

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND THE IMAGINATION  
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a tradition considering the traumatized child was developed in American Literature. In particular, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, provided the traumatized American child with a voice, defining a tradition that would be developed throughout the American literary cannon, in works such as *Light in August* and *The Bluest Eye*, and persists in works of contemporary literature. This tradition arose in response to a Romantic and Victorian focus on the child, adopting the concern and applying American themes and style. Additionally, the American tradition of the traumatized child responds to and parallels research and conclusions of developmental psychology and studies in Child Development. This

tradition is influenced by a series of standard constructs and focuses on the relationship between trauma and the child's imagination.

## DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this thesis to my beautiful wife, Christy, and to my loving mother and proofreader, Rosemary, who inspired and supported me throughout this process.

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## Childhood Trauma and the Imagination in American Literature

### Introduction

In the past decade there has been a boom in public reception for literature concerning children. Both children and adults have been captivated, first by the *Harry Potter* series and more recently by *The Hunger Games* trilogy. A critical conflict for both of these series concerns the mind of a child who deals with trauma, specifically trauma over the loss of parents. Yet this recent trend of foregrounding the plight of the traumatized child has interested authors for centuries. In particular, American literature has shown an acute sensitivity towards portraying childhood trauma. Ernest Hemingway famously proclaimed, “All modern literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.” This commendation responds to the voice and style Twain supplies for American writers to follow. But in addition to stylistic contributions, Twain’s narrative of childhood abuse and abandonment provides a voice for the traumatized American child and establishes a tradition that influences subsequent works throughout the American canon. With *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain utilizes a set of constructs that future contributions to the tradition manipulate in order to comment on developing concerns for the child. This tradition is not only concerned with the trauma itself, but also with the child’s psychological reaction to trauma, in particular the role of the imagination in coping with trauma. This tradition can be found in many other standard texts of the American canon, suggesting a progression of influence running through the work of William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and beyond.

According to contemporary psychoanalytical terminology, trauma “is an event in an individual’s life that is defined by its intensity, by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization” (Laplanche and Pontalis 465). The works I investigate chronicle the impact that trauma has upon the child and the challenge the child has in coping with the trauma. Additionally, a study of this tradition chronicles the cultural progression with regards to the type of trauma that dominates scientific and social concern, from the physical abuse of *Huck Finn* to the psychological abuse in *Light in August*; the sexual abuse featured in the *Bluest Eye* to traumatic parental loss that dominates contemporary fiction in works like *Potter* and *Hunger Games*, as well as Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. While all of these texts focus on childhood trauma, the novels of Twain, Faulkner, Morrison, and Foer use the setting of a prior generation to challenge past assumptions of developmental psychology, a field in dialogue with literary depictions of trauma. Historical fiction enables these authors to look back upon approaches to trauma through their contemporary lens.

The portrayal of childhood trauma is laced throughout the American literary canon. My study begins in Southern American literature of the late nineteenth century, when Twain established a critical framework for the interaction between imagination and childhood trauma. This framework influenced the course of twentieth-century texts that, like Twain, used the traumatized child to represent national issues. Nearly five decades after Twain established an early voice for the child victim of abuse and neglect, Faulkner created the character of Joe Christmas to

expose the lasting impacts of childhood trauma on adulthood. Nearly a century after Huck Finn ran from his abusive father, Morrison's Pecola Breedlove presents a response to the tales of Finn and Christmas, giving voice to the sexually traumatized Southern girl. In these works, aspects of the tradition evolved in critical response to the previous works; however, common constructs in the treatment of childhood trauma remained consistent. Each of the works features both physical and psychological trauma and considers the role of the imagination as a coping mechanism for the child. Furthermore, each of these works suggests that the traumatized child epitomizes the American theme of lacking identity. Not only do childhood traumas disrupt identity, but they also require a pragmatic and realistic approach in a plausible rather than fanciful setting.

Although outspokenly critical of Twain's work early in his life, once referring to him as "a hack writer who would not have been considered fourth rate in Europe," Faulkner celebrated Twain during his writing career. Faulkner even presented his novel *The Reivers* to his editor through a comparison with *Huck Finn* (Hamblin 412). The most commonly cited critical parallels between Twain and Faulkner are their utilization of satirical humor, concern with Southern race relations, and celebration of nature (Hamblin 412). However, their common concern for childhood trauma presents as strong a parallel as any. In the character of Joe Christmas, Faulkner considers trauma comparable to Huck Finn's through a post-Freudian lens that shifts the focus from childhood to the influence it imposes on adulthood.

The influence of Twain and Faulkner upon Morrison has been fairly well chronicled in both critical study of her work and in her work itself. Morrison has



carried the Southern literary tradition into postmodern literature, considering many of the themes through a contemporary lens. Morrison considered both Twain and Faulkner in her work *Playing in the Dark*, arguing that both authors attempt to define white identity through black characters. Morrison also based part of her master's thesis, "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated," directly on Faulkner. Jocelyn A. Chadwick-Joshua recognizes the similarities between Twain's and Morrison's work specifically in thematic considerations, setting, and characterization (360). The strongest thematic similarity Chadwick-Joshua recognizes is a common consideration of the search for identity (359). In *Huck Finn*, *Light in August*, and *The Bluest Eye*, narrative searches for identity are rooted in, and compounded by, childhood trauma. Morrison is quick to refute critical comparisons between herself and Faulkner and is outspoken in her claim that her work does not resemble his. However, the line of influence is undeniable, and, as David E. Magill notes, much of her work "combat[s] with his (Faulkner's) cultural values and beliefs" (119). Harold Bloom goes as far as to refer to Faulkner as the father of Morrison's work and specifically cites *Light in August* as an influence (4). *The Bluest Eye*, in particular, is a direct response to Twain and Faulkner's portrayal of childhood trauma, demanding female consideration in the tradition. Morrison explicitly sets the trauma and response of her female protagonist, Pecola, in stark contrast with the traditionally male narratives of childhood trauma. However, to create such a contrast it is necessary for Morrison to utilize many of the constructs of this tradition that Twain and Faulkner have developed.

By expanding our investigation of works contributing to this tradition we are able to identify common constructs of the tradition that remain constant, even though the source of the trauma fluctuates. As trauma has narrative effects, the study of trauma aligns with the study of modern literature. Examining a variety of approaches, such as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Catcher in the Rye*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, enlightens the foundation for the tradition that Huck Finn established.

## Historical and Cultural Context for *Huck Finn*: The First Voice Heard

This American tradition considering childhood trauma began at the end of the Victorian era, as the child became a new center of intellectual inquiry:

An article on ‘Children and Modern literature for the *National Review* (1892) noted that ‘It is often said that ‘this is the Age of Children’; the rise of literature centering on children, it argued, was both a cause and effect of new attitudes to children which had placed them ‘at the front’ of attention. (Shuttleworth 9)

The Victorian era responds to the Romantic celebration of children with equal interest, but with a more scientific and skeptical approach. It is during this era that the consciousness of the child emerges as a literary concern. Authors like Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens began investigating child development in their works. Works for and about children established a place in the literary realm, motivating narrative interest in development.

In her book *The Mind of the Child*, which investigates children’s literature and psychology in the nineteenth century, Sally Shuttleworth identifies three standard approaches to children in Victorian British literature: “the adventure literature for boys of W.H.G. Kingston, Captain Mayne Reid, and R.M. Ballantyne, the more domestic-focused fiction for girls of Charlotte Yonge, Elizabeth Sewell, or Juliana Ewing, and the fantasy and fairy tale forms of Lewis Carroll, Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald, and Jean Inglow” (Shuttleworth 10). *Huck Finn* offers a contrasting response from across the Atlantic and expresses the American child’s voice through a different approach. Rather than fantastic tales in exotic locales or fantasy realms accessible only through the imagination, *Huck Finn* offered a familiar

narrative setting on the Mississippi River and, in adhering to the spirit of realism, considered common traumatic conflicts rather than exceptional encounters with pirates and cannibals. Focus on internal rather than external worlds of imagination enabled psychological study of children and the impact of trauma on identity-formation.

The historical fiction narrative is the ideal genre utilized by the American tradition, as it demands consideration of contemporary concerns of child trauma through an examination of the previous generation and allows the personal accounts of trauma to comment on broader political concerns. Twain sets his work prior to the Civil War, approximately fifty years prior to its publication. Accordingly, Faulkner and Morrison also place their characters in the realm of the previous generation. This approach allows for commentary on contemporary psychology, while critiquing the assumptions of the past. The American tradition engages with traumatic events in the prior generation to provide commentary on the psychological and social debates of their time. Through this approach the authors equate trauma with the past and impose national and political identities on their characters. Thus, through historical fiction, the characters become national children representative of races and ethnicities, and their trauma is set in relation to political traumas. Huck's trauma corresponds with the persistent traumatic in the wake of slavery. Pecola's personal trauma is set in relation to the national trauma of enslaved women and African Americans from oppression in an earlier generation. Foer experiments by setting a child's personal trauma as representative of both the recent national trauma emerging from the 9/11 attacks and the previous generation that emanates from World War II.

Finally, the American tradition attempts to present a more authentic portrayal of internal imagination as a response to trauma. The tradition exposes an imagination unique to the traumatized child and the role it plays in coping with trauma. For American literature, the imagination is presented as a critical defense against childhood trauma. Arnold H. Modell recognizes the difficult challenge in identifying the term imagination, which has had a variety of interpretations since Aristotle identified it as “sensation without matter” (126). A more productive approach is to identify this concept by establishing standardized categories within the concept, as both Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant have done. In 1651, Thomas Hobbes recognized variances in the human imagination. In his work *Leviathan or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Common-wealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*, Hobbes identified two types of human imagination: simple and compounded. The simple imagination is “the imagining of the whole object as it was presented to the Sense” (5), which can be considered a more mimetic imagination, limited to exact experiences. The compounded imagination is a constructive capability of the imagination, wherein man combines individual experiences to create something original. Hobbes uses the example of combining an image of a horse and an image of a man to create a centaur. Over a century later, Kant used a similar approach, categorizing the imagination as productive and reproductive. This categorization contrasts unconscious creation independent from experience and creation based upon experience. In consideration of the child’s imagination, we will define imagination simply as mental product that functions beyond reality, to alter, expand, or shape reality for the child. The imagination will be identified as either imitative or creative.

Furthermore, we will cite the function of the child's imagination as either an aspect of play removed from reality or a functional tool for coping with reality.

Portraying the child's imagination presents a pitfall in literature, because the adult author no longer has direct access to the child's imagination. The tendency in Romantic and earlier Victorian literature was to present exceptional idealizations of the child's imagination. Twain responded with simpler, more genuine portrayals of the child's imagination, as an adult would observe it. Twain approached the child's imagination through the lens of realism. Through this approach, Twain presented the characters of Tom Sawyer and Huck to contrast the imitative imagination of normal child's play with the more creative, functional imagination upon which the traumatized child relies. In doing so, Twain also erected a new point of access for more expansive concerns of literature. Thus in literature, the study of trauma became a study of imaginative literature and the enterprise of fiction itself.

*Huck Finn* established the American response to literary considerations of children, which blossomed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. V.S. Pritchett credits Twain with the "breach of American with English literature" (75). This breach is articulated through Twain's approach to children in literature, as he presents the American child to the literary sphere. With *Huck Finn*, Twain creates not just a literary character, but also an "American epic hero" (Frank 39). In the process, Twain institutes a tradition considering the American child's heroic and epic experiences with trauma.

W. H. Auden analyzes the 'American' qualities of *Huck Finn* as he compares the novel to *Oliver Twist*. Finn's stoic approach to trauma and Twain's resistance of a happy ending are among the qualities he identifies (132). Twain offers a matter-of-

fact relation of trauma from a narrator with a direct and stoic attitude towards the difficulties he experiences. Twain also utilizes a more pragmatic approach to the child's ability to cope with trauma. Twain rejects the fantastic fantasy worlds and magic creatures that traditionally occupied the realm of the child's mind and opposes the tidy, fulfilling endings that were common. Auden recognizes a sad reservation at the end of *Huck Finn* that conflicts with the optimistic fulfillment found at the end of Dickens's work. *Huck Finn* subtly hints that the child's ability to cope with trauma and conflict is not necessarily a sign that they have overcome the conflict. Faulkner and Morrison develop this approach further in their own works.

Despite the influence *Huck* has had on subsequent American literature, R. Kent Rasmussen and Harold Bloom note an aspect of *Huck* that critics often overlook:

So much attention is paid to *Huckleberry Finn*'s treatment of subjects such as slavery and race relations that its theme of child abuse is generally overlooked. It is a surprising oversight, in view of the fact that the novel's central character is a young boy running away from an alcoholic father's physical abuse. (111)

Rasmussen and Bloom astutely identify Huck's trauma as the driving force motivating the action of the novel. The foundation of this trauma is his "battered-child syndrome" (Wolff 64). Huck's trauma is inherited from his father Pap Finn, an alcoholic who is either at best absent or at worst abusive. The most subdued aspects of Huck's trauma were when talking about literature use present tense throughout manifested in neglect, while the most extreme aspects involved physical abuse.

Larry Wolff notes, “Huck’s ‘surprisingly matter of fact’ tone conceals the truth about his abuse even to the readers” (Wolff 65). Huck Finn verbalizes the abuse he receives as normative, failing to fully recognize the trauma he faces:

Pap he hadn't been seen for more than a year, and that was comfortable for me; I didn't want to see him no more. He used to always whale me when he was sober and could get his hands on me; though I used to take to the woods most of the time when he was around. (21)

The irony of *Huck Finn* “results from Huck’s inability to understand his experiences, either while they are happening or as he retells them, as well as the reader and the author understand them” (Miller 22). For Huck, abuse is neither unacceptable nor out of the ordinary. His scale of comfort is skewed to a degree in which not being beaten is considered a comfort. Huck’s relationship with his father results in a childhood where instability and displacement are the norm. Therefore, Huck has trouble adjusting to the “regular and decent” (11) life offered to him by the Widow Douglas and views solitude as the ideal. Although Huck is able to successfully cope with the trauma he experiences, he is never able to resolve the trauma, as evidenced by his inability to accept stability, “But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it” (279). Huck’s trauma has placed him in an enduring state of instability that alienates him from society.

Huck Finn’s trauma results in his isolation from society, instigating a complex emotional response from the boy. Huck Finn’s status in the community is revealed best during Huck’s first appearance in Twain’s earlier novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, “Shortly Tom came upon the juvenile pariah of the village, Huckleberry



Finn, son of the town drunkard. Huckleberry was cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle and lawless and vulgar and bad” (54).

St. Petersburg shuns Huck, as he is associated with the sins of his father. His rejection also stems from his reputation for being improper, which due to a lack of an awareness for social graces commonly instilled by parental figures. Throughout the novel, Huck appears to embrace solitude. Forrest Robinson notes, “Huck is the happiest-- free, easy, comfortable, satisfied-- when he is alone . . . on the wide river” (50). However, his desire for this solitude is a result of his awareness of his outcast status. When engaging in civilization, such as when he is living with the Widow Douglas, Huck is tormented by feelings of isolation and frequently complains of feeling alone. Evidence is explicit in Huck’s reaction to a lecture on manners that he receives from Miss Watson: “Miss Watson she just kept pecking at me and it got tiresome and lonesome...I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead” (13). Miss Watson’s criticism of Huck’s inappropriate behavior makes him aware that he is an outsider. Huck’s apparent preference for solitude is a defense against an awareness of isolation.

Additionally, Huck’s trauma is compounded by a lack of formal education that sets him apart from other characters like Tom Sawyer. The only time Huck commits to attending school occurs when Pap forbids it, “I didn’t want to go to school much before, but I reckon I’d go now to spite Pap” (31). However, this lack of formal education and traditional nurturing is the catalyst for an imagination that enables Huck to cope with or overcome his trauma. Twain represents the child’s imagination as a creative, functional tool that both indicates and addresses trauma yet

shields the child from it. This representation of a functional imagination is in direct conflict with the common psychological approach to childhood, which separates it into two exclusive realms, “the provinces of actuality and imagination,” associating the imagination with play (Brown 16).

Gillian Brown identifies *Tom Sawyer* as a portrayal and celebration of typical child’s play (29). In the novel Tom engages in imitative games for the sake of entertainment. His imaginative play is often based on and limited to literary sources such as Robin Hood. Tom Sawyer is so dependent upon his literary sources that he becomes upset when the game violates the book, “Why, I can’t do that, it ain’t in the book” (79). Consistent with common perceptions, specifically Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Child’s Play” (1878), the imagination is imitative and stimulated by props, such as a tin trumpet or toy bow and arrow.

In *Huck Finn*, however, Twain responds to his previous work by presenting an alternate, deviant imagination that is creative rather than imitative and functional rather than reserved for play. Twain emphasizes the variances in the imaginations of the typical child and the child who has experienced trauma. Huck is set as a foil to Tom, who has received a more stable upbringing and has been raised by Aunt Polly in a more structured home. Tom has received a formal education, is considered “smart” (Lyons 107), and flaunts his exposure to literature. In *Huck Finn*, Tom maintains the same style of play with a “literary” origin (Bell 62) as he displayed in the first book. Tom even structures Jim’s rescue around works he read by Alexandre Dumas (Bell 77). But the focus of *Huck Finn* is on Huck’s struggles with Tom’s literary-based play. Huck resists playing a game with Tom based on *Don Quixote*, identifying the

fake guns and swords as “only lath and broomsticks” (22) and equating Tom’s play with lying. Tom frequently calls Huck “ignorant” (22, 232) for violating the literary rules of his games by applying reason and sense. But oftentimes, as is the case with freeing Jim, Tom’s imagination is simply cruel, or counterproductive to the task at hand.

Alternatively, Huck’s imagination is original, creative, and more functional than Tom’s. Huck displays mastery in role-playing in various villages along the river, skillfully assessing the people he encounters and creating a suitable character. During his encounter with the old woman Huck initially attempts to adopt a female disguise, but when that fails, he is able to fabricate an additional identity to adapt to the situation. Unlike Tom, Huck does not need to rely on literary characters created by adults; he is creative rather than imitative. Huck’s imagination functions in direct response to the complications of his trauma. But during his adventures on the river, Huck is able to adapt to a variety of environments and is accepted into various households. Huck’s ability to address his trauma through his imagination is most evident when he adopts Tom’s identity for his final adaptation. When Huck discovers the character he is meant to play, he responds, “But if they was joyful, it warn’t nothing to what I was; for it was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was” (216). Huck’s great relief in receiving any identity alludes to the major conflict that plagues him throughout the work. This relief allows Huck to communicate trauma he is unable to recognize and vocalize to himself.

Huck’s imagination is also a survival mechanism, protecting him from moments of trauma. Huck utilizes brilliant creativity and ingenuity in faking his own

death to escape from Pap at the cabin. When Huck recognizes his imprisonment in the cabin as life threatening, his imagination responds. Larry Wolff claims, “It was not until pap actually tried to kill Huck with a knife that the boy ran away” (65), but Huck was is aware of the danger and formulating an escape earlier: “I judged he had got drowned, and I wasn’t ever going to get out any more. I was scared. I made up my mind I would fix up some way to leave there” (33). Although, in Huck’s estimation, his plan does not feature the “fancy touches” Tom would have supplied, Huck is able to predict the reactions of Pap and the townspeople and fabricate his own death accordingly.

Since Leo Marx explored the pastoral ideal in *Huck Finn*, there have been numerous critical investigations into the connection between Huck and nature. Marx first recognized Huck as a boy that “belongs to the terrain” and retreats into nature (333). Huck’s imagination continually depends on nature. We see this reliance in his escape plan, when he slaughters a wild pig to serve as a surrogate for him in faking his own death. Twain constructs a connection between Huck and nature, as the wild animal must be slain in Huck’s place in order for Huck to find redemption.

Through his examination of the imagination and trauma, Twain also critiques the influence of education and religion. In his comparison of Huck and Tom, Twain presents education as a limitation for the imagination. Huck is the hero of the work, and his imagination is celebrated as protective and effective. Thus, his lack of formal education should be viewed as at least skepticism about, if not condemnation of, formal education. Due to the trauma he has encountered, Huck is sensitive to the lies of the world. Therefore, he is equally skeptical of literature and religion: “I reckoned

(Tom) believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of a Sunday School” (23). Again, through the hero of the work, Twain suggests a reluctance towards religion, particularly when that religion is pressured upon the child: “Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it” (20). Lionel Trilling argues that there is a god presence in Huck Finn, but not of a traditionally biblical god: “*Huckleberry Finn* is a great book because it is about a god--about, that is, a power which seems to have a mind and a will of its own, and which, to moral men of moral imagination, appears to embody a great moral idea” (83). Twain sacrifices organized religion in favor of Huck’s quest for a personal spirituality, based on emotion and the natural inspiration of the river. During his greatest moral conflict, debating whether to turn Jim in, Huck recognizes, “I’d got to decide forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it” (207). Rather than committing to an established ideology, Huck molds his own morality, adopting aspects of adult counsel, religion, superstition, and even slivers of wisdom from Pap. All of this skepticism is combined to produce a criticism of the intrusive nature of adults upon children. Huck is acutely aware of the lies and hypocrisy of adults: “They get down on a thing when they don’t know nothing about it” (12). All of Huck’s trauma stems from the intrusion of the adult world and his greatest defense is his imagination. Through his imagination, Huck is able to “reattach himself to the world and to its lies, fabricate the self out of them” (Bell 75). And even if this reattachment is false or temporary, it is requisite for his survival.

## Joe Christmas Reveals the Aftermath

In *Light in August*, William Faulkner shifts the trauma of the Southern child to a post-Civil War era and the focus to the aftermath of the trauma. The childhood trauma of Joe Christmas is presented as flashbacks during the Joe's adulthood. In this work, the child's trauma functions as the catalyst for many of the conflicts Joe faces later in life. The flashback section of the work is introduced with a theory of memory: "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders" (119). This obtuse statement, echoed throughout the flashback portion of the work, suggests that everything occurring in Joe's life stems from these memories. Arthur F. Kinney attempts to untangle this quotation, explaining that it is "a *circular* statement; it brings us back to where we began and so encloses us, finally in memory to which believing and knowing, at opposite sides of the moving circle of memory, are subordinate" (29). Therefore, despite all the running and travelling that Joe does throughout his life, he constantly returns to these early traumatic experiences.

Critics commonly recognize the Freudian influence on Faulkner's work. Faulkner's texts rely on "classical Freudian categories and concepts...scenes of incest, narcissism, the Oedipus complex, the castration complex, and so on" (Zeitlin 87). *Light in August* is a post-Freudian adaptation of the tradition of childhood trauma. Consistent with Freudian psychoanalysis, wherein infantile trauma influences the adult (Chapman 49), Faulkner's focus is on how childhood trauma impacts the adult. For Faulkner, the trauma cannot end with the character merely

looking towards the future, because he is acutely aware that the trauma is still present in that future.

The flashbacks in *Light in August* narrate a series of traumatic events that occur during Joe Christmas's childhood and continue to plague him as an adult. Joe experiences traumas involving sexual confusion, neglect, physical and verbal abuse, racial discrimination, and religious anxiety. In accordance with Twain's approach to childhood trauma, Joe's experience isolates him from society and imposes spiritual anxiety. Faulkner also acknowledges the role of the child's imagination as a coping mechanism, although it is less explicit and detailed than the consideration by Twain.

The first traumatic event occurs when Joe is five years old and living in an orphanage. Joe witnesses a sexual encounter involving the orphanage's dietitian while stealing her toothpaste. While the dietitian is angry at Joe for witnessing her engaging in a sexual act, Joe believes she is angry at him for stealing. Although Joe misunderstands the events, he recognizes that he is engaged in something inappropriate. Joe is traumatized by the dietitian's reaction, which instigates emotions of fear, shame, and confusion. He is first terrified by the dietitian's immediate aggression, during which she hisses, "you little rat! Spying on me! You little nigger bastard!" (122). There is nothing to suggest that, at the age of five, Joe is able to comprehend the connotations associated with the racial epithet or connect it to his own racial ambiguity, but she is angry with and hates Joe nonetheless. The event also imprints a memory that will develop into a compulsion as Joe becomes more aware of its context. His adult life is driven by racial ambiguity and a displaced shame of race. Joe is also ashamed by this encounter. He is not ashamed by the

sexual context, which again he did not understand. Rather, he is ashamed of his own juvenile mistakes, stealing the toothpaste and vomiting, as “the last thing in the world he would do would be to tell about the toothpaste, the vomit” (124). Finally, the emotional response that ultimately elevates this experience to a trauma is the confusion involved. As he assumes guilt for the encounter, the dietitian’s bribe for silence leads to “astonishment, shock, outrage” (125). This event completely shatters all assumptions he has about morality, guilt, and punishment. The most interesting term Faulkner uses in narrating the reaction is outrage, as it suggests feelings of anger or offense directed towards the dietitian’s gesture. This is anger that Joe will later project on most of the women who enter his life. Alwyn Berland suggests, “This episode in the orphanage establishes a cluster of three associated ideas or motifs that are of paramount importance throughout the novel: sex, black blood, and female lawlessness” (38). Joe’s three greatest conflicts throughout the text can be traced back to this early experience. Despite his inability to comprehend the meanings behind the events, Faulkner suggests that the details imprinted on him nonetheless.

Joe’s second tragic experience occurs when Joe is kidnapped from the orphanage by the janitor, whom Faulkner later reveals as Joe’s grandfather. Once again Joe is unaware of what is occurring. This experience portrays Joe as a pawn, submissive to the wills of adults in the same manner that Huck is helpless at the start of his text. Just as the guardianship of Huck shifts between Pap and Widow Douglass, Joe’s world is frequently destabilized, shifting from orphanage to orphanage and eventually to the McEachern household. Prior to feeling that his life was endangered, Huck accepted the shifts in fate with which he was presented.



Similarly, Joe is unflinching towards his shifts in environments: “The place where they now were was no different from the one which they had left in the night--the same children, with different names; the same grown people with different smells” (140). The traumatized child is once again portrayed as exceptionally adaptive.

Consistent with Twain’s placement of Huck into the care of Widow Douglass, Joe is placed adopted into a new home. A second wave of trauma occurs following Joe’s adoption. Through misguided religious fervor, Mr. McEachern raises Joe through a combination of neglect and child abuse. Frequently the novel narrates Joe performing labor without being fed: “He had had no breakfast; likely neither he nor the man had once thought of that” (153). Not only does Mr. McEachern neglect Joe’s basic needs, but also Joe fails to recognize the neglect himself. Consistent with the tradition, Joe adopts this unstable and unacceptable environment as a norm.

Joe’s trauma is not limited to neglect, however, but extends to physical abuse. Joe is beaten with a strap for infractions that include failing to polish his shoes and being unable and unwilling to memorize scripture, in a scene suggesting the biblical tradition of The Passion: “When the strap fell he did not flinch, no quiver passed over his face. He looked straight ahead, with a rapt, calm expression like a monk in a picture” (149). Although Faulkner denies a deliberate connection between Joe and Christ, his intention is questionable given his assignment of the name *Christmas*, inclusion of the term ‘rapt,’ and simile of a ‘monk.’ When challenged, Faulkner concedes that the “Christ story is one of the best stories that man has invented...and of course it will reoccur” (Gwynn and Blottner 3). Faulkner further develops Twain’s portrayal of Huck’s matter-of-fact recognition of abuse by suggesting that

Joe seemingly embraces his punishment. Although Huck does not identify his abuse as wrong, he at least attempted to avoid it. Instead, Joe makes no apparent effort to avoid the abuse, eventually refusing to attempt to learn the scripture. Rather than fleeing from the abuse, Joe hardens against it. Faulkner also suggests that McEachern is not the first person to abuse Joe, “It was not the hard work which he hated, nor the punishment and injustice. He was used to that before he ever saw either of them” (168). Much like for Huck, physical abuse is so normalized for Joe it becomes a familiar part of his life. However, while Huck is dedicated to avoiding abuse, Joe embraces his beatings as an appropriate form of justice.

Just as Huck is upset by the Widow Douglass and Miss Watson’s attempts at nurturing and civilizing him, Joe is most upset by Mrs. McEachern’s acts of kindness: “It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard ruthless justice of men” (168-69). Joe resists the kindness of Mrs. McEachern with an attitude comparable to Huck’s resistance of the widow. Berland correctly asserts that Joe’s discomfort with Mrs. McEachern stems from his rivalry with the dietitian and his subsequent distrust of women. This is certainly an aspect of the conflict, but, particularly when considered in conjunction with *Huck Finn*, it is also likely that kindness and comfort are foreign and therefore suspect to Joe. Just as Miss Watson’s advice highlights Huck’s outcast status, Mrs. McEachern’s kindness stimulates an awareness of Joe’s displacement.

Isolation of the traumatized child is a primary condition in Twain and Faulkner’s novels. During an interview Faulkner explained, “That was [Joe

Chrismtas's] tragedy-- he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know which he was" (Gwynn and Blotner 1). Joe is aware of his outsider status beginning at the orphanage, where the other children "have been calling him Nigger for years" (133). Eventually, Joe normalizes and embraces social exile. John L. Longley identifies the source of Joe's tragedy as his demand for "self-definition" (59). However, it is not merely a demand to define himself that leads to his ruin. The compulsion to define himself as an outcast ultimately leads to Joe's demise. Joe's interaction with the other children, while living with the McEacherns, suggests that the children did not exclude him and were willing to embrace him, as they included him in activities such as hunting. However, Joe's earlier sexual trauma isolates him from the other boys during the episode with the black girl. While the other boys are excited about their sexual encounter, Joe is repulsed by it, projecting his disgust on the girl and abusing her for it. Joe is isolated from the social circle of the other boys as they are forced to physically restrain him. Joe eventually demands the outsider status with which he identifies. Although Joe's race is uncertain and others assume he is white, Joe frequently confesses that he is black in another effort to instigate punishment. At the end of his narrative, Huck suggests that he will remain an outsider throughout his life. Faulkner allows his reader to witness the finality of Joe's exile from society.

Faulkner is far more definitive than Twain in his exposition of sexual trauma and anxiety. Although some critics, including Leslie Fiedler (95), argue a queer reading of Huck's relationship with Jim, an examination of such a theme is not comparable to Faulkner's consideration. Traumatic events early in Joe's life cause a

sexual anxiety that eventually develops into deviance in adulthood, portrayed through his violent and degrading sexual relationship with Joanna Burden. Just as Joe behaves like a dog during his encounter with Mrs. McEachern, Joe encourages Joanna to dominate him sexually and degrade him like a dog. Although the text acknowledges that Joe was ignorant of the sexual aspect involved in the episode with the dietitian, Faulkner suggests that the event still has an impact on his sexuality. When Joe reacts violently to his first sexual experience with the girl in the barn, his emotional response is associated with this earliest memory: “There was something in him trying to get out, like when he used to think of toothpaste” (156). Although he does not fully understand the connection, Joe relates the two experiences. The initial traumatic experience reverberates nine years later to instigate an additional traumatic experience. It is once again a trauma that isolates him from the other boys engaged in the sexual ritual.

Faulkner also develops the role of the child’s imagination in coping with trauma. Joe’s imagination reveals insight into the impact of his trauma and shields him or allows temporary reprieve from the trauma. The confusion he experiences from the kidnapping is implied further through analysis of his imaginative response. Joe attempts to create a context for this puzzling experience by imagining that the other orphans who had been adopted had disappeared in a similar experience: “He believed that that was what was happening to him now. He believed that he knew now how they had all managed to depart without leaving any trace behind them. He believed that they had been carried out, as he was being, in the dead of night” (137). Joe creates an explanation that simultaneously explains the disappearance of Alice, the

twelve-year-old girl who had cared for him years earlier, and draws comfort his own anxiety and confusion by normalizing the traumatic event. Joe's imagination also addresses other emotional struggles. It is already established that Joe feels isolated from the other children, so this imaginative exercise allows him to fit in and share an experience with the others.

Joe's imagination also helps him cope with the anxiety he feels over his relationship with Mrs. McEachern. After a particularly charged confrontation, during which he violently rejects her kindness, Joe imagines he is no longer trapped in her house: "From beyond the window he could smell, feel, darkness, spring, the earth" (155). Consistent with Leo Marx's pastoral ideal in American literature, Joe longs for nature as "a retreat to an oasis of harmony and joy" (1). This psychological retreat introduces a series of imagined connections with nature that allow Joe to cope with the trauma he experiences. Joe's imagination responds to his sexual encounter with the black girl in a similar manner, involving the motifs of nature and escape: "When he went to bed that night his mind was made up to run away. He felt like an eagle: hard, sufficient, potent, remorseless, strong. But that passed, though he did not then know that, like the eagle, his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage" (160). These fantasies of freedom indicate traumatic experiences of captivity, identified during Faulkner's first description of the orphanage:

A grassless cinder-strewnpacked compound...enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic surges, with sparrowlike childtrebling, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls the bleak windows where in rain soot form the yearly adjacent chimneys streaked like black tears. (119)

This description accentuates the captivity in which Joe was raised, comparing it to a zoo or prison. It reveals that Joe's trauma has led to captivity anxiety. Faulkner emphasizes the contrast between the "grassless" orphanage and the "sparrowlike" orphans establishing disconnect between the organic child and his artificial cage. Huck experiences a similar animalistic captivity, as Pap keeps him locked inside the cabin. During his description of his detention, Huck even compares himself to a dog (33).

The reliance on the nature motif further strengthens the connection between Huck and Joe. Just as Huck retreats to nature on the Mississippi, Joe frequently retreats into nature either physically, as he does during the two episodes when he is confronted with the reality of menstruation, or in his imagination, as he does when he is alone in his bedroom. According to Marx, "The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery" (1). The pastoral ideal is a typically American literary motif incorporated into the tradition of childhood trauma. These works suggest that the traumatized child is particularly reliant on nature as a landscape for escape.

Faulkner also utilizes Twain's influence in his commentary on adults and religion for the traumatized child. Twain establishes a strong skepticism of the adult influence upon the traumatized child, identifying the adult as the source and often compounding force of trauma. Faulkner relies on this construct in *Light in August*. During the earliest traumatic episode, the dietitian is the source of Joe's trauma, and it is her ignorance and detachment from the five-year-old that compound the trauma: "She was also stupid enough to believe that a child of five not only could deduce the

truth from what he had heard, but that he would want to tell it as an adult would” (123). While Twain seems to mock adults for their ignorance in the realm of children, Faulkner prosecutes them for the damage they create. Longley argues that Joe’s struggle is with a “cosmos that is violent, chaotic, and absurd” (57). This recognition creates a particularly insightful lens with which to examine his early trauma. As a child, Joe’s world is excessively chaotic and absurd because he is forced into a realm of adults where politics regarding race and sexuality exceed his comprehension.

Struggles with religion plague Joe throughout his life. Following the climactic murder of Joanna Burden, Joe rationalizes his crime by explaining, “She ought not to started praying over me” (106). As with all his conflicts, Faulkner traces this struggle back to Joe’s childhood trauma. Joe first encounters spiritual uncertainty in the response of the dietitian. As Alwyn Berland writes, “Joe’s misfortune results from the child’s miniature Calvinist world of strict rewards and punishments being tampered with” (37). Joe was raised in a belief structure founded on reward and punishment. This Calvinist structure was so rigid that the first violation, in which Joe was offered a bribe after committing a sin, is enough to completely shatter Joe’s perspective on the world. The criticism of religion expands exponentially during Joe’s stay with the McEacherns. Here the rigidity of Calvinism is multiplied further, as his stepfather is extreme in his religious devotion. The religion also serves as justification for the abuse Joe receives. Huck Finn resolves his religious conflicts by yielding to his perceived inevitable damnation, in submission concluding, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell” (207). Similarly, Joe eventually accepts his identification with

evil. Berland recognizes that this conclusion is the combination of Joe's racial uncertainty and the religious connotations he associates with his suspected race: "In Calvinism...the human beast *is* black, incapable of any redemptive goodness through his own effort" (41). So by embracing a black racial identity, Joe embraces an association with evil.

In *Light in August*, Faulkner reinforces and expands the place of the traumatized Southern child that Twain establishes in the American literary tradition. He embraces the examination of childhood trauma and the child's role of the imagination in coping with that trauma, combined with themes of race and isolation. But Faulkner expands the tradition of Twain in a recognition of the persistence of trauma: a persistence at which Twain merely hinted through his final lines. While Huck's continued alimentation and decision to light out into the territory indicate that trauma is persistent, the persistence is not detailed in the narrative. However, Faulkner explicitly examines the persistence through the scope of his novel. The scope is no longer limited to childhood trauma's impacts the child, but chronicles its impact throughout the person's life.



### Pecola Breedlove's Silence

Through the postmodern text, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison presents a direct response to the tradition of childhood trauma, demanding representation for the traumatized Southern girl. Morrison considers many of the traditional constructs but reworks them to reflect her own reality. *The Bluest Eye* offers new interpretations of the gender and race implications of the tradition and simultaneously provides a new lens for examining these previous works.

*The Bluest Eye* introduces Pecola Breedlove to the tradition, providing a voice for the traumatized girl. But Pecola is set in contrast with traumatized boys to reveal a far different terrain from a female perspective. *The Bluest Eye* is loyal to the constructs established by Twain and Faulkner but accentuates the far more submissive role forced upon the traumatized girl. By speaking back to the tradition, Morrison comments on Huck and Joe as only part of the story. Laurie Vickroy identifies Pecola as “a subaltern girl not previously represented in the Western literary tradition” and “a concrete example of the neglect, exploitation, disempowerment, and disavowal of communities and even entire cultures” (81). Morrison’s overarching contribution is that while the traumatized boy possesses the viable option to flee from trauma, there is no avenue of retreat for the girl. *Huck Finn* and *Light in August* are both narratives of protagonists journeying away from trauma. Morrison responds with a narrative of an immobile victim of trauma whose suffering is compounded by said immobility yet whose quest is deeply interior.

Isolation of Morrison’s Pecola stems specifically from sexual assault, but the assault is only the culmination of broader neglect. Pecola’s neglect becomes evident

with the first introduction of her character: “Mama had told us two days earlier that a ‘case’ was coming--a girl who had no place to go” (16). Nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer begins her narrative of Pecola during the temporary period in which the MacTeer family fosters the child. Pecola’s time in foster care corresponds to the adoptions of Huck and Joe and characterizes the instability of her environment. Pecola is not introduced as a person, but rather as a ‘case,’ both dehumanizing and isolating the girl. Her home life is eventually revealed as a family “festering together in the debris of a realtor’s whim” (34). Pecola’s family is exceptionally poor and devoid of affection. This poverty is evidenced by the fact that the entire family refers to the mother as “Mrs. Breedlove” (43). The most nurturing adult presence in Pecola’s life comes from the prostitutes who live in the apartment above her family.

Pecola is raised in a violent household, in which her parents frequently engage in physical altercations. However, her mother does not limit the abuse to her father: “Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life” (129). Morrison decisively spurned the previously established gender roles when considering the abuse. In Twain and Faulkner, the physical abuse comes from paternal figures, while the maternal figures, although scorned for it, are presented in the traditional role of the nurturer. While Cholly, Pecola’s father, is responsible for Pecola’s poverty, neglect, and rape, Mrs. Breedlove is responsible for the physical abuse of both her son and daughter. Mrs. Breedlove perpetuates the abuse she has experienced throughout her life by abusing her own children. It is relevant that the same-sex parent is responsible for the abuse

in all of the cases, as the same sex-parent is an internalized self-model for the child. Pecola's feelings of ugliness and unworthiness are self-abusive.

Morrison echoes Twain and Faulkner in indicting an entire community for the trauma of the victim. Just as Huck's violent trauma is compounded by the scorn of the community, and Joe's trauma results from a series of experiences attributed to multiple villains, Morrison tries the entire community for the physical and psychological abuse inflicted on Pecola, from the assaults of her parents to the ridicule of her classmates to the harsh and cruel reaction of the community. Vickroy argues that the source of Pecola's trauma is not an individual, but rather a black community that has been traumatized by a white race (86), "a concrete example(s) of the neglect, exploitation, disempowerment, and disavowal of communities and even entire cultures" (81). This revelation reveals the extent of Morrison's engagement with social isolation. Morrison examines how the sources of the trauma were, at one time, the isolated and victimized. Cholly is ridiculed for his race. Pauline is sequestered by her disabled foot. However, eventually the isolated become a part of the wickedness that has victimized them. They are either absorbed by this wickedness, or, as in the case of Pecola, eternally isolated and dependent on "a madness which protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end" (206). It is not to suggest, as Vickroy does, that the individual culprits can be absolved of accountability because the trauma can be traced back through generations as part of a wicked whole. Instead Morrison is contributing to the argument that trauma breeds trauma.

Morrison presents the most powerful representation of the imagination in the three works. The imagination develops from the extreme trauma that her character has undergone, suggesting that imaginative response is relative to the traumatic impact. Pecola's dependence on her imagination increases as the trauma becomes more severe. The most explicit and examined response is Pecola's fantasy of having blue eyes. Pecola is plagued by self-loathing, resulting from her physical appearance:

The rest of the family--Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove--wore their ugliness...The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly. (38-9)

As a result, Pecola becomes obsessed with cultural standards of beauty, such as Shirley Temple. Her imagination compensates for this self-loathing by developing the fantasy that she has blue eyes. She uses this fantasy to cope during episodes of trauma, including scenes of domestic violence. Pecola imagines her blue eyes will quell her parents' violence, fantasizing that they will respond, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty blue eyes" (46). Pecola imagines her blue eyes calming the aggression of her parents. Consistent with the tradition, her imagination provides insight into other aspects of her trauma. Her fantasy of stopping the violence suggests both feelings of helplessness and guilt for the domestic violence she endures. At the end of the novel, when reality becomes too much to bear, Pecola is completely dependent on her imagination to cope with her trauma, accepting her imagination over reality. As a result, she believes that

Soaphead Church has given her blue eyes: “I know. He really did a good job. Everybody’s jealous. Every time I look at somebody, they look off” (195). This fantasy also reveals an acute awareness that the community has shunned her. Pecola compensates for the recognition that no one will look at her by imagining they are jealous of her blue eyes. Pecola’s fantasy simultaneously shifts her psyche beyond the abuse and further isolates her through her madness.

A second technique for coping with isolation is Pecola’s creation of an imaginary friend. Morrison begins her work with a familiar Dick and Jane reading primer, emphasizing the elements of a happy youth:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green and white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play, Who will play with Jane? . . . See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father will you play with Jane? Father is smiling...Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (3)

Morrison utilizes the reading primer to emphasize the critical elements missing in Pecola’s traumatized life. She lacks a stable home, nice clothing, and loving parents. But Morrison ends the primer with the child’s need for friendship and playmates. Pecola’s rape has isolated her from the other children and consequently she is missing this element of friendship, which Morrison deems so critical that she sets it as the conclusion. Pecola must fabricate an imaginary friend and accept it as a reality to cope with this critical void.

Earlier in the work, Pecola also copes with the domestic violence by imaginary attempts to disappear. Pecola imagines she is able to make her entire body

disappear except for her eyes: “Try as she might she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point” (45). This passage also identifies Pecola’s projection of trauma onto her eyes, which impede her escape. This disappearance fantasy corresponds to a common construct in which the traumatized child imagines his or her own death or considers the world without them. Huck reveals this fantasy when he admits, “I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead” (13). This construct is suggested in *Light in August* as well, when Joe retreats from abuse lying in bed “like a tomb effigy” (154). In this tradition, the death fantasy often serves as an indication of trauma. It also has merit as trauma response, offering a safe outlet to satisfy the compulsion. Pecola’s inability to complete the disappearance indicates that she is unable to satisfy her compulsion. The resistance of her eyes, the symbols of her ugliness yet watchfulness, emphasizes the severity of her self-loathing. It is also her eyes that are her portal for watching the violence rather than actively fleeing. Pecola’s eventual success in applying the fantasy to her eyes symbolizes the ultimate achievement of her imagination.

Morrison also uses the foil of Claudia MacTeer, similarly to Tom in *Huck*

*Finn*:

In Morrison’s first novel she constructs a duality that exists between Claudia MacTeer, the narrator who defies the hierarchy of domination and submission by nurturing her own life and finding words for grief, and Pecola Breedlove, another little girl who is raped and then silenced by her own internalized self-hatred. (Williams 53)

While Tom is presented as a normal child with an imitative imagination applied to play, Claudia functions to provide a lesser degree of trauma with a creative

imagination that addresses trauma. Claudia faces many similar social challenges as Pecola. She faces racial and gender oppression and struggles with not fitting the societal concept of beauty. However, because Claudia has not undergone the extreme traumatic experiences that Pecola has, Claudia reacts very differently, confronting the adversity rather than shying away from it or accepting and embracing it.

While Pecola feebly accepts her gender role, Claudia aggressively tests and questions gender. When presented with the engendered toy of a Baby Doll, she is “physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair” (21). Rather than caring for the doll, Claudia destroys it in a stereotypically masculine fashion. Claudia reacts just as violently as the racially biased concepts of beauty do to reject her. While Pecola accepts cultural standards that categorize her as ugly, deficient, and flawed, Claudia rebels against the standards and attacks those who adhere to the ideal. She bullies the little white girl who lives next door, beating her up and leaving “red marks on her white skin” (9), and fantasizes that Maureen Peal, the “high-yellow dream child” (62), will fall off a cliff. This fantasy represents an application of the imagination that responds directly to the trauma she faces, enabling her to overcome her trauma. Morrison uses the character of Maureen to accentuate the effect of the trauma on Pecola and highlight the necessity of her imagination in the void of normalized reactions. The extreme nature of Pecola’s trauma allows for an imagination that aids coping, but is unable to stimulate recovery. A critical aspect of the duality in the works stems from the apparent irony that both *Huck Finn* and *The Bluest Eye* present the more normalized child with a more violent imagination. Tom creates games of violence and death,

parallel to Claudia's fantasies, while Huck and Pecola use their imaginations to generate stability. Whereas the normalized child uses imagination to experience the fantastic, the traumatized child requires it to achieve stability.

Claudia also achieves another development in the tradition of trauma, as the narrator of the text. Claudia introduces the concept of therapy writing to *The Bluest Eye*'s treatment of trauma: "As the artist figure in the novel, Claudia affirms that there are melodies in grief and to write and speak of those experiences that have remained unrecorded is to begin to heal the invisible wounds created by silence" (Williams 53). Pecola cannot narrate her own trauma because she is unable to comprehend it. However, Claudia is coming to terms with the grief of witnessing Pecola's trauma by putting it into words. Morrison echoes this sentiment in the text during her characterization of Soaphead Church: "To name an evil was to neutralize if not annihilate it" (164). Pecola will never be able to overcome her trauma because she will never be able to recognize and accept it. This insight also provides an interesting lens for consideration of *Huck Finn*. Huck is able to narrate his own tale, suggesting a parallel with Claudia and placing him in a better mental state than Pecola, yet, as discussed earlier, much of his trauma is left vague, implying a lasting impact. In consideration of realist literature, Jane F. Thrailkill notes, "traumatic memories lack narrative and context" (128). Huck is able to provide brief references to the abuse he experiences, but he fails to provide a full narrative account of the abuse. The child abuse Huck absorbs goes unnoticed by many critics (Rasmussen and Bloom 111) because Huck still cannot verbalize it. This analysis seems consistent with Freud's essay "A Child is Being Beaten," which identifies the three



stages of beating-fantasies. In Freud's essay the second stage of the abuse fantasy involves the fantasy "*I am being beaten by my father*" (104). Freud argues that, of the three fantasies involved, this is the fantasy that is exiled to the subconscious and never remembered. The child's inability to perceive their own abuse is suggested by both Twain and Faulkner.

Morrison also echoes the sentiments of Twain and Faulkner in portraying ignorant adults who violate the realm of the child. Morrison introduces this theme early in her work, as Claudia complains, "Adults do not talk to us--they give us directions" (10). The adults in the novel are the direct source of the trauma depicted. However, the ultimate condemnation occurs in the adults' brutal reaction to Pecola's rape:

"None of them Breedloves seem right anyhow. That boy is off somewhere every minute, and the girl was always foolish"... "She carry some of the blame"... "How come she didn't fight him?"...we listened for the one would say, "Poor little girl," or, "Poor baby," but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been. (189)

Morrison condemns the parents for their ignorant reactions to the situation and suggests that their reactions infect their children, who, in turn, shun Pecola as well. The adults are presented as the brutal force that instills ignorance in their children.

Morrison does, however, emphasize some variance in the childhood trauma tradition. Morrison presents an adverse consideration to the pastoral ideal upon which Twain and Faulkner rely. While both Twain and Faulkner celebrate nature and the outdoors as a refuge from the trauma, Claudia depicts the outdoors in a different light: "There is a difference between being put out and being put *outdoors*. If you are

put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go” (17). In Morrison’s world, being outdoors is not the idealized escape depicted in earlier American literature. Based on an African-American perspective not shared by the other author’s, Morrison’s interpretation of outdoors is one of poverty, not freedom and adventure. For the extremely poor, like the Breedloves, living outdoors is an imposed sentence of poverty, not an optional retreat.

Pecola’s brother Sammy represents a direct response to the texts by Twain and Faulkner. Sammy is a male child going through neglect and abuse trauma, similar to that of Huck and Joe, and presenting similar reactions. *The Bluest Eye* presents commentary on the engendered aspect of trauma, and Sammy functions a male constant by which to measure the variance in the trauma of a girl. *The Bluest Eye* suggests that while boys can always flee from trauma, running away is often not an option for girls, left helpless and trapped within the realm of trauma. Morrison constructs the Sammy-Pecola duality as she exposes the initial trauma:

There was a difference in the reaction of the children to these battles. Sammy cursed for a while, or left the house, or threw himself into the fray. He was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have fun away from home no less than twenty-seven times...Pecola, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance. (43)

Morrison makes it clear that whereas Sammy has the option to fight or flee, Pecola must endure it because of her gender. Sammy can escape, just as Huck escaped on the river and Joe eventually fled, wandering town to town. However, it would be unacceptable and dangerous for a girl to run away, traveling from town to town or floating down a river. This double standard is maintained at the conclusion of the

novel. Sammy has left town, escaping the environment of his trauma, but Pecola remains, driven mad by the abuse, forced to escape into her own mind. The engendered aspect of trauma is echoed in the presentation of Cholly and Pauline's trauma. Cholly responded to his own trouble in a manner similar to that of his son: "Running away from home for a Georgia black boy was not a great problem. You just sneaked away and started walking" (152). A boy on the run would have no trouble finding food and shelter from the generosity of others and odd jobs for money. But Pauline is stuck in her traumatic environment, waiting and hoping for a stranger to take her away, dependent on Cholly to rescue her.

*The Bluest Eye* further undermines the trauma boys' encounter in comparison with the trauma of girls through two strong allusions to Joe Christmas. Claudia's narrative begins with an episode that involves her getting reprimanded for vomiting, just as Faulkner introduced the character of Joe. Also, there is a distinct parallel between the sexual trauma Cholly experiences via the intrusion of the white men and the sexual trauma of Joe. Both men engage in public sexual experiences that are complicated by race. And both men react by blaming and lashing out at women rather than confronting the source of their trauma. Cholly blames Darlene rather than the white men who accost them and Joe continues to blame all women. This parallel culminates with both men projecting their trauma onto other women, with Joe killing Joanna and Cholly raping Pecola. This parallel reinforces Morrison's message that while men may spend their lives running from trauma, women are often forced to endure lives engulfed in trauma.

## Paralleling Psychology

The literary tradition considering childhood trauma and the imagination has obvious common concerns with the fields of child study, child psychology, and child psychiatry. The trends in the fields tend to parallel one another in content as well as conclusion. Historically, scientists and writers have shared an interdependent relationship in studying the child, each providing inspiration and research for the other. In her work on literature and child study in the nineteenth century, Shuttleworth comments on the codependence of literature and science: “It is certainly not the case that literary texts simply drew on the emerging scientific theories. Indeed, the reverse can be shown true, with key literary works playing a formative role in the development of the frameworks of nineteenth-century child psychiatry” (Shuttleworth 3). *Huck Finn*, *Light in August*, and *The Bluest Eye* offer representations of the trends in child study in their respective times, addressing ideas of the past through contemporary lenses and even foreshadowing future conclusions in the field.

One of the many commonalities of childhood trauma literature is commentary on conclusions in child development. The author’s set their texts in an earlier time period to consider previous suppositions about the child with a modern approach. Twain sets *Huck Finn* in the antebellum South and considers him with a post-antebellum awareness. Just as this approach has definite implications with major social progressions such as emancipation, it has implications with regards to child study and psychology. It is also important to consider this approach with respect to the previously established chain of influence; Joe Christmas’s childhood experiences

occurred in the time of Twain, and *The Bluest Eye* is set roughly a decade after the publication of *Light in August*. By setting Huck in a period in which psychologists equated the imagination with lying, Twain rebuts this parallel. Faulkner critiques Freud by setting Joe's life to span the period in which Freud was developing his research. By setting Pecola as a contemporary of Faulkner, Morrison critiques prior treatment of the child as apolitical.

Twain's contribution to children in literature occurred a decade prior to the Child Study Movement of the 1890's, when both the literary and scientific fields were responding to the Romantic celebration of the child's mind and imagination: "This Romantic cult of the child continued into the Victorian period, reaching its peak in the 1890s when bands of self-proclaimed 'child-lovers-- sought to chronicle the outpourings of the childish imagination" (Shuttleworth 7). However, great skepticism of the imagination also arose during this period, as the child's imagination was aligned with both insanity and lying. Many scientists and novelists during the period argued that the imagination should be repressed to subdue a declination into madness or delinquency.

Views on the child had shifted greatly in 1859, with Charles Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species*. *Origins* countered the romantic view of the child as innocent and angelic and placed it in more of a primal state, describing children "like brutes [who] live in the present; their happiness or misery being dependent upon impressions made upon the senses" (Shuttleworth 181). Faulkner would consider this connection in his presentation of the young Joe Christmas, who frequently reverts to an animalistic state in response to trauma. Faulkner plays with

the duality of the child as animal and human during Joe's traumatic experience in the dietitian's closet: "Perhaps it was the animal warning him that more would make him sick; perhaps the human being warning him that if he took more than that, she would miss it" (122). Faulkner evokes this debate over the status of the child by creating ambiguity over whether Joe's response is human and reasonable or animalistic and instinctual. The link between child and animal becomes even stronger after eight-year-old Joe rejects Mrs. Eachern's kindness: "He rose from the bed and went and knelt in the corner as he had not knelt on the rug, and above the outraged food kneeling, with his hands ate, like a savage, like a dog" (155). In this scene, Joe reverts to an animal state as a response to trauma.

Darwin's representation of children as beasts places the child in a pre-evolved realm divided from the civilized adult world. Beasts are incapable of true imagination, limiting the child to mere fancy. Darwin went on to equate fancy with lying, resulting in an association that threatened promotion of the child's imagination. Shuttleworth depicts the excessive threat perceived in the child's imagination: "The dominant image is not of the innocent child corrupted by adult mismanagement, but rather that of the criminal mind, or . . . the hysterical girl" (71). More tellingly, in 1881 psychiatrist George Savage analyzed the child's imagination as an indicator of "moral insanity," defining it as when a child lies "with such wonderful power that he lies like truth" (Shuttleworth 61). Scientists, parents, and religious leaders feared the imagination as a symptom of madness or delinquency. This fear of inherent madness blossomed from Darwin's *Origins*, which introduced ideas of inheritance, suggesting a propensity towards madness could be present in utero. Shuttleworth recognizes a

similar fear of and reluctance to promote lying or imaginary fallacies in children in novelists during that period (66).

The debate was balanced, however, as scholars like Robert Louis Stevenson celebrated the imagination of the child. In his 1978 essay “Child’s Play,” Stevenson championed the imagination as an integral part of play and as essential to child development. Stevenson argues that children are not “contemporaries” of adults and so it is fallacious to consider aspects of their play in the same realm (38). But in defending the child’s imagination, Stevenson also suggested limitations of it. Stevenson viewed the mind of the child as limited and primitive in comparison to the mind of the adult: “We grown people can tell ourselves a story, give and take strokes until the bucklers ring, ride far and fast, marry, fall, and die; all the while sitting quietly by the fire or lying prone in bed. This is exactly what a child cannot do” (33). Stevenson saw the imagination of the child limited to the toys in their hands and the stories adults have created. The child did little more than act out the adventures adults had created, “‘Making believe’ is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character... They are passionate after dreams and unconcerned about realities” (36, 38).

Stevenson’s celebration of the child’s imagination echoes Twain’s attitude in his 1876 novel, *Tom Sawyer*, which celebrates play with both a child’s wonder and an adult’s nostalgia (Brown 29). Twain is anchored soundly in his celebration of the imagination. However, with *Huck Finn* Twain takes the argument in a new direction, acknowledging the connection between the imagination and lying and suggesting, in the case of a child experiencing trauma, that this application of the imagination serves

a critical function in insulating and protecting the child. Rather than leading Huck towards madness or extreme delinquency, lying allows the boy to adapt and assimilate to various conflicts along the river. While Stevenson defended the imagination by disassociating it with lying, Twain equated the imagination with lying but maintained a defense of its value.

In 1886, James Sully determined the development of the imagination as the origin of play, which he defined as “a mimicry and kind of make-believe of the actions of adults” (321). Sully, like Stevenson, identified the stories of adults as the driving force in the development of the child’s imagination, as hearing stories inspire children to model new stories. However, Sully did recognize that “[d]ifferent persons differ in power of imagination no less markedly perhaps than in that of memory” (324). Sully suggests, “These differences plainly depend partly on native inequalities and partly on differences in surroundings, the influence of companionship, and special exercise and training” (324).

Twain contradicts these arguments in his presentation of Huck. Huck’s imagination is not shown to be imitative and limited, but rather creative and functional in addressing his trauma and coping with conflicts. Unique trends in the imaginations of traumatized children that support Sully’s recognition of variance in the imagination arise when studying *Huck Finn* and the child narratives that follow. These narratives suggest that trauma creates a variance in the child’s imagination consistent with Sully’s conclusions.

Sully also argues against those fearful of the child’s imagination by arguing for the importance of training the imagination through guidance, stimulation,



literature, and education. In *Huck Finn*, however, Huck's trauma prohibits the training that Sully suggests is critical. Nonetheless, we do not find the "bad moral and intellectual consequences" (326) that Sully suggests will occur. Granted, Huck's imagination has been altered by his trauma, but it remains equally powerful. Twain goes as far as to criticize formal education as oppressive. Tom has received a formal education, is considered "smart" (Lyons 107), and displays exposure to literature, which Sully marks as crucial for the training of the imagination. Yet Huck is the character that displays greater adaptability, independent thought, and empathy.

Huck appears to parody the ignorance of many early psychologists with regards to his imagination. He is repeatedly envious of Tom's imagination: "What a head for just a boy to have! If I had Tom Sawyer's head I wouldn't trade it off to be a duke, nor mate of a steamboat, nor clown in a circus, nor nothing I can think of" (224). However, Huck's imagination is far more productive and efficient than any plan Tom concocts. It is only Jim, frequently the source of awareness and enlightenment for Huck, who recognizes the true value of Huck's imagination, "He said Tom Sawyer couldn't get up no better plan than what I had" (50).

With regards to formal education, Twain's allegiances lie closer to those of Romantic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued children should be "brought up in the countryside, away from corruptions induced by accelerated forms of learning and raised according to the laws of development laid down by nature" (Shuttleworth 5). Huck is very much a naturalist character and displays Darwinian adaptability in foreign and shifting environments. During this period, Darwinism and

Romanticism coexisted uneasily. Educational F.H. Heyward considered the competing influences of Darwinism and Romanticism on child study:

[E]ver since Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published, thinking men have no longer been able to regard nature in herself as wholly wise or kind. There is a calmness, a callousness—one might almost say a cruelty and wastefulness—about her that precludes the reflective man from holding this view. There goes on everywhere in Nature a 'struggle for existence,' and the 'fittest' who survive are not necessarily the most loveable creatures, but rather those that are strongest, or at any rate those that are most adapted to their special circumstances. (Hayward 26)

Huck's naturalist sensibilities and adaptability offer evidence of this fragile coexistence representing both of the competing influences.

G. Stanley Hall, a contemporary of Freud, argues the adverse effects of oppressive parenting and religion on children, concluding that they lead to morbid oversensitivity towards lying (Shuttleworth 71). This development explains the childhood trauma tradition's progression into Faulkner, who presents oppressive parenting and religion in McEachern's influence of Joe. McEachern's overbearing parenting and obsessive religiosity lead to Joe's clear oversensitivity towards lying. Despite the abuse he endures, Joe does not tell McEachern his first lie until he is seventeen, when he has already begun to identify himself as evil, with a self awareness reminiscent of Huck's acceptance that he will lie for Jim and go to hell. With almost a sense of satisfaction, McEachern berates Joe, "You have revealed every other sin of which you are capable: sloth, and ingratitude, and irreverence and blasphemy. And now I have taken you in the remaining two: lying and lechery" (164). Faulkner presents this lie as a transition point for Joe into adulthood. It is at this point that Joe stands up to McEachern for the first time and rebels against his

parental oppression. By portraying lying as a rite of passage, Faulkner aligns lying with adulthood.

The lie as a rite of passage suggests a second debate over the source of children's lies. Many psychologists viewed lying as an innate deficiency. Hall bracketed children with women, savages, and criminals as all prone towards lying (Shuttleworth 74): "Gabriel Compayre had sought to overturn this construction, arguing lying was in fact learnt behaviour"; however, Compayre also believed it was a practice reserved for street children and that the "well-born" were spared. (Shuttleworth 69). In *Huck Finn*, Twain cites lying as a learned behavior through Huck's acute sensitivity towards the lies all around him. Huck begins his narrative by explaining, "I ain't never seen anybody but lied one time or another" (11). Huck Finn recognizes the adult world as one of lies and must conform to this practice in order to survive. He is dependent upon his imagination to adapt to this adult realm of deception. In the next decade, Sully endorsed Twain's position, arguing that lying is a learned behavior attributed to adult intrusions on the child's life through forms such as aggressive interrogation (Shuttleworth 70).

Despite the amount of child studies conducted in the nineteenth century, Shuttleworth admits that histories of child psychology or psychiatry do not begin until the turn of the century with the emergence of Sigmund Freud. It is in Freud's research that the child's imagination gains notoriety for its creativity and functionality and is equated to the imagination of the adult. In his essay "Formulations on Two Principles of Mental Functioning," Freud discusses the universal practice of "phantasying" which occurs during the child's play or the adult's daydream (303). In

both the child and the adult, the imagination becomes a tool to shield or escape conflicts in reality. In his essay “On Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” Freud goes as far as to equate imaginative play with creative writing (437).

An important shift in thought occurs during this period as the imagination is no longer a symptom foreshadowing inherent madness, but a response protecting the child from trauma and conflict. *Huck Finn* seems to acknowledge and foreshadow ideas of Freud nearly twenty years later. Huck’s imagination certainly acts in response to the trauma he has endured. Huck’s ‘play’ at different characters during his stops along the river protects him from his struggles with isolation and identity, as he can create identities to help fabricate a more palpable reality. Freud seems to echo Huck’s reaction in “On the Psychic Mechanisms of Hysterical Phenomena,” wherein he defines hysteria as altered “personality structures resulting from defensive attempts to deal with traumatic experiences in childhood” (Reyes 317).

Faulkner also depicts Freud’s suggestion of a functional imagination. Freud suggests that fantasies allow the “mental apparatus” to fulfill pleasures, of which “motor discharge” is restrained (“Psychic Mechanism,” 303). When reality prohibits the fulfillment of desire, this desire can be satisfied through fantasy. This influence is apparent in Joe Christmas’s fantasy about fighting McEachern. When sneaking out of the house Joe believes he sees a shadow following him, but realizes it might just be in his mind:

Then he thought he had not (seen it), that it might perhaps have been something in his mind projected like a shadow on a wall. “But I hope it is him,” he thought. “I wish it was him. I wish he would follow me and see me get into the car. I wish he would try and follow us. I wish he would try to stop me.” (172)

Joe is fulfilling his desire for rebellion and violence against McEachern by imagining that he has the opportunity.

As he is writing in a Freudian era dominated by psychoanalytic research, Faulkner appears dominated by Freud's theories: "Faulkner's texts rely on classical Freudian categories and concepts...scenes of incest, narcissism, the Oedipus complex, the castration complex, and so on" (Zeitlin 87). Faulkner's great concern with sexual trauma is linked to the emphasis Freud places on sexuality. In "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," Freud groups all fantasies into two categories of motivation: ambitious wishes and sexual desires (439). As Freud argues trauma as a disruption of the normal desires, Joe is depicted as a case of disturbed and thus perverse sexual desires.

Faulkner also depends heavily on Freud's theories of repression when presenting the trauma of Joe Christmas. An overriding theme of Joe's narrative is the connection between adult struggles and childhood traumas. In the essay, "On Psychoanalysis in Culture," Freud claims,

A deeper insight into the mechanism of obsessional neurosis is gained if we take into account the primary fact which lies at the bottom of it. This is always the repression of an instinctual impulse (a component of the sexual instinct) which was present in the subject's constitution and which was allowed to find expression for a while during childhood but later succumbed to suppression. (434)

Joe's sexual suppression, and eventually repression, is the source of his obsession with the impurity of women. This obsession is depicted during two separate episodes

when Joe undergoes extreme traumatic responses when confronted with women's menstruation (185, 189). Joe is informed of menstruation on multiple occasions, but he is so disturbed by it that his mind represses the reality. Therefore each time he encounters menstruation, he reacts violently by slaughtering a sheep or assaulting the girl and becomes physically ill.

Freud argues that the suppression of impulses is eventually converted into a repression resulting in "obsessional neurosis." Throughout the flashback section of the text, Faulkner depicts his interpretations of conversion. Although the narrator recounts the trauma Joe has experienced, he suggests that Joe has repressed these memories: "Then it was three or four years ago and he had forgotten it, in the sense that a fact is forgotten when it once succumbs to the mind's insistence that it be neither true nor false" (186).

Morrison also utilizes Freud's ideas of repression and conscious versus subconscious thought. Many of Freud's theories are at work in the flashback to Cholly's trauma: "His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess-- that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke" (151). By projecting his hatred of the white men onto Darlene, Cholly's mind is protected from a reality he is not able to accept.

While Freud is an influence on much of Morrison's work, much of her approach criticizes his conclusions rather than consistently portrays his work: "In the 1970s the attack of Freud's ideas about women established itself as a fixture of neo-feminist discourse, rehearsed in countless books, articles and reviews" (P. Robinson

13). For example, depiction of actual sexual assault on a young girl conflicts with Freud's controversial research on "false memories," wherein most sexual anxiety results from "in born psychic conflicts" rather than actual sexual abuse (Reyes 317). Morrison's implied combative commentary on the psychology of the past is paralleled in Claudia's criticism of the response from her community: "According to Claudia, in 1930s America the oppressed and traumatized cannot help one another, because the power they have available to them is that feeling of superior to the weak" (Vickroy 88). A prevalent theme in *The Bluest Eye* is the deficiency of the community in responding to trauma, likely due to common misconceptions in its approach to trauma. Morrison suggests that, despite all the 'progress' achieved in the field of psychology, the people of Lorain, Ohio, do not have appropriate means to address the young girl's trauma. Soaphead Williams, the "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams" (165), evokes a connection to Freud, who was greatly concerned with dream interpretation. Aligning Freud with Soaphead suggests biting criticism, as Soaphead masks Pecola's trauma from her but does nothing to alleviate it.

A second shift in psychology, which impacted the progression of Morrison's text from Faulkner's, is the shift from behaviorism to cognitivism: "The cognitive revolution had built up steam in the United States by the late 1950s, and cognitive psychology had become the dominant school for psychology by the end of the 1960s" (Moghaddam and Lee 168). The cognitive approach stresses study of the mental process over limiting study to the behavior of the individual. This development, along with the concern for gender and the lack of female mobility, would explain why

the majority of Faulkner's narrative depicts Joe's actions, while Morrison delves into Pecola's mind.

Psychology addressing childhood and female trauma had become a national concern when Morrison depicts it in *The Bluest Eye*. Freud's main focus for studying childhood trauma considered its impact on the adult. However, in the 1970s the focus was placed directly on the child and particular attention was given to child maltreatment. In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act was signed, making abuse an issue of national policy (Reyes 119). This shift in focus explains the literary tradition's shift from Faulkner's concern to Morrison's. Rather than considering how the trauma has impacted Pecola's life as an adult, Morrison was concerned with the effect it had upon her childhood and the community's inability to recognize its impact on them.

Morrison is also writing at the height of the feminist and civil rights movements: "With the ascendance of the civil rights, feminist and, and human rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s, mental health professionals and advocates put forth the rape trauma syndrome and the battered woman syndrome to describe the consequences of sexual and domestic violence" (Reyes 317-8). Morrison's work is extremely relevant to the impacts that social progress were having on psychology in her time. As psychologists begin to focus on domestic violence towards women and children, Morrison considers it in her work, viewing sexual abuse of a child with imagined blue eyes as an internal crisis of black culture.



## The Global Trauma Tradition

Literary consideration of childhood trauma certainly did not begin with Twain's work. Early in the nineteenth century E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote numerous tales concerning traumatic events in children's lives. A century later, Sigmund Freud relies on Hoffmann's "The Sandman" as the cornerstone for his essay "The Uncanny." But it is another tale by Hoffmann, *The Strange Child*, that features a formula of constructs that underscore the American approach to trauma. *The Strange Child* is the tale of two siblings, Felix and Christlieb, who create an imaginary friend in order to cope with experiences of trauma. With *The Strange Child*, Hoffmann precedes many of the constructs of the American tradition, which revolve around the child's reliance on the imagination to cope with trauma that he or she unable to overcome.

Using *The Strange Child* as an entry into the work of Twain and the subsequent works of trauma accentuates the line of romantic influence uneasily lurking beneath Darwinian settings and tropes. Beyond the aforementioned canonical texts, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Catcher in the Rye* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* are model works of trauma that offer different approaches while remaining true to the American tradition. *Anne* is an early Canadian contribution that considers the plight of the traumatized girl, while considering many themes that parallel *Huck Finn*. *Catcher* presents a unique angle to the tradition, focusing on teenaged Holden Caulfield, who is experiencing a trauma-induced arrested development resulting from the death of a loved one. Specifically in the character of Dill, *To Kill a Mockingbird* offers

commentary on the imaginations potential for protection from neglect in work of a post-World War II Southern literature.

L. M. Montgomery's *Anne* adopts the construct in response to the trauma of the orphan and provides an earlier account of female trauma than Morrison. While it is important to note that Montgomery's narrative is Canadian, the similar political and social concerns of the two developing nations motivate coordinating literary concerns. *Catcher in the Rye* explores the protective imagination of a teenaged Holden Caulfield, who is experiencing a trauma-induced arrested development resulting from the death of a loved one. J.D. Salinger offers a unique perspective, as Caulfield is older than many of our protagonists but is frozen in a more immature state because of his trauma. Specifically in the character of Dill, Harper Lee offers commentary on the imagination's potential for protection from neglect in a work of post-World War II Southern literature. Dill also introduces the theme of gender confusion to childhood trauma.

The first construct found in the tradition of the child trauma concerns identifying the character by an "otherness" that will lead to the trauma experienced in the work. In *The Strange Child*, the sibling protagonists, Felix and Christlieb inhabit a liminal state through a revelation of their social status, as they are faced with the realization that they are poorer and less educated than their cousins. During a visit, their wealthy uncle reveals that they "belong to a less distinguished line of von Brakels and will never amount to much" (128). Later, their ignorance of is also revealed. This deficiency is echoed by the children's parents and eventually the children themselves become concerned with it, "Poor children that we are, we don't

know any natural sciences!” (144) It is suggested that the children must be educated in order to complete the transition back into a stable state. Later in the text, the death of their father forces the children deeper into a traumatized state as their family is faced with financial ruin.

This liminality should be recognized as the isolation previously chronicled in Huck, Joe, and Pecola. These characters cannot function in the established social structure as other children do, because of the psychological damage of the trauma and society’s identification of their damaged state. Huck’s time on the river is symbolic of his liminal state as he travels between multiple towns but is not a member of any of them. This work closes on an ambiguous note but maintains that his liminal status may be prolonged out in “the territory ahead of the rest” (279). Joe’s liminality is presented as a psychological state, in his inability to relate to other characters because of his traumatic experiences. As Joe is unable to overcome his trauma, he maintains liminality throughout his life, wandering from town to town in a manner similar to Huck, unable to achieve stability. Finally, Pecola’s liminality is symbolized through her family’s instability. Pecola’s rejection from society following her rape indicates that her liminal state will be prolonged and likely permanent.

The establishment of liminality on the traumatized child remains consistent in L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*. Growing up an orphan, Anne shares the same domestic void as Huck, Joe, and Pecola, frequently moving between foster homes and orphanages after her parents died of a fever: “YOU would cry, too, if you were an orphan and had come to a place you thought was going to be home and found that they didn’t want you because you weren’t a boy” (34), Anne laments soon

following her arrival at Green Gables. This quotation also indicates the compounding effect gender has on trauma, a concept that Morrison explores further. Anne's socially inferior gender makes her life as an orphan more difficult, limiting the likelihood of her adoption. This liminality is compounded further by the emphasis on her Canadian heritage, which differentiates Anne from the typical Barnardo "Street-arabs" that fit the orphan stereotype, suggesting a racially charged political parallel to this work of historical fiction. Holly Blackford exposes the "anti-imperial sentiment" underlying Anne's trauma as an orphan (XXV). Anne's trauma becomes representative of the Canadian-born orphan, overshadowed by Barnardo imports. Anne misery over the traits that isolate her, even from other orphans, reveals her social rejection and subsequent insecurity.

Hilary Emmett speculates at an even more severe, unspoken trauma in Anne's past. Emmett quotes Anne from a later book in the series, *Anne of Ingleside*, "I was often very hungry before I came to Green Gables – at the orphanage... and before. I've never cared to talk of those days" (Emmett 81), as evidence that, despite Anne's seemingly endless conversation, there remains a trauma left unspoken. Emmett notes that Montgomery leaves these former traumas untold (82) but suggests conflicts upon which Morrison would later expand.

There are liminal qualities inherent in the character of the orphan, as they lack access to the family unit, which is the foundation of the child's social structure. In addition, deficiencies in basic needs fulfillment and education destabilize the orphan even further. In *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne is able to complete her transition back into the societal structure through adoption and education.

At first glance, *The Catcher in the Rye*'s Holden Caulfield appears the exception on this list, as his trauma seems unique. Holden is, at seventeen, the oldest character and the only one whose parents are still married, and who has been given favorable opportunities and education. But in his past we find a single traumatic event, the death of his brother, Allie, which has led to displacement and neglect similar to that of our aforementioned victims. His rebellious nature, for which Holden is often celebrated, is actually, "his only means of dealing with his inability to come to terms with the death of his brother" (Miller 74). E.H. Miller argues that Allie's death was such a traumatic experience that Holden "is emotionally still at the same age (thirteen years old)" (75). Holden acknowledges his own immaturity; "Sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen" (9). Thus, due to his emotional state, Holden's traumatic response is comparable to the imaginations of these younger characters.

Holden Caulfield maintains the trend of liminality in the traumatic child. His parents have sent him away to preparatory school and due to academic dismissals; he is repeatedly required to change boarding schools, shifting from one state to another without achieving stability. His feeling of banishment to boarding school suggests at least a perception, if not reality, of parental disinterest. Miller notes that, "In his eyes his mother is so preoccupied with Allie that she continues to neglect Holden, as presumably she did when Allie was dying" (75). Throughout *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden is set in a state of "betwixt and between," resisting the transition into adulthood and longing for the childhood he has left behind. Holden equation of maturing with disappearing is akin to Huck's fantasies of death and Pecola's fantasy

of disappearance. His reluctance to grow up can be attributed to his experiences with death, displacement, and neglect, which warp his interaction with society.

The most liminal character in Lee's work is not the protagonist Scout, but rather in the relatively periphery character of Scout's close friend Dill. Harold Bloom astutely recognizes a relationship between Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Bloom 7). However, Bloom mistakenly tries to make a connection between Huck and Lee's character Scout and is subsequently unable to succeed. Lee's legitimate response to Huck is in the character of Dill, who shares a comparative traumatic background resulting in an equally effective imagination. Although critics often acknowledge Dill as a literary portrayal of Lee's childhood friend Truman Capote (Bloom 12-13), the parallels between Dill and Huck are undeniable. Dill and Huck share a childhood of neglect: "Dill, supposedly has a mother and a stepfather, but in any event, no parental figure appears to care much about him" (Markey 32). Dill's father is suggested to be more absent in Dill's life than Pap:

I asked Dill where his father was...  
 "I haven't got one."  
 "Is he dead?"  
 "No..."  
 "Then if he's not dead you've got one, haven't you?"  
 Dill blushed. (8)

Although the specifics regarding Dill's father remain a mystery, it is clear from his reaction that trauma is present. Similar to Huck's experience with Pap, Dill has also had to deal with alcoholism, particularly with his guardian in Maycomb, Aunt Rachel: "Bet that woman [Aunt Rachel] drinks a pint for breakfast every morning-- know she

drinks two glasses full. Seen her” (245). Finally, Dill is also in a state of liminality, symbolized by his being passed from relative to relative. Just as he is unable to find a stable place in a family, he is unable to establish a stable role in a broader social structure. And like all of the male trauma victims, this displacement has led to an inclination towards running away (160).

Hoffmann also presents a critical response to adult infiltration on the realm of the child, which is later interlaced throughout the American tradition. In most cases of literary trauma, adults are criticized as the direct or indirect source. The texts also expose the adult’s ignorance of both the trauma and the potential of the child’s imagination in response to the text. This ignorance parallels the shortcoming of the early child studies we discussed. In Hoffmann’s text, the von Brackel parents demand the children be educated, arranging for the poisonous Master Inkbolt to tutor the children. Felix and Christlieb’s parents are also consistently ignorant of the idea that the children’s imaginations are the source of the magical events they claim. When the children explain their adventures with the strange child, their parents assume he must be a neighbor’s child and ask, “Whoever put all this nonsense into your heads?” (183) In contrast, education is destructive to the child’s imagination. Master Inkblot’s education leads to the disappearance of the strange child. It is only at the very end of the work that the parents acknowledge their children’s creative gifts. Sir Thaddeus recalls his own childhood imagination, “I too once knew the strange and lovely child who showed you so many marvels here in the wood” (194).

Many of the other works in the tradition find inspiration in a similar influence. Although it does not necessarily criticize education, *Anne of Green Gables*

emphasizes a similar manner in which education replaces the imagination, and the novel is equally skeptical of the impact of religion. Similar to Huck, Anne is without a formal education prior to her arrival at Green Gables. However, as Anne is educated throughout the text, her creative imagination is replaced by an imitative imagination dependent on poetry and literature. Consistent with the contrasts explored through Tom and Claudia, a gradual shift occurs in Anne's imagination as she becomes comfortable and secure with her life at Green Gables. Anne's creative and inventive imagination gives way to poetic recitation and literary play. Once Anne develops companionships, she no longer needs to invent friends. Anne's game of Lancelot and Guinevere with Diana, Jane, and Ruby is noteworthy because it marks a shift towards an imagination Sully would recognize as conventional. As Anne adapts to a more stable and normalized childhood, her imagination becomes more consistent with the literary imagination of Tom Sawyer. Anne is no longer dependent upon her imagination for survival and can now utilize it in games of mimicry.

A direct parallel is found in Anne and Huck's reluctant attitude towards their relatively late introduction to religion: "Mrs. Thomas told me God gave me red hair *on purpose*, and I've never cared about him since. And anyhow I'd always be too tired at night to bother saying prayers" (31). Anne's attitude towards religion is similar to the attitude expressed by Huck during his analysis of the allegory *Pilgrims Progress*: "It was about a man that left his family. It didn't say why" (103). On account of the trauma they have faced, Huck and Anne both find the God they're told is responsible to be suspect.



Holden also highlights the shortcomings of adult interference with the lives of the child. Holden is repeatedly dismissed from schools, with the bulk of the text following such a dismissal, suggesting the inefficiency of the education system in addressing his trauma. Additionally, Holden is skeptical of adults in general. Similar to Huck Finn, Holden displays an acute awareness towards ‘phonies.’ Just as Huck is always skeptical of the lies adults are telling him, Holden is obsessed with the idea that he is being deceived. Holden would prefer the child’s realm, of which he can no longer be a part, to the adult realm into which he is being forced. Frequently throughout the work, Holden watches children at play with feelings of nostalgia, writes poetry about his brother’s baseball glove, and celebrates the youth of his sister Phoebe.

Dill is set as a point of contrast to school from the narrator’s perspective. Dill only visits in the summer when school is not in session. It is clear that Dill is intelligent but as the traumatized child he represents the opposition of education. Scout explains Dill “could read two books to my one, but preferred the magic of his own inventions” (164). What Jem claims as the start for the entire narrative it is Dill’s dissatisfaction with playing “dramas based on works” (8) that leads to his suggestion of “making Boo Radley come out” (1). Dill’s desire to create rather than imitate is the catalyst for all the action in the novel.

The next construct of the tradition is to accentuate the exceptional imagination of the traumatized child in relation to normative imitative imagination, which more closely resembles the immature imagination presented by Stevenson. Hoffmann’s sibling protagonists are set in relation to their more educated cousins. Felix and

Christlieb's cousins function as a foil for the siblings, emphasizing the children's liminality and highlighting their exceptional imaginations. The toys that the cousins present to the children suggest that the cousins engage in a more imitative form of play. The gifts include a toy huntsman and a wooden shotgun and hunting knife, which would encourage play involving the mimicry of a real hunter. Felix rejects these "silly things" and throws them into the pond (140). In contrast to the play likely engaged in by their cousins, Felix and Christlieb respond with more creative play--constructing an imaginary friend: the strange child. This friend, the strange child, reinforces the children's disapproval of prop toys, "The toys that you threw away yesterday weren't good for anything much, but you and Christlieb are surrounded by the most wonderful playthings ever seen!" (147-48) The siblings proceed to utilize nature as a landscape for their creation, "Next moment the blades of grass turned into the most beautiful dolls ever seen, and the twigs became dear little huntsmen" (149).

Both *Huck Finn* and *The Bluest Eye* accomplish this construct through foils created for Huck and Pecola. When set in comparison to Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn displays an original, functional imagination, creating characters to help him cope rather than adopting literature for play. Pecola is shown to have a defensive imagination necessary for coping with her extreme trauma. While Claudia's imagination is equally imaginative, it is more defensive than aggressive, allowing her to recover from a comparatively mild trauma.

Montgomery also explores her protagonist's ability to cope with trauma through the imagination, by setting her in relation to a normal child. Anne's character is set in comparison with her best friend, Diana Barry. The contrast begins with a

physical description of the two. Anne is skinny and bony with red hair and freckles, while Diana is plump and pretty as Anne wishes she looked. Diana continues the trend of the literature dependent foil, introduced by her love of reading. However, Diana lacks the imagination and creativity of Anne, who is reliant on these qualities.

Early in *Catcher*, Holden is set in contrast to his roommate Stradlater. Stradlater functions to show how Holden's trauma has trapped him in a liminal state between childhood and adulthood. The two argue over Stradlater's treatment of girls, which conflicts with Holden's naïve chivalry. Stradlater, presented as a character newly initiated into the realm of adulthood, is ignorant of Holden's creativity, failing to appreciate Holden's creative writing about the baseball mitt.

*Mockingbird* also emphasizes Dill's exceptional qualities in contrast with a more normal character. Gary Richards recognizes "Jem as a foil for Dill to establish his effeminacy" (123), but the contrast between the characters functions even further. Just as Tom is the counterpoint to Huck's trauma and imagination, Jem is a contrast to Dill. Despite the loss of his mother, Jem has a comparatively stable home life with Atticus, an interested and engaging father. Thus, Jem's imagination is accordingly predictable by the standards of Stevenson and Scully. Jem structures his play around the literature he has read, including *Tarzan*, *The Rover Boys*, and *Tom Swift* (8-9). When prompted by Scout to invent new characters for them to play, Jem claims "I'm tired of makin 'em up," revealing either a preference for literature or limitations in creating original characters.

This use of imagination as an indicator foreshadows a common practice by contemporary psychologists who rely on the imagination to identify children's trauma

(Dyregrov 112). As the author uses imagination in direct response to trauma, the response can be used to identify the trauma itself. The strange child is a direct response( to the children's concern with their lower social status. Christlieb and Felix each child creates the strange child in his/her own likeness to combat feelings of otherness: "So Felix thought the strange child was a boy, and Christlieb insisted that their new friend was a girl" (155). In addition to condoning their rejection of the toys, the strange child appears as a prince or princess soothed the children's concern with their own social statuses (161). Their imagined playmate responds to their concerns over educational deficiencies in natural sciences by describing a homeland that violates science through the presence of fairies. In his imagination, personified nature reaffirms Felix's scientific proclamation, "It's the wood that gives you pretty little children protection and shelter," as a pine tree responds, "That is a true word you spoke boy" (156). After creating the strange child, "they had never felt such pleasure before" (151).

Twain, Faulkner, and Morrison also offer the reader insights into trauma via the reaction of the imagination. Huck's fantasies of escaping Pap suggest that the abuse is more severe than Huck's conversational allusions indicate. Joe's imagination is often stimulated at the end of his traumatic experiences, offering readers a way to track them. As a narrator, Claudia will use Pecola's imagination to locate the specific trauma with which she is coping. Pecola's fantasy of blue eyes stems from her basic conflict with her appearance and the fantasy is applied to more severe traumatic experiences such as domestic violence and rape.

Much in the same manner as Pecola's imagination, Anne's imagination functions as a shield for her insecurities. Anne likes to role-play, imagining she is "nice and plump, with dimples" in her elbows, to overcome her concern with being too skinny. Anne's displacement has led to feelings of inadequacy and she is subsequently excessively self-conscious, particularly about her red hair. However, by imagining she is different she can temporarily escape her concerns.

The word imagination appears fifty-one times throughout *Anne of Green Gables*, and Anne is explicit in recognizing its importance: "Isn't it fortunate I've got such a splendid imagination? It will help me through splendidly" (260). Anne's imagination helps her to cope with trauma in many of the same manners as Huck. Anne tries to avoid discussing her trauma by disguising it with fantasies of her imagination. When Marilla questions Anne about her past, she pleads, "Oh, what I KNOW about myself isn't really worth telling... If you'll only let me tell what I IMAGINE about myself you'll think it ever so much more interesting" (54). As Emmitt recognizes, the trauma of Anne's past is both "unspeakable" and "ineffable" (84), and so Anne attempts to retreat behind her imagination. Anne reluctantly discusses the death of her parents and some of the tough, ineffectual life she experienced in the foster homes and orphanage, but there are hints of a deeper, silenced trauma.

Holden's imagination indicates trauma to which the narrator only alludes. Holden's role-playing as a blind boy is an attempt to cope with the death of his brother. "Holden assumes Allie's red hair when he puts on the red cap," and his joking plea for his mother is a response to his need for parental comfort (Miller 77-

78). Holden assumes the role of a blind child to address the trauma he finds unspeakable and ineffable. Holden seeks a creative outlet for his unresolved trauma soon after his play with Ackley, when he writes the essay about Allie's baseball glove.

Consistent with the strategies of Anne and Huck, Dill's imagination indicates the trauma he is unable to discuss. Dill compensates for his lack of a father figure by inventing stories about his own father and stepfather, each time emphasizing their superiority to Atticus. Dill claimed his father was taller than Atticus (40) and his stepfather was much younger (132). Dill attempts to use his imagination to mask or possibly dismiss his envy of his friends' father. Prior to running away to Maycomb, Dill sends a letter excusing his absence with a story about building a fishing boat with his stepfather (132), and upon his arrival to Maycomb spins a hyperbole about being chained in the basement and joining "a small animal show" (159-160). It is only after being pressed by Jem and Scout that he reveals neglect as his true reason for running away, "They'd stay gone all the time and when they were home, even, they'd get off in a room by themselves" (163), and admits to stealing money from his mother to take a train to Maycomb. It is also at this time that Dill hints at an additional source for his isolation. Dill paraphrases his parents' criticism of him: "You're not a boy. Boys get out and play baseball with other boys, they don't hang around the house worryin' their folks" (163). In his essay "Harper Lee and the Destabilization of Heterosexuality," Richards examines Dill's homosexuality (120). This passage suggests that Dill's isolation is due, at least in part, to his homosexuality, thus compounding the trauma.

Finally, the tradition of childhood trauma is dependent on the child's imagination as a coping mechanism for trauma. Although in many cases the children are unable to resolve their traumatic experiences, they are able to cope with them through their imaginations. Hoffmann utilizes this approach years prior to the start of the American response to the tradition. In *The Strange Child*, the children's imaginary friend disappears following their education with Master Inkblot. However, the strange child, the symbol of their creative imagination, returns after their greatest trauma when it is needed most. Following the death of their father and the family's financial ruin, "The strange child stepped out of the sweetly fragrant leaves, surrounded by such dazzling brightness that Felix and Christlieb had to close their eyes" (196). Due to the reemergence of their creative imagination, "All the grief and pain had left them, and they left heavenly joy deep in their hearts" (196). Hoffmann presents the functional capabilities of the creative imagination as a forum for coping with trauma.

Huck, Joe, and Pecola all rely on their imaginations to cope with traumas they are unable to overcome. Huck uses his imagination to adapt to a world he views as false. Joe uses his imagination to attempt to explain events he cannot understand and to temporarily escape the trauma in which he is trapped. Pecola relies on her imagination to survive experiences her mind cannot otherwise process or accept.

Anne's imagination surpasses imitation en route to function, as she uses it to cope with loneliness. To overcome her solitude, Anne befriends the local plants around Green Gables, proclaiming, "Everything seems to be calling to me...Anne, Anne, we want a playmate" (49). Anne even employs Marilla's geranium as a

pseudo-friend, naming the plant Bonny. Even though Anne uses props, as Stevenson determines requisite, her play is not imitation in preparation for adulthood, but rather a substitute for the missing elements in her childhood. Anne also reflects on using her imagination as an escape from both the orphanage and foster care, this time without the assistance of props. Similar to the imaginations Stevenson recognized in adults, Anne would “lie awake at nights and imagine” regal pasts for the other orphans. Anne is aware that her survival of the trauma in her past is dependent upon her imagination. And the only limitation Anne’s imagination seems to have is in imagining away the red hair she claims breaks her heart (24).

Holden’s creative imagination is most explicit in his creation of identities. “Like Huck, Holden assumes a series of guises during his lone wanderings” (Kaplan 41). Holden role-plays an imaginary student, “Rudolf Schmidt,” when riding the train with his classmate Morrow’s mother. This role-playing provides Holden with the motherly attention he lacks in his life. The conflict in Holden’s comment, “Mothers are all slightly insane. The thing is, though, I liked old Morrow’s mother” (55), reveals conflicting emotions towards his own mother; he is bitter about her neglect yet still desires her attention. Holden’s imagination functions to fulfill his maternal void. Another example of Holden’s imagination shielding him from trauma is in his fantasies of being shot. These fantasies follow his violent encounter with the prostitute and her pimp and his failed date with Sally. Holden role-plays that he has been shot and is dying to escape the traumatic reality he has just experienced.

Dill’s traumatic experiences have left him an imagination typical of the tradition. Dill is able to quickly fabricate lies to skirt trouble, as he does when



making up the story about playing strip poker (61). Dill also uses his exceptional imagination to blur the truth of his trauma. Just as Huck's "surprisingly matter of fact" tone conceals the truth about his abuse even to the readers (Wolff 65), Dill uses fantastic tales to hide from the trauma in his past.

This influence of the strange child, an imaginary friend found in and deeply connected to nature, also suggests an additional intersection for the texts with regards to the child connection to nature. The later texts maintain this consideration for the sibling's connection with nature and its stimulation of their imaginations. Nature offers the same retreat for Hoffmann's characters as it does for Huck and Joe. An explicit connection to and reliance on nature is seen in *Anne*. Anne of Green Gables is defined by the pastoral ideal of Green Gables, where she has been saved from her trauma. The early comparison Anne makes between the children at the orphanage and the few "whitewashed cagy" trees outside the gates and the barren description of the asylum (22) parallels the metaphor between orphans and caged animals and the description of the "grassless cinder-strewnpacked" compound in which Joe Christmas was raised (119).

The contrast between the American texts and Hoffmann's text accentuates the construct that makes the text American. Hoffmann presents the strange child as a magical occurrence, only suggesting that he is a figment of the child's imagination. He presents his text as a fantastic event functioning beyond the realm of reality. The American adaptations of this tradition stress the realistic applications of their texts. They present these traumatic narratives as a response to how the child's consciousness actually functions. The authors of these works intend to achieve more

than an adult's celebration or fantastic interpretation of the child's mind, but as a literary case study through an authentic portrayal of the mind.

This utilization of realism can be attributed to a constant desire to respond to developing scientific conclusions on the subject. American texts stress the function of the imagination as a response to early psychological misconceptions and trends developing from these roots. The American tradition portrays inventive and functional imaginations that develop in children who have experienced trauma and occur in cases where the imagination has not been cultivated in the manner psychologists like Sully suggest as necessary. However, Sully's claim that such negligence would result in "bad moral and intellectual consequences" (326) must be questioned. Although moral and intellectual conflicts are found, they are more likely the result of the trauma itself, rather than the lack of guided imagination exercise and training. And although these characters experience moral conflicts, the results are generally not "bad consequences." Huck Finn's moral conflict arises when he questions the tradition of slavery. Granted his objection is due more to empathy with Jim than to recognition of the immorality of slavery, but his speculation of the assumed morals of the time leads to positive consequences. Tom, on the other hand, is only able to help Jim with the foreknowledge that Jim is a free man. Similarly, Dill has more empathetic moral reservations than Scout. While Scout's negative reaction to Tom Robinson's trial stems from Atticus's involvement in it and she is unable to see Robinson as more than "just a Negro" (227), Dill recognizes a deeper evil in the mistreatment of another human being. So as with Huck, although a moral conflict exists, it is the result of the character's potential to question the status quo and

personally reflect on morality. Holden Caulfield has arguably the most questionable consequences with regards to morality and education. It would seem his struggles with education have less to do with his intelligence or his imagination and are likely linked to his inability to overcome trauma. Also, it is an excessively strict moral code that contributes to his committal to the asylum. As Anne's is the only story that follows the character throughout her education, she is the model for potential academic success, despite a lack of imagination cultivation. Anne's academic success conflicts with Sully's theory of bad intellectual consequences.

A final American construct is in the search for identity stressed in these works. Although Felix and Christleib suffer from feelings of otherness, it is because model children conflict with their own identities. However, these children remain self-aware and confident in their identities, evidenced by their resistance to the imposed changes. The American models of traumatized children have far more trouble establishing identities. Attempts to cope with trauma are revealed as desires to fit in rather than a struggle to resist and maintain. Huck creates characters to adapt. Joe embraces the black identity that isolates him in favor of the void in identity that he fears. Pecola and Anne imagine beautiful characteristics consistent with society's norms. Dill fabricates a history that is more normal than his own, and Holden attempts to return to the childhood he can relate to rather than the foreign adult realm he into which he is forced.

## Extremely Traumatic & Incredibly Imaginative: A Contemporary Adaptation

The tradition of childhood trauma remains relevant in contemporary literature. Jonathan Safran Foer adopts this tradition in his recent narrative concerning the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001. And although critics often overlook the relevance of his work as a narrative of childhood trauma, Foer is continuing this tradition of American literature, fusing previous approaches, such as the work of Freud, with contemporary advances in the field of childhood trauma study and the contemporary concern with trauma from loss or death. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* simultaneously presents a trauma child as a symbol of a traumatized nation and a portrayal of a traumatized individual.

Foer's novel, *Extremely Loud*, is often examined for its role as one of the earlier post-9/11 works to discuss the tragedy and engage the survivors. Critics often discuss its treatment of and impact on the social trauma experienced by a nation, declaring it "hypercanonical in the discussion of 9/11 fiction" (Duvall and Marzec 455). Those critics, who do study the specific trauma of the protagonist in novel, do so through its relationship to other tragedies or characters. Ilka Saal focuses on how this tragedy is depicted in relationship to tragedies like Hiroshima and the Dresden bombings, while Sien Uytterschout and Kristiaan Versluys focus on how the protagonist's trauma compares to that of his grandparents. These comparisons are directly suggested by Foer in his text and do offer value; however, there is also a certain merit in investigating the primary trauma on its own. The exploration of social trauma in this novel focuses primarily on the experience of a young boy who feels extremely isolated by his trauma. It is just as important to narrow the

investigation of the work to the specific traumatic struggle of this individual, as it is to expand the scope to capture more grand and universal impacts. An intimate investigation with Foer's protagonist, Oskar Schell, exposes a complex childhood trauma with roots that extend beyond the boy's mourning of his father's death. Furthermore, Foer's work depicts an interesting relationship between childhood trauma and the imagination that is consistent with the literary tradition and relevant to contemporary psychological studies in trauma. When read in relation to contemporary case study research, *Extremely Loud* offers an accurate account of the relationship between the imagination and trauma and offers insight into the conflicts, which complicate the novel. However, before the relationship between trauma and the imagination can be explored, it is necessary to conduct a detailed analysis of the trauma itself.

In accordance with many of the other child traumas, Foer's novel can be analyzed as a direct reaction to the work of Sigmund Freud. In their article "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*," Uytterschout and Versluys attempt to apply Freud's concepts of melancholia and mourning to this work. But rather than directly addressing the research of Freud, Uytterschout and Versluys rely upon Dominick LaCapra's contemporary application of Freud's work, which simplifies the study of melancholia and mourning to the terms "acting out" and "working through," two terms which never appear in Freud's original work. This approach embraces the contemporary relevance of the work but ignores the tradition out of which the work develops. It is evident that Freud's original text has had a great impact on the tradition and an ignorance of this

connection fails to examine the full scope of the text. This contemporary oversimplification offers merit in examining Oskar's behavior in the wake of a trauma but provides little insight into fully identifying the depth of the trauma itself. A greater investigation into the source of Oskar's trauma is conducted in a close reading through the lens of Freud's original text "Mourning and Melancholia." In this text, Freud details the process of identifying mourning and melancholia and tracing it back to its source.

Much of the tradition of childhood trauma is centered on loss. In Freud's words, "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person or to the loss of some abstraction" (243). In this writing, Freud identifies mourning as the "normal" reaction to an identified loss. Whether it is an actual loss, as with Holden's brother Allie, or a psychological loss, as with Pecola's innocence, coping with loss is a crucial aspect of childhood trauma.

Oskar experienced the monumental loss of his father during the 9/11 attacks. His father's death is the primary source of mourning and Oskar is extremely aware of and able to identify this loss of his physical being. When his psychologist, Dr. Fein, suggests that there may be other factors, such as puberty, contributing to his depression, Oskar replies, "It's because my dad died the most horrible death that anyone ever could invent" (201). Oskar acknowledges and accepts that his father's death is the source of his mourning. But at other times in the novel, Oskar reveals a more subtle awareness that his depression extends beyond this loss. During the following conversation with his mother, Oskar suggests that the source of his sadness is more complex than simply missing his father: "'I'm sad.' 'About Dad?' 'About

Everything” (42). During this conversation Oskar reveals that his feelings are more complicated than mourning. Oskar knows that he is sad about more than just the death, but is unable to identify what specifically is making him sad. Consistent with the traumas of Huck and Pecola, Oskar is unable to verbalize his trauma. Instead he creates a list of the many things that he perceives are wrong with the world, including domesticated animals, nightmares, car accidents, and bad handwriting. Freud explains, “In mourning it is the world that has become poor and empty” (246). It is obvious that these things are not primary sources of his sadness but rather that an unidentified sadness has created an awareness of all that is wrong around him. Oskar’s mourning over the loss of his father is compounded by far more complicated and less definable losses and contradicting emotions.

Freud claims that, compared to mourning, with melancholia “there is a loss of a more ideal kind...the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either” (245). Melancholia stems from a loss that is less concrete and difficult to define. Throughout much of the work discussed, the most difficult aspects of loss are the elements that cannot be identified. Joe is unaware of what has been lost in his initial episode with the dietitian, and this confusion has the greatest traumatic impact. Holden is aware of the loss of his brother, but plagued by a loss of innocence, which he cannot identify. Oskar focuses on the many things he finds wrong with the world, because he cannot identify the more obtuse effects of losing his father.

Another conflict of emotions exists in Oskar’s obsession with death. This obsession is a common traumatic reaction depicted throughout the tradition. Huck, Joe, and Pecola are all depicted in narrative instances considering their own deaths.

Oskar is simultaneously intrigued by and afraid of death. At one point in the novel he muses, “What’s so horrible about being dead forever, and not feeling anything, and not even dreaming?” (145) Death offers Oskar an escape from pain just as it offers Huck an escape from feelings of isolation. But Oskar is also terrified of death: “There was a lot of stuff that made me panicky, like suspension bridges, germs, airplanes, fireworks, Arab people on the subway...” (36). Some of Oskar’s phobias, such as his fears of planes and Arab people, can be directly related back to the September 11 attacks. But these more justified fears have been extended to anything he views as a life risk, like germs and airplanes and taking showers. Oskar drinks coffee because, “It stunts my growth, and I’m afraid of death” (154). Just as Holden romanticizes youth, Oskar fears growing up because of its association with death.

Post-Freudian trauma narratives portray a more aggressive shift towards the symptom of self-loathing. Joe, Pecola, and Oskar are more explicit about blaming themselves for their trauma than Huck, in accordance with the work of Freud.

According to Freud’s essay,

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings (sic), and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment...The disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning. (Freud 244)

Freud argues that mourning and melancholia both present symptoms of depression and disinterest in activity, love, and the outside world. However, melancholia is unique in the individual’s tendency towards self-abuse. As Freud determines



melancholia to be the more severe reaction to mourning, it is most relevant to utilize the determining characteristics of melancholia for initial access into child's psyche. Pecola frequently blames herself for the trauma she has undergone. Faulkner describes Joe's response to abuse as "the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and selfcrucifixion" (160). This self-abuse is the greatest source of trauma evidence in Foer's work. The most obtuse instances revealing Oskar's 'self-reproach' are found in his compulsion to bruise himself. Oskar frequently bruises himself throughout the novel. Following the trail of bruises throughout the novel will hopefully lead to greater insight into the sources of Oskar's melancholia.

James Strackley, an editor of "Mourning and Melancholia," notes that according to Freud, "it is a manifestation of mourning to reproach oneself for [a loved one's] death (what is known as melancholia) or to punish oneself in a hysterical fashion with the same states that they have had" (Strackly 240). Oskar bruises himself throughout the novel as punishment for the death of his father. On occasion, he punishes himself for specific mistakes he has made. After returning to the shattered vase and finding the envelope and key he had missed, Oskar explains, "I was so mad at myself for not noticing it before that I gave myself a little bruise" (41). Oskar is experiencing guilt as a result of his father's death and physically punishes himself for it. Failing to notice a possible clue his father has left behind becomes an extension of the guilt he has projected upon himself.

The most relevant bruise Oskar administers comes in the wake of replaying his father's phone message. Obviously unsettled from reliving the trauma, Oskar responds with a variety of his coping reactions,

I stared at the fake stars forever.  
I invented.  
I gave myself a bruise.  
I invented. (69)

During this sequence, Oskar directly associates his bruising with his father's death and the conflicting emotions that resulted from the tragedy. Freud explains that self-reproaches reveal the belief that "the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved objects" (251). Oskar eventually vocalizes his own guilt regarding the phone messages, "He needed me, and I couldn't pick up ... Do you forgive me? ... For not being able to tell anyone" (301-2). Oskar is guilty for not answering the phone and for abandoning his father in a time of need. His guilt is compounded for not sharing these final messages with anyone. Oskar feels his cowardice in not answering the phone has hurt his father, and by not sharing the message he has kept his villainy hidden from anyone else.

The messages are also a source of the love and hate conflict that Freud recognizes in melancholia. It is obvious that Oskar loved and cherished his father and is mourning his loss. But Oskar is also angry with his father, because of the messages. These conflicting emotions toward the source of the trauma are common throughout the literary tradition. Huck wishes for Pap's death, but refers back to Pap's advice for guidance; Joe rebels against McEachern, but embraces his rigidity. However, while with Huck and Pap feelings of admiration conflict with abusive

relationships, with Oskar feelings of anger and hate conflict with a loving relationship. After replaying another of Thomas's messages Oskar accuses his father,

Why didn't he say goodbye?  
I gave myself a bruise.  
Why didn't he say 'I love you'? (207)

Oskar is feeling anger towards his father for not saying goodbye and even goes as far as to question the love they shared. "Mourning and Melancholia" states, "we perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego" (Freud 248). This suggests that the bruises Oskar gives himself after listening to the messages are actually directed at his father. As Oskar has set himself in place of his lost love-object, Oskar attempts to wound his father by wounding himself.

Oskar's guilt regarding the phone messages also reveals Foer's examination of the traumatized child's isolation. Oskar is driven further into a liminal state by the trauma he experienced. This conflict is verbalized at the end of the subsequent conversation Oskar has with his grandmother: "I couldn't explain to her that I missed him *more*, more than she or anyone else missed him, because I couldn't tell her about what happened with the phone. That secret was a hole in the middle of me that every happy thing fell into" (71). The phone messages from Thomas Schell arise as a likely source of Oskar's melancholia. Beyond the mourning that normally accompanies a loss of a loved one, Oskar's experience with the phone messages have propagated some of the ambiguous loss he is experiencing. Oskar now feels alone in this tragedy. The phone messages have cost him companionship in trauma. Oskar

has lost both his mother and his grandmother as confidants and is completely isolated in the pain he is experiencing. Oskar believes that because he alone heard his father's final messages, he is now suffering the greatest pain. Additionally, the description of the secret as a hole is particularly fitting, as it parallels the idea of traumatic disorientation that he is experiencing and that has caused his self-reproach. The isolation that accompanies childhood trauma frequently leaves a 'hole' or vacancy in the victim, who relies on the imagination to fill it. In Freud's terms, this hole parallels an inability to conceive what he has lost.

The trail of Oskar's bruises also leads back to isolation from his mother. While in *Light in August*, Joe projects his trauma on his surrogate mother Mrs. McEachern by isolating himself from her, in *Extremely Loud* Oskar projects the trauma of his father's death upon his mother. The most glaring conflict between Oskar and his mother is in regard to her boyfriend Ron. During one episode, Oskar bruises himself after breaking the vase, because his mother and Ron are in the other room, laughing and not noticing. Oskar resents his mother for dating Ron and for not sharing in his sorrow: "I wanted to tell her she shouldn't be playing Scrabble yet. Or looking in the mirror. Or turning the stereo any louder than what you needed to hear it. It wasn't fair to Dad, and it wasn't fair to me. But I buried it all inside me... She wasn't missing Dad" (35-36). This quotation echoes earlier suggestions of Oskar's solitude in mourning. Also, as Oskar associates himself with his dead father, the slight he feels his mother is committing against his father has an even greater impact. Oskar is outspoken about his disapproval of her relationship with Ron, but his conflict with his mother extends further.

In response to hearing his mother and Ron have fun, Oskar reveals, “I zipped myself all the way into the sleeping bag of myself, not because I was hurt, and not because I had broken something, but because they were cracking up. Even though I knew I shouldn’t, I gave myself a bruise” (37). Oskar repeatedly references zipping himself into the sleeping bag of himself as a metaphor for his relationship with his mother. This metaphor reveals their deficiency in communication. Oskar zips himself into his sleeping bag when Ron is around, because he feels she is showing she no longer loves his father. He also zips himself up when discussing how his mother no longer loves him and feels “if she could have chosen it would have been my funeral we were driving to” (6). This shows that part of Oskar’s guilt over his father’s death stems from his mother. The sleeping bag also serves as an additional death fantasy, as sleep is frequently a metaphor for death. Oskar is feeling guilty that he is alive and his father is dead. By zipping himself into his sleeping bag, Oskar is putting himself in his father’s place. Oskar’s sleeping bag metaphor shows that he is isolated from his mother. He is no longer comfortable sharing his thoughts and feelings with his mother and an integral part of their relationship has been lost. Oskar’s mother is the second love object he has lost due to the tragedy.

The main deviation of *Extremely Loud* from the constructs of the previous works in the tradition is in its relatively contemporary setting. While Twain sets his novel forty to fifty years prior to publication, allowing for distance from the national trauma it depicts, Foer publishes his work only four years after the trauma he is examining. Interestingly, it is this violation that instigates the most disapproval from his critics. Philippe Codde summarizes the negative response from critics: “Many

consider its form completely inappropriate for representing 9/11. Yet many of these responses seem prompted, understandably, by emotions about the recentness (say, the incredible closeness) of the historical crisis of 9/11” (241). Codde astutely suggests that critic’s personal connections and emotions to the national trauma impact the reception of the novel, but disapproval of the text also comes from its violation of an established tradition that relies on chronological distance from its subject matter. It would seem that critics are aware of and uncomfortable with the construct violation that Foer commits.

The literary tradition of childhood trauma evolves as psychology evolves, combining and commenting on previous conclusions through a contemporary lens. Foer combines his traditional Freudian approach to experiencing trauma with advances in contemporary research on coping with and recovering from trauma. While previous contributions to the tradition focused on coping with persistent trauma, *Extremely Loud* considers the idea of moving on. Additionally, comparing earlier texts with Foer’s most recent text further indicates the tradition’s potential for foreshadowing psychology. Earlier applications of the imaginations potential coping presage the cotemporary research, which Foer applies.

Foer frequently applies contemporary research on the imagination’s potential for coping with trauma in his text. Oskar instinctively attempts to utilize his imagination to cope throughout the work. Oskar’s most accessible adaptation of his imagination to the trauma he has undergone is found in his ‘inventing.’ Oskar often attempts to distract himself from his trauma by inventing objects such as a perpetual

yo-yo or a solar powered limousine. However, more often than not Oskar's inventions are solutions to the conflicts his trauma presents.

In his study of trauma in children and teenagers, Atle Dyregrov argues that this direct link between the imagination and the trauma is useful in identifying trauma:

Play can provide signals indicating whether or not the trauma has become stuck, as is the case with compulsive, repetitive play. This means that the child is constantly re-enacting what happened through play, without this providing any reduction in tension, or the reduction is short term. (112)

Dyregrov argues that repetitive play is evidence of 'stuck trauma' equitable to the disorders considered by Freud. This repetitive imagination was depicted earlier in Morrison's work, as Pecola repeatedly considered her fantasy of blue eyes. This 'repetitive play' is also evident in Oskar's inventing as a compulsive behavior:

"I started inventing things, and then I couldn't stop, like beavers which I know about. People think they cut down trees so they can build dams, but in reality it's because their teeth never stop growing, and if they didn't constantly file them down by cutting through all of those trees, their teeth would start to grow into their faces, which would kill them" (36)

Oskar realizes that his imagination is his main defense in coping with his trauma. In this passage he argues that without this creative outlet his melancholia would overwhelm him. Although through much of the novel Oskar's imagination is not able to help him in overcoming his traumatic experience, it is allowing him to survive the event.

Children who undergo trauma often use “imagination as a partner to help cope with the situation” (Dyregrov 112). All of the works previously discussed narrate direct applications of the imagination for specific instances of trauma. Oskar uses his imagination to address specific symptoms associated with his melancholia. Oskar imagines, “I could invent a teakettle that reads in Dad’s voice, so that I could fall asleep” (1). This concern reestablishes Oskar’s sleep problems as part of his trauma. In this invention Oskar is attempting to simultaneously remedy his sleep deprivation and his mourning for his father. The invention also serves to strengthen the connection between the two. In response to the communication deficiency that exists between Oskar and his mother, Oskar invents Morse code jewelry. As already established, Oskar is unable to share his experience concerning his father’s messages with his mother, so instead, he “convert[s] Dad’s last voice message in Morse-code” (35) and gives it to his mother. The childhood trauma tradition frequently presents the imagination as a manner of coping with trauma rather than an option for recovering from trauma. Although this imagination is unproductive in providing a remedy for the lack of communication, it at least offers Oskar an outlet for his anxiety. Oskar is able to share the message with his mother without her knowing it. Oscar’s imagination also helps him control his rage and cope with issues that do not directly concern the trauma. Oskar overcomes his anger with Dr. Fein by imagining that he is ransacking his office and calling him an ‘asshole’ and is able to shrug his shoulders and walk away from the conflict. Similarly, Oskar copes with being bullied by Jimmy Snyder by imagining that he humiliates and assaults Snyder during the *Hamlet* school play. Oskar’s imagination allows him to control the post-traumatic



rage he experiences in a manner reminiscent of Claudia. However, some of Oskar's attempts to distract himself from his trauma are less effective than others. When he is afraid something terrible has happened to his grandmother his attempts to distract himself are unsuccessful: "I tried to invent optimistic inventions. But the pessimistic ones were extremely loud" (235). This passage, echoed in the title of the text, accentuates Oskar's encompassing struggle with "extremely loud" traumatic residue and the importance of his imagination during this experience.

In light of recent research that has revealed greater success in recovering from trauma, *Extremely Loud* offers a more optimistic approach than previous works. Recent research has discovered, "In their imagination children can change the triggering event, stop the traumatic episode or reverse fatal consequences. They can also take revenge, acquire a safe distance, or prevent future traumas or loss" (Dyregrov 114). Oskar often tries to alter the 9/11 attacks with his inventions. He attempts to reverse the fatal consequences of the attack by inventing a bird-seed shirt that would have allowed the victims to fly from the building (2). In his imagination, Oskar attempts to change the triggering event by redesigning the skyscraper:

Sometimes I think it would be weird if there were a skyscraper that moved up and down while its elevator stayed in place...Also, that could be useful, because if you're on the ninety-fifth floor, and a plane hits below you, the building could take you to the ground, and everyone could be safe, even if you left your birdseed shirt home that day. (3)

He imagines this invention as a preventive measure that might have saved his father's life. Oskar also attempts to prevent future traumas by inventing "pockets big enough for our families" (74). With this enormous pocket Oskar will always have his family

with him and will be sure to keep them safe. Oskar begins to find reconciliation at the end of the novel when he is able to reverse the damages caused by the trauma. After Oskar reconciles his relationship with his mother, he is able to construct the flipbook of the falling man, “When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky” (325).

The imagination is most productive when its products “can repair damages...” (Dyregrov 114). It is not enough to imagine changing past events or preventing future tragedies; the child must be able to repair the trauma he/she has experienced. He/she must acknowledge it has occurred and then imagine a way to repair it. Dyregrov argues, “In such cases, adults must help the child to find a better ‘solution’ for their play, by carefully introducing ideas for another ending” (112). Although the adults in *Extremely Loud* do not directly suggest the solution, at the end of the novel Oskar has reestablished his relationship with his mother, promising hope for his future. This is a development from previous texts, which portrayed severe trauma as a more permanent impact, according to the trends in trauma in their respective time periods. Oskar’s final hope conflicts with Huck’s suggested future isolation, Pecola’s and Holden’s falls into madness, and Joe’s permanent isolation and subsequent death.

Freud recognizes that with recovery from a loss of love, “the progress is long-drawn-out and gradual” (Freud 256). Oskar acknowledges at the end of the text that his recovery is not complete. Oskar finishes his picture book and reveals, “And if I’d had more pictures, he would’ve flown through a window, back into the building, and the smoke would’ve poured into the hole that the plane was about to come out of” (325). Just as the picture book is only a start to reversing the tragedy, Oskar has only

begun to recover from the extreme effects. But as Freud concludes in “The Ego and the Id,” one must begin by “welcoming a process of mourning that can never be complete” (Clewell 56). In this respect, *Extremely Loud* likely explores the next major development in this ongoing tradition, considering not just the imagination’s potential for coping, but as a progressive move towards recovery. Both protective and adaptive, *Extremely Loud* suggests that we have yet to realize the full capacity of the creative imagination.

## Conclusion

As *Extremely Loud* looks forward to the imagination's potential for healing trauma, the function of trauma literature appears to intersect the content of trauma literature. In addition to offering academic commentary on the field of child psychology and enlightening the public to social injustices, the literature itself holds the potential for healing trauma. As the works of the American tradition parallel personal and cultural traumas, the enterprise of fiction offers healing potential for both traumas.

Vickroy notes that authors are compelled to consider past traumas because “[t]hese issues remain personally and culturally alive years, even decades later” (X). It is clear that the Twain and his audience still struggle with the trauma of slavery that *Huck Finn* investigates. Authors are compelled to depict past trauma because the affects are persistent. According to Vickroy, the goal of trauma fiction is to “heal or inform” (20). However, it is only through informing or reminding the nation of past trauma that the nation can begin to heal. Literature shines light on the past traumas our nation has repressed with the hope of stimulating recovery.

The relationship between personal and cultural traumas found in American literatures is particularly effective, because cultural tragedies can lead to personal trauma, as well as national trauma. In trauma literature, the characters close themselves off from the personal trauma they experience. The male protagonists run from it, while the girls are forced to hide within their own minds. Accordingly, self-knowledge and identity are simultaneously lost as the characters insulate themselves. However, literature offers readers the potential for working through trauma that the

characters do not possess. Literature reconciles readers with experiences of trauma and allows them access to self-knowledge in the context of trauma. It is through this awareness of trauma and of the self that healing can begin.

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