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The Rhetoric of Violence

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THE RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE

by

James C. Gunter

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

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Master of Arts

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

James C. Gunter

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of James C. Gunter in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

THE RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE

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Master of Arts

This thesis seeks to understand how we read and understand the use of depictions of violence by examining its rhetorical presentation. Although the media gives us a mixed understanding of the way that experiencing violence secondarily (that is, through all types of media) affects us, scholarship in this area has proved clear connections between viewing/experiencing depictions of violence and raised levels of aggression. On the other hand, there is a clear difference between gratuitous depictions of violence and socially useful depictions of violence (i.e., the difference between a slasher movie and a holocaust movie) that that area of scholarship does not expressly take into account. I argue that the language of trauma studies has the ability to evaluate the impact of violent texts on audiences and that Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Pentad has the ability the examine depictions of violence to uncover explicit and hidden ideologies that affect the presentation of the violence and, thus, our reception and interpretation of that violence. Working in conjunction, these two theories can help audience's understand depictions of violence on an ideological level and help them to assess the violence's potential traumatic impact on themselves and others within certain contexts. To demonstrate this theory of understanding violence, I make two short analyses of Native Son and The Lovely Bones

and demonstrate an in-depth analysis of Fight Club and Blood Meridian in order to give an example of the type of reading I am advocating and its potential for understanding and interpreting depictions of violence in ways that uncover both social benefit and harm. In the end, I hope that this theory of reading violence might extend beyond the sample readings I have done and into other types of media, so that we can all understand the ways that violence is used rhetorically for social and political purposes and be able to both use it and interpret it responsibly.

working, cooking dinner when I was hungry, and holding me up spiritually. This thesis would not have been possible without her.

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CHAPTER 1: FICTION AND RHETORIC, VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

In January 2006, Larry H. Miller, a Salt Lake City businessman who owns

multiple car dealerships and movie theatres, decided to pull *Brokeback Mountain* from

his theaters just hours before it was scheduled to open. Despite his assertion that he is not

a "community censor," his official reason for pulling the movie was his fear that the

homosexual love affair between two cowboys was a "dangerous" attack on the traditional

family ("Miller Explains" B.02). However, also opening that weekend in Salt Lake City,

and in Miller's own theaters, was the slasher movie *Hostel*. *Hostel* follows a pair of

American backpackers in Europe who hear about a hostel packed with beautiful women

who want to have illicit sex with American tourists. After they arrive at the hostel and

have their expected sexual encounters, they learn that the hostel's real purpose is to lure

in victims for rich people who want to live their dark fantasies of torture and murder.

Cinemareview.com, a website that posts detailed explanations of movie content, lists

Hostel's violent content:

> Very bloody, very extreme: toes are cut off; holes are drilled into a man; a
>
> man's ankles are sliced; a man's fingers are cut off; throat slashings; a
>
> man's leg is sliced with a chainsaw; a woman gets a blowtorch to the face;
>
> a dangling eyeball is cut off; a woman throws herself in front of a moving
>
> train and is run over on the tracks; men are hit with rocks and pipes;
>
> glimpses of severed heads, fingers, and various limbs; bloody scenes of
>
> surgery; bloody shootings, including ones to the head; drowning in a
>
> toilet. (Cinemareview.com)

One can only wonder about Miller's rationale when a movie that depicts a loving

relationship between two men is more dangerous than a movie whose sole purpose is to

shock and titillate through extreme, bloody violence—not to mention strong heterosexual

sexual content (so much so, in fact, that New York Magazine movie critic David

Edelstein labels it "Torture Porn" [par. 1]). Whereas the link between viewing

homosexual depictions and having homosexual tendencies is controversial at best, the

link between viewing violence and increased aggression has been well established by

multiple studies and has been consistent over many years (Anderson et al., Bushman and

Anderson). However, the mainstream media has been lax in reporting the conclusions of

the overwhelming majority of researchers in the field, mainly because of the media's

vested financial interest in violent media and their sense of "journalistic fairness"

(Bushman and Anderson 486-87). As a result, the public receives the diluted message

that violent narratives *may or may not* have an adverse effect on their own aggression and

their own views on violence in the real world.

But this thesis is not about trying to find the link between depictions of violence

and physical aggression, nor is it about attacking mainstream media. This thesis is about

creating a system whereby we can examine violence in fiction through the context of

ideology and its rhetorical effect on readers, so as to determine the way violence

functions as a rhetorical device. Understanding the rhetoric of violence through the

ideological context is important because, although Anderson et al. acknowledge the fact

that researching the effects of violence in media often relies on varied and broad

definitions and measurements of violence (82-83), studies linking violence and

manifestations of physical aggression fail take into account the ideological perspective

that the violence illustrates—at least not to the degree with which I am going to explore it. For example, Anderson et al., while summarizing the breadth of research linking media violence and aggression, never go into more detail than to use the term "violent media" or "violent scenes," (84-88) demonstrating that, within the research, there is no real distinction between a movie like *Hostel*, or the *Saw* movies, and anti-war films such as *Apocalypse Now* or *Full Metal Jacket*. Granted, all these movies are violent, but their rhetorical stance toward the violence they depict varies greatly.

<p style="text-align:center">The Mirror Fallacy</p>

Those who control media content have, in large part, defended violent films and TV by saying that they are only reflecting reality, claiming that much of the violent content has a socially responsible base and message. And although the validity of this belief has been questioned and examined by multiple scholars and theorists in academic circles (specifically, many of the postmodern critics) I would argue that it is still a argument that has much power in the popular media and, as such, still has an effect on the type and themes of media that are produced and mass consumed[1]. However, M.H. Abrams, while laying out a solid history of the shifting views of the definition of art throughout history in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, posits questions about the validity of the mirror metaphor—the idea that art is a reflection of reality. In his reevaluation of the history of artistic criticism, he points out that there are certain "archetypal analogies," like the art-mirror metaphor, that categorize and systematize certain ideas in a way that gives structure to abstract concepts (31). The metaphor originally comes from Plato, but

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[1] Bushman and Anderson (479-80) give multiple examples of TV and film executives doubting the findings of research that demonstrates a clear connection between portrayals of violence and increased aggression, and almost all of them evoke the mirror analogy to defend the violent media they produce.

Abrams questions its accuracy asking, "To what extent may the concept have been generated from the analogy?" (31). In essence, he is representing a viewpoint that questions whether the generally accepted concept of art as mirror has been generated from the metaphor itself, rather than from the actual nature of art. And although the mirror is a popular metaphor to conceptualize art, the metaphor leaves out certain qualities of art that the mirror does not explain or account for. For example, Abrams points out that "the very sharpness of focus afforded by a happily chosen archetype makes marginal and elusive those qualities of an object which fall outside its primitive categories" (35). This is to say that in *some* respects, art is like a mirror, but it is not like a mirror in *all* respects; therefore, the metaphor may not always be an accurate analogy for art. For example, the mirror metaphor does not take into account the creative aspect of art, the fact that art is a construction, or interpretation, through a human medium that is not perfectly reflective or clear. In fact, thinking about art as a constructive process rather than a reflective process, increases the artist's moral responsibility to society, instead of minimizing it (Vatz 158). The general idea that art is reflective rather than constructive, then, might be more attractive to those who purvey violent media precisely because it relieves them of responsibility for the effects that the audience may experience or suffer from viewing, reading, or listening to such content.

In addition, what these executives and artists do not take into account, when they insist that they are not responsible for their depictions of violence, is the rather pragmatic fact that they work in fiction. So despite how much they may be influenced by the real world, they are the creators—the constructors—of artifice. In more modern terms than those set up by Plato, Aristotle, and Abrams, Baudrillard, in his comments on the

successive phases of the image, dismisses the whole idea that anything man-made can actually reflect the real world, that—even if at one time it was meant to—any new creations are just simulacra of simulacra (3-7). But, I use Baudrillard sparingly. For, seemingly, if all art is just simulacra, then authors of fiction have no responsibility for the interpretations of their violent portrayals. However, authors (as will be shown in more detail later) manipulate their works—including the use of violent story elements—in an attempt to bring about certain reactions and arouse feelings in the reader or audience. That is, authors purposefully use stories, words, plot elements, characters, and all other dramatic or comedic devices to affect the reader, and as a result, although their work may not be a refection of reality, it can still affect the reader or audience in very real ways that are both intentional and unintentional. Thus, knowing that a creation is purposefully fictitious should immediately raise questions about the validity or truthfulness of that work because fiction ultimately comes from the imaginary. So as much as creators want to claim that their fictitious creations are real, they seem to be working under a self-contradictory philosophy. Wayne Booth characterizes this seemingly logical fallacy well, saying: "artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know" (*Rhetoric* 3). In other words, when an author is making things up, his work is fictitious and, therefore, cannot be a perfect mirror to any reality. As a result, in popular media, defending violent content simply on the grounds that it is a reflection of reality is an impotent argument.

<div align="center">The Rhetoric of Fiction</div>

The problem with fiction is that it is always partial, biased, and most definitely persuasive. As Booth points out, "In practice, no author ever manages to create a work

which shows complete impartiality" (*Rhetoric* 78). But biased work is not necessarily the conscious fault of the author; it is a result of the constraints of fiction itself. Borges makes an analogy for this constraint in "*Del Rigor en la Ciencia*" ("Of Exactitude in Science"), in which an empire has perfected cartography to the point that they create a map of the empire that is the same scale as the empire itself. But in trying to encompass everything, the map becomes completely useless and unwieldy. Kenneth Burke expresses this same idea with his idea of language as a "terministic screen." He explains that because language cannot encompass the totality of any object or idea, language is "a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function as a *deflection* of reality" ("Terministic Screens" 45). Such is the same with fiction. The constraints of written language do not allow one to say or write "everything." And just like the Borges' map, even if one could write everything, the work would become so unwieldy that it would render itself useless. In fact, language's very utility lies in the fact that it boils down experience and the totality of the universe into small, overly simplified chunks that we can deal with. But in doing so it inevitably focuses attention on certain characteristics of the world over others. And because language itself focuses attention in certain areas over others, Booth declares that "all authors inevitably take sides," in that if "a given work will be 'about' a character or set of characters [,] it cannot possibly give emphasis to all, regardless of what the author believes about the desirability of fairness" (*Rhetoric* 78). Indeed, he goes on to say, "In centering our [the reader's] interest, sympathy, or affection on one character, [the author] inevitably excludes from our interest, sympathy, or affection some other character" (79)[2]. So even in deciding on a set of characters, the

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[2] Richard Lanham also explores the idea of drawing the reader's attention to certain ideas

author is being impartial and biased because in choosing to tell one story, and choosing to tell it with a chosen set of characters, he is inevitably excluding all other stories and all other characters and points of view. And although this might simply be considered the natural selection of a story and point of view on the part of the author, it is nonetheless a conscious exclusion of other points of view and other stories. From the outset, then, authors are partial and biased because they have chosen to exclude the vast majority of material and focus the reader's attention on a specific story chosen by the author through his or her choice of words.[3]

But bias runs deeper than simply choosing one story to tell over another, the language an author uses to tell a story as well as the narrative focus of the reader's attention and sympathies is a form of persuasion, further complicating the idea that any author can be impartial or simply reflect reality. For example, Kenneth Burke states that rhetoric "is rooted in an essential function of language itself [. . .] a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (*Rhetoric* 43). In this light, all language is a means of persuading others to cooperation, whether it be overt, like persuading a legislative body to pass a piece of legislation, or whether it be subtle, like giving a character heroic characteristics in order to persuade the reader that the

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through emphasis. In *The Economics of Attention*, he argues that even though rhetoric "has traditionally been defined as the art of persuasion [,] it might as well, though, be called the economics of attention" (21). His idea is that persuasion is created through the allocation of attention to selected information over other information. In this view, rhetoric functions as a filter of information, not necessarily its originator.

[3] As an interesting side note, Bushman and Anderson found that 87% of crime in reality is non-violent, compared with 13% on reality-based TV shows like *Cops* (479). And although murder accounts for only 0.2% of violent crime in the US, it accounts of 50% of all crime on reality-based TV shows (479). So even in so-called reality TV, the representation ("the mirror of reality") of crime is unevenly focused on violent crime and murder.

character's actions are heroic. Rhetoric, in this sense, is the use of language to bring about a cooperative effect—one that brings readers into the worldview that the author wants them to inhabit—whether the effect is intentional or not. And although attempting to be unbiased is a virtuous quality in a writer "in so far as it warns the novelist that he can seldom afford to pour his untransformed biases into his work" (Booth *Rhetoric* 70), in reality all language is biased in that it creates rhetorical effects in the audience. And because all language is rhetorical, all language becomes a form of persuasion, producing effects in the audience that lead them to be persuaded to worldviews different from their own—even in fiction. For example, in fiction, a writer's object is to constantly manipulate the reader's emotions and attitudes toward the characters of a narrative in order to bring about the rhetorical effect that he or she desires. In doing so, the writer uses biased language and, as a result, readers to adopt a certain emotional state and attitude toward the characters and actions in the fiction. Of course when it is the emotion and attitude that the writer intends, the author declares the fiction "successful." In a romance novel, the object is to center readers' interests in the love of two people so far as to convince readers that these people *do* love each other and that they deserve to be with one another, so the author uses impartial language to persuade the reader to that purpose. In horror, the author uses specifically biased language to persuade readers to feel fear and anxiety. In mysteries, authors impartially manipulate language to drop clues to readers without seeming like they are dropping clues, all the while trying to confuse the reader with extraneous facts, but not confuse them enough to make them frustrated to the point that they stop reading. In reality, all fiction is a constant game of persuasion: if the author can persuade the reader to feel the right way, the reader will continue to read. If readers

fail to feel what the author intends, the reader stops reading, or—apart from the intent of

the author—if readers fail to feel the effects that they believe they should feel, they stop

reading or give the fiction a bad review. Indeed Booth states: "all of the old-fashioned

dramatic devices of pace and timing can be refurbished for the purposes of a dramatic,

impersonal narration. And manipulation of dramatized points of view can [. . .] convey

the author's judgment with great precision" (*Rhetoric* 272). So not only is fictional work

biased, but that bias is a way to focus the reader's attention on certain emotions or ideas

in an attempt to persuade the reader to some purpose, even if the result is unintentional.

But many writers may scoff at the idea that their fiction—to some extent—is

always rhetorical. At the same time, though, many writers also declare their intentions to

achieve such-and-such an effect or "move" the audience to feel certain emotional

crescendos or a cathartic release. Take, for example, Richard Wright who discusses the

reason for his stylistic choices in *Native Son* in his essay "How 'Bigger' was Born":

> I had written a book of short stories which was published under the title of
>
> *Uncle Tom's Children*. When the reviews of that book began to appear, I
>
> realized that I had made an awfully naïve mistake. I found that I had
>
> written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over
>
> and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book,
>
> no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they
>
> would have to face it without the consolation of tears. ("Bigger" 454)

Wright realized that the style he had used in his earlier work situated the fiction's

interests, sympathies, and affections such that people whom he did not intend to be his

audience (i.e., bankers' daughters) could identify with the characters and situations that

he was portraying. Thus in *Native Son*, the work that grew out of this realization, Wright

consciously tried to change the way that his language portrayed Bigger and his situation,

in order to bring about a rhetorical effect on the audience that was not sympathetic, but

rather "hard and deep" so that those bankers' daughters couldn't feel as if they

understood the black man, his situation, or his plight. Instead, he intended to use "terms

which would, in the course of the story, manipulate the deepest held notions and

convictions of their lives" (454). This conscious and specific use of language to achieve

certain effects in the reader is an example of the way that writers use rhetoric to persuade

readers to a certain point of view that the writer holds. In Wright's case, we can see that

not only does the author have a conscious objective in mind for his fiction, but he is also

fully aware of the way that fiction can act persuasively to achieve certain effects and

purposes.

As another example, Flannery O'Connor, widely known for using violence in her

fiction, is similar to Wright, in that she makes the conscious choice to use a certain plot

element intended to illicit a very specific response from the reader. Writing about her use

of violence she says, "In my own stories I have found that violence is strangely capable

of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace"

(O'Connor 112). With her use of violence, then, O'Connor consciously attempts to shock

her characters into specific realizations; however, she is also trying to affect the reader in

specific ways. Acknowledging that some have called "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

"grotesque," she writes, "In this story you should be on the lookout for such things as the

action of grace in the grandmother's soul, not for the dead bodies" (113). But no matter

what O'Connor thinks readers *should* focus on, the violent acts, in this case, are where

many readers place their focus, despite her best intentions. But apart from her thoughts on

this particular story, O'Connor also expressed a belief that the audience should be

affected by the violence portrayed in her fiction; she writes:

> The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions
>
> which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear
>
> as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and
>
> he may be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across
>
> to this hostile audience. [. . .] you have to make your vision apparent by
>
> shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you
>
> draw large startling figures. (33-34)[4]

However, although O'Connor realizes that she is consciously trying to affect the reader in

some way, she also acknowledges that ultimately she may have little control over the

reader. She writes, "To some extent, the writer can choose his subject, [. . .] but he can

never choose what he is able to make live" (qtd. in Katz 56). So although O'Connor is

similar to Wright in that she consciously intends to persuade her audience to certain

points of view, she also acknowledges that the writer does not necessarily control the

effect that his or her fiction has on readers.

Brian Evenson, as well, is an author who does not deny that he has a certain

rhetorical purposes in mind for his fiction and his audience. Brian Evenson is the author

of *Altmann's Tongue*, whose short-story subjects range from simple murder, to animal

mutilation, incest, and serial killers—all portrayed in stark, gruesome detail. In the

---

[4] O'Connor's idea of using violence as a way to shout at the reader is an illustration of Lanham's concept of allocating attention to certain ideas/elements in order to draw attention to them, thus rhetorically emphasizing what the author wants to convey. (See footnote 2).

afterword to *Altmann's Tongue*, Evenson explains that he wants to use violence "not as symbolic, not as meaningful, but as a basic an irrecoverable act—using violence that overflows boundaries of expectation, violence as a kind of deterritorialization that floods society and leaves it drowning underwater" (271). Even in this statement, Evenson recognizes the rhetorical quality of his narratives. He even assigns actions to the theme of violence, which shows a clear desire to make the narrative affect something outside the text itself—to take on a rhetorical effect. Further, Evenson elaborates on exactly what effect he wants to create in the reader:

> I wanted to move the reader away from seeing something mimetically depicted, toward feeling (and perhaps resenting) that they are being drawn into the artistic object, into the transgressions therein. [. . .] I wanted to draw the reader into the sensation of having the gun snouting against his or her own fragile temple, to draw the reader into a situation in which sensation outweighs mimesis. (272)

Unequivocally, Evenson intends to do violence to the reader, to affect the reader in a manner akin to personal trauma, and he does it much more explicitly than either Wright or O'Connor.

All these authors desire to alienate, shock, or put a gun to the head of the reader— to affect them through the text in some way. Although O'Connor wants readers to focus on grace for purposes of Christian enlightenment, Evenson's reasons for wanting to traumatize the reader are a little less clear. When explaining why he wants to use his fiction like a gun to the reader's head, he explains, "Violence, movement, ontology, and epistemology deflect off one another and off other ideas and notions in a way that I hope

will continue to shimmer and shift after the experience of reading the book is over" (278).

So although Evenson is very direct about his desire to affect the audience in some violent

manner, his reasons for doing so are cloudy at best. Using such general terms, and laying

out such a vague goal for inflicting violence on the reader makes one question Evenson's

actual motivations, leading one to wonder if there really is a purpose to his violence or if

he is simply trying to justify his own fascination with stark, bloody violence in a

academically acceptable way. However, despite any author's reasons for doing so, fiction

has an affect on the audience. Whether that effect is intentional on the part of the author

or not, the stories we tell have an effect us. But despite the fact that an author can

effectively use language to get the audience to feel what he or she wants them to feel,

their success in doing so depends a great deal on the person reading. Certainly, as Roland

Barthes points out, "Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader," making

"the writer the only person in literature" (148). And so much talk of what the author

intends and desires seems to work against the fact that, as O'Connor points out, the writer

cannot choose what he or she is able to "make live" in the mind of the reader. And

Barthes, in declaring the "Death of the Author," states that "a text's utility lies not in its

origin, but in its destination" (148). But as much as it might be easy to blame readers for

their own violent impulses after reading and interpreting a violent piece of fiction,

authors participate in the creation and interpretation of their own texts to varying degrees.

It is for this reason I have called this thesis "The Rhetoric of Violence" because, although

this project is primarily concerned with the way that violence is interpreted by readers

and the subsequent effect of those interpretations, authors also use violence as a rhetorical

tool in order to control or affect the interpretation that readers come away with, both in conscious and unconscious ways, even if those ways are heavily dependant on context.

<div align="center">The Rhetoric of Trauma</div>

Whether the author's intent—or the text's effect, independent of the author's intent—is to define identity through exclusion, shock people into turning to God's grace, or simply to express his or her own violent desires, the actual effect of violence on the audience is a form of trauma. Modern theories of trauma begin with Freud, who diagnosed "traumatic hysteria" as the state of a patient who has experienced so much trauma that they are no longer able to process it (what today is diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). The symptoms of trauma—the "hysteria" for Freud—are often delayed from the actual experience, which led him to extrapolate on the process of memory creation. For, if traumatic experience is "forgotten" for a period while the mind is unable to process it, then traumatic memory is fundamentally different from non-traumatic memory. Freud theorized that trauma split the psyche into traumatic and non-traumatic sections, which are processed differently, going so far as to say that the traumatic psyche acts like a foreign object in the brain. Cathy Caruth, in "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," explains, after reading and critiquing Freud, that traumatic memory is characterized by a period of latency or belatedness, wherein "the effects of the experience are not apparent" (186). As a result, the remembering of trauma is experienced "only in connection with another place, and in another time" (187). This leads Caruth to state, "For history to be a history of trauma means that is it referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs" (187). Thus, the narration of trauma can never be historically true; the narration of trauma

can only be taken as a distortion or falsification of the reality of the event. The goal of

listening to trauma narratives, then, is "not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the

testimony of the survivor's departure from it; the challenge of the therapeutic listener, in

other words, is how to listen to departure" ("Trauma and Experience" 10). Narrating

trauma, in effect, "is a repeated suffering of the event, [and] a continual leaving of its

site" (10). Thus, Caruth believes, that narrating trauma is harmful to the victim—making

them relive the trauma—and ineffective in education because it falsifies the trauma that

other's seek to understand.

In the 90s, Holocaust studies looked to trauma theory to help explain the trauma

of the Holocaust and the latent symptoms of its victims. Theorists like Dominick LaCapra

began to explore the ways in which the symptoms of trauma could pass on to individuals

who did not experience the trauma for themselves—through what he calls "cultural

transmission." To prevent this transmission of traumatic symptoms, LaCapra advocates

dealing with the trauma by "working-through" rather than "acting-out" (119)[5]. In

opposition to Caruth, LaCapra finds the narration of trauma very useful in working

through trauma in order to reduce traumatic symptoms (117-19). Although neither side

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[5] Although this thesis doesn't deal directly with the therapeutic effects of trauma narration for trauma survivors, it might be important to briefly draw a distinction between "working-through" or "acting-out" trauma. LaCapra offers a very succinct definition: "*Working-through means work on posttraumatic symptoms* in order to mitigate the effects of trauma by generating counterforces to compulsive repetition (or acting-out), thereby enabling a more viable articulation of affect and cognition or representation, as well as ethical and sociopolitical agency, in the present and future" (119). In essence, because trauma tends to produce symptoms that are repetitive in nature, where one might symbolically repeat the trauma—through a subconscious desire to "understand" what has happened—or "act-out," LaCapra advocates dealing with the symptoms consciously through therapy, narration, etc., so as to bring (at least) partial conscious understanding to the trauma and thereby mitigate the repetitive symptoms and hopefully keep from culturally transmitting those symptoms to others.

agrees on the purpose and result of sharing traumatic experience, they are united in their belief that narrated trauma has a power outside of the traumatic experience itself.

These theorists and their constituent camps, have explored the power of trauma narrative on the victims of trauma. But the study of how trauma narratives affect the audience is what I am most concerned with when looking at trauma narratives from a rhetorical perspective. For example, John Mowitt, in his essay "Trauma Envy," explores trauma as contributing to the appearance of moral authority given to those who have experienced and expressed trauma. His idea is based on the social effects of guilt; if a person (or political party) can show that they have been traumatized, those who inflicted the trauma will be viewed as morally corrupt, the public, then, cedes the moral high ground to the victim, whose request for redress seems more than fair (280-82). He applies this idea to the political realm where he sees neoconservatives appropriating moral authority from the perceived moral wound dealt to Americans during the 60s (279-80). In dealing with the effects of trauma narrative on audiences, and the use of trauma narratives by political parties for desired political capital, Mowitt is essentially documenting the rhetorical effectiveness of trauma narratives. Accordingly, Mowitt's assertion that trauma narratives can bring about political change by affecting the audience in certain desired ways, is exemplified in the respected Holocaust survivor, writer, and lecturer, Elie Wiesel, who has used his Holocaust experience repeatedly in order to influence policy and bring about social awareness and justice[6]. In addition, in "The Politics of Negotiating Public Tragedy: Media Framing of the Matthew Shepherd Murder," Ott and Aoki show how the beating and subsequent death of a young

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[6] See "The Perils of Indifference," "Nobel Lecture," and "Dedication Address" listed in works cited.

homosexual man by two Montana men, gave moral authority to the gay rights movement

(220-32). In all of these examples, trauma is converted to political capital through guilt.

Historically, then, trauma narratives can be very effective rhetorical tools, especially

when creating guilt in order to persuade audiences to give moral authority to victimized

groups.

However, LaCapra argues that retelling trauma narratives can have a more

personal and profound impact on the audience or reader. He states that those who read or

hear trauma narratives "may experience aspects of trauma or undergo secondary

traumatization, at least through the manifestation of symptomatic effects such as extreme

anxiety, panic attacks, startle reactions, or recurrent nightmares, without personally living

through the traumatizing event to which such effects are ascribed" (114). So, in one

sense, moral authority is given to the perceived victim of trauma because, in some small

way, the audience has experienced the trauma through the trauma narrative and, as a

result, sympathizes with the victim—or the socio-political cause that has used the victim

as a representation of its ideals and goals.

In addition, Mowitt points out that another effect of trauma narratives can be

guilt, depending on how the trauma narrative is framed (280). In the case of

neoconservatives, Mowitt argues that because they can frame the Left as the moral

authority of the 60s and, consequently, for its moral decline, they can "deny that its

partisans bear any properly political responsibility for the traumas inflicted upon blacks

and women" (281). As a result, not only do they absolve themselves of responsibility, but

they implicate the majority of Americans as guilty of those acts. So not only can the

audience sympathize with those who tell trauma narratives, they can also be implicated as

the perpetrator of the trauma, causing them to feel the guilt associated with inflicting

trauma and ceding moral authority to the victim as an act of compensation (281-82).

Regardless of the argument that trauma narrative can effect positive change (as Wright

and O'Connor are attempting), using trauma narratives to create guilt in an audience that

has not perpetrated any crime might seem manipulative and self-serving, especially for

the purposes of political gain.

<div align="center">Reading Violence, Inflicting Trauma</div>

Beyond the use of trauma narrative for political gain, LaCapra points to the idea

that trauma, stemming from violence, can be foundational to the identity of a person or

group. For example, the crucifixion of Christ, a supreme act of violence, is the foundation

for Christian ideology and the Holocaust is foundational to twentieth-century Jewish

identity (LaCapra 114-15), just like the trauma of slavery is foundational to African-

American identity. Indeed, our own "deepest experiences of suffering, disturbance, loss

or even ecstasy" may not necessarily come out of living through personal trauma, but

through transhistorical trauma that is culturally transmitted (115-16), that is, trauma

experienced in a shared past that is transmitted through socio-cultural agencies. In fact,

Rene Girard cites the uniformity of sacrificial ritual and myth across cultures as proof

that a violent act might be foundational to all cultural/historical identites (92). Further, he

argues that once violence has been initiated in a community, a cycle of violence begins

from which the community cannot extricate itself (81). But violence will destroy a

community if violent impulses are directed inward for lack of an external enemy, so the

community ritualizes violence in order to provide an outlet for inherent violence. Girard

states:

> The rites of sacrifice serve to polarize the community's aggressive
>
> impulses and redirect them toward victims that may be actual or
>
> figurative, animate or inanimate, but are always incapable of propagating
>
> further vengeance. The sacrificial process furnishes an outlet for those
>
> violent impulses that cannot be mastered by self-constraint; [. . . and]
>
> prevents the spread of violence by keeping vengeance in check. (18)

For example, the ancient Jewish practice of scapegoating (pronouncing the sins of the people upon an animal and then killing it or releasing into the wild to die) provides an example of releasing violent impulses on a surrogate victim to appease the violence inherent in human interaction[7].

The idea that violence is foundational to cultural identity, however, is problematic. For if cultural identity stems from trauma, then the resulting identity stems from non-narrative memory and can only be reconstructed as artifice, a fictional reimagining of events that cannot actually be remembered. Caruth calls into question the validity of historical narrative specifically for this reason. She states,

> [It is] in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma—
>
> both in its occurrence, and in the attempt to understand it—that we can
>
> begin to recognize the possibility of a history which is no longer
>
> straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of
>
> experience and reference). [. . .] we can understand that a rethinking of

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[7] Similarly, Aristotle describes this purgation of emotion in general with his term "catharsis." His idea is that mimetic acts in drama serve to purge pity and fear from the audience by modeling elevated—or proper—emotions in order to keep the emotions of the audience in check (47-49). In both examples, the intent is to create a mimesis whereby the audience can purge certain emotions through the mimetic acts.

reference is not aimed at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our

understanding, that is, of precisely permitting *history* to arise where

immediate understanding may not. ("Unclaimed Experience" 182)

Here, Caruth is implying that the idea of history, as we know it, has risen out of the

inexplicability of trauma. She believes that when trauma cannot be understood

narratively, we create our own narrative to explain the trauma in order to make sense of it

ourselves. If, then, cultural identity arises out of history—which arises out of trauma—

then our narratives are not exactly true. As such, the work of both Girard and Caruth

point to a basic problem with trauma narrative when being used to form identity: that a

trauma narrative can never be completely, factually true. This is not to say that all

foundational identities are false, but that (as Caruth points out) they are never historically

true. This leaves room for foundational identities to be emotionally true to some extent,

but that emotional truth can only be conveyed and remembered through fictional

narratives.

As a result, the power of trauma narratives over an audience—whether they arise

from a political or literary sphere—leads one to question the reasons for inflicting

violence, even mimetically, on readers and whether the price of inflicting trauma is

greater than the effects of its possible social benefits. Although, Wright and O'Connor

seem to push for positive social change in their use of fictional violence, how are

audiences supposed to know in what context to interpret that violence? As well, if

neoconservatives—or any political movement—can create a feeling of guilt that gives

them moral authority, how can an audience make a judgment on the benefit of that guilt?

That is to say, the use of trauma narrative—which is to some extent always fictional—

can be used for purposes that both benefit and harm readers and, in turn, society in general. But the intent of using trauma cannot always be the standard by which the social usefulness can be measured because, as pointed out earlier, the actual effects of trauma narratives can differ greatly from any intended purposes depending on the audience and context in which it is interpreted.

However, attempting to illustrate the social usefulness of trauma narratives, LaCapra argues that trauma narration can have a curative act for victims of actual trauma (as opposed to fictional trauma narratives). Although he acknowledges that the wound that trauma has dealt to a victim can never be fully healed, he advocates a "working through" of traumatic experience—including narration—in order to minimize the symptoms of trauma in present-day life and hopefully open up future life possibilities for victims by transforming a non-linear experience into a linear narrative that can be examined and explored, even if imperfectly (117-22). In this light, the purpose of narrating trauma is to create a curative effect for the victim. However, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth argues that, despite the curative effects that narration of trauma can have for the victim, turning non-narrative memory into narrative is problematic:

> Beyond the loss of precision there is another, more profound, disappearance: the loss, precisely, of the event's essential incomprehensibility, the force of its *affront to understanding*. [. . .] The possibility of integration into memory and consciousness of history thus raises the question, [. . .] "whether it is not sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past." ("Recapturing" 154)

LaCapra and others have called this view of trauma "sacralization or rendering sublime"

the experience of trauma (LaCapra 122). Caruth's idea is that trauma is a sacred

experience for the victim and should not be shared because of its loss of power for the

victim, despite any pain or subsequent symptoms that this non-narrative experience may

continue to cause. In Caruth's view, then, sharing trauma is not only a destruction of the

sublime experience of trauma, but sharing trauma narratives falsifies the trauma anyway,

nullifying any social benefit that a trauma narrative might have had.

Despite Caruth's objections, LaCapra and others believe that sharing traumatic

experience can be beneficial not only to the victim, but to others as well, and he outlines

two possible scenarios in sharing trauma narratives: for the listener/reader the experience

can be vicarious or virtual. Vicarious trauma is a secondary traumatic experience in

which "one perhaps unconsciously identifies with the victim, becomes a surrogate victim,

and lives the event in an imaginary way that, in extreme cases, may lead to confusion

about one's participation in the actual events" (LaCapra 125)[8]. For example, being asked

to "put yourself in the victim's shoes," either directly or though extremely graphic

imagery, is a common example of an attempt at creating a vicarious traumatic experience.

Whereas virtual trauma is an "experience of trauma, [where] one might imaginatively put

oneself in the victim's position while respecting the difference between self and other and

recognizing that one cannot take the victim's place or speak in the victim's voice" (125).

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[8] This in an interesting application of Girard's idea of the sacrificial surrogate that purges the violent impulses of a community. In Girard's model, the surrogate is an object or animal upon which the community can project its unwanted tendencies, but it is not an object that the community can identify with on an emotional level. La Capra's model is interesting because replacing the inanimate object or animal with a human allows others to identify with the victim and confuse themselves with the victim under certain circumstances.

Virtual trauma might be illustrated in the telling or reading of a victim's story through a third-person narrator who only describes the events and does not try to make any emotional connection with the reader or audience. Although virtual trauma appears to have obvious advantages in that non-victims might be able to—in some small way— understand the experience of victims, vicarious traumatic experience has the potential not only to nullify the singularity of a traumatic event (as asserts Caruth), but it can also lead to the acting out of posttraumatic symptoms in those that have only secondarily experienced the trauma (126). Take, for example, a religious group that has been persecuted in the past, like the Jews or Mormons. Although physical persecution may have ceased long ago, Mormons, for example, pass on stories of violent persecution that form part of their foundational identity. Current members, who have never experienced physical persecution but have been inculcated in Mormon history can appear uneasy or uncomfortable when their religion is made public. This uneasiness, or apprehension, about non-believers is a secondary posttraumatic symptom. By learning about persecution at the root of the religion's founding, the attitude toward non-believers becomes one of apprehension for fear that the same traumas may be inflicted again, even though physical persecution and trauma may be a remote possibility. This apprehension is a small-scale acting out of the symptoms of trauma, although only experienced secondarily. Thus, the infliction of vicarious trauma on a reader can have very powerful consequences that may result in the acting out of posttraumatic symptoms. For this reason, LaCapra states that "to judge whether [inflicting secondary trauma] is desirable would entail considering how ethical, social, and political issues applied and whether

they were preempted by higher-order considerations that were religious or 'ethical' in some revised sense related to the quasi-religious" (129).

Toward a Theory of Reading Violence

Of course, dealing in terms as subjective as "ethics" or "quasi-religious morality" is a bit dicey, to say the least, and is fraught with problems of academic rigor and basic concerns about non-empirical study. However, analyzing violent texts for the purpose of identifying their ideological framework, can help us to understand the contextuality of the portrayals of violence. Determining the context of the violence can then give us an insight into the ways in which the violence might serve certain purposes—social, personal, political, etc.—which we can examine in light of creating a virtual or vicarious traumatic experience for the reader. Examining the degree to which a text encourages a vicarious or virtual experience, then, might help us to understand the actual traumatic effect that the text has on readers and the degree to which traumatic symptoms might be passed on, at which point we might be able to measure or evaluate, to some degree, the social usefulness of violent texts within certain contexts.

In Chapter 2, I lay out a case for using Kenneth Burke's dramatistic theory as a starting point for understanding a text's ideological framework, which creates the context for violence, and the importance of using trauma theory to evaluate the results of a dramatistic analysis of violent texts. As well, I go through a pair of short sample analyses of Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* and Wright's *Native Son* using Burke's dramatistic pentad and trauma theory, in order to illustrate the type of analysis I am advocating. And in chapter 3 and 4, I examine longer works, namely Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, in order to explore the ways in which violence works to specific ends

within longer more complex texts and the possible traumatic effects of violence on readers when presented in the ideological contexts that the novels set up.

My ultimate desire is to provide a system by which violence may be examined—not to condemn its use, but to understand its usefulness and demonstrate its effects on readers, giving writers and readers tools to understand and responsibly use narrative violence as a rhetorical tool.

CHAPTER 2: DRAMATISM: ACTING OUT TRAUMATIC IMPACT

Brian Evenson, in the afterward to *Altmann's Tongue*, makes it very clear that he wants to assault the reader with the violence in his book. But why? As an answer, Evenson states that, in his writing, "Violence, movement, ontology, and epistemology deflect off one another and off other ideas and notions in a way that I hope will continue to shimmer and shift after the experience of reading the book is over" (278). That is indeed a vague answer for an author who wants "to draw the reader into the sensation of having the gun snouting against his or her own fragile temple" (272). Physical assault is an extreme and traumatizing experience, and perpetrating such violence against another human being—one would hope—should have some good reason behind it other than simply wanting the reader to think vaguely about "violence, movement, ontology, and epistemology," especially in light of the notion that trauma narratives can create secondary traumatic symptoms in an audience. As such, traumatizing a reader through narrative violence is not something to be taken lightly. Although one might argue that Evenson's fiction is merely, well, fiction, and that it doesn't have any real physical effects, it is evident that Evenson believes that his fiction can have physical effects, or he would not be attempting to traumatize his audience in the first place.

Indeed, reading Evenson's fiction feels like an assault, and I question his motives. But regardless of an *author's* intent in using violence, I believe there is a system by which we might uncover the placement of motive in a piece of violent fiction *itself* (which may contradict the author's own stated purpose) to discover the underlying ideological context of the violence and the rhetorical effect it might have. Specifically, Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad is an extremely effective way to uncover motive and,

in turn, the ideology of a given piece of text. Once that ideological context is uncovered

through use of Burke's pentad, examining the ideology and the presentation of violence

in the context of trauma theory gives us an idea of whether the violence might encourage

repetitive acts or whether it might have the potential to create traumatic symptoms in the

reader and for what purpose.

<div align="center">The Ethics of Reading Violent Texts</div>

In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Wayne Booth stays away from

picking sides in the battle of determining the ethics of a particular text. In fact the idea of

"sides" at all seems too narrow for Booth. He states, "The word 'ethical' may mistakenly

suggest a project concentrating on quite limited moral standards," a system of belief that

teaches "'Moral' judgments," aligning itself with one ideological position (Booth

Company 8). Instead of focusing on which decisions or actions adhere to some abstract

and subjective notion of right and wrong, he broadens his definition to include "all

qualities in the character, or ethos, of the authors *and readers*" (*Company* 8, emphasis

added). In this way, he avoids taking an ideological stance, which allows him the ability

to talk about the effects of narratives on readers in a general sense (as opposed to making

judgments on the effects themselves), avoiding sweeping generalizations that he

characterizes as a weakness of the so-called ethical criticism that has been done in the

past (*Company* 9).

Another benefit of Booth's definition of ethics is the emphasis it places on the

reader. As quoted earlier, ethical criticism is not only concerned with the character of

authors, but with readers as well. That is to say that ethical criticism in the past has

forgotten about the readers and placed all emphasis on the author of a text, as Booth

states, "label[ing] a given narrative or kind of narrative as in itself harmful or beneficial" (9), eschewing the responsibility of a careful reading. The results of this type of criticism abound in the echoes of critics who place all burden of ethics (or morality in this sense of the word) on the text itself, blaming the text if the critics themselves cannot understand it, or are offended by it. The results are the immediate condemnation of the text as a whole based on surface details that may be considered racist, violent, or politically subversive in some way. The effects of such hasty generalizations of a text move from simple condemnation, to censorship, to—at its extreme—book burning. Instead, Booth advocates an ethics of reading, one in which "the ethical reader will behave responsibly toward the text and its author, [and] that reader will also take responsibility for the ethical quality of his or her 'reading.'" (*Company* 10).

It is this definition of ethics, one that accounts for author and reader, that is, perhaps, the most useful when looking at violent texts. So often, violent narratives are looked upon as gratuitous, or only for shock value—a device used by those who have nothing else to say or are simply morally corrupt. For example, in the NCTE guideline, "The Students' Right to Read," the National Counsel of Teachers of English declare that censorship of novels in English classrooms is "often arbitrary and irrational" (par. 2). However, a number of well-respected critics have explained narrative violence as having a symbolic use or serving certain social purposes. Richard Slotkin, in *Regeneration Through Violence*, explains narrative violence as a manifestation of the mythical violence that has, in part, created American identity (5). As such, it has become a symbol of regeneration. Aristotle explains, that the emotions of fear and pity (which could result from depictions of violence) can be expunged through catharsis achieved through the

artistic presentation of such emotions (47-49). Also, Girard, identifies ritual sacrifice (violence transformed into narrative) as symbolic of the violence inherent within a community (8). Even Burke recognizes that poetic violence can be "neutral" in that it is a symbol "for transformation in general" (*Rhetoric* 11)[9]. These critics are not focusing on condemning violent texts but on giving the audience explanations for the existence of narrative violence and its function in society, placing the responsibility for interpretation on the reader.

<center>Uncovering Ideology through Pentadic Analysis</center>

But despite the fact that violent texts have been both dismissed and academically explained, uncovering the symbolism and meaning in violence requires going deeper than surface elements of death, murder, or war. Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian linguist and literary critic, theorizes that these small parts of the work—the "thematic content, style, and compositional structure" (60)—serve only to create the actual unit of human communication: the utterance, the text as a whole. Further, he argues that, the smaller pieces that make up the work as a whole lose their individual meaning when they are parts of a larger utterance such as a novel (62). Thus, it is the utterance that determines the meaning of its smaller structural components not the other way around. So, the surface features of a violent text (or the superficial acts of violence) can only be understood within the framework of the utterance. So, if the utterance is a framework that works to define the meaning of the individual parts of a text, the utterance exhibits a type

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[9] It is worth noting that even though Burke acknowledges the neutrality of poetic-violent imagery, much of his overall project was concerned with transcending violence and war through better communication. This is evidenced in part by the epigraph to *A Grammar of Motives*: "Ad bellum purificandum" (Toward a purification of war). See also Burke's "Rhetoric—Old and New" for a discussion on rhetorical identification and transcendence (full citation in Works Cited).

of worldview or ideology[10] within which other terms become meaningful. As such,

violent texts require an especially rigorous analysis to determine the ideological context

of the violence in the text as a whole. Simply put, the acts of violence in a text can only

be judged contextually and cannot be examined as acts independent of the text as a whole

unit. It is only within an analytical framework that accounts for the context of violent acts

where one can actually determine the overall rhetorical effect of a text as a whole, not

just its constituent parts. And perhaps the best system for examining the relationships

among all aspects of a work, including its philosophic base and the interaction between

its constituent parts as a whole, is Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad because it seeks to

uncover the ideology of a text *through* the interaction of its parts, or dramatistic ratios.

What Burke saw in other modes of critical inquiry was a lack of understanding

one's own situatedness. In focusing on one aspect of a human drama, all other

perspectives were forgotten. Further, Burke observes that "the greater the *absolutism* of

the statements, the greater the *subjectivity* and *relativity* in the position of the agent

making the statements" (*Grammar* 512). In other words, the more absolute one's critical

mode is, the less one recognizes that it is simply one perspective. What Burke offers,

instead, is a vocabulary that functions as a "representative anecdote" (324), a metaphor

(in this case, drama) that functions as a representation of the interaction of ideological

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[10] James H. Kavanagh, in Lentricchia and McLaughlin's *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, states that "ideology designates a rich 'system of representations,' [. . .] which helps form individuals into social subjects" (310). Thus, "Ideological analysis is concerned with the institutional and/or textual apparatuses that work on the reader's or spectator's imaginary conceptions of self and social order in order to call or *solicit* [. . .] him/her into a specific form of social 'reality' and social subjectivity" (310). As such, throughout this thesis, when I refer to ideology, I am not referring to any specifically stated political or religious perspective, but rather the worldview or perspective of a certain author, character, text, etc.

perspectives. Drama works well for a discussion on motives because, as Burke states of all critical modes, a particular mode doesn't only reveal reality, "but rather it *reveals only such reality as is capable of being revealed by* [a] *particular kind of terminology*" (313). What dramatism offers, then, is a metaphor for human action that can be examined apart from the reality of the situation itself, but whose parts accurately describe action and reveal motivation. Burke explains,

> Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (xv)

Any answer to the above questions, as Burke points out, can be identified and discussed using dramatistic language. As a result, the metaphor of drama is perfectly suited to examine these relationships because of the vocabulary it uses.

To apply dramatisitic language to a given situation, one need only to identify the different elements and assign appropriate terms (scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose). Doing so not only allows one to abstract the physical parts, but it reveals the relationship that the terms have with one another, illustrating a certain ideological perspective. Specifically, identifying pentadic terms allows one to determine where on the pentad the greatest emphasis for motive is placed and how the internal relationship between those parts function (xv-xvi). The placing of motive is important because it reveals not only

how a specific ideology interprets the world and catalogs experience, but it also reveals where responsibility is placed within that ideological perspective.

For example, Tonn, Endress, and Diamond use dramatism to examine a tragic accident in Maine where a young wife, and mother of two—Wood, was shot in her own backyard by a hunter, Rogerson, who had left a designated hunting area. Tonn et al. describe how the media was quick to absolve the hunter of any wrongdoing by placing emphasis on "scene" (171). As the media framed it, the hunter had been confused by his surroundings and simply shot at what he thought was the white tail of a deer, which seemed natural (171-172). As such, he was not an agent, but simply a part of the natural scene. On the other hand, the victim was framed as someone who was not a part of the scene but an intruder (being a recent transplant to Maine); framed as such, the victim was assigned the role of agent, bringing upon herself, her own death (174-178). Because of this media framing, the hunter was acquitted of all charges in the victim's death. In this case, Tonn et al. were able to use the vocabulary of dramatism as a mode through which they could identify pentadic terms and examine how the relationship of the terms could uncover the social function (or implications) of the event's rhetorical presentation.

Perhaps a more explicit example of using dramatism to examine the relationships between ideological perspectives is Barry Brummett's article, "A Pentadic Analysis of Ideologies in Two Gay Rights Controversies." Brummett examines the basic concept of homosexuality with dramatism. In his analysis he finds that the gay rights movement emphasizes the agent (253). They do so by taking the stance that acts are only a natural product of being an agent, creating an agent:act ratio (253). On the other hand, anti-gay rhetoric emphasizes the act as primary, arguing that "a person is gay because he/she *does*

something" (255). The anti-gay movement, then, is creating an act:agent ratio where people are defined by what they do, denying that gays are simply born gay. Brummett's analysis is interesting because it illustrates how dramatism can serve as a critical mode that not only uncovers motive for action but can show relationships between different motivational emphases within the pentad. In this case, Brummet is able to clarify that the difference between the two factions is a fundamental difference in perspective. Thus advocates on either side are not even arguing on the same terms and, as a result, will not come to an understanding.

In both these instances, the authors were able to use the dramatistic pentad not only to uncover motive and responsibility for action, but to present the dynamics of the pentadic terms in ways that exposed the interaction of ideological perspectives. However, simply uncovering the motives behind the rhetorical use of violence is a dead end, in and of itself, because dramatism doesn't offer a context within with to judge the ideologies themselves, it simply uncovers them for examination. However, in addition to dramatism, trauma theory seems to offer great insight into the rhetorical impact of violent text on an audience. As discussed in the previous chapter, trauma theory deals specifically with the way that symptoms of trauma are passed on and how they function socially and culturally. As such, trauma theory serves as a critical mode that has the vocabulary to deal with trauma narratives in a socio-cultural context. At this point, an examination of violence through certain passages within a handful of texts might be useful, in order to illustrate not only the relationship between Burke and violence, but the relationship between pentadic analysis and trauma theory. Specifically, I'll look at selections from *The Lovely* Bones and *Native Son*, which not only depict violence but illustrate ways in

which violence is used rhetorically. I will examine these texts with the system I have

indicated, using the dramatisitc pentad to uncover motive and ideology and using trauma

theory to explore the rhetorical impact, on readers, of violence within that context.

The Lovely Bones

The Lovely Bones, by Alice Sebold, was published in 2002 to favorable reviews.

The novel became a book club regular and is in development by Peter Jackson to be made

into a film. The book's entry into popular culture seems odd considering that the book

centers around the rape and murder of a fourteen year-old girl and the emotional

aftermath of her family and those who knew her. Although the majority of the book

follows the family and friends of Susie, the murdered girl, as they deal with the trauma

that has hit them, the first chapter is the traumatic event itself: the rape and murder of

Susie Salmon. In an examination of trauma theory in general, the book in its entirety

might be useful, but, in an examination of violence, it is the first chapter that is the most

pertinent to our discussion.

Within this first chapter, there are some interesting pentadic dynamics at play, the

first of which is a structural emphasis on the primacy of the act itself. The structure of the

first chapter is a vacillation between juxtaposed images of the rape and Susie's pondering

on the normal things in her life: her mousy brown hair, her junior high classes and

teachers, and her father's embarrassing stories. Eventually the narrative becomes more

focused on what normal events are transpiring at the moment that Susie is trapped and

assaulted. These moments of innocence and everyday life are interspersed with the

disturbing dialogue of Mr. Harvey, the rapist, and Susie and the strange events leading to

her death, like this exchange when Susie comes upon Mr. Harvey in the cornfield

between the junior high and her house, narrated by the dead Susie:

> "I've built something back here," he said. "Would you like to see
> it?"
>
> "I'm sort of cold Mr. Harvey," I said, "and mom likes me home
> before dark."
>
> "It's after dark, Susie," he said. (Sebold 7)

The events, and Mr. Harvey's dialogue, become more disturbing as the chapter

progresses and Susie reluctantly enters an underground room that Mr. Harvey has dug out

in the middle of the cornfield:

> "Look around," he said.
>
> I stared at it in amazement, the dug-out shelf above him where he
> had placed matches, a row of batteries, and a battery-powered fluorescent
> lamp that cast the only light in the room—an eerie glow that would make
> his features hard to see when we was on top of me.
>
> There was a mirror on the shelf, and a razor and shaving cream. I
> thought that was odd. Wouldn't he do that at home? But I guess I figured
> that a guy who had a perfectly good split-level and then built an
> underground room only half a mile away had to be kind of loo-loo. (10)

When Mr. Harvey begins to force himself onto Susie, the juxtaposing images begin to

vacillate more quickly and Susie begins to focus on the everyday things that she imagines

are going on while she is trapped with her attacker:

I fought hard. I fought as hard as I could not to let Mr. Harvey hurt me, but my hard-as-I-could was not hard enough, not even close, and I was soon lying down on the ground, in the ground, with him on top of me panting and sweating, having lost his glasses in the struggle.

I was so alive then. I thought it was *the worst thing in the world* to be lying flat on my back with a sweating man on top of me. To be trapped inside the earth and have no one know where I was.

I thought of my mother.

My mother would be checking the dial of the clock on her oven. It was a new oven and she loved that it had a clock on it. "I can time things to the minute," she told her own mother, a mother who couldn't care less about ovens.

She would be worried, but more angry than worried, at my lateness. As my father pulled into the garage, she would rush about, fixing him a cocktail, a dry sherry, and put on an exasperated face: "You know junior high," she would say. (12-13)

These juxtapositions gradually become quicker and more stark until the climax of the act itself:

"Susie! Susie!" I hear my mother calling. "Dinner is ready."

He was inside me. He was grunting.

"We're having string beans and lamb."

I was the mortar, he was the pestle.

"Your brother has a new finger painting, and I made apple crumb

cake." (14)

Structurally, as these two parts of the narrative come closer together, becoming

successively quicker, tension builds as the narrator zooms in on the action and then pulls

back. Not only does it build tension but the movement of the narrative structure pushes

the reader toward a final act, a release of the tension, which seems like an inevitability. In

this way, the narrative is driven like the sex act itself, a rhythmic building of tension

toward a release. Structuring the narrative in this way focuses the narrative on the

moment of release—the act itself, making the other terms of the pentad subordinate. In

this manner, the narrative structure seems to place emphasis on act, creating an act:scene

ratio. Since the act is the driving force of the narrative structure, the act is the driving

force behind all action by agents.

At the same time that the structure focuses on act, Susie seems to focus on agent,

in disturbing ways, implying that she is, in part, responsible for her own rape. At multiple

points in the narration Susie takes responsibility for her own actions: "I felt like

observing my way out of there, but I didn't" (8), "I was like I was in science class: I was

curious" (9), "I guess I was thinking that Mr. Harvey was a character, and I liked the

room, and it was warm, and I wanted to know how he had built it, what the mechanics of

the thing were and where he'd learned to do something like that" (10). Perhaps the

starkest example of Susie taking responsibility for her actions is after the rape when Mr.

Harvey asks Susie to get up off the ground. She narrates, "I could not move. I could not

get up" (15). Certainly, in some of the earlier examples one could argue that Susie is

simply reacting in a human way, telling the reader about her actions, but this last

example, puts the others in perspective. She does not say that she did not know what made her stay in her prostrate position—"something, some force, wouldn't let me get up"—but clearly uses the first-person pronoun, to take responsibility for her choice. This action is highlighted when she states, in the following paragraph, "was it only that, only that I would not follow his suggestion [that he killed me]?" (15). She clearly takes responsibility for her own actions by questioning her decision, blaming herself for not acting. Burke states that "when one talks of the will, one is necessarily in the field of the *moral*; and the field of the moral is, by definition, the field of *action*" (Burke, *Grammar* 136). Thus, generally, by placing emphasis on the agent, one takes responsibility for one's own actions, which is usually considered a moral stance—being socially responsible, yet which is disturbing in this context because Susie, by acting "morally" is blaming herself for her own rape.

The idea that she takes the blame for her own actions is played out even more disturbingly as she compares her rape to an intimate moment between two lovers. She states, "Mr. Harvey made me lie still underneath him and listen to the beating of his heart and the beating of mine. How mine skipped like a rabbit, and how his thudded, a hammer against cloth. We lay there, our bodies touching" (Sebold 14). She describes his voice as "gentle, encouraging, a lover's voice on a late morning" (15). And when Mr. Harvey says, "Tell me you love me," Susie says, "Gently, I did." Of course, she tells him she loves him because she is afraid of him, but the language used here is sweet, soft and alluring, the way one might remember a first love or other intimate moments. Susie further incriminates herself in her own rape by intimating that although this was a horrible experience (after she tells Mr. Harvey she loves him, he kills her), there is an air

of complicity in her view of the situation. At the same time, Susie's self-incrimination is ironic—she blames herself for an act that she clearly had no control over, did not initiate, and could not have stopped—which is underscored by the narrative's emphasis on the primacy of the act.

So, in the first chapter of *The Lovely Bones*, two ratios are at odds: act:scene and agent:act. Whereas the act dictates the narrative structure, and thus the unfolding of the scene and agents, Susie places emphasis on the agent, taking responsibility for her actions and, in turn, the actions done to her. However, Susie's emphasis on agent seems ironic when placed in this specific scene because, although placing motive in the agent is a moral stance, the narrative structure controls Susie, her situation, and the actions of Mr. Harvey.

However, this is as far as we can go with pentadic analysis. Clearly, Susie's misplaced sense of blame and the primacy of the act make Susie a sympathetic character, but the vocabulary of dramatism doesn't provide a way to discuss the effect of that sympathy on readers. The vocabulary of trauma studies, on the other hand, deals specifically with how trauma affects individuals. In this case, the trauma victim is sympathetic, but not easy for readers to identify with—or place themselves in the perspective of. Since Susie's perspective is ironic, identifying with her point of view would be difficult because it would require the reader to agree with Susie and blame her for her rape. As a result, the rhetorical effect of this scene is not vicarious. That is, *The Lovely Bones* does not offer a reading wherein one can inhabit Susie's ideological perspective. If they cannot inhabit her perspective, readers are dissuaded from sharing in co-victimhood with her, and hopefully dissuaded from sharing in any traumatic

symptoms that this experience might produce. Instead, this scene lends itself toward a virtual reading that depicts the act of rape in a way wherein readers might know of Susie's experience, which may make readers uneasy, but it may also help them to understand victims of sexual violence without degrading victims' experience by sacralizing it.

In sum, analyzing the first chapter of *The Lovely Bones* with pentadic analysis leads us to an understanding of Susie's ideology as a character within the larger ideological context of the chapter. In addition, application of the vocabulary of trauma studies to the resulting dynamic between Susie's ideological perspective and the narrative structure helps us to realize that although the chapter is graphic and disturbing, it may help readers to understand the violence of rape and understand victims' mindset without encouraging readers to participate in the traumatic symptoms of a physical rape.

Native Son

Richard Wright's *Native Son* is similar to *The Lovely Bones* in that it also deals with the death of a girl, although under very different circumstances and from the killer's perspective. Also, there is a different pentadic dynamic at work in the killing and mutilation of Mary Dalton. The pentadic terms that are most at play after Bigger kills Mary are scene, agent, and act.

First, from the beginning of the novel, Bigger feels controlled by scene: he is a black man living in a white man's world. When he goes to interview for the chauffer job with Mr. Dalton, he feels uncomfortable, stiff, and constantly questions whether he is acting the way he should around white people: "There was an organic conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted him to be when in their presence; none had ever

told him that in so many words, but their manner had made him feel that they did" (48). Already, Bigger feels that he is in a completely foreign world with rules he doesn't know and if not followed would lead to regrettable consequences. As a result, his first thought after he realizes he has inadvertently killed Mary is one of scene: "The reality of the room fell from him; the vast city of white people sprawled outside took its place. She was dead and he had killed her. He was a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer. He had killed a white woman" (87). Instead of focusing on the morality of his act, Bigger focuses on scene because it is the most powerful determinate of action in his world: he is not a murderer; he is a *black* murderer in a *white* scene. And scene becomes a controlling factor in Bigger's actions from this point on, which sets up an initial scene:agent ratio.

However, the other term at work here is act. If Bigger is letting scene define him as an agent, scene is also driving Bigger's actions. That is, scene is the defining force, but in order to avoid the inevitability of the scene (which it is his purpose to avoid), Bigger is driven to act. In fact, immediately after deciding that he is going to cover up the murder, his language turns from discussions of how he is part of the scene to how the scene drives him against his will to commit horrible acts. From that time until the body is disposed of, the narrator repeats the exact phrase "he had to" ten times, and there are multiple other references to Bigger's reluctance to act that are reinforced by a reiteration of his purpose to avoid the inevitability of the scene. If, then, Bigger is forced to do what he does, he is not responsible for his actions. So, responsibility for action is placed solely on scene. Because of the interplay between scene, act, and purpose, Bigger's ideology can be thought of as an "ends justify the means" attitude toward his life and actions.

This ideology, however, is complicated by Bigger's role as a victim of scene, driven against his will to cover up an accident.

An "ends justify the means" ideology is not particularly sympathetic because it implies an ability to *choose* means (acts). But Bigger is also sympathetic because, rhetorically, he does not control his actions or situation: the scene defines how he must act—in ways he abhors. In this way, readers should feel sorry for Bigger, sympathizing with him. However, although Bigger is sympathetic in one sense, he also defies sympathy because his ideology implies motive and choice. In fact, Wright has created a situation in which readers are uncomfortable with their sympathy for the main character because, although his situation is controlled by scene—giving him a limited set of options—the options he chooses are extreme and abhorrent. For example, the passage below describes Bigger mutilating Mary's body:

> Gently, he sawed the blade into the flesh struck a bone. He gritted his teeth and cut harder. As yet there was no blood anywhere on the knife. But the bone made it difficult. [. . .] Then blood crept outward in widening circles of pink on the newspapers, spreading quickly now. He whacked at the bone with the knife. The head hung limply on the newspapers, the curly black hair dragging about in the blood. He whacked harder, but the head would not come off. [. . .] He *had* to burn this girl. [. . .] He saw a hatchet. *Yes!* That would do it. He spread a neat layer of newspapers beneath the head, so that the blood would not drip on the floor. He got the hatchet, held the head at a slanting angle with his left hand and, after pausing in an

attitude of prayer, sent the blade of the hatchet into the bone of the throat

with all the strength of his body. The head rolled off. (92)

In addition to making Bigger more sympathetic by taking away the responsibility for his

actions through depersonalizing Mary's body and the agencies through which he

mutilates her body[11], this passage inflicts trauma on the reader by its graphic and stark

depiction of human mutilation. Contrarily, just as Bigger's situation makes him

sympathetic, the graphic nature of his acts resists a vicarious reading that would require

close identification with Bigger, putting the reader in Bigger's shoes. In terms of trauma

studies, the reader's conflicted sympathy for Bigger makes him very hard to identify

with, making the experience of reading this violence nothing but virtual for the simple

fact that, if readers cannot whole-heartedly identify with Bigger, they cannot share in his

experience or take part in the subsequent traumatic symptoms.

As stated in Chapter One, Wright's purpose was to make a book that was "so hard

and deep that [readers] would have to face it without the consolation of tears" ("Bigger"

454). In this case, pentadic analysis allowed us to uncover the motives at work in and on

Bigger, which, alone, would seem to work against Wright's purpose, making Bigger

sympathetic (i.e., something readers could cry over). However, further analysis with the

vocabulary of trauma studies suggests that the nature of the sympathy is problematic,

resisting a vicarious reading, and actually fulfilling Wright's stated purpose for good or

ill.

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[11] Depersonalizing Mary's body comes in the form of calling it "the head," "the hair,"
and "the bone" instead of Mary's head, Mary's hair, or Mary's throat. And
depersonalizing the agencies consists of using the terms "the knife," "a hatchet," not "my
knife," "Their hatchet"—especially when the action of cutting off Mary's head is given to
the hatchet, not Bigger: "sent the blade of the hatchet into the bone," not "Bigger cut
Mary's head off with a hatchet."

Moving Toward an Understanding of Violence

Determining motive in violent fiction allows us to examine the ideology that stems from that motive and creates a context within which the rhetoric of violence might be discussed. But although pentadic analysis is very good at uncovering motive for action, it does not serve as a mode in which one can measure the effect of the contextual violence on readers. In the selections from *Native Son* and *The Lovely Bones*, pentadic analysis allows us to examine the motives at work in the text, which lead to underlying ideologies. From that point, using the terminology of trauma studies may provide a better understanding of the way that violence inflicts trauma on the reader and works to identify how the author's use of trauma might serve a social or political function. In *The Lovely Bones* the use of violence, in context, may serve to help readers sympathize with rape victims without giving them the sense that they fully understand what it is to be a rape victim; in *Native Son* the contextual violence seems to push readers away from identification with Bigger for Wright's own social purposes. The next two chapters will explore these dynamics in two longer, more complex texts and, hopefully, provide an example of how violence can function rhetorically on readers and audiences, illustrating socially productive and unproductive ways of using and interpreting narrative violence.

CHAPTER 3: DECONSTRUCTING TYLER DURDEN:

THE RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE IN *FIGHT CLUB*

In the spring of 2000, a group of ten Brigham Young University students began holding a fight club on Monday nights. These fight clubs grew to the point that crowds of 250-300 men and women would show up in backyards and public parks. Then neighbors began calling the police to complain about noise and report suspicious activity. The founders deny that any inspiration came from the movie *Fight Club*, released in theaters fewer than six months earlier. Their denial comes despite the fact that the Provo fight club was a fairly secretive organization (members fought under aliases, the fight location was kept secret until a few hours before the event and spread by word-of-mouth) that pitted men with no boxing experience against each other for the rush of adrenaline— almost the exact plot of the movie. Although the BYU school newspaper only references the movie once in its multi-month coverage of the events (Perry par. 21)—which eventually ended due to pressure from local law enforcement—other local media made the connection between the movie and the local events fairly prominent. In addition, one unidentified fight club member told *The Daily Universe*, the BYU school newspaper, "It's just you feel that adrenaline—like at the top of the roller coaster for three or four minutes. It's a wonderful feeling" (par. 5) which seems to be in the general spirit of the film's attitude toward violence. Chuck Palahniuk, author of the book that the movie is based on, says that before the hype and success that followed, *Fight Club* was just a stylistic experiment (212-13). But Palahniuk's act of experimentation turned into a novel, a regional bestseller, a critically acclaimed movie, and, finally, a cultural phenomenon. The cultural effect of the fight club philosophy (the one that leads young men to mimic

the traumatic acts that are portrayed in the novel with the hope of creating some new identity for oneself) is perhaps the most interesting. In essence, the basic idea of *Fight Club* is that one can transcend ordinary life through trauma and self-destruction.

Palahniuk states that when the kernels of the novel were beginning to form in his head,

> the bookstores were full of books like *The Joy Luck Club* and *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* and *How to Make an American Quilt*. These were all novels that presented a social model for women to be together. To sit together and tell their stories. To share their lives. But there was no novel that presented a new social model for men to share their lives. (214)

What Palahniuk wanted to do was create a model for men to come together in the same way women bonded, but the structure of the new model needed to be expressly masculine. He jokes that he could have written "'Barn-Raising Club' or 'Golf Club' [. . .] something nonthreatening" (214). But he had to write something threatening, something that would clearly define the boundary between femininity and masculinity, something "not too touchy feely" (214). In this way, Palahniuk is much like Richard Wright, in that Wright included extreme content in *Native Son* so that "no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears" ("Bigger" 454). In the same way that Wright is drawing a boundary with his content to resist white sympathy, Palahniuk is creating a border made of extreme violence in order to create a boundary that women (who already have models for emotionally fulfilling social interaction) cannot cross, in order to create a new definition of

masculinity separate from the feminizing forces of modern consumer culture. But, although attempting to create a modern model of masculine identity might be admirable, Palahniuk's methods serve to create paradoxical ideologies, emphasizing act-agent ratios, that glorify the violence of self-destruction for the purposes of transcendence and encourages traumatic repetition of the destructive acts depicted in the novel.

<div align="center">Dramatism and Consumer Culture</div>

The novel sets up a dramatistic ratio where men have become part of the specific scene of consumer culture. After his apartment is blown up, *Fight Club*'s unnamed narrator reflects on his foolish desire and competition for consumer goods by enumerating the possessions he lost, dwelling on ridiculous details to emphasize the sarcastic effect: A "Haparanda sofa group with orange slip covers," a "Johanneshov armchair in the Strinne green stripe pattern," "Rislampa/Har paper lamps made from wire and environmentally friendly unbleached paper," "The Alle cutlery service," "The Vild hall clock made of galvanized steel," "The Klipsk shelving unit," and the "Hemlig hat boxes" (Palahniuk 43-44). Afterward, the narrator expresses the depressing truth about his consumer driven life: "you're trapped in your lonely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you" (44). Here, the novel begins to debunk the myth of the owner-possession paradigm and suggests that it is not the owner who defines his possessions, but that an owner's possessions define his identity. In this reversal, the narrator becomes part of the scene of consumer culture, creating a scene:agent ratio in which the agent is defined by the scene. And, by extension, any action that would appear to be the will of

the agent is really just an extension of the scene, changing the agent's perceived action into simple motion[12].

If the idea that consumer culture was controlling all of us were the end of the critique of consumer culture, it would apply to men and women equally, but it does not. The novel characterizes consumer culture as a feminizing force that emasculates men, taking away their masculine identity. This feminization of masculinity through consumer culture is expressed with comments like, "the people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue" (Palahniuk 43). Replacing pornography with furniture catalogs seems to replace heterosexual virility with feminine nesting, which would turn men from, what might be considered, positive heterosexual affirmation to feminized homemakers. Feminization continues as the narrator names off the color options of a "Mommala quilt-cover set": "Orchid. Fuschia. Cobalt. Ebony. Jet. Eggshell or heather" (44). Not only are men redirecting their sex drives toward home furnishings but they are expressing traditionally feminine characteristics, like worrying about the color of the bedspread. Susan Faludi, in *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, comments that not only are men increasingly "measured only by participation in celebrity-driven consumer culture" but success in consumer culture is "fraught with gender confusion for its 'feminine' implications of glamour and display" (39). This display of commercial masculinity consists of "objectification, passivity, infantilization, pedestal-perching, and mirror-

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[12] This is the Burkian sense of "motion" which connotes the physical, "subverbal," or "extraverbal," realm of actions that are done without thinking or by instinct. In this context, the perceived actions of a man are not really his actions, but motion he carries out as dictated by the scene of consumer culture. Motion is interrupted by "action" that is deliberate. See "Linguistic Approach to Problems in Education" (260-61), full citation in Works Cited.

gazing" that "have long been designated as the essence of feminine *vanity*" (39) to the point that, for men, the "gentleman's cigar club [is] no more satisfying than a ladies' bake-off, the Nike Air Jordan no more meaningful than the Dior New Look" (40). Thus, the narrator's characterization of the scene of consumer culture specifically deals with the problem of the feminizing of masculine identity. And this characterization situates him within a scene:agent ratio that defines and controls him, not allowing him the ability to define his own identity.

To combat the oppression of the scene, Tyler Durden and the narrator attempt to redefine their masculinity in a way that separates them from the dominant culture. So, in contrast to the scene:agent ratio, Tyler advocates an act:agent ratio through which violent acts serve not only to define the agent, but also to create a barrier between masculine identity and feminizing consumerism. Tyler asks the narrator, "I want you to do me a favor. I want you to hit me as hard as you can" (Palahaniuk 52). Although, at this point, neither man knows exactly what this act of violence is going to do, "Tyler explained it all, about not wanting to die without any scars, about being tired of watching only professionals fight, and wanting to know more about himself" (52). Tyler's explanation that he is tired of watching only professionals fight shows a disdain and willful rejection of celebrity-consumerism, exemplifying Tyler's desire to redefine his masculinity apart from the dominant cultural model. Not only that, but the desire to know more about oneself through violence expresses a paradigm that breaks from the consumerist scene of self-identity—based on possessions—and emphasizes action as a way to define one's own identity. Essentially, Tyler and the narrator are unsatisfied with the ways in which

scene has defined their masculinity and attempt to define themselves through acts of violence as a way to break from the scene.

The Paradox of the Fight Club Ideology

However, the method through which acts define the agent problematizes the act:agent ratio. Not only does violence define the agent, but—in the novel—true identity comes from complete self-destruction: "Tyler says I'm nowhere near hitting bottom, yet. And if I don't fall all the way, I can't be saved. Jesus did it with his crucifixion thing. I shouldn't just abandon money and property and knowledge. This isn't just a weekend retreat. I should run from self-improvement, and I should be running toward disaster" (70). Tyler also states, "The lower you fall, the higher you'll fly" (141). But the idea that self-destruction saves you is paradoxical and ill conceived. Although in the Judeo-Christian tradition there certainly exists the idea of repentance, where one destroys an old self in order to make a new self, those rituals focus on non-violent cleansing (such as baptism) or projecting the self onto a surrogate who is destroyed (animal sacrifice). In fact, the idea that Tyler wants to model himself after Jesus is fallacious because Jesus' intention was not self-improvement; rather, Jesus acted as the surrogate for the sinful self, so that the community could be renewed. Granted, Tyler's ideology consists not in death, but in destroying the self as it has been defined by consumer culture; however, that redemption is achieved through bodily harm and the threat of death. For example, the narrator describes the transformation that occurs through violence at fight club:

> You saw this kid who works in the copy center, a month ago you saw this
> kid who can't remember to three-hole-punch an order or put colored slip
> sheets between the copy packets, but this kid was a god for ten minutes

when you saw him kick the air out of an account representative twice his

size then land on the man and pound him limp. (48-49)

In this example, not only does self-destruction create a new identity, but violence toward

others helps one throw off consumer culture and reclaim one's masculinity. Of course, in

this example, there is no regard for the health or safety of the beaten account manager:

the quest to become an agent is self-centered. So not only is the fight club ideology

paradoxical because it emphasizes self-destruction as a path to self-discovery, but it is

problematic because it focuses on destruction of others as a means of gaining

transformation unto salvation—putting others down in order to lift oneself up.

At the same time that the quasi-religion of fight club offers redemption—a

separation from the scene—it places restrictions on the agent, defining the agent only as a

member of a new collective of other enlightened bottom-hitters. When fight club attains

more popularity and more and more men start showing up to fight, it becomes a

systematized institution, and a new rule is created: "Nobody's the center of fight club

except the two men fighting" (142), in contrast to the old format where Tyler or other

fight club chapter leaders acted as organizers, standing in the center of the room, giving

the rules. Now, "the leader's voice will yell, walking slowly around the crowd, out in the

darkness" (142), eschewing individuality in favor of group identity. In fact, although the

overt ideological message is one of self-empowerment through self-discovery, fight

club's actual practice is to destroy individuality in favor of a new collective identity. In

fact, recruits to Project Mayhem—the terrorist group created by Durden and made up of

elite members of fight club—repeat self-derogatory aphorisms like "You are not a

beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone

else, and we are all part of the same compost pile" (134) as well as "I am the all-singing, all dancing crap of the world, [. . .] I am the toxic waste by-product of God's creation" (169). These self-derogatory statements serve to reinforce the abolition of individuality for members of Project Mayhem. In fact, the rules of Project Mayhem expel members who separate themselves from the group through arrest or death. When police shoot Big Bob, the ex-body builder, on a Project Mayhem assignment, the narrator explains why Bob didn't just give up when the police drew their guns: "It was better to get hurt then arrested, because if you were arrested, you were off Project Mayhem" (177). Big Bob had shaved his hair and burned his fingerprints off with lye (177) in order to become eligible for Project Mayhem and wasn't about to get kicked off, ostracized by the group that had given him redemption through self-destruction. The narrator states, "Only in death will we have our names since only in death are we no longer part of the effort" (178). Paradoxically, the appeal of fight club is its promise of liberation, yet the further one initiates into fight club—reaching Project Mayhem—liberation is turned into groupthink. One moves from passive participation in consumer culture, which extinguishes individuality, to active participation in Project Mayhem, where one loses individuality; breaking scene to become an agent, is the initiation into a new scene where one gives up their agent status. Thus, the fight club promise is not only paradoxical, but a mirage. Essentially, then, the stated ideologies of the book—the ideas that many readers cling to—are self-contradictory, and cancel themselves out which creates an overall weakness in the overt ideological message of the novel.

So the mirage of fight club is the fact that it offers salvation from consumer culture in the form of freedom and self-identity; however, the projected ends of fight club

have nothing to do with individuality or personal salvation. That is, the stated ideologies of the book only serve to mask an underlying ideology. All in all, the ends of fight club serve as a justification for the means by which it is accomplished. In fact the stated aim of Project Mayhem is to destroy humanity to the point where the earth can start over again. Basically, in the view of Project Mayhem, humans have destroyed everything that they have ever touched and the narrator and Tyler believe that they are the ones who have been left to clean up the mess: "For thousands of years, human beings had screwed up and trashed and crapped on this planet, and now history expected me to clean up after everyone" (124). But instead of cleaning it up, they think it would be better to destroy everything and start over again:

> It's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world. A cultural ice age. A prematurely induced dark age. Project Mayhem will force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the earth to recover. [. . .] Like fight club does with clerks and box boys, Project Mayhem will break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world. (125)

These ends are the only thing that matter, in fact human destruction is expected. As stated earlier, the search for self-identity is self-centered; similarly, the quest to save the world does not care about casualties. As Tyler says, "You justify anarchy. [. . .] You figure it out" (125). And making no individual more important than the project only serves to emphasize the fact that the ends of the project justify the destruction it creates. Following the rationale of Project Mayhem, just as total self-destruction results in a better you, total world destruction creates a better world, and the means of that destruction do not matter so much as the end result.

On a smaller scale, the "ends justify the means" ideology is best illustrated by the "human sacrifice" of Raymond K. Hessel. The purpose of a human sacrifice is to pick a random man and get him to live life by fulfilling his desires, desires that have been taken from him by commercial culture. Randomly-picked Raymond wants to be a veterinarian. The narrator holds a gun to Raymond K. Hessel's head and tells him, "I know who you are. I know where you live. I'm keeping your license, and I'm going to check on you, mister Raymond K. Hessel. In three months, and then in six months, and then in a year, and if you aren't back in school on your way to becoming a veterinarian, you will be dead" (154). The narrator describes the way he frightens Raymond with his gun:

> I pressed the wet end of the muzzle to the tip of your chin, and then the tip of your nose, and everywhere I pressed the muzzle, it left a shining wet ring of your tears. [. . .] I pressed the wet end of the gun on each cheek, and then on your chin, and then against your forehead and left the muzzle pressed there. (154)

The narrator envisions the result of this sacrifice: "Raymond K. K. [*sic*] Hessel, your dinner is going to taste better than any meal you've ever eaten, and tomorrow will be the most beautiful day of your entire life" (155). Certainly, one can imagine that Raymond's life will be in vivid Technicolor after having his brief encounter with violence, thinking that he might die, but the dramatic methods of the awakening might be considered excessive or grotesque. But those means are unimportant; if the subject has an awakening, then the goal of this homework assignment is fulfilled, despite any physical or psychological harm caused to Raymond K. Hessel—the ends justify the means.

This "ends justify the means" ideology focuses attention on purpose and its supremacy over the other terms of the pentad. In fact, in this model, the purpose defines the act (which, in turn, defines the other terms of the pentad). That is, if the purpose is righteous, then the acts in the name of that purpose are righteous, without regard to morality, social norm, or even human life.

<div align="center">Traumatic Impact</div>

As previously shown, the fight club promise of agent-ness only amounts to a change of scene in that the culmination of fight club—Project Mayhem—results in a loss of identity similar to the loss of identity caused by consumer culture. Combined with a motivational emphasis on purpose, fight club's message is very manipulative and dangerous to the characters in the novel. But the acts in the novel are fictitious, and as such aren't actually damaging to any physical person or property. However, the presentation of these acts are not presented in a way that discourages readers from acting-out the fight club ideology. In fact, the ideology and acts of violence in *Fight Club* are presented in such a way that glorifies and encourages traumatic repetition of the events in the narrative despite the novel's ideological weaknesses.

In chapter 1, I discussed trauma theory and the impact that narrative trauma can have on readers. Specifically, there are two modes in which narrative trauma can be expressed: virtual and vicarious[13]. In *Fight Club*, the rhetorical presentation of the narrative and its ideological message encourage a vicarious reading experience through

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[13] This is not necessarily to say that a violent text has to be completely virtual or completely vicarious but that different texts will encourage one reading over another through the rhetorical presentation of the violence they portray.

the lack of a name for the narrator, the direct address/present tense style of the prose, and the valorization (or glorification) of the ideology and actions of the narrator/Tyler.

First, *Fight Club*'s protagonist has no name. The lack of a name allows the narrator to become a blank for everyman, which is also illustrated by his lack of physical description. Further, the narrator never overtly expresses any real emotion. Instead he characterizes himself as different body parts that inform the reader of the narrator's emotional state. In fact, the body parts (and, eventually, emotional states) that the narrator uses, don't even belong to him, but to a fictional man named Joe: "I am Joe's raging bile duct [. . .] I am Joe's grinding teeth. I am Joe's inflamed flaring nostrils" (59), "I am Joe's boiling point" (71), "I am Joe's blood boiling rage" (96), "I am Joe's smirking revenge" (114), "I am Joe's broken heart" (134), "I am Joe's complete lack of surprise" (138), "I am Joe's cold sweat" (184), "I am the pit of Joe's stomach" (185). These body parts are referred to in the third person which allows the reader to understand the narrator's emotions, yet the reader doesn't have to identify with the emotions because they are projected onto a third person, which is neither the narrator or the readers. This lack of a name and avoidance of personal emotional expression allows readers to project their own traits, personality, and emotions onto the narrator. This projection creates the sense that the reader should encounter the text vicariously—as if he were actually the narrator, taking his place in both inflicting and receiving violent acts—allowing the reader to live though the events of the novel personally, not though a third party. Giving readers a vicarious experience of violence creates a simulated traumatic experience that invites readers to claim traumatic symptoms—which may be acted-out through the repetition of the violence in the novel.

Also adding to the vicarious traumatic experience of the novel is the narrator's intermittent style of using the present tense and directly addressing the reader. Both present tense and direct address are used in the first chapter, setting the tone for the rest of the novel. The opening line states, "Tyler gets me a job as a waiter, after that Tyler's pushing a gun in my mouth and saying, the first step to eternal life is you have to die" (11). Shortly afterward, the narrator addresses the reader and tells him how to make silencer holes in a gun, make plastic explosives, and brew nitroglycerin: "You take a 98-percent concentration of fuming nitric acid and add the acid to three times that amount of sulfuric acid. Do this in an ice bath. Then add glycerin drop-by-drop with an eye dropper. You have nitroglycerin" (12). As well, throughout the novel, there is the repetition of the phrase "you wake up at" followed by the name of an airport, which dictates that the reader should be in a certain place and time, further making the experience of the novel more dictatorial than it would be if experienced through a removed, third-person narrator. The examples illustrated above, and others, create a feeling in the reader that the narrator is conversing with him, interacting with him, which differs from a third-person account that puts the reader in an observational role rather than a participatory one. These styles draw the reader into a more personal relationship with the narrator and the text, creating a setting where the action of the novel is more "real," adding to the sense that reading this novel should be a vicarious experience.

Although the two structural elements above encourage a vicarious reading experience, the ideological perspective of the novel, as well, reinforces a vicarious traumatic reading and encourages traumatic repetition. First and foremost, Tyler—who is responsible for inflicting trauma—is heroized, not condemned for the things that he does.

In fact, Tyler is rhetorically framed as a type of savior: "Oh. Tyler, please rescue me,"

"Deliver me from Swedish furniture," "Deliver me from clever art," "Deliver me, Tyler,

from being perfect and complete" (46). Once it is revealed that Tyler and the narrator are

one and the same (Tyler being a split-personality hallucination) the narrator embarks on a

mission to destroy himself, so he can heroically stop the fulfillment of Project Mayhem.

As a result, not only does the protagonist become the savior when Tyler's identity is

revealed, but he also changes roles to become the savior who will stop world destruction

by stopping Project Mayhem—which he does through the displays of masculinity that

have been advocated throughout the novel. For example, the narrator tries to take

evidence to the police only to be confronted by a group from Project Mayhem who

attempt to castrate him. He escapes castration without explanation, retaining his

manhood, so to speak. Then, he goes to a fight club and attempts to kill himself by

fighting everyone there, which he also survives—inexplicably—like some sort of

impervious superhero. The narrator's last attempt is to kill himself by shooting himself in

the head which, again, he survives, blowing a hole through his cheek instead of the back

of his head. These attempts, although they are an attempt to destroy Project Mayhem,

ironically reinforce the fight club aesthetic of masculine display and prove to the reader

the "truthfulness" of the fight club ideology. Rhetorically, then, although the narrator

superficially tries to condemn the fight club ideology by attempting to stop Project

Mayhem, he only does so through application of the ideology he is condemning, thus

demonstrating to readers that the fight club ideology is admirable and can be a means to

salvation, which encourages readers to duplicate the narrator's and Tyler's actions

because the novel both encourages readers to participate in a vicarious reading experience and valorizes the fight club ideology.

As well, even though the narrator fights to end Project Mayhem, the end of the novel finds him ambivalent about the outcome. Instead of condemning Tyler's actions and ideological perspective, the narrator shows no remorse for his actions and, thus, continues to reiterate the fight club ideology. In the mental hospital, where he resides at the end of the novel, the narrator has the following conversation with himself:

> I've met God across his long walnut desk with his diploma hanging on the wall behind him, and God asks me, "Why?"
>
> Why did I cause so much pain?
>
> Didn't I realize that each of us is a sacred, unique snowflake of special unique specialness?
>
> Can't I see how we're all manifestations of love?
>
> I look at God behind his desk, taking notes on a pad, but God's got this all wrong.
>
> We are not special.
>
> We are not crap or trash, either.
>
> We just are.
>
> We just are, and what happens just happens.
>
> And God says, "No, that's not right."
>
> Yeah. Well. Whatever. You can't teach God anything. (207)

Granted, the narrator does not whole-heartedly endorse Tyler's ideology, but his "new" philosophy of "just being" doesn't reject Tyler's beliefs either. Combined with the fact

that the narrator does nothing to quell the agents of Project Mayhem around him—those

hospital workers who whisper to him, "We miss you Mr. Durden," "Everything's going

according to the plan," "We're going to break up civilization so we can make something

better out of the world," and "We look forward to getting you back" (208)—the narrator

gives the impression that he does not condemn what they do, nor the ideological

viewpoint they still ascribe to, backhandedly endorsing it and encouraging the

continuation of fight club and Project Mayhem. Because Tyler is still a hero and the

narrator doesn't condemn his actions, the novel perpetuates an ideology of redemption

through self-destruction. In addition, because the novel encourages a vicarious reading, it

invites readers to participate in its violence and—encouraged by Tyler's ideology—

symptomatically repeat it.

<p align="center">The Social Usefulness of *Fight Club*</p>

Perhaps what is most intriguing about *Fight Club* and its paradoxical and self-

contradictory philosophy is the author's attitude toward the way that his own novel

perpetuates violence. In the afterword to the current edition of the novel, Palahniuk

enumerates the effect that his novel and the subsequent movie have had on the world

since its publication. The list covers a little over two pages and includes the existence of

the BYU student fight club, among many others; the "fight club look" of Versace; young

men burning kisses into their hand with lye; numerous parodies and imitations like SNL's

"Fight Like a Girl Club" and The Onion's "The Quilting Society"; Fight Club-inspired

Graffiti; commercial products that quote or name Tyler Durden on their packaging; and

more (110-12). In a sense, Palahniuk is mythologizing his own novel by enumerating its

permeating effect on society. But even after Palahniuk acknowledges the fact that people

have been encouraged by the fight club phenomenon to hurt themselves and others, he

does nothing to condemn the extent to which people have been influenced by the novel.

In fact, in a 2006 *USA Today* article about underground teen fight clubs, Palahniuk, who

declined a formal interview said, "God bless these kids. I hope they're having a great

time. I don't think they'd be doing it if they weren't having a great time" (M. McCarthy

par.12). Further eschewing any responsibility for his role in the novel's followers'

destructive acts, he states "Once, a friend worried that these stories might prompt people

to copycat, and I insisted that we were just blue-collar nobodies living in Oregon with

public educations. There was nothing we could imagine that a million people weren't

already doing" (215). This is all interesting because, at the same time that Palahniuk is

championing a philosophy where men break from the scene to become agents by

choosing to act and take responsibility for their actions, when it comes to taking

responsibility for the influence his novel has had, his response is to place himself under

the control of a larger scene, saying that he was just part of the motion, not part of the

action. This denial of responsibility, for me, indicates that the novel is not really some

type of carefully crafted masculine manifesto that Palahniuk, and the novel's devoted

fans, would make it out to be. But, rather, it is a simple glorification of violence that

serves to play out the author's and readers' own violent fantasies.

All in all, *Fight Club*'s stated message is muddled at best, and the rhetorical

stance of the novel seems to encourage—or at the very least be indifferent to—traumatic

repetition of the events depicted and the philosophy that it espouses. However, that does

not mean that *Fight Club* is not a useful text. It still serves as an interesting and useful

study in the way that those who perpetuate violence might hide behind contrived

philosophies to validate their own fantasies. In this case, looking at *Fight Club* gives us

an understanding of how dramatistic analysis can uncover motive within a text, and, by

examining the way that that motive is assigned within the text, the overall ideological

message and context of the violence in the novel. Once we can understand that

framework, we can determine the possible traumatic impact of the novel on the audience.

Such analysis reveals that *Fight Club* might be a socially dangerous book if its underlying

ideological contradictions and rhetorical structures are not taken into account or

understood. But despite the fact that *Fight Club* perpetuates violence and self-destruction,

what is more dangerous is the idea that all books that are violent on the surface should be

dismissed as gratuitous and socially irresponsible. In the end, *Fight Club* offers a glimpse

into what makes a violent piece of art dangerous, which, in and of itself, is valuable

knowledge that can be used as a benchmark for comparative study of other works that

might be dismissed for superficial violence[14].

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[14] Examples of other texts banned for use of violence are *A Clockwork Orange*,
Slaughter-house Five, *Catch 22*, and others.

CHAPTER 4: THE EVENING TRAUMA IN THE WEST:

THE RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE IN *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

For the past few years there have been rumors that Cormac McCarthy's *Blood*

Meridian would be made into a movie, reflecting a strange desire in our culture to

appropriate any significant literary work (or any popular novel, TV show, comic strip,

graphic novel, ancient myth, cartoon, board game, etc.) and turn it into a film. And

although *Blood Meridian* is not the most publicly well-known of McCarthy's novels, a

2006 New York Times Book Review article about the most important American fiction

of the past twenty years ranked *Blood Meridian* second after Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

(Scott 17–19). And in literary circles it is widely accepted as McCarthy's greatest work to

date. Director Ridley Scott, who has been vaguely connected to the project, gave an

interview to Cinematic Happenings Under Development, confirming that a *Blood*

Meridian movie was, indeed, in the works, but he expressed the difficulty of adapting

such a book to the screen because "You need violence to do it properly" (Smith par.33)[15].

A *New York Magazine* article found Scott's seemingly obvious observation laughable:

> *Blood Meridian* is a book made up of almost nothing but violence.
>
> Violence is its medium. Saying you need violence to do a film of it
>
> properly is like saying you need paint to paint a picture properly. If [the
>
> movie] ever happens, *Blood Meridian* might be the best movie in years
>
> that we simply don't have the stomach to sit all the way through. ("Will
>
> Ridley Scott" par. 3)

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[15] In this section of the interview, Scott comments that *Blood Meridian* would have to be a big-budget movie in order to do it justice, insinuating that a large budget may not be available for such a violent—assuredly R-rated—movie which may not make as much money as a tamer PG-13 version.

Indeed, *Blood Meridian* is McCarthy's most violent work, but that is partly because of its subject matter. *Blood Meridian* chronicles the rampage of a band of outlaws across the American west in the 1840s. It follows their bloody massacre as they kill Indians for profit and Mexicans for fun, eventually just killing everything that comes across their path. And to the extent that McCarthy has created an historical novel, his depiction of the American West contradicts popular, romantic myths of American cowboys and westward expansion.

Richard Slotkin, in *Regeneration Through Violence*, observes that although there was a conscious effort by early Americans to create an American mythology from the ground floor, these attempts did "not take into account [. . .] that the process of mythogenesis in a culture is one of continuous activity rather than dramatic starts and stops. True myths are generated on a sub-literary level by the historical experience of a people" (4). That is, American founding myths were, to some extent, fiction from the beginning—conscious efforts at creating identity through different rhetorical approaches—and were not created by an individual but by a continuous cultural process. McCarthy's book, then, represents one of those processes that attempts to revise earlier myths, in turn revising American identity. But, despite its function as a revision of the foundations of American identity one cannot help but wonder if its ultimate purpose outweighs the massive amount of violence it contains. In functioning as a way to question American identity, does *Blood Meridian*'s violence traumatize the reader to the point that any useful rhetorical purpose is frustrated? The answer is complicated, but although *Blood Meridian* is soaked with relentless violence, its rhetorical presentation of violence resists a vicarious traumatic reading, leaning toward an observational, or virtual, reading

that distances the reader from the action, maximizing traumatic impact without encouraging mimetic acts.

Featuring the "Agent"

Much of my discussion of *Fight Club* centered around the paradox of competing ideologies based in scene:act and act:agent ratios and how violence was the agency that allowed agents to transcend their current situation. These same dynamics are at play in *Blood Meridian*, but this discussion is concerned primarily with the term "agent" and how responsibility for action is placed (or not placed) on the agent. Emphasizing motivation in the agent, gives the agent responsibility for his or her actions, and an ideology of individual responsibility for action encourages social change through personal empowerment, whereas a doctrine that emphasizes scene as motive for action effectively does not hold individuals responsible for their actions and fosters social stagnation. As well, eschewing responsibility for individual action allows for the manipulation of the individual by those in power. This is not to say that scene has no effect on the agent and his personal empowerment. Indeed, the scene (as well as the other pentadic terms) has a profound effect on the amount of power an agent has over his or her own situation, limiting choices and setting standards and boundaries. However, without the emphasis of power and responsibility being placed on the agent, the agent becomes an agent of the scene, or a piece of the scenery to be manipulated by outside forces. It is this focus on the motivational emphasis placed on the agent that is at the heart of the conflicting ideologies at work in *Blood Meridian*.

The Kid

The conflict of motivational emphases in *Blood Meridian* is illustrated in the novel's characterization of the kid and the judge. The kid is described as one who "can neither read nor write and in him broods already the taste for mindless violence" (C. McCarthy 3). And referring to the boy's face, the author[16] writes that there was "all history present in that visage, the child the father of the man" (3). Both descriptions seem to reduce the kid to a product of his surroundings: being born with an inherent taste for violence that is otherwise unexplainable and being just another representation of the succession of mankind. The feeling of fate pressing down on the kid is heightened by the author's use of the present tense. He writes, "He has a sister in this world that *he will not see* again [. . . .] At fourteen *he runs away*. He *will not see* again the freezing kitchenhouse in the predawn dark" (3-4 emphasis added). This use of present tense though the first few pages makes the reader aware of authorial control over the kid, explicitly letting the reader know that the author is in control, knows what is going to happen, how everything is going to turn out. The sense that the author is the one controlling the action and fate of this character seems to make the kid an unwitting pawn in the world that has been created for him, taking away his control over his own actions. In this way, the scene comes to be equated with motion[17]. Defined this way, the kid is part of the motion of the novel, his actions being dictated by the story's forward

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[16] Briefly, let me interject that the use of term "author" and its derivatives in the context of this chapter does not imply McCarthy himself, but rather the implied author of the story. I debated using the term "narrator," but "narrator" only implies the teller and not necessarily the creator of the story. In the last chapter, "narrator" worked well because it was a reference to a character in the novel; however, here there is no narrating character, so "author" seemed to better convey the ideas I am trying to get across.

[17] As in the last chapter, I am using the term "motion" as Burke uses it, to connote the physical, "subverbal," or "extraverbal," realm of actions that are done without thinking or by instinct. See "Linguistic Approach to Problems in Education" (260-61), full citation in Works Cited.

momentum. Of course, making the kid part of the motion of the story also relieves the kid

of responsibility for his actions. So already the kid begins to represent an ideology that is

based in scene, where the scene defines and controls agents—a scene:agent ratio.

But despite this initial characterization, the kid attempts to assert his agent-ness[18]

early in the novel, although he fails and falls back into the motion of the scene. His

assertion comes when he is in the town of Nacogdoches. It has been raining for sixteen

days, and all the dirt streets have turned to mud, and, as a result, the town has set up

planks to walk on between buildings so that people don't have to walk in the mud.

Walking on these planks, the kid comes face to face with another man, by the name of

Toadvine, who tells him to "get out of my way" (9), effectively commanding the kid to

step off the plank into the mud. However, "The kid wasn't going to do that and he saw no

use in discussing it. He kicked the man in the jaw" (9). In this act, the kid, attempts to

assert his agent-ness over the scene by breaking the motion around him and standing out.

A fight ensues wherein both parties are injured. After this incident, the kid and Toadvine

become partners in crime. But true to his initial characterization, the kid slips into a

subservient role again, taking Toadvine's commands.

The criminals separate shortly after a violent act they commit together, and the

kid leaves the town of Nacogdoches. After the kid leaves Toadvine, the narration slips

back into present tense, again emphasizing the author's role over the kid's destiny,

situating the kid firmly as an agent of the scene. From this point, the kid goes through a

series of incidents and chance happening where he never takes the role of an agent, but

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[18] I use the term "agent-ness" here and throughout the chapter to connote a will and
ability to act. In popular terms, it is the equivalent of "agency." But because "agency" has
a very specific and different meaning when talking about the pentad, I have opted to use
this new term so as not to equivocate and confuse the reader.

tends to wander, only reacting (not acting) to the scene around him. When asked by the soldier of a renegade captain of the US Army if he wants to join with them to hunt Indians and take over part of Mexico, the kid replies "I don't know . . . the boy pulled at the halms of grass. He looked at the horse again, Well, he said. Don't reckon it'd hurt nothin" (30). And after a discussion with the renegade army captain, where the kid offers little more than ambiguous answers about his intentions or desires—or even any type of affirmation that he wants to join the renegade army unit—the captain turns to his sergeant and says "sign this man up" (36). Again, the pattern of giving up his own agent-ness and responsibility is played out, making the kid nothing more than part of the motion, a prop in the scene that other agents manipulate.

The kid eventually meets up with the judge and the Glanton gang, a group of scalp hunters who are hired by the Mexican government to kill Indians and paid by the scalp. He joins them in their bloody quest, and, soon after, largely disappears from the narrative as the Glanton gang, led by Judge Holden (simply referred to in the story as "the judge"), begins to dominate the action of the novel. In the way that the kid drops out of the narrative for the majority of the novel, the novel's form reflects the way that he places dramatistic emphasis on scene. As it is, the kid, who emphasizes scene and doesn't take responsibility for his actions, disappears from the action (blending into the scene-ery of the novel) as stronger actors take over the agent role (i.e. the judge).

Even when the kid emerges again at the end of the novel, he doesn't appear to have changed his ideology at all. At the end of the novel, when the kid is a man, he shoots a boy in self-defense. "He wouldn't have lived anyway," he says (322). When the boy's friends come to get they body, they agree: "I knowed we'd bury him on this prairie"

(323). Another of the boys gives the reasoning behind this statement. Speaking of the dead boy he says, "His momma and daddy both dead. His grandaddy was killed by a lunatic and buried in the woods like a dog. He's never knowed good fortune in his life and now he aint got a soul in this world" (323). The kid says nothing but watches the boys carry their dead companion away. As such, the kid shot the boy because it was inevitable, not because he was making a choice to do so. So one can see that the kid still views himself not as free-acting agent, but as part of the motion of the scene, only carrying out what the situation dictates, and continues not to take responsibility for his actions, illustrating his emphasis on a scene:agent ratio.

The Judge

When the kid first enters Nacodoches the narration quickly switches from present to past tense, which is significant because this is where the kid first encounters the other main character, the judge. At this meeting, the kid finds himself part of a crowd (another scene) gathered in a tent to listen to a preacher (agent). The judge enters as part of the crowd, but then sets himself apart from the motion of the scene by accusing the preacher of being a con-artist, guilty of sexual deviancy. In doing so, the judge breaks from the motion by acting to manipulate the scene around him. From that point, the judge orchestrates a rebellion against the preacher to the point where they rise up and grab the preacher to hang him. Minutes later, the kid enters a hotel lobby where the judge is standing at the bar. Men around the judge ask him how he came to know the criminal past of the reverend and the judge replies, "I never laid eyes upon the man before today. Never even heard of him" (8). The author writes, "There was a strange silence in the room. The men looked like mud effigies. Finally someone began to laugh. Then another.

Soon they were all laughing together. Some one bought the judge a drink" (8). The judge, from this characterization, is one who transcends scene through action; the judge openly defies the motion of the scene to set himself apart by inciting action. So unlike the kid, the judge is one who manipulates scene by differentiating himself from the motion inherent in it, symbolizing an agent:scene ratio.

The judge's motivational emphasis on the agent is seen specifically when he explains his philosophy of cataloging the things he encounters. The judge has a book in which he is constantly drawing and cataloging objects in the world, and, at one point, one of the company of murderers tells him:

> But don't draw me, said Webster. For I don't want in your book.
>
> My book or some other book said the judge. What is to be deviates no jot from the book wherein it's writ. How could it? It would be a false book and a false book is no book at all.
>
> You're a formidable riddler and I'll not match words with ye. Save my crusted mug from out your ledger there for I'd not have it shown about perhaps to strangers.
>
> The judge smiled. Whether in my book or not, every man is tabernacled in every other and he in exchange and so on in an endless complexity of being and witness to the uttermost edge of the world. (141)

Here, the judge recognizes the power of the scene, the way that history drives forward— seemingly endlessly—without regard to individuals. But although the Judge recognizes the power of the scene, he also recognizes his situatedness within it. The judge, then, believes that by action (or inciting to action) he has the power to act as agent, controlling

the scene around him. This is further illustrated when he discusses the ruins among which

the Glanton gang has made camp one night:

> So. Here are the dead fathers. Their spirit is entombed in the stone. It lies
>
> upon the land with the same weight and the same ubiquity. For whoever
>
> makes a shelter out of reeds and hides has joined his spirit to the common
>
> destiny of creatures and he will subside back into the primal mud with
>
> scarcely a cry. But who builds in stone seeks to alter the structure of the
>
> universe and so it was with these masons however primitive their works
>
> may seem to us. (146)

The judge recognizes the scene in which he is performing (history has created the

moment in which he is currently participating), and thus he has the power to change "the

structure of the universe." His philosophy is this: It is only through knowledge of the

scene that one can have power over it.

     The judge's power over the scene is even evident in the tone of the narrative at the

very end of the novel. After the judge kills the kid, the narrative returns to present tense;

however, the reemergence of the present tense at the end of the story seems different

from its use when the kid is first presented at the beginning of the novel. While

describing the kid, the author predicted the future and acted as the manipulator of the

narrative; whereas, at the end, the author states that the judge's "feet are light and nimble.

He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in light and in shadow and he

is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he

will never die" (335). Instead of simply stating that the judge will never die, the narrator

places motivational emphasis on the judge himself, "He says that he will never die." As

stated, the narrative recognizes the judge's agent-ness by letting the judge take possession of his words, effectively letting the judge become a co-agent with the author. In this way, not only does the judge place power and responsibility in the agent, but the author complies with that ideology, reflective of an agent:scene ratio.

Conflicting Ideologies

What the reader is faced with at the end of the novel is a conflict between the ideological viewpoints of the scene:agent and agent:scene ratios, neither of which appears appealing considering the way they are applied throughout the novel. But the conflict becomes explicit as the kid runs into the judge at a saloon after the kid kills the boy on the plains. The judge begins by dissecting the kid's ideology: "Was it always your idea, he said, that if you did not speak you would not be recognized?" (328). Here, the judge recognizes the kid's situation, wilfully embedded in the scene. Perhaps, it is here that we gain the most insight about the kid. From the examples of the kid, expressed earlier, there is a feeling that the kid does not realize his own situatedness, thus does not have the power to act as an agent. But, the judge, who has observed the kid throughout their murderous rampage across the American West, slaying indians, Mexicans, slaughtering animals, and anything that stood in their path, recognizes that it is not just that the kid is unaware of his situation, but also that the kid has willingly become part of the scenery in order to eschew responsibility for his actions. That willful disregard for responsibility is what the judge takes issue with.

At this point, the judge asserts there is a reason for all men being in the situations they are in, even if they don't realize it. The kid, then, turns to the other drunk and violent saloon patrons, reasoning, "Everybody dont have to have a reason to be someplace"

(328). In this statement, the kid weakly argues that most people are controlled by the scene, having no reason for the things they do (just following the motions), relieving others of responsibility for their actions. However, the kid does not recognize the implications of his ideological stance. The judge counters him: "If it is so that they themselves have no reason and yet are indeed here must they not be here by reason of some other?" (328). The judge deconstructs the kid's ideology and exposes to him the reality of the kid's own ideology—that the scene has control over those who do not recognize its power. The judge continues,

> This is an orchestration for an event. For a dance in fact. The participants will be apprised of their roles at the proper time. For now it is enough that they have arrived. As the dance is the thing with which we are concerned and contains complete within itself its own arrangement and history and finale there is no necessity that the dancers contain these things within themselves as well. In any event the history of all is not the history of each or indeed the sum of all those histories and none here can finally comprehend the reason for his presence for he has no way of knowing even in what the event consists. In fact, were he to know he might well absent himself and you can see that that cannot be any part of the plan if plan there be. (329)

The Burkian language in this excerpt is uncanny as the judge expounds on the power that the scene has over those who do not recognize their own situation. From here, the judge lays out his philosophy of gaining control of one's situation and becoming an agent. Speaking of the scene they are currently in as a "ritual," he states:

A ritual includes the letting of blood. Rituals which fail in this requirement

are but mock rituals […] We are not speaking in mysteries. You of all men

are no stranger to that feeling, the emptiness and the despair. It is that

which we take arms against, is it not? Is not blood the tempering agent in

the mortar which bonds? […] What do you think death is man? […] What

is death if not an agency? (329)

In this last line the judge identifies death as "an agency" or a means by which other

things are achieved. Coupled with the idea that rituals (representing scene) include a

blood letting (death) and that a ritual without a blood letting is false, death becomes an

agency by which men make their scene "real." In the previous chapter, I discussed the

idea that violence is what sets you apart from consumer culture; the judge's idea of the

"real" is similar but in a more general sense. In the sense that the judge is using it, "to

make real" does not mean to bring into being. He has already established that the scene

exists and has great power. Therefore "real" here means to bring into reality or to become

aware of. Hence, death is the tool by which men become aware of their situation within

the scene. The judge elucidates this idea later in his conversation with the kid:

As war becomes dishonored and its nobility called into question those

honorable men who recognize the sanctity of blood will be excluded from

the dance, which is the warrior's right, and thereby will the dance become

a false dance and the dancers false dancers. And yet there will be one there

always who is a true dancer […] Only that man who has offered up

himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and

seen horror in the round and learned at the last that it speaks to his inmost

heart, only that man can dance. (331)

So not only is death the tool by which men can come to recognize the scene, but the man

who has recognized his scene (as grisly as it might be in its power over history and

mankind) is the only "true dancer," or the agent who becomes powerful and can control

his own dance, acting as a true agent by taking responsibility for action.

At this point, the judge's philosophy seems to be completely irresponsible from a

social standpoint—he argues that killing others makes one powerful. However, even if

explicit killing takes place throughout the novel, it is not just the act of killing itself that

has brought the judge the power to be a "true dancer." If this were the case, then the kid,

who has participated in all the same violence, would be just as powerful, but he is not.

The key to understanding the way that the judge views violence hearkens back to his

catalog of the world, the book that he carries in which he draws and catalogs things he

encounters. When asked what he intends to do with the sketches and notes in his ledger,

the judge replies, "expunge them from the memory of man" (140). His intention is to kill

these objects by identifying them. (The objects themselves are thrown into the fire and

destroyed, thus the judge asserts his power to control the scene, by killing part of the

scenery.) So, to the judge, killing and identification are the same act. Interestingly, Burke

identifies killing in the same way: "The killing of something is the changing of it, and the

statement of the thing's nature before and after the change is an identifying of it" (Burke

Rhetoric 20). Thus, the judge's philosophy is not one of simply killing, but one of gaining

power through identification. For it is in this form of identification that one takes on the

ultimate responsibility—the responsibility for life itself. But it is only by taking that

responsibility upon one's self that power is earned. And with that power, one becomes an agent and "true dancer."

The Dominant Ideology

Getting at the dominant ideology of the book, then, is tricky. Are we supposed to pity the kid, to view him as a tragic figure caught up in circumstance? Or are we to enact the judge's moral-but-destructive philosophy of gaining power through death? Ultimately, the text itself reveals its ideological preference through its rhetorical presentation, or the attitudes it betrays toward the characters and situations it portrays. Booth states that "all authors inevitably take sides" (Rhetoric 78), meaning that the authors cannot help but be subjective in their attitude toward their own characters. In *Blood Meridian* it is the kid that seems to be condemned for his ideology and actions (or inactions). This is not only illustrated through the kid's death at the hands of the judge, but by his characterization as an illiterate (exemplified by his use of double negatives, "aint," and his general lack of self-awareness), as one who does not think about his actions, as a coward, and ultimately by his lack of a name (simply given the epithet "the kid," connoting a naive, juvenile). Conversely, the judge is portrayed as cunning, intelligent, and powerful. He speaks eloquently and philosophically. Even his title, "the judge," connotes power and authority. And even though not all eloquent characters are heroes, the judge is also portrayed as the moral center of the book because he has adopted an idealistic ideology that places responsibility for action on the agent, which, according to Burke, is a moral stance[19]. So, although the judge is a mass murderer it is his ideology that, rhetorically, is the most dominant and appealing.

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[19] See my discussion of Susie's moral stance in chapter 2.

But praising the judge for his idealistic philosophy seems gruesome and counter-intuitive for any argument trying to make a case for the positive effects of such a disturbingly violent book. However, just because the kid is condemned does not mean the judge's actions are glorified. For instance, when the judge is found by a band of Yumas trying to kill the Glanton gang, the judge is described as follows: "When they entered the judge's quarters they found the idiot [a mentally disabled man the gang has picked up along the way] and a girl of perhaps twelve years cowering naked on the floor. Behind them also naked stood the judge" (275). Being caught naked with a twelve year-old girl and a mentally disabled man is certainly not glorious. Or take, for instance, the judge's last impression on the reader: dancing naked in the saloon after killing the kid, the judge is

> Huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant. […] He bows to the fiddlers and sashays backwards and throws back his head and laughs deep in his throat […] He wafts his hat and the lunar dome of his skull passes palely under the lamps and he swings about and takes possession of one of the fiddles and he pirouettes and makes a pass, two passes, dancing and fiddling at once. (335)

The judge is a grotesque, frightening, and unappealing figure, not the positive idealist one might expect based on his moralist ideology. In this way, the narrator displays a judgment on the application of the judge's philosophy. Although the judge's philosophy becomes the dominant ideology of the book, the judge himself is also judged on his responsibility for the knowledge he has, as the reader is repulsed by the judge and his actions and cannot identify with him.

Traumatic Impact

As evidenced in the last chapter, *Fight Club* has the power to encourage young

men toward self-destruction and violent behavior. *Blood Meridian*, being admittedly

much more violent, would logically lead to even more socially irresponsible behavior.

However, it does not. This may be due, partly, to the subject matter: *Fight Club* is about

men fighting modern consumer culture and *Blood Meridian* is about western outlaws—

it's easy to form a fight club, but harder to go on a rampage through the southwestern

desert today. But, these differences seem superfluous, owing to the fact that Tyler Durden

and the judge adopt similar ideological perspectives of becoming an agent through

violence. As a result, both novels could incite similar mimetic acts. But despite these

similarities, the rhetoric of violence in *Blood Meridian* doesn't encourage mimetic acts.

Blood Meridian is an extremely violent book, filled with disturbing imagery. For

example, there is the incident of the bush of dead babies:

> They came to a bush that was hung with dead babies. [. . .] These small
>
> victims, seven, eight of them, had holes punched in their underjaws and
>
> were hung so by their throats from the broken stobs of a mesquite to stare
>
> eyeless at the naked sky. (57)

And when the kid comes upon a town that has been massacred by a group of Cherokee,

he enters a nearby church to find that "the murdered lay in a great pool of their communal

blood. It had set up into a sort of pudding crossed everywhere with the tracks of wolves

or dogs and along the edges it had dried and cracked into a burgundy ceramic" (60). Soon

after, he meets up with the Glanton gang, whom are described in all their gruesome dress

and appearance: "The trappings of their horses fashioned out of human skin and their

bridles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders

wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears" (78). Or take the

simple acts of brutality that become commonplace throughout the novel. For example, the

judge buys a pair of puppies from a street vendor and throws them into a river:

> The dogs disappeared in the foam. [. . .] The Vandiemenlander raised and
>
> cocked his pistol. [. . .] The pistol bucked in his hand and one of the dogs
>
> leaped in the water and he cocked it again and fired again and a pink stain
>
> diffused. He cocked and fired the pistol a third time and the other dog also
>
> blossomed and sank. (192-93)

Violent acts become so commonplace that cruel and random killings take on an feeling of

mundaneness, like the following passage: "Brown on his way back from the bar poured a

pitcher of aguardiente over a young soldier and set him afire with his cigar. The man ran

outside mute save for the whoosh of the flames" (268).

But despite the senseless violence in these acts and images, they are all presented

in a removed, third-person style that is shockingly stark, the way that a serial killer might

indifferently describe torturing victims, treating them as things, not people. This

presentation of events breaks from normal experience, much the same way that Brian

Evenson uses violence to "[overflow] boundaries of expectation" (271). However,

whereas Evenson's violence is meant to make the reader a victim of the violence, *Blood*

Meridian's violence makes the reader a bystander or witness to these atrocities. And it is

in this way that *Blood Meridian* does not invite the reader to participate in a vicarious

experience through the text. Instead, the novel creates a virtual experience that allows the

reader to witness horribly traumatic events without becoming a victim.

In addition, the novel does not allow one to have a vicarious experience as a killer. In *Fight Club*, the reader is encouraged to be drawn into the thinking and actions of the narrator, identifying with him and experiencing the same traumas and perpetrating the same violence. However, *Blood Meridian* does not allow for any identification whatsoever with any of its characters. As discussed earlier, because of the kid's ideological perspective and the narrative's attitude toward him, the kid is not a sympathetic character—not someone with whom the reader can easily identify. Additionally, the judge is grotesque. Even if his ideology is "moral" his actions are not, resulting in the reader's impression that the judge is not admirable but disgusting and repulsive. As such, the reader cannot identify with the judge in any meaningful way either. Because the reader cannot identify with either of the main characters, the reader cannot have any type of vicarious experience with the text, experiencing it neither as a victim nor as a perpetrator.

Blood Meridian, then, has an interesting dynamic at play: a maximizing of violent content with no way for the reader to identify with the text either as a victim or perpetrator. How does a reader deal with an experience that is both traumatic and virtual? That is, if readers experience violence, but cannot identify with the characters involved in the process, how does the reader experience a catharsis of the emotions involved? Without catharsis there is no emotional resolve, which invites readers to work through the traumatic experience themselves without the help of identification. But because the experience is not vicarious but virtual, the working through is conceptual not actual. The trauma inflicted on readers is, then, a trauma that invites contemplation not physical aggression or the acting-out of traumatic symptoms. Within the context of *Blood*

Meridian, if the novel is a revision of mythic western narratives, the violence in the book

leads one to contemplate the concept of their own identification as an American and what

that means in the context of a bloody westward expansion at the foundation of that

identity. So, in a sense, *Blood Meridian* is about the violence inherent in our concept of

ourselves, but does not invite repetition of that violence.

Identity and Social Benefit

Although *Blood Meridian* may contain extensive, bloody violence, the rhetoric of

the violence in the novel helps one to work through trauma in order to come to a better

understanding of self and identity within an American context. But do not take this

analysis to be an apologetic for *Blood Meridian*; the violence it contains is still disturbing

and many people are turned off by it. I, myself, give a disclaimer to anyone who seems

interested in reading it because I want to let them know that the content is extreme.

However, as a whole, the novel does have a useful—even beneficial—social function in

leading readers to question the role of violence that is inherent in their very selves and the

way they identify themselves in the context of history. Admittedly, it does so through

extreme imagery, but the social benefit would not occur without the content. As such,

Blood Meridian serves as a complex study in the way that the rhetoric of violence can

function in a novel and in society. And, hopefully, the type of analysis I have advocated

(pentadic analysis and trauma theory) will allow more readers to understand the dynamics

at play in *Blood Meridian* and not dangerously dismiss it categorically along with other

violent texts or media.

CHAPTER 5: AFTERMATH:

DECODING VIOLENCE, REMAKING IDENTITY

On July 4th, 1990, while out for a mid-morning walk, Susan Brison was grabbed from behind, raped, strangled, beaten, and left for dead. A professor of philosophy, she tried to put the experience and the subsequent aftermath into some sort of context, to make sense of the whole thing, but found she could not (ix). Her book *Aftermath: The Remaking of a Self* chronicles her search for understanding and her thoughts on trauma and violence. After the incident, she said she felt like she had died and that "the line between life and death, once so clear and sustaining, now seemed carelessly drawn and easily erased" (8-9). When trying to explain the attack to others she was met universally with denial (9). It is not that people didn't believe that she was raped and almost killed, but that people tried to explain the rape in ways that made sense to them, placing blame, trying to make the situation seem like it could have been prevented—sometimes inadvertently blaming Brison for her own rape. She comments, "Where the facts would appear to be incontrovertible, denial takes the shape of attempts to explain the assault in ways that leave the observers' worldview unscathed" (9). Brison reasons that this is because some violence can be so traumatic that others "cannot allow themselves to imagine the victim's shattered life, or else their illusions about their own safety and control over their own lives might begin to crumble" (9). The fact of the matter is that trauma shatters self-identity; however, Brison argues that "it's essential to try to convey it" (5). LaCapra agrees with Brison, arguing that, for the victim, retelling, or narrating, traumatic experience can help to separate the past event from the repetitive traumatic symptoms they cause (128-29) which is important for victims to do if they want to come

to terms with the trauma they have experienced (117-19)[20]. For this purpose, Brison

comments that narratives "can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and

view of the world, but it also reintegrates the survivor into a community, reestablishing

bonds of trust and faith in others" (Brison xi), which is essential to creating a life after

trauma.

Notwithstanding the effect that narrating trauma has on victims, trauma is more

widely used for purposes other than a victim's healing, specifically in the realm of violent

fiction. The fact that fictional violence acts rhetorically on an audience is not new. As

mentioned in chapter 1, violence has been used to create a rhetorical effect on readers for

political, social, and religious reasons. And these attempts go far beyond the few texts

that I have mentioned in this thesis and into other types of media. However, the use of

violence is not always as altruistic as bringing people to God, helping to define

masculinity, exploring race relations, or helping people to understand victims of rape. In

fact, violence is probably most often used simply for entertainment or shock value. The

danger of a flood of violent media is that inasmuch as it can break readers' sense of

reality and identity, if repeated ad nauseum, it can also deaden the senses and feelings,

desensitizing readers toward violence and leading them to accept higher levels and

amounts of violent behavior.

Anderson, et al., in multiple studies on the effect of violent media on individuals,

argue that not only does watching violent media increase aggression in viewers, but that

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[20] LaCapra adds, "*Working-through means work on posttraumatic symptoms* in order to mitigate the effects of trauma by generating counterforces to compulsive repetition (or acting-out), thereby enabling a more viable articulation of affect and cognition or representation, as well as ethical and sociopolitical agency, in the present and future. Hence, as I am using the term, working-through does not mean total redemption of the past or healing its traumatic wounds" (119).

Repeated exposure to such [media] can lead the viewer to experience less

of a negative emotional reaction to future scenes of blood and gore and to

pain expressed by victims. Such habituation (or desensitization) may well

enable one to consider harming someone without experiencing the

negative emotional reactions that normally inhibit aggression. (99)

For example, on September 11th, 2001, I was working when I heard about the first plane

to hit the World Trade Center. My coworkers and I turned on the TV and watched as the

towers' gaping hole spewed black smoke. Like everyone else, I didn't know what was

going on and was generally confused. When the second plane hit, I saw the explosion it

created and my first reaction was excitement. Immediately after experiencing that sense

of excitement, I realized that the pictures on the television were not part of a Bruce Willis

movie—it was not directed by Michael Bay or produced by Jerry Bruckheimer. Real

people had just died in a large ball of fire. The thought was strange because I had been

used to applauding such acts of violence in the movies and on TV. And I realized then

that I was a product of desensitization, simply by exposing myself to violent media—and

not extremely gory, media at that, but just "ordinary," "harmless," "entertaining," "run-

of-the-mill" action movies.

But despite the desensitization that violence can cause, the rhetoric of violence

can also create social awareness or lead to political change. Take, for example, Upton

Sinclair's *The Jungle* whose graphic depictions of the meat packing industry caused the

creation of legislation protecting meat packing workers and consumers. Or look at Harriet

Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* whose violence spurred the anti-slavery movement

along toward the Civil War. Even Ott and Aoki, who assert that the coverage of the

beating death of Matthew Shepherd did not bring about real social change, acknowledge that anti-hate crime legislation was widely discussed—and enacted in some states—in reaction to the media coverage of the event and subsequent conviction of the perpetrators (228, 231-32). As a result, although violence is destructive and can encourage aggression, it can also be a force for positive social change.

So, if violence is destructive, but can also be socially useful, the solution to narrative violence cannot be to ban all depictions of violence. The solution to this problem is a better understanding of how the rhetoric of violence works on audiences so that audiences can take a closer look at the elements of violent media they see around them and understand the effects it might be having on them. What I have attempted to do throughout this thesis is to suggest that the social impact of violence does not come from a surface level of understanding, but rather comes from an analysis of the ideologies at play in the text. Again, Anderson, et al., have found that various presentations of violence to an audience can have various effects on the amount of aggressiveness they display after watching it (98). For example, whether an audience identifies with the aggressor or the victim, or whether the aggressor seems justified or is punished for his or her actions, have all proven to have an effect on the audience's attitude toward future confrontation and aggressive behavior (98-99). Ultimately, violent acts occur within the particular context of an individual text, each of which has its own ideological framework—whether the author of the text expresses a particular ideology or not. An understanding of the ideologies at play within each text, then, should help one to determine the context within which violent acts occur, for what reasons it occurs, and the possible rhetorical impact of that violence as interpreted by the reader. As has been shown, Burke's model of

dramatism works very well for understanding the ideologies at play within a text. Using

pentadic analysis, then, we can identify the ideological viewpoint of the text itself, which

can help us determine the context of the violence and any rhetorical effects it might have.

　　　　Although good rhetorical analysis that takes into account the expressed (or

uncovers the unexpressed) ideology of the text might be good for examining all types of

texts, both written and otherwise, in the case of violent texts—or those that use violence

specifically as a rhetorical tool—examining the ideologies at work is essential to

understanding how the violence functions within the text and on audiences. Because

violence is a powerful tool that can create guilt, place blame, incur secondary traumatic

symptoms, create understanding, and simply shock, examining the ideological framework

within which it is embedded gives us an understanding of how that violence can or

should be perceived, and thus an insight into the way that it might function toward social,

personal, or political ends. But basic rhetorical analysis (and, in the case of this thesis,

pentadic analysis) does not have the vocabulary or a theoretical model to deal with the

social effects of violence specifically. Trauma studies, on the other hand, provides rich

vocabulary and concepts (like vicarious and virtual trauma) for dealing with questions

concerning the use of violence for purposes of inflicting trauma on the reader or

audience. At the same time, trauma studies lacks a solid model of textual analysis that

can deal specifically with the nature of printed text and their rhetorical effects. As such,

trauma studies needs rhetorical analysis—specifically a mode that examines ideology,

such as Burke's pentad—and rhetorical analysis coupled with trauma studies can produce

a reading that explores the ways in which violence functions ideologically leading to

possible rhetorical effects as well as its social usefulness. Pairing Burke's pentad and

trauma studies, then, can serve as a powerful tool for understanding the possible personal and social impact of violent texts.

But despite the theories and analyses I have laid out in this paper, I hope that these ideas can go beyond a simple textual (and contextual) analysis of fiction. By studying the way that violence works rhetorically, I hope that we can come to a better understanding of how violence affects social interaction and political policy. The fact is, discussing violence in novels and movies is an fascinating intellectual and scholarly pursuit, but the rhetoric of violence is used in many other ways that could potentially affect us both physically and socially on a larger scale: Jihadist websites use video depictions of violence to inspire and recruit more members to their cause; US soldiers create home videos of daily violence in Iraq, both to show others the brutality of the war and to inspire patriotism in other soldiers; street gangs use acts of violence rhetorically to send messages to other gangs; anti-abortion literature uses the rhetoric of violence to encourage support for their cause; the threat of violence in home security system commercials is used to create a desire to buy home security systems; even children's superhero cartoons can preach violence as a first line of defense against any combatants; and the rhetoric of a rape narrative acts to change our sympathies toward victims of rape.

Susan Sontag, the noted photographer and essayist, observes that photographs depicting violence, hunger, and other stark images "cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one—and can help build a nascent one" (17). However, she goes on:

> The quality of feeling, including moral outrage, that people can muster in
> response to photographs of the oppressed, the exploited, the starving, and
> the massacred also depends on the degree of their familiarity with these

images. [. . .] Photographs shock insofar as they show something novel.

Unfortunately, the ante keeps getting raised—partly through the

proliferation of such images of horror. (19)

The problem is a paradox, images of violence can be used to arouse feeling and spur

people toward political action, yet the more these images pervade our consciousness, the

more likely we are to ignore them. In reluctance, Sontag adds, "photography has done at

least as much to deaden experience as to arouse it" (21). The same might be said of

violence in all forms of media: the more we experience narrative trauma, either

vicariously or virtually, the ante is raised on the amount of trauma we can deal with. As

society becomes more immersed in narratives of violence, physical reaction to the actual

violence around us becomes deadened. And deadening our reaction to violence leads to a

callousness toward victims and an acceptance of those who perpetrate violence. What I

hope is that by studying the rhetoric of violence in texts that may have a relatively small

impact on society at large, we might come to understand how the rhetorical use of

violence might function on a larger scale, so that we may use it, or discourage its use, in

ways that will actually have an impact on social and political interaction at a community,

national, or international scale.

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