"FINDING…A MAP…TO THAT PLACE CALLED HOME": THE JOURNEY FROM SILENCE TO RECOVERY IN PATRICK MCCABE'S *CARN* AND *BREAKFAST ON PLUTO*

by

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PREFACE

"FINDING…A MAP…TO THAT PLACE CALLED HOME": THE JOURNEY FROM SILENCE TO RECOVERY IN PATRICK MCCABE'S *CARN* AND *BREAKFAST ON PLUTO*

The purpose of this dissertation is to argue that trauma theory provides a productive critical framework for interpreting Patrick McCabe's novels *Carn* and *Breakfast on Pluto*, two novels that have received little to no critical attention prior to this study. My criticism focuses on the way that trauma theory allows us to better understand McCabe's use of narrative technique and narrator voice to create differing emotional effects in the narrative; his insight into character psychology, primarily with the use of elements of trauma experience (such as flash back, dissonance, avoidance, numbing, etc.) to create characters that can be understood and explained best through analysis by trauma theory; and his focus on the repercussions of unresolved trauma experience on character motivation and ultimate life choices.

I utilize Dr. Judith Herman's rubric of the stages of trauma and recovery, "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community," from her seminal book *Trauma and Recovery* for the sequence and organization of this dissertation, and frame my chapters accordingly (3). Further, I use Kali Tal's discussion of personal and national (collective) myth from her book *Worlds of Hurt* to illuminate the devastating repercussions of the trauma experienced by the characters in this study to help the reader to understand the

significance of the silencing experienced by Josie Keenan in *Carn* and the trauma recovery journey embarked upon by Patrick Braden in *Breakfast on Pluto* (115-16).

When read in tandem, *Carn* and *Breakfast on Pluto* walk the reader through the stages of trauma and recovery, specifically emphasizing the way that disparate forms of trauma have affected the characters' understanding of personal and cultural identity. I contend that reading *Carn* and *Breakfast on Pluto* through the lens of trauma theory demonstrates how Patrick McCabe's work challenges and reconstructs societal myths to emphasize and demonstrate the way that personal and cultural myths are strongly embedded in the survivor's psyche, how these myths have done violence to that psyche, and how to accommodate and heal the hurt born of this violence.

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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to argue that trauma theory provides a productive critical framework for interpreting Patrick McCabe's novels *Carn* and *Breakfast on Pluto*, two novels that have received little to no critical attention prior to this study. My criticism offers a new understanding of McCabe's work, particularly focusing on the way that trauma theory allows us to better understand his use of narrative technique and narrator voice to create differing emotional effects in the narrative; his insight into character psychology, particularly with the use of elements of trauma experience (such as flash back, hallucination, avoidance, numbing, etc.) to create characters that can be understood and explained best through analysis by trauma theory; and his focus on the repercussions of unresolved trauma experience on character motivation and ultimate life choices.
I believe that trauma theory helps the reader to create a context in which to better understand the progression of McCabe's narratives by bringing her closer to the experiences of the characters and helping her to comprehend the greater significance of the events of the story. Consequently, examining McCabe's narratives in terms of trauma theory is crucial because it suggests to the reader valid psychological explanations for many of his characters more destructive life-choices. Indeed, without trauma theory, it is often very difficult to explain or even to accept the seemingly bizarre behavior of many of his characters.

In fact, so difficult is it to understand McCabe's work without trauma theory that early reviewers of McCabe's work were often hard-pressed to identify a genre for it, and we find from Stephanie Merritt's review of McCabe's *Call Me the Breeze* that there is a "name coined for Patrick McCabe's distinctive literary sub-genre," and that is "bog

gothic" (53). She then explains the term as a "world [that includes a] cast of grotesques usually serv[ing] into relief humanity's baser impulses, as manifested through the particular mentality of small-town Ireland" (53). It is easy to see why critics would feel comfortable situating McCabe's work as a type of gothic literature for his novels certainly emphasize the atypical lives of those on the periphery of both large towns and their own societies. Furthermore, one could arguably type those figures as grotesques. And more often than not, the reader is subjected to one form of violence or another, and this violence usually has something to do with vengeance or retribution, speaking to the idea of indulging in one's baser instincts.

It's true. McCabe's writing *is* violent and often difficult to read. Yet, I do not believe that the violence is what inhibits people from reading and understanding his work. Indeed, stories of rape, murder, suicide and such are common enough in fiction circles that a plot line that includes one or all of these topics rarely raises eyebrows. I think the difficulty lies less in the idea of *reading* the actual violence and more in *experiencing* the way that the main characters endure and react to the violence in their lives. This fine distinction speaks to Patrick McCabe's insight into the complexity of human behavior, and further, his inherent understanding of the physical and psychological devastation that trauma can create.

To demonstrate the importance of using trauma theory as a lens through which to analyze *Carn* and *Breakfast on Pluto*, this introduction (1) reviews criticism of McCabe's texts in order to define a gap in this criticism, (2) briefly discusses why McCabe's novels are deserving of such attention, (3) defines trauma theory, discusses its use for interpreting McCabe's texts, and provides a history of it, and (4) outlines the scope of my

study.

Current Criticism

Although Patrick McCabe is a contemporary Irish author who has an extensive literary portfolio that includes nine novels, one children's book and a play, many people have never heard of him. Indeed, even among literary types, the work of Patrick McCabe is lauded as critically important and insightful, but is infrequently studied. To date, only seven completed dissertations consider the work of McCabe (but only in tandem with other Irish writers) and only twenty-five articles, excepting book reviews, have been published about McCabe or his work. There is no scholarly work that considers *Carn* and *Breakfast on Pluto* exclusively[1].

The seven dissertations that consider McCabe in tandem with other authors focus on genre in or the nationalistic or historical aspects of McCabe's writing. Laura G. Eldred's "'A brutalized culture': The horror genre in contemporary Irish literature" considers McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* as a part of the horror genre. Matthew J. Spangler's "Oral eyeness: Scripted orature in twentieth century literature and performance" analyzes the performative value of *The Butcher Boy* and how it affects contemporary Irish culture. Margaret McKimmey Harada's "Grotesque Circumstances: The Bildungsroman of Deformation in Contemporary Literature," and Dorothy Ellen Kimock Posh's "Struggling to Survive: The Violent Bildungsroman of Atwood, Kosinski and McCabe," considers *The Butcher Boy* as a Bildungsroman gone wrong; Brian Francis Cliff's "Communities of Difference in Contemporary Irish Literature: Paul Muldoon, Frank McGuinness, and Patrick McCabe," considers the implications of setting (on the Northern Irish border and

the implications thereof) on McCabe's work, particularly focusing on *The Butcher Boy*; Kathryn Lee Kleypas' "Rewriting the Nation: Edna O'Brien, Patrick McCabe and the Second Wave of Modern Irish Fiction," considers Patrick McCabe as a break from the more traditional writers (Joyce, Beckett) because of his use of violence in the narrative. Finally, James M. Smith's "Ireland's Architecture of Containment: Contemporary Narratives of the Nation State" considers the historical background for the setting of the industrial schools in *The Butcher Boy*. None of these dissertations focus primarily on Patrick McCabe and further, only one dissertation, Dorothy Ellen Kimock Posh's "Struggling to Survive: The Violent Bildungsroman of Atwood, Kosinski and McCabe," uses elements of trauma theory as the primary mode of examination. However insightful, her dissertation study does not consider the trauma recovery journey in either *Carn* or *Breakfast on Pluto* and, instead, attempts to prove that Francie Brady in *The Butcher Boy* is suffering from schizophrenia (169).

Furthermore, none of the articles on McCabe or his work use the trauma recovery journey as a critical framework and most, if not all, focus on *The Butcher Boy*. Five articles are introductions to and general discussions of McCabe's writing (James P. Austin's "Patrick McCabe (1955-)," Alan Forrest Hickman's "Growing Up Irish: An Update on Stephen Dedalus," John Kenny's "Irish Writing and Writers: Some Recent Irish Writing," Rüdiger Imhof's "The Fiction of Patrick McCabe", and Colin Lacey's "Patrick McCabe: A Comedy of Horrors") and one is an interview with McCabe that pre-dates the release of the film version of *The Butcher Boy* (Christopher FitzSimon's "St. Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies: Elliptical Peregrinations through the Subconscious of a Monaghan Writer Traumatised by Cows and the Brilliance of James

Joyce"). Finally, Rainier Emig's "Alien Sex Fiends: The Metaphoricity of Sexuality in Postmodernity" briefly considers *Breakfast on Pluto* to argue that the character of Patrick Braden is emblematic of Judith Butler's notion of the postmodern inability to subscribe to ontologies. These articles are important for they give us a context for how McCabe's work is located among other Irish and contemporary novelists. Furthermore, the interview gives us a sense of McCabe's personality and how it does or does not influence the narrative voice of his novels.

Some of the articles look at constructions of Irishness in McCabe's work, ranging from Irish society to Irish film. Clare Wallace's "Patrick McCabe: Transgression and Dysfunctional Irelands" discusses the way that *The Butcher Boy*, *The Dead School* and *Breakfast on Pluto* transgress traditional binaries considered sacred in Irish society through their narrative elements and the actions of the characters, but she spends very little time on *Breakfast on Pluto*. Linden Peach's "Limit and Transgression: Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996), Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992) and William Trevor's *Felicia's Journey* (1994)" considers the way that Irish society deals with violence against women. Tom Herron's "ContamiNation: Patrick McCabe and Colm Toibin's Pathographies of the Republic" examines the way that both McCabe and Toibin create and explode dysfunctional, and in many ways, dangerous societal ideals in an Irish context. James S. Brown's "Things Not Meant to Heal: Irish 'National Allegory' in Doyle, McCabe, and McCann," and Hedwig Schwall's "The working-class hero's view on 20th century Ireland in recent historical novels" consider McCabe in tandem with other Irish authors and emphasize McCabe's construction of Irish identity, while Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's "Virgins and Mothers: Sinéad

O'Connor, Neil Jordan, and *The Butcher Boy*," Martin McLoone's "The Abused Child of History: Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy*" and Carole Zucker's "The Poetics of Point of View: Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy*" study Neil Jordan's film version of *The Butcher Boy*. These articles give us a sense of the political consciousness of McCabe's work, discussing ways that McCabe embraces and critiques Irishness in his novels and the film versions.

Eight articles concentrate on *The Butcher Boy* exclusively, looking at the generic, historical, and psychological aspects of it. Laura G. Eldred's "Francie Pig vs the Fat Green Blob from Outer Space: horror films and *The Butcher Boy*" considers The *Butcher Boy* as an Irish representative of the horror genre. Jessica Scarlata's "Carnivals and Goldfish: History and Crisis in *The Butcher Boy*" looks at the sociological aspects of the book. Tim Gauthier's "Identity, self-loathing and the neocolonial condition in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*," considers post-colonialism and its legacy in the narrative. Michael Molino's "The 'house of a hundred windows': Industrial Schools in Irish Writing," and James M. Smith's "Remembering Ireland's Architecture of Containment: 'Telling' Stories in *The Butcher Boy* and *States of Fear*," discuss the history of industrial schools and their use in Irish fiction, while Donna Potts' "From Tir na nOg to Tir na Muck: Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*," and John Scaggs' "Who is Francie Pig? Self-Identity and Narrative Reliability in *The Butcher Boy*," focus on positive and negative constructions of Irish identity. Finally, Clare Wallace's "Running Amuck: Manic Logic in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*" considers the sociological consequences of Francie Brady's madness. These articles are invaluable for they help to create a context for the sociological elements that help to perpetuate trauma in McCabe's novels.

Finally, Maribel Butler de Foley's "Irish novels into Spanish" discusses a Spanish translation of *The Butcher Boy*. I will not use this article in my dissertation, as it does not have any bearing on my subject.

Why isn't more written on McCabe? In his review of McCabe's latest published novel, *Call Me the Breeze*, Christopher Korenowsky posits a potential explanation for McCabe's lack of scholarly attention, and he may have been discussing any one of McCabe's novels in his remark that "[some] readers may find the novel *difficult*, as the text is presented in fragments, scripts, and memories that may not always be exactly true" (98, emphasis mine). To those not used to trauma narratives, which are often non-linear narratives and focus on gratuitous subject matter, McCabe may be hard to stomach and even more challenging to define.

Yet even with a lack of critical emphasis on his work, I believe that McCabe is a vital contributor to the landscape of fiction, Irish and otherwise, and deserves a dissertation-length study of his work. Because of his careful focus on traumatic experience -- demonstrated both in the style of the narratives as well as the experiences of the characters --and the way that it wreaks havoc on the lives of his characters, McCabe's work creates a context for the reader to experience vicariously the physical, psychological and social repercussions of unresolved trauma on the lives of his characters in the safety of a fictional narrative.

Methods

In order to understand the sequence and organization of this dissertation, one must become familiar with Dr. Judith Herman's rubric of the stages of trauma and recovery

from her seminal book Trauma and Recovery, and Kali Tal's discussion of personal and national myth from Worlds of Hurt. It is important to note that trauma theory is not one particular theory, but more of a general term used by the medical community and particularly by those involved with mental health, to distinguish the type of therapy utilized by those treating patients who present with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

While there are many theories of trauma theory[2] to work with, I have found Dr. Herman's talking therapy rubric, a theory that she has used with her own trauma patients, to be the most succinct, yet one that best incorporates the tenets that I believe to be the most essential in all of the theories that I researched. Dr. Herman identifies the basic stages of recovery from trauma as "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story [also known as "working through"], and restoring the connection between survivors and their community" (3). Because I see the novels working in the progression that Dr.Herman suggests, I have ordered my chapters to follow this sequence.

Similarly, my reading of McCabe's work has been greatly enhanced by Tal's notion that in order to understand the essence of trauma narratives, you must realize that trauma often produces a "conflation of two very different, but constantly intersecting, kinds of myth: national and personal" (115). She goes on to explain, "national (collective) myth is propagated in textbooks, official histories, popular culture documents, public schools, and the like. This myth belongs to no one individual, though individuals borrow from it and buy into it in varying degrees" (115). Therefore, these myths can be either extremely helpful or harmful to the developing personality for they are essential to shaping an individual's sense of societal identity.

The second type of myth, personal, "is the particular set of explanations and expectations generated by an individual to account for his or her circumstances and actions" (116). This myth system is equally important for it helps a person to establish an individual sense of identity that may or may not conform to a larger group identity. While both myth systems are not mutually exclusive, the problem occurs when a trauma experience shatters an individual's sense of identity by destroying the cherished belief systems held in place by national or personal myth.

I believe that recognizing both the national and personal myths and more particularly, the shattering of both types of myth in each novel elucidate the trauma experienced by the characters and help the reader to understand the progression from the effects of silencing in *Carn* and to the path to recovery in *Breakfast on Pluto*. *Breakfast on Pluto* is the more hopeful of the two novels examined, for it suggests a potential future reconnection with the community.

In order to demonstrate the benefit of using trauma theory to study McCabe's work, one must first understand what distinguishes a traumatic experience from a non-traumatic one and further, what trauma theory is and does, and the differing degrees of trauma. Cathy Caruth, who in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* uses trauma theory to evaluate literature, states that "[in] its most general description, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). It is not the event itself that causes it to become traumatic, but rather the way that the survivor reacts to the event changes it from an experience to a traumatic experience. If we think of

trauma theory as a way of studying the traumatic experiences of war veterans, the survivors of sexual and physical abuse, and other horrific events to see how these experiences affect the individual and then use that information to determine how to help that person to heal, the importance of trauma theory is undeniable. Trauma theory, which used to be the specific domain of therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, has now become a useful tool in the study of literature as well.

But how does this lend itself to fiction, or more particularly, fiction that focuses on traumatic events? According to Laurie Vickroy in her book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction,* "fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience" are typed trauma narratives (1). These narratives discuss and perhaps even explain how the traumatic event affects those caught in its wake. As Vickroy explains,

> [t]rauma narratives…enact the directing outward of an inward, silent process to other witnesses, both within and outside the texts. Such reconstruction is also directed toward readers, engaging them in a meditation of individual distress, collective responsibilities, and communal healing in relation to trauma. These writers engage in a delicate balancing act by trying to lure readers into uncomfortable or alien material, sharing victims' pain with readers, shifting between what can and cannot be revealed, or appealing to readers through popular forms of writing (memoir and fiction). (3-4)

Trauma theory, then, is an effective means of analyzing the site of and the effects and repercussions of fictive trauma and enables the reader to gain a greater understanding of the significance of the events of the story. Sometimes trauma theory simply helps to

clarify both the narrative and the import of it, while other times it can help to suggest a path to healing.

In general, McCabe's work is teeming with disparate forms of trauma – from sexual to emotional to physical to political. Since Patrick McCabe's novels concentrate both on the traumatic events that occur as well as the chronic repercussions of that trauma in the lives of the characters mentioned above, it is safe to type McCabe's novels as trauma narratives. And as Vickroy states, trauma narratives are important documents because she believes that knowledge of trauma through trauma narratives "inevitably involves the opportunity to unveil new perspectives concerning relationships of power and their effects, to analyze what we repress and why, and to examine our need for cultural and individual myths that block understanding" (22). Therefore if we consider this quote in terms of McCabe's work, trauma theory gives us a new understanding of character in terms of the psychological dynamics that emerge as a result of the inter and intra-personal relationships that the characters experience. When reading of them through trauma theory, McCabe's characters now become multi-faceted beings reacting to the difficult experiences in their lives, instead of grotesques. This, in turn, allows us a window into their motivations and makes it easier for us to understand and accept their decisions.

According to Kirby Farrell, author of *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, trauma theory has its origins in Victorian England when doctors were trying to suggest an explanation for the terror experienced by those who survived railroad accidents. They termed the experience of living through life threatening situations but becoming psychologically harmed by that experience as "traumatic neuroses" (2). More specifically, Farrell states "[in] 1866 the British surgeon John

Erichsen published *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System*, which held that physical shock to neural tissue could result in mental injury" (8). This concept was revolutionary, for it suggests that the trauma produced by experiencing a harmful and/or life-threatening event could cause actual mental damage. Farrell considers Erichsen as an originator of the beginnings of trauma theory, but others[3] identify Jean-Martin Charcot as the true founder of trauma studies because of his groundbreaking work in the study of hysteria. Charcot worked with marginalized individuals (prostitutes, beggars, and the insane) who suffered from hysteria, a pervasive affliction that was practically ignored by the medical field at that time. Charcot emphasized the physical symptoms of his patients and regarded any emotional outbursts or confidences that they would relate in relation to their condition as examples of "symptoms to be catalogued" (Herman 11). While Charcot made great strides into discerning the symptoms of his patients (which he deemed wholly psychological), he never happened upon the root cause of their hysteria. This discovery was to be the burning passion of two of Charcot's protégés, Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud.

Curiously enough, although Janet and Freud worked separately, they came to strikingly similar conclusions about the connections between hysteria and trauma and the way to begin the healing process for this affliction. Both determined that hysteria was caused by enduring some form of psychological trauma and that the symptoms could be relieved by verbalization (Herman 12). This meant that unlike Charcot's study of hysteria, which emphasized only the symptoms of the affliction, Janet and Freud stressed the importance of the emotional outbursts of the patients. Suddenly, it became imperative

to actually listen to what the patient had to say for in her verbalizations lie both the cause of her distress and the way to auger healing.

Both Janet and Freud continued their studies of hysteria, but it was Freud who would cause a scandal with his hypothesis about the aegis of hysteria. After engaging in hundreds of hours of psychoanalysis with women who suffered from hysteria, Freud concluded in his 1896 paper "Aetiology of Hysteria" that "at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood, but which can be reproduced through the work of psycho-analysis in spite of the intervening decades" (Freud 203). It is important to note that this sexual experience was not considered a positive thing; indeed, Freud believed that the hysteria exhibited in these women resulted from the sexual abuse they suffered as children, which haunted them for decades and exhibited itself in their aberrant behavior.

Unfortunately, Freud soon retracted this theory for he found that neither he nor his medical peers could absorb the enormity of it. As Dr. Judith Herman states in her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Freud realized that "[hysteria] was so common among women that if his patients' stories were true, and if his theory were correct, he would be forced to conclude that what he called 'perverted acts against children' were endemic, not only among the proletariat of Paris, where he had first studied hysteria, but also among the respectable bourgeois families of Vienna, where he had established his practice" (14). Could it be possible that trusted adults abused so many girls? Apparently, it was much easier for Freud to accept the notion that these women had wished that these experiences happened and/or manufactured situations to enable the encounters to occur, and so he

decided that emotional outbursts were fantasies rather than reality, retreated from the study of hysteria and reworked the sexual angle into his now famous Oedipal Complex.

While Freud chose to close the door on his studies of hysteria, the world was changing as a result of the horror produced by the Great War, World War One. Countless young men died in that conflict and many others came home with strange, seemingly psychosomatic symptoms alarmingly similar to hysteria in women, which would later be termed "shell shock." Because so many men experienced similar symptoms, doctors felt it incumbent to study this disorder. Some doctors felt that suffers needed to be shamed back into "acting like men," while others suggested more compassionate treatment options (Herman 21). Nothing conclusive was determined and while physicians noticed similar hysterical symptoms in many soldiers who had fought during World War II, it wasn't until the aftermath of the Vietnam War that the medical community created a name for this disorder. In fact, it was not until 1980 that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was finally recognized as a legitimate mental disorder and included in the American Psychiatric Association's official manual of mental disorders. Originally considered only in light of war experience, post-traumatic stress disorder can now be an official diagnosis for sufferers of any major trauma, from physical to sexual to psychological[4].

Therefore, my dissertation argues that by utilizing trauma theory, we see that Josie Keenan from *Carn* and Patrick Braden from *Breakfast on Pluto* are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and desperately need Dr. Herman's talking therapy in order to heal. Specifically, because of Josie Keenan's inability and/or refusal to communicate her experiences, she is locked in a prison of silence and this has devastating consequences for

her in adult life. For Josie, this forced silence leads to further trauma, regression, depression and death. The other character that I consider, Patrick Braden, does communicate his experience through speech and writing respectively, and by the end of his narrative lives a less desperate life than that of Josie Keenan. Although he is still scarred by his experiences, Patrick exhibits a sense of optimism wholly absent in Josie Keenan.

Using Dr. Herman's rubric, my first chapter "Irreparable Loss: The Ramifications of Father-Daughter Incest in *Carn*," examines the life and life choices of Josie Keenan, a woman whose childhood experiences with incest and the inherent silence surrounding that experience has proscribed a negative and destructive pattern of behavior for her. In this chapter we see the devastating impact of trauma[5] on the life of this defenseless girl left to fend for herself in a society shrouded in silence. Truly, Josie Keenan is ripe for PTSD simply because of the myriad trauma she suffers before she is twenty years old: an abusive household, the death of her mother, repeated sexual victimization at the hands of her father, the death of her father, institutionalization, abandonment by her boyfriend, teenaged pregnancy, and the death/murder of her infant son. Yet, it isn't the trauma themselves but the legacy of the symptoms of PTSD that has the most devastating effect on the life of Josie Keenan. Her inability to speak of her experiences, her inability to forge close-knit bonds, and her negative self-concept enmesh and pervert Josie's sensibilities, causing her to believe that her only option was to kill the one thing that she truly loved.

I contend that the incest, coupled with the loss of her parents (which effectually places her in an orphanage), creates a shattering effect on Josie's sense of self and causes

the girl to experience the symptoms of PTSD chronically. Instead of a healthy, confident girl eager to take on the challenges of growing up, Josie becomes a scared and self-effacing child stuck in perpetual survivor mode as she faces adolescence and adulthood.

My second chapter, "Silently Bearing the Burden of Trauma: Josie Keenan in *Carn*," follows Josie's physical and emotional journey from her dismissal from Molloy's Select Drapery to her untimely death. Josie moves from place to place – physically and emotionally -- looking for a sense of safety and security that somehow always eludes her. Hoping to be embraced by a society that rejects her, Josie spent her formative years attempting to conform to a myth system that couldn't accommodate the reality of her life. Instead of helping Josie to heal from the horror of her experiences, the harsh climate in Carn forced the wound to remain open perpetually.

As an adult, Josie is plagued by flashbacks, hallucinations and guilt wrought by her life experience. In order to cope with these PTSD symptoms, Josie continues her childhood behaviors of numbing and dissociation, but in adulthood adds a substance abuse problem to aid her ability to engage in those coping mechanisms. In her life and even her death, Josie Keenan becomes a symbol of the chronic devastation inflicted by untreated PTSD. By reading the life story of Josie Keenan through trauma theory, we see a woman struggling with external and internal forces beyond her control. In an attempt to retain control of her life and her emotions, Josie utilizes the PTSD coping mechanisms of numbing, dissociation, and self-medication until the devastation of her newly inflicted trauma proves too powerful. Refused both the voice to speak of her experience as well as the community to listen to her story, Josie becomes a living wound, unable to heal.

Considering Josie's life according to the tenets of trauma theory, I argue that her early childhood experiences, coupled with the later traumas that she endures as an adolescent and an adult, leave her shattered and in chronic survivor mode. Josie remains in the first stage of trauma, never to heal, because she does not have the capacity to voice her wound.

In Chapter Three, "Feeling that "whatever it is that holds you to the ground beginning to slip away": Addressing Patrick Braden's emotional and sexual trauma scars in *Breakfast on Pluto*," I argue that the "autobiography" written by Patrick Braden in *Breakfast on Pluto* is actually a trauma recovery narrative, because this novel is explicitly grounded in an understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, trauma theory, and trauma therapy, as demonstrated through Patrick's wide range of trauma experiences -- from emotional to sexual to physical and, finally, political -- and all of these are documented in Patrick's life-writing. In fact, Patrick's "autobiography" demonstrates "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" termed "scriptotherapy" by renowned trauma theorist Suzette Henke in her book *Shattered Subjects* (xii). In Patrick's writing, we see the non-linear process of "working through" Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which includes the documentation of the guilt, worthlessness, rage, self-pity, numbing, confusion, regression, dissociation, and finally, acceptance that he feels. This chapter considers Patrick's use of writing as a coping mechanism to deal with both the formative emotional trauma and the later sexual trauma that he faces as an adult.

At this point in the narrative, Patrick suffers from a decimated sense of self because he only defines himself by negation. He is not legitimate, he is not wanted or claimed by

his biological family, he is not recognized by the Catholic Church, he is not stereotypically male, and he is not politically affiliated. He is so beaten by his experiences, that Patrick only sees himself in terms of what he isn't instead of what he is. What he doesn't realize is that through these experiences he will more clearly define who he is and what type of world he is willing to accept.

The final chapter of this dissertation, "Envisioning that "dream of home where it might all make sense": Healing Patrick Braden's wound through scriptotherapy in *Breakfast on Pluto,"* follows Patrick's psychic journey toward healing and concentrates on the scriptotherapy that Patrick produces to mend from the political and physical trauma that leads him into a total mental breakdown. This chapter also considers the strategies for recovery that ensue. I argue that however painful it is for Patrick to write down the traumatic events of his life, he must do so in order to rebuild a complete sense of self.

I contend that Patrick's experience of marginalization, and further, his ability to write of his experience of marginalization, affords him clarity of vision that will enable him to recover from his next round of devastating traumas. Indeed, when pushed to the limits of sanity, Patrick finds the emotional reserves of strength within him to transform his image of himself from a victim of circumstance suffering from PTSD to a "wrong-to-right avenger" who can begin to heal. In so doing, Patrick loses his need for escapist fantasies and sexualized father figures because he becomes the hero of his own life.

The conclusion of my dissertation briefly revisits the previous chapters in order to establish my hypothesis that when read in tandem, *Carn* and *Breakfast on Pluto* walk the reader through Dr. Herman's stages of trauma and recovery in order to better understand