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Hiding in Stories: The Use of Speculative Fiction in
Autobiographical Writing as a Representation of Trauma

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1 Introduction

Due to the ever rising interest in trauma, authors have found a considerable number of approaches to write about something that resists description at every turn, and scholarly engagement in the resulting narrative structures has grown significantly in the last thirty years. While the depiction of trauma in speculative genres has been investigated in different areas of cultural and literary studies, surprisingly little work has been done on how those elements are employed in the genre of autobiographical writing. However, especially because autobiographical writing only rarely includes elements of speculative fiction in an attempt to create a truthful and authentic telling, I find this a particularly interesting topic, and the three autobiographical works I analyse provide a first glimpse into how this can be done.

In *Reading My Mother Back*, Timothy Baker uses animal stories from his childhood to make sense of his mother's life and the traumatic experience of losing her. The stories become both a form of escape, in which he can hide from the trauma he experiences, and a way for him to visualise something that is difficult to grasp and describe. Richard Scott Larson uses the 1978 horror movie *Halloween* to explain and narrate the traumatic experiences of his childhood in *The Long Hallway*. The influences from horror narratives are noticeable in direct intertextual references and also in Larson's narrative style. Using this approach gives him a structure through which his experiences become narratable. Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* employs elements from several genres in order to relate the story of an abusive queer relationship, most notably speculative fiction. Almost every chapter uses either intertextual references to such narratives or completely adapts to their style of writing. By doing this Machado invites the reader to use their imagination and make connections between the many interweaving stories, instead of telling her story in a chronological and traditional manner. All three works are autobiographical, apply speculative elements to depict trauma and were written recently by queer authors, which exactly matches the focus of my thesis. The speculative genres included in the analysed books are horror, animal stories, fairy tales, science fiction and fantasy.

By looking at all three works, I am able to make broader assessments about the use of speculative fiction elements in autobiographical writing to represent trauma than I could with just one of them, without making generalised claims about all books that employ similar approaches.

The main research question posed in the thesis is thus how elements from speculative fiction are used in the three chosen autobiographical works to portray trauma. To answer this question there are sub-questions that need to be addressed. These inquire into the purpose speculative fiction elements serve when portraying real lived trauma and whether the use of fictional elements diminishes the authenticity of the autobiographical work. The thesis also investigates how the depiction of trauma overlaps with the depiction of queer experience in all three works, as they share similar narrative strategies.

In order to answer these questions, a dense theoretical framework is necessary. In my case, this is comprised of influences from trauma theory and queer theory, as well as research on autobiographical writing. In literary theory, scholars of trauma studies have largely focused on the inexpressibility of trauma and the narrative structures and methods that result from this obstacle. The first wave of trauma theory looked at key structures in writing that were used to depict trauma, like intertextuality, repetition, absence and indirection. Newer developments pay closer attention to the transgenerational transmission of trauma and its manifestation as a form of haunting. These structures are often observed in speculative fiction, which is why these genres lend themselves particularly well to trauma writing.

Within the context of autobiographical writing, the thesis focuses on the relationship between fact and fiction. Following the autobiographical pact coined by Phillipe Lejeune, the author of an autobiographical work promises the reader to tell a true story about themselves. However, many scholars in the field of life writing have found that the relationship between autobiographical writing and fiction is more complicated than this pact suggests. The use of

speculative fiction elements can for example be viewed as breaking with narrative conventions and signify the rupture of narration caused by traumatic memories.

A similar breach of conventions can be found in the depiction of queer experience. As queer experience has historically often been categorised as something beyond the ordinary and breaking with societal norms, its depiction warrants new and experimental forms of expression. The literary strategies employed to depict these experiences are therefore similar to the way traumatic experiences are expressed. Both might employ speculative fiction elements or break with standardised styles. As the analysed works are concerned with both queer and traumatic experiences, their uses of speculative fiction are used to depict both kinds of experiences.

The first three chapters of this thesis will look at the theoretical framework used for my argumentation already sketched out above, starting with trauma theory, continuing with autobiographical writing and concluding with queer theory. Trauma theory is the greatest influence on my argumentation, which is why I explore it in the most detail. I look at definitions of trauma over time and the way trauma theory has developed in the context of literary theory. Especial focus is paid to depictions of transgenerational trauma and the use of intertextuality. In the course of this, I also examine the three most frequently used speculative genres in my corpus – fairy tales, children’s animal stories and horror – and their connection to depictions of trauma. Definitions of autobiographical genres can differ greatly and depend heavily on the differentiation between fiction and truth in the work, which is why a dive into different approaches and a specification on which is used in the thesis is necessary. I also investigate ideas of place in autobiographical writing, and representations of trauma. Finally, in my engagement with queer theory, I explore its connections to autobiographical writing, trauma writing and speculative fiction.

The theoretical framework is followed by a close reading and analysis of the three chosen works. All three chapters of analysis examine the way intertextuality and place are employed in the books to represent trauma. The first chapter – focusing on Baker’s *Reading*

My Mother Back – also explores the depiction of transgenerational trauma especially. The second chapter is dedicated to Larson’s book *The Long Hallway*, which mostly uses horror narratives for its depiction of traumatic experience. In the third chapter, I additionally investigate how Machado uses broken forms and how she deviates fully into speculative writing to make her trauma narratable.

From the results found in the outlined chapters, I draw the conclusion that the authors of the three chosen works deviate from the norms of autobiographical writing by employing elements from speculative fiction in their writing as an effective way of making their trauma narratable. By employing these elements they mark the rupture of narrative possibility created by trauma, allowing them to circumvent its unspeakable nature and to convey their experiences.

2 Trauma

The discussion of trauma and especially representations of trauma in literature is one of the key topics of this thesis. The following chapter gives an insight into the most important developments and theories of trauma, focusing on those which will primarily be used in the analysis of the three primary works. To introduce the term trauma properly, I dive into the changing definitions and distinctions of trauma over time. This will be followed by an in depth discussion of trauma theory in literary studies, looking at the different ways trauma can be incorporated into writing. Besides the general observations made by scholars in this field, I will look at three expressions of trauma in more detail: transgenerational trauma and its manifestation as a form of haunting in writing, intertextuality as an expression of trauma and speculative fiction as a way to represent trauma. The theories and arguments investigated in this chapter build the basis for my own argumentation in the analysis.

2.1 *Definitions of Trauma over Time*

Before talking about trauma and its symptoms in literature, it is necessary to define what the term refers to. This is because since its inception, the word has gone through several iterations. The original meaning of the word – stemming from the Greek – can literally be translated as ‘wound’ (Caruth 3). While it was originally used in a medical context to refer to a physical wound, over time the meaning changed to refer to the psychological reaction a person has when faced with traumatic events and their mental repercussions (Luckhurst 2f). The term found its way into widespread discussion especially during and after the First World War, which marked a great influx of traumatic reactions to the war. Interest further increased over the events of the following years, which culminated in and were consolidated by the inclusion of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* in 1980 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (Kurtz 6). While the definitions and terms that were set in this inclusion were still quite loose, the cultural impact it had is considered tremendous by many scholars (Kurtz 7; Caruth 3; Luckhurst

1). It not only aided the cultural understanding and acceptance of trauma, but also paved the way for the conception of trauma studies in several cultural disciplines – including literary studies.

Of what scope an event has to be in order to be considered as traumatic has changed tremendously over time and is still to this day open to interpretation and different depending on the definition that is used. For example, J. Roger Kurtz defines it in the introduction of his discussion of trauma in literature as “an injury to the psyche caused by catastrophic events, or by the threat of such events, which overwhelm an individual’s normal response mechanisms” (2). However, the American Psychological Association also includes a much larger collection of instances such as “crime, natural disaster, physical and emotional abuse, neglect, experiencing and witnessing violence, death of a loved one” and more (“Trauma”). These varying definitions show that it is difficult to narrow down the experience of trauma to one simple explanation. In the context of this thesis, I will therefore not attempt to find one particular definition of the word trauma and rather stick to certain characteristics which are attributed to survivors of traumatic experiences.

In this thesis the main concern thus will not lie with the traumatic event itself, but with how it imprints itself on the mind of the person living through it and how its psychological ramifications can then be represented in writing. Roger Luckhurst collects three sets of symptoms in his book that he adapts from the APA’s definition of PTSD. The first is the way that the events are “persistently re-experienced” through “flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original” (Luckhurst 1). The second set that he defines entails the affected person trying to avoid anything that reminds them of the experience to the point that they might forget it completely. The third is a heightened sense of stress, which seems to point back to an observation that was already made by Sigmund Freud, who sees trauma as an “accretion of excitation in the nervous system” that cannot be disposed of properly (qtd. in Kurtz 3). What is especially interesting about these sets of symptoms is their temporality. They

do not necessarily appear right after the event has occurred, but can – and in most cases do – only manifest themselves belatedly (Luckhurst 1). The field of trauma theory in literary studies concerns itself with exactly these symptoms and how they are translated into writing, which the following chapter will expand upon.

2.2 Trauma Theory in Literary Studies

While literary studies have been concerned with trauma for a long time, the inception of trauma theory was brought about only in the second half of the 20th century. The Second World War led to a change in those writings which had traumatic experiences as their topic. The Holocaust posed a completely new challenge to writers, as there was a general consensus that the horrors of this time were so great, it was almost impossible to find words that would be able to represent it. The writing that was produced in the following years led to a great influx of engagement with trauma in literary theory, which ultimately led to the establishment of trauma theory in the mid-1990s. One of the key figures of this development is Cathy Caruth, who shaped a lot of the ideas and notions that are central to trauma theory. She especially notes the paradoxical nature of trauma as an experience that can only really be understood in hindsight and which unwillingly repeats itself in the actions of the survivor (Caruth 2). However, trauma theory has developed since then and while Caruth's definitions are still used often, there have been many writers that have expanded upon and improved them. Overall, trauma theory in literary studies investigates how the disruptive effects of trauma on the mind can manifest themselves in literature. In the following, I will outline the influences on trauma theory from other theoretical frameworks, some of the main scholars of the field and their findings, and a number of developments the critical theories have gone through.

There are several influences from different fields that can be seen as direct contributors to the original engagements with trauma in literature, which are summed up in the writing of Cathy Caruth in the 1990s and Roger Luckhurst, who discusses these influences in hindsight in the 2000s. Famously, Theodor Adorno claimed that after the horrors of Auschwitz there was

no way for poets to continue their work and yet – in a paradox that already mirrors that of traumatic characteristics – being silent was not an option either (Luckhurst 5). Trauma theory concerns itself with this unique and unprecedented challenge and how it is incorporated in writing. A similarly contradictory stance was investigated by Jacques Derrida with the concept of aporia, which Caruth directly incorporated into her own theories on trauma (Luckhurst 4). He seeks out moments of “apparent contradiction and irresolution,” which are abundant in trauma literature (Luckhurst 6). Derrida’s influences can also be found in the writing of Dominick LaCapra, whose book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* has become a central text in trauma theory. LaCapra argues that “trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence,” which leads to “problems in representation and writing” (41). The result are disarticulations and gaps in the narrative. The most notable influence, however, as most scholars use it as a source for their theories, is Freud’s writing on trauma. The concepts and observations that he collects in his work are picked up by several scholars when they address trauma in writing and provide the basis for a lot of the characteristics that make up trauma writing.

In the earlier stages of trauma theory, these characteristics were developed into three concepts, which were used to investigate the relationship of trauma and narrative. The concepts can be summed up as “absence, indirection, and repetition” (Kurtz 101). As mentioned previously, traumatic events cannot be properly processed by the brain and assimilated into memory. Therefore, traumatic memories are characterised by gaps and absences. These absences can often be found in trauma narratives, as those narratives do not only represent trauma, but as Laurie Vickroy argues they “internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures” (3). The gaps in memory that are incorporated into trauma writing are one of the main concerns for Gabriele Schwab, who sees them as narrative visualisations of the crypt, which “contain the secrets” of trauma and therefore simultaneously hide and reveal it (4). This simultaneous hiding and

revealing can also be found in the concept of indirection. Here, the trauma narrative avoids addressing the trauma directly and instead tells a story that is related to the event, but does not directly mention it (Kurtz 102). Dominick LaCapra sees narratives that use this type of obfuscation as their own genre, that of “traumatic realism” (14). They use metaphor to tell stories of trauma without having to directly address it. The third concept is repetition. Early observations of this concept can already be found in the writing of Freud, who notes that the traumatised individuals he worked with seemed to be forced to relive their traumatic experiences in the form of flashbacks, dreams and what he calls the repetition compulsion (Kurtz 104). There appears to be an underlying hope that, by reliving the experience again and again, it might finally be fully processed (Luckhurst 9). In narratives, the subjects of trauma see themselves forced to retell the story of their suffering over and over again or they use repetition as one of their narrative strategies (Vickroy 29). Repetition is also one of the main components Caruth uses in her readings of trauma narratives in her book *Unclaimed Experience*. She sees this repetition as the voice of the wound – playing here with the original Greek meaning of the word trauma – that “cries out” (2). Luckhurst sees repetition compulsion not only as a symptom of trauma in writing, he argues that it has become “a cultural shorthand for the consequences of traumatic events,” which are that the subjects become trapped in “cycles of uncomprehending repetition” (9). While the three concepts outlined here pose some of the more central concepts of the early writings in trauma theory, there are other characteristics that are agreed upon by most critics in the field.

One of the main characteristics of traumatic memory and in turn traumatic writing that has been subject of engagement from many critics in the field is that of temporality. As trauma cannot be fully acknowledged in the moment it is happening, it can only be understood at a later point in time. Furthermore, the repetition-compulsion does not allow the traumatised mind to distinguish the past from the present. This creates a chronology that resists the linear. Laurie Vickroy suggests that survivors of trauma live in a kind of durational time, as for them the past

constantly blends into the present. Therefore writing about their experience “resists chronological narration or normal modes of artistic expression” (5). Luckhurst agrees that “no narrative of trauma can be told in a linear way: it has a time signature that must fracture conventional causality” (9). Trauma narratives can therefore break open the rules of chronology in order to mirror the workings of trauma on the mind of the subject. Cathy Caruth is additionally interested in the timeframe from the traumatic event until its first return in the person’s mind. This is the time in which the trauma is forgotten – or not known – and yet the experience is preserved within the mind, which she terms latency. Caruth argues that it is this initial forgetting and this latency, that allows the trauma to be experienced at all (17). Returning again to Freud, many scholars are particularly interested in his concept of ‘*Nachträglichkeit*’, which proposes that the effects of trauma only come into play belatedly and that if it can ever be understood, it can only happen in hindsight (Atkinson *Poetics* 5; Caruth 17; Luckhurst 81; Schwab 64; Whitehead 6). Luckhurst finds here a unique ability of literature: “discourses requiring logical causation” are unable to accept or work with this unusual temporality, while literature can incorporate it into itself and create a “disarticulation of linear narrative” (81). Trauma narratives thus are often characterised by gaps in time and breaks in the linear narrative, as they assimilate to the way trauma behaves in the mind or more specifically in memory.

Writers of trauma narratives have found ways to represent the effects of trauma on the mind by fragmenting the narrative not only in its chronology, but also in the layout or structure. This can be done for example with gaps “in the page layout and content” or “shifting viewpoints” (Vickroy 29). Roger Luckhurst argues that these fragments appear due to the “tension between interruption and flow” that is created by the disruptive quality of the traumatic event (79). The narrative is moulded into a new and unusual shape, which highlights the alternation of “discordance and concordance” (85). The traumatic content of the narrative therefore once again breaks apart the customary frameworks of literature in order to display how the mind of a traumatised individual is affected and changed.

While the concepts outlined above are still relevant in trauma theory today, there have been developments beyond them in more recent works of trauma studies. One of the directions trauma scholars have explored is to take the transgenerational transmission of trauma into account (Kurtz 8). An important critic in this development is Gabriele Schwab with her text *Haunting Legacies*. She investigates how subjects are haunted by the presence of a violent history that they themselves might not have experienced, but rather the generations before them. As already mentioned above, she is interested in “cryptic enclaves in language” and other ways that the hidden trauma manifests itself in writing (4). Similarly, Meera Atkinson illuminates the consequences the cyclical transmission of trauma can have not only across generations, but also cultures, in her book *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma* by analysing literary accounts of familial trauma. As transgenerational trauma is featured heavily in *Reading My Mother Back*, I go into more detail on this topic in chapter 2.2.1.

The difficulty of relating or testifying trauma and becoming witness to the traumatising event is further complicated by the fact that it is exactly this testimony which might release the victims from their torments. Experts like Dori Laub, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray insist that trauma cannot be worked through alone and that it is essential for victims to speak about their trauma in order to be relieved from its weight (Felman and Laub 57f; Alcoff and Gray 262). Luckhurst sees a risk for survivors to get trapped in the previously mentioned repetition compulsion, if they do not manage to translate this repetition into an “analytic process of ‘working through’” (9). For this form of testimony, a second person is needed, which could be a therapist (Felman and Laub 57f). However, Laurie Vickroy argues that this could also extend to the reader of trauma literature, as they can take part in “the process of translating traumatic experience.” She sees a potential in trauma literature to shift the perception of and cultural attitudes towards trauma (22). Especially autobiographical accounts of trauma, which will be the main concern of my analysis, offer readers a unique insight and allow the authors of the narratives to – at least in part – work through their own trauma.

In conclusion, it can be said that the characteristics of trauma narratives emerge as reflections of the effects trauma has on the mind. The destabilising effects of trauma and its unspeakable nature pose a challenge to writers that can be overcome in part by adapting to the characteristics of trauma on the mind. However, as some parts of trauma will always remain unspeakable, authors can mark this rupture by breaking with narrative or genre conventions. In the following chapters, I want to expand on three topics within trauma theory that are important to my argumentation, as they are main features of the analysed books. These will be the concept of transgenerational trauma and the idea of trauma as a form of haunting, intertextuality as an expression of trauma and the depiction of trauma in speculative fiction. All three pose productive avenues to eventually explore their applications in the works analysed in the thesis.

2.2.1 Transgenerational Trauma as a Form of Haunting

Newer developments not only in trauma studies but also psychology have focused on the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Scholars in this field are interested in how the trauma that was experienced by one generation can be passed down to the subsequent generations, even if the traumatic events are never directly addressed or even kept hidden. In fact, it is often of particular interest how the secret made of trauma manifests itself in multiple generations. This transmission of trauma is frequently described as a form of haunting. The following will present some of the key findings of this approach.

One of the key figures in the discourse surrounding transgenerational trauma is Gabriele Schwab, who has been mentioned previously. The title of her book *Haunting Legacies* already points to the haunting quality trauma has for a person who is affected by a transgenerational form. Schwab argues that the trauma is silenced by the generation living through it and that they create “tombs,” as they refuse to address and acknowledge the hurt. The mourning necessary to properly process trauma cannot take place, as the traumatic event is not fully registered in the first place, turning it instead into a haunting presence that hovers over the following generations (Atkinson and Richardson *Traumatic Affect* 254). Consequently, the

silences are passed down to the children and grandchildren of the affected, who carry it with them without knowing what it is. In writing, Schwab calls the narrative expressions of these silences crypts, which are the “linguistic scars of trauma” (Schwab 4). These often come in the form of “fragmentations, gaps, or ellipses” (45). The unintegrated memories seem to almost turn into the “ghost, that is, the unfinished business [...] of the past,” which then “come[s] to haunt language from within, always threatening to destroy its communicative and expressive function” (49). Not only the person then, but also the language itself seems to become haunted, pointing to the unspoken secrets that hide beneath. There are several rhetorical figures Schwab highlights as ways to express haunted language, like metaphor and semantic ambiguities, who are particularly appropriate because they manage to both hide the trauma and still reveal it to a certain extent (54). Schwab is therefore interested in how the transgenerational trauma not only comes to haunt the persons affected by it, but also how it affects language and their consequent ability to relay the secret of the wound.

Another important scholar in this context is Anne Whitehead, who concerns herself with fictional trauma narratives and has found that there is an abundance of novels in contemporary fiction which concern themselves with “haunted histories.” Going one step further than Schwab, she not only calls on the concept of haunting, but rather directly addresses these histories as ghosts specifically. She sees ghosts as “an appropriate embodiment of the disjunction of temporality” and that the subjects are possessed by their “insistent repetitions and returns” (6, 12). Meera Atkinson is especially interested in this idea in her book *Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma*, where she creates her own theory of haunted textuality. For her, the writings of transgenerational trauma seem to be a “super-spooked practice of writing,” whose power lies in the fact that they are able to speak of something without being able to fully articulate it, always hovering “between presence and absence, unnameable, and unknowable in the usual sense” (*Poetics* 86).

It seems then, that most scholars concerned with transgenerational trauma agree on the fact that the secrets and silences that are kept around trauma lead to the creation of tombs and crypts, both in the minds of the traumatised individuals and in their narrative formulations of their experiences. They become visible in language through “incoherencies, discontinuities” and “disruptions” (Schwab 53). However, Anne Whitehead finds another way that the crypt can become visible, especially in literature. She argues that the haunted house is a literary device commonly used in narratives that deal with or directly address transgenerational trauma (28f). Similar to Schwab, she draws on the metaphor of the crypt, suggesting that the haunted houses “both externalise or symbolise psychic processes” and that they “suggest a connection between trauma and place” (28f). As will become clear in my discussion of autobiographical writing, place plays a central role in such narratives. The haunted house, as a formulation of the traumatic crypt, can thus be seen as a point of connection between autobiographical narratives, trauma narratives and speculative narratives. This aspect is something I will explore more in detail in my analysis, as the literary device of the haunted house is employed in the works I am analysing.

The engagement with transgenerational trauma and its expressions in narrative marks an important development in trauma theory. While not all primary texts analysed in this thesis strictly deal with transgenerational trauma, the concepts brought forth by scholars in this field prove to be very useful for my analysis. The haunting presence of trauma and the gaps created by it are visualised in the analysed works with the help of speculative fiction, either through intertextual references or by employing narrative elements such as the haunted house.

2.2.2 Intertextuality as an Expression of Trauma

Authors of trauma narratives can employ a range of different literary devices in order to represent trauma. A few of these devices have already been outlined above, such as repetition, indirection or a fragmented and non-linear chronology. Another way to mark the effects of trauma in narrative is to employ intertextuality.

In her book *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead collects a number of narrative and literary devices, which she contends to be the key stylistic features of trauma narratives: “intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice” (84). She names two main reasons why she views intertextuality as an expression of trauma. The first lies in the fact that intertextuality can be interpreted as a “surfacing to consciousness of forgotten or repressed memories” (85). As most memories of trauma are not properly processed by the brain and therefore repressed until a sudden and uncontrolled return later on, intertextuality can mirror this resurfacing effect of traumatic memory in narrative. Whitehead also argues that by doing this, the intertextual references “evoke the Freudian notion of the repetition-compulsion, for their characters are subject to the ‘plot’ of another(’s) story” (85). She argues that by drawing on stories the reader recognizes from somewhere else and whose outcome they already know, the trajectory of the story seems inevitable and like a predestined outcome the characters cannot escape. This inescapability is what then refers back to how Freud characterises the repetition-compulsion in trauma victims (89f). The second reason lies in the fact that intertextuality disrupts the temporality of a narrative (91). This connects to what has already been said on the symptomatology and non-linear chronology of trauma. Whitehead is not the only scholar that emphasises intertextuality as a feature of trauma narratives. In a much more recent work from 2020, Joachim Schiedermeier notes that intertextuality is often viewed as having a “character of semantic change,” as the “intertextual element changes its meaning according to its new context.” He argues that this can also be said about trauma, where the reoccurring memories remain the same but the context in which they appear changes (64). Consequently, intertextuality can certainly be included among stylistic features of trauma narratives, as it allows for a visualisation of the symptoms of a traumatised mind.

Intertextuality can additionally be employed in an attempt to mark a certain amount of self-consciousness in the narrative. Whitehead argues that in the context of trauma fiction, intertextuality is often used in order to create distance between the author and the experience

they are narrating. This happens especially when the author did not live through the events themselves and therefore uses intertextual references in a self-conscious way to create “reflexive distance” (92). However, I argue that this self-conscious and self-reflexive use of intertextuality can also be productive in autobiographical retellings of trauma. Instead of creating distance in order to mark the fact that they have no first-hand experience, the authors of autobiographical works rather employ intertextuality in trauma narratives in order to aid them in their own understanding of what they have lived through and as a result how to narrate it to their readers. As the traumatic experience breaches normal understanding, the writers can use the distance created by intertextuality to make sense of it and at the same time highlight their lack of understanding. It is then up to the reader to interpret the gap created between the source text and the new text, forcing them to make sense of the narrative by themselves (Whitehead 93).

In conclusion, the use of intertextuality as a literary device bears several applications in the writing of trauma narratives. They can mirror the effects of trauma in the form of fragmented narration and chronology or the repetition-compulsion. Additionally, the self-reflexive use of intertextuality can create the distance necessary to make the experience more accessible. In my analysis, I aim to highlight how the three authors of autobiographical trauma narratives make use of all these applications of intertextuality.

2.2.3 Speculative Fiction as a Portrayal of Trauma

There are several ways trauma writing and speculative fiction can overlap, which will be outlined in this chapter. One point of connection stems from the fact that they both frequently draw inspiration from psychoanalysis and the writings of Freud. Furthermore, writers of trauma often “demand a suspension of disbelief” from their readers and to do this they may “draw on the supernatural” (Whitehead 84). Speculative writing allows authors to put some distance between themselves and the traumatic event, creating an opportunity to describe it despite its disruptive effects on language. The term speculative fiction encompasses quite a wide variety

of genres, which is why I focus on the genres that are referenced and used in the three primary books the most frequently. These are horror, fairy tales and children's animal stories.

The connection between trauma writing and children's animal stories might not be as apparent as it would be with fairy tales and horror, but it warrants discussion nevertheless. In the study of children's literature, animal stories are considered to be a medium in which children can explore aspects of themselves more easily than they could with stories that feature other human children (Melson 18). The anthropomorphised animals make it possible for children to identify with them, while still keeping a certain distance between themselves and the characters, due to their animal nature. The characters have designated roles – such as the “wild beast, cunning fox, the faithful dog” – and associated characteristics, rather than an inner working as complex as that of humans (Melson 18). This ambiguity between distance and yet identification can be useful for the description of traumatic events and the character's reaction to them. In her discussion of children stories about natural disasters, Paula Connolly argues that the animal story allows a “two-pronged effect of providing child readers with a means of sentimental identification while simultaneously removing the focus from human tragedy, and thus emotionally distancing the young reader from descriptions of death” (2). By using animal stories in their discussion of trauma, authors could therefore create the necessary distance between the trauma and its subject to be able to tell the story despite the hindrances of traumatic memory.

Fairy tales offer a very similar set of possibilities for trauma narratives. Anne Whitehead observes that the beginnings of fairy tales signal a departure from the real ordinary world into something new and unknown. She connects this to the unprecedented quality most traumatic events hold and the need for trauma narratives to go beyond the usual measures of storytelling (41). Gabriele Schwab sees in fairy tales a way for herself to deal with the emotions associated with trauma. She suggests that fairy tales allowed her to deal with the “raw emotions, the fears, terrors, and loneliness of a child exposed too early to stories of trauma” (43f). The

psychoanalyst Robin Goldberg agrees that fairy tales offer children a kind of solace in the face of trauma, allowing them to better understand and perhaps even overcome it (302). The fairy tale is an especially useful vehicle for this type of projection, as they may depict “a psychic crisis resulting from trauma, followed by regression into more primitive emotional conflict, and finally a re-emergence at a higher developmental level” all within their storytelling (White 727). They can thus mirror the journey the mind has to go through in the face of trauma and aid it in its overcoming. The form of the fairy tale therefore offers an opportunity to put trauma into a shape that is emotionally manageable and generally understandable, not only for children but also adults.

Horror stories as an expression of traumatic memories have been explored in the most detail of the three mentioned genres. The connection can already be seen in the haunting presence trauma tends to take on especially in a transgenerational context. Horror, as a genre of “ferocious excess,” seems to lend itself for representations of trauma, as it “specializes in hyperbolic scenarios of human subjects in the throes of excruciating physical and psychic pain” (Hurley 2). There is a similarity also between trauma and horror narratives in the fact that they both address a breach of the mind’s capabilities and display its aftereffects, like “psychic entrapment, repetition compulsions, [and] uncanny returns in the shape of literal monsters” (Hurley 2). The concept of the uncanny originates from Sigmund Freud and refers to a type of fear that is elicited in people when they are confronted with something that is both familiar and yet unknown. This can happen for example by being confronted with a memory which was originally repressed and now returns (Whitehead 128). In writing this can be evoked by repetition, another feature that can occur both in trauma and horror narratives. In one instance it becomes a device to depict trauma, in the other it is used in order to elicit fear. Luckhurst even argues that post-traumatic experience on its own is already intrinsically uncanny and can therefore find expressions in stories that might feature “ghostly visitations, prophetic dread, spooky coincidence or telepathic transfer” (98). The similarities and connections between

horror and trauma narratives consequently suggest the utility of horror stories in the context of trauma literature and the representation of trauma.

The features of the three speculative genres outlined above showcase how the genre is a useful tool in the representation of and engagement with trauma in literature. The demands imposed on writing by trauma can be overcome by employing features from or references to the mentioned genres, as they all either mirror the effects of trauma in their own characteristics or can aid the overcoming of these demands by creating distance between the subject and the events.

3 Autobiographical Writing

The books I analyse and the genre of writing I am concerned with in this thesis, all fall under the category of autobiographical writing. I am particularly interested in how the previously discussed narrative techniques to display trauma are used in autobiographical texts. For this purpose, it is first necessary to clarify which genre definitions I am working with and to explain my understanding of the term autobiographical writing. I will then discuss the idea of truth – and its distinction from fiction – in the context of autobiographical writing. This is vital, because the authors of the texts I am analysing all connect their own stories with elements from speculative fiction. This could be seen as a deviation from the autobiographical mode, but as I will argue in this chapter, I view it as an expansion of the genre rather than a departure from it. As all three of my primary texts are concerned with notions of the home as a central place of narration, I will also discuss the role of place in autobiographical writing in this chapter. Finally, I will zoom in on my particular interest in this thesis and discuss the representation of trauma in autobiographical writing, exploring what the difficulties of this are and how writers have managed to deal with them.

3.1 General Definitions and Genre Distinctions

The three works that are analysed in this thesis all fall into the category of autobiographical writing, but might also be categorised as memoirs specifically. Since the books somewhat deviate from the typical structures of both autobiography and memoir – for example, by blending factual and fictional elements or resisting chronological order – for my analysis and argumentation, I will use the term autobiographical writing as a more flexible category. The term life writing, which Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson use to encompass both memoir and autobiography, could also be used, but in some definitions this also includes biography (Leader 1; Smith and Watson 4). My focus lies solely on stories written about the authors' own experiences, therefore the term autobiographical writing is more appropriate.

It seems that even within the scholarly discourse on autobiographical writing, there is a certain amount of difficulty ascribed to pinning down the categories that the different works could be put into. Historically, autobiography was the standard term used for practices of life writing which emerged in the Enlightenment, but the term has been criticised as “inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life writing” (Smith and Watson 2f). A newer attempt to define autobiography that is quoted regularly is the autobiographical pact by Phillipe Lejeune from the 1970s, in which he argues that the author of the text enters a pact with the reader that the story which is being told is about themselves and their own experiences and that they are telling the truth (15). However, this definition, too, has been disputed since then, and – as Linda Anderson observes – not even Lejeune himself seemed to ever be satisfied with it (2; Boldrini and Novak 13; Smith and Watson 1). Compared to autobiography, the term memoir has occupied a more flexible position. Some scholars argue that memoirs are more open due to the fact that they can focus on any part of life instead of having to retell an entire life-story (Anderson 113). Historically, memoirs were “recollections by the publicly prominent who chronicled their social accomplishments,” but in recent years the term has been used by publishing houses much more generously for a wide variety of autobiographical works (Smith and Watson 3). Both terms therefore have gone through several iterations and can be interpreted differently, depending on the context in which they are used and the person using them, which results in the difficulty of ascribing autobiographical texts to one genre definition in particular.

This complexity of defining the genres of autobiographical texts illustrates that the boundaries of each genre are not always clear. This is further complicated by the fact that the distinction between non-fiction and fiction can also blur. Distinguishing between truth and fiction in autobiographical writing is not as clear cut as might be expected. As the primary works I am analysing include elements from fictional narratives in their writing, I will be looking at the blend between autobiographical writing and fiction in more detail in the

following chapter. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, like many other scholars in the field, discusses the term autofiction in this context. She argues that autofiction is caused by “insufficiency of human memory” (2). As traumatic memory is fundamentally flawed, this characteristic of autofiction would fit the works discussed in this thesis. However, as Wagner-Egelhaaf notes, the term lacks a consistent explanation that critics in the field agree on (3). So while some definitions of the term might apply to the texts I am working with, others – who insist that works of autofiction make no claim to truth – do not (Atkinson 17). I argue that the fictional elements and references in the books are present to allow the authors to relay their real life experiences in a sincere manner to the reader, rather than straying from the truth. Thus, I will continue to use the term autobiographical writing, rather than autofiction.

3.2 Truth and Fiction in Autobiographical Writing

Following Lejeune’s concept of the autobiographical pact, any autobiographical text promises the reader a fully truthful depiction of events. However, as has already been mentioned briefly above, the matter of distinguishing between fact and fiction often times lies outside of the reader’s capabilities. It might mean that the reader instead has to “oscillate between two attitudes of reception,” either reading the text as a novel or an autobiography (Wagner-Egelhaaf 3). The following outlines some of the critical discussions of fiction in autobiographical texts and what purpose fiction can serve in a genre that would usually abstain from using fictional elements in order to seem authentic.

Given this tension, if an author chooses to evoke the kind of autobiographical pact that Lejeune proposed to tell the truth about themselves and the events that have happened to them, it would seem counterintuitive to include any fictional elements. Instead, this pact suggests that the author might try and tell their story solely following facts as honestly as possible, in an attempt to convince the reader they are telling the truth. However, around the same time that Lejeune was first writing about the autobiographical pact, other scholars instead did away with the idea of the author and their intentions in general. Paul de Man for example argued that it

was not truly possible to decide which texts should be read as autobiographical or fictional (Wagner-Egelhaaf 1). One of the key arguments against truthfulness as a defining criterion of autobiography seems to be that human memory is fundamentally flawed and memories can oftentimes not be recalled exactly or in perfect chronological order, which would mean that it is almost impossible to produce a text that is an exact recollection of one's experiences (Wagner-Egelhaaf 1; Boldrini and Novak 17). Drawing the line between fictional genres and autobiographical ones therefore becomes increasingly difficult, and more and more writers instead include narrative strategies usually employed in fiction in their autobiographical writing (Wagner-Egelhaaf 466). This lack of distinction remains a problem which occupies many theorists in the field of life writing and this thesis makes no attempt at solving it.

Despite this tension, fiction can still have a number of possible uses in autobiographical writing and thus find its place as a part of such texts. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf even argues that the question of "how to tell the truth by fiction [...]" can be regarded as the primary concern of the art of autobiography" (2). Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir agrees with this take by marking fictionality as "a necessary part of the autobiographical process itself and not something external to it" (qtd. in Boldrini and Novak 9). Paul Eakin takes this idea a step further by arguing that fictionality is not only an important part of autobiographical writing, but that the self at the centre of the autobiographical text is already "necessarily a fictive structure" (*Fictions* 3). Another way to look at fictional elements is put forward by Sidone Smith and Julia Watson when they argue that "any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, is a characterization of its writer" (15). Writers of autobiographical narratives can therefore purposefully employ fictional elements to reveal more about themselves. Truth and fiction can exist side by side in the autobiographical text, both adding to the image of the author that is created for the reader. At the same time, it may remain impossible for the reader to distinguish between the real and the fictional.

This ambiguity can be especially useful for representing trauma in autobiography. The depiction of trauma in autobiography will be discussed in more detail at a later point in the thesis, but a brief mention here is necessary. The portrayal of traumatic memories, because of their non-chronological and fragmented nature, demands an approach that might deviate from the prevalent norms. Using fiction in a genre that usually abstains from doing so – like most forms of autobiographical writing – marks a breaking with narrative conventions and therefore a rupture of narrative possibility. Yet at the same time it reinforces the argument brought forth by the scholars mentioned above, that fiction in autobiographical texts can reveal just as much about the subject as a faithful rendition of facts could. Intertextuality has already been mentioned previously as a form of representing trauma, but can also be seen as a subversion of the distinction between fiction and reality. Authors do this by creating “cross-textual links between their life and works that are clearly marked as fiction” (Boldrini and Novak 18). As a result, using fictional elements in autobiographical writing – no matter whether through intertextual references or by employing fictional narrative strategies – can allow authors to put traumatic experiences into words in a way that is understandable for the reader, despite trauma’s inexpressible nature, and thereby at least partially overcome the problems posed by traumatic memory.

While the distinction between truth and fiction remains an unresolved issue in the context of autobiographical writing, the discussions outlined above prove useful for my argumentation in this thesis. On the one hand, the presence of fiction in autobiographical texts marks a moment of rupture that can be useful to mirror the effects of trauma on the mind. On the other hand, as some scholars agree that fiction is an undeniable part of autobiography, it can be used by authors in order to expand upon their own experiences and make them easier to grasp for the reader, which adds to the authenticity of the text rather than taking away from it.

3.3 Ideas of Place and Home in Autobiographical Writing

All three of the works examined in this thesis are to some extent concerned with constructions

of place, especially with the house, and consequently the home, as a place where identity is created and also where trauma occurs, which is why an excursion into the realm of place and home in autobiographical writing seems appropriate. The following shall therefore give a very brief overview into what purpose and function places can have in autobiographical writing.

The spaces people inhabit and where an autobiographical narrative is set can not only be the backdrop to a narrative, but rather become a way to express identity and situatedness. While space refers to a physical location, it becomes a place when it is inhabited and imbued with meaning by a subject. Lawrence Buell explains that a space transforms into a place exactly because of the sense that individuals develop about this specific space (qtd. in Smith and Watson 43). The spaces where an author chooses to narrate their story therefore can become a vehicle to express their identity. Machado for example chooses to put the focus of her entire narration on the Dream House, as she calls it. Baker and Larson similarly emphasise the central role of the family home in their books, clearly. The spaces the narrators inhabit are of great importance to them. This preoccupation with place as a way to perform and display identity has been observed as a marker for autobiography created and situated in North America (Smith and Watson 43), which all three books are examples of. The space a person inhabits also seems to be one of the main components of autobiography, as it could even be viewed as a key requirement for the telling of one's own story in the first place. Janet Varner Gunn argues that "only because self's already inhabiting the space-time of its world can autobiography take place" (9). The narrators' surroundings influence and create the perspective that their view of the world is grounded in. By writing their story, "they [disclose] the ground that makes autobiography possible in the first place" (Gunn 9). The place and time in which the story is told are consequently central to the reader's understanding of the text and for them to be able to relate to the author's experiences. In the case of trauma, the focus on the place from which the trauma is told could therefore be useful in aiding the understanding of an experience that would otherwise be difficult to grasp. Overall, the places from which an autobiographical story is told

can be used to create an autobiographical identity and situate the reader in the life which is retold.

In his observation on the house in *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard proposes that the “house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind” (6). In writing, the house can become a vessel for the memories and thoughts of the person living in it. This explains the house’s usefulness in the context of autobiographical writing, in which memory plays such a crucial role. The variety of rooms a house holds can, according to Bachelard, become a refuge for memories (8). Connected back to the concept of the crypt mentioned earlier in the context of transgenerational haunting, it might also allow for traumatic memories to be locked away. Different rooms can become imbued with meaning and associations, allowing the reader to be led through the workings of the traumatised mind by exploring the house in autobiographical texts.

The notion of home has also been observed to be used to represent both mental and physical struggle in autobiographies by female authors (Edwards and Hogarth 2). Instead of being viewed as a place of refuge, the home becomes a “significant and troubling aspect of identity” and yet remains “a crucial factor in their construction of identity in narrative” (Edwards and Hogarth 2). The house, with its cultural associations, can thus become a useful vehicle for the narration of autobiographical stories, especially if these stories are also concerned with moments and phases of struggle.

The places an autobiographical story is set in aids the narrator in constructing their identity and relaying their experiences. The associations with certain places that are made generally in society or which the narrator creates specifically throughout their life are visualised by the concepts of space and place that the authors employ in their narration. In the works analysed for this thesis, the house and the home play a central role, and the discourse outlined above shows that the house can be employed in order to depict the inner workings of the mind.

3.4 *Trauma in Autobiographical Writing*

The focus of this thesis lies in a specific form of representing trauma in autobiographical writing. Outside of the corpus at the centre of this thesis, writing about trauma has long been a standard practice in autobiographical texts. As it does in most literary genres, trauma and its inexpressible qualities force authors to find new ways to talk about their experiences, which might oftentimes break with the limitations of the generic conventions. It is therefore worth investigating how these breaks caused by trauma become visible in autobiographical texts and what significance they carry.

The traumatic event, as has already been discussed previously, fragments memory and resists chronological or logical narration. The author of an autobiographical text puts themselves in a position where it is expected of them to tell the truth, which is connected to genre conventions. These conventions might, however, be too restrictive to bring trauma into the narrative and describe it in a way that makes it understandable (Gilmore 3). In order to write about trauma, the autobiographical author therefore has to test, and perhaps even go beyond the limitations of the genre. This necessity to break previously established conventions has already been observed in the discussion of trauma writing in general, yet it seems in the context of a genre that is mostly associated with more coherent and chronological narration, this deviation becomes even more notable. The unsayable quality of the traumatic event is a paradoxical problem for a genre that relies on the authentic account of one's own story. Roger Luckhurst argues that there is a distance created between what he terms "the trauma memoir" – autobiographical texts centred on traumatic events – and conventional autobiography, because these texts must make the one moment their focus which "escapes self-apprehension" and because they "recount a discordance" of the mind (118f). This does, however, not have to mean that autobiographical texts about trauma cannot exist without denying its basic qualities. Going beyond the usual standards and conventions in autobiographical writing might instead be a way to extend the boundaries of the genre and create a representation that is more faithful to the

memory of the experience, as this approach can visualise it more comprehensively (Novak 3; Gilmore 7). Breaking with the narrative conventions might therefore once again reflect an ambivalence created by traumatic memories, in which the narrative departs from the usual conventions of telling the truth in order to come closer to an authentic retelling.

Memory, or rather the failing of memory, plays a large part in the difficulties raised by trauma in autobiographical texts. Those affected have difficulty arranging the events in their mind, and are plagued by “fragmentary intrusions” (Smith and Watson 28). The wound caused by trauma on the mind is most noticeable in memory, which is where the idea of traumatic memory originates (Gilmore 25). However, as Julia Novak aptly puts it, in order to write about one’s life the memory needs to be activated (17). The texts produced by traumatised individuals will therefore have to work with the wounds created in the mind and find a way to use the resulting incoherent structures. One of the ways this can be done is by incorporating poetry into the text, whose structures lend themselves to visualising the fragmented memories (Eades 185; Boldrini and Novak 17). Another way is noted by Leigh Gilmore in the use of fantasy. She argues that because of the fragile and shattered nature of traumatised memory and the resulting difficulty in representing the self, fantasy can enter the narrative easily. She sees this as an often unavoidable result, as “the dissimulation of the subject in the scene of fantasy parallels the dissimulation of the subject in the scene of memory, trauma, and self-representation” (42). The use of speculative fiction as a method of truthfully representing the state of the traumatised mind therefore could prove similarly useful, without necessarily taking away from the text’s authenticity. The fickle nature of traumatic memory thus poses challenges to autobiographical texts that can, however, be overcome with similar narrative strategies employed in fictional trauma writing (see Ch. 2.2).

One of the questions that might arise when looking at all the difficulties presented by trauma for autobiographical writing is why somebody would want to write about their trauma in the first place. Other than the simple urge to express their own life and suffering in an artistic

manner, one important reason that has been noted by several scholars is the therapeutic effect that writing about one's trauma can have (Smith and Watson 28; Wagner-Egelhaaf 425). This form of expressing and subsequently working through the traumatic event done by the victim has already been discussed previously, but it is worth mentioning it here again, as the autobiographical text is specifically apt for this purpose. One of the scholars interested in this connection between life writing, trauma and testimony, Susanne Henke, argues in her book *Shattered Subjects* that "autobiography is, or at least has the potential to be, a powerful form of scriptotherapy" (xv). Writing an autobiographical text can thus aid in working through and understanding a traumatic past, while this does not necessarily mean that the trauma can be healed or the wounds and gaps created by it can be filled by the text (Anderson 131f). The aim of writing an autobiographical text about trauma might therefore be partially to create a sort of therapeutic testimony that both relays the experience to the reader and aids the author in understanding and processing their trauma.

Despite the limitations and difficulties outlined above, trauma has been the subject of a great number of autobiographical texts and will presumably also be so in the future. The testimonial and therapeutic quality of writing such a text cannot be ignored and authors have found a large number of ways to integrate trauma into the narrative. The resulting deviations from conventional narrative structures in autobiography and the integration of fictional elements – while they do mark the rupture created by trauma – do not have to be viewed as deviations from the truth, but rather as a possibility for the author to come closer to an accurate representation of traumatic experience. This is the purpose that I argue can be found behind the speculative elements that are employed in the three autobiographical works analysed in this thesis.

4 Queer Writing

The focus so far has been on two key features of the analysed primary works: they are autobiographical texts and have trauma as one of their central topics. However, it cannot be ignored that all three texts were also written by authors that are part of the LGBTQ+ community and experiences that are specific to their queer identity are part of their narration. Additionally, there are several points in which some of the theories already outlined and those of queer theory overlap. The following chapter will therefore give a brief overview over these overlaps and how queer theory becomes relevant for my analysis.

4.1 *Queer Autobiographical Writing*

Autobiographical narratives, no matter of which genre specifically, are written by persons representing a wide range of identities and social positions. While originally autobiography might have been a privilege only available to people that were considered important or of high influence, the memoir brought with it an increase in popularity of autobiographical writing by people of all backgrounds. In this chapter, I want to outline the significance autobiographical writing can have for people that identify as queer and how they challenge the genre conventions usually set by these types of narratives.

There are several scholars in the field of life writing that have emphasised the ability of autobiographical writing to help the author narratively construct their own identity (Eakin *How Lives* 139; Cohler 3; Wagner-Egelhaaf 106). The act of writing can thus be viewed as a way for an individual to form their own identity and at the same time relay this identity along with their experiences, thoughts and feelings to a reader. This type of identity formation is essential when considering queer autobiographical writing. Added to the possibility of constructing their own identities in the process of writing, the narratives might also become important vehicles for other people who share similar feelings and experiences to make sense of them and find their way to their own identities. In his examination of gay autobiography, Bertram Cohler remarks how autobiographical texts were used by “gay and lesbian readers [...] to help understand the

meaning of sexual desire in their own lives, to learn about how others have dealt with [similar] issues” (6). The authors of such narratives therefore write about previously underrepresented experiences, in order to allow others to establish their own identity and this might also aid marginalised communities in becoming more visible and challenge previous exclusion from discourse (Novak and Dhúill 16). As Wendy Moffat notes, by creating a “documentable queer textual past,” they allow a sense of identity not only of individual people, but even a larger sense of community and common identity of queerness to be created (qtd. in Novak and Dhúill 17). Consequently, the experiences and identities recorded in these types of autobiographical narratives play a key role in the community, even if they might not be easy to write about.

Similarly to what has already been said about traumatic experiences in autobiographical works, writing about queer life experiences comes with difficulties. This is because the sexual and gender orientations that are considered queer “challenge, resist, or complicate social conventions” and norms that have been established as the status quo and the ‘normal’ mode of being (Bryant 263). However, by putting queer experiences into narrative, authors can use their “imaginative faculties to unhouse those social conventions from their contrivances of propriety” (Bryant 263). It is no surprise then, that in order to challenge these norms, the usual genre conventions – in this case of autobiographical writing – are often broken in order to incorporate alternative ways of thinking. This evokes notions that have been discussed in depth about trauma narratives. The following chapter will go into more detail on these similarities. Another difficulty that arises when writing about queer life experiences is the possibility of contributing to harmful ideas about queer people that have been established in society and thereby setting back efforts for equality instead of furthering them. In her discussion of two texts about same-sex abuse – one of which is *In the Dream House*, which will be analysed later – Prudence Bussey-Chamberlain acknowledges how writing about such a topic could “consolidate negative attitudes toward the queer community” (261). Writers of queer autobiographical texts therefore

might feel the need to be aware of such negative connotations and might want to make sure to avoid fuelling them.

Autobiographical works that have queer experiences as their topic exist in an ambiguous position, where the writers have the ability to positively influence their identity and that of their community, but are faced with challenges that inhibit them from writing their stories. The books that are analysed in this thesis all walk this very fine line of queer autobiographical writing and I argue that the methods they employ to write about their traumatic experiences are also used to convey their experiences as queer people.

4.2 Connecting Points between Queer Writing and Trauma Writing

As has already become clear in the previous chapter, texts written by queer authors face similar challenges as those about trauma and their structures often go beyond the boundaries of the genre they are written in. However, there are other ways in which trauma writing and queer writing come into connection and there are several scholars who have concerned themselves with the particulars of queer trauma. In the following I want to touch on the work of two of those scholars in particular.

Quinn Eades has already been mentioned previously in the context of autobiographical writing. He uses his chapter “Queer Wounds: Writing Autobiography Past the Limits of Language” to talk about the particulars of writing about queer trauma and how it could be portrayed in narrative. He differentiates the queer wound – which I read as an equivalent to queer trauma – from other wounds as ones that are “destined to be hidden, revised, obfuscated,” but at the same time “constantly performed” (184). What seems to make a major difference is the fact that the queer wound “is an ill-begotten wound in the eyes of the world” that needs to remain hidden, as it would not be accepted by society the way that injuries from war or other causes might (188). The queer aspect of the wound therefore seems to hold a similarly ambiguous position as trauma on its own already does. The subject feels the need to revisit and talk about their trauma – or perform it as Eades argues – even though it remains hidden and

forgotten at the same time, making it difficult to access and put into words. One of the solutions Eades puts forward is to embrace the fragmentary nature of the queer wound and to write “a figurative form of life-writing that is able to hold both the stories and silences of the traumatic experience” (185). Eades’ reflections on queer trauma reiterate to some extent the same things that have already been established about trauma in general and therefore reinforce that the two can often appear connected in narratives.

The second scholar I want to briefly mention here is Laura Westengard and her work on gothic writings that take inspiration from the traumatic experiences of queer existence. Westengard is interested in “insidious trauma,” which is the trauma marginalised subjects experience as they are “constantly threatened by the prospect of violence” on top of any major traumatic event they might live through in their life (15). In this interpretation queer existence would then be marked by trauma as a default, which could explain the fundamental similarities between queer texts and trauma texts. Another similarity or connection Westengard remarks lies in the concept of failure. She argues that “the failures of traumatic expression have become a queer mode” (19). Queer failure – as Westengard calls it – allows for an approach to traumatic expression that “recognizes [trauma’s] negativity and unspeakability, while remaining receptive to the antinormative possibilities of communicating trauma queerly” (20). Approaching a trauma text from a multifaceted position of both trauma and queerness might therefore prove a productive way to circumvent the narrative challenges posed by trauma. Westengard is particularly interested in the gothic as “a way of queering trauma” and one of the aspects she points out is how queer writers and artists “deploy haunting to queer the experience of trauma” (26; 21). Haunting has already been established as an expression of the transgenerational transmission of trauma and Westengard views haunting in a similar way, as she argues that it is an expression of the ongoing insidious trauma that is experienced by queer writers and marks its reverberations in their lives. As a result, time itself becomes fractured and ‘queered’, which leads Westengard to the conclusion that “insidiously traumatized time is

haunted time is queer time” (21). Temporality, whose importance in the context of trauma writing has already been outlined previously, is thus another dimension in which queer experience and trauma overlap to some extent and can become an avenue for writers to explore innovative ways of depicting experiences that are marked by both.

Westengard is not the only scholar who is interested in the connection between the queer and the gothic, which brings me to the final aspect I want to discuss in connection with queer writing. In the following chapter I will outline some of the work that has been done on investigating the expression of queerness through the use of speculative fiction, which will return my argumentation to the main question of the thesis.

4.3 *Speculative Fiction as an Expression Of Queerness*

The main interest of this thesis lies in the use of speculative fiction as a representation of trauma, yet there have been a number of scholars interested in the connection between speculative fiction and queerness as well. As all three texts are written by queer authors and the previous chapters have already outlined some of the connecting points between queer writing and trauma writing, it makes sense to also highlight the associations that have been explored between speculative fiction and queerness.

The gothic has already been mentioned before as one of the genres that is utilised to express queer life experiences. Similar to the investigations Laura Westengard makes in the realm of the gothic is the research done by Paulina Palmer in *The Queer Uncanny*. Her interest lies especially in the uncanny and its ability to express queer existence. She analyses works that apply the uncanny to explore the way that queer existence is often viewed as unfamiliar in a heteronormative society and therefore has to remain hidden and be kept in line (5). She marks the origin of the uncanny aspect of queer attraction in the fact that there seem to be “no physical or mental signs [to] differentiate the homosexual from the heterosexual” which “[triggers] in the heterosexual fears about his own sexuality” and a “sensation of profound uncanniness” (16).

The genre of the gothic and the uncanny in particular thus seem to be useful tools to explore themes of queer experience in writing.

Genres that have found ample investigation in queer scholarship and are similar to the gothic are ghost stories and many other types of horror narratives. In *It Came from the Closet: Queer Reflections on Horror*, Joe Vallese collects a vast number of essays which investigate the queer aspects of horror movies. He argues that queer theory can be used as a lens through which horror movies can be viewed and analysed, but also that horror movies can be used as a lens through which to look at queer experiences and to help understand them. Featured in the collection is also an essay by Richard Scott Larson on the movie *Halloween*, in which he uses the movie to reflect on his childhood as a closeted queer person. The reflections he makes in the essay are quite similar to those he makes in his memoir, which reiterates the argument that he uses the horror genre as a way to rework his traumatic experiences, but I will go into more depth on this matter later when analysing the memoir. Similarly, in an article for the New Yorker, Nell Stevens argues for a possibility to read ghost stories through a queer lens. She marks similar moments of fear associated with queerness as Palmer does in her reflections on the queer uncanny, but also specifically marks ghost stories as a constant transgression of binaries and their haunting qualities as a way for the queer presence to be incorporated into places where they are otherwise excluded. Horror narratives thus seem to become a fruitful ground for writing about queer experiences, whether that is by applying a queer lens to a horror narrative or vice versa.

Speculative Fiction has also become an important tool in imagining possible futures. Kayleigh Charlton and Alexis Lothian both investigate the ability of speculative fiction to create otherwise previously unimaginable futures for queer existence in their respective research. They remark on how queer existence is often seen as a threat to the continuation of human existence and that speculative fiction seems to be the only tool with which a possible future for queer people can be imagined. Lothian also marks again the non-chronological quality of queer

time and its possible effects on imagining a queer future. The speculative genre is marked in both texts as a way to imagine possible futures, but also as a means to understand and represent those existences in the past and present. Speculative fiction can consequently be viewed as an important tool to make those existences visible and legible in narrative form.

All the research outlined above marks the ways queer theory and speculative fiction connect, but also – maybe even more importantly – how speculative fiction can become a useful tool for writing queer narratives. The same has already been argued for the use of speculative fiction as a representation of trauma earlier in the thesis. It again seems then, that queer representations and trauma representations can be put into narrative form by the use of similar methods and approaches. Together with the connections and similarities that have been outlined between queer writing, autobiographical writing and trauma writing respectively, it becomes clear that the queer aspects of the works analysed in the following cannot be ignored. There might be overlaps between the representations of queer experience and of traumatic events and at some points it might be impossible to distinguish one from the other, which is why, even if the focus of this thesis lies in the representation of trauma, the representation of queer existence will also always play an important role.

5 *Reading My Mother Back* – Timothy C. Baker

The first book I want to analyse is *Reading My Mother Back: A Memoir in Childhood Animal Stories* by Timothy C. Baker. The book is categorised as a memoir already in the title, but I would argue that this is too narrow a designation. For instance, while the book is autobiographical in nature and in large parts tells the story of Baker's childhood, it is also keenly interested in the life and childhood of his mother. Baker's engagement with both his own story and his mother's, as well as how the two have influenced each other, can be subsumed under the term "auto/biography." The term makes it clear that elements of both autobiography and biography are present in the book (Saunders 6). The premise of the book seems to be an attempt at piecing together the fragments of his mother's life that Baker was able to find. It starts out with her funeral, then jumps back to Baker's childhood and the formative years he spent with his mother in the U.S. and goes all the way to her death and its ramifications on Baker's small family.

Each chapter of *Reading My Mother Back* focuses on one story that Baker read in his childhood and that he connects to his memories of his mother. Most of them – as the title already suggests – feature animals as their main characters or have animals as a central theme. The stories range from widely known ones like *Charlotte's Web*, to ones that seem more specific to Baker's upbringing, like *Merle the High Flying Squirrel*. While the chapters are all titled with one particular story, there is quite a range of different books and stories that Baker mentions in each chapter. Some of them are of historical significance as they help contextualise the time that the narration is set in, but most of the stories have significance to Baker personally, either because he read them at a specific point in his life or because he associates them with memories he has of his mother. He uses the stories, their characters and plotlines to try and make sense of what happened to him as a child. The use of intertextuality therefore presents a major point of interest for my analysis and will make up the first part of my engagement with the book.

The book was published in the fall of 2022, so very recently. In my research I have come upon no existing critical engagement with the book, which might be due to the fact that it has not reached a large audience as of yet. The author, Timothy Baker, is a professor of Scottish and contemporary literature at the University of Aberdeen and his previous publications were all of literary criticism, which means *Reading My Mother Back* is the first work of non-scholarly writing published by him. His interest in animals in literature is already established in some of his academic writing, but seems to be solidified by his memoir. While his academic work also includes research in queer studies and queer temporality, the memoir does not specifically focus on this aspect of his life and only briefly and vaguely addresses his life experiences as a person that is part of the queer community.

The book features quite a range of themes, from grief, to loneliness, community and illness. However, for my analysis I want to focus mostly on the discussion of trauma. Baker's loss of his mother is one clear point of rupture in his life, but there are other instances in which trauma interrupts the narrative. There are hints at trauma his mother suffered that, while it is never directly discussed in front of him, Baker can sense and which is also passed down to him.

The first of the following chapters of the thesis is dedicated to the way the stories of Baker's childhood are used to make sense of trauma and especially what role the use of intertextuality plays here. I also go into more detail on the way the stories were used as a form of escape during Baker's childhood. As I have outlined the importance of place in autobiographical writing, I examine Baker's choices of setting in the book and evaluate the importance of the childhood home as a place of narration. Baker's life – and therefore also his autobiographical text – was deeply impacted by the trauma his mother faced in her own childhood, which is why at the end of the chapter I explore the representation of transgenerational trauma in the book.

5.1 “*The World is Known through Stories*”¹: *Making Sense of Trauma through Stories and the Use of Intertextuality*

As has already been mentioned above, Timothy Baker ascribes each chapter of his book to one central story that he read in his childhood, and includes additional stories in the course of the chapters. He terms this as the act of “rereading” his childhood and that by “revisiting the books we read in childhood [...] we [revisit] our childhood selves” (44). Going back to the stories of his childhood is therefore an attempt to put himself back into the mindset of his younger self and revisit the memories of his now deceased mother. However, there are other ways the intertextual references to the stories and novels of his childhood influence and shape his narrative, especially when the memories Baker revisits are traumatic in nature. With the examples analysed in the following, I argue that not only are the animal stories of Baker’s childhood used to revisit his childhood memories, but rather they are the lens through which he becomes able to process these memories in the first place and put them into narrative form (Jefferies 00:01:04–00:01:29).

There are several points in the memoir where the narrative of an animal story is shown to mirror that of Baker’s own or his mother’s life. This happens right from the beginning of the book, with the first story Baker chooses. He notes that the most terrifying moment in *The Story of Babar* – a story about a young elephant who becomes the king of his community – is how Babar’s mother “dies instantly; she is there and then not there” (5). While the story is included in the book because Baker connects it with a family visit to a museum when he was five years old, the intertextual reference is also used here to introduce the trauma of the death of Baker’s mother to the reader, making the trauma visible without having to directly address it. Baker seems aware of this connection and puts it right at the beginning deliberately, as he also writes that “this is my mother’s story,” right after the story of Babar (6). Something similar happens

¹ Baker, *Reading My Mother Back*, p. 16.

on pages 30 to 31 when Baker talks about the fact that there are very few photographs showing his parents' faces and that instead he only found pictures in his family photo albums that depict the many animals that were part of his childhood. The trauma of loss is here visualised by the missing pictures, a direct absence of his mother from most photos. To fill this gap, Baker uses the book *The Animal Family* his mother gave to him "as explanation" (32). Instead of pictures or tangible records of his family, he instead has a book which, for him, sums up a lot of what family means to him. Baker also remarks that he uses the childhood stories directly to make sense of his own experiences, showing an awareness of the intertextual reworking of his memories. For example, he declares that he used Efrafa from *Watership Down* to better understand the cult Lamb of God that his mother was a part of, noting that the "imagined story and the lived experience are inseparable" (85). *Watership Down* follows a community of rabbits that need to relocate after their burrow was destroyed. On their journey they come across many different communities of rabbits, including a tightly governed one called Efrafa. Baker finds similarities in the chain of command and power dynamics that are at play in *Watership Down* in the records he finds of the community created by Lamb of God. By working with both the text from his childhood and the records of the cult in general, he is able to get better insight into the life his parents lived and understand some of the mechanisms that were at play in his childhood. The impenetrable memory of his childhood therefore only becomes tangible and knowable through the use of an intertextual reference. Following Anne Whitehead's argumentation on intertextuality that was summed up earlier in the thesis, Baker's return to these texts in intertextual reference could be seen as a manifestation of the repetition-compulsion that is often described as a main symptom of the traumatic mind (Whitehead 85). This is further strengthened by the fact that Baker seems to be unaware of this return of the traumatic memories at some points in the memoir. On page 72 for example, when discussing *The Magician's Nephew*, Baker realises that the book he cherished so much and chose to discuss in his memoir is about "a boy's desire to save his sick mother." Baker's mother also died due

to long on-going sickness and it seems that without being aware of it, Baker had associated his own struggle with being unable to save his mother from death with the story of Digory trying desperately to save his mother in *The Magician's Nephew*. The traumatic “past lingers unresolved, not remembered in a conventional sense” – as Laurie Vickroy aptly puts it – and only by returning to the text does Baker realise this connection (12). Similarly, Baker also returns to *The Book of Sorrows* again and again, even though he says that he hates reading the novel (123). Despite this dislike, Baker finds that the book puts something into words that he is unable to really grasp himself. He relates the final days of his mother and how one of her final acts was to sell her cherished violin to buy a guitar for her son. The memory seems to be too painful to dwell on for Baker, as immediately after he goes back to talking about Chauntecleer from *The Book of Sorrows*. He compares his own faults to those of Chauntecleer in an attempt to make sense of them and also to make them understandable to the reader. The painful memory only becomes accessible and communicable to him through the intertextual reference, which both makes the memory clearer and available while also putting a necessary distance between it and Baker at the same time. Overall, a lot of the stories Baker uses as intertextual references serve either to mirror the events of his own life or because they allow him to describe his own life through their lens. He addresses this explicitly at the very end of the book when he says, “if reading these books has taught me anything, it is that all of my stories are individual, and all of them are universal. What we share is the unshareability [sic] of our grief” (146). While he feels that his own pain and trauma are unique, he uses the references to the works which share similar themes and stories to access a shared ability of understanding that is given to him by reading these stories of his childhood. Only through these diversions from his own story into those of animals and magical creatures can the traumas he suffered in his childhood become narratable.

One of the reasons why the animal stories are such a useful intertextual tool when discussing traumatic memories has already been explained previously and has to do with the

emotional identifications children are able to have with the animals in the stories. It allows them to learn how to be empathetic and gives them an avenue to work through their own memories and feelings. Baker is aware of this connection and writes about how the animals from childhood stories “share our grief and joy,” that they are the ones children will first empathise with and that they teach them about “death and loss” (13). Interestingly Baker also remarks that “the child reader sees animals both as self and other” (14). The animals from the stories that go through the same or similar things as the child reading the story can therefore become a place for identification, through which the children can process the events that would otherwise remain unknowable. This is because, while the child can see themselves in the animal and understand that they are going through the same thing, they still know that it is somebody else and the distance created by this knowledge allows them to process the events. In returning to these stories from his childhood Baker seems to want to create the same effect when trying to tell the story of his mother and his childhood as without them, the events might remain unknowable and he would be unable to properly narrate them.

Another important ability that Baker seems to derive from the animal stories he uses in his autobiographical writing is their ability to help deal with the pain and disruption that is caused by trauma. This is something Baker was aware of himself even while writing his book, as he writes at one point that “reading someone else’s experiences can help the bereaved make sense of their own” and that “if our story is shared by someone else, it means we can progress through it” (73). The stories he incorporates mirror the pain he went through in childhood and when losing his mother in exactly this way. *The Wind in the Willows* is a good example for such a mirroring. When revisiting this book Baker realises that while he remembered the book to be one coherent narrative, it actually “turns out to be a series of fragments” (44). This mimics Baker’s access to his own memories, that instead of a linear timeframe, he only finds “pieces that refuse to cohere” (44). While it is not directly stated here as a traumatic memory, this

fragmentation and refusal to cohere to a linear chronology is equivalent with the symptoms of a traumatised mind.

One of the main ways Baker remembers his mother is through the art he sees, the music he hears and the stories he reads and he muses that his mother used stories in a similar way as he does. He contends that “putting herself in other people’s stories was a way of choosing a story that was less painful than her own,” which suggests that she used stories like Baker does in the book (22). Baker suggests that stories made it possible for her to access her experiences without having to deal with the pain of trauma. They represent her “imagined experiences,” which are to Baker “as real, as necessary, as whatever truth of her past she might have known” (22). The imagined memories in the stories of childhood become a place-holder for the real memories of the past.

While they make up the vast majority, children animal stories are not the only genre Baker employs in an attempt to make sense of his childhood and his mother’s life. Nevertheless, one of the other genres he uses is still heavily connected to childhood: the fairy tale. In the chapter titled “*The Magician’s Nephew*” Baker talks more in depth about his mother’s illness and the troubles her health caused her. While he has some basic information about her illness and the fact that her kidneys failed, it seems that a large part of it still remained a mystery to him. At the beginning of the chapter he tells two stories of his mother which both – or neither – could be the reason her kidneys failed. Both have a somewhat mysterious and almost magical nature to them, his mother’s reasonings and intentions always remaining unclear to the reader in the same way they always remained unclear for Baker. His mother turns into a mystery that he cannot solve and the only way he has found to deal with this is to try and tell her story – a story that remains almost impossible to tell due to its gaps and misdirection. Together with the few details he has about her abusive childhood her story, underlying that of Baker’s, has the characteristics of a story about trauma. The only way Baker can put it into a narrative shape is when he addresses it as a fairy tale. He says that “whatever happened to my mother in the early

1970s, whatever choice she made or accident befell her, it made her life into the pattern of a fairy tale” and that “her body became a narrative she could not understand” (76). The mysterious circumstances of his mother’s illness and the difficult journey she went through due to her declining health warrant a narrative representation that can only be achieved by following the mysterious and magical workings of a fairy tale instead of that of a more traditional autobiographical narrative.

Overall, there seem to be two goals that Baker wants to reach by using intertextual references to the animal stories of his childhood. One is to find a way to explain his memories to himself, to finally make sense of what happened. He seems to be convinced that “there was a story that could explain everything, if only you kept reading” (128). Here the intertextual reference and the diversion from the usual genre conventions become an attempt to make sense of trauma and to put it into a form that is understandable and knowable. The other goal is to make his own story and that of his mother narratable, as “writing the story makes it real” (16). Putting his memories into a form that turns it into a narratable story is what gives them power and is what allows him to at least in part work through the pain caused by trauma.

5.1.1 “I am Reading, and I am Safe”²: Using Stories as a Form of Escape

Throughout the book it becomes apparent that the stories Baker uses do not only serve a purpose in his current engagement with his past, but that they also played a key role as a coping mechanism in his childhood. He frequently addresses the fact that stories and books were an avenue for him to escape what was happening around him. They therefore provided a refuge from the trauma he was faced with, both in his own life and his mother’s past.

Baker establishes his use of reading as a form of escape quite early on in the book. He acknowledges it already in the second chapter, where reading alone at home became the preferable alternative to being in school, where he was subject to humiliation from his teacher.

² Baker, *Reading My Mother Back*, p. 9.

The stories he reads as a child – which also become the stories he uses later to retell the events of those days – become a shield that keeps him safe from the world, as Baker writes: “I am reading, and I am safe” (9). Instead of focusing on what is happening around the young Baker, and which he might not fully understand or be able to process, he puts his entire focus on books.

When young Baker is directly faced with traumatic and hurtful events, he uses stories and books as navigational tools, which allow him to get through them. After watching the Challenger explosion live in school, he is confronted with feelings that are “insurmountable” and he felt he was “inconsolable” (58). Baker remembers that “the stories of Kipling and Tolkien and a dozen other writers swirled around me, and became part of my map of the world” (58f). The stories “were a defence, a panacea” (59) that allowed him, at least for the moment, to deal with the onslaught of emotions and process an event that would otherwise escape his understanding.

His reading habits can be seen as an attempt to make sense of the trauma he faces, to look for explanations in the books which he uses to shield himself from the world around him. The further he escapes into the stories, the easier it might become to finally understand that which he is afraid of and be able to go back into the world. Baker’s later engagement with the stories in an attempt to narrate the memories of his childhood thus mirrors the way he employed them in his childhood.

5.2 “Our Memories Are Most Real to Us When They are Fixed in Space”³: Home as the Place of Memory

Similar to most stories that are concerned with childhood memories, Baker ascribes importance to his childhood home as the place where all these memories are collected. Even though his family moved a few times during the time the autobiographical work is set in, each of the homes becomes a central point of his memory and therefore also his narration. By remembering his

³ Baker, *Reading My Mother Back*, p. 18.

home and setting his story there, he is “hoping that it might say something about [his] life” (18). Additionally, Baker discusses ideas of home and homesickness in relation to the stories of his childhood he is revisiting in the book.

As a scholar himself, Baker is aware of literature on the childhood home as a formative place in which stories of childhood and growing up are set. He quotes Gaston Bachelard’s observations on the childhood home, which I have briefly mentioned in my discussion of autobiographical spaces, and describes the childhood home as a “poetic world, a world of memory and imagination that defines us as we define it” (18). His awareness of the connotations and implications the childhood home has in autobiographical stories shows that it is a deliberate choice, rather than just a coincidence, that the main setting for his story is the home, as it holds “explanatory potential” (18). As Janet Varner Gunn argues in her discussion of place in autobiographical writing, he reveals the ground that made autobiography possible in the first place and uses it to ground his narration and showcase where his identity was formed (9). Baker describes this himself, when he writes: “The stories we tell about our houses are not simply descriptive, but formative” (18). The discussion of his childhood home is thus not merely a description of his surroundings, but it is also employed to further visualise the formative influence the home has on childhood memories and the stories that are told from these memories.

In the face of trauma, especially unprocessed trauma that lingers on the mind, the house can also hold potential for imagination. Bachelard argues that “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). While Baker does not directly know of the trauma his mother faces, he seems to be aware of the fact that something happened to her in the course of her life that left a lingering impression on her and which she sought to escape throughout the rest of her lifetime. One of the ways Baker observes that this unprocessed trauma affects her, are the coping mechanisms she put up in her life. He recognises that for his mother staying in one place was a form of survival, while at the same time she liked to imagine houses and spaces that she would never live in in intricate detail.

Baker muses that for her it must have been “vital to imagine herself in a space she could control, the space she had been denied throughout her childhood, perhaps through her adulthood too” (19). Following Bachelard’s argumentation, the house that she imagined in her daydreams, rather than the house she actually lived in, became the safe space that protected her. So while Baker’s childhood home is central to his narration and the formation of his identity, it is also a place his mother seemed to want to flee in her mind in an attempt to escape the confines of her unresolved trauma.

The ideas and connotations of home are not discussed separately from the stories of his childhood and rather intermingled with the intertextual references and discussion, just as the discussion of trauma is. Baker examines the ways home is depicted in the stories he read as a child to better understand his own connection to his childhood home and the feeling of returning home that is so often addressed in these stories. He compares the home of Mole in *The Wind in the Willows* to the act of rereading he is undertaking for his book. Throughout the story, Mole longs to go on a journey and yet once he is on that journey what he wants most desperately is to return home. Baker observes that when returning to a book from childhood, while wishing that one has moved on from its content and that the stories do not relate to one’s current experiences anymore, one is sometimes still called back to those old stories, unable to move on from them. In *Wind in the Willows* Baker finds a similar structure in that there is “a sense of constant yearning, a yearning for home and a yearning for away” (47). While Baker does not directly connect this unwilling and yet unavoidable return to trauma – whose symptoms are quite similar –, he does link it to the concept of afterwardness, which was originally coined by Sigmund Freud in his examinations of trauma. The act of looking back at something with the knowledge of retrospection, without being able to change them or go back to that point in time, creates a form of homesickness. This, to Baker, is also exactly what the act of rereading his childhood stories is: “not a form of nostalgia, but homesickness. It is a moment of afterwardness” (47). The home, or more specifically the yearning for a return home, is therefore mirrored by

Baker's return to the texts of his childhood. The need to return to these stories, while it is in a way painful to do so, calls to mind the incessant return traumatic memories make in the mind, the inability for traumatised individuals to move on and instead being forced to return again and again.

Another way Baker's understanding of home in relation to stories can be connected to trauma comes up when he discusses the way his mother and him constructed the world around them in their mind. One of the places Baker's family moved to when he was a child was Baltimore. Instead of remembering the state in a traditional sense, Baker remembers that both his mother and him constructed their surroundings by drawing from the stories they read and watched. He writes: "My childhood Baltimore was built from Bill Peet and L. Frank Baum, then, my mother's reconstructed by John Waters, both of us pulling from whatever sources we had to hand, constructing a world that felt suitable, that could explain something about ourselves and others as if repetition were a form of truth" (23). Repetition, instead of creating their own new memories of the place they lived in, calls again to mind the way trauma influences memory and its incessant return (Whitehead 86). The stories and characters they draw from to create their world keep them from directly experiencing or remembering the place they lived in. The stories thus once again become a shield that keeps them from directly remembering the trauma, while still acting out its effects on the mind.

On the one hand, the home allows Baker to visualise his identity and especially the shaping of this identity in his childhood and thus constructs the ground from which the autobiographical text can emerge. On the other hand the ideas of home and the way these ideas are constructed in Baker's mind imitate symptoms of trauma and reinforce the notion that Baker uses the childhood stories he rereads to process and narrate his trauma without having to directly address it.

5.3 “What Do People Who Feel This Bad Do?”⁴: *The Echoes of Transgenerational Trauma*

Baker’s autobiographical writing in *Reading My Mother Back* differentiates from the other two primary texts in the way that it does not only deal with his own life and his own trauma, but that it is in large parts also an examination of and an attempt to reconstruct his mother’s life and the trauma she faced. This makes sense in the case of their relationship, as the trauma she faced – which remained mostly unknown to Baker – was passed down to him. As I have outlined in my discussion of transgenerational trauma above, it is not necessary for trauma to be known in order to be passed down, and often it is especially the secret of trauma that is felt in the following generation. When addressing this transgenerational trauma, Baker again uses the stories from his childhood to find some sense and explanation for it.

Before being able to name and understand the connection that is built between Baker’s trauma and his mother’s, he seems to be able to feel it through his body. Baker remembers that his mother was terrified of driving and that without ever knowing why she was so afraid, he inherited that fear (18f). Laurie Vickroy argues that the bodies of trauma survivors are in many cases the sight where the trauma is replayed, which is why in literary texts the body becomes the site of narration for trauma (10, 32). Baker uses this connection in his narrative to try and explain how he knows that his mother was abused. While he knows of a few details and stories, he is unaware of the extent of abuse his mother faced as a child. However, he knows for certain that his mother lived in fear most of her life and that he knows this “through the body – not just hers, but mine” (100). Without knowing where her peculiarities and fears came from, Baker felt them in his own body. He felt that he “could not move in any way other than [his] mother moved” and that it was like a “physical echo” he could never explain (100f). It is just as Gabriele Schwab outlined in her work on transgenerational trauma, that “children become the recipients not only of their’ parents lived memories but also of their somatic memories” (14). The trauma

⁴ Baker, *Reading My Mother Back*, p. 126.

his mother faced is passed down to him only through the body, as she was never able to speak of it.

In an attempt to work out what this transgenerational trauma means and trying to find a way to process it, Baker turns to the stories of his childhood. When describing this act of rereading, Baker acknowledges the haunting quality it takes on. He uses the term “circular haunting,” because when rereading a text from childhood it is impossible to approach it like you would for the first time, as one is informed both by the first experience one had with the book and all the books that were read in between (45). While rereading, Baker feels haunted by the “sense that not only [has he] changed, but the book itself is rendered different just by the fact that [he], now, [is] rereading it” (45). He picks this notion of haunting up again when discussing his mother’s trauma and its transmission to him. Not only is he haunted by the gaps left in his mother’s story that are impossible to fill after her death, but he also sees her everywhere, almost like a haunting presence (105f). The trauma of her death, together with the transgenerational trauma she passed to him, continue to haunt him “with its insistent repetitions and returns” (Whitehead 12). The sense of haunting he feels when rereading and the haunting quality that is often ascribed to transgenerational trauma seem to mirror each other, which further supports the notion that in rereading his childhood stories and using them to tell his own story, he attempts to fill the gaps left behind by trauma.

The attempt to overcome the silences in his mother’s story by using other stories is something Baker seems to inherit from his mother. After watching the movie *Hairspray*, she explains to Baker that the way school was depicted in that movie was how her high school life went (20). What he has learned from fiction is all the information he has on his mother’s time in school. Baker’s mother used the fictional stories, instead of her own, in order to avoid having to address the trauma that was present in her life in those years and as a result, when trying to understand the gaps left behind by trauma, Baker does the same (22). He explains this towards the end of the book when he writes:

This is why I have to go back to the books I read in childhood, in the order that I read them. It is only in this reading and rereading that I can begin the work of recovery, work I have deferred for almost fifteen years. It is only because these books had explanatory power then that they have explanatory power now. (127)

The act of rereading is thus for him a way to fill in the blanks and also the only way he can start to work through the grief he was left with after his mother's death. The stories have the ability to aid him in this act of working through, because he and his mother used fiction during his childhood to cope with their surroundings and to shield themselves.

In conclusion, Baker's mother passed down her own trauma to her son in a transgenerational transmission. As the trauma was unspeakable, it remained a secret, a gap left behind even after her death. The haunting quality that it took on could, for Baker, only be overcome by the act of rereading the stories of his childhood and using them to come closer to understanding the trauma. Additionally, the stories make the gaps and fragments left behind by his mother's trauma narratable, allowing him to tell the story of his childhood in a coherent way, in spite of the challenges posed by trauma.

6 *The Long Hallway* – Richard Scott Larson

The second book I analyse in the course of this thesis is *The Long Hallway* by Richard Scott Larson. Similar to Baker's book that I analysed above, it is classified a memoir by the publisher. While the book could fit into that category, I argue that it swerves from the genre at many points, using elements from horror literature and film to visualise its narrative content. The term autobiographical writing, which I chose to address the books in my thesis, encompasses all these deviations from the traditional demands of the genre.

The book is set at the time when Larson was around twelve years old and follows the events of that time. It addresses his father's alcoholism and Larson's estrangement from him as a result, leading up to his father's death. During that time, one of Larson's classmates is also raped and murdered, sending the small town he is from into disarray. Towards the end of the book Larson is abused by a stranger while on holiday, consolidating for him the notion that something is fundamentally wrong with him. These traumatic experiences, chained together with the constant fear Larson lived in due to his sexual orientation, make up the major themes and driving forces of the book.

At the time of narration, Larson was living closeted, trying to hide his queer identity as he was afraid of the reaction he would be met with if somebody found out. He compares his homosexual desires to a monster living within him, which is why he associates with Michael Myers, the villain of the 1978 movie *Halloween* – the first instalment of the franchise. As an avid fan of horror movies already in his childhood and exactly this association, Larson chooses to structure his memoir around the movie *Halloween*, analysing many parts of the movie while using them to explain his experiences during that time to himself and the reader. He uses the movie, as well as other tropes and stylistic devices from horror movies, to make the trauma he faced during that time knowable and narratable.

The book was first published in 2024, which makes it the most recent of the three books I analyse. Due to its recent release, there has been little to no critical engagement with the book.

It was published by the University of Wisconsin Press as a part of a series called “Living Out: Gay and Lesbian Autobiographies”, which publishes a wide range of autobiographical texts by queer authors in an attempt to “embrace the full range of LGBT experience” (“Living Out”). Richard Scott Larson is a writer and critic of both film and literature, who has published a large number of essays and texts of criticism in several magazines. *The Long Hallway* is his first book, but he has published autobiographical texts before, as already mentioned in *It Came from the Closet*.

In the following, I first examine the use of intertextuality and references to both fairy tales and horror narratives as an attempt to hide from trauma and also to make it accessible to both the author and the reader, despite its unspeakable nature. I then zoom in on Larson’s references to the horror genre in particular and analyse how he employs stylistic and narrative devices of the genre in his own writing and how the narration is influenced by the movie *Halloween* in particular. As the title of the book already suggests, the hallway plays a central role in the book. In the final part I look at the use of place in the book, focusing especially on the depiction of the long hallway and the – often times haunted – house.

6.1 “A Kind of Darkness that Felt to Me Like the Perfect Place to Hide”⁵: Hiding Trauma in Stories and the Use of Intertextuality

Throughout his narration, Larson frequently alludes to fictional speculative narratives or uses devices that are prevalent in such narratives for his own story. *Halloween* is the movie he addresses the most, but it is not the only influence. At many points the references and intertextual elements are used in an attempt to visualise traumatic moments or to allow Larson to hide from the pain of his memories.

The attempt to hide from trauma in a story that is not Larson’s own is already alluded to at the beginning of the book when the movie *Halloween* is first introduced. Larson remembers

⁵ Larson, *The Long Hallway*, p. 17.

the first time he watched the movie at his father's house, where he was able to use the movie as a distraction from his father's drinking habit. He recalls how the movie created "a kind of darkness that felt to [him] like the perfect place to hide" (17). The relief the young Larson felt was so strong that he would return to the same movie again and again in the following weeks, using it both as an escape from what was happening around him and later as a tool to understand himself and his desires. The movie is a representative for the entire horror genre for him, which is the type of story he engages with the most to avoid confronting the world around him. He writes that horror "implied a kind of comfort for me throughout my childhood and adolescence, an increasingly necessary escape from the real" (29). Larson seems to be aware of the fact that he uses stories as an escape, because the memories from that time are too difficult to bear. When attempting to write about these memories in his autobiographical work, the stories therefore need to have a place as well. By using the stories he puts the necessary distance between himself and the painful events in order to make the trauma narratable.

Larson already made use of fiction as a tool to make trauma narratable when he was younger. He remembers a piece of fantasy fiction he created as a child about a boy wizard, who is unable to control his powers due to the anger he feels towards his father, who is an alcoholic and who he cannot rely on (162). The main character very clearly resembles Larson and the feelings he has towards his father. Using the fantastic aspects of the story, he is able to distance himself from these similarities, creating a story that is both his own and yet a completely different one. Additionally, the wizard of the story loses his memory after a traumatic event and when he does finally remember, the "realization tears him apart, rewriting everything he'd ever known" (162). Larson evokes the nature of traumatic memory here, how the traumatic event is often not remembered by the person living through it and how remembering can be a painful experience. By recalling this story in his autobiographical narrative, Larson highlights the role fictional stories play in his life and their ability to enhance his otherwise non-fictional narrative.

Larson uses fictional tools in a similar way when he narrates the moment he and his brother found out that their father has died. Larson is unable to remember the moment in a traditional way, instead it becomes “like something in a film rather than something [he’d] lived through, the climactic moment when everyone gets the news that changes everything forever” (133). In order to be able to narrate this moment in the book, he thus chooses to use the characteristics of a movie to describe the scene:

A quietly emotional music score begins to play while my mother delivers the news to my brother and me—the two of us kneeling beside her on the bed—that our father is gone. [...] We crumple into her arms as her mouth forms words that are drowned out by the notes being struck on an invisible piano, everything going soft and murky at the edges. [...] Now the image begins to blur into a slow dissolve, the camera sweeping away. (133)

Using the techniques that are usually employed in filmmaking, he is able to put the event into a familiar shape, allowing him to discuss it despite the fact that trauma is making it difficult for him to remember.

The wish to escape into fictional narratives as an alternative to his current state is further reinforced by Larson’s frequent reference to fairy tales. As I have outlined in chapter 2.2.3, fairy tales have been observed to offer comfort for people who are faced with trauma. Additionally, fairy tales clearly mark a departure from the real world, which makes them especially suitable for representing the unprecedented nature of traumatic events. Larson acknowledges this quality of fairy tales when he writes: “The magical exists alongside the everyday in fairy tales, infecting the known world with the fantastic and the unexplainable” (46). Trauma as the unexplainable event thus finds an explanation in the world of fairy tales, as the unexplainable is necessarily a part of it. At the time when Larson and his brother would visit their father every Saturday and were confronted with his alcohol abuse and worsening condition, Larson recalls how he had “fantasies of escape” (44). He recalls that he had wanted to flee into “imaginary worlds of [his] own creation, magical places where [he] would have secret knowledge about how to traverse the landscape or unlock a door where treasures awaited

[him]” (45). The understanding he lacks in the real world could be overcome, if only he could flee into the world of fairy tales.

In order to be able to rework the events of his adolescence in his autobiographical narrative, Larson uses fairy tales as a tool to make his trauma visible to the reader. Throughout the book, Larson recalls the difficulties his younger self had with his brother and how, even though they were facing the same troubles, he found himself unable to share the pain with his brother. He writes that while his brother had been right next to him the entire time, “neither of [them was] seeing the other as [they] groped blindly towards the faintest glimmer of light” (144f). In order to make this inability to share their trauma with one another understandable to the reader, he uses the story of Little Red Riding Hood. While the general story of what happened to her is known, Larson is interested in what it was like for her “inside the wolf” and “what happened in those lonely hours before she stuffed the wolf’s body full of stones” (145). But, just as Larson and his brother are unable to speak to each other of their pain, so is Little Red Riding Hood. Larson instead writes: “We privately map the contours of the dark forests we find ourselves in, learning through trial and error where its borders are the weakest and the most permeable. And we always have to escape alone. But we can leave no map for those who step into the shadows after us, because every darkness tells a different story” (145). Larson uses the fairy tale to elaborate on the way trauma makes it almost impossible for him to share it, leaving him to his own devices and forcing him to deal with it alone. Using the fairy tale alongside his own story, he is able to visualise what he went through in spite of these restrictions.

While the fairy tale is one speculative genre Larson employs to visualise his trauma, the genre that is far more prevalent is horror. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, horror stories and movies were a form of escape for Larson, especially the movie *Halloween*, which he says “had become a kind of fairy tale” for him (30). When attempting to remember the times young Larson spent at his father’s house after his parents divorced, he finds that the memories “are like a reel of film haphazardly spliced and reordered, offering only glimpses into the story

that took place there” and that they “float around in [his] mind unmoored from any narrative function” (32). That the memories of that time are fragmented and cannot be put into a chronological order matches the way traumatic memories behave in the mind. While these characteristics make it difficult for Larson to recount the experiences of that time, he finds a way to circumvent this difficulty by employing stylistic devices from the horror stories he used as an escape back then. He introduces the memories without any preamble and includes them in the book in no chronological order. In both instances where this happens, on page 33 and 37, Larson at first switches to present tense, instead of past tense which he uses throughout most of the book. The switch in tense gives the memory a sense of urgency and immediacy, interrupting the usual flow of the narrative, similar to how traumatic memories interfere with the usual workings of the mind. Breaking with the linear flow of time that is usually expected in a narrative is one of the strategies used to represent trauma (Vickroy 29). The first memory he recalls is not obviously traumatic, as it recalls how Larson woke up in the middle of the night because of a tornado, yet he remarks how to him it “was the end of the world” at the time and that he can still remember a voice inside his head telling him to “get up and save [his] family from whatever has come to destroy [them]” (34). As Michael Richardson remarks in his discussion of traumatic affect, it is not possible to evaluate trauma outside of its context and that while some forms of trauma might not be so impactful as to shake the world, they still affect and shatter the inner workings of an individual person (2). By using the same techniques as he would for more traumatic moments of his life, Larson gives this memory the same traumatic connotation. He uses phrases that might be used in a horror novel, such as: “The fear spreads through my body like electricity” and “all those corners now stretching into endless blackness where anything could be lying in wait for me” (33). The second time he uses this approach in his narration is a memory of his father getting into a terrible accident after having driven under the influence. Again, there are noticeable influences from the horror narratives he read at the time, as he writes of “flashing lights and swirling orbs in the otherwise infinite

darkness” and “a sense of danger [that] pushes away any thoughts of falling asleep again” (37). While he does not use a direct reference to a horror story in particular, as he does at other points with *Halloween*, there are still similarities between his own writing and those of the genre. These similarities are especially noticeable in the moments in which he recalls traumatic and fragmented memories, as they allow him to depict these memories truthfully in spite of their non-chronological and fragmentary aspects.

Another set of memories that is framed by Larson’s reference to and use of the horror genre can be found towards the end of the book. He recalls a family visit to a resort during the summer, during which Larson is sexually harassed by an older man. While the memories start cheerful and are arranged in chronological order, Larson intersperses them with similar movie references as he used when he found out his father had died. He uses the movements of a fictional camera to recall the scenes, like a “slow zoom to the parking lot” or “in a film I would be shot from the outside with my face pressed close to the glass” (113ff). By using the same stylistic devices as he did before, he already instils a sense of foreboding in the reader, letting them know that a similar event is about to happen. Larson also reinforces this by including a fictional soundtrack made from “low and hypnotic notes that are meant to inspire the onset of either desire or dread. You can’t tell which one it will be” (115). The fictional camera even captures things that it would be impossible for Larson to remember: “But now the camera pulls back and reveals a shadowy figure watching from the boardwalk whose eyes we’ve actually been seeing through the entire time the boy has been there, his singular focus foreshadowing whatever is going to happen next” (116). Larson is only able to add this scene as he is writing the narrative in hindsight, adding the fictional element of how it would appear in a horror movie to make it clear to the reader that the memory that he is about to recall is painful for him. At the end of the vacation, as they are leaving the resort and the place where Larson was harassed, he writes that “in a horror movie, [he’d] be struck down by [his] attacker the moment [he] believed

he was safe” (127). Unable to process and retell what happened to him in a traditional sense, he again uses what he has learned from horror movies to explain it.

The scenes analysed above make it clear that Larson uses speculative genres both as an escape from his trauma and to visualise it in his autobiographical narrative. During his childhood, fairy tales and especially horror movies were a way for him to cope with and escape from the traumatic things happening around him. In his recollection of these events, he uses the stylistic devices and tropes he has become familiar with in order to put these events into words, as they would otherwise resist narration. The elements of horror I have outlined above are, however, not the only ones Larson makes use of. There are several elements which come up even more frequently than those mentioned here, which is why I discuss them more in depth in the following.

6.1.1 “What Interested Me In the World Was Also What Scared Me”⁶: Horror as a Representation of Trauma

In *The Long Hallway* Larson uses both the horror genre in general, as well as the movie *Halloween* more specifically, to create a way for him to explain and narrate his childhood. There are three concepts from the horror genre which are employed throughout the narration several times and that I want to analyse in more detail. The first of these concepts is the silent onlooker that watches from the shadows, unnoticed by those he is watching. The second is the idea of the bogeyman or the monster, which is personified in the book by Michael Myers, the villain from *Halloween*. Lastly, I want to look at the concept of the mask as a form of hiding one’s true self and the act of revealing what is hidden beneath the mask. I argue that he uses these concepts to portray his own feelings towards himself and his identity.

The idea of somebody that is lurking in the shadows at first seems to be a childhood fear of Larson. While talking to his mother when Larson is already an adult, she reminds him that

⁶ Larson, *The Long Hallway*, p. 19.

he used to be afraid of the dark and would tell her that “it felt like someone was in there with [him] [...] Someone in the shadows, someone [he] couldn’t see” (162). While this fear persists, especially also after one of Larson’s classmates is murdered and the murderer is at large, it quickly becomes associated with shame and the fear of punishment. Larson writes that “the darkness outside my bedroom window after T’s murder now held some kind of latent possibility of someone hiding out there so that no one would discover what he really was and come to punish him for it” (15). This association with punishment seems to stem from the fact that Larson sees himself turning into a person that watches from the shadows throughout the narrative. The first time he experiences the act of watching in the book, he describes it like the pleasure he would get from “running all the way home with [his] pockets full before anyone could punish [him] for what [he’d] done” (25). The people the young Larson watches in this way are usually men or young boys his age and Larson feels shame for desiring them and fears the punishment he would be dealt if somebody found out. He writes: “But the pleasure of looking was always undermined by the fear of being found out, and I always knew that the objects of my desire must not in any way be made plain” (45). Each time Larson watches from the shadows, he is caught between the pleasure of seeing that which he desires and the fear of being found out and punished for his sexuality. The first time Larson comes close to another boy in a romantic manner, he is punished for this immediately after, the boy pushing him away and kicking him in the chest. He runs home afraid and ashamed, hiding outside his home and watching his mother from the dark of the garden, remaining unseen. He does not want to be seen by her, as he thinks “she would know [he’d] done something wrong. Something unforgivable” (88). This correlates with what Laura Westengard wrote on insidious trauma, the constant fear that queer people live in due to the punishment and violence they might experience because of their sexuality (15). Uncertain of the meaning behind his feelings and behaviours, Larson once again turns to his only source of understanding at the time, the movie *Halloween*. Larson realises quickly in his many viewings of the film that parts of the movie are

filmed from Myers' point of view, teaching "a voyeuristic way of being in the world, a way of looking without being seen" and that he "recognized [himself] as its student" (47). Only later in his life, during his studies of film at university, does he learn the terms for this sort of behaviour, the "experience he'd internalized when [he] first saw Michael stalking his victims" (54). He learns about "the sadism of the voyeur. The spectator as a Peeping Tom. The ruthless, brutal thrills of watching" and "horror as a reenactment of the repressed" (54). It becomes clear that Larson associates his own desires and the acts of his childhood with these types of narratives, convinced that they are vile acts based on shameful desires that need to be suppressed and forgotten. The only way he finds to explain and express them is by comparing his life to a horror movie, with himself becoming the perpetrator rather than the victim. This idea of him being the perpetrator of something terrible by committing this act of watching is not only reinforced by the fact that Michael does this in the movie, but also by the real life events surrounding Larson. After the murderer of his classmate is found and arrested, he learns that the murderer had been previously evicted from his home, as he was prone to looking through young girls' bedroom windows and watching them. Therefore the murderer is also "someone who watched from the shadows—someone who looked" (106). Just after this revelation Larson recalls a scene from *Halloween* where Michael is stabbed in the eye by Laurie, the female protagonist of the film. He observes that "she is punishing him for his looking" and that when the young Larson saw her do it he knew he "should have been punished too," because of "all those boys [he'd] watched at the swimming pool and the locker room [...] those men at the bowling alley who never knew [he] was there" (106f). Larson associates his own actions with those he observes in the movie and in real life, assuming that he deserves the same punishment. This further reinforces Larson's perception of himself as a criminal and as a monster, akin to a real life murderer and a horror movie villain.

Throughout the book, Larson focuses frequently on monsters and bogeymen, which is also why he is so particularly interested in the character of Michael Myers. There is both the

monster that seems to be hunting Larson, waiting for him in the shadows, and the monster that Larson finds within himself. He compares himself frequently to Michael Myers, mostly due to his sexual orientation and desire for men, which he believes he must be punished for and cannot show others. In one of his last conversations with his father, the young Larson talks to his father about girls and his father attempts to give him advice on how to approach them. This conversation makes Larson uncomfortable and he compares his inner thoughts to a monster for the first time in the book: “I could tell as I met his eyes across the picnic table that he just wanted to be sure I would grow into the right kind of man, but this made me afraid that he would see the kind of man I was actually turning into, the monster inside of me pressing hard against my skin and trying to wriggle its way out” (7). Convinced that his sexual desires are monstrous, the young Larson is constantly afraid of being found out. He finds understanding in the character of Michael, thinking that he was similar to him. For Michael “the revelation of sexual desire seems to have triggered a latent evil inside [his] young body that finds expression in the shiny blade of a kitchen knife” (20). As Larson watches the movie at the same time when he first experiences desire towards other boys, he assumes that this non-normative desire must be similar to the evil that is awakened in Myers. Larson becomes convinced that he “was a monster in the shadows, a danger to warn other kids against” (75). When watching the movie and seeing how Michael is hunted by the police, young Larson feels as if they are hunting him, wanting to join Michael in his hiding place so that he might be able to hide from everyone there, too. Even after a few years have passed and Larson is about to move away for college, the identification between him and Myers is still active. When driving to visit his hometown one last time before finally moving away, he wonders whether he “would be mistaken for Michael Myers returning home after many years away” (154). Unable to process his desires and thoughts due to a fear that he would be met with hate and disgust, Larson uses the character of Michael to make sense of it. In the autobiographical discussion of this time, Michael becomes a useful tool to describe and visualise the fear and shame Larson felt at the time.

Additionally, Larson uses the concept of the bogeyman to explicate his father's condition. After finding out years later that his father had in fact died as a result of his alcoholism and not because of cancer, as Larson had originally thought, he reassesses his thoughts of the time and comes to realise that he had misunderstood his father and his condition. He reimagines the alcoholism as his father's own bogeyman that is following him around. He writes:

The bogeyman had already been with us on the drives my brother and I took with our father late at night when the car swerved dangerously and I'd instinctively grab the door handle until the direction had been corrected. The bogeyman was with my father when I watched *Halloween* for the first time in his living room while he sat at the kitchen table as the beer cans accumulated. [...] The bogeyman had been watching us the whole time. (164)

Similar to when he uses the monster and the bogeyman to describe the shortcomings he sees in his own personality, he now uses the concept he is familiar with from horror movies to make it clearer for himself and the reader where his father's shortcomings derived from. Imagining the alcoholism as a bogeyman following his father around that he cannot escape from, Larson grows to understand a situation better that was unexplainable for him as a child.

Another concept from horror that Larson frequently employs in his writing is that of the mask, or the act of hiding one's true self and then being revealed. His main inspiration is once again drawn from *Halloween* and the mask that Myers wears. As young Larson felt that his sexual orientation was a monstrous side of him, he was adamant to hide it from the world, putting on his own sort of mask to remain hidden. This is another way in which he felt connected to Michael, as they both wear masks in order to hide themselves and their monstrosity. Larson discusses the opening sequence of the movie in detail, explaining how Michael takes his first victim when he is still a child and is discovered by his parents wearing a clown mask. Instead of taking the knife from him, his father first removes the mask in order to "reveal him" (27). This act of revealing is what will lead to his punishment for his actions later on, as Larson notes: "he is going to be punished for what he has revealed to the world about himself" (28). Larson

directly connects this to his own mask that he puts on to hide his sexual orientation when he writes: “The opening of *Halloween* is a coming-out story” (28). Myer’s mask is also observed as a source of power, the only way to defeat him lying in the act of revealing the man hiding beneath the mask (120). Unable to fully understand the fear the young Larson felt at being found out, he finds in Myers the only explanation and guideline for how he can remain hidden and what will happen if his mask is taken from him. However, throughout the book he learns that perhaps the mask does not work as well as he thought it would. At one point in *Halloween*, Myers attempts to hide himself under a bedsheet pretending to be a ghost, in addition to the mask he wears. Rather than concealing him, it makes the scene look “cartoonish” and reveals to Larson how “silly it looks to hide in plain sight” (91). After Larson is abused by a stranger while on holiday, he experiences this himself, realising that perhaps he “had never actually been wearing a mask at all” and that rather his “secret desire had been visible on [his] body all along to those who knew how to look” (126). Even when the opposite of what the mask was originally intended to do comes to pass, Larson finds an explanation for it in the movie and is able to discern his own experience with its aid. While *Halloween* is Larson’s main source of inspiration throughout the book, he does observe other types of masking in similar stories. He also references the movie *Scream*, where he notes that he especially liked that the main character distorted his voice over the phone “to hide who he really was” (4). Larson again sympathises with the villain of the story, as he sees similarities in his behaviours and his own. By watching and studying these two films and many others from the same genre, Larson thought he was “giving [himself] an education in what to expect from the world, or at least in how [he] expected the world to eventually receive [him]” (146). He seems convinced that his desires must remain hidden, because he would face punishment otherwise and he finds this explanation in the stories he uses as a form of escape.

All three of the concepts from horror stories that Larson uses frequently are connected to his sexuality and the fear and punishment he expected because of it. As I mentioned in my

discussion of the connections between trauma writing and queer writing, the narrative structures that are used in these two types of writing are often similar. In Larson's book the two become intertwined regularly, as there are a lot of situations where Larson associates his sexuality with traumatic memories. He felt that the harassment he suffered was deserved due to his own 'monstrosity' and that he had to adopt the same strategies as the villains in the stories he watched in order to survive. His use of the horror elements are therefore both used as an examination of his queer identity and a representation of his trauma. As his sexual identity was often the source of the trauma he was faced with, the two cannot be separated in this case.

6.2 "*The Man Waiting For Me at the End of the Long Hallway*"⁷: Places of Narration

The setting of Larson's book changes throughout the narrative, as he moved regularly in his childhood. However, there are significant places which he returns to habitually, especially in the context of his traumatic memories. The two places I want to highlight are the house, which often becomes a haunted place both through Larson's engagement with horror narratives and the memories he associates with it, and the hallway, which is the part of the house that is featured the most, as he returns to it every night in his dreams. Both places are employed to visualise the memories Larson associates with them and the time he spent there.

In the time span that the book is focused on, Larson lives in three different homes. While all three hold significant memories of that time, I want to focus on the first house, which he lived in when his parents were still together. Once Larson, his brother and his mother move out, his father lives there alone and the children come to visit him on the weekends. This is the time when Larson is confronted with his father's alcoholism and where he first discovers his love for horror movies. He comes to associate his father so strongly with that house, that even when his father has moved out he remembers that to him "he still smelled like the old house" (10). However, Larson associates the house less with the childhood home he had lived in once, but

⁷ Larson, *The Long Hallway*, p. 11.

it rather becomes a place he associates with pain. As a child he started to avoid the house so much that he and his brother would wander in the streets in the time they were supposed to visit their father, rather than enter the house. He compares the house to the murder site in *Halloween*, starting to think of it as “haunted, like the boarded up and abandoned Myers house in Haddonfield” and he knew that he “couldn’t make [himself] go inside that house again” (62). Unable to process the memories associated with the house and the reason why he does not dare enter the house again, he turns to his favourite movie in order to explain it. His idea of the house becoming haunted is reinforced throughout the narrative. The last time they pretend to visit their father is on Halloween night, where Larson instead takes his brother trick-or-treating in the neighbourhood. Even though they avoid their father’s house, they still end up going into a haunted house, which was made up for the occasion. Larson becomes engrossed in the experience, forgetting that his brother had gone in with him, which leads to him losing his brother. After a frantic search, he tells his mother and they manage to find the brother, but their mother finds out about the fake visits and that their father had never seen them or taken care of them. As a result, they are forbidden to go back to their father’s house (66ff). Larson is relieved at this solution, as he again reiterates that the “house we’d all shared together was now haunted and needed to be boarded up, its demons and ghosts trapped inside forever, even with my father still there alone in the dark behind the locked front door” (76). The traumatic memories associated with the place can thus be locked away like ghosts and demons, allowing Larson to move on. Using the metaphor of the haunted house allows him to grasp his feelings and memories associated with the house.

Once again, Larson uses the movie *Halloween* as a main source of how he imagines his own house and the memories he associates with it. At the very end of the book, Larson rewatches the movie with his mother when he is already an adult and while seeing the houses of the movie he is reminded of the homes he lived in during his childhood. He writes: “While I watched those houses flash before me in the dark as the ending credits rolled, [...] as the

soundtrack began to play and the three houses of my childhood appeared unbidden in my mind as if I'd never left them behind" (165). Watching the movie he so heavily associated with the memories and the trauma of that time, the memory returns to him outside of his control, just as has been argued traumatic memories behave (Caruth 2). The house from *Halloween* had become so heavily associated with his own childhood homes that he cannot separate them, which further reinforces the choice to use the intertextual reference to this movie in his autobiographical engagement with this time.

The second place of narration that is of significance in Larson's book is the hallway. Throughout the book Larson has a reoccurring dream where a man – who he cannot properly see or make out who he is – is waiting for him at the end of a long hallway. On his way to the man Larson passes a large number of people, knowing that once he walks past them they will die, but he is unable to stop himself from moving forward. The first time Larson recalls this, he writes that the people he passed "would kill themselves in some elaborately gruesome way just as my gaze met theirs" (11). He never reaches the man at the end of the hallway, even though the dream occurs again and again throughout this time in his life. This "compulsion to repeat, to dream or relive or relate the traumatic event over and over," as Roger Luckhurst argues in his discussion of trauma, is an attempt to "return the psyche to a state of quiescence once more" (83). Returning to the imagery of the hallway again and again represents Larson's compulsive return to the traumatic memory in his mind in an attempt to work through it.

That the dream of the hallway is directly tied to Larson's father becomes clear when his father is diagnosed with cancer. After Larson's mother informs him of the diagnosis, he begins to see cancer in almost every person he comes across and eventually it also appears in his dreams, where he saw "cancer in the people in the long hallway [...] the skin of their faces peeled back to reveal the rot of their insides, veins and organs all crawling with worms" (76). During his first visit of his father in the hospital, his father reveals to him that he has had a reoccurring dream where he is steadily moving forward in the dark. Larson had never told his

father about his dream beforehand and he begins to wonder that maybe this is something they have in common and that maybe his “father had been beside [him] the whole time in all those other nights, and [he] just hadn’t looked to see” (79). However, he is not fully able to process this idea at the time. Only much later, when Larson is already an adult, can he really think about the events of that time. He realises that his father had been “walking down his own long hallway toward whatever was waiting for him at the end” (166). Being unable to process the trauma at the time, Larson suppresses the memory and can only return to it at a later point. Just as Caruth argues, “only in and through its inherent forgetting” can the trauma be “experienced at all” (17). The trauma returns to Larson in the form of the dream again and again, but he is only able to connect it to his father in retrospect, when he has the ability to reflect on his trauma.

Larson does not make an attempt to pinpoint the origin of the imagery of the long, dark hallway in his book, however, there are connections that can be made once again between Larson’s experiences and the horror movies he watches at the time. On several occasions in his discussion of *Halloween*, Larson chooses to mention that the characters are moving down a dark hallway. During the first murder for example Michael “proceeds to move slowly through the quiet and shadowed hallways” (20). At another point, one of Michael’s victims is “walking slowly down a shadowed hallway” (55). The scenes are not connected, yet the shadowed hallway is specified in both occasions. Larson uses the same imagery as he sees in the horror movies to describe his own experiences, leaning on the associations with fear and pursuit that are found with dark hallways in these scenes in order to better visualise his own experiences.

In conclusion it can be said that Larson uses influences and references from horror movies and fairy tales in order to make his trauma narratable and to put the memories of his adolescence into a familiar shape, which makes it understandable both for himself and the reader.

7 *In The Dream House* – Carmen Maria Machado

The third and final book I analyse is *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado. Even though it is categorised as a memoir just as the two previous books, it is definitely the most experimental of the three. In each chapter Machado uses a different trope, genre or lens to retell the story of her abusive relationship. They are all titled in the same way, starting with “*Dream House as...*” and the reference or trope she is using afterwards. The deviation from the traditional genre conventions and structures of autobiographical writing allows Machado to represent the fragmentary and life-altering nature of the traumatising experience she went through.

The book was first published in 2019 and has since earned both critical and public acclaim. Machado was praised for bringing the topic of same-sex partner abuse to light, which has previously lacked literary representation. There are several scholars that have engaged with Machado’s text, highlighting and exploring different aspects of the book. Prudence Bussey-Chamberlain, whose text I have already mentioned in chapter 4.1, uses Machado’s text to explore the connection between the representation of queer partner abuse and experimental forms of memoir writing. Isobel Lavers is interested in a similar topic, investigating how Machado uses her experiments with form to fill a gap that has been present in the queer women’s archive of intimate partner violence and thereby expands the representations of queer experience. Anjeanette Wiese views Machado’s use of fragmentation more broadly as a success in depicting an experience that would otherwise remain culturally unintelligible. While these scholars’ works all examine interesting aspects of Machado’s book, the one that aligns the most with my particular interest is Chloe Green, who argues that Machado’s experimentation and form allow her to create an emotionally accurate portrayal of her traumatic experience. Green uses the arguments of Leigh Gilmore – whose work I have used in my discussion of autobiographical trauma writing – to investigate how Machado pushes the boundaries of autobiographical writing to “capture not only the fracturing experience of trauma but also the

attendant trauma of not being believed” (531). My argumentation differs from Green in that my focus is not only Machado’s experimentation with form, but in particular her use of intertextuality and speculative fiction to make her experiences of trauma both intelligible and as emotionally accurate as it is possible within the confines of trauma representation.

Besides *In the Dream House*, Machado has published a short story collection titled *Her Body and Other Parties* and a graphic novel. She has written several short stories, essays and texts of literary and cultural criticism. Her writing has earned her several awards and *In the Dream House* was a bestseller. Different to the two books I have analysed previously, Machado does not focus on one genre or trope in particular. Instead, with each chapter she chooses a new focus and narrative lens with which she can examine and relay her experience as clearly as possible (Qasim). The use of speculative fiction in particular, whether that is through an intertextual reference or by using narrative devices from the genre, allows Machado to look at her own life story in an unusual manner that can encompass even those experiences that otherwise escape her grasp. As the blurb on the back of the book promises, by doing this Machado “explodes our ideas about what a memoir can do and be.”

In my analysis, I first focus on how Machado uses intertextuality in order to find an expression for trauma. She does this both in her chapter headings, as well as throughout the text, employing tropes and motifs from well-known speculative stories. She also uses footnotes, either to add her own academic insights or to reference a collection of motifs from fairy tales. As Machado frequently experiments with the form of her book, I also look at how this contributes to her construction of a trauma narrative. She breaks with narrative conventions by using fragmentation, breaking the linear chronology and uses metaphor and analogies to reframe her own experiences. Quite a large part of the book is also written in second-person form, showcasing the discord between the narrating I writing the book and the narrated I living through the traumatising events (Smith and Watson 72f). Here she also frequently taps into her knowledge of speculative fiction and uses their characteristics to build her own unique form.

The title of the book already suggests the importance of the house as a narrative space, which is why I dedicate part of my analysis to examine the spaces Machado utilises for her narration.

7.1 “Putting Language to Something for Which You Have No Language is No Easy Feat”⁸:

Intertextuality as an Expression of Trauma

Almost every chapter of Machado’s book, which are often times quite short, uses a different genre or trope as its topic in order to approach the story Machado is trying to narrate. Quite a large number of these are intertextual references to mainly works of fiction. While Machado does not exclusively utilise works of speculative fiction, these genres are the most prevalent and for my analysis I will primarily stick to these references. The other genres that are present have a similar function as the use of speculative fiction has, yet I argue that the speculative elements, which deviate the most from traditional autobiographical texts, are especially well suited for representing her traumatic experiences.

There are a few moments in the book where Machado follows a story out of her own life with one from a work of speculative fiction. When comparing the chapters with each other, it becomes clear that Machado uses the fictional stories to expand upon her own experiences and relay the full scope of the events to the reader more clearly. In the chapter “*Dream House as Bluebeard*,” Machado uses the story of Bluebeard to compare herself to the character of the wife in the story (67). In the previous chapter Machado recalls a visit to her girlfriend’s parents, during which the two get into a fight and her girlfriend hurts her by grabbing and keeping hold of her arm while her parents are in the room. Machado is scared and cannot fully grasp the situation, knowing only that she is afraid of what her girlfriend will do next. In the story of Bluebeard that follows this instance, Machado muses that if his last wife had not gone against his will, she would have slowly become bent to his will, doing everything he says without question. She writes: “This is how you are toughened, the newest wife reasoned. This is where

⁸ Machado, *In the Dream House*, p. 156.

the tenacity of love is practiced; its tensile strength, its durability. You are being tested and you are passing the test; sweet girl, sweet self, look how good you are; look how loyal, look how loved” (67). At first glance, the chapter simply retells and discusses the story of Bluebeard and his wife, but in combination with the previous chapter, it becomes clear how the two mirror each other. Machado uses Bluebeard’s wife as a stand-in for herself, even addressing her in the same manner as she addresses herself during the previous chapter, which is also written in second-person. The lines between herself and Bluebeard’s wife begin to blur when she writes, “you are being tested and you are passing the test,” leaving it up to the reader’s interpretation who she is speaking about in that moment (67). Something similar is achieved in the chapters “*Dream House as Dirty Laundry*” and “*Dream House as Five Lights*” (176, 177). In the first, Machado’s girlfriend interrogates her, trying to find out who she has told about the fact that the girlfriend yells at her and the incidents of abuse that have occurred. There is no answer that satisfies her, instead “every answer enrages her” and she “calls [Machado] a liar” (176). Machado follows this story of her own life and the abuse she suffers with a retelling of an episode of Star Trek, in which Captain Jean-Luc Picard is interrogated with the help of truth serum. He is put through repeated torture, all in an attempt to make him say that he can see five lights instead of the four that he can actually see. At the end, Picard admits that he was close to doing so shortly before being saved; he says that he “would have told him anything. Anything at all” (180). The chapter that actually revolves around Machado’s life is rather short, only half a page, but she dedicates three pages to the Star Trek episode. Machado lacks the means and words to fully describe what has happened to her or how she felt during that time, so instead she utilises the intertextual reference to speak for her. The events are similar enough that the reader can see the connections between the two and draw their own conclusions as to how Machado felt at the time. Failing to find her own words for her traumatising experiences, Machado circumvents their unspeakable nature by employing the speculative stories.

Some of Machado's chapters are also not direct intertextual references to a specific work, but are more broadly referencing genres as a whole. In these cases the chapters are named after the genre, such as "*Dream House as High Fantasy*," "*Dream House as American Gothic*," "*Dream House as Spy Thriller*" and "*Dream House as Murder Mystery*" (76, 86, 104, 209). In the first, "*Dream House as High Fantasy*," Machado uses the genre to describe the way she felt when she first got into the relationship, as if she was "a piece of someone's destiny. [She is] critical to a larger plan that will span many years, many kingdoms, many volumes" (76). In the second, she talks about the two things that are necessary to make a story a gothic romance: "woman plus habitation" and "marrying a stranger" (86). Machado observes that her own story, the one she is telling in this autobiographical text, fulfils these two preconditions: "it was woman plus habitation, and she was a stranger" (87). Her girlfriend is a stranger to her, because she only learns of her abusive side when she is already living with her in the house she calls the Dream House. In these chapters Machado would not necessarily need the speculative genres to tell her own story. However, as her memories and understanding are fractured by trauma, the references to these types of fiction allow her to construct her narrative. In "*Dream House as Murder Mystery*," Machado even writes a completely new story about a murder that occurs at a dinner party and it remains unclear how this relates to her own autobiographical story and her relationship. However, the emotion conveyed in this chapter still follows the same patterns as her own story throughout book, justifying its place in the narrative. It expands the reader's understanding of Machado's emotional state at the time. The purposeful deviation from what factually happened into the realm of the speculative marks the rupture caused by trauma (Whitehead 84).

Similar to the references to genre Machado makes, she also names some of her chapters after popular tropes from either books or movies. She seems to suggest that the events unfolding in her life can be categorised into the same tropes and motifs that are usually found in fictional narratives. By doing this, the story already seems familiar to the reader and gives the

impressions that “the decisions and fate of the character are predestined from the outset” and Machado produces the “motif of an inescapable trajectory or fate, which [...] bears comparison with Freud’s elaboration of the repetition-compulsion” (Whitehead 89f). In the chapter “*Dream House as a Stranger Comes to Town*” Machado narrates the first arrival of Val, the girlfriend of the woman in the Dream House at the time (19). The chapter is short and only introduces Val to the reader briefly, but by giving it this title, Machado references a similar occurrence that is often employed in other narratives, where the arrival of a stranger in town disrupts the usual flow of daily life there. This way, the reader is aware of the role Val will play later on in the narrative without Machado necessarily having to spell it out in her own writing. Similarly, in “*Dream House as Haunted Mansion*,” Machado references a motif that is frequently used in horror literature (146). This way she adds subtext to the Dream House, without having to explain in detail what she means. The reader can use the title and the reference to previous works to ascribe meaning to the house in which the narrative is set and the people in the narrative.

The main intertextual influence that Machado uses throughout the book stems from folktales and fairy tales. There is an entire chapter titled “*Dream House as Folktale Taxonomy*,” which she dedicates to writing about motifs from different fairy tales, most of them focused on the silence or silencing of its main characters (38f). However, this is by far not the first reference to folktales that Machado makes. From the beginning of the story, when Machado starts to date the woman in the Dream House, she frequently uses footnotes to reference a classification of folktale motifs, picking in each moment the appropriate motif for what she is narrating. As there are more than a dozen of such references throughout the book, I analyse only a few key examples in this thesis. In the chapter on folktale taxonomy I mentioned, Machado uses five such footnotes to categorise the motifs that are present in the three fairy tale stories she references. In this case the footnotes are not surprising, as the stories she is referencing are part of the folktale genre. However, on most other occasions Machado uses the footnotes for events

in her own life, which – as this is an autobiographical text – would not be categorised as a folktale. By referencing the same system as one would for a folktale, Machado bestows her otherwise factual narrative the qualities of a speculative story.

The footnotes referencing the folktale guide can be loosely separated into two categories: occasions where what is happening in the narrative is very close to the motif referenced in the footnote, and occasions where the connection is more vague and figurative. An example for the first category can be found in the chapter “*Dream House as Lesson Learned*,” where Machado recalls going to visit her mother’s sister. She writes: “As a child you not so secretly referred to her as your ‘scary aunt’ because she was known to fly into unpredictable rages; rages that, more often than not, centered on you” (79). Right after this sentence, she includes a footnote which states: “Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Type S72, Cruel aunt” (79). Her aunt’s cruelty and rages are unexplainable to Machado, seemingly random and unavoidable. The motif of the cruel aunt as a character that is often part of a folktale grants an explanation and categorisation. Machado blends the border between fictional folktales and her autobiographical narrative by making this connection, which could suggest a deviation from the authentic truth of her story. However, as Machado includes the footnote in an attempt to explain something that she is not able to understand herself, she thereby allows herself and the reader to grasp her narrative more thoroughly. This is not the only instance where Machado feels the need to explain the actions of the people around her with the help of the folktale guide. On page 175, after confronting her girlfriend about the fact that she has stopped going to therapy, her girlfriend makes excuses saying that she is “totally fine” and that she does not “need therapy.” The reader is then guided to the understanding that her girlfriend must be lying, as Machado includes the footnote: “Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Type X905.4, The liar: ‘I have no time to lie today’; lies nevertheless” (175). Instead of trusting her own judgement and telling the reader her own thoughts, Machado rather relies on the guide to explain her girlfriend’s behaviour.

Right after this instance, Machado also uses a footnote to expand upon her own actions. After she confronts her girlfriend by saying “You chased me. You destroyed everything around me. You have no memory of any of it. Doesn’t that alarm you?,” she includes the footnote “Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, Type C411.1, Taboo: Asking for reason of an unusual action” (175). In this case, the footnote seems less to be an attempt to find an explanation for her actions and rather amplifies the feeling associated with her actions. Most of the times Machado uses footnotes in connection with her own actions it includes some sort of taboo that she breaks. This ranges from simple actions such as driving at night, which is categorised as “taboo: doing thing after sunset (nightfall),” to her bodily reaction to her abuse like “sickness or weakness for breaking taboo,” “taboo: weeping” and “bleeding from breaking taboo” (100, 117, 219, 221). While her actions are not unexplainable to her, as those of the people around her are, Machado still utilises the folktale references in order to make sense of the events that unfolded during a traumatising time. The footnotes suggest that she associates her own actions with the breaking of taboos, as a punishment for this overstepping might be the only explanation Machado can find for the traumatising things that happened to her.

As has already been mentioned above, there are several instances where the references in the footnotes are connected to Machado’s narrative in a more figurative way. This happens frequently in association with her abusive girlfriend’s behaviour. When they first move into the Dream House together, Machado references the motif “girl mistakenly elopes with the wrong lover,” hinting already at the fact that the relationship will turn into a bad experience for Machado (75). In “*Dream House as American Gothic*,” which has already been analysed previously, she uses the footnote “falling in love with person never seen” to strengthen the implication that her girlfriend seemed like a stranger to her after revealing her abusive tendencies (87). At a later point she even compares her to a creature from a folktale, when she writes, “She peels the sheet away from your body; you shiver” followed by the footnote “Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Type E279.3, Ghost pulls bedclothing from

sleeper” (143). Though the narrative by itself stays realistic and autobiographical, the footnotes clearly deviate from this by connecting the events to elements from speculative fiction. As the behaviour of the woman in the Dream House becomes progressively more irrational and traumatising for Machado, the references equally adapt by deviating more and more from the usual autobiographical standards. This increase can also be observed in the chapter “*Dream House as Mystical Pregnancy*” in which Machado, despite the fact that this would be impossible, starts to experience pregnancy symptoms while living in the Dream House (187). Unable to process what is happening to her in a rational sense, she jumps to conclusions that are impossible. This is also reflected in the footnote, which spans over half a page and includes over thirty motifs that have to do with conception (188). The trauma she faced was so disruptive to her reality that Machado uses a large and visually disruptive footnote to make this disruption clear to the reader.

One of the final footnotes Machado uses can be found in the chapter “*Dream House as Epilogue*,” where she writes about the origin of the book and where she wrote it. She writes, “I wrote a large part of this book in rural eastern Oregon” and follows it with the footnote “Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Type D2161.3.6.1, magic restoration of cut-out tongue” (276). This points to the healing effect writing about her trauma might have had for Machado. Only by writing her own account of the events does she – following the metaphor of the cut-out tongue – regain her ability to speak.

The frequent inclusion of footnotes can overall be seen as a visual representation of the fragmentation caused by trauma. The reader is forced to jump from the sentence to the bottom of the page and back again, if they want to follow Machado’s intended reading flow. As a result, the process of reading is interrupted, again and again, which “compromise[s] the fluidity of the text and evidence[s] the breakdown of language and representation” (Mayer 139). Just as traumatic memories interrupt the daily life and mind of the traumatised individual, the narrative

is interrupted by Machado's frequent use of footnotes, mimicking for the reader the way that her mind behaves.

There are, however, also a number of footnotes throughout the book that do not reference the classification of folktales. In these footnotes, Machado rather explores historical background or academic insights to the things she is writing about. Due to their rather academic and less fictional nature, they are less relevant to my argumentation, but warrant a mention here nevertheless. Similar to her use of speculative fiction, they provide an avenue for Machado to at least attempt to rationalise and explain the traumatising events. In the chapter "*Dream House as Fantasy*" for example, Machado compares the image of lesbian relationships as a fantastical utopia to the reality of domestic abuse. In order to do this, she references three different accounts of lesbian partner abuse or "lesbian battering," as it is called in her footnotes (124). Similarly, in "*Dream House as Equivocation*," Machado includes three footnotes that take up half the page to further contextualise the way queer abuse is silenced even within the queer community (230). Unable to comprehend the abuse she faces in her own relationship, she searches for and then includes any information she can find on this type of abuse. By doing this she creates distance between herself and the traumatising event; as Anne Whitehead argues, the "self-conscious use of intertextuality can introduce reflexive distance into the narrative" (92). While the academic insights Machado poses in these footnotes have a similar effect as the ones referencing folktales, contextualising and fragmenting the narrative that is otherwise so personal, they seem less out of place and unexpected as the speculative additives. The footnotes referencing the folktale guide therefore break with the known conventions of autobiographical more thoroughly than those examined in this paragraph.

In conclusion it can be said that Machado uses a number of intertextual references to make sense of the traumatising time she lived through because of her abusive relationship. The references give her a way to narrate something that otherwise resists being put into words and allows her to grant the reader an accurate portrayal of her experiences and emotions.

7.2 “I Try to Say, But I Fail and Fail and Fail”⁹: *Breaking the Narrative and Deviating Forms*

One of the main ways Machado visualises and portrays the effects of trauma on the mind in her narrative is by breaking with narrative conventions, either by employing unusual forms or by straying from a realistic retelling of events into the figurative and fantastical. The main feature I want to analyse is present throughout most of the book, where Machado chooses to narrate the events in a second-person perspective, instead of the first-person narration, which is more customary for autobiographical writing. However, there are other ways Machado adapts the narrative form of her novel, such as a switch of narrative tense or a broken chapter structure. She also plays with the concept of linearity, asking the reader at times to switch back and forth within the book. In the following, I examine key examples of this and how it connects to her use of speculative fiction elements.

Most of the chapters in which Machado is writing about her experiences in the Dream House and the abuse she faced are written in second-person narration, while the chapters which detail her life after the Dream House are written in first-person narration. There are several reasons why she could have chosen to do this. Leigh Gilmore for example posits that “first-person accounts of trauma by women [...] are likely to be doubted, not only when they bring forward accounts of sexual trauma but also because their self-representation already is at odds with the account the representative man would produce” (23). Machado’s use of second-person narration might therefore be an attempt to make her account more believable by including the reader, as she is directly addressing them. Isobel Lavers remarks in her analysis of Machado’s book that by using second-person narration she distances “her autobiographical self from the very narrative she depicts, and in turn [closes] the gap between the reader and the experiences of abuse” (145). I argue that both these argumentations can be applied to Machado’s text and

⁹ Machado, *In the Dream House*, p. 173.

that they are also productive avenues to look at the representation of trauma in her book. As the traumatising event is difficult – or almost impossible – to grasp, creating distance between it and herself allows Machado to formulate it in narrative form. The break from the traditional way of narrating an autobiographical story also marks the rupture caused by trauma and makes a clear distinction between the narrated person living through the traumatising time and the narrating person writing about it.

Machado elaborates on her choice of second-person narration in the chapter “*Dream House as an Exercise in Point of View*” (12). She writes “You were not always just a You. I was whole—a symbiotic relationship between my best and worst parts—and then, in one sense of the definition, I was cleaved: a neat lop that took first person—that assured confident woman, the girl detective, the adventurer—away from second, who was always anxious and vibrating like a too-small breed of dog” (12). It becomes immediately clear that the trauma she faced due to her abusive relationship led to a rupture within herself, not only on her mind but also her personality. She addresses her past self directly, as if they were two separate entities rather than one person at different times. However, she also acknowledges that even though they are separated by time, the past self cannot be ignored when she writes: “I thought you died, but writing this, I’m not sure you did” (12). As most scholars in the field acknowledge, trauma often causes the past to blend into the present, making it difficult for the afflicted person to separate the two. Machado’s choice to address her past self and narrate her story in second-person narration is an attempt to create such a separation in order to make the events of that time knowable and narratable.

The split between the two persons who serve as protagonist of the story is also strengthened when Machado switches back and forth in her point of view. In the chapter “*Dream House as Cottage in Washington*,” Machado starts out by writing in the first-person perspective: “Many years later, I wrote part of this book in a cottage on an island off the coast of Washington State” (105). While she is there, she picks up a snail to observe it and

accidentally drops it, cracking its shell. This is when she switches the perspective mid-sentence: “I’d come all the way to this island to write a book about suffering, and you did something terrible to a resident of the island who’d done no harm” (105). While for the most part of the chapter, Machado has returned to the usual type of narration for autobiographical writing, she reverts back to the distanced perspective when pain is inflicted and she is reminded of what happened to her. It shows that despite the fact that the traumatising time has passed, it still influences Machado and remains a part of her mind.

The appearance of timelessness of the traumatic experience is further heightened by the fact that Machado writes most of her chapters, especially those that are written in second-person narration, in present tense. This gives the reader the impression that the events she is writing about are not finished, but rather still ongoing. As Laurie Vickroy observes, survivors of trauma “live in durational rather than chronological time, they continue to experience the horrors of the past” (5). Though Machado writes about events in the past, she never acknowledges this in the tense she chooses. She writes for example: “You make a mistake early on, though you don’t know it at the time. You admit to her that you are constantly nursing low-grade crushes on many people in your life” (90). The time markers “early on” and “at the time” would suggest that these are events from the past that Machado is contemplating in the present, but the tense does not reflect this shift in time. Her choice of tense rather reflects the durational time she is experiencing in her mind due to the traumatic nature of the events she is relaying.

Furthermore, Machado marks the break caused by trauma by employing fragmentation and breaking the narrative on the level of form. She acknowledges the direct connection between her use of fragmentation and her experiences in the Dream House, as she writes: “It would make sense if, during the time in the Dream House, your work suffered. [...] But instead, your creativity explodes. [...] You begin to experiment with fragmentation. [...] I broke the stories down because I was breaking down and didn’t know what else to do” (171f). Right after this acknowledgement follows a chapter in which Machado refrains entirely from using the

letter e. For this she even has to change her usual chapter naming structure as it is now called “*Traumhaus as Lipogram*” (173). It is an attempt to circumvent the trouble she is having with representing her experiences, which resist narration, as she makes clear when she writes: “It’s hard, saying a story without a critical part. [...] I try to say, but I fail and fail and fail” (173).

The most notable break in form happens in the chapter “*Dream House as Choose Your Own Adventure*” (189). The chapter starts out as normal, retelling an instance where Machado’s girlfriend is angry at her right in the morning. However, instead of continuing the story and telling the reader what happened next, she gives three options as to what happens next: “If you apologize profusely, go to page 190. If you tell her to wake you up next time your elbows touch her in your sleep, go to page 191. If you tell her to calm down, go to page 193” (189). On each of the respective pages the reader can now turn to, there is a different outcome to the situation and another set of choices what could happen next. With each of these choices, the reader can decide how the situation continues and no matter which route is taken, it remains unclear what happened in reality. This goes on until page 204, with the reader flipping back and forth between the pages, as the linear structure is broken by this unusual form. By employing this device and letting the reader choose for themselves what the outcome of the situation will be, Machado clearly deviates from the usual norms of autobiographical narratives. It becomes impossible to ascertain what the truth is in this instance and the reader is forced to accept that Machado’s experience goes beyond the ordinary bounds of representation. This is one of the ventures that Machado undertakes to amplify the defamiliarization of the reader to the narrative by drifting into the fictional. While this is one of the most noticeable deviations in form and reliable narration that Machado employs – which is why it warrants discussion here – for my argumentation I want to focus more on the times in which Machado deviates from reality by shifting into the speculative, fantastical and metaphorical.

One of the instances where Machado’s narration shifts from a realistic autobiographical retelling into a more metaphorical and fantastical mode happens right after her girlfriend breaks

up with her. She observes her phone after being broken up with and writes: “It grows in your hand, larger and larger, and you discover that, instead, you are shrinking. By the time the realization hits you, you are three feet tall. [...] You soon make out, though, that you are in the pool of tears that you had wept when you were nine feet high” (219f). The emotions caused by the breakup are so indescribable to Machado that instead of sticking with the usual mode of autobiographical narration, she instead veers into the fantastical. This marks for the reader the moment her memories are ruptured by emotions. Additionally, the pool of tears can be viewed as a reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Both the growing and shrinking to inhuman sizes and the pool of tears are elements that are featured in the children’s book (Carroll 15). By using this imagery Machado again creates an intertextual reference, further marking the traumatic nature of the event. A few chapters later Machado returns to this scene of swimming in her own tears, this time coming across a mouse and a range of other creatures that have fallen into well of tears: “a Duck and a Dodo (Amy Parker’s “trusting, extinguished bird”), a Lory and an Eaglet. And among them, every stranger who has ever seen you cry in public doing the breaststroke” (224). The story is not a retelling of what actually happened to Machado after the break-up and yet it fluidly emerges from the rest of the narrative. Unable to explain her feelings and memories in a normal way, Machado chooses the fantastical to push the boundaries of what a memoir can be and what might be a part of it.

There are also chapters which are entirely fantastical and in which it remains unclear whether they have anything to do with Machado’s life at all. It remains up to the reader to interpret their connection and how they could be a representation of what Machado went through. The first is “*Dream House as the Queen and the Squid*,” in which Machado retells a story that she “learned from a squid” (232). It is a story of a lonely queen that had been given a squid to delight her. At first their “friendship was a magnificent one,” but sometimes the “queen was distant, often cruel” (233). Eventually, the squid is replaced by a bear and it realises that the queen has gone through a range of animals, discarding them after she lost interest.

While the story does not seem directly related to Machado's autobiographical narrative, there are connections that could be made between the characters in the story and the people in Machado's life. I argue that she uses the story as a stand in for her own story. Using the characters of the queen and the squid allows her to create distance from the event and detach herself. The resulting fairy tale like story gives the reader an insight into her thoughts and feelings, without speaking about them directly. By doing this Machado employs the concept of indirection that scholars observe as one of the ways writers translate trauma symptoms into writing (Kurtz 102).

Something similar happens in the chapter "*Dream House as Generation Starship*" (270). At first glance, it is a made up science fiction story about humans having left earth. However, a number of phrases hint at the fact that it might instead again be a stand in for Machado's feelings about her own story:

They had to get out—they knew it, everyone knew it, but they were lucky, and found a ship. [...] They left out the worst parts, maybe, because even now, surrounded by chrome and glass and stars, the acute bite of the planet's betrayal has lessened. [...] 'I suppose it must have been terrible,' they said uncertainly. 'We took so much effort to leave. It must have been the worst place. (270)

The story of the passengers' doubt about leaving earth and how their memories of their time on earth become confused, leading them to think that perhaps it might not have been as bad as they remember it, can be seen as a representation of Machado's own feelings about her past with the woman in the Dream House and the story she is writing about her. As her memories are clouded and fragmented by trauma, she uses the speculative and fictional story of Generation Starship to at least come close to a truthful representation of her thoughts and feelings on the matter.

In short, throughout her book Machado breaks the narrative at several points and either uses deviating forms or speculative stories to achieve this. She does this in order to circumvent the prohibiting effect trauma has on her memories and narrative abilities, and thus finds a way to represent her experiences.

7.3 “From Now On, It Will Just Be You and the Woman in the Dream House”¹⁰: the House as the Place of Trauma

While all three books analysed in this thesis use the narrative space to visualise trauma, Machado’s work demonstrates this the most extensively. The book is named after the most important space in the narrative: the Dream House. As I have mentioned previously, each chapter name starts out with the Dream House as well. Machado makes it clear from the beginning that the memories and the trauma narrated in her book are heavily associated with this place. She even writes: “Places are never just places in a piece of writing. If they are, the author has failed. Setting is not inert. It is activated by point of view” (81). In her writing – and as she claims in any good piece of writing – the places that are used as setting for the story are never merely there just as a backdrop, but an important way for the author to communicate to the reader the feelings and views of the person that is inhabiting the space.

The Dream House is the most important place of narration throughout the book and therefore discussed the most. Right at the beginning of the book, Machado gives a few vague descriptions of what the Dream House looks like. Most notably, however, in this chapter she makes it clear to the reader that “it is important to remember that the Dream House is real” (7). While some of the discussion of the Dream House and the things that happened inside it veers into the metaphorical and speculative it still remains a real place and the story told within is based on and formed by Machado’s memories. She promises the reader at this stage – akin to Lejeune’s autobiographical pact – that the Dream House and the events that happened in it are real. Machado associates the Dream House with the trauma she experienced there and how it changed her, as she finds that she “came of age, then, in the Dream House” (37). Additionally, Machado’s girlfriend at the time – who abuses her – is never named and instead she is only ever called “the woman in the Dream House” or “the woman from the Dream House” (8, 75).

¹⁰ Machado, *In the Dream House*, p. 75.

While the house only becomes the Dream House through the associations Machado makes with it and the experiences she has while living there, she also notes a predisposition of the house to become the place where she will experience difficult things. In the chapter “*Dream House as Lesbian Pulp Novel*” Machado writes that in the Dream House “tragedy is a foregone conclusion” and that it “was written into the DNA of the Dream House” (78). Many books that were categorised as lesbian pulp novels featured unhappy endings and failed relationships due to publishers’ fears about censorship, which Machado seems to evoke here (Bronski 686f). The intertextual reference she makes to the genre thus creates the motif of an “inescapable trajectory or fate,” which Anne Whitehead so heavily associates with intertextuality in the context of trauma literature (89). It is important to note that for Machado this fate is tied to the house, and less to the people inhabiting it. In the same chapter she also imagines a creature very far in the past stumbling across the place that would one day become the Dream House and that could hear the “ghosts of a future that hadn’t happened yet” (78). This marks the timeless quality of the memories Machado associates with the house, as they remain forever on her mind, forcing her to return to them again and again.

While the inescapable fate can be interpreted as a motif evoked by intertextuality, it is also an image often associated with transgenerational trauma (Schwab 42). In Machado’s narration this imagery is evoked in the chapter “*Dream House as Haunted Mansion*” (146). In it, she observes the qualities of a haunted mansion and explores how they apply to the Dream House. The qualities she collects are “metaphors abound; that space exists in four dimensions; that if you return somewhere often enough it becomes imbued with your energy; that the past never leaves us; that there’s always atmosphere to consider; that you can wound air as cleanly as you can wound flesh” and she finds these in the Dream House (146). Thus she became “the sudden, inadvertent occupant of a place where bad things had happened” (147). Machado finds the remnants of a violent past in the Dream House and also considers the fact that one day somebody else might find the echo of what happened to her in this house. This sort of secret

past that can be felt, but is not openly addressed and instead hidden, is considered to be a feature of transgenerational trauma.

Another aspect Machado frequently writes about in her book is the safety usually associated with having a house or room to oneself and the damage that can be done when this safety is breached. Her time in the Dream House has changed her perspective on this matter as she writes that she “always thought the expression ‘safe as houses’ meant that houses were safe places,” but that later she learns the expression is “closer to ‘the house always wins’” and that “house idioms and their variants, in fact, often signify the opposite of safety and security” (88). The first seeds of doubt about the safety of houses can be found in her childhood, when Machado’s mother takes out the doorknob to Machado’s room, not allowing her to fully close or lock her door. She realises then that “nothing, not even the four walls around [her] body, was [hers]” (93). This memory is picked up again later on, when Machado is chased through the Dream House by her girlfriend and she locks herself in the bathroom to save herself. Remembering her childhood, she prays “that she wouldn’t have the tools or know-how to take the doorknob out of the door.” Her girlfriend is unable to remove the doorknob and Machado is instead granted a sanctuary and her “own little space, even though after that it would never be [hers] again.” Later her “entire body would charge with alarm every time [she] stepped into that bathroom” (164). Machado associates a similar feeling with the entire house as she writes: “You spend so much time trembling between the walls of the Dream House, obsessively attuned to the position of her body relative to yours, not sleeping properly, listening for the sound of her footsteps” (146). Feeling unsafe within her own four walls is one of the key ways that Machado is broken down by her abuser. She acknowledges that a “common feature of domestic abuse is ‘dislocation’” where the victim is “uprooted from her support network, her friends or family, her ability to communicate” (81). In Machado’s narrative, the Dream House plays this role of dislocation, as it is her girlfriend’s house far away from Machado’s own friends, in

which she is only ever a visitor. The house thus plays not only a role as the backdrop of these events, but as a main factor in the way Machado experiences the trauma of domestic abuse.

Bachelard's argument that the house and its rooms can become a vessel for memory can undoubtedly be applied to Machado's writing (14). She establishes this already in the epigraph, where she uses a quote from Louise Bourgeois which states that "you pile up associations the way you pile up bricks. Memory itself is a form of architecture." She even calls the Dream House "a dungeon of memory" (82). She also uses this imagery in her chapter "*Dream House as Memory Palace*" in which she associates different parts of the house (the driveway, the back patio, the kitchen, the living room, the office, the bathroom and the bedroom) with experiences she has made with love and crushes (14ff). Each room becomes a place where she can store part of her memory. Most notably, while most of the memories are written about in great detail, the memory associated with the bedroom is kept secret and the reader only gets the words "don't go in there" (16). This memory – which can be assumed to be a painful one – is hidden and locked away, evoking the image of the psychological crypt that Gabriele Schwab observes in trauma writing (49). After Machado has left the Dream House and she thinks about her former girlfriend, she imagines her only in connection with the Dream House. She imagines her "threatening you in the bedroom, weeping for you in the living room, pledging her undying love in the office" (242). The memories of her girlfriend are all tied to a certain room and in a larger sense tied to the Dream House.

Overall, it can be said that Machado uses the architecture of the house and its rooms to make sense of the often confusing way memories of trauma behave and gives them a shape that is understandable and legible. Together with her experiments with form, deviating narrative styles and her frequent use of intertextuality she creates a narrative about trauma despite its unspeakable qualities. The use of speculative fiction in particular allows her to mark the rupture and change that has occurred due to these events and grants her the ability to represent her experiences truthfully.

8 Conclusion

The analysis of the three works has shown that the use of speculative fiction in autobiographical writing can definitely be a productive way to circumvent the unspeakable nature of trauma. While the use of speculative fiction may at first seem like a deviation from an authentic and truthful retelling of the events narrated in the autobiographical works, they are rather one of the few ways the authors are able to come close to such authenticity at all. As has been thoroughly discussed throughout the thesis, the nature of trauma and its effects on the mind prohibit a narration that follows the standard literary genre conventions. Making trauma visible thus is only possible by setting new boundaries for the genre and highlighting exactly those points where trauma exceeds normal human experience.

The three authors I focus on in this thesis all use different genres and techniques to write about trauma in their books. Baker uses the stories from his childhood, Larson horror movies and Machado a whole array of genres to make their trauma accessible to the reader and put it into a form that is legible. While all three use speculative fiction, they do so to a different extent and in different ways. However, the analysis has shown that there are similar strategies and main themes in all three of these works. The two main similarities in the way all three books employ speculative fiction is that they do so by using intertextuality and their focus on place as an important part of the narrative.

Intertextuality noticeably is the aspect of all three books I analysed the most. This was a choice that was informed by the way it was presented in the books. All three use a range of books, movies and TV-shows in their narration, either to contextualise their importance in their own lives or to use their structure to build their own narrative. Baker compares a lot of the things that happened in his own childhood to the stories and characters that he read about in his childhood. Rereading – the term that he uses frequently throughout the book – these stories provides him with a structure through which he can access the traumatic memories that would otherwise remain inaccessible. They provided shelter from the events as they were unfolding

in front of his childhood self and create the necessary distance for him as an adult to be able to write about them. Larson uses horror movies in his book quite similarly. They offered him an escape while growing up and featured characters he could identify with. When trying to access the traumatic memories, the horror movies become the lens through which he is able to look at his memories and narrate them. While both are queer men, only Larson writes about his experiences as a closeted child and teenager and the painful experiences that he associates with his sexuality. The influences from horror movies are used here also as a way to make his feelings about his sexuality clearer, which shows that it is possible for the techniques of trauma writing and queer writing to overlap. In Machado's case, the focus is less on the shelter from trauma that stories can provide and rather more on the way they can aid her in her narration. While she uses by far the largest number of genres and references, she employs them with the same purpose as both Baker and Larson, because the speculative stories provide framing for her own experiences. All three thus use intertextuality to make their trauma accessible for themselves and then utilise the form and features of speculative genres to create a narrative form through which the trauma can become comprehensible for the reader.

The second point which I focused on in all three books was their use of place in the books. For all three, the setting of the book and the places which they associated with their trauma played an important role for their narration. The most important place of narration is the house, which becomes the ground on which the story is told. Larson is the one who takes inspiration from speculative writing the most directly in the context of place, as he frequently uses the haunted house as a concept borrowed from horror narratives and adapted for his own writing. For all three, the house and the rooms it holds are used to visualise the trauma and are places where it can be contained. In Machado's writing the house and its rooms also come to represent her mind and the memories associated with trauma which are locked away in it. The places in which the trauma occurs become central points in which the reader gets to know the authors and learns to understand what they experienced.

Compared to the other two, Machado is the most experimental with form. She frequently breaks the page layout or delves more into the metaphorical rather than the literal retelling of events. By doing this she heightens the disarticulation caused by trauma and relies more on the understanding of the reader.

Overall, while the three books do have many differences, they all use speculative fiction in their autobiographical writing with the same goal: to make trauma accessible. The use of fictional elements, rather than diminishing the authenticity of the work, allows the authors to construct a closer approximation of a truthful retelling of events than they could have created without them. By using these elements, they create the necessary distance between themselves and their painful memories and at the same time increase their access to their memories, a paradox that mirrors the way trauma is both elusive to storytellers and yet must be written or spoken about in order to be overcome. The three books analysed use intertextuality and place as their main avenues of introducing speculative fiction in their writing. Additionally, they are connected by the fact that they are writing about queer experience – which often uses the same techniques as trauma writing. While Larson and Machado do this more frequently than Baker, it is noticeable in all three.

The interweaving of different genres – autobiographical writing and speculative fiction – and the blend between truth and fiction highlight the way trauma crosses boundaries and signals to the reader that the experiences narrated in the books go beyond the regular bounds of human experience. The unspeakable nature of trauma is circumvented by the use of speculative fiction the authors make in their autobiographical narratives, marking a rupture of narration and making a depiction of these experiences possible in the first place.

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Appendix

English Abstract

This thesis investigates how the authors of three autobiographical works – *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado, *Reading My Mother Back* by Timothy Baker, and *The Long Hallway* by Richard Scott Larson – employ elements from speculative fiction in their writing to portray trauma. These elements are used in order to circumvent the unspeakable nature of trauma and to allow the authors to put an experience into words that would otherwise exceed the limits of their narration. The use of speculative elements lends itself to this purpose in particular, as its structures and characteristics can depict things beyond the ordinary. The three chosen books are autobiographical works from the past decade and either use speculative fiction as intertextual references in their writing or embed concepts from these types of narratives in their own storytelling, which are analysed in a close reading. Trauma is notoriously difficult to represent and demands unprecedented forms of writing, which have been observed by literary scholars. Speculative fiction can serve as a means of generating such innovative narrative structures. These findings from trauma theory, paired with fundamental principles from theories on autobiographical writing, build the foundation of my argumentation. As all three authors are part of the queer community and similar structures can be found in the representation of trauma and queer experience, queer theory will also support the theoretical framework. Autobiographical works usually remain grounded in reality and writers abstain from using fantastical elements in order to establish credibility. The deviation from this norm clearly marks the rupture of narrative possibility created by the traumatic events detailed in the works. I argue therefore that the use of speculative fiction is a productive way for authors to depict the inexpressible reality of trauma in autobiographical writing and enables them to convey their experiences in spite of these limitations.

German Abstract

In dieser Arbeit wird untersucht, wie die Autoren dreier autobiografischer Werke – *In the Dream House* von Carmen Maria Machado, *Reading My Mother Back* von Timothy Baker und *The Long Hallway* von Richard Scott Larson – in ihren Werken Elemente der spekulativen Fiktion verwenden, um Traumata darzustellen. Diese Elemente werden verwendet, um das Unausprechliche des Traumas zu umgehen und es den Autoren zu ermöglichen, eine Erfahrung in Worte zu fassen, die sonst die Grenzen ihrer Erzählung überschreiten würde. Die Verwendung von spekulativen Elementen eignet sich hierfür besonders gut, da ihre Strukturen und Eigenschaften Dinge jenseits des Gewöhnlichen darstellen können. Bei den drei ausgewählten Büchern handelt es sich um autobiografische Werke aus dem letzten Jahrzehnt, die entweder intertextuelle Bezüge zu spekulativer Fiktion in ihren Texten machen oder Konzepte aus dieser Art von Erzählungen in ihre eigenen Geschichten einbetten. Trauma ist schwer darzustellen und verlangt noch nie dagewesenen Formen des Schreibens, die von Literaturwissenschaftler*innen untersucht wurden. Die spekulative Fiktion kann als Mittel dienen, um solche innovativen Erzählstrukturen zu erzeugen. Diese Erkenntnisse aus der Traumatheorie, gepaart mit Grundprinzipien zum autobiografischen Schreiben, bilden die Grundlage meiner Argumentation. Da alle drei Autor*innen der queeren Community angehören und ähnliche Strukturen in der Darstellung von Trauma und queerer Erfahrung zu finden sind, wird auch die Queer-Theorie den theoretischen Rahmen stützen. Autobiografische Werke bleiben in der Regel in der Realität verankert und die Autoren verzichten auf phantastische Elemente, um Glaubwürdigkeit herzustellen. Die Abweichung von dieser Norm markiert eindeutig den Bruch der narrativen Möglichkeiten, der durch die in den Werken geschilderten traumatischen Ereignisse entsteht. Ich argumentiere daher, dass die Verwendung spekulativer Fiktion für Autor*innen ein produktiver Weg ist, die unaussprechliche Realität des Traumas in autobiografischen Texten darzustellen, und ermöglicht es ihnen, ihre Erfahrungen trotz dieser Einschränkungen zu vermitteln.