Representations of Trauma in Contemporary Children's and Young Adult Fiction

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Representations of Trauma in Contemporary Children’s and Young Adult Fiction

by

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Abstract

Kenneth B. Kidd argues that often “children’s literature of atrocity turns away from rather than confronts the difficulties of its subject matter, opting for simplistic narratives” (185). Responding to Kidd’s invitation for others to “trouble and enrich” (205) his account of trauma in children’s and young adult literature, this thesis conducts three case studies that portray complex depictions. It examines genre restrictions, the vagueness of the word “trauma,” and the place of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual and Freud in trauma narratives for young readers.

In its analysis, the thesis uses the diagnostic tools of the DSM-IV-TR, Freudian theories, and close readings to investigate the representations of trauma.

The thesis demonstrates that narratives about trauma for young readers are simultaneously complex and hopeful (as per genre expectations). Confronting difficult subject matter, these books equip readers with the political insights needed to recognize and change similar conditions in their own lives.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Kenneth B. Kidd observes that while the depiction of suffering young protagonists in children’s and young adult (YA) literature is not a new phenomenon, texts about trauma have flourished “since the late 1980s and early 1990s” (Kidd 181). Since this period, trauma narratives for young readers have produced protagonists who not only suffer, but are explicitly wounded by their suffering. In his exploration of trauma in children’s literature, Kidd proposes “at least some of the children’s literature of atrocity turns away from rather than confronts the difficulties of its subject matter, opting for simplistic narratives” (185). Responding to Kidd’s invitation for others to “trouble and enrich” (205) his study, this thesis conducts three case studies of children’s and YA literature that offer complex representations of trauma. Rather than portraying trauma as being singular and fixed (Balaev 27), the case studies focus on different aspects of trauma, and the protagonists experience and respond to trauma differently, emphasizing their complexity.

The first case study is J.K. Rowling’s children’s literature series, *Harry Potter*. The series has sold 450 million copies (“Rowling ‘makes £5 every second’”), has had hugely successful movie adaptations of all seven books, and has made Rowling one of the few billionaire authors in the world. The second is Markus Zusak’s YA Holocaust novel, *The Book Thief*. The novel has been on the *New York Times* best seller list for two hundred and thirty weeks, has a movie currently in production, and has won Zusak a long list of literary awards. Lastly is Suzanne Collins’s YA dystopian fiction, *The Hunger Games* trilogy. The trilogy has sold 50 million copies (Springen), and the first movie adaptation opened as the third highest weekend opening bringing in 115 million dollars (Springen). The second film is expected to break more records when released in
November 2013. Though the three case studies range in content (one is set in a magical world, another in historical Nazi Germany, and the third in a dystopian post-apocalyptic America), all address trauma.

This thesis argues that trauma, as presented in the case studies, functions as a complex agent of change and maturation, and the narratives charge readers to become aware political agents in their own worlds. Children’s and YA literature is often concerned with the transformation of child/adolescent to adult. Both Kidd and Eric Tribunella\(^1\) note and question the strange and highly disturbing depiction of trauma in young people’s writing as an opportunity of growth, for it acts as an agent of transformation and maturation of young characters into adults. Within the case studies, trauma shatters the protagonists’ sense of themselves, forcing them to “reorganize the self in relation to this new view of reality” (Balaev 40). Trauma challenges the young protagonists’ “previous formulations of [the] self” (Balaev 27), and they must learn to construct new identities that include their trauma. This thesis argues the transformation is more complex and varied than Tribunella’s argument in how trauma is utilized in YA American realist fiction\(^2\) as the agent of maturation into melancholic adulthood. The case

\(^1\) Kenneth B. Kidd is the author of *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children’s Literature*, and Eric Tribunella is the author of *Melancholia and Mourning: The Use of Trauma in American Children’s Literature*. These two major works represent two of the most recent and foundational work on trauma in young people’s writing.

\(^2\) Tribunella argues that realism is a more useful tool for instruction, and that fantasy “undermine[s] the sense of the weightiness of the traumatic event” and works to
studies’ protagonists must reconstruct their sense of selves, but the way in which they experience trauma, as well as their responses to it, are distinct.

While exploring how the case studies are able to provide complex narratives of transformation, or reconstruction of the self, through trauma, this thesis is also interested in three questions that add to the intricacy of the narratives. First, the thesis tests the place of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) in depictions of trauma in children’s and YA fiction, as well as reveals the continuing hold of Freudian theories in the realm of literature. Secondly, the thesis is interested in the extent writers are able to fit their depictions of trauma within genre demands without offering an overtly simplified narrative. Thirdly, the thesis explores the vagueness with which the word trauma is used (especially by scholars who have previously discussed the case studies), and I do close readings to identify how the word “trauma” is used in the three examples.

The concept of trauma this thesis uses relies on both the Diagnostic Statistical Manual-IV-TR (DSM-IV-TR) as well as approaches of Sigmund Freud. Using the DSM-IV-TR in conjunction with Freud may seem strange as the development of the DSM was a conscious step away from Freud and psychoanalysis. Joel Paris notes the development “mitigate the experience and effect of trauma” (xxx). Since the case studies all have fantasy elements, the thesis challenges the assertion that realism is the best genre in which to represent trauma.

Though the combination of the DSM and Freud may seem unnatural since the DSM revolution “was an attack on analysis” (Paris 90), I am not the first to use both in discussions of trauma in literature. For example, Cathy Caruth in The Unclaimed Experience also uses a combination of the DSM and Freud.
of the *DSM-I* in the 1950s was a “counter attack to psychoanalysis” (75). The *DSM-III* was a revolutionary best seller, and Paris argues that today copies of the “*DSM-IV* can be found in the office of every psychiatrist, physician, and social worker treating mental illness” (86). The *DSM III* and *IV* make diagnoses of mental illnesses based on symptom patterns or clusters, rather than talk therapy or analysis. Characters within the case studies reflect the patterned symptoms the *DSM-IV-TR* utilizes when diagnosing trauma related mental illnesses. While many believe the *DSM* has made Freudian analysis obsolete and archaically outdated, there is still a place for psychoanalysis, even along side the *DSM*, in discussions of literature. Alan Stone argues that Freud had always belonged to the arts and humanities, and Freud himself “recognized that what he was doing was very close to literature” (Stone, n.pag.). Stone furthers that if “psychoanalysis and Freud belong to the arts and humanities . . . then that is the domain in which Freud and psychoanalysis will survive” (n.pag.). Psychoanalysis arguably being closer to “literature than to science” (Stone, n.pag.), there is still a place for Freudian theories in discussions of trauma within literature, even when the *DSM* is involved.

In order to establish the concepts of trauma used in the thesis, I separate this introduction into three parts. Because the history of hysteria and war combat in relation to trauma is reflected in the case studies, the first section gives a short history of how trauma came to mean “wounds to the spirit” (Hacking 183) occasioned in wartime. The second section examines Freudian concepts of trauma, as well as provides an overview of the *DSM*’s history to give a context for the symptoms and signs of trauma displayed in the case studies. The final section provides the definition of trauma used in the thesis, as well as an outline of the three case studies.
1.1 A History of Trauma: Hysteria and War Neurosis

Many theorists and scholars, such as Freud, Cathy Caruth, Ian Hacking and Ruth Leys, to name a few, attribute the railway accidents of the nineteenth century as the catalyst for redefining trauma. Once understood as a wound of the body, trauma became a wound of the mind. The railroad accidents produced numerous serious physical injuries and deaths. Yet, a distinct few survivors walked away from the accidents seemingly unharmed, only to return to physicians days later complaining of “terrible pain” (Hacking 185). Often the latent injuries could not be connected with any apparent physical injuries. A famous example is that of Victorian author Charles Dickens who survived the Staplehurst railway crash physically unharmed, yet lost his voice for two weeks following the derailment, and was nervous travelling by train for the remainder of his life. Cases like that of Dickens, who complained of pain with no physical symptoms, baffled doctors.

In 1866 a prominent London physician, John Eric Erichsen, gave a lecture regarding these unique railroad accident victims. Erichsen suggested in his lecture that the symptoms were psychological in nature, and referred to the survivor’s condition as railway spine. Ian Hacking notes that victims of railway spine “had no lesions, that is, no apparent trauma. In that respect they were like hysterics” (186). At the time hysteria was understood as a condition that included disturbances to the nervous system, “characterized by such disorders as anesthesia, hyperesthesia, convulsions, etc., and usually attended with emotional disturbances and enfeeblement or perversion of the moral and intellectual faculties” (“Hysteria.” 1.n). It was generally believed that women

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4 Hysteria was also defined as being “Morbidly excited condition; unhealthy emotion or excitation” (“Hysteria.” 2).
were more susceptible to hysteria because the disorder was thought to be caused by disturbances to the uterus and its functions (“Hysteria.” 1.n.). Yet, railway spine appeared similar to hysterical symptoms, and a link was made between railroad survivor’s symptoms and that of hysteria.

Many men did not appreciate the connection of hysteria with railway spine because of hysteria’s feminizing aspect. Erichsen certainly did not agree with comparing “a man of forty-five who is hit by a sudden and over-whelming calamity,” to a condition given to “love-sick girls” (Hacking 186). Because hysteria was largely regarded as a feminine illness, the diagnosis was not thought serious enough to define the pain of the railway accident survivors, many of whom were men. As well, those hoping to sue railroad companies for damages were highly unlikely to be rewarded any compensation if their symptoms were thought to be the result of hysteria. Thus a new disorder was required to define what these victims were experiencing that would not belittle their illness in the eyes of a court. Indeed, a man diagnosed with hysteria would experience trouble having his condition taken seriously anywhere.5

There is evidence in the case studies of lingering prejudice against gendered perceived symptoms (like hysteria), especially in J.K Rowling’s Harry Potter series, as well as Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games trilogy. Harry Potter is mocked by Draco Malfoy and his goons for exhibiting symptoms they deem feminine. For example, twice when coming into contact with the fear-inducing Dementors, Harry faints, which is a

5 Similarly, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was added to the DSM-III in 1980, and was largely a response to soldiers returning from Vietnam. A new disorder was needed in order to qualify for insurance claims.
symptom often attributed to Victorian ladies of weak constitutions. Harry is teased ruthlessly for having this response, and Draco does a “ridiculous impression of a swooning fit” which is followed by “roar[s] of laughter” (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban* 75) from other students. When Harry exhibits a seemingly feminine symptom it causes other students not to take his symptoms seriously, nor the event that occasioned them.

Similarly, Katniss Everdeen is diagnosed with hysteria by doctors baffled by her symptoms. Being thought hysterical belittles Katniss’s condition not in the eyes of others, but her own, for she regards her symptoms as a sign of weakness. Both examples will be discussed in further detail within the case studies.

Ruth Leys argues it was during the Great War that it “became evident to some physicians that, in absence of physical lesions, their [soldiers] wounds were psychological rather than organic in nature” (83). Because this phenomenon was affecting men on a large scale, hysteria became an even more problematic. Soldiers who had not suffered physical injuries were complaining of pain and psychological troubles. The soldiers’ symptoms were labeled war neurosis in place of hysteria to remove gendered prejudice. Freud explains in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1920) that the Great War gave rise to a number of illnesses, which though similar to hysteria in their symptoms, actually surpasses it in that the “enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities” (10) is far greater than that of hysteric symptoms. Freud began to apply the term trauma and war neurosis to the previously diagnosed hysteria of soldiers:

> The term ‘traumatic,’ . . . we apply it to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with . . . and this may result in permanent
disturbances of the manner in which energy operates. (*Introductory Lectures* 275)

War presents a soldier with daily “stimulus too powerful” for a mind to continually comprehend. Like the railroad accidents, the victim is presented with an event too sudden, shocking and destructive to comprehend, which causes the psychological trauma or wound.

Leys notes the significance of William Brown, who in 1920 was the first to apply the term shell shock (another label given to Katniss Everdeen) to soldiers who showed symptoms of “loss of sight or hearing, spasmodic convulsions or trembling of the limbs . . . exhaustion, sleeplessness, depression, and terrifying, repetitive nightmares” (Leys 84). Brown believed these symptoms were a result of soldiers materializing the powerful emotions of destructive and distressing events into bodily symptoms. The psychological symptoms give pain to the body when what has really been wounded by wartime experiences is the mind. Brown proposed that soldiers, who are expected to always maintain self-control and remain disciplined during conditions on the front line, are faced with “unremitting physical and psychological stress” that when faced with “any significant trauma” (Leys 84) they would have to break down. The soldier is unable in the moment of significant trauma to express his “powerful emotions directly, through action and speech” (Leys 84). Because soldiers are expected to remain disciplined and in self-control they must “consciously materialize them [the trauma] by converting them into physical or bodily symptoms” (Leys 84).

The case studies, whether for a short or extended period of time, take place in war-like settings. Harry Potter experiences combat when the Order of the Phoenix battles
Voldemort and his Death Eaters during the last chapters of the series. *The Book Thief* takes place in Nazi Germany during the beginning of World War II, and protagonist Liesel experiences bombings, witnesses injured war veterans, and the mistreatment of Jewish people. Katniss experiences combat during her participation in two Hunger Games, and when fighting the Capitol along side the rebels. War and combat have had a profound effect on the developing concept of war neurosis, trauma, and PTSD. The case studies reflect this ongoing relationship of trauma with war in their often volatile and combative settings.

1.2 Freud and the Diagnostic Statistical Manual

Drawing from his studies of soldiers from WWI, Freud began to develop theories of what constituted trauma. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explores how certain events are able to damage the mind. The body, and all within it, is a living organism that is “susceptible to stimulation” (28). The surface of the living organism facing out into the external world (the physical body) is believed to be differentiated and “will serve as an organ for receiving stimuli” (29). Because the surface of the “vesicle” (29) is continuously being bombarded with external stimuli and modified from the stimuli, Freud supposes there must be a method for containing impact stimuli have on the deeper layers (our internal functions such as the mind) of the organism:

> as a result of the ceaseless impact of the external stimuli on the surface of the vesicle, its substance to a certain depth may have become permanently modified, so that excitatory processes run a different course in it from what they run in the deeper layers. A crust would thus be formed which would at last have been so thoroughly ‘baked through’ by stimulation that
it would present the most favourable possible conditions for the reception of stimuli and become incapable of any further modification. (29)

In order to contain the impact stimuli can have on internal layers of the living organism, a crust develops (which Freud later refers to as the protective shield) which blocks the further reception of stimuli into the deeper layers of the organism.

However, sudden, destructive and highly distressing experiences are able to break through the protective shield and travel into the underlying layers with strong intensity and are thus able to modify the internal organism, or in this case, the mind. Extremely distressing experiences are able to break through the protective shield because the mind is not prepared to defend against the stimuli; the energies come as a shock to the organism. Freud believes that such stimuli are bound to “provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism” (33). Because these experiences are able to break through the protective shield there is a flooding of stimuli into the lower layers resulting in trauma to the mind. In his discussions, Freud touches on the ambiguity of trauma: is it the event (stimuli) that is traumatic, or the response (the disturbance) to the event? Though not in the realm of this thesis to attempt to provide a well-researched answer, Freud’s discussion demonstrates the ambiguity surrounding trauma when trying to define it.

Outcomes of stimuli breaking through the protective shield can include melancholic mourning, the compulsion to repeat, and repetitive dreams. Melancholic mourning, as discussed in Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), is the unhealthy mourning of a lost loved object. Freud argues that healthy mourning of a loved object entails the “withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to
a new one” (586). The time of mourning is needed “for the command of reality-testing to be carried out” (589) to renegotiate reality with the absence of the lost object. With melancholic mourning the libido is not displaced on another object, but instead there is the “identification of the ego with the abandoned object” (586). Not displacing the libido from the object, but identifying with it, causes the “loved person of the loved-relation” to not be “given up” (587). The melancholic mourner does not accept the absence of the lost object in their new reality, but identifies with the object in order to continue incorporating it in the present. Melancholic mourning often arises when a loved object is lost due to a distressing event, and is found in all three case studies. For example, in chapter one I argue the best evidence of Harry Potter being traumatized by his parents’ murders is in his being melancholic in his mourning. Harry refuses to accept his parents’ absence from his life, and believes that they could one day be restored to him.

Freud also examines how the compulsion to repeat acts as a method of overcoming traumatic neurosis. He notes that the trauma victim is “fixated to his trauma” and to “the moment at which the trauma occurred” (*Pleasure Principle* 12). In the waking and dream world trauma victims can feel as if they are repeating their trauma against their wishes. Freud explains that the subconscious compulsion to repeat is used to overcome distress. He uses an example of a child’s game, *daifort*, to illustrate how mastery can be achieved through repetition. In order to master the distressing experience of his mother’s departures, the child takes a toy, throws it away, and triumphantly discovers it. The compulsion to repeat the distressing nature of the child’s separation from his mother is seen in his game, but he is able to achieve mastery over the separation through it. The child becomes an active participant by retrieving the object when he
wishes. Freud argues that through the compulsion to repeat the child “make[s] [ himself] master of the situation” (Pleasure Principle 16). Through the compulsion to repeat one can gain mastery over trauma.

Tied to the compulsion to repeat are dreams of the trauma. While some scholars argue that nightmares of the trauma are exact replicas of the distressing event (this is impossible to prove), Freud draws upon the highly symbolic nature of dreams. He argues dreams do “not consist entirely of situations, but also include disconnected fragments of visual images, speeches and even bits of unmodified thoughts” (“On Dreams” 157). Freud also argues that dreams are a sort of substitute for thought processes (“On Dreams” 147) and are full of meaning and emotions. Like the da/fort game, dreams endeavor “to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis” (Pleasure Principle 37). The dreams arise in “obedience” (37) to the compulsion to repeat in that victims can achieve mastery over their trauma through dreams. Protagonists from all three case studies have dreams concerning their distressing events. While the dreams are often distressing, paralyzing, and sometimes retraumatizing, they ultimately act as a means of gaining mastery over their trauma.

In contrast to Freud’s often highly symbolic and subjective forms of trauma (which Stone argues fits well in the humanities), the DSM relies on symptom patterns to

6 Freud names dreams that call on trauma “anxiety dreams” (Pleasure Principle 37).

Though most dreams act as wish fulfillment and function within the pleasure principle, anxiety dreams work against the pleasure principle; they act beyond the pleasure principle.
diagnose trauma related mental illnesses. The first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders (DSM-I)* was published in 1952, and was developed largely to incorporate the “outpatient presentations of World War II serviceman and veterans” (*DSM IV-TR*, Introduction n.pag.) who demonstrated psychophysiological, personality, and acute disorders. The *DSM-I* was the first official manual of mental disorders to put focus on clinical utility. A new way of classifying psychopathology was used, and the term *disorder* began to be used when referring to a “generic group” (Clegg 365), and *reactions* was used to describe the specific diagnoses.

The *DSM-III* “represented a profound break from [these] previous classification systems” (Clegg 366). Most importantly, in terms of this thesis, in 1980 PTSD was first named as a disorder in the *DSM-III*. In the manual, a traumatic event was first defined as a “catastrophic stressor that was outside the range of usual human experience” (Friedman, n.pag.). This definition proved to be controversial, especially with feminists who challenged the notion that PTSD only happens outside the range of normal experience. For an individual who is routinely abused, the abuse becomes part of their normal human experience, but it is nevertheless traumatic and capable of producing PTSD. As well, the *DSM-III* attempted to remove earlier explanations for disorders, and replaced them with categories that relied on symptom clusters or patterns. This move was “justified by the lack of useful etiological knowledge” (Clegg 366) and also provided language more accessible to clinicians of different theoretical backgrounds. The *DSM-III* reflected the developing belief that disorders need to be based on data (unlike Freud’s emphasize on analysis), and that the pursuit of further data would help to understand the
“multiple determinants of mental illness and the effectiveness of various biological, psychological, and social treatments” (Spitzer qtd. in Clegg, 366-67).

Work on the *DSM-IV* was begun in 1987 and changes focused mainly on renaming, reorganizing, removing and adding a few categories, as well as changing criteria for various disorders. One of the most significant changes in the manual was the “greater emphasis on culture-specific aspects of diagnosis” (Clegg 367), and the acknowledgement that most, if not all, mental disorders “result from a complex and varying interplay of biological, psychological, and environmental risk factors” (Frances qtd. in Clegg 367). A new revision process was also introduced that would view empirical data through literature reviews, data reanalysis, and field trials. The purpose of this new revision process was to provide diagnosis based on evidence, not individual opinion (yet a further movement away from analysis). The degree to which decisions *are* based on evidence rather than opinion is uncertain, but this shows a shift in emphasis and importance being placed on empirical evidence within mental illness diagnosis.

Joshua W. Clegg argues that “As the *DSMs* have changed, so also has mental illness itself” (370). How mental illnesses are defined in the public sphere during a certain moment in history is reflected in the various renditions of the *DSM*; the *DSMs*’ definitions of mental illnesses permeate and reflect mainstream culture. When diagnosing fictional characters I use the *DSM* current to the time the text was written, for the classifications and symptoms reflect the conception of mental illness that may have influenced the writing. I use the *DSM-IV-TR* (2000) as the basis for my clinical diagnosis.
of characters for it reflects the conception of trauma and PTSD during the time all three case studies were written.⁷

In May 2013 the *DSM-5* was released and major changes were made to trauma related disorders, for example: the deletion of “intense fear, helplessness or horror” (Grohol n.pag.) as a response to trauma because “that criterion proved to have no utility in predicting the onset of PTSD” (Grohol n.pag.). The *DSM-IV-TR* has three major symptom clusters for PTSD that include re-experiencing the event; avoidance; and increased arousal. The *DSM-5* now has four clusters that include re-experiencing the event; heightened arousal; avoidance; and negative thoughts, moods or feelings. Another major change, that could greatly influence the depiction of trauma in young peoples’ narratives, is the introduction of two subtypes. The first is called *PTSD Preschool Subtype*, which is “used to diagnose PTSD in children younger than 6 years old” (Grohol n.pag.). As well, PTSD is now developmentally sensitive, meaning “diagnostic thresholds have been lowered for children and adolescents” (Grohol n.pag.). It will be interesting to examine if and how depictions of trauma within children’s and YA literature change to reflect the new criteria of trauma and PTSD in the *DSM-5*.

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⁷ The first three books in the *Harry Potter* series (*The Philosopher’s Stone* in 1997, *The Chamber of Secrets* in 1998, and *The Prisoner of Azkaban* in 1999) were written before the *DSM-IV-TR*, but for the sake of simplicity I use the *DSM-IV-TR* with the entire series.

⁸ With the new edition the *DSM* shifted from using roman numerals to mark the edition number (*DSM-IV*) to Arabic numerals (*DSM-5*).
1.3 Definition of Trauma and Outline of Thesis Chapters

Relying on the *DSM-IV-TR*, this thesis defines a traumatic event as an extreme stressor that an individual responds to with “intense fear, helplessness, or horror” (*DSM-IV-TR*, sec. 309.81 n.pag.). Examples of events that are discussed include military combat, violent personal assault, torture, and/or “observing the serious injury or unnatural death of another person” (*DSM-IV-TR*, sec. 309.81 n.pag.). For an extremely stressful event to be considered traumatic to an individual, he or she must exhibit prolonged (at least a month) symptoms and signs of distress. If an individual does not exhibit prolonged symptoms or signs due to an extreme stressor, then the event is not considered to be traumatic to the individual, nor has the individual been traumatized. The *DSM-IV-TR*’s symptoms are broken down into three categories: re-experiencing the event, the persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the event, and a numbing of general responsiveness. If traumatized, the individual must exhibit symptoms from all three clusters.

However, Freud’s concepts of melancholia, the compulsion to repeat, and recurring dreams are evident also in the fictional depictions. The character will be ruled by the compulsion to repeat both in the waking world through methods similar to the *da/fort* game, or during sleep with reoccurring nightmares that can be both highly symbolic or resembling the actual event. Also, protagonists from the case studies will react to a distressing event with elements of melancholia (which can greatly resemble

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9 Due to constraints on space, I will not be discussing sexual assault and abuse (present in *The Hunger Games* in the character Finnick) or terrorist attacks (can be argued to be found in *Harry Potter*).
depression), and often respond to losses from extremely distressing events with melancholic mourning. These signs signal that the extreme stressor is traumatic for the protagonist.

The first case study deals with J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Though many scholars have labeled Harry a victim of trauma due to his parents’ gruesome murders, I question this status and argue that scholars have overlooked how Voldemort displays more classic signs of being traumatized by the night of Lily and James’s deaths. The closest Harry comes to displaying symptoms of trauma is in his melancholic mourning, which he is able to overcome through a healthy form of identification with his parents. I explore Harry’s developing and maturing response to death throughout the series, and argue Harry is not traumatized by the loss of loved ones, but motivated to action. Finally the epilogue illustrates that Harry is able to grow into an adult with no lingering wounds from his distressing past, though he has been matured by experiencing death. Harry has achieved absolute healing from his past wounds, and has been able to incorporate his lost loved ones into his life in a healthy way.

The second case study focuses on Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*. I question the ability of narratives to traumatize readers, and offer instead that through the representation of trauma the novel charges readers to become political agents in their own lives. First I study the trauma that arises from protagonist Liesel’s loss of family. I examine Liesel’s melancholic mourning as the means of delaying and accepting the loss of her family. Secondly I consider Liesel’s relationship with Max, and their small community of trauma victims. I explore the lessons Max teaches Liesel regarding the limitations of words (more than one person is needed to resist), and the lessons’ effect on
Liesel’s developing identity. Finally, I look to the epilogue to show how Zusak uses Liesel’s trauma to warn readers against becoming bystanders to atrocity, and charges them to take an active role in ensuring that atrocities like the Holocaust are not be repeated.

The last case study is Suzanne Collins’s trilogy *The Hunger Games*. I argue that Collins is the least Freudian of the studies, and that her concept of trauma does not include healing but learning to manage trauma. I first focus on the experience of Katniss both in and out of the Hunger Games, and argue that instead of absolute healing Katniss must learn to incorporate her traumatic past into her new identity. Secondly I discuss Peeta’s identity-altering torture by the Capitol. Like Katniss, Peeta does not achieve absolute healing, but learns to manage his symptoms with behavioral therapy techniques. I then turn to how the cultural trauma of the Hunger Games affects Panem’s shifting identity. In the trilogy, readers learn about the harsh realities of war, and are encouraged to question cultural power structures. In contrast to the epilogue of Rowling’s series, the epilogue that concludes Collins’s trilogy demonstrates that absolute healing is not achieved. Instead Katniss, Peeta and Panem must integrate their traumatic memories into their new identities.
“My books are largely about death. . . . We're all frightened of it” (Rowling qtd. in Greig)

In their chapter “Controversial Content: Is *Harry Potter* Harmful to Children?” Deborah Taub and Heather L. Servaty-Seib question if death, “particularly the vivid portrayal of death” (Taub and Servaty-Seib 22), is an appropriate topic for children’s books. The authors argue that questioning death’s suitability as subject matter in children’s literature originates from a desire to “protect children from the pain of death” (23). One of the many reasons why J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series has been controversial is its being saturated with death, and many question whether this is suitable for young readers.

Ultimately Taub and Servaty-Seib argue that depictions of death, as presented in *Harry Potter*, are beneficial for readers¹ because as “Harry and his friends work through their grief, their experiences highlight many contemporary issues . . . including uniquely adolescent aspects of grief’” (24). The authors find that exposing readers to death and grief within *Harry Potter* proves to be helpful in educating how to acknowledge death, remember deceased loved ones, and “openly express feelings about the deceased” (27). I agree *Harry Potter* has the potential to encourage the development of a matured concept of death in readers, and argue Rowling creates a series largely about death that remains hopeful. Harry is able to experience death without being permanently damaged. The

¹ Many scholars, like Taub and Servaty-Seib argue that *Harry Potter* begins as children’s literature, but moves into YA literature as the series progresses into darker material. I argue that the series remains children’s literature. Though some scholars will signify *Harry Potter* readers as adolescents, when I discuss young readers I am referring to pre-adolescents.
series offers an introduction to death, could aid in developing a mature understanding of death as Taub and Servaty-Seib suggest, and allows readers to end a series “largely about death” feeling hopeful.

Harry is clearly not untouched by experiencing death as J.K. Rowling admits:

What I was trying to do with the death in this book was that I wanted to show how very arbitrary and sudden death is. . . . It’s one of the cruel things about death. . . . That’s how it happens – one minute you are talking to your friend and the next minute he is gone, so shocking and inexplicable – one minute they are there but now where did they go? I found it upsetting to write because I knew what it would mean to Harry. (Rowling qtd. in Fry, Webcast)

What death means to Harry is what so many scholars have failed to explore, and is the focus of this chapter. Many critics label the deaths in *Harry Potter* as being traumatic for Harry, take for granted what constitutes a traumatic event, and never question whether Harry is in fact traumatized by the assumed traumatic events. For example, Angelea Panos argues the trauma in *Harry Potter* provides an example of resilience to young readers in that Harry is able to adapt “despite stressful experiences” (169). But Panos fails to make the connection that the stressful experiences are what mature Harry and make him resilient. Similarly, Julia Pond argues “Harry strongly feels himself set apart from his classmates—not just in fame and name, but also in trauma and experience” (Pond 184, emphasis added), without defining trauma further than Harry’s witnessing Cedric Diggory’s murder. Rachel Cox believes Lily and James’s murders are what define Harry, and that “the discovery of his parents’ murder . . . abruptly forces Harry into the role of a trauma victim” (2), greatly taking for granted that the murders are indeed
traumatic to Harry. Lastly, Linda Jardine argues that readers can “understand the full extent of the trauma Harry suffered” (80, emphasis added), but spends no time explaining what is meant when referring to Harry’s trauma, nor how the trauma he suffers is, in fact, suffered.

What these, and others, take for granted is if and how Harry does experience trauma. It is true that the deaths Harry witnesses have the potential to be traumatizing experiences. The Diagnostic Statistical Manual-IV-TR (DSM-IV-TR) includes the experience of witnessing death or serious injury to others (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) as an extreme stressor capable of traumatizing or even producing PTSD. But as stated in the introduction, for an extreme stressor to be considered traumatic to an individual he must be traumatized by the experience, which entails exhibiting prolonged (at least a month) symptoms. The same extreme stressor can be experienced by several people and yet not be considered a traumatic event by all; trauma is defined by the individual’s response to the extreme stressor. According to the DSM-IV-TR, an event can only be considered traumatic if an individual exhibits extended symptoms, and this is what critics of Harry Potter take for granted. Harry experiencing the extreme stressors of loved ones’ deaths does not ensure that he will be traumatized, just as the DSM-IV-TR argues: “many victims of extreme stress do not develop subsequent psychopathology” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.). It is often unclear throughout the series whether Harry is responding to extreme stressors with prolonged traumatic symptoms.

Harry is disturbed by witnessing death, and suffers through grieving processes, but he is not consistently traumatized by these experiences as is shown in his lack of prolonged symptoms. Most often Harry does not exhibit continued symptoms of trauma.
as a response to death, undercutting claims made by past scholars that Harry has been
defined by his trauma. Many critics mark the events at Godric’s Hollow (Lily and
James’s murders) as Harry’s defining trauma. Yet, it can be argued that it is the
perpetrator, Voldemort, who fits the criteria of being traumatized more than that of Harry,
which shifts the significance of the event for Harry. The strongest claim for Harry’s
trauma can be made in his melancholic mourning of his parents’ deaths, and Harry is able
to heal from this sign of trauma. Otherwise, Harry is able to experience multiple extreme
stressors without being traumatized.

In order to explore death and trauma, this chapter focuses on the deaths of Lily
and James Potter, Cedric Diggory, Sirius Black and Albus Dumbledore. First, I examine
Lily and James’s murders and argue it is Voldemort who is traumatized by the tragedy at
Godric’s Hollow, not Harry. Secondly, I argue Harry does exhibit traits of trauma in his
melancholic mourning. I explore Harry’s ability to shift his unhealthy melancholic
mourning to a healthy mourning through identification with his parents, which leads to
his subsequent healing. Thirdly, I investigate the deaths of Cedric, Sirius and
Dumbledore in order to track Harry’s developing maturity in regards to mourning and
death. Fourth, I examine Harry’s own death and resurrection, and how his triumph over
death maintains traditional children’s literature conventions. Finally, I discuss the
epilogue which functions to soften Harry’s struggles, making the series safe to be read by
children. Young readers of the series are presented with safe depictions of death in which
the protagonist triumphs over it. Ultimately Harry is strengthened by his distressing
experiences rather then hindered and overcome by them, which ends the series with
positivity.
2.1 The Tragedy at Godric’s Hollow: Whose Trauma Is It?

In the opening of *Harry Potter* readers hear secondhand from Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall that Voldemort has murdered Lily and James Potter in their home at Godric’s Hollow, and attempted, but failed, to kill their year-old son Harry. The entire series is largely driven by this inciting tragic, and potentially traumatizing, event. The novel then jumps to ten years later and Harry does not remember his parents nor their murders: “He couldn’t remember his parents at all” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 27). The absence of Harry’s memory can be argued as aligning with Cathy Caruth’s theories of traumatic memory. According to Caruth’s arguments, Harry has not forgotten the memory of his parents’ murders, but rather he was not fully conscious (Caruth 17) during the event; therefore a memory did not have the opportunity to be formed. Though physically present, Harry missed the experience of Lily and James’s murders because the event, “not being experienced *in time* . . . has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 62, emphasis original) by Harry.

Though Harry has no memory of his parents nor their deaths, he does have a reoccurring dream of “a blinding flash of green light and a burning pain on his forehead” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 27). Readers later learn the dream is a vision of Voldemort’s casting a spell (the green light) in an attempt to kill Harry (the burning pain on his forehead). The dream repeats the experience of how Harry received his physical wound, in the shape of a lightning bolt, on his forehead. It is the physical trauma that has the strength to break into Harry’s consciousness, rather than any other moment, perhaps because receiving the lightning-bolt shaped wound affected Harry directly and physically. Following Caruth’s theories, we could attribute the dream Harry has as the repetition of a traumatic
experience (Caruth 63) in its attempt to be known; it is a compulsion to repeat. But Harry’s repetition deviates from Caruth in her argument that the “repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be retraumatizing” (63), because Harry’s vision does not function to retraumatize. Harry does not exhibit symptoms of being traumatized or retraumatized by the dream, but is puzzled by it and tries to understand its meaning from the little, and false, information he has been given about his parents.

Harry’s absent memory could also be an example of ordinary forgetting. Because of Harry’s young age, his inability to remember his parents or their murders could be due to the developmental changes in memory from visual representation to narrative memory, which makes “the inability to remember much that happened before we were 3 or 4 years old . . . normal” (McNally 77). It is possible for young children to remember events that were extremely stressful, but Richard McNally notes that for a memory to be maintained the event must be understood by the child at the time and discussed later (61). Due to Harry’s young age, he did not understand the event of his parents’ murders at the time they took place. As well, while living with the Dursleys, there are no discussions of Lily and James: “His aunt and uncle never spoke about them [Harry’s parents], and of course he was forbidden to ask questions” (Philosopher’s Stone 27). The sparse information Harry has been able to squeeze out of the Dursleys is a lie about his parents dying in a car crash. The lie causes Harry to believe the dream he has of the blinding green light “was the crash” (Philosopher’s Stone 27). The memory of Lily and James is not fostered nor encouraged by the Dursleys.

Whether Harry was unable to process and create a memory of his parents’ deaths because of his young age, or because of the extremely stressful nature of the event, we
know that Harry was unable to create a substantial memory of the event and that he does not seem to be traumatized. Using the very different theories of Caruth and McNally we can understand Harry was not in the position to process the event when it took place (though why he could not process the event is debatable). Thus both the theories of McNally and Caruth are useful when discussing Harry’s loss, or apparent lack, of memory concerning his parents.

There is a third argument to be made about the nature of Harry’s flash-of-green-light vision that shifts perspective away from Harry to that of Voldemort. The events that transpired at Godric’s Hollow are tragic to Voldemort because he was unable to kill Harry. When taking Voldemort’s perspective into consideration, Harry’s vision becomes complicated. Due to Voldemort’s spell backfiring when trying to kill Harry, a piece of Voldemort’s soul latched onto the infant’s connecting them. Because of their connection, the vision Harry experiences may not be his own, but actually a memory of Voldemort’s. If the vision is indeed Voldemort’s, then Harry is experiencing the vision vicariously through Voldemort’s compulsion to repeat in the attempt to gain mastery over his own trauma; in other words, it may not be Harry who is driven by the compulsion to repeat, but Voldemort. Voldemort replays the memory of his failed murder attempt in order to gain mastery of the trauma that Godric’s Hollow holds for him.

Immediately upon experiencing the trauma of being unable to kill Harry, Voldemort demonstrates symptoms of being traumatized. The most obvious, for our discussion has been centered around it thus far, is the repetition of the flash-of-green-light vision. The repeated vision is an example of experiencing “recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event” as well as “feelings as if the traumatic event were...
recurring (including a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and
dissociative flashback episodes)” \((DSM-IV-TR, \text{ sec. 309.81 n.pag.})\). The recurrent
memory is extremely distressing to Voldemort, and proof of this is evident when Harry
shares the vision, it is accompanied with a “burning pain on his forehead” \((Philosopher’s
Stone 27)\). Later it is revealed Harry’s scar hurts when Voldemort is experiencing extreme
emotions of anger. Harry’s pained scar following the vision is proof of Voldemort’s own
distress over the recurrent memory.

Though Voldemort’s physical body is destroyed by the backfiring spell, he is still
living because he has protectively split his soul (this will be explained in greater detail
later on). Rather than retaliating or reconnecting with his followers, the Death Eaters,
Voldemort flees to the forests of Albania. While Voldemort must escape somewhere in
order to regain strength to once again achieve physical form, it is the choice of remote
Albanian forests, in which he will not be surrounded by any of his loyal supporters,
which can be viewed as the symptom of “diminished interest or participation in
significant events . . . [and] estrangement from others” \((DSM-IV-TR, \text{ sec. 309.81 n.pag.})\).

As well, throughout the series Voldemort exhibits symptoms of irritability and intense
outbursts of anger against his own Death Eaters. Voldemort’s outbursts can be a result of
his obsession with achieving domination, and frustration over his plans consistently being
thwarted by Harry. But in light of Voldemort’s trauma, his outbursts can also be linked to
symptoms of his traumatization.

Voldemort’s continued hunt for Harry is of course linked to his ultimate plan of
domination over the wizarding world, but might also be read as a sign of his compulsion
to repeat in order to gain mastery over his trauma. The climax of each novel in the series
involves a battle between Harry and Voldemort (or a loyal supporter acting in his place),
all of which are orchestrated by Voldemort in the attempt to finally triumph over the past
trauma of being unable to kill Harry. When Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,
discusses the compulsion to repeat it often takes place in dreams, which is true of
Voldemort with the flash-of-green-light vision. Yet, Voldemort also literally tries to
repeat killing Harry in order to gain mastery over the traumatic failed attempt, and this
reveals that Voldemort is “fixated to his trauma” (Freud 12) and that he has the
instinctual “urge . . . to restore an earlier state of things” (43) in which he was in
complete control. Voldemort’s fixation on his trauma is an obsession, and motivates his
every action.

The *DSM-IV-TR* states that for someone to be considered suffering from PTSD
symptoms, like the ones above, they must persist for at least a month. Voldemort’s
symptoms endure for thirteen years, and continue when he returns to the wizarding world
(for a grand total of nineteen years), showing that he has experienced not only trauma,
but PTSD, a clinical and prolonged response to trauma. Voldemort’s nineteen years of
PTSD expose the inability to place his trauma in the past. Harry’s relationship to his past
is complex and in constant development throughout the series, whereas Voldemort’s past
“remains static” (Zimmerman 194). Voldemort’s trauma has frozen time causing him to
remain stagnant instead of moving forward. Considering the flash-of-green-light vision
from the perspective of Voldemort demonstrations he is the one traumatized by the
events at Godric’s Hollow, not Harry.

Though Harry is not traumatized by the tragedy of Godric’s Hollow, he does
struggle when the truths of his parents’ deaths are revealed. Harry gains knowledge of his
parents, their deaths, and his ancestry early in the series. Though the knowledge has the potential to traumatize Harry, it is not a burden. In *The Philosopher’s Stone*, the Hogwarts’ groundskeeper, Hagrid, reveals the truth of how Harry’s parents died. Hagrid is furious at the Dursleys for lying to Harry and creating a false memory of who his parents were. Hagrid lectures the Dursleys that their lie is “‘an outrage! A scandal!’” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 44). According to Hagrid, it is important for Harry to know the story of his parents, for it is Harry’s story as well: “Harry Potter not knowin’ his own story. I don’t know if I’m the right person ter tell yeh—but someone’s gotta—yeh can’t go off ter Hogwards not knowin’” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 44, emphasis added). According to Hagrid, knowing the truth could be distressing, but Harry must understand the event to know who he really is. To begin understanding his own importance Harry must learn about his difficult past. Hagrid aligns for the reader, and Harry, that the loss of Lily and James is, and will continue, to be essential in Harry’s own story. Harry will be linked with the event that claimed his parents’ lives until he defeats Voldemort.

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2 Though the Dursleys’ intentions were strictly selfish, their technique of making Harry believe a false memory so he would not remember the traumatic one is reminiscent of Pierre Janet’s method for curing patients of traumatic neurosis. An aspect of Janet’s psychotherapy was to make “the patient forget” (Leys 106). He believed a cure to traumatic neurosis was possible from “the excision of . . . imputed or reconstructed trauma” (Leys 107), not the recovered traumatic memory. This could be seen as true for Harry, as he did not suffered from the traumatic memory of his parents’ deaths because he believed in the false memory.
When Hagrid tells Harry the true story of his parents’ murder, Harry once again has the vision of the green light but with detail added: “As Hagrid’s story came to a close, he saw again the blinding flash of green light, more clearly than he had ever remembered it before—and he remembered something else, for the first time in his life—a high, cold, cruel laugh” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 46). The developed vision signals that perhaps a memory of the significant event is beginning to be recovered. Taub and Servaty-Seib argue it is knowledge that unveils the suppressed memory of his parents’ murders (25). Though it is questionable whether the memory was suppressed because it is unclear whether there is even a memory to suppress, it does seem evident that knowledge plays a part in the added detail. McNally explores how context affects remembering. He argues some memories may only come into consciousness during “certain situations” (40) that present the correct contextual cues. McNally explains: “information may be available in memory, but not accessible, because of the absence of potent reminders. . . . Seemingly long-forgotten events may immediately come to mind when cues . . . are present once again” (McNally 40, emphasis original). Hagrid provides Harry with contextual cues that allow his limited memory to expand. Taub and Servaty-Seib are right in noting that information is what allows the memory to be more fully known, for the information provides Harry with important contextual cues.

Learning the truth of his parents is “very painful” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 46) for Harry, yet he does not exhibit any signs of being traumatized by the information. Harry is motivated to action, which is contrasted with Voldemort’s static nature as a response to his trauma. Directly following feeling pained, Harry also experiences “feeling pleased and proud” (47). These emotions result not only from Harry’s learning about his parents’
courage, but the excitement surrounding what and who he really is: a wizard. Harry is excited and proud to join the same magical world his parents were part of. The happiness that makes Harry feel “as though a large balloon was swelling inside him” (49) quickly overshadows the pain he first felt from the recovered memory. Harry’s happiness shows that though learning the truth of his parents’ deaths, he is not traumatized by the event. Harry feels closer to his parents because of Hagrid’s truth, because he is now given the opportunity to join their world, which brings him closer to them. The excitement of being closer to his parents greatly overshadows the pain of their murders, and Harry is moved to the action of becoming part of a new community, which is completely opposite to the action Voldemort takes due to the events at Godric’s Hollow.

Harry is excited about joining the magical world, but when the excitement fades he is haunted by his parents’ murders and hungers to learn everything he can about the event. Throughout the series Harry is able to completely flesh out the memory of his parents’ murders through his own and others’ memories. Living in a magical world, Harry has the opportunity to explore the event from his and others’ perspectives, though experiencing someone else’s memory can be dangerous. For example, to hide his shame of helping a young Voldemort complete the evil task of creating a Horcrux, Professor

\[^{3}\text{A Horcrux is, “the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of his soul. . . . you split your soul . . . and hide part of it in an object outside the body. Then, even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged” (Half-Blood Prince 464-65). Lord Voldemort splits his soul in seven Horcruxes, and this is why he is able to survive death. To kill Voldemort, Harry must destroy all seven of the Horcruxes.}\]
Slughorn alters his memory: “‘I am not proud. . . . I am ashamed of what—of what that memory shows’” (Half-Blood Prince 459). Though Harry is able to experience Slughorn’s memory, through the magic of the Pensieve, he is being shown a false memory. Harry learns he must be careful when witnessing the perspectives of others, for memory can be deceiving. Memory is greatly colored by the emotions and perspectives of individuals at the time of the event, and can be altered after the event to suit the individual’s needs. Memory is presented like a living organism, constantly changing and being added to.

As already mentioned, Harry is sometimes able to experience what Voldemort is feeling and thinking. Professor Snape explains to Harry: “the curse that failed to kill you seems to have forged some kind of connection between you and the Dark Lord. The evidence suggests at times, when your mind is most relaxed and vulnerable—when you are asleep, for instance—you are sharing the Dark Lord’s thoughts and emotions” (Order of the Phoenix 469). The connection allows for Harry to experience the night his parents were murdered from the first person perspective of Voldemort: “he [Harry] was Voldemort . . . his scream was Harry’s scream, his pain was Harry’s pain” (Deathly Hallows 279-80). From the perspective of Voldemort, Harry observes his childhood home and a year-old version of himself playing happily with his parents. Harry is unable to relish in the scene for Voldemort’s feelings of arrogance disband any happiness: “too easy, too easy, he had not even picked up his wand” (281). Harry experiences the

4 The Pensieve is a basin in which memories are poured into so others can view them: “One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one’s mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them” (Goblet of Fire 519).
pleasure Voldemort felt in murdering his father James, “He laughed before casting the
curse” (281), and feels the “faint amusement of her [Lily’s] attempts to barricade herself”
(281). It is understandably disturbing for Harry to have to share and feel in the pleasure
and amusement Voldemort felt when murdering Lily and James. Harry also experiences
Voldemort’s pain (280) from being seemingly defeated, and shares Voldemort’s
insurmountable disappointment in being unable to kill the infant Harry.

Voldemort’s memory provides Harry a detailed account of his parents’ murders
from the perspective of the perpetrator. A concerned Hermione (one of Harry’s best
friends) shakes Harry awake from the shared dream/memory with Voldemort, and tells
Harry she has had to watch him “shouting and moaning and . . . things” (Deathly Hallows
283). He finds the portrayal difficult and painful to experience, yet how the memory
makes Harry feel is not dwelt upon. He does not respond to the memory with extended
traumatic symptoms, which shows the memory has not traumatized Harry. Harry is
visibly shaken and is “drenched in sweat” (Deathly Hallows 282), but his thoughts
immediately return to the task at hand before the link with Voldemort took over: the
search for the Horcruxes. Harry is pained by learning more about his parents’ deaths, but
not traumatized. Rather, Voldemort’s memory functions to motivate Harry in continuing
his journey of defeating Voldemort at a time when Harry was losing hope in being able to
do so.
2.2 *Harry’s Melancholic Mourning*

The strongest claim for Harry experiencing trauma can be shown in his melancholic mourning\(^5\) of his parents. Melancholic mourning shares many characteristics with depression, which is a symptom of trauma, making melancholia a potential symptom of trauma. Losing someone or thing can lead to the unhealthy mourning of the lost loved object. In Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia” he distinguishes between healthy mourning of a lost loved object and the unhealthy identification with the loved object through melancholia. In the context of the essay, Freud defines mourning as the “time needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail” (589) to renegotiate a new reality that includes the absence of the loved object. After time is spent testing out the new reality “the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object” (589), and the person in mourning will be able to identify the absence of the lost loved object and place it in the past. The healthy mourner is able to come to terms with the finality of death, and learns to function in reality without the loved object. The mourner is able to separate the past, in which the loved object was present, from the present and future in which the new reality will not include the lost loved object.

Melancholia, according to Freud, borrows features from mourning in that it is “a reaction to the real loss of a loved object” (587), but behaves like an “open wound” (589) that does not accept the finality of loss. Not accepting the absence transforms healthy

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\(^5\) I focus on Freud’s theory of mourning and melancholia rather then the *DSM-IV-TR*’s description of depression in this section. I place focus on Freud because the stories he uses to describe mourning and melancholia are more helpful and relatable to Harry’s response as compared to the *DSM-IV-TR*’s very clinical description of depression.
mourning “into pathological mourning” (587). Melancholic pathological mourning expresses itself through self-reproaches “to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object” (587-88). The melancholic mourner takes on the responsibility of the loss and is self-tormented (588) in being unable to give up the loved object. In contrast to normal mourning, which Freud defines as the withdrawal of the libido from the object and a displacement of it on to a new one (586), the melancholic mourner does not displace the lost object, but takes in the lost object and identifies with it. In this way, melancholia creates the illusion that the loved object is not lost, nor belonging to the past, but still present. Melancholia is a refusal to accept that the loved object is indeed gone, a self-tormenting disorder which delays the truth of the loss, and identifies the lost object into one’s own ego to preserve its presence.

Freud argues that for melancholia to take place there must be a strong fixation on the lost loved object (586). Melancholia results in physical symptoms such as the inability to sleep, “refusal to take nourishment” (584), and depression. Harry has a strong fixation on his parents and the fantasy of being part of a family. Once Harry begins school at Hogwarts, and has gained more information about his parents, he enters into a period of melancholic mourning and depression. Harry refuses to accept the finality of his parents’ absence, and displays the misplaced hope that they will appear in the present. These melancholic responses can be a sign that Harry is experiencing traumatic

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6 Freud also believed that melancholia created toxins within the body that caused disease (589). Thus melancholia could produce many illnesses and diseases that were not psychological.
symptoms, and has been traumatized by his parents’ absence. This section will explore
the possibility of Harry’s traumatization, and his means of overcoming it.

Though there are several examples of Harry’s melancholia, I have chosen two that
best showcase his melancholic mourning and possible trauma. One example of Harry’s
melancholic mourning takes place in *The Philosopher’s Stone* where Harry discovers the
Mirror of Erised. When first encountering the Mirror of Erised, Harry is unaware that it
shows “nothing more or less than our deepest, more desperate desire of our hearts” (157).
When Harry gazes into the mirror he sees “his family, for the first time in his life” (153).
The reaction to seeing his family in the mirror is complex. Harry “stared hungrily back at
them” (153) and is filled with joy (153) at being able to see his family for the first time.
Yet Harry also feels a “powerful kind of ache inside of him,” and a “terrible sadness”
(153). Cox argues that Harry finds a new personal identity in being a member of a family
(63) when looking into the mirror, but it is a false identity. Seeing a mirror image is not
enough, and staring hungrily at the family suggests there is a desire to consume, to
completely embody family.

Harry becomes obsessed with the mirror and confuses the reflection with a
possible reality. He returns several nights, ignoring his best friend Ron’s warnings: “I
know what you’re thinking about, Harry, that mirror. Don’t go back tonight” (155).
Despite Ron’s warnings, Harry runs to the room for three nights (156) and sits in front of
the mirror thinking there is nothing “to stop him from staying here all night with his
family” (156). Harry has confused the mirror’s magic as actual time spent with his
family. He is unable to believe that this mirror, reflecting his deepest desire, is in fact
reflecting an empty and impossible image. It reveals his melancholic belief that his
family belongs to the present, and is not limited to the past. Dumbledore catches Harry with the mirror, and senses the danger it possesses for him. He warns Harry the “mirror will give us neither knowledge nor truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen . . . not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible” (157). Though Dumbledore tries to convince Harry to no longer visit the mirror (158), he does not give Harry the chance to fulfill his promise and hides it. This exposes that Dumbledore does not fully trust that Harry will be able to resist the temptation, and reveals that he could sense the obsession and fixation Harry is exhibiting for his lost loved objects.

After the mirror is hidden, Harry “started having nightmares” of his parents “over and over again . . . disappearing in a flash of green light” (158). Though his parents were literally only a mirror image, having the mirror taken away causes Harry to feel as if they have been truly taken from him again. The repetitive nightmares act both to express the fear Harry has of losing his parents, and his subconscious desire to understand that they have already been lost. The nightmares expose the possibility that Harry is traumatized by his parents’ absence. The mirror did not bring his loved objects back, yet Harry still experiences sadness in losing their reflection. This response offers the most obvious sign of Harry’s experiencing trauma in regards to the absence of his parents.

However, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud revises his earlier views on identification and admits that he “did not appreciate the full significance of this process and did not know how common and how typical it is” (638). While, as shown in the previous section, identification with a lost object can prove to hinder one’s progress in accepting the absence of the lost object, identification can also be a normal and healthy function, as
Freud revises, “it [identification] makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its ‘character’” (638). Through the identification with the lost object, the individual is able to alter his character in order to both “survive the object-relation and in a certain sense to conserve it” (639). Identification is revised by Freud as the normal action of altering the character of the mourner in a way that allows him/her to conserve the lost object, and incorporate it into his/her present self, or otherwise known character.

Rowling draws on Freud’s two different perspectives of identification as is evident in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* where Harry experiences healthy identification with his parents as a means of altering his character in order to include them in his present through his experiences with the Dementors. Harry must not only battle his own depression concerning his lost loved ones, but must also battle against Rowling’s metaphorical embodiment of depression: the Dementors. Dementors are large cloaked figures whose faces are completely hidden by hoods (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 65). When in the presence of Dementors humans are drained of “peace, hope and happiness” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 140) and filled with darkness, depression and hopelessness. If one gets too near Dementors they will perform a kiss, which entails having “every good feeling, every happy memory . . . sucked out of you” and leaves one in a “soulless” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 140) state. Dementors are the embodiment of depression and its ability to steal all hope, joy, happiness, and ultimately one’s soul.

Harry’s first encounter with the Dementors takes place on the Hogwarts Express when a Dementor unexpectedly enters Harry and his friends’ train compartment, and everyone experiences, “every good feeling, every happy memory . . . sucked out,” and they are “left with nothing but the worst experiences of . . . life” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 140).
Harry’s encounter differs from that of his train companions. Harry not only feels the happiness being sucked out of him, but also hears “Screaming inside his head. . . . A shrill voice was laughing, the woman was screaming” (134). Though whom the laugh and scream belong to is at first a mystery, Harry figures out “who that screaming voice belonged to. . . . When the Dementors approached him, he heard the last moments of his mother’s life, her attempts to protect him” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 138). The Dementors force Harry to relive his dying mother’s screams and her murderer’s laugh. Depression/the Dementors cause Harry to experience his mother’s screams as if they are occurring in the present, which enforces his melancholic mourning and shows signs of trauma. Harry finds this memory, and the emotions it unveils, so overwhelming he loses consciousness on the train.

While Harry is upset over Lily’s screams, and having to re-experience them whenever around a Dementor, he is more embarrassed by his fainting spell. Harry is ashamed to be the only person in his train compartment to go “sort of rigid,” fall out of his seat and “start twitching” (67), while the others merely “felt weird. . . . Like I’d never be cheerful again” (67). Harry is frustrated that he had such a reaction and “felt the beginnings of shame. Why had he gone to pieces like that, when no one else had” (68). Harry is worried he will be set apart from his peers in his reaction to the Dementors, and fears appearing weaker and more sensitive. Although Harry’s friends encourage him that his reaction to the Dementors is nothing to be ashamed of, Harry is teased by students. Draco Malfoy does “a ridiculous impression of a swooning fit” (75) for his fellow Slytherins who answer with a “roar of laughter” (75). Draco and his peers mock and feminize Harry’s response to the terrifying Dementors. Harry’s reaction to the
Dementors is not validated by all of his peers, but belittled and embarrassingly linked to a swoon (most commonly associated with delicate women), which in turn causes Harry not to validate nor accept his own response. This is similar to the discussion in the introduction of WWI shell-shocked soldiers who were feminized because of the link of their symptoms to hysteria. Harry’s feminization because of fainting during an extremely stressful event shows a continuation of this history. Harry’s response to the Dementors/depression, and by extension his melancholic mourning, is not validated by his community.

Harry and his godfather Sirius are attacked by a group of Dementors, but saved by a Patronus in the shape of a stag. The Patronus Charm is the only spell able to fight Dementors and is conjured by “concentrating, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory” (Prisoner of Azkaban 176). When conjured correctly, wizards are able to create a silver animal that is a physical embodiment of their happiness able to chase away Dementors. The Patronus acts in opposition to trauma for one must make the choice and have the will to conjure happy thoughts, whereas with trauma one does not have control. Harry is unable to see who cast the Patronus, but infers it must have been his father because James’s Patronus was a stag, and “Each one [Patronus] is unique to the wizard who conjures it” (Prisoner of Azkaban 176). Harry imagines it could only be his father who conjured it, and chooses to believe the impossible that his father is still alive rather than consider other possibilities. This scene enforces Harry’s melancholic mourning in believing his father could be alive.

Though Harry has been taught that the dead must remain dead, and that only a living wizard can cast a Patronus Charm, Harry’s willingness to believe his father has
cast the stag Patronus reveals he is melancholic in his mourning. Harry refuses to accept
the finality of his parents’ deaths in believing they could still be alive have a physical
presence in the present. Even in the face of Hermione’s sound reason, “your dad’s—
well—dead” (297), Harry holds onto the hope that his father is still alive and waits\(^7\) for
him near where the Patronus was cast from: “Where are you? Dad, come on” (300). It
finally hits Harry that it was not his father who cast the Patronus, but Harry himself.
Harry’s Patronus takes the same form as his father’s, showing that Harry has identified
with his lost loved object and it has altered his own character to incorporate his father. As
Dumbledore tells Harry “your father is alive in you . . . how else could you produce that
particular Patronus?” (312). This example supports Freud’s revised theories of
identification of the lost object because it is not presented in a harmful or debilitating
manner, but as a normal technique that can be used to include the lost object in the
present. Harry’s identifying with his father by sharing a Patronus acts as a kind of
birthright, and symbolizes Harry’s inclusion in his parents’ world. The Patronus is a way
for Harry to identify with his parents in a healthy way that keeps their memories alive,
and incorporates them into his character. In this way Harry’s identification with his father
begins the transition to healthy mourning. Though his parents are dead, Harry can honor
their memories through incorporating them into his life.

Harry is ultimately able to make the complete transition from melancholic to
healthy mourning, and recover from the loss of his parents. Though he often gives into
the fruitless hope that his parents could be restored to him, Harry learns that even in a

\(^7\) Harry and Hermione travel back in time with the Time Turner. Harry then has the
opportunity to discover first hand if it was his father.
world of magic one cannot be brought back from the dead (though as will be discussed later, this rule does not apply to Harry).\textsuperscript{8} Harry’s transformation to healthy mourner can most clearly be shown during his first visit to Lily and James’s graves. No lingering hope remains that his lost loved objects will return, and as he looks at the graves Harry thinks, “they were gone. The empty words could not disguise the fact that his parents’ moldering remains lay beneath snow and stone, indifferent, unknowing” (Deathly Hallows 269). Harry has moved into healthy mourning and taken the time to renegotiate reality without the possibility of his parents returning. Harry has placed his loved objects in the past. It is not entirely hopeless, for Harry has learned how to include his deceased loved ones into his life, without being melancholic. Harry names his children after his parents and Dumbledore to keep their memory alive. And as previously discussed, Harry’s conjuring the stag Patronus is evidence of being able to include lost love objects in his life, and use his past losses to battle looming darkness and depression. It is through positive

\textsuperscript{8} The presence of ghosts provides a counter-argument for death being a final absence from the world of the living. After the death of Sirius, Harry seeks out Nearly Headless Nick, the Gryffindor house ghost, to pursue the possibility of Sirius returning as a ghost: “you’re dead. But you’re still here, aren’t you” (Order of the Phoenix 758). Nick has anticipated Harry’s, and perhaps the readers’, question: “It happens, sometimes . . . when somebody has suffered a . . . loss” (758, ellipses original). Nick teaches Harry, and young readers, not to hope for such a return for “very few wizards choose that path” (758), and Nick himself only chose to return as a ghost because he was “afraid of death” (759). Thus even with the presence of ghosts in the series, Rowling removes the possibility of this type of existence for Harry’s deceased loved ones.
identification with his parents that Harry is able to overcome any trauma resulting from the absence of his family.

2.3 *Harry Made Resilient Through Grief*

Unfortunately for Harry, his parents are only the first of many loved ones lost. Though there are several losses that would be interesting to examine Harry’s reaction to (such as Harry’s pet owl Hedwig, Dobby the house elf, and members of The Order of the Phoenix in the final book), due to the length of this chapter I will only focus on the deaths of Cedric Diggory, Harry’s godfather Sirius Black, and Hogwarts’s Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. Memories of these three deaths depart completely from Caruth’s theory of traumatic memory in that Harry can recall each event vividly, and is haunted by the repetition of the events in both his waking thoughts and dreams. This section will then focus less on Harry’s memory of events, but center on his reaction to the losses of loved ones. Building from the experience of working through the memory of his parents’ deaths, Harry’s struggles with the following losses result in his maturing in mourning and responses to extremely stressful events, and his maturation into adulthood faster than his peers.

The first death within the series that readers witness is that of Cedric Diggory.\(^9\) Cedric is a handsome and popular sixth year student at Hogwarts who, along with Harry,

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\(^9\) Lily and James Potter die before the series begins. Also, though Professor Quirrell is killed by Harry, in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, he was possessed by Voldemort, so no attention is paid to the death after it has occurred. Cedric is the first character during the action of the series to die and have other characters notice and talk about the death.
is chosen to compete in the Triwizard Tournament. Though Cedric is Harry’s competition, both Harry and readers come to like Cedric because he is a genuinely good person, demonstrated in his refusing to participate in the “POTTER STINKS” (*Goblet of Fire* 261) campaign, and his sharing tips with Harry on how to solve clues regarding a tournament task. Harry comes to respect Cedric so much that when both reach the Triwizard Cup at the same moment, rather than race for the win, the boys decide they would rather share the victory: “we’ve helped each other out, haven’t we? We both got here. Let’s just take it together” (*Goblet of Fire* 551).

Cedric’s death is unexpected to both Harry and the reader. In order to win the tournament together, the boys touch the Triwizard Cup at the same moment. They are surprised to find the cup is a Portkey (a transportation device) and does not transport them to a cheering crowd, but a graveyard full of Death Eaters and Voldemort. Before the boys have time to overcome their surprise, Voldemort gives the order “Kill the spare” (*Goblet of Fire* 553), and Cedric is instantly “lying spread-eagled on the ground beside him [Harry]. He was dead” (553). Harry is given no time to prepare for Cedric’s death, nor much time to grasp what has happened to Cedric, for “before Harry’s mind had accepted what he was seeing, before he could feel anything but numb disbelief, he felt himself being pulled to his feet” (554). Harry is quickly forced into confrontation with Voldemort, and trying to find an escape, before he can begin to comprehend the meaning

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10 The Triwizard Tournament is a contest between the three largest magical schools in Europe. Each school is represented by one champion and competes in three magical tasks. The champion with the most points of the end of the tasks wins the Triwizard Cup.
of this event or begin to grieve. Harry has received a wound, but because of his state of shock, and instinct to flee danger, he does not yet feel the wound’s pain.

Harry is able to escape Voldemort using the Portkey, and takes Cedric’s body with him (581) to Hogwarts, where Harry has the opportunity to dwell on what has happened to Cedric. When the realization washes over Harry that Cedric has died he is broken by the truth, and feels the wound of Cedric’s death. The death is jarring to readers and Harry not simply because he is the first to die during the action of the series, but also because he is young. Cedric’s death informs readers and characters that youth is not immune to death, nor does youth protect one against Voldemort. From this moment on, no character is safe from death. Now that Harry feels the pain of his wound he is no longer aware nor cares about the Triwizard Tournament, and he “lets go of the Cup” (583). Harry’s attention is fully focused and fixated on Cedric: “he clutched Cedric to him even more tightly” (583). Harry pulls the lost loved object to himself as if he were trying to absorb the object, and thus not truly having to be parted from it. Harry must fight outside sources trying to force the break from the loved object: “he felt fingers trying to pry him from Cedric’s limp body, but Harry wouldn’t let him go” (583), showing his unwillingness to break the physical connection. The physical body of Cedric is all Harry has left, and if Harry keeps the body close he will not truly lose the loved object. Thus Harry’s first reaction to Cedric’s death is being unable to be parted physically from the loved object.

Dumbledore is solely able to separate the boys with “extraordinary strength” (583), showing the power of Harry’s grasp. Once Dumbledore has separated Harry from Cedric, his main concern is to begin Harry’s healing and grieving process. Dumbledore is
aware of the potential irrevocable damage the loss of Cedric could cause Harry, so he focuses immediately on recovery. Other adults want Harry to be removed from discussions of Cedric’s death, in order to spare him further grief: “look at him—he’s been through enough tonight—” (590). But Dumbledore is absolute in his belief that Harry must be made to understand how and why Cedric’s death unfolded: “‘He will stay . . . because he needs to understand. . . . Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery. He needs to know who has put him through the ordeal he has suffered tonight, and why’” (590). Being made to understand the event does lead to the acceptance of Cedric’s death, for Harry holds on to no false hope that Cedric could be restored. Harry understands that Cedric is gone, and his loved object is completely lost to him. Emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding extremely stressful events in order to recover from them. Just as Harry hungered for knowledge of his parents’ deaths in order to understand the event, Dumbledore recognizes the significance of understanding in Harry’s ability to cope with Cedric’s death.

Dumbledore’s immediate actions prevent Harry’s melancholic mourning, but Harry struggles with the loss in other ways. During the novel that follows Cedric’s death, *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry expresses anger surrounding the death. Harry’s anger results from feeling isolated and misunderstood by his community because no one else has shared in his particular experience. He is unable to control his anger and has many outbursts against well-meaning friends. Harry misreads and finds others’ sympathy for his experience infuriating:

You don’t know what it’s like! You—neither of you—you’ve never had to face him, have you? The whole time you’re sure you know there’s nothing between
you and dying except your own—your own brain or guts or whatever—like you can think straight when you know you’re about a nanosecond from being murdered, or tortured, or watching your friends die. (*Order of the Phoenix* 293)

As Pond argues, “Harry strongly feels himself set apart from his classmates” (184) due to both his past experiences, and his being the only student at Hogwarts Voldemort is actively hunting. The other students have learned from Cedric’s murder they are not safe from death, but none is targeted like Harry. Harry’s feelings of isolation result in extreme anger throughout *The Order of the Phoenix*.

Once Harry returns to Hogwarts he finds more kindling for his anger’s fire when discovering his witnessed account of Cedric’s death is not believed, and thus not validated, by the student body. Judith Herman argues that survivors of trauma, or in Harry’s case a potentially traumatic event, can suffer damage to their “faith and sense of community,” especially when the events involve “the betrayal of important relationships” (55). Though Harry has not been traumatized, he is shown as being better able to handle extreme stressors when he has the support of his community. Harry learns that his favorite teacher, Professor Moody,\(^1\) was responsible for arranging Harry (and Cedric by proxy) to be sent to Voldemort. Because of this betrayal, Harry is uncertain and angered by not knowing who is on his side. Students second-guessing his story shatter Harry’s connection with his school community and results in sustaining his anger. Herman argues that “sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a

\(^1\) Technically it was not the real Professor Moody, but a Death Eater disguised as the professor for the entire school year. Through the year Harry did grow close and trust the Death Eater masquerading as Moody.
sense of a meaningful world” (70), and while students at the school remain unsupportive of Harry’s potentially traumatic experience, Harry continues to respond with anger. As well Harry experiences “nightmares about Cedric” (*Order of the Phoenix* 14) and has physical reactions to the dreams: “He opened his eyes. Every inch of his body was covered in icy sweat; his bed covers were twisted all around him like a straitjacket” (409). Yet because Harry feels betrayed and isolated from his community he decides “He was not going to share his dreams with anyone” (*Order of the Phoenix* 214) because his trust in his community’s potential for support of his traumatic experiences has been shattered.

Harry only ceases reacting with anger when the community believes and supports him: “Ev’ryone knows yeh’ve bin telling the truth now, Harry” (*Order of the Phoenix* 753). Harry is strengthened and healed by the support of his community: “He somehow could not find words to tell them what it meant to him, to see them all arranged there, on his side” (*Order of the Phoenix* 766), and his anger surrounding Cedric’s death dissipates. Though there is sadness, there is not another moment in the series in which Harry reacts with anger to memories of Cedric’s death. Despite the fact that *The Order of the Phoenix* ends on a heavy note with Sirius’s death, Harry is reinforced and healed by his community’s support and validation of his experience. With the support of the community, Cedric’s death has become yet another motivator for Harry to defeat Voldemort, not a source of crippling anger, allowing Harry to avoid being traumatized by witnessing Cedric’s death.

Harry’s matured response to death is evident in his mourning of Dumbledore and Sirius. As mentioned above, the loss of Sirius Black takes place on the heels of Harry’s
coming to terms with Cedric’s death. Like Cedric, Sirius dies quite suddenly: “The second jet of light hit him squarely on the chest. The laughter had not quite died from his face, but his eyes widened in shock” (*Order of the Phoenix* 710). The sudden loss produces for Harry the same initial shock as with Cedric. Harry does not process that Sirius has died and tries to convince his friends, “‘We can still reach him!’” (*Order of the Phoenix* 711). Harry’s friends, who understand that Sirius is beyond saving, try to explain this to Harry who is unwilling to accept this truth: “‘He hasn’t gone!’ . . . ‘HE—IS—NOT—DEAD’ roared Harry” (712). Harry responds to this death initially with unbelief and possibly the greatest fury exhibited by Harry during the entire series.

Harry’s initial anger quickly fades, and he responds to the loss of Sirius with depression:

> It was unbearable, he would not think about it, he could not stand it . . . there was a terrible hollow inside him he did not want to feel or examine, a dark hold where Sirius had been, where Sirius had vanished; he did not want to have to be alone with that great, silent space, he could not stand it—. (*Order of the Phoenix* 723)

Being a recently discovered godfather, Sirius represented the last chance for Harry to have a family. Sirius’s death represents the final and ruined opportunity for Harry to experience his very own loving and supporting family. Harry is shaken by the death in that the promise of Harry’s greatest desire being achieved could be destroyed: “‘It was cruel that you and Sirius had such a short time together. A brutal ending to what should have been a long and happy relationship’” (*Half-Blood Prince* 77). Even though Sirius offered what Harry desired, he is not spared from Voldemort.
Once the anger and depression fade (the depression only lasts for two chapters) Harry is not overtly hindered by grief for Sirius, but motivated to action against Voldemort. Though he grieves deeply for a short period, by the time the next novel begins Harry is ready to continue fighting Voldemort, and less time is spent on missing his godfather. Cedric’s death takes an entire novel and a quarter to conquer, and yet Harry comes to terms with Sirius’s loss within chapters of the death showing his developing maturity. Due to his past losses and experiences with death, Harry has learned how to continue living with the hollowness the loss of his loved objects have created.

The most mature response to death Harry exhibits is to Dumbledore’s, and we can begin to see how death and grief have made Harry resilient. As with the previous losses of loved objects, Harry first responds with disbelief, “Dumbledore could not have died” (*Half-Blood Prince* 557), which is due greatly to the sudden nature of the death. Yet, because of Harry’s past experiences with lost loved objects, the truth of the situation quickly sets in (more quickly than any death previous), and Harry for the first time moves directly into mourning without experiencing melancholic mourning: “And then, without warning, it swept over him, the dreadful truth, more completely and undeniably than it had until now. Dumbledore was dead, gone” (600). Harry harbors no false hope that Dumbledore could return, or something could be done to change what has happened, as he has done with all previous deaths. Harry accepts Dumbledore’s absence with normal mourning. Evidence of this maturity is displayed when Harry sees an eye quite like Dumbledore’s in the remaining shard of the Mirror of Erised: “He had imagined it, there was no other explanation; imagined it because he had been thinking of his dead Headmaster. If *anything was certain*, it was that the bright blue eyes of Albus
Dumbledore would never pierce him again” (Deathly Hallows 30, emphasis mine). Harry has been taught by his past losses about the finality of death, and has learned not to hope that lost objects could be returned to him.

Harry is of course deeply saddened, a symptom of healthy mourning, but is learning to renegotiate his reality with the absence of Dumbledore. His grief over Dumbledore also does not inhibit him, but gives Harry his final push of taking action against Voldemort, a clear sign that Harry has not been traumatized by the death. Directly following Dumbledore’s funeral, with “his [Harry’s] eyes upon Dumbledore’s white tomb,” Harry reveals his plans of action: “‘I’ve got to track down the rest of the Horcruxes . . . and I’m the one who’s going to kill him [Voldemort]’” (Half-Blood Prince 606). Instead of being disabled and paralyzed by Dumbledore’s death, as would be proof of Harry being traumatized, he is moved to action.

Harry’s maturation is contrasted with other characters’ reactions to Dumbledore’s death. Throughout the novels Harry is portrayed as maturing faster than his peers because of his losses. Eric Tribunella argues that maturity is presented in popular American children’s literature as a product of trauma in that “trauma is useful, as a means of promoting or achieving mature adulthood” (xxvii). Tribunella explains that “To be mature is to be wounded, so maturity is a state of injury” (xiv), which results from the loss of loved objects. The loss of these objects is “transformative, whether that loss is voluntary or not” (xv). Harry has matured from being wounded by his losses of loved objects; he has been transformed by loss. Where Harry differs from Tribunella’s argument is that his losses are not traumatic, and he does not mature into a melancholic adult, as will be explored in the final section of this chapter. The differences could be due
to Tribunella’s examining realistic American children’s fiction, but the transformative nature of loss is still pertinent in *Harry Potter*. Harry’s transformation by loss is made evident when compared with other characters.

For Ron and Hermione, though they have stood by Harry through his losses, Dumbledore marks the first death that affects them directly. When Ron and Harry see a Patronus in the form of a doe, Ron wants to believe it was Dumbledore who sent it. Harry sees an immature version of himself reflected in Ron’s hope: “he understood too well the longing behind the question. The idea that Dumbledore had managed to come back to them, that he was watching over them, would have been inexpressibly comforting” (*Deathly Hallows* 317). Harry’s witnessing death has matured him faster than his closest friends. Harry understands death more completely than Ron because of his past experiences, allowing Harry to help Ron learn the same lessons: “‘Dumbledore’s dead. . . . I saw it happen, I saw the body. He’s definitely gone’” (317). Ron experiencing the same empty hopes Harry once did, and in an episode eerily similar to Harry’s own mistaking a Patronus’ wizard, shows it is a normal immature response to hope that the lost can be restored. The episode teaches readers it is acceptable to hope for a time, but to know the dead cannot be returned to us.

2.4 *The Resurrected Hero*

In the final volume Harry learns that when Voldemort failed to kill him during the tragedy of Godric’s Hollow the back-firing spell turned Harry into Voldemort’s final Horcrux: “‘Part of Lord Voldemort lives inside Harry. . . . while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to, and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die’” (*Deathly Hallows* 551). Since Voldemort can only be killed when all the
Horcruxes have been destroyed, Harry “understood at last that he was not supposed to survive” (554). Harry accepts and willingly takes part in his fate that “I must die” (556, emphasis original), but unlike all other characters who have died, Harry triumphs over death and returns from the dead, breaking all the rules the series has thus far established and maintaining conventions of children’s literature.

In 1999, eight years before the final installment of Harry Potter would be released, Rowling gave an interview clearly stating the nature of death within the series:

Magic cannot bring dead people back to life; that’s one of the most profound things, the natural law of death applies to wizards as it applies to Muggles and there is no returning once you’re properly dead. . . . once you’re dead, you’re dead. (Rowling qtd. in “Interview,” emphasis original)

In the context of the entire interview, Rowling was responding to questions of whether certain characters, like Harry’s parents, would ever return. She makes it clear that within the series dead is dead. How then are we to account for Harry’s own return from the dead? It could be argued that because the above statement made by Rowling came before her writing, or even considering, Harry’s resurrection story it does not apply. Rowling admits that though she had an end point in mind while writing, she was unsure whether Harry would survive, so her initial stand on the nature of death may have changed.

Another explanation Rowling has given is that Harry was not actually dead: “[Harry:] I’m dead?’ . . . ‘[Dumbledore:] This is the question, isn’t it? Oh the whole, dear boy, I think not’” (Deathly Hallows 567). Instead, his time at King’s Cross with the deceased Dumbledore could have been “a kind of limbo between life and death” (Rowling qtd. in “The Deathly Hallows Web Chat”). Therefore Harry was not “properly dead” and then
could return to life not having broken the rules. Whether Rowling decided to change the limitations of death, or whether Harry was not properly dead but in limbo, the question arises: why does Harry experience death so closely only to escape it? Why would Rowling’s limitations of death change when applied to Harry, especially when the emphasis of the series up to this point has been on the finality of death?

A close inspection of Harry’s death and supernatural resurrection is needed in order to begin answering the above questions. In Dumbledore’s will he leaves Harry a golden snitch that has written on it “I open at the close” (Deathly Hallows 559, emphasis original). Harry puzzles over the meaning until it becomes clear when he is walking to his death, and whispers to the snitch “I am about to die” (559). This causes the snitch to open and reveal the Resurrection Stone. The stone has the power to bring back the dead, but only in a shadow form. The stone provides Harry the means to fulfill his deepest desire: to be reunited with lost loved ones. Harry makes the decision to use the Resurrection Stone to surround himself with lost loved ones in the moments before he will join them in the afterlife. Surrounding Harry are figures “less substantial than living bodies, but much more than ghosts” (560) of his father, mother, Sirius, and the recently deceased Lupin. While Voldemort was searching for the Resurrection Stone as a way to escape death, to retain his static nature and as “an evasion of time’s power” (Zimmerman 197), Harry uses the stone to muster support and to be “strengthened by the presence of those who have died” (Zimmerman 197) as he moves towards death. Harry willingly walks towards what Voldemort uses all his energy to avoid: death. Once again Harry’s development and his incorporating the past to strengthen his future is contrasted with the traumatized Voldemort who is frozen in the static state unwilling to develop. Harry is
willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good, aligning Harry as a Christ-like figure who “demonstrates his own love” (*Bible NIV*, Romans. 5.8) by dying to save his community.

Once Harry surrenders himself to Voldemort and is “killed” by the Killing Curse, he awakens in limbo. In the room that seems “like a mist he had never experienced before” (565), Harry partakes in a long and often confusing conversation with Dumbledore, explaining the connection between Harry and Voldemort. Dumbledore reveals that Voldemort had been “more afraid than you” just moments before when Harry had willingly accepted death because Harry “had accepted, even embraced, the possibility of death, something Lord Voldemort has never been able to do” (596). Now in limbo, Harry has the opportunity to move “On” (578) and be reunited with his lost loved ones. But Dumbledore urges Harry to leave limbo and return to the world of the living, because by conquering death Harry will be able to defeat Voldemort and “by returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart” (578). Though Harry feels walking out of limbo will be easier than walking to his death, it is “warm and light and peaceful here, and he knew that he was heading back to pain and fear of more loss” (579). The biggest sacrifice Harry must make is not dying, but choosing to rejoin the living. Harry gives up the opportunity to be forever reunited with his loved ones, and continue a peaceful existence, to return to the living world of pain and loss. Thus Harry both dies and is resurrected to defeat evil and save the world.

After returning to the land of the living Harry pretends to be dead, until the right moment is revealed for him to challenge Voldemort. When Harry does reveal he’s alive there are “yells of shock, the cheers, the screams on every side of ‘Harry!’ ‘HE’S
ALIVE!” (590). There are obvious similarities between the Order of the Phoenix’s reactions to Harry’s being alive, and the disciples of Jesus discovering he had been resurrected. For example: “the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy” (Bible NIV, Matthew. 28.8), and “The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord” (Bible NIV, John. 20.19). Harry’s returning from the dead acts as a sign of hope for the Order, knowing that if Harry can conquer death, they can conquer anything. Just as Christ’s resurrection acts as a symbol for Christians of the promise of the triumph over death, Harry’s return marks his literal triumph over death and his, and the Order’s, power to defeat Voldemort/evil.

Harry’s return also holds true to children’s literature conventions. Traditionally children’s literature has drawn on and followed the conventions of comic heroic epics, not tragedy (in which Harry would most likely die). The genre being largely comedy rarely has lead protagonists die, but come close to death and ultimately triumphing over it, which in turn leads to the restructuring of a damaged society. In this way Harry becomes like Beowulf, Odysseus, and more recently Aragorn (from Lord of the Rings) in the comic epic hero tradition. Thus Harry returning from the dead signals that Rowling has ultimately stayed true to classical children’s literature conventions, situating the series firmly in the genre.

There is of course a long history of child protagonists dying in children’s literature, but the deaths are usually softened, triumphant, and ultimately hopeful. For example, in George MacDonald’s At the Back of the North Wind, child protagonist Diamond dies from illness in the last chapter of the novel. Diamond’s death is romanticized as his corpse is described as “a lovely figure, as white and almost as clear as
alabaster” (298) which beautifies and begins to soften the fear of death. The novel ends with a sentiment that is potentially confusing to young readers, that though “they thought he was dead. I [the narrator] knew that he had gone to the back of the north wind” (298) which is a magical world untouched by time and pain that Diamond briefly visited earlier in the novel. Young readers are given a safe portrayal of death and the afterlife, and death is portrayed as not something to be feared but a beautiful transition into a new state of being. Thus even with the young protagonist dying, and not being resurrected like Harry, death is presented in a safe context devoid of any potential fear inducing characteristics. Diamond is still able to escape the finality of death in that he has gone to the back of the north wind to live a new existence devoid of pain. The young hero is ultimately protected from death, and remains a triumphant hero adhering to classic conventions of the genre.

As well, in the final volume of C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle*, the children discover that they have died: “‘There was a real railway accident,’ said Aslan softly. ‘Your father and mother and all of you—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning’” (173, emphasis original). The children are not shown to be disturbed or at all upset by this revelation, but rather “Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them” (173) when asking Aslan if they are dead, hoping the answer will be yes. Again death is presented as a triumph, and ushers characters into a new existence which functions as a holiday and reward to the instruction based worldly existence. The readers are spared any sadness over having protagonists die.

Death is shown as being an appropriate topic in children’s literature if the hero is protected and triumphant over it. In *Harry Potter* readers are presented with an accurate
depiction of death (more so than Victorian children’s literature like North Wind), yet are also given a hopeful depiction in which it is defeated. This seems to be a counter-productive lesson, and one that instills hope into readers while contradicting everything that has been established thus far (dead means dead) about death. Harry’s being a resurrected hero shows the limitations with which children’s literature can engage with death.

2.5 All Is Well: The Epilogue

Mike Cadden explores the popular trope of having epilogues in children’s and YA literature, while their inclusion in adult fiction has gone out of vogue. He argues that epilogues function to “provide the implied reader reassuring completion beyond closure; it can calm fears that a particular and possible bad outcome won’t come to pass down the road” (343). It is not enough that readers know Harry has defeated Voldemort, but they need to be reassured that Harry will have a happy life, and no other evil force will threaten his happiness. Cadden argues that in epilogues reassurance is key for letting young readers know “a character gets to enjoy the positive outcomes of the story’s closure” (“All is Well” 344). In terms of Harry Potter, young readers must also be reassured that there is no further pain from past experiences. The epilogue in Harry Potter functions to show readers that Harry has completely overcome any wounds he may have once had. The entire series is made safe to be read by young readers because of the epilogue. The depiction of potential trauma in this example of children’s literature becomes safe because readers are reassured that characters will enjoy happiness for the foreseeable future.
The softening of death in the novel’s close is a device often used in conventional children’s literature, aligning *Harry Potter* further with this genre. For example, in the classic *Charlotte’s Web* by E.B. White, young readers experience death, but are promised happiness which lasts as compensation. Charlotte has died and her children have left which has left the pig, Wilbur, alone. It seems to Wilbur “like the end of the world” and he “crie[d] himself to sleep” (180). Young readers cannot be left with this upsetting ending, so they are reassured that three of Charlotte’s children stay behind and pledge their friendship “forever and ever” (182) to Wilbur, and that the pig was taken “fine care of . . . all the rest of his days” (183). Death presented throughout the series is softened by the reassuring epilogue in both *Harry Potter* and the classic *Charlotte’s Web*.

During the epilogue, Harry finally has the family he always wanted, and has named his children after three lost loved ones (Lily, James, and Albus). Harry’s children act as a replacement for his previous lost loved ones, promising that he will not have to feel the pain of their absence again. There are also no signs of returning extreme stressors, “The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years” (607) and there is no threat of other extremely stressful events like those Voldemort threatened. All is well in the end, and the traumatized Voldemort is forever defeated.
Recently children’s and YA literature have focused on the traumas created from atrocities in order to educate readers about them. One such book that participates in this trend is Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*. Kenneth B. Kidd argues that while war books for children and young adults are not new, and date back to at least the nineteenth century, “What is new is the atrocity part, as well as the emphasis on experiences of pain and suffering on the part of the principle characters” (182 emphasis original). Kidd argues that to “some degree” the act of “reading trauma writing is expected to be traumatizing as well as fortifying” (191) to young readers and thought to be an important educational tool. Similarly, Eric Tribunella argues that the act of reading narratives of trauma and atrocity is a form of “literary discipline, [used] to threaten them into subjection, and to show them the unpleasant realities of life” (xxiii) for young readers, and acts as an “artificial stressor” (xxvii) that enables maturation in readers. Proving whether readers are traumatized by their reading is not possible with the type of researching I am conducting, I do challenge Tribunella and Kidd’s notions. I argue that Zusak’s does not try to discipline or traumatize readers through his representation of trauma, but he charges readers of the novel to become political agents capable of stopping the repetition of past atrocities.

Holocaust literature written for young people is often didactic, which can be problematic when assigning an overarching lesson to a historical event. Lydia Kokkola notes that writing for children and young adults is traditionally known to be “susceptible to ideological shaping,” and when authors choose to write about the Holocaust “they inevitably take on a highly moralistic set of ideologies for shaping their texts” (7). But
when texts attempt to balance trauma with a hopeful and didactic message, the ideologies communicated in the texts can lead to unsuccessful and untruthful depictions of the Holocaust. Lawrence Baron observes in his writing about Holocaust films for younger viewers that “Parents and teachers naturally want to avoid traumatizing children and adolescents with overly graphic depictions of violence or instilling in them a sense of despair about human nature” (394), which is hard to accomplish when such emphasis is placed on depicting the suffering of victims. Adrienne Kertzer\(^1\) argues that in the attempt to avoid filling young readers with complete despair, there is the potential to tell “stories whose delicate and sensitive language persuades us that, despite the Holocaust, human values remain the same. The Holocaust was a blip; our humanistic values remain strong” (“Do You Know,” 242). These narratives can instill hope in readers that atrocities like the Holocaust will never happen again by placing atrocities outside of their experience.

*The Book Thief* is a YA novel about World War II and the Holocaust that focuses on trauma while remaining ultimately hopeful while teaching readers\(^2\) that the notion of “never again” is not guaranteed. This chapter focuses on Liesel’s trauma of losing her family, her community of trauma with Max, her attempts to regain control through

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\(^1\) Though *The Book Thief* has been commercially successful, there has been surprisingly little scholarship written on it. Due to this I rely heavily on Adrienne Kertzer’s and Jenni Adams articles on the novel. Other articles which I found interesting, but did not fit with the chapter topic, included Susan Koprince’s “Words from the basement: Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*” (2011), and Judith Ridge’s “Death Gets Its Say” (2006).

\(^2\) Because *The Book Thief* is YA fiction, when I refer to “young readers” in this chapter I am referring to adolescents.
stealing books, and her active resistance through writing. I argue *The Book Thief* follows the trend of educating readers about WWII and the Holocaust by focusing on the emotional and psychological effects of atrocities, while making it evident that the past can be repeated if readers are bystanders and do not take an active role against injustices. Readers are given the opportunity to begin grasping the depth of the atrocities while learning that the past can be repeated, and through Liesel’s experience there is the possibility “that readers recognize themselves as political beings who possess the power to challenge the status quo and thereby ensure that the future will be better than the past” (Kertzer “What Good are the Words?” 22). Through Liesel’s trauma, readers witness her intense emotional and psychological struggle, and learn that such suffering can and will happen again if readers remain bystanders to injustices.

3.1 The Trauma of a Lost Family

*The Book Thief* takes place in Molching, a fictional German town, during World War II. The novel is narrated by Death, who is searching for distractions from the “survivors” (5) of war. Death “can’t stand to look” at the survivors, the “ones who are left behind, crumbling among the jigsaw puzzle of realization, despair, and surprise” (5) without diversions; otherwise the job becomes too overwhelming. Death finds a source of distraction in a journal dropped by the novel’s protagonist, Liesel. The novel is comprised of Death’s detailing the stories he’s read in the journal “several thousand times over the years” of what Liesel “saw and how she survived” (14).

Jenni Adams notes that having Death as narrator functions “to mediate the harsh realities of the novel’s subject matter,” and Death is able to “simultaneously . . . confront the adolescent reader with the fact of death (in both an abstract an a historically located
sense) and to offer protection from the most unsettling implications of this fact” (223). Kertzer finds it noteworthy that the novel “employs the world-weary and all-knowing voice of Death rather than the traumatized voice of a child to narrate” (“What Good are the Words” 30), for it allows the novel to rely on a child’s memoir, but “in a manner that acknowledges the limitations of basing Holocaust understanding on one child’s account” (29). Death is omniscient about the events of WWII and the Holocaust, and gives details of events that take place outside Liesel’s experience. Death, as narrator, allows a bigger picture to be conveyed and illustrates to readers that Liesel’s story is only one among millions: “You could argue that Liesel Meminger had it easy. . . . Certainly, her brother practically died in her arms. Her mother abandoned her. But anything was better than being a Jew” (Zusak 161). Readers are informed that Liesel’s hardships only scratch the surface of the horrors committed, and her story is put into perspective in comparison to what took place in the camps. Liesel has it tough, yet her experience is liminal compared to the experience of prisoners in the death camps.

_The Book Thief_ begins in January 1939 with “soon to be ten” (21) year old Liesel travelling with her mother and younger brother, Werner, by train to Molching, where the two children are to be put into foster care with Hans and Rosa Hubermann. Liesel’s parents are communists, and with her father being captured by the Nazis (although this is not yet known by Liesel), her mother believes the children will be safer with foster parents. Liesel comes to love Hans and Rosa, but their home is not always the safest place. Hans is less than enthusiastic about joining the Nazi party, and after he paints over a racial slur written on a Jewish friend’s shop the family is viewed suspiciously by the Nazi party. Most dangerous is the Hubermanns’ hiding of Max Vandenburg, a young
Jewish man and son to a deceased WWI friend of Hans, in their basement. The Hubermanns must include Liesel in their deception in order keep themselves and Max safe. Thus the Hubermanns’ home becomes a space of quiet and secret resistance.

On the train to Molching, Liesel experiences the first extremely stressful event that results in her being traumatized: Werner’s death. Though the event is earth shattering for Liesel, no one else “noticed” and “The train galloped on” (20). The normality of death is portrayed to readers in that the death of one young boy is not enough to make an impact on the train passengers. Early in the novel readers are presented with bystanders, those who do not want to endanger themselves by becoming involved with the hardships of others, in that no one tries to comfort or help the bereaved mother and sister. Though the war has not yet begun, the anxiety and fear of being caught up in someone else’s problems have already taken root. While this foreshadows the role bystanders will play during the war, it also illustrates that being a bystander, whether there is a war or not, is always an issue. Bystanders witness the suffering of others without attempting to help. Being a passive participant is dangerous during war and peace times, for it allows groups to perform atrocities against others without resistance.

The two guards responsible for deciding how to continue on with a dead passenger argue “over what to do” (22), and do not display any sympathy for Liesel and her mother. The passengers and guards remain bystanders to Liesel and her mother’s grief, not wanting to become involved, for Hitler’s Germany has taught being involved, and drawing unwanted attention, can be dangerous. Elie Wiesel in his 1986 Nobel Peace

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3 The OED defines bystander as “one who is present without taking part in what is going on” (“bystander, n,” def. 1).
Prize Acceptance speech spoke out against being a bystander. He said that the atrocities he suffered in the WWII concentration camps made him swear to “never be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation” (n.pag.). Wiesel argues that we “must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere” (n.pag.). It is the relatively minor inaction of bystanders, like the ones on Liesel’s train, who choose not to interfere that eventually allowed the larger atrocities during World War II to take place.

Liesel’s initial reaction to her brother’s death is shock; her body stiffens (21) and her mind receives an “onslaught of thoughts” such as “This isn’t happening. This isn’t happening” (21). Just as Harry Potter was unable to immediately process the deaths of loved ones, Liesel is unable to accept her new reality. Liesel’s first response is to shake Werner, a reaction Death has seen before: “I assume it has something to do with instinct. To stem the flow of truth” (21). Shaking the body as if Werner will awaken is trying to revive someone already lost. Death’s aligning this action with instinct makes it a natural reaction; to refuse death is written within human nature.

After the guards remove Werner from the train, he is buried in a graveyard close to the station. Once Werner is buried in the frozen ground, Liesel finds it impossible to leave and shows the first symptoms of psychological distress, and the foundation for her later post-traumatic stress disorder. Her mother is able to retain social decorum, and leaves the graveside to thank the priest “for his performance of the ceremony” (23), but Liesel stays by her brother’s graveside. She stares at the newly dug grave in “disbelief” and starts to dig, telling herself over and over “He couldn’t be dead. He couldn’t be dead.
He couldn’t--” (23). Liesel’s hands become covered in “frozen blood” (23) from the snow and ice, but she does not relent digging. She must be “dragged away” with a “warm scream” (24) filling inside her. Liesel’s actions in the graveyard reveal she has not accepted her brother’s absence. Liesel and her mother get back on a train and continue on their journey to Molching as if nothing has happened, but for Liesel “everything had happened” (25 emphasis original). Werner’s death means everything to Liesel and has put her world into chaos.

There is little time between Werner’s death and Liesel’s having to part with her mother. Liesel is already in a fragile state due to her brother’s death, so she feels her mother’s “abandonment” keenly. The loss of her remaining family in such a short period of time disrupts Liesel’s entire world and she feels abandoned, alone, and confused:

If her mother loved her, why leave her on someone else’s doorstep. Why? Why? Why? . . . No matter how many times she was told that she was loved, there was no recognition that the proof was in the abandonment. Nothing changed the fact that she was a lost, skinny child in another foreign place, with more foreign people. Alone. (32)

Adding to the trauma of losing Werner, Liesel is further traumatized by her mother’s perceived abandonment and her subsequently being thrust into a new and strange environment in which she feels completely isolated.

Margaret and Michael Rustin argue that separation from parents in children’s literature, even when done in the best interest of the child, or for a short period of time (such as over summer holidays), can cause young characters to feel unworthy of love, and conclude that if they were better the separation would not have occurred (69). The
Rustins use Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden* as an example, in which Tom is sent to live with his aunt and uncle while his brother recovers from the measles. Although Tom is expected to be away from home for only a few weeks, and the separation is for Tom’s protection (so he does not also get measles), upon leaving he thinks if he “allowed himself to weep tears, they were tears of anger” (1) and “waves good-bye angrily to his mother” (3).

Though *The Book Thief* is widely regarded as YA literature, the Rustins’ arguments about separation in children’s literature apply well to Liesel. Tom does not experience the same degree of psychological distress as Liesel does from separation, but he does exhibit the same misunderstanding of why the parting has occurred. Tom believes it would have been better to get measles and stay with his family, rather than not have measles and have to leave them. Liesel does not understand her abandonment because she does not know why it must take place. She does not yet understand the danger of her parents being communists in Nazi Germany, nor that her mother’s “abandonment” is for her protection. Liesel is deeply distressed; perceiving her mother has abandoned her because of a lack of love, she is thrown into an unfamiliar world with no remnants of the past to ease the transition (such as her brother’s company). Liesel’s struggle with the transition from her mother’s to the Hubermanns’ care is shown in her literal refusal to enter the Hubermanns’ home. First Liesel “would not get out of the car” (28), and after taking fifteen minutes to coax her from the car, she clings onto the front gate (28) with tears streaming down her face. Just as Liesel needed to be forced away from her brother’s grave, she must be forced into living in the new reality with her foster parents.
Liesel continues to show symptoms of “significant distress” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) from the loss of her mother and brother immediately upon entering the Hubermanns’ home. She is silent and does not talk about her past, especially Werner, with the Hubermanns as a sign of her effort to “avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.). Liesel acts with “detachment or estrangement” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) from the Hubermanns, and initially is uncomfortable in their presence. Liesel also exhibits “irritability or outbursts of anger” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.). For example, when Rosa tries to give her a bath, Liesel “twisted into one corner of the closet-like washroom, clutching for the nonexistent arms of the wall for some level of support” (Zusak 33). The irrational refusal to bathe lasts for two weeks. As well Liesel exhibits a “restricted range of affection” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) as is shown in her inability to produce smiles easily (Zusak 31). It takes months for Liesel to accept the new reality with the Hubermanns, and proof of her acceptance is evident in her ability to call Hans and Rosa, Mama and Papa: “She would have no trouble calling him Papa” (35). Just as Tom, in Tom’s Midnight Garden, comes to love his time away from home (“the day for Tom’s going home had already come and gone; but he was still staying with his aunt and uncle. He had managed that for himself” [Pearce 98]) Liesel is able to come to think of the Hubermanns as family.

Though Liesel is able to overcome her extreme distress at being thrown into a new home, she continues to struggle with the loss of her family. Liesel is fixated on Werner’s death, and her obsession is most evident in her repetitive nightmares. Death informs readers that the “first few months were definitely the hardest,” because “every
night, Liesel would nightmare. Her brother’s face. Staring at the floor” (36). Unlike Harry Potter who has nightmares throughout the series that educate and motivate him, Liesel is not encouraged by the nightmares she experiences, but is paralyzed by them:

She would wake up swimming in her bed, screaming, and drowning in the flood of sheets. On the other side of the room, the bed that was meant for her brother floated boat-like in the darkness. Slowly, with the arrival of consciousness, it sank, seemingly into the floor. This vision didn’t help matters, and it would usually be quite a while before the screaming stopped. (36)

Liesel’s nightmares, and her reactions to them, fall under the DSM-IV-TR’s symptoms of “recurrent distressing dreams of the event,” as well as “feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring,” and lastly displaying “intense psychological distress at exposure to internal . . . cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.). Liesel’s nightmares reveal her trauma concerning Werner’s death. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud argues that through anxiety dreams (nightmares) of traumatic neuroses patients endeavor “to master the stimulus [trauma] retrospectively” in their “obedience to the compulsion to repeat . . . to conjure up what has been forgotten and repressed” (37). The reoccurring nightmares function as Liesel’s unconscious compulsion to repeat the traumatic event in order to gain understanding and mastery. In Liesel’s case, understanding her trauma entails accepting and acknowledging what she has repressed: Werner is dead.

Liesel’s trauma is further supported in her being a melancholic mourner. As discussed in the previous chapter, melancholic mourning is the refusal to form a new reality that includes the absence of the lost loved object, but instead one tries to “establish
an identification of the ego with the abandoned object” (Freud “Mourning,” 586) in order to preserve its presence. Though the death of young characters in canonical nineteenth century children’s literature texts is common, it is death being portrayed in children’s and YA literature “as a destabilizing event” (Kidd 182) which is new. Liesel’s melancholic mourning of her brother shows the developing response and reception of death in YA literature. For example, in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* three young women mourn the death of their sister Beth. Like the passing of Diamond in George MacDonald’s *At the Back of the North Wind*, Beth’s death is presented in a positive light in that it has brought an end to her long illness. Beth’s face is “full of painless peace” (450) and her sisters “smiled through their tears, and thanked God that Beth was well at last” (450). Like Diamond, Beth’s death is ultimately a triumph, whereas there is no triumph shown in Werner’s death or Liesel’s mourning.

In *Little Women*, the chapters that follow Beth’s death are entitled “Learning to Forget” and “All Alone.” In these chapters the sisters each grieve Beth in a way which aligns with Freud’s structure of “normal mourning” (“Mourning” 587), which is “a reaction to the real loss of a loved object” (587) by the “withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one” (586). The youngest sister, Amy, grieves, but “in spite of the new sorrow it was a very happy time” (Alcott 460) because she is newly in love, withdrawing her libido from Beth and transferring it to her new lover Teddy. Despite Beth’s death, life goes on for Amy; she grieves while continuing to live. In “All Alone” Jo navigates her new reality of Beth’s absence with a “ceaseless longing for her sister” (463) and feels her childhood home has lost all its warmth since “Beth left the old home for the new” (463). Once again death is not presented as an end,
but a new beginning, and Jo feels more left behind than unable to accept her sister’s absence. Jo’s response is to leave the home and start a new life, freeing her libido from Beth. After these two chapters, in which the sisters mourn for Beth while accepting her absence and continuing on with their lives, the novel proceeds without further consideration of Beth. The March sisters’ mourning is distinctly different from that of Liesel’s melancholic mourning, for Liesel is unable to accept Werner’s absence and his death is a destabilizing event. Liesel finds herself in a static traumatized state of melancholic mourning due to the death as is displayed in her repetitive nightmares.

Liesel’s nightmares develop throughout the course of the novel, providing various versions of her initial trauma. Initially the nightmares repeat the image of “Her brother’s face./ Staring at the floor” (36) and act as a “return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” (Caruth 59). Unlike Harry Potter’s nightmares, dreams of Liesel’s trauma are in fact retraumatizing, as Cathy Caruth argues traumatic flashbacks can be (63), which is evident in Liesel’s waking from the nightmares “screaming” (Zusak 36). Furthermore, on one occasion the screaming is accompanied with “a moment of bed-wetting hysteria” (62), which Liesel remembers four years later as “the trauma of wetting the bed” (64). The physical reaction Liesel has to her nightmares shows both her resistance to accepting Werner’s death and her further experiencing trauma through the dreams. As Liesel grows closer to Max her nightmares evolve: when Liesel reaches for Werner’s face in the dream it becomes Max’s face (331). Liesel fears that her loss will be repeated and her new brother-figure will also die.

While Liesel’s nightmares act to retraumatize, they later are the catalyst for healing. The nightmares provide a temporal space for Liesel to develop a strong
relationship with her foster father, Hans: “Possibly the only good to come out of these nightmares was that it brought Hans Hubermann, her new papa, into the room, to soothe her, to love her” (36). The waking hours following the nightmares provide the opportunity for community to help the victim of trauma. It is the fatherly love of Hans that Liesel needs following the loss of her family. Developing a close relationship to Hans minimizes Liesel’s initial feelings of isolation from being thrust into a new environment, allowing her to begin recovering from feeling “abandoned” by her mother. As well, Hans uses the countless nights Liesel is unable to sleep after waking from her nightmares to teach her to read and write. Looking back on her experience, Liesel writes in her journal that it was the relationship with Hans and learning to read which helped heal her: “Papa, you saved me. You taught me to read” (538).

Liesel is able to begin the transition from melancholic mourning to Freud’s conception of healthy mourning. The first change takes place just before Liesel’s twelfth birthday (221), two years after Werner’s death and the start of the nightmares. Liesel shares for the first time the content of her nightmares with Max, and this fellowship marks a small breakthrough. Liesel determines on the heel of her birthday that “she should be old enough now to cope on her own with the dreams” (220). Though still battling with her nightmares, Liesel believes she has become strong enough to battle them on her own without Hans’s help.

Zusak continues to stress Liesel’s melancholic mourning when she recognizes it in someone else. Ilsa Hermann, the mayor’s wife, stays within her tomb-like home suffering from the grief of losing her son twenty years prior. In June 1941 Ilsa discontinues using Rosa Hubermann as a laundress explaining it would be hypocritical if
they maintained “small luxuries while advising others to prepare for harder times” (261 emphasis original). Liesel believing that the “fact that harder times were coming was surely the best reason for keeping Rosa employed” (261), yells at Ilsa in a fit of rage: “‘It’s about time . . . that you do your own stinking wash anyway. It’s about time you faced the fact that your son is dead. . . . He’s dead and it’s pathetic that you sit here shivering in your own house to suffer for it. You think you’re the only one?’” (262).

While angry that Ilsa is not aware of the hardships taking place outside her home (such as how much the Hubermanns will struggle with this loss of income), Liesel realizes she is guilty of what she accuses Ilsa of: “Immediately. / Her brother was next to her. / He whispered for her to stop, but he, too, was dead. . . . He died in a train. / They buried him in the snow” (263). Werner’s phantom asks Liesel to recognize within herself that which she accuses Ilsa of. Liesel’s own “self-tormenting” (Freud “Mourning” 588) is taken out on Ilsa. Though Werner’s phantom attempts to show Liesel she is guilty of what she accuses Ilsa of, she refuses to accept the similarity: “Liesel glanced at him, but she could not make herself stop. . . . She shoved the boy (Werner) down the steps, making him fall” (263).

It takes another two years after this encounter with Ilsa, and deciding she can handle the nightmares on her own, for the reality of Werner’s death to finally hit Liesel: “It was with great sadness that she realized that her brother would be six forever” (473). Four years after Werner’s death, Liesel is able to acknowledge the truth that her brother is absent, and belongs in the past. It is with this realization that “her brother never climbed into her sleep again. . . . and the boy only came before she closed her eyes” (473). The nightmares end when Liesel is able to accept the reality of Werner’s absence. There is no
longer a repression of the trauma, therefore the traumatic symptoms end. As well, Werner is not forgotten or never thought of again; Liesel can now control when she thinks of Werner and remembers him in her waking world. The memories of Werner are not retraumatizing, signaling that Liesel has been healed from the trauma of her brother’s death. Ironically Liesel heals from one trauma on the heel of another, the bombing of Himmel Street.

3.2 Liesel as Book Thief

The Rustins argue that “play is a way of coping with loss” (32), and often it is the loss of parents in children’s literature, whether it be temporary or indefinite, that characters must cope with. The Rustins posit that play provides an imaginary space “to explore the experience of loneliness” (31) due to loss. For example, the midnight garden functions as the imaginary space for Tom to work through his loneliness due to the separation from his parents and brother. In his imaginary space Tom learns to manage the temporary loss of his family (and idealized summer holidays), and becomes independent so much so that he is sad to return home. It is through play in the midnight garden that Tom copes with loss and begins to achieve autonomy from his family. The Rustins’ observations of play echo that of the da/fort game Freud witnessed his grandson playing in order to gain mastery over his mother’s absence. Like Tom, the grandson’s da/fort game of throwing and retrieving a ball creates a space in which he is able to achieve the great accomplishment of “allowing his mother to go away without protesting” (Pleasure Principle 14). Freud believed his grandson’s game provided a space in which he could be an active participant, whereas at the “outset he was in a passive situation . . . overloaded
by the experience” (15). As the Rustins argue, play allows the child to take an active part and exert control over an initial experience, or separation, in which he was helpless.

Liesel’s book thievery, both the act of stealing and the many hours spent learning to read, can be seen as a type of play providing Liesel with the space to cope with loss and achieve autonomy. Liesel is unable to control the separation of herself from her mother and brother, which is extremely distressing. Although powerless, Liesel vainly tries to exact some agency as can be seen in her digging at the frozen ground of Werner’s grave, and refusing to enter the Hubermanns’ home. Through stealing books, Liesel can exhibit her control and agency, and can find space to cope with her loss and subsequent loneliness as Freud and the Rustins suggest. Yet, while Liesel can be seen to align with Freud’s and the Rustins’ arguments concerning play, Zusak is in contrast to the Rustins’ and Tom’s Midnight Garden in Liesel’s losses being permanent rather than temporary. The permanence of Liesel’s losses do not allow her to ever reach the da/there portion of the game.

Being able to read when once “words had rendered Liesel useless” (147) now fills her with an “innate sense of power. It happened every time she deciphered a new word or pieced together a sentence” (147). The power that comes from reading fuels the stealing so Liesel can continue feeling she has control over her chaotic world. I examine two instances of Liesel’s stealing which best illustrate her complicated form of play and reach for power. First, the stealing of The Grave Digger’s Handbook is a direct response to Werner’s death, and the book acts as a substitute for Werner allowing Liesel to explore her loss. Secondly, The Shoulder Shrug is stolen when Liesel realizes that Hitler is
responsible for the destruction of her family, and stealing allows Liesel to exercise her agency over what gets consumed in Hitler’s fires.

Liesel is motivated by anger to steal her first book as she is dragged away from her brother’s graveside: “There was something black and rectangular lodged in the snow. Only the girl saw it. She bent down and picked it up and held it firmly in her fingers” (24). Werner is also lodged in the snow, and as we have seen Liesel tries “to dig” (23), but is incapable of saving Werner from the frozen ground. *The Grave Digger* stands as the substitute for Werner when Liesel is powerless to save him. Having no control over Werner’s death, Liesel steals the book lodged in the snow, in order to gain agency during the extremely distressing experience.

Once living with the Hubermanns, Liesel keeps the book secret and safe from being taken away by burying it “beneath a fold layer of clothes” (28). The burying of the book parallels Werner’s burial, and while Liesel hides the book to keep it safe, it could also be her subconscious trying to bring what she has repressed into consciousness. Liesel subconsciously uses the substitute of her brother (the book) to uncover what has been repressed. She is terrified of having the book taken, as it would function as a second loss of Werner. Death makes the book’s meaning explicit to readers: “THE BOOK’S MEANING. 1. The last time she saw her brother” (38), showing that the book functions as Liesel’s “last link to him [Werner]” (38). In order to protect the link from being broken Liesel hides it “under her mattress, and occasionally she would pull it out and hold it” (38), similarly to a girl with a doll. Being unable to protect her brother from being taken, Liesel obsessively protects the book. The book creates a space where Liesel can have a substitute to hold and nurture in the place of Werner.
During the “bed-wetting hysteria” (62), Hans finds the book when stripping Liesel’s sheets, and there is the potential of a repetition of the original trauma in that the book could be taken away; Liesel could lose the link to her brother. But it is “lucky” (64) that it is Hans who finds the book, for rather than remove Liesel’s link, he encourages her to learn to read it, which allows Liesel to gain some control over the loss. In learning to read the book, Liesel is able to engage with it, which in turn allows her to maintain a living connection and link to her brother, and because of this “her hunger to read that book was as intense as any ten-year-old human could experience” (66). Initially the book behaves as a crutch and substitute for Liesel to continue denying Werner’s absence (the da to her fort game), but it develops into a source of power and agency. When Liesel finishes the book she feels a sense of having “conquered not only the work at hand, but the night who had blocked the way” (87). Following the accomplishment of conquering not only the reading, but also the night that brings nightmares, Liesel opens up about her loss and tells Hans “His name was Werner” (87). Feeling more in control, Liesel begins the process of introducing the absence of Werner into her new reality. In this way, the space reading has provided allows Liesel to explore her loss, and begin gaining autonomy from her lost family through conquering the book.

Liesel’s next act of thievery takes place during a celebratory book burning for Hitler’s birthday (April 1940), taking her play to a very dangerous space. Liesel, as a member of the Hitler Youth, is part of a march before the book burning. Surrounded by her fellow Hitler Youths, Liesel finds herself caught up in the excitement: “she was compelled to see the thing lit. She couldn’t help it. I guess humans like to watch a little destruction” (109). Though excited to watch destruction, another part of Liesel tells her
“this was a crime—after all, her three books were the most precious items she owned” (109), beginning to plant seeds of doubt in Liesel about the nature of this celebration. During a speech made “by a man on a podium” (110) Liesel realizes she is not like the other children in the Hitler Youth. The man passionately shouts (110) that through the leadership of Hitler, Germany has “put an end to the disease that has been spread through Germany for the last twenty years. . . . The immoral! The Kommunisten!” (110, emphasis original). Liesel is used to hearing about the Jews, and how Germany was the superior race (111), but this is the first time she hears that communists, regardless of being German, “were also to be punished” (111).

This moment of revelation leaves Liesel in shock as she sorts through its ramifications. Liesel “saw it all so clearly,” and begins to understand that “Her starving mother, her missing father” were lost because they were “Kommunisten” (111). Liesel hears the speaker commence the book burning, shouting “And now we say goodbye to this trash, this poison” (111), linking Liesel’s parents to what Hitler’s Germany believes to be the trash and poison of the country, what needs to be punished. When Liesel makes this connection, it is no longer merely books she sees thrown into the fire, but also her family that has been consumed by Hitler’s regime. Liesel now understands and feels that she is an outcast in her own community as the “burning books were cheered like heroes” (113). In this horrible moment of clarity, Liesel must question her identity and her role within the community; does she want to be part of a community (like Hitler Youth) that considers those like her parents trash and poison? Once again Liesel feels helpless, for

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4 Between these acts of stealing, Liesel is given two books as birthday presents by Hans and Rosa.
she does not even understand until this moment what it was that had taken her parents from her, and ultimately destroyed her family. As she watches the books being burned she links their assumed poison to what her parents are accused of, and being unable to save her family from Hitler’s flames, Liesel seeks an opportunity to regain some control.

Once the birthday celebrations have ended, Hans and Liesel are left behind in a nearly empty square. As Hans carefully explains to Wolfgang Edel why he has not yet joined the Nazi party, and soldiers clear away the remains of the celebration, Liesel notices three books have survived the burning, “Whatever the reason, they were huddled among the ashes, shaken, Survivors” (119). Like The Grave Digger, the three unburned books act as possible substitutes (three books for three lost family members). Powerless to save her family from Nazi Germany, Liesel senses an opportunity to save a book as compensation and Death tells readers “it was anger and dark hatred that had fueled her desire to steal it” (84). Like the first stolen book, it is anger that motivates Liesel to steal.

Quickly, while being ignored by soldiers, Liesel grabs one book from the ashes and runs away, placing the book inside her Hitler Youth uniform. Even though the three could be possible substitutes for her family, Liesel is unable to save all three, but takes the risk to rescue at least one. Though first appearing cool, once against her chest the book begins heating up and burning her. As she walks home “Smoke was rising out of Liesel’s collar. . . . Beneath her shirt, a book was eating her up” (122). Physically feeling the Nazis’ hate, she is marked just like her family. Liesel learns when rescuing The Shoulder Shrug from the ashes that saving something Nazi Germany has deemed as trash and poison is dangerous. The hot book consumes her, burns her, but she keeps it hidden despite the risk it causes, having been unable to do so with her family. Like The Grave
Digger, this game does not end with da (there), for although she has been able to rescue one substitute, the separation of Liesel from her family is permanent. Liesel’s stealing and reading games do not function to provide her with the mastery to allow her family to go away without her protesting, but allows her to successfully mourn her separation and gain some control.

3.3 Max and Liesel as Writers

When Max arrives in November 1940 at the Hubermanns’ he is “shaking and shaken” (185), already broken from the dangers (such as losing his entire family) of being a Jew living in Nazi Germany. He had been hiding for two years in an empty storeroom (194) before coming to Himmel Street, and although the Hubermanns offer the promise of safety, Max knows the “very idea of it [safety] was ludicrous” (185). Max feels guilty for putting the Hubermanns at risk for hiding him: “How many times in those first few hours of awareness did he feel like walking out of that basement,” but his will “to live” outweighs the “guilt and shame” (208) he feels from putting the family at risk.

Liesel is presented as being the “wildcard” (195) to Max’s safety. To ensure she does not innocently and accidently speak of Max outside the Hubermanns’ home, Hans reminds Liesel of the night of the book burning: the night she realized the dangers of Nazi Germany. Hans, though worried about frightening Liesel “too much” decides it is better to “err on the side of too much fear rather than not enough” (203). To ensure Liesel does not speak of Max outside their home, Hans is honest with his foster daughter about what the consequences of Max being discovered would be:
‘For starters,’ he said, ‘I will take each and everyone of your books—and I will
burn them.’ It was callous. ‘I’ll throw them in the stove or the fireplace.’ He was
certainly acting like a tyrant, but it was necessary. ‘Understand?’

The shock made a hole in her, very neat, very precise. . . .

‘Yes, Papa.’

‘Next. . . . They’ll take you away from me. Do you want that?’

She was crying now, in earnest. ‘Nein.’

‘Good. . . . They’ll drag that man up there away, and maybe Mama and me, too—
and we will never, ever come back.’

That did it. (203-04, emphasis original)

Having already experienced the loss of her family, potentially losing her foster parents
threatens the repetition of her trauma and this terrifies Liesel. As well, her books being a
source of power, their threatened destruction would mean the loss of her power and
agency. In short, Liesel is instructed if she tells anyone of Max, her entire world will be
destroyed. Hans must threaten this destruction to convey to Liesel the seriousness of their
situation, and to make sure she never unthinkingly speaks of Max. Though the instruction
is harsh, and against Hans’s usual character, it works and Liesel never speaks of Max; the
wildcard factor is removed.

Max, the man who requires secrecy, fascinates Liesel and she spends several days
watching him sleep\(^5\) to the point that it “became an obsession, to check on him, to see if
he was still breathing” (205). Liesel starts “noticing the similarities between this stranger
and herself. They both arrived in a state of agitation on Himmel Street. They both

\(^5\) Max “slept for three days” (205) upon arriving at the Hubermanns’.
nightmared” (206). Liesel and Max both suffer the repercussions of being separated from
their loved ones, and fear what Nazi Germany has in store for them: “In their separate
rooms, they would dream their nightmares and wake up, one with a scream in drowning
sheets, the other with a gasp for air next to a smoking fire” (219). Finding someone who
shares in her emotional and psychological suffering precipitates an immediate bond
between Liesel and Max: they are similar in their trauma. Sensing camaraderie with Max,
Liesel asks him about his nightmares and tells him about her own, which is a “small
breakthrough” (220) for neither had discussed the contents of their night terrors with
anyone else. As previously discussed, it is after sharing her nightmares with Max that
Liesel informs Hans she is now old enough to deal with the nightmares on her own,
showing the strength she receives from her shared connection with Max. The similar
trauma between the two creates a supportive ally for both in the healing of their wounds.

Liesel and Max’s connection through trauma is reminiscent of Cathy Caruth’s
arguments of how trauma can connect people. Caruth uses a parable in which a traumatic
wound cries out to another to illustrate that the listener bears witness to the wound. The
listener “listens to a voice that it cannot fully know but to which is nonetheless bears
witness,” (9) which leads to “one’s own trauma . . . [being] tied up with the trauma of
another” (8). Caruth argues that trauma is “never simply one’s own . . . we are implicated
in each other’s traumas” (24). Max and Liesel implicate one another in their traumas by
acting as listener and witness to one another. Both are no longer alone in their trauma
because they have found a partner to act as witness to their experience. The shared
witnessing is important in the healing process, and shows the importance of having a
community when healing traumatic wounds. Judith Herman argues that experiencing
trauma can cause all basic relationships to be called into question (51) and can shatter the construction of the self that is formed in relation to others. It is only through the support of the community that a survivor of trauma can restore the connection to the community (70). While Max and Liesel bear witness to each other’s wounds, they are rebuilding their trust in relationships that had been destroyed due to trauma.

Though similar trauma introduces a connection between Liesel and Max, it is words, reading and writing, which cement their bond and further enable healing. Wanting to give Liesel something on her twelfth birthday, Max paints over the pages of the only book he owns, *Mein Kampf*, and writes the story of Liesel and Max’s friendship. Max had used *Mein Kampf* to hide his train ticket to Molching, hoping that guards would not suspect him of being a Jew if he were carrying the Führer’s biography. When in the Hubermanns’ home, to fill his long hours Max reads and rereads *Mein Kampf*, since it is his only book, and seethes “at the content” (217). Max destroys the words written by Hitler, and replaces them with his own in a short story he calls *The Standover Man*, which Adams argues presents “a visual summary of the novel’s ambivalent attitude toward fear and consolation” (225). In the story Max tells Liesel about his own journey of hiding from the Nazis to finding Liesel. He writes about their shared connection of dreams and their developing friendship. All Max’s beautiful words of friendship gag and suffocate (237) the words of *Mein Kampf*. Max literally writes over the hateful and dangerous words of Hitler and replaces them with a short history of his trauma, and the friendship that is helping him to overcome it. It is an act of defiance on the part of Max, an active resistance, as well as a means of claiming agency in being able to destroy Hitler’s words and replace them with his own.
Max writes a second story for Liesel before leaving the Hubermanns’. He first gives the book to Rosa and Hans asking them to delay giving it to Liesel until she is ready to read it. A few days before Christmas, Rosa gives the book to Liesel and tells her: “I think you’ve always been ready, Liesel. From the moment you arrived here, clinging to that gate, you were meant to have this” (443). The short story is called The Word Shaker, and tells an allegorical tale of Hitler who “decided that he would rule the world with words” (445), and so he planted an entire forest of his words until Germany was a “nation of farmed thoughts” (445). The word shaker (Liesel) “understood the true power of words” (446) and planted her own tree made of words of friendship (446). The Führer tries to cut down the word shaker’s tree, but finds he cannot make “any impact on the word shaker’s tree” (447) as long as the word shaker sits in the tree, and continues to believe in the power of her words. A young man (Max) joins the word shaker in the tree, and after the two had “looked and talked enough” (450) they climb down the tree, which then tumbles to the ground.

The Word Shaker conveys to Liesel both the power and limitations of words. Max shows how Hitler has come to rule Germany through his words alone, and that Liesel can stand against these words as long as she believes in her own. The one tree in the forest of many cannot be brought down as long as the word shaker remains in the tree. Max explains to Liesel the power of words, and how she can use that power to her advantage, as she has done through her reading and stealing. Yet, in the end, her power is limited. One tree of good words is not enough to combat a forest of hateful words, and ultimately the word shaker’s tree falls down.
Liesel lives out the lesson of *The Word Shaker* when she sees Max being marched through Molching on the way to a concentration camp bordering the town.\(^6\) They embrace in the middle of the street, ignoring the yells of soldiers for them to stop. The soldiers’ shouts soon become physical, and Max and Liesel are brutally whipped in the street. Shortly after the disastrous meeting, Liesel returns to the Hermanns’ library, which Liesel has often visited either by invitation or in secret to read. Liesel initially sits on the floor and stares at the beautifully bound books that had once provided her with hope and happiness; they helped grow her single tree in Hitler’s forest. For a long period of time “she sat and saw. She had seen her brother die with one eye open. . . . had said goodbye to her mother. . . . had seen a Jewish man who had twice given her the most beautiful pages of her life marched to a concentration camp,” and Liesel again sees at the center of all this suffering “the Führer shouting his words and passing them around” (520-21). Liesel, who has long taken comfort and healing from words, now looks at the beautiful library and tells them “don’t fill me up and let me think that something good can come of any of this” (521). Liesel hates that the books made her believe she could make a difference, and that her single tree in Hitler’s forest could change anything. She understands her highly constrained limits, and questions how her words could possibly compete with those shouted by Hitler. Though being a word shaker was once inspiring to Liesel, she now thinks it impossible to combat millions of hateful words.

\(^6\) Worried that the Gestapo will visit his house after Hans gives a piece of bread to a Jew being marched through Molching, Max leaves the Hubermanns’ home, telling Hans “You’ve done enough” (398).
Liesel’s realization of the limitation of words incites her to destroy a book in the Hermanns’ library in an act of agency against words:

She tore a page from the book and ripped it in half. Then a chapter. Soon, there was nothing but scraps of words littered between her legs. . . . The words. Why did they have to exist? Without them, there wouldn’t be any of this. Without words, The Führer was nothing. There would be no limping prisoners, no need for consolation or worldly tricks to make us feel better. What good were the words? (521).

Realizing what Hitler’s words have done, and that her own words have limited power, Liesel releases her rage by destroying words; her rage causes her to destroy what once gave her pleasure. Just as Max painted over the words of the Führer to try and silence them and offer another voice, Liesel destroys words and tries to silence as many as she can. At the end of her destruction, Liesel wonders what good are the words uttered by all the beautifully bound books, by Max in his beautiful pages, and in the books she has stolen. A hopeless and defeated Liesel leaves the Hermanns’ library.

Ilsa Hermann responds to Liesel’s ransacking her library by giving her a journal, providing Liesel with the opportunity to become a word shaker: “I thought if you’re not going to read any more of my books, you might like to write one instead” (523). The journal offers the opportunity for Liesel’s form of resistance to move from reading to writing. Liesel becomes consumed with writing down her story, adding her own tree to the forest. She spends most of her time in the basement writing, and Liesel’s life is
literally saved. Liesel’s obsession with writing shows her active form of resistance and agency. But the question remains, what good are Liesel’s words? Kertzer argues in “What Good are the Words?: Child Memoirs and Holocaust Fiction” that leaving this question open is Zusak’s challenge to his readers. It is now up to the readers to decide what to do with their reading. Liesel’s choice to take an active role after her reading serves as a model to readers to also take an active role. What readers do following reading Liesel’s words will determine what good her words are. Will readers be bystanders when witnessing the suffering of others, be like Death and find the journal merely a distraction, or be inspired by the words to be political agents and take action against injustice? If readers take action, Liesel’s words are worth something. If readers are bystanders the words are useless, for just as the word shaker’s tree fell in Hitler’s forest, it takes more than one to resist.

3.4 “It would take a long life”: The Epilogue

The main part of the novel concludes with Liesel being traumatized again by the bombing of Himmel Street that results in the deaths of the entire community including her foster parents and best friend Rudy. The last image of Liesel readers are left with is a shocked and broken girl unable “to say goodbye” (536) to those she has lost. Readers are presented with more trauma and are not given any promises of Liesel’s recovery. At the

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7 Himmel street is bombed, and Liesel is the lone survivor because she was up in the middle of the night in the cellar rereading the last time in her journal: “I have hated the words and have loved them, and I hope I have made them right” (528). Writing in the journal literally and accidently saves Liesel from dying in the bombing.
novel’s close, there is arguably no hope to be found. An epilogue is needed to restore hope and provide some reassurance to readers.

*The Book Thief*’s epilogue does not exactly follow Cadden’s argument that “epilogues reassure the child reader that a character gets to enjoy the positive outcomes of the story closure . . . at least for a very long time. . . . We need to reassure them that happiness ‘sticks’” (344). However, Zusak’s epilogue does soften the last image of the traumatized Liesel, and offers hope in ensuring readers Liesel does recover. This hope is highly ambiguous. Death first informs readers “There was no recovery from what had happened” on Himmel Street, but then contradicts and concedes that Liesel does recover, though “That would take decades; it would take a long life” (545). Unlike the completely reassuring epilogue of *Harry Potter*, *The Book Thief* reassures readers while placing doubt and uncertainty. Liesel does recover from her trauma, and the epilogue does assure readers she enjoyed happiness and a full life (“her three children, her grandchildren, her husband” (544)) after experiencing trauma. But readers are not told how long Liesel’s healing process took, and Death hints that it involved the entirety of her long life to recover from the destruction of Himmel Street. In contrast to the epilogue in *Harry Potter*, readers are not promised that the scars from past events did not continue to pain Liesel.

Death notes that atrocities, similar to those that caused Liesel’s trauma, might be repeated. As Death takes Liesel’s soul into his arms he notes that outside her home “a few cars drove by. . . . Their drivers were Hitlers and Hubermanns, and Maxes, killers, Dillers, and Steiners” (550). The epilogue ends with no reassurance that what has happened in the novel will not, and could not happen again. Because the novel is based
on the historical WWII, this truth reaches into the world of readers, telling them not to feel confident that comparable atrocities could not happen in their own lives. It has happened before, it could happen again.

What reassurance or hope are readers then left with in the epilogue? First Zusak does reassure that trauma can be overcome; no matter how horrible the event one can heal and experience happiness, though healing from trauma may take a long life. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, readers are cautioned that the past can be repeated, and to make the statement “never again” true requires action. The novel then acts as training ground for young readers to witness atrocities, and does not allow readers to believe that human nature will allow peace forever, or even at all. The novel asks young readers to be conscious of evil in the world, and invites readers as Elie Wiesel did to “always take sides” (n.pag.) and not be apolitical bystanders. Dominick LaCapra argues that “historical traumas and losses may conceivably be avoided and their legacies to some viable extent worked through,” and “more desirable social and political institutions and practices” (85) can be achieved if one can learn from the traumas of the past, and apply the lessons to the present. For just as Death notes there are Hitlers driving outside, there are also Liesels, Hubermanns and Maxs who will try to do what is right even in the face of daunting atrocities. Zusak charges readers who have now read Liesel’s words and learned of her trauma, to take an active role and choose a side. Not diminishing Liesel’s trauma, he restores the hope that the past will not be repeated if actions are taken against injustices.
Chapter Four: Trauma and Identity in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

“We all have our ways to stay busy, to keep thoughts of our time as contestants in the Hunger Games at bay” (*Fire* 15)

Suzanne Collins’s dystopian trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, offers a depiction of trauma in which absolute healing is not achieved. While focus is placed on the first person narrator Katniss, the trilogy portrays an entire community of trauma victims, as well as a country stunted by cultural trauma. Collins depicts a society where all have been irrevocably affected and altered by trauma. Mary F. Pharr compares *The Hunger Games* trilogy to J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series and notes that Harry is able to survive Voldemort’s reign of terror “with a permanent scar rather than a lingering wound” (222). But Katniss and her “country can never be sure that the past, darkened by human rather than monstrous nature, will not return in the future” (222) and thus complete healing will never occur. Pharr argues that having a monster as villain allows Harry Potter to be the boy who lives and achieves absolute healing, while Katniss’s experiencing the darkness of human nature makes her the girl who learns and does not heal completely.

While Pharr makes an interesting comparison, she ignores that the monstrous villain Voldemort also shows the dark side of human nature. Harry’s ability to experience distressing events without lingering wounds, while Katniss’s wounds are still festering, is not due to differing villains, but differing concepts of trauma. For example, Rowling’s *Harry Potter* epilogue shows absolute healing. Meanwhile, Collins presents trauma as being able to alter identity permanently, and traumatic memories become part of the new complex identity that makes absolute healing, like Harry Potter’s, impossible. As well, *The Hunger Games* trilogy is YA literature and thus does not follow the same literary
conventions as *Harry Potter*. Kenneth B. Kidd argues YA literature tends to be “about the management of trauma, whereas children’s literature . . . makes clear the profound emotional and psychological effects of trauma—even the impossibility of recovery” (182), which can be seen in Collins’s trilogy, especially in the third volume *Mockingjay*. It is the trilogy’s genre of YA literature, and its presentation a different concept of trauma, that most accounts for the difference of Katniss’s suffering from Harry’s. A more adept comparison would be between Collins and Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*, for both do not place emphasize on healing, but on living with the new trauma-impacted identity.

Collins presents a concept of trauma in which identity is fundamentally changed. Absolute healing is not the goal of trauma victims but instead it is the management and inclusion of traumatic memories and symptoms into the new complex identity. Though there are many trauma victims to examine within the trilogy, I focus my exploration on Katniss, Peeta, and Panem’s cultural trauma. Of the three case studies, Collins’s work is the least Freudian, and the *DSM-IV-TR* is the more useful tool when examining trauma in the trilogy. First I show that Katniss’s PTSD comes from her ongoing experience with having survived death, and I examine how her identity has been altered. Secondly I explore Peeta’s torture by the Capitol, the new identity that is formed from the torture, and the use of behavioral therapy to both manage distressing cues and safely incorporate them into his new identity. For my exploration of Katniss and Peeta’s management of their trauma I focus on the third volume of the trilogy, *Mockingjay*. Thirdly I investigate the effects of the Hunger Games cultural trauma on the shifting identity of Panem. Just like Peeta and Katniss, the entire country’s identity is altered by trauma. Lastly, I
examine the epilogue to show that Collins’s concept of trauma does not include absolute healing, but the incorporation of a traumatic past into one’s new identity.

4.1 “My name is Katniss Everdeen. Why am I not dead?”: The Struggle Surviving Death

The context for the Hunger Games trilogy is that North America was plagued with natural disasters: “the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land” (Hunger Games 18). War had ensued over what resources remained and resulted in the formation of a new country: Panem, “a shining Capitol \(^1\) ringed by thirteen districts, \(^2\) which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens” (18). But peace did not last, and the thirteen districts unsuccessfully rebelled against the controlling Capitol: “Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated” (18). As a reminder that the “Dark Days” of the uprisings must never be repeated, the yearly Hunger Games are begun as a “punishment for the uprisings” (18), and act as a reminder to the twelve districts that there is little chance of “surviving another rebellion” (18). Once a year each district “must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate” (18) in the Games. Tributes from each district are “imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena” which changes each year, and “over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the

\(^1\) The Capitol is home of the dictatorship-like government and the extremely wealthy, and holds complete economic and political power over the thirteen districts.

\(^2\) Each district is responsible for producing and refining certain resources as dictated by the Capitol. For example, district one makes luxury goods, three is electronics, six is transportation, eleven is agriculture and twelve is coal mining. Districts are not allowed to interact with one another. Selling and trading resources between districts are controlled and mediated by the Capitol.
death. The last tribute standing wins” (18). The Capitol treats the yearly Games as a festive “sporting event” (19), and they are broadcast like a reality television show whose viewing is mandatory in the twelve districts. The winning tribute receives a lifetime of riches, and for one year the winning tribute’s district is “showered with prizes, largely consisting of food . . . grain and oil and even delicacies like sugar” (19), while the other districts battle starvation.

Katniss Everdeen is the district twelve female tribute in the seventy-fourth annual Hunger Games. Her sister, Prim, is first randomly selected as tribute, but Katniss volunteers in her sister’s place. As will be discussed later on, Katniss develops PTSD as a response to the extreme stressor of participating in the Hunger Games. Yet, it is not until she has left the arena of the Games that Katniss begins to exhibit symptoms of PTSD tied to her experience in the Games. Katniss’s delayed symptoms show, for at least herself, trauma may not be “the encounter with death” but the “ongoing experience of having survived it” (Caruth 7). Pharr argues that Katniss has been “fundamentally traumatized by her own survival” (226), putting emphasis on Katniss’s continued experience of surviving. Cathy Caruth suggests that at the core of trauma stories there is a double narrative that oscillates between a crisis of life and a crisis of death, “between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (7). While Katniss is distressed at having encountered death, it is her ongoing experience of surviving death that she most struggles with.

While competing in the Hunger Games, where she encounters death, Katniss’s motivations and beliefs sway from one end to another, which lay the foundation for her later psychological damage. Katniss’s swaying is due to her navigating between
accepting inevitable death, which would allow another tribute to live, and the life instinct of winning and living, which would mean the death of the other twenty-three tributes. The high stakes attached to both her dying and living result in Katniss’s consistently changing motivations, strategy, and beliefs while in the Games, and her traumatic response upon leaving. One example of Katniss’s wavering is in her confidence of being able, or even wanting, to win the Hunger Games. Katniss volunteers believing she is sacrificing her life to protect Prim: “I can’t win. . . . The competition will be far beyond my abilities” (36). Yet, soon after volunteering, Katniss gains self-confidence in being able to survive. Katniss is an excellent hunter, and her best friend Gale asks her “‘How different can it be, really” (40) to kill people rather than animals? Though this comparison initially disturbs Katniss, “The awful thing is that if I can forget they’re people, it will be no different at all” (40), it does lead to confidence in her hunting skills. She feels “a flicker of hope. . . . some food, the right weapon, why should I count myself out of the games?” (70).

Once competing in the Games, Katniss’s beliefs only continue to oscillate. She wavers between not wanting to take part in the violence to being eager and willing to make a kill. Her changing stance on her own violence in the Games begins to show cracks forming in her psyche that will eventually result in her traumatization. When first entering the Games, Katniss hides from the other tributes as long as possible. Hiding can allow her to preserve her own life without having to participate in the violence. But once Katniss finds a bow and arrows, she is given “an entirely new perspective on the Games” (197). Upon receiving her bow she is given confidence not to flee if she comes across another tribute, but to “shoot. I find I’m actually anticipating the moment with pleasure”
Katniss’s life instinct is rampant and she ignores the larger implications of her survival. While Katniss hates the Capitol for creating the Games, it “has not lessened my hatred of my competitors in the least” (238), and she takes pleasure in imagining their deaths at her own hand. The strategy of delaying her own participation in the violence wanes, and Katniss looks forward to taking a more active role in the Games’ violence.

At other times Katniss’s blood lust is completely absent and she does not want “anyone else to die” (293). One such instance of Katniss rising above the expected violence of the Games is in her forming an alliance with a young girl named Rue. Though she knows “this kind of deal [with Rue] can only be temporary,” neither she nor Rue “mentions that” (201). Katniss endangers herself by becoming emotionally attached to Rue because she finds her similar to Prim. There is the potential for Katniss to make a second sacrifice for this new sister figure, and this puts her survival at risk. The relationship with Rue challenges Katniss to “see beyond significations of hunter and survivor” (Ming Tan 58) within the Games, and causes her to see humanity in a fellow competitor. The shift is substantial as Katniss transforms from dehumanizing her competitors to seeing the humanity within them.

Before Katniss must choose between her own life or Rue’s, Rue is killed by another tribute, who is in turn killed swiftly by Katniss. Putting herself at risk by staying in an open and exposed spot, Katniss makes a burial for Rue: “I decorate her body in the flowers. Covering the ugly wound. Wreathing her face. Weaving her hair with bright colors” (237). Susan Shau Ming Tan notes the burial “wrenches Katniss from the narcissistic impulse of the ideal I, as her concerns for survival fall away” (58). The connection with Rue, and its being severed, shifts Katniss’s priorities within the Games.
Katniss is motivated to have a burial for Rue not because it will further her own survival, but as an attempt to shame the Capitol and “make them accountable” (Hunger 236-37). As Katniss covers Rue’s body in flowers, she recognizes “Rue’s humanity” while also “assert[ing] her own” (Ming Tan 58) to both the Capitol and herself.

It could be argued Katniss does exhibit traumatic symptoms while in the arena because she has reoccurring distressing nightmares, but the nightmares reveal her past trauma of losing her father. Her father was “blown to bits in a mine explosion” and even “five years later, I still wake up screaming for him to run” (5). The nightmares of her father’s death reveal Katniss has a traumatic past that she still struggles with, which is separate from the Hunger Games. Katniss refers to the period following her father’s death as the “worst time” (26). She recalls that even when the “numbness of his loss had passed” she would experience pain “out of nowhere, doubling me over, racking my body with sobs” (26). Before becoming a participant in the Games, Katniss was already struggling with the past trauma of losing her father, and was emotionally and psychologically damaged.

Though Katniss does not exhibit traumatic symptoms tied to the experience of participating in the Games while in the Games, the new extremely stressful experience causes the past trauma of her father’s death to come to the surface, as can be seen in emerging nightmares of her father. While in the arena, Katniss does not dream of the Games, or the participants who have died, but of her father. For example, during training for the Games, Katniss’s sleep is “filled with disturbing dreams. . . . I bolt up screaming for my father to run as the mine explodes into a million deadly bits of light” (86). When hallucinating after being stung by a tracker jack, whose venom targets “where fear lives
in your brain” (195), Katniss does not hallucinate being killed in the Games, but sees her “father’s last moments” and watches “Prim die” (195). The tracker jack’s venom reveals that the horrors of the Hunger Games have not yet caused psychological damage, and what Katniss fears is tied to her past trauma of losing her father and her trauma being repeated by losing Prim.

Once she has left the Hunger Games arena, Katniss begins to experience the psychological damage the Games have caused, and she struggles with the ongoing experience of having survived death. Katniss and Peeta manage to outlive all the other tributes, and are named victors of the Hunger Games. Both are extremely weak from injuries sustained in the Games, so are whisked away, and Katniss loses consciousness. Waking in a hospital bed she sees “Lying at the foot of the bed in an outfit that makes me flinch. It’s what all of us tributes wore in the arena. I stare at it as if it had teeth” (351). These reminders of the Games provoke “recollections of the trauma” (*DSM-IV-TR*, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) in Katniss and she responds with fear and distress. Later when having to re-watch highlights of the Games in front of a live audience, Katniss tells readers: “I do not want to watch my twenty-two fellow tributes die. I saw enough of them die the first time. My heart starts to pound and I have a strong impulse to run” (362). Katniss wants to avoid “triggers that would lead to re-experiencing the trauma” (*DSM-IV-TR*, sec. 309.81 n.pag.), and when exposed to triggers she responds with anxiety and fear. Now that Katniss (and Peeta) have survived, the implication of their victory sinks in: they are winners because twenty-two others have died. This realization results in Katniss’s trauma as she struggles with having survived twenty-two others’ deaths.
The following two books in the trilogy, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, present a traumatized Katniss significantly struggling with her experience of having survived death. The focus for the remainder of the trilogy is on the management of trauma, just as Kidd argued characterizes YA literature (182). However, before concentrating on the damage competing in the Hunger Games has caused, I will focus on one positive outcome. Katniss once condemned her mother for the extreme depression she experienced after her husband was killed in the mine explosion. Though Katniss is also psychologically damaged by her father’s sudden death, her mother allows her grief to interfere with daily life, and leaves the care and welfare of the family in the hands of her young daughter. Her mother withdraws from the world and is consumed in grief and depression, while Katniss, though struggling with her own grief, provides the resources needed to survive for the family. Though her mother tries to explain “I couldn’t help what-- . . . I was ill” (*Hunger* 35-6), Katniss remains angry (15) at her mother upon entering the Games.

After competing in the Hunger Games, Katniss relates her mother’s past suffering, the “crushing depression she fell into after my father’s death” (*Fire* 31), to what she is now feeling due to experiences during the Games. The altered view of her mother is significant in that it shifts the traditional gendered story in which a son goes to war and learns to understand his father’s past. For example, Art Spiegelman writes of a similar experience of understanding past trauma through his own in *In the Shadows of No Towers*, placing his story in the gendered view of the son understanding the father through war. For Spiegelman, it takes the experience of witnessing the Twin Towers fall to relate to his father’s experiences in Auschwitz: “I remember my father trying to
describe what the smoke in Auschwitz smelled like . . . The closest he got was telling me it was ‘indescribable.’ . . . That’s *exactly* what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept. 11!” (Spiegelman 3). Once being unable to fully understand the stories of the father, the son comes to understanding through his own experiences.

The gendered story is reversed for it is a mother and daughter who come to better understand one another through their war-like experiences. Katniss begins to understand her mother “couldn’t help” her crushing depression “because sometimes things happen to people and they’re not equipped to deal with them. Like me, for instance. Right now” (*Fire* 31-32). Although Katniss has struggled with her father’s death, and has even been traumatized by it as was shown in her repetitive nightmares, the mother’s pain had been indescribable to the daughter. It takes the experience of the Hunger Games to fully understand and accept the depth of her mother’s emotional and psychological distress. Katniss’s experiencing similar emotional and psychological turmoil as her mother leads to the acceptance and forgiveness of her mother’s past behavior. In addition, once Katniss goes into the Games her mother no longer appears to have the traumatic symptoms she once did. The mother steps back into her nurturing, caregiver role that depression had once rendered her incapable of performing when Katniss returns from the Hunger Games. Now that the daughter understands the mother’s trauma, the mother’s symptoms cease.

Other than the positive healing of her relationship with her mother, Katniss is negatively affected by her trauma, and is often paralyzed and completely controlled by her symptoms. Katniss’s traumatic symptoms align with the *DSM-IV-TR*’s criteria for PTSD, and she is diagnosed (in her own words) by Dr. Aurelius at the end of the trilogy as being a “hopeless, shell-shocked lunatic” (*Mockingjay* 378). Being labeled (either in
her own words, or truly the Doctor’s) as shell-shocked parallels Katniss’s condition with that of World War I soldiers. As discussed in the introduction, finding a suitable diagnosis for war neurosis was difficult as doctors were baffled by the latent symptoms of soldiers. The term “shell-shock” came from the need for a diagnosis that would not belittle the psychological illnesses of soldiers, as the past diagnosis of hysteria had done. Like the soldiers of WWI, Katniss’s (and Peeta’s as well, which will be explored further on) condition is unfamiliar to doctors, and there are no clear treatments for her state, which is apparent when her only treatment is being given morphling.

Katniss’s experience is similar to that of combat soldiers in not only her involvement in the Hunger Games, but also in her active participation in uprising conflicts during Mockingjay. Collins engages with the history of war neurosis in naming Katniss as shell-shocked. The author also comments upon the past and present shortcomings of the diagnosis and treatment of non-active soldiers battling mental illness due to wartime experiences as is conveyed in the lack of support (both family and society at large) Katniss receives at the end of the trilogy. Like many past and present soldiers, once Katniss has played her role in the rebellion she is removed from the public eye, and left to battle her PTSD alone. Katniss’s strong parallel to war veterans could be due to “The lifelong repercussions of Collins’s father’s service in Vietnam” (Dominus, n.pag.).

Collins, in an interview with Susan Dominus of The New York Times, reveals that her “father came back from Vietnam enduring nightmares that lasted his whole life. As a child, she awoke, at times, to the sounds of him crying out during those painful dreams” (Dominus, n.pag.). Due to his experience, Collins’s father took it upon himself to educate his children about war. While living in Brussels, he seized every opportunity to educate
his children about the region’s violent past, and no monument or battlefield was left unnoticed. Collins admits that she has “embraced her father’s impulse to educate young people about the realities of war” (Dominus, n.pag.). The entire trilogy can be seen as Collins educating young people about war, specific examples of war’s harsh realities can be seen in Katniss’s having PTSD and the community’s failing to provide the necessary support.

Katniss’s symptoms align strongly with the *DSM-IV-TR*’s diagnostic criteria for PTSD, continuing to support Collins’s claim that she wants to educate readers about the realities of war. Katniss displays the typical symptoms such as “unspeakable” (*Mockingjay* 115) nightmares that increase “in number and intensity” (*Fire* 72) which Katniss feels she “can’t handle” (192 emphasis original). The nightmares fall under the diagnostic criteria of “intrusive distressing recollections” as well as “distressing dreams” (*DSM-IV-TR*, sec. 309.81 n.pag.). She exhibits symptoms of increased arousal such as “hypervigilance” and “exaggerated startle response” (*DSM-IV-TR*, sec. 309.81 n.pag.), which is evident in her reacting “defensively to any unfamiliar touch” (*Mockingjay* 27). Katniss is also shown to have numbing responses and avoids stimuli associated with the Hunger Games in her withdrawal from family and friends, and seeking alone time while living in district thirteen: “I just go back to our compartment or wander around 13 or fall asleep somewhere hidden. . . . Right now, they leave me alone because I’m classified as mentally disoriented” (19). Collins depicts Katniss’s illness so closely to the *DSM*’s diagnosis for PTSD that Katniss becomes a textbook example.

Perhaps the most telling response of Katniss’s trauma occurs when she discovers she will have to reenter the Hunger Games:
My body reacts before my mind does and I’m running out the door, across the lawns of the Victor’s Village, into the dark beyond . . . I don’t stop. Where?
Where to go? . . . . next thing I know I’m on my hands and knees in the cellar of one of the empty houses in the Victor’s Village. . . . I ball up the front of the shirt, stuff it into my mouth, and begin to scream. *(Fire 174)*

Upon learning she will have to literally relive her experience, Katniss shows “intense psychological distress” and “physiological reactivity on exposure” *(DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.)* to the trauma. Though, until now, Katniss has been able to hide her emotional and psychological distress from her family (she fears it will only upset them to know how much she is hurting), she is unable to control her response to learning she will reenter the Games. Once coming out of the trance-like state, Katniss achieves her desire to numb the pain and fear by getting drunk for the first time: “inside me, the liquor feels like fire and I like it” *(Fire 177).* Upon seeing her family after her flight, Katniss tries to remain in control, but finds she has lost this ability as well: “I have to be strong. . . . I open my mouth, planning to start off with some kind of joke, and burst into tears. So much for being strong” *(180).* Having to re-experience her trauma literally throws Katniss’s world into complete chaos, and she loses control of her responses.

Remembering Rue, her ally in the Hunger Games, also causes Katniss distress and she responds with symptoms of PTSD. Katniss had seen similarities between Rue and her sister Prim when she first saw Rue: “I bite my lip. Rue is a small flower that grows in the Meadow. Rue. Primrose” *(Hunger 99).* When weighing reasons whether she should form an alliance with Rue, Katniss is greatly swayed by her similarities to Prim: “she’s a survivor, and I trust her, and why not admit it? She reminds me of Prim” *(201).* Katniss
volunteered in her sister’s place to spare her from the Hunger Games, and Katniss feels the same protective instinct towards Rue because of her similarities to Prim. Though the alliance only lasts a few days before Rue is killed by another tribute, a strong connection is quickly formed because Katniss associates the girl with Prim. As Rue lays dying she asks Katniss to sing, and she further projects her little sister onto Rue: “if this is Prim’s, I mean, Rue’s last request” (234). Though Rue is not Prim, Katniss’s confusion of the two girls make Rue’s death similar to experiencing her sister’s death.

The association of Rue with Prim becomes reversed once Katniss leaves the seventy-fourth Hunger Games. Prim often functions as a cue for Katniss that symbolizes “or resembles an aspect of the traumatic event” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) in that she resembles Rue. Katniss experiences the disarming cue as Prim is interviewed by a television crew: “Bam! It’s like someone actually hits me in the chest . . . I squeeze my eyes shut and I don’t see Prim—I see Rue” (Fire 40). The association causes Katniss psychical pain in feeling that she has been hit in the chest, and she feels as if she is re-experiencing the trauma of Rue’s death. This cue causes Katniss to see “her [Rue] lying on the ground with the spear still wedged in her stomach . . .” (41 ellipses original). Katniss’s trauma has reversed her association of Rue with Prim. Just as Rue once stood for Prim who was safe at home because of Katniss’s sacrifice, Prim now stands for Katniss’s inability to save Rue: “Who else will I fail to save from the Capitol’s vengeance?” (41). One girl stands for the other, and sadly Katniss is ultimately unable to save either.³

³ Prim is killed during a bombing in Mockingjay.
Arguably even more powerful than the cue of Rue/Prim is the distress and anxiety the cue of President Snow’s rose causes Katniss. Snow visits Katniss’s home shortly after she wins the seventy-fourth Hunger Games to warn against encouraging rebellion while she and Peeta do a tour of the twelve districts. Snow threatens to kill everyone she loves if the revolution is not quelled. During this terrifying visit, Snow wears his signature white rose pinned to his suit, which has the overwhelming smell “of blood” (Fire 30). Immediately after President Snow leaves her home, Katniss feels the room “spinning in slow, lopsided circles, and I wonder if I might black out,” (30) showing a physical reaction to Snow’s fear tactic. After this encounter, the smell of the white rose acts as a cue for Katniss to re-experience the terror and panic felt during and after the interview. When she smells the rose’s scent, Katniss has bodily reactions: “without even knowing what it is at first: my palms begin to sweat” (Mockingjay 19); “Sweat begins to run down my back, fill my palms . . . Black spots swim across my field of visions” (88); “The sickeningly sweet smell hits my nose, and my heart begins to hammer against my chest” (160). Even the memory of the rose’s smell makes Katniss’s “body break out in a sweat” (22). For Katniss, the scent of Snow’s rose functions as a distressing cue that brings up not only stressful thoughts of her traumatic interview with Snow, but a sense of a “foreshortened future” (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) for herself and loved ones.

Once Snow has been captured and detained by rebel forces, and his power to harm Katniss and her loved ones is removed, an encounter with her old cue continues to bring up traumatic symptoms: “The encounter with Snow opens the door to my old repertoire of nightmares” (363). Katniss meets President Snow in his greenhouse full of roses, which leaves Katniss that night “on the floor of the wardrobe, tangled in silk,
screaming my head off” (363). Even though the threat has been removed and her family and friends are safe, the cue of the rose still holds the power to distress Katniss and throw her into emotional and psychological turmoil.

After assassinating the rebel President Coin (because Coin wanted to reinstate the Hunger Games with Capitol children) and being deemed shell-shocked, Katniss is sent home to district twelve. Upon reentering her home, Katniss finds a rose President Snow had left months before. She grabs “the vase, stumble down to the kitchen, and throw its contents into the embers. As the flowers flare up, a burst of blue flame envelopes the rose and devours it. . . . I smash the vase of the floor for good measure” (383). Katniss removes the cue’s power over her by destroying it. The extinguishing of the rose, and Katniss’s showering and scrubbing “the roses from my hair, my body, my mouth” (383), are acts of cleansing and a breakthrough in her suffering.

In the end Katniss is unable to heal completely from her PTSD because her trauma has changed who she is. Though Katniss is not as severely affected by her traumatic memories as she had once been, in the trilogy’s last chapter Collins shows readers that Katniss still wakes “screaming from nightmares of mutts and lost children” (Mockingjay 388). Though the threats to herself and her family are over, Katniss is still haunted by her experience of surviving death, and by those who did not. In The Hunger Games trilogy, the stress of trauma is not something that can be overcome, but something that alters identity. Trauma changes who Katniss is, and she must learn to live with her new identity. Katniss believes that there is a promise “that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again” (388). One way in which she combats traumatic symptoms and forces herself to believe things “can be good again” is by
playing a game that acts to retrain her thinking processes (which is an example of behavioral therapy which will be discussed in greater detail further on). When Katniss feels the overwhelming fear that everything good in her life “could be taken away” she makes “a list in my head of every act of goodness I’ve seen someone do” (390). She calls the game “Repetitive” and even “tedious after more than twenty years,” but admits: “there are much worse games to play” (390). It is worse to dwell on the traumatic memories, the ones that bring up feelings of fear and anxiety, then to tediously focus on the good she has experienced. Though Katniss continues to struggle with loss and traumatic symptoms, she has learned to include past trauma in her new identity and accept the occasional symptoms with her “good deeds” game.

4.2 “He’ll never be the same”: Peeta’s Fear Conditioning and Behavioral Therapy

Peeta Mellark is the son of a baker, and the male tribute chosen from district twelve in the seventy-fourth Hunger Games. Katniss and Peeta know one another from school, but their true connection was formed outside school and years before the reaping. When Katniss’s family was starving shortly after her father had died, Peeta gave her a loaf of bread. This gesture of kindness gave Katniss hope (Hunger 32) that she and her family could survive. Though the two have not spoken since the bread incident, Peeta is in love with Katniss, and is motivated by protecting her both in and out of the Games. Peeta puts Katniss’s best interests above his own, which means being prepared to die so that she may live.

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4 Reaping is the name of the ceremony in which two children from each district are randomly drawn to compete in the Hunger Games. The children are reaped/harvested like crops by the Capitol.
The night before entering the seventy-fourth Hunger Games, Peeta confides in Katniss that his goal is to “‘die as myself. . . . I don’t want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster I’m not’” (Hunger 141). While Katniss has been focusing on survival strategies, Peeta confesses his main worry is maintaining his identity, and not letting the Capitol and their Games change him: “‘I keep wishing I could think of a way to . . . to show the Capitol they don’t own me. That I’m more than just a piece in their Games’” (142, ellipsis original). Both Peeta and Katniss are named victors of the seventy-fourth Hunger Games.  

Peeta bakes and paints in order to keep his memories of the “time as contestants in the Hunger Games at bay” (Fire 15), showing that he, like Katniss, struggles with the ongoing experience of living with death. But through the Capitol’s torturing, Peeta’s worst nightmares become a reality: they change who he is and use him as a mere piece in their political games.

Katniss is rescued and airlifted from the Quarter Quell arena by the rebels and taken to district thirteen. In contrast, the rebels are unable to rescue Peeta, and he is

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5 Katniss and Peeta are the last tributes left, and rather than one kill the other both put a handful of poisonous berries in their mouth to look like they are attempting a double suicide. The Capitol needs a victor, so they name both victors before they can swallow the berries.

6 When the Capitol initially wrote the rules for the Hunger Games they laid out that every twenty-five years the anniversary would be marked with a Quarter Quell which “would call for a glorified version of the Games to make fresh the memory of those killed by the districts’ rebellion” (Fire 171). The first Quarter Quell had the districts vote for tributes, and the second had twice as many tributes compete. For the “seventy-fifth anniversary, as
captured and held hostage by the Capitol so they can “use him against” (*Fire* 388)
Katniss. Collins keeps readers and Katniss in the dark as to what is being done to Peeta, but his gradual mental and physical disintegration is shown through a series of interviews broadcast to the districts by the Capitol. During the first interview Peeta “looks healthy to the point of robustness. His skin is glowing, flawless. . . . His manner’s composed, serious” (*Mockingjay* 21). Katniss, though confused by Peeta’s message during the interview for the rebels to cease fire, is happy that he is alive and healthy. There is no sign of his being physically abused, and only a glimpse of psychological confusion is shown in his calling for a cease-fire. The second interview shocks Katniss: “The healthy, clear-eyed boy I saw a few days ago has lost at least fifteen pounds and developed a nervous tremor in his hands. . . . the fine clothes cannot conceal the pain he feels when he moves, [he] is a person badly damaged” (112). In mere days Peeta’s physical transformation is jarring, and it is obvious he has been physically tortured. As well, the tremor in his hands, and his uncharacteristic behavior, betrays his psychological damage. It is clear to Katniss from Peeta’s drastic transformation that extreme torture is being used.

The third and last interview presents the most disturbing image of the transforming Peeta. He sits “off to one side. . . . The foot of his prosthetic leg taps out a strange irregular beat. Beads of sweat have broken through the layer of powder on his upper lip and forehead” (132). Peeta is shown to be struggling in both his stance and

_a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the males and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of tributes_” (172) forcing Peeta and Katniss to compete for a second time.
sweating, but it is the “angry yet unfocused” (132) look in his eyes which frightens (132) Katniss the most. In an erratic uncharacteristic manner, Peeta warns those watching the interview of a secret attack the Capitol is planning on district thirteen: “No one is safe. Not in the Capitol. Not in the districts. And you . . . in Thirteen . . . Dead by morning!” (133, ellipses original). Though he tries to hide his message, the Capitol knows he has given away their surprise attack. The camera is knocked to the floor and still broadcasts “The scuffle of boots. The impact of the blow that’s inseparable from Peeta’s cry of pain. And his blood as it splatters the tiles” (134). This is the first concrete evidence of Peeta’s being physically abused and controlled by the Capitol.

A rescue mission is mounted after Peeta’s third interview, and he is successfully taken from the Capitol and transported back to district thirteen. Katniss is “light-headed with giddiness” (176) before being reunited with Peeta, but it takes only moments with him to realize the full extent of damage the Capitol’s torture has caused. When Peeta first sees Katniss, the woman he loves, he “sweeps the doctors aside, leaps to his feet” (176) for what Katniss expects to be a loving embrace. But Peeta’s fingers instead “lock around my [Katniss’s] throat” (176-77), and he tries to strangle her to death. Peeta’s violent reaction to Katniss reveals he has been fundamentally changed, and his worst nightmare of being altered by the Capitol has become a dark reality. The Capitol has been able to take what Peeta holds most dear, his love for Katniss, distort his affection and morph his love into fear. Like Katniss, Peeta’s identity has been changed by trauma; torture has forged a new identity.
It is revealed that Peeta has been tortured through “hijacking,” which uses venom of the tracker jack to target the place in the brain that houses fear. The Capitol used the venom to alter Peeta’s memories:

Recall is made more difficult because memories can be changed. . . . Brought to the forefront of your mind, altered, and saved again in the revised form. Now imagine that I ask you to remember something—either with a verbal suggestion or by making you watch a tape of the event—and while that experience is refreshed, I give you a dose of tracker jacker venom. . . . enough to infuse the memory with fear and doubt. And that’s what your brain puts in long-term storage. (181)

The memories the Capitol targeted and transformed are of Katniss. Peeta, once unconditionally in love with Katniss, has now been conditioned to fear her. Katniss becomes a cue of Peeta’s trauma, and when he is exposed to this cue extreme fear and anxiety are activated within him. Exposure to a severe stressor, such as torture (DSM-IV-TR, sec. 309.81 n.pag.) can impair “the ability to judge threat imminence correctly and react accordingly, and a state of anxiety results” (Rua and Fanselow 31-32). Peeta incorrectly identifies Katniss as a threat because of his fear conditioning. When in her presence, or if she is mentioned, he reacts with extreme worry, fear, and anxiety. Having his feelings for Katniss altered (having defined himself by loving her) shows that Peeta’s very identity has been transformed by torture.

Psychologists have linked fear conditioning to creating PTSD. Richard McNally explains that many “liken trauma stressors to unconditioned stimuli that elicit the unconditional response of fear and that established neutral cues as conditional stimuli that elicit the conditional response of fear” (80). Peeta’s torturers used fear conditioning to
elicited in him extreme distress when exposed to certain cues, and this caused symptoms of PTSD. McNally notes the conditioning model “precipitate[s] PTSD by producing toxic levels of fear” (85) in which the person being conditioned will be “helplessly terror-stricken by an uncontrollable stressor” (85). Again this is true of Peeta, for when exposed to the cue of Katniss he is unable to control his fear and anxiety. For example, Peeta is shown a tape of himself and Katniss hiding in a cave during their first Hunger Games in the attempt to combat the altered memories of Katniss with the truth. But Peeta reacts to the tape by being unable to speak for several hours and goes into “some sort of stupor” (*Mockingjay* 196). Though Katniss is not shown to be harming Peeta in the footage, his conditioning has made it so when he is exposed to this cue, in any setting, he reacts with extreme distress.

Mark Barad and Christopher K. Cain note that behavioral therapy deliberately exposes patients to cues “that generate fear or anxiety” (78) in order to gradually reduce the amount of distress “such cues cause when encountered during the course of the patient’s usual activities” (78). Behavioral therapy seeks to condition patients not to feel fear and anxiety when exposed to certain cues. While behavioral therapy can successfully teach patients to control and replace fear and anxiety inducing cues, it is a slow process and “requires great effort from the patients and therapist, and it does not always work. Even when it does work, patients remain subject to relapses” (78). In the case of PTSD patients, the authors note that the struggle to cure anxiety and fear with behavioral therapy intensifies because PTSD “is notoriously difficult to treat” (78).

Peeta’s doctors try methods reminiscent of behavioral therapy to cure him, and try to undo the conditioning gradually by slowly exposing him to things he used to enjoy such
as decorating cakes (*Mockingjay* 228), and interacting with people unassociated with Katniss. They also try to “hijack” Peeta back by bringing up the distorted memories of Katniss “and then give him a big dose of a calming drug” (195). Both methods aim to remove the anxiety and fear from the cue, and replace it with calm and pleasure. However, as doctors work with Peeta it becomes evident that while he “‘might get somewhat better. . . . he’ll never be the same’” (182). The torture has irrevocably altered who Peeta is, or had been. This is devastating news for Katniss, for never being the same means continuing to associate her with a fear and anxiety-inducing cue. Even if Peeta is cured he could be subject to relapses. Seeing Katniss’s disappointment with Peeta’s diagnosis, she is told that “‘At least he’s alive. . . . Peeta’s damaged, but he’s here. With us’” (182). Collins again places emphasis not on curing trauma, but on its creating a new identity and the need to learn to live with ongoing symptoms. Just as Collins’s father’s own life-long struggles were reflected in Katniss’s altered identity due to her participation in the Hunger Games, Peeta’s identity has been transformed through the Capitol’s torture.

One way in which Peeta tries to reconstruct his own tampered memories is with a game he calls “Real or Not Real” (272), which uses techniques similar to behavioral therapy. The game also has similarities to Katniss’s “good deeds” game as she tries to retrain her mind to focus on the positive rather than the negative. Due to the hijacking of his memories, Peeta can no longer tell “what’s real anymore, and what’s made up” (270), causing him to find threats in wrong situations. In order to reconstruct memories of Katniss, Peeta asks questions to others, who then in turn tell him if what he said was real, or not real. Though “reconstructing his memory of me [Katniss] is excruciating” (272)
and slow as behavioral therapy can be, it begins to allow Peeta to reconstruct his memories of Katniss so that her presence does not act as a consistently distressing cue. The game begins with reconstructing small details like Katniss’s favorite color, the name of teachers they shared, Katniss’s “preference for cheese buns” (272), to bigger questions of trust: “You’re still trying to protect me. Real or not real” (302). Though the game is a slow process, the reconditioning of Peeta’s memory of Katniss is successful. She begins to be able to touch him, though “he freezes at my touch, but doesn’t recoil” (302). They move to a kiss, and although “His whole body starts shuddering,” Katniss keeps her lips “pressed to his” (314). Finally, after countless rounds of real or not real “Peeta and I grow back together” (388), and ultimately end up marrying.

Though the behavioral therapy is successful, Peeta is subject to relapses and often clutches “the back of a chair and hangs on until the flashbacks are over,” and still sometimes asks Katniss, “You love me. Real or not real?” (388) to sort out his distorted memories. The behavioral therapy of the “real or not real” game has been successful in diminishing Katniss as a distressing cue. But Peeta must live with the threat of relapse, and the “real or not real” game allows him to do so. The doctors were correct in their hypotheses that Peeta would get better, but that he would never be the same. Peeta’s symptoms are less severe, but his identity is forever changed by his traumatic experiences.

4.3 Cultural Trauma as a Political Tool

Just as Katniss and Peeta’s identities are altered by trauma, the cultural identity of Panem is in continual flux due to the cultural trauma of the Hunger Games. Jeffrey C. Alexander defines cultural trauma as when members “of a collectivity feel they have been subjected
to a horrendous event” which in turn leaves “indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). Kai Erikson calls this shared wound collective trauma, and differentiates it from individual trauma in that collective trauma entails “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erickson qtd. in Alexander 4, emphasis original). Cultural, or collective trauma, does not have to entail every person within a society being individually traumatized due to the extreme stressor, but instead there is a “dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in social fabric” (Eyerman 2) within the collective group. How the group once thought of their collective selves, their social and political structures, religious beliefs, economy, and so on has been put into question because of how they understand the event. There is the potential for a once cohesive group to lose its cohesiveness, as well as have their identity fundamentally changed.

For Alexander, it is not the particular event that creates cultural trauma, but how the event is represented that constructs cultural trauma. He argues trauma is not “the result of a group experiencing pain” from an event, but “the result of . . . acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity” (10). Collective actors, or what Alexander and Neil Smelser call carrier groups, represent “social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are” (Alexander 10) to the public sphere, which in turn can cultivate cultural trauma. Carrier groups, who include “cultural specialists such as priests, politicians, intellectuals, journalists, moral entrepreneurs, and leaders of social movements” (Smelser 38), hold “meaning making” power in the public
Carrier groups must make a claim of cultural damage from an event in order for it to be regarded as damaging by the public sphere. Smelser furthers that once carrier groups are able to establish an event as a national trauma “its status as trauma has to be continuously and actively sustained and reproduced in order to continue in that status” (38). There can be several carrier groups putting forth differing notions of how an event should be regarded, so when one voice becomes louder the meaning of the event can change. The highly constructed nature of cultural trauma, as well as the need for it to be maintained to be considered trauma, greatly differentiates from individual psychological trauma.

The country of Panem has been built upon fractured layers that have never allowed the divided country to achieve a fully cohesive state, or recover from the distressing events of their past. Before The Hunger Games trilogy begins, North America was thrown into chaos from natural disasters and the subsequent war over resources, laying a cracked foundation for Panem to be built upon. An attempt to heal from the chaos can be seen in forming Panem from the ashes of North America. The new country does not return to old cultural systems of North America, but forms a new identity with the Capitol and thirteen districts. Panem is unable to achieve a stable level of cohesiveness, or completely heal from the tear in social fabric, because of the absolute power of the Capitol (the strongest carrier group), and this results in the districts’ first uprising against the Capitol. The newly established society is thrown into chaos again because of the uprisings, and yet another new social identity is formed with the Hunger Games. The Capitol enforces the segregation of the districts with the yearly Hunger Games, and keeps the memory of the failed uprisings fresh. Rather than be inspired by
the past attempt at rebellion, the Capitol has Panem regard the uprisings as a disastrous failure not to be repeated. Pitting children from each district against one another destroys the opportunity for any cohesive bonds to form between the districts and is politically advantageous for the Capitol.

Just as experiencing an extremely stressful event does not ensure an individual will be traumatized, an entire culture is similarly not ensured to experience cultural trauma from extremely stressful events. As previously discussed, Alexander argues it is carrier groups who propose meaning. One powerful carrier group in reality, and in the trilogy, is mass media for it can control how an event is presented and distributed to the larger audience. Though cultural trauma is “rooted in an event or series of events,” (Eyerman 3) it is not always directly experienced by the entire community. It is the mediation of the horrendous events through mass media that relates “the pain to a larger audience” (Alexander 14) and can create cultural trauma. Alexander argues that even if the identities of the victims of trauma have been established to the larger community, at the “beginning of the trauma” the wider audience may “see little if any relations between themselves and the victimized group” (14). It is when the victims are represented in terms of “valued qualities shared by the larger collective identity” (14) that the audience will begin to symbolically participate in the experience of the original trauma, moving from individual to a cultural trauma. When trauma enters mass media outlets it gains the opportunity to have the suffering of victims understood, but it also becomes “subject to distinctive kinds of restrictions” (Alexander 18). Mass media communications can result in trauma being overtly dramatized and allows for “competing interpretations to gain enormous persuasive power over others” (18). Carrier groups such as the owners of
media outlets, politicians, and other “elites” (18) may use the developing cultural trauma for their own purposes, which is what the Capitol does.

The Hunger Games are the most popular reality television show in Panem (mainly because viewing is mandatory in the districts). In this way, the Hunger Games’ victims’ identities are broadcast to a wider audience. The wider audience’s responses to images of the victimized are controlled by the Capitol carrier group’s mass media. Those watching the Games (bystanders) are not motivated to action against the Games, or encouraged to identify with the victims’ trauma, because of the way the Capitol shoots, edits, advertises, and distributes the footage. The Capitol uses the districts’ trauma of fearing that their children might be chosen as tributes as a political tool to ensure passivity in the districts. Though most of the districts do not view the Games as pure entertainment, as the viewers/bystanders in the Capitol do, the segregation from other districts has each cheering for their own tributes to win. The Capitol manipulates each district’s focus to be on the fear of potentially losing their children in order to maintain political power.

The Capitol controls the images of Hunger Game tributes so that their celebrity status will be broadcasted to the mass audience, and not their trauma. The struggles of victims are hidden, and the wider audience is encouraged to identify and be envious of the wealth and security of the victims, not their continued suffering. By manipulating how the greater audience perceives the victims, the Capitol is able to stop the districts from symbolically relating to their trauma, which could result in bystanders taking an active role against the perpetrators. The Capitol keeps Panem from relating to the victims of trauma by hiding the victors’ trauma, trying to stop bystanders from identifying with the trauma of the victims.
The uprisings in the districts take place because the Capitol ultimately fails to remain the most powerful carrier group. The spark of rebellion is first lit after Katniss covers Rue’s dead body with flowers. The burial moves Katniss to the position of being a new cultural carrier who regards the horrendous event of the Hunger Games differently than the Capitol carrier group. It does not matter that Rue is from another district; Katniss takes the time to honor her death with a burial. As Katniss walks away from Rue’s body, she touches her three middle fingers of her left hand to her lips and lifts the three fingers to the sky. It is a sign used at funerals meaning: “thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love” (Hunger 24). Katniss shows this great sign of respect to a member of another district, and the gesture begins to break boundaries and have the public sphere view the Hunger Games from her perspective, not the Capitol’s. This begins Katniss being cheered on not only by her own district, but also by Rue’s and others who come to respect her actions. This is the first action that begins to unite the districts against the Capitol (that moves them from bystanders to active members).

Katniss becomes a dangerous symbol, and a threatening cultural carrier, that the Capitol tries to diminish by their media distribution to the public sphere.

Just as the Capitol uses mass media to hinder bonds between the districts forming and ensuring passivity, the rebels (another carrier group) of district thirteen use it to encourage cultural trauma and unity. Piotr Sztompka defines rebellion in the confines of cultural trauma as being “a more radical effort aimed at the total transformation of culture in order to replace the traumatic condition with a completely new cultural setup” (168). The rebels try and spark a new cultural set up by distributing mass media in a different way. The rebels, knowing the power Katniss’s image already has, use her in several
promos in which she speaks the truth about what life was like in her district (starvation and fear of Capitol violence) and what her experience during and after the Hunger Games has been. Katniss destroys the image of victors living a life of luxury with her truth. She hopes that in being honest the bystanders of the districts will relate to her struggles and resistance: “I do the thing that Haymitch has wanted since my first interview. I open up” (*Mockingjay* 168). Katniss as cultural carrier, and the rebels as carrier group, compete successfully against the representation the Capitol has presented to the public sphere of the Hunger Games.

As well, the rebels air mini documentaries called *We Remember*: “in each one, we would feature one of the dead tributes. . . . The idea being that we could target each district with a very personal piece” (*Mockingjay* 109). The rebels hope that bystanders will begin to symbolically participate in the trauma of the victims and be moved to action. In this way, the rebels “establishes the victim, attribute responsibility, and distribute the ideal and material consequences” (Alexander 22) which is an uprising against the Capitol by the thirteen districts. Once cultural trauma has been established through district thirteen’s promos of Katniss and other tributes, both living and deceased, there is an “identity revision” (Alexander 22) throughout Panem, and the collective identity is revised. Alexander notes that during the identity revision of the culture there will be a period of “re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of self” (22). Panem can now look back and re-evaluate what has happened to them and decide whether social change is for the better.
Sztompka argues that cultural trauma “in spite of its immediate negative, painful consequences,” can become a positive force of “social becoming. . . . In spite of the disruption and disarray of cultural order that trauma brings about, in a different time scale it may be seen as the seed of a new cultural system” (194). The rebels are successful in defeating the Capitol by inspiring actions in bystanders, but Collins only depicts the possibility that a better cultural system will be formed. The new President Coin wants to reinstate the Hunger Games with Capitol children, showing the past cultural trauma will be repeated. Sensing the danger, Katniss assassinates President Coin, and readers are told that the Hunger Games are officially ended. But the villain in the trilogy is not one person. President Snow is shown to have similar interests as the rebel leader Coin, and it is the dark side of human nature that is the real threat. There is a potential that the new government, with a newly elected leader, could be positive (for example: “Machines from the Capitol break ground for a new factory where we will make medicines” [Mockingjay 387]), but Katniss remains afraid that all this new peace “could be taken away” (390). There is the potential that the cultural trauma of Panem has laid the foundation for a new and healthier cultural system, but there is also the danger that “mobilization against trauma may be too small, and coping strategies ineffective. Then trauma initiates a self-amplifying vicious spiral of cultural destruction” (Sztompka 194, emphasis original). Katniss feels it may be too soon to tell whether the cultural trauma of Panem has allowed for a greater society to form, or whether total cultural destruction is still on the horizon. Panem is still determining what its cultural identity will be.
4.4 “There are much worse games to play”: The Epilogue

*The Hunger Games* differs the most from Mike Cadden’s arguments concerning epilogues in children’s and YA literature. Cadden notes that epilogues often provide “emotional satisfaction” for readers and reassurance that “happiness ‘sticks’” (“All is Well” 344). Unlike *Harry Potter* and *The Book Thief*, the main part of *The Hunger Games* ends with several loose strings tied (Peeta and Katniss are married, the outcome of other characters is revealed), and arguably the emotional satisfaction of readers has been met. Readers are aware that Katniss and Peeta end up together, and are reassured they do enjoy happiness after trauma, although Katniss and Peeta do not heal from their trauma but have learned to live with it. There is not the same open-endedness as with the other two discussed case studies that seemed to require an epilogue to reassure young readers of happiness for the protagonists. Yet, the *Hunger Games* trilogy does end with an epilogue.

The focus of the epilogue is on Katniss and Peeta’s children. The children symbolize the rebirth of society, and a new generation who can be pure and hopeful because they have not had to live through the Hunger Games. Yet, while the children symbolize hope for the next generation, there is also extreme fear surrounding them. Katniss once swore never to have children (*Hunger 8*), for she could not face sending them to the Hunger Games. Even after the Games are ended it takes “five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree” (*Mockingjay* 389) to have children, and Katniss only agrees because “Peeta wanted them so badly” (389). Katniss frets over the day she will have to explain her role in the Hunger Games to her children and wonders “How can I tell them about that world without frightening them to death?” (388). She worries about having to
explain her trauma, her continued nightmares “Why they came. Why they won’t ever really go away” (390). She confides that she is still afraid that her peace and happiness will be taken away, but she has created the good deeds game. Similar to Harry Potter combating the Dementors with the Patronus spell that requires a wizard to recall a happy memory, Katniss battles her ever-looming trauma with memories of goodness.

Cadden also notes that epilogues often reassure readers that “something didn’t happen—that quells fear that a character’s newly positive situation or newly found resolve won’t hold up” (348). Readers want to know that the solution to whatever problem was not temporary, but a permanent triumph. As with *The Book Thief*, readers of *The Hunger Games* are not reassured that atrocities will never take place again. There is no guarantee that the rebels’ triumph over the Capitol is permanent, or that the new government will not fall into dangerous old habits. Katniss still lives in fear of the Hunger Games, or something similar, returning. Also, like Zusak’s Liesel who takes a long life to recover from her trauma, Katniss still struggles with her trauma, though there is no promise given (like with Liesel) that complete recovery is possible. Collins depicts trauma not as being something one must strive to recover from, but something that irrevocably changes identity. The epilogue does not assure readers that perfect happiness is enjoyed by Katniss and Peeta, but reinforces that traumatic memory is something that must be incorporated in their new identities.
Epilogue

This epilogue does not fulfill the function Mike Cadden finds in epilogues because this is not an epilogue to a children’s or YA book. As well, while writing the thesis acted at times as an extreme stressor, the writing did not traumatize and thus no reassurance of my enduring happiness is necessary.

The epilogue does return to the questions posited in the introduction and summarizes the conclusions the thesis has come to. Asking whether children’s and YA literature are able to provide complex representations of trauma, what is the place of the DSM and Freudian theories when analyzing depictions of trauma in children’s and YA literature, and to what extent are authors able to maintain genre conventions while depicting trauma, this thesis has conducted three case studies of children’s and YA fiction that do offer depictions of trauma that confront the difficulties of the subject matter, and portrays complex representations of trauma. In Kenneth B. Kidd’s exploration of trauma and children’s literature in his book Freud in Oz, he finds the literature often does not confront the difficulties of the subject matter, and writers opt for simplistic narratives that give “expression to trauma but in a distorted form, offering psychological relief but at the expense of historical truth” (189). Although only the Book Thief is grounded in history, all the case studies provide a complex representation of trauma.

Each study explores a unique aspect of trauma, and portrays varying responses, showing that trauma is not a fixed entity. This counters Eric Tribunella’s assertion of trauma being singular in how it functions by transforming young characters into mature melancholic adults. This difference could arise from Tribunella discussing only American YA fiction, and two case studies do not fall under this category (J.K. Rowling is a British
writer, and Markus Zusak is a New Zealander). However, Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy does fall under the category Tribunella discusses, and neither Katniss nor Peeta can be categorized as melancholic adults. This shows there is more complexity to the representations of trauma then Tribunella accounts for.

Though the complexity of the representations can be seen in many ways (and has been the subject of the thesis), it is significant that with each epilogue the treatment of trauma grows more complex. In J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, trauma is possibly avoided altogether and any injuries from Harry’s distressing experiences are defeated. Markus Zusak, in *The Book Thief*, depicts Liesel’s trauma as being defeated, but readers do not see the process of defeat. Finally, Suzanne Collins in *The Hunger Games* trilogy portrays trauma as never thoroughly being defeated, but managed. The epilogues alone demonstrate that there is a variety of representations of trauma within children’s and YA literature, and each is complex in its treatment of trauma.

The *DSM-IV-TR* and Freud’s theories had varying utility in the case studies. Freud fit best within J.K. Rowling’s series, especially the concept of melancholic mourning, as Freud’s own stories used to illustrate his theories were best matched with Harry’s story. His usefulness in this children’s literature series could be due to its being British, as Joel Paris argues that Freud “never lost his influence in Europe, though forgotten in America” (74). Freud being forgotten in America is evident in Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy, as the *DSM-IV-TR* was more helpful in exploring the characters’ traumas because of their highly symptom based responses. Thus, I argue that both Freud and the *DSM* have a place and utility within discussions of trauma in children’s and YA
literature, but the extent of their usefulness can be affected by where the book is written, as this influences what conceptions and theories of trauma dominate the culture.

This thesis was also interested in how writers are affected by genre conventions in their representations of trauma. The depiction of trauma in the children’s literature example (*Harry Potter*) was hindered by genre expectations. In order to achieve a happy ending with no lingering injuries from trauma, Rowling made the question whether or not Harry had been traumatized at all by his extreme stressors very murky. Further research is needed to determine whether it is possible to portray characters who have been traumatized in children’s literature while maintaining genre conventions, but from the evidence found in the three case studies, YA fiction appears to be better suited to representations of trauma. It is possible that there are examples of children’s literature that portray more clearly traumatized characters, but I question if they are able to maintain the conventions of their genre, and how the portrayal affects overall sales and reception.

Though the case studies were unique in their complex portrayals of trauma, each confronted difficult subject matter with, what I argue, not the intent to fortify readers through traumatizing them, but in the attempt to awaken readers as political agents with power to make an impact in their own worlds. *Harry Potter* deals largely with death, and through experiencing Harry’s varied responses to death, readers can recognize their own or other’s responses and learn healthy practices of grief. Zusak charges his readers to become political agents against atrocity to ensure that a repetition of events, like that of the Holocaust, will not occur again. Collins educates her readers about the harsh realities of war, and charges them to become aware of power structures in their own worlds. All
three case studies, through their complex representations of trauma, do not protect readers from difficult subjects or offer simplistic and distorted views of the world, but equip readers with the political awareness and courage to change similar conditions within their own worlds.
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