TRAUMATIC REVERBERATIONS: VICTORIAN NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Post-nineteenth-century modernity has been described as a “trauma culture” because the time period has experienced both widespread, collective catastrophes, such as the two World Wars and the Holocaust, as well as more insidious forms of trauma that affect our everyday lives, including historical legacies and present occurrences of slavery, imperialism, and racism. More recently, the growing number of testimonials by women detailing their traumatic experiences of sexual violence and rape, highlighted by the #MeToo movement, have brought more awareness toward the traumatizing effects of our heteropatriarchal society. Yet despite their astonishing number, our culture often fails to accept the validity of these claims and recognize this female trauma as legitimate. Because of trauma’s inherent connection with narrative, literary scholars have made significant contributions in the quest to better understand the complexities of trauma and its multiplicities. However, these investigations have been overwhelmingly attracted to literary modernism, claiming that the experimentalist modernist form, full of elusions, gaps, and unconventional narrative structures, best replicate the real-world experiences of trauma and can provide access for narrating the otherwise unknowable. This thesis challenges the privileged connection between trauma and modernism, both in terms of form and time period, arguing instead that nineteenth-century literary texts and culture can better elucidate our present ideations of female trauma. In the Victorian era, trauma was theorized as inherently female; to be female was to be automatically traumatized. Consequently, what resulted was a paradoxical existence...
where the female is always and yet never traumatized, her continuous traumatized state marking any trauma as natural and thus illegitimate. Our present conceptions of female trauma, I argue, are directly influenced by this understanding, thereby explaining why it is both ubiquitous and yet rarely recognized as such. Indeed, it is precisely the assumed traumatized status of the female body that intimately connects our contemporary trauma culture with the nineteenth century. Following arguments made by literary trauma scholars that literary texts can help us better understand trauma itself, I place what I believe is a pertinent contemporary female trauma narrative, Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony during Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court nomination, into conversation with three novels either written during the nineteenth century or strategically utilizing its culture, Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and Sarah Waters’ *Fingersmith*, all of which focus on female trauma. By illustrating the complex connections between the two, I ultimately argue that Victorian culture and its literary texts can provide us with new strategies for reconceptualizing trauma that women experienced in the past and for acknowledging, accepting, and addressing trauma that women experience in the present.
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 CONTENT ADVISORY

This thesis is about trauma, specifically trauma inflicted on and experienced by women. Because a significant part of this thesis deals with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, I would like to issue a content advisory ahead of this thesis to warn readers that the content which follows can be distressing. This thesis contains very detailed accounts, both real and literary, of physical and psychological violence against female bodies. Although I believe that the information in this thesis is important and should be read, I also very much respect each reader’s personal history and the experiences that they bring to this text. As such, please proceed only if you feel comfortable in doing so.

It is also important for me to acknowledge my own privileged position as the writer of this thesis. Unlike the women narrating these testimonials, I have not experienced the trauma inherently associated with being a woman in our society. Consequently, I do not want to, at any point in this thesis, assume that I can personally understand what these women, or any other for that matter, have underwent or continue to undergo in terms of trauma. Furthermore, given that this thesis argues against masculine interpretations of female trauma, I want to make clear that I am not assuming to know how trauma is personally experienced or felt by these women. Rather, I am taking their trauma for what it is—trauma—and analyzing how it is narrated and how their witnesses respond to it.
Men’s truths are different from ladies’
—Maud, in *Fingersmith*

You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful
and she's laughing.
—Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”
INTRODUCTION

VICTORIAN TRAUMA NOW

On September 27, 2018, Christine Blasey Ford testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the wider American public, as well as international audiences, that then-Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh was guilty of sexually assaulting her when they were young. So she can describe the event in her own language, it is best here to quote her narrative of the event in its entirety:

Early in the evening, I went up a narrow set of stairs leading from the living room to a second floor to use the bathroom. When I got to the top of the stairs, I was pushed from behind into a bedroom. I couldn’t see who pushed me. Brett and Mark came into the bedroom and locked the door behind them. There was music already playing in the bedroom. It was turned up louder by either Brett or Mark once we were in the room. I was pushed onto the bed and Brett got on top of me. He began running his hands over my body and grinding his hips into me. I yelled, hoping someone downstairs might hear me, and tried to get away from him, but his weight was heavy. Brett groped me and tried to take off my clothes. He had a hard time because he was so drunk, and because I was wearing a one-piece bathing suit under my clothes. I believed he was going to rape me. I tried to yell for help. When I did, Brett put his hand over my mouth to stop me from yelling. This was what terrified me the most, and has had the most lasting impact on my life. It was hard for me to breathe, and I thought that Brett was accidentally going to kill me.¹

For those who either watched or listened to her testimony, and for those reading her recollection of the event, it is clear that Ford was describing a traumatic experience. Ford’s testimony demonstrated that her encounter with Kavanaugh terrified her when it happened and, moreover, continues to haunt her through unwanted memories. Describing her symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, Ford noted that she insisted on having two front doors installed in her home and that she still vividly remembers the laughter coming from the perpetrators, thereby

emphasizing the long-term emotional effects—feelings of claustrophobia and shame—that plague her.

Unfortunately, Ford’s traumatic experience is not an isolated example; rather, it is one case among many in a culture that commodifies the female body, transforming it into an object that is oftentimes used to satisfy male sexual desire. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five women will be the victim of rape at some point in their lives, and one in three women will be the victim of sexual violence. As Ford’s narrative illuminated, the trauma that results from these attacks is not limited to the event itself but further manifests in various symptoms after the event as well. In fact, research shows that the vast majority of sexual violence survivors—indeed, up to 94 percent—experience symptoms of PTSD during the two weeks following the attack. Aside from statistics, the extent to which violence toward female bodies can be considered a wide-spread cultural crisis is illustrated through the growing number of women coming forward to testify that they too have experienced sexual trauma. The #MeToo movement in particular highlights how an otherwise singular example of trauma has been reinterpreted as a collective experience through a growing number of victim testimonials.

Sexual violence and other consequences of living within a heteropatriarchal society are just one component of what E. Ann Kaplan describes as our “trauma culture.”

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2 M. C. Black., K. C. Basile, M. J. Breiding, S. G. Smith, M. L. Walters, M. T. Merrick, M. R. Stevens, “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 summary report,” last modified 2010, https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf. This is, of course, not to say that men are not also the victims of sexual violence, although their likelihood of being a victim is much lower. According to the same report, one in 71 men will be raped during their lifetime, while one in six will be the victim of sexual violence. Acknowledgement of male victims of sexual violence is reported elsewhere, and while it is important to discuss and raise awareness of this issue, this thesis is limited to a discussion of female victims. However, it should be noted that the same patriarchal structures that subject women to sexual violence likewise affect men, although in different ways.


specifically post-nineteenth-century modernity, has been linked to trauma because the time period has contained both widespread, collective catastrophes, as well as more insidious forms of trauma that affect our everyday lives. Global traumatic events such as the two World Wars, the Holocaust, and the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, have come to define entire generations. The historical legacies and present occurrences of slavery and imperialism, as well as the effects of global capitalism, continue to affect our consciousness.\(^5\) Despite experiencing the repercussions of these societal traumas, our culture is, perhaps paradoxically, likewise obsessed with trauma and representing it through various media. From novels and films depicting gruesome deaths and harrowing tales of survival to an interactive gaming culture that promotes violence and destruction, we gain pleasure from witnessing and vicariously experiencing trauma through these fictional objects. This is not to say that these media directly contribute to trauma but rather that they demonstrate the fetishization of trauma within our contemporary culture. This obsession with trauma extends even to language itself. Indeed, trauma has become so ingrained in our everyday lives that to be “traumatized” is no longer restricted to the catastrophic or the insidious; to experience a stressful event, from stubbing one’s toe to having an embarrassing moment in the supermarket, is to be seemingly traumatized beyond repair.

Kaplan places a strong emphasis on literature’s role in the production of modernity’s trauma culture, although she is not the first to make this connection. Narrative, literary or not, has a long association with trauma. Arguably beginning with Freud’s psychoanalytic approach

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\(^5\) The trauma that results from the historical legacies of widespread atrocities, such as slavery and the Holocaust, has received an increasing amount of scholarly and clinical attention in recent years. Discussing intergenerational trauma, Marinella Rodi-Risberg states that “the modes of transmission range from the molecular to the psychological, the intrafamilial, and beyond to the socioethnocultural and the political.” See Marinella Rodi-Risberg, “Problems in Representing Trauma,” in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 120.
that was first developed during the late nineteenth century, the ability to narrate trauma, to translate trauma into narrative format, became a crucial step in a patient’s path to recovery. This is because, according to Freud, the trauma does not lie the original event but is constituted through two separate events, the original event and the second event which acts as a “trigger.” Neither of these two experiences is traumatic in itself; rather, the trauma occurs when the individual is unable to recover, process, or assimilate the original event into their consciousness or “history.” In trauma’s traditional, psychoanalytical understanding, memory of the event is effectively foreclosed, but apparitions of the event can return to haunt the victim until they successfully manage to confront it or deal with it in some fashion. Consequently, Freud developed what became known as the “talking cure,” promoting the idea that patients can recover if they simply narrate their traumas, bringing them back into conscious memory.

Narrating one’s trauma has seen success both in the past and present. As Joshua Pederson notes, examples of this include Holocaust survivors feeling a moral responsibility to share their survival stories in order to raise awareness of past atrocities, Vietnam war veterans creating “rap groups” in order to express their experiences at war, and domestic abuse survivors forming support networks to narrate their traumas to each other.6 Similarly, the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, both of which seek to raise awareness of communal traumas experienced by women and black communities, respectively, are heavily reliant on narrative and testimony. However, the narrativization of trauma has since been critiqued and the extent to which this process is actually effective has been challenged by both scholars and psychiatrists as trauma and the power dynamics behind this methodology become more understood, particularly in the last decade. This will be discussed more in chapter one, but it is important at this stage to

6 Joshua Pederson, “Trauma and Narrative,” in Trauma and Literature, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 97.
understand the complex ways in which trauma and narrative intertwine, both positively and negatively. To narrate trauma does not necessarily mean to cure it. Indeed, ways of narrating trauma and determining who has the power and authority to narrate are often contingent on and influenced by the same ideological structures that originally cause the trauma itself.

Trauma began to be taken more seriously in our culture in the late twentieth century as a result of the Vietnam War. The pathological consequences of being exposed to the atrocities that encompass war manifested in soldiers, including now well-known symptoms of PTSD, such as shell-shock and war neurosis. During the same time, influenced by trauma’s inherent connection to narrative, academics and scholars of literary studies began exploring the relationship between trauma and literature, constituting one component of what is now called the “ethical turn” within the academy. Consequently, trauma and literary language entered into a reciprocal relationship, in which both constitute crucial parts of the other and in which both can be used to better understand the other. Guided by the assumed necessity of narrativizing trauma to induce recovery, one of the fundamental assertions proposed by scholars of literary trauma studies, both old and new, is that literary language itself can provide us with possibilities, methods, or techniques for narrating trauma that otherwise ordinary language cannot.

In the 1990s, influential scholars that are now established names within the field, including Cathy Caruth and Geoffrey Hartman, began theorizing this connection between trauma and literature. Hartman, for example, argues that literature may provide ways for us to “read the wound”7 of trauma and proposes the possibility that trauma “can only be reclaimed by literary knowledge.”8 The idea of “reclaiming” trauma through literary language is used more

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extensively by Cathy Caruth in what is now considered a foundational text in literary trauma studies, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Heavily indebted to Freudian psychoanalysis, Caruth highlights the epistemic struggle inherent to both trauma and literature, stating that “if Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing, and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet.”  

As Caruth suggests, trauma can likewise help us better understand literature, and as J. Roger Kurtz notes, “there is something inherent to the nature of trauma that offers insights into exploring questions of signification and representation that have long dogged literary studies.”  

Other scholars crucial to the development of literary trauma studies include Shoshana Felman and Dominick LaCapra. Felman is especially interested in literature’s potential to help better understand widespread atrocities, specifically the Holocaust; for Felman, “it is precisely because history as holocaust proceeds from a failure to imagine, that it takes an imaginative medium like [literature] to gain an insight into the historical reality as well as into the attested historicity of its unimaginability.”  

For LaCapra, trauma literature is able to extend beyond the page and to the reader through affect: “one might argue that narratives in fiction may provide insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible ‘feel’ for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods.”  

This thesis explores precisely this relationship

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between trauma, narrative, and affect, albeit with a more active end goal in mind. Can literature, through its unique ability to represent otherwise unimaginable traumas, inspire ethical or political action through the emotional effect it has on readers?

In part because trauma is frequently seen as a post-nineteenth-century phenomena and because modern understandings of trauma are traced back to Freud’s writings at the end of the nineteenth century—“it all begins with Freud, of course,” states Kaplan—literary trauma scholars overwhelmingly focus on literature produced during the modernist period when exploring these connections. In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead expounds on this relationship by arguing that the narrative techniques used in literary modernism mimic trauma’s literary qualities:

It is also clear that fiction itself has been marked or changed by its encounter with trauma. Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection. Trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique.

Indeed, when one thinks of novels concerned with or focused on representing trauma, modernist texts likely come to mind. Virginia Woolf’s character Septimus Smith from *Mrs. Dalloway* is recognized as one of the most well-known literary subjects who experiences trauma. This is, in part, because Septimus so clearly demonstrates the damaging effects that war can have on the individual psyche and is a prime example of Freud’s theory of war neurosis, shown through both his experiences and his narration style, which, following Whitehead’s argument, mimics his psychological trauma. Other frequently cited examples include almost any novel written by Toni Morrison, but especially *Beloved*, which encapsulates the intergenerational traumas produced by

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slavery, and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, the title, being Sartrean inspired, a reference to the psychological trauma caused by imperialism and colonist regimes.

This is all to say that scholars generally resisted applying the concept of “trauma” to literatures written before 1900, firmly agreeing with Woolf’s statement that on or about 1910 human character changed. Moreover, if it is accepted, as it generally is, that trauma “began” with Freud, to discuss trauma before Freud seems anachronistic at best. However, trauma did not, in fact, begin with Freud, although our modern psychological conception of it is generally traced to him. The word “trauma” originated from the Greeks and referred to a “wound.” Prior to Freud, trauma was conceptualized as a physical ailment; to receive trauma was to receive physical violence towards the body. Freud turned this violence inward, popularizing the idea that trauma is a distinctly internal experience. As such, trauma post-Freud is generally taken to be something related to the individual’s mental condition, a case of psychological damage and specifically connected to the unconscious. But to argue that trauma is a “modern” phenomena is to discount and ignore the complex ways that individuals and cultures prior to the twentieth century sought to understand trauma, both physical and psychological, in all of its intricacies. Gradually, scholars are beginning to acknowledge this and consider Freudian psychoanalysis not as something that originated in a vacuum but rather as the product of a Victorian culture that was both coping with widespread trauma and equally fascinated with it. Highlighting the historical influences behind the Freudian conception of trauma, Karolyn Steffens states that “rather than explore the depths of the unconscious, the majority of nineteenth-century medical discourse sought an etiology for the trauma of modernity in disease, heredity, and the physiology of the nervous system and brain.”

15 Steffens’ description of Victorian trauma is significant because it

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highlights the contradiction inherent to literary trauma studies and scholars who treat trauma as a solely “modern” occurrence; that is, “modernity” as a lived experience is a shared traumatic event, and that just as twentieth- and twenty-first-century modernities have impacted us with all of their catastrophic and insidious traumas, so too were the Victorians traumatized by their own encounter with nineteenth-century modernity. Understood this way, post- nineteenth-century trauma is no longer a unique experience, a “trauma culture” cut off from the effects of time and history; rather, as Steffens further argues, “although literary critics often turn to the First World War, shell shock marks a culmination, not the origin, of the forces of modernity that had been contributing to a marked rise in traumatic neuroses throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.”

Indeed, rather than being exempt from the widespread catastrophes that have come to define our experiences, the Victorians underwent societal traumas that would similarly define their era. Although the Victorians experienced a wide range of traumatic events, scholars have now accepted that the embodiment of all of these traumas and that of modernity itself for the Victorians can be illustrated through the form of the railway. In his study mapping the genealogy of trauma, Roger Luckhurst states that “the general scholarly consensus is that the origin of the idea of trauma was inextricably linked to the expansion of the railways in the 1860s.” The trauma associated with the railway was at first believed to be only physical. Many passengers were physically injured because of frequent collisions between cars. Moreover, the chances of injury were exacerbated due to the flimsy structure that provided no safety for occupants. However, as it is now well documented, automobile accidents do not result in physical injuries alone; rather, symptoms of PTSD and other psychological traumas can manifest after the

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16 Steffens, “Modernity as the Cultural Crucible of Trauma,” 37.
traumatic event. Furthermore, the railway has come to symbolize the ideological structures that dominated Victorian consciousness and their relationship with modernity:

Nineteenth-century modernity is characterized by the shock of unprecedented social change, including widespread industrialization and urbanization, new political alignments, the rise of nation-states, increasingly capitalistic and imperial relations, the establishment of legal precedence for accident insurance, and technological innovations like the telegraph, electricity, steam engines and photography. Although all these changes play a vital role in emerging trauma discourse, pre-psychoanalytic medical and literary discourse about trauma unfolds against the embodiment of these forces of modernity: the railway.\textsuperscript{18}

If we were to adopt Caruth’s understanding of trauma as a “crisis of truth,” which for her highlights the psychoanalytic idea that trauma is unassimilated into a victim’s memory and history, the Victorians’ crisis of truth is the epistemic doubt they faced when confronted with the unprecedented change that has come to define modernity. Thus, to make the claim that there is a fundamental difference between “Victorian” trauma and our “contemporary” trauma is to ignore the inherent similarities between the two. Although we assume that we have escaped the “anxiety of influence” that the modernists felt, distanced from the Victorians enough to avoid influence but close enough to still acknowledge their existence, we have, in fact, inherited the same epistemic crises that defined the Victorian imaginary. Trauma in contemporary culture is precisely so traumatic because, as individuals of the twenty-first century, we assume that we have progressed enough to avoid these catastrophes. Our belief in this teleological illusion is a direct descendent of the same Victorian way of thinking. Rather than always progressing linearly toward a mythical future, history organizes itself cyclically, the present always influenced by the past. Our understanding of trauma is not an exception to this, and our conceptions of trauma could be improved if we were to acknowledge this cyclical relationship.

\textsuperscript{18} Steffens, 37-8.
This thesis takes the cyclical structure of history as a fundamental premise and argues that the nineteenth century and our present historical moment are intricately connected both in terms of our fascination with and our understanding, interpretation, and experiences of trauma. Despite wanting to section ourselves off from the past and often claiming that we experience trauma in a fundamentally different way, our own epistemologies of trauma—how we know it and how we subsequently confront it—are indebted to the Victorian period. Consequently, this thesis seeks to challenge the arbitrary gulf between literary trauma theory, as well as trauma studies more widely, and the nineteenth century, a gap that is seemingly justified by Mark Seltzer’s claim that the post-twentieth-century “modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma.”19 In this regard, to argue that trauma is inherently tied with narrative and that literary narrative in particular can help us better imagine the traumatic experience while simultaneously excluding literature produced during the Victorian period is to both ignore the significant ways nineteenth-century texts engage with trauma and, furthermore, fail to benefit from the insights these texts can provide us. Moreover, to argue that trauma literature can only be written with “elliptic omissions, gaps, and distortions” and that “trauma cannot be grasped through conventional realistic forms of narration and that we have to resort to modernist strategies of representation in the attempt to imaginatively work through and transform psychic trauma,” as Silke Arnold-de Simine summarizes, is to both overemphasize a Freudian psychoanalytic understanding of trauma and dismiss trauma narratives of the nineteenth century as unrealistic representations.20 Rather than discounting trauma narratives such as Jane Eyre and David Copperfield because their narration styles do not seemingly follow a Freudian

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20 Silke Arnold-de Simine, “Trauma and Memory,” in Trauma and Literature, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 141.
psychoanalytic approach to trauma, a more productive reading would be to examine the ways these narratives as nineteenth-century texts can help elucidate our current conceptions of trauma. This thesis does not disagree that the imaginative qualities of literature can help us better understand trauma; rather, that is one of the fundamental claims made throughout. However, by dissolving the arbitrary gap between literary trauma theory and the Victorian period, this thesis argues that nineteenth-century texts and their wider culture can similarly accomplish this goal.

To discuss all the similarities between Victorian and contemporary trauma would be overwhelming within the scope of this thesis. Thus, this thesis examines one distinct area of trauma: the trauma that women experience under patriarchal ideologies and the violence inflicted on their bodies, both corporal and psychological. This thesis argues that the trauma women experience not only connects the Victorian and contemporary periods in significant ways and plays a key role in designating both respective periods as trauma cultures, but that this trauma in particular demonstrates the complex ways that trauma itself comes to be culturally constructed, implemented, and understood. In order to acknowledge this process, it is first important to understand that trauma as violence against female bodies, their ability to narrate this trauma, and literature have a long historical relationship. As Emma Miller argues, “authors have long been aware of the unique problems of the narratology of sexual trauma.”

Miller goes on to give examples, including Ovid’s Philomela and Shakespeare’s Lavinia, who both experience extreme violence and have to strategically narrate their traumas because their tongues were cut out, and Shelley’s historical representation of Beatrice Cenci, depicted as a woman whose claims that her father is abusive are ignored but who finally receives justice through writing. In this regard,

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22 Miller, “Trauma and Sexual Violence,” 227.
these examples demonstrate what literary trauma scholars argue about modernist literature; that is, literary narrative can be used to help imagine and understand trauma, and that narrative itself can induce the recovery process.

The Victorian period is used in this study, rather than the classical, Shakespearean, or Romantic eras, because the nineteenth century demonstrates a fundamental shift in how trauma, particularly when concerned with the female body, was conceived and understood. Indeed, for the traumatized female victim, trauma was no longer thought of something that results from forces acting with and/or on the body, an exterior violence that harms interior subjectivity. Rather, trauma was imagined to be in and of itself feminine; to be female was to be inherently traumatized, the female being constructed and scripted by men as a traumatized figure. Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of trauma illustrates the crystallization of this cultural shift. In 1897, Freud altered his own theorization of hysteria, a traumatic experience in itself that comes from the Greek word for uterus and thus pathologizes the female condition. Freud originally believed that hysteria developed in women because of repressed memories of sexual abuse that occurred during their childhood, most often by fathers or male siblings. However, Freud later abandoned this “seduction theory” and instead came to argue that hysteria is actually caused by repressed desires and fantasies, that the trauma originates in the female’s unconscious wish to have intercourse with the father that ultimately cannot be fulfilled; as Andrew Barnaby explains, “to the extent hysteria still involves a sexual component, Freud hypothesized that what had been recounted as episodes of abuse are in reality sexual fantasies.”23 The reason behind this shift is

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23 Andrew Barnaby, “The Psychoanalytic Origins of Literary Trauma Studies,” in Trauma and Literature, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27. Of course, we now know that widespread sexual assault was likely not uncommon, similar to today. Freud’s abandonment of seduction theory in favor of the belief in unconscious desires has translated into our contemporary “rape culture” through the form of “she wanted it” or “she was asking for it” narratives.
that Freud, after having an influx of female patients claiming they were assaulted, thought it was impossible that sexual violence could be happening on such a mass scale. This would ultimately lead Freud to argue that “hysteria necessarily presupposes a primary experience of unpleasure—that is, of a passive nature” and that “the natural sexual passivity of women explains their being more inclined to hysteria,” “nature” and “natural” here being important descriptors. Yet the problem here is not the amount of trauma but rather whom that trauma is directed towards; indeed, Freud would have no problem defining “war neurosis” as the widespread trauma men experience from war. Freud’s theory that female trauma originates from an internal experience rather than being caused by external, violent forces would define much of his later psychoanalytic theories, most importantly those related to castration anxiety. Thus, for Freud, to be born female is to be inherently traumatized because women exist without the phallus. Consequently, the trauma associated with castration is not so much a physical trauma, that is literally losing the phallus, but rather an ideological trauma of becoming a woman. And because the female body is predetermined to be traumatized, women can therefore not experience actual trauma. This shift in the understanding of trauma as inherently female and as the fear of becoming female crystalizes in Freud’s reinterpretation of the Medusa myth. Whereas for Ovid Medusa is presented as a traumatized victim twice over, both raped in Athena’s temple and punished for being victimized, the victim in Freud’s interpretation is rather Perseus, the male figure who beheads her. In this complex interweaving of violence inflicted on the female body, narration, and literature, Medusa is transformed from a traumatized victim into a perpetrator who threatens Perseus with traumatic castration—to be permanently connected with trauma as a female—and thus must be traumatized yet again through decapitation. Medusa, unlike Philomela

and Lavinia, is never able to narrate her trauma because the trauma is no longer hers, symbolized by her decapitated head, with its mouth prematurely open yet unable to speak. A product of Victorian reinterpretation, Medusa’s trauma is consequently transformed into a symbol of masculine heroics and recovery.  

Although Freud could be seen as a prime example of how trauma was reconceived during the Victorian period, it is important to note that Freud’s theories were, at least in part, inspired by a culture that had not only already seen a growing fascination with various medical sciences intended to interpret interior subjectivities but also that had already begun pathologizing womanhood. Indeed, psychiatry as a term was first coined in 1808 and theories of female hysteria did not begin but rather peaked with Freud’s theories, gradually obtaining more cultural relevance from the middle of the nineteenth century. This is best explained by Elaine Showalter’s influential text on female “madness,” The Female Malady. For Showalter, the over-diagnosis of female madness during the Victorian period by what she describes as a “male-dominated and possibly misogynistic psychiatric profession” is dependent on the ideology that women, as opposed to men, are inherently connected to madness itself:

Contemporary feminist philosophers have analyzed and illuminated a cultural tradition that represents “woman” as madness, and that uses images of the female body … to stand for irrationality in general. While the name of the symbolic female disorder may change from one historical period to the next, the gender asymmetry of the representational tradition remains the same. Thus madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady.

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What Showalter demonstrates is that this “gender asymmetry of the representational tradition,” despite changing its name, constitutes a majority of the Victorian imaginary of the female condition. Consequently, Freud’s theory that trauma is inherently female is not simply a response to an approaching modernity but is rather influenced and constituted by a Victorian culture that was already obsessed with theorizing the ontological status of femaleness. Femaleness being inherently tied to trauma heavily defines nineteenth-century trauma “culture” because the connection between the two permeated multiple aspects of society. As Showalter describes, female “madness” was not medically authorized but also instituted through other cultural realms. Consequently, female madness appeared in art and literature, as well as scientific and juridical practices. Similar to Foucault’s conception of power, trauma as female was dispersed and pervasive, a “disciplinary regime” that consistently reinforced the relationship through various institutions.  

This thesis is based on the claim that the Victorian and contemporary periods share a trauma culture which is connected through the idea that being female defines the traumatic experience and consequently influences how we acknowledge and address trauma itself. Just as Freud inherited the representational tradition of gender asymmetry, so too have we inherited from the Victorian period the belief that trauma is a distinctly female condition. In her feminist analysis of psychic trauma, Laura Brown explains that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III-R defines trauma as an “event outside the range of human experience.” Yet, as the statistics presented at the beginning of this introduction illustrate, sexual violence toward the female body is so common that, as Brown explains, some modern lawyers argue that

the traumatized female body is, in fact, not traumatized at all, precisely because its ubiquitous nature means it does not exist outside the range of human experience. Thus, Brown notes that “human” experience does not represent both the male and female gender, but rather becomes “what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class: white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men.”

Although the amount of physical violence inflicted on female bodies by exterior perpetrators is a significant component of the phallocentric process of signifying female identity as a site of trauma, this process is likewise constituted by other aspects of our contemporary culture as well. Indeed, many factors of a woman’s existence are, paradoxically, seen as inherently traumatic and thus not traumatic at all. For a woman, sex is supposed to hurt; childbirth, her natural function, is supposed to hurt; fashion, professional attire, and beauty are all supposed to hurt. What this demonstrates is that female trauma, as in the Victorian period, is understood as pervasive, dispersed across various cultural discourses and thus naturalized as an assumed status.

This thesis treats Ford’s testimony and traumatic experience as a pertinent contemporary example of female trauma to demonstrate the connection between past and present. Following the methods used by literary trauma scholars that suggest that literature can be used to creatively “imagine” the complexities of trauma, Ford’s experience is placed into conversation with three novels, all of which are either written during the nineteenth century or strategically utilize its culture. All three texts feature female characters who are traumatized and have violence inflicted upon their bodies, either mentally or physically. The point of this study is not to directly compare the trauma of fictional characters to the trauma experienced by Ford and by the countless women who are victims of sexual violence, and this study does not argue that the two are morally

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equivalent. Rather, what these texts and Ford’s narrative have in common is that they are all impacted, in varying degrees, by what I call the phallocentric hermeneutics of trauma. That is, how each woman experiences trauma in these texts and in Ford’s real-life scenario is understood through masculine interpretations. It is never the female’s trauma alone; rather, female trauma is filtered through patriarchal ideologies that reinterpret these experiences not as traumatic but rather as simply being female, instead prioritizing the male experience and using this position in the construction of meaning. In this phallocentric world, females are scripted to be intimately connected to trauma itself, to always already be traumatized, while simultaneously experiencing and undergoing trauma consistently as a result of this patriarchal oppression. Consequently, what results is a paradoxical existence where the female is always and yet never traumatized, her continuous traumatized state marking her trauma as natural and thus illegitimate.31 Trauma, both in the nineteenth century and in our contemporary moment, is understood as a lived female experience, not a traumatic catastrophic moment, or, as Jennifer Griffiths’ argues, a symptom of the “female body’s already inherent instability or corruption.”32 This, in turn, is precisely why we still struggle to acknowledge female trauma victims as victims who have experienced trauma.33

31 This idea that trauma becomes naturalized as a feminine identity through repeated performances is similar to Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. For Butler, gender is not natural identity or a component of some interior subjectivity; rather, gender is constituted through repeated performances which, in turn, mark the gender as natural. Similar to Butler, I argue that “femaleness” and thus female trauma is crafted through phallocentrism. However, it would be both incorrect and problematic to claim that female trauma is naturalized through a “performance,” as it recalls contemporary arguments that certain actions by females, such as behavior or appearance, justifies the trauma inflicted on their bodies. Rather, as I have previously stated, trauma is naturalized as female both by being theoretically framed as such and the repeated trauma inflicted by men. If anything, it is the repeated performances of men that naturalize this trauma. See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 2015).


33 I want to make clear here that I am not arguing that any traumatic incident experienced by women is not experienced, by the female body, as traumatic or catastrophic. Trauma, in whatever form, is recognized subjectively by women as trauma. Rather, the witnesses to these traumas, operating under a phallocentric hermeneutic or phenomenology, do not interpret it or understand it to be traumatic.
It is important to note that my interpretive method is not psychoanalytic, nor is it based on the ideas of trauma championed by Freud and, consequently, those scholars who have adopted his framework. I consider Freud a product of the patriarchal culture he was working within and the theories he crafted to, likewise, be a product of that. Thus, to utilize this model, at least with the argument I am putting forward, would be to utilize a very phallocentric hermeneutic that, I believe, has negative consequences for how we address victims of trauma. Similarly, I do not use Caruth’s “crisis of truth” or the idea that trauma is “unclaimed” in the same way she has used it, especially since my first chapter challenges the Freudian notion of unnarratable trauma altogether. Indeed, many of the women in the texts I have chosen can distinctly remember their traumatic experiences. Each of the texts used, including Ford’s narrative, do illustrate a crisis of truth, but in the sense that truth itself and the epistemologies of trauma have suffered a crisis at the hands of a phallocentric culture that do not allow the female victim to claim her trauma as her own.

Each of the following chapters and their respective texts, *Villette*, *Dracula*, and *Fingersmith*, critique the epistemic methods of knowing and understanding trauma that are influenced by phallocentric hermeneutics. Moreover, I argue that each of these texts provides the reader with their own strategies to similarly engage in this critique. In chapter one, I interpret Lucy Snowe’s silences in response to her traumatic event not as the product of a traumatic amnesia but, rather, a direct challenge to patriarchal methods of both uncovering and knowing a traumatized victim’s interiority. By providing readers with ethical paradigms, Lucy’s narrative encourages readers to question the means by which we uncover, know, and interpret trauma, and the amount of detail we need to be sympathetic witnesses. *Villette* is discussed at the beginning of this thesis not only because it is published first chronologically—this is important when
considering the text’s historical circumstances and temporal position near the advent of Victorian psychiatry and other medical sciences—but also because it is proleptic of the ways that female trauma is naturalized in both Dracula and Fingersmith. By refusing to let her fictional counterparts and her reading audience truly know her traumatic experience, Lucy maintains autonomy over her own trauma, albeit at the expense of her trauma remaining unresolved.

In chapter two, I turn to Bram Stoker’s Dracula to examine the complex relationship between widespread, communal trauma and representation. Once again taking into account the novel’s historical circumstances, the novel’s relationship with representation is examined in two key ways. First, similar to scholars of literary trauma studies, Dracula’s various discursive forms ask what narrative style is best to represent and thus confirm the truth of a collective trauma that would otherwise seem unimaginable. Second, representation is used to discuss the impact that phallocentric hermeneutics have on how trauma itself is represented; similar to the Medusa myth, Dracula’s narrative demonstrates to readers how certain interpretive methods can cause us to invalidate trauma by understanding it differently. In Dracula, female trauma is an entirely unclaimed experience, interpreted paradoxically as ubiquitous, natural, and illegitimate.

In chapter three, I expand on the relationship between the epistemologies of trauma, history, and representation in Sarah Waters’ Fingersmith. Fictionally taking place in the late 1860s and the early 1870s but published in 2002, Waters strategically utilizes Victorian culture, particularly the way female trauma was understood, to connect it with our own. Through its emphasis on historiography and temporality, I argue that the novel provides strategies for rewriting and reinterpreting a traumatic history and that this, in turn, gives us the possibility of reimagining a future where female trauma can be reclaimed as trauma through subversive narrative practices. All of these texts, as I will argue, are thematically related in their relationship
with trauma both to each other and to Ford’s testimony. And although the texts vary widely in terms of their publication dates—1853, 1897, and 2002, respectively—these three dates correspond to the three time periods significant in this argument: the advent of Victorian psychiatry, Freud’s dismissal of the seduction theory, and the twenty-first century. Similarly, that their publication dates range so widely further demonstrates just how expansive and important questions of trauma are, as well as the phallocentric hermeneutics that influence it.

By placing these three texts into conversation with Ford’s narrative, I want not only to emphasize the importance of realizing the complex ways the past influences the present, but also to argue that acknowledging this relationship and understanding its intricacies can, in fact, help us better address trauma and trauma victims. Our contemporary confrontations with trauma illustrate that trauma is not simply historically contingent but, rather, is a concept that is historically influenced; the “madness” that defined women in mid-Victorian psychiatry, Freud’s theory of castration anxiety, and the male theorization surrounding hysteria that coalesced during the fin de siècle directly influence what it means to be traumatized in the twenty-first century, how we understand and interpret trauma, and, consequently, how we decide who has been legitimately traumatized. This is not to say that these texts can act as therapeutic tools; I do not believe that reading these texts can help someone recover from trauma, nor do I believe that if everyone were to read these texts then trauma, especially towards women, would magically end. Instead, I believe that these texts can help us better understand how trauma comes to be culturally constructed and influenced by the very power dynamics that cause trauma in the first place, thereby changing our ideations of trauma itself. As each of these texts demonstrates, trauma is, in part, constituted by larger social and political practices and can be utilized as a patriarchal tool to uphold existing ideological structures. By understanding trauma both as a
symptom and a tool of phallocentrism, female trauma itself can possibly be reclaimed through narrative, reconceptualized not as a given female experience but rather as trauma that needs to be addressed and resolved. If we agree, as Astrid Erll argues, that literary representations of trauma “can have an impact on readers and can re-enter, through mimesis, the world of action, shaping, for example, perception, knowledge, and everyday communication, leading to political action—or prefiguring further representation,” then perhaps these texts, along with others, can inspire different ways of thinking that, in turn, can change reality for the better.34

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CHAPTER I

VILLETTE AND THE ETHICS OF KNOWING TRAUMA

Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?
– Ginevra, in *Villette*

Miss Brontë has written a hideous, undelightful, convulsed, constricted novel … one of the most utterly disagreeable books I ever read
– Matthew Arnold

What is it about *Villette* that, according to Matthew Arnold, makes the novel so disagreeable for the reader? Unlike the novel’s narrator, Lucy Snowe, who often conceals her thoughts and instead remains silent, Arnold is not reserved in explaining the reasoning behind his proclamation: “Why is *Villette* disagreeable? Because the writer’s mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion, and rage—and therefore that is all she can in fact put into her book.”35 As if presaging the argument made by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Lucy Snowe becomes the fictional embodiment of Brontë’s own anger towards the heteropatriarchal society in which she lived. However, whereas Brontë’s most well-known character, Jane Eyre, manages to separate herself from the literal madwoman in the attic, Bertha Mason, and ultimately demonstrates redeemable qualities, Lucy Snowe, to many critics and reviewers of the novel, remains enigmatic, a sphinx who refuses to tell us her secrets.36 Indeed, it is precisely Lucy’s narrative silences and elusions that make the novel at times feel constricted, since the narrator of this supposed fictional autobiography does not expose, as it is generally expected, all of the aspects of her life and interiority.

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36 Although I focus on the differences between Lucy’s and Jane’s traumatic experiences and the ways in which they narrate it, it is important to note that Bertha is arguably the main traumatized victim in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha’s trauma, in many ways, remains entirely unclaimed, as she is relegated to the attic and is never able to voice her trauma through narrative, other than the occasional scream or moan.
The extent to which Lucy’s narrative silences are employed on her own free will has remained arguable and critics often describe her as an unreliable narrator. Gilbert and Gubar claim that Lucy’s lack of narration is not her own doing but rather a symptom of her “submission” to the patriarchal culture that governs the novel. She is “locked into herself, defeated from the start” and is “tormented by the realization that she has bought survival at the price of never fully existing, escaped pain by retreating behind a dull, grave camouflage.”37 In contrast, other reviewers and critics give Lucy more agency, although they frame this agency in a negative way. For example, a nineteenth-century review written in *The Spectator* regarding *Villette*’s publication found that the novel offers “little that is cheerful or consoling” because “Lucy took a savage delight in refusing to be comforted, in a position indeed of isolation and hardship.”38 Although not as extreme as claiming that Lucy’s masochistic tendencies dominate her narration, Rachel Ablow, in a much more recent critical engagement with the text, states that Lucy “consistently baffles our curiosity, misleading us, mocking us, and teasing us with partial glimpses or vague outlines of states of affairs that she also identifies as critically important.”39

While giving more agency to Brontë’s narrator than Gilbert and Gubar do, Ablow nonetheless characterizes Lucy as devious and her relationship with the reader as one grounded on deception. This is, again, similar to Gregory O’Dea’s claim that Lucy shows “invidious contempt” towards her audience by “actively working to disorient” and demonstrating a “perverse, forbidding attitude toward the reader.”40

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With Lucy’s nature characterized in these ways, it is perhaps not surprising that Arnold found her narration to be undelightful and disagreeable. However, what is surprising is that these critics, despite acknowledging that she suffers from pain, isolation, and various hardships, do not consider the impacts that Lucy’s traumatic experience has on her narration and her relationship with witnesses and interlocuters, readers and her fictional counterparts alike. Similar to Brontë’s other female protagonist Jane Eyre, Lucy experiences a traumatic event, yet only the former seemingly inspires sympathy. In order to understand the different receptions towards these two characters, it is best to analyze both of their traumatic experiences in detail. Describing her events in the red room and the traumatizing affects it has on her psyche, Jane states:

I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern carried by some one across the lawn: but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot, a sound filled my ears … I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down … No severe or prolonged bodily illness followed this incident of the red-room; it only gave my nerves a shock of which I feel the reverberation to this day. Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering, but I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did: while rending my heart-strings, you thought you were only uprooting my bad propensities.41

Lucy narrates her traumatic incident in the following way:

Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass—the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest? Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen overboard, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time—a long time—of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own

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hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be
saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.\footnote{Charlotte Brontë, \textit{Villette} (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 39.}

It is useful to find similarities between these two recollections. Indeed, both Jane and Lucy
describe their traumas in terms of physical effect, and both describe the feeling of being
suffocated. Moreover, both emphasize that they experience mental reverberations of the trauma
and consequently suffer from long-term psychological damage.

What distinguishes these two narratives from one another is the amount of detail we
receive from each narrator. While Jane describes in detail what actually transpired in the red
room and what led to her being traumatized—the apparition of her deceased uncle—we do not at
this point, and in fact never in the novel, truly know what happened to Lucy and instead get an
allegorical account of some catastrophic event. What is particularly interesting in Lucy’s account
are her statements “I will permit the reader to picture me” and “it cannot be concealed.” These
two remarks perhaps help create the arguably fraught relationship between Lucy and her reader
that Ablow and others describe. Moreover, Lucy’s statements foreshadow the main narrative
challenge that \textit{Villette} offers. The first statement—“I will permit the reader to picture me”—
positions Lucy as the active member in the relationship between herself and the reader, a
relationship that readers often take for granted. Whereas Jane freely discloses intimate facts
about her subjectivity and allows readers to assume anything they want about her fictional
interiority, Lucy, here early in the novel, clearly demonstrates that as narrator she has control
over what she discloses to the reader, and that the epistemic relationship between her and the
reading audience should be a consensual one. The second remark—“it cannot be concealed”—
here acts ironically, since Lucy does indeed conceal what actually happened to her through her
allegorical narration. As Ablow argues, this could be interpreted as Lucy mocking or teasing the
reader. However, as this chapter will come to demonstrate, this statement by Lucy is accurate in that her trauma cannot be concealed if witnessed by a sympathetic interlocuter under the right circumstances.

Why, then, despite Gilbert and Gubar’s claim that her “story is perhaps the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written,” is Lucy’s character chastised and has *Villette* failed to gain the culturally currency that *Jane Eyre* has?43 The answer to this question ultimately depends on the expectations the reader has when approaching this fictional autobiography of trauma. To say that Lucy loses her narrative voice because of her disenfranchisement under patriarchy is to ignore the complex ways in which she uses her narrative silences to challenge male authority and phallocentric hermeneutics of trauma throughout the text. Similarly, to claim that Lucy’s silences are her intentional efforts to mislead, mock, or tease the interlocuter/reader is to cast blame on a traumatized victim who ultimately, despite *The Spectator*’s claim, seeks a sympathetic companion who can free her from isolation. What makes *Villette* at first seem difficult and contradictory is that Lucy realizes that she cannot both challenge her phallocentric culture by retaining autonomy over her trauma through silence while simultaneously inducing recovery through narration. Lucy’s narrative silences are un delightful and disagreeable only if we as witnesses approach her narration under the assumption that it is her responsibility to reveal intimate details about both her history and her current feelings. However, reading Lucy’s narration as one influenced by trauma reveals a narrative strategy that complicates the assumed responsibilities of a narrator/victim, and asks to what extent must a traumatized victim narrate their interiorities in order to gain sympathy from

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their reader/witness. In this regard, *Villette* challenges readers to consider their own ethical guidelines when responding to and witnessing trauma narratives.

Although Brontë’s novel predates the Ford-Kavanaugh hearing by over a century and a half, the important questions that *Villette* poses as a trauma narrative—how much we must know about a traumatized victim’s history to sympathize with them and how we go about obtaining this knowledge—transcend the temporal gap between the two and offer us valuable strategies for responding to even the most nascent testimonies of trauma. This is not to say that the trauma experienced by Lucy and Ford are the same—indeed, one is a real person and one is a fictional creation—even though both are influenced by the insidious traumas of a heteropatriarchal culture in varying amounts. In fact, Lucy has a certain degree of privilege given she that has the ability to remain silent, in some moments, if she chooses to. Rather, what connects these two cases is the way that witnesses come to know Lucy’s and Ford’s trauma, the epistemic methods they take to uncover and unearth otherwise private interiorities and painful memories, often times non-consensually. The narratives told by Ford and Lucy share many similarities, with the most significant being that, like Lucy’s, both Ford’s reliability as a narrator and the ways in which her audience sympathetically responds to her narrative are directly dependent on her memory and, more specifically, the amount of detail she narrates to her witnesses about her traumatic experience. The connection between Ford and Lucy is that, for both, this becomes an impossible situation: to refuse to speak is to admit that the trauma may not exist; to narrate, regardless how much, is to have their trauma interpreted as non-traumatic or in a way that does not correspond to their own experiences.

*Villette*’s critique of victim/witness power dynamics and unethical methods of knowing trauma can be extrapolated in order to help us better understand similar concerns with regard to
Ford’s testimony against Kavanaugh. From the beginning of the congressional hearing, Ford’s narrative is framed by the fact that knowledge of her traumatic history was obtained unethically and without her consent by being leaked to the press. The techniques of surveillance used against Lucy that will be discussed later—spying on her documents and “watching and spying everywhere, peering through every keyhole, listening behind every door”—are modernized yet retain their essential qualities in Ford’s narrative.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, Lucy’s physical letters are reincarnated as Ford’s digital messages; Beck’s “staff of spies” who haunt Lucy around the house are akin to the media who stalk Ford outside her home. Despite claiming that Ford “reiterated that she wanted her allegations held confidential” and chastising the media for the “shameful way that they treated the witness, who insisted on confidentiality,” Ford is nevertheless forced into an arena where surveillance dominates.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, although she states that she did not want to give her testimony and that she was “terrified” when doing so, Ford is made to narrate intimate details about her traumatic experience and, moreover, urged to recall these memories while being surveyed by members of congress, the wider public, and, perhaps most damaging, the accused himself. With her traumatic testimony transformed into a public spectacle, that this method of knowing Ford’s interiority is unethical becomes clear not only through her own visible emotional turmoil, but by the prosecutor herself, who reminds us that “the best way to interview victims of trauma is to … talk to them one-on-one in a private setting, and to let them do the talking, just let them do a narrative.”\textsuperscript{46} Although it is precisely this advice that she strives to follow, Lucy’s ability to “just do” a narrative without exterior pressure or influence is, similar to Ford’s own attempt, consistently challenged.

\textsuperscript{44} Brontë, \textit{Villette}, 81
\textsuperscript{45} “Kavanaugh Hearing,” \textit{The Washington Post}.
\textsuperscript{46} “Kavanaugh Hearing,” \textit{The Washington Post}.
Memory and narrative voice have been major components for both traditional psychological and literary trauma theory. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth, using the Freudian model, argues that the traumatic incident is traumatic precisely because it is *not* known or incorporated into the victim’s memory: “what returns to haunt the victim … is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known.”

Caruth thus insists that the victim experiences traumatic amnesia that leaves them unable to narrativize their experiences. In attempting to acknowledge and process the “inescapability of trauma’s belated impact,” narration has typically been considered the cure in traditional psychoanalytic approaches to trauma.

As Anna Hunter explains, “the most effective way of reducing the pathological symptoms of trauma in the survivor is to facilitate the conscious narration of the traumatic event, so that it may become lifted from the subconscious and integrated into conscious memory.” This process, previously known as the “talking cure,” is not a simple narration but, according to Dori Laub, necessarily a dialogic process. According to Laub, the witness/interlocuter of a trauma testimony must act as a “blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.”

This special relationship cannot take place between any two individuals; rather, “for the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*” (original emphasis).

This narratorial process of remembrance and recovery thus heavily relies not only on the speaker’s willingness to narrate their traumatic history but also on the presence of a distinctly sympathetic interlocuter,

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49 Anna Hunter, “The Holocaust as the Ultimate Trauma Narrative,” in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 68.
51 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony*, 70.
who, being a “blank screen,” does not interpret this narration through their own ideologies, allowing the victim to retain complete autonomy over their trauma.

More recent investigations into trauma and narrative have begun to question the assumptions made by scholars with regard to the victim’s memory and their ability to recall their traumatic event. These new interpretations are crucial for understanding both Lucy’s silences and Ford’s own apprehension when recalling her trauma. In Remembering Trauma, Richard McNally argues that traumatic amnesia does not exist; instead, victims of trauma can remember their experiences, but they may choose not to speak of them. For McNally, the reason why victims often do not wish to recall or discuss their traumatic incident is simple: “traumatic events from the past are recalled with such vividness and emotional intensity that it seems as if the trauma were happening all over again.”

Lucy’s description of her traumatic event thus aligns more closely with McNally’s interpretation than it does with the Freudian model used by Caruth. If we are to read Lucy’s description of her trauma from this perspective, McNally’s theory offers one possible answer as to why Lucy chooses to narrate it the way she does. Although Lucy’s recollection is filled with vividness and emotional intensity—the description of the pressure on her lungs and throat, for example—her reluctance to say what actually happened could be a

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53 It is important to note that no single interpretation of trauma aligns with every traumatic moment and how these moments affect an individual’s memory of the event. As Lucy herself states, the amount that one is able to recall can depend on the event itself: “certain junctures of our lives must always be difficult to recall to memory. Certain points, crises, certain feelings, joys, griefs, and amazements, when reviewed, must strike us as things wildered and whirling, dim as a wheel fast spun” (Brontë, Villette, 536). Lucy clearly remembers and is able to analyze and interpret the trauma moment that defines her narrative of loss and abandonment, but at other moments in the narrative she admits that she is unable to either recall or narrativize memories as Caruth describes. This is seen, for example, after Lucy’s confession to Silas, when she states, “where my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell … never whispering a word to memory, and baffling imagination by an indissoluble silence,” and during another potential moment of abandonment, respectively: “as to that week of suspense, with its blank, yet burning days … I can remember, but I cannot describe its passage” (Villette, 185, 489). However, I am not treating these subsequent moments for Lucy as traumatic; rather, they are triggers and symptoms of the traumatic experience she has previously narrated.
coping mechanism that prevents her from experiencing more psychological trauma.\textsuperscript{54} Ford herself clearly understands this and during her testimony frequently described the negative effects of recalling her traumatic experience. Stating that she “did her best to ignore the memories of assault, because recounting them caused her to relive the experience, and caused panic and anxiety,” Ford demonstrates that the problem is not so much her ability to remember but rather her reluctance to because of the potential for more trauma: “the events have been seared into my memory and have haunted me episodically as an adult.”\textsuperscript{55} This interpretation of trauma and silence aligns with the arguments made by Stef Craps, who states that silence might not indicate the victim’s inability to remember or integrate their trauma into their consciousness but rather a personal decision that one makes to better reconcile with their loss. Consequently, Lucy’s silence, not her narration, becomes necessary in her recovery process, “a conscious choice deserving of respect.”\textsuperscript{56}

To discuss the psychological and social dimensions of trauma in a novel like \textit{Villette}, despite it being published almost half a century before Freud would begin his investigation into the phenomena, is not as anachronistic as it might initially seem. Indeed, Freud’s techniques of studying an individual’s internal psyche and discovering repressed memories hidden in the subconscious did not form in a late-Victorian vacuum. Rather, in the decades leading up to Freud’s work, the Victorians demonstrated an increased fascination with uncovering the secrets of an interior subjectivity. Sally Shuttleworth, paraphrasing Foucault, argues that “the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of a new economy of individual and social life, centered on the

\textsuperscript{54} Interestingly, Ford, like Lucy and Jane, emphasizes the feeling of suffocation in her recollection: “Brett put his hand over my mouth to stop me from yelling. This is what terrified me the most and has had the most lasting impact on my life. It was hard for me to breathe.” See “Kavanaugh Hearing,” The Washington Post.
\textsuperscript{55} “Kavanaugh Hearing,” The Washington Post.
regulation of the forces of the body and controlled through surveillance. A new interiorized notion of selfhood arose, and, concomitantly, new techniques of power designed to penetrate the inner secrets of this hidden domain.\textsuperscript{57} The techniques of power that Foucault mentions included new forms of medical sciences. Shuttleworth notes that these interpretive methods sought to “decode the external signs of the body in order to reveal the concealed inner play of forces which constitute individual subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{58} Psychiatry and phrenology are two examples of medical sciences that sought to accomplish this ideological task of discovery. Many of these cultural strategies of surveillance appear in \textit{Villette}. Throughout the novel, Lucy’s subjectivity and her traumatic past become highly desired items within an epistemological battleground, as nearly all of her fellow characters use espionage and other surveillance techniques in an attempt to decipher her withheld interiority and history.\textsuperscript{59} The methods of surveillance are deployed within several different institutions of power. Consequently, both Lucy’s past history and present feelings are forcibly unearthed within her personal and professional lives, by individuals with both medical and religious authority. By actively refusing to provide details about herself and instead remaining silent, Lucy challenges the institutional and cultural obsessions with knowing and surveillance. And because Lucy’s history and interior subjectivity are both influenced by a traumatic incident that continues to affect her into the present narrative moment, her elusions are not simply a way for her to recover and memorialize her loss but are in fact more subversive,

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Sally Shuttleworth, \textit{Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Shuttleworth, \textit{Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology}, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Lucy is not exempt from practicing these methods of surveillance herself, as it is evidenced by her use of physiognomy to interpret a person’s character. Many of Lucy’s moments of surveillance, however, differ significantly when compared to those who attempt to spy on and know her. As will be discussed later, in terms of her interactions with Dr. John and Madame Beck, Lucy often assumes an acquiring, and therefore masculine, gaze in order to gain a type of epistemic authority and challenge those in positions of power. In other instances, Lucy spies on Beck and M. Paul spying on her and reading her personal letters. In these circumstances, Lucy’s act of espionage is indeed different because she uses surveillance to expose the unethical acts practiced by others.
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strategically critiquing the interpretive methods practiced by the novel’s fictional interlocuters as well as a burgeoning trauma culture that would eventually coalesce at the end of the century.

Lucy’s allegorical account of a shipwreck hints that her trauma stems from being the sole survivor of an unknown catastrophic incident, evidenced by the use of plural pronouns—“all hope that we should be saved was taken away”—and her concluding note that “the crew perished.” That Lucy includes herself as a victim of the experience through the use of “we,” despite the fact that she clearly survives physically, is telling. Coupled with her previous acknowledgement that she continues to feel the reverberations of her experience into the present moment, the description of Lucy’s trauma suggests that her subjectivity was altered in some fundamental way.\(^{60}\) Being orphaned both influences Lucy’s original decision to travel to Villette and affects her mental and emotional wellbeing while there. Claiming that she has nothing more to lose, Lucy chooses to move to Villette because she believes she has no one who would mourn her if she were to die in the process: “If I died far away from—home, I was going to say, but I had no home—from England, then, who would weep?”\(^{61}\) Similarly, when being diagnosed with homesickness by M. Paul towards the end of the novel, Lucy replies that “to be homesick, one must have a home; which I have not.”\(^{62}\) These two references to home or the lack thereof, one prior to moving to Villette and one after an extended stay there, illustrate the primary ethical

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\(^{60}\) Scholars have often assumed that Lucy suffers mentally and/or psychically, most likely either from depression or anxiety, both stemming from PTSD. Helen Cooper, for example, argues that Dr. John’s diagnosis that Lucy has a “nervous fever” correlates with what we would now consider depression. Lucy herself frequently notes that she suffers from some type of mental ailment, seen when she states, “I really believe my nerves are getting outstretched: my mind has suffered somewhat too much; a malady is growing upon it” (Brontë, *Villette*, 176). However, Lucy never fully discloses to the reader an exact condition, and I use the terms “hint,” “possibility,” and “suggest” because of this lack of confirmation. Furthermore, given her later critique of Dr. John’s interpretive methods and diagnosis of her, to assume what Lucy may be suffering from without her consensual narration of it, I believe, is counterproductive. For a further discussion of Lucy’s critical diagnoses, see Helen Cooper, introduction to *Villette*, ed. Helen Cooper (London: Penguin Books, 2016), vii-xlvi.

\(^{61}\) *Villette*, 55.

\(^{62}\) *Villette*, 402.
quest of the novel: that Lucy seeks a sympathetic companion and ultimately struggles to find one.

When taking into account Lucy’s traumatic history and her orphan status, the argument that Lucy takes savage delight in refusing to be comforted seems to be influenced by a complete misunderstanding of Lucy herself, one that recognizes her as a misanthrope rather than a victim. Referring to her recollection of the shipwreck, Lucy states that she “complained to no one about these troubles. Indeed, to whom could I complain?” Lucy’s comment demonstrates that it is precisely because of her traumatic experience and its repercussions that she feels as though she cannot be comforted by others, simply because she has no close connections left who can comfort her. As she further states, “there remained no possibility of dependence on others; to myself alone could I look. I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature; but self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances.” That Lucy is not naturally reclusive and instead seeks companionship in the form of an interlocuter who will act as a witness to her traumas is illustrated by her decision to partake in a Catholic confession despite being Protestant. With her trauma influenced by abandonment, being left alone at the school while the others are on vacation triggers in Lucy a specific emotional and mental response characterized by depressive states that emphasize her current solitude: “my heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises!” Lucy’s near mental collapse causes her to seek an emergency confessional with Pere Silas. In her diminished state, Lucy acknowledges that, despite not being a proper interlocuter, Silas’s presence is still

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63 Villette, 39.
64 Villette, 40.
65 Villette, 173.
comforting: “I had not expected he would be [furnished with counsel fitting the circumstances.] but the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet consecrated—the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused—had done me good. I was already solaced.”

Lucy’s confession to Silas illustrates the cross-temporal importance of a private, consensual testimonial that the prosecutor in Ford’s case stressed. Yet while Lucy is momentarily allowed to narrate her trauma in an appropriate setting, her relationship with Silas is nonetheless flawed, and he fails to take on the role of a sympathetic witness that she desires. Two aspects of Lucy’s narration to Silas are important when understanding her frequent decisions to remain silent to other characters close to her. First, as opposed to Madam Beck, Dr. John, and M. Paul, all of whom frequently attempt to gain access to her selfhood without her consent, Lucy here voluntarily chooses to disclose details about her life and interiority. Second, although her confession to Silas offers a momentary repose from her mental anguish, Lucy understands that Silas’s own subjective position and interpretive method, in this case being Catholic, prevents them from having a dialogic relationship. Indeed, Silas himself understands that their religious differences prevent him from being a fully compassionate interlocuter, telling Lucy that her narrative “marks a great break in the common course of confession” and that “were she of our faith I should know what to say.”

While Silas acts as a temporary witness, his refusal to alter his expectations of what he thinks Lucy’s confession should be, how she should narrate it, and under what conditions it should be spoken, prohibits him from forming the relationship with Lucy that she longs for. Using his own religious standpoint and misreading Lucy’s narratorial practices, Silas assumes that her confession will “become formal and trivial with

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66 Villette, 179.
67 Villette, 179.
Moreover, Lucy comprehends that whatever compassion Silas may have is influenced by his own selfish wants: “had I gone to him, he would have shown me all that was tender, and comforting, and gentile, in the honest popish superstition. Then he would have tried to kindle, blow and stir up in me the zeal of good works.” For Lucy, Silas fails to be a proper interlocuter because his own prejudices and expectations prohibit him from witnessing her confessional trauma narrative partially, instead appropriating her trauma in order to accomplish his own religious agenda. For Silas, Lucy’s recovery lies in standard Catholic religious practices, not through the process of writing what he would deem a “heretic narrative.”

Lucy’s interaction with Silas demonstrates that a proper witness must be, as Laub argues, a “blank screen,” an individual free of expectations as to how a victim should narrate their trauma or how they should recover from it. For Lucy, a proper interlocuter sympathizes with her traumatic experiences based on her experiences alone, rather than being interpreted through their own subjective standpoint. This belief influences her own relationships with both Paulina and Miss Marchmont, two victims to varying degrees who confide in Lucy, placing her in the position of witness to their suffering. What makes these two relationships significant is that each victim suffers hardships and/or traumas that result from feelings of abandonment similar to Lucy’s own. However, a key factor differentiates the two: Lucy’s interaction with Paulina takes place before her own traumatic experience, while her relationship with Miss Marchmont happens afterwards, and this indeed changes the way Lucy acts in each situation.

Paulina expresses an intensified, perhaps exaggerated form of Lucy’s desires to find a sympathetic companion as a result of abandonment, with her dependency issues stemming from

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68 Villette, 179.
69 Villette, 180.
70 Villette, 180.
an apparently neglectful mother who has since died, leaving her to obsess over having an intimate connection with both her father and Graham. Whereas Lucy seeks to remain on equal terms with her interlocuter and keep her interior selfhood private unless revealed through a consensual narrative, Paulina takes this relationship further, wishing to “live, move, and have her being in another … to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence.” Upon being rejected by Graham, Paulina illustrates that her pain is influenced by the emotional affect that this rejection causes, asking Lucy, “have you no pain just here (laying her elfish hand on her elfish breast,) when you think you shall have to leave Graham?” In this moment, Paulina seeks a sympathetic witness to her pain, but the sympathy she seeks is one influenced by subjective experience rather than objective compassion; in this case, the trauma would no longer be Paulina’s but rather Lucy’s, the attention placed on how Lucy interprets and experiences a situation rather than Paulina herself. By not answering Paulina’s question, Lucy engages in the same practices she later champions in her relationships with Madame Beck, Dr. John, and M. Paul. That is, rather than interpreting Paulina’s potential trauma through her own biased viewpoint, Lucy instead comforts Paulina through a dialogic conversation and sympathetic gestures: “I took her in. She was chill; I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her. Thus tranquillized and cherished she at last slumbered.” Lucy relieves Paulina’s pain by providing the emotional support needed alleviate her feelings of abandonment, in this case making her feel cherished. These actions consequently have an immediate positive effect on Paulina’s psychological and emotional wellbeing: “She departed the next day; trembling like a leaf when she took leave, but exercising self-command.”

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71 Villette, 29.
72 Villette, 38.
73 Villette, 38.
74 Villette, 38.
Lucy’s employment by Miss Marchmont occurs after her traumatic experience and is therefore heavily influenced by it. As in to her confession with Silas, Lucy’s desire to find companionship is demonstrated through this relationship; recently orphaned, Lucy describes her connection with Miss Marchmont as a “little morsel of human affection which she prized as if it were a solid pearl.”

Lucy’s ability to connect with Miss Marchmont is, in part, grounded in their suffering of similar traumas caused by abandonment; as with Lucy, Miss Marchmont loses a close companion in a tragic accident and has “suffered since.”

The primary difference between her relations with Paulina and Miss Marchmont is that, in the latter, Lucy’s connection moves beyond sympathy and into empathy. Whereas Lucy before critiqued Paulina’s desire to achieve a type of empathetic unity with Graham based upon shared feelings and existence, she now experiences something very similar with Miss Marchmont: “two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty—her pain, my suffering—her relief, my hope—her anger, my punishment—her regard, my reward.”

For Lucy, her relationship with Miss Marchmont represents an ideal connection between two individuals, one characterized by empathetic understanding. Once again, we see Lucy taking the role of a dialogic witness to a consensually-narrated traumatic experience, this time when her employer tells the story of losing her husband. And as it did with Paulina, this

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75 Villette, 42.
76 Villette, 46.
77 Villette, 42.
78 I describe Lucy’s relationship with Miss Marchmont here as empathetic because it seems to go beyond just sympathy. Lucy’s association with Miss Marchmont seems innocent here, but trauma scholars have cautioned against expressing empathy toward a trauma victim as a form of compassion. Specifically, Dominick LaCapra recommends affective engagement while also keeping a certain distance, strategically navigating between sympathy and overidentification with another individual’s trauma. This is to ensure that the trauma is not appropriated and instead belongs solely to the victim. However, Lucy’s relationship with Miss Marchmont, as it will be later discussed, stands in contrast to her relationship with the novel’s patriarchal figures. Whereas the masculine characters attempt to read Lucy’s trauma through their own interpretations, thereby threatening to mark Lucy’s trauma as “unclaimed,” here Miss Marchmont empathetically shares her trauma while retaining autonomy over it. For a further discussion of trauma’s relationship with empathy, see Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
produces a positive impact; rather than re-experiencing her trauma through narration, Miss Marchmont’s recollection of her husband’s passing allows her to experience “deep delight … bringing back to her heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities … that I long have thought decayed.”

The difference between these two interactions is also inspired by a more insidious, societal influence that Lucy herself clearly understands. Explaining the reasoning behind the fear that Graham does not express as much care for or as intense an emotional attachment to Paulina as she does for him, Lucy bases this difference first on their gender: “Paulina, you should not grieve that Graham does not care for you so much as you care for him. It must be so … because he is a boy and you are a girl.” For Paulina, who has yet to bear the “shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations” of the wider world, the amount of affection that she feels toward Graham should necessarily be reciprocated in the same amount, yet Lucy, older and more aware of these gender relations, realizes this is not possible. This same reason is used to explain why Lucy is able to connect so closely with Miss Marchmont and experience the intimate solidarity that Paulina desires with Graham. Not only do their similar traumatic experiences bring them closer together, but the dynamics of their relationship as two women in particular allow Lucy to have a “view of a character she could respect.” Consequently, the power dynamics associated with a “harsh mistress lecturing her dependent” transform into those of an “irascible mother rating her daughter.”

79 Villette, 43-4.
80 Villette, 37.
81 Villette, 37.
82 Villette, 41.
83 Villette, 41.
Lucy’s relationship with Miss Marchmont thus stands in complete contrast to her relationship with her next employer, Madame Beck. Whereas the prior relationship is based on consent, in terms of both Miss Marchmont’s consensual narration of her past history and her allowing Lucy to gain access to her present interior subjectivity—“she gave Lucy the originality of her character to study” (emphasis mine)—Madame Beck demonstrates that she follows the Victorian cultural obsession with gaining access to an individual’s otherwise hidden selfhood.84 Lucy’s first encounter with Beck illustrates this accordingly: “She asked my name, my age; and sat and looked at me—not pityingly, not with interest: never a gleam of sympathy, or shade of compassion, crossed her countenance during the interview. I felt she was not one to be led an inch by her feelings: grave and considerate, she gazed, consulting her judgement and studying my narrative.”85 The narrative that Lucy offers Beck, one here based on consent and how much Lucy wants to disclose about herself, is ultimately not enough to satisfy Beck’s thirst for knowledge. Consequently, despite claiming herself that Lucy tells a narrative “full of integrity,” Beck nevertheless uses phrenology in her attempt to penetrate into Lucy’s interior: “she meant to see through me … a veil would be no veil for her.”86 Beck’s quest to know all she can about Lucy leads her to spy on her employee’s belongings and letters in order to access otherwise private information. Lucy judges Beck’s surveillance in terms of its ethical ramifications, acknowledging that her employer’s methods of knowing were “hardly fair or justifiable.”87 This “system of managing and regulating” places Beck in a power position above Lucy; as opposed to Miss Marchmont, where the positions between employer and employee collapse through

84 Villette, 42.
85 Villette, 72.
86 Villette, 73.
87 Villette, 77.
compassion and sympathy, Beck’s “ruling by espionage” grants her epistemic authority and, consequently, prevents the possibility of her being a sympathetic companion.88

The disempowerment that Lucy experiences with Beck is influenced by the phallocentric ideology that affects female trauma victims. Looking at Beck’s face, Lucy observes: “at that instant, she did not wear a woman’s aspect, but rather a man’s. Power of a particular kind strongly lined itself in all her traits, and that power was not my kind of power: neither sympathy, nor congeniality … were the emotions it awakened.”89 As in the relationship between Graham and Paulina, Lucy acknowledges the complex dynamics between power, gender, and sympathy; because Beck takes on a masculine persona, the power distinctions between the two prevent sympathy from forming. That Beck is the only woman in Lucy’s narrative to actively desire and obtain access to Lucy’s interior in such unethical ways and to such an extent while simultaneously having a masculine presence mirrors the phallocentric power structures that underwrite Victorian obsessions with surveillance. As Shuttleworth explains, Western science during the nineteenth century was in many ways a byproduct of the discourse present in the wider heteropatriarchal Victorian society: “male science unveils female nature, piercing through her outer layers to reveal her hidden secrets.”90 Consequently, to have power one must know the other while simultaneously remaining unknown to the other. This indeed explains why Lucy feels disempowered within Beck’s realm of surveillance, as Beck obtains access to Lucy through

88 Ford acknowledges a similar relationship between her and her potential witnesses who unethically seek to uncover her past: “I have seen my life picked apart by people on television, on Twitter, other social media, other media, and in this congressional body, who have never met me or spoken with me.” See “Kavanaugh Hearing,” The Washington Post.
89 Villette, 86.
90 Shuttleworth, 9.
espionage while Lucy is left to wonder “of what nature were the conclusions deduced from this scrutiny.”

Understanding the phallocentric influences behind knowledge and power thus helps us interpret Lucy’s silences not as a result of her disempowerment by patriarchy but, rather, as her active refusal to allow a masculine interpretation of her interiority, a critique of phallocentric practices, and as a strategy to retain autonomy over her own trauma. Read in conjunction with the compromised ethical strategies of Madame Beck, Lucy’s act of silence during an early encounter with Dr. John demonstrates political and potentially subversive implications. Caught gazing at him with the help of a “clear little oval mirror fixed in the side of the window recess – by the aid of which reflector Madame often secretly spied persons walking in the garden below,” Lucy’s refusal to respond to Dr. John’s probing question is a direct challenge to the patriarchal history of psychiatry that places women in positions of passivity as objects to be studied and interpreted. Indeed, Dr. John’s diagnosis of Lucy’s feelings is suggested to be an impulse reaction to her troubling the power dynamics on which the novel’s system of surveillance relies, a fight-or-flight response to an action that made him “ill at ease under a direct, inquiring gaze.” Consequently, in a narrative where power is directly dependent on the ability to know, Lucy’s act of silence in this situation is, perhaps paradoxically, more politically challenging than if she were

91 Villette, 77. Lucy illustrates this point further when she herself experiences epistemic authority over Beck: “Two minutes I stood over Madame, feeling that the whole woman was in my power, because in some moods, such as the present—in some stimulated states of perception, like that of this instant—her habitual disguise, her mask and her domino, were to me a mere network reticulated with holes; and I saw underneath a being heartless, self-indulgent, and ignoble” (Villette, 494). In this moment, Lucy acquires the gaze necessary to peer into Beck’s interior. It is significant, also, that in this interaction Beck no longer has a masculine persona but is rather described as a “whole woman.”

92 It is important to note that Lucy here acknowledges that her own act of gazing is potentially unethical, despite it being consensual: “it was perhaps not my business to observe the mystery of his bearing, or search out its origin of aim; but, placed as I was, I could hardly help it. He laid himself open to my observation.” Lucy again critiques gendered power relations with her claim that Dr. John “never remembered that she had eyes in her head, much less a brain behind them” (Villette, 108).

93 Villette, 108.

94 Villette, 108.
to reject his interpretation through speech. Lucy is “rather soothed than irritated by [this] misconception” precisely because she remains in complete control over her own interiority, diminishing his epistemic authority within this situation.⁹⁵ And because Lucy, it is suggested, is offended by his misrecognition and limited interpretation of her, her silence in this situation stands as a critique of both Dr. John and Madame Beck’s epistemological paradigm, their overt desire to exteriorize the private in an effort to obtain interpretive power rather than to be a compassionate interlocutor.

Dr. John’s misrecognition of Lucy’s interior transpires again when he tries to understand, interpret, and cure her “nervous fever” as a professional psychiatrist. Yet just as Silas’s religious standpoint prevents him from being a dialogic interlocuter because he cannot sympathize with her outside of his own interpretive lens, so too does Dr. John fail to comfort Lucy in a time of need. With his professional viewpoint guided by the patriarchal power structures that influenced Victorian psychiatry, Lucy acknowledges that Dr. John cannot understand her—“mine was a state of mind out of his experience”—without either nonconsensually gaining access to her own subjectivity or interpreting her traumatic experiences and recommending cures based on his own subjective experiences.⁹⁶ Dr. John exercises his professional desire to “read” Lucy’s pain with or without her consent: “‘Don’t come in,’ said I to him; but he stepped a moment into the well-lighted vestibule. I had not wished him to see that ‘the water stood in my eyes’ … He always wished to heal—to relieve—when, physician as he was, neither cure nor alleviation were, perhaps, in his power.”⁹⁷ Lucy’s statement suggests that Dr. John’s power, in a professional sense, lies in his ability to cause pain rather than alleviate it, which he demonstrates by taking

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⁹⁵ *Villette*, 108.
⁹⁶ *Villette*, 254.
⁹⁷ *Villette*, 254.
her letter. Clearly not understanding that Lucy’s trauma stems from abandonment, Dr. John’s
decision to momentarily hide Lucy’s letter triggers in Lucy an intense emotional reaction that
causes her to “grop[e] on the floor, wringing her hands wildly” and feel as though her “bit of
comfort had been preternaturally snatched from her.”98 That Dr. John cannot understand and
sympathize with Lucy’s pain and instead interprets it through his own experiences is illustrated
through his suggestion that Lucy simply “cultivate happiness” as a way to cure her apparent
mental illusions of the nun.99 For Lucy, Dr. John’s advice is nothing other than “hollow”; for Dr.
John, Lucy’s ability to simply obtain happiness should come as easily as it does for him: “And
why, Lucy, can’t you look and feel as I do – buoyant, courageous, and fit to defy all the
nuns?”100 In both circumstances, Dr. John fails provide the necessary help that Lucy needs in the
form of a compassionate witness to her trauma. And although Lucy at first takes comfort in
misrecognition, this too eventually begins to wear on her emotionally. Lucy’s realization that Dr.
John has an “entire misapprehension of her character and nature” and that “he wanted always to
give her a role not hers,” despite originally giving her a sense of epistemic authority, stands in
contrast with her quest to find a companion.101

This quest ultimately leads Lucy to an unlikely companion in the form of M. Paul. The
initial dynamics of their relationship demonstrates in many ways all of the critiques that Lucy
gives, whether verbally or non-verbally, throughout her narrative. Although M. Paul interprets
correctly that Lucy is in need of a friend due to her homelessness and abandonment, his
recommendation of a cure for her trauma, that she needs “checking, regulating, and watching

98 Villette, 274.
99 Dr. John’s misdiagnosis of Lucy as someone suffering from hallucinations further degrades his professional
authority. Moreover, that the nun, something that causes Lucy severe emotional distress, is a man-made problem
like the letter further suggests that Lucy’s suffering is in many ways socially and environmentally, rather than
psychologically, determined.
100 Villette, 279.
101 Villette, 352.
over,” echoes the obsessions with surveillance manifested by Beck and Dr. John.\textsuperscript{102} And indeed, similar to those two as well, M. Paul bases this interpretation on acts of espionage and voyeurism, claiming to know Lucy’s interior desires based on his own subjective view of female nature, which he “knows by heart.”\textsuperscript{103} Lucy here again critiques M. Paul’s interpretative strategies and argues that his epistemic methods are unethical. Yet M. Paul further counters Lucy’s critique with the same reasoning used by Silas: practicing a different religion prevents him from sympathizing and understanding Lucy.

With their relationship initially framed this way, it is surprising that M. Paul becomes the sympathetic interlocuter who engages with Lucy in the dialogic conversation that she needs. M. Paul’s presence allows Lucy to orate a final narrative that confirms that she, under the right circumstances, possesses eloquent narratorial abilities: “I spoke. All leaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue.”\textsuperscript{104} What makes M. Paul a particularly good interlocuter in this concluding moment is that he has seemingly lost all of the negatives that Lucy previously critiqued. Instead of checking her, which he originally claimed Lucy needed based on his own interpretation of her selfhood, M. Paul now “incited her to proceed; spurring her by the gesture, the smile, the half-word.”\textsuperscript{105} In this moment, M. Paul once again takes on a “piercing glance,” yet this gaze no longer holds the patriarchal power it once held; rather than seeking a hidden interior nonconsensually, his gaze now “tended neither to calm nor to put her down.”\textsuperscript{106} The reason for this transformation is that M. Paul is now following the recommendations that Lucy has championed throughout the novel. As a witness to

\textsuperscript{102} Villette, 403.
\textsuperscript{103} Villette, 403.
\textsuperscript{104} Villette, 540.
\textsuperscript{105} Villette, 541.
\textsuperscript{106} Villette, 541.
a trauma narrative, M. Paul leaves all subjective expectations and interpretations behind: “he forgot his own doctrine, he forsook his own system of repression.” Taking Lucy’s narrative for what it is and nothing more, M. Paul provides Lucy with what she has searched for all along: “I was full of faults; he took them and me all home.”

Lucy’s solace with M. Paul is seemingly momentary, as she concludes her narrative with the possibility that her companion dies at sea. However, as with her original traumatic experience, Lucy never discloses to the reader what actually happened. What Lucy offers instead is one final challenge, urging us to “conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror … to picture union and a happy succeeding life.” That Lucy encourages us to imagine this situation in particular is not by accident, as the typical Victorian fictional autobiography ends with a fulfilling heterosexual marriage. As readers of this genre, we expect that Lucy, like Jane Eyre, will follow these conventions, yet this does not turn out to be the case. This is not to say that Lucy’s narrative does not provide examples of the traditional formula we expect from the genre. Whereas Lucy does not satisfy the reader’s assumed expectations, Paulina Home does, as we see her development from a child to a young woman, which culminates in her marriage to Dr. John. Indeed, a narrative arc similar to Paulina’s is arguably what Lucy desires most, complete with a companion and, quite literally, a “Home.” Why does Paulina conform to our expectations, while Lucy, the novel’s narrator and protagonist, does not? The answer to this question becomes clear when understanding the complexities of trauma and the impact it can have on narrative. As a narrative influenced by trauma, Lucy’s tale reminds us that we cannot expect a typical narrative pattern. As Hunter explains, trauma narratives, and in this case a

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107 Villette, 541.
108 Villette, 541.
109 Villette, 546.
fictional autobiography, can challenge the reader’s expectations by confronting them with a narrative arc that presents a “reversal of the traditional pattern of growth, and the absence of a felt resolution.”\footnote{Hunter, “The Holocaust as the Ultimate Trauma Narrative,” 77.} What we get instead is a “narrative that does not and cannot meet with the reader’s expectations born out of generic tradition.”\footnote{Hunter, 77.} Perhaps more importantly, to assume anything about Lucy’s narrative without her own disclosure or consent—to assume an ending to her narrative based on our own subjective expectations—is to participate in an unethical act that she has cautioned against all along. Lucy’s narrative, like her narrative to Silas, is disagreeable and rebellious because it makes a great break from the common course of confession. It is ultimately up to us, however, to choose how we react to this rebellion: to either, like Beck, Dr. John, and Silas, keep our expectations, to judge Lucy for the amount she does not tell us, or to take Lucy’s narrative for what it is and offer the sympathy she desires.

In a narrative where a traumatic history is always relevant yet never fully disclosed, \textit{Villette} challenges readers to address their own position as interlocutor and the ethical concerns that arise from occupying this role. This can, in turn, help us respond appropriately to modern trauma narratives such as Ford’s. In her opening remark during the hearing, Senator Feinstein stated that the most damning aspect of the case was not Ford’s narrative itself but rather how her witnesses responded to it, ultimately critiquing the “unwillingness to take these kinds of allegations at face value and look at them for what they are.” Ford’s narrative is very similar to Lucy’s in that she does not perform victimhood in a way that some individuals are expecting; like Lucy, who is oftentimes blamed for her own suffering and seen as someone who manipulates her audience, so too is Ford often characterized as a “witness whose memories

\footnote{Hunter, “The Holocaust as the Ultimate Trauma Narrative,” 77.} \footnote{Hunter, 77.}
change at her convenience,” someone who enjoys intentionally deceiving her audience. Yet this misguided view is influenced by a failure to recognize the complexities of trauma and the dynamics that arise between victim/witness, knowing and not knowing. If we fail to do so, we miss our chance to provide the sympathy that trauma victims need and instead risk the possibility of revictimization. We likely still desire to know more about Lucy’s past, present feelings, and trauma by the novel’s end. As in Ford’s case, this may affect the amount of sympathy we feel for her. But we must ultimately acknowledge that Lucy’s “system of feeling” as a trauma victim, and how that affects what she chooses to narrate, is more important than our own. Rather than forming an unethical relationship with Lucy based on our desire to discover and interpret her, Lucy’s testimony is intentionally vague precisely because it challenges us to not suppose whatever may lie in the narrative gaps and rather to be a sympathetic listener despite her many silences.

113 *Villette*, 196.
CHAPTER II

“PROOFS OF SO WILD A STORY”: REPRESENTING COMMUNAL TRAUMA IN DRACULA

‘My thesis is this: I want you to believe.’
‘To believe what?’
‘To believe in things that you cannot.’
—Van Helsing and Dr. Seward, in Dracula

At the conclusion of Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel Dracula, the main characters return to Transylvania, the site where their battle with the eponymous villain took place. Despite having, at this point in the novel, over three hundred pages worth of documentation which gives testimonial accounts to their traumatizing encounter with Dracula and other vampires, Jonathan Harker notes that the group nonetheless struggles to successfully incorporate their memories into their imagination and to understand them as a reality: “it was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths.”114 Shortly thereafter, Harker expands this dilemma to the documents the characters wrote and thus the novel itself, stating that “in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of type-writing, except the later notebooks of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing’s memorandum. We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story.”115 Although Van Helsing proclaims that the group wants “no proofs” and asks for “none to believe them,” the novel’s initial editorial note, presumed to be written by Harker himself, suggests another interpretation.116 Indeed, that “all needless matters have been eliminated, so that history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact,” speaks to the

114 Bram Stoker, Dracula (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 326.
115 Stoker, Dracula, 326-7.
116 Stoker, 327.
novel’s status as a cultural artifact, one that was intentionally edited and curated to meet its intended purpose as a historical document which seeks to validate, to assert the truth of, a widespread, collective, and cultural trauma that may seem unimaginable.117

Shifting from *Villette*, a trauma narrative focused on a singular traumatic experience, to a novel like *Dracula*, one focused on collective trauma, allows us to make a similar shift in our explorations of the connections between nineteenth-century texts and Ford’s testimony against Kavanaugh. While it is indeed Ford’s individual experience that is surveyed and interpreted, members of the Committee and Ford herself emphasized how her testimony was not just about her trauma but rather the communal, group trauma of being a woman in a heteropatriarchal culture, one that silences victims of sexual assault and, consequently, normalizes its traumatizing effects. Thus, just as the records presented in *Dracula* attempt to validate a trauma that is seemingly unimaginable because of its scope, so too does Ford attempt to bring recognition to the widespread cultural trauma of female rape that, similar to Dracula’s assault on the novel’s characters and Western values more widely, is regarded as unbelievable due to its magnitude. Consequently, in narratives where the narration itself is essential in bringing awareness to widespread atrocities, the connection between the trauma in *Dracula* and that in Ford’s testimony lies precisely in how to represent these atrocities in the best, most convincible way to inspire believability.

Although a significant concern for Ford’s testimony was her ability to remember the traumatic event and whether she could vocalize it—she claims that she could and she chose to narrate it—another large component of the hearing was focused on how she narrated it. Indeed, claiming that it was her “civil duty” to speak, Ford’s narrative had both a political purpose, in

117 Stoker, 5.
that she wanted to change the way sexual trauma is understood in the cultural sphere, and a rhetorical purpose, in that she had to convince both the Senate Judiciary Committee and the wider public that her traumatic experience did, in fact, take place.\(^\text{118}\) That Ford’s testimony was a rhetorical argument corresponds to the hearing itself, where detail and accuracy were the main methods of determining whether or not her traumatic event was real. Consequently, the narrative was delivered precisely, with Ford recounting minute details in highly descriptive ways. Ford was, in many facets, successful in this endeavor; members of the committee praised her accuracy and assured her that the events she narrated were believable. News outlets were quick to follow, with Dylan Scott of *Vox* reporting that “Most people got their first direct look at Ford, and the overwhelming consensus, from right, left, and center alike, was that she was a credible and compelling witness.”\(^\text{119}\) Scott’s statement is significant in its description of Ford as a witness: credible and compelling. What this characterization demonstrates is that empiricism was not the only necessary component of Ford’s rhetorical argument. Indeed, in order for Ford’s testimony to be taken as real and believable, a certain amount of emotional sensationalism was necessary. Describing her testimony as a “gripping retelling” of the original event, Scott notes that Ford’s “voice cracked, she seemed clearly nervous, and she often looked on the edge of tears.”\(^\text{120}\) Moreover, Scott states that different modes of telling brought on different emotional impacts: “The contents of Ford’s testimony were already known, as her written statement had been posted the night before, but reading it in writing and seeing Ford recall the alleged assault in real life were two wholly different experiences.”\(^\text{121}\) Ford’s testimony, then, is about narrative and


\(^{120}\) Scott, “7 Moments.”

\(^{121}\) Scott, “7 Moments.”
narrative mode. Walking the thin line between objectivity and subjectivity, Ford needed both the logos—the empirical accuracy—to be credible and the pathos—the emotional appeal—to be compelling in order to make her account believable.

Yet the connection with representation between Ford’s hearing and Dracula also extends to how the victims themselves are represented as victims. Representing widespread trauma is often complicated by ideological structures that strategically manipulate narratives, inverting the power dynamics between the perpetrator and the victim in ways that radically alter who occupies these roles. This occurs often in contemporary politics and especially in narratives of trauma. Take, for example, the “national emergency” of illegal immigrants declared by Donald Trump. For Trump, immigration challenges his own ideological system. Being in a position of power, Trump has the ability to change the immigration narrative as he seems fit. Consequently, immigrants at the border are no longer victims of communal trauma caused by psychic and corporal damage but are, rather, perpetrators of trauma on American society. This process affected Ford’s testimony against Kavanaugh, as the dynamics of rape culture are also influenced by shifting narratives. Laura Brown reminds us that, because sexual violence does not exist outside of the range of human experience—an experience that privileges the male position and a masculine subjectivity—it is often not considered trauma by many witnesses. Brown’s analysis helps explain why some supporters of Kavanaugh were quick to describe him as the real victim in the situation rather than Ford; as a white, educated male, it is Kavanaugh whose life was disrupted, whereas Ford’s encounter, regardless of whether it really happened or not, is a typical human (i.e., female) experience. As I will discuss later, Dracula too navigates the complexities of how communal trauma is narratively framed. The victims in Dracula are undeniably the females, but the way this trauma is represented signifies their bodies not as traumatized
victims—to be traumatized as a female is an already assumed position—but rather as dangerous perpetrators. Thus, this chapter will first discuss representation in terms of narrative mode, examining the ways in which the characters navigate various discursive regimes in order to make their trauma “real.” I then turn to the representation of victimhood and discuss why the traumatized females fail to achieve the status of “real” victims. Ultimately, I argue that both the Crew of Light’s failure to signify the women as traumatized and its failure, as Harker notes, to provide “proofs so wild a story” are caused by the very phallocentric hermeneutics of its writers.\textsuperscript{122}

The contradictory claims that bookend Dracula’s narrative—one that positions the events as entirely inconceivable outside of a cultural imaginary and one tries to validate the events—attest to the novel’s status not only as a text that deals with trauma and its impacts on memory, but also as one directly concerned with trauma’s complex relationship with representation and reader reception. As a text that narrates the traumatic encounters with vampires through various styles ranging from epistolary diary entries and newspaper clippings, to stenographic text and phonographic recordings, Dracula acts as a case study, a document that explores the possibilities, limitations, and consequences of representing expansive trauma within various discourse regimes.\textsuperscript{123} In this regard, Stoker’s text finds many similarities with scholarly accounts of cultural trauma studies, which often investigate literature’s potential to, in the words of Anne Whitehead, “narrate the unnarratable.”\textsuperscript{124} It is important to acknowledge that trauma plays a

\textsuperscript{122} “Crew of Light” is Christopher Craft’s title for the group consisting of Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, Quincey Morris, Arthur Holmwood, and Jonathan Harker. See Christopher Craft, “‘Kiss me with Those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s Dracula,” Representations, no. 8 (1984): 120.

\textsuperscript{123} As a widespread cultural trauma that exceeds imaginability, the Holocaust has been a fruitful example of this pursuit (i.e., in what format can a tragedy like the Holocaust be best represented and inscribed as knowable in cultural memory?). For a longer discussion on the Holocaust as a collective trauma and its relationship with representation, see Anna Hunter, “The Holocaust as the Ultimate Trauma Narrative,” in Trauma and Literature, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 66-82.

large role in the historical circumstances surrounding *Dracula*’s publication as well. Being Irish, it is safe to assume that Stoker drew at least some inspiration from the Great Famine that devastated Ireland during the mid-nineteenth century. As Joseph Valente states, “Ireland and the Irish Question may be said to constitute the ‘other scene’ of *Dracula*, a never fully present correlative to the official narrative … at once a supplementary shadow term and the novel’s ultimate object of reference.”

Thus, Harker’s exploration of the unknown East and Dracula’s journey into England mirrors both British imperialism and its colonial occupation of Ireland and the immense emigration of the Irish to England that occurred as a result of the famine. Similarly, the emphasis on blood and hunger in the novel quite literally to the communal trauma of starvation that the Irish endured. This is not to say that Stoker’s fictional account of a vampiric takeover is equivalent to the real-world tragedies of the Great Famine; however, as Harker’s doubts of his own traumatic history and testimony imply, *Dracula* is similar in that it likewise emphasizes a crisis of truth with regard to a collective traumatic event and positions itself as a text concerned with validating its events as historically accurate to both the characters themselves as well as to the wider reading public. Consequently, the vampiric attack in *Dracula* follows Whitehead’s understanding of collective traumatic events like the Great Famine in that the “crisis extends beyond the individual to affect the ways in which historical experience can be accessed at the wider cultural level.”

Recent scholarly investigation into the relationship between trauma and narrative representation shifts the focus away from what a traumatized victim remembers to, instead, how trauma is recollected. Since trauma studies are typically oriented toward the modernist period,

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scholars often conclude that the modernist novel and its related techniques of gaps, elusions, and repetitions are the most productive methods for narrativizing traumatic experiences. Although Jennifer Wicke argues that Dracula is the “first great modern novel in British literature,” mainly because of Mina’s frequent use of the typewriter, it is important to recognize that it is a fin de siècle text nonetheless, and thus one that predates what could be considered “modernist” fiction. Accordingly, Dracula represents trauma in a way that corresponds to its historical situation, that is, a representation based on Victorian empiricism and realism. Mina illustrates this through a description of her own record keeping, stating that “you must be able to put down exactly almost every word spoken, even if you had to refine some of it afterwards … I shall try to record it verbatim.” To represent the trauma inflicted by Dracula in a narrative format, to know this trauma, is one of the novel’s ultimate goals, because to know more about Dracula is to defeat him and, by extension, to work through and overcome the trauma inflicted.

Harker’s conclusion at the novel’s end that their traumas remain at least somewhat unimaginable may suggest that their modes of representation—regimes that emphasize historicity and evidence—have failed and give credence to Silke Arnold-de Simine’s claim that “trauma cannot be grasped through conventional realistic forms of narration and that we have to resort to modernist strategies of representation in the attempt to imaginatively work through and transform psychic trauma.” But to examine Dracula in such a way would be unproductive and anachronistic. Rather, following Karolyn Steffens recommendation that we must “return to nineteenth-century literature to fully establish the origins of the aesthetic routinely applied to contemporary literature,” reading Dracula as a product of its time (at the precipice of a new

128 Stoker, 163.
129 Silke Arnold-de Simine, “Trauma and Memory,” in Trauma and Literature, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 141.
century), as a text that is consciously aware of its utilization of different representative models and as a text that indeed struggles to discover the most appropriate way to communicate trauma in a narrative format, may provide us with productive strategies for understanding the complex relationship between traumatic events and how they are discursively represented.\footnote{Karolyn Steffens, “Modernity as the Cultural Crucible of Trauma,” in \textit{Trauma and Literature}, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 40.} Similarly, because the narrative is filtered and represented through many of the male characters’s own ideologies, it demonstrates how phallocentric hermeneutics can impact a narrative’s rhetorical impact. Thus, this argument reads \textit{Dracula}, similar to Ford’s testimony, as a political and rhetorical text, a cultural document capable of providing contemporary audiences with epistemic tools and methods for understanding trauma’s complex relationship with narrative representation and ideology.

Despite the amount of scholarly criticism that the novel has received since its publication, critical work addressing \textit{Dracula}’s relationship with trauma remains relatively underrepresented. Past interpretations of Dracula’s vampiric bite understand, productively so, the attack in relation to wider social consequences. These interpretations were particularly fruitful in the late 1990s, where scholars such as Christopher Craft and Stephen Arata put the novel’s vampirism into conversation with wider \textit{fin de siècle} anxieties about gender insubordination and colonial insurgency, respectively. Although being historically composed during the same time that the academy experienced its “ethical turn” and trauma studies began to emerge as a critical force, these readings failed to address the traumatic implications these anxieties have on the novel’s fictional bodies. Nonetheless, such examinations are useful in that they acknowledge that \textit{Dracula}’s narrative is about a group, cultural experience, and thus its relationship with trauma is not singular but, rather, collective. Here Jeffrey Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma is useful;
as he states, “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”131 By depicting a foreign entity seeking to invade and radically alter English culture quite literally by subjecting women to vampiric penetration, Dracula’s narrative is certainly about a cultural trauma that, as Harker explains, continues to haunt the group through “vivid and terrible memories.”132 The task, then, is to represent these memories in the most convincing way to make them believable.

The traumatic experience in Dracula is showcased as both a corporeal one, in that the victims undergo a physical metamorphosis during their transformations into vampires, and a psychic one, in that the trauma inflicted on the characters is often described as a mental “shock” that impacts their mnemonic processes and radically alters core characteristics of their identities. Harker’s original encounter with Dracula in Transylvania is traumatic precisely because the vampire symbolizes, as Alexander’s definition of cultural trauma describes, a degeneration of the characteristics that are fundamental to the identity of the British cultural system that Harker holds paramount. This begins seemingly as soon as Harker leaves London; his journey into “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” brings with it a breakdown of the teleological progress that, to the Victorians, defined their era. As Harker notes, “there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordinance Survey maps” and that “it seems to me that the further east you go the more unpunctual are the trains.”133 By the time Harker arrives at Dracula’s castle, it is clear that this has already begun to affect him, with him stating that he was

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131 Jeffrey Alexander, Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004), 1.
132 Stoker, 326.
133 Stoker, 10-11.
having “all sorts of queer dreams,” psychological turmoil that is comparatively small but that nevertheless foreshadows the larger horrors that he will experience.\footnote{Stoker, 10.}

While Harker lets his readers know through his journal entries that being held prisoner gradually begins “destroying his nerve,” the largest shock to his psyche occurs when he encounters the vampiric women lurking in the castle’s forbidden rooms.\footnote{Stoker, 38.} Describing the women as exhibiting a “deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive,” Harker characterizes the females primarily in relation to their degenerative qualities: “as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth.”\footnote{Stoker, 42.} This encounter is traumatizing for Harker precisely because what he witnesses stands in stark contrast to what he takes as true within his wider cultural imaginary; dichotomous to the “fair lady [who] sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter,” the vampiric women defy any relationship to the domestic angel-in-the-house and instead act as active sexual agents who reorient Harker’s own position as one who is passively penetrated.\footnote{Stoker, 40.} As Craft rightly argues, Harker’s encounter with the vampiric women “entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes.”\footnote{Craft, “‘Kiss me with Those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s Dracula,” 120.} It is thus not surprising that Harker experiences a moment of overwhelming “horror” and “sank down unconscious” in response to witnessing the women devour the “half-smothered child” that Dracula brought them for dinner, this action being the exact opposite of the domestic, motherly role that Harker has, up until this point, taken for granted.\footnote{Stoker, 44.}
That *Dracula* presents trauma primarily as a psychic experience and also as one very much dependent on women signals its status as a late nineteenth-century artifact. The text lets readers know that it is aware of its historical positioning through Mina’s discussion of the New Woman\(^\text{140}\) and Arthur’s claim that “we men and women are like ropes drawn tight with strain that pull us different ways. Then tears come; and, like the rain on the ropes, they brace us up, until perhaps the strain become too great, and we break.”\(^\text{141}\) Arthur’s statement is significant because it acknowledges the evolution from understanding trauma as a physical experience to understanding it as a mental experience that characterized the period’s psychological developments. In *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, Jill Matus explains this development:

> The term “trauma” emerged in the late nineteenth century when the label for a physical wound came to be associated with a mental state. A precondition of that shift was that the mind had to be conceived of as physical, material, and physiological – and therefore vulnerable – like the body.\(^\text{142}\)

Understanding this progression of psychological discourse helps explain why the characters in the novel are quick to diagnose the victims’ suffering as distinctly psychological; in the case of Harker, his symptoms are typically described as a “violent brain fever” or a “fearful shock,” while Arthur and Dr. Seward claim they are “sure that there is something preying on the dear girl’s mind” and come to “the conclusion that it must be something mental” when trying to understand Lucy’s traumatic experiences.\(^\text{143}\)

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\(^{140}\) Perhaps first coined by Sarah Grand in 1894, the term “New Woman” described females who partook in activities that were alternatives to traditional feminine roles, whether it be related to education, career paths, or leisure. The New Woman was perhaps most notable for her sexuality. As Carol Senf notes, these women “felt free to initiate sexual relationships, to explore alternatives to marriage and motherhood, and to discuss sexual matters such as contraception and venereal disease.” See Carol Senf, “Dracula: Stoker’s Response to the New Woman,” *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1982): 35.

\(^{141}\) Stoker, 158.


\(^{143}\) Stoker, 95, 104-5.
For the characters who were subjected to the vampiric bite, remembering their traumatic experiences is a complex process, as trauma oscillates between something that is knowable and something that is unknowable. Once Harker does eventually escape from Dracula’s castle, he appears to suffer from a type of traumatic amnesia, unable to accurately recall the events he experienced. As Mina describes it, “all the resolution has gone out of his dear eyes, and that quiet dignity which I told you was in his face has vanished. He is only a wreck of himself, and he does not remember anything that has happened to him for a long time past.” Mina hypothesizes that recollecting his traumatic experiences would, in fact, result in further psychological damage, stating that she fears “it might tax his poor brain if he were to try to recall it,” that it “may make or continue some injury to the brain,” and that remembering could act as a “reopening of his old wound”; similarly, Harker himself originally states that he does “not want to know it.”

However, we know from Harker’s journal entries that he is able to accurately describe his frightening experiences as well as his emotional responses to them as they are happening. This is seen, for example, when he recounts that his “very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, face down with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings.”

Harker’s ability to put into narrative what he is experiencing thus stands in contrast to Caruth’s conception of trauma as an experience that cannot be incorporated into memory or narrativized. Witnessing Dracula personally in England acts as a trigger to Harker, as well as to the other main characters, that reorients their relationship with traumatic memories. With Harker stating “if only I knew [it was him]” in response to seeing Dracula again, trauma as it was conceptually

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144 Stoker, 99.
145 Stoker, 99, 156, 202, 100.
146 Stoker, 39.
understood up until this point in the novel undergoes an epistemological shift. Consequently, remembering and thus knowing one’s own traumatic history is seen no longer as psychologically detrimental but rather as a strategy for coping with and overcoming the traumatic experience. Mina demonstrates this shift accordingly when she states, regarding Harker, “it may be that it is the doubt which haunts him; that when the doubt is removed, no matter which—waking or dreaming—may prove the truth, he will be more satisfied and better able to bear the shock.”

How best to represent a traumatic history that seems unimaginable henceforth becomes the novel’s main undertaking. Similar to how Dracula displays no reflection in the mirror and the vampiric women “threw no shadow on the floor,” the characters must represent a tragedy that defies representation due to both its scope and unimaginability. In relation to their trauma, they must, as Simine explains, “turn traumatic memory into narrative memory and integrate it into a life story.” For the characters of Dracula in particular, written testimonies are the most effective strategy for accomplishing this goal, as they become therapeutic tools used by the characters to work through their own psychological ordeals. This is evidenced by Harker’s journal entry, in which he writes that “feeling as though my own brain were unhinged or as if the shock had come which must end its undoing … I turn to my diary for repose.” Mina too demonstrates this relationship when she states, “I am anxious, and it soothes me to express myself here [in her diary]. It is like whispering to one’s self and listening at the same time.”

Perhaps more importantly, these written narratives act as tools that alleviate the crisis of truth that plagues the victims, because they provide evidence to each other that their traumatic

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147 Stoker, 155.
148 Stoker, 163.
149 Stoker, 42.
150 Simine, “Trauma and Memory,” 141.
151 Stoker, 41.
152 Stoker, 72.
encounters with Dracula are real. Indeed, the story demonstrates a clear relationship between written documentation and epistemological certainty. This relationship is primarily created by the need for precise and accurate record keeping, particularly in traumatic moments. Thus, when held prisoner in Dracula’s castle, Harker notes that “the habit of entering accurately must help soothe me” and that he must “put down every detail in order” (emphasis added).\(^\text{153}\) Similarly, shortly before Lucy is transformed into a vampire, she writes in her diary “an exact record of what took place to-night” (emphasis added).\(^\text{154}\) Although trauma scholars may argue that trauma causes “temporality and chronology to collapse” and that “no narrative of trauma can be told in a linear way,” to psychically represent and work-through trauma in Dracula is to recount trauma’s specific details and provide specific evidence.\(^\text{155}\) As Mina states, “in this matter dates are everything … every item must be put in chronological order.”\(^\text{156}\) Similarly, Van Helsing claims that “knowledge is stronger than memory, and we should not trust the weaker.”\(^\text{157}\) In this regard, Dracula stresses the importance of representing trauma not so much in relation to personal memory but rather in terms of transforming subjective interpretations into objective knowledge.

As the beginning and conclusion of the novel suggest, the novel’s characters are trying to represent trauma in such a way that it is not only believable to them but also to a wider audience. In this regard, Dracula is a trauma narrative that is consciously concerned with reader reception and affective response. Dr. Seward hints at the importance of a compelling and gripping narrative when he is finished reading Harker’s diary, stating that he was “so absorbed in that wonderful diary … that he let time run on without thinking.”\(^\text{158}\) Similarly, Mina brings forth this

\(^{153}\) Stoker, 41, 49.  
^{154}\) Stoker, 114.  
^{155}\) Whitehead, Trauma Fiction, 3.  
^{156}\) Stoker, 198.  
^{157}\) Stoker, 112.  
^{158}\) Stoker, 197.
issue when she too first reads Harker’s testimony of his traumatic experiences, acknowledging that the “terrible record of Jonathan’s upset me so.”\textsuperscript{159} Within the fictional landscape of \textit{Dracula}, trauma narratives must be accurate to ensure believability, but also compelling to ensure readerly pleasure. Likewise, sympathy, especially when related to different discursive regimes and modes of representation, plays a large role in this affective process. Mina observes that a certain amount of emotional response is necessary and that Dr. Seward’s phonographic diary is affective because it is “enough to dry up the springs of pity [that one may have for Dracula himself] in one’s heart,” thereby eliminating the possibility of perpetrator trauma.\textsuperscript{160} However, she likewise warns against the possibility of creating an overly affective reaction:

I have been more touched than I can say by your grief. That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly \textit{true}. It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to almighty God. No one must hear them spoken ever again! See, I have tried to be useful. I have copied out the words on my typewriter, and none other need now hear your heart beat, as I did.\textsuperscript{161}

So as to not initiate a trauma transference and subject the audience to the possibility of secondary trauma,\textsuperscript{162} Mina advises Seward not to use the phonograph, perhaps the novel’s most authentic evidence, as a tool to represent their traumatic experiences.

Why, then, despite the enormous amount of evidence, do the men themselves fail to believe what has happened to them? The answer to this question is best illustrated by examining Lucy’s vampiric death scene. If the “trauma” caused by Dracula is the way his vampiric bite transforms women into sexual agents who perform femininities which are incongruent with the

\textsuperscript{159} Stoker, 161.
\textsuperscript{160} Studies in perpetrator trauma explore the traumatic symptoms that develop when and by committing acts of violence. See Marinella Rodi-Risberg, “Problems in Representing Trauma,” in \textit{Trauma and Literature}, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 110-23.
\textsuperscript{161} Stoker, 197.
\textsuperscript{162} The idea that reading, seeing, or hearing testimonies of trauma can cause a traumatic experience for the witness has received much critical attention. See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, \textit{Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History} (New York: Routledge, 2012), 57.
novel’s phallocentric imaginary and that quite literally “shock” men into penetrative positions, it is not surprising that the men choose to destroy Lucy’s body and transform it back into something that better aligns with their own ideologies of womanhood. Interpreting the vampiric trauma in this way consequently demonstrates why the Crew of Light’s solution to the problem that is vampiric Lucy is not only unethical but, ironically, conflicts with their own methods of empiricism by placing them in an otherwise impossible situation. If the men do not destroy Lucy’s newfound sexuality, their ideology and power position will be threatened by their ability to be penetrated. Yet “driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake” into Lucy’s chest and transforming her back to her pre-vampiric state, the men effectively erase their strongest piece of evidence that the entire assault on London took place. This “working-through” of their psychic distress may indeed return Lucy’s face to one that showcases “unequalled sweetness and purity,” but, as Dr. Seward notes, this change in Lucy’s appearance “marked her truth to what we knew” (emphasis added).¹⁶³ The truth they know is a truth that, perhaps paradoxically, cannot exist simultaneously with the truth of Dracula’s traumatic attack. In a document that seeks to incorporate Dracula’s traumatic rampage into history by making it believable, accurate, and based on evidence, Lucy’s own vampiric body would be the most concrete and physical documentation the group could provide. That Lucy has undergone a physical metamorphosis once again, this time back to her original state, suggests she is in fact not a marker of “truth” but rather simply a palimpsest, a once authentic document representing a traumatic history that is now written over.

The phallocentric imaginary that prevents the men from taking active female sexuality as a reality likewise prevents them from representing the female victims in the novel as real victims.

¹⁶³ Stoker, 192.
The interaction between Harker and the vampiric women foreshadows the ways in which a narrative overwhelmingly devoted to illustrating the trauma inflicted on female bodies becomes reoriented into representing trauma as an experience that is only afforded to males. Indeed, although *Dracula* is about the communal trauma experienced by London society at large, the physical and psychological trauma caused by Dracula is negotiated on and through female bodies. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that it is not the men who are the targets of Dracula’s bite but rather Mina and Lucy; they are the ones hunted and penetrated, and who ultimately undergo the psychological and physical transformation into vampires. That it is seemingly only females who face the possibility of turning into vampires allows us to reconsider the role of the vampiric women in Harker’s trauma scene in Castle Dracula. This is not to say that Harker is not traumatized; rather, the way that his trauma is narrated and represented is more complex than it initially seems if we consider the possibility that the vampiric women themselves were already traumatized by Dracula. Consequently, similar to Brown’s analysis of female trauma, potentially victimized females are re-victimized, placed into the role of the perpetrator that inflicts damage on the now-victimized male body. This connection is solidified further by Harker’s representation of the traumatic event, as he frames the trauma as an ideological one, a destabilization of the heteropatriarchal, masculine experience. Within the world of *Dracula*, complete with the consistent brutalization of female bodies, it is Harker’s position in this moment that falls outside of the assumed masculine experience and is thus represented as traumatic.\footnote{The vampiric women, including Mina and Lucy, being unrecognizable as traumatized victims occurs even in scholarly interpretations of the novel. In the critical attention that *Dracula* has received, especially during the 1990s, the women are not seen as traumatized because their transformations into vampiric women are interpreted as solely beneficial, freeing them from the chains of patriarchy that shackles their subjectivity. For example, Craft’s interpretation of *Dracula*, as mentioned earlier, sees the vampiric women as subverting gender roles and potentially introducing Harker to the pleasures of homoeroticism. In another interpretation, Valente argues that Harker’s encounter with the younger Dracula in London is “the most chilling scene in the novel” (Valente, 73). While the...}
Arthur’s statement that men and women are traumatized in different ways alludes to the gendered understandings of trauma that dominated late-Victorian psychological discourse. Lucy’s case in particular is emblematic of the period in its similarity to Freud’s theorization of hysteria. Indeed, Lucy’s transformation post-vampiric bite in many ways mirrors a transformation in Freud’s own theoretical understandings. Thus, whereas Lucy is originally characterized as a passive victim to Dracula’s nonconsensual bite, her frequent sleep-walking and incessant need escape the confines of her home instead depicts her as a figure who demonstrates unconscious sexual desires. Her eventual transformation into a vampire, a process described as her “sweetness” turning into “adamantine, heartless cruelty” and her “purity to voluptuous wantonness,” signifies her trauma as distinctly sexual and conscious, and her desire to bite not only the male characters but also children marks her active, sexual desires as dangerous within the Victorian imaginary.\textsuperscript{165} Although it is unlikely that Stoker’s text was directly influenced by Freud’s theory, the novel’s representation of female trauma in this way nonetheless puts it into conversation with wider social investigations into traumatic experiences.

Just as the male authors’ patriarchal ideologies influence them to kill the female vampires because their sexual agency is inconceivable, so too are they killed because this subversion of phallocentric power dynamics positions the men as traumatized victims. Consequently, in scenes where men violently penetrate female bodies, the men are represented as victims defeating their persecutors. When Van Helsing goes to kill the three vampiric women who once threatened to penetrate Harker, his role as the inflector of violence is momentarily altered, instead becoming the victim of the vampiric women’s allure that threatens to “paralyse his faculties and to clog his

\textsuperscript{165} Stoker, 187.
very soul” with their “strange oppression … beginning to overcome him.”\textsuperscript{166} The switch in representation is more markedly illustrated with Lucy. Indeed, Lucy’s transformation into a vampire is never represented as her own trauma; rather, it is the men who experience trauma from seeing her undergo an ideological change via vampiric transformation. Thus, Lucy’s vampiric state no longer signifies her body as a victim but, instead, a violent perpetrator who threatens the men: “The beautiful colour became livid, the eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell-fire, the brows were wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa’s snakes, and the lovely, blood-stained mouth grew to an open square, as in the passion masks of the Greeks and Japanese. If ever a face meant death—if looks could kill—we saw it at that moment.”\textsuperscript{167} Although the use of Medusa may be coincidental, Lucy’s connection to the mythological figure nonetheless acts as a proleptic example of how Freud would later frame female trauma. The traumatized victim is no longer Lucy, who, like Medusa, was non-consensually penetrated; rather, it is she who threatens to traumatize the men through death or, symbolically, castration through her coils of snakes. In order to avoid this trauma, the men re-penetrate Lucy’s body, marking her truth to what they knew.

This violent act against Lucy’s body remains unclaimed as female trauma. Despite the penetration of female bodies being widespread in the narrative, this violence cannot be signified as trauma within the phallocentric imaginary of the text precisely because the female condition is already inherently connected with trauma itself. Similar to the vampiric women, who are represented only as vampires and only as traumatized, Lucy’s traumatized body after being re-penetrated by the Crew of Light is represented as one returning to “unequalled sweetness and

\textsuperscript{166} Stoker, 252.
\textsuperscript{167} Stoker, 188.
purity,” rather than as one penetrated with a stake.¹⁶⁸ This ideological strategy marks *Dracula* as symptomatic of the late-Victorian trauma culture; for the female victims, trauma is both a symptom of patriarchy, their bodies repeatedly damaged by masculine penetration, as well as a tool to uphold it.

¹⁶⁸ Stoker, 192.
CHAPTER III
REWITING TRAUMATIC HISTORIES, REIMAGINING TRAUMATIC FUTURITIES: QUEERING TRAUMA WITH SARAH WATERS’ FINGERSMITH

But in his face, at last, I see how much I want her
– Maud Lilly, in Fingersmith

And by then, it was too late to change anything
– Susan Trinder, in Fingersmith

In the third and final part of Sarah Waters’ 2002 novel Fingersmith, Sue Lilly, once known as Sue Trinder, attempts to convince the doctors operating a women’s mental asylum that she was institutionalized unjustly in the place of someone else, a case of mistaken identity. In response to her argument, the doctors gaslight Sue, refuse to believe her claims, and attempt to psychologically manipulate her into doubting the validity of her own narrative:

Fancies, Mrs Rivers. If you might only hear yourself! Terrible plots? Laughing villains? Stolen fortunes and girls made out to be mad? The stuff of lurid fiction! We have a name for your disease. We call it a hyper-aesthetic one. You have been encouraged to overindulge yourself in literature; and have inflamed your organs of fancy.¹⁶⁹

This response does confirm that the doctors were, like Sue herself, tricked into believing that she is actually Gentleman River’s mentally troubled wife. As readers, we know that the doctors are wrong for two reasons. Based on plot alone, it is clear that Sue’s story is at least somewhat factual and that her subsequent diagnosis is misguided because it has been revealed that Sue is illiterate; rather, it is Maud Sucksby, once known as Maud Lilly, who “overindulged” in literature. Likewise, the novel’s narrative confirms this as well, since it is revealed to the reader during the second part—narrated by Maud instead—that Sue was tricked. However, the doctors’ response is more complicated than it initially seems. Because of the novel’s narrative structure and the order in which the reader receives information, we know before Sue herself does that the

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Waters, Fingersmith (New York: Riverhead), 447.
story she presents to the doctors is not entirely accurate. We learn from Maud’s narration that she was tricked as well, and that the mastermind behind the entire plot is Mrs. Sucksby rather than Gentleman. Moreover, since Sue has not yet learned that she and Maud were switched at birth—that Sue was intended to live the life that Maud has lived—her vehement claim that she is Sue Trinder is not correct. Thus, Sue’s present traumatic experiences at the mental asylum are directly influenced by a multi-layered patriarchal scripting of her personal history; the masculine characters have carefully created a script for her to follow and her performance of this script, unbeknownst to her, satisfies masculine desire. Consequently, the narrative she is forced to enact is both dependent on a traumatic history and forecasts a traumatic future, her life scripted under phallocentrism to be intimately connected to trauma itself.

Sue’s interaction with the doctors is just one among many moments in the novel in which trauma, narrative, temporality, and historiography are intricately intertwined. The novel’s two female narrators are both led to believe that by traumatizing the other their own traumas will be cured or at least lessened. For Maud, this means escaping from her uncle’s oppressive home and gaining both corporeal and psychological wellbeing; for Sue, this means achieving class mobility and financial independence. In both cases, Gentleman, the novel’s main patriarchal character, creates a fictional history for the women to follow in order to deceive the other. Maud and Sue both believe that they hold agency in this decision by voluntarily agreeing to the switch and by directly causing certain actions to happen. Sue highlights this complex relationship between agency and fictionality soon after meeting Maud for the first time, stating, “for, though I knew her fate—though I knew it so well, I was helping to make it!—perhaps I knew it rather in the

170 Although the novel reveals that Mrs. Sucksby, a woman, is the mastermind behind the entire script that Maud and Sue perform, I still consider her a “masculine” agent, in that she upholds the phallocentric order.
way you might know the fate of a person in a story or a play.”\textsuperscript{171} Although both women believe that the outcome of the plot will grant them more agency in the future, the irony of Sue’s statement is soon revealed: she does not know Maud’s fate precisely because both of their fates were fictionally produced like the narrative modes she references.

The women eventually discover that their histories, up until the present narrative moment, were each carefully orchestrated without their consent, that their narratives were written for them by other individuals for personal gain, and that any possibility of constructing and narrating their own futures without trauma is foreclosed. However, the novel’s ending suggests that the two women ultimately gain epistemic and ontological authority over their futures, placing them in a position of power in which they can begin narratively scripting and imagining a future without trauma and, as this chapter will argue, begin the process of reconstructing and reclaiming a traumatic past. Indeed, the novel’s complex relationship with temporality and historiography, as well as its function as a fictional autobiography, demonstrates that this process is focused on both the possibility of a peaceful future \textit{and} the possibility of rewriting and reinterpreting a traumatic past through historical revisionism. This dual process, I contend, takes place both through the narrative’s plot and structure, and on a wider, generic level. Following Hélène Cixous’ argument that female-written narratives can “serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures,” \textit{Fingersmith} demonstrates the prospects of rewriting a traumatic history, radically altering and reclaiming a historical narrative that was otherwise used for disenfranchisement.\textsuperscript{172}

Through this process, the novel further puts forth ways to reimagine a future that forecloses

\textsuperscript{171} Waters, \textit{Fingersmith}, 101.

traumatic reverberations and, instead, allows for the possibility of post-traumatic growth.\textsuperscript{173} Moreover, this process is not simply limited to the novel’s characters. By writing a narrative that is non-linear and that consistently reveals withheld information crucial to understanding what has already taken place, \textit{Fingersmith} challenges the reader to actively apply their own methods of historical revisionism, to reconsider and reinterpret the history that the narrative presents.

My previous chapter discussed the complex relationship between group trauma and narrative representation by interrogating what narrative strategies are best for incorporating widespread trauma into an imaginable history and what the effects of representing trauma through certain interpretive frameworks are. While \textit{Dracula} poses these questions and provides possible answers, the conclusion of the vampiric narrative does not offer any possibility for post-traumatic growth; Harker questions the productivity of his own discursive methods, doubting, despite extensive documented proof of Dracula’s existence, that their experiences can be believable to both themselves as victims and the wider public. Moreover, the masculine protagonists of \textit{Dracula} fail to support the narrative’s real victims—the women whom Dracula hunts—instead representing the trauma as their own and re-traumatizing the females in the process. \textit{Fingersmith} further investigates the intricacies between trauma, narrative, and representation. However, unlike \textit{Dracula}, Waters’ novel presents the possibility of re-representing a traumatic historical narrative, allowing traumatized victims the opportunity of appropriating discursive strategies of oppression in order to imagine a future narrative of post-traumatic growth. In this way, the connection between \textit{Fingersmith} and Ford’s testimony is clear. By narrating her own history of her traumatic event, Ford sought to reconceptualize a history of female trauma, that is, to encourage individuals to look back on history and realize the extent to

which historical narratives of female trauma have been scripted by phallocentric hermeneutics. Doing so would, in turn, help us construct a future where sexual trauma would, at best, not happen, and, at the very least, be taken more seriously.

Based on publication date alone, *Fingersmith* might at first seem out of place when juxtaposed with *Villette* and *Dracula*. However, as a neo-Victorian text, the novel is a particularly appropriate final chapter in this thesis exploring the connections between the nineteenth century and our contemporary culture. Indeed, in many ways *Fingersmith* “does” the theory that this thesis has argued for; by strategically drawing upon nineteenth-century literature and culture, Waters seamlessly connects Victorian social and cultural concerns with those of the twenty-first century and offers us strategies for reinterpreting histories of trauma and reimagining futures without it. Although the novel is historically situated during the 1860s to the late 1870s (thus taking place between *Villette* and *Dracula*), its categorization as “neo” Victorian demonstrates both its liminal discursive position and also its preoccupation with historical revisionism. As Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben argue, “the neo-Victorian phenomenon both reflects and contributes to crucial developments in trauma discourse and cultural memory, both at national and global levels, constructing competing versions of the past that continue to inform the present.”174 *Fingersmith* allows readers to effectively “relive” the traumas of the nineteenth century while also enforcing the idea that those traumas remain of relevant concern to contemporary audiences. Similar to the previous two novels I have discussed, *Fingersmith* illustrates a connective trauma between past and present as specifically related to gender and sexuality, as well as the relationship between narrator/victim and reader/witness. For Waters’ novel in particular, female trauma is orchestrated by and through patriarchal narratives.

that seek to literally write womanhood for masculine benefit and pleasure, demonstrating the
damaging effects of a phallocentric “history” of female sexuality.

Maud’s trauma stems from a complex web of patriarchal oppression, where multiple
forces operate to create a narrative trajectory for her life based on their own pleasure and desires.
Maud suffers direct physical and emotional abuse from her uncle, who originally adopts her from
a mental asylum in order to make her his personal librarian and servant. Her uncle’s ultimate
goal is to make Maud a successor to his business of producing pornographic texts:

‘My eyes grow weak,’ he says, replacing his glasses. ‘Your sight shall save my own.
Your hand shall be my hand. For you come here with naked fingers, while in the ordinary
world—the commonplace world, outside this chamber—the men who handle vitriol and
arsenic must do so with their flesh guarded. You are not like them. This is your proper
sphere. I have made it so. I have fed you poison, by scruple and grain. Now comes the
larger dose.’\textsuperscript{175}

Spoken directly before he lets Maud cross the “bounds of innocence” and allows her to read the
pornographic material, the Uncle’s statements demonstrate the extent to which he attempts to
construct both a history and future for Maud based not on her own subjective identity but, rather,
on his experiences and desires. Maud’s uncle’s scripting is both physical and ideological. In a
corporeal sense, he seeks to make Maud quite literally enact the same bodily rhythms that he
does as a bookmaker. Ideologically, her uncle seeks to transform what would otherwise be
considered trauma—“poison,” or heteropatriarchal pornography—into something that Maud
would either be immune to or, perhaps, eventually find pleasure in. Consequently, any
individuality that Maud originally possessed as a queer woman is either subsumed into her
uncle—“Miss Maud likes what her uncle likes”—or eradicated all together along with her
ontological status—“He has made me like a book. I am not meant to be taken, and touched, and

\textsuperscript{175} Waters, 208.
liked. I am meant to keep here, in a dim light forever.”\(^{176}\) Her uncle’s strategy is more symbolically portrayed through Maud’s gloves. While the gloves literally mean to keep Maud from smudging the ink in the books she helps create and, more abstractly, mean to turn her into a “lady,” the gloves also come to represent Maud’s inability to make a mark on her own life. That her uncle makes her wear the gloves at all times, even during otherwise unpractical situations, such as eating dinner, which causes them to become stained, illustrates that Maud’s inability to have personal agency over her own life extends beyond the library and bookmaking. This is further suggested through the fact that Maud is often restrained from speaking altogether, as it is “silence that her uncle cultivates in his house, as other men grow vines and flowering creepers.”\(^{177}\)

Maud’s uncle maintains power over her through a combination of physical abuse and psychological torment. Maud suffers mentally from physical and emotional isolation because her uncle prevents her from leaving Briar: “That’s how much he prizes her. Won’t hardly let her out—fear she’ll break in two.”\(^{178}\) To Maud, this emotional manipulation extends beyond physical manipulation and into a supernatural realm; as she claims, “the sun never shines here. My uncle has forbidden it. Strong light, you see, fades print.”\(^{179}\) Taking into account Maud’s previous comparison to herself as a book, her uncle’s fear that sunlight will fade print consequently takes on a more significant meaning—to let Maud see sunlight, to let her regain any sense of positivity, could potentially risk a relinquishment of power in the form of losing his possession of her physical body and the identity he scripts for her. In terms of physical abuse, the most prominent example occurs shortly after she is first introduced to her job as a bookkeeper:

\(^{176}\) Waters, 130.  
\(^{177}\) Waters, 192.  
\(^{178}\) Waters, 87.  
\(^{179}\) Waters, 72.
'Now, did I want a set of coarse fingers upon my books,' he says, 'I should have had Mrs Stiles bring me a nurse. I should not have given her a pair of gloves, to make those coarse hands softer. Your hands I shall have soft, however. See here, how we make children's hands soft, that are kept out of their gloves.' He puts his own hand to the pocket of his coat, and uncoils from it—one of those things, that bookmen use—a line of metal beads, bound tight with silk, for keeping down springing pages. He makes a loop of it, seeming to weigh it; then he brings it smartly down upon my dimpling knuckles.\footnote{Waters, 195.}

The physical abuse that Maud suffers is clearly present, but again we see deeper connections between Maud’s physical autonomy and “books” as they have formed significance via her uncle. Thus, similar to the line of metal beads that are designed to keep “springing pages” restrained, the metal beads are used to physically manipulate Maud into submission. Moreover, the uncle’s connection between two different types of “soft” in this passage, soft from lack-of touch and soft from over-touch through beating, mirrors Maud’s entrapment under her uncle’s governance, in that she can choose either ontological erasure through the symbolic gloves or physical pain, perhaps to the point of death.

In addition to the corporeal and psychological abuse she undergoes at Briar, Maud further experiences a more insidious trauma as a result of the pornographic material itself. Originally described by Gentleman as a “dictionary” and later by the uncle as an “Index,” the pornographic material that Maud herself helps curate represents a phallocentric history of female sexuality, in that the sexuality that is given to women in the texts is both constructed by heterosexual men and used to satisfy their pleasure only.\footnote{Waters’ use of pornography is significant because the genre draws a parallel between the Victorian period and the twenty-first century. Just as contemporary feminists are in disagreement as to whether pornography serves as a product of patriarchal rape culture or an avenue for women to express their sexuality and desires, so too was Victorian pornography a medium that simultaneously portrayed the rape and subordination of women while also allowing them certain creative possibilities. This fraught and complex relationship between pornography and female trauma is depicted throughout \textit{Fingersmith}, as Maud moves from being traumatized by pornography to using as a tool to express her own queer desire. For a more thorough discussion of the complexities of Victorian pornography, see Thomas Joudrey, “Penetrating Boundaries: An Ethics of Anti-Perfectionism in Victorian Pornography,” \textit{Victorian Studies} 57, no. 3 (2015): 423-432.} Describing the nature of the work, Maud’s uncle states,
“has there ever been something of its like? A universal bibliography, and on such a theme? They say science is dead amongst Englishmen.” Maud’s uncle’s description of the collection here demonstrates the extent to which female sexuality is produced and defined by men; that the bibliography is universal suggests that this collection encompasses all possible sexual identities that women can have, and that the curation is described as a scientific process grounds the collection in objective truth based on empiricism and seemingly forecloses the possibility of any deviant sexualities existing, given that they would be characterized as untrue. As Maud describes it, what this collection does is eliminate any sense of “pleasure” that she as a woman may feel and, instead, appropriates it to satisfy the pleasure of men only: “The world calls it pleasure. My uncle collects it—keeps it neat, keeps it ordered, on guarded shelves; but keeps it strangely—not for its own sake, no, never for that; rather, as it provides fuel for the satisfying of a curious lust.” This occupation is traumatic for Maud because, while she can literally script the words onto the pages and create otherwise false histories and narratives of female sexuality, she cannot script a life that corresponds to her own identity as a queer woman. Encompassed by this patriarchal view of female sexuality, where the only information regarding her own sexual pleasure is filtered through the pleasure of men, it is not surprising that Maud at first grants the text’s epistemic authority and incorporates them into her own methods of thinking about sexuality, and “supposes all printed words to be true ones.”

What Maud has learned about female bodies and female pleasure is soon tested through her interactions with physical women that exist outside of the world of the pornographic texts. Thus, Maud is at first surprised that her maid’s body does not correspond to female bodies as

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182 Waters, 220
183 Waters, 209.
184 Waters, 194.
they are illustrated in the books, stating, “her legs—that I know from my uncle’s books should be smooth—are dark with hair.”

Although Maud claims that, with age, she begins to “understand her uncle’s books to be filled with falsehoods” and that she “despises herself for having supposed them truths,” her narration demonstrates how the ideologies she has gained through the texts continue to shape both her own life trajectory and her interactions with the world.

Incorporating these fictional histories into her own personal life narrative, interacting so closely with the pornographic material is traumatic for Maud not only because it literally frightens her—“I imagine the parting of my legs. I imagine myself fingered and pierced”—but, moreover, because the patriarchal texts erase her identity as a queer woman, making her unable to experience the pleasures that a lesbian relationship would give her.

This is not to say that the lesbian experience is not included within the phallocentric imaginary; rather, lesbian sex does not result in female pleasure but is instead appropriated for male pleasure as a precursor for heterosexual intercourse. This is demonstrated clearly during one of Maud’s performances in which she reads the pornography to a male audience. Reading a book that “tells of all the means a woman may employ to pleasure another, when in want of a man,” queer female pleasure is appropriated for male pleasure both in the text itself and in the physical world, where the male audience members obtain pleasure from Maud’s performance.

Indeed, what this scene effectively illustrates is that queer desire cannot exist within the phallocentric history of female sexuality that the uncle curates. Consequently, despite Maud herself, as a lesbian woman, becoming aroused by reading lesbian fiction, any potential for pleasure is soon transformed into shame when she realizes that her queer identity was appropriated for male pleasure solely: “And

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186 Waters, 211.
188 Waters, 296.
despite myself— and in spite of Richard’s dark, tormenting gaze— I feel the stale words rouse me. I colour, and am ashamed. I am ashamed to think that what I have supposed the secret book of my heart may be stamped, after all, with no more miserable matter than this— have its place in my uncle’s collection.”"^{189}

It is clear that Maud is traumatized by the physical and mental abuse at Briar and that she experiences the reverberations of this trauma both while she is there and once she escapes. Maud’s symptoms of PTSD are triggered through books and anything related to them. This is seen, for example, when Maud expresses psychosomatic symptoms upon seeing dust on her dress. As Sue narrates, “she stood and looked me over, then brushed at her own skirts. ‘But here is dust,’ she cried, ‘from my uncle’s shelves! Oh! The books, the terrible books!’ She was almost weeping, and wringing her hands.”^{190} Maud herself acknowledges that her experiences could possibly cause her permanent psychological damage, that “what she fears most as a child are the spectres of past lessons, imperfectly erased.”^{191} This is eventually proven true through her triggers, such as the dust, with Maud equating the “smell of smouldering dust” with “the smell of the parching of her own youth.”^{192} Yet the imperfectly erased lessons that she learns from her uncle also manifest in the “real” world outside of Briar. That her uncle designates her a “whore” after she escapes, that various male Londoners assume that she is a prostitute, and that her encounter with pornographic texts in London bookstores “quite unnerves her” demonstrates that the phallocentric scripting of femaleness as something that is only used to satisfy male lust exists beyond the pornographic narratives, the uncle’s library, and Briar itself. Physical reality and fiction become blurred within the phallocentric world of the novel, each constituting the other in

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^{189} Waters, 296.
^{190} Waters, 109.
^{191} Waters, 204.
^{192} Waters, 204.
a cyclical relationship that continuously curates scripted female histories and actively scripts futures.

History in *Fingersmith*, as it pertains to the ones scripted by the men for Sue and Maud, and fiction, as it pertains to the pornography that Maud is forced to contribute to, are both ideologically and socially conditioned under phallocentrism, and the otherwise fictional distinction between the two (fictional, in that for the men scripting both there was never a distinction) begins to collapse for Maud. Maud’s sexual relationship with Sue further confirms the fact that she absorbed at least some of the pornography’s portrayal of queer female desire into her conception of sexual relationships and pleasure. With the periodical interruption of her narrative during the intercourse scene by memories of the lesbian intercourse from her uncle’s pornography, Maud performs a phallocentric script of lesbian desire, stating, “and at first, it is easy. After all, this is how it is done, in my uncle’s books: two girls, one wise and one unknowing … It is easy. I say my part, and she—with a little prompting—says hers. The words sink back upon their pages.”

With Maud imagining her sexual experience through this lens and Sue literally performing masculinity by pretending to be Gentleman, what is in actuality a moment of lesbian intercourse is ideologically transformed under phallocentrism. Consequently, lesbianism can exist either to satisfy male desire and be a precursor to heterosexual sex—Maud thinks of Gentleman watching them, thereby gaining voyeuristic pleasure—or fail to exist altogether. Coupled with the imagined Gentleman either partaking in the sexual acts or gazing upon them, Maud’s statement that her bodily fluids were running “like ink” symbolically illustrates that any pleasure she may experience is not her own but rather acts as inspiration to continue producing the very lesbian pornography that scripted the situation.

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193 Waters, 297.
194 Waters, 298.
performance of lesbian sexuality is defined by phallocentric scripts and their performance, in turn, both validates the masculine narratives of female sexuality and acts as an addition to the historical archive, thereby confirming Sue’s statement that “they can only do this one way.”

Despite lesbian sexuality being defined by males for males, it is precisely Maud’s and Sue’s queer identities that challenge and eventually disrupt the phallocentric narratives that scripted their subjectivities. The inherent irony of this relationship is illustrated in the following conversation between Sue and Gentleman: “‘This girl—what’s she like.’ ‘You said she’s queer in her head.’ ‘Not queer,’ said Gentleman. ‘Only what I should call fey. She’s an innocent, a natural. She has been kept from the world. She’s an orphan, like you are; but where you had Mrs. Sucksby to sharpen you up, she had—no-one.’” As readers, we learn after this, primarily during Maud’s own narration, that the characteristics Gentleman attempts to give Maud here, the history he tries to script for her in a better attempt to accomplish his patriarchal plot, are entirely wrong. First, Maud is, in fact, “queer,” although not in the way that Gentleman means in this scene. Second, we later learn that Maud is not “innocent,” at least with regard to how innocence is defined within narrative, given that she already passed her uncle’s “finger of innocence” in the story’s plot, although not yet in the narrative. Third, “natural,” similar to “queer,” has an ironic meaning. We know that Maud is not “natural,” since her identity is constructed by her uncle and Gentleman; rather, what is natural about her is indeed her queer identity. Consequently, Maud’s queerness as well as her lack-of-innocence, in that she knows what constitutes lesbian sex acts, disrupt both the narratives that Gentleman crafted for her and Sue as well as the narrative created by her uncle and the wider phallocentric ideology that defines female sexuality. Thus, returning to the intercourse scene with this in mind, we see this play out both in Maud’s own words—“it is

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195 Waters, 149.
196 Waters, 32.
easy, it is easy … then she rises above me and puts her mouth to mine,’” thereby implying that following her script becomes harder once Sue kisses her—and symbolically, in that the intrusive mental recollections of her uncle’s pornography cease, likewise, when she kisses Sue.

Maud and Sue’s queerness is subversive because it allows them, at least during this stage of the story, to momentarily see through the scripts created for them and to experience a desire that is distinctly lesbian. For Sue, being with Maud makes her momentarily forget the plot that Gentleman designed: “At first I would say to myself, ‘When Gentleman comes I’ll do this’; or, ‘Once he gets her in the madhouse, I’ll do that.’ But I’d say it, then look at her; and she was so simple and so good, the thought would vanish.”¹⁹⁷ For Maud, whose history was scripted twice by Gentleman and her uncle’s pornography, being queer and feeling desire for Sue allows her to “grow used to her, to the life, the warmth, the particularity of her; she has become, not the gullible girl of a villainous plot … but a girl with a history” (emphasis added).¹⁹⁸ Indeed, queer desire transforms Sue from a fictional archetype defined by a male plot—the “wise” girl in lesbian pornography—into an individual, a person with particularities and with a history of her own. That Maud’s queer desire is disruptive to the phallocentric imaginary is confirmed when Gentleman discovers her feelings, stating, “Have you forgotten what she has come to you for? Do you think she has forgotten? Do you suppose yourself anything to her, but that? You have been too long among your uncle’s books. Girls love easily, there. That is the point of them. If they loved so in life, the books would not have to be written.”¹⁹⁹ First, we know that Maud’s queer identity challenges Gentleman’s plot because, by this time in the story, it has already been revealed to readers that Sue does, in fact, often forget the plot when around Maud, and that she

¹⁹⁷ Waters, 101.
¹⁹⁸ Waters, 273.
¹⁹⁹ Waters, 291.
does care for Maud in a way that surpasses the financial benefits of the plan. More importantly, however, is that Maud’s queerness illustrates the contradictions innate to the phallocentric creation of womanhood and desire. For Gentleman and her uncle, Maud’s status as a “whore,” designed for male pleasure only, and her assumed heterosexual desires exist both within the “fictional” world of the pornography but also within the physical world. However, when confronted with the possibility of queer desires existing outside of the pornography, Gentleman argues that Maud’s feelings are not grounded in reality and are fictional, in that they do not exist and are influenced by fiction. Gentleman bases his contradictory argumentation on the futurity of the books themselves; if queer desire were to exist outside of the pornography, if girls could really love that “easily,” books would no longer be needed. The relationship between queerness and futurity has been discussed before, perhaps best by Lee Edelman. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman argues that queerness cannot exist as an authentic identity but is rather defined in relation the governing order; it is a “structural position determined by the imperative of figuration.” Thus, for Edelman, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only disturb one.” Queerness, according to Edelman, is antithetical to futurity, incongruent to our culture’s dominate ideology of reproduction. In *Fingersmith*, queerness is antithetical to the production of pornography and thus the futurity of the phallocentric imaginary.

Edelman argues that queer individuals should embrace their relationship with the death drive and their impossible relationship with futurity, but this is not the ethical project presented in *Fingersmith*. Rather, in a novel where to be a queer woman is to be traumatized, where queer histories are written and queer futurities are imagined under a phallocentric lens, reproduction and futurity are essential to both the establishment of a queer identity and the possibility of post-

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traumatic growth. At the conclusion of *Fingersmith*, having defeated Gentleman, Maud’s uncle, and Mrs. Sucksby, Sue discovers that Maud has indeed inherited her uncle’s business and continues to write pornography to sustain herself financially. This could be interpreted to mean that Maud has, as she was trained for, subsumed her uncle’s identity, and that she continues the traumatic legacy of phallocentric pornography; Maud herself notes that she is “still what he made her” and that she will “always be that.”²⁰² However, this position is complicated when Maud reveals the details of her writing. As Sue narrates, “Maud had still held the paper. Now it fluttered to the floor. I stooped and caught it up and smoothed the creases from it. ‘What does it say?’ I said, when I had. She said, ‘It is filled with all the words for how I want you.’”²⁰³ Maud’s inclusion of her sexual desires she experiences for Sue in her pornography reorients a once phallocentric medium that defined queer desire as heterosexual desire, transforming it into documentation of a lesbian sexuality produced by lesbians for lesbian fulfillment. It is important to note that Maud still operates within a wider phallocentric culture; the production of these texts is, in part, dependent on a marketplace that wants to purchase them. Yet Maud tactically operates within this ideological structure, re-appropriating tools that were once used to traumatize and oppress her, using them instead to both rewrite an otherwise traumatic history of female sexuality and contribute to a future of female pornography that is no longer traumatic but instead illustrates authentic queer desire. This process is illustrated symbolically through the ink stains Maud leaves on her body; no longer wearing gloves, Maud is able script pornography and her own identity, leaving fingerprints on the texts and herself.

The process of historical revisionism extends beyond Maud’s pornography, demonstrating to both Sue and the reader the complex relationship between trauma and narrative,

²⁰² Waters, 581.
²⁰³ Waters, 582.
as well as providing both strategies for reimagining traumatic histories. Maud’s revelation of how her uncle abused her causes Sue to imagine the narrative and history Gentleman scripted for Maud from a different viewpoint. As Sue narrates, “Oh, Maud,” I said. ‘If I had only known! To think, of you—’ I began to cry. ‘To think of your uncle— Oh!’ My hand flew to my mouth … ‘Oh!’ I still held the book. Now I looked at it and let it drop as if it burned me. ‘Oh!’”204 Sue here suggests that knowing trauma differently and understanding Maud’s history from a different perspective, in this case Maud’s instead of Gentleman’s, would have inspired earlier ethical actions. The narrative’s structure itself, with its non-linear temporality, encourages readers likewise to acknowledge that narrative point-of-view can determine how we perceive and understand trauma. Thus, the reasoning behind Maud’s actions as they were originally narrated to us by Sue is transformed by Maud’s own analeptic narration. Consequently, whereas Sue originally interprets, based on the script written for Maud by Gentleman, that Maud’s screaming and flinching in the presence of Gentleman is caused by “love,” we now know that these are psychosomatic symptoms of her fear of him. While Gentleman originally states that Maud wiggles and sighs in the bed for him, we later learn that these actions were, rather, Maud expressing her desires for Sue, and that Gentleman here tries to use them to enhance his own narrative. And, finally, whereas Sue originally did not understand why Maud would “wake, bewildered, in the night” and would ask “queer questions,” such as “Am I real? Do you see me?” we understand, by the end of the novel, that Maud is expressing symptoms of PTSD caused by the phallocentric script that has threatened to erase her identity.205 By constructing an analeptic narrative with a non-linear temporality, Maud and Sue’s narration encourages readers to revise their own understanding of the history that the novel put forth.

204 Waters, 580.
205 Waters, 123, 139, 145.
That Gentleman’s name remains Gentleman throughout the narrative, despite his actions and despite the two women having narratorial authority to indeed name him whatever they desire, is tactical for many reasons. In terms of the subversive strategies used by the female narrators, keeping the name Gentleman again re-appropriates patriarchal techniques that were used against them. More specifically, Gentleman comes to stand not for an individual person but rather an abstract idea and group; similar to the way in which Gentleman and Maud’s uncle collapsed female individuality to create a fictional, abstract idea of womanhood, so too does the designation “Gentleman” lose all personal qualities. This subversive technique likewise has cross-temporal implications that further contribute to the narrative’s focus on historical revisionism. Gentleman’s name is yet another narrative technique that allows us to reinterpret history, challenging our assumptions of who had that title and who deserves to have it. Indeed, Gentleman’s identity never truly matters in this text; rather, his actions and abuse of power come to define him. The irony of keeping the honorific consequently encourages us to acknowledge the wider privileges associated with patriarchy, that men, despite their abuse of power and the unethical actions they commit, nevertheless retain their privileged status and are, moreover, identified as men of power rather than men of abuse or wrongdoing.

The end of the novel illustrates that Maud and Sue’s most subversive act is their re-appropriation of language and narrative itself. Up until the end of the novel, narrative was used as an oppressive tool to construct female identities that reinforce the phallocentric imaginary, traumatizing the women through this process. Maud herself establishes the connection between language and trauma when she discovers that Sue is illiterate, stating, “Not to read! It seems to me a kind of fabulous insufficiency—like the absence, in a martyr or a saint, of the capacity for
pain.”

Both by writing herself and by teaching Sue how to write, Maud, along with Sue, transforms a tool once used for oppression into a tool that can help them strategically craft their own narratives; as Judith Herman argues about narrative and post-traumatic growth, this allows the women to be “the writer of their own story, the author and arbiter of their own recovery.” Following Cixous’ claim that “woman must write her self … she must put herself into the text—as into the world and history—by her own movement,” it is precisely Sue’s literacy that allows her both to write her story and, subsequently, to better understand the ideologies of her social world.

Coupled with this concluding scene, Sue’s statement at the beginning of the novel that “this is the first time she remembers thinking about the world and her place in it” becomes more significant. And because we know, upon finishing the novel, that Maud and Sue’s intercourse scene takes place in the narrative after they both reproduce pornography in the story’s temporality, their sexuality and desire is no longer seen as acts scripted by men for men but, rather, as yet another re-appropriation of phallocentric scripts; the ink that runs from Maud’s body no longer connects her to her uncle’s patriarchal narratives, but instead symbolically establishes their intercourse in an archive of lesbian erotica that is informed by queer desire. By the end of the narrative, it is clear that Gentleman and Maud’s uncle are no longer scripting female identities and histories; instead, Maud and Sue script both the men and themselves. Doing so allows for the possibility of reclaiming their trauma which has otherwise was excluded from them; as Herman continues, “by pulling apart the master narratives that construct a damaged identity and replacing them with a more credible, less morally degrading narrative, counterstories

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206 Waters, 257.
207 Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 133.
209 Waters, 3.
serve as practical tools for reidentifying persons. They serve to repair the damaged identity. 210

In a world where femaleness is inherently tied to trauma, Maud and Sue’s narrative demonstrates that trauma can only be potentially resolved by reclaiming female trauma as a legitimate experience through the production of a non-phallocentric narrative that both reinterprets history and reimagines futurities.

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210 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 186.
CONCLUSION

VICTORIAN TRAUMA FOR THE FUTURE

In 2015, literary scholars of the Victorian period convened to partake in what is now called the V21 Forum on Strategic Presentism. The question proposed was simple: during a time when the value of a humanities education and, more specifically, literature is “under attack” by being conceived as either intellectually or economically worthless, how can we convince those outside of the academy that Victorian literature in particular remains relevant and valuable? The solution was, instead of disconnecting ourselves from the present and remaining isolated in our nineteenth-century bubbles, to consider how presentism, otherwise seen as critically naïve, can be used strategically. David Sweeny Coombs and Danielle Coriale state that “by insisting on the recognition of the past’s difference from the present, we’ve made it more difficult to conceptualize why studying the past matters for the present.”211 Coombs and Coriale’s presentism is strategic not only because it reemphasizes the importance of Victorian literature, but also because they believe we can “think critically about the past in the present in order to change the present.”212 This is the framework that this thesis has advocated for. By reading these three texts as trauma narratives and illustrating how trauma plays a complex role in each, I have advocated for critically examining the texts in new ways. Coincidingly, by engaging these Victorian texts with a moment that, I believe, greatly defines our present experiences with trauma, I have advocated that these texts, despite existing within and being concerned with a culture many of us rarely even think about, can be used strategically to help us recognize the complex relationship between ideology, power, and trauma. Recognizing this relationship might, as Coombs and Coriale state, “offer us new ways to engage in the urgent task of asking how the

Victorian era might help us imagine alternative futures to the various mass extinctions that loom just over the horizon of the present.”

Other influential literary scholars have not been as encouraging when discussing this possibility. Back in 1995, Stanley Fish argued that literary critics cannot engage with political issues that define our present experiences: “It is not so much that literary critics have nothing to say about these issues, but that so long as they say it as literary critics no one but a few of their friends will be listening, and, conversely, if they say it in ways unrelated to the practices of literary criticism, and thereby manage to give it a political effectiveness, they will no longer be literary critics.” Perhaps trauma, which is already inherently literary, as this thesis and other scholars have argued, can be the strategic bridge which crosses the gulf that Fish believes exists between literary critics and politics. Or, rather, we can ignore Fish’s argument altogether. Our contemporary trauma culture has no room for pessimism. Ford’s testimony illuminated this. The argument presented in this thesis is unique in that it strives for its own irrelevancy. For Victorian trauma narratives to no longer matter to us is to acknowledge that we have come to understand trauma in a fundamentally different way, an understanding that disconnects us from a nineteenth-century influence. The ultimate goal, as Cixous argues, is for “the future to no longer be determined by the past.” But this is not yet the case. Ford told her narrative, but Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed. However, we should not see Kavanaugh’s confirmation as a failure on Ford’s part; similar to the women in Villette and Dracula, we can use negative outcomes to reconsider our own ideations of trauma and how we respond to it, thus recognizing Ford’s narration instead as a subversive testimony that, like Maud and Sue, directly challenges our

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213 Coombs and Coriale, 88.
culture’s phallocentric interpretation of female trauma. It is clear that we still feel the reverberations of a Victorian trauma culture on our own, but this should not defer us. Rather, it should reinforce that, perhaps now more than ever, Victorian texts can be used to teach us something meaningful.


