WOMEN WRITING TRAUMA:

HOW FEMALE WRITERS USE NARRATIVE VOICE IN FICTION

TO REPRESENT THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

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(Content warning: Themes and discussions of trauma and serious sexual abuse)

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ABSTRACT

When an individual experiences a trauma, one thing often lost is the ability to use language to explain the ordeal and associated emotions. The aim of the critical study is to examine how female writers use narrative voice in fiction to represent the effects of trauma. I will discuss how an understanding of different points of view have informed my own writing of a traumatic event. The introduction presents the early trauma theories formed during the 1980s. Chapter one gives an overview of first person by defining the term. The impact of using the technique is investigated by analysing the narrative in novels *True Things About Me* (2010) by Deborah Kay Davies, *My Dark Vanessa* (2020) by Kate Elizabeth Russell, and *Speak* (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson. The chapter demonstrates how the texts relate to trauma theory and concludes with examples of first-person narrative within my novel *On the Other Side*. Chapter two provides an analysis of third person and examines the different forms of the technique, as well as the definitions. The benefits and pitfalls of using this narrative when writing about trauma is explored by analysing the novel *Back in the First Person* (1986) by Kathy Page, the novella *Rapture* (2002) by Susan Minot, and the chapter 'Kelly Brown' from Pat Barker's novel, *Union Street* (1982). Relating these findings to my novel forms a discussion on reasons for switching narratives. Chapter three looks at second person and the challenges defining the term. The chapter analyses female writers' use of second person in the novels *Devoured* (2018) by Anna Mackmin and *Blow Your House Down* by Pat Barker (1984), the novella *Rape: A Love Story* (2003) by Joyce Carol Oates, and short story 'Lust' by Susan Minot, published in Minot's short stories collection *Lust and Other Stories* (1989). Following the exploring of texts, I demonstrate my use of second person. The conclusion reflection on my creative project and relates my findings about the impact and considerations of narrative voice and how that fits into my writing of trauma.

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INTRODUCTION

Pursuing an approach without being bound by the traditional model's view of language allows an interpretation that establishes language's ability to multiply depict the various meanings of traumatic experience.

- Michelle Balaev, "Trauma Studies"

When an individual has experienced a trauma, one of the things often lost is the ability to use language to explain an ordeal and the subsequent emotions associated with it. This critical study will examine the ways in which narrative voice and point of view can be used in fiction by women writers to tell such a story and how both can best represent the effects of a serious trauma. Discussions around traumatic events, for example the experiences of women which resulted in political response the Me Too Movement[1] and the coronavirus pandemic[2], are becoming more prevalent than ever via both social media and mainstream media. Because of this trauma, its impact and recovery are in the spotlight like never before and therefore a discussion of the depiction of trauma in literature is of the upmost importance. This can, however, be especially challenging when individuals will experience events differently to one another.

Michelle Balaev believes that writers who are writing about trauma should not be bound by the usual conventions of language in order to allow the complexities of writing trauma to be explored. As the field of trauma studies continues to develop by adapting new approaches and perspectives, Balaev explains the importance of encompassing new findings. She claims it will enhance "further exploration of sociocultural and semiotic implications of trauma in literature" (369) so that "the breadth of current criticism [can attest] to the versatility of trauma studies and its relevance to literary theory" (369).

The word trauma can be used in two different contexts according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In a physical context it means “a physical injury”. While in a psychological context it means an emotional response to “a deeply distressing or disturbing event”, such as a personal trauma like the death of a child – the example cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Although this study focuses on the depiction of trauma in its psychological context there will also be a minimal overlap of references to physical trauma too, as often the two can go hand in hand. For example, a physical trauma, such as a car accident, can evoke an emotional response as well an injury, either serious or minor. It is also possible, however, to experience such an accident and walk away uninjured but still be emotionally scarred from the experience, thus causing a response of trauma to the event.

The idea behind this study came from an exploration of narrative voice while writing my novel, *On the Other Side* (2021), a project which makes up the remainder of this submission for the degree of Master of Philosophy. Using different narrative voices created a way of distancing myself as a writer from the text, thus allowing me to complete a novel that draws on personal experiences of recovering from a serious trauma possible. This is most evident with the use of a third-person narrative being attributed to the protagonist, Lucy Smith, who is based loosely on my adolescent self.

The origin of *On the Other Side* began after writing a creative non-fiction project for an undergraduate workshop. The piece, entitled *Soup Bowl*, was made up of a series of short chapters and employed a food-based metaphor to explore a traumatic experience. One chapter explored being forced to eat oxtail soup by a male adult and it ran parallel to the description of a sexual assault in later life. The personal revelations that followed the group’s discussion became significant to the starting of this project and, as an individual, it allowed me to explore my own lack of understanding about the trauma I had endured. That chapter would go on to become the premises for *On the Other Side*.

Many of the scenarios within *On the Other Side* are fictionalised versions of real-life events and situations that have taken place. Transmuting this raw experience into a novel has made it possible for me to step back from the text to prepare emotionally ahead of writing on the subject matter of trauma. With this specific focus on grooming[3], sexual abuse, and rape, it is the personal experiences of these issues that have made it possible to look at fictionalising an often-unspeakable trauma effectively. It has also been a learning process working out how to differentiate the novel's characters from real-life individuals who inspired them. This has been achieved by experimenting with voice and viewpoint, allowing my growth as a writer by developing an understanding of the use of focalization and the different ways of manipulating narrative in order to construct readers' experiences of the story. Throughout the writing process of these issues, it has been crucial for me to create a distance with *On the Other Side* so what I have been able to write, critique, and put the project forward to share during small workshopping groups with peers during the completion of this postgraduate.

Underpinning this analysis of narrative voice in trauma fiction will be an exploration of the critical theory around trauma. First developed in the 1990s, trauma studies explore how psychological trauma, and its effects, are presented in literature and subsequently the kinds of the language which are used. While much earlier studies, from around the 1920s, relied on Freudian theory, Balaev describes how this limited model of trauma "imagines an extreme experience which challenges the limits of language and even ruptures meaning altogether" (360). This suggests that suffering is unrepresentable. What followed next in trauma studies research was a more pluralistic model in which Balaev instead suggested that an "assumed unspeakability of trauma is one among many responses to an extreme event rather than its defining feature" (360). So, while the impact of trauma may cause challenges and limitations to language, as well as disruptions to thought processes and meaning altogether, it is still

possible to convey it. It is the idea that a traumatic experience challenges the limits of language that has compelled me to look at the topic in more detail.

If an event is so terrible that one loses the ability of speech – internally or externally – how is it still possible to write a story when the protagonist or narrator who has suffered a trauma may be unable to tell it? And for the writer, are there enough literary forms and methods of narrative construction available to represent a trauma effectively and accurately? By analysing narrative voice, this critical study will demonstrate ways in which it can be done.

Examining the concept of trauma and its role in literature, Cathy Caruth pioneered the early traditional trauma model. She defines trauma as an event that "fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation" (Balaev: 363). That is, she defines trauma as something that is unrepresentable in language, creating a generalised idea that dissociation is inevitable and narrative recall is not possible, particularly for the individual. Similar to Balaev's claims, the emphasis Caruth includes within her trauma model is that the notion of unspeakability rests on the claim that trauma fractures both language and consciousness, causing lasting damage. Caruth argues this in the monograph *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (1996):

> Although isolating, traumatic experience can never with certainty be reduced to, or framed within, the boundaries of an individual life. The annihilation of experience at the core of what we think of as personal trauma is never wholly extricable from larger social and political modes of denial. (121)

Once again, this adds more challenges to composing a narrative point of view, especially if it is argued that a trauma is not confined to one individual. Caruth also looks at neurobiology to examine the effect on consciousness and memory following a trauma, in particular the work of Bessel van der Kolk. Der Kolk also argues that the neurobiological response to trauma can

elicit a "speechless terror" (172) which prevents remembering a trauma as it cannot be "organized on a linguistic level" (172).

However, as trauma studies have developed so has the critical work around it. A pluralistic trauma model now pushes directly against the traditional Caruthian model, as Balaev explains:

> The pluralistic model of trauma challenges the unspeakable trope in seeking to understand not only the structural dimensions of trauma that often develop in terms of trauma's dissociative effects on consciousness and memory, but also the cultural dimensions of trauma and the diversity of narrative expression. By moving away from a position that centralizes pathological fragmentation, the pluralistic model suggests that traumatic experience uncovers new relationships between experience, language, and knowledge that detail the social significance of trauma. The study of trauma within this approach provides greater attention to the variability of traumatic representations. (366)

This suggests that traumatic experiences are in fact able to uncover new relationships through the direct use of experience and experimentation with language, which in turn provides a range of possibilities of how trauma can be represented.

Anne Whitehead touches on this, arguing that narrative relies on "smooth progression and sequentiality" (213). She describes it having a "seductive power" (213) on the reader who ultimately desires "an uninterrupted narrative with no unexplained gaps or inconsistencies" (213). That is the narrative, or story, should appear to progress clearly. The narrative of trauma, however, is not always satisfactory or methodical in a retelling. Whitehead also states that initial trauma is lost to the individual, instead being either relived or remembered:

> If it is relived, this process occurs without any conscious awareness on the part of the patient: there is no sense of the past as past or as a part of the individual's history. If the event is remembered, it is remembered as past but its recall necessarily takes a narrative form. In narrative, the event is altered and new perspectives are taken on it; in short, it is transformed. (214)

When using narrative voice to represent trauma it is important to make it accessible, but to also reveal the trauma in such a way that it can be transformed from its origin while being influenced by other narrative accounts.

As well as coming to this subject as a writer, this study has also been informed by my viewpoint as a reader, looking at the ways in which trauma is written and talked about within fiction. A close analysis of other writers' works has revealed different techniques and provided a deeper understanding of the craft of writing. One text which changed the dynamic of my writing was Susan Minot's *Rapture* (2002). Before this, writing about a sexual act seemed to me to be a taboo subject but Minot uses the act as a backdrop to explore the depth of a doomed relationship. It felt like the validation I needed to write about the complexities of sex. Soon after this, the exploration of different narrative techniques and how they are used to effect began to intrigue me, especially the use of second-person narrative. Again, it was Minot who presented an unforgettable narrative in her short story 'Lust', as its unnamed narrator flips between first and second person which ultimately detaches the narrator from herself, making an intimate moment less personal. For me as a reader, this became a shared experience allowing a more empathetic response for the character-narrator. Reading an inconsistent narrative was both thought-provoking, exciting, and became something of an experience more than just reading for pleasure.

Since studying creative and professional writing as an undergraduate in 2004, I had used a variety of narrative points of view to tell different stories. But it was not until after reading more texts which used multiple narratives, such as *Rape: A Love Story* (2003) and *Back in the First Person* (1986), that I decided to write a novel which explored this, and for the first time alternate them within the same story. As well as exploring first-, third-, and second-person narrative within this critical study, I will also examine the different ways in which they can be manipulated to write about trauma; the position from which the reader sees

the story (focalisation), limited and omniscient third person, and unreliable or restricted narrators.

Throughout my research on trauma, I have been drawn to the works of female authors and have read an expansive list of short stories and novels that cover traumatic events written by women. In a society where the female voice can often be suppressed – an issue I will expand on during this critical study in relation to narrative voice – I wanted to focus on women writers who have published texts dealing with trauma and its recovery to look at this specific group's viewpoint and exploration of the topic.

When it comes to critics' discussions of the depiction of trauma in fiction, Pat Barker's Regeneration trilogy – *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), and *The Ghost Road* (1995) – is a text which is often analysed. Critics have cited these texts to open discussions and form a benchmark of what to expect when both writing and reading trauma. Although *On the Other Side* draws from this literary theory and criticism, it is doing something different in terms of its use of narrative point of view and is focusing on a different experience of trauma.

On the Other Side is a novel that explores the effects of trauma on a family after the rape of 14-year-old Lucy Smith. Her father, Mark Smith, is dealing with his own trauma following the loss of his wife. He also feels as if he has failed his daughters – both Lucy and her older sister Sarah. He spirals into an undiagnosed psychotic breakdown and becomes obsessed with finding Lucy's attacker. As Lucy moves on from the trauma, Mark has only just begun, and ultimately it is Lucy who helps him through.

This critical study is divided into three chapters that each examine a different narrative form: first-, third-, and second-person narrative. Each chapter will then analyse how different narrative voices can be used to depict trauma in fiction, how they are used using specific examples from literature, and how they have been used to effect in *On the Other*

Side. The study will culminate in a conclusion outlining the findings and reflecting on my own novel.

Chapter one opens with the definition of first person, sets out the conventions of this form, and examines how first-person narrative can be used to depict trauma. It will then examine the narrative voice in *True Things About Me* (2010) by Deborah Kay Davies. The novel follows an unnamed female narrator who within hours of meeting a man is having rough sex with him in a car park. She is both repulsed by herself and awakened. Using a close and direct first-person narrative voice, albeit a limited one, allows the reader to sympathise with the narrator while following her descent into obsession and depression.

The chapter will then look at Kate Elizabeth Russell's novel *My Dark Vanessa* (2020) to determine the effectiveness of the first-person narrative voice across two different timelines: 2000 and 2002. By analysing the protagonist, Vanessa Wye, and her relationship with her former English teacher, Jacob Strane, it will look at how the narrator is limited in what information she has and what she eventually discovers. Finally, it will look at how text messaging and email is used, a technique used prominently in *On the Other Side*.

Finally, the episodic structure of the narrative within the novel *Speak* (1999), by Laurie Halse Anderson, will be examined to show how the protagonist's narrative is used to view people as well as show the reader how she is viewed too. At the start of the novel, Melinda Sordino refuses to accept she was raped at a high school party. The first-person narrative conveys the loneliness which surrounds her after the event, as well as the constant questioning of herself and what really happened.

The chapter will conclude by discussing my decision to give Mark a first-person narrative in my novel *On the Other Side*, rather than giving this to Lucy, the survivor[4], who is written in third person. It will also look at the desire to explore the effects of trauma on a group, in this case a family, as well as an individual.

Chapter two will examine third-person narrative and the use of character focalisation, defining each term and looking particularly at the potential of both omniscient and limited narration in relation to trauma.

Examining the text, *Back in the First Person* by Kathy Page, the chapter will explore how a change in narrative voice can be used to reflect Cath's loss of a sense of self and her loss of voice, by switching the opening chapters from first person to third person, before returning back to first person. It will also look at why Page uses this technique and what effect it has on the narrative and its impact on the telling of the story.

Next, the use of two different narrators who use the same narrative point of view will be looked at by analysing Minot's *Rapture*. The analysis will specifically focus on how close third-person narration is used in Minot's novel and what impact this has when characters slowly peel away the layers of a complex relationship.

I will then look at the first chapter of Barker's novel *Union Street* (1982), 'Kelly Brown', to explain how the use of third person can expand the literary setting of a story and allow the reader to see the events through multiple characters' eyes as well as giving them a voice.

The chapter will then conclude with examining the use of third-person narrative in *On the Other Side* and will explain how it is used to make Lucy's voice more powerful voice than if she were written in a first-person narrative. It will also look at the way in which this narrative allows a writer to move between the thoughts of other characters too.

The narrative of second person will be explored in chapter three and will look at examples of this somewhat enigmatic narrative voice. Texts which use second person are rare and existing analysis is sparse. Many creative writing manuals and tutors advise against using this type of narrative due to its complexities, such as a limited point of view and the assumption of it being a less-favoured style by readers. This chapter will examine the

technique and how it can be used to powerful effect when writing trauma. As well as looking at the pitfalls and highlights of using second person, I will also examine the way in which this narrative voice specifically aids writing about trauma due to its advantages in distancing the author while bringing a reader closer to sympathising with a character.

The novel *Devoured* (2018) by Anna Mackmin, uses a second-person narrative throughout. "Nearly thirteen" is a 12-year-old girl living on a rural Norfolk commune during the 1970s. Her narrative is told in close second person, which makes for an authentic and realistic portrayal of the inner thoughts of a young girl, especially the way she describes the novel's main threat to her – the "Hairy Dolly". The narrator's voice has parallels with the opening chapter's protagonist in *On the Other Side*, where second-person narrative is used to describe a sexual assault. The narrator at this point in the novel is unknown but it will become apparent later it is Lucy's voice. I have used second-person narrative for several reasons, which I will explore more thoroughly in chapter three, including to encourage reader empathy and relatability of the event, allowing a deeper understanding of the emotions and reactions involved with the trauma of sexual assault. By looking at Mackmin's use of it in *Devoured*, this chapter will examine the effectiveness of second person at drawing the reader in, rather than the assumption of it having the opposite effect.

Two more texts that combine the narrative voice again are Minot's title story 'Lust' from *Lust & Other Stories* (1989), which plays with switching viewpoints in order to comment on the narrator's sexual history but also that of women more generally, and *Rape: A Love Story* by Joyce Carol Oates, which looks at the impact of gang rape. These examples of second person appear to give a voice to both the authors, as well as the narrators. The narrator in 'Lust' makes statements such as "[t]he more girls a boy has, the better" (Minot: 10) or "[y]ou do everything they want" (17) which in turn can be interpreted as the author's view of how society's thinks, rather than the narrator solely. Oates does a similar thing with the

opening chapter of *Rape: A Love Story*. It opens with a list of scathing victim-shaming assumptions of the protagonist's mother, forcing the reader to acknowledge where the blame lies rather than questioning if "She Had It Coming" (3) or not, as the opening chapter's title suggests.

Chapter three of this study will also include an analysis of how second person forces the reader to enter the mind of a specific character, whether they want to or not. By looking at another of Barker's novels, *Blow Your House Down* (1984), this section will explore the use of changing viewpoint, often within the same scene, as the story follows a group of women who have turned to prostitution. They are forced to work outside on the streets knowing a killer is at large, and Barker plays with focalisation to force readers inside the mind of a violent killer, whether they want to or not.

Finally, this critical study will conclude with my findings of how narrative voice can be used to depict the effects of trauma and its recovery within literature that is written by women. As well as drawing on published examples, I will also bring into the concluding evidence my own findings gathered during the time spent writing my novel, *On the Other Side*, and how this will continue to influence me as both reader and writer.

CHAPTER ONE: First Person

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1999), M. H. Abrams interprets recent understandings of what narrative is, as proposed by cognitive psychologists and literary and cultural theorists. He describes their proposals by claiming that "narrative, or the telling of diverse "stories" about how one thing leads to another, is the basic means by which we make sense of the world, provide meaning to our experiences, and organize our lives" (174). As a writer, it is possible to draw extensively from experience – and many authors do. Elleke Boehmer echoes this ethos and relates it to the importance of choosing a narrative point of view: "This is one of the central decisions a writer must make. It affects not only the angling, but the force, atmosphere and shape of a piece of writing, especially perhaps fiction" (154). It is no surprise then that "the first person may seem in many cases an immediate and available channel, even a natural choice" (154).

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines narrative as "a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee" (145). In fiction, this consists of a series of events put together and recounted by a narrator usually either first person or third person. Thus, it is narrative technique that becomes the method of telling a story. Often, a narrative voice is either a character or a version of the author telling the story, but it is important to note that "...the first point almost anyone in the field of narrative will agree on nowadays with regard to narrators is that they should not be confused with authors", as asserted by H. Porter Abbott (62). This means the responsibility of telling the story falls to the narrator, a term which is defined by the same Oxford dictionary as "one who tells, or is assumed to be telling, the story in a given narrative" (Baldick: 146). It is important to note that the narrator's level of involvement with any given story can wildly differ, as can the degree of their overtness.

(1.1) What is first-person narrative?

First-person narrative is a “narrative or mode of storytelling in which the narrator appears as the "I" recollecting his or her own part in the events related” (Baldick: 84). This type of narrator and their involvement within a story can vary.

A main protagonist written as a first-person narrator is an important participant, who is given noticeable characteristics and personalities. An example of this is the character of Jane Eyre who, in Charlotte Bronte’s novel of the same name (1847), is both the narrator and protagonist at the heart of the plot. It is also possible to have a peripheral first-person narrator, such as a witness to the events of a story, who may be identified as having no more than a voice. An example of such narrator can be found in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), where the tragic story of the novel’s hero, Jay Gatsby, is told through the eyes of narrator Nick Carraway.

Whether the first-person narrator is an involved character or a bystander, they are only able to tell the story as they know it. A strength of this is that the reader is instantly drawn in by the use of “I” and is able to share the narrator's viewpoint and therefore their emotions too. It puts the “...reader firmly in the mind of one character” (Newman: 56). The problem with this is that the viewpoint is limited to one person’s perspective, as they cannot know the inner thoughts of another character. Although as with many rules, there are exceptions. In Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones* (2002), the deceased protagonist, Susie Salmon, is able to be both all-knowing and all-seeing as a first-person omniscient and omnipresent narrator as she narrates from the afterlife. Generally, though, a first-person narrator has a limited perspective and ultimately it will be up to the reader to decide if they are a reliable narrator “whose accounts of events we are obliged to trust” (Baldick: 146) or an unreliable one “whose accounts may be partial, ill-informed, or otherwise misleading” (146).

Drawing on a strength of using a first-person narrator when writing about trauma can be an effective way of sharing a survivor's[4] point of view and presents an opportunity for understanding and empathy from a reader. Lucy Bond and Stef Craps explain in their monograph *Trauma*, that previously early critical theorists have gone as far as to argue that trauma is virtually unrepresentable through language – a Freudian theory. But if this were indeed true, then the catalogue of literature that explores trauma and its recovery would not exist today. Bond and Craps go on to explain that theories have since moved on in their discussions to suggest instead that the assumed unspeakability of trauma, which can be one of many responses to an extreme event, it is not its defining feature. Instead, they suggest that trauma has now been positioned as a "belated response…too shattering to be processed as it occurs" (4) but not impossible to talk about. In fact, it would be fair to say that the voiceless victim has almost become a literary trope.

(1.2) How first-person narrative can be used to depict trauma

The voice in Deborah Kay Davies's novel *True Things About Me* (2010) is that of an unnamed female narrator. She has a job processing claims at a benefits office where she meets a man, just released from prison. Hours later, she finds him waiting for her after work and within minutes they are having rough sex in a car park. She becomes both repulsed by herself and awakened. What ensues next is sexual-fuelled obsession that pulls her into her darkest self.

The close first-person narrative used in the novel is direct and open, and while the narrator is able to share her thoughts and feelings, she struggles to understand them and constantly questions how they have developed. As she becomes distanced from her loved ones and rapidly slides on a downwards spiral, rather than losing the ability to say what is happening she develops an inability to explain why she feels the way she does:

> I didn't recognise the smell of myself. Each time I thought about the car park, something winced in the pit of my stomach and a fluttering sensation rose up from around my heart and drifted out through my scalp. I felt appalled. In the bath the water swam over me. I sank under and worked the dried blood out of my hair. As I did, the fluttering sensation changed. Now it felt like something was shrivelling inside. (9)

Following the sexual encounter in the car park, Davies draws on other senses to convey her narrator's feelings after she "couldn't remember things, like how to do my job" (7). Time loses meaning, routine tasks become complicated, and she becomes afraid. In order to form a sense of normality, she turns to another sensory aspects to collect her thoughts; sight, specifically colour, becomes "the easiest way" (7). She tells the reader "Mid-blue was coming out of work with Alison. Suddenly yellow. Then apricot. Down into red, streaked with something else. At the bottom a sediment of khaki" (7).

Ultimately, it is her actions which define the climax of the novel as she takes hold of her "new life" (214) by counting "five hundred beautiful beats" (214) as she suffocates her abuser to death with a pillow. While the syntax of the sentences in this final scene remains staccato, the use of the word "beautiful" in relation to the context of his murder shows us that the narrator is not devoid of language or its meaning, despite enduring months of domestic abuse, resulting from their first sexual encounter in the car park.

In a 2010 *Guardian* review, Joanna Briscoe described being both fascinated and repelled by this story of "sickness" and acknowledges that it is "inescapably distressing to witness someone else's nervous breakdown" with fictional mental deterioration being "no less uncomfortable to inhabit". The protagonist's trauma, although not wholly explained, is nonetheless emotive and well described, even with sparse details. And its dreamlike, rhythmic quality gives the novel an almost a poetic feel, opening up a window to the subconscious of someone right in the epicentre of a trauma.

Echoing a similar use of language and structure is the young adult novel *Speak* (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson. An American novel, it tells the story of high school freshman Melinda Sordino. She is sexually assaulted at an end of summer party that is broken up after she calls the police, a move for which she is ostracised by her peers. She is unable to verbalise what happened or tell anyone why she called the police.

In this novel, the protagonist almost stops speaking altogether but just like *True Things About Me*, the author allows the protagonist to channel her emotions into something physical – her artwork. Using this creative medium helps the novel's narrator to gradually acknowledge what happened to her and face the fallout of being raped. The reader is told this in the final few paragraphs as Melinda looks at her final assignment, describing it a "homely sketch". She continues: "It doesn't need anything. Even through the river in my eyes I can see that. It isn't perfect and that makes it just right" (Anderson: 229).

The novel is written in a diary format, sometimes reading as a script, and is made-up of a nonlinear plot and narrative which switches from one topic to another. It is effective in that it mimics the trauma the protagonist experienced, and how she attempts to process it herself. Her trail of thought is erratic. In the space of four pages, for example, she describes her mother preparing dinner and staffing problems at work, her bedroom which she feels "belongs to an alien" (18) due to the outdated décor, homework versus napping, her father watching television, and looking in a mirror at her reflection before eventually hiding it in her closet. This episodic structure works for this narrative. The reader is also shown her silences in the script-like format:

> Dad: "It's supposed to be soup."
>
> Me:
>
> Dad: "It tasted a bit watery, so I kept adding thickener. I put in some corns and peas."

> Me:
>
> Dad: [putting wallet from his back pocket] "Call for pizza. I'll get rid of this." (71)

For some individuals undergoing a trauma, the inability to speak, either about what has happened or generally, is possible. When depicting this silence in fiction though, Anderson shows us a way in which a writer can demonstrate those silences.

Speak is also successful in how it uses the first-person narrative to show how the protagonist, albeit with a limited point of view, is viewed by her peers:

> Her eyes meet mine for a second. "I hate you," she mouths silently. She turns her back to me and laughs with her friends. I bite my lip. I am not going to think about it. It was ugly, but it's over, and I'm not going to think about it. My lips bleeds a little. It tastes like metal. I need to sit down. (5)

Again, the reader is drawn to the senses, this time the taste of blood, as she describes the events happening in front of her. As Melinda documents going through the motions, she unknowingly presents to the reader her life, and the people and events in it, as well as her internal trauma. As she questions herself, she is unaware that she is letting the reader question the actions of those around her too.

American historian Dominick LaCapra, best known for his work on European intellectual history and trauma studies, suggests that time becomes irrelevant when a trauma happens and that the distinction between past, present, and future collapses:

> when the past is uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no differences between it and the present... [O]ne experientially feels as if one were back there reliving the event, and the distance between here and there, then and now collapses. (119)

He argues that specific methods should be applied to trauma literature in order to allow the writer to articulate the trauma experience accessibly and avoid creating it into something elusive and unknown. This contradicts Caruth's theory on how trauma is processed. So, which should it be? Factually accurate and emotionally accessible in order to encompass more empathy and understanding, or more stylised and uncertain as if inviting the reader to join the processing of trauma within the mind? In Kate Elizabeth Russell's novel *My Dark Vanessa* (2020), the reader is given the benefit of experiencing both the protagonist's initial trauma and subsequently the impact it has on her.

The novel tells the story of Vanessa Wye through alternating timelines. The first in 2001, when Vanessa is a 15-year-old pupil who is groomed into having sex with her English teacher, Jacob Strane, and then in 2017 when she is a 32-year-old who is caught up in a storm of sexual allegations against him. Vanessa is horrified when she learns that Strane has been accused of sexually assaulting a former student, as she is sure their relationship was a loving one, not abuse. As she is forced to explore her past and revisit everything that happened, she begins to redefine her sexual awakening as rape. The fact she may be one victim of many makes her realise she may not have experienced the great love story of her life at all.

During the same year of its publication, Russell confessed in a *Guardian* interview with Fiona Sturges to having an initial interest in taboo relationship and a desire to explore that. During her late teens, she dreamed up the central characters of her novel, but it would go through numerous drafts over the next eighteen years. Then, in 2018, Russell's agent presented publishers with the novel, and it was released during the peak of the Me Too Movement. Women across the world shared stories and exposed the ways men had used power to abuse and silence them, and Russell, conscious of not "jumping on the bandwagon", began to analyse her own understanding of the relationship she had written:

> "I think I didn't fully understand the material that I was trying to work with," she reflects. "[At first] I definitely saw the relationship between an older man and a younger girl as romantic – in the same way that *Wuthering Heights* was romantic, or Jane Eyre. To me, great love stories were also stories that were full of abuses and control. I often jokingly refer to the early versions of my characters as 'teacher Twilight'. But as I grew up I feel like the characters grew up too."

As well as drawing on her own personal experiences, Russell read 80 or so other titles including autobiographies, novels, plays, and clinical studies of sexual abuse and paedophilia, as part of her research for the book. She also kept a journal throughout her early teens, which would prove invaluable in helping her to write the voice of teenage-aged Vanessa, from her speech and thought-processes to her reactions and emotions. This is an author who turned to research, as well as her own experiences, to write what she believes is an accurate expression of the trauma of grooming and sexual assault.

With that in mind, Russell has written the protagonist in first person in ways which allowed her to explore the complicated relationship while at the same time allowing the reader to make up their own mind over the series of events which unfold, as well as follow the protagonist's thought process. In some ways, it is almost as if the reader is one step ahead of Vanessa, waiting for her to draw the same conclusions; she is not a reliable narrator because of the trauma but the reader is able to interpret what she sees. The reader is often the outsider who is listening to and watching how she deals with the fallout from the accusations, as well as her recovery. The scene where Vanessa realises for herself what the reader already know is heart-wrenching:

> "I just feel..." I press the heels of my hands into my thighs. "I can't lose the thing I've held on to for so long. You know?" My face twists up from the pain of pushing it out. "I just really need it to be a love story. You know? I really, really need it to be that."
>
> "I know," she says.
>
> "Because if it isn't a love story, then what is it?"

> I look to her glassy eyes, her face of wide-open empathy.
>
> "It's my life," I say. "This has been my whole life." (Russell: 319)

Vanessa also becomes frozen in time as her 15-year-old self in some parts, confessing to her therapist that she can't "remember anything about [herself] that happened before him" (360). As a narrator, she is full of self-reflection, as well as denial. While she is unaware of being an unreliable narrator, in that she initially sees her trauma as a love story, this novel is unique in that the reader can see her own shift from denial to realisation as she begins to understand that the relationship was not appropriate. As she begins to question her interpretation of events, she is aware enough of the situation to want to remove any evidence of it, as a way of protecting Strane:

> Standing in my living room, I imagine what it might feel like to be reckless. My breath catches at the thought of what would happen if I spilled a line of gasoline over all this evidence, from thirty-two all the way back to fifteen. The wreckage I'd cause if I dropped a match and let it burn. (198)

Another interesting use of the first-person narrative in *My Dark Vanessa* is a type of modern-day epistolary, with the use of texts and emails. With parts of the novel set at the turn of the millennium – now more than 20 years ago – its historical importance is notable. This was a time in history when society was relatively unaware of the dangers of the internet and an era before social media existed. Instead, young Vanessa exists in a world where there are whispers behind classroom doors and rumours circulate by word-of-mouth. As the reader becomes transported into 2017, the news about Strane is much more accessible and sharable via the world wide web. The use of email and text messaging really brings this novel into the present time and encompasses many of the #MeToo issues which have been highlighted in recent times, while, most importantly, giving our female protagonist a voice.

(1.3) Putting the use of first-person narrative into action

In many ways, *My Dark Vanessa* shares many parallels with my own novel, *On the Other Side*. As well as being set over two time periods (2000 and 2002), *On the Other Side* features a second protagonist who wrestles with their emotions following the fallout of rape. The difference, however, was my decision to write the survivor's relative, her father Mark, in first-person narrative rather than the survivor, Lucy. Mark becomes obsessed with tracking down his daughter's abuser, an unnamed man who grooms her from the age of fourteen resulting in a serious sexual assault. Lucy, although aware of her situation, does not understand the implications of what happened to her until a couple of years after the events have unfolded when, during an argument with Mark, she confesses the attack to him. As a way of dealing with his emotions, Mark begins to speak to his deceased wife – Lucy and her sister Sarah's, mother – Kathryn.

While many novels about rape have given its protagonist the main voice in a first-person narrative, *On the Other Side* explores how other people who are not the survivor deal with such a trauma. Some may ask why it is that in a world where men are too often given the primary voice about sexual assault, it is Lucy's voice, the female voice, which is written in the third-person narrative and not the first? While there are benefits of writing from the survivor's point of view, the character of Mark is an unreliable first-person narrator. Lucy has been written in close third person, allowing the reader not only to see the world from her perspective but also to open the wider world around her by delving into the minds of other characters. Mark's point of view is extremely limited. It is this restrictive narrative and fixed mindset which presents an opportunity to deal with some of the assumptions of rape and its survivors. Mark gives in to the incorrect notion that sexual assault brings with it shame on the survivor rather than on the attacker:

> I'm furious at Lucy. She's made me look like a first-class idiot. If I'd have known she was that silly to do what she did then obviously I would have put more passwords on things and some sort of security on it. Of course, I would have kept an eye on who she was talking to and what they were talking about. In fact, I would have banned her from those damn chat rooms altogether. Now it's too late. (32)

Mark feels it is easier for him to blame Lucy for what has happened, victim-shaming her for being "silly" rather than helping her to have healthy relationships, a trait which is seen all too often in society going right back to Ancient Greece when the rape of a woman was seen as dishonourable for the family. Mark is embarrassed by her actions, as well as his own for what he feels has been a failing in his role as a father by not keeping her safe. His idea of safety is flawed though, as he thinks keeping his daughters distanced from the world is the only way to protect them. Mark also demonstrates his dated ideas of rape, accusing Lucy of "asking for it" by wearing short skirts and low-cut tops, when in reality it is the attacker who is to blame. Using Mark's limited first-person narrative has allowed some inaccuracies and crass generalisations to be broken down, which in turn helps to solidify Lucy's voice rather than take it away.

As with *My Dark Vanessa*, *On the Other Side* uses text messaging and emails – literature's twenty-first-century version of a telegram or letter. There are many examples of the epistolary novel, where "the narrative is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters" (Abrams: 191), such as *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) by Lionel Shriver, in which Eva writes to her deceased husband, Franklin, or *Where Rainbows End* (2004) by Cecelia Ahern, which follows its two protagonists communicating solely by the mediums of letters, postcards, text, and email to follow a lifelong romance.

The use of these elements within a novel allows the writer a wide scope to convey information. With *On the Other Side*, all the main characters use text messaging, which both

moves the narrative forward and allows the reader to find out information that might not necessarily be known to Mark or Lucy. For example, early in the novel we see a relationship begin to develop between Lucy and a boy in her drama class, Dylan. By using text messaging, the reader is shown conversations between Emily, Lucy's best friend, and Dylan who develop a relationship without Lucy's knowledge. The reader is never introduced to Sarah's girlfriend, Rhianwen, within the narrative but her presence and voice play an important part of the story as she guides Sarah to help Lucy via text messaging.

Using the first-person narrative convention of emailing and text messaging was at times an effective way of moving the narrative on, while also giving the opportunity to use first-person for other characters in the novel. Using these communicative methods within literature allows information to be shared with the reader, which might otherwise be impossible via the narrator. Finally, using this less prevalent first-person narrative allows the creation of ambiguity as the reader is sometimes left unsure as to whether a message has been sent or even replied too. It allows the characters to type, delete, and then retype perhaps a less honest account of their feelings. The reader can be shown a more honest account of the narrator's thoughts (for example, strikethrough[5] can be used to remove text the narrator has written and decides to delete, but remains visible to the reader), while at the same time less is revealed to other characters. This is a good representation of an individual's internal struggle with trauma as while it shows the inability of a narrator to speak about or vocalise the effects of a trauma, as suggested by Freud, Balaev, and Caruth, it does give the author the ability to represent the emotions associated with a trauma within a work of literature.

The lure of using a first-person narrative can initially appear lucrative to a writer writing about trauma, especially if they are drawing from their own experiences, but it is this idea of naturalness which may create pitfalls, as Boehmer explains:

> Writing is always an artefact, built up out of choices and splices, cutting and honing: it is not a direct translation from life. Yet, because it feels nearby and identifiable, the I-voice has the potential, to an extent, to distract a writer from fully forming and realizing their work as external to themselves. (155)

In conclusion, there is much to consider when writing in first person as with any other form of narrative. Importantly though, by setting up the narrator's "I-voice" to have an independent existence within a story, means their idiosyncrasies and senses – such as sound, smell and sight – can stand a writer in good stead when writing trauma.

CHAPTER TWO: Third Person

One of the most crucial decisions a writer makes before putting pen to paper is which narrative voice to use. Sometimes a personal preference will take precedent, sometimes it writes itself automatically, other times the writer is forced to admit they got it wrong and will have to change their plans altogether. Either way, the narrative is critical – especially when it comes to writing trauma. But which narrative structures offer the most effective ways of depicting trauma? And is one more effective than another to deal with the recovery from trauma?

When looking at the benefits of writing in third person, a narrator who "knows everything that needs to be known about the agents, actions, and events, and has privileged access to the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motives" (Abrams: 232) can be a real strength to telling a story because it allows a narrator freewill to move across time and space, while shifting between characters. By writing a different type of third-person narration though, it can completely change the narrative. While an omniscient narrator's "reports and judgments are to be taken as authoritative by the reader" (232), an author may decide to write narrator who is intrusive and may comment on and evaluate other characters' actions or express personal views about society. Furthermore, the narrative could be limited, staying "inside the confines of what is perceived, thought, remembered and felt by a single character (or at most by very few characters) within the story" (233). Even this technique has developed into stream-of-consciousness narrative, giving the reader "the illusion of experiencing events that evolve before their own eyes" (233). The author almost becomes a video camera with a lens that can be used to zoom in and out of the action, or like the comedy sitcom *Peep Show*[6] the camera becomes the eyes of the narrator with whom we see the action through.

(2.1) What is third-person narrative?

A third-person narrative is "a mode of storytelling in which the narrator is not a character within the events related but stands 'outside' those events" (Baldick: 225). Characters will be referred to as "he", "she", or "they" but the use of "I" and "we" is still permitted in commentary on the events. Because the narrator is not a character in the story, this type of narration provides distance to allow a panoramic view of the events as they unfold.

As discussed in the previous chapter, third-person narrators are often omniscient or all-knowing about the events, but they can also be restricted in their knowledge. This type of limited narrator, or impersonal narrator, neither identifies themselves, nor takes part in the story. The information given by them may be either restricted, where a narrative voice gives access only to the information available to the physical senses of an observer and is therefore unable to read characters' minds, or unrestricted – omniscient – where the narrative voice allows access to a variety of information, including characters' thoughts or past and future events.

Many novels are written in the third person, and it is in this type of narrative structure that a disembodied narrator is able to describe what the characters do and what happens to them. Although we are not seeing directly through a character's eyes, as you do in a first-person narrative, often the narrator is able to describe the main character's thoughts and feelings about what's going on, as well a wider picture of their world. This subjective third-person narrative is close to first-person, as John Gardner asserts in *The Art of Fiction* (1983): "Once first-person narrative has been mastered – by some standard of mastery – the writer is encouraged to write in the third person subjective […] and emphasis is placed on the character's thoughts […]" (155). This creates a deep consciousness allowing the thoughts and

feelings of the character to become "the immediate (unmediated) thoughts and feelings of the reader" (156).

To clarify, a "focalizer is the figure from whose perspective any part of a story is presented – the person through whose eyes we see the action" (Diana Wallace), which means the story can be presented from the perspective of either a narrator, character (character-focalizer), or both. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan discusses this use of focalization in *Narrative Fiction* (1983). She argues that rather just being point of view, focalization is a "purely visual sense […] to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive, and ideological orientation" (72). While a third-person or omniscient narrator is capable of speaking and seeing, they are also able to tell the reader what a character sees, or has seen, or even what they have not picked up on. Internal focalization allows insight into other character's points of view of the events surrounding and unfolding around them. External focalization allows the narrator to travel over time and use hindsight and reflection. Rimmon-Kenan adds: "If the focalizer is a character […] then his acts of perception are part of the story. If he is the narrator, focalization is just one of many rhetorical strategies at his disposal" (86). This is a useful tool for the trauma writer who is dealing with many complex issues which can change the narrative of a survivor.

(2.2) How third-person narrative can be used to depict trauma

In her 1986 novel *Back in the First Person*, Kathy Page uses a shift from first- to third-person perspective to enact the removal of the protagonist from her sense of identity following an attack. After Cath Sheldon is raped by her ex-boyfriend, Steve Blake, she begins to feel as if she is losing herself along a journey where her allegations are not taken seriously. Not only that, but she is made to feel as if the assault is somehow her fault, or that it did not even happen at all, such as when she is first interviewed by the police:

> 'Everything will be easier if you cooperate; you are making serious allegations, Miss Sheldon, they need substantiating. If I got a fiver for every girl that came in here this time on a Saturday night –' (28)

> 'Now… you've been on your own since Steven Blake left you, a year ago, Pretty young woman like yourself; no reason to be alone. Now if he left you causing all that upset and so on, now might it not occur to a woman in that position, if any opportunity presented itself, to get your own back?' (29)

> 'Miss Sheldon, you lived with Steven Blake for four years, then decided for no apparent reason that you were incompatible. It looks to me as if you didn't know your mind. Are you sure Mr Blake couldn't be forgiven for getting the wrong idea?'
>
> It was a statement rather than a question. (30)

Despite the book being published, and set, during the 1980s, these are judgements and assumptions that are still held today; one only has to look at the sobering statistics about rape and other forms of sexual violence in England and Wales to realise there is still a lot of work to be done when discussing sexual assault and the treatment of its survivors.

In January 2013, the Ministry of Justice, Office for National Statistics and Home Office, released the first ever joint official statistics bulletin on sexual violence. *An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales* revealed that approximately 85,000 women and 12,000 men (aged 16 - 59) experience rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault by penetration in England and Wales alone every year. These figures are based on aggregated data from *Crime Statstics* 'Crime Survey for England and Wales' in 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12. Only around fifteen per cent of those who experience sexual violence report it to the police. A third of people believe women who flirt are partially responsible for being raped, as reported from a study by Amnesty International UK. And Home Office figures show an ongoing decline in the conviction rate for reported rape cases, putting it at an all-time low of 5.6 per cent in 2002 (Kelly: 11).

From police incredulity to medical callousness, lack of legal literature, and having to face reflections of shame on the faces of those who should care the most, *Back in the First Person*, despite being set some 35-years before now, still asks serious questions about our justice system and support, or lack of, of survivors. By the end of the novel, Cath is able to take charge of her life once more and escapes from an unadmitted need to tell others what has happened and to be believed, and the silence which had walled up around her:

> She felt that she was just about beginning to understand certain things: about the law, about the rape, about her mother, about herself – a tangle of thin threads she must be careful not to drop. It was important not to complicate matters. Through this legal warping of her experience she was at last able – being forced – to describe what had happened, to herself and to such as were able to listen. And that, she was sure, could not be done at the same time as conniving with those who were not. (218)

A few lines later, and we learn that Blake has been acquitted of his crimes. By the penultimate chapter of the novel, Cath's voice has returned to the original opening narrative of first person:

> […] at the end of all those versions of that story […] and of all that forgetting and remembering, I would eventually want to write down my own version. Even if I have had to write as if it happened to someone else, here, in the account I have given, at last I recognise what happened to me. I am back in the first person. And, of course, this time I expect to be believed. (234)

In Caruth's monograph, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, she explains how trauma itself cannot be defined by either the event itself or the distortion of it, but rather how it has been experienced. She explains this by arguing that the event is "not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (4), adding that trauma works through the survivor being unaware of its nature and will instead return to haunt the individual later. Caruth argues that it is only when knowing the truth of the traumatic experience, that the impact of the event is registered by the survivor.

Page's technique of changing the narrative illustrates Caruth's argument about experiencing trauma after the event has taken place. For Cath, this becomes almost an out-of-body experience:

> The laundry bag felt heavy; she could not get warm. She felt frightened: was there something the matter with her physically? It would be best to stay in. Time had started to race now, and filling the hours seemed less urgent. Even her fingers seemed to have only a fraction of their strength. (48)

The previous chapter explored how sense can be used to depict a survivor's experience of trauma, and this novel offers another example of this. As shown in the above passage, even with a different narrative viewpoint it is possible to convey feelings resulting in trauma.

It is important to note that trauma can be relative and has been characterised more broadly by psychiatrists. MJ Horowitz defined it as "a sudden and forceful event that overwhelms a person's ability to respond to it, recognizing that a trauma need not involve actual physical harm to oneself; an event can be traumatic if it contradicts one's worldview and overpowers one's ability to cope" (2065). In Susan Minot's novella *Rapture* (2002), the events take place over one afternoon during the act of fellatio between two former lovers. The narrative structure allows the characters, Kay and Benjamin, to take it in turn to reminisce about their past relationship, lost love, and think about why they will never work as a couple. Using such an intimate act as the backdrop of the book, while peeling away the layers of this relationship, shows both characters in vulnerable positions, while the events of their lives unfold:

> He watched Kay. She looked absorbed in a nice, slow way, applying herself. He felt oddly distant. He knew he'd once had a sharp, finely tuned feeling toward her, but he couldn't locate it. Must be all the pollution of the last few months, he thought. Everything was corroded. It was impossible to think in a fresh way. He couldn't imagine ever getting back to anything fresh. (44)

Trauma is complex for its survivors and that is reflected in literature. Minot arguably creates an extremely personal backdrop to *Rapture*, when the use of flashback could have sufficed. This intimate scene creates a voyeuristic experience for the reader who is unable to take their eyes off the events unfolding. Only it is not in a perverse way, but instead shows the intricacies of this relationship using a close third-person narrative. Minot shows how to be impactful, without creating a plot that could be accused of being written for shock value.

Gaby Wood sums up their relationship perfectly in her *Observer* review. She suggests that while Minot is "brilliant at mapping out this game of occlusion and denial, of showing how two bodies so close together can hold such wildly divergent minds", she also creates a "humdrum tragedy in the fact that neither of these people will ever know how far the other is from them, or how many moments of love they have lost". The couple have mismanaged their desire so that when Kay thinks things are just beginning, Benjamin feels it is too late:

> It was terrible being away from Kay...All those feelings in the past, he couldn't forget them. But he wasn't able, and probably frankly was too ruined, to actually feel them again.
>
> So now, but to three years down the line, Him, here, with Kay again, but with his earlier self worn away. He felt snapped off, like a heavy branch creaking on a tree which one night just doesn't make it through the storm. (Minot: 45)

The same experience will never happen to the same two people, and what is interesting, as pointed out by Stephen Koch, is that "it is a mistake to assume that point of view itself necessarily endows any story with either unity or coherence" (90). A story can be effective not only by its use of narrative point of view, but also creating a conflict and pursuing its outcome. The conflict, or the secondary trauma, Minot displays in *Rapture* is dissociation, a condition where the mind copes with overwhelming stress with feelings of numbness, being spaced out and detached from the body. This is shown with Benjamin by using a close third-person narrative, which allows the protagonist to demonstrate dissociation. This technique

can also open up a survivor's world in literature too, allowing the reader to see events through someone else's eye while giving other characters a voice.

In *Union Street* (1982), Pat Barker's first novel, the challenges of survival are explored in a poverty-stricken and precarious world. The novel focuses on the lives of seven of the women who live on Union Street, based in a town in the northeast of England during the 1970s. Its opening chapter, "Kelly Brown", deals with the fallout of the squalid rape of Kelly, a neglected and fiercely independent eleven-year-old. Barker's descriptions are honest and distinctive and an example of the ways that certain language choices in a novel are important to discussing trauma, in particular in this novel, from a child's perspective:

> Then, as she continued to stare, she saw a slight movement, a crumbling almost, at the corners of the lids. Something was happening to his face. It was beginning to split, to crack, to disintegrate from within, like an egg when the time for hatching has come. She wanted to run. She didn't want to stay there and see what would hatch out of this egg. But the horror kept her pinned to her chair. And the face went on cracking. And now moisture of some kind was running into cracks that had not been there a minute before, dripping, finally, into the open, the agonised mouth. She watched, afraid. And looked away. (33)

The naivety and childlike language of Kelly's closer third-person narrative shows her evolving trauma unfold. She uses simple language, with many references to nature, to explain her feelings, comparing them to objects she is familiar with, such as the cracking egg. This symbolism is just as important to Kelly's story as the narrative, as it is an effective tool which draws from life within fiction. Earlier in the chapter, Kelly is in a park and looks at the ground "for the gleam of conkers in the grass. It was too early though […] They would not have ripened yet" (14). The Man, who "had been watching her for a long time" (14), offers to open a conker for her but due to "the gash in the green skin […] the white seed" (14) he agrees "It's not ready yet" (14). This is symbolic of the virgin Kelly and a simple premonition of the disturbing events about to unfold.

Noting Barker's use of shifting points of view, John Mullan argues in a 2012 *Guardian* article that: "We are allowed to know the thoughts of several characters … The shifts of viewpoint seem calculated as much to undermine our sympathies as to invite them." The omniscient third-person narrative in "Kelly Brown" gives other characters a viewpoint from which to discuss the events which happened to Kelly, while allowing readers to share their own sympathies and become privy to the gossip following the rape of the young girl, including the points of view of Kelly's mother and peers. Again, this reflection of trauma is a useful way of showing the effects of it.

With *Union Street*, Barker shifts away from the ideological context seen within the creative arts during the 1950s, the same era the novel is set in, and instead moves towards depicting social realism[7]. In his essay "The Small World of Kelly Brown: Home and Dereliction in Union Street", John Brannigan argues that rather than writing a version of television's *Coronation Street*[8], Barker created a novel showing the realities of the working-class life in the northeast of English during the fifties. Brannigan goes on to say how the novel pays "considerable attention to demythologizing the homeliness and continuity of working-class culture and that registers the traumatic impact of the decimation of particular economic and social structures" (4). Paul Magrs echoes this in his essay "Real Life" where he explains that drawing from real life can an ideal way of recreating "the heat of the moment" (131). He describes how fiction writers should be inherently nosy as the genre is "the place where we can ask the questions that you would never dare to ask in real life" (132). So, while an author can get a narrator to step inside someone else's shoes using a third-person narrative, it should be clear which are the attitudes and opinions of a character, narrator, or writer, especially when they may be the shoes of someone who has suffered a trauma.

There is a final argument to be had over whether trauma writing should leave the reader with a hopeful ending, although it would not be true to life if every survivor was given

a resolution. In Kelly's case, the reader is given a sort of resolution and one which works by using Kelly's close narrative. At the beginning of the chapter, Kelly thinks of womanhood as something to be avoided but is told "[i]t's nature" (Barker: 3). By the end of the story, she watches a young couple with fresh eyes: "They ran to meet each other and, oblivious of the crowds around them, kiss […] Kelly stared after them, hungrily" (69). Although we are not directly told this, Kelly is opening herself up to the idea of having a boyfriend one day as she follows "in their footsteps" (69). It shows the beginning of her recovery.

At the start of this critical study, it was highlighted that the voices of women can be suppressed when it comes to the conversations surrounding sexual assault. Barker is an example of one female author who embraces writing trauma and the impact it has on her readers. In an interview with Barker, Brannigan described her as "an iconoclastic novelist […] often because she has the courage to deal with controversial contemporary events and subjects in her writings" (392). This is something Barker acknowledges herself, recalling an incident where a "particular lecturer felt very strongly that no woman should have written such a book […] It's a difficult book. It is complicit, but then I take that on board, because I think society is complicit, and we are part of that society" (Brannigan 392). Rather than labelling her writing as being about trauma, Barker admits to exploring the dynamics of society within often challenging events.

(2.3) Putting the use of third-person narrative into action

Writing *On the Other Side* has allowed me to become something of an advocate for the use of third-person narrative and its effectiveness in writing and depicting trauma. Because I identified strongly with the protagonist, Lucy, becoming distanced from the novel was paramount. Some difficult scenes would have been virtually impossible to write without the

distancing effect of that particular narrative. The irony of this is that focalisation became an important part of Lucy's narrative, and that of other characters written in third person.

The third-person omniscient narrative worked in *On the Other Side*, as it allowed a method of storytelling to be used in which the narrator knows the thoughts and feelings of all the characters in the story. It also helped with character development, such as with Emily, Lucy's best friend. In this particular section, it could be argued that the narrative structure has allowed my own voice to come through a secondary character:

> [Emily] may have only been fourteen years old at the time, but [she] had not been blind to this strange man who seemed only to be interested in her friend for all the wrong reasons. Youth had not equipped her with the tools she needed to help Lucy. Years later, after she discovered what had happened to the girl who used to be her friend, she wished she had done more. (148)

And while this technique may have an impact on the reader's experience by creating an opening which may unwillingly pull them out of the story, this use of the intrusive third-person narrator allows the reader time to reflect and question the unfolding events. The aim of this was to allow the conversation surrounding a serious sexual trauma to be discussed in more detail, by showing the knock-on effects of rape within a family and society.

This was an effective use of narrative for these characters, but a close, limited third-person narrative was used for the character of the man, Lucy's abuser. His world is a much smaller place, and this narrative reflects his own small mentality:

> He asked the girl what her favourite musical was. He did not really give a flying fuck what it was, but he knew she would lap it up […] She also mentioned she was reading some book by Virginia Andrews. He'd heard about it before and knew that it was just drivel for pre-adolescent girls. What a fucking joke […] She was stupid. Like most kids these days. (108)

He is unwilling to show Lucy the empathy she deserves and, for most of the novel, is indifferent over his treatment towards her. When I originally wrote this section from his first-person point of view, it gave his voice too much authority and power, leaving the novel unbalanced. It gave him an unnecessarily high platform. However, it did create a disturbing and unique point of view – that of a rapist and abuser. Is it fair to ask whether he should even have a voice in the novel at all? There are arguments for and against this. But giving him a voice, albeit limited, offered a chance to open the conversation.

A further balance had to be added to the narrative too. Originally written in two parts, with Lucy's narrative primarily set in 2000 and Mark's in 2002, the novel lost too much of Lucy's voice in the second half. The different time periods and point of views have now been combined to create a more well-rounded and effective timeline. The to-ing and fro-ing between the characters lets the events unfold from opposing sides. For example, while Lucy often tries to romanticise her horrible mistreatment, this is counteracted by the man's indifference and cruelty: "She wondered if she touched it for him, in a car park late at night, he might love her […] She wondered if she let him grope her on a cliff top during a sunny August afternoon, he might love her […] Lucy thought that if she let him force her head down there, then he might love her." (168-69). While the reader learns that Lucy is trying to justify the behaviour, they also learn that the man has no romantic feelings for Lucy whatsoever: "He trailed behind her, inspecting a nearby wall to see if it would shield them enough for him to take her up against it. He decided it was not a good spot. She was virgin-tight, and it would be too awkward to get it up her" (175).

Finally, by drawing from the experiences of other women writers of trauma, who have inspired my use of using the third-person narrative, it unites us and makes us relatable to the conversations surrounding sexual assault with the hope of breaking down the stigma. For example, when Kelly from "Kelly Brown" talks her rapist into taking her to get refreshments

in a chip shop, her world is transformed: "Plastic was too plastic, wool too woolly, and the grains of salt and sugar left behind on the table felt like rocks beneath her wincing fingertips" (Barker: 33). This description inspired the scene where Lucy confronts her attacker: "You feel grains of salt from someone else's lunch, grinding against the bottom of your glass […] everything is bigger and stronger and able to hurt you more" (Bishop: 264). There are also similar descriptions. Kelly is described by Barker as having her hand forced "to close around the smelly purple toadstool" (Barker: 29) while Lucy as an adult becomes aware of the power she holds by being able to say no to her former attacker, who she has decided is not able to touch her ever again "with those elastic fingers or his wet purple head" (Bishop: 264).

The idea of small but significant nod to other writers' work in the same subject matter adds emphasis to writing and unites women writers as they attempt to make sense of sexual assault, the Me Too Movement, and male privilege[9]. By making each other's work relatable and connected to each other, while making sure not to plagiarise, it can help to bring these conversations, as well as survivors, together.

Most works of fiction, no matter what the narrative point of view is, has the aim of telling a story by depicting the thoughts, responses, and actions of more than one character. Margret Geraghty, in *The Novelist's Guide* (1995), describes point of view as "a little like a damp patch in the corner of your ceiling. You can ignore it at first, but sooner or later, you have to deal with it" (56). While in the real world, the phrase point of view will be used to describe someone's opinion, in literary terms it describes the focus of the novel, that is "the angle from which the story is revealed" (56). Third-person narrative allows the writer many options of which to experiment with – omniscient, detached, multiple viewpoints – and can create "maximum reader involvement" (63), but, as Geraghty points out, it does bring with it "a crate of responsibilities" (65) too – especially with multiple characters. Third person may offer great freedoms but things to take into consideration include chronology and tense of the

different characters, balancing how much line space is giving to different voices, and pitfalls of the writing becoming fragmented. It is also knowing when to change the point of view, making sure not to "yank" (66) the reader out of one character's mind and into another, unless of course that is the desired effect.

CHAPTER THREE: Second Person

Unlike first- or third-person narrations, where the term indicates the point of view the story is told from, second person refers to the addressee. While this may be the implied reader, it could also be that of the "I" of the first-person point of view or even the third-person narrator.

Using this technique sees the story, or at least a section of a story, being told by a narrator who is addressing someone they call "you", using the second-person pronoun to address them. But information is sparse on this narrative voice, despite offering opportunities for writers to experiment with this point of view.

(3.1) What is second-person narrative?

The definition given in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* describes "a narrative told from the second-person point of view, the narrator addresses a "you"; thus, a narrative that reads "If you really want to know New Orleans, you need to walk Bourbon Street at midnight ..." would be an example of second- person narrative" (292).

While the definitions of first- and third-person narrative seem clear, second-person narrative causes much discussion among the writing community. For example, Matt DelConte discussed his own problems trying to find a definition. In an article for 'Style', he criticised the Bedford definition, claiming it is not precise enough "for it uses merely the presence of 'You' as its main criterion' (DelConte: 204). By this he means the narrative use of "you" can also be part of the rhetoric of a first- or third-person point of view. It is not easily definable.

There are other definitions. Gerald Prince says second-person narrative is "a narrative the narratee of which is the protagonist in the story s/he is told" (84). Brian Richardson believes second-person narrative is "defined as any narration that designates its protagonist by a second person pronoun. The protagonist will usually be the sole focalizer, and is

generally the work's narratee as well." (312). And Monika Fludernikvii provides another definition:

> Narrative whose (main) protagonist is referred to by means of an address pronoun (usually you) and add that second-person texts frequently also have an explicit communicative level on which a narrator (speaker) tells the story of the "you" to (sometimes) the "you" protagonist's present-day absent or dead, wiser, self. (288)

These definitions also cause problems for DelConte, who explains that a "lack of consensus" hinders the analysis of second-person narration and also "[corrupts] our understanding of how the narrative modes relate to one another…' (204). He believes that the term is misleading as it leads to assumptions about whom the narrator is by use of the pronoun "you", as well as placing the narrator into a distinct narrative that is exclusive of other points of view. M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, goes someway to explaining this:

> The second person may turn out to be a specific fictional character, or the reader of the story, or even the narrator himself or herself, or not clearly or consistently the one of the other; and the story may unfold by shifting between telling the narratee what he or she is now doing, has done in the past, or will or it commanded to do in the future. (243)

This is a more encompassing definition of the complexities of writing in a second person narrative brings.

(3.2) How second-person narrative can be used to depict trauma

Advice for writers wanting to use second-person point of view is often mixed or, even worse, unenthusiastic. Even Abrams describes this form as being "exploited in a sustained way only during the latter part of the twentieth century and then only rarely; the effect is of a virtuoso performance" (234). While it is a skill which takes time to perfect, it is my opinion that writers should not be put off using it. If anything, they should be encouraged to experiment

with second-person narrative as it creates new ways of depicting the world, its people, and the events which happen.

Kate Grenville described second person as "a challenge […] very limited in knowledge, and over an extended piece it's unsettling for the reader." (62). Surely when reading about trauma, the reader is already unsettled. H Porter Abbott argues that one of the reasons the form is not more prevalent in literature is "as readers we do not take well to being addressed in this way, with someone else telling us what we are thinking and doing…" (64). Greenville agrees: "It can start to sound rather bullying or it can force you to identify with a character you feel very much at odds with" (62). But the effect of addressing the reader as "you" creates unique and interesting options in writing trauma.

The second person is effective in drawing a reader into the story and involving them in ways which are not possible with other narratives. Even if the "you" voice is that of a protagonist, it encourages the reader to perform the actions of the narrative vicariously. The narrative does not have to be an experience that the reader has had in order for this to happen, it only needs to be something that a reader is able to relate to by perhaps using their own and often different experiences to understand and empathise.

A text which comes up repeatedly when discussing the successful use of second person, is Jay McInerney's novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984). As well as demonstrating how it can be used to tell a novel-length story, it also creates a distancing effect:

> You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might come clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder. Then again, it might not. A small voice inside you insists that this epidemic lack of clarity is a result of too much of that already. (1)

Another example where this narrative is used effectively is the novel *Devoured* (2018) by Anna Mackmin. Set inside a commune of free-thinkers and poets in 1973, in deep rural Norfolk, the 12-year-old protagonist is raising herself amidst the chaos of Your People – a group focussed more on poetry and pottery than raising their children or home-schooling them. The two children of the novel have learnt to cook for themselves, and personal hygiene is the last thing on their daily agenda. This coming-of-age novel, although far removed from many readers' experience of growing up, is relatable to many in its themes of becoming an adult and specifically a woman. It is relatable in that many readers will be able to empathise with things such as physical changes of the body as they grow, even if it happened in different circumstances to *Devoured*. The novel's protagonist shares her own experiences of starting puberty by each morning looking out for signs of her period starting while making sure she is retaining the appearances of childhood:

> Morning. Stop, look at yourself before you wake up. No splodges, no veins, no sad torn cracks and sags, no dark and anxious smudges. Perfect apricot skin complete with the baby fuzz of ripe fruit. It wouldn't matter what order the features are arranged in, the newness of you is all that counts. Who could resist? (117)

Although it is unlikely the reader grew up in a commune in 1970s Norfolk, it is likely they are able to share characteristics with the narratee. In this example, the narratee is also the narrator and the protagonist. The voice becomes confessional, rather that instructional, with an underlying tone of foreboding. It anticipates the sexual assault of Boudicca, whose name is not revealed until close to the end of the book. This in itself allows the reader to form a closeness by exploring relatable issues, such as the challenges of growing-up, despite, ironically, information being withheld. Using "you" is effective in taking emotion away from a first-person character-narrator to create distance, which in turn strengthens the emotion. Again, this is shown when Boudicca is subjected to a sexual assault by Bryan, the man she has childishly nicknamed "Hairy Dolly" throughout the novel:

> Your head is not working like it's supposed to.
> Everything's gone away from you. It's all whizzing. Whizzing away.
> Bryan's got your face in his hands, he's undoing his trousers and he's pushing you and your head against the tree. Firmly. He's got his willy in his hand. It isn't hairy. It's bouncing on its own. (280)

Despite the warnings against using a narrative point of view deemed unpopular and difficult, with some readers finding it condescending and unrealistic, there are examples of novels and short stories which prove it is a strong narrative to tell trauma. For example, a writer may switch to the second-person form in order to step away from the intensity of first person, allowing the narrator or even the writer themselves a chance to distance themselves.

In Susan Minot's short story collection *Lust & Other Stories*, she often sums up whole stories with spot-on one-liners which usually appear at the end. These powerful single lines create a clear undertone. The reader is able to ask questions and be led succinctly towards the story's ending where much is revealed, often with an element of hopefulness for recovery. Minot uses random stream of consciousness passages reminding the reader, and often the narrator, of things they would rather forget. Combining these with a lack of chronological order, she presents a representation of reactions and emotions that are true to life and that of experiencing trauma.

The narrator in the book's title story 'Lust' switches between first person and second person throughout the piece. These switches take place during the more heightened scenes when the narrator, and perhaps Minot herself, wants to distance herself from the sexual acts and beliefs of the short story's first-person voice. At the beginning of the story the narrator says: "Leo was from a long time ago, the first one I ever saw nude" (3). As the subject matter intensifies, she distances herself: "You'd start to see a boy and something would rush over you […] you couldn't possibly think of anyone else. Boys took it differently […] you'd act like you weren't noticing" (8). This use of second person makes an intimate narration less

personal and while the use of "you" refers specifically to the character, its use also universalises the themes for women and girls.

In this story, the narrator gives an account of her sexual experiences. Innocent phrases encompass much more than what is being said. She highlights the pressure to perform: "He kisses my palm then directs my hand to his fly" (6), how sex becomes an act, a chore, an expectation: "I got butterscotch sauce, craving something sweet" (6), before Minot eventually states a presumption held by the narrator: "It was different for a girl" (7). And while it is something assumed by the narrator, Minot has crafted the narrative voice in such a way that it enables the reader to question if it is also the belief within society, outside of the story, or even that of Minot herself. The narrator in 'Lust' moves on and suddenly the worst thing becomes being accused of being a "cock-teaser" (9), and then there is the overwhelming sense of the necessity for always being attached in a relationship. Eventually though, the narrator argues that it is as if "a petal gets plucked each time" (11) a woman has sex, consensual in this case, while boys are free to brag about the number of sexual partners they have had, without judgement. They can "stalk around, sure-shouldered […] more in him, a fatter heart, more stories to tell" (11). Again, this is the narrator's point of view, but is also adds social commentary.

The scenes in this story cover just a few paragraphs at the most for each different male or event mentioned. The narrative is successful in conveying the story's message that all women are thought of as the same and they are obligated to perform and to do "everything [men] want" (17):

> They get mad after, when you say enough is enough. After, when it's easier to explain that you don't want to. You wouldn't dream of saying that maybe you weren't really ready to in the first place. (13)

Minot is making sure to point out here that, despite the narrator almost down-playing what she is describing, the conversations surrounding women and sex need to change. The

statement Minot is making is shocking; a woman cannot ask a man to stop having sex with her because he will get mad, it is easier (less confrontational) to explain why she does not want sex only after having sex, women are unable to say if they are not ready to have sex. The narrator accepts this as being the way things are, the writer does not.

The episodic technique, mixed with an unclear and non-linear narrative is a good reflection of the way in which the mind remembers things. Minot also uses dashes and white space to show the constantly changing thoughts of her narrators as well as leaps in time. Often the best stories are not told from the beginning and when writing trauma, it is not possible to represent it or communicate it as straightforward. Caruth argues that trauma, at the time of happening, is not fully experienced, instead it becomes stored differently. She also believes that integrating trauma into a story that can be readily understood, can "lose both the precision and the force that characterizes trauma recall" (153), which in turn denies "the event's essential incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding" (153).

This method of switching narrative is also used by Barker in the 1984-novel, *Blow Your House Down.* The novel documents the lives of a group of prostitutes, and the gruesome actions of a murderer who is singling them out in a northern city in England. The novel flips between third- and first-person, and it is during an extremely violent attack where Barker's use of narrative point of view moves seamlessly between them all:

> Kath, terrified and in pain, risked one look round and saw the whites of his eyes turned up. There was a heavy smell of violets and decay and it seemed to be coming from his open mouth. Oh God. She'd landed herself a real nutter this time. Give him what he wants. She arched her back still further, opening herself up to the thrusts. (64)

Then, within the next paragraph, the reader is transported into the mind of the attacker and watches the scene play out in his point of view. Even the moment of Kath's death is "at some point, unnoticed by him" (65). He is too concerned with his efforts and making sure his tracks are covered:

> He could feel her staring at him, though he kept his back turned. He kept thinking, Why don't her eyes close? But he didn't let it make him careless. He went on searching until he was sure he'd covered every inch of the floor. (65)

By using switching narratives, the reader can view the events from both Kath's point of view as well as that of her murderer, almost like a film camera zooming in on the actions as they unfold and focusing on the scenes the director (or in this case, the writer) wants the audience (reader) to focus on.

Finally, Barker briefly uses second-person narration at the end of this same chapter, to describe the discovery of Kath's body:

> Kath's body seems to have shrunk inside its clothes. If you approached the mattress casually you would see nothing but a heap of old rags. You would tread on her before you realized a woman's body lay there.
>
> The window is boarded up, the room dark, except for five thin lines of moonlight that lie across the mattress like bars. One of them has just reached her eyes. They look so alive you wonder she can bear the light shining directly into them. Any moment now, you feel, her eyes will close. (66)

There are a number of possible reasons why she does this. Firstly, it invites, or even forces the reader to look at Kath's dead body. Secondly, it could be the viewpoint of another character, Jean, who goes on to murder the man. Thirdly, perhaps it is the attacker himself. Or, finally, maybe it is a nameless discoverer, likely a police officer who has been called to the scene. Although the body is found by children, Barker's description does not fit in with that of a child's observation.

The "you" becomes ambiguous while giving the author a platform to speak a brutal truth about the wider issues of society's view of prostitutes, and women forced to sell their bodies for money.

Trauma is complex for its survivors and that is often reflected in literature. Both have continuously changing parameters that shift across different social and cultural backgrounds. Anne Whitehead notes these significant overlaps, stating "[the] rise in trauma

theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered" (3). She continues, claiming that "fiction itself has been marked or changed by its encounter with trauma" (3).

Joyce Carol Oates' novella *Rape: A Love Story* (2003) begins as an account of one fourth of July in Niagara Falls. Teena Maguire, a single mother in her thirties, is gang raped and left for dead, while her 12-year-old daughter, Bethie, witnesses the horrific attack. Following the attack, self-confessed rookie cop, John Dromoor, seeks out justice for the pair. In Oates' novella, she is exploring the impact narrative point of view has when writing a story dealing with a serious trauma.

The reader becomes immersed in a world narrated using alternating viewpoints, as well as narrative points of view which switch at the beginning of each new chapter. By using second person, Oates invites the reader into the action and removes their ability to look away. In a 2005 review in *The Observer*, Kate Kellaway describes the narrative voice as "authorial" and "claustrophobic throughout" and suggests that "[t]he persistent use of 'you' […] turns Joyce Carol Oates into an intimate advocate". She goes on to praise the narrative "with its ugly aftermath", revealing how Oates' language allows the consequences of crime to seep through. It is as if the author wants to assert her own voice as well as that of her protagonists':

> What you didn't realize. What no one could have told you. How the rape was not an incident that had happened one night in the park in the random way of a stroke of lightening but the very definition of Teena Maguire's life, and by extension your life, afterward. (Oates: 45)

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the narrative voice is not always that of the author. However, in the case of this novella, Oates does appear to challenge a system where

women still fear rape and where far too many have experienced it and watched their attackers walk free from court. Kellaway adds:

> [T]he author's way of developing this story is anything but usual […] In her fleeting, incisive way, she gives us a glimpse of Teena's interior life as a faulty, loving mother and a person of grit and gaiety. Someone good.
>
> Teena and her attackers are not the only focus of this book. Oates includes a policeman called Dromoor, a brilliantly conceived character […] a dangerous man.
>
> He hasn't lost his soul entirely, or his heart. He makes himself Teena's champion but his morality is compromised. He will turn out to be a deadly practitioner of his own brand of smooth justice. In this discomfiting story, there is no such thing as uncomplicated salvation."

Oates uses the tool of second-person narrative to put her readers into the shoes of the person she wants them to be in. The narrative is less concerned with pulling readers out of the story, or making them feel uncomfortable, but instead is written seamlessly through the addressing of Bethie. The novella presents a difficult subject matter in a way which allows the reader to question and reflect on the effect of traumas and society's view of its survivors.

(3.3) Putting the use of second-person narrative into action

Reading *Rape: A Love Story* inspired my desire to explore writing a story using second-person narrative. With *On the Other Side,* I have used the second-person narrative to portray arguably the most heightened scene of the entire novel; the moment Lucy is raped.

As well as using this point of view as a tool to focus the reader's attention on certain passages, I used it as an effective way of distancing myself from the text. Like *The Lovely Bones* author, Alice Seabold, I used my own first-hand experience of rape to write that scene. Using second person helped to provide not only the strength to be able to write the scene from a distance but also added objectively as a writer, rather than a survivor. It also helped to shift the balance for the reader who becomes more than just an observer. They are forced to see the event as it unfolds:

> Your whole body tightens as you feel a pain like a dagger sliding into your rectum. Relax, just relax now. But your body shakes, and you cry out in pain.

> You are being ripped in half. Are you going to pass out? He gathers up speed and holds you tighter. You feel your eyes rolling then he stops and thrusts one final time. Something warm is sinking into you. Then there is relief as he leaves your insides. You roll over and stop.
> You stop breathing. You stop crying. You stop living.
> You stop everything. (Bishop: 4)

Shifting the narrative voice to second person enabled me to write the novel. Not only was it useful as a literary method, but also made it possible for me as an individual, a writer, a survivor, to write about trauma.

CONCLUSION

> Sometimes a traumatic address comes from our past. Sometimes it comes from pasts we do not know. Sometimes it is ours, and sometimes the voice of another. Sometimes we speak with a voice that precedes us, a voice that is not ours but whose only opening is though the language that cries out from our wounds. And sometimes our language must find its way through the language of others we will never understand.
>
> - Cathy Caruth "Addressing Life."

Twenty years ago, Cathy Caruth wrote the monograph *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Reflecting on her work from two decades ago, in the additional afterword 'Addressing Life: The Literary Voice in the Theory of Trauma' inserted in the monograph's 20th anniversary edition, she explained that when the study was first published, the field of trauma studies – a phrase which she has not used in her own writing – was yet to exist. While this is a phrase, she goes on to say, which captures the breadth of the field, "it has disadvantage of codifying the term "trauma" and eliminating some of its surprise and literariness" (174). I have come to realise through my own research during this critical study and my experiences of writing about trauma, that trauma is a topic which needs to be free from literary constraints in order to explore issues that can be extremely personal and also different to each individual. The writer needs to have this freedom to be able to add to existing conversations and question, while also being accountable.

Continuing in the afterword, Caruth goes on to describes how society's understanding of trauma and how it is represented has dramatically expanded. Despite this, she explains that new trauma theories do not "simply make a claim to new knowledge but rather articulates a kind of not-knowing at the heart of catastrophic experience" (117). I like the honesty of Caruth's assertation that there is no perfect way to describe or depict trauma but that embracing that knowledge allows a writer to explore ways of describing it, whether that be through narrative voice or other means.

To quote David Lodge: "The golden rule of fictional prose is that there are no rules – except the ones that each writer sets for him or herself" (94). It was this conclusion which led me to want to experiment with narrative structures and voice. While it may be argued that third-person narrative is a way of being detached from the narrator, allowing an omniscient view, I have used it to become closer to my protagonist, Lucy. Using a close third-person narrative allowed me to explore not only her world, but the way in which she views the world around her as well as how people view her. But that was not the only thing it allowed me to do. As a writer drawing from a personal experience of sexual assault, it allowed me enough distance to remove myself from the trauma I experienced, and in turn write about it.

In a society where women's voices are already so repressed, especially around conversations of sexual assault, why did I make the decision to take Lucy's voice away by not giving her a first-person narrative? For me, it was an easy choice. The decision was not about taking Lucy's voice away but instead expanding her world to allow the narrative that space it needed to explore her surroundings. Rather than using first person to give an insight in the inner trauma of a sexual assault survivor, I wanted to use this narrative point of view to demonstrate how society makes many assumptions. For example, when it comes to rape and sexual violence, survivors can often be victim-shamed[10] over incidents such as outfit choices, alcohol consumption, or even having to endure their past sexual history being revealed during a court case. So, rather than taking Lucy's voice away, I used limited third person to force the reader to think about their own opinions regarding sexual offences and to help break down the unwarranted assumptions of survivors, such as dated views about covering up, not being intoxicated, and not walking alone.

Sadly, it is not just fiction where these conversations are taking place. Six months ago, the country was shaken by the murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021. Now, within days of completing this critical study, women's safety is once again in the spotlight following

the murder of teacher Sabina Nessa this month (September 2021). Despite thousands taking to the streets and social media to share their daily experiences of harassment, fear and threat, and organisations such as Reclaim These Streets[11], being launched, there is still a long way to go. And it shows why conversations surrounding trauma are more important than ever before.

Using different narrative structures has allowed me as a writer to open discussions on trauma, especially trauma resulting from sexual assault, as well allowing me to improve my skills with narrative voice by learning about its impact on different kinds of storytelling. Switching narrative viewpoints has become a strength of *On the Other Side*. It demonstrates that careful thought about narrative strategy can add an extra dimension to the story, such as the use of focalisation between the survivor, her loved ones, and abuser, and adds an extra layer of discussion. Through this I have been able to explore all the ways in which point of view can be manipulated to enhance narration. Using a variety of different narrative voices within one novel has allowed me to create a different dynamic when writing about trauma. It has become a way of conveying something which is much more than just plot and setting – it creates has created a different way for me to tell Lucy's story that straightforward narration simply would not have been able to do.

The consideration of what the overarching question is that pulls a reader through *On the Other Side* is an important one – not just from the perspective of me as a writer but also for the person reading it. I wanted to write a novel that opens the conversation surrounding sexual assault and its traumatic impact, while also depicting that impact from multiple points of view experimenting with both narrative and narrators. I believe that without shying away from issues such as grooming, mental health, and trauma, *On the Other Side* raises many questions for discussion. I have attempted to answer many of them with the use of a purposefully disjoined narrative structure, episodic technique, layered characterisation, and multiple point of view. These techniques give an effective depiction of how trauma can affect

an individual and how it may be relayed or relived. While other questions (Who is to blame for what happened? How would you act as a parent? How does society treat survivors?) have also been given a platform.

As a writer, I am confident in my beliefs, but for the readers of *On the Other Side*, I wanted the characters' stories to start conversations. By doing that we break the taboo, judgements and stigma, and assumptions that come with this kind of crime. I also believe that the ending of *On the Other Side* offers hope, something that is important to me to be passed on to others, especially fellow survivors.

NOTES

[1] The Me Too Movement was first started in 2006 by American activist, Tarana Burke. She began using the phrase "metoo" to help other women who had been abused to stand up for themselves. The hashtag #MeToo became viral after actress Alyssa Milano and other women began using it to tweet about the Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse allegations on social media website Twitter. The phrase and hashtag have quickly gone on to become an international movement. (More information can be found via the organisation's official website https://metoomvmt.org/)

[2] On 31st December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown origin detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. This caused a global pandemic which, as of 5.41pm (CEST) on September 21st, 2021, there have been 228,807,631 confirmed cases of COVID-19 coronavirus, including 4,697,099 deaths reported to WHO (The latest statistic can be found at https://covid19.who.int/)

[3] Grooming is the action of a paedophile preparing a child for a meeting, especially via an internet chat room, with the intention of committing a sexual offence.

[4] I have decided to use the term survivor rather than victim to change the language we use surrounding sexual assault and to take away negative connotations associated with people who have been attacked.

[5] Strikethrough is a typographical presentation of words with a horizontal line through their centre resulting in ~~text like this~~. When given the appearance of being used on a computer screen, it indicates deleted information and can be used deliberately to imply a change of thought.

[6] *Peep Show* is a British television sitcom starring David Mitchell and Robert Webb, and was written by Jesse Armstrong and Sam Bain. It was broadcast from 2003 until 2015. Stylistically, the show uses point of view shots with the thoughts of the main characters audible as voice-overs.

[7] Merriam Webster defines social realism as a theory or practice (such as painting) of using appropriate representation and symbol to express a social or political attitude

[8] *Coronation Street* is a British soap opera which has been shown on television since 1960. The programme centres around Coronation Street: a cobbled, terraced street in Weatherfield, a fictional town based on inner-city Salford.

[9] Male privilege is a system of advantages or rights that are available to men solely on the basis of their sex.

[10] Victim-shaming is often associated with survivors of rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence, who face ridicule and judgment for stepping forward and speaking out about abuse.

[11] Reclaim these Streets is a movement which aims to use legislation, education, and community action to ensure no woman has to be asked to “text me when you get home” again. More information can be found at: https://reclaimthesestreets.com/

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