing.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Gordon 38.

¹⁴⁵ Gordon 39-40.

¹⁴⁶ Gordon 162.

¹⁴⁷ Gordon 160.

¹⁴⁸ See Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 1-21.

In *The Shadow Man* Gordon describes the ways in which she was motivated by a quest for the intact relic: 'Which is the *real* father, the *real* daughter? The ones that can't be changed or lost?'.¹⁴⁹ The quest is for enough reliable evidence to re-create this *real* father, although she recognises the impossibility of the task. On both a symbolic and a literal level she is concerned with what *remains* of her father. Will he emerge as he once was, she wonders, rub the earth from his eyes and thank her for rescuing him?

In her quest for the intact relic that she knows she will not find, Gordon uses the metaphor of a sea rescue. Paul Auster, too, uses this analogy in *The Invention of Solitude*, where, drawing on Collodi's *Pinocchio*, he wonders if 'one really has to rescue one's father from the bottom of the sea in order to become a *real* boy'.¹⁵⁰ Recovery of the past, and the undertaking of a quest, are in these cases explicitly linked to authenticity.¹⁵¹ There are shades of Plath in these two memoirists' use of the 'beneath the sea' metaphor of recovery: 'I used to pray to recover you'

¹⁴⁹ Gordon 39.

¹⁵⁰ Auster 79.

¹⁵¹ A similar metaphor is also used in Georges Perec's *W or the Memory of Childhood*, trans. David Bellos (1974; London: The Harvill Press, 1996) 22-25. Perec's autobiography begins with a fictional story about a man--Gaspard Winkler--setting off on a quest to recover the potentially ship-wrecked body of a child, also named Winkler, whose false papers the adult Winkler uses as a fake identity. The suggestion is that if the adult Winkler can rescue the traumatised child bearing the same name, he can earn his own authenticity. This story serves as a parallel for Perec's own autobiographical quest.

says the poet-narrator of 'Daddy'.¹⁵² And as Gordon prepares to exhume her father's body she, like Plath, wonders if 'even the bones would do'.¹⁵³

These watery fathers are, in both senses of the word, unfathomable. Gordon cites an extract from *The Tempest* as an epigraph, the extract from which Plath took the title for one of her father poems. This is the 'Full Fathom Five' passage:

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are corals made,
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.¹⁵⁴

Gordon writes that her attempt to recover the past, her father, was made difficult by 'New impressions [that] drowned the originals; they were covered over by relentless and obliterating seas of new experience, new sights and sounds'.¹⁵⁵ It might be possible to fathom the father out, but what is brought back from the depths might not quite be what was expected. His burial might have brought about a sea-change. Coming to terms with what might be left of her

¹⁵² Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) 222.

¹⁵³ Plath 224, my **emphasis**.

¹⁵⁴ Cited by Gordon 245.

¹⁵⁵ Gordon 40.

father's body, his story, is, for Gordon, an essential part of the mourning process.

What Maria Torok might refer to as Gordon's 'fantasy of the exquisite corpse' indicates the way in which 'recovery' might operate as a trope not just in this memoir, but also in other memoirs.¹⁵⁶ The autobiographer's desire to recover the past 'as it really was' might be naïve, deluded even, but that does not make it any less necessary to maintain as a theoretical possibility. The act of disinterring her father's body before reburying it in a plot of her choosing is enacted narratively as well as literally, but this act is marked by an ambivalence about what this might mean: 'Do I believe that if I get him into words properly, he can live again? Or is it that by getting him properly into words, I can finally allow him to be dead?'.¹⁵⁷ Does narrative--getting something 'properly into words'--enable forgetting or remembering; is it an act of holding on or of letting go? 'The dead are lost', writes Appignanesi of her impossible desire to recover them before presenting them to her mother as a form of 'reparation', 'But maybe, none the less, it makes a difference if by remembering them, we lose them properly'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ See Maria Torok, 'The Illness of Mourning and the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse', Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. Nicholas Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 99-107.

¹⁵⁷ Gordon 261.

¹⁵⁸ Appignanesi 7-8.

Moreover, Gordon is speculative about the kind of narrative that will enable her to get her father 'properly into words' and experiments throughout the text with different forms, at times overtly fictionalising her father's story and attempting to write it in the first person, inhabiting her father's 'I'. Towards the end of her memoir, Gordon attempts to reach her father by telling him stories. The stories are all titled 'THIS IS WHAT IT IS LIKE'. The final story is about a woman who, for a long time since her father's death, has been receiving packages, all marked 'FROM THE ESTATE OF YOUR FATHER'. The woman hopes to make something of all the things contained in the packages--'a broken spring from the inside of a silver watch', for example--'She doesn't know what kind of thing it will be, only that its name will be THIS IS MY FATHER'.¹⁵⁹ She eventually 'gives up the idea of a coherent shape'. Instead, the things 'must be constantly accessible, constantly interchangeable, constantly ready to be in different relations to one another'.¹⁶⁰ And yet although these stories gesture towards the conciliatory, reconstructive process of self-making described by Kuhn and King, Gordon ends her memoir with the reburial of her father, suggesting a more definite form of closure based on a recovery model of memory and identity. Thus her memoir sits between both models, acknowledging the unreliability

¹⁵⁹ Gordon 201.

of the archaeological evidence and the need for a continual process of reconstruction, while at the same time seeking an end to the ongoing process of the memory work at the heart of mourning, and at the heart of autobiography itself.

'Every autobiography requires a coming to terms with the past and a revision of family history', writes Miller, but none more so than the detective memoir, it would seem.¹⁶¹ Eakin uses Art Spiegelman's graphic memoirs *Maus I* and *Maus II* (1986; 1991), based on Spiegelman's protracted interviewing and recording of his father's story, as examples of the 'story of the story'.¹⁶² He claims that 'the stress is on the performance of the collaboration and therefore on the relation of the two individuals involved'.¹⁶³ Miller also takes up this point and emphasises the ways in which Spiegelman's memoir emphasises the process of relational autobiography: 'getting the story was the relationship'.¹⁶⁴ In memoirs like Appignanesi's, Lott's, Kuhn's, and Gordon's, however, 'getting the story' is subordinate to revising the story. The story of the story is the story of the revision of a family narrative that is seen as dominant, censored, edited and abridged. The

¹⁶⁰ Gordon 201.

¹⁶¹ Miller 2.

¹⁶² Eakin 58. See also Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (1986; London: Penguin, 1987) and *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991; London: Penguin, 1992).

¹⁶³ Eakin 59.

¹⁶⁴ Miller 19.

auto/biographical quest, in these cases, is for a narrative with which to replace these dominant and restrictive family histories.

The following section explores psychoanalytic revisions of life narrative, and focuses on the ways in which concepts of recovery and reconstruction are entwined in Freud's notion of therapeutic narratives. The difference between therapeutic narratives and historical narratives may not be as great, I argue, as recovered memory opponents have suggested. In section five, I discuss the ways in which the revision of family narrative that occurs in a selection of detective memoirs may highlight the problematic tension between recovery and reconstruction in contemporary life writing.

4. Therapeutic Histories

Of course, the stories must attempt the best connection with reality.¹⁶⁵

A revision of life-narrative is at the heart of the psychoanalytic exchange. Psychoanalysis traditionally begins with the telling of a life story and yet the analysand might expect to leave with quite a different (and implicitly more 'truthful') narrative from the one with

which s/he began. In Phillip's parodic and hyperbolic description of the gulf between the analysand and the autobiographer, psychoanalysis proposes to do what autobiography cannot: to replace an unhealthy narrative with a healthy one. This begs the question of what a healthy or an unhealthy narrative might look like. In what follows I discuss the ways in which Freud's changing concept of therapeutic narrative may be born of the tension between concepts of recovery and reconstruction. Despite the firm distinction set up during the memory wars between therapeutic narratives and historical narratives I argue in this section that the divide between them might not be as great as this seems to suggest.

'I begin the treatment', Freud explains at the start of the 'Dora' case, 'by asking the patient to give me the whole story of his life and illness'. He goes on to compare this first account to an 'un navigable river'.¹⁶⁶ Hysterics are unable, Freud claims, to give a 'smooth and precise' report about themselves.¹⁶⁷ Their accounts are full of 'gaps unfilled' and 'riddles unanswered', connections are 'incoherent' and the order of events is 'uncertain'.¹⁶⁸ The patient's inability to 'give an ordered history of their life insofar as it coincides with a history of their illness' is seen as a symptom; it is 'characteristic of the

¹⁶⁵ Lott 255.

¹⁶⁶ 'Dora' 45.

¹⁶⁷ 'Dora' 45.

neurosis' and the gaps and incoherences of memory, specifically in relation to the history of the illness, are 'a necessary correlate of the symptoms'.¹⁶⁹ At this point in his explanation, Freud takes a detour and describes the case of a woman referred to him after years of unsuccessful treatment for hysteria. After hearing her story, 'which came out perfectly clearly and connectedly in spite of the remarkable events it dealt with', Freud deduced that hers was not a case of hysteria. She was later diagnosed with 'tabes'.¹⁷⁰

The purpose of analysis, Freud writes in the 'Dora' case is not just to remove all symptoms 'and to replace them with conscious thoughts', but also to 'repair the damage to the patient's memory'. 'These two aims are coincident', writes Freud, 'When one is reached, so is the other; and the same path leads to them both'.¹⁷¹ Freud does not declare his intention to repair 'Dora's' narrative, but the metaphor of restoration invites the analogy of an incoherent narrative made to cohere, of fragments that are stuck back together to form a whole.

Contemporary psychotherapies place the same marked emphasis on patients' abilities to 'give an ordered history of their lives' and, as in Freud's case histories, an inability to do so often leads to a diagnosis. In *Sybil*

¹⁶⁸ 'Dora' 45.

¹⁶⁹ 'Dora' 46.

¹⁷⁰ 'Dora' 46.

(1974), an account of multiple personality disorder (a 'multobiography'), it is Sybil's gap-filled life-story which leads to the analyst's suspicion that 'alter' personalities had been leading parts of Sybil's life without her knowledge or memory.¹⁷² And contemporary trauma theorist Bessel A. van der Kolk makes a connection between life and life narrative in cases of traumatic memory:

In the case of complete recovery, the person does not suffer anymore from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks, behavioural re-enactments, and so on. Instead the story can be told, the person can look back at what has happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality.¹⁷³

While the 'talking cure' of Breuer's 'Anna O.' case performs--or proposes--a cure by catharsis or purgation, it is Freud's 'Dora' case that has led some commentators to conclude that psychoanalysis is 'a sort of cure by narrative'.¹⁷⁴ Steven Marcus, drawing on an earlier paper by Philip Rieff, compares Freud's case histories, in their

¹⁷¹ 'Dora' 45-47.

¹⁷² Flora Rheta Schreiber, *Sybil: The True Story of a Woman Possessed by Sixteen Separate Personalities* (London: Penguin, 1974).

¹⁷³ Bessel A. van der Kolk, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Caruth 176.

¹⁷⁴ Janet Malcolm uses this term 'cure by narrative' in 'Reflections: J'appelle un chat un chat', *In Dora's Case: Freud--Hysteria--Feminism*,

'singular and mysterious complexity', to certain works of modernist fiction.¹⁷⁵ After pointing out the lack of differentiation in the case between story, history and report--and thus the inherent incoherence and fragmentariness of the case history itself--he goes on to point out that the problem with the patient's life-story comes down 'in the first instance to formal shortcomings of narrative'.¹⁷⁶ Freud's implication here, he deduces, is that 'a coherent story is in some manner connected with mental health (at the very least with the absence of hysteria)'.¹⁷⁷

Marcus concludes:

On this reading, human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory place, and with everything (or as close to everything as is practically possible) accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence. Inversely, illness amounts at least in part to suffering from an incoherent story or an inadequate narrative account of oneself.¹⁷⁸

'The patient does not merely provide the text', writes Marcus, commenting on Freud's statement on the ease of

eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (1985; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 323. She disagrees with this view.

¹⁷⁵ Steven Marcus, 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History', In *Dora's Case* 56. Kahane and Malcolm point out Marcus's '(unacknowledged) literary debt to Philip Rieff' 308.

¹⁷⁶ Marcus 70.

¹⁷⁷ Marcus 71.

¹⁷⁸ Marcus 71.

interpreting dreams; 'he also is the text, the writing to be read, the language to be interpreted'.¹⁷⁹

Marcus extends this implication into a discussion of reality and truth that renders the whole question of illness and narrative a good deal more problematic:

in the course of psychoanalytic treatment, nothing less than "reality" itself is made, constructed or reconstructed. A complete story--"intelligible, consistent, unbroken"--is the theoretical, created end story. It is a story or a fiction, not only because it has a narrative structure but also because the narrative account has been rendered in language, in conscious speech, and no longer exists in the deformed language of symptoms, the untranslated speech of the body.¹⁸⁰

Which, then, is the 'true' story: the one spoken by the body in symptoms or the 'fiction' created by analysis?

Marcus continues:

At the end--at the successful end--one has come into possession of one's own story. It is a final act of self-appropriation, the appropriation by oneself of one's own history [. . .]. What we end with, then, is a fictional construction that is at the same time

¹⁷⁹ Marcus 81.

¹⁸⁰ Marcus 71.

satisfactory to us in the form of the truth,
and as the form of the truth.¹⁸¹

The final constructed 'reality' that 'Dora' must accept as her own truth, in order to 'appropriate' herself and her history is, as Marcus concedes 'Freud's more than Dora's'.¹⁸² The failure of the case history, for Marcus, is that it 'belongs progressively less to her than it does to him'.¹⁸³

In his essay 'Fictions of the Wolf-Man' (1998) Peter Brooks raises a question that Marcus leaves unanswered: what is the relationship of the patient's original story to the truth? And how can psychoanalysis posit a fictional story constructed by the analyst as the history that the patient must come to appropriate, without the collaborative enterprise of the analysis turning into the combative--even abusive--situation that was so marked in the 'Dora' case?¹⁸⁴

'With the case history of the Wolf Man', Brooks writes, 'Freud has advanced to a more subtle presentation of complex narrative plots and a more subtle understanding of what the "healthy narrative" of life may be'.¹⁸⁵ He continues:

¹⁸¹ Marcus 71-72.

¹⁸² Marcus 79.

¹⁸³ Marcus 85.

¹⁸⁴ Crews, for example, states that the 'Dora' case is 'one of the worst instances on record of sexual hectoring by a reputed healer' 53.

¹⁸⁵ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998) 282.

It is notable that Freud more than once during the course of his analysis proposes to the Wolf Man a more straightforward, logical, "reasonable" narrative of events, only to have his patient refuse recognition and credence to these standardised plots. Freud and his patient together demonstrate that it is not so much simple coherence and mere plausibility that make our narratives persuasive. Narrative sequences and scenarios must accord with the complex, twisting, subversive patternings of desire. [. . .] The powerful fiction is that which is able to restage the complex and buried past history of desire as it covertly reconstitutes itself in the present language.¹⁸⁶

The key, for Brooks, is transference: the phenomenon that Freud did not recognise at work in his analysis of 'Dora'. Invoking Bakhtin's conception of the 'dialogic', Brooks concludes that 'the "true" narrative lies in-between, in the process of exchange; it is the product of two discourses playing against one another'.¹⁸⁷ Brooks writes that 'the patient comes to the analyst with a story that is not so much false--since it does in some manner signify the truth--as it is incomplete and untherapeutic'.¹⁸⁸

Whereas for Marcus the therapeutic narrative is a coherent fiction, for Brooks it is, too, a 'necessary fiction', but one that emerges out of the 'centreless and

¹⁸⁶ Brooks 283.

¹⁸⁷ Brooks 285.

reversible structure' of dialogue.¹⁸⁹ 'Truth', Brooks argues, 'arises from a dialogue among a number of *fabula* and a number of *sjuzet*, stories and their possible organisations, and also between two narrators, analyst and analysand'.¹⁹⁰

If for Marcus the therapeutic narrative is what Brooks here refers to as a 'standardised plot', a coherent story, for Brooks it entails the exploration of different possible relationships between story and plot, between 'the order of events referred to by the narrative' and 'the order of events presented in the narrative discourse'.¹⁹¹ While for Marcus, the therapeutic narrative functions as such only insofar as it adheres to a prescribed sense of order, for Brooks it relies on the possibility of multiple orderings, on a shift away from what he earlier refers to as 'the nineteenth century's obsession with questions of origin, evolution, progress, genealogy, its foregrounding of the historical narrative as par excellence the necessary mode of explanation and understanding'.¹⁹²

Janet Malcolm takes issue with both Brooks and Marcus in their assumption that psychoanalysis is primarily a kind of 'cure by narrative'. '[T]his "underlying assumption" is nowhere to be found in Freud's work', she argues; 'Quite

¹⁸⁸ Brooks 285.

¹⁸⁹ Brooks 284.

¹⁹⁰ Brooks 284.

¹⁹¹ Brooks 12.

¹⁹² Brooks 7.

the contrary, Freud distinguishes between narrative closure and therapeutic benefit'.¹⁹³ 'Closure' here is crucial, as it highlights a point of dispute between Marcus's and Brooks's theories and raises questions about the form of the 'therapeutic narrative' and its relation to the 'recovery' model of memory and narrative. Malcolm is sceptical, too, about the collaborative nature of the so-called narrative cure. She writes of the necessary 'epistemological inequality' between analyst and analysand, and argues that 'what the analyst is "selling" is precisely the difference of his psychoanalytic discourse from the discourses of ordinary, conscious life and common sense'.¹⁹⁴

Bowie points out the difference between the 'Dora' case and the other case histories: 'whereas elsewhere psychoanalysis is a lacunary mode of interpretation--one which collects gaps, interrogates and systematises them--it here ['Dora'] presses towards plenitude with impatient speed. Lacunae are not to be allowed their lack'.¹⁹⁵

Likewise Toril Moi comments on Freud's symbolic filling of Dora's 'epistemological hole'.¹⁹⁶ There is a gender issue here, of course, which has been discussed at great length.¹⁹⁷ Jacqueline Rose, for example, claims that the failure of the case is due to the repression of 'Dora's'

¹⁹³ Malcolm, 'Reflections' 323.

¹⁹⁴ Malcolm, 'Reflections' 310.

¹⁹⁵ Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust, Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 20.

femininity through the removal of hysterical symptoms.¹⁹⁸ In Rose's view the 'therapeutic narrative', should one exist, occurs not 'in-between' patient and analyst, but rather consists of an exchange of one discourse for another, one kind of knowledge for another. It entails, in Rose's view, the enforced standardisation of a history which fails to cohere with the normative patriarchal plot.

Although Malcolm disputes the claim that psychoanalysis proposes a 'cure by narrative', the theory has gained great credence in contemporary trauma studies.¹⁹⁹ In *Holocaust Testimonies* (1991), for example, Lawrence Langer stresses the importance not only of narrative, but also of the kind of collaboration of which Brooks writes. 'The subtle urging of an interviewer', writes Langer, 'who after all is no more than an emissary of the outsider's point of view, can lead a witness to shift from one form of memory to another, and indeed control and shape the content of each'.²⁰⁰ And yet although the process of testifying is seen by Langer, Felman and Laub as therapeutic (on both individual and sociological/historical levels), the aim is not to achieve 'narrative closure', but to accept that

¹⁹⁶ Toril Moi, 'Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora', *In Dora's Case* 197.

¹⁹⁷ See, for example, *In Dora's Case* for examples and bibliographies.

¹⁹⁸ Jacqueline Rose, 'Fragment of an Analysis', *In Dora's Case* 129.

¹⁹⁹ Even if critics agree that Freud does propose a 'cure by narrative' there can be no real consensus on the kinds of narrative that are decidedly therapeutic. Neither 'Dora' nor the 'Wolf Man', arguably, were 'cured' by Freud's therapeutic methods.

²⁰⁰ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (London: Yale University Press, 1991) 9.

'Remembering and recording what happened operate on several levels, leaving atrocity and order in a permanently disrupted suspension'.²⁰¹

Elaine Showalter's controversial book *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1997) reverses the terms of the therapeutic narrative. By hystories, Showalter means 'cultural narratives of hysteria'.²⁰² Showalter adheres, in part, to the traditional conception of hysteria as a means of communicating the unspeakable--'In the words of Robert M. Woolsey, hysteria is a "protolanguage", and its symptoms are "a code used by a patient to communicate a message which, for various reasons, cannot be verbalised"'.²⁰³ Yet for Showalter, bodily expressions of the unspeakable are not the only symptoms of contemporary hysteria. The symptoms she concerns herself with in *Hystories* are not the life-narratives with which the patient enters analysis, but more often those with which s/he leaves. Claims of ritual satanic abuse, Gulf War Syndrome, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Multiple Personality Disorder, for example, are all seen by Showalter as symptoms in themselves; these are the 'cultural narratives of hysteria', the 'hystories'. These symptomatic narratives are quite the opposite to the 'therapeutic narratives' of which Brooks and Marcus write. Showalter concludes:

²⁰¹ Langer 9.

²⁰² Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1997; London: Picador, 1998) 5.

And we can lead the way in making distinctions between metaphors and realities, between therapeutic narratives and destructive hystories. If hysteria is a protolanguage rather than a disease, we must pay attention to what it is telling us.²⁰⁴

But what is the difference between 'therapeutic narrative' and 'destructive hystory'? This question became more pressing during the RMT debate, where legal proceedings often followed in the wake of therapy and purportedly 'therapeutic narratives' were tested in a court of law. The very fact that Showalter's book was so controversial reveals the ways in which no firm decision on the difference between histories and hystories has yet been reached.²⁰⁵ It also illustrates the extent to which these issues are not merely theoretical, the impasse not a concern only for mental health practitioners or academics, but was rather a fierce battle, played out on much more public fronts, over authority.

²⁰³ Showalter 7.

²⁰⁴ Showalter 13.

²⁰⁵ Showalter writes in her preface to the paperback edition of *Hystories* that she was surprised by the response to her book: 'I didn't predict that I would become the subject of conspiracy theories myself [. . .] that people would bombard me with hate mail, offer me blood transfusions, advise me to get a bodyguard, threaten to rip me apart, or warn me of assassination unless I recanted' x. Her response, probably no less controversial than the book itself, is reminiscent of Freud's response to his detractors: 'the inflammatory reaction to the book from some quarters has only confirmed my analysis of hysterical epidemics of denial, projection, accusation, and blame' x.

Brooks's claim that Freud's therapeutic methodology in the 'Dora' case might be based on dominant historical discourses of the time is telling: does the therapeutic efficiency of narrative depend on its conformity to 'standardised plots'? Do narratives become therapeutic only when they have become *historical*? And does history, in this case, simply refer to currently dominant discourses of truth-telling? This is interesting to consider in the light of RMT, which revived Freud's early models of repression and recovery and sought to create coherent recovery narratives that could withstand legal verification tests. In this sense contemporary therapies revived not only a nineteenth-century model of therapy, but also a nineteenth-century model of truth-telling discourse.

Freud distinguished between 'psychic reality' and 'material reality', and maintained--at least after *Studies on Hysteria*--that it was 'psychic reality' that concerned him the most.²⁰⁶ And yet although his later work places a greater emphasis on psychic reality, there is, arguably, no hierarchy of realities here. Psychological reality, Freud suggests, is just as 'real' as material reality. Freud's distinction between these two realities, however, does not carry over into the RMT debate, where we are more likely to

²⁰⁶ See 'General Theory of the Neuroses' 1917 (1916-1917), *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, PFL 1, trans. James Strachey, eds. James Strachey and Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 415.

encounter increasingly hierarchical conceptions of truth or reality.

Showalter, as we have seen, distinguishes between 'therapeutic narratives' and 'destructive hystories', suggesting that some narratives may cure while some merely perpetuate illness. Elsewhere, the notion of 'historical' or 'biographical' truth seems to have taken the place of Freud's 'material reality' and invests it with a greater authenticity. According to Loftus and Ketcham, for example, 'narrative' or 'story' truth is always in conflict with the 'happening truth' that is indistinguishable from 'historical truth'.²⁰⁷

And yet this division between the narrative and the historical elides the fact that history itself may be no more than a narrative, that the historical may be 'true' only insofar as it is narratively persuasive. The true story, it seems, for Loftus and Ketcham is one that conforms to a more legalistic definition, one that can provide evidence which can then be weighed, measured and tested in a court of law. And indeed, even RMT proponents would seem to confirm this view by promoting the idea that the 'therapeutic narrative' achieved through analysis can, and even should, be validated by judge and jury.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ See Loftus and Ketcham 38-73.

²⁰⁸ And yet as Loftus and Ketcham's accounts of such trials illustrate, the judgement often depends on the ability of various memory-experts to provide a persuasive narrative. See for example Loftus and Ketcham 38-73.

There are refractions of these issues, if not explicit references to them, in contemporary life writing. The revision of 'dominant' family narratives in family memoirs, as I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, mirrors a simultaneous disavowal of 'traditional' autobiographical narrative. Yet these revisions are not unmarked by ambivalence. By seeking to replace family myths--or 'conventional autobiographies'--with a more 'truthful' account, these memoirists beg the question of what a 'truthful' autobiography might look like.

5. Historical Recoveries

My mother's story is devoid of history.²⁰⁹

And yet those feelings are history.²¹⁰

Annette Kuhn, as we have seen, distinguished between 'conventional' autobiography and her own 'memory work'. By 'conventional', Kuhn seemed to be alluding to a vague notion of traditional autobiography as a narrative which is linear, chronological, and coherent. In her 'editing' of the family album, too, Kuhn seeks to find an alternative to the traditional deployment of family photographs in what

²⁰⁹ Appignanesi 83.

²¹⁰ Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 17.

she compares to a 'classical narrative: linear, chronological', 'a mode of sequencing that is culturally speaking, rather circumscribed'.²¹¹ Appignanesi revises her mother's story which, told too many times, had 'congealed into a series of tableaux' which 'took on brighter and brighter colours, painted over the horrors of the War from which they had emerged'.²¹² Lott, likewise, makes his aim the revision of his family's 'coherent' story.

Each of these examples suggests that the revision of the family narrative is marked by a desire to find a narrative with which to replace a 'conventional', 'traditional' model of autobiography based on a nineteenth-century model of historical writing. And yet these revisions are often marked with ambivalence, because such a model offers certain 'consolations'. As Carolyn Steedman points out, the 'recovery' model of memory and narrative maintains the possibility that:

life-stories can be told, that the inchoate feeling of living and feeling can be marshalled into a chronology, and that central and unified subjects reach the conclusion of a life and come into possession of their own story. [. . .] the hope that that which is gone, that which is irretrievably lost, which is past time, can be brought back, and conjured before the eyes

²¹¹ Kuhn 17.

²¹² Appignanesi 81.

"as it really was"; and that it can be possessed.²¹³

Autobiographies and their theorists have long challenged this model of autobiographical writing and have emphasised the plurality of stories, selves, and histories as well as the reconstructive model of memory, narrative, and identity. And yet these memoirs seem to suggest that the nineteenth-century model of historical autobiography still holds sway over the previous generation and, because of this, was the dominant mode in the domestic realms of these authors' childhoods.

The family photograph album, as Kuhn illustrates, serves as an emblem for the dominant family narrative. In its coherence and ostensibly objective referentiality, it can, like the dominant family myth--and like the 'conventional' autobiography--mislead. As Marianne Hirsch writes in *Family Frames* (1997):

photography's social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family. The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness. [. . .] Because the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the events it records, it has the

²¹³ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography, and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992) 163.

effect of neutralizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics. As photography immobilizes the flow of family life into a series of snapshots, it perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history. [. . .] Looking at them we both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of a "real" one.²¹⁴

The family photograph, she continues, 'sustains an imaginary cohesion', and yet she indicates the ways in which photographs are now being used by 'memory workers' like Kuhn and Jo Spence to 'disrupt' this coherent visual narrative, 'breaking hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze'.²¹⁵

There is a marked ambivalence in memoirs such as Lott's, Appignanesi's, and Gordon's over such a radical revisioning of family narratives and an anxiety over the question of which kinds of narratives may serve as vehicles for truth-telling in the absence of 'conventional' modes.²¹⁶ Lott's memoir addresses these questions from both a historical and a therapeutic perspective. He explicitly endows the ability to tell the truth about the past with a

²¹⁴ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 7-14.

²¹⁵ Hirsch 8. See also Jo Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1988).

²¹⁶ There are also ethical implications of these revisions too, which I discuss at greater length in Chapter Two.

therapeutic function, but also explores the difficulties of such truth-telling for the contemporary personal historian.

Lott's memoir addresses the double-edged quality of story-making and the problematic relationship between identity and narrative, between stories and selves. Beginning with a novelistic report of his mother's suicide and Lott's subsequent declaration of intent--to 'find out' what led her to it--*The Scent of Dried Roses* continues in the detective story vein that characterises other contemporary memoirs.²¹⁷ Lott had himself suffered from a suicidal depression through which his mother nursed him, but until beginning his detective work into his mother's past following her suicide, he was unaware that she had also suffered from depression. In order to discover what led to the suicide, as well as to locate his own potential complicity in it, he describes the ways in which '[he] had to examine the traces of her life, the products and the waste products, like a forensic scientist, inferring, deducing, blind-guessing'.²¹⁸ The biographical quest becomes indistinguishable from the autobiographical one, the one in which Lott attempts to make sense not only of his own depression in relation to his mother's, but also the role he played in her suicide. As Blake Morrison points out, the narrator-author is both 'detective and chief suspect'.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Lott 22-23.

²¹⁸ Lott 22-23.

²¹⁹ Blake Morrison, 'England Unmade Me', *TLS* 11 October 1996: 35.

The available literature on organic and hereditary depression does not serve, for Lott, as an adequate explanation. Nor does psychoanalytic treatment offer Lott the explanation he seeks. Of his consulting-room experiences, he quips: 'I chain-smoke, and wait for him to tell me the secret of my life'.²²⁰ He comes away unsatisfied. The therapist asks him about his parents and he writes that 'Although I knew them not to be perfect, I am unaware of having been abandoned, under-loved, overloved, untouched or abused. It is clear that he believes me to be in denial'.²²¹

The therapeutic agenda behind *The Scent of Dried Roses* is clear from Lott's title. The eponymous scent, Lott explains in his chapter on the historical treatment of depression, was once prescribed as a 'sentimental' cure for 'melancholy'.²²² By borrowing this 'cure' for his title, Lott suggests that the writing of the book may likewise function as a cure, but by borrowing from the historical archive of treatments the most ludicrous, nostalgic, and sentimental treatment Lott places a question-mark over this supposed function.²²³

Other memoirs express a similar disinclination to adhere to the objectifying diagnosis of psychiatrists or

²²⁰ Lott 245.

²²¹ Lott 245-46.

²²² Lott 71.

²²³ He did not, for example, include the word 'Prozac' in his title as others have done. See, for example, Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation*:

psychoanalysts and often the life-narrative is written against the grain of medical narratives which fail to contain or account for complexity of experience or feeling. Reading the psychiatric literature on post-natal depression, Fiona Shaw writes of how:

in a space of a page, I found myself categorized: definition, frequency, predisposing factors, causes, clinical features, treatment and prognosis, all given relatively clearly, for "puerperal psychosis". [. . .] it was dismaying to find my experience boxed in like this, reduced to an implausible scientific jargon. As though by imposing their "scientific" language on someone, they could make sense of and contain all the fever and the fret.²²⁴

Likewise Anne Karpf, in her second-generation Holocaust testimony *The War After* (1996), objects to psychoanalytic and psychiatric theorisations of Holocaust survivors on the grounds of the therapeutic assumptions that govern them:

I am not a case-history: no one wants to be a case, especially one with a history, or to be reduced to a cluster of symptoms. In professional literature, the case-history sets out to prove the professional's diagnosis: it

Young and Depressed in America: A Memoir (1996; London: Quartet, 1998) and Lauren Slater, *Prozac Diary* (1998; London: Penguin, 2000).

²²⁴ Shaw 157.

retrospectively shapes the patient's history, which seems to move inexorably towards a therapeutically "worked through" resolution, free of any recurring messes and imperfections.²²⁵

'My own path is far more bumpy and circuitous', she writes, 'and this story doesn't end with all problems neatly solved, although in the process of revising my parents' [interview] tapes I do feel some kind of resolution'.²²⁶

This echoes Appignanesi's disavowal of 'discourses of traumatic illness' even as she takes such discourses into account and claims to have achieved a kind of 'resolution' through the writing of the memoir.

Although memoirists such as Shaw, Karpf, and Appignanesi oppose the notion of a 'writing cure', such memoirs are often placed in dialogue with 'professional diagnoses' and offer alternative means of achieving 'resolution'. The rejection of diagnostic narratives serves a similar purpose to the disavowal of dominant family myths and 'conventional' models of life narrative: these revisions are in the service of more complex, more circuitous negotiations between past and present.

This is more specifically the case in transsexual autobiographical narratives, for example, where the life story told to the doctor may by necessity be a fiction

²²⁵ Karpf 313.

designed to ensure that the desired diagnosis is reached. As Jay Prosser writes, the inability to plot a coherent and recognisable transsexual narrative for the doctor may lead to a misdiagnosis and a refusal of treatment:

the diagnosis of "true" or "primary" or "core" transsexualism is surely derived not merely from a certain plot codifiable as transsexual but from an account that renders up this plot clearly and coherently. [. . .] In effect, to be transsexual, the subject must be a skilled narrator of his or her own life. Tell the story persuasively, and you're likely to get your hormones and surgery; falter, repeat, disorder, omit, digress, and you've pretty much had it, however "authentic" a transsexual you are.²²⁷

It is not enough, Prosser suggests, for a story to be true; in order to convince the listening professional of its authenticity it has to conform to a predetermined 'acceptable' transsexual narrative.

The previous section explored the ways in which therapeutic narratives and historical narratives may not be as easily distinguishable from each other as the RMT debate, with its rigid polarisation of narrative truth and historical truth, seems to suggest. Indeed, the efficacy of therapeutic narrative may well depend on its relationship

²²⁶ Karpf 313.

to the dominant cultural mode of truth-telling, the dominant mode of 'historical' discourse. By questioning and challenging the relationship of their personal histories to the 'standardised plots' of therapeutic narratives, these memoirists may simultaneously challenge their narratives' relationship to other ostensibly objective historical forms.

Carolyn Steedman, whose memoir *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986) is an early paradigm for the family memoirs which followed it, is deeply ambivalent about the status of her text as 'history'. At the beginning of her text she is 'very eager to tell readers [. . .] that what they are about to read is not history'.²²⁸ But 'At the end, I want those readers to say that what I have produced is history; which would please me more than anything else'.²²⁹ Steedman distinguishes her auto/biography from conventional forms of history and from memoir which, she writes, traditionally insist on the primacy of external events rather than inner experiences in the shaping of narrative.²³⁰

In her experimentation with a blend of forms and disciplines, she explicitly addresses the problem of writing an account of a working-class childhood from a point of exclusion from literary and historical forms:

²²⁷ Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 108.

²²⁸ Steedman, *Past Tenses* 45.

²²⁹ Steedman, *Past Tenses* 45.

²³⁰ Steedman, *Past Tenses* 43.

I have to refuse the label history to what I say about Burnley in the 1920s, about the possible way my mother was brought up, about the certain descriptions of my own childhood--not because I don't present perfectly true and useful historical information here, but rather because my rhetorical framework would collapse if I said this was history: the central story.²³¹

For Steedman, the status of her text as history does not depend on its truth-status, but on its relationship to the 'central story'. In her exploration of the conflict between personal history and history, between marginal stories and central stories, Steedman selects a genre which promises to bring into sharper focus the tensions between them. This genre is the psychoanalytic case-study:

The written case-study allows the writer to enter the present into the past, allows the dream, the wish or the fantasy of the past to shape current time, and treats them as evidence in their own right. In this way, the narrative form of case-study shows what went in to its writing, shows the bits and pieces from which it is made up, in the way that history refuses to do and fiction can't.²³²

²³¹ Steedman, *Past Tenses* 46.

Steedman's interest in the 'Dora' case, in particular, does not centre on 'Dora's' hysteria, nor, as she says, on 'Freud's failure to cure it'.²³³ It centres instead on 'the questions raised by the presentation of personal stories, the relationship of these narratives to history'.²³⁴ The choice of the case-study form does not, in Steedman's case, imply pathology. It is rather a means of exploring the ways in which personal stories and history fit (or fail to fit) together either because of an oppressive patriarchy that seeks to pathologise that which does not conform, as in 'Dora's' case, or because there exists a narrative and cultural tradition that does something very similar to life narratives that inhabit the 'borderlands'.²³⁵

Steedman's choice of genre does not, either, suggest an unproblematic embracing of psychoanalysis. Indeed, Steedman discusses in some depth the ways in which psychoanalysis, as an 'interpretative device' excludes working-class experience. Steedman uses the dream, the wish, the vague memory, like Freud as evidence, but by becoming agent of her own epistemological discovery she resists perpetuating the analytic objectifying stance. The case history form, for Steedman, offers a way to resist forcing into coherence a narrative that does not fit. It

²³² Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986; London: Virago, 1996) 20-21.

²³³ Steedman, *Landscape* 130.

²³⁴ Steedman, *Landscape* 130.

²³⁵ Steedman, *Landscape* 22.

offers a way to tell more than one story, and in more than one genre. Steedman's memoir shares with later contemporary memoirs an emphasis on what Eakin refers to as 'the story of the story', which also characterises the case history.²³⁶

Likewise, Kuhn rejects the label 'autobiography' for her own memory work and claims that 'Each of these essays is a case history in its own right'.²³⁷ And, like Steedman, Kuhn seeks to 'explore connections between "public" historical events and "personal" memory'; in her case histories 'outer and inner, social and personal, historical and psychical, coalesce'.²³⁸ This coalescence or cohesion differs, however, from Marcus's notion of a therapeutic narrative which forces into coherence an incoherent narrative by turning it into a 'standardised [historical] plot'.

The 'coherent narrative' which Kuhn seeks to instate is a means of counteracting her mother's tendency to 'tamper with evidence', to cut down photographs and to impose her own interpretation of them by inscribing messages on the back.²³⁹ Kuhn describes these incidents as examples of 'obsessive (and usually "bad") remembering' on her mother's part against which her own memory work is an attempt to introduce the possibility of 'good' remembering:

²³⁶ Eakin 58.

²³⁷ Kuhn 4.

²³⁸ Kuhn 4.

²³⁹ Kuhn 55.

'good' because it allows for different possible interpretations.²⁴⁰

If Lott is ambivalent about the therapeutic function of writing, he is no more so about the status of his memoir as autobiography, biography, or confession. He describes his mother's suicide as 'a confessional act'.²⁴¹ Placing his own complicity in this act at the centre of his autobiographical quest, he declares that he too must now 'confess' to the crime.²⁴² And yet he acknowledges at the end of *The Scent* that it is not clear whether his memoir should be taken as autobiography, biography, confession or 'expiation', suggesting either that the verdict is still out on his guilty involvement, that it may be up to the reader to decide, or even that in the final analysis the 'explanation' for his mother's suicide might go above and beyond his own culpability.²⁴³ Although this began as a detective quest, Lott suggests that the crime in question is one that cannot be solved.

In fact in Lott's memoir it is finally narrative that emerges both as prime suspect and potential vehicle for cure: stories can be 'unsustaining, cruel, self-defeating', or they can be provisional explanations, 'sustaining lies'.²⁴⁴ By exploring the therapeutic and historical

²⁴⁰ Kuhn 15.

²⁴¹ Lott 21.

²⁴² Lott 10.

²⁴³ Lott 262.

²⁴⁴ Lott 132; Kuhn 3.

efficiency of the different kinds of 'stories' or 'lies' available, Lott makes a firm distinction between his own narrative capabilities and those of his parents. He simultaneously desires and disavows his parents' stories, longing nostalgically for a time when narrative and identity were simple, uncomplicated affairs and yet unable himself to tell a 'true story' within these confines. Lott bemoans the fact that he is unable to tell the kind of story his parents could tell--'a common story with a beginning, middle and an end in the right places', which echoes Kuhn's assertion that *Family Secrets* is not a 'conventional' autobiography because 'I offer no life story organised as a linear narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end, in that order'.²⁴⁵ Although he finds himself crippled by a postmodern distrust of the coherent narrative he claims: 'I wish I could tell a story, a single narrative, like my father has, instead of this snakepit of narratives that compete, eclipse each other, then slide mutely back into darkness'.²⁴⁶

There is a certain degree of disingenuousness in Lott's simultaneous desire for and repudiation of such 'traditional' models of autobiographical narrative. While Lott could not, perhaps, ever restore the past 'as it really was', he surely could have 'marshalled' his evidence into chronology. He could have written something resembling

²⁴⁵ Lott 132.

a 'traditional' autobiography. But what his, and other memoirs seem to insist upon is the fact that this model no longer serves to convince, no longer functions as persuasive truth-telling mode.

Although he claims to long for the possibility of a coherent unifying story like his parents', Lott refers to their stories as 'lies'. Interestingly, parents in contemporary family memoirs are almost unanimously characterised as 'liars'.²⁴⁷ Appignanesi, for example, explains that 'Every family has its division of psychological labour. In mine, my mother was the liar, my father the silent, inscrutable one, while I was the truth-teller'.²⁴⁸ Parents' lies may justify the revision of their stories, and by placing these lies at the centre of these revisions, detective memoirists implicitly--and sometimes explicitly--make a greater claim for the truth-status of their own stories.

And yet truth does not always emerge as an unambiguous panacea, as the parents' reasons for deception are often complex and necessary. In Appignanesi's memoir, for example, Appignanesi's mother's lies take a more insidious form: not willed forgetting or concealment, but instances of internalised oppression. Lying, Appignanesi discovers, may have been the only way in which to survive the war, and

²⁴⁶ Lott 132.

²⁴⁷ See, for example, Grant 31; Morrison 13-14; Shaw 141; and Kehoe 190 for an example of parents' 'lies'.

to keep painful memories out of reach. 'My mother's ideal interlocutor', she reveals, 'is always and ever the Gestapo officer'.²⁴⁹ Lying about her name, her nationality, her religion, even about more mundane matters was for her mother, Appignanesi concedes, both a means of survival and an internalisation of 'the discourse of the master, the coloniser, the aggressor'; the message was that 'Jewishness [. . .] carried a shameful taint, one which had on too many occasions proved mortal'.²⁵⁰

Appignanesi describes watching, over and over again, a videotape of her mother's oral Holocaust testimony. Her mother 'weaves her web of story' in which she is 'a bold young woman who outwitted dreaded foes'.²⁵¹ 'Yet when I look at my transcript of the video', Appignanesi writes:

I am startled by how fragmentary her narrative is. Each fragment makes sense on its own, but nothing coheres--as if the only point of cohesion were her own speaking body. Without it, dislocation rules. There is an occasional winter or spring, but there are no dates. Everything floats in a limbo crowded with detail which evades sense. The burning of the Warsaw Ghetto is an aside--a smoke-filled view from a new flat. My mother's story is devoid of history.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Appignanesi 30.

²⁴⁹ Appignanesi 34.

²⁵⁰ Appignanesi 35.

²⁵¹ Appignanesi 82.

²⁵² Appignanesi 82-83.

What does Appignanesi mean when she says that this, a life-story, a testimony, is 'devoid of history'? Whether it is the incoherence of her mother's story or the subjective nature of it--the disproportionate meaning assigned to the new flat in relation to what is witnessed from the window--is not clear. Was the story still devoid of history when the visible presence of her mother on screen conferred a 'point of cohesion' on it? What is a story lacking when it is lacking history? And what, precisely, is this story if not history? She continues:

I rush to the history books. I read and read. History makes sense of memory. It gives one a grid for individual experience. It provides a panorama of troop movements and official decrees. It offers up statistics and above all pattern. History, after all, is written with hindsight. Ends are already known [. . .]. While my parents lived the War, it was a frenzied rush of days and nights [. . .]. Confusion ruled. The unstructured moments of my mother's memory echo that confusion.²⁵³

'Nonetheless', she continues, 'I still need to rid myself of some of my own'. The history books, despite their pattern and statistics fail to 'make sense' of her mother's story. Elsewhere she writes that her parents' and their

²⁵³ Appignanesi 83.

friends' stories 'wore the jagged marks of individual memory which often won't fit neatly into the grand historical narrative'.²⁵⁴

In order to 'make sense of [her] parents' war and [her] own sudden interest in it', Appignanesi decides to 'visit the sites of memory' in Poland.²⁵⁵ This knowing trope on the title of Nora's influential books on memory leads her onto the next sub-chapter 'On Site', explicitly linking the individual and the historical archaeological quests she is about to undertake. It is only in the archives, as fragments of documentary evidence--Appignanesi calls them 'historical proof'--gradually emerge that 'narrative and recorded fact coalesce'.²⁵⁶ Finding the address of her own first home she feels 'a tingle of investigator's triumph, the kind I imagine Maigret must have felt when a case began to come together'.²⁵⁷

Appignanesi suggests here that personal history can be 'made sense of' through a discovery of documentary evidence to support it, that personal history can become history through a coalescence of narrative and recorded fact, subjective and objective truths, although the brief consolation this offers is denied towards the end of her memoir. When the final document arrives from the •ód• Registry of Residents, informing her of the absence of her

²⁵⁴ Appignanesi 60.

²⁵⁵ Appignanesi 83.

²⁵⁶ Appignanesi 96-97.

family from their records, Appignanesi concludes that 'The slate is clean. Official history refuses to coincide with family memory. Everything is open to invention'.²⁵⁸ The lack of documentary evidence thus creates a gap between personal history and history which the mother's story alone cannot fill.

Lott makes the somewhat grand claim that 'before the great flood of 1956' all parents had a monumental narrative, a coherent narrative that served as a sufficient explanation for their place in the world.²⁵⁹ Lott and his brother belonged, so the newspapers seemed to declare, to 'a unique generation in history'; they were 'the New Elizabethans [. . .] vital, creative, original, sexy!'.²⁶⁰ They could own things 'and they would be different shapes, made of different materials than what had gone before' and they would have the ambiguous luxury of choice born of capitalism.²⁶¹ The differences between this new generation and the last are many, but the defining one for Lott is that they each entail very different ways not just of knowing about, but also of narrating the past. He writes:

²⁵⁷ Appignanesi 97.

²⁵⁸ Appignanesi 231.

²⁵⁹ Grand not just in the sense that this is clearly a sweeping and unsubstantiated assertion, but also because 1956 is Lott's own year of birth.

²⁶⁰ Lott 130.

²⁶¹ Lott 130. Lott (229) defines one of his symptoms as the inability to make a choice among all the possible choices in the supermarket. See Oliver James, *Britain on the Couch* (London: Century, 1997) for a

I wish I could tell a story, a single narrative, like my father has, instead of this snakepit of narratives that compete, eclipse each other, then slide mutely back into darkness. For my father, like all fathers and mothers before the Great Flood that began around 1956, seemed to have a common story, with a beginning a middle and an end in the right places.²⁶²

Lott's dubious distinction between old or traditional forms of memory and narrative and contemporary forms is reminiscent of Pierre Nora's work on history, which likewise distinguishes between old forms of memory and narrative, and between 'true' and 'false' memory on this basis.

Bemoaning the decline of 'spontaneous', collective, and community memory, Nora claims that 'prosthetic' memory has taken its place, that archives and monuments, for example, have been created in the service of a willed anamnesis: 'when memory is no longer everywhere, it will no longer be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means'.²⁶³ For Nora the faith in history as a means of 'recovering' the past is a characteristic of 'the history memory of old', which assumed 'that the past could always be resuscitated by an

study of the ways in which advanced capitalism may have contributed to the increasing prevalence of depression in Britain.

²⁶² Lott 132.

²⁶³ Nora: 16.

effort of remembrance'.²⁶⁴ Since the passing of 'spontaneous' memory, history and memory are marked by anxiety: 'Since no one knows what the past will be made of next, anxiety turns everything into a trace, a possible indication, a hint of history that contaminates the innocence of all things'.²⁶⁵ This is the problem confronting detective memoirists who, like Lott, seek to make 'traces' of the past into 'evidence' and to construct a true story from fragments while resisting the impulse to erect a monumental story which although it may offer the illusion of a recovery of the past will only ever be a 'lie'.

Lott holds firm to the conviction that his parents were more adept than he at 'sticking to' their stories, of figuring out 'what it all boils down to'.²⁶⁶ His parents' past and his own childhood belong to pre-history, an Arcadian state that can be longed for but not restored, leaving behind only watery relics, causes like 'vapour' and facts which are not hard but 'as soft as loam'.²⁶⁷ The 'flood' separates not only his life from his parents' lives, but also two very different Englands. The England of his childhood and of his parents' lives is 'an England that has gone now, even as an idea, a dream. There is nothing we have thought of to put in its place. There is, in fact, no place to put it; the cohering forces themselves have

²⁶⁴ Nora: 16.

²⁶⁵ Nora: 17.

²⁶⁶ Lott 196.

collapsed'.²⁶⁸ Lott suggests that it was his mother's inability to change her story of self in the face of so many external changes that contributed to her suicidal despair.

Lott specifically links his mother's coherent story, her 'bad lie' to her illness: 'depression is a very particular type of illness, in that it seems to hinge on your interpretation of the world, the story you tell yourself'.²⁶⁹ '[P]hysical depression', he continues, 'can be caused by culture, by a way of seeing and imagining the world, and yet end up as a physical illness'.²⁷⁰ Narrative, in its relation to lived experience and identity, emerges in Lott's memoir as both suspect and potential cure:

Depression is about anger, it is about anxiety, it is about character and heredity. But it is also about something that is in its way quite unique. It is the illness of *identity*, it is the illness of those who do not know where they fit, who lose faith in the myths they have so painstakingly created for themselves. [. . .] Once I realise this, the reasons for undertaking this book, which, I can now admit, has sometimes seemed obscure while writing, begin to become clear to me. For in finding a

²⁶⁷ Lott 34-35.

²⁶⁸ Lott 34.

²⁶⁹ Lott 263.

²⁷⁰ Lott 265.

solution to identity, you begin to find a solution to depression.²⁷¹

Lott claims that his mother's illness was partly due to her coherent narrative which refused to yield to change, to the monumental explanation which had 'congealed' into an inexorable solidity. He claims that his mother 'hanged herself because her story, her idea of herself as a successful wife and mother--the only real test of worth that she knew--was no longer sustainable in her shocked mind'.²⁷² And yet he is ambivalent about the kinds of narrative which may prove therapeutic, or true.

His father's story is, according to Lott, also a lie, but it was one which enabled survival, it was 'a good lie, a sustaining lie, and, above all, a single and comprehensible lie'.²⁷³ Lott's parents have in place the same story, the same kind of coherent narrative, 'a common story with a beginning, middle and an end in the right places'.²⁷⁴ But for Lott's mother the necessary fiction is unsustaining: it is a 'bad lie'.

Lott's stated desire to recover the 'true story' of his mother is marked by this ambivalence. The inability to relinquish coherence and nostalgia can, Lott acknowledges, be politically dangerous:

²⁷¹ Lott 265.

²⁷² Lott 266.

²⁷³ Lott 132.

²⁷⁴ Lott 132.

If you want to get historical about it, you can talk about nationalism, Nazism, holocausts, ethnic cleansing; they are all merely ways of holding fast to your story, of avoiding the awesome responsibility that accepting uncertainty and insignificance entails.²⁷⁵

In Lott's memoir, the burden of guilt and the consolation of explanation can fall equally under any of these headings: 'England, history, family, love, regret, identity, meaning'.²⁷⁶ But the multitude of possible 'stories and their possible organisations', in Brooks' words, proves to be more stultifying than enabling. 'My story, my story', Lott laments, 'It doesn't add up, it doesn't cut a swathe that is clear'.²⁷⁷ At university, Lott makes a discovery: there are no answers, only stories that one must make up before 'sticking to' them.²⁷⁸ The writing of essays presents the same problem as the writing of the memoir:

References, sources, quotes, evidence. Will they help the making of sense? Why can I never reach any conclusions, as you are clearly supposed to? All the different explanations and

²⁷⁵ Lott 267. King, also, writes of the ways in which 'romantic arcadianism'--the desire to recapture an earlier state of innocence--has been turned to both liberatory and 'deeply conservative ends' 30.

²⁷⁶ Lott 196.

²⁷⁷ Lott 196.

²⁷⁸ Lott 204-05.

interpretations, I cannot escape the impression that each is exactly as convincing as the other.²⁷⁹

Confronted with masses of contradictory evidence about his parents' past and his mother's illness, Lott grapples with what seems to be the impossibility of coherence and with a proliferation of stories--or anecdotes--all equally convincing, but none of them quite managing to explain:

I've never claimed there was just one story. There are dozens of them, some of them this much true, some of them that much true. [. . .] Perhaps there's a middle course, though its confusing to think so. Surely each explanation cancels the other. There are more clues to select and examine. Perhaps they will add up. I doubt it somehow, but I cannot shake off the idea that, in a blink, I will achieve some revelation, arrive at some place, which will explain everything to me, where everything will slot into place. [. . .] I will have arrived. I will know what is what, what it all *boils down to*.²⁸⁰

All that remains of the past, for Lott, are 'scraps', gripping in their status as 'remains', their ability to evoke:

²⁷⁹ Lott 205. See also Auster, who makes a similar point 61.

²⁸⁰ Lott 196-97.

These scraps are like random out-takes from a very, very long film. I hold them up to the light, I examine them. What they tell me is infinitely open to interpretation, but holds my attention nevertheless, because these scraps are the last relics of a time when I imagined myself holy, master of my fate, fitting tightly into a larger story.²⁸¹

Drawing on the videorecorder image of memory, Lott gestures towards the possibility of referentiality, even of recovery, but he also suggests that even if traces of the past remain they are still dependent on a degree of interpretation: they do not speak for themselves.

Lott writes, towards the end of the memoir, that he has confidence in his completed manuscript, 'confidence in it as a document and a record'.²⁸² 'I am slowly, inevitably falling into the myth', he confesses, 'that I have secured the True Story of my mother. That I am a Historian. It is over', he continues, 'I have a story now, written down, fixed in time and space, something to hold to that is mine. For I have finished my book now and, although I do not see it as therapy, I have used it to work through some conclusions that I consider to be firm, to be final'.²⁸³

This accomplishment Lott specifically endows with a therapeutic potential, claiming that since the completion

²⁸¹ Lott 133.

²⁸² Lott 269.

²⁸³ Lott 269.

of his story, his dependence on Prozac has decreased. The belief that he has 'secured' a true story, a piece of history, is, though, another myth. His memoir ends with the discovery of a new piece of evidence--he reads Jean's medical files which reveal that her illness had been more protracted than he had suspected--one with the power to at least hint at an entirely different explanation, a different 'true story'.

6. Conclusion

What happens, I asked at the beginning of this chapter, when the autobiographer adopts the roles of detective and archaeologist, roles upon which some of the most important tenets of psychoanalytic authority are founded? What happens when the autobiographer enters into a discourse which traditionally conceives of the personal historian as the patient, the object of analysis, the 'crime' to be solved, and becomes the agent of his or her own epistemological discovery? I offer no clear answers to these questions here, but I suggest that by posing questions like these it becomes possible to identify the ways in which contemporary autobiography is currently responding to the challenges of the historical crises I

outlined at the beginning, currently testing its own limits against other discourses of truth-telling.

The detective memoirs I have discussed in this chapter differ from their fictional counterparts in their resistance to a final verdict. Just as the biographical quest with which they often begin is derailed as the biographical and the autobiographical merge, the detective quests, too, are thwarted on the grounds of inadmissible evidence, evidence that fails to lead to a reconstruction of the 'true story', or of 'what really happened'. And yet it is in this sense that these memoirs pose a challenge to the very sources upon which authoritative, 'objective' histories are based. These are texts that continually confront their own impossibilities and paradoxes.

Although the conclusion of many of these memoirs is consistent with the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist approach of those who, like Felman and Caruth, insist on the impossibility of direct historical representation, there is a sense that autobiography can still be sustained by the myth of recovery, of referentiality, even if it is acknowledged to be this genre's most fictional of premises.

In contrast to Felman's preferred method of negotiating the 'missings' of autobiography, the detective memoir persistently refuses to relinquish the unique and paradoxical agency of autobiography, the role of the autobiographer as both seeker and sought. And in contrast

to recent theories which have emphasised the pervasiveness of reconstructive models of memory, narrative, and identity in contemporary life writing, I argue that detective memoirs carve out a space where 'recovery' and 'reconstruction' can co-exist in their projects of self-making.

CHAPTER TWO

The Ventriloquist

1. Introduction

How is one to tell a tale that cannot be--but must be--told?¹

Here Elie Wiesel expresses what has become a defining paradox of Holocaust representation and asks a question of crucial importance for witnesses, historians, and artists seeking to transmit the truth of an event which many believe lies outside of the 'limits of representation'.² In spite of the continuing efforts at historical representation, commentators like Wiesel often emphasise that the Holocaust is essentially unrepresentable, a position that is based on corresponding claims about the 'uniqueness' or incommensurability of this historical event.³ Theodore Adorno's often-misrepresented and much-modified statement in the late 1940s that 'to write poetry

¹ Elie Wiesel, 'Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction', rev. of *Holocaust*, *New York Times* 16 April 1978, Section 2: 1, 29.

² For several challenging accounts about what this now commonplace phrase might mean, see Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

³ See, for example, Friedländer's introduction to *Probing the Limits*, where he suggests that 'What turns the "Final Solution" into an event at the limits is the very fact that it is the most radical form of

after-Auschwitz is barbaric' is partly responsible, Michael Rothberg suggests, for the ensuing 'Bilderverbot' or 'ban on representation'.⁴ Rothberg roughly divides commentators on the issue into two groups: the realist and the antirealist. 'The realist approach has characterized the dominant scholarly methodology', he writes, 'that of historians and others who assert the necessity of considering the Holocaust according to "scientific" procedures and inscribing the events within continuous historical narratives'.⁵ Antirealists--and proponents of the 'Bilderverbot'--like Wiesel, on the other hand, emphasise the need for 'radically new regimes of knowledge' in order to approach the subject, as well as a discourse which 'seeks to disable established modes of representation and understanding'.⁶ And yet Wiesel's position, as Rothberg and Norman Finkelstein both point out, often results only in 'calls for silence'. Finkelstein--not a fan of Wiesel--writes that 'for his standard fee of \$25,000 (plus chauffeured limosine), Wiesel lectures that the "secret" of Auschwitz's "truth lies in silence". Rationally comprehending the Holocaust amounts, in [Wiesel's] view, to denying it'.⁷ In spite of such debates over the limits of

genocide encountered in history' 3. He goes on to cite Jürgen Habermas in order to support this point.

⁴ Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 19.

⁵ Rothberg 4.

⁶ Rothberg 4-5.

⁷ Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000) 45.

Holocaust representation, the eyewitness testimony of survivors is today considered to be more important than ever before, and yet first-person witness accounts of the Holocaust are by no means uninflected by the issues at the heart of these debates.

The two primary US repositories for Holocaust testimony reflect some of these tensions. The Survivors of the Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles was founded by Steven Spielberg in 1994, partly because remaining Holocaust survivors were beginning to dwindle in number and partly because the threat of Holocaust denial appeared to be on the increase.⁸ Spielberg's goal was to collect and prepare for transmission 50,000 survivor-interviews in just three years.⁹ The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, which began as a grassroots organisation in 1979, currently houses 4200 oral Holocaust testimonies.¹⁰ The emphasis at the Shoah Foundation, as I discovered when I visited the archive in 1998, is on the historical importance of eyewitness testimony rather than on the literary and psychoanalytic implications of

⁸ See Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Plume, 1994) for a thorough overview of revisionism or Holocaust denial. See also D. D. Guttenplan, *The Holocaust on Trial: History, Justice, and the David Irving Libel Case* (London: Granta, 2001) for an account of the 2000 case David Irving vs. Penguin Books Ltd.

⁹ '[T]he weekly quota was 320 interviews in 30 languages in more than 40 countries' wrote Marc Fisher, 'Tough Questions for Spielberg Holocaust Project', *International Herald Tribune* 14 April 1998: 15.

¹⁰ See <<http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/>>.

testimony which has increasingly become the focus of the Yale archive.

The Shoah Foundation received some unfavourable critical attention from the press when its methods of interviewing and cataloguing came to light. Although the Foundation benefitted from an initial injection of funding from Spielberg, the association with this founder and the Hollywood setting carried negative connotations.¹¹ The historian Sid Bolkosky, who aided in the training process for Shoah Foundation employees 'came away distressed that the project was fixated on speed and a Hollywood approach to storytelling' and Yehuda Bauer commented that 'a portion of these interviews will not be useful' because they 'are being done without any possibility of checking information'.¹² The 'usefulness' of the Yale testimonies is already well-established: whereas in 1998 I was the first academic researcher to make use of the Shoah Foundation archive, the testimonies at Yale have been the subject of several important and ground-breaking studies of Holocaust testimony.¹³ Charges of 'Hollywoodisation' of the Holocaust

¹¹ In 'Spielberg's Shoah Project, Remembering the Past', *Washington Post* 7 April 1998: D01, Marc Fisher writes that Spielberg is reported to have donated 60 million dollars to the Foundation.

¹² Fisher, 'Tough Questions': 15.

¹³ Studies that I will be discussing in this chapter. For example Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992); and James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). The Shoah Foundation has, however, produced a series of educational films and CD-ROMs designed for educational purposes, see <<http://www.vhf>>.

were levelled at the Shoah Foundation not only on account of the speed of the process, but also because of the supposed imposition of Hollywood-style 'happy endings' on testimonies.¹⁴ Whereas the Shoah Foundation encourages witnesses to spend no longer than two hours on their videotaped testimonies, Yale testimonies range in length from half an hour to 26 hours.¹⁵ A former employee of the Foundation stated that 'we don't have time for the pace of academia' which may be an implicit reference to the much smaller but more respected Yale archive of testimonies.¹⁶

While the primary focus at the Shoah Foundation is on the quantity of testimony and the historical imperative to counteract the claims of Holocaust deniers, at Yale the impetus behind the interviewing process is not only historical but also literary and psychoanalytic. As Shoshana Felman writes, the testimonies at Yale are given by Holocaust witnesses to 'professionally trained interviewers, most of whom are psychoanalysts or psychotherapists'.¹⁷ Also referring to the Yale archive James E. Young suggests that 'Of all possible kinds of interviewers, trained psychoanalysts and therapists may well be the best qualified to elicit testimony'. '[T]he

org/>.

¹⁴ One commentator compared the project to 'making a movie, where you just do it and disband' and others have criticised the emphasis on post-liberation life in testimonies, where witnesses are encouraged to invite their families into the interviewing room. Fisher, 'Spielberg's Shoah Project': D01.

¹⁵ See <<http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/about/index.htm>>.

¹⁶ Jim Banister cited in Fisher, 'Spielberg's Shoah Project': D01.

psychiatrists who interview at Yale' are, he writes, 'Trained to encourage narrative telling and interpretation, and through them insight into traumatic events, with a minimum of new psychic damage or further trauma'.¹⁸

The difference in approach at these two archives suggests that the input of the interviewer might be responsible for determining the 'validity' or 'usefulness' of certain eyewitness testimonies. In its emphasis on quantity over, some have suggested, 'quality', the Shoah Foundation seems to assign a less important role to the interviewer, and assumes that the witness will be able to testify without any specialised forms of questioning. The Yale methodology, however, seems to imply that questions of representation and narrative may pose problems for the witness, and their use of trained psychoanalysts or therapists as interviewers suggests that both history and pathology are at stake in oral Holocaust testimony.

While Young suggests that Yale's choice of psychoanalytic interviewers may be an attempt at damage-limitation, Shoshana Felman's description of Yale testimonies indicates that the choice of interviewing techniques there may function as an implicit endorsement of the antirealist, anti-representation position. Felman suggests that it is 'within the context of these dialogic interviews' that witnesses come to narrate their story 'in

¹⁷ Felman, Felman and Laub 41.

its entirety' for the first time; 'enabled' by the interviewer, the witness is able to address 'the suffering, the truth, and the necessity of this impossible narration'.¹⁹ While the historical framework of oral Holocaust testimony is self-evident, it is less obvious why psychoanalysis should play a part in the eliciting of testimony from witnesses. Is the purpose of the testimony not just to provide a historical account but also to approach something resembling a 'cure'? And indeed, what might 'cure' entail for a witness to historical atrocity?

Felman suggests that testimony can only be given effectively in the context of an analytic encounter, that prior to the interview, witnesses have been unable to tell their story '*in its entirety*', that testimony must be enabled by a specific kind of dialogic interview. In the previous chapter I used Felman's work on the 'missings' of autobiography and Felman and Cathy Caruth's notion of indirect reference as a starting point for my discussion of the 'missings' of contemporary life writing. This chapter begins once more with Felman and Caruth, exploring the ways in which their psychoanalytic and poststructuralist approaches to oral Holocaust testimony implicate an antirealist position that suggests the impossibility of historically valuable testimony without the 'enabling' analytic encounter.

¹⁸ Young 166.

Caruth's and Felman's work on trauma narratives is dependent, in both cases, on a theory that prior to the interview situation witnesses are 'possessed by' the traumatic event, a theory based on readings of Freud. In the following section I discuss the implications of this pathological model for their accompanying theories of historical transmission, discussing the ways in which pathology might be a necessary precondition for antirealist 'transmissions'. I then discuss the implications of theories like this for second generation testimony, exploring the parallels between theories of possession and Nicholas Abraham's and Maria Torok's theories of transgenerational haunting. In the final two sections I discuss the ways in which theories of possession and haunting might usefully highlight ethical problems in other relational accounts.

2. 'A Privileged Witness': Truth, Pathology, and Historical Transmission

What Does A Woman Want? (1993) was influenced by Felman's previous, collaborative work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). Just as Felman dismisses women's 'confessional'

¹⁹ Felman, Felman and Laub 41.

literature in her 1993 study and endorses instead a process of 'indirect representation' based on a dialogic encounter, in *Testimony* she confines her discussion to oral testimony, to the pedagogical issues surrounding histories of the Holocaust, and to the 'inadvertent' testimonies of male writers. Indeed, Felman employs the very same terminology in both books, despite the questionable analogy between the oral testimony of Holocaust survivors and women who, she claims, have led 'a traumatized existence'. Referring to Freud's 'Irma' dream as the site of the 'birth' of psychoanalysis, she sets the terms for a theory that will underpin her readings of impossible witnessing in these radically different contexts:

Psychoanalysis [. . .] profoundly rethinks and radically renews the very concept of testimony, by submitting, and by recognizing for the first time in the history of culture, that one does not have to possess or own the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, not *available* to its own speaker.²⁰

'I am not in possession of my own autobiography', Felman wrote in *What Does A Woman Want?*. What does it mean not to

be in possession of one's own life story?²¹ This section explores the ways in which the figure of the witness 'possessed by' a traumatic event in Felman's work serves not only to endorse her corresponding theory of indirect representation and historical transmission in place of historical representation, but also forges what I read as a problematic connection between pathology and truth.

Caruth's almost identical theory of possession makes this connection even more explicit. By exploring the ways in which the 'possessed' serves as 'privileged witness' in Caruth's and Felman's work I question the implications of a theory which makes pathology a precondition for historical transmission and ask what might become of the privileged witness once she is, in psychoanalytic terms, 'cured'.²²

In *What Does A Woman Want?* Felman qualifies her assertion that she is not, and can not be, in 'possession' of her life story by referring to questions of origins (models upon which women's stories can be founded) and

²⁰ Felman, Felman and Laub 15.

²¹ Responding to Felman's work, as well as to other women writers, Linda Anderson suggests that a concept of 'remembered futures' is applicable to women's autobiography: 'it might still be possible to rescue memory from nostalgia and to think about home as a destination--something yet to be constructed--and not as an origin we can only ever desire in retrospect' *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997) 10. In this sense, women's life stories can be perceived as having a potential for future meaning that was not necessarily accessible at the time of writing, and criticism as an act, as Anderson writes, 'of attempting to read into the future what was "not yet" in the past' 6. Here, however, I focus on the psychoanalytic implications of Felman's model of 'possession' and on what I see as the alarming implications of the connections she forges between truth and pathology.

²² 'Privileged witness' is a term used by Rosette C. Lamont, the translator of Charlotte Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz and After*, introd.

destinations (finding an appropriate 'address'). But in *Testimony* the haunting of the Holocaust witness is figured more specifically as a symptom of trauma, is given a more thorough theoretical framework, and a more explicitly psychoanalytic and poststructuralist context. Caruth's work places the haunted witness firmly in the context of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and makes explicit the connection between 'history' and 'symptom'.

The theories of possession in both Caruth's and Felman's work are closely related to some neurobiologists' concept of dissociation.²³ Felman and her collaborator on the project, the psychoanalyst Dori Laub, agree that traumatic memories are 'unavailable' to the Holocaust witness because the event was never properly experienced as it occurred, in keeping with the theory of a 'split consciousness' in cases of dissociation. Laub refers to the

Lawrence Langer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). I discuss this point later in the chapter.

²³ Although Felman and Caruth usually express it in less clinical terms, their work has clear connections to both Freud's early work on trauma and Pierre Janet's preceding work. For a thorough explanation of the similarities and differences between Janet's and Freud's theories, see Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995). Caruth is notably influenced by the work of neuroscientist Bessel A. van der Kolk and Ruth Leys makes the point that the theory that victims of trauma are 'possessed by' the past rather than being in 'possession of' that past is common to both modern neurobiology and 'certain versions of poststructuralism'. Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 229. Dissociation is distinguished from repression in that dissociated material is inaccessible to the victim's consciousness and is frozen intact, whereas repressed material can be subject to distortion and made available to consciousness. The distinction between dissociation and repression was one of the issues discussed during the recovered memory debate. See Frederick Crews, *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (London: Granta, 1997) 15 and Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching*

Holocaust as 'an event without a witness'.²⁴ 'The Holocaust created a world', he writes, 'in which one could not bear witness to oneself', because it was also a world in which the 'other' became an inconceivable concept.²⁵ Without the possibility of 'address', without the ability to turn to a 'you', 'one cannot say "thou" even to oneself'. In addition to this, Laub attributes some of the impossibility of witnessing to internalised oppression, to some survivors' belief that they are 'sworn to silence': 'Because of their participation in the Holocaust they have become the "bearers of a secret" (*Geheimnistraeger*) never to be divulged' and this 'emphasises even more the delusional quality of the Holocaust'.²⁶ This 'delusional quality' is further exacerbated by the euphemistic deceptions employed by the Nazis in order to conceal from their victims the truth of the occurrence:

The perpetrators, in their attempt to rationalize the unprecedented scope of the destructiveness, brutally imposed upon their victims a delusional ideology whose grandiose coercive pressure totally excluded and eliminated the possibility of an unviolated,

for Memory: the Brain, the Mind, and the Past (London: Basic Books, 1996) 263.

²⁴ See Laub, Felman and Laub 75-93.

²⁵ Laub, Felman and Laub 82.

²⁶ Laub, Felman and Laub 82.

unencumbered, and thus sane, point of reference in the witness.²⁷

Felman considers the impossibility of witnessing from a particularly scopic perspective, and suggests that Nazi-imposed euphemisms even prevented the events from being seen, let alone experienced, or witnessed. Felman refers to the Nazi euphemism for 'corpses'--'figuren' or 'figures'-- as 'a disembodied verbal substitute which signifies abstractly the linguistic law of infinite exchangeability and substitutability'.²⁸

On a different level Primo Levi also describes a similar detachment of signifier from referent, likewise explaining the ways in which witnessing was precluded by distortions of language which prevented witnesses from seeing the reality unfolding before them. In order to testify truthfully to the events witnessed, Levi suggests, a new language would need to be created:

Just as our hunger is not that of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say "hunger", we say "tiredness", "fear", "pain", we say "winter" and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes. If the Lager had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have

²⁷ Laub, Felman and Laub 81.

²⁸ Felman, Felman and Laub 210.

been born: and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind [. . .] hunger and knowledge of the end drawing nearer.²⁹

Here can be identified the stirrings of an antirealist project, albeit from within a narrative that does attempt a representation of history. It is an interesting paradox that the antirealist branch of Holocaust commentators may well have developed the rationale for their 'ban on representation' from the information gleaned from 'realist' representations of the Holocaust such as Levi's, or from the attempts at realism and direct historical and autobiographical representation in oral Holocaust testimony. This appears to be most specifically the case for Lawrence Langer, who emphatically rejects the normalising codes of traditional historical frameworks of understanding in the study of oral Holocaust testimony.

Langer insists that 'we must learn to suspect the effect as well as the intent of bracing pieties like "redeeming" and "salvation" when they are used to shape our understanding of the ordeal of former victims of Nazi oppression'.³⁰ By inventing new forms of memory and grouping his chosen testimonies under these headings, Langer hopes to unsettle, if not shatter, the notion that

²⁹ Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*, trans. Stuart Woolf (1958; London: Abacus 1998) 129.

³⁰ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies* 2.

survivor testimonies can be understood by a listener who employs established modes of listening and narrative expectation and 'traditional assumptions about moral conduct'.³¹

Although Langer's work is not explicitly informed by psychoanalysis, his rejection of the view that realist or traditional frameworks of understanding can make sense of Holocaust testimonies parallels the antirealist thrust of Felman's and Caruth's avowedly psychoanalytic work. They too:

underscore the question of the witness, and of witnessing, as nonhabitual, estranged *conceptual prisms* through which we attempt to apprehend--and to make tangible to the imagination--the ways in which our cultural frames of reference and our preexisting categories which delimit and determine our perception of reality have failed, essentially, both to contain, and to account for, the scale of what has happened in contemporary history.³²

And like Felman and Caruth, Langer seems to move swiftly from a realisation that Holocaust testimonies do not sound

³¹ Langer xii. Langer's chapter headings include, for example, 'Unheroic Memory', 'Humiliated Memory', 'Deep Memory'. They each suggest not only that the 'former victims' of the Holocaust remember in a different way, but also that suffering emerges in spite of attempts to mitigate it through consolatory moral frames such as redemption or even liberation.

³² Felman, Felman and Laub xv. See also Mary Jacobus, 'Border Crossings: Traumatic Reading and Holocaust Memory', *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

true in the way we might expect, to an insistence that in order to be authentic or historically viable, they break apart traditional frameworks and 'remain disrupted narratives'.³³

Caruth also emphasises the impossibility of witnessing traumatic events and supports her theory with an appeal to Freud's work on traumatic neuroses.³⁴ Stressing the belatedness of trauma and Freud's analogy of the accident victim who gets away 'apparently unharmed' from the scene of the trauma, Caruth supports the claim that the traumatic event is 'not registered at the time of its occurrence' but only belatedly.³⁵ Although Freud vacillated, as I discussed in the previous chapter, on the question of the intactness of repressed traumatic memories, in his work on the 'returning traumatic dream' he is 'startled', writes

³³ Langer xi.

³⁴ And to van der Kolk, see Leys 228. Freud made several references to the conceptual relationship between demonical possession in the Middle Ages and hysteria in the nineteenth century, but Caruth focuses more on the literality of the trauma by which the traumatised are possessed and it is perhaps for this reason that she steers clear of the other links between possession and psychoanalysis. See Freud, 'A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis' 1923 (1922), *Art and Literature*, PFL 14, trans. James Strachey., ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1990) for a discussion of the relationship between demonical possession and hysteria. In this essay Freud writes of how 'The states of possession correspond to our neuroses. [. . .] In our eyes the demons are bad and reprehensible wishes, derivatives of instinctual impulses that have been repudiated and repressed. We merely eliminate the projection of these mental entities into the external world which the Middle Ages carried out; instead, we regard them as having arisen in the patient's internal life, where they have their abode' 383-84. Freud's focus in this essay is on sexuality, but it is clear how repressed traumas might be seen to function analogously to repressed 'reprehensible wishes' or unarticulable desires.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays' 1939 (1934-38), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud XXIII*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud, ed. James Strachey (1964; London: Vintage, 2001) 67.

Caruth, because 'the dream cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but it, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits'.³⁶

The impossibility of witnessing, for Caruth, is a precondition of possession: '[T]he event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event'.³⁷ Because the event was not assimilated at the time of its occurrence, Caruth theorises, it never attained the status of 'narrative memory'.³⁸ The pathology of PTSD depends on this particular form of possession, on the theory that unable to narrate, forget, or remember the traumatic experience, the witness is fixed in a painful and often debilitating cycle of repetition. The event insistently returns, but not through a conscious act of memory on the part of the witness, but rather unconsciously in the form of flashbacks, terrifying nightmares and what

³⁶ Cathy Caruth, ed. 'Introduction', *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 5. In her fascinating chapter on Caruth's work, Ruth Leys questions whether Caruth's interpretation of Freud is 'justified'. She writes 'For [Caruth's] project to succeed it is crucial for her to make the case for the literal in Freud, because the de Manian theory of the performative demands it' 274-75. For Freud's brief account of the returning traumatic dream, see 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' 1920, *On Metapsychology*, PFL 11, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1990) 281-83.

³⁷ Caruth, 'Introduction', *Trauma* 4-5.

³⁸ See van der Kolk and van der Hart in Caruth, *Trauma* 158-83 for an account of Janet's work in this area.

Freud would refer to as 'symptomatic acts'.³⁹ Because the traumatic memory is encoded differently from normal memory, Caruth maintains, it remains untainted by the normal distortions of memory. Not only does the traumatic memory remain 'absolutely true to the event', but this truth 'forms the centre of its pathology or symptoms': 'while the images of traumatic reenactment remain absolutely accurate and precise, they are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control'.⁴⁰

This investigation into the relationship between pathology and truth is ethically and politically crucial. PTSD poses problems for legal testimony because the prime symptom (the proof of pathology) is the inability to narrate the traumatic events in the coherent, persuasive narrative that may be necessary to conform to legalistic concepts of truth-telling.⁴¹ Felman and Caruth negotiate the impossibility of witnessing by appealing to the possibility of a historical transmission in place of representation: this is the essence of their antirealist

³⁹ The term 'symptomatic acts' refers to the unconscious acting-out of a traumatic experience. See Sigmund Freud, 'Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")' 1905 (1901), *Case Histories I*, PFL 8, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1990) 113-16 for an example.

⁴⁰ Caruth, *Trauma* 5, 151.

⁴¹ Ruth Leys points out that, equally, the connection between suggestibility and PTSD may also invalidate a witness's testimony: 'in the first legal test of the movement to make rape an indictable war crime, lawyers for the accused were able to exploit the fact that a Muslim victim of repeated rape was diagnosed with PTSD by demanding a halt to the trial on the grounds that the traumatized woman's suggestibility made her testimony and memories suspect' 307.

approach.⁴² For them the act of bearing witness to trauma is tied up with the paradox expressed by Wiesel in my epigraph to this section: the imperative to testify is inextricably bound to a 'crisis of witnessing'. The demand for testimony of the Holocaust is commensurate with the impossibility of adequately representing the event. As Dori Laub writes 'the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling'.⁴³ And yet this approach is validated by an appeal to literality and mimesis, to a direct historical encounter that takes place at the point at which language breaks down.

Although the witness's experiences cannot be narrated--they have never attained the 'status of narrative memory'--the process of the interview enables the unmediated truth of the experience to pass from the witness to the interviewer. As Felman writes, the interview is the place where the story is told 'in its entirety' for the first time, not because the witness has been silently withholding the story until then, but because the dialogic encounter with the analytic other enables a *different kind of*

⁴² Nicola King discusses Toni Morrison's assertion in *Beloved* that 'This is not a story to pass on' as an intentionally ambiguous statement about transmission, meaning at once that the story cannot, or should not be transmitted, but also cannot be ignored. She writes that both *Beloved* and Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (which I discuss briefly in the following chapter) 'recognise that some events cannot be fully reconstructed or integrated into a coherent story, that something in them will always resist recovery or "passing on"', *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 24.

testimony.⁴⁴ The analyst-interviewer is in effect the first listener. Just as Langer insists that the voice of 'deep memory' can only be heard through a specific kind of listening which is attuned to discord, Felman too insists that '*it takes two to witness the unconscious*'.⁴⁵

Theories like Caruth's and Felman's have a crucial role in the understanding of trauma. They urge listeners of traumatic accounts to recognise the truth behind the fractured narrative and, like Langer, insist on the deployment of new frameworks of understanding in order to access the truth. And yet the relationship they forge between truth and pathology is problematic because it presupposes that without symptoms, without pathology, there can be no historical transmission at all:

The attempt to gain access to a traumatic history, then, is also the project of listening beyond the pathology of individual suffering, to the reality of a history that in its crises *can only be perceived in unassimilable forms.*
(my emphasis)⁴⁶

⁴³ Laub, Felman and Laub 79.

⁴⁴ Felman, Felman and Laub 41.

⁴⁵ Felman, Felman and Laub 15. And yet this depends on a very specific kind of listening and Caruth, in particular, is vague about what this might entail: 'And by carrying that impossibility of knowing out of the empirical event itself, trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of impossibility. How does one listen to what is impossible? [. . .] the challenge of the therapeutic listener [. . .] is how to listen to departure' 10.

⁴⁶ Caruth, 'Recapturing the Past: Introduction', *Trauma* 156.

Both Caruth and Felman come close to suggesting not only that history is dependent on trauma but also that its transmission depends on the continued suffering of the witness. Not only does the theory of possession and transmission positively rely on the symptoms of PTSD-- 'unassimilable' memory--but the methods of transmission are based on a one-sided concept of transference where the act of testifying is seen as a contaminating factor, infecting the witness to the act of witnessing with the 'literal' core of traumatic experience. James E. Young traces this concept of contagious witnessing to the Talmud:

not only is a witness described as someone who both knows and sees an event, but, as elaborated in Talmud (Sanhedrin 30a), once an unjust event is known, it must by law be reported. And if one can become a witness merely by knowing of an event, then implicit in the testimonial act seems to be the possibility for making more witnesses by the informing of others of events.⁴⁷

And yet while this appears to be an endorsement of representation--'the informing of others'--in Felman's and Caruth's accounts, the 'making of more witnesses' is crucially dependent on their antirealist agenda. Felman emphasises this process in her account of testimony and

⁴⁷ Young 18.

pedagogy, exploring the ways in which traumatic historical truths were transmitted to her class with unpredictable results. The distrust of historical representation and the increasing tendency of commentators to encourage transmission is also identifiable in certain US Holocaust museums where the stress is on a vicarious experiencing of the event rather than on a 'mere' understanding, knowing, or learning.⁴⁸

If historical transmission relies on the opening up of a dialogic space between witness and listener then this theory ought to preclude the possibility of a successful written testimony. Felman and Caruth are tacit on this point, but Langer makes it explicit, stating that 'Oral testimony is distinguished by the absence of literary mediation [. . .]. Oral testimony [as opposed to written testimony] violates our need for conclusions [. . .] wrenching us from familiar assumptions that govern our response to normal narrative'.⁴⁹

There seem to be several reasons for the emphasis on oral testimony as privileged mode of historical transmission. For Felman and Caruth, specifically, oral testimony is more applicable and amenable to the psychoanalytic model of analyst/ analysand, replicated

⁴⁸ See Edward Norton, 'Yes and No to the Holocaust Museums', *Commentary* 96 (1993): 23-32 and Edward T. Linenthal, 'The Boundaries of Memory: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum', *American Quarterly* 46 (1994): 406-33.

⁴⁹ Langer 57.

(ostensibly unproblematically) in the figures of witness and interviewer (or even of witness and viewer of the videotaped testimony). It is not at all clear what witnesses--testifying in order to bear witness, not to receive treatment--would make of such theorising, what they might make of the pathologisation of their testimonies, even if it is a profoundly privileged pathologisation. Oral testimony, as Young points out, is 'ontologically privileged' and Felman emphasises this in her reading of Lanzmann's *Shoah*: 'Why is it that the witness's speech is so uniquely, literally irreplaceable?' she asks, 'What does it mean that a story--or a history--cannot be told by someone else?'.⁵⁰ She offers no direct answers to these questions, but offers *Shoah* itself as a form of response. It becomes clear, however, through the course of her reading, that the witness's account is irreplaceable because of the pathology which makes of him or her a privileged witness, because s/he is the 'bearer of a secret' truth, because, in this case, ontology becomes almost indistinguishable from epistemology.⁵¹

But it is at the point of Caruth's and Felman's insistence on the privileged relationship between pathology and the truth that the psychoanalytic thrust behind their theories begins to break down. Implicit in the theory that

⁵⁰ Shoshana Felman, 'In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*', *Yale French Studies* 78-79 (1990): 40.

witnesses are 'possessed by' the truth of an event, by a literal registration of that event, is the possibility of transmission which will always be more privileged than representation because it bypasses the distortions of language. To represent is, ultimately in this view, to misrepresent or to distort. And so this antirealist psychoanalytic theory of testimony offers no viable alternative to the painful repetitions and relivings of trauma and no promise of assimilation, resolution, or recovery. The theory is grounded in psychoanalysis and it seems that although Caruth and Felman accept the diagnosis--the witness is possessed by an unassimilable trauma--they reject the cure. The witness is not encouraged or enabled to come into 'possession of' the traumatic memory because this would entail the narrativising of the event, which would in turn dilute the impact of the trauma and prevent it from being transmitted. In Caruth's view in particular, symptom is turned to advantage. Indeed, Caruth makes explicit that we are to understand that the symptoms of PTSD are history.⁵²

Dominick LaCapra suggests that Caruth's and Felman's theories rely too heavily on a theory of 'acting out' as opposed to 'working through', on a theory that the historical truth of traumatic occurrences can only be

⁵¹ Leys also makes the point that Caruth's and Felman's theories conflate epistemological claims with ontological ones 229.

⁵² Caruth, 'Introduction', *Trauma* 5.

transmitted through a painful reliving or repetition of the event.⁵³ While it may be wrong to refer to 'cure' in the case of witnesses to trauma (what, indeed, might this entail?) it is clear that from a psychoanalytic perspective symptoms may be alleviated by a process of 'working through'. 'Acting out' is in fact seen as a symptom in itself of an unresolved psychic trauma. LaCapra draws parallels between 'working through' and 'acting out' and Freud's conception of the 'work of mourning'; seen this way 'working through' would parallel the 'liberatory' act of mourning as opposed to the pathological variant which entails a melancholic identification.⁵⁴

Caruth could be seen to dismiss the issue of 'cure' or of therapy at the very beginning of her edition *Trauma*, where she refers to 'the problem of how to help relieve suffering, and how to understand the nature of the suffering, without eliminating the force and truth of the reality that trauma survivors face and quite often try to transmit to us'. She continues:

⁵³ See *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 185 where LaCapra criticises the antirealist approach in general on these grounds and *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) 186-87 where he specifically aims his criticism at Felman and Caruth.

⁵⁴ See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 66, in particular, and also Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' 1917 (1915), *On Metapsychology*, PFL 11, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1990) and Sigmund Freud, 'Recollection, Repetition and Working Through' 1914, *Collected Papers II*, The International Psycho-Analytical Library No. 8, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. Masud R. Khan (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1924).

To cure oneself--whether by drugs or the telling of one's story or both--seems to many survivors to imply the giving-up of an important reality, or the dilution of a special truth into the reassuring terms of therapy. Indeed, in Freud's own early writings on trauma, the possibility of integrating the lost event into a series of associative memories, as part of the cure, was seen precisely as a way to permit the event to be forgotten.⁵⁵

And yet elsewhere Caruth refers to 'the special truth' of the survivors in terms of the symptoms of trauma, which involve terrifying nightmares, flashbacks, and unintended 'relivings' of the trauma. By dichotomising 'forgetting' with 'remembering', as she does here, Caruth not only simplifies Freud's early work on trauma, but also resists the idea that the alternative to 'forgetting' might not be simple remembering, but reliving, or repetition. Paradoxically, this kind of traumatic memory is the cornerstone of her theory. Seen in the light of LaCapra's distinction between mourning and melancholia, or working through and acting out, the issue of memory versus forgetting becomes a good deal more complex. The working-through of memories of a lost loved one in 'Mourning and Melancholia', for example, is seen as a precondition not for forgetting what has been lost, but for finding a new outlet for libidinal energy. Unable to 'work through' such

⁵⁵ Caruth, 'Preface', *Trauma* vii.

memories may ultimately lead to such energy being turned upon the mourner him or herself, resulting in melancholia.⁵⁶

Later in *Trauma* Caruth returns to the same point, but here she makes more explicit the ways in which 'cure' would ultimately contravene the historical imperative to testify by distorting the literality of trauma. Drawing on Janet, via van der Kolk, Caruth writes that:

The trauma thus requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure. But on the other hand, 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. [. . .] The possibility of integration into memory and the consciousness of history thus raises the question, van der Kolk and van der Hart ultimately observe, "whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past?"⁵⁷

⁵⁶ In 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud remarks that when the melancholic mourner chastises himself for being 'petty, egoistic, dishonest' etc. 'he has come pretty near to understanding himself'. '[W]e only wonder', Freud continues, 'why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind' 255. Although the subject-matter is quite different, Freud hints here (albeit flippantly) at a connection between pathology and truth (or self-knowledge) that emerges more forcefully in Caruth's and Felman's theories of possession.

⁵⁷ Caruth, 'Recapturing the Past: Introduction', *Trauma* 153-54.

This view may ultimately lead to a refusal to allow or enable the witness to integrate traumatic memories into 'the reassuring terms of therapy' because those conciliatory frames are precisely what the antirealist approach opposes. If the symptoms of PTSD can be relieved by a process of working through which would allow them to become part of 'narrative memory', then Caruth seems to suggest here that it is 'cure' that will ultimately prove sacrilegious. This is one of Ruth Leys's primary objections to Caruth's and van der Kolk's theories: 'if, as van der Kolk sometimes appears to propose, the narration of the traumatic memory is essential to cure PTSD, the narrative treatment is carried out at the cost of falsifying the traumatic origin'.⁵⁸ Summarising Caruth's position, Leys indicates the resistance to cure that her theories presuppose: 'if history is a symptom of trauma it is a symptom which must not, indeed cannot, be cured but simply transmitted, passed on. "[T]he traumatic nature of history", Caruth sweepingly writes, "means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others"'.⁵⁹ And they implicate others, we might add, only to the extent that the pathology at the heart of trauma is maintained.

In his essays in *Testimony* Dori Laub's approach differs slightly from Felman's in that he places a much

⁵⁸ Leys 251.

greater emphasis on the therapeutic efficacy of testimony in the quasi-analytic setting of the interviewing situation. He also refers more specifically to the witness, whereas when Felman writes of 'liberating testimony' and the 'bursting of the secret', she significantly omits to allude to the speaking subject.⁶⁰ Laub appears to be more concerned with the process of testimony as the coming into possession of the story by which the witness has previously been possessed: 'One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life', he writes, 'repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which has to actually pass through, in order to complete the process of survival after liberation'.⁶¹

Refusing to distinguish between testimony as history and testimony as therapy, Laub clearly regards the two aims as equally important: 'The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive'.⁶² But perhaps the most important theoretical distinction between Laub's and Felman's theories is that Laub appears to conceive of traumatic memories sometimes in terms of repression as opposed to dissociation. This is a crucial

⁵⁹ Leys 273.

⁶⁰ Felman, Felman and Laub xix.

⁶¹ Laub, Felman and Laub 78, 85.

⁶² Laub, Felman and Laub 78. See also Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora,

distinction because it is the very 'literalness' of traumatic memories characterised by dissociation that permits the process of historical transmission. Memories untold for long periods of time can, Laub suggests here, lead to a distortion of the truth of the event: 'The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of actual events'.⁶³ Whereas when Caruth maintains that it may be a 'sacrilege' to distort traumatic memories through narrative consolation it is not clear whether what is at stake is the well-being of the witness or the integrity of the historical 'event' which they bear within, for the psychoanalyst (and Holocaust survivor) Laub, historical transmission is secondary to the survivor's health.

One of the risks of the psychoanalytically-informed antirealist approach is that it may potentially invalidate those survivor testimonies that do not 'make us encounter strangeness' or that employ traditional narrative (or redemptive) devices. Rothberg makes this point in *Traumatic Realism*, where he suggests that Langer's strictly antirealist project:

1992) 175-95, where Herman discusses the therapeutic benefits of storytelling.

⁶³ Laub, Felman and Laub 79.

ultimately leads [him] to exclude [. . .] all experiential evidence that does not fit his thesis. Any testimony that might support the idea of a continuity between the experience of the concentrationary universe and the values of the outside world is dismissed, as are any accounts that deny the ultimate contamination of the survivor's post-Holocaust world by the death-world of mass murder.⁶⁴

LaCapra attests that both Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies* 'are concerned with victims as victims, not as survivors or agents'.⁶⁵

A variation on this problem was also at the root of criticism about the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. The Foundation was charged with 'Hollywoodising' the Holocaust on the grounds that interviewees were being encouraged to close with an account of their lives since liberation, and to invite family members to appear on screen with them.⁶⁶ Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) was also charged with misrepresenting the Holocaust by attempting to represent it at all, as well as with imposing a redemptive ending in the form of a narrative 'resolution'. The distinction between the Shoah Foundation and the Yale archive is, to an extent,

⁶⁴ Rothberg 121-22.

⁶⁵ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 98.

⁶⁶ Fisher, 'Spielberg's Shoah Project': D01.

emblematised by the distinction between the critical receptions of *Schindler's List* and Lanzmann's *Shoah*, albeit less polarised.⁶⁷

In their readings of Claude Lanzmann's acclaimed 1985 film *Shoah* both Caruth and Felman identify the cinematographic model for their theories of historical transmission. '*Shoah* is a film made exclusively of testimonies', writes Felman in what LaCapra has referred to as 'the authorized reading of *Shoah*' on account of Lanzmann's (rare) favourable reception to it.⁶⁸ *Shoah* is an astonishing accomplishment: it took over ten years to make and lasts for nine and a half hours. It consists of interviews with former victims of the Holocaust, perpetrators, and bystanders and contains no archival footage or documentation. Lanzmann insists that *Shoah* is not a documentary for this reason and that it absolutely refuses to attempt any kind of historical representation. Lanzmann is vehement on this point because for him the very project of representation, the project of 'understanding' is 'obscene'. Lanzmann made this clear in a talk he gave to the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis at

⁶⁷ Miriam Bratu Hansen, for example, writes of 'the persuasive polarization of critical argument into the opposition between [the two films] as two mutually exclusive paradigms of cinematically representing or not-representing the Holocaust'. '*Schindler's List* is not *Shoah*: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory', *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): 294.

⁶⁸ Felman, 'In an Era of Testimony': 40. Dominick LaCapra, 'Lanzmann's *Shoah*: "Here There Is No Why"', *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997): 245.

Yale University in 1990.⁶⁹ The purpose of the talk was originally to present a screening of a film about the Nazi doctor Eduard Wirths followed by a discussion. After viewing the film privately, however, Lanzmann decided not to screen the film and the discussion which ensued was focussed on this refusal.

In a brief preface Caruth explains that Lanzmann's objection to the film was based on what he felt to be the film's 'attempt to gain understanding of the Holocaust' through a psychological exploration of Wirth's later ambivalence towards his previous 'Nazi activities'.⁷⁰ Lanzmann felt that the film was 'an attempt to rehabilitate the image of a Nazi'.⁷¹ His refusal to screen the film is typical of the antirealist, antirepresentational approach; it parallels Langer's dismissal of redemptive narratives and Caruth's dismissal of the 'reassuring terms of therapy'. For Lanzmann the refusal to attempt to understand the question, for example, 'Why have the Jews been killed', 'is the only possible ethical and at the same time the only possible operative attitude'.⁷² Instead Lanzmann insists on

⁶⁹ A transcript of the talk, entitled 'The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann' can be found, along with its introduction by Felman and preface by Caruth, in Caruth, *Trauma* 200-20.

⁷⁰ Caruth, 'Preface', 'The Obscenity of Understanding', *Trauma* 200-01.

⁷¹ Lanzmann, 'The Obscenity of Understanding', *Trauma* 209.

⁷² Claude Lanzmann, '"Hier ist kein Warum"', *Au Sujet de Shoah--Le Film de Claude Lanzmann*, ed. Bernard Cuau et al. (Paris: Berlin, 1990), cited in Caruth, 'Recapturing the Past: Introduction', *Trauma* 155. Lanzmann is particularly vehement in his opposition to *Schindler's List* too, see Lanzmann, 'Why Spielberg Has Distorted the Truth', *Guardian Weekly* 3 April 1994: 14. See also Yosefa Loshitzky, ed.,

the necessity of transmission over representation and, as the closest possible enactment of Caruth's and Felman's theories, *Shoah* is open to some of the same problems as their theories.

For Caruth, Lanzmann's refusal to understand 'is not a denial of a knowledge of the past, but rather a way of gaining access to a knowledge that has not yet attained the form of "narrative memory"'.⁷³ Felman emphasises the ways in which 'psychoanalysis is crucially relevant to the film' (and vice versa) and comments on 'the amazing psychoanalytic presence of Claude Lanzmann on the screen'.⁷⁴ And yet other commentators have criticised Lanzmann's approach, focussing in particular on his insistence that witnesses relive traumatic events for the sake of the historical transmission. LaCapra makes the appropriate psychoanalytic analogy again by pointing out that 'by *transmission* Lanzmann means not only testimony but also--and more insistently--incarnation, actual reliving, or what would in psychoanalytic terminology be called acting-out'.⁷⁵ Others have contested Lanzmann's absolute refusal of representation and have indicated the ways in

Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁷³ Caruth, 'Recapturing the Past: Introduction', *Trauma* 155.

⁷⁴ Felman, 'Introduction', 'The Obscenity of Understanding', *Trauma* 202.

⁷⁵ Dominick LaCapra, 'Lanzmann's *Shoah*: "Here There is No Why"': 237.

which, with its careful editing and staging of 'reality', *Shoah* does not entirely enact this refusal.⁷⁶

The prime focus of criticism has been on the scene in *Shoah* where Lanzmann encourages the survivor-witness Abraham Bomba to relive his experiences in a concentration camp.⁷⁷ A barber by profession, Bomba's task in Treblinka was to cut women's hair before they entered the gas chamber. Lanzmann had interviewed Bomba prior to the filming and claims that although he 'did not know what would happen' he 'knew what [he] wanted him to say'.⁷⁸ Lanzmann rented a barbershop in Tel Aviv for the interview and pushed Bomba to answer his questions despite the interviewee's protestations and to a crisis-point.

Lanzmann considers this one of his most successful interviews, but viewers have found the scene--which amounts to a reliving or a reenactment--profoundly disturbing. Not only was the scene staged in a highly self-conscious way (giving lie perhaps to the strictly antirepresentational

⁷⁶ See for example Rothberg 127. Rothberg also points out that Lanzmann goes so far as to edit a witness's stammer out of the film 241. Langer also comments on this: in an endnote he uses the *Shoah* witness Filip Müller's written testimony as an example of the ways in which the editing of written accounts means that there is no guarantee, as there is in oral testimony, that 'every word spoken falls directly from the lips of the witness'. But the following note adds that in the *Shoah* interview Lanzmann had 'edited out [Müller's] speech impediments with a technological dexterity that must have been nothing short of Herculean' Langer 210.

⁷⁷ Not all commentary on this scene has been negative. Felman writes admiringly of it and Ewa Kuryluk describes Lanzmann's interview with Bomba as 'particularly moving', 'Memory and Responsibility: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*', *The New Criterion* 4:3 (1985): 18. See also Nora Levin 'Some Reservations about Lanzmann's *Shoah*' *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* 18 April 1986: 89-93.

project), but the retraumatisation of Abraham Bomba as he relives the experience of cutting the hair of women from his village prior to their deaths throws into question Lanzmann's insistence on accessing the truth at the cost of the witness's 'comfort'. Indeed, Felman writes approvingly that what Lanzmann avoids 'above all' 'is an alliance with the silence of the witness, the kind of empathic and benevolent alliance through which interviewer and interviewee often implicitly concur, and work together, for the mutual comfort of an avoidance of the truth'.⁷⁹ When in *Shoah* Simon Srebnik is taken back to the village in Chelmno through which he had passed as a boy incarcerated in the camp there and there erupts a startling anti-Semitic outburst among the villagers, Felman states that at this point in the film 'we are made to witness this reenactment of the murder of the witness'.⁸⁰ Lanzmann has explicitly stated that one of his aims in *Shoah* was to 'resuscitate' those who died alone during the Holocaust, 'to kill them a second time, with me; by accompanying them'.⁸¹

In Lanzmann's insistence that the suffering of witnesses can be transmitted to himself and to viewers of the film LaCapra sees the signs of a troubling empathic identification with the victims of the Holocaust that comes

⁷⁸ Claude Lanzmann, 'Seminar with Claude Lanzmann 11 April 1990', ed. Claire Nouvet, spec. issue of *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 95.

⁷⁹ Felman, 'In an Era of Testimony': 53.

⁸⁰ Felman, 'In an Era of Testimony': 68.

close to the pathological in itself. Not only would Lanzmann's 'full identification' with the victim allow him 'to act out trauma vicariously in the self as surrogate victim' but also, by insisting 'on having the victim relive traumatizing events' Lanzmann may be 'concealing [his] own intrusiveness in asking questions that prod the victim to the point of breakdown'.⁸² Referring to Nicholas Abraham's and Maria Torok's theories of incorporation (to which I will return later), LaCapra suggests that Lanzmann may be incorporating the painful experiences of witnesses rather than merely identifying with them: 'Fully empathic identification with people and places enabled Lanzmann to feel that he was reliving--indeed suffering through--a past he had never in fact lived. He would even be phantasmically able to die other's deaths with them'.⁸³

Also problematic in Lanzmann's concept of transmission is the assumption that this theory can be applied to former victims, bystanders and perpetrators alike.⁸⁴ Although Lanzmann varies his technique slightly in each case (he

⁸¹ Claude Lanzmann, 'Les Non-lieux de la Mémoire', *Au Sujet de Shoah* cited by LaCapra 'Lanzmann's Shoah': 291 .

⁸² LaCapra, 'Lanzmann's Shoah': 245.

⁸³ LaCapra, 'Lanzmann's Shoah': 250, 255, 264. For a different view see Michael S. Roth, 'Shoah as Shivah', *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 226, where Roth sees Lanzmann's desire to accompany the victims through their deaths as a 'highly meritorious act'.

⁸⁴ Ruth Leys suggests this is also a problem with Caruth's reading of the story of Tancred and Clorinda in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*. By making of Tancred--the inadvertent murderer--an example of traumatic memory, Caruth seems to imply that perpetrators are subject to the same post-traumatic effects as victims, a suggestion that Leys considers to have grave implications when these theories are applied to an understanding of Holocaust witnesses, Leys 292-97.

interviews victims beforehand, for example, but does not do this with perpetrators), the theory that an irreducible 'secret' truth can be accessed using quasi-psychoanalytic techniques applies to all of the interviewees. And yet this theory is based on an understanding of the ways in which memory functions in cases of PTSD and so ought not necessarily apply to all of Lanzmann's interviewees, arguably not even to all former victims of the Holocaust.

Ewa Kuryluk writes that watching *Shoah* demonstrates how 'memory [. . .] goes with assuming responsibility, and forgetting goes with avoiding it'.⁸⁵ Lanzmann's intrusive (even deceptive) interviewing techniques with perpetrators confirm this view and lend it the status of justice and truth-seeking at the cost of the comfort of secrecy or forgetting. But while this works very well with the perpetrators, who 'forget' crucial instances of their complicity, and with bystanders who saw only what they wanted to see, it is less justifiable in the case of former victims who may have different reasons for secrecy or forgetting. The ethics of this antirealist project appear questionable when the extent of its dependence on pathology and continued suffering becomes clear.

In Chapter One I raised the question of agency in relation to Felman's and Caruth's theories of 'indirect' historical representation. *Shoah* also poses such questions,

⁸⁵ Kuryluk: 15.

particularly in its emphasis on the 'inadvertent' or 'unwitting' testimonies that Lanzmann manages to elicit. As Lanzmann himself says, despite the fact that *Shoah* is composed almost entirely of oral testimony:

There is no personal story in [*Shoah*]. [. . .] None of the survivors in *Shoah* speaks in the first person singular, none tells his or her own story. The hairdresser does not say how he escaped from Treblinka after spending three months in the camp. I was not interested in that, and neither was he. He says "we". He speaks for the dead. He is their spokesman.⁸⁶

The implications of the transmission theory for written testimony are clear, especially for those testimonies which do attempt a 'realist' representation of first person experiences or which attempt at least some form of narrative resolution. The theory of transmission seems not only to depend on pathology, but also, and crucially, on the lack of agency caused by this pathology. Ruth Leys points out that in Caruth's reading of the literal return of the event in Freud's work on recurring nightmares in cases of traumatic neuroses:

traumatic dreams are not autobiographically or subjectively mediated or owned by the

⁸⁶ Claude Lanzmann, 'Why Spielberg has Distorted the Truth', *Guardian Weekly* 3 April 1994.

individual; rather the "self"--which can hardly be characterized as a self any longer--is possessed by the traumatic dream, which thus bypasses all representation by impersonally memorializing and chronicling the historical truth of the traumatic origin.⁸⁷

Although in *Holocaust Testimonies* Langer is wary of written testimonies, and sceptical about the extent to which they may avoid the narrative trappings designed to console or redeem, in Charlotte Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz and After* he finds a model written testimony. In his preface to Delbo's memoir Langer frames the text with his insistence that this is no mere first-person account of the Holocaust, but that instead readers are to understand this memoir as unmediated reference, untainted by either the agency of the witness or by the distortions of 'normal' memory.

In her introduction to *Auschwitz and After*, the translator Rosette C. Lamont discusses Delbo's impassioned desire to bear witness to the atrocities she witnessed at Auschwitz and the narrative mode through which she strives to 'raise the past from its ashes'.⁸⁸ Delbo, Lamont writes, is a 'privileged witness'.⁸⁹ Langer's preface outlines the metaphors that Delbo uses to convey her experience of Auschwitz. The metaphors revolve around a theory of

⁸⁷ Leys 273.

⁸⁸ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont, introd. Lawrence Langer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) vii.

⁸⁹ Lamont in *Auschwitz and After* vii.

dédoublement or doubling of selves past and present, and of memory 'ordinaire' and 'profonde' or external and internal.⁹⁰ 'Auschwitz is there, unalterable, precise', Delbo writes, 'but enveloped in the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it from my present self. Unlike the snake's skin, the skin of memory does not renew itself'.⁹¹ *Mémoire ordinaire*, or as Langer calls it 'common memory', is the memory of everyday life: 'It frees us from the pain of remembering the unthinkable'. *Mémoire profonde* (deep memory), however, lies beneath the thick 'skin of memory', reminding us 'that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be'.⁹² When Delbo speaks of Auschwitz, she says, she is drawing on 'external' or 'thinking' memory.⁹³ But the first volume of *Auschwitz and After*, according to Langer, is written in such a way that it provides access to--indeed speaks from--the *mémoire profonde* which lies preserved beneath the skin of memory.⁹⁴

Delbo's distinction between common and deep memory--which Langer takes up in more detail in *Holocaust Testimonies*--is to an extent analogous with the psychoanalytic distinction between the conscious and the unconscious: it is a metaphor of dissociation. In Delbo's account the skin of memory, although tough and usually

⁹⁰ Langer in *Auschwitz and After* xi.

⁹¹ Delbo, cited by Langer in *Auschwitz and After* xi.

⁹² Langer in *Auschwitz and After* xi.

⁹³ Delbo, cited by Langer in *Auschwitz and After* xiii.

⁹⁴ Langer in *Auschwitz and After* xiii-xiv.

concealed by the quotidian common memory, 'gives way' in dreams and nightmares, in keeping with Freud's concept of the 'returning traumatic dream' which thwarts his theory of the pleasure principle and wish-fulfilment:

Over dreams the conscious will has no power.
 And in those dreams I see myself, yes, my own
 self such as I know I was: hardly able to stand
 on my feet [. . .] the suffering I feel is so
 unbearable, so identical to the pain I endured,
 that I feel it physically.⁹⁵

For Langer, however, this no mere description of a terrifyingly realistic nightmare of the past: 'In spite of her insistence that she is describing a nightmare, Delbo has found a genre of discourse to pierce the skin of memory'.⁹⁶ The piercing of this skin is not in Langer's view just a psychical or even a physical effect, but a narrative one. And yet this 'genre of discourse', which refigures the conscious/ unconscious distinction as a

⁹⁵ Delbo xiii.

⁹⁶ Langer in *Auschwitz and After* xiii. Langer's use of the word 'pierce' recalls Roland Barthes's work on photography. Barthes distinguishes between two different ways of experiencing a photograph: by 'studium' (to appreciate, but 'without special acuity' 26) and by 'punctum' (to be wounded, pricked, pierced by an image: 'it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out like an arrow, and pierces me' 26). To some extent this could be refigured as the difference between representation and transmission, in terms of effect. Langer seems to suggest that Delbo has written in such a way that the *studium* is subordinate to the *punctum*, creating an effect where the actuality of the referent leaps out and wounds the reader in the way that Barthes's photograph of his mother in the Winter Garden 'pricks' him 67-73. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans, Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993).

physical boundary which can be breached entails, according to Langer, an *eschewal* of narrative:

The first volume of *Auschwitz and After* shuns the narrative impulse, with its dependence on reflection, and forges instead a remarkable style of direct confrontation that lures us into the maelstrom of atrocity while simultaneously drowning all intellectual defenses.⁹⁷

The translator's preface to *Auschwitz and After* makes it clear that it is not just the narrative impulse which is 'shunned' or strangely absent in Delbo's text, but also the author. She writes:

In order to bear and bare the unbearable, Charlotte struggled to render her style unobtrusive, almost transparent. Because she wrote from the extreme edge of being, she sought never to attract attention to the manner in which she expressed herself. How she said was only important because of what she had to say. The Holocaust experience, which she described as "the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century", spoke through her as its messenger.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Langer in *Auschwitz and After* xiv.

⁹⁸ Lamont in *Auschwitz and After* vii.

Delbo's style is sparse and raw and, as Langer suggests, confronts the atrocity with a startling directness, but does this amount, as Langer claims, to a 'shunning' of the narrative impulse?⁹⁹ Langer's suggestion that she writes directly from deep memory--*in spite of her insistence that she is simply describing a nightmare--sits oddly with the simultaneous claim that she has 'forged' a 'remarkable style of direct confrontation'* and with Lamont's description of the ways in which Delbo 'struggled' to render her prose unobtrusive. Is Delbo, then, to be seen as a 'medium' for events which speak through her by way of her 'transparent' prose, or is she instead to be seen as an author 'forging' a narrative that would create this impression? In other words is Delbo, as author, present or not? Although Delbo's agency is implied, both Langer and Lamont appear to be arguing for her absence. There is a clear relationship here between Delbo's status as, on the one hand, *privileged witness* and on the other, as *medium* for historical truth, between this claim to a greater *authority* and the simultaneously implied lack of authorial *agency*.

Recent theories of trauma, informed by poststructuralism and psychoanalysis pose pressing

⁹⁹ Michael Rothberg suggests that Delbo's 'poetic prose' is a striking example of what he calls 'traumatic realism', that is 'a realism in which the scars that mark the relationship of discourse to the real are not fetishistically denied, but exposed; a realism in which the

questions of equal relevance to genre theorists and historiographers as to clinicians or trauma theorists, especially since for Caruth and Felman the traumatic has become less and less localised and specific and extends to an understanding of history more generally. These theories presuppose that the pervasiveness of models of trauma and recovery leads to a renewed emphasis on psychoanalysis in literary theory, but how, we might ask, does psychoanalysis unsettle the autobiographical project? How might the alliance of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism lead to a privileging of the pathological, making of traumatic memory an ineluctable paradigm of historical transmission?

Paradoxically, the shift away from realism in theories like Felman's and Caruth's depends on a strictly mimetic, literal account of historical transmission--one that bypasses language, subjectivity, and agency and yet nevertheless depends on first-person eyewitness accounts of trauma. This extreme privileging of the ontology of survivor testimony is at odds with the attendant aversion to subjectively mediated narrative.

It is interesting to consider the consequences of the pathology-truth connection for autobiography both as a genre of truth-telling and as a potential medium for testimonies of trauma. Psychoanalysis, in Caruth's and Felman's work on trauma almost seems to serve as a tool for

claims of reference live on, but so does the traumatic extremity that

the perpetuation of the poststructuralist declaration of autobiography's impossibility. And yet although LaCapra and, in different ways, Rothberg seek a way around or out of such impasses of trauma theory, their suggested approaches do not quite have the impact of Felman and Caruth's claims for the ultimate, ineffable truth, literality, or mimesis of testimony.

A further consideration here is the question of transgenerational accounts of trauma. There are several parallels between theories like Abraham and Torok's 1970s revisioning of psychoanalysis in *The Shell and the Kernel* and Caruth's and Felman's theories of possession and transmission. In the following section I explore the parallels between the theories of possession that have been the focus of this section and those of transgenerational haunting, and consider the ways in which second generation Holocaust testimony, in particular, may shed some light from a literary perspective on the complicated ethics of appropriation and the problematic connection between truth and pathology that I have discussed here.

3. Transgenerational Haunting: A Relational Symptomatology

I sign twice, under my father's name. Once next to the word "Owner", and then next to the word "Daughter".¹⁰⁰

'Legacies', the first chapter of Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, begins at her father's deathbed and with a lesson on memory. The 'diabetic delirium' her father enters in the final throes of death effects a temporal and geographical shift as the hospital becomes, for him, the SS camp where he was interned during the Holocaust, and his daughter the potential aid to his escape.¹⁰¹ This is less a memory than it is a kind of time-travel, a psychical but virtual return to the past: 'He hadn't talked of the war years since my childhood. Yet at the end, they were there intact--like some wilfully obscured and venomous secret, which all his later experience couldn't obliterate'.¹⁰² The ease of the return, the meticulous preservation of not just the memory, but of the 'war years' themselves, and their stubborn refusal to erode, provides both a poignant reminder of the tenacity of traumatic events and an optimistic, if not impossible, paradigm of memory. 'I am all too aware that my parents' past is a narrative in a foreign and forgotten language', writes Appignanesi.¹⁰³ Yet if the exile from that (here both literal and metaphorical)

¹⁰⁰ Mary Gordon, *The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search for her Father* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 272.

¹⁰¹ Lisa Appignanesi, *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (1999; London: Vintage, 2000) 4.

¹⁰² Appignanesi 4.

foreign country of the past is to be bemoaned, the virtual time and space-defeating memory of her father offers no alternative. His is not the romantic and sentimental brand of involuntary memory evoked by the Proustian madeleine, where 'the vast structure of recollection' springs miraculously out of a mere cup of tea.¹⁰⁴ The traumatic memory is quite literally involuntary, unbidden, unwelcome and Appignanesi's father is possessed by its force.

In Chapter One I discussed the implications of Appignanesi's revision of her mother's wartime history, exploring the ways in which *Losing the Dead*, and certain other contemporary memoirs, seem to be caught intractably between personal history and 'history'. Appignanesi considered her mother's story to be 'devoid of history' and sought to replace it with an account which balanced the subjective experience with the official historical record, the 'congealed' memories and stories told too often with a more 'truthful' narrative that would allow for different interpretations of events. As well as being a relational auto/biography and an exploration of the limits of history and personal narrative, *Losing the Dead* is also an account of what Appignanesi explicitly refers to as 'transgenerational haunting'.

¹⁰³ Appignanesi 81.

¹⁰⁴ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past: 1*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (1954; London: Penguin, 1989) 51.

The deathbed scene with which Appignanesi introduces her memoir introduces a memory-model which bears no resemblance to either the recovery model or the reconstruction model which I discussed in the previous chapter. Instead Appignanesi's father's 'diabetic delirium' initiates a process of memory that could more accurately fit into descriptions of PTSD discussed in the previous section. Despite his silence on the subject of his wartime experiences for most of Appignanesi's life, her father's dying words reveal him to have been possessed by a traumatic experience that was never fully resolved or worked-through and that returned to haunt him. It is interesting that Appignanesi chose to begin her memoir here: juxtaposed with her ensuing quest for memory, her father's ventriloquism--the war years speak through him--is an ideal type of autobiographical recall that her own endeavours could never match. And yet this brief introduction to Appignanesi's memoir illustrates more effectively than the theories of Caruth and Felman the personal cost that the status of privileged witnessing may exact.

Paul John Eakin writes of relational autobiography that 'the story of the self, the "I", is subordinated to the story of some other for whom the self serves as

privileged witness'.¹⁰⁵ Although Eakin does not refer to Caruth's and Felman's theories of possession, or to Delbo's position as 'privileged witness' to the Holocaust, in what follows I explore the ways in which theories of possession might inform a reading of certain second generation Holocaust testimonies and even some less theoretically informed relational auto/biographies. In this section, by exploring the parallels between transgenerational haunting and possession, I seek to unsettle notions of privilege and pathology and to investigate the ways in which problems of authority and agency in accounts of an other's life might be both mitigated and problematised by these theories.

Although the term transgenerational haunting has become almost common currency in discussions of second generation Holocaust survivors, this metapsychological theory was first developed by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok in the 1970s. As a concept, transgenerational haunting extends across their work, featuring in their discussions of mourning and melancholia, of identifications both normative and pathological, and also of their readings of certain key works of literature.¹⁰⁶ It has its roots in

¹⁰⁵ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 58.

¹⁰⁶ See for example *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand, *Theory and History of Literature* 37 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). They also provide an interesting reading of *Hamlet* in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1978), ed. trans. and introd. Nicholas Rand, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and in Abraham, 'The Phantom of Hamlet or the Sixth Act: Preceded by the Intermission of "Truth"', *diacritics* 18:4 (winter 1988): 2-19. Esther Rashkin has developed the

Freud's metapsychology, but seeks to extend Freud's concepts of the return of the repressed, of mourning and melancholia, and of the unconscious more generally, by focussing on the transgenerational aspect of psychic trauma--an aspect which was hinted at, but never extended into a full theory, by Freud.¹⁰⁷ Whereas Freud coherently theorised the ways in which the unconscious functions as an 'other' in the psychic system, Abraham and Torok conceive of a more literal way in which to theorise the unconscious as other. In their concept of transgenerational haunting the unconscious psychic relics of a parent can be transmitted to the unconscious of the child without ever having passed through consciousness. They refer to such relics as 'secrets', but these are not secrets wilfully withheld, but rather unarticulable traumas unknowingly

theories of Abraham and Torok as 'tools' for literary criticism, applying their theories of haunting, phantoms, and cryptonymy to several works of Gothic literature. See *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and 'Tools for a New Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism: The Work of Abraham and Torok', *Diacritics* 18 (1988): 31-52. See also Allan Lloyd Smith, 'The Phantoms of *Drood* and *Rebecca*: The Uncanny Reencountered through Abraham and Torok's "Cryptonymy"', *Poetics Today* 13:2 (summer 1992): 285-308, and Christopher Lane, 'The Testament of the Other: Abraham and Torok's Failed Expiation of Ghosts', *diacritics* 27:4 (winter 1997): 3-29. I give just a brief overview of Abraham's and Torok's substantial theories here, focussing on similar aspects throughout their work in order to concisely summarise their position and to focus on the parallels between theories of possession discussed in the previous section and the theory of transgenerational haunting.

¹⁰⁷ Freud commented that 'the Ucs. of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the Cs. [. . .] the fact is incontestable', 'The Unconscious' (1915), *On Metapsychology*, PFL 11, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1990) 198-99. In 'The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis: A Contribution to the Problem of Choice of Neurosis' 1913, *On Psychopathology*, PFL 10, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1993) 137-38, Freud remarks on the ways in which the unconscious of one person can affect the unconscious of another, but

transmitted. The trauma may then activate symptoms in the child to whom it is transmitted. As Abraham and Torok write:

Should a child have a parent "with secrets", parents whose speech is not exactly complementary to their unstated repressions, the child will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge--a nescience--subjected to a form of "repression" before the fact. The buried speech of the parent will be (a) dead (gap) without a burial place in the child. This unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host and may led to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effect can persist through several generations and determine the fate of an entire family line.¹⁰⁸

Although instead of privileged mediumistic witnesses or *Geheimnisträger*, Abraham and Torok focus on the 'cryptophore'--a bearer of *someone else's* secrets--there are some striking similarities between the theories of possession I discussed in the previous section and Abraham's and Torok's concept of transgenerational haunting.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the emphasis on transmission in Felman's and Caruth's theories appears to be an endorsement

not specifically on the kind of unconscious transmission of which Abraham and Torok refer.

¹⁰⁸ Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 140n.

¹⁰⁹ Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 158.

of the situation described as so pathological and damaging in Abraham's and Torok's account.

The distinction between repression and dissociation I discussed earlier in relation to theories of PTSD is also found in Abraham's and Torok's work, although they refer not to dissociation but to 'preservative repression'. Like dissociation and in contrast to 'dynamic' repression 'Preservative repression seals off access to part of one's own life in order to shelter from view the traumatic monument of an obliterated event'.¹¹⁰ The secrets are 'encrypted' and are not locatable within narrative memory--of which, as in the theory of possession, they have never been a part: 'It is memory entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection'.¹¹¹ As in Caruth's and Felman's theories, the secret has a privileged relationship to truth and is considered unassimilable to knowledge prior to the analytic encounter.¹¹² Abraham and Torok also emphasise the necessity for a reliving of the event or secret, as opposed to a mere telling and yet they differ from Caruth and Felman in that they place particular emphasis on the possibility of cure through the analytic work.¹¹³ In Caruth's view, which is influenced by van der Kolk, the narrativising of the dissociated traumatic material would result in an alleviation of symptoms at the

¹¹⁰ Rand in *The Shell and the Kernel* 18.

¹¹¹ Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 141.

¹¹² Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 157.

cost of the truth of the literal registration of the event. But although Abraham and Torok refer to dissociated material as 'encrypted' (which may parallel the idea of a literal registration taking place outside of language) they reject the Lacanian theory of a complete separation between signifier and referent and work towards the possibility of what they refer to as 'decrypting' or 'demetaphorisation'.¹¹⁴ Distinguishing also between the 'crypt' (where one's own encrypted secrets are held) and the 'phantom' (the return of someone else's 'repressed'), they attempt to theorise both a process of 'decrypting' and also one which would allow the 'weakening' of the phantom. The aim is to 'restore to speech' that which has been encrypted or that which silently haunts.¹¹⁵

For Abraham and Torok the phantom, or the secret, is an 'obstacle to self-making', a barrier to the normative process of identification.¹¹⁶ They distinguish between introjection and incorporation, making it clear that incorporation--which is to introjection what melancholia is to 'normal' mourning--is the pathological variant of identification.¹¹⁷ And as incorporation is synonymous, for Abraham and Torok, with 'preservative repression', then to

¹¹³ Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 158-59.

¹¹⁴ Rand, Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 17, 22, 105.

¹¹⁵ Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 108.

¹¹⁶ I discuss this in more detail in the following section.

¹¹⁷ Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 102.

be possessed by someone else's secrets is a barrier to self-knowledge and to the construction of a life history.¹¹⁸

Some second generation Holocaust testimonies, like Appignanesi's, reveal an explicit awareness of and interest in issues of transgenerational haunting. Memoirs such as Anne Karpf's *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (1996) and Helen Fremont's *After Long Silence: A Woman's Search for her Family's Secret Identity* (1999) involve a confrontation with the traumatic pasts of the authors' parents as well as with the effect of these persisting traumas within themselves. These memoirs also quite explicitly figure the disclosure of parental secrets and the revision of their histories as therapeutic necessities. Appignanesi and Karpf, in particular, are aware that their family histories are inextricably entwined with pathologies connected to unresolved traumas. Anne Karpf refers to PTSD as 'the second generation syndrome' and Lisa Appignanesi refers specifically to 'transgenerational haunting':

The psychological tropes, the ways of confronting and filtering experience, which structured [my parents'] lives grew largely out of the war and subsequent immigration. I suspect they passed these patterns on to my brother and me, as surely as they passed on their genes and with as little choosing.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Rand in *The Shell and the Kernel* 102.

¹¹⁹ Appignanesi 8.

'Memory, like history, is uncontrollable', writes Appignanesi, 'It manifests itself in unruly ways. It cascades through the generations in a series of misplaced fears, mysterious wounds, odd habits. The child inhabits the texture of these fears and habits, without knowing they are memory'.¹²⁰ During prayers for the victims of the Holocaust at the Yad Vashem, Karpf recalls the way in which:

I began to sob in a way which made me feel uncomfortable. I was crying so personally over something which hadn't happened to me. It seemed then as if I hadn't lived the central experience of my life--at its heart, at mine, was an absence.¹²¹

Her life, she writes, 'seemed to shape itself inexorably around duress and escape, around imminent catastrophe [. . .] I made an internal concentration camp of my own and acted as both commandant and inmate. With an awful involuntary mimetic obsession, I constantly replayed the act of surviving'.¹²² Helen Fremont, in her family history project, describes a similar phenomenon.¹²³ When Karpf's

¹²⁰ Appignanesi 8.

¹²¹ Anne Karpf, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (1996; London: Minerva, 1997) 146. See also Henry Raczymow, 'Memory Shot Through with Holes', trans. Alan Astro, *Yale French Studies* 0:85 (1994): 98-105.

¹²² Karpf 253.

¹²³ Helen Fremont, *After Long Silence: A Woman's Search for her Family's Secret Identity* (London: Piatkus, 1999) 119.

parents object to her relationship with a gentile man--her mother claiming that in refusing to propagate Jewish children she was completing the task Hitler set out to accomplish--Karpf suffers a debilitating outbreak of excema on her hands and arms. She relates these recurring outbreaks to the expression of unspeakable emotions, referring to 'That elegant spokesperson, my body'.¹²⁴

My rage towards my parents, interned for decades, began to venture out, and it felt utterly consuming and murderous [. . .] but if my unconscious self was trying to articulate its distress, it spoke in a language my conscious self couldn't comprehend, much less converse in.¹²⁵

Her symptomatic 'eruptions' appear to have no place in language: the trauma bypasses her conscious mind in its haste to articulate itself across her body as in traditional concepts of hysteria (a term which Karpf vehemently rejects when finding her situation described in psychological journals). And yet at other times, the unconscious appears so utterly readable that it cannot be taken seriously:

After years of my scratching, a close friend asked whether the place on my inside forearm

¹²⁴ Karpf 101.

that I was repeatedly injuring wasn't on the same place, indeed the very same arm, where my mother's concentration camp number was inked. I was astonished. It had never occurred to me that the unconscious could go in for such crude symbolism [. . .] it seemed like a base attempt to endow my own flimsy desolation with historical gravitas and dignify it by reference to my mother's. (I remain unconvinced.)¹²⁶

Here Karpf rejects the simplicity of the connection between pathology and truth, and the psychoanalytic explanation that might 'dignify' her symptoms with history. The very literalness of the symbolism, which appears to need no 'decrypting' or 'demetaphorisation' gives rise to doubts, even though the connection is not something that she herself had been able to make. Karpf employs several metaphors of incorporation and appropriation, metaphors which recall Abraham's and Torok's work on transgenerational haunting--at one point she refers to Helen Epstein's analogy of an 'iron box' of preserved memories buried inside the children of survivors that needs to be excavated. Referring to the 'awful, involuntary mimetic obsessions' from which she suffered, she also gestures towards the loss of agency which, as I discussed earlier, appears to be unavoidably connected to both the

¹²⁵ Karpf 103.

¹²⁶ Karpf 106.

symptoms of trauma and to the transmission of traumatic truths.

In such accounts history, as in Caruth's formulation, is seen to occur as 'symptom'. Karpf describes herself as the bearer of her parents' secrets, of their stories:

for us those stories--through their power, repetition, and the sheer vehemence of the telling--took on the power of myth and fable: you knew them by heart, even able to prompt and remind, you internalised them--they became yours. The parents left the stories to the safe keeping of their children'.¹²⁷

'Is it any surprise', she asks, 'that some of us longed to appropriate their narratives for our own lives?'¹²⁸

In Abraham's and Torok's work such 'safe-keeping' is referred to in less positive terms. The transmission of secrets from parents to children creates a 'crypt' in the child's psyche, which in turn becomes an 'illegal burial place'--which might add a new twist to Nancy K. Miller's idea of the 'family plot'.¹²⁹ These second-generation Holocaust testimonies articulate an ambivalence over processes of holding on and letting go, working through and acting out, that is to an extent lost in theorisations of

¹²⁷ Karpf 252.

¹²⁸ Karpf 252.

¹²⁹ Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* 141. See also Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) xi.

transgenerational haunting or of traumatic possession. Karpf gestures towards a sense of *obligation* in her reference to 'safe-keeping', to a conception of family secrets or unresolved transmitted traumas as heirlooms or treasured mementos which it would be unseemly to give away. And by writing of her 'longing to appropriate' her parents' traumatic histories she highlights a point of tension between *possession by her parents' past* and *possession of it*. If an outbreak of excema on a part of her body corresponding to her mother's Holocaust tattoo is a symptom of the appropriation of her body by her mother's trauma, it seems that the only alleviation of the symptom would involve another kind of appropriation: the appropriation of her mother's story through the body of her text. And yet this process is marked by a profound ambivalence and a scepticism towards the simplicity of pathologising terms of symptom and cure that fail to account for the complexities of family relationships and their histories.

As in Felman's theory of transmission these second generation testimonies place a marked emphasis on oral testimony, even though these are written accounts of trauma and family history. Appignanesi, Karpf, and Fremont each conduct interviews with their parents, but in contrast to the theories of transmission discussed in the previous section, these interviews do not function as invitations to contamination by trauma; here, instead, the contamination

has already taken place and the interview is seen as a means of making sense of family history, getting the facts straight, or perhaps of purging the offending 'secrets'. And yet in another important sense these authors do not just write their parents' lives in order to let go, but simultaneously enact another process of possession by *incorporating* the parent's story into their own text.

Appignanesi, and Karpf incorporate their parent's (oral) histories into their texts to varying degrees, and with varying degrees of ambivalence over the process. Appignanesi both watches her mother's videotaped oral testimony and attempts to elicit a version of her own. In response to what seems to be her mother's growing insanity due to Alzheimer's disease--she describes her wryly as 'the Lady Macbeth of Highgate'--and not wanting 'this image of her to usurp all others', Appignanesi 'set[s] out to elicit her stories from her in a systematic way, pen at the ready', but finds that her mother's memories 'elude system'.¹³⁰ The videotaped testimony appears coherent, but when transcribed is notable for its lack of 'history', for its overly subjective nature. Karpf interviews and records her parents' testimonies herself and includes the transcribed recordings in her text, giving her parents a voice. Fremont, on the other hand, rewrites her father's story 'imaginatively' before telling us (towards the end of

¹³⁰ Appignanesi 80-81.

the memoir) that he had actually written his own memoirs and without designating where her own version correlates or fails to correlate with his.

Art Spiegelman's graphic auto/biography *Maus* is comprised almost exclusively of the interview process between father and son. The father's language is at the centre of Spiegelman's text, notable for the meticulous transcriptions of Vladek's linguistic idiosyncrasies and Yiddishisms. And yet, with the exception of Spiegelman's memoir, these second generation meditations all involve the revision of the parents' narratives, the suggestion that oral testimony is somehow, and in different ways, not enough. Spiegelman seems so intent on allowing his father's words to speak for themselves that the CD ROM of the *Maus* volumes now includes the recorded voice of Vladek himself.¹³¹

The inclusion of oral testimony in these memoirs is always marked by ambivalence: by the tension between unethical exposure and the imperative to tell a more truthful story than the parents'. By including grammatical or factual inaccuracies in their parents' spoken accounts, these adult children assert their own authority over the family history, leaving their accounts open to some of the problems that have traditionally been associated with the

¹³¹ See LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* 146-48.

practice of oral history.¹³² Similarly, in other contemporary family memoirs, the inclusion of transcriptions of parents' (often badly written and misspelt) letters and even sometimes photocopies of their degenerated handwriting, might suggest that the author is asserting his or her right as author at the cost of exposing their parents' embarrassing lack of literacy.¹³³

And yet the ethical questions posed by such exposures are mitigated in the case of second generation testimonies, where what might be seen as unethical biographical exposure is legitimated by therapeutic necessity. Indeed, what are we to make of Abraham's and Torok's theories of 'haunting' in the light of such breaches of privacy? Seen through the

¹³² Paul Thompson takes this problem into account in his study of oral history *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (1978; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). He writes of the ethical problems that arise when a 'middle-class professional determines who is to be interviewed and what is to be discussed and then disappears with a tape of somebody's life which they never hear about again--and if they did might be indignant at the unintended meanings imposed on their words' 21-22. Elsewhere Thompson appears confident that the perpetuation of class-discrimination in the practice of oral history is a thing of the past and yet his admiration for the Oxbridge history students who 'sit at the feet' of oral historians suggests a problematic reversal of authority that is not fully substantiated 10-12. See Penny Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the Subject', *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, eds. (London: Routledge, 2000) 91-105 for a discussion of some of these issues and Eakin 169-81 for a discussion of related issues. A recent initiative by the BBC in the UK is designed precisely to avoid the kinds of problems that collecting and editing oral testimony can entail. The Digital Storytelling Project gives people in small communities (pilot schemes have been set up in Cardiff, and two are about to be launched in Blackburn and Hull) training in order for them to master the skills to enable them to create mini-movies of their life stories (or parts of them). Contributors write scripts, make the movies using scanners and digital cameras, and are responsible for all of the editing. See <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales>>. The project is based both on the Mass Observation project in Sussex and a similar project based in Berkeley, California: <<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/massobs>>; <<http://www.storycenter.org>>.

lens of psychoanalysis--and memoirs like Appignanesi's and Karpf's specifically position themselves in relation to this--the ethical questions raised by the appropriation and revision of an other's life story answer to a therapeutic necessity as much as to a historical imperative. The theories of Abraham and Torok allow for the possibility that we can 'confess' the secrets and the stories of an other, in the name of healing.

Miller both problematizes and attempts to mitigate the question of ethics by relating the ethics of exposure in memoirs of a parent's death to the 'liberatory work of mourning' in Freudian psychoanalysis. Such memoirs, caught 'between the poles of resentment and forgiveness' allow a space for interpretation which she refers to as 'realization': 'Realization entails understanding our parents' own unfinished business with their mothers and fathers: seeing it as theirs, finding the language in which to name it, and moving on'.¹³⁴ The 'realization' can be seen, Miller suggests, as analogous to the working through of (sometimes ambivalent) memories in the work of mourning. By implication, the withholding of parent's secrets, the refusal to acknowledge ambivalence, might result in the pathological type of mourning that is melancholia.¹³⁵ Thus

¹³³ Miller has some interesting insights into this question, *Bequest and Betrayal* 32-33.

¹³⁴ Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 6.

¹³⁵ Freud makes this point about ambivalence very clear in 'Mourning and Melancholia': 'The loss of a love-object is an excellent

the ethical implications of biographical exposure are mitigated by a recourse to psychoanalytic frames of understanding. And yet the process of 'naming' may, as Abraham and Torok might see it, entail in itself a form of appropriation.

But whereas Lanzmann, for example, endorses the reliving of trauma for the sake of historical transmission--and arguably refuses to problematise this endorsement--memoirists like Spiegelman and Appignanesi unsettle their textual appropriations even as they enact them. Appignanesi acknowledges that she is more interested in her mother's past than her present, even that by focussing on the family history she is managing to avoid confronting the daily needs of 'the Lady Macbeth of Highgate'. This is evident in *Maus* too, where Spiegelman also depicts several instances of his remorse over the relentless questioning of his father which sometimes results in his father's physical exhaustion. And yet, again, the ambivalence is marked by Vladek's joy at the renewed relationship between himself and Artie as they join together on a project in which they can both participate--and through which he can give something valuable to his independent, intellectual son.

The family memoirist may be a burgling biographer but when the jewels they snatch are a part of their own

opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open. Where there is a disposition to

inheritance the crime is less easily defined or solved. Psychoanalysis unsettles this ethics of appropriation because here representation--however flawed--is occurring in place of a painful transgenerational or transhistorical transmission. The alternative is a reliving of the parent's life: you write your parent's life to avoid having to live it, literally.

On one level Appignanesi's and Karpf's memoirs could be seen as tentative attempts at 'cure', or at least as an alleviation of symptoms, although this reading would oversimplify by far the nature of these projects. Their very recourse to psychoanalytic frames of understanding is worthy in itself of scrutiny, however. Karpf, in particular, ultimately rejects psychoanalytic theories of transgenerational haunting as adequate explanations of--or solutions to--her inherited anxieties. But how might the very inclusion of these theories serve to legitimate her textual appropriation of her parents' stories, sanctioning what could be seen as a breach of privacy? And if these are to be understood as attempted representations of another's traumatic past, how might *Losing the Dead* and *The War After* be located in relation to the antirealist 'ban on representation', to the theory which makes of historical transmission a privileged mode of understanding the past?

In some sense they mount a challenge to the strictly antirealist approach: they resist the 'totalising' account that antirealists consider the mark of the realist approach, and insist on conveying the representational difficulties at the heart of their auto/biographical endeavours. Indeed, in Karpf's memoir, psychoanalysis itself is seen as a 'totalising' theory that fails to account for the disruptiveness of 'real' history. Thus while Karpf and Appignanesi write of the need to refuse a continued transgenerational transmission of trauma, they offer no clear answers about the kind of writing that might turn symptom into narrative.

4. 'So That was the Patrimony': Philip Roth and the Ethics of Relationality

Over the past twenty years, criticism of autobiography has undergone several notable shifts of emphasis. The influential *On Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980) edited by James Olney represents for some critics a watershed in critical thinking on the genre. The collection includes essays on previously unremarked autobiographical engagements and maps out new territory for thinking and writing about the genre. Arguing that there was virtually no critical and theoretical literature on

autobiography before 1956, Olney wonders in 1980 about the rapid growth of the genre, asking 'Why was it not proper to produce literary studies of autobiography twenty-five years ago? Why is nothing else as proper, as vital, today?'.¹³⁶

Olney offers up several potential reasons for the proliferation of criticism, but for him it was the shift in emphasis from 'bios' (life) to 'autos' (self) that was 'largely responsible for opening things up and turning them in a philosophical, psychological, and literary direction'.¹³⁷

Since the publication of Georges Gusdorf's 1956 essay 'The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', he argues, critics have increasingly concerned themselves with 'the dawning self-consciousness of Western man that found literary expression in the early moments of modern autobiography--those moments where secular autobiography was slowly developing out of spiritual autobiography and when autobiography as a literary mode was emerging out of autobiography as a confessional act'.¹³⁸ With the emphasis on 'bios' came what now seem to be naïve assumptions about the possibility of adequately narrating a life and a sense that the only point of contention was the question of whether or not the autobiographer was telling the truth.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ James Olney, ed., *On Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1980) 8.

¹³⁷ Olney 19.

¹³⁸ Olney 13.

¹³⁹ Olney 19-20.

The post-1956 emphasis on 'autos', however, led to more varied discussion of autobiography as a literary act. The shift also accompanied, if not enabled, the increasing democratisation of autobiography: the move away from the 'great man' tradition of life writing and towards a less canonical notion of the genre. Olney noted in 1980 the increased publication and critical recognition of women's autobiographies, African-American autobiographies and African autobiographies, a development which he attributes to the importance of autobiographical texts to emergent Women's Studies, African-American Studies and African Studies in university departments as well as to the feminist commitment to the 'personal' emblematised by the 1970s slogan 'the personal is political'. Olney proposes Georges Gusdorf as an exemplary critic of the genre, and his 1956 essay 'The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' as the pioneering instigator of the shift from 'bios' to 'autos'. 'In the beginning, then', he writes, 'was Georges Gusdorf'.¹⁴⁰ Yet even as Olney's introduction asserts Gusdorf's pre-eminence in the field, (his collection is dedicated to Gusdorf and also includes the first appearance of Gusdorf's essay in English translation) other essays in the collection already represent a shift away from what is seen as the androcentric Gusdorfian paradigm.

¹⁴⁰ Olney 8.

Mary G. Mason's (1980) essay 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers', for example, illustrates the ways in which such androcentric and canonical paradigms fail to account for gender differences in life writing. Drawing on four early 'prototypes' of women's autobiography Mason argues that 'the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some "other"'. She writes of the 'grounding of identity' that takes place in women's autobiographies 'through relation to the chosen other'.¹⁴¹ These models stand in stark contrast to 'the two prototypical male autobiographers, Augustine and Rousseau' on whom both Gusdorf and Olney draw for their discussion of autobiographical paradigms.¹⁴² If Gusdorf is to an extent responsible for the shift from 'bios' to 'autos' that led to more rounded discussion of autobiography as a literary act, feminist revisions of his model such as Mary Mason's helped to shift the emphasis away from 'the self' and towards a concept of relational selves.

¹⁴¹ Mary Mason, 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers', Olney 210. The essay is also included in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenck, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

¹⁴² Mason, 'The Other Voice' in Olney 210. See also Georges Gusdorf, 'The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' in Olney, and James Olney, 'Transmogrifications of Life-Writing', *The Southern Review* 33 (summer 1997): 554-73 in which Olney makes the startling claim that we can learn all we need to know about the development of autobiography by looking at Augustine, Rousseau, and Beckett.

Feminist revisions of the androcentric model of autobiography also led to a consideration of the many different forms of autobiography normally excluded from the canon. In her 1997 book *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures*, for example, Linda Anderson refuses to be constrained by 'definitions of autobiography as a genre' and resists any literary hierarchy of autobiographical forms.¹⁴³ Instead, Anderson includes in her discussion 'diaries, letters, fiction and theoretical writing--under the general umbrella of autobiography'.¹⁴⁴ Her inclusion marks this important shift in critical approaches to autobiography, away from 'definitions of autobiography as a genre' which, Anderson observes, 'tend to perpetuate a masculine genealogy of the subject' and towards a more democratic, less circumscribed, approach.¹⁴⁵ Definitions of the 'conditions and limits of autobiography' might, as Olney suggests, have put autobiography on the critical map, but more recently critics have sought to avoid the delimiting effects of such attempts. By defining what autobiography is or should be, theorists are always at risk of pathologising or marginalising those accounts which fall outside of the 'limits'.

¹⁴³ Linda Anderson, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997) 12.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson 12.

¹⁴⁵ Anderson 12.

Taking Mason's work on gender and relationality as a starting point, in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999), Paul John Eakin suggests that the relational model of identity might not be the mark of autogynography that Mason and other feminist critics have supposed.¹⁴⁶ Instead he posits that 'all identity is relational despite differences that fall out along gender lines'.¹⁴⁷ Eakin also discusses the Gusdorf model, which stresses 'the separate, autonomous individual' and argues that although this paradigm has long held sway in criticism of autobiography, it fails to withhold closer scrutiny.¹⁴⁸ Although he suggests that critics ought to review earlier life writing in order to discover the traces of relationality that undoubtedly exist there, it is in the wealth of recent autobiographical writing by both men and women that Eakin's thesis is most convincingly confirmed. Memoirs such as Germaine Greer's *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You* (1989), Philip Roth's *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991), Blake Morrison's *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* (1993), and Martin Amis's *Experience* (2000) to name but a few, exemplify the prevalence of the relational model in life writing of the last ten years, while anthologies such as *Fathers: Reflections by Daughters* (1994) and *Our Fathers:*

¹⁴⁶ The term 'autogynography' was coined by Domna C. Stanton in order to differentiate between men's and women's autobiographical writing. See 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Reflections by Sons (2001) likewise reveal that the relational other need not always be mother.

Relationality, for Eakin, is based on a developmental paradigm which takes into account the work of, among others, the psychologist John Shotter and the sociologist Ian Burkitt, both of which stress 'the child's intersubjective instruction in personhood'.¹⁴⁹ When applied to Eakin's corpus of auto/biographies and memoirs, relationality exposes the permeability of the boundary between autobiography and biography. He writes:

in the relational lives in my corpus, the story of the self is not ancillary to the story of the other, although its primacy may be partly concealed by the fact that it is constructed through the story told of and by someone else. Because identity is conceived as relational in these cases, these narratives defy the boundaries we try to establish between genres, for they are autobiographies that offer not only the autobiography of the self but the biography and the autobiography of the other.¹⁵⁰

Although Eakin does not describe it in such terms, it seems clear that relational accounts are construed as *normative*

¹⁴⁷ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 50.

¹⁴⁸ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 49.

¹⁴⁹ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 62. See Ian Burkitt, *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality* (London: Sage, 1991) and John Shotter and Kenneth J. Gergen, eds. *Texts of Identity* (London: Sage, 1989).

¹⁵⁰ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 58.

in his view: because identity and narrative always spring from a child's 'intersubjective instruction in personhood' it follows that life narratives will likewise be intersubjective, always written of and on the boundary between self and other. Eakin claims that 'autobiographical memory is socially and culturally constructed', a claim which he supports by turning to the work of developmental psychology:

Analyzing parent-child conversations about the past, they stress the interpersonal context in which the extended self emerges, they highlight the role of rules and conventions in the formation of autobiographical memories and they show how the young child gradually assimilates these narrative practices.¹⁵¹

Relationality does not exclusively relate to the parent-child relationship, however, and Eakin's corpus includes examples of life writing which veer from this model. Henry Louis Gates's *Colored People: A Memoir* (1994), for example, is in Eakin's view an account of the construction of subjectivity in relation to a community.¹⁵² Yet the focus of Eakin's study is the most preponderant form of relational life narrative: 'the self's story viewed through the lens of its relation with some key other person, sometimes a

¹⁵¹ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 110.

¹⁵² Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 75-76.

sibling, friend or lover, but most often a parent--we might call such an individual the *proximate other* to signify the intimate tie to the relational autobiographer'.¹⁵³

In the previous section I discussed the ways in which transgenerational haunting provides a model for what might be seen as the ultimate relational bond. Here I consider whether a psychoanalytic approach to relationality might further complicate the ethical issues involved in the telling of an other's life. I focus on Philip Roth's memoir *Patrimony*, beginning with one line in particular that Eakin cites as an example of the necessary 'relationality' of Roth's story. '[R]ecalling his relation with his father', Eakin writes, 'Philip Roth evokes a period when their lives were "intermeshed and spookily interchangeable": '[I]n contrast to the supposedly self-determining model of identity that autonomy predicates, a relational concept of selfhood stresses the extent to which the self is defined by--and lives in terms of--its relations with others'.¹⁵⁴ Although Roth's memoir could be seen to confirm the model of relationality as it is loosely defined here (in the sense that we all, always, live and write our lives 'in relation' to others) the extract Eakin cites from *Patrimony* points to something altogether more complex. Something, in Roth's words, altogether more 'spooky'.

¹⁵³ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 86.

¹⁵⁴ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 161.

'When a writer is born into the family', Philip Roth famously wrote, 'the family is finished'. Roth has always had to defend himself against biographical readings of his fiction, much of which focuses on family relationships in fictional Jewish households much like the one in which he was raised. He is aware of the ethical implications of writing about oneself when this writing involves the revelation of another's life in the process and yet he has long defended himself against charges of unethical biographical exposure on the grounds that he is a writer of fiction and not biography or autobiography, even when, as in the case of *Deception* (1990), he toys with the boundaries by naming his principal character--a novelist--Philip and his wife Claire.¹⁵⁵ Roth's generic trickery extended into his first foray into nonfiction, titled, in a deceptively unambiguous fashion, *The Facts*, as I discussed in Chapter One. How is *Patrimony*, in the light of the author's history of generic playfulness, to be read unproblematically as a 'true story'? As one commentator writes, in *The Facts* 'Roth [. . .] manages to make the standoff between fiction and autobiography emblematic of the impossibility of extricating the literary from the

¹⁵⁵ Hanif Kureishi did something very similar in his 'novel' that has since been made into a film, *Intimacy* (1998), but he also defends himself by claiming the book is a work of fiction. Claire Bloom actually wrote her own memoir after the publication of *Deception* and responded to some of these issues. See Claire Bloom, *Leaving a Doll's House* (London: Virago, 1996).

actual, the fictional from *The Facts*'.¹⁵⁶ *Patrimony* sits uneasily alongside Roth's fiction and even his novelist's autobiography, appearing to be more at home in the growing corpus of 'memoirs of a parent's death', and emerging as an exemplary model of the genre. Yet as Miller suggests, this may depend on how it is read: 'Patrimony is an amazingly straight book for a writer like Roth, depending, of course, how you read the shit literally placed at its heart'.¹⁵⁷

In an early review of *Patrimony* Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky wonders why critics have almost unanimously referred to the memoir as 'moving' 'charming' and 'touching' when it is so obviously a father-son battleground, when the mark of the memoir's candour is evident most explicitly in the recounting of the ambivalence of Roth's feelings towards his father. Moreover, Rubin-Dorsky argues that although the memoir 'insists on its literalness; it relies heavily on metaphor in order to convey the relationship between father and son' and he reads 'Philip' in *Patrimony* as a fictional character, much like the 'Philip' in *Deception*.¹⁵⁸

It is important to consider *Patrimony* in the light of Roth's earlier fiction, because the earlier work begs questions about this 'touching' account of Roth's father's death. And yet it seems almost 'unseemly'--to use one of

¹⁵⁶ Peter J. Bailey, 'Why Not Tell the Truth? The Autobiographies of Three Fiction Writers', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 32: 4 (1991): 219.

¹⁵⁷ Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 33.

Roth's terms--to read *Patrimony* as a self-conscious narrative, to focus on his use of metaphor and 'trickery' at the cost, it seems, of the 'human' aspect of his memoir.¹⁵⁹ And yet Roth makes it clear throughout *Patrimony* that he is not only the son, but also, ineluctably, the writer. Writers are 'born into families', and his 'unseemly' conduct is dictated by the demands of his profession.¹⁶⁰

Focussing less on the memoir as a whole and more on certain key scenes in the book, here I consider what happens if we read *Patrimony* in the light of the psychoanalytic theory Roth himself evokes briefly, rather than in the light of 'normative' relational models.¹⁶¹ Before considering *Patrimony* in more detail, I consider the question of relationality as a normative model of identity and narrative, discussing the ways in which relationality could be seen as analogous to *identification* in both a psychoanalytic and a literary context.

Diana Fuss makes explicit the connection between a psychoanalytic concept of identification and relationality, although in *Identification Papers* she discusses no relational auto/biographies. A reading of Roth's *Patrimony*,

¹⁵⁸ Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, 'Honor thy Father', rev. of *Patrimony: A True Story*, by Philip Roth, *Raritan* 11:4 (1992): 137-38.

¹⁵⁹ This may in itself be a topic worthy of further discussion.

¹⁶⁰ See Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 33.

¹⁶¹ I do not hope to provide a definitive reading of *Patrimony* on this model, but I suggest that by reading it in this way we may come to some quite different conclusions about his treatment of the ethics of relational auto/biography.

however, which focuses on identificatory issues rather than relational ones, yields some interesting results.

'Identification', writes Fuss, 'is, from the beginning, a question of relation, of self to other, subject to object, inside to outside'.¹⁶² Identification is the process whereby a person substitutes a lost love-object with an image of that object which can be kept inside. In 'The Ego and the Id' (1928) Freud maintains that such substitutions make 'an essential contribution towards building up what is called its [the ego's] "character"'.¹⁶³ There is something 'silly' and 'obvious', observes Fuss, about identification--this 'routine, habitual compensation for the everyday loss of our love-objects'.¹⁶⁴ Like Eakin's model of relationality, theories of identification revolve around the ways in which identity is necessarily constructed through self-other relations. 'Subjectivity', writes Fuss, drawing on a Freudian concept of identification, 'can be most concisely understood as *the history of one's identifications*'.¹⁶⁵

Freud uses the terms introjection, incorporation and identification interchangeably.¹⁶⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis

¹⁶² Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (London: Routledge, 1995) 3.

¹⁶³ Freud, 'The Ego and the Id' 1923, *On Metapsychology*, PFL 11, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 368.

¹⁶⁴ Fuss 1.

¹⁶⁵ Fuss 34. See also 'The Ego and the Id', 368 where Freud makes a very similar comment.

¹⁶⁶ The term introjection is actually Sandor Ferenczi's. See Ferenczi's 1909 essay 'Introjection and Transference' in *New Contributions to Psychoanalysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (London: Maresfield Reprints, 1952). Fuss points out that Freud uses the words 'introjection' and 'incorporation' interchangeably (Fuss 55), but in 'The Ego and the Id' Freud also uses the terms 'introjection' and 'identification'

succinctly explain the slight difference between introjection and incorporation. Incorporation, they write, is:

the process whereby the subject, more or less on the level of phantasy, has an object penetrate his body and keeps it "inside" his body. [. . .] Incorporation provides the corporal model for introjection and identification.¹⁶⁷

Introjection, on the other hand, is a 'process revealed by analytic investigation: in phantasy, the subject transposes objects and their inherent qualities from the "outside" to the "inside" of himself'. The difference between the two comes down to a question of physical boundaries.

'Introjection is close in meaning to incorporation, which indeed provides it with its bodily model, but it does not necessarily imply any reference to the body's real boundaries (introjection into the ego, into the ego-ideal etc.)'.¹⁶⁸

Introjection, in Abraham's and Torok's work emerges as a psychoanalytic counterpart to Eakin's theory of relationality:

interchangeably, sometimes when (as in his discussion of melancholia) the term 'incorporation' would seem more fitting.

¹⁶⁷ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac, 1973; rpt. 1988) 211.

Introjection is in fact the psychic counterpart of the child's biological development and its dependence on others as it travels through the various stages of maturation before reaching autonomy or adulthood. On one level, then, introjection is the psychic equivalent of growth, of the passage from sucking to chewing, from crawling to walking and running, from baby talk to words and full-fledged speech.¹⁶⁹

Torok identifies the fantasy of incorporation thus:

Introducing all or part of a love object or thing into one's own body, possessing, expelling, or alternatively acquiring, keeping, losing it--here are varieties of fantasy indicating, in the typical forms of possession or feigned dispossession, a basic intrapsychic situation.¹⁷⁰

Here we find once again the 'possession' metaphor that I discussed earlier. To be possessed, in other words, is to incorporate. Emphasising the mediumistic aspect of incorporation Fuss remarks on the 'previous models [of incorporation] that seek to conceptualize the influence of other on self--demonic or ecstatic possession, contagious passion, animal magnetism, mesmerism, hypnosis', models which all rely on the 'absence' of the subject's agency as

¹⁶⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis, 229.

¹⁶⁹ Rand in *The Shell and the Kernel* 9.

¹⁷⁰ Torok in *The Shell and the Kernel* 126.

in Caruth's and Felman's theories of possession.¹⁷¹ The difference between introjection and incorporation might then be seen as analogous to the difference between possession of (the other and the other's story) and possession by these things.

Eakin addresses our more literal understanding of possession in relation to the privacy laws determining what it is legally permissible for one person to say or write about another. These laws centre on the concept of 'the right to an inviolate personality', a concept which, Eakin argues is complicated by a relational model of identity.¹⁷² 'How', Eakin asks, 'can the practice of life writing be said to infringe on the individual's "right to an inviolate personality"?'¹⁷³ But how might the concepts of incorporation, of possession, and of haunting complicate this issue yet further? What, for example, are we to make of a theory which turns the disclosure of someone else's secrets into a therapeutic imperative?

The privacy laws Eakin discusses are based on a conflation of personhood and property and are thus concerned with the transgression of private spaces. From a relational point of view, the boundary between self and other is less discernible than that between, to use his

¹⁷¹ Fuss 4.

¹⁷² Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* citing Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis's celebrated 1890 article 'The Right to Privacy' 162.

¹⁷³ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 165.

example, the inside of a building and the outside. Eakin tests the Warren and Brandeis model of privacy on a selection of relational autobiographies beginning with the much-quoted extract from Ted Hughes's 1989 letter to the *Independent*: 'I hope each of us owns the facts of her or his own life'.¹⁷⁴ Arguing that the facts of his life were his exclusive property, Hughes came close to arguing that the life of his relational other were also his own. His words carry particular significance in relation to Abraham's and Torok's theory of transgenerational haunting where, as we have seen, the focus is on the possibility of 'owning'--or of being owned by--the facts of *someone else's* life. Wary that he might have appeared to be 'mount[ing] a case against the propriety of writing lives', Eakin turns again to Roth's *Patrimony*, this time in order to praise the respect that Roth affords to the 'integrity' of his father's person even as he simultaneously 'transgresses his privacy'.¹⁷⁵

The extract from *Patrimony* which Eakin cites is framed by a series of often-quoted, crucial scenes: the taxi scene where Roth muses on the Freudian theory of parricide and cannibalism; the college scene where Roth first describes his sense of 'merging' with his father; the bathroom scene

¹⁷⁴ Included and discussed in Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Papermac, 1994) 8. For interest see also Ted Hughes, 'The Place Where Sylvia Plath Should Rest in Peace', *Guardian* 20 April 1989; 'Sylvia Plath: the Facts of her Life and the

where Roth cleans his father's shit; and the hospital scene where, after heart-bypass surgery, Roth describes feeling 'at once reborn and as though I had given birth'. The order of these scenes, although often overlooked, is crucial.

Rather than reading these scenes as examples of a normative relationality and identification, how might they be read instead as examples of something approaching *incorporation*, an exploration of the permeability of the psychical and physical boundaries between father and son. Eakin takes note of the transgression of boundaries in these scenes and acknowledges Nancy K. Miller as the one who writes most thoroughly about this.¹⁷⁶ But the curious thing is that even as Eakin cites Roth as an example of the most relentless transgressor of privacy (of both psychical and physical boundaries), *Patrimony* emerges as a *model* relational autobiography, as a memoir which somehow fails, in the end, to violate the 'integrity' of its subject.

A reading of *Patrimony* which takes into account theories of identification--both normative and pathological--suggests that it may not be in spite of Roth's breaching of boundaries between father and son but by virtue of them that he authorises the telling of his

Desecration of her Grave', *Independent* 20 April 1989; and 'Where Research Becomes Intrusion', *Observer* 29 October 1989.

¹⁷⁵ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 182.

¹⁷⁶ See Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 23-55.

father's story, not, as Eakin suggests, the son's 'profound respect for the integrity' of his father's person.¹⁷⁷

The first taboo-breaking episode is the taxi scene in which Roth makes a direct reference to Freud's 'Totem and Taboo'. After recounting an amusing anecdote about a parricidal taxi driver who had knocked out his father's teeth--Roth posing as a psychiatrist and wryly remarking that on his 'first professional outing, a positive transference had been effected'--he goes on to make the following connection:

He actually did it, I realized, annihilated the father. He is of the primal horde of sons who, as Freud liked to surmise, have it in them to nullify the father by force--who hate and fear him and, after overcoming him, honor him by devouring him.¹⁷⁸

And although Roth claims to belong to the 'horde that can't throw a punch', he concludes that, '[w]e have teeth as the cannibals do, but they are there, embedded in our jaws, the better to help us articulate'. 'When we lay waste', he continues, 'when we efface, it isn't with raging fists or ruthless schemes [. . .] but with our words, our brains, with mentality'.¹⁷⁹ Words, we are led to conclude, are for

¹⁷⁷ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 182.

¹⁷⁸ Philip Roth, *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991; London: Vintage, 1992) 159.

¹⁷⁹ Roth 159.

killing and consuming fathers as well as for 'recreating' them, indeed, the consumption may have to occur before re-creation can begin.

Miller describes *Patrimony* as a kind of substitute child for the childless Roth, a 'posthumous grandchild', she says, referring to the episode where Roth muses on his father's penis, memorises it even: 'I must remember accurately', he tells himself, 'so that when he's gone I can re-create the father who created me'.¹⁸⁰ The self-confessed 'unseemliness' of *Patrimony* relates not, as it may seem, to the disclosure of secrets but to the fact that, as Roth admits, 'I had been writing all the while he was ill and dying'--the fact that the 're-creation' began before the original was gone.¹⁸¹

Many contemporary memoirs, Miller writes, are 'meditations on the author's authority to tell the story' and *Patrimony* is no exception to this.¹⁸² Towards the end of the memoir Roth employs several metaphors of incorporation and of appropriation; he persistently describes scenes where father and son are called upon to speak *for* and even sometimes *through* each other. The vernacular for which Roth is so famous, 'is his': it belongs to Herman. And the jokes, too, he tells the woman in the nursing home 'originate with him'. Roth speaks up for his father on at

¹⁸⁰ Miller 28. Roth 177.

¹⁸¹ Roth 237.

¹⁸² Miller 3.

least two occasions. He writes to the Metropolitan Life insurance company to complain about their anti-Semitic promotion policies on behalf of his father, and berates the anti-Semitic telephone abuser of his father from the phone in his father's house. 'You must not forget anything': the imperative which runs throughout *Patrimony*, is at no point in the memoir spoken by Herman.

In the scene which follows the taxi incident, Roth recalls his college education and the gulf which he felt widening between himself and his father during these years. He recalls that he felt at this time:

as though I were something like his *double* or his *medium*, emotionally to imagine that I was there at college in his behalf and that it wasn't just I who was being educated but he whom I was delivering from ignorance as well. Just the opposite was happening, of course: every book I underlined and marginally notated, every course I took and paper I wrote was expanding the mental divide. [. . .] Yet for many months there was nothing my reasonable self could do to shake off the *sense of merging with him* that overcame me in the library [. . .] the impassioned, if crazy, conviction that I was somehow *inhabited* by him and quickening his intellect right along with mine.¹⁸³ (my emphasis)

¹⁸³ Roth 160.

Roth symbolically *ingests* the father in the taxi scene before describing the ways in which he once felt he had been 'inhabited by him', had been his 'medium' and his 'double'. This is a metaphor not of relationality but of incorporation. After cannibalising and then merging with the father, Roth is both reborn and gives birth. The blood-sucking heart-baby which, in spite of the metaphor, remains resolutely *inside* leads Roth to indulge in two simultaneous and contradictory identifications as he finds himself:

androgynously partaking of the most delirious maternal joy. [. . .] I was as near to being the double of my own nurturing mother as, during the anxious, uncertain hours on the eve of the bypass, I had come to feeling myself *transposed*, interchangeable with--even a sacrificial proxy for--my failing father. [. . .] I was never a heart patient alone in that bed: I was a family of four.¹⁸⁴

'Philip is like a mother to me', says Herman Roth at one point, in a telephone conversation overheard by the adult son. And indeed, Roth bears his father before bathing, cleaning, changing him and, finally, giving birth to his re-creation. The pregnant woman, in Fuss's view, is:

the perfect figure for a psychoanalytic model of identification based on incorporation.

¹⁸⁴ Roth 226.

As Otto Fenichel comments, pregnancy represents the "full realization of identificatory strivings to incorporate an external object bodily into the ego and to enable that object to carry on an independent existence there".¹⁸⁵

In the pregnancy metaphor, Roth finds a counterpart to the image of himself as 'medium' for his father. By making Herman speak *through* him--'You must not forget anything'--I would argue, he endows his memoir with a legitimacy and an authority that exceeds what Miller refers to as the other, contradictory injunction: 'not to tell'.¹⁸⁶ And just as Delbo is seen as a medium not just for her own experiences, but for the Holocaust itself, Roth is under the command here not just of his own father, but of *the* father, he acts on the orders of the *ultimate* paternal directive.¹⁸⁷

In the first book-length monograph of Roth (1982), Hermione Lee discusses the themes that were apparent in Roth's work before *Patrimony* was ever conceived:

Eating and excreting provide analogues not only for sexual taboo-breaking but also for the process of analysis and narrative. Mrs. Portnoy's intention to "get to the bottom of this diarrhoea" might as well be Spielvogel's, when faced with Portnoy's frantic logorrhoea. Tarnopol's and Portnoy's narrative outpourings

¹⁸⁵ Fuss 23.

¹⁸⁶ Miller 28.

¹⁸⁷ See Miller 28.

are a painful "letting go". [. . .] We are what we eat, and all our lives we never finish getting hold of stuff to turn into ourselves, and then getting rid of it: so with the relation between experience, memory and selfhood.¹⁸⁸

You eat the father and turn him into yourself. Then you can speak on his behalf. Writing--getting to the bottom of the shit your father gives you--may even be a therapeutic necessity. About to embark on the mammoth bathroom-cleaning operation at the centre of his book, Roth makes an analogy which is in some sense a *non-sequitur*: 'It's like writing a book', he muses, 'I have no idea where to begin'. How many other ways, Roth makes us wonder here, is dealing with your father's shit just like writing a book?

Roth's earlier autobiographical project *The Facts* concludes with an attack on Roth by his fictional alter-ego Nathan Zuckerman: 'Don't publish', Zuckerman advises, 'you are far better writing about me than "accurately" reporting your own life. [. . .] I am [. . .] the key to disclosure [. . .]. Your gift is not to personalize your experience but to personify it, to embody it in the representation of a person who is not yourself. You are not an autobiographer, you're a personificator'.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Hermione Lee, *Philip Roth: Methuen Contemporary Writers Series* (London: Methuen, 1982) 16-17.

¹⁸⁹ Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989) 161-62.

The metaphors of incorporation that Roth employs to such great effect in *Patrimony* are not so far removed from those which he uses to describe precisely what it is that a novelist does--he allows voices to speak through him:

to go around in disguise. To act a character. To pass oneself off as what one is not. To *pretend*. The sly and cunning masquerade. Think of the ventriloquist. He speaks so that his voice appears to proceed from someone at a distance from himself. But if he weren't in your line of vision you'd get no pleasure from his art at all. His art consists of being present and absent.¹⁹⁰

Would it be too cynical to conclude that Roth has authorised his right to disclose his father's secrets by couching his transgression in a series of well-executed metaphors of incorporation, thus turning possession by his father almost imperceptibly into a case of possession of him? As Eakin amusedly points out, after citing Roth's final use of *Patrimony's* refrain 'You must not forget anything': 'By repeating here the command he formulated earlier in the episode in which he observes his father's

¹⁹⁰ Hermione Lee, 'The Art of Fiction LXXXIV' (1986), George J. Searles, ed. *Conversations with Philip Roth* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992) 167. This is close to de Man's idea of autobiography as personification or prosopopoeia.

penis, Roth enhances its phallic authority: the son is under his father's orders to write this "unseemly" book!¹⁹¹

'Don't tell Claire', pleads Herman when his son finds him in the bathroom, surrounded by and covered in shit. Roth transcribes the conversation in which he promises not to tell. And then he has to justify the telling: 'So that was the patrimony', he concludes. The shit--not the considerably less explosive tefillin or shaving mug--is the patrimony, that which is handed down from father to son. Roth can only tell about the shit by making it his inheritance, by making it *his own*. The shit becomes something which comes through *him*.

Eakin comments on the 'transgressive' nature of *Patrimony*, and applauds Miller's work on Roth's exploration of the 'permeable borders' between father and son. Commenting on the shit episode, he writes:

Roth is never closer to his father's body; mapping every inch of the interpersonal space they share, he works his way through to a stance of acceptance, coming into his own through the body of another.¹⁹²

'Isn't there a sense', Eakin wonders, 'in which the episode of the shit is inextricably relational, belonging at once

¹⁹¹ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 185.

¹⁹² Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 183. See also Miller 26.

to father and son alike?'¹⁹³ Yet isn't there also a sense in which Roth legitimates the telling of the story by first of all appropriating it as his patrimony? A sense in which he does indeed 'come into his own *through* the body of another', through metaphorical appropriations of the father's body and narrative? 'Or', writes Eakin, viewing the scene from an alternative perspective, 'does the episode merely confirm our misgivings about life writing of any kind, prompting us to recognize that the confessional drive behind life writing that draws us to it--our desire to penetrate the mystery of another person--may also constitute its primary ethical flaw'.¹⁹⁴ Eakin rejects this conclusion and instead 'takes heart [. . .] in Roth's brave negotiation of the difficulties posed by relational identity, in the seamliness of his practice of the "unseemly" profession'.¹⁹⁵

Familial relational bonds complicate the ethics of privacy, of appropriation, and of exposure and this is particularly notable in certain family memoirs where the desire is not only to 'penetrate the mystery of another person' but perhaps rather to discover the self--or aspects of it--by discovering the mysteries of another: the desire to discover the boundary between self and other precisely by exploring the extent to which it can be breached.

¹⁹³ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 185.

¹⁹⁴ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 185.

¹⁹⁵ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 186.

5. 'A Willed Possession'

This section focuses on another account of textual possession legitimated by a theory of a more 'spooky' type of appropriation, but here the ethical issues are complicated yet further because in this case the phantom is an 'other' of the less 'proximate' kind. In what follows I discuss the collaborative nonfiction work *Rodinsky's Room* (1999) by Iain Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein. *Rodinsky's Room* is emblematic of the contemporary family memoir and its vicissitudes on several counts. It is a biography which 'becomes' an autobiography. It is, on the surface at least, a 'relational' auto/biography and, in a different sense, it is also a collaborative project.¹⁹⁶ Sinclair and Lichtenstein adopt the archaeological model of recovery so marked in some of the earlier contemporary memoirs. Sinclair recounts a conversation with Lichtenstein in which the project is described as an 'excavation' of her family heritage, 'collecting fragments of evidence and reassembling them'.¹⁹⁷ She uses the bits and pieces of evidence from the room to construct her own history. 'She improvised with all the required roles', writes Sinclair,

¹⁹⁶ Iain Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein tell their stories in alternating chapters.

'private detective, archaeologist, curator, ghost writer, ventriloquial deliverer of Rodinsky's voice and art'.¹⁹⁸

And yet *Rodinsky's Room* is difficult to categorise generically as it is also a ghost story, a Gothic novel of sorts, and a family memoir which takes a complete stranger to the author as its 'proximate other'. It is also an uncanny tale of possession and my reading of it here focuses on this aspect, as I investigate the metaphors of appropriation throughout which justify the appropriation of Rodinsky's story. In the light of the theories I have discussed in this chapter *Rodinsky's Room* can be read, I suggest, as an example of the ways in which metaphors of possession and haunting help to mitigate the ethical problems confronted by relational life writing.

In 1991 the artist Rachel Lichtenstein visited the Princelet Street synagogue in Spitalfields as part of a family history project. She began the project after the death of her grandfather who had owned a watchmaking shop in Princelet Street and she had been advised to visit this 'museum' as a potential resource. When she entered the synagogue, Lichtenstein cried at what struck her as a poignant reminder of a lost time and place. 'It appeared to me now as if the Princelet Street synagogue had been

¹⁹⁷ Sinclair in Iain Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* (1995; London: Granta, 2000) 81.

¹⁹⁸ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 4.

transported directly from Eastern Europe'.¹⁹⁹ It had: 'The ark had been hand-carved in Poland and brought over, along with the brass chandeliers and other religious items, by Polish and Russian refugees intent on resurrecting their community in London. [. . .] The cobwebs had been sprayed on for cinematic effect'.²⁰⁰ She had walked onto a film-set where students from the National Film School were in the process of filming a production called *The Golem of Princelet Street*, a film about an Orthodox scholar, a Polish Jew named David Rodinsky, who had worked as the synagogue's caretaker and had lived in an attic room above the synagogue.

Rodinsky had mysteriously disappeared in 1969. His room had been locked, unseen, until 1980 when it was discovered by workmen sent in to refurbish the building. The room was left intact--a time-capsule--but by the time Lichtenstein entered it in 1991, things had already been thrown away or disrupted. She salvages several items on their way to the skip, already fiercely invested in the preservation of these artefacts. Lichtenstein takes it upon herself to uncover the secrets of the room, of Rodinsky and in so doing, to discover her own heritage, her own self.

There is, in *Rodinsky's Room*, the now familiar preoccupation with the (im)possibility of restoring the past, incongruent with the quest to find Rodinsky's--and

¹⁹⁹ Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 22.

her own--true story. When she stumbles upon photographs taken at the time of the room's opening, Lichtenstein initially believes that she is witnessing the 'original' state of the room. But it becomes clear that the photographer, Danny Gralton, had already disrupted the scene in order to create his own narrative:

Gralton foregrounded newspapers that acted like subtitles: ISRAEL REBORN. Sorry shards of scholarship were heaped on the table. The photographer's gift for documentation was at odds with an expressionistic impulse towards direction, arrangement, presentation. The room provoked this very natural response. It was a dim interior, untouched for years, in which a correct display of objects would expose some terrible narrative secret.²⁰¹

This acknowledgement of the fictionality of the 'real' is paralleled by the film-set onto which Lichtenstein first stumbles. By contrast, Lichtenstein's account is an attempt to discover the true story and the metaphors employed throughout this increasingly gothic tale make it clear that such truth is dependent on a process of mutual appropriation rather than on a self-conscious staging of reality or an attempt at direct representation.

²⁰⁰ Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 22.

²⁰¹ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 173.

Much of what remains of Rodinsky is quite literally unreadable: notebooks written in ancient languages, in crabbed script, informing the detective only of Rodinsky's cabalistic 'obsession with language as code'.²⁰² There is no correct order in which the objects can be placed, for the secret to be revealed. The code cannot be cracked. Any attempt to create coherence from the incoherent accumulation of evidence would result in the cancellation of all the possible other versions that could be constructed. The re-creation of Rodinsky's story is invited, legitimated, by his absence. His absence allows Lichtenstein free licence: 'There is nothing [Rodinsky] could say', writes Sinclair, 'He is an absence. He doesn't belong in his own story'.²⁰³

Sinclair's narrative nominates Lichtenstein as the sole proprietor of Rodinsky's life and story. Unlike Roth's *Patrimony*, Mary Gordon's *The Shadow Man*, and Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, *Rodinsky's Room* is not, strictly speaking, a 'family memoir'. Lichtenstein seeks to discover the key to her family heritage not, as in the family memoirs, by exploring the lives of her parents but by attempting to dis-cover the life story of a complete stranger who nobody seemed to 'know'. She takes possession of Rodinsky's story in order to come into possession of her own.

²⁰² *Rodinsky's Room*, rear cover.

Arguably, the authors of family memoirs have a greater claim on the archaeological terrain of their parents' pasts, a greater stake in the detective work which is so intimately connected with a quest that is, at its core, genealogical. And psychical: the archaeological metaphor works on two levels, describing both archival searches and revelations of buried memories and secrets. Paul Auster, as I discussed in Chapter One, reads the articles detailing his grandmother's murder of his grandfather 'as history. But also as a cave drawing discovered on the inner walls of [his] own skull'.²⁰⁴

Whereas the ethics of appropriating a parents' story are surmountable, negotiable, in memoirs like Karpf's--the stories simply 'became yours'--it is less immediately obvious in *Rodinsky's Room* why it is Rachel Lichtenstein that emerges as the sole nominee for the telling of Rodinsky's story. In what follows I discuss not only the metaphorical appropriations of Rodinsky that occur in this unusual memoir but also the metaphors of appropriation that legitimate the telling.

Rodinsky's Room begins in the office of a New York literary agent, and with the question not of Lichtenstein's right to tell the story, but of the reason why anyone would ever want to read it:

²⁰³ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 174.

²⁰⁴ Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982; London: Faber & Faber, 1989) 37.

"So you got twenty minutes. A *frummer* in the attic, he disappears. Who should care? Where's the story?" She laughs, delivers her pitch. She's told it before, often, but it always has the same effect. Rachel becomes the thing she is talking about. He listens. (In the film version you could freeze-frame the cigar smoke.) It's a performance and it's true.

'Rachel Lichtenstein', he continues, 'is the story'.²⁰⁵ As biographical trail, this story is not marketable; if it takes an autobiographical detour, that may be another matter. *Rodinsky's Room* continues in the same spirit in which it begins. For this story to work, we have to believe that it belongs to two people. Not only that, but we also have to believe that Lichtenstein has very good reason to take this particular route--above all others--into her own past. When she follows the detective trail to Poland, Sinclair explains that, '[l]eaving the Princelet Street synagogue was the best way of understanding the essence of the teasing narrative that was hers, and hers alone, to complete'.²⁰⁶ It is not enough, it seems, to suggest that Lichtenstein chose this story and that it therefore belongs to her. Instead, we have to believe that the story chose her.

²⁰⁵ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 4.

²⁰⁶ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 200.

There are several suggested reasons why this story is seen as 'hers, and hers alone'. For one thing, Lichtenstein appears to be the only one qualified to do the job, which is seen as a mere adjunct to her vocation as 'truth-seeker'. The search for Rodinsky is connected to the unending work of the Talmudic scholar, with the promise of an alchemical transformation at the end of the line: the promise that the right code will resurrect the missing biographical subject.²⁰⁷ The 'curated objects' of Rodinsky's room--if correctly displayed should--'meld to form the narrative body of the missing, the ardently desired other'.²⁰⁸ 'I wasn't qualified to hunt down the human story', admits Sinclair, it would have to be 'someone who belonged here by birthright. Someone who could read the history of the room as an analogue of their own undisclosed heritage'.²⁰⁹ Lichtenstein, as artist, as truth-seeker, as scholar is well-equipped for the task.

During a period of doubt, Lichtenstein takes a trip to Israel to consider whether or not she should continue with the Rodinsky project. Whilst there she visits a rabbi, well-known for his mysterious cabalistic feats. Lichtenstein explains the nature of her quest and asks whether she should continue. She tells the rabbi the date of her birth and what she knows of the dates of Rodinsky's

²⁰⁷ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 189.

²⁰⁸ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 81.

²⁰⁹ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 256.

birth and death (not insignificantly, he died the year she was born). After making a 'strange chart' and appearing to be deep in concentration, the rabbi finally tells her:

You are always searching for disappearing things: most of the time you do not find them, sometimes you do. You are connected to the *olam hasod*, the secrets of the earth, you are the one that peels back the layers of the earth, like an onion, to find the meaning. This man, Rodinsky, his *neshama*, his soul, is connected to yours, you must continue your search, it is this search that will lead you to the right path.²¹⁰

Lichtenstein immediately returns to London to complete the search.

Miller addresses the question of authority in relation to memoirs about a dead or dying parent, suggesting that the death of the parent legitimates the telling of the adult child's story:

In these narratives, the parent's death seems to authorize--or at least provide a cover story--for a writer's autobiography. If not explicitly, the memoirs devoted to a dead parent are almost always meditations on a

²¹⁰ Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 129.

writer's authority, her right to tell this story, the path she followed to telling it.²¹¹

And yet 'children's right to produce these representations of their parents raises an ethical problem': 'The dead instantly lose their entitlement to privacy'.²¹²

Lichtenstein's appropriation of Rodinsky's story is yet more difficult to justify for not only is Rodinsky not her father, when Lichtenstein begins her story he is not yet even certifiably dead.²¹³ 'I had intruded into Rodinsky's personal life, rummaged through his belongings, discussed his personality and possible whereabouts with many people', confesses Lichtenstein, 'but the truth is I did not know if he was dead or alive'.²¹⁴ After 20 years of inoccupancy, though, his room is literally declared public property: 'The synagogue, complete with dark secret, passed rapidly into the hands of the Spitalfields Heritage Centre--where it is now possible, with the aid of a good torch, to climb the damaged staircase and by confronting the room, discover the man'.²¹⁵ In his absence, Rodinsky's story, too, was up for grabs.

The dead--even the merely absent--have perhaps, as Miller suggests, lost their 'entitlement to privacy'; they cannot answer back, they have lost their 'rights' to the

²¹¹ Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 3.

²¹² Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal* 13.

²¹³ Although she discovers quite early on the evidence which suggests that he ended his life in a Surrey mental hospital.

²¹⁴ Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 101.

story. There is another sense, though, in which the death of the auto/biographical subject might legitimate the appropriation of their story: the dead can haunt. Lichtenstein and Sinclair go on to justify their appropriation of Rodinsky's story by advancing a theory of possession that cuts both ways: as Lichtenstein takes possession of the story, so Rodinsky takes possession of her. The boundary between subject and object, autobiography and biography, self and other becomes in this way, too, permeable: Lichtenstein writes Rodinsky's biography in order to discover her own story, while Rodinsky writes his own autobiography through her biography of him. He is her medium just as she is his.

'There was something mesmeric, possessed, in the way Rachel told her tale', Sinclair begins.²¹⁶ The telling of this tale is imperative. Lichtenstein has been selected for the task by something beyond her control. She has been mesmerised and thus has no choice: the story speaks through her. Sinclair's narrative becomes more and more hyperbolic and Gothically charged as the metaphorical appropriations--and the metaphors of appropriation--begin to gather momentum:

²¹⁵ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 34.

²¹⁶ Sinclair also refers to his own narrative as 'part exercise in false memory, part mediumistic rant', *Rodinsky's Room* 255.

Rachel Lichtenstein, in pursuit of the mystery of David Rodinsky, the haunting properties of the Princelet Street attic, kept breaking away, withdrawing, resuming other projects. But it was no good. Rodinsky, *the idea of Rodinsky*, had become a dybbuk. The soul of a dead person who enters the body of a living human and directs their conduct.²¹⁷

Lichtenstein would put it slightly differently, but their alternating texts tell the same tale: Lichtenstein was driven to discover Rodinsky by forces outside of her control. She not only has the authority to pass on the story; she has the sole authority to do so. Lichtenstein is among other things, Sinclair writes, 'ventriloquial deliverer of [Rodinsky's] life and art', but this bizarre theory of a two-way possession would complicate the metaphor. Who is the puppet, the dummy? And who is working the strings?

A similar case of mutual possession occurs in Sinclair's follow-up to *Rodinsky's Room*, *Rodinsky's A-Z of London: Walked over by Iain Sinclair*. This very brief account finds Sinclair exhuming Rodinsky's tattered old--and annotated--A-Z of London from one of Lichtenstein's iron boxes before following in Rodinsky's footsteps with a video camera. Rodinsky, Sinclair declares, was a 'psychogeographer', the annotated A-Z a 'displaced

²¹⁷ Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 83.

autobiography'.²¹⁸ The quest is similar to that of Lichtenstein's; Sinclair wonders if the annotations were 'his way of uncovering an occulted pattern', if the lines were 'the record of a magical act'.²¹⁹ But the journey neither resurrects the man nor uncovers his secrets. And yet as Sinclair and his camera-toting companion follow the trail, they are struck by various 'coincidences'. When the appointed cameraman is unable to attend, Sinclair asks a friend, Petit, to come along instead. They walk a while and:

Then I noticed the street name: Pettits Place. Followed by Robinson Road. This was uncanny, *Robinson* being the name of Chris Petit's most autobiographical novel. It was almost as if Rodinsky had set the walk up, as if he had anticipated the particular pair of brogues that would tiptoe across his grave.²²⁰

Later, 'almost as if' acquires more certainty as Sinclair writes of 'Rodinsky's playful anticipation of a film that would be made more than thirty years after his death'.²²¹ Just as they think they are beginning to come into possession of Rodinsky's secrets, they understand that they are, to recall the denouement of *Patrimony*, under

²¹⁸ Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's A-Z of London: Walked over by Iain Sinclair* (Uppingham: Goldmark, 1999) 29.

²¹⁹ Sinclair, *A-Z* 12.

²²⁰ Sinclair, *A-Z* 31.

²²¹ Sinclair, *A-Z* 33.

Rodinsky's orders to undertake this 'unseemly' quest. The quest is indeed 'uncanny': they are Rodinsky's puppets, his automata, blindly driven by invisible mechanisms. The biographical quest always, it seems, takes them somewhere that is *too close to home*. Lichtenstein writes of how Sinclair's discovery of Rodinsky's A-Z entailed a role-reversal between the two of them: 'Suddenly Iain was the one possessed'.²²²

'The soul of a dead person who enters the body of a living human and directs their conduct': this would make of Lichtenstein an *authorised* biographer, a ghost-writer of the highest order. And yet, again, the possession cuts both ways because this is, in Sinclair's words, 'a *willed* possession':

Rachel Lichtenstein nominates her own "father", in the shape of Rodinsky. Her investigations force him to speak. She ingests this dybbuk, the elective ancestor. It's a form of willed possession. She wants to complete some unfinished business. [. . .] The dybbuk is [. . .] a more benevolent form of incubus: an entity selective about its host body. Possession by a dybbuk is frequently a kind of blessing: but there is no shirking the responsibility of the task for which the recipient has been nominated. Something was absent in such lives,

²²² Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 335.

there was an emptiness, until this contact was recognized.²²³

Did Lichtenstein wilfully ingest this dybbuk or did it nominate her as its host? The passage is unclear because Sinclair is suggesting, I think, that both are true.

In a striking parallel with Abraham's and Torok's theories of phantomic haunting--with its emphasis on 'illegal burial places' and the 'cryptophore'--Rodinsky's room is described as 'a tomb without a body'; Lichtenstein's task is to 'exhume [Rodinsky], bone by bone'.²²⁴ 'A tomb without a body', an empty coffin or, as Sinclair suggests--linking the myth of Rodinsky with the age-old Jewish myth of the Golem--'a room with no doors'.²²⁵

If the room is, as Sinclair suggests, Rodinsky's autobiography and also an empty tomb, and if Lichtenstein is, as Sinclair tells us 'the story', is the suggestion here that Lichtenstein has become, as in Abraham's and Torok's theory, Rodinsky's 'illegal' burial place? That she has invited a case of transgenerational haunting so that in the process of exhuming Rodinsky's remains, she might also exorcise her own demons? That she has 'incorporated' her own father along with Rodinsky in order to perform a double process of holding on in order to let go? Has Lichtenstein

²²³ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 196.

²²⁴ Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 219, 221-22.

²²⁵ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 184. See also Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem* (1915), trans, Mike Mitchell (Cambs: Dedalus, 2000) 17.

become a cryptophore? It seems that Rodinsky's Room would invite such a reading.

Their use of the Golem myth would also support this reading. Although there are several such myths in circulation, Gustav Meyrink's novel *The Golem* is the one which inspires Sinclair. The symmetries with Rodinsky's myth were perhaps too tempting to pass over: 'And like the Golem of Prague [Rodinsky] eventually turns to dust in the forgotten attic of a synagogue'.²²⁶ In Meyrink's version, the Golem is Athanasius Pernath, the amnesiac narrator's, *doppelgänger* and 'it manifests itself in a room with no doors--that is, in an area of the mind inaccessible to normal consciousness'.

The Golem is, above all, an uncanny tale of possession. Pernath, the amnesiac hero of Meyrink's tale, is apt to disappear into trance-like states while the mysterious stranger who is also his double--and the Golem--takes over his body. When Pernath awakens from these trances he knows only 'that ghostly fingers had been poking round the crevices of [his] brain'.²²⁷ In his introduction the translator, Mike Mitchell, writes:

In Old Testament Hebrew the word [Golem] seems to have meant the unformed embryo. In medieval Jewish philosophy the term designated *hyle* or

²²⁶ Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* 225.

²²⁷ Meyrink, *Rodinsky's Room* 39.

matter which had not been shaped by form. More curiously Hassidic mystics in twelfth-thirteenth century Germany are known to have practised an obscure ritual which aimed to use the cabalistic power of the Hebrew alphabet and manipulate the material form of the universe to create a "golem".²²⁸

It appears that such hyperbolically Gothic metaphors might be in danger of leading the narrators away from the auto/biographical quest. But it is, in fact, by virtue of such metaphors that the link between autobiography and biography is forged. There are parallels between Mitchell's explanation of the Golem meaning and the theories of possession I discussed earlier. The pregnancy metaphor that is also a metaphor of pathological incorporation finds its parallel in the Golem, which is 'an unformed embryo'. The memoir ends with a birth and a funeral: with the birth of Lichtenstein's son--named David--and with the laying of a new headstone for Rodinsky's finally-found grave, '[t]he day had come', writes Lichtenstein, 'for David Rodinsky and I to free each other'.²²⁹

The unassimilable, unarticulated knowledge--'unformed matter'--at the heart of contemporary theorists' conception of literal traumatic truths--encrypted, in Abraham's and Torok's formulation--finds its gothic counterpart in this

²²⁸ Mitchell in Meyrink 16.

²²⁹ Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* 336.

tale of the Golem. Indeed, in Freud's concept, the effect of the uncanny is something which reminds us of an unknown knowledge and it is this unknown known that is at the heart of the *heimlich/ unheimlich* conundrum. And in this way, too, Lichtenstein's authority over Rodinsky's story becomes almost self-evident. Rodinsky, via the Golem analogy, becomes Lichtenstein's uncanny *doppelgänger*.

Richard Holmes, a biographer who, too, has followed in the footsteps of his numerous biographical subjects, writes of a mutual haunting that occurred during his first foray into the tracks left by another--his pursuit of the 'footsteps' of Robert Louis Stevenson through the Cevennes during Holmes' early adulthood. Although the trip did not begin as a biographical quest, it became one once Holmes recognised that he had initiated 'the growth of an imaginary relationship with a non-existent person, or at least a dead one'.²³⁰

In this sense, what I experienced [. . .] was a haunting. Nothing of course that would make a Gothic story, or interest the Society for Psychical Research; but an act of deliberate psychological trespass, an invasion or encroachment of the present upon the past, and in some sense the past upon the present. And in this experience of haunting I first encountered--without then realising it--what I

now think of as the essential process of biography.²³¹

But although Holmes goes on to insist that a 'more or less conscious identification with the subject' is a prerequisite for biography, he conceives of this as a kind of 'pre-biographic' enterprise, something you have to do in order to be interested enough to write.²³² The true biographical work begins, according to Holmes, 'at the moment, at the places, where this naïve form of love and identification breaks down'. This is where the work of 'impersonal, objective re-creation' begins.²³³ But what, we might ask, about autobiography that must by necessity--of whatever form--take a detour through biography? If, for Holmes, biography begins once the subjective element has been purged, might not the auto/biographical project begin at that very point of 'naïve' identification, at the very moment of 'haunting'?

6. Conclusion

A new emphasis on relationality in both autobiography and the study of autobiography has instigated a renewed focus on the ethics of disclosure. In this chapter I have

²³⁰ Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (1985; London: Flamingo, 1995) 66.

²³¹ Holmes 66.

²³² Holmes 66.

explored the ways in which psychoanalysis and its relational symptomatologies unsettle yet further the already complicated relational issues connected to some contemporary memoirs. Abraham's and Torok's theories of transgenerational haunting are interesting to consider in this context because they make of the disclosure of someone else's secrets into a therapeutic necessity, based on a theory of possession that has proved so problematic to issues of historical representation and trauma.

Although it has not been a focus of this chapter, the question of publication of course complicates these issues yet further. Ethical questions may only come to the fore once relational accounts are published. And in the same way, as Gillie Bolton and Celia Hunt in their work on writing and therapy suggest, the truth-status of autobiographical writing is less necessary to ascertain when writing is for private purposes.²³⁴ Both Bolton and Hunt emphasise the role of fiction in autobiographical therapeutic writing as a necessary means of reworking painful experiences.²³⁵ Although I do not suggest that the writers I discuss in this thesis are engaging in writing therapy of the kind with which Bolton and Hunt are concerned, the consideration of therapeutic issues in

²³³ Holmes 67.

²³⁴ Gillie Bolton, *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing: Writing Myself* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000) and Celia Hunt, *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000).

autobiography--the reading of autobiography in relation to certain psychoanalytic tenets--highlights the problematic tensions in life writing between the personal and the political.

This is most specifically the case when we consider the ways in which Felman's and Caruth's psychoanalytically informed theories might inadvertently, to use one of their favourite words, devalue certain legitimate attempts to tell the truth for political or historical purposes (such as women's 'confessional' writing or the written accounts of Holocaust survivors which might be seen as 'totalising' or reliant on frames of 'redemption'). Rothberg suggests that traumatic realism might serve as an effective bridge between strictly realist and strictly antirealist approaches to Holocaust representation, but it is notable that his prime example of traumatic realism, Spiegelman's *Maus* is precariously suspended between the fiction and the nonfiction generic categories.

While *Maus*, in Rothberg's view, achieves a kind of realist representation without being distortive or redemptive or totalising or misrepresentative (all of the arguments which antirealists use in order to support a theory of transmission over representation), one historian claimed that he "wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole"

²³⁵ van der Kolk, drawing on Janet, shares this view to an extent. See van der Kolk and van der Hart in Caruth 158-179.

because it contains no historical evidence'.²³⁶ Miller suggests that it may be through therapy that the 'postwar generation "has learned to understand history"'.²³⁷ Contemporary trauma theory would certainly support this claim, and yet this curious collision of history and therapy brings anxieties about the status of personal history--which, arguably, increasingly combines both therapeutic and historical aspects--as a discourse of truth-telling. I argued in Chapter One that the difference between what are traditionally thought of as historical narratives and therapeutic narratives is not as great as one might imagine. But it is also the case that when therapeutic narratives are too close to historical ones (as in the 'Dora' case) they might not prove therapeutic at all. On a free-association model, on the other hand, the therapeutic narrative might not even be a narrative. In the context of traumatic history Langer might put forward an argument that is nothing if not postmodern, claiming that what is conceived of as a traditional historical narrative is a fiction in itself: the imposition of a 'normal' framework of understanding onto a narrative that persistently resists it. And yet oral Holocaust testimonies are still not comfortably accepted as 'history' in the way that something like *Maus* cannot even neatly fit into the nonfiction category.

²³⁶ Rothberg 2.

The following chapter focuses on a memoir that brings these issues into particularly sharp focus. The revelation of Benjamin Wilkomirski's memoir as a 'fake' was strengthened by suggestions that it was the result of recovered memory therapy. And yet although many believed Wilkomirski to be delusional rather than fraudulent--believing that the memoir represented 'his' truth--its genre-category was subject to intense debate. The Wilkomirski case revealed the ways in which, despite the apparently unproblematic collision of psychoanalysis and history in theory, when subjective truth is at odds with biographical truth, it becomes synonymous with fiction.

²³⁷ Miller, citing Alice Kaplan 104.

Chapter Three

The Liar

Autobiography does not include degrees: it is all or nothing.¹

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on one of the most controversial memoirs of the 1990s: Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939-1948* (1995). *Fragments* enjoyed a brief period of critical acclaim before being exposed as a 'hoax' in 1998. But the case was not straightforward: in spite of mounting evidence against the authenticity of *Fragments*, Wilkomirski persistently refused to renounce the story he told there. The Wilkomirski controversy was heightened by the fact that this was a *Holocaust* memoir in dispute; it was published and denounced at a time when the fear of Holocaust denial was augmenting and debates over the implications of what has become known as 'the Holocaust industry' were becoming increasingly fraught.² The stakes

¹ Phillipe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', *On Autobiography, Theory and History of Literature* 52, trans. Katherine Leary, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 13.

² See, for example, Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000); Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (1999; London: Bloomsbury, 2001); Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Plume, 1994); and D. D. Guttenplan, *The Holocaust on Trial: History, Justice, and the David Irving Libel Case* (London: Granta, 2001). See

were high and the implications of the Wilkomirski case far-reaching. Because of this, I argue, certain aspects of the Wilkomirski case were swamped by the historical implications of this contested memoir.

As a response to increasing doubts over the authenticity of *Fragments* Suhrkamp commissioned a historian to investigate the case. In his report Stefan Maechler concluded that *Fragments* may have been the result of actual but misremembered and seriously decontextualised childhood trauma, that it still in some sense told the story of the child who had become Benjamin Wilkomirski. At the centre of the case, then, was a traumatised child with a 'fictional' identity, whose life story was contravened by the historical record at every turn. This conclusion would appear to be at odds with the simultaneous claim that *Fragments* is a 'fiction', a 'fake', or even a 'hoax'. Yet this was often overlooked because *Fragments* was considered a danger to the status of other survivor testimonies--a danger, perhaps, even to the historical record itself. Even if *Fragments* were the result of pathology, even if it was a trauma narrative in some crucial sense, the ethical breach Wilkomirski had committed in appropriating an experience that was not his own was the focus of most of the commentary on the case. One commentator even claimed that

'A Wilkomirski is in many ways as dangerous, if not more so, than a Holocaust-denier like David Irving'.³

The implications and consequences of the Wilkomirski case have been discussed at length. Some commentators expressed a desire for the case to be closed once the facts are known, yet this outcome seems unlikely.⁴ As Maechler writes, the Wilkomirski case 'is a battle over who occupies and owns what memories and with what right', a question with which Holocaust commentators and historians have become increasingly concerned.⁵ Norman Finkelstein attributes the entire Wilkomirski phenomenon and controversy to a rapidly burgeoning 'culture of victimhood', indicating a further topic for future discussion.⁶ Other relevancies and readings have been proposed. Renata Salecl provides a Lacanian reading of the case, claiming that when traumatic memories are invented it is due to 'the necessary inconsistency of the symbolic order and [. . .] because of the inherent powerlessness of

³ Calev Ben-David, 'A Holocaust Fraud', *Jerusalem Post Newspaper* 1 August 2001, 4 July 2002 <<http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2001/08/09/Books/>>.

⁴ Philip Gourevitch, 'The Memory Thief', *New Yorker* 14 June 1999: 48-62, and Blake Eskin, *A Life in Pieces* (London: Aurum Press, 2002).

⁵ Maechler 304.

⁶ RMT accounts are replete with examples of people walking away from therapy with entirely different life-stories--different identities--from the ones with which they entered. The theory that people accept fantastical alternative life-stories of abuse and horror to gain recognition, attention, or sympathy does not sit easily with some of these accounts which are just as incomprehensible as Wilkomirski's. See for example Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memories: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994) 227-64 for a full account of one such case.

the authorities'.⁷ For Maechler the Wilkomirski affair partly reveals 'the mechanisms that are now part of the Shoah and its remembrance', and he claims that *Fragments* 'reflects the very core structures of the Shoah itself'.⁸

Linda Anderson writes:

In the future it may be possible to understand Wilkomirski's obsession with the Holocaust and absorption of the historical archive of trauma as telling us something, beyond individual pathology, about the pathology of history whose traumatic effects spread uncontrollably and implicate us in ways we do not as yet understand. This might also allow us to see through the fiction to history again.⁹

The Wilkomirski case, it is clear, will continue to initiate lively and contentious discussion in the future. In this chapter I concentrate on an aspect of the Wilkomirski case that has been largely overlooked. I focus on the *generic* implications of Wilkomirski's contested memoir, rather than on the historical implications of his transgression. So much seemed to depend on what was an ostensibly simple generic conundrum: should *Fragments* be relabelled fiction? Should the publishers withdraw it altogether? Should it be repackaged as a kind of 'memoir

⁷ Renata Salecl, 'Why One Would Pretend to be a Victim of the Holocaust?', *Other Voices* 2.1 (February 2000), 17 August 2001 <<http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/salecl/wilkomirski.html>>.

⁸ Maechler 308.

with lies'?¹⁰ One thing was for certain: although Wilkomirski continued to defend the story he told there as 'his truth' *Fragments* could no longer be marketed as a work of non-fiction. In this sense the Wilkomirski case may reveal the parameters of autobiography and highlight the tensions between subjective and objective truth in this genre.

The following section outlines the background to 'the Wilkomirski affair' and in the third section I argue that Wilkomirski's memoir was in fact subtly repackaged as a story of yet another case of recovered memory therapy gone awry. I problematise this reclassification, which, as I show, was based on a partial redefinition of RMT, and against Wilkomirski's vehement protestation.

Wilkomirski's staunchest defenders were those in the mental health professions, or those who had worked with child survivors of trauma. Most of his critics brought to the case the perspective of the historian who insists that what is not fact must be fiction. The most substantial study of the case so far was written by Stefan Maechler, who claims that bad therapy was responsible for the 'tragic aberration' and yet brings the case to a strangely psychoanalytic conclusion.¹¹

⁹ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2001) 133.

¹⁰ This is the subtitle of a memoir I discuss later in the chapter, Lauren Slater, *Spasm: A Memoir with Lies* (London: Methuen, 2000).

¹¹ Maechler 272.

The tensions between psychoanalysis and history ran so high in this case that at the heart of the controversy, I argue, were the beginnings of a much broader debate about a growing divide between psychoanalytically legitimated truth and historically legitimated truth: a debate about authority. If this really is a case of delusion rather than deception, if Wilkomirski has really told his true story the only way he can, then this raises questions about the limits of autobiography or testimony. In the last three sections of this chapter I turn more specifically to questions of genre raised by the Wilkomirski case and consider the implications of the psychoanalysis/ history tension to other exercises in 'truth-telling'. Does this tension only become problematic in cases of testimony in dispute? Is it a problem only of relevance to testimony--where historical imperatives are more pressing--or might it equally implicate other forms of life writing? If, as Maechler's 'study in biographical truth' suggests, the Wilkomirski case could only be explained through a psychoanalytic intervention, then what might this tell us about the uncertain balance of the 'psychoanalytic' and the historical in life writing more generally?

2. A Genuine Fake

Fragments was first published in German in 1995 by the Jüdischer Verlag, a division of the Suhrkamp press. It was a Holocaust memoir written entirely from a child's perspective, a slim volume composed of fragmentary memories of violence and terror in the Nazi extermination camps and an account of a child's attempt to comprehend them. The author, Benjamin Wilkomirski, a Swiss clarinetist of some repute, claimed at the beginning of the memoir that he was 'not a poet or a writer', that he was only trying 'to use words to draw exactly as possible what happened, what I saw'.¹² Nevertheless, *Fragments* was soon translated into 9 languages and hailed as a classic of Holocaust literature. Wilkomirski was compared to Primo Levi, Paul Celan, and Jean Améry and won such prestigious prizes as the *Jewish Quarterly Literary Prize*, the *Prix de Mémoire de la Shoah* and a National Jewish Book Award in London, Paris and New York respectively.¹³ In *Fragments* Wilkomirski told the story of how as a small Latvian Jewish child he was separated from his parents during a massacre of Jews in the Riga ghetto, how he escaped to Poland by boat before being taken to Majdanek concentration camp and then to another camp (possibly Auschwitz). After years of cruelty and torture, Wilkomirski recounts, he was sent to a Krakow

¹² Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948* (1995; London: Picador, 1996) 4.

¹³ Elena Lappin, 'The Man with Two Heads', *Granta* 66 (summer 1999): 49 (reference to comparison with Levi), also Gourevitch: 65 where he refers to correspondence from Harvey Peskin in which he compares Wilkomirski to Celan, Levi and Amery.

orphanage before being adopted by a wealthy Swiss family who gave him a false identity and forbade him to speak of his past.

Wilkomirski's story, told in 'a chaotic jumble' of 'snapshots' and fragmentary memories was, Philip Gourevitch recalls, 'seized upon as a testimonial that delivered what had no longer seemed quite possible: a fresh line of vision on the century's defining moment of inhumanity'.¹⁴ The children's book illustrator Maurice Sendak concluded that 'all children [. . .] are finally vindicated'.¹⁵

The success of *Fragments* gave Wilkomirski the opportunity to travel the globe, giving lectures, accepting prizes, and speaking to the press across Europe, in the United States and in Israel.¹⁶ In 1998, however, an article appeared in a German weekly newspaper *Weltwoche* which would begin what Stefan Maechler referred to as an 'avalanche'.¹⁷

Daniel Ganzfried, a Swiss writer, had been commissioned by a magazine called *Passages* to write a piece on Wilkomirski as part of a series on 'creative people who excelled in an area which was different from their daily

¹⁴ Wilkomirski 4; Gourevitch: 50.

¹⁵ Maurice Sendak, cited in Robert Alter, 'Arbeit Macht Fraud', *The New Republic Online* 30 April 2001, 18 July 2001 <http://www.thenewrepublic.com/043001/alter043001_print.html>.

¹⁶ Gourevitch: 50. Although *Fragments* was a huge critical success, it was not a best-seller, as later commentators have pointed out. Stefan Maechler, for example, writes 'The most copies, 32,000, were sold of the version in English--not really that many when one considers the huge market: the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and the rest of the British Commonwealth; it was a long way from being a bestseller' 119.

¹⁷ Maechler 145.

job'.¹⁸ Ganzfried interviewed Wilkomirski and, after having doubts about his authenticity 'His story began to turn into a piece of detective work'.¹⁹ *Weltwoche* funded the research into Wilkomirski's past and, in two separate pieces in August and September 1998, they published the results.²⁰

Ganzfried's attack was explicit and unambiguous. This is what he had discovered:

The author was born not in Riga, but rather as the illegitimate child of one Yvonne Grosjean in Biel [Switzerland], on 12 February 1941, was later placed temporarily in a children's home in Adelboden, was put up for adoption in 1945, and was finally placed with the Dössekkers in Zürich. Contrary to his claim of having first arrived in Switzerland in 1948, he can be seen posing for a photo "as early as the summer of 1946, merry as can be and surrounded by his family outside their villa in Zürichberg", where he entered the primary school in 1947.²¹

Ganzfried claims that before becoming Bruno Dössekker the author was not, as he claims, Benjamin Wilkomirski but Bruno Grosjean. This evidence would reveal that Wilkomirski was not only not Jewish, but also that he had spent the war years in relative safety in Switzerland. He goes on to conclude his article with a charge that, Maechler states,

¹⁸ Michael Guggenheimer, editor of *Passages*, cited by Lappin: 24.

¹⁹ Lappin: 25.

²⁰ Lappin: 25.

²¹ Maechler 129.

'could not have been more explosive': "Benjamin Wilkomirski, alias Bruno Dössekker [. . .] knows Auschwitz and Majdanek only as a tourist".²²

Although Ganzfried's article was instantly leapt upon by numerous commentators as a shocking exposé of Wilkomirski's deceit, Wilkomirski himself had broached the issue of his double identity in an afterword to *Fragments*. This had been added at the request of his German publisher in an attempt to avoid the kind of controversy that Ganzfried's article initiated. Doubts had been raised even before the publication of *Fragments* in German. But as Elena Lappin indicates, until Ganzfried's attack:

It seemed that no one--no prize judge, publisher, critic, scholar or reader--was troubled by the author's two-page afterword in which he shyly introduced the idea to his readers that Benjamin Wilkomirski was not his only identity.²³

This tentative introduction to the shadowy existence of Bruno Grosjean/ Dössekker (although this name, which appears on Wilkomirski's birth certificate and passport, is nowhere mentioned in *Fragments*) is prefaced by an allusion to the then only recently organised Children of the Holocaust societies and to the fact that countless 'children without identity' are only now able to come

²² Maechler, citing and translating Ganzfried 129.

forward and tell their stories--stories which are contradicted by or left out of the historical record.²⁴ These children were 'furnished with false names and often false papers too. They grew up with a pseudo-identity which in Eastern Europe protected them from discrimination, and in Western Europe, from being sent back east as stateless persons'.²⁵ Wilkomirski, making clear that he too was a 'child without identity', continues:

As a child, I also received a new identity, another name, another date and place of birth. The document I hold in my hands--a makeshift summary, no actual birth certificate--gives the date of my birth as February 12, 1941. But this date has nothing to do with either the history of this century or my personal history.²⁶

Wilkomirski does not give many details in his afterword, for example he makes no mention of the Dössekkers or of Bruno Grosjean. He would later vehemently deny that he and Bruno Grosjean are one and the same person, despite quite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. But here, in his afterword, he simply makes clear an important distinction: 'Legally accredited truth is one thing--the truth of a life

²³ Lappin: 12-13.

²⁴ Gourevitch writes that although Bruno Dössekker is the given name on the passport, the document also includes 'an "artist's" name, Benjamin Wilkomirski: 'the name he claims as his true identity'. Gourevitch: 48-49.

²⁵ Wilkomirski 154.

²⁶ Wilkomirski 154.

another'.²⁷ This distinction would prove crucial to the debate that followed.

It seems that Ganzfried was bemused by the response to his inflammatory articles in *Weltwoche*. 'I thought that I would publish all the facts, and that would be that. Instead I'm realizing that my article has started a strangely philosophical discussion' he told Elena Lappin.²⁸ According to Ganzfried, Wilkomirski is 'a coldly calculating man systematically executing a fraud'.²⁹ Others were less convinced. Although it became clear that there were serious gaps between Wilkomirski's 'legally accredited truth' and the story he told in *Fragments* and elsewhere, and although the events recounted in the memoir were proven to be historically improbable, the question of whether Wilkomirski had 'coldly calculated' the deception or whether he truly believed his story is still being debated.

Wilkomirski was stripped of each of his prizes and honours, and *Fragments* was taken off the shelves until the publishers could decide what to do with it. Some felt that *Fragments* should be reissued as fiction, others thought it should be 'recalled altogether, like a defective automobile'.³⁰ Neither of these things actually occurred. Instead, after a brief hiatus *Fragments* was republished first in German (2000) and then in English (2001) alongside

²⁷ Wilkomirski 154.

²⁸ Lappin: 26.

²⁹ Cited in Maechler 269.

³⁰ Gourevitch: 52.

the results of Stefan Maechler's historical investigation into the case. Gourevitch wrote in 1999 that 'Mächler's [sic] task is to conduct a thoroughgoing and impartial assessment of the case, and to produce a report [. . .] that, whatever its conclusions, will be made available to all the publishers of "Fragments" so that they may include it in future editions of the book'.³¹ It is not quite the case that Maechler's assessment was included in the present edition of *Fragments*, but rather the other way around. The text of Wilkomirski's disputed memoir can now only be found at the end of Maechler's almost 400 page 'study in biographical truth'. *The Wilkomirski Affair*, as it is now called, 'includes' the text of *Fragments* and the name Wilkomirski appears on the title page only in the context of the 'affair'.

Maechler provides overwhelming evidence against Wilkomirski's account and yet is still unable to prove that Wilkomirski lied or that *Fragments* can be seen unambiguously as a fraud. Lappin compares the conundrum to

the two-head theory attributed to the linguist Paul Postal. It is used to describe an utterly arbitrary and unverifiable hypothesis, and goes something like this: Every person in the world has two heads, one of which is permanently invisible.³²

³¹ Gourevitch: 68.

'So what, in this two-headed world', she asks, 'became of the "real" Bruno Grosjean?' Maechler offers a hypothesis of his own and although he was commissioned by Suhrkamp as an impartial historian, he ends up with a strangely psychoanalytic conclusion. His theory is that the young Bruno Grosjean suffered traumas that his adult self was able to recall and recount only by first shielding himself with a different identity, by telling a different story. The real traumatic events suffered by Grosjean/ Wilkomirski are presumed to be unutterable, inaccessible, unassimilable and yet they find expression in the Holocaust story which parallels them.

Although *Fragments* is not historically or biographically verifiable, Maechler concludes that it is still in some sense Wilkomirski's autobiography, still a testament to a traumatic past. After discovering the truth about the early life of Bruno Grosjean, Maechler concludes that 'Wilkomirski-Grosjean did not have two heads; he had not led two lives. Instead, his book tells his own life, the life of Bruno Grosjean--but with breathtaking alienation'.³³ What began as a historical investigation into the referential (im)possibilities of *Fragments* became a wider debate on the gap between psychoanalytically legitimated truth and historically legitimated truth. The conclusion seems to be that Wilkomirski is not a fraud or

³² Lappin: 28.

³³ Maechler 229.

an impostor, but a 'psychological rarity', a genuine fake.³⁴

Despite Maechler's findings *Fragments* is usually described as a 'fake' Holocaust testimony, an unambiguous fiction. There is considerable evidence against Wilkomirski's account and Maechler's trauma explanation is not necessarily mutually exclusive from an accusation of deception, from the possibility that in the absence of an identity and a history Wilkomirski wilfully and knowingly sought out alternative ones. And yet nor does the conclusion that *Fragments* is not true in a historical or a biographical sense rule out the possibility that it was written in good faith.

Maechler admirably unearths a great deal of historical inconsistency in Wilkomirski's account, but Wilkomirski defends these historical inaccuracies by insisting that 'the SURVIVAL OF EVERY SURVIVOR is linked to many very "unlikely" happenings, ways, tricks, coincidences. Because it was not the rule to survive'.³⁵ Because no historian can know the full story about each individual survivor (especially about the relatively undocumented child survivors), the fact of historical inaccuracies in

³⁴ Hanno Helbling wrote a letter to the Jüdischer Verlag expressing some doubts over Wilkomirski's testimony. She was concerned at how *Fragments* was to be marketed, and suggested it might be best to package the book as 'a psychological rarity, testifying to the Holocaust's ability to radiate into new mythic shapes', cited by Maechler 94.

³⁵ Wilkomirski's response to Raul Hilberg's arguments against the historical probability of his story in the CBS *60 Minutes* broadcast about the case (7 February 1999), cited by Maechler 149.

Wilkomirski's account does not amount to hard evidence against him. Although Saul Friedländer was sceptical about the historical accuracy of Wilkomirski's story, he concedes that 'In all this chaos, notwithstanding the organization, it's possible that by some wild chance this small grain of dust could have blown through untouched'.³⁶

More persuasive is the other type of evidence on which Maechler relies in his investigation, evidence based on inconsistencies and improbabilities in Wilkomirski's own account of his story. When faced with the evidence against him Wilkomirski offers what appears to be a highly implausible counter-argument, claiming that the Doessekers did indeed adopt a boy named Bruno Grosjean, but that he was later switched with Wilkomirski in a covert operation born of his adoptive father's anti-Semitism.³⁷ There is no evidence to substantiate this plot, yet although its spuriousness does not inspire confidence nor can it be categorically disproved. One of the most damning pieces of evidence against him is the inheritance he accepted from the birth-mother with whom he now claims no kinship. If Wilkomirski was not, and had never believed himself to be, the son of Yvonne Grosjean, then why did he not only accept

³⁶ Cited by Gourevitch: 55.

³⁷ Maechler 25-26. The name of Wilkomirski's adoptive parents appears in commentary of the case alternately as 'Doesseker' and 'Dösseker'.

an inheritance from her, but even go so far as to contest the will in order to secure his share? ³⁸

Further evidence against Wilkomirski's account comes in the form of his ex-wife who claims that Wilkomirski had always had a tendency to deception. Past acquaintances also verified that Wilkomirski had long been prone to inventing implausible and inconsistent stories about his childhood and upbringing and a child survivor of the Holocaust with whom Wilkomirski had spoken at length went on to claim that Wilkomirski used her memories in his account: 'I was his memory; he appropriated it' she told Maechler.³⁹

And indeed, if Wilkomirski truly believes in his identity as a Holocaust survivor then why does he continue to refuse to submit to the DNA test that could solve the matter once and for all? During his investigations Maechler located a living Grosjean relative who was prepared to submit a DNA sample. Wilkomirski's refusal to offer a sample of his own--against which Max Grosjean's sample could be matched in order to prove a familial relation--indicates an unwillingness to put himself in a position where he might be proved wrong. When Holocaust survivor Yakov Maroko came forward as a potential father to Wilkomirski, however, Wilkomirski allowed a paternity test

³⁸ Wilkomirski states in his letter to the testamentary office that he wished to claim his 'legal rights to a portion of the estate' of his 'birth mother', Maechler 234. He had earlier told Lappin that he had accepted the inheritance only on the insistence of his lawyer that he would not have to accept her as his birth mother, Lappin: 27.

³⁹ Gourevitch: 57; Maechler 199. See Maechler 196-203 for an account of Wilkomirski's relationship with Karola.

to go ahead, even though proof of paternity would have meant relinquishing the Wilkomirski name and identity to which he so ardently clung (it would, however, have proved that he was a Holocaust survivor). The test was negative, but both Wilkomirski and Maroko agreed that this was of no importance. What mattered was 'the human feeling you have'.⁴⁰

Yet more evidence against Wilkomirski's account came in the form of his relationship with another child survivor of the Holocaust who first corroborated his story but was later proved to be a fake of an even greater degree than Wilkomirski. Laura Grabowski first contacted Wilkomirski after reading *Fragments* in 1997 because she was moved by the memoir which recounted similar stories to her own.⁴¹ Serious doubts were later raised about her testimony, but not until after she had appeared with Wilkomirski in a televised interview.⁴² They claimed to recognise each other from Birkenau and had by this point struck up a firm friendship. In 1998, Laura Grabowski wrote to Leon Stabinsky (co-chair of a Los Angeles Holocaust Survivors Group of which she was a member) using the name Grabowski-Stratford. As Stabinsky told Maechler, he had already begun to have doubts about the authenticity of Grabowski's

⁴⁰ Maechler 78.

⁴¹ Maechler 124.

⁴² Shown in the CBS *60 Minutes* broadcast, 7 February 1999.

testimony, but an internet search revealed that Laura or Lauren (Grabowski) Stratford had been doubted before.⁴³

His search unearthed an internet article in the online Christian magazine *Cornerstone*. 'Satan's Sideshow: The True Lauren Stratford Story' was the title of the article by Bob and Gretchen Passantino and Jon Trott which made a startling claim.⁴⁴ Lauren Stratford (alias Laura Grabowski) was the author of *Satan's Underground* (1988), a memoir about her childhood ordeal of sexual abuse, her later involvement with Satanic ritual abusers, and her final recovery through Christianity. Not only this, but the memoir was shown to be a fake, as was her second memoir/self-help manual *I Know You're Hurting* in which Stratford claimed to suffer also from Multiple Personality Disorder.

Laura Stratford was Laurel Willson, born in 1941 in Tacoma, Washington. She had a long history of fabricated life stories. A 1999 *Cornerstone* article 'Lauren Stratford: From Satanic Ritual Abuse to Jewish Holocaust Survivor' provided proof (in the form of social security information and photographs) of the shared identity of Willson-Stratford-Grabowski.⁴⁵ 'Although the two [Wilkomirski and

⁴³ Maechler 205-06.

⁴⁴ Bob and Gretchen Passantino and Jon Trott, 'Satan's Sideshow: The True Lauren Stratford Story', *Cornerstonemag.com* 18.90 (1990), 13 June 2001 <<http://www.cornerstonemag.com/features/iss090/sideshow.htm>>.

⁴⁵ Bob and Gretchen Passantino and Jon Trott, 'Lauren Stratford: From Satanic Ritual Abuse to Jewish Holocaust Survivor', *Cornerstonemag.com* 28.117 (1999), 13 June 2001 <<http://www.cornerstonemag.com/features/iss117/lauren.htm>>. The article can also be reached via a link from the 'stop bad therapy' website under the same title. This is followed by an article on Grabowski/ Stratford and Wilkomirski, subtitled 'two hoaxes for the price of one!', <<http://stopbadtherapy>.

Grabowski] support each other's stories', write the authors, 'they don't have even a modicum of corroboration or evidence to counter the overwhelming evidence that neither story is true'. Grabowski claimed that 'only the individual can decide if he/ she is a survivor'.⁴⁶

There is something deeply unsettling about this proposition when it is combined with the notion of 'memory theft'. Gourevitch, in particular, suspects that Wilkomirski appropriated for himself 'second-hand memories, borrowed memories, and outright stolen memories'. He continues:

I am thinking of a testimony he gave to the Holocaust museum, where he held up a picture of a little blond-haired, Jewish boy in a Krakow orphanage after the war, and said "I know that's me". Who was that child before Wilkomirski clipped his little head and put it on his own shoulders?⁴⁷

Wilkomirski entered the lives of many people during the course of his memoir's success, and many were left somehow scarred once Ganzfried's doubts about his authenticity became more concrete, not least those who initially

com/experts/experts.html>.

⁴⁶ Cited by Passantino, Passantino, and Trott, 'Lauren Stratford'.

⁴⁷ Gourevitch: 68.

believed in Wilkomirski only to have their own credibility questioned in the wake of Ganzfried's attack.⁴⁸

In *A Life in Pieces* (2002) Blake Eskin, whose family initially 'adopted' Wilkomirski as a cousin due to their purportedly shared family name, reflects on the process whereby Wilkomirski was stripped of his assumed identity:

A great effort has gone into convincing people that the lost soul on his way to my parents' apartment is Benjamin Wilkomirski, child survivor of the Holocaust. Later, once he was widely accepted as Benjamin, prying that identity away from him would become a messy and prolonged struggle, conducted on public and private fronts, among the many individuals around the world whose lives and senses of history had become entwined in his.⁴⁹

And yet there is also something deeply poignant in the image of a man on such a desperate quest for an identity and in the ensuing dissolution of that identity, and some of the evidence against Wilkomirski begs certain questions.

Several of the objections to Wilkomirski's behaviour and to his memoir, for example, seem to be based on a paradigmatic model of Holocaust survivors and their testimonies. Gourevitch cites Arthur H. Samuelson, Wilkomirski's American publisher, stating that 'the one

⁴⁸ See, in particular, Maechler's study and Eskin's *A Life in Pieces* for an account of the lives touched by Wilkomirski's.

⁴⁹ Eskin. *A Life in Pieces* 3.

thing [survivors] have in common is that they don't cry'.⁵⁰ Wilkomirski's constant tears raised Samuelson's alarm. Several commentators have noted the obviously constructed nature of Wilkomirski's Jewishness. 'He goes to a hairdresser to get his hair curled' complains Ganzfried, 'He has a phoney Yiddish accent'.⁵¹ Gourevitch describes Wilkomirski's appearance on the televised meeting of Wilkomirski and Maroko where he 'appears in a flowing scarf, draped in a batik scarf, with a yarmulke pinned to his curls'.⁵² Holocaust survivors, indeed Jews, Gourevitch hints, do not look like this. And again, describing Wilkomirski on video footage of his trip to Majdanek, Gourevitch remarks: 'his meandering movements, wincing eyes, and bewildered, groping recitations of his memories have a strangely comforting familiarity; this, we know, is how a "rememberer" looks in a movie'.⁵³

One of Ganzfried's main objections to Wilkomirski's testimony is 'the pornography of violence' in *Fragments*.⁵⁴ This was also an objection to Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* (1965), D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), and Helen Demidenko's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994).⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Gourevitch: 51.

⁵¹ Cited by Gourevitch: 65.

⁵² Gourevitch: 61.

⁵³ Gourevitch: 61.

⁵⁴ So he told Gourevitch: 65.

⁵⁵ See Sue Vice *Holocaust Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000) 39, 69 and 156. Emphasis has also been placed on Demidenko's 'constructed' Ukrainian identity: 'dressed in peasant blouses and sporting long blonde hair, she appeared on chat shows and was widely interviewed about her family history and her writing. [. . .] her hair was not really blonde', writes Vice 143.

Both Demidenko's and Kosinski's 'novels' were involved in similar generic controversies to Wilkomirski and Thomas's novel was criticised for its fictionalisation (and sexualisation) of historical events.

Pornographic violence is a feature in these three fictionalised or inauthentic Holocaust accounts and, according to Ganzfried's blueprint, is never a feature of authentic Holocaust testimony at all.⁵⁶ His prescription suggests that there is such a thing as a paradigmatic testimony and presumably that this form can be imitated. Wilkomirski's crime, it seems, lies not in his imposture alone, but in his failure to impersonate accurately. Although Wilkomirski's memoir was initially received as a prime example of traumatic narrative, Lappin claimed that on first reading *Fragments*, her feeling was that 'it wasn't fragmented enough'.⁵⁷ And yet as Gourevitch notes, this may be one of the best arguments in Wikomirski's favour: 'if he'd set out to pull off a hoax he couldn't have done a worse job of it'.⁵⁸

If Wilkomirski is, as Ganzfried claims, 'a coldly calculating man' then the treatment of him in Maechler's study and elsewhere has been remarkably temperate. If he is in fact--although this seems unlikely--a Holocaust survivor

⁵⁶ Questions have been raised over the authenticity of Dave Pelzer's highly successful 1990s trilogy of memoirs *A Child Called 'It'* (1995); *The Lost Boy* (1997); and *A Man Named Dave* (2000) and for similar reasons. See Geraldine Bedell, 'Child Abuse as Entertainment', *Observer* 2 September 2001, Review: 1-2; and 'Did He Make "It" All Up?', *Mail on Sunday* 25 March 2001.

⁵⁷ Lappin: 13.

and the victim of a conspiracy to conceal his Jewish identity then the withdrawal of his books and prizes, along with the intrusion into his life, is far more than he should have had to bear. As Eva Koralnik, Wilkomirski's agent, told Maechler: 'What an upside-down world, in which a victim of the Shoah had to prove his story; what a dreadful humiliation for the man'.⁵⁹ Wilkomirski's long-time supporter, Lea Balint, believed that until enough evidence could be provided to confirm his story, 'This careless, ugly, and inhuman treatment of him must stop'.⁶⁰ But if he is a 'genuine fake', that is if his memories are wrong but he continues to believe in them and to defend them, then what are the ethical implications of the attacks against him? Can he be condemned for being deluded?

Wilkomirski himself went so far as to brand the interrogative techniques of his accusers 'fascist'. Referring to Raul Hilberg's criticism of him during the CBS *60 Minutes* broadcast about the controversy, Wilkomirski proclaimed:

It is the same tactic, used in the fifties and sixties, by former Nazi-judges in Nazi wartime

⁵⁸ Gourevitch: 56.

⁵⁹ Maechler 95.

⁶⁰ Maechler, citing Balint's letter to *The New Yorker* after Ganzfried's exposé 152. Balint supported Wilkomirski largely due to her work with 'Children Without Identity' and to the fact that to deny Wilkomirski's memories would be to risk victimising him (and other child survivors) further if he really was telling the truth. She remained staunch in the face of doubts and maintained that until DNA evidence could refute Wilkomirski's story he ought to be given the benefit of the doubt, Maechler 156.

trials towards Jewish witnesses and victims [. . .]. This is a real FASCIST TECHNIQUE OF ARGUMENTATION. I can even hear the noise of Mr. Goebbels' dances and shouts of joy in hell!⁶¹

In a similar vein, he describes the way in which the instant success of his memoir made him feel finally 'liberated'.⁶² When Ganzfried's exposé was first published, however, his wife reported that Wilkomirski was 'absolutely pushed back to the time from in the camps'.⁶³ As Gourevitch notes: 'when Wilkomirski renounces "the ordering logic of grown-ups", he is not only telling his readers, "You must believe me", he is also issuing a warning: "To disbelieve me is to participate in my further victimization"'.⁶⁴

The 'genuine fake' explanation is the only way around what has become an impasse. If Wilkomirski is neither a Holocaust survivor nor a fake, then what, exactly, is he? Norman Finkelstein, with his characteristic frankness, describes Wilkomirski as 'Half-fruitcake, half-mountebank' and yet if the tension is, as he suggests, between pathology and deception it is interesting that the majority of commentators come down on the side of pathology.⁶⁵ 'I am not a psychologist', Lappin begins her conclusion of the Wilkomirski case; 'Still, the similarities between

⁶¹ Cited by Maechler 150.

⁶² Lappin: 18.

⁶³ Lappin: 18 and Gourevitch: 51.

⁶⁴ Gourevitch: 52.

⁶⁵ Finkelstein 60.

Fragments, the early life of Benjamin Wilkomirski, and what we know of the early life of the real Bruno Grosjean are too striking to resist'.⁶⁶ Maechler insists that Wilkomirski was in fact 'horribly victimized'--without therapy 'Wilkomirski's tragic aberration would be unthinkable'.⁶⁷

It is almost as though the psychoanalytic explanation is necessary here only because *Fragments* was the result of bad therapy, but perhaps the psychoanalytic approach is the only way to conceive of this story as both untrue and yet in an important sense also true to the teller. Maechler's psychoanalytic intervention may have served as an exit route from another impasse. It might have been a way in which *Fragments* could be branded a fake and yet Wilkomirski excused from the charge of fraudulence, a way of delivering a verdict of innocence based on an unsound mind. The tensions between psychoanalytic and historical approaches to Wilkomirski's disputed testimony and to testimony in general is a focus of the following section, which discusses Wilkomirski's enforced relationship with the RMT debate. Might therapy have proved a convenient scapegoat in the absence of a clearly definable motive for the 'crime'?

⁶⁶ Lappin: 65.

⁶⁷ Maechler 272.

3. 'The Controversial Category': The Wilkomirski Case and RMT

'I grew up and became an adult in a time and in a society that didn't want to listen, or perhaps was incapable of listening', begins Wilkomirski's afterword to *Fragments*, 'So for decades I was silent, but my memory could not be wiped clean'.⁶⁸ Wilkomirski claims that *Fragments* was an attempt to reclaim this silenced voice and describes the process by which this was enabled:

Years of research, many journeys back to the places where I remember things happened, and countless conversations with specialists and historians have helped me to clarify previously inexplicable shreds of memory, to identify places and people, to find them again and to make a possible, more or less chronology out of it.⁶⁹

He makes an important distinction here between silence due to *oppression* and silence due to *repression*, and thus takes a more historically biased view on Holocaust testimony than those expressed by theorists of trauma and the Holocaust.⁷⁰

There has always been a difference of opinion between these two factions--psychoanalysis and history. Whereas

⁶⁸ Wilkomirski 153.

⁶⁹ Wilkomirski 155.

Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub and Cathy Caruth, for example, would maintain that the silence of survivors after the war and until recently was as much a psychological effect of trauma as it was an effect of political oppression, some more historically biased commentators would claim that silence was maintained only in relation to the 'outside world'. Laub writes of the 'historical gap' which occurred between the event of the Holocaust and its widespread disclosure in oral testimony. Drawing on a psychoanalytic theory of belatedness he claims that 'It is not by chance that these testimonies, even if they were engendered during the event--become recoverable only today'.⁷¹

Saul Friedländer, however, would disagree that the 'historical gap' was filled with silence, that belatedness was due to repression:

The 15 or 20 years of "latency" that followed the war in regard to talking or writing about the Shoah, particularly in the United States, should not be equated with massive repression exclusively, in contradiction to the German scene. The silence did not exist within the survivor community. It was maintained in relation to the outside world, and was often imposed by shame, the shame of telling a story that must appear unbelievable. [. . .] The

⁷⁰ Silence due to oppression and silence due to repression are not, of course, mutually exclusive categories, but most commentators seem to adhere to one explanation more than the other.

silence was breached, especially in Israel, by the debates from 1951 on concerning the reparations agreement in Germany, the Kastner trial, and finally Eichmann's capture and trial.⁷²

The first readers of *Fragments* may well have wondered why Wilkomirski describes his memories as 'inexplicable', why it took 'years of research' before childhood memories could be made sense of. Indeed, the first review of Wilkomirski's memoir raised some doubts, but *Fragments* was widely read by others as a testament to trauma and memory and an example of oppression overcome.⁷³ For Jonathan Kozol, writing in the *Nation*, the reader of *Fragments* must participate 'in the chaos of a child's desperate incomprehension, his longing to find reference points that might explain the inexplicable'.⁷⁴ He adds that *Fragments* 'is likely to be

⁷¹ Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle', *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 66.

⁷² Saul Friedländer, 'Trauma, Memory, and Transference', *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 259. Finkelstein also maintains that there is no evidence to support a theory of repression in this case. He claims that 'The real reason for public silence on the Nazi extermination was the conformist policies of the American Jewish leadership and the political climate of postwar America' 13.

⁷³ See Maechler 111-119 on the first review of *Fragments* by Klara Obermüller in *Weltwoche* in August 1995 and on the subsequent, mainly unquestioning, reviews.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Kozol, 'Children of the Camps', rev. of *Fragments*, by Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Nation* 28 October 1996, 17 August 2001 <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/children-camps-bk-review-html>>. As we have seen (Chapter One) the detective memoir which emphasises the search for the past had, by the time of *Fragments*'s publication, become commonplace and this could be a reason why Wilkomirski's afterword was not initially considered odd. Also commonplace by this stage was an increasing acknowledgement that memoirs (particularly illness memoirs) are as relevant to psychologists, medical practitioners, historians, and social scientists as they are to literary critics or the general reader.

read as much by child psychologists as it will be by historians'.

Wilkomirski's claim that his memoir is the product of research and 'countless conversations with specialists and historians' may have served initially as a kind of factual rhetoric, designed to deflect attention from historical and factual inaccuracies.⁷⁵ Yet these avowed attempts to find an 'access to' his own past were later used as evidence against him, the implication being that if his memories were real then he should not have had to seek verification for them in the history books or elsewhere. What Wilkomirski does not mention in his afterword is a course of psychotherapy that he undertook while researching the book, that his best friend and confidant during this process, Elitsur Bernstein, also happens to be a psychotherapist, and that his 'access to' the past relied on both psychoanalytic and historical forms of investigation.

Although in his afterword Wilkomirski appears to place himself firmly in the historians' camp on the question of oppression versus repression, the back cover of the first UK and US editions told a different story. Or rather it told the same story, but either inadvertently or knowingly,

⁷⁵ The childlike perspective Wilkomirski maintains throughout *Fragments* was also seen to serve the same purpose. As Maechler writes: 'Historical imprecisions or contradictions do not impair credibility; on the contrary, they underscore the authenticity of a childlike perception' and 'conceal the fact' that the memoir is written with 'the conscious, knowing mind of an adult', Maechler 279.

it introduced a word that by 1995 had become so ideologically loaded that it thrust Wilkomirski into the midst of the memory wars. 'Only in adulthood', announced that fateful blurb, 'did [Wilkomirski] find a way to recover his memories'. Once suspicions about *Fragments's* authenticity began to spread, the publisher's use of the word 'recovery' meant that the recovery of Wilkomirski's past, regardless of his denials and distinctions, was now firmly bound up with the 'controversial category' of recovered memory therapy. The most recent book about the Wilkomirski case, Blake Eskin's *A Life in Pieces*, states the RMT connection clearly on the inside front cover, asserting that Wilkomirski 'claimed to have unearthed his repressed Holocaust memories through therapy'.

Wilkomirski was vehement that his memories were not the result of RMT. When asked about his 'recovered memories' by Gourevitch he responded:

RECOVERED MEMORY means to re-discover through therapy, lost things of your unconscious memory. And that is in my case ABSOLUTELY WRONG. Never in my life have I forgotten what I wrote in my book. I had NOTHING TO RE-DISCOVER again.⁷⁶

Bernstein confirmed that the therapy Wilkomirski underwent with Monica Matte was not in 'that controversial

⁷⁶ Gourevitch 54.

category'.⁷⁷ He was alluding to RMT and presumably to the most contentious areas of the recovered memory debate: the therapists' use of hypnosis and truth serum (sodium amytal) in order to recover repressed memories, to the phenomenon of 'robust repression' itself along with the notion that this can be followed by full recovery of previously unsuspected memories which are then unambiguously assumed to be historical fact.

Mark Pendergrast was the first to make the connection between Wilkomirski and RMT. Pendergrast wrote his anti-RMT book *Victims of Memory* (1995) in response to false accusations of abuse levelled at him by his adult daughters.⁷⁸ He suggests that Wilkomirski may have changed his story due to the increasingly controversial nature of recovered memories:

Now that *Fragments* has been publicly debunked, Wilkomirski/Doessekker won't submit to interviews, but he apparently claims, via third parties, that he has always recalled these horrors. Yes, he was in therapy, but only for personal problems. Such an assertion is highly suspect, probably a rationalization and yet another rewriting of the more recent past. If he has always remembered all of this, why would

⁷⁷ Maechler 89. The name of Wilkomirski's therapist appears alternately in commentary as 'Matte' or 'Matta'.

⁷⁸ Mark Pendergrast, *Victims of Memory: Incest Accusations and Shattered Lives* (1995; London: Harper Collins, 1997). In *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (1995; London: Granta, 1997) Frederick Crews refers to *Victims of Memory* as 'a 603-page dose of history, logic, and exhortation' 204.

he allow the publisher to call them recovered memories on the book's back cover? Why would he stress the fragmentary, chaotic nature of his "memories", writing about how "the first pictures surface one by one, like upbeats"? Why would he have referred to recovered memories in speeches?⁷⁹

This may be more a problem of terminology than anything; apart from scattered references to 'recovery' there is no evidence to prove that Wilkomirski ever admitted to having repressed all memory of his childhood traumas prior to his therapy with Monica Matte. In fact he strove to make it clear that this is not what he meant by 'recovery'. The term 'recovery' or even the more controversial 'recovered memory', moreover, need not refer specifically to the controversial therapeutic practices of the late 1980s and early 1990s. As we saw in Chapter One, recovery--both the term and the concept--might equally refer to the autobiographical act, even when the memories recovered are not traumatic in nature. Wilkomirski's therapist was an advocate of non-classic psychoanalysis and employed techniques such as art therapy and concentration exercises in order to elicit memories. Wilkomirski maintained that his memories had always been present; therapeutic exercises

⁷⁹ Mark Pendergrast, 'Recovered Memories and the Holocaust', *stopbadtherapy* 14 January 1999, 14 June 2001 <<http://www.stopbadtherapy.com/experts/fragments/fragments.shtml>>.

only served to provide a context for them, to help him to 'make sense of' troubling nightmares and body memories.⁸⁰

Much has been made of the fact that Wilkomirski changed his story throughout his life and this evidence appears to be at odds with his claim that he had always remembered his childhood. Maechler interviewed past acquaintances of Wilkomirski and found that he had claimed to be a refugee from the Baltic States during his high-school years.⁸¹ 'Not until the mid-1960s', he adds, 'did he begin to manifest a Jewish heritage, wearing a necklace with the Star of David, donning a yarmulke at home, and mounting a mezuzah on his apartment door'.⁸² He first used the name Wilkomirski in 1972 and by the early 1980s a documentary featuring Wilkomirski revealed that his 'biography had definitely become a Shoah story'.⁸³

Wilkomirski's therapy with Monica Matte did not begin until the early 1990s.⁸⁴ This chronology alone should preclude the possibility of therapy-induced Holocaust 'memories'. Wilkomirski's Holocaust-related life stories pre-date his therapy by at least a decade. The fact that Wilkomirski's stories changed between his high-school years and the publication of *Fragments* may well support an accusation of deception (or of a deliberate construction of an alternative identity) but it would not support a theory

⁸⁰ Maechler 82, 89, 251.

⁸¹ Maechler 237.

⁸² Maechler 237.

⁸³ Maechler 239-40.

of 'robust repression' followed by recovery through therapy of previously unsuspected memories. Wilkomirski's changing story, in fact, goes some way to confirm his claim that therapy was a means of finding a chronology for his story and of explaining 'previously inexplicable shreds of memory' that had nonetheless always been present.

It seems that it was interpretation, rather than the contested issue of repression that was the problem here, a question of reconstruction rather than of recovery. We do not need to dispute the existence of repression to see how 'inexplicable' memories can become 'explanatory fictions'. The link between RMT and Wilkomirski might reveal to us the ways in which the RMT debate was far broader in scope than it seemed to be: implicating not just disreputable therapy, the use of drugs or hypnosis to elicit repressed memories, but more broadly the issue of whether or not memories recovered (in any way) could count as historical truth.⁸⁵

One aspect of Wilkomirski's story that critics found contestable was his claim that he was able to retain photographic images from his very early childhood. Infantile amnesia should make such a claim untenable.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Maechler 88.

⁸⁵ J. P. Roos claims that 'the recovered-memory discussion throws more light on the debate concerning reality and construction of life stories than on the actual question of repression of memories', 'Reality or Nothing! False and Repressed Memories and Autobiography', *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*, Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leysdorff, and Graham Dawson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1999) 213.

⁸⁶ Pendergrast uses this as evidence against Wilkomirski's supposed recovered memory claims. see 'Recovered Memories and the Holocaust'

When Maechler advanced his theory that Wilkomirski's Holocaust story was a rewriting of actual, but very different, childhood traumas, however, he found some interesting results. Maechler found evidence to support his theory that many of Wilkomirski's Holocaust 'memories' were actually distorted memories of his time spent in children's homes in Switzerland: that they were real, but decontextualised memories of his childhood. Maechler found parallels between the malevolent female guard in Majdanek and an emotionally unstable and violent foster mother, between Wilkomirski's account of a happy kite-flying incident with his brother Motti and his former foster brother's account of an identical incident. There are several more examples, but what struck Maechler, in spite of the vastly skewed contextualisation, was the accuracy of these memories. Wilkomirski accurately sketched details of a former foster home and its surroundings and, although he claimed them to be sketches of a hiding place in Poland, he 'had even correctly indicated the position of the rising sun'.⁸⁷ The accuracy of his memories--'the boy was only three, four years old at the time' writes Maechler--astounded both Maechler and Wilkomirski's former foster brother.⁸⁸ Whereas Wilkomirski's claim that he remembered events and scenes from very early childhood was used as

and also Pendergrast's letter to the editor of the *New Yorker* in the wake of Gourevitch's attack: <<http://www.stopbadtherapy.com/experts/frgments/letter.shtml>>.

⁸⁷ Maechler 230.

evidence against his Holocaust story, it now served as confirmation of Maechler's new theory.⁸⁹

Pendergrast is insistent on the RMT connection, and for him it leads to only one conclusion. In a 1999 article on recovered memory and the Holocaust he describes his first reaction to *Fragments*:

I couldn't help wondering about some passages, including the one [. . .] in which the young Wilkomirski--apparently only two or three years old--survived having his head bashed into a wall. Then I read the back cover of the book. "Only in adulthood did [Wilkomirski] find a way to recover his memories". Oh, no, I thought. *Recovered memories!* I realized that I was probably reading a book filled with false memories of the Holocaust--not necessarily lies, but perhaps delusions, created either alone or with the help of psychotherapy.⁹⁰

Wilkomirski persistently attempted to extricate himself from the recovered memory connection, but by this point it was too late and the recovered memory issue was almost unanimously offered as an explanation for his false or confabulated memories.⁹¹ The FMS (false memory syndrome)

⁸⁸ Maechler 230.

⁸⁹ Maechler does not find parallels, however, between the early life of Bruno Grosjean and some of Wilkomirski's more horrific memories and so his explanation is in some sense incomplete. Where did Wilkomirski's memory of the bloody rat emerging from a female corpse come from, for example?

⁹⁰ Pendergrast, 'Recovered Memories and the Holocaust'.

⁹¹ Confabulation is a term which became commonplace during the memory debates of the 1990s. A confabulation is a blend of true and false

Foundation even cited the exposé of Wilkomirski as another triumph against RMT.⁹² The RMT connection answered a troubling question for Wilkomirski's critics, however. If Wilkomirski's memoir told 'his truth' then how could it also be a 'hoax'? The 'bad therapy' explanation served to shift the blame of deception away from Wilkomirski and onto the therapists responsible for the creation of his mistaken identity.

While Pendergrast believes that 'Wilkomirski/ Doesseker [. . .] has truly come to believe his recovered "memories"', some have argued that Wilkomirski himself may have used the RMT connection as a means of evading responsibility. Hilberg, for example, agrees with Ganzfried, as Pendergrast writes, 'that this is a case of conscious fraud, since Doesseker accepted money from the Swiss state when his biological mother died. "I believe he is just using the whole recovered memory as a tool", Hilberg told me, "not that he believes it necessarily"'.⁹³

Although it is contestable whether Wilkomirski's memories were the result of suggestive therapeutic techniques, there is one further aspect of the case which suggests an affinity between his case and RMT. This is Wilkomirski's insistence that his memories--and his story

memories, some details taken from actual experience with others added in order to confabulate a coherent story out of them.

⁹² See for example this online FMS newsletter:

<<http://www.fmsfonline.org/fmsf99.n24.html>>.

⁹³ Pendergrast, 'Recovered Memories and the Holocaust'.

as told in *Fragments*--unquestionably reflect the historical truth. Ganzfried's exposé in *Die Weltwoche* was followed by a long article in *Die Zeit*, by sceptical journalist Jörg Lau.⁹⁴ Lau believed that Wilkomirski's and Bernstein's joint therapy proposal was responsible for the beliefs which made the writing of *Fragments* possible. Lau claimed that: 'It was written in the spirit of a presumptuous psychotherapy that believes it can provide meaning in life, indeed as "identity", by accepting, supporting, and authenticating as "historical reality" anything the client may choose to offer'.⁹⁵

Maechler believes that Wilkomirski's and Bernstein's therapeutic methodology can reveal much about Wilkomirski's own recovery techniques since in his speeches on the methodology he offers 'examples exclusively from his own memory'.⁹⁶ The method also reveals Bernstein's therapeutic inclinations which may have impacted on Wilkomirski, although Bernstein claims never to have analysed him. Maechler suggests that Wilkomirski's companions throughout the writing and the publication of *Fragments*, Wilkomirski's wife and Bernstein both 'held a position that granted privileged status to subjective memory'.⁹⁷

Matte also responded to doubts about Wilkomirski's memoir by assuring the publisher that '*Fragments* described

⁹⁴ Maechler 134.

⁹⁵ Cited by Maechler 135.

⁹⁶ Maechler 247.

⁹⁷ Maechler 271.

the actual memories of her patient of two and a half years'.⁹⁸ This might have contributed to the Wilkomirski/RMT connection, but it could be countered that all therapies grant privileged status to subjective truth and that the problems arise, as was evident from the RMT controversy, only when analysands go public with their therapeutically retrieved memories and claim that they unquestionably represent biographical or historical fact.

As Charles Hanly wrote in an argument against Jeffrey Masson in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*: 'It would be painfully humiliating, confusing and profoundly detrimental to the progress of an analysis if an analyst were to treat even a distorted memory of a real event as though it were a phantasy'.⁹⁹ And if Wilkomirski had, as he claims, entered therapy with his Holocaust narrative already in place, if it was not an outcome of the therapy itself, then why need Matte have doubted these 'memories'?

Peter Brooks, identifying the difference between psychoanalytic and legal definitions of truth, wonders what would happen if Freud's final analyses of 'Dora' and 'The Wolf Man' were tested in a court of law. He writes:

The point is, of course, that Freud never intended them to be subjected to legal determinations of truth. If in the earlier

⁹⁸ Eskin 59.

⁹⁹ Cited by Ann Scott in *Real Events Revisited: Fantasy, Memory, and Psychoanalysis* (London: Virago, 1996) 11.

case, in *Dora*, he still seems to believe that the psychoanalyst has access to the truth of an individual's factual biography, in the later example, the *Wolf Man*, and in much of his subsequent writing, he makes it clear that the status of truth in psychoanalysis is different. It is a truth constructed in a transactional, transferential interaction of analyst and analysand, a truth whose verifiability finally is not at issue, since what counts is its explanatory force and its therapeutic value.¹⁰⁰

In fact Bernstein's and Wilkomirski's therapy method seems designed to avoid privileging subjective truth over historical reality, as attested by their insistence that the method requires the presence of both a psychologist and a historian.

In 1995 Wilkomirski gave a guest lecture at the University of Ostrava in the Czech Republic. It focussed on two areas of history which he felt had been neglected: oral history and the historical experiences of children during the Shoah. The lecture was entitled 'The Child's Memory as a Historical Source in Contemporary History, as Exemplified by Surviving Children of the Shoah'.¹⁰¹ The therapy proposal was based on an interdisciplinary model which suggested the collaboration of both psychologists and historians: 'To prevent the historian from causing further trauma with his

¹⁰⁰ Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 123-24.

¹⁰¹ Maechler 80.

questions, he himself, along with the witness, requires the support of a psychologist versed in the field'.¹⁰² While the psychologist's presence was required to prevent further trauma, the historian was required in order to corroborate memories recovered through the therapeutic procedure.

It is clear how this therapeutic proposal could be interpreted as an attempt to further legitimate Wilkomirski's testimony. The presence of the historian might counter the claims that memories recovered through therapy have no basis in historical fact. Wilkomirski suggests four techniques to aid the 'reactivation' of traumatic childhood memories: concentration exercises, visits to the site of the trauma, drawing exercises, and conversations with those with similar memories.¹⁰³ Memories 'reactivated' in this way may not represent historical truth, but the presence of both psychologist and historian should ensure that subjective and historical truth coalesce.

Ideally the collaborative efforts of historian and psychologist should result in a finely tuned balance between the different aspects of testimony: the witness recovers a memory which is then verified by the listening historian. Drawing on transcripts of Wilkomirski's speeches, however, Maechler illustrates how this technique can go horribly wrong: the therapist attempts to elicit

¹⁰² Maechler 81.

¹⁰³ Maechler 247-48.

enough memory-detail to find a historical explanation and ends up contributing 'to his fabrication of pseudomemories'.¹⁰⁴

Pendergrast is scathing about Wilkomirski's therapeutic methodology and insists that Wilkomirski's and Bernstein's model of recovery is no different from that practised by recovered memory therapists: 'using their method, even preverbal memories could be recovered accurately fifty years later'.¹⁰⁵ Pendergrast's insistence on the connection between Wilkomirski's case and RMT is puzzling: the link seems to be dependent on Wilkomirski's supposed claim that he was able to recover memories repressed since childhood (both in himself and in others), but nowhere does Wilkomirski make a claim for total repression of memory followed by recovery. His claim instead seems to be that his therapeutic technique enables him to find historical verification for the flimsiest of memory traces and thus to verify them as accurate memories of past experiences. This is, of course, problematic in itself, but it is not the same claim that recovered memory therapists were making. The greatest problem with his theory is that none of his 'clients' are prepared to agree that the therapy worked for them. One in particular claims

¹⁰⁴ Maechler 255.

¹⁰⁵ Pendergrast, 'Recovered Memories and the Holocaust'.

that Wilkomirski took credit for memory work she had accomplished alone.¹⁰⁶

The RMT debate, as I have discussed, was rooted in polemic and although the debate may have cooled it still remains fixed in impasse. Critics of RMT usually share a similar strategy of attack. They cite Ellen Bass and Laura Davis's RMT 'bible' *The Courage to Heal* (1988) as an example of hyperbolic victim-appointing and Elizabeth Loftus's clinical memory trials as an example of the untenability of RMT claims.¹⁰⁷ Loftus provides evidence that false memories can be implanted in people's minds and against the validity of massive repression.¹⁰⁸ Supporters of RMT counter this, however, by claiming that Loftus's memory experiments do not adequately replicate a traumatic situation and so are not applicable to cases of severe psychic trauma.¹⁰⁹

The RMT debate allowed for little ambiguity of memory. At its furthest extremes RMT supporters were liable to claim that memories recovered in therapy were always true

¹⁰⁶ Maechler 257-62.

¹⁰⁷ See for example, Crews 193; Pendergrast; Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1997; London: Picador, 1998) 60-61; and Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memory, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria* (London: André Deutsch, 1995) 6.

¹⁰⁸ See Loftus and Ketcham and also Elizabeth F. Loftus *Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) on the problem of witnessing and memory.

¹⁰⁹ See Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 246-47 and Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 125 for an account of Bessel A. van der Kolk's challenge to Loftus. See also Crews 165-67. Crews cites recovered memory advocate Lenore Terr claiming that 'Trauma sets up new rules for memory', but he supports Loftus's vehemently anti-RMT position.

and RMT critics came close to suggesting they were always false. Ambiguities in memory (which there almost certainly always are) were used as evidence against the claim that therapeutically retrieved memories can be historically accurate. And this is the argument that Maechler uses against Wilkomirski's insistence that his memories are recorded in 'exact snapshots':

One cannot help but notice [. . .] how much Wilkomirski has appropriated from the two basic principles of recovered-memory therapy. Particularly noteworthy is the assumption that past experiences leave behind photographic traces, so to speak, that can remain unchanged up to the present. If there is any consensus in the broad field of memory research, it concerns the abandonment of a memory model that proceeds from a storing of engrams or representations.¹¹⁰

And yet Maechler would later discover that Wilkomirski had retained photographically exact memories from his early childhood, although the story and the identity he had constructed around them were founded on a false contextualisation.

It is surprising that Maechler does not engage more fully with contemporary trauma theory in his study. Felman, Laub, and Caruth are notably absent from *The Wilkomirski Affair*, as are other commentators on traumatic memory,

¹¹⁰ Maechler 252-53.

testimony and the Holocaust such as Dominick LaCapra, James E. Young and Michael Roth.¹¹¹ Perhaps this omission is born of an unwillingness to consider *Fragments* as though it were an actual trauma narrative--even though this is Maechler's conclusion in the final analysis. Maechler cites van der Kolk on confabulation in order to provide extra support for his theory that Wilkomirski was the victim of irresponsible therapy, but van der Kolk's other work on trauma narrative allows for more ambiguity than this would suggest.

Van der Kolk suggests in 'The Intrusive Past' (written in collaboration with van der Hart) that encouraging the witness/ patient to exchange traumatic memories for alternative stories may even be a therapeutically beneficial technique. 'Both Janet and many contemporary psychotherapists', he writes, 'have tried to assist their patients [. . .] by suggesting to them an alternative, less negative or even positive scenario'.¹¹² Janet suggested to a patient who was traumatized by the sight of naked corpses after a cholera epidemic that she visualise the corpses with clothes on, or getting up and walking away. Van der Kolk concludes: 'Memory is everything. Once flexibility is introduced, the traumatic memory starts losing its power over current experience. By imagining these alternative

¹¹¹ Some of their reactions to the Wilkomirski affair are recorded in Maechler's study, but he does not engage with their theories.

¹¹² Bessel A. van der Kolk, 'The Intrusive Past', *Trauma: Explorations of Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 178.

scenarios, many patients are able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror'.¹¹³

Although we are to assume that Wilkomirski's Holocaust story did not function as a 'more positive scenario' than his actual childhood traumas, van der Kolk's theories in 'The Intrusive Past' would suggest that an analysand who had been encouraged to accept memories that are not true to aid the therapeutic process is not necessarily a victim of bad therapy. Whilst in Maechler's study van der Kolk served as a kind of expert witness to provide further evidence that Wilkomirski's memories are confabulations, if not simply false, a more thorough discussion of recent trauma theories alongside the Wilkomirski case yields interesting results.

Certain aspects of trauma theory would in fact corroborate parts of Wilkomirski's story, such as his insistence on the literalness of his memories. It is *precisely* the literalness of traumatic memories and recurring nightmares that makes them so problematic.¹¹⁴ But trauma theory would problematise Wilkomirski's claim that he was able to render these memories accurately and factually in prose. As Felman points out:

What the testimony does not offer is [. . .] a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events. In the testimony, language is in

¹¹³ Van der Kolk 178.

process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constataion of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge.¹¹⁵

Maechler problematises *Fragments* on the grounds that Wilkomirski appeared to know too much about the nature of traumatic memory; he notes that the fragmentary, gap-filled narrative of *Fragments* reveals that Wilkomirski relied on 'a manifest understanding of how traumatized memory functions'.¹¹⁶ He writes:

In assuming a child's perspective, Wilkomirski is imitating patients who often say that they recall a traumatic experience with the same intensity as if it were immediately present. This fragmentary form also allows the author to make use of a hallmark of authentic memories of Shoah survivors: they cannot give what happened a meaning, cannot put the disparate pieces together into a coherent narrative so that what they have suffered may loosen its hold over their present life and become the past. These formal characteristics turn *Fragments* into what is apparently a textbook case of traumatic memory.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Caruth's introduction to *Trauma*.

¹¹⁵ Shoshana Felman, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992) 5.

¹¹⁶ Maechler 279. See Mary Jacobus, 'Border Crossings: Traumatic Reading and Holocaust Memory', *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) for a discussion of the ways in which Wilkomirski's descriptions of memory cohere with both Freudian and Lacanian notions of traumatic memory.

¹¹⁷ Maechler 279-80.

Paradoxically the fact that *Fragments* is 'a textbook case' serves as evidence against its authenticity for Maechler because, as he later states 'the only authentic autobiographical story of Auschwitz is the one that marks the impossibility of its authenticity in the text'.¹¹⁸ And yet Maechler seems to argue that *Fragments* does just that.

One of the primary objections to Wilkomirski's anti-RMT defence is his description of his memories as 'exact snapshots of photographic memory'.¹¹⁹ He began *Fragments* with a declaration that he was not a writer, that his memoir was an attempt 'to draw exactly as possible what happened'.¹²⁰ It is written entirely through a child's perspective and renounces, as Wilkomirski writes, 'the ordering logic of grown-ups'.¹²¹ He thus makes a claim not just for the accuracy of his memories but also for the accuracy of their representation in his text, for the status of 'words' as a kind of 'transparent medium' of experience. This is something that, according to Felman, testimony is unable to achieve, because language in testimony is 'in process'; it is a performative speech act rather than a constative statement offering 'a totalizable account'.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Maechler 293.

¹¹⁹ Wilkomirski 4.

¹²⁰ Wilkomirski 4.

¹²¹ Wilkomirski 4.

¹²² Felman 5. Felman is referring to oral Holocaust testimony here and it is not clear how she would judge the status (as witness) of written Holocaust testimonies that were written prior to or without the

In Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography

(1992) Paul John Eakin explains that one of the traditional beliefs about autobiography's claims is that language can serve as a 'transparent medium of expression, permitting unmediated access to the world of reference beyond the text'.¹²³ This may be a traditional belief about the referential possibilities of testimony too, but with testimony the stakes are higher as testimony not only seeks to observe a historical imperative but also claims in some sense to be representative, to speak for others with similar experiences. The tension between this imperative and the therapeutic imperative of testimony is one of the central concerns of contemporary trauma theory.

In *Testimony*, Felman and Laub write of the often uncomfortable tensions between clinical, therapeutic, or psychoanalytic approach to testimony and the political or historical approach. Laub relates an anecdote which illustrates the dichotomy at its polemical extreme. It is worth citing in full:

A woman in her late sixties was narrating her
Auschwitz experience to interviewers from the
Video archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale

interview process. Her essays on Camus and de Man, however, make it clear that 'witnessing does not provide narrative knowledge' and that testimony might need to be sought between the lines of writings claiming to be something else, Felman 139. Felman suggests that de Man's testimony, for example, can be found in his theoretical writing: 'History as Holocaust is mutely omnipresent in the theoretical endeavour of de Man's work', Felman 140.

[. . .]. She was relating her memories as an eyewitness of the Auschwitz uprising; a sudden intensity, passion and color were infused into the narrative. She was fully there. "All of a sudden", she said, "we saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding [. . .]". Many months later, a conference of historians, psychoanalysts, and artists, gathered to reflect on the relation of education to the Holocaust, watched the videotaped testimony of the woman, in an attempt to better understand the era. A lively debate ensued. The testimony was not accurate, historians claimed [. . .]. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four. Since the memory of the testifying woman turned out to be, in this way, fallible, one could not accept--nor give credence to--her whole account of the events. It was utterly important to remain accurate, lest the revisionists in history discredit everything.¹²⁴

Laub was one of the psychoanalysts present and for him the error expressed a significant truth:

The woman was testifying not to the number of chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence [. . .]. The woman testified to an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish

¹²³ Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 30

¹²⁴ Laub, *Testimony* 59.

armed revolt just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth.¹²⁵

Laub adds that it was 'through my listening to her' that 'I [. . .] came to understand not merely her subjective truth, but the very historicity of the event, in an entirely new dimension'.¹²⁶

This recalls Anderson's hope that one day we may be able to look at the Wilkomirski case and 'see through the fiction to the history again'. Laub's psychoanalytic perspective allows him to see through the errors in this witness's story and to find something 'more radical, more crucial'. But as his anecdote also illustrates, it takes a certain kind of listening in order to understand this 'historicity' and if the psychoanalyst is willing to recognise both the therapeutic and the historical reverberations of testimony, the historian is less willing or able to see both sides. For the historian an error is an error; for the psychoanalyst it is an opening. Yet it is not just the difference of opinion that is important here; Laub also illustrates the extent to which the status of testimony--indeed the very *emergence* of testimony--is dependent on the presence of a listening other. It is a flaw of Wilkomirski's therapeutic model that he serves at once as client, historian and psychoanalyst. In this case,

¹²⁵ Laub, *Testimony* 60.

as Maechler points out 'Only the client [. . .] has at his disposal the criteria by which to judge the truth of historical facts', which recalls Grabowski's claim that 'only the individual can decide if he/ she is a survivor'.¹²⁷ It is also notable, though, that in order to deliver his 'diagnosis' of Wilkomirski Maechler briefly abandons his historian's cap and adopts an 'authoritative' psychoanalytic persona.¹²⁸

The emphasis of trauma theory might be more on the therapeutic than the historical function of testimony, but this does not, in Laub's view, detract from the historical imperative to testify. Instead, it finds a way to see through the necessary 'fictions' of testimonial narrative to the history again. From the perspective of recent trauma theory *Fragments* emerges as perhaps the model trauma testimony, illustrating more strikingly the problem of memory and narrative for the traumatised child than perhaps any truly verifiable testimony could do. Wilkomirski's 'true story' is one that cannot be told, his history one that cannot be 'accessed' directly. From the perspective of RMT, however, *Fragments* can only be seen as a fake, the result of irresponsible therapy of which Wilkomirski is either the naïve victim duped into delusion or the willing accomplice in the 'fabrication of pseudomemories'.

¹²⁶ Laub, *Testimony* 62.

¹²⁷ Maechler 256.

¹²⁸ See Maechler 163-64 and observe the means by which he claims the authority to 'diagnose'.

4. RMT and the Holocaust

Although RMT became a large feature of the Wilkomirski controversy, Pendergrast made something of a leap when he titled his internet article 'Recovered Memories and the Holocaust'. It is unusual to find RMT discussed in any kind of detail alongside accounts of the kinds of recovery with which Holocaust testimony commentators are concerned. Caruth, Felman, and Laub for example, make no mention of RMT in their studies of trauma and the Holocaust and in *Trauma: A Genealogy* Ruth Leys alludes only fleetingly to RMT.

The dangers of placing the disreputable RMT beside therapeutically motivated Holocaust interviews are obvious. RMT began as a 'socio-political movement' and enabled silenced victims of sexual abuse to recover both their individual histories and the historical reality of such abuse from repression or political oppression.¹²⁹ It went on, however, to unearth increasingly bizarre and unsubstantiated memories of alien abductions and ritual satanic abuse, which is why it was so disastrous for Wilkomirski's case when he met--and corroborated the story of--Laura Grabowski.

¹²⁹ Crews 160.

There are of course clear differences between the procedures of RMT and those of oral Holocaust testimony. Holocaust testimonies are based on verifiable historical events at which the witness is always presumed to have been present. 'Repression' is rarely mentioned in accounts of Holocaust witnessing and certainly not in the context of a complete repression of the event followed by a complete recovery. Yet both recent trauma theory and RMT share certain philosophical implications. Both are concerned with the relationship between the recovered past and historical reality, and both are founded on an early Freudian model of repression and recovery, although the 'recovery methods' advocated or employed differ.

Leys notes that the psychoanalytic approach to Holocaust testimony was only consolidated in the wake of post-Vietnam PTSD studies, an observation which connects these two separate yet interrelated approaches.¹³⁰ RMT's absence in major works on trauma theory is probably

¹³⁰ PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder was only included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* in 1980. See Laura S. Brown 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma', *Trauma* 100-112. Leys writes that the Holocaust is now not only seen as 'the crucial trauma of the century, but also the one that can be fully understood only in the light of our knowledge of PTSD', Leys 15-16. Although PTSD became, as Leys points out, less psychoanalytically theorised, studies of Holocaust testimony have remained almost exclusively the province of either history or psychoanalysis. By the psychoanalytic approach to testimony, I refer to the work of Felman, Laub and Caruth rather than the earlier attempts by, for example, Viktor Frankl and Bruno Bettelheim to psychoanalytically theorise Holocaust survivors. For an example of these theories, however, see Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart* (1960; London: Penguin, 1986), Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, trans. Ilse Lasch (1959; New York: Touchstone, 1984). Bettelheim is a Freudian analyst and has been accused of a 'blaming the victim approach', Frankl's perspective is that of what he calls 'existential analysis'.

attributable to its controversial nature and not due to the emphasis on sexual abuse in RMT. Theories of PTSD, for example, can accommodate traumatic memories of both sexual abuse and combat neuroses. At its extreme, the RMT theory asserts that a victim can have had absolutely no knowledge of sexual abuse and can, through therapy, retrieve a photographically accurate memory of such an event long repressed.

As I discussed in Chapter One, however, there are no grounds for anti-RMT commentators to distinguish between the supposed 'robust repression' of RMT and Freud's early theory of repression and hysteria. Although Holocaust interviewing is not based on a theory of repression, at times the terminology comes close--memories of Holocaust trauma may not be 'repressed' but the truth of this experience is 'essentially not available to its own speaker'.¹³¹ And, of course, many Holocaust interviews are based on the analyst-analysand relationship. Langer speaks of 'deep memory' and 'buried memory' which, through the 'subtle urging of the interviewer' can come to light, and oral Holocaust testimonies are seen to provide 'access to' these buried stories, to put the witness 'in possession' of them again.¹³² As Laub's anecdote about the Auschwitz uprising illustrates, historically accurate testimony is

¹³¹ Felman 15.

¹³² Langer 9 and Felman 15-16.

not the primary aim of such interviews, which are based on more therapeutic goals.¹³³

It is no surprise that the majority of Wilkomirski's defenders were psychoanalysts rather than historians. Raul Hilberg, along with Lawrence Langer, and Yehuda Bauer 'knew' instantly that *Fragments* was a fiction. On the CBS *60 Minutes* broadcast he attested that Wilkomirski's story sat somewhere between 'the highly unlikely and the utterly impossible'.¹³⁴ He was present at a Holocaust symposium at Notre Dame where, while the rest of the audience gave Wilkomirski a standing ovation, Hilberg 'sat on his hands'.¹³⁵ Wilkomirski felt abused by historians who, he claims, have only a meagre understanding of the working of trauma and who have not committed themselves sufficiently to the history of children during the Holocaust. 'These historians', Maechler writes, 'treated his book as the "historical and factual report of an expert adult witness", whereas the issue here was one of images explicitly designated as "those that remained in a young child's memory, without the critical and ordering logic of adults"'.¹³⁶

In 1999 and, as Maechler writes 'against the maelstrom of disbelief', Harvey Peskin made the controversial decision to present Wilkomirski an award on behalf of the

¹³³ As discussed in Chapter Two.

¹³⁴ Cited by Maechler 149.

¹³⁵ Pendergrast, 'Recovered Memories and the Holocaust'.

¹³⁶ Maechler 141-42.

American Orthopsychiatric Association (ORTHO).¹³⁷ The award was the seventh Hayman Award for Holocaust and Genocide study and Peskin is both a psychoanalyst and professor emeritus at the University of California. Peskin awarded the honor partly in support of other child survivors and partly in response to Wilkomirski's work with child survivors through his historical and psychoanalytic therapeutic procedure. He concluded his speech 'The ORTHO award honors [. . .] the memoirist and the healer and his journey from one to the other'.¹³⁸

A further article by Peskin in November/ December 2000 confirms his continuing belief that Wilkomirski had received an unfair 'trial' and that he should still deserve the benefit of the doubt:

It is only in the capacity to doubt freely that we can approach an authentic sense of verified truth. Yet, the denial of our special ambivalence deprives us of the liberty of doubt. Splitting our minds into icons and taboos, into true belief and disbelief, is in the long run small comfort.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Maechler 156. Maechler titles his sub-chapter 'Against the maelstrom of disbelief' after Peskin published his argument against Wilkomirski in the *Nation* and declared that even against this maelstrom of disbelief he still intended to support Wilkomirski. See Harvey Peskin 'Holocaust Denial: A Sequel', *Nation* 19 April 1999, 31 January 2002 <<http://past.thenation.com/issue/990419/0419peskin.shtml>>. The ORTHO association is, Maechler writes, 'an interdisciplinary organization for professionals dedicated to the psychological health of children and adults'.

¹³⁸ Cited by Maechler 158.

Peskin, writes Maechler, was concerned that 'the debate over Wilkomirski's guilt had been dominated by historians, and had not involved experts in trauma and traumatic memory'. He felt that 'the publisher would be placed at a disadvantage if the historian did not have the input of trauma experts' and suggested that Wilkomirski's and Bernstein's therapeutic methodology 'be adapted for use on its own creator'.¹⁴⁰

Likewise, when Wilkomirski proposed to a panel of historians that they investigate the case on his behalf, they refused to accept his condition that they do so in cooperation with Lea Balint who was not only one of his staunchest supporters but also an expert in dealing with child survivors.¹⁴¹ The Suhrkamp press went ahead and commissioned the historian, Stefan Maechler, without accepting Peskin's suggestion that the research be carried out in collaboration with experts in traumatic memory. And yet not only did Maechler come up with an oddly psychoanalytic conclusion, when he explains the terms of his research they do not seem so far removed from Peskin's suggested approach:

Authentic remembrance of a trauma is a story that cannot be told. Presuming that Wilkomirski does have traumatic memories (and this will

¹³⁹ Harvey Peskin, 'Memory and Media: "Cases" of Rigoberta Menchú and Benjamin Wilkomirski', *Society* 38:1 (November/ December 2000): 39-46.

¹⁴⁰ Maechler 163.

¹⁴¹ Maechler 138-39.

become my working hypothesis in my research), I can do only one thing as a historian: investigate the circumstances that so traumatized him that he in fact does not understand them and cannot fully relate to them even today. In which case a historian's work is assisted not only by documents--as Peskin would have it in his simple dichotomy of documents and memory--but also by both the present and the missing memories of contemporary witnesses, including those of Wilkomirski himself.¹⁴²

Although Maechler refused to rely on the assistance of psychoanalytically biased investigators in his study, he still makes a claim for the validity of both historical (documentary) and psychoanalytic (memory) sources.

Psychoanalysis, because of its tendency to value subjective truths and because of its epistemological relativism might have been seen here as a danger to the objective pursuit of historical investigation. Suhrkamp's decision to allow only a historian to carry out the research on their behalf, though, begs certain questions. Who has the authority to determine the historical status of testimony? Both Wilkomirski and Grabowski defended the view that 'only the individual' had the authority over the status of their memories and identities. Maechler ended his study with an allusion to a potentially pending law suit brought against Wilkomirski by a Zurich lawyer in response

¹⁴² Maechler 164.

to Ganzfried's article, suggesting that only a court of law could solve the matter once and for all.¹⁴³ *The Wilkomirski Affair* itself had the feel of a legal investigation and even Wilkomirski's defender Peskin in his 2000 article on Wilkomirski and Rigoberta Menchú declares: 'The investigation of fraud against Menchú and Wilkomirski will be treated here as in a courtroom'.¹⁴⁴ And yet the verdict in both cases ends on a *non liquet*, with Maechler pointing the way to further legal investigations and Peskin concluding with a reminder of the need for ambiguity and doubt.¹⁴⁵

The only truly objective test of veracity would be the DNA test to which Wilkomirski still refuses to submit, but even then, the verdict would only be clear if the test proved positive; if Wilkomirski's DNA did not match that of Max Grosjean this would still not prove that he was Benjamin Wilkomirski. Eskin believes, too, that this would still not provide sufficient evidence for Wilkomirski and his supporters:

¹⁴³ Maechler 299, 317. Yet Maechler also claims that 'The question remains [. . .] whether delegating the affair to the public prosecutors is not more likely to cover up the countless problems it poses' 299.

¹⁴⁴ Peskin, 'Memory and Media': 40.

¹⁴⁵ I have borrowed the legal term '*non liquet*' from Freud, who ends his case history of 'The Wolf Man' with this same kind of epistemological undecidability. See Sigmund Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis ('The Wolf Man')', 1918 (1914), *Case Histories II*, PFL 9, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 295. See also Peter Brooks on the tensions between the 'status of truth' in law and in psychoanalysis 123-24.

for someone whose faith in Benjamin has not been shaken thus far, it is always possible to remain faithful: to decide that the Swiss governmental conspiracy against him would manufacture a false positive result, to maintain that DNA testing is less than 100 per cent accurate, or to pretend, as the author of *Fragments* himself did [. . .] that the medical experiments to which he was subjected and the resulting leukaemia could have altered his genetic makeup.¹⁴⁶

In the search for the most objective methods possible through which to investigate the case, it is not surprising that Suhrkamp decided against the psychoanalytic approach, even though this is perhaps the only way in which to make sense of the case. A psychoanalytic investigation might well have run the risk not only of validating Wilkomirski's testimony as a trauma narrative, but also of weakening the historical validity of other survivor testimony too.

Wilkomirski's critics feared that this 'fake' Holocaust memoir would be a hot topic for Holocaust deniers, and revisionist websites indicate that these fears were not misplaced. The continuing support of Wilkomirski by psychoanalysts and specialists in traumatic memory only added fuel to this fire. Psychoanalysis, as Peskin's words above illustrate, favours the ambiguous, and as Laub's anecdote reveals, might find the lie or the error more

¹⁴⁶ Eskin 231-32.

revealing than historical 'truth'. Laub in fact supported the ORTHO award, while Langer opposed it on the grounds that *Fragments* reminded him of the earlier controversial Holocaust 'testimony' *The Painted Bird*.

In an article titled 'Historical Past vs. Political Present' posted on the *Historical Review* website, the Holocaust revisionist Arthur Butz uses Wilkomirski's memoir as evidence that 'the revisionists are right'.¹⁴⁷ He attacks those who initially supported Wilkomirski's memoir, in order to bolster his claims that revisionist history is based on sound historical fact rather than on the reports of eyewitnesses. Those who continued to support Wilkomirski even after the controversy only serve, he claims, to further the revisionist cause. 'There is no doubt that Wilkomirski's work was "being taken seriously among therapists who treat Holocaust survivors"', he wrote, naming Dori Laub as a notable example.¹⁴⁸

One of the main arguments against the support of Wilkomirski is that to defend him is to open the door to doubt that would then impact on other survivor testimony. Butz turns this argument against Wilkomirski to his favour:

Wilkomirski's account does indeed sound a lot like those of the "survivors" who have testified to atrocious German cruelties in the

¹⁴⁷ Arthur Butz, 'Historical Past vs. Political Present', *Journal of Historical Review* 19.6 (November/ December 2000), 31 January 2002 <http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v19/v19n6p12_Butz.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Butz.

camps, though I would prefer to turn that around: the accounts of those survivors sound a lot like Wilkomirski's. Because of the Ortho award, you now have that evaluation from a group of professional psychiatrists.¹⁴⁹

David Irving uses a similar line of attack in his website writings, using Holocaust specialists' defence of Wilkomirski as evidence that they are liable to defend any account of the Holocaust, however unverifiable it may be. The tone of these articles is gleeful and self-congratulatory. Denouncing Wilkomirski and his supporters Irving takes the opportunity to announce the honorary appointment of another 'ASSHOL' member: the 'ASSOCIATION of SPURIOUS SURVIVORS of the HOLOCAUST and OTHER LIARS', a group he invented during 'a speech in Canada, to cover people like Wilkomirski and Wiesel and Foxman'.¹⁵⁰

Fragments was easy pickings for Holocaust deniers and the Wilkomirski controversy gave them the opportunity to drag other examples of fraudulent testimonies (that were initially believed) into the fore as 'proof' not only that eyewitness accounts are often unverifiable, but also that Holocaust historians and commentators are liable to believe them anyway.¹⁵¹ Experts in Holocaust testimony, from both

¹⁴⁹ Butz.

¹⁵⁰ David Irving, 'Index on Benjamin Wilkomirski', *International Campaign for Real History* (date not provided), 8 January 2002 <<http://www.fpp.co.uk/Auschwitz/Wilkomirski.2html>>.

¹⁵¹ See for example the website of the *International Campaign for Real History*, <<http://www.fpp.co.uk/Auschwitz/stories/Strummer1.html>> for

the historical and the psychoanalytic camp, may agree that survivor accounts can be unreliable, but not that this shakes the foundation of the historical truth at the core of them. Some Holocaust historians prefer not to rely on survivor accounts as historical evidence.¹⁵² Psychoanalytic commentators recognise the flawed nature of survivor testimony but find ways to see through the errors in testimony to a greater 'historicity'. As Roger Boyes wrote, however, in the *Times*:

The importance of the [Wilkomirski] debate is that many on the far Right are contesting the details and, therefore, the veracity of the Holocaust. Witness accounts are essential. That is why Steven Spielberg set up the Shoah Foundation to interview survivors. Since many are in ill-health, and since the camps themselves are decaying, Holocaust biography has become more important than ever. Fake Holocaust testimony distorts the debate.¹⁵³

While survivor accounts may be susceptible to historical errors it is rare to find a trauma narrative as historically inaccurate as Wilkomirski's memoir, and

details of revisionists' reaction to a previous case of 'fake' Holocaust testimony, the case of Deli Strummer.

¹⁵² Raul Hilberg is a notable example. And survivor testimonies were not used, as I noted in the introduction to this thesis in the David Irving libel case, see D. D. Guttenplan, *The Holocaust on Trial: History, Justice and the David Irving Libel Case* (London: Granta, 2001) 96.

¹⁵³ Roger Boyes, 'Testimony of Holocaust "Survivor" Denounced as Fiction', *London Times* 8 September 1998, 8 January 2002 <<http://www.corax.org/revisionism/nonsense/980908testimony.html>>

Fragments should in no sense be considered typical. This is why it could not remain on the bookshelves in its non-fiction form and why the question of its generic status was so important to resolve.

5. Genre Troubles: From Masterpiece to Kitsch

When Wilkomirski was first called upon to respond to Ganzfried's public attack on the authenticity of *Fragments* he made an interesting distinction between the two different ways in which his memoir might be read. He claimed that 'The reader was always free to regard my book as literature or as personal document'.¹⁵⁴ It is not clear what Wilkomirski meant by this, although it may be a gesture towards what is perhaps the simplest and yet the most problematic aspect of his memoir: the fact that it was *published*. In seeking to allocate blame for the Wilkomirski débâcle several commentators turned to the therapist responsible for Wilkomirski's 'memories' and ensuing 'memoir', as I have discussed, but Wilkomirski's agent and publishers were also subject to critical scrutiny.¹⁵⁵ Raul

¹⁵⁴ Cited by Maechler 131.

¹⁵⁵ This question was becoming relevant even before Ganzfried's disclosure. See, for example, Doreen Carvajal, 'Now! Read the True (More or Less) Story!; Publishers and authors debate the Boundaries of Nonfiction', *New York Times* 24 February 1998, late ed.: E1. See Martin Arnold, 'Making Books; Does Nonfiction Mean Factual?', *New York Times* 20 July 2000, late ed.: E3 for a post-Wilkomirski view. The issue was also taken up again with some urgency after the public disclosure of the inauthenticity of Tom Carew's *Jihad* in November 2001. See Owen

Hilberg, for example, wondered: 'How could this book make its way through several publishing houses as an autobiography?'¹⁵⁶

It is highly unlikely that *Fragments* would have attracted any attention at all if it had remained a 'personal document', and this was Wilkomirski's initial intention when he began writing.¹⁵⁷ Maechler blames the writing of *Fragments*, in part, on Bernstein, Piller, and Matte, who encouraged Wilkomirski as he wrote, but this encouragement--and even the credence they gave to his account--is not necessarily admonishable in itself. Once *Fragments* was published, and published as 'memoir', it became a part of the historical record and was open to the kind of scrutiny it eventually received. The reader could not regard *Fragments* as 'personal document' because this is no longer what it was.

Moreover, Wilkomirski makes claims in *Fragments* for its historical and public value, not only maintaining that his memories and memoir unquestionably represent historical fact but also claiming that his birth certificate has 'nothing to do with either the history of this century or

Bowcott, 'Afghan Book Author "was Never in SAS"', *Guardian Unlimited* 15 November 2001, 29 January 2002 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4299445,00.html>>.

¹⁵⁶ Cited by Maechler 135.

¹⁵⁷ Maechler also acknowledges this, writing that 'His conduct turned highly explosive only because he became a public figure and entangled publishers, schools, museums, the media, self-help organizations, and readers in his game' 302.

my personal history' (my emphasis).¹⁵⁸ Maechler also takes issue with Wilkomirski's statement of defence:

In the wake of Ganzfried's vilification, Wilkomirski said that no one had to believe him. But even my brief analysis of the text shows that it is precisely this freedom of choice that he denies his readers, forcing them to read what he has written as authentic autobiography. Moreover, all his public appearances were powerful staged performances of this ostensible identity between author and first-person narrator.¹⁵⁹

The very term 'memoir' indicates the manner in which a text should be read--in Bruss's terms, the contextual material determines the 'illocutionary value' of a text--and precludes the matter of choice.¹⁶⁰ Eva Hoffman refers to *Fragments* as a result of 'false memoir syndrome' and points out that this 'may sometimes involve genuine pathology; but when pathology goes public, it can become culpable'.¹⁶¹

Many were anxious that if *Fragments* remained in its original form as memoir then this would impact on other survivor testimonies, would introduce a degree of relativism that could potentially undermine the historical

¹⁵⁸ Wilkomirski 154.

¹⁵⁹ Maechler 282.

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 10.

¹⁶¹ Eva Hoffman, 'True to Life?', *Time.com* 14 June 1999, 26 February 2002 <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/intl/article/0,9171,110790614-27329,00.html>>.

importance of all eyewitness accounts. Jörg Lau, who reacted strongly to the therapeutic 'presumptions' that led to the writing of *Fragments* is one such critic:

Those who deny Auschwitz did not need to wait for Wilkomirski to nurse their mad ideas, and if *Fragments* should prove to be a mere victimization fantasy, then the witness, the poems and the novels, of real victims will not be discredited by that. Permanent damage can arise only if the status of this text remains uncertain, which is what its author wants. That everyone is free to believe or not to believe in the authenticity of reports about the Holocaust is precisely the cynically laid-back position of the modern revisionists, who have taken a lesson from postmodern epistemology.¹⁶²

There were different opinions on the historical importance of *Fragments*, with some, like Lau claiming that ambiguity must not be allowed, and with others attesting that *Fragments* might still prove a useful educational tool. Deborah Lipstadt, for example, claimed that she would still place *Fragments* on her reading list at Emory University.¹⁶³ Lipstadt felt that the fictionality of *Fragments* 'might

¹⁶² Cited by Maechler 135-36.

¹⁶³ Lipstadt recently wrote, however, that she would be reluctant to do so in the light of all the new evidence against Wilkomirski's account, 4 June 2002 (private correspondence).

complicate matters somewhat. But [the book] is still powerful as a novel'.¹⁶⁴

One of the first people to express doubts about *Fragments* was Hanno Helbling, who wrote to Wilkomirski's agent to voice her reservations before publication.¹⁶⁵

'Everything depends', she wrote 'on how such a publication is presented'.¹⁶⁶ She suggested that the book be packaged as an 'Auschwitz novel', as '"genuine" memoirs that sooner or later may be identified as fiction' or as a 'psychological rarity'.¹⁶⁷ The writer and Holocaust survivor Norman Manea told Gourevitch that 'if Wilkomirski had called his book "fragments from a therapy", he could have avoided the current controversy: "It could still be nonfiction, but much more honest, and the book would be the real thing, even if it is a delusion"'.¹⁶⁸ Another commentator wrote that there are reasons for which *Fragments* should continue to remain 'in our literary landscape--if not as a memoir (it is not that), and not as a novel (it is not that either, at least not yet), then at least as a "case"'.¹⁶⁹ Langer felt that *Fragments* had an impact 'as imagined experience, but not as history', and stated that although

¹⁶⁴ Cited by Eskin, 'Wilkomirski's New Identity Crisis', *Forward* 18 September 1998, 11 June 2001 <<http://www.forward.com/issues/1998/98.09.18/arts.html>>.

¹⁶⁵ Maechler 93-94. Maechler believes Helbling may have been 'tipped off' by acquaintances of Wilkomirski's who had heard that he was about to publish a Holocaust memoir and who doubted its authenticity.

¹⁶⁶ Cited by Maechler 94.

¹⁶⁷ Cited by Maechler 94.

¹⁶⁸ Cited by Gourevitch: 54.

it was historically inauthentic, *Fragments* was nonetheless a good 'allegory' of the camps.¹⁷⁰ Wilkomirski's American publisher Arthur Samuelson declared that even though *Fragments* might be fiction, it remains 'a pretty cool book', adding that 'It's only a fraud if you call it non-fiction. I would then reissue it, in the fiction category. Maybe it's not true--then he's a better writer!'¹⁷¹

Wilkomirski's translator Carol Brown Janeway believed that if *Fragments* did turn out to be fiction 'then what's at issue are not empirical facts that can be checked, but spiritual facts that must be pondered'.¹⁷²

Both Lappin and Finkelstein cite these two commentators and both take issue with their approaches. Lappin wrote: 'it seemed to me that non-mystical facts were the essence of the matter here and that, if Wilkomirski had broken another contract--that between an author and the reader's trust--then this book should be reclassified as fiction or withdrawn'.¹⁷³ Finkelstein adds Israel Gutman, a director of Yad Vashem, Holocaust lecturer and survivor, to his list:

According to Gutman, "it's not that important" whether *Fragments* is a fraud. "Wilkomirski had written a story which he has experienced

¹⁶⁹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Problems of Memory and Factuality in Recent Holocaust Memoirs: Wilkomirski/Wiesel', *Poetics Today* 21.3 (Fall 2000): 554.

¹⁷⁰ Cited by Maechler 158, 212.

¹⁷¹ Cited by Lappin: 49 and Finkelstein 60.

¹⁷² Lappin: 50 and Finkelstein 61.

deeply; that's for sure. [. . .] He is not a fake. He is someone who has lived this story very deeply in his soul. The pain is authentic". So it doesn't matter whether he spent the war in a concentration camp or a Swiss chalet; Wilkomirski is not a fake if his "pain is authentic": thus speaks an Auschwitz survivor turned Holocaust expert. The others deserve contempt; Gutman, just pity.¹⁷⁴

Although many offered suggestions as to how Wilkomirski's memoir might be repackaged nobody, it seems, was in favour of allowing *Fragments* to remain in the nonfiction category. Samuelson's claim that the fictional status of *Fragments* makes of Wilkomirski 'a better writer' begs certain questions. Are prizes and honours bestowed upon the writers of memoirs for the quality of the writing or for the memories themselves, for the fact that the author lived through the events s/he describes? Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* was embroiled in a similar generic controversy to Wilkomirski's 'memoir' and 'Kosinski was able to awaken the enthusiasm of the woman who would become its publisher by suggesting it was autobiographical', writes Maechler, adding that the generic status of Kosinski's book also impacted on its critical reception: "I thought it was fiction", Elie Wiesel says, "and when he told me it was autobiography I tore up my review and wrote

¹⁷³ Lappin: 50.

¹⁷⁴ Finkelstein 61.

one a thousand times better"'.¹⁷⁵ While the text itself remains identical, the 'illocutionary force' of a book, as these examples illustrate, depends on its generic status. This was marked in the Wilkomirski controversy, where it almost seemed as though *Fragments's* swift private to public trajectory involved several textual transmutations: from the unpublished memoir written as an aid to therapy and intended for a small audience of family and friends, to the 'masterpiece' Holocaust memoir, and finally to the 'fake' memoir.

Some felt that it would not do simply to reclassify *Fragments* as fiction and claim it as a great novel, because by the time it had been revealed as a fake, it had already become a different kind of book altogether. Ruth Klüger, for example, maintained:

The original readers have nothing to feel embarrassed about. A few weeks ago they had a very different book in their hands from the one they have now, even though the text has remained the same. We shall continue to have to read those books that claim to be history differently from those that merely contain stories.¹⁷⁶

Klüger goes a step further and states that *Fragments* becomes nothing more than 'kitsch' once it is separated

¹⁷⁵ Maechler 214.

¹⁷⁶ Cited by Maechler 281.

from the historical framework. Maechler agrees with Klüger's analysis and adds:

When there are breaks or contradictions between the interior and exterior worlds portrayed, we find a literary work stimulating, fascinating, and rich. As soon as the author tried to make these exterior and interior worlds congruent, however--as by immediately duplicating an internal emotion or threat with an external one--we sense it to be a one-dimensional world, that is, kitsch.¹⁷⁷

This is unavoidable in Wilkomirski's case, unless, Maechler writes 'we read the text as a description of a different reality, as that of the traumatized little Bruno Grosjean'.¹⁷⁸ Maechler does read *Fragments* in this way, and yet appears simultaneously to agree with Klüger that *Fragments* is kitsch because not historically or biographically true.¹⁷⁹

This reading further problematises the generic confusion surrounding *Fragments* which, as Maechler also claimed, could be read as an 'alienated' autobiography. Some critics found a way around this conundrum, however, by pathologising *Fragments* and by coining a term to describe this kind of 'psychological rarity': literary Munchausen

¹⁷⁷ Maechler 282.

¹⁷⁸ Maechler 282.

¹⁷⁹ Maechler 282.

Syndrome.¹⁸⁰ Yet even if *Fragments* is the result of an identity-afflicting pathology, even if it is still in some crucial sense Wilkomirski's autobiography, it does not qualify as non-fiction. As Lappin wrote:

I thought about Wilkomirski. Either he had been born in this country or he hadn't, in which case *Fragments* was a lie--his early lives were mutually exclusive. But "lie" might be too strong a word, meant for courts of law. Writing has milder terms. In writing, there is fiction and non-fiction. There seem to be clear divisions, but as any writer knows the boundary can be blurred, and nowhere more so than in this literary form "the memoir". Trying to evoke the past the memoirist needs to recreate it, and in doing so he may be tempted to invent--a detail here and there, a scene, a piece of dialogue. In any case, did it matter so much whether *Fragments* was fact or fiction?¹⁸¹

She concludes by suggesting that the conditions of the Wilkomirski affair may be different for those applied to other works of non-fiction, that Wilkomirski's 'public speeches in the name of all child survivors, his book's role in the historical record, his claims to be a

¹⁸⁰ Anthony Daniels, 'Literary Victimhood', *The New Criterion* 18 September 1999, 26 February 2002 <<http://www.newcriterion.com/archive/18/sept99/victim>>.

htm>. Daniels also 'diagnoses' Helen Demidenko with literary Munchausen Syndrome, and claims that Rigoberta Menchú's editor Elisabeth Burgos-Debray may be suffering from 'literary Munchausen Syndrome by proxy'.

witness' would need to be denounced 'if he was making it all up', and perhaps even if he wasn't because 'If care with the truth does not matter here, then it can matter nowhere'.¹⁸² Wilkomirski's case is an extreme one and *Fragments* a highly atypical 'autobiography' yet in demanding that its generic status be modified most commentators here seem implicitly to be arguing for the sanctity of the autobiographical pact.

In a recent essay 'Breaking Rules: The Consequences of Self-Narration' Eakin turns to the cases of Rigoberta Menchú and Wilkomirski in order to explore the implications of their 'fictional' or 'fraudulent' testimonies. He suggests that the controversies surrounding these two authors have less to do with a literary transgression (or even with the fact that both dealt with historically and politically important events) than with a transgression of identity 'rules': 'You don't make the front page of the *New York Times* as Menchú did for violating a literary convention'.¹⁸³ Yet Klüger makes explicit the fact that

¹⁸¹ Lappin: 15.

¹⁸² Lappin: 15.

¹⁸³ Paul John Eakin, 'Breaking Rules: The Consequences of Self-Narration', *Biography* 24.1 (Winter 2001): 115. Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1992. She was later accused of falsifying parts of her testimony and of claiming experiences of others as her own. See Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed. and introd. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright (1983; London: Verso 1999); David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1999); and for an overview of the debate see James Poniewozik, 'Rigoberta Menchú Meets the Press', *Salon* 12 February 1999, 8 November 2001 <<http://www.salon.com/news/1999/02/12newsa.html>>; David Horowitz, 'I, Rigoberta Menchú, Liar', *Salon* January 1999, 8 November 2001 <<http://www.salon.com/news/1999/01/12newsb.html>>

Fragments's failure is in its transgression of the autobiographical contract: 'without the guarantee of a living first-person narrator identical with the author, [*Fragments*] merely becomes a dramatisation that offers no illumination'.¹⁸⁴ Klüger seems to suggest here that *Fragments* is fiction, or even kitsch, not so much because it is historically unverifiable but rather because it breaches the normative rules of truth-telling discourse.

But just how normative are these rules? Lejeune himself is the first to admit to their slippery nature, to the fact that there are more exceptions to the rule than there are examples of it. 'Autobiography does not include degrees', he wrote in 1973, 'it is all or nothing'.¹⁸⁵ He made similar statements about the inflexibility of identity: 'An identity is, or is not. It is impossible to speak of degrees, and all doubt leads to a negative conclusion'.¹⁸⁶ But in his return to the 'pact' in 1982 he concedes that on re-reading he is 'struck by the contradiction' between these statements and the examples that followed them (which were of course exceptions to these rules).¹⁸⁷

://www.salon.com/col/horo/1999/01/nc_11horo2.html>; Greg Grandin and Francisco Goldman, 'Bitter Fruit for Rigoberta', *Nation* 8 February 1999, 8 November 2001 <<http://www.thenation.com/issue/990208/0208grandin.shtml>>; and Peter Canby, 'The Truth about Rigoberta Menchú', *New York Review of Books* 8 April 1999, 8 November 2002 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article_id=526>.

¹⁸⁴ Cited by Maechler 281.

¹⁸⁵ Lejeune 13.

¹⁸⁶ Lejeune 5.

¹⁸⁷ Lejeune 125.

From a generic perspective, the argument that *Fragments* should be reclassified as fiction begs the question of parameters between fact and fiction in autobiography. How fictional does an autobiography have to be--and in what ways--before it is reclassified as fiction? If we accept Maechler's proposition that *Fragments* tells the life story of Bruno Grosjean, albeit with 'breathtaking alienation' then what might it mean to refer to the memoir as 'fiction'? What is meant by 'fiction' in this case? Theorists of autobiography, as I will show, have been concerned with the ways in which the parameters between fact and fiction in autobiography have been steadily shifting over the past twenty years, the ways in which the line that separates fact and fiction in autobiography has been blurring to the point where it does seem fair to ask, as Lappin does, if it even 'matter[s] so much whether *Fragments* is fact or fiction'. Yet the Wilkomirski case is one in which this issue *does* matter, as Lappin concludes, and in this sense may serve as a reminder of the 'conditions and limits' attached to all autobiographical endeavours.

6. 'Fiction-Making Tricks'

It has become commonplace to refer to the 'fictions in autobiography'. The last twenty years have seen an increasing number of critics focussing on precisely this problematic aspect of life writing. Eakin's *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985) and Timothy Dow Adams's *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (1990) are two notable examples, but most critical accounts of the genre now recognise the tensions between history and fiction that prove so problematic to definitions of autobiography. James Olney suggested in 1980 that it was since Georges Gusdorf's 1956 essay 'The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' that the increased emphasis on 'autos' rather than 'bios' has led to a more rounded concept of autobiography as a literary rather than a historical endeavour.¹⁸⁸ Virginia Spencer Karr puts the watershed at 1960 with Roy Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, but adds that it was poststructuralism that ushered the genre away from the referential and the historical and towards the literary and the fictional.¹⁸⁹

Writing of the 'dark ages' before poststructuralism, Eakin recalls:

¹⁸⁸ James Olney, ed., *On Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1980) 8.

¹⁸⁹ Virginia Spencer Karr, ed., introduction, 'The Vexingly Unverifiable': Truth in Autobiography', spec. issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 22.2 (Fall 1990): unnumbered pages. John Sturrock is one author, in particular, who, writing in the wake of poststructuralist revisionings of the genre, argued that chronological narrative in autobiography was itself a fiction. See John Sturrock,

Those were the days when autobiography was ranged along with biography and history as one of the artless literatures of fact. Since then, in the last twenty years, the pervasive initiative has been to establish autobiography as an imaginative art, with special emphasis on its fictions. This shift in perspective from fact to fiction has been accompanied by the poststructuralist critique of the concept of the self (the principal referent of autobiography) and of the referential possibilities of language.¹⁹⁰

Whether deconstructive or not, and whether they are writing about Rousseau or Roth, recent critics of autobiography are all too aware of the fictions implicit in the autobiographical project.¹⁹¹

These 'fictions' have also been a preoccupation of this thesis: in the last two chapters we have seen how the tension between documented history and 'the truth of a life' has become a focus in contemporary life writing. Carolyn Steedman insists that dreams can be used as historical evidence in life writing as well as the 'objective' truths that may or may not always be counted on to provide access to marginalised experiences. Searching for the truth about her parents' wartime histories, Lisa

'The New Model Autobiographer', *New Literary History* 9 (1977-78): 51-56.

¹⁹⁰ Paul John Eakin, 'The Referential Aesthetic of Autobiography', 'The Vexingly Unverifiable': 129-30.

¹⁹¹ Mary Evans's recent book, for example, *Missing Persons: The impossibility of auto/biography* (London: Routledge, 1999) takes the

Appignanesi finds that falsified or missing documents mean that 'Official history refuses to coincide with family memory' and feels that because of this 'Everything is open to invention'.¹⁹² Lichtenstein and Sinclair employ imaginative reconstruction in the place of 'facts' in their quest for the truth about Rodinsky's life. Their quest leads them away from documented history and towards not just fiction, but perhaps even something approaching science fiction in this case. These texts explore the ways in which, in the absence of documented history (or in the face of its flaws) histories may need to be reconstructed from the 'bits and pieces' of available evidence.¹⁹³

Annette Kuhn turns her attention to the family photograph and, along with Marianne Hirsch, to the referential limitations of this ostensibly objective medium. She writes:

Photographs are evidence, after all. Not that they are to be taken only at face value, nor that they mirror the real, nor even that a photograph offers any self-evident relationship between itself and what it shows. Simply that a photograph can be material for interpretation--evidence in that sense: to be solved, like a riddle; read and decoded, like clues left

fictions in auto/biography as her focus and deals with many early examples of biography and autobiography alongside more recent ones.

¹⁹² Lisa Appignanesi, *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (1999; London: Vintage, 2000) 231.

¹⁹³ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986; London: Virago, 1996) 21.

behind at the scene of a crime. Evidence of this sort can conceal, even as it purports to reveal, what it is evidence of.¹⁹⁴

These authors identify parallels between archival evidence and that discovered in the 'cave of memory' and thus provide an implicit critique of the subjective/ objective, psychoanalytic/ historical tensions brought to bear by the contradictory imperatives of life writing: tensions which were so marked in the Wilkomirski case.¹⁹⁵ And yet the Wilkomirski case reveals the parameters between boundaries that are, in these other texts, deliberately blurred.

Fictions in autobiography may have become a commonplace, but what do we mean, exactly, when we refer to these 'fictions'? In Wilkomirski's case, as Lappin pointed out, it is not Wilkomirski's 'lies' that make *Fragments* a fiction, but rather the fact that his story is simply not true. This begs the question of whether 'delusions' are to count as fictions too.¹⁹⁶ In Steedman, Appignanesi and Kuhns' memoirs, the reconstructive model of identity and

¹⁹⁴ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso 1995) 11. See also Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁵ Mary Gordon, *The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search for her Father* (1996; London: Bloomsbury, 1997) xx.

¹⁹⁶ As Ann Scott points out "'Real memories" can be of thoughts, too, and thought may sometimes take the form of fantasy, and fantasy may be unconscious'. She is alluding to critics' (in particular to Jeffrey Masson's) tendency to oppose 'fantasy' with 'the event' as though fantasy is unambiguously opposed to 'the real'. This seems to mirror the problem with Wilkomirski's delusions, which are considered to be 'based on' real events and are therefore not necessarily the 'fiction' as opposed to the event's 'fact'. Ann Scott, *Real Events Revisited: Fantasy, Memory and Psychoanalysis* (London: Virago, 1996) 6.

self-narrative leads to a suspicion of all the different kinds of 'evidence' on offer. But are their reconstructions, even if based on perhaps unreliable 'scraps' of evidence, 'fictions'?

The Wilkomirski case problematises the reconstructive model of identity and narrative on which several recent theorists of autobiography have based their studies. Eakin, for example, writes of the 'making' of 'selves' in recent autobiography, emphasising the constructive nature of identity and narrative in these contemporary texts. Nicola King, likewise, writes that 'Reading the texts of memory shows that "remembering the self" is not a case of restoring an original identity, but a continuous process of "re-membering", of putting together moment by moment, of provisional and partial reconstruction'.¹⁹⁷ As we have seen, the Wilkomirski controversy seemed to revolve more around the question of reconstruction than it did around the contested phenomenon of repression and recovery, and it is partly for this reason that the case should be of as much interest to theorists of genre as it is to psychoanalysts or historians. If Wilkomirski did not 'recover' his repressed childhood memories, as Pendergrast's RMT argument insists, but instead reconstructed them from the 'bits and pieces' of memory and archival evidence he discovered then

¹⁹⁷ Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 175.

this introduces the possibility that a memoir based on this model can go disastrously wrong.

The reconstruction model poses problems for makers of history too, as Maechler found. His report on the Wilkomirski 'affair' opens itself to the same kinds of critique to which he subjected Wilkomirski's self-making. Maechler begins his study by alluding to a historical debate which is, he says, 'comparable' to the memory debates in which Wilkomirski's case was embroiled. This 'revolves around the question of whether a historian registers past events in simple passivity, without reflecting his or her own agency, or adds something new to the presentation whenever she or he constructs a true story out of evidence about the past'.¹⁹⁸ Because the Wilkomirski case is concerned with similar questions, Maechler adds, these are issues he finds himself unable to 'dodge'. He explains his methodology: his task has been to 'investigate all relevant evidence without bias and with the greatest of care', to ensure that all 'descriptions and conclusions are based on documents, audiovisual materials, and conversations in which [he] took part'. Because oral history relies on the interviewing process and because this involves the subjective input of the interviewer:

I have chosen to give this account the form of a journalist's report and have attempted to

¹⁹⁸ Maechler viii.

achieve a transparency that will allow readers to examine my procedures, constructions, and results and to keep in mind my position as a researcher and writer when forming their own opinion.¹⁹⁹

Here he does not so much 'dodge' the age-old historical questions to which he alludes as transcend them, which seems all the more odd when he begins his report on the following page: 'A gentle breeze passed over the lake that extended along the forested lower slopes of the Jura'. He is not referring to a recent visit he made to these parts; he is writing of early August 1940 and telling the tale of Yvonne Grosjean, purportedly the mother of the man who was to become Benjamin Wilkomirski. This is not the 'transparent' style of the investigative journalist (who is as much a character in the investigation as the subject).²⁰⁰ It is the style of an omniscient observer in a novel. He makes clear that this chapter 'A Fateful Excursion' is based on the 'rich, atmospheric detail' found in transcripts in the State Archives in Bern, but Maechler's persistent reminders that what we are reading is 'based on' historical material begs yet more questions about Wilkomirski's case. Wasn't Wilkomirski's story also 'based on' archival research and historical material? And wasn't this used as evidence against the authenticity of his

¹⁹⁹ Maechler viii-ix.

story? Wilkomirski, of course, did not conduct his research 'without bias', and took from his research only that evidence which supported his conviction that he was who he thought he was or wanted to be. But the juxtaposition of Maechler's investigation and Wilkomirski's research reveals the precariousness of this kind of historical authority. As Susan Rubin Suleiman points out 'Mr. Maechler's book itself presents a contradiction: Although [sic] its stakes are historical and factual, the book is structured like a detective novel, with important pieces of information withheld at crucial points, only to be revealed later'.²⁰¹

Genre theory seemed irrelevant to the Wilkomirski controversy even though at the heart of the debate was the question of *Fragments*'s generic status. Suhrkamp employed a historian to solve the matter; they did not turn to theorists of genre in order to determine the generic re-labelling of this contested memoir. As we have seen, the tensions between psychoanalytic and historical readings of the text (and its author) led to impasse. Can genre theory fare any better? Can it account for such an 'alienated' autobiography as Wilkomirski's?

Lejeune's pact may seem hospitable to Wilkomirski's 'alienated' autobiography because, as Eakin writes in his

²⁰⁰ For an account of the Wilkomirski case based on this model see Blake Eskin's *A Life in Pieces*.

²⁰¹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Charlatan or Madman? What a Study of a Literary Hoax Can't Decide', rev. of *The Wilkomirski Affair*, by Stefan Maechler, *Forward* 8 June 2001, 6 November 2001 <<http://www.forward.com/issues/2001/01.06.08/arts1.html>>.

introduction to *On Autobiography*, the pact does not require the autobiographer to 'commit' him or herself 'to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her life'.²⁰² Even if we accept the proposition that *Fragments* was written in good faith, however, it still falls at the first hurdle when confronted with the pact itself. According to Lejeune's definition autobiography is 'Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality'.²⁰³ Not only is *Fragments* not retrospective but written from the perspective of a child, it seems that nor does Benjamin Wilkomirski fit the profile of a 'real person'. '[F]or Lejeune', writes Eakin, 'this phrase ['real person'] signifies an individual whose existence is verifiable, attested to by the legal record': no verifiable identity, no autobiography.²⁰⁴ This may be fair enough in relation to Wilkomirski's memoir, but where does it leave the other, authentic, 'children without identity'?²⁰⁵

Bruss's slightly later guidelines are based on a performative model of self-narration--the 'act' of

²⁰² Eakin, Lejeune ix.

²⁰³ Lejeune 4.

²⁰⁴ Eakin, Lejeune x.

²⁰⁵ Or, indeed, others who have identities in conflict with the 'official record', such as transsexual men and women whose experience as gendered subjects conflicts with their 'legally accredited truth'? Interestingly Sarah Burton includes transsexuals in her list of 'six kinds of liar' in *Imposters: Six Kinds of Liar: True Tales of Deception* (London: Viking, 2000).

autobiography--but she is more wary of the potential for autobiographical lie-telling than is Lejeune. Like him, however, she maintains that the individual referred to in the text must be identical to the author and that this individual 'is assumed to be susceptible to appropriate public verification procedures'.²⁰⁶ Not only this, but because in autobiography 'a claim is made for the truth-value of what the autobiographer reports [. . .]. The audience is expected to accept these reports as true, and is free to "check up" on them or attempt to discredit them'.²⁰⁷

Perhaps surprisingly, however, audiences rarely do so, and the Wilkomirski case revealed the extent to which even agents and publishers may also be reluctant to 'check up' on the accounts of the authors they represent. There are plenty of discernible fictions in autobiography, as recent studies have emphasised, but these may not be so much 'fictions' as narrative techniques. Philip Roth's autobiography *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1989) includes its own 'checking up' response in the form of a letter to the author by his fictional alter-ego Nathan Zuckerman. Roth is cunning here, because 'Zuckerman's' candid and impassioned attack on the book is likely to deflect attention from the autobiography's unmentioned weaknesses, to deflect criticism of the 'checking up'

²⁰⁶ Bruss 11.

²⁰⁷ Bruss 12.

variety. Aside from Roth's correspondence with Zuckerman *The Facts* is a traditional, unselfconscious, chronological autobiography, raising no questions about its own facticity, the author's own memory, or the referentiality of the account. Zuckerman appears at the end of the book to mount his case for Roth's return to fiction and for the value of fictional writing as an approach to truth over the value of this kind of autobiography. Roth, via Zuckerman, thwarts his own autobiographical engagement, and offers a case for fiction as the prime truth-telling mode:

You tell me in your letter that the book feels like the first thing you have ever written "unconsciously". Do you mean that *The Facts* is an unconscious work of fiction? Are you not aware yourself of its fiction-making tricks? Think of the exclusions, the selective nature of it, the very pose of fact-facer. Is all this manipulation truly unconscious or is it pretending to be unconscious?²⁰⁸

'With autobiography there's always another text, a countertext, if you will, to the one presented', Zuckerman continues, 'It's probably the most manipulative of all literary forms'.²⁰⁹

These 'fiction-making tricks' are, of course, the narrative devices on which autobiography relies in order to

²⁰⁸ Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989) 162.

maintain an 'illusion of reference'.²¹⁰ Wilkomirski also employed such 'fiction-making tricks' in *Fragments*, tricks designed to pass off his writing as 'a transparent medium for experience'.²¹¹ As Maechler wrote, Wilkomirski's sustained and fragmentary childlike perspective 'conceals the fact that every word is written in the present and that the author surely shapes his memories with the conscious, knowing mind of an adult'.²¹² Wilkomirski's critics were not initially drawn to question the authenticity of *Fragments* for this reason, however, even though, as Maechler states, the adoption of a child's perspective to reflect the incomprehensible nature of the Holocaust is a 'common strategy in works of fiction' but 'extraordinary for an allegedly autobiographical work'.²¹³

Certain levels of 'fiction-making' are acceptable in autobiography, as the huge success of memoirs such as Frank McCourt's and Dave Pelzer's attests. Both authors, for example, incorporate lengthy 'verbatim' conversations that

²⁰⁹ Roth 172.

²¹⁰ 'Illusion of reference' is Paul de Man's term, see 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN* 94.5 (December 1979): 920.

²¹¹ Such narrative strategies are not necessarily a sign of 'fiction' but are often simply ways in which to make a true story sound true. Olney points out that this has traditionally been a problem associated with slave narratives too, narratives that tend to conform to a specific mode of presentation in order to perform their function as 'true stories', the imperative to 'give a picture of "slavery as it is": To give a true picture of slavery as it really is, he must maintain that he exercises a clear glass, neutral memory that is neither creative nor faulty--indeed, if it were creative it would be *eo ipso* faulty for "creative" would be understood by sceptical readers as a synonym for "lying"', 'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature', *The Slave's Narrative*, Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 150.

²¹² Maechler 279.

²¹³ Maechler 279.

occurred thirty, forty, even fifty years previously, sometimes conversations at which they were not even present. And yet their popular appeal suggests that readers are willing to collude in such 'fiction-making', although they would doubtless feel differently if it emerged that McCourt, for example, had been to Ireland 'only as a tourist'.

Discussions of the dubious status of Tracey Emin's work as 'art' permeated the response to her Turner Prize nominated installation *My Bed* (1999) as well as to her other 'confessional' work. Much commentary revolved around the question of whether the bed was really her own (in which case it was not art) or whether it was constructed for the exhibition (in which case it was too artful, even deceptive). Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss: A Secret Life* (1998) provoked similar confusion. In 1997, for example, before the publication of her own memoir, Linda Grant wrote a strangely negative review of *The Kiss* which centred on the question of veracity in relation to artfulness. Grant was, she says 'disturbed' by 'the sensibility of [Harrison's] prose', adding that:

The Kiss is a memoir which is asking to be judged as literature, as if it were a novel. As non-fiction, it seems somehow artful rather than art, which is the difficulty of much of the work in the current school of personal memoir. As each incident rises effortlessly

from the constraining silence of her life to illuminate the narrative as metaphor, one begins to wonder how truthful are the events we are being told about.²¹⁴

Are only novels 'literature'? Does memoir-writing require no literary skill? It is not clear whether Grant's problem with *The Kiss* is because it is too 'artful' or too 'effortless'. Interestingly, while there is a suspicion that *The Kiss* might be a veiled work of fiction, Harrison's earlier, fictional, treatment of incest *Thicker than Water* (1991) was attacked on the grounds that it rang 'too true for its own good'.²¹⁵

Matthew Collings observed in October 1999 that 'The critical storm that blew up during the week over Tracey Emin's un-made bed, made into art, was about content not formal qualities. It was assumed to have no formal qualities, only cheap shock content'.²¹⁶ While Harrison's memoir was attacked on the grounds that it was too 'artful', Emin's installation was pilloried because it was not artful enough. Both critiques centre on the myth that truth-telling is facile, lacking the necessary engagement with art that fiction presupposes. As Rachel Cusk writes in

²¹⁴ Linda Grant, 'Little Princess', *Guardian* 24 April 1997: 12.

²¹⁵ Scott Spencer, 'Her Childhood was Doomed', rev. of *Thicker than Water*, *New York Times Book Review* 21 April 1991: 13.

²¹⁶ Matthew Collings, 'You've Made Your Bed...', *Observer* 24 October 1999, Review: 5. See also Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'The Rumpled Bed of Autobiography: Extravagant Lives, Extravagant Questions', 'Autobiography and Changing Identities', eds. Susanna Egan and Gabrielle Helms, spec. issue of *Biography* 24.1 (winter 2001): 1-15 for

response to the novelist Jenny Diski's memoir *Skating to Antarctica* (1997): 'Non-fiction: that negative prefix, rather like the words off-duty, suggests something casual and civilian, a technical reprieve from discipline. [. . .] Non-fiction is where novelists go on leave'.²¹⁷ If, as in Harrison's case, such artistic engagement or discipline appears to be present, the suspicion is that the author must not be telling the truth. And if, as in Emin's case, the work appears too 'artless', the suspicion is that anyone could do it.²¹⁸

These issues have also been at the forefront of discussions of confessional discourse as a feminist consciousness-raising tool. Rita Felski suggests that 'these narratives lack the self-consciousness typically associated with modernist texts and thus strike critical readers as naïve'.²¹⁹ And Leigh Gilmore counters the claim of naïveté by suggesting that 'women find in confessional discourse a subject position that grants them authority from which to make truth claims'.²²⁰ She argues that 'the confession, as it persists in women's self-representation, may have little tolerance for irony, but the extent to

a discussion of Emin's installation and the problem of veracity and artfulness.

²¹⁷ Rachel Cusk, 'It Hurt too Much to Carry', *Guardian* 5 June 1997: 13.

²¹⁸ Although perhaps the discomfort arises not from the truth-claim but rather from, in particular, Harrison's visibility due to the pre-publication publicity she allowed. It is not insignificant that less publicised accounts of incest and abuse such as Sylvia Fraser's *In My Father's House* (1989) and Elly Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word* (1989) elicited no such negative and personal responses.

²¹⁹ Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 225.

which its subjects police themselves and strive to produce a "truthful" account defines them as highly "self-conscious".²²¹ Paradoxically, the 'confessional' mode might place the autobiographer in a conflictual relationship with dominant modes of truth-telling. The critical response to Harrison's memoir implies that even feigned 'naïveté' might prove more convincing than explicit 'artfulness' and yet as the response to Emin's work reveals, naïveté might lead to a critical emphasis on content as opposed to form. The problematic fictionality of Wilkomirski's text may be due less to the fictions in autobiography and more to the fictions of autobiography: to the very notion that autobiography is able to function as a 'transparent medium' for the past and that this past 'can be brought back, and conjured before the eyes "as it really was"'.²²²

Wilkomirski's persistent claim that not only his memories but also his text unquestionably represent historical truth seems outmoded in the context of recent autobiographical writing and recent theories of autobiography. As Eakin writes: 'Most autobiographers these days certainly know--to one degree or another--that autobiography is a fiction. Why, then, do they persist in asking us to believe that autobiography is constituted by

²²⁰ Gilmore 225.

²²¹ Gilmore 225.

²²² Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography, and History* (London: Rivers Oran Press, 1992) 163.

the stuff of biographical reality?'²²³ And Erica Jong, in a similar vein, wrote in 1985 that 'the comforting notion that there are definite forms in literature--novel, confessional novel, memoir, autobiography--is more of a fiction than fiction itself'.²²⁴ The destabilisation of the very notion of 'I' also intervenes to unsettle the autobiographical project. 'If we do not know who the "I" is, how do we know where the "truth" lies since the "I" is the very guarantor of truth-telling', asks Sidonie Smith.²²⁵

Theories of autobiography may appear to be in a state of perpetual flux and the guidelines set down by theorists such as Lejeune and Bruss are as flexible as they are prescriptive. And yet there would exist no such concept as a fraudulent or fake autobiography if there were not still in place a dominant discourse of truth-telling and contracts that, although flexible, can yet be broken. Leigh Gilmore suggests that 'autobiography draws its social authority from its relation to culturally dominant discourses of truth-telling and not, as has previously been asserted, from autobiography's privileged relation to real life'.²²⁶ She also explores the extent to which 'critical language participates in policing truth by criminalizing

²²³ Eakin, 'The Referential Aesthetic': 142.

²²⁴ Erica Jong, 'The Life we Live and the Life we Write', *New York Times* 10 February 1985, section 7: 26.

²²⁵ Sidonie Smith, 'Construing Truths in Lying Mouths: Truth-telling in Women's Autobiography', 'The Vexingly Unverifiable': 163.

²²⁶ Leigh Gilmore, introduction, *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, eds. Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore and Gerald Peters (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994) 9.

certain autobiographers'.²²⁷ Maechler's study may be seen as an exercise in such 'policing' too, but as both the RMT debate and his own conclusion suggest, the real authority over the truth-status of life-narrative may only be found in a court of law.

This is a perplexing proposition for autobiographers writing from the 'margins', especially at a time when the boundaries between margin and mainstream are in the process of dissolving. Sidonie Smith addresses this problem, and explores the function of truth-telling as a normative code, demonstrating the extent to which those writing from the margins might always be in breach of that code, might not be able to tell their own truth within the parameters laid down for them. "'Truth-telling" is "truth to" the normative cultural function', she writes.²²⁸ Specifically, Smith raises the question of what truth-telling might mean to the female autobiographer, and asks some pressing questions about the nature of this 'truth' that go beyond the poststructuralist critique of truth-telling in general. She asks:

"Truth" to what? To facticity? To experience? To self? To history? To community? Truth to the said, to the unsaid, to other fictions (of man, of woman of American, of black, etc.), to the genre? And truth for what and for whom? For the

²²⁷ Gilmore 9.

²²⁸ Smith, 'The Vexingly Unverifiable': 158.

autobiographer? The reader? Society? At a time in the West when the autobiographical seems to surround us and yet when the autobiographical and novelistic seem to have merged inextricably with one another, what does it mean to ask about the perplexed relationship of the autobiographical to "truthtelling"?²²⁹

What happens, she asks, when excluded people adopt that normative cultural voice, becoming white, male, bourgeois?: 'In the wrong mouth "truth" can be transformed into the "lie"'.²³⁰

Such arguments were brought to bear on the controversial Rigoberta Menchú case, but not on Wilkomirski's. Menchú's *testimonio* raises the question of what truth-telling might entail in different cultural contexts. The controversial nature of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* may have been exacerbated, like Wilkomirski's case, by the fact that it was so highly acclaimed before doubts began to surface (Menchú was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize). Menchú was later accused, however, of claiming the experiences and stories of others as her own, of bolstering the authoritative 'I' with a collection of silent others. One reporter noted that, when challenged, Menchú 'tries to simultaneously argue that she didn't lie and that if she did, it doesn't matter'.²³¹ Some felt that Menchú's 'lies'

²²⁹ Smith, 'The Vexingly Unverifiable': 147-48.

²³⁰ Smith, 'The Vexingly Unverifiable': 159.

²³¹ Poniewozik.

were in the service of a greater truth--a collective truth--and that her only lie was saying 'I' where she ought to have said 'we' or even 'they'.

Similar claims have been made about Richard Wright's 1945 autobiography *Black Boy*. In an article titled "'I Do Believe Him Though I Know He Lies": Lying as Genre and Metaphor in *Black Boy*', Timothy Dow Adams points out the generic confusion surrounding *Black Boy*. Some felt the book was sincere, others disagreed, but what Dow Adams argues is that 'both sides are correct; that the book is an especially truthful account of black experience in America, even though the protagonist's story often does not ring true; and that this inability to tell the truth is Wright's major metaphor of self'.²³² He concludes that '*Black Boy* should not be read as historical truth, which strives to report those incontrovertible facts that can somehow be corroborated, but as narrative truth' and thus provides a quasi-psychoanalytic reading of Wright's text, as he draws the distinction between 'historical truth' and 'narrative truth' from Donald Spence's psychoanalytic book on that subject.²³³

Wilkomirski's 'lies' are of a different order from all of these, but they do also represent, for him if for nobody else, a 'truth' of the subjective or narrative kind. And

²³² Timothy Dow Adams, "'I Do Believe Him Though I Know He Lies": Lying as Genre and Metaphor in *Black Boy*', *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, Amistad Literary Series, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah (New York: Amistad Press, 1993) 302.

yet although dominant discourse can sometimes circumscribe legitimate attempts to tell the truth, there do, as the Wilkomirski case illustrates, have to be times where it 'really matters'.

To conclude this chapter I turn to another controversial memoir of the past decade, Lauren Slater's *Spasm: A Memoir with Lies* (2000). In discussing what are perhaps the surprising parallels between Slater's memoir and Wilkomirski's I explore the question of subjective truth in life writing and ask whether autobiography can truly serve as a vehicle for it.

7. Conclusion: 'A Metaphorical Memoir'

Slater declares that her purpose in *Spasm* is 'to ponder the blurry line between novels and memoirs'.²³⁴ *Spasm*--titled *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* in the US--also presents a pressing case for the acknowledgement of subjective reality or metaphorical rather than historical truths in autobiography. In it Slater claims to suffer from temporal lobe epilepsy, but she also suggests that she may be using the illness as a metaphor for her life. On an ethical level there is a parallel between Slater's appropriation of a neurological disorder from which she may

²³³ Dow Adams 314.

not suffer and Wilkomirski's appropriation of the Holocaust survivor identity. There are parallels, too, in both authors' insistence on the higher value of 'the truth of a life' over biographical fact, and in the controversial aspect of both memoirs. Rebecca Mead made her displeasure with *Spasm* explicit when she opened her review: 'Sickness demands compassion, but even so, one can be forgiven for wanting to throttle the narrator of Lauren Slater's latest book, ''Lying'' [sic].²³⁵ Mead praises Slater's writing, but criticises the 'heavy-handedness' with which she conveys her message of metaphorical truth. Likewise, Janet Maslin believes that Slater 'flogs' her point until it ceases to be important and suggests that there is nothing original in Slater's insistence on the slippery nature of truth in autobiography.²³⁶

Slater is unprecedentedly forceful in making her point, as Mead and Maslin point out. She even includes a point-by-point memo to her editor at Random House imploring that *Spasm* be marketed as a nonfiction title. She suggests

²³⁴ Lauren Slater, *Spasm: A Memoir with Lies* (2000; London: Methuen, 2001) 160.

²³⁵ Rebecca Mead, 'Stranger than Fiction', rev. of *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*, by Lauren Slater, *New York Times* 16 June 2000, section 7: 11.

²³⁶ Janet Maslin, 'It Could be Fact or Fiction . . . or Something Else', rev. of *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* by Lauren Slater, *New York Times* 22 June 2000, section E: 9. Mary McCarthy's *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957) could be seen as an early example of the overt and avowed use of fiction in autobiography, but although there is often a blurred line between 'fiction' and 'fact' in autobiography, Slater's memoir is, I would argue, more original than Mead and Maslin allow because she addresses this issue directly and tells the truth about her lies. Tim O'Brien also uses this strategy in *The Things they Carried* (1991), allowing the reader to be drawn into a story before

that it be marketed as 'a book that takes up residence in the murky gap between genres, and by its stubborn self-position there, forces us to consider important things'.²³⁷

And yet if the blurring of fact and fiction in autobiography is so obvious, the concept of 'metaphorical truth' so unoriginal, then why would Slater need to 'flog' this point? Both Mead and Maslin rightly question the reader's role in this because in refusing 'to tease apart the fabrications from the facts' Slater is in effect asking her readers to believe her even though they know she is lying, to fulfil their contractual agreement even as she admits she is breaking her own. Referring to Wilkomirski, Hoffman contends that 'It is perfectly legitimate to mix fact and fiction, if the reader is given fair warning'.²³⁸ The readers of *Spasm* and *Fragments* were given no such warning and I suggest that this may be the source of their deepest generic transgression.

Maechler suggests that Kosinski's justification for his fictionalisation of the Holocaust (and the truth claim he makes alongside it) may appropriately describe 'the process by which Wilkomirski's inner images may have become "memories"'.²³⁹ 'Kosinski', writes Maechler, 'asserts that memory is fiction, a subjective reality that one can turn into a fairy tale to conquer fear. With that Wilkomirski

exposing its fictionality, but as his book is a novel (albeit perhaps an autobiographical one) the stakes are very different.

²³⁷ Slater 161.

²³⁸ Hoffman.

would never agree--after all, he still insists that his narrative has the quality of photographic copy'.²⁴⁰ In Wilkomirski's case subjective reality was entirely divorced from actuality, but are subjective realities, as Maechler seems to suggest always synonymous with fiction? Many felt Wilkomirski's memoir to be a metaphorical appropriation of the Holocaust, but are metaphors also, necessarily, 'fictions' too?²⁴¹

In the wake of Ganzfried's exposé Wilkomirski might well have asked the same questions as Slater: 'Why is what we feel less true than what is?'. She asks:

Suppose I simply feel like an epileptic [. . .] supposing I have chosen epilepsy because it is the most accurate conduit to convey my psyche to you? Would this still not be a memoir, my memoir? After all, if I were making the whole thing up--and I'm not saying I'm making the whole thing up--but if I were, I would be doing it not to create a character as a novelist does, but, instead, to create a metaphor that conveys the real person I am. [. . .] My memoir, please. Sell it as nonfiction, please.²⁴²

Refusing to state whether or not she is telling the truth about her epilepsy, Slater also suggests she may be

²³⁹ Maechler 243.

²⁴⁰ Maechler 243.

²⁴¹ See, for example, Maechler 278.

²⁴² Slater 162-63.

suffering from Munchausens (although this too might be a lie). 'Munchhausen's', she writes, 'is a fascinating psychiatric disorder, its sufferers makers of myth that are still somehow true, the illness a conduit to convey real pain'.²⁴³ This recalls Maechler's description of *Fragments* as 'a meaningful story for an inexplicable and inaccessible past'.²⁴⁴

Georges Perec's 1975 autobiography *W or the Memory of Childhood* also explores fiction as a 'conduit to convey real pain' and yet he alternates 'fiction' with 'fact', displaying the 'fictions' in italicised print and 'fact' in roman. The split is also of voluntary memory with involuntary: roman print for his attempts to reach the past through voluntary memory and research, and italics for an ostensibly unrelated story about an island named 'W'. The truth, he claims, lies not in one or the other but only in their 'fragile intersection'.²⁴⁵

Sylvia Fraser's *In My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing* (1987) enacts a similar typographical fissure. Amnesia had rendered Fraser's memories of abuse inaccessible until she entered a course of recovered memory therapy: 'For clarity', she writes, 'I have used italics to indicate thoughts, feelings and experiences pieced together

²⁴³ Slater 87.

²⁴⁴ Maechler 272.

²⁴⁵ Georges Perec, *W or the Memory of Childhood*, trans. David Bellos (1974; London: The Harvill Press, 1996) preface.

from recently recovered memories and to indicate dreams'.²⁴⁶ Fraser's memoir was published before the recovered memory controversy became widespread, but she adds in her foreword that the sexual abuse secret 'has been corroborated by outside sources' and so while she affirms the material reality of her story, she still places a tentative question mark over her subjective experience of it.

Leslie Ritchie takes issue with this recourse to italics to represent a subjective experience and accurately suggests that:

The typographical differentiation suggests her awareness of the inadequacy of dominant discourse to represent the experience of incest. [. . .] If the dominant fiction is found in regular type and regular grammar, and the split lies in repressed italics, fractured dream narratives, and childlike speech, then what mode(s) might represent a diachronic view of self for the victim of incest?²⁴⁷

Italics are perhaps the ideal typescript to represent subjective truths; they even visually approximate the handwritten word suggesting an immediacy of narration and yet, as Leslie suggests, they may also represent the

²⁴⁶ Sylvia Fraser, *In My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing* (1987; London: Virago, 1999) preface.

²⁴⁷ Leslie Ritchie, "'Words are for Forgetting": Incest and Language in Betsy Warland's *The Bat Had Blue Eyes*', *Essays in Canadian Writing* 65 (1998): 206.

inadequacy of dominant discourse to consider subjective truth as anything other than fiction.²⁴⁸

Susan Wicks's memoir *Driving My Father* (1995) is another example of this. Wicks does not differentiate between 'fact' and 'fantasy' in this account of her parents' deaths but her memoir is described on the cover as 'Half memoir, half novel' suggesting that a memoir which fails to distinguish between the two ends up generically divided. Suleiman suggests that the problem with *Fragments* is that 'Unlike Perec's and Robbe-Grillet's works, Wilkomirski's book does not play with categories--it obfuscates them, which is not the same thing. The problem with *Fragments*, as a text, is precisely that it does not recognize--or at any rate, does not admit--its own fictionality'.²⁴⁹

Despite the well-documented 'Freud bashing' that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s over Freud's unwillingness to believe that his patients' stories of abuse were materially or biographically true, there is

²⁴⁸ David Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks* (1989) also dealt with incest by employing scenes of fantasy where the viewer is left unsure of whether or not the events are actually occurring in 'reality' or in 'fantasy', hallucination or dream. The father in the father-daughter incest story at the centre of the series is represented almost throughout in the form of a repellent, elusive man bearing no resemblance to Laura Palmer's actual father. This mode could be seen as the visual counterpart to the italicised subjectivities discussed here. And yet Chris Rodley writes that 'after the release of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, Lynch received many letters from young girls who had been abused by their fathers. They were puzzled as to how he could have known exactly what it was like. Despite the fact that the perpetration of both incest and filicide was represented in the "abstract" form of killer Bob, it was recognized as faithful to the subjective experience', *Lynch on Lynch*, Chris Rodley, ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1997) xii.

still a problem, it would seem, with 'subjective reality' outside of the consulting room. We need only to look at the havoc caused by Wilkomirski's refusal (or inability) to admit his own 'fictionality', not to mention these other related examples, to see that the tension between psychoanalytically legitimated truth and historically legitimated truth poses problems for the genre theorist as well as for the historian or psychoanalyst. Assuming that Wilkomirski is a 'genuine fake' rather than a knowing impostor, his main problem, from a generic point of view might well have been an excess of faith in the autobiographical project, a failure to recognise the very fictions contained within the notion of autobiography itself.

As the above examples, and indeed those discussed throughout this thesis, illustrate, if there is a 'rhetoric of fact' that can still convince, it may consist merely of a recognition of autobiography's necessary 'fictionality'. Wilkomirski does call attention, as Eskin indicates, 'to his own uncertainty throughout the book', with the result that 'he gets his readers to accept their confusion rather than following up on it'.²⁵⁰ Wilkomirski may have had some idea about the potential of doubt as factual rhetoric, but in his defence of the memoir he insisted again and again that his memories and the memoir he made of them were

²⁴⁹ Rubin Suleiman, 'Problems of Memory': 552.

²⁵⁰ Eskin 57.

unquestionably true. As Percec's and Fraser's italicised subjectivities reveal, subjective truths are not enough on which to base a life story that will also pertain to 'history'. And as the Wilkomirski case demonstrates, psychoanalytically legitimated truth, or even just subjective truth, may have a long way to go before it can be validated as biographical truth.

CONCLUSION

In 1998 I visited the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles in order to gain an insight into oral Holocaust testimony for my Masters degree on that topic. One day the interviewers at the Foundation were discussing their experiences. One recalled an intriguing interview with a woman who had survived Auschwitz. When the interviewer asked her about the details of her survival, the woman replied: 'I had typhoid and I was dying. As I was lying in my bunk one night my mother came to me and she brought a goat, a blanket, and a pot of honey. She milked the goat and gave me the milk to drink, she fed me the honey, and she wrapped the blanket around me to keep me warm. After this I was much stronger, and this is how I survived the experience of Auschwitz'. The interviewer, bemused, asked how the woman's mother had managed to get hold of such treasures in a concentration camp. She was swiftly enlightened, as the woman replied: 'Oh no, my mother was then already dead, but she came to me in the night with a goat, some honey, and a blanket, and this is how I survived the experience of Auschwitz'.

In *Holocaust Testimonies*, Lawrence Langer addresses the problem of accuracy in oral testimony: '[S]ince testimonies are human documents rather than merely

historical ones', he writes, 'the troubled interaction between past and present achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy'.¹ Langer's phrase 'human document' strikes me as a particularly fitting expression for stories such as the one recounted at the Shoah Foundation. For Langer it is this kind of unexpected response, this challenge to logical conceptions of truth, that makes oral testimonies, in their 'humanness' somehow more than 'merely' historical documents, and that trivialises the comparatively pedestrian concerns of the historian. One of the aims of this thesis has been to explore the often precarious balance between the 'human' and the 'historical' in contemporary life-narratives. Felman refers to tensions which pertain to the human and the historical, tensions between the clinical, therapeutic, or psychoanalytic and the political or historical effects of testimony, and she asks how testimony can 'intervene, pragmatically and efficaciously, at once historically (politically) and clinically'.²

Psychoanalysis offers a unique insight into the 'humanness' of testimony, or of autobiography: it proposes that stories can be considered true in an important sense even when they do not sound true in the way that we might expect. And yet although Langer claims that the status of

¹ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) xv.

² Felman, *Testimony*, 8.

oral testimonies as 'human documents' is what puts them above history, it may well be the case that 'humanness' can place such subjective accounts altogether outside of history, that it can invalidate testimony from a historical, or a legal, perspective. Indeed, if we recall Laub's anecdote about the woman who testified to the explosion of four chimneys during the Auschwitz uprising, this is precisely what happens. And as this thesis has demonstrated, the clinical and the political, or the human and the historical aspects of testimony are not easily reconciled.

In its heyday, recovered memory therapy promised such reconciliation. 'Recovery' served a dual clinical and political function, helping to effect both what Judith Lewis Herman referred to as 'the healing of individual victims' and 'the restoration of social order'.³ The debate that followed was due to a gap that began to widen between the clinical and the political when it became clear that psychoanalytically retrieved histories could not withstand the verification procedures required of juridical testimony. Recovered memory therapy emerged from the 1990s as an object of the deepest suspicion, despite its promising beginnings. RMT initially offered the possibility of a privileged kind of autobiographical recall, promising that absent memories could be restored in all completeness

and coherence and that they could be validated in a court of law and justice restored. And yet even in its most idealised form the therapy posed certain problems, threatening at times to lead not to integration and recovery, but potentially to a kind of dispossession: 'in the instant of recovery', as Luckhurst writes, 'we can become strangers to ourselves'.⁴ In some RMT cases, the proposed 'cure' seemed less preferable than the symptoms and this posed a challenge to one of the fundamental tenets of psychoanalysis: the conviction that remembering is preferable to forgetting. As David Krell wrote of Freud's faith in the benevolence of memory: 'If the unremembered reminiscence is *thanatos*, remembrance is *eros*, and *eros* will prevail'.⁵

The contemporary trauma theory discussed in this thesis also throws into question this privileging of memory over forgetting. Lanzmann's persistent interrogation of Abraham Bomba in *Shoah*'s barbershop scene, for example, makes us wonder whether the painful *reliving* of traumatic experience for the sake of historical transmission is truly preferable to the alternative. Indeed, theories like Caruth's and Felman's present a particular challenge to witnesses to historical atrocity. Although they suggest the

³ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 1992) 1.

⁴ Roger Luckhurst, 'Recovered memory/ memory recovered', *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*, Peter Marks and Roger Luckhurst, eds. (London: Longman, 1999) 86.

possibility of a *literal* resurrection of the past in the present for the purpose of historical testimony, they simultaneously reject the idea that this can be achieved without the help of an analyst figure, an enabling other, which may in turn suggest the impossibility of accurate or viable testimony outside of this specific theoretical framework. Psychoanalysis usefully proposes ways in which testimony might be admitted as historical or biographical evidence even when it doesn't sound true in the way we might expect, but, as I suggested in Chapter Two, theories of testimony based on psychoanalysis might come close to invalidating testimony that does conform to received notions of truth-telling.

Theories of belatedness or *Nachträglichkeit* pose similar politico-ethical problems. While the concept of 'deferred action' proves a useful vantage point from which to consider the necessity for revision or 'retranslation' in autobiography (which in itself, as Nicola King proposes, may serve therapeutic ends), in its resistance to closure and its emphasis on self-making as a 'continual process' it may preclude the possibility of (a final) accurate testimony, and although the theory of belatedness allows for the fact that a traumatic experience may not be 'registered' when it occurs but only later, a strict application of this theory runs the risk of suggesting that

⁵ Cited by Ann Scott, *Real Events Revisited: Fantasy, Memory and*

(accurate) testimony cannot be given right after the occurrence of an event, but only at a significant distance from that event.

And so in this sense psychoanalysis might well serve as a delimiting factor in considerations of autobiography and testimony, as opposed to a simple validation of the 'human' aspect of life-narrative. For with the emphasis on psychoanalysis also comes a profound distrust of coherent stories, which are seen to function as screens for more profound truths. Felman's dismissal of women's confessional writing illustrates this problem: the stories we have at our disposal, the tale that can be told is, from a psychoanalytic perspective and as Adam Phillips points out, a cover story, a screen for the 'true' story that can only be accessed indirectly. Françoise Meltzer sees this as 'a problematic central to psychoanalysis' and illustrates this by referring to Freud's famous anecdote where, in responding to a suggestion that his cigar-smoking had phallic implications, he proclaimed that 'sometimes a good cigar is just a good cigar'. Meltzer writes:

the discipline which insists on transference and, perhaps even more significantly, on displacement as fundamental principles, ultimately must insist in turn on seeing everything as being "really" something else. [.

. .] psychoanalysis needs at times to remind itself [. . .] that it is possible for a cigar really to be a cigar.⁶

Testimony accounts for the need to say 'this is true and it happened to me', and for these words to be taken at face-value, but as this thesis has demonstrated, sometimes the irreconcilability of the therapeutic and the historical demands of testimony throws into question the relationship between trauma, language, and truth.

This thesis was motivated by a desire to investigate the ways that psychoanalysis and history implicate one another in crucial ways, and in so doing to explore the extent to which autobiography might be able to serve as a vehicle for the human and the historical aspects of testimony, without these aspects cancelling each other out. Laub's anecdote illustrates how the 'human' and the 'historical' might sometimes function dichotomously. And by equating the human document with gravity and the historical document with accuracy, Langer occupies a problematic theoretical position. Is history free from subjectivity and is the human document, although grave, unable to achieve the degree of objectivity necessary for an accurate version of events? If to err is human, does history always get it

⁶ Françoise Meltzer, 'Introduction: Partitive Plays, Pipe Dreams', *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Françoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 1. This edition was first published as a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* 13:2 (winter 1987).

right? Shouldn't autobiography, that most subjective of historical genres, operate as a site of reconciliation?

The memoirs I discussed in Chapter One confronted this issue directly, demonstrating that if this genre cannot serve a reconciliatory function, it might at least provide a forum in which to explore the problematic relationship between the human and the historical, the clinical and the political. The memoirs discussed in this thesis might be understood as testimonies not only because of their emphasis on 'access to' the past as opposed to 'statement of' the past, but also because of their self-conscious positionings in relation to objectifying theories or histories. Tim Lott positioned his mother's story in relation to the clinical 'explanations' for her depression and suicide and for his own depression. Anne Karpf and Lisa Appignanesi attempted to locate their personal histories and those of their parents in relation both to the historical record and to psychoanalytic theories of transgenerational haunting. Carolyn Steedman and Annette Kuhn question the relationship of their working-class histories to dominant middle-class cultural histories. They each gesture towards the fictiveness of 'history', questioning the authority that such dominant modes derive from their ostensible objectivity. Lott does this by pointing out that the history of depression is as multiple and shifting as his own projects of self-making,

Appignanesi questions the authority of documentary evidence by making clear the inadequacies of archival resources, and Steedman explores the extent to which universalising theories such as psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and feminism often exclude working-class experience. And yet the desire for their personal histories to count as history is attested to by a preoccupation with referentiality, with evidence, and with recovery. As I suggested in Chapter One, these texts demonstrate how autobiography can still be sustained by the myth of recovery or referentiality, even if this is acknowledged to be this genre's most fictional of premises.

Wilkomirski's case brings into particularly sharp focus the relationship between autobiography and truth-telling. And it is here that perhaps the hazards of a psychoanalytic approach to autobiography--the hazards of prioritising the 'human' document over the 'historical'--become starkly evident. Wilkomirski's insistence on the referential qualities of his text exacerbated the problematic 'fictionality' of his text, which suggests that in these sceptical times the only autobiographies we can truly believe are those that make it clear they don't believe in themselves. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson see this as the primary strategy in a contemporary memoir very different from Wilkomirski's *Fragments*. In *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) Dave Eggers 'invites his

readers to collaborate in reconstructing the authority of autobiography as a site of "keeping it real" precisely by exposing its contrivances'.⁷ Eggers's memoir, for Smith and Watson, suggests that 'being suspicious about the ethics of autobiographical writing may be the one ethical act available to it'.⁸

Would it have made matters simpler if Wilkomirski had been inclined, or able, to 'admit the fictionality' of his story? On the one hand it may be unethical to label fiction an autobiographical account that, for the author, represents fact. But on the other hand, what the Wilkomirski case made clear was the fact that the author's considerations may well need to be outweighed in the favour of a greater good: in this case it seems the alternative to validating Wilkomirski's 'truth' was to throw into question the truth-status of other survivor accounts. Whereas Menchú's transgression may have been in saying 'I' where she should have said 'we' or even 'they', Wilkomirski's 'I' could not be divorced from its representative force. Perhaps above all the Wilkomirski case served to validate survivor accounts as history, to recognise their status as such by invalidating the one that spectacularly failed to withstand historical scrutiny. But Wilkomirski's case,

⁷ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'The Rumpled Bed of Autobiography: Extravagant Lives, Extravagant Questions', 'Autobiography and Changing Identities', eds. Susanna Egan and Gabrielle Helms, spec. issue of *Biography* 24.1 (winter 2001): 12-13.

⁸ Smith and Watson: 9.

extreme as it was, poses questions about the limits of autobiography--about parameters between the human and the historical--that pertain to the genre more broadly. Where do we draw the line? When does a narrative become so subjective that it exceeds the parameters and becomes a work of fiction? What, for example, would a historian make of the woman testifying to her survival through the ghostly intervention of her dead mother?

A recently published study of trauma, testimony, and the limits of autobiography discusses some of the same issues as the ones explored in this thesis, but with a notable difference of emphasis. In order to investigate the relationship between testimony and truth-telling, Leigh Gilmore identifies the recovered memory debate and recent trauma theory as emblems of the fraught relationship between testimony and truth. She focuses on texts that reveal how:

autobiography's project--to tell the story of one's life--appears to constrain self-representation through its almost legalistic definition of truth telling, its anxiety about invention, and its preference for the literal and verifiable, even in the presence of some ambivalence about these criteria. [. . .] The

portals are too narrow and the demands too restrictive.⁹

Gilmore 'redirects attention away from the most prominent contemporary memoirs to texts about trauma that test the limits of autobiography'.¹⁰ But the texts discussed in her study are not autobiographies but fictions and Gilmore's aim is to demonstrate how 'In their embrace of autobiography's impossibility and revision of the testimonial imperative, limit-cases reveal how not writing an autobiography can be an achievement'.¹¹ Gilmore hopes that her study of fictional texts will offer an invaluable insight into autobiography and its implications, and this seems a fitting response to trauma theories and the impasses of memory-work: theories that seem to perpetuate autobiography's impossibility even as they articulate the political and clinical need for flexible modes of truth-telling. Gilmore's study does not suggest that fiction is the ideal forum for truth-telling, but it may suggest that fiction offers a way in which to tell the truth about telling the truth, without the burden of judgement that, as Gilmore makes clear, inevitably falls upon the avowedly non-fiction writer.

⁹ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 3.

¹⁰ Gilmore 3.

¹¹ Gilmore 15.

'Fiction's dead. That's a fact' proclaimed Linda Grant, writing from the midst of the 1990s memoir boom, and indeed many were concerned that the hunger for tales of true-life threatened to lead to the extinction of the novel.¹² And yet what Gilmore's study suggests is that the contemporary memoir and the issues surrounding it may have served as a call for the reconfiguration of the space between 'fact' and 'fiction', between the 'historical' and the 'human' and that what they have to tell us is something that Lejeune knew all along: 'In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing'.¹³

¹² Linda Grant, 'Fiction's Dead. That's a Fact', *Guardian* 16 June 1998, Features: 5.

¹³ Phillipe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact (Bis)', *On Autobiography, Theory and History of Literature* 52, trans. Katherine Leary, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 131-32.

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