

Growing up with Trauma

Representations of Sexual Trauma in Young Adult Literature

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Summary

This thesis examines the ways in which young adult literature represents sexual trauma inflicted on adolescent protagonists. The appliance of trauma theory to the novels I have chosen shows how trauma is represented as well as the inherent didactic intention of this representation. For these purposes I have chosen three stylistically different young adult trauma narratives and a collection of comics: Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999), Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) and Phoebe Gloeckner's *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2002) and *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (1998). The aim of the thesis is to see the connection between young adult trauma narratives and trauma theory and the different ways in which the trauma is represented. By analyzing the representation, voice and symptoms of trauma that can be found in the novels, the author's didactic message and their awareness of their audience can be found. The thesis will demonstrate the connection between both young adult theory and trauma theory and I will explore the teaching value of these novels as a way of helping those who have experienced sexual trauma as well as informing those who have not.

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Ingrid Marie Wilke

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Introduction

The growing popularity of the young adult genre has sparked the interest not only of the public but also the academic community. There has been a larger interest in researching the didactics of young adult literature as well as critical readings of many young adult novels. The following thesis will look at how young adult literature has used its didactic point of view to deal with and represent trauma. The thesis will focus on the questions about representation of sexual trauma: What kind of language is used to represent sexual trauma? In what ways do the protagonists of the novels deal with or show their trauma? How do the authors choose to represent the sexual trauma that their protagonists experience? I will use three young adult novels in comparison to each other to show that even though the genre often deals with less serious issues, it can also depict sexual trauma just as well as canonical literature, or for the sake of their audience maybe even better. I will show how these three literary works have didactic tendencies and can be used in a pedagogical way while still being able to represent the intricacies of sexual trauma and the field of trauma theory. These novels depict trauma in accordance with trauma theory, by using the character development of the protagonists as the driving force of the story. Even though the trauma is a large part of the plot in the novels it is the protagonists, and their personal development throughout the novel that drive the plot forward. By gaining insight into the emotional life of someone who has suffered through a sexual trauma the reader makes a connection with the protagonists as well as an understanding of the implications of sexual trauma. Michael Cart shows how this connection becomes an important one; “The heart has its reason that the mind cannot know, which means we come to understanding not only through our head but also through our heart. It is fiction – the best fiction – that offers us essential opportunities for cultivating empathy, for feeling sympathy and emotional engagement with others” (129). This becomes important in regard to sexual trauma because of its history of concealment. These novels become part of a larger movement that argues the importance of speaking openly about sexual trauma as a way of preventing future trauma.

Both sexual trauma and sexual harassment has, as of late, become an important topic in the public debate. The structural indifference to victims, and the repression of accusations has been brought into the public sphere through political and social movements. This change in public opinion has been a slow process, especially in the field of young adult literature. As the genre developed, sex was rarely a topic discussed or portrayed unless it had dire

consequences. It was not until 1975, with Judy Blume's *Forever*, that sex was portrayed as the act of love and desire that it can be. (Cart, 144). This started a movement towards breaking down the walls of sexual puritanism and authors started to write more openly about sex, in both good and bad ways. As is usual for the genre it continued to break taboos and molds, covering subjects previously seen as inappropriate for such a young audience, and the final taboo to fall was that of incest (145). It is important to write about these subjects as they are a part of many adolescents' lives, many who might not have anyone to turn to. Through literature they can find similarities to their own lives, or, as stated earlier, it can strengthen sympathy and empathy for those who are suffering through such horrific experiences.

I will focus on three young adult novels in which the protagonist has suffered sexual trauma. I have chosen to focus on this specific type of trauma because it is a field that studies show affect many adolescents, but it is still one of the least reported crimes, as well as there being a great deal of stigma attached to it (Cart, 146-147). This shows that of the many adolescents who experience such trauma are not equipped to handle the implications and have no one to turn to. There is a need for a community that is more open and understanding towards victims of sexual trauma. I feel that novels like the ones used in this thesis can help towards this development.

All the protagonists are high school students, but their traumas occurred before high school. In her novel *Speak* (1999) Laurie Halse Anderson's protagonist Melinda was raped at a party during the summer before high school, leaving her an outsider who is struggling to deal with the trauma she has experienced. Feeling isolated by her friends, misunderstood by her parents and all alone, she locks herself up in a shell of silence. Without being able to talk to someone about what happened, she struggles to find the language to deal with what is happening inside her. In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) Stephen Chbosky's protagonist Charlie suffered sexual abuse in early childhood. However, where Melinda tells the reader quite quickly that something has happened to her that has left an impact, Stephen Chbosky doesn't reveal the traumatic event until the end of the novel. However, Charlie's role as an outsider and a wallflower leads to him seeing a lot of other people's traumas, even if he does not understand it all. He has experienced the loss of his aunt at a young age, and before the beginning of high school he also loses his best friend to suicide. However, as Charlie starts high school he becomes connected to some of the seniors who are "outsiders" as well. These friends accept Charlie despite his lacking social skills. Through both experiencing traumatic events as well as witnessing them, Charlie's story deals with a plethora of issues

that teenagers can recognize in themselves. From feeling like you don't fit in, to dealing with drama with friends and problems at home, Charlie's story becomes relatable to almost any teenager. The last novel that I will analyze, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015) by Phoebe Gloeckner, differs from the others in many ways. Where Melinda experiences one major trauma, and Charlie has suffered traumatic abuse over a period of time, this protagonist, Minnie Goetze, experiences many different types of trauma, that lead her down dangerous paths. She has suffered neglect and some sexual abuse growing up and this leads to her having several sexual relationships at a young age, one of them with her mother's boyfriend. She struggles in school and, like her mother, starts experimenting with drugs and alcohol and hanging out on Polk St. On Polk St. her trauma increases as her drug abuse does, reaching a tipping point with a one-week bender of abuse, drug use and Minnie getting raped. In order to understand Minnie's childhood, and some of the traumatic events from *Diary of a Teenage Girl*, the chapter on this novel will also include the analysis of Phoebe Gloeckner's collection of comics, *A Child's Life and other Stories* (2000).

Even though all three novels take place in high school and are focused around sexual trauma, all three protagonists differ significantly. They have different family histories, come from different social and economic statuses and have different positions in high school. The different stories do not focus only on the sexual trauma but also on other dynamics of high school and teenage life. These dynamics, like popularity, peer pressure and grades are aspects of high school that most of society has recognized as normal and something that everyone experiences. What separates these novels from other novels focused on high school and teenage life, is the sexual trauma that the protagonists experience. However, all three novels have different ways of representing the trauma. The way that trauma is represented in the novels can be used as a tool to make the readers understand trauma, especially sexual trauma in a different way. The representation also becomes telling of the author's point of view and style. When writing about and representing something as serious and significant as sexual trauma it is important that the subject is dealt with in a way that does not diminish it. Analyzing these novels and their way of talking about, portraying and dealing with trauma can show how the genre as a whole deals with the issue. The following chapters will analyze these books separately, paying special attention to the depiction of symptoms of trauma, how the protagonists become a voice for trauma and the representation of the unrepresentable trauma. In the following, each of these aspects will be defined and tied to the theory that they are pulled from.

Trauma; scaring the human psyche

When thinking about trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder today, most people associate it with people who have experienced war or faced a life-threatening situation. The traumas experienced during war time can be both violent and sexual in nature. However, the first studies of psychological trauma started in the 1890s with studying women who were diagnosed with hysteria. Through the studies of these patients, Freud and his collaborator Joseph Breuer discovered that many of their patients had been sexually abused or assaulted (Herman 13). With the start of the First World War, and the Second World War after that, the study of war veterans and the trauma they had suffered became a priority:

For most of the twentieth century, it was the study of combat veterans that led to the development of a body of knowledge about traumatic disorders. Not until the women's liberation movement of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common post-traumatic disorders are those not of men in war but of women in civilian life (Herman 28).

Even though war veterans and their trauma can be sexual and is not to be undermined, the everyday trauma that children and women experience happens on a much larger scale. The pattern of studying trauma for limited periods of time and then putting it on the back burner shows that the interest in studying of trauma often depends on the support from a political movement (9). It is a subject that has been easily forgotten in the decades between major wars. That is until the 1970s, when the study of long-term psychological effects of war became important and talked about openly in society. The following support groups, and research into PTSD lead to further interest in the effects of trauma, now including matters that had previously been taboo, for example traumas connected with sexual violence, both in war and peace time. The fight for society as a whole to recognize the severity of sexual traumas and the abuse that women experience at home and in the public sphere was and still is hard. Sexual trauma not only had to carve out its own place as a field of study, but also had to fight to raise the consciousness of society. The first step was to give the injustice a name, from there the development of support groups and speaking about the sexual violence in public to make the public aware of the problem (Herman 28-29). When public awareness was greater the research into these types of trauma exploded as well as the documentation of sexual trauma (30). The feminist movement also used language to redefine what rape meant:

Feminists redefined rape as a crime of violence rather than a sexual act. This simplistic formulation was advanced to counter the view that rape fulfilled women's deepest desires, a view then prevailing in every form of literature, from popular pornography to academic

texts. Feminists also redefined rape as a method of political control, enforcing the subordination of women through terror (Herman, 30).

These battles were primarily fought throughout the 1970s and gave grounds for survivors to come out and speak about what they have experienced, but it was not until the 1980s that sexual trauma and the following PTSD that many survivors experience was recognized as the same found in combat veterans (32). However, many sexual crimes are still not reported to the police, and the conviction rate is extremely low (Cart, 146-147). This shows that even though sexual traumas have carved out a place of their own in the scientific field, it still has to fight to be taken seriously in society as a whole.

Even though research is an important step in the right direction it's through mediums like literature that the public can become better informed about sexual trauma and the consequences. Cathy Caruth expresses why literature is a good media to discuss and inform about sexual trauma: "Literature is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (Caruth, 3). Through the very nature of literature, it gains a connection to trauma theory. Because of the enigmatic nature of trauma, its discovery through theory becomes a quest to find out something that can simply not be known. This is reflected in the language used when discussing or recollecting trauma. Both for victims and witnesses of trauma it is hard to express exactly what has happened. This is because of the nature of the trauma itself:

Trauma, from the Greek meaning "wound," refers to the self-altering, even self-shattering experience of violence, injury, and harm. Crucial to the experience of trauma are multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. Indeed, the relation between trauma and representation, and especially language, is at the center of claims about trauma as a category. Something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet, at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma. Thus language bears a heavy burden in the theorization of trauma. It marks a site where expectations amass: Can language be found for this experience? Will a listener emerge who can hear it? Attempts to meet these expectations generate incompatible assertions that both metaphorize and literalize trauma (Gilmore, 6).

The role of language and literature will be further explored in the following chapters. However, the difficulty of finding a language to express the trauma the individual has experienced is a big part of the theory and study of trauma. As Gilmore points out, this becomes especially important in literature, because how can an author use language to represent something which has no language and is theorized as unrepresentable? Even if the

author is able to find a way around the difficulties of language, further problems arise with finding an audience that can actually read and understand the language of trauma. Herman also theorizes the obstacles that the survivor is faced with when it comes to speaking about the traumatic event:

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery (Herman, 1).

In this, Herman shows how different ways of telling their story can not only influence the way that the individual is understood by society, but also the ways that the survivor is able to overcome the trauma and find themselves again. Both Herman and Gilmore show one of the main challenges that sexual trauma has had to overcome. Because of the language difficulties many choose to not speak about the trauma they have experienced, and those who do, take the risk of being scrutinized or not believed at all. This further shows the structural denial in society to believe victims.

Trauma theory in literature

While debating the role of autobiography as a literary means of representing trauma, Gilmore also defines the difficulties that any author writing about trauma will have to face, the paucity of language in the face of trauma. When a survivor of trauma cannot find the words to describe what he or she has been through, how can an author of fiction put words to such events that shatter the self? She also points out that in order for someone to be able to use language and represent trauma, there has to be a witness, or in literature a reader, who is able to comprehend the voice and language of the victim (Gilmore 7). This affects not only the readers but also the authors writing about trauma. The authors writing in fiction have helped blast through the social barriers when it comes to writing about sex and sexual trauma. Even though this process was met with skepticism, critique and out-right hate and scorn. This can all be seen as a natural consequence of breaking social barriers and writing about such taboo subjects. The story is different when it comes to nonfiction and especially autobiographies. Gilmore states that there has of late been a boom in the number of autobiographies that have been published (16). The reception of these memoirs has been mixed. In *The Autonomies of Rape* Dana Heller goes through several different books that categorize and analyze novels

dealing with sexual trauma. In the essay she discovers the way that rape changes when it has been written about, not only does it become about the rape, but it and its reception become a part of a bigger discussion of class, race and nation (Heller, 330). Both Heller and Gilmore point out the disbelief that these memoirs are often met with. Being able to write about a sexual trauma takes great strength and courage, but many of them are met with scorn as well as critics proclaiming their stories as lies.

Because of the demands both on the reader and the writer when representing trauma in literature, the assumption is that literature representing trauma in a justifiable way is directed to an adult audience. However, it is not only adults that are victims or witnesses to trauma. Trauma is also a part of the lives of many children and young adults. When writing about trauma depicted in young adult fiction Tannert-Smith addresses one of the central concerns about authenticity and the audience that it is directed at:

This concern about authenticity is further exacerbated in popular young adult trauma fiction which offers the adolescent reader identification with a suffering protagonist and yet also presumes that reader's simultaneous coping ability, a curious duality of reader response that may constitute the disturbing transference of an adult desire onto an 'innocent' expected to exhibit both vulnerability and strength, to evince victimization while modeling recovery (Tanner-Smith, 395).

In this she addresses one of the main issues that many critics have with young adult trauma fiction. How can the authors balance their own opinions or perspectives of what they think is best for adolescents with what adolescents would actually do after experiencing sexual trauma? This question will be discussed in the following chapters as well as the young adult literature genre's ability to depict and give justice to a subject as serious as sexual trauma.

The critical aspects of young adult literature

Young adult literature is a genre that has grown hugely popular over the last 30 years. It has developed from a subgenre in children's literature into its own and is an extremely popular genre read by both young adults and adults alike. The genre's growing popularity has also inspired many movies and movie franchises. At the same time there has also been a growing interest in the genre on an academic level. This has led to more research into how young adult texts can be taught and should be used in classrooms as well as more critical readings of young adult literature, which helps in building a theory around the genre. From the end of the twentieth century there has been a clear separation between children's literature and young adult literature as both genres have grown. Because it has become such an enormous genre

with readers of all ages it becomes harder to define young adult literature only by its readership. It has therefore become more common to define it based on whether or not the novel, poem or short story has one or more of the following attributes or features:

(1) The protagonist is a young adult; (2) the story is told from the perspective of a young adult; (3) the story is written in the voice of a young adult; (4) coming-of-age issues relevant to young adults are addressed; (5) The story is marketed to young adults; (6) the story is one that young adults choose to read (Gillis and Simpson, x).

The young adult literature genre is based on the concept of the *bildungsroman*, in which the novel focuses on the spiritual and psychological development of the protagonist. In other words, the way that the protagonist becomes more and more educated, both in an academic sense and education through life experience. However, the genre has also developed many different formats and narrative structures which have found different ways of dealing with the emotional changes that adolescents go through. Many young adult novels deal with the challenges of teenage life, the changes that happen when a child grows up and starts to realize his or her place in the world along with the harsh realities of life. Because of the educational aspect and the fact that most young adult literature authors are adults but writing for a younger audience, didactics and aspects of moral stories often become a part of the young adult genre, especially in realistic fiction. Throughout the history of the genre we can see how the definition of children and young adults has changed, as well as the lessons that adults want to teach them. Just as the moral stories were told in the oral tradition for centuries, young adult literature continues to strive to teach young adults how to become better adults.

Eric Tribunella has studied the connection between children's literature and the use of trauma or loss in this genre. When looking at the change in children's lives throughout the twentieth century, he states that: "Although childhood has grown safer for many children, the prominence of children's books about trauma suggests that there remains a sense that children *need* trauma, or that trauma is useful, as a means of promoting or achieving mature adulthood" (Tribunella, xxvii). This shows that children's literature is still focused on educating children about morality or some essential truth or cruelty in life that many adolescents are sheltered from in today's society. Thereby, by depicting this in literature they are still able to learn a lesson which will help them mature. Even though this becomes altered when dealing with young adult literature, and especially regarding a matter such as sexual trauma, the central didactic notions of children's literature can still be seen in young adult literature as well. Growing awareness of the trauma that many children and young adults have

experienced, in the same way as sexual trauma directed at women, has inspired political and scientific movements. Because of these movements it is a topic that has come more into the light and inspires people to write or talk about trauma as a way of helping others who might be going through the same thing.

Another part that plays into the didactics of YA literature is the adolescent issues dealt with in these novels. There are novels about the typical teenage and adolescent issues, like friends, love, school and family. But there are also more controversial issues that are dealt with in these novels such as sex, drugs, alcohol, abuse, death and other issues that are not commonly thought of as adolescent issues. The inclusion of this content completely severs the bond between these novels and children's literature. The content of these issues and the way that some authors deal with them has long been a point of controversy; especially in American schools and libraries there is a long history of banning books that are not deemed appropriate by the community. This type of censorship goes against the didactic function that these novels are based on. When thinking about young adult literature novels that have been banned, most of them serve some sort of didactic purpose, to shine a light on these issues and their connection to the adolescent community and culture despite what the "adult community" believes. Authors might also try to help adolescent readers who can recognize themselves in the protagonists or find themselves in similar situations. This is one of the main aspects of the novels analyzed in this thesis. They all show a variety of different issues that are traumatic to the protagonists, and through this the author is able to show the readers different ways that trauma can affect a person, the symptoms of trauma and ways to start healing.

The rising popularity of young adult novels and the movie franchises based on them tends to shape popular opinion on the genre. Because the movie franchises and chick lit books are the ones that are mentioned most in the media, most people seem to consider them as representative for all young adult literature. However, the growing popularity of the genre has also let the publishing world know the possibilities of the young adult literature market. Along with flooding the market with popular literature or "chick lit" this also makes it possible for books of more substance to be published (Cart, 89). Michael Cart argues that there is a clear distinction between the popular young adult literature and young adult literature that should be critically read, analyzed and prized for its merit (78). When describing this distinction, he praises the books that have won the Printz Award, arguing that the winning novels differ from popular young adult fiction because of the fullness of their characters. Where popular fiction mainly focuses on driving the plot forward, he claims:

But story in these books is always in service to character. And although the actions of the characters may often contain an element of ambiguity, they are never arbitrary or dictated by the needs of a formula or a plot device. It is because they feature such fully formed, beautifully realized, multidimensional characters that these books will endure, just as the human spirit (Cart, 78-79).

I will argue for the depth and complexity of the protagonists in the novels I have chosen to analyze, and how these characters and the development of them through their trauma is what drives the story.

Central trauma aspects in the novel

The following section will show how all three novels will be studied and analyzed. In order to find the common ground between young adult theory and trauma theory the novels will be judged on three central aspects. These aspects are didactics, voice of trauma and finally representation of trauma. Given the similarities of the aspects there is some overlap, but all three are also very distinctive and are used in different ways in all three novels. These aspects can tell us about what “lessons” there can be found in trauma as well as how we as a society want to prepare younger readers for such trauma. It can also help show the ways that sexual trauma influences a person’s psychological state, and how readers can recognize someone who has suffered trauma. “Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life” (Herman, 51-52). These books cannot change this feeling, but the hope in teaching adolescents about sexual trauma and its implications is that it can help change the way that the survivors are met in society, thereby closing the distance between the victims and their community. To show this the following central aspects will be the main focus of the analysis.

The symptoms of trauma in a didactic setting.

The didactics aspects of the novels help us as critics understand the “lessons” that authors and society in general, are trying to teach younger readers about sexual trauma and about life. It shows the author’s understanding of trauma as well as how these novels can be taught in the classroom. It will be important to answer questions such as; how can we first see the influence that the sexual trauma has had on the protagonist? What has happened? What sort of connections does the protagonist have to the other characters in the story? In order to find answers to these questions, a close reading of the text will be necessary.

There will also be a strong focus on young adult literary theory. In order to really find out how the didactics of the text work, I will look at theories in young adult literature in

comparison to trauma theory. This is where I will find and prove the didactic element that can be found in each text. How can young adult fiction act as a teaching method about sexual trauma? What does the genre gain from this topic? These three novels are just three among many others dealing with sexual trauma. The young adult literature genre as a whole has just as much nuance as adult fiction when it comes to the serious issues that are being written about, both in a positive and negative fashion. How does this affect the genre and the readers? Tribunella suggests that in order to convey the seriousness of trauma to young adults and children, the fictional realist young adult novel is “a more effective vehicle of instruction for children” (xxx). Through close reading of the novels in each chapter we will see that the realist novel succeeds in using the genre to convey the monumental effects of sexual trauma while at the same time being what Tribunella calls a vehicle of instruction. Using didactics is not only important in the sense that it can teach adolescent about the effects of sexual trauma and how they should respond, but it is also important for the recovery of survivors of trauma. “The fundamental stages of recovery are established safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community” (Herman, 3). This shows, not only how complicated the recovery from a sexual trauma can be but also how important it is for the survivor to have others there to help.

Voice of trauma

This aspect deals with the narration of the text as well as the language used. This will focus on the concept that trauma appears to be without any language that can justify it. It will focus on the language used to describe sexual trauma and its consequences, but also on the reception that this trauma is met with when spoken. Do these young protagonists have someone in their life that can bear witness to their testimony? The role that each of the protagonists as a voice of trauma will also be discussed here. In autobiographies it is the victims themselves who are writing about their experiences, but in fiction the author acts as a link between the victim and their witnesses, us the readers. What language is used? How do the protagonists take on their role as voices of survivors of sexual trauma? The answer will lay the ground work for finding the common ground between trauma theory and young adult theory.

The voices used will also tell us about the way that the authors view their protagonist and the power structure between adolescent and adult, as well as the structure between society and the survivor/victim of sexual trauma. The power structure between adults and adolescents can be seen not only in the relationships between the adult characters and the adolescent ones,

but also in the narrative form and the fact that at the time of publication all the authors of the books are adults, writing from the perspective of a young adult. This brings with it its own set of complications. Both when it comes to the language and the voice used in the novel. Each of the three novels are distinctive in the voice and language of the protagonist. This is not only because of the author but also the time in which the novels are set in, and the protagonists themselves. Phoebe Gloeckner's novel is set in the 70s and some of the diary entries are drawings the author drew herself when she was an adolescent. This drastically separates the novel from the others. This and the distinctive aspects of the voice used for all three protagonists will be discussed further in the chapters.

Representation

The representation will overlap a great deal with the voice of trauma, because in two of the three novels it will be mainly concerned with the language used to describe and thereby represent the trauma. However, in the case of the Phoebe Gloeckner's two books I will look at both the way that the author uses the language but also the pictures that she draws. Given the graphic element of her work, the way she chooses to represent sexual trauma becomes a large part of the plot. Reading about the experience and seeing it in drawings as well as in writing becomes a completely different experience for the reader. The difference between the three novels and their representation of trauma is important because all three representations speak to the central aspects of how trauma theory is treated in young adult literature. The representation also becomes particularly important because of the history that sexual trauma has. It is important that the representation of sexual trauma speaks to the severity of the trauma as well as its long history of being undermined. As well as analyzing the language it will also be important to look specifically at how the trauma is represented as imagery. Does the author give the reader all the gruesome details, or is the sexual trauma something that the reader reads about without knowing what really happened, or something in between these two? This says something about what sort of impact that the author wants the text to make, and if it is the physical or emotional scars of the trauma that the author prioritizes. If the author deals with the trauma directly and detailed, it can scar the readers as well as the protagonists, and some readers are mature enough to deal with this, but not all. The author therefore has to pay attention to who they want to write for and how they might react to their writing. Will it scar them or even trigger those who have experienced trauma of their own?

The three novels clearly have very different representations of trauma, not only in the literary sense but also from a psychological standpoint. They vary in both form and in media,

and all three protagonists also represent three different psychological responses to trauma. All three of these different reactions are common effects of trauma and to some extent all the protagonists experience each of these, and more, at some point. However, it also becomes clear that each protagonist is a clear representation of one reaction to trauma.

Throughout my analysis I have focused on close reading the novels and finding connections between them and trauma theory. To do this I have used theory from some of the most well-known literary trauma and young adult theorists as well as critical articles connected to the novels and about teaching young adult trauma literature in the classroom setting. Because of the criticism that the young adult genre faces there are not many critical writings about these novels, or about the genre as a whole, I have therefore had to draw many conclusions on my own. Trauma theory on the other hand has extensive sources writing both about the psychological ramifications of sexual trauma, recovery and how trauma has been depicted in literature. However, for my intention of connecting trauma theory to the young adult genre I have used some of the most well-known theorists rather than delving deeper into other sources. From the connection between dominant theoretical theories in trauma and the events depicted in this literature readers can learn about trauma theory. My intention is not for the readers to gain full understanding of the field, but rather to gain insight into the main aspects of sexual trauma and how these connect to both fictional and actual people who have experienced sexual trauma.

Chapter One: Speaking out over the Silence

Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999)

The growing market of young adult literature shows not only the buying power of adolescents but also a growing academic interest in them and their lives. Even though adolescent lives have changed enormously over the past centuries, some of the challenges stay the same. The bodily changes that occur during puberty have a psychological impact on adolescents. Most adolescents have various struggles with accepting the changes in their bodies as well as accepting the process towards forming their place in the adult world. Tribunella rightly argues that the changes that happen in adolescent lives are dramatic, but also that adolescents are more sheltered than earlier. He further argues that to prepare adolescents for adult life, society has now started to inflict trauma through literature: "The striking recurrence of this pattern suggests that children's literature, and indeed American culture, relies on the contrived traumatization of children – both protagonists and readers – as a way of representing and promoting the process of becoming a mature adult" (Tribunella, xi). This narrative function of teaching adolescents about adulthood through trauma in literature can clearly be seen in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*. This becomes clear through Anderson's choice of subject for the novel as well as the choices that she makes within the novel. The narrative, style and the didactic and representative messages that can be found in the novel are coherent with the point that I am trying to argue in this text. This point being that the young adult literature genre has been representing trauma for a long time, and in a way that is coherent with trauma theory and aimed at teaching younger readers about sexual trauma and its dangers. The following analysis will show how *Speak* can be used as a pedagogical tool and teach younger readers about the psychological impacts of sexual trauma, by illustrating how Anderson's novel corresponds with trauma theory, both through representation of symptoms and psychological and physical responses.

Even though the novel is packed full of subjects and themes that most teenagers can recognize themselves in, the main focus of the narrative is the rape that the protagonist has survived. Though Tribunella argues for the trauma being conveyed through literature in a scenario of lost objects or bodily injury, Anderson's way of conveying the experience of trauma to the younger readers is more direct and blunter than the loss of an object, but can be compared to the loss of a limb (Tribunella 132). When a person experiences trauma they lose a part of themselves, a part that can be impossible to find again. *Speak* shows how extremely

devastating rape can be on the psyche and how it completely changes the victim's life.

Speak is written in the problem novel format, a format in which the author often has a goal of teaching the young reader something. This sense of didactic purpose is easily connected to the subject of rape within the novel. Through the following analysis and close reading of the novel, we will see that Anderson clearly writes in a didactic manner, trying to give guidance and teach adolescents. This guidance is directed both towards readers who have experienced rape or other types of sexual trauma as well as readers who haven't suffered through trauma. Anderson tries to connect with both these types of readers in order to inform the victims about ways to work through their traumatic experience as well as informing the community around the survivor about ways to help them. This didactic link between reader and author is part of what makes young adult literature a good genre to tackle the subject of sexual trauma.

When dealing with young adult literature, the age of the protagonist becomes important; it has an important role in the plot, in how the reader reacts to the text, in how it is taught and how it is perceived by critics and the public. In the novel, Melinda is raped at the age of fourteen. Like other rape victims this act shatters her sense of self and takes away her agency. For a child or teenager who is trying to conform to their life as adults, still learning and trying to find their agency and sense of self, this becomes detrimental. Most people question who they are or who they will become while in high school. However, when a feeling of being unsafe, without control over your own body and having someone who has robbed you of your identity is added onto the already complicated situation, it affects every aspect of your life. In the novel the reader gets to see how Melinda deals with these feelings as well as the influence that the rape has had on her life.

Before starting high school Melinda had a good group of girlfriends, liked school and regarded herself to be relatively normal. Even though her parents seem to have been slipping away from each other for years, there does not seem to be many problems in her life. Then she is attacked at a party and her whole world changes. After the rape she wanders back into the party to try to call the police, but as the police asks her questions she experiences her first psychological reaction to what she has just suffered. She becomes completely silent, not being able to comprehend, let alone speak about what has just happened (Anderson, 136). The police arrive at the party and all her future and previous classmates misinterpreted her call as her ratting all of them out to the police. This causes a lot of trouble for those who are taken by the police for underage drinking. The whole experience ends up cutting her off from her

previous friends and sense of community, as well as losing parts of herself. Not only because of the horrible attack that she has experienced but because she does not have anyone in her life who is open to hear why she called the police. Melinda goes from being a part of a group of friends in middle school to being an outsider and loner, bullied and despised by both her old and new classmates. This loss of self and community is both indicative of the sexual trauma that she has experienced as well as the psychological effects of this trauma and the actual physical loss that she experiences because of the misunderstanding. Melinda goes from being part of a group she calls the “plain janes” to being an outcast, floating aimlessly around and trying to avoid any personal contact. By separating Melinda from her community, Anderson manages to exemplify the position that many victims of sexual trauma find themselves in, as well as many teenagers.

The following discussion will focus on showing how trauma of this kind can be taught, how it is received and used by teenagers and teachers alike. This will be shown through an analysis of the symptoms of trauma that Melinda displays in the novel, the narrative structure and voice as well as the way in which trauma and teenage life are represented in the novel. By analyzing these aspects of the novel, I will show how it can be used for pedagogical purposes, in the same way that canonical literature is used, to teach young adults about trauma theory, writing and the effects of trauma. This will be shown through close reading and analyzing the plot and the relationships between the characters in the novel. These relationships also show the power structure that can be found between adolescents and adults as well as between the victim of rape and the perpetrator. The power dynamics and personal relationships that are found in the high school environment play a large part both in the plot and in the way that Melinda reacts to the rape. The community and the people that surround her have an impact on the psychological stress that the rape has already put on her. All of these factors influence the voice of trauma that comes through the text in the novel. This voice is connected to the language paradigm of trauma and the theoretical impossibility of it. “Something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency” (Gilmore 7). This becomes especially relevant in regard to *Speak* because of the silence that has such a central role in Melinda’s story.

In her paper “Anatomies of Rape” Dana A. Heller goes through different academic texts that analyze what literature about rape and sexual violence can tell us about American

society. She specifically looks at Sielke's book *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990*, in which the rhetoric around rape is discussed in detail. Namely, that rape and other forms of sexual violence, when used in discourse becomes a part of a large discourse about social, political and economic concerns and conflicts (Heller, 330). The larger implications of sexual trauma in social and political discourse shows the importance of the discussion as a whole. When it becomes a part of many other important aspects of society, it provides further incentive as to why these matters should be discussed with adolescents. Heller, in her analysis of Sielke, also states the importance of writing about rape in a way that does not deny rape or make the message unclear. This would only further a discussion that denies rape and violence, that has been mainly directed towards female victims, a discussion that has been going on for far too long (Heller 331).

Whether or not this discourse becomes the same when dealing with sexual trauma as used in young adult literature depends on the scale one is looking at, on a national, international or individual level. So even though the national discourse can tell us a lot about sexual trauma and the way society deals with it, it will not be a focal point in this thesis. It is however worth noting that rape and sexual trauma are a part of a larger debate regarding American nationalism, which corresponds with Tribunella's theory about using trauma in young adult literature to educate adolescents:

Understanding the processes by which American culture seeks to produce mature adult citizens helps us to realize the costs associated with those processes, and while not necessarily alleviating the pain or necessity of undergoing melancholic maturation, studying this phenomenon might provide some solace for those who have experienced it and some insight into those who resist (Tribunella 134).

This shows that sexual trauma is not only a part of the larger national discourse, but it is also something that adolescents need to be educated in. Cart puts great emphasis on the importance of fiction directed at young adults that deals with these issues. By using realistic fiction that is able to connect with most readers on an emotional level "and perhaps, one hopes, making their stories available will foster understanding and promote positive change" (Cart, 149). Gilmore also argues that the scrutiny that many autobiographical authors writing about trauma have faced has made many authors turn towards the fiction genre instead (Gilmore, 23).

However, for realistic fiction to be effective as a didactic instrument for teaching adolescents about sexual trauma, the teachers have to be sure that the issue is dealt with in accordance with trauma theory. Sexual trauma is spoken about to an increasing degree, but

there is still a large amount of taboo and stigma connected to the subject. It is therefore important that the information given to adolescents about the subject is correct and shows the complexities of sexual trauma. This is more likely to happen if the literature about sexual trauma, even if it is fictional, is in accordance with trauma theory. In the following subchapters I will try to show how *Speak* can be used as a pedagogical tool to teach adolescents about sexual trauma.

Melinda shows the way; hidden didactics in symptoms and roads to recovery

Melinda as a character becomes relatable for most teen readers because, even before there are any signs of trauma, she starts off as an outsider. The outsider character is typical for the young adult problem novel format. This is not without reason. Going through puberty and starting a new school with new people can be challenging for anyone, especially for those who do not feel like they belong to any particular clique or group, which is true for a lot of teenagers in this position. Anderson makes a point of this within her format. The novel is structured into separate parts according to the school year, and when Melinda gets her grades. Through this the readers get to see Melinda slipping more and more behind as the school year moves forward and she is left behind (Anderson, 46, 92). This is also able to engage the younger readers, as that is how their year is structured. The fact that Melinda is slipping behind because of personal issues is also something that many adolescents might be struggling with as well.

The shield of silence that Melinda uses to shut out the rest of the world is one of the most prominent aspects of the novel. Anderson even uses the format, and the page design to show Melinda's silence, not just through words in the text but also through absence of text. Instead of writing that Melinda does not respond when adults ask her questions, Anderson leaves a blank space in the middle of the text or only tells the reader about the physical reaction that Melinda has to the question or situation (Anderson 88). This not only gives physical proof of her silence on paper, but it also shows the space between Melinda and the other characters in the novel. Apart from the role of the outsider that Melinda has, the silence is the first hint that something is really wrong with Melinda. Why wouldn't she talk to or answer anyone? Dori Laub argues that silence is a large part of the experience of testimony of sexual trauma. Before the victim has testified to the trauma, the trauma seemingly does not exist, making the silence a sanctuary as well as a prison (Felman & Laub 58). Thereby, he argues, "the speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to – and of listening to themselves" (58).

Even though Melinda's silence is what comes across in the text as the clearest symptom of something being wrong, there are also other things that should alert her classmates, teachers or parents. Some of the symptoms that Melinda displays are only obvious for the reader, given the insight that the reader has into Melinda's thoughts. The reader

becomes the only one that Melinda really has any honest contact with. She avoids talking to anybody else, hiding in an old janitor's closet at school trying to catch up on the sleep that she cannot seem to get at night, because of nightmares about the trauma (Herman 29). She bites her nails and her lips, trying to keep her mouth from saying the words that scare her so much (Anderson, 46). At one point she even tries to harm herself with a paper clip and although it can hardly be seen as a suicide attempt, it should be taken as a serious sign of someone who is struggling. "I open up a paper clip and scratch it across the inside of my left wrist. Pitiful. If a suicide attempt is a cry for help, then what is this? A whimper, a peep?" (Anderson, 87). However, Melinda's mother looks at it as a cry for attention and shuts it down with the excuse that she "doesn't have time for that" instead of taking it seriously and helping her daughter (Anderson, 88). This passage shows not only the relationship that Melinda has with her parents but also the way that the community and most of the adults around her react when met with troubled adolescents. It shows a tendency of not taking adolescent problems seriously, assuming that it is only a part of puberty and the changes happening within the adolescents themselves. This tendency might not be problematic in general, but in cases like Melinda's it creates an even larger gap between adults and adolescents. This gap is also increased by Melinda's silence. A silence, like Laub argued, that is indicative of the silence that many victims of trauma surround themselves in. This silence is both reassuring and a prison for the victims. It is easier to pretend that nothing has happened than to admit what has.

The relationships Melinda has with the people around her become an integral part of her story. People and speaking are the things she tries to avoid. Denying herself social contact becomes a part of her reaction to the rape. Both Herman and Gilmore state that the reaction of the community around the survivor of sexual trauma is important when it comes to dealing with what has happened. It can influence the survivor in many different ways, from how to speak about the attack to how to move forward after the attack. Herman makes it clear that in order for the victim to heal from the trauma it is important that s/he is able to reconnect with their community (Herman, 3). Anderson, thereby, uses both Melinda's silence and her disconnect from her peers to show how many victims of sexual trauma react, by separating themselves from their community as well as using silence to avoid the healing process that happens through testimony. This also shows how Anderson uses the novel to show adolescents, who find themselves in Melinda's situation, ways to recover, by encouraging them to break free from the silence and reach out to their community. Even though Melinda surrounds herself in silence, she is constantly looking for someone who she can trust with her

testimony. This is what Anderson wants her readers to do as well. It is also shown through the methods of therapy that Anderson uses and how much help Melinda gets from them.

The only class at school that Melinda likes and prospers in is art class. It is also through this class that she is able to connect with the complex feelings inside her. It is the only class where she is able to actually concentrate on her work, and through this work she starts connecting with her emotions. The silence that she surrounds herself with works not only to distance herself from others, but also from her feelings. Melinda struggles with accepting what has happened to her, and by silencing herself she also tries to silence her emotions. The art room becomes the only place where she tries to let go. This happens mainly because of her art teacher and the safe space that he creates. Already from the first class the reader notices that Melinda feels differently about Mr. Freeman than any other teacher, because he is the only teacher she doesn't give a nickname. One of the things that makes Mr. Freeman stand out from the other teachers is that he strives to make the classroom a place where the students should feel free to express themselves through art.

There are several different forms of therapy that can help survivors of sexual trauma deal with what they have experienced. Anderson chooses to highlight two of these in her novel, and they are both related to the art class and Mr. Freeman as a teacher. The most obvious therapy that comes from Mr. Freeman's art class is art therapy. This starts already with the first class when Melinda is assigned trees as her focus and through this assignment she discovers the "therapeutic properties of art" (Snider, 299). Through the art assignment Melinda starts working through her emotions, connecting the imagery of trees to memories, both good and bad. From memories about her and her parents picking apples (Anderson, 66) on one side and on the other it was under trees that Melinda was raped (Anderson, 135). Snider argues for the symbolic value of trees within art and literature, in the novel, and compares it to the journey that Melinda is on. The changes that Melinda goes through in the novel, from the emotional growth to the psychical changes can all be connected to artistic representations of trees (Snider, 302).

Snider also focuses on the didactic message that Anderson uses in the novel. When dealing with young adult literature, a large part of the focus lies on what the literature can teach young adults and how these texts can be taught in a classroom setting. The focus for Snider then lies in both the therapeutic messages that Anderson is sending and also the intertextuality that can be found in the novel. This intertextuality can be found in reference to Greek classical tragedy regarding trauma and rape. Snider suggests teaching the novel

alongside classical Greek literature, showing that the novel can work as a modern interpretation of the classical trauma stories and the way they were told. The symbolism of the trees, that can also be found in classical texts make the connection complete (Snider, 301). By using these texts together and looking at them critically it can give the young adult genre more credibility and change the conversation surrounding it. This intertextuality further shows Anderson's awareness of her readership and how she would like her novel to be used and taught. This connects back to my argument about young adult literature and how it can and should be taught alongside canonical literature to teach adolescents about sexual trauma with a plot that they can easier connect with. Throughout the novel, Anderson continues to show how little Melinda connects with her subjects, again pointing at adolescents need to connect with the subject matter they are being taught.

The second way that Anderson chooses to show the readers how to recover after sexual trauma is through speaking about what has happened. Throughout most of the novel Melinda refuses to speak to anyone about anything, but towards the end of the novel, as she sees her old best friend getting closer and closer to the guy that raped her, she decides to try to talk about what has happened. She chooses the wrong person to open up to and ends up questioning what happened to her and feeling isolated again (Anderson 184). Anderson uses this segment to show the importance of a witness that can hear Melinda's testimony; this will be discussed further below. After being attacked by Andy once more, she stands up to her demon and stops the attack, and while doing so she regains her voice, and this time chooses to open up to an adult whom she truly trusts (Anderson, 198). With this Anderson highlights the importance of talking about what has happened, but also puts emphasis on the need for adolescents to talk to adults when they are dealing with such serious issues.

"Talk therapy" and testimony is not the only aspect of the novel which focuses on language and its complex connection with trauma. There is also a great deal of focus on the language that both Melinda and other characters use in regard to rape. For young adult literature that deals with issues such as sexual trauma, it is important that the correct rhetoric is used. This is highlighted by the way that Anderson shows the reader how sensitive the issue is. Even though this seems self-explanatory to most people, there are still those that deny rape and the horrible effects that it has. It is also important to use the word rape, rather than sexual assault, in order to evoke the seriousness of the matter. However, the debate about the rhetoric used when dealing with rape and sexual trauma becomes complicated when it is addressed to young adults. Most trauma theorists would argue that the use of the word rape would be

necessary, not only for the readers but also for Melinda, that putting the right word to the attack will help her accept and heal from what has happened. However, critics such as Chris McGee comments that the word rape makes what happened to Melinda clinical and thereby impersonal (McGee, 183).

This statement is also connected to McGee's main argument that is based on the power structure between adults and teenagers in young adult literature. The full effect of this and the language factors of writing to a young adult audience will be discussed further when looking at the narration and voice that Anderson uses. However, when it comes to the didactics of the novel it is simultaneously important to keep in mind that some language might be correct to use when discussing trauma might not be suitable when writing for young adults. This is because of the clinical nature that some of the discussion has. On the other hand, adolescents and young adults dealing with rape and sexual trauma need the same if not more help than adults to understand and deal with what has happened. Thus, at some point they will have to face the "clinical" terms. I would argue that when connecting the clinical terms to a first-person narrative like *Speak*, or any other form of trauma narrative that young adult readers can connect with, it works to the pedagogical benefit of the young reader. They get to learn about the clinical side of trauma theory, while reading about the emotional destruction and damage that it does from someone who they are able to relate to.

The attack was perpetrated by someone who was a stranger to Melinda; the fear of a stranger vs the fear of someone the victim knows, and trusts has different effects on the victim and brings with them different psychological effects. Anderson shows the reader that a part of the healing process is to talk to someone who can stand to be a witness to the victim's trauma, even if this can be very hard to find. An adult is often a better choice than an adolescent. The language of rape suffers from the same unnatural restraints as the language of trauma, thus, making it nearly impossible to convey to others. McGee argues that one of the most interesting aspects of the novel is how it deals with the power dynamics in society, and especially that between adults and adolescents. He argues that at the end of the novel when Melinda stops trying to heal on her own and turns to an adult, she is giving into the fantasy of adult readers of the novel. Adults would like Melinda to see that they are the key to helping her heal (McGee, 182). Hence, McGee is trying to show how adult authors of young adult literature are influenced too much by the fact that they are adults. He argues that the adult view of the matter changes the plot of the novel, making the ending more pleasing for adults rather than how young adults might actually act in this type of situation. However, this

argumentation misses a central aspect of healing from trauma and how that healing process should be conveyed. Because of the novel's didactic purpose, it is important for Anderson that the ways in which Melinda works through her trauma can both teach and help the readers. A major aspect of recovering from a traumatic experience is navigating the language connected to it and finding someone who can hear the victim's testimony. Herman states the complexity connected to the language of trauma and that the victim needs to find someone who can understand this language in order to heal through testimony (Herman, p. 3).

This person proves impossible for Melinda to find in her peers. She therefore needs to find a way to heal on her own. As will be shown in the following chapter on *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, a certain amount of emotional internal work has to be done by the victims of trauma before they are able to remember or testify to the trauma that they have experienced. They have to gain back some of the emotional stability or comfort that they had before the trauma happened (Terr 12). When she has started this process and feels ready to talk to one of her peers, she is met by disbelief as well as someone who clearly does not understand the psychological effects that the rape has had on Melinda. "*Did you get pregnant? Did he have a disease? Oh my God, Are you OK????????*" (Anderson, 184) The communication between Melinda and her ex best friend happens in the library, so the first time that Melinda is actually telling someone about the attack, other than the reader, there are still no words spoken. Their communication happens on paper, passing notes back and forth to each other. Anderson here shows that even though Melinda wants to talk about what happened she is not ready to speak the words out loud and clear. This along with Rachel's reaction, compared to Mr. Freeman when asking Melinda about what has happened, shows the difference between trying to speak about trauma with other adolescents compared to adults. The exchange between Rachel and Melinda shows that adolescents don't quite know how to deal with these issues furthering my argument as to why texts like *Speak* should be taught in the classroom.

Sexual trauma is a serious issue that is not dealt with enough in the school system, so by adding novels about sexual trauma and young adults to the syllabus we can show adolescents how to respond to sexual trauma. Laub points out the importance of a witness or listener who is able to hear the victim's story: "The absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" (Laub 68). This also shows Anderson's knowledge of trauma, as well as why Melinda feels the need to turn to

an adult when she no longer is able to keep healing by herself, even if this means giving into the power dynamics of the adults that she has tried to avoid throughout most of the novel.

In his study of *Speak*, McGee also had his students read the novel to get their take on some of the aspects of the novel that he reacted to. They stated that they feel like the silence that Melinda surrounds herself with makes her seem weak. McGee argues against this assumption. He argues that Melinda's strength can be found in her silence. It is not the act of silence that makes her weak, but the giving into adult pressure and speaking to them weakens her character in McGee's eyes (McGee, 185). Melinda does prove herself to be strong by standing against the pressure of the adults around her, whom for the most part show little interest in finding out why she is silent, but I would argue that this seems like an oversimplification and undermines the enormous strength that it takes for an individual to try, not only once, but twice to control the language of trauma and actually speak about the attack.

Silence can speak louder than words

There are many different ways of delivering a didactic message through young adult literature. Anderson mainly uses symptoms of trauma and ways of recovering from trauma to deliver her didactic message about ways of dealing with sexual trauma. However, when looking critically at the novel, most critics have chosen to focus on the narration and the voice that is used in the novel. This becomes relevant not only because of the genre of the novel, but when dealing with sexual trauma both the voice and the way of telling or retelling the story becomes important. As mentioned earlier, the most noticeable trait of the novel is the shell of silence that Melinda traps herself in.

The concept of silence is an interesting one. Melinda traps herself in a bubble of silence, trying to keep herself from confessing what has happened to her. She doesn't want all her secrets to be spilled. Through both her nightmares and when she is awake the book is filled with examples about Melinda's lips being shut or nibbled to the bit in an attempt to keep all her feelings inside (Anderson 151). However, mutilation or self-mutilation can be a common psychological defense in children and adolescents who have suffered from trauma. As mentioned earlier, the silence that the victims often embed themselves in is both a comfort and a prison (Laub 58). This means that the child can completely stop speaking, trapped in a state of shock and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, the same way that some adults react when it comes to speaking about traumas that they have experienced. Speaking about what has happened is a part of the recovery but getting to that part can be extremely hard and take a long time. Melinda's silence, on the other hand, becomes ambiguous because of the relationship that she has with the readers. She seems to tell them everything, from her relationships with teachers, friends and parents to the recurrent nightmares about her trauma and even gives a quite detailed description of the rape itself. For someone who is trying their best to keep silent, she speaks a lot to the readers. Anderson here shows that even though trauma victims try to keep silent, more times than not they want to talk about what has happened. The trauma will not be ignored, and the victim has to deal with what has happened. Hence, the written account of Melinda's thoughts becomes indicative of a victim's need to give testimony about their trauma.

The silence becomes Melinda's security blanket as well as her way of distancing herself from others. By putting up a wall of silence she protects herself from the scrutiny of her peers but also creates a distance between her and those who can help her. Even when confronted in a class with an oral presentation, Melinda resists it, saying that she has a right to

stay silent if she chooses to (Anderson, 156) However, this attempt to stay silent ends up getting her in detention and while in detention she ponders why people are so against her staying silent. “Lawyers on TV always tell their clients not to say anything. The cops say that thing ‘Anything you say will be used against you.’ Self-incrimination. [...] So why does everyone make such a big hairy deal about me not talking” (Anderson, 157). Her question is answered later when she gets confronted by the same classmate that helped her. In this confrontation David states that even though staying silent is her right, using it as a form of protest becomes counterproductive: “don’t expect to make a difference unless you speak up for yourself” (Anderson 159). With this he pinpoints the central issues that Melinda has been trying to deal with. She wants to stay silent, but she can’t change what has happened to her by staying silent. The only way to affect change in one’s own life is by taking charge and speaking up for oneself. This becomes one of the turning points in the novel. After the advice from David and having Mr. Neck actually punish her for staying silent, Melinda starts reaching out, talking to her parents and other classmates, taking small steps in order to reclaim her own voice.

When dealing with the effects and aftermath of a sexual trauma, Felman and Laub argue that in the act of testifying and the role of witness are important to heal from the trauma (Felman 47). However, the act of testifying can also be extremely taxing on the survivor. Gilmore also points out the similarities and dualities that are linked to the act of testifying. The act itself of telling others about what happened can be taxing enough, but the legal system comes into play when reporting the sexual trauma (Gilmore 5). The repetition that the survivor has to go through in the process of testifying, both to the people close to them and to the legal system, is similar to the psychological impact on the victim through flashbacks, nightmares and emotional flooding (Gilmore 7). These issues are all aspects of the voice of trauma that the author must take into consideration when writing about trauma in a realistic fictional novel. They are all parts of what an actual trauma victim has to go through, so in order to write a realistic fiction about sexual trauma the author must be careful to portray the correct language and pressure on the victim in the novel. Laying these issues on top of the complicated power dynamics that can be found within young adult literature adds to the complexity of the novel. All of this also corresponds with the language barrier that both victims of trauma and those writing about trauma meet:

Language is asserted as that which can realize trauma even as it is theorized as that which fails in the face of trauma. This apparent contradiction in trauma studies represents

a constitutive ambivalence. For the survivor of trauma such an ambivalence can amount to an impossible injunction to tell what cannot, in this view, be spoken (Gilmore 7).

With this Gilmore shows that even though the language used to describe trauma is a theoretical impossibility, it is at the same time an essential part of both recovering and dealing with sexual trauma. Anderson has experience in writing for children and adolescents, and this can be seen in the way that she uses the narrative in the novel. Even though most of the novel consists of Melinda's thoughts, Anderson still tries to use the voice of a teenager, to connect with the younger audience that she is writing for. This happens through the language, both in Melinda's thoughts and in the one-sided conversations that she has with Heather. Heather becomes the only one who will even try to talk to Melinda at the beginning of the year. Snider argues that Anderson uses Heather to fill the void that is left when Melinda is consistently silent, "The silence surrounding Melinda is filled by the loquaciousness of Heather. [...] as she speaks constantly and yet says very little of substance or consequence" (Snider, 303). I would argue that within the babble that comes from Heather, Anderson tries to connect even more with her adolescent audience. Even though what she babbles about is irrelevant in comparison with Melinda's issues, they are still central aspects in many high school teen's lives (Anderson, 23-24).

Chris McGee however argues that Anderson is able to give Melinda her own voice. That in her silence Melinda is not only trying to work through the trauma on her own, but she is also resisting the power dynamics that adults try to push on adolescents (McGee, 179). Michael Cart shows one side of this power structure when writing about these structures as it appears in most young adult literature: "It gives pause that so often the adults who do appear – be they parents or teachers – are presented as the cause of rather than the solution to the problem plaguing a teen protagonist. Or that, in the interest of empowerment, teens are shown as having to resolve their problems by themselves without adult interference" (Cart 130). Cart highlights one of McGee's central points, that adults also read young adult literature and often judge it according to what they want adolescents to read. This includes the adolescent narrative in which adult authors write in an adolescent voice, but writing what adults would want to hear adolescents say, which is the narrative that McGee argues against. Anderson's novel can be seen as a young adult novel in which the adult author talks down to the reader and steers them towards a solution. However, Cart's argument does not take into consideration the subject that *Speak* deals with. Sexual trauma is something in which most people, both adult and adolescents do not know how to deal with, therefore novels like *Speak*, that deal with such a serious matter need to show the readers how to deal with it. The two

following chapters are examples of novels which do not follow the same path as *Speak* in this sense. Especially *Diary of a Teenage Girl*, which is written in an autobiographical way, shows how an adolescent tries to deal with trauma, but ends with her getting less resolution than Melinda does at the end of *Speak*.

The voice of trauma does not only deal with the narration of the novel or the language and voice that the protagonist or victim/survivor uses, but also the voice of the community of people around the survivor. The witnesses of the trauma story become an integral part of the way that the reader reacts to the trauma. The reader can easily become affected by how the community around the survivor reacts to the rape testimony that comes from the survivor. At the same time, in a novel like *Speak* the reader becomes privy to the inner thoughts of the survivor and therefore becomes a witness as well. The discussion also has to be focused on the role of the witness, including other characters in the novel and the readers as witnesses to the trauma. As a witness the reader of the novel has to understand and be open to the language of trauma, and how it is a theoretical impossibility. Felman and Laub define what it means to be a witness by looking at the expectations that are attached to it, as well as the need for a witness when testifying:

Since the testimony cannot simply be relayed, repeated or reported by another without thereby losing its function as a testimony, the burden of the witness – in spite of his or her alignment with other witnesses – is a radically unique, noninterchangeable and solitary burden. [...] To bear witness is to *bear the solitude* of a responsibility, and to *bear the responsibility*, precisely, of that solitude. And yet, the *appointment* to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of the isolated stance, to speak *for* others and *to* others (Felman and Laub 3).

Melinda's ex-best friend Rachel is a good example of a witness who is not ready to hear or understand the language of trauma. Her reaction to hearing about her friend being raped can be classified as "textbook" wrong (Anderson, 184). She asks questions that are both ignorant as well as offensive and hurtful for a victim to hear. Anderson uses this part of the novel as a didactic measure to show some of her readers how not to react if someone close to them trusts them with this kind of information. She also uses it to show the readers the responsibility that is put on them when someone entrusts them with their testimony of trauma.

As mentioned, McGee focuses a lot of his argument on the power dynamics between adolescents and adults. However, these dynamics are not only found within the novel, but also in real life. Even though some of the arguments that McGee relies on might be flawed, they are also a part of the realistic fiction genre that Anderson is writing in. Most adolescents feel pressure from the adults in their life to comply to the adults' wishes or demands of them. By

not complying to these power dynamics Melinda becomes a strong character in the sense that she stands up for herself. However, this makes her a strong young adult literature protagonist. In order for her to be a strong protagonist in a novel about sexual trauma, she also needs to find her voice again and tell someone, the right someone, about what happened.

For the main part of the novel Melinda is struggling to put the correct words to what exactly happened to her. Given the impossibility that is connected to sexual trauma and language it is only expected that she has a hard time not only dealing with what happened to her but also naming it. Melinda goes through two different stages of naming what has happened. The first stage is actually giving a name to the monster who attacked her (Anderson, 86). But even after telling the readers that Andy is the IT that she fears at school, she continues to call him IT. Naming the monster happens quite early in the book however, it takes a long time for Melinda to realize what happened to her. This is connected to her silence, and the silence that many victims of trauma surround themselves in. Naming their attacker, is part of their testimony, and thereby just as hard to tell someone. It is not until after her talk with David, and other small steps towards recovery that she even dares to say that she has been raped. The question only seems to pop into her head when she sits at home sick watching talk shows:

Was I raped? Oprah:” Let’s explore that. You said no. He covered your mouth with his hand. You were thirteen years old. It doesn’t matter that you were drunk. Honey, you were raped. What a horrible, horrible thing for you to live though. Didn’t you ever think of telling anyone?” (Anderson, 164).

Melinda imagines this scenario even after she has told the reader about what happened the night of the attack. This shows the struggle that she has with accepting all that she has been through, and it is only after this realization that she can really start to recover and talk about what has happened. Laub also points out that when a victim of trauma is testifying to a trauma it is not important that some of the details are missing or might be historically incorrect. “Knowledge in the testimony is, in other words, not simply a factual given that is reproduced and replicated by the testifier, but a genuine advent, and event in its own right” (Laub 62). The testifier is telling the witness about the event, therefore creating it, so it is the victims opinion and experience of the event that matters.

Representing trauma to a younger reader

Because of the difficult language surrounding trauma, it is said to be unrepresentable, meaning that no one can truly understand the trauma that has occurred except the victims, who often are not even able to understand it themselves. “In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constation of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge” (Felman 5). This sense of not being able to represent the trauma complicates both the psychological ramifications of the trauma and the recovery. It also problematizes writing or retelling the trauma. Cathy Caruth uses Freud to show the duality that comes with violent trauma, like the rape Melinda experienced:

The accident, that is, as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility. What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not been fully known (Caruth 6).

This shows not only the difficulties that the victims face while trying to deal with the violence they have experienced, but also when writing about trauma. How can an author represent a sexual trauma adequately without experiencing it themselves?

There are many different ways of representing trauma, and Anderson chooses to use as many of these as possible. In previous section both the symptoms and the voice have been discussed, both as aspects of young adult literature and as ways of representing and writing about sexual trauma. However, there are certain aspects within both the symptoms and the voice that also become an important part of the representation of trauma that happens in the novel. The following section will show different aspects that have been discussed before, as well as new ones in order to show the main ways that sexual trauma is represented.

The strongest representation of direct sexual trauma in the novel can be found in the way that Anderson writes about the actual rape. Even though the reader becomes aware of something horrible happening to Melinda, and Andy/IT being the person that did this to her, it is not until the end of the novel that the reader actually gets to hear directly about what happened:

We were on the ground. When did that happen? “no.” No I did not like this. I was on the ground and he was on top of me. My lips mumble something about leaving, about a friend who needs me, about my parents worrying. I can hear myself – I’m mumbling like a deranged drunk. His lips lock on mine and I can’t say anything. I twist my head away. He is so heavy. There is a boulder on me. I open my mouth to breathe, to scream, and his hand covers it. In my head, my voice is as clear as a bell: “NO I DON’T WANT TO!” But I can’t spit it out. I’m trying to remember how we got on the ground and where the

moon went and wham! Shirt up, shorts down, and the ground smells wet and dark and NO! – I'm not really here [...], and he smells like beer and mean and he hurts me hurts me hurts me and gets up and zips his jeans and smiles (Anderson 135-136).

This all happens in a flashback/dream and is a graphic retelling of the rape that Melinda suffered through. The representation of nightmares and flashbacks in the novel happen several times and work to represent the repetitive aspect of sexual trauma itself as well as the act of testifying that comes with telling others about a sexual trauma like rape. However, this is one of the clearer flashbacks that she has, and it makes her able to see what happened that night more clearly. Hearing that she said no clearly showed that she did not want to do anything and then he still forced himself on her, opens up for her understanding what actually has happened to her. The language in this passage leaves little up to the imagination of the reader, there should be no doubt in the reader's mind about the fact that Melinda was raped. However, as we will see in the following chapters, there are different and more direct and graphic ways of representing trauma, both through text and pictures. Anderson chooses to represent Melinda's trauma directly, while still leaving out some of the most gruesome details about the experience. This is shown through Melinda's loss of focus and not being able to clearly see the event. The reader sees the attack completely from Melinda's perspective, both the rape itself but also Melinda's mind trying to protect herself by focusing on other things. McGee argues that this is because, "For Melinda, language is imprecise in capturing the event itself, let alone the emotions connected with it" (McGee, 177).

In other words, this representation shows both the problems that Anderson faces in trying to write about such a horrible attack and at the same time the difficulties that Melinda has in actually accepting what has happened. Even as she is reliving the moment her mind, she is not able to stay completely in focus, both because of the trauma and because of the alcohol. It also has to be considered that Anderson chose not to portray the absolute full graphic details of the rape because of her audience. As will be shown later, this differs from other young adult authors. Melinda is also the only one of the protagonists in this thesis who would be, by Lenore Terr, classified as a Type 1 victim, a victim who has experienced a single traumatic event and not been subjected to repeated sexual trauma (Terr 30). This means that Melinda is less likely to repress or "forget" the memory altogether. The following chapters will feature protagonists who represent Type 2 trauma victims.

Another important aspect of the representation of sexual trauma in the novel is the

identity crisis that both Melinda and her all of her high school classmates go through. Identity crises among pubescent adolescents is not uncommon. Many people struggle to find their place in the world as their bodies change and the expectations put on them change as well (Tribunella, xxxvii). As Melinda starts high school, the whole school is in upheaval searching for their new mascot after they stopped being the Trojans, because it “didn’t send a strong abstinence message” (Anderson, 4). The irony of Melinda working through the aftermath of a sexual trauma and the school board trying to change the school image to be more chaste shows some of the dark humor in the novel as well as the stigma that is attached to sexual trauma and the victims of it. Even though the numbers of reported sexual violence among teens continue to grow, the dark numbers of unreported cases continue to grow as well (Cart, 148). The dark numbers highlight the difficulties that are connected to coming forward as a survivor of sexual trauma and the discouragement and shame that sometimes meet survivors of trauma. The school’s identity struggles show the resistance that American society has towards teens and sex.

The symptoms that are described earlier in the chapter show some of the symptoms that are attached to the psychological implications of sexual trauma. These symptoms clearly show the extent that the rape has and how the following PTSD has influenced Melinda. When it comes to representation of trauma, the representation of the psychological impacts of sexual trauma also plays a large role. The representation of psychological implications after sexual trauma can be found in how the symptoms are portrayed in the novel. In order for the representation to happen correctly it needs to be coherent with trauma theory, to show adolescents how serious and life changing the matter is, as well as signs of people who might have experienced sexual trauma. Because it is a subject that is discussed so little in schools, we need more easily accessible literature about sexual trauma that adolescents can learn from. Even though there are many symptoms that are attached to sexual trauma, and they can vary depending on the individual who is affected by them, they can still be divided into main categories:

The many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder fall into three main categories. These are called “hyperarousal”, “intrusion”, and “constriction”. Hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender (Herman 35).

Within these we can see that Melinda mostly takes on the role of a trauma victim who finds herself in a constant state of hyperarousal. This can be seen through her separate symptoms and the way that the rape continues to haunt her and interrupt her life. When a victim finds

themselves in a state of hyperarousal, it means that their baseline level of alertness is higher than normal (Herman 36). It can be easy to recognize someone in this state because their reactions often happen so visually. Whether it be the dark circles under Melinda's eyes from the lack of sleep, or her bleeding lips from trying to hold the trauma inside her (Anderson 124-125). These are only a few of the examples that can be found in the novel that show Melinda's hyper aroused state; and how this state affects every aspect of her life. The repetition aspect of the trauma, and how it reappears constantly is also a big part of the hyperarousal state, victims of trauma "respond to each repetition as though it were a new, and dangerous, surprise" (Herman 36). The similarities between this and what happens to Melinda throughout the novel, as well as the format of the novel are striking. For Melinda it is not only the memories and emotions from the attack that come back to haunt her, but also the perpetrator himself. The following passage shows not only how Melinda lives in constant fear of the memories of the attack, but also has to suffer through knowing that at any moment she will meet the person who attacked her:

It feels like the Prince of Darkness has swept his cloak over the table. The lights dim. I shiver. Andy stands behind me to flirt with Emily. I lean into the table to stay as far away from him as I can. [...] Andy must be talking too, I can feel deep vibrations in my backbone, like a thudding speaker. I can't hear the words. He twirls my ponytail in his fingers. Emily's eyes narrow. I mumble something idiotic and run for the bathroom (Anderson 90-91).

This passage in the book shows only one of the many, and actually one of the less confrontational meetings between Melinda and her attacker. The manipulation of twirling Melinda's hair around his finger, shows the power that Andy feels he has over her. He thinks that because she has kept quiet for so long he can keep her under his thumb. The power that an attacker has over his victim is often not only because of physical strength, but also social standing and psychological manipulation. Andy is a very popular senior at the high school that Melinda goes to. This becomes a part of why Melinda feels like she can not speak. With showing the difference in the social standing between the attacker and the victim, Anderson is able to represent the pressure that many victims feel. Because of the seriousness of these kind of accusations, and the debates about false memory and false accusations, it somehow becomes easier for people around the victim and the attacker to believe the accused attacker rather than the victim (Gilmore 29).

Even though Melinda is mainly in a state of hyperarousal, she also represses the trauma that happened to her. The repression is rooted both in the silence that Melinda surrounds herself in, but also in the coming to terms with what happened to her, which has

been discussed above. On the other hand, McGee uses this to build up his argument about Melinda resisting the power dynamics. “Melinda’s inability to name what has happened to her as well as her overall silence after the rape is not *purely* a psychological mechanism of repression, which is where many other young adult novels on the same subject might choose to stop” (McGee, 178). The length that Melinda goes to both to repress what has happened to her and to resist becomes ambiguous because it both adds strength to her character and can also take strength away from her character. This is because of the strength that is required from the victim of trauma to speak about it, some readers might interpret Melinda as weak because she stays silent (McGee, 183).

By using these aspects of the novel to represent sexual trauma Anderson is able to further use her novel as a didactic device, marrying young adult literature with trauma theory.

When the silence ends

Anderson's didactic purpose becomes clear through the way that she shows Melinda's psychological reactions to the sexual trauma that she experiences. By showing how these symptoms are connected to trauma theory, essentially by showing how very real they are in real life victims of sexual trauma, they also serve the purpose of teaching young readers about sexual trauma. When adding the novel to a classroom setting I am asking the same question that Felman asks: "Can educators be in turn edified by the practice of the testimony, while attempting to enrich it and rethink it through some striking literary lesson?" (Felman 1). By showing educators that young adult literature also can be a genre used in literary lessons to improve pedagogical messages about sexual trauma we can also improve how young readers are connected to the material and what they get from it. The analysis of representation and voice of trauma used in the novel further the discussion about its validity and usefulness.

Anderson's narrative structure shows the emotional life of a teenager as well as an adolescent who has experienced a trauma. By using the first-person point of view, the reader gets an intimate look into Melinda's thoughts and feelings. In the other two novels that will be analyzed in the following chapters, the authors use letters and diary entries to represent emotions. These protagonists give their testimonies in writing, while Melinda's testimony is based on the narrator's voice. The final juncture of the novel when Melinda fights back at her attacker and finds the strengths to break out of silence and actually speak about what happened is also the most important didactic moment in the novel. It is the moment when Anderson shows that she truly believes that the best way for adolescents to recover after experiencing a sexual trauma is by turning to an adult who is willing and able to listen to their testimony.

Anderson furthers the connection between her novel and trauma theory through her narrative structure and the actual representation of trauma within the plot. The narrative structure lets the reader see into Melinda's thoughts, to experience the fear that she feels when her flashbacks and her attacker haunts her. The repetition of both of these symptoms is indicative of the repetition that can be found in victims of trauma as well as the language that time and time again tries to depict trauma but fails. This complicates the representation of trauma because it happens through text and language. Anderson uses both the written words, and the absence of language to represent Melinda's silence and the trauma she goes through. While telling the readers about her trauma, Melinda's focus slips in and out of the situation and this becomes indicative of the struggle that language meets in the face of trauma but also

of the disconnect that victims of trauma often experience. Melinda also becomes a representation of a specific type of trauma victim and a psychological response to this trauma.

Through this representation of trauma, young adult literature novels like *Speak* “can provide opportunities for writing activities or conversations about teenage problems in an attempt to achieve [such] critical literacy” (Alsup 163). Both McGee and Snider also bring up the different ways in which novels like *Speak*, can be used in a classroom setting and can teach younger readers about theory, critical ways to read texts as well as to teach them about sexual trauma. Snider uses Anderson’s symbolic use of trees to exemplify how the novel can be used in coherence with classical literature. The tree has been used as a symbol of change and transcendency both in art and literature, by focusing the symbolic aspect of the novel around the tree, Anderson connects her novel to classical literature and symbols. Because it is easier for younger readers to connect with Melinda’s story, based both on the voice, theme and time of the novel, it can also become easier for them to connect with classical works that have similar or the same themes (Snider 302).

McGee focuses more on the way in which Anderson’s novel can teach adolescents about critical reading and being able to see the internal power structures that rule the narrative structures in the novel, while dealing with trauma: “Anderson’s book strives for authenticity as it confronts an extremely difficult topic while simultaneously problematizing the very nature of authentic identity after trauma” (McGee 173). Anderson’s narrative becomes filled with identity questions through the age of her protagonist, the trauma she experiences, and her struggles with identity, but most importantly there is the identity of the narrator. The narrator is written in the voice of an adolescent girl but is written by an adult author. Throughout most of the novel this is hidden by the fact that Melinda does not speak to an adult or take the most obviously didactic way of dealing with her trauma, but rather stays silent. “Even though she resists it early on, Anderson’s book does tend to assign teens problems that are outside of their capacity to fix as the book draws to a close” (McGee 181). With this, McGee means that even though Anderson tries to let her protagonist handle her trauma in ways that many adolescent trauma victims do, by keeping quiet, towards the end of the novel Melinda has come so far in her journey that she needs help from adults to keep recovering from her trauma. Not all adolescents have a trusted art teacher that they can turn to, but hopefully this novel can help to show teenagers in this situation that adults whom they can trust and turn to can be found. By connecting such a novel to trauma theory, as well as pedagogical ways of

teaching the novel, I have shown that Anderson is able to marry the young adult literature genre with psychoanalytic trauma theory while making it relatable to younger readers.

Chapter Two: Observing Life from the Outside

Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999)

Many young adult novels, especially novels in the bildungsroman and problem novel genre, have focused on the character of the “outsider”, whether it be the outsider from the norm that just doesn't fit in, i.e. Holden Caulfield or an outsider with a hidden or supernatural ability i.e. characters from the novel series *The Twilight Saga*. For whatever reason, the character of the outsider has always been a character that young adult readers enjoy reading about and can recognize themselves in. This often comes from the fact that many adolescents feel that they themselves are outsiders at high school, but it also correlates with the identity crisis that adolescents face as they go from childhood to adulthood. This crisis is centered in the adolescent's confusion at the adult world, their place in it, as well as the bodily and hormonal changes that occur all at the same time (Tribunella, 130). Throughout the development of the young adult literature genre, the outsider has always been recognizable, either as the protagonist or as one of the central characters in the plot.

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* the reader meets not only one outsider, but a whole group of them. The protagonist of the novel, Charlie, has just started high school and finds himself completely without friends. Even though he had friends earlier, and still sees the people he knows around the halls, he spends most of his time alone, observing his peers, teachers and family. This is until he is encouraged by a teacher to participate more in life, to not just observe those around him but to get to know them. Charlie's first attempt to participate in high school life is going to a football game, this ends up changing his life. At this game he meets Patrick and Sam. They like that Charlie is not quite like everyone else and gives original and unabashed answers to every question they ask him (Chbosky, 20). Through Patrick and Sam, Charlie gets included into a group of characters, that are considered outsiders at high school, a group consisting of people with specific political and cultural opinions, people who are gay or have a somewhat fluent sexuality and people who sell or use drugs recreationally. None of them seem to fit into the “normal” mold that so many other high school students do, but instead of disliking their role as outsiders they cherish it as something that distinguishes them from the rest. It is through this group that Charlie gets to experience teenage life and discovers a world he hasn't been aware of before. For Charlie as well as most

other adolescents, high school and the age he is in changes his entire perception of the world.

This novel has become extremely popular and adapted into a film which also became popular, both among adolescents and adults. I would argue that this is because the novel represents such a multitude of different, typical and atypical characters that most viewers and readers recognize themselves in. The novel also deals with many difficult issues that adolescents and people in general face. For the purpose of this analysis of the novel the main focus will be the sexual trauma that is portrayed, both the trauma that Charlie himself has to deal with as well as the trauma that he witnesses. I will argue that even though the portrayal of Charlie's sexual trauma is delayed and convoluted in the novel, it still becomes a major factor in the text, both in regard to the plot and the way that readers experience it. I will further argue that the sexual trauma portrayed in the novel is useful in a pedagogical and didactic sense both inside and outside of the classroom. The didactic message that it sends can create a large understanding, both for male victims of trauma and victims of incest, that will effect both its younger and adult readers. I will argue that this novel, as well as *Speak* is important in order to teach adolescents about sexual trauma and the psychological effects that these traumas have on the victims. By discussing issues such as sexual trauma with teenagers we as teachers, and adults in general, can raise awareness as well as help those who have survived sexual trauma. In the following I will show how *Perks* can be a useful tool to start such discussions.

Perks becomes a unique representation of young adult literature because of its format. The novel is an epistolary in the sense that it is written as a series of letters written by the protagonist to an unknown reader. However, it is also clearly a young adult novel. Within the young adult literature genre, there are representations of many other subgenres, but *Perks*, like *Speak* and many other well-known and critically acclaimed young adult novels is a realistic fiction novel. Realistic fiction is itself often divided into subgenres containing novels that can be classified as bildungsroman or problem novels. Because of the issues dealt with in the plot of the novel and the didactic messages that can be found, it can also be classified as a bildungsroman. The emotional transformation that Charlie goes through in the novel, where at the end of it he reaches a new level of maturity, is one of the main classifiers of the bildungsroman genre (Matos 34). The epistolary format of the novel also gives the reader a unique role as a witness in the story. Since the reader that the letters are addressed to is anonymous, the letters might as well be meant directly for the readers of the novel. The role of the witness becomes more complicated by the sexual traumas that are dealt with. Thereby

the readers not only become a part of the story but also as witnesses of the trauma that Charlie writes about (Felman, 4). The role of witness effects the expectations that are put on the reader as well as how the text effects the reader. When someone becomes a witness to a trauma they also become effected by said trauma, for each new witness the effects of trauma spreads. Even hearing or reading a trauma narrative leaves an impact on the witness (Laub 58). The analysis of the novel and the following discussion will, therefore, not only be centered around the sexual trauma that Chbosky depicts but also its format as a bildungsroman, its narrative style and its place within the young adult literary genre.

The main differences between *Perks* and *Speak* is the focal point of the plot, the sexual trauma that both protagonists have experienced. The different ways in which the two authors have chosen to depict adolescents dealing with sexual trauma has also been the focal point of critics' analysis of the novels. Where *Speak* makes it clear from the start that something horrible has happened to Melinda and completely changed her as a person, *Perks* has a larger focus on the adolescent life and the wide array of troubles, emotions and issues that adolescents meet. Rather than just portraying the troubles of the protagonists, *Perks* also focuses on showing the different troubles of those whom Charlie surrounds himself with.

The sexual trauma that both protagonists have experienced has affected them deeply and in ways that they both discover throughout the narratives. The roads that they take to come to this discovery are very different. Melinda realizes it by exploring her emotions through art, while Charlie only realizes it at the very end of the novel when he is put in a sexual situation and the trauma that he has repressed for several years comes to the surface again (Matos 28). However, this does not mean that the novel doesn't deal with trauma until the very end. By being an outsider and an observer Charlie uses the letters he writes to reflect and tell the reader about different traumas that he and those close to him have experienced, both sexual and violent. Through his writing and participating in life rather than just observing it, Charlie's walls of repression start to break down, leading him to a greater understanding of his emotions and the things that have happened to him (27). Chbosky's didactic message becomes clear through the wide array of issues that he confronts both Charlie and the readers with. Through the readers active role as a witness to these traumas, it becomes clear that Chbosky is trying to inform and deal with issues that adolescents are met with but aren't always talked about. Charlie's story in itself cannot be considered normal, but by adding so many other complicated stories about sexual trauma and other adolescent issues it creates a stronger connection between the average adolescent reader and Charlie's story. Cart

argues that it is the strong protagonists and characters in young adult literature that makes it such an interesting genre. In young adult literature the plot is often driven forwards through character development (Cart 78-79). It is the characters in *Perks* that make it such a captivating novel for both adult and adolescent readers.

The sexual trauma that Charlie experiences is one of the most complicated and taboo to both write about and discuss. Charlie is not only sexually abused at such a young age, but the perpetrator is also someone who is a close relative, making Charlie a victim of both sexual trauma and incest (Cart 146). Sexual trauma, at any age, changes the lives of those who live through it, but when it happens within the first formative years of a child's life the psychological consequences and changes in development are hard to separate. Where other victims of sexual trauma are haunted by the act, and often the perpetrator afterwards, the child that has been sexually abused by someone whom they truly trust is further affected. This breaks apart their sense of self, but also severely affects the development that they have to go through from child to adolescent and eventually to adult. The relationship that the victims have to the perpetrator of sexual trauma influences the reaction that the victim has to the trauma. In *Speak* we see Melinda being haunted by her attacker, someone who has a higher social status and is constantly close by. For Charlie the perpetrator is the aunt whom he loves and trusts but who dies before he even realizes what she did to him.

The outsider trying to understand

The role of the outsider in *Perks* is quite different from Melinda's role in *Speak*, for the symptoms of sexual trauma in Anderson's novel are quite clear while in Chbosky's novel the sexual trauma that Charlie has suffered becomes hidden until the very end of the novel. This changes the analysis of the symptoms as well as the didactics in the text. In *Speak* the didactic message of healing through speaking to someone comes across clearly, while in *Perks* Charlie has already spoken to a therapist several times before he even realizes the trauma that he has been through. Because the trauma happened when Charlie was so young, his mind has not been able to process what happened to him and has repressed all of the memories. However, as the reader and Charlie learn throughout the course of a year, trauma leaves a deep scar in the psyche of the victim that cannot be ignored (Terr 6-7).

Charlie is different. This becomes clear throughout his journey, both from things that people say to him and through the way that he writes his letters. Charlie is an observer who sees the world and those around him, but he does not understand them until he starts to participate in his own life. Charlie observes people rather than trying to make a connection with them and this has separated him from others for a long time. In anger his sister points this out: "You're a freak, you know that? You've always been a freak. Everyone says so. They always have" (Chbosky 26). Though his strangeness is what separates him from those around him, at the beginning of the novel, it is also his strangeness that brings him so close to Sam and Patrick. Through their eyes, Charlie finds out that he is a Wallflower, someone who observes but doesn't do anything about what he sees. The letters, thereby, becomes Charlie's attempt to breaking free from this, to try to do something and try to participate. The qualities that draw Sam and Patrick to Charlie are also the qualities which he needs to gain control over so that his memories will return.

Charlie retells most of what he observes to the reader through the letters that he writes. This becomes his way of analyzing the behavior of others but also of himself. It is very important for Charlie that both he and the people he writes about, as well as the anonymous reader, preserve their anonymity. From the first letter he makes it clear that the matters he is going to write about will be both private and serious (Chbosky 2). This starts to prepare the reader for the subject matter that will be dealt with in the novel as well as showing that Charlie is aware of the fact that these are issues he shouldn't be disclosing to a complete stranger. However, from the first page of the novel Charlie bases his choice of confidant on the values that he finds important, showing the reader how he deals with things as well as

what he thinks makes a good person (2). This is also one of Charlie's advantages, from the first letter Charlie puts a requirement on his readers. In the novel he (chooses) the reader of his letters, but he also let's the other readers know what he expects from those who read his letters. In comparison, both Minnie and Melinda ask for no sympathy from the readers of their narratives. In *Speak* Melinda struggles to express her testimony through speaking, while Charlie struggles to remember, but also express his trauma through the written word. While Minnie doesn't write for the purpose of anybody else reading her diary entries, but to try to deal with her ambiguous emotional response to the sexual trauma she experiences.

The letters are significant in reference to the voice, format and narrative style of the novel, but they also become one of Charlie's most important tools for dealing with his experiences. Through the letters he reflects his own and other's experiences, his emotions attached to these experiences and the ways that he deals with them (Matos 18). The letters that Charlie writes and the events described in these become Chbosky's way of incorporating trauma throughout the plot. The letters thereby become a part of the way that both Charlie and the readers learn about sexual and other traumas and the psychological effects that these traumas can have. There is a lot of controversy surrounding sexual trauma and how to speak about it openly in society in general; incest and the sexual abuse of children is still a taboo. Depicting them in a novel for young adults is extremely controversial. The fact that the novel also touches on violent relationships, rape, random sex and drug use made the novel one of the most banned books at its time of publication (Matos 1).

As mentioned Charlie has a hard time connecting with people but is still able to make some friends. However, none of the friendships seem to come close to the relationship that he had with his departed Aunt Helen or even that of his friend Michael. This becomes a relationship that confuses both the reader and Charlie himself. Throughout most of the novel Charlie writes about aunt Helen as if she were his best friend, the one he looked up to and could trust the most in the world (Chbosky 5). He tells the reader about the overwhelming grief he feels, losing first her and then his friend Michael from middle school:

Dave with the awkward glasses told us that Michael killed himself. His mom was playing bridge with one of Michael's neighbors and they heard the gunshot. I don't really remember much of what happened after that except that my older brother came to Mr. Vaughn's office in my middle school and told me to stop crying (Chbosky 3).

The way that his emotions overwhelm Charlie to the point of blacking out will be discussed below, but it is important to note the experience early on. Even though crying and being emotionally distress is normal in such a traumatic situation, Charlie's reaction of losing

himself completely and being out of control is unusual. Rather than telling him to stop, his brother should try to comfort him and see that this is not a normal reaction. Charlie's reaction becomes telling of the lack of control that he has over his emotions, but also that already before he starts writing letters he is confused by them and open to discovering why his reaction is so much stronger than others.

Lenore Terr has done extensive research into repression and how it has affected many adolescents and adults. When she first started her research, she received many letters from people who had experienced repression. "The letter writers [also] showed me that a whole life can be shaped by an old trauma, remembered or not" (Terr xiii). These writers also tell Terr about how they came to rediscover their trauma, either through dreams, art, writing or simply seeing something that triggers their memories (xiii). This connects to Charlie's story. Even though it is his body that finally triggers his memories, Charlie's letters help him deal with his emotions and work through things that he previously did not understand. Terr also makes it clear that in order for a victim of repression to be able to remember what they have experienced, they need to regain a certain level of emotional comfort (12).

As the readers get more information about aunt Helen it becomes increasingly clear that she was a person who had herself experienced traumatic events and lived a hard life (Chbosky 6). There is also little or no indication of her being the perpetrator of Charlie's sexual abuse until Charlie's walls of repression crumble and a flood of memories wash over him (Chbosky 202). This information makes the reader rethink their previous perception of both Charlie and the whole novel. Charlie is different from the stereotypical adolescent as well as the other "outsider" characters. Charlie's struggle to connect with others and his emotions can be symptomatic of Charlie's trauma, but the unaware reader doesn't become aware of this until they are forced to retrospectively analyze him. As mentioned sexual trauma changes a person and leaves deep scars, and when it happens at such a young age it changes the way the child develops, both socially and emotionally. These changes in Charlie's emotional development shows that even if he cannot remember his own trauma, it still affects him. This teaches the younger reader about how long lasting the effects of trauma is, at least if it is not dealt with.

Since the realization comes at the very end of the novel, the symptoms that show Charlie's experience with trauma become clear only after having read the novel in full. As a pedagogical work it has to be discussed further after the students have read all of it, only then will the connections between Charlie's behavior and what they signify become clear. Some of

the examples that clearly show Charlie's suffering from psychological repression are the blackouts that he has when he is overcome with emotion and the flashbacks of memories from his childhood that he writes about in his letters. And finally, the moment that the dam of memories breaks as he is in a sexual situation and is touched in a sexual way for the first time since the trauma.

Sexual trauma, even though it is not made clear until the end, still plays a large part in the novel. This comes through both through Charlie's observations of others, either talking about violent relationships or himself witnessing traumatic events. However, rather than having the trauma itself being the main focus of the novel, Chbosky chooses to focus more of the novel on how Charlie adapts to life after trauma, even before he realizes that he has experienced trauma. This happens through Chbosky focusing on the psychological changes and challenges that Charlie faces. This shows Chbosky's didactic intention, by showing how Charlie deals with his emotions and the ways that he takes charge of his life. The steps and changes that Charlie make in his life, can also be helpful for adolescent readers. Both victims of trauma as well as those who are confused or are dealing with other issues.

Firstly, the novel deals more clearly with the grief that Charlie experiences after losing not one, but two of the people whom he considers his closest friends. Even though these losses happen before the start of the novel Charlie often deals with the emotions attached to the trauma of losing someone close to you throughout the plot of the novel. While on Christmas break Charlie has a hard time feeling lonely and missing his Aunt, who died on Christmas Eve (Chbosky 91-92). There is also a very real feeling of confusion that surrounds the death of his friend Michael. Michael kills himself, and Charlie struggles to understand why his friend didn't talk to him about what he was feeling. The emotions that he writes about and the way he tries to understand what has happened can hit home with many adolescents. Given that the leading causes of death among adolescents are violence and related injury, of these 14 percent are suicide (Cart 131). Given these numbers it is clear to say that both suicide and grief are common struggles that many adolescents face. Charlie's attempt to deal with these emotions might not help the readers, but by teaching such a novel it will at least open up the conversation more within the classroom.

Beyond this Charlie also observes violent relationships, between his sister and one of her boyfriends, the struggle between his friend Patrick and his boyfriend who is not openly gay and even a rape at a party that his siblings hosts (Chbosky 11, 36, 30-31). Through these experiences and many others Charlie reflects about teenage life and the aspects of it that he

doesn't understand. These stories and reflection work to further the didactic ideology behind the bildungsroman. Because of Charlie's role as the observer he sees a lot and reflects as well as asks questions about what he has seen or experienced. The questioning and reflecting that Charlie does puts him in a position of representing the traumas that he sees but does not experience himself. Just like the readers of the novel become witnesses of Charlie's trauma, Charlie is a witness to many other traumas and knows the burdens of this role. After carrying this burden with him for a long time, Charlie writes the letters as a witness testimony, sharing his responsibility with others. The influence that this has on the voice of trauma as well as the representation will be discussed further below.

The way that Charlie represses the sexual trauma he has been exposed to, and the process of breaking through this repression to come in contact with his emotions and really participate in life is both Charlie's biggest challenge and the main representation of both trauma and the recovery process. Matos argues that through writing and starting to participate in life, rather than just observing the life happening around him, Charlie starts to slowly but surely break down the walls of repression. "Rather than tackling external issues directly he focuses on internalization of his problems, turning to writing as a therapeutic way of soothing the tension between the pressures of the outside world and his inability to cope with them" (Matos 6). We can see this through the changes in Charlie's writing, him correcting himself and putting an effort into being as accurate and articulate as he can, and through his own reactions and behaviors that he describes in his letters (Chbosky 14). Matos is trying to show that through participating in life, Charlie can achieve the emotional comfort that Terr argues is necessary for the repression to lift.

For Charlie it is not only the quest of discovering the language of trauma, how to speak about what happened, but he has to actually remember that something so terrible has happened to him. His mind has to accept the trauma and be able to cope with all its implications. The conversations that Charlie has with other characters in the novel and the self-reflection that he goes through in his writing play a large role in Charlie discovering the truth about what happened to him. Instead of speech therapy or art therapy that Melinda ends up being a representation of in *Speak*, Charlie represents therapy through the written word. Judith Herman argues that one of the fundamental stages of recovery for those who have survived a trauma is "reconstructing the trauma story" (3). For Charlie this can only happen when he is able to understand his emotions, even though Charlie comes to the actual realization through talking to a therapist after a break down (Chbosky 208). He still has to

work through his emotions on his own, and we can see that happening in the letters that he writes.

Charlie's emotions become a part of the text through his writing, but also when he chooses not to write. He himself seems scared of getting too deep into his emotions. At several points in his writing he can jump out of a memory and say that he needs to stop before he gets too emotional (Chbosky 94). Charlie is a highly emotional character, and several of his most important memories are of situations where he doesn't seem in control of his emotional responses and can't stop crying. In some of the situations this seems like a normal response, like when he finds out that his best friend has died, however, as the plot goes on and this happens over and over and it becomes increasingly strange. An example that stands out here is when he tells Sam about his sexual dreams about her, he starts crying not because he is embarrassed but because he felt bad (Chbosky 21).

Charlie has a good relationship with both his parents, but through the course of his first year in high school he makes another connection with an adult. As Charlie excels in his English class he establishes a close relationship with his teacher. His teacher, Bill, starts to give Charlie extra work, investing in Charlie and his abilities. His teacher thereby becomes his first confidant at a new school, showing the influence that a good teacher can have in a child's life. On top of this, Charlie's relationship with Bill also gives the text an intertextual focus. Bill gives Charlie canonical classics to read, and through these novels Charlie starts to focus on his writing as well as his emotional responses to certain situations (Matos 18). The novels that Charlie is given to read all have a memorable protagonist, like *Peter Pan*, *This side of Paradise*, and *The Catcher in the Rye*. Not only do these books inspire Charlie to write more, but they also work as an inspiration for readers, and a motivation for Charlie to explore his emotions and the world around him. In the same way that Melinda finds an adult whom she can trust in her art teacher, so does Charlie in his connection with Bill.

Bill also becomes instrumental in Charlie's process towards breaking free from the repression that his mind has put on the traumatic events. Matos argues that the walls of repression that Charlie's mind has built up to shield him from the trauma that he suffered through, at the hands of someone he truly loved, get torn down slowly but surely through two processes, Charlie starting to actively participate in his life and through his writing (Matos 24). Where Melinda's mind uses silence to protect itself from the trauma getting out, Charlie's mind represses the memories of trauma until he is ready. As the novel progresses Charlie's emotional outbreaks and breakdowns happen more frequently. Matos argues that as

Charlie participates more in his own life, with his friends, he opens up his emotions and this gives room for those emotions and memories that he has buried to come forward. He also argues that even though action is what makes Charlie's memories break free, "it is the act of writing that helps him put his life into perspective and provide the missing puzzle pieces" (Matos 28). As his emotions come to the surface Charlie both loses control over them more often but also reflects over them and gains insight into himself and how these emotions affect him. Rather than just telling the reader about losing control and not being able to stop crying, like he does in the start of the novel, Charlie starts to know his own limits and knows that writing can help him calm himself down, as well as it can make it worse:

I don't know if you've ever felt like that. That you wanted to sleep for a thousand years. Or just not exist. Or just not be aware that you do exist. Or something like that. I think wanting that is very morbid, but I want it when I get like this. That's why I'm trying not to think. I just want it all to stop spinning. If this gets any worse, I might have to go back to the doctor. It's getting bad again (Chbosky 94).

This shows that he becomes more self-aware, both in regard to his own emotions as well as the fact that these emotions are unusual. He understands that his emotions might becoming too much for him to try to control. Thereby he tries to write about them, trying to let them out on paper.

Whether a testimony is spoken to an active witness or written down and published for a less specific group of witnesses, it has the same gravity and expectations. As discussed in the previous chapter, a witness has many expectations put on them. They have to accept that an incident, too horrible to put into words, as the truth and become "a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event" (Laub 57-58). The weight that has been put on the witness is also the weight that is put on the victim when testifying. But it is also through this performative act of testifying that the victim of trauma is able to put the trauma behind them and start to recover. Lenore Terr states that there are many ways in which repression can lift, and the act of writing is one of them. Even if it is not the trigger that ends up releasing the memories, it helps Charlie achieve the emotional stability that he needs for the repression to lift and for him to start his recovery.

The voice of the witness

The narrative structure that Chbosky uses becomes an intricate topic of debate among the critics who have written about the novel. This is not only because of the way that Charlie writes his letters and the issues that he faces through his writing but is also connected to the genre and narrative style of the letters. Firstly, the narrative brings up questions about the style and format in the novel as well as the pedagogical message that Chbosky is trying to deliver. These questions become important to acknowledge before looking at the voice of trauma and testimony because they give insight into the genre as well as the teaching possibilities that the novel provides.

The novel is written as an epistolary, a series of letters through which Charlie explains his story to an unknown reader. At the same time, it is also a part of the bildungsroman genre in the way that Charlie self-reflects over his emotions and the experiences that he has and uses this to develop emotionally and reach a new level of maturity (Matos 34). However, these two different styles stand slightly in opposition to each other. The bildungsroman usually uses the omniscient or first-person narrative, giving the reader full in-sight into the protagonist's thoughts. This is in order to "help students develop an awareness of the cultural and social differences that exist" (Matos 15). However, since this novel is written as an epistolary, in theory the reader does not have the same access to the protagonist's thoughts. Since Charlie is the one writing the letters he controls the information that the reader has access to. This means that Charlie can hide things from the readers, like the real names of the characters in the novel (Chbosky 2). When reading the novel, the readers should be aware of the fact that Charlie has the possibility of being a slightly unreliable narrator. This point can be made for all three of the protagonist's that are dealt with in this thesis. However, I would argue that it is more important to be aware of this in Charlie's letters, and Minnie's diary entries because of the self-censorship that is built into most people's nature. While in the act of writing something down we all have a tendency to self-correct or censor ourselves. Letters and diary entries don't necessarily give us the same insight into the protagonist's thoughts as a first-person narrative, even if they can also keep things from the reader. Charlie's situation is also different because of the repression he experiences.

This argument is also strengthened by the repression within Charlie, since his mind is keeping information from him, how can the reader trust Charlie to give them full insight into his life and emotions, as mentioned, Charlie also has a tendency to stop his letters when he can't deal with his emotions, cutting off the readers access to his thoughts. However, because

of Charlie's honesty, and the way he candidly writes about his emotions, even if it is in retrospect, these arguments can be used both to argue that Charlie is an unreliable and a reliable narrator. This discussion becomes relevant both as a teaching aspect, but also in regard to the serious subject matter that Charlie discusses. When depicting and representing sexual trauma victims, a reliable, honest narrator or protagonist is desired. This is especially needed in young adult literature because of the inherent didactic message that the authors are trying to send. In order to teach someone about complicated issues such as sexual trauma, the teacher often desire literary evidence that can be understood by younger readers. This evidence should also be honest in its representation as to avoid further confusing the issue.

The voice in the novel is also affected by the genre, and the message that the author is trying to convey through the genre and narrative style. For Mike Cadden it's the differences between single-voiced and double-voiced narratives that is one of the most interesting aspects of young adult literature, and *Perks*. He argues that these narrative techniques can tell us about the different didactic measures that the author has taken in the text: "In a single-voiced text there is one dominant and didactic voice with no representation of a legitimate alternative position" (Cadden 147). This also shows that the narrative structure is clearly used in the genre as a didactic measure. This narrative structure is often used in young adult literature, because of its goal of teaching the young readers. By offering only one voice with a legitimate position, the reader tends to agree with that voice. In regard to adults writing young adult literature, this effects the power structure within the novel:

When an adult writer speaks through a young adult's consciousness to a young adult audience, he or she is involved in a top-down (or vertical) power relationship. It becomes important, then that there be equal (or horizontal) power relationships between the major characters within the text so that the young adult reader has the power to see the opposing ideologies at play (Cadden 146).

This is offered by using "active" double-voiced narrative, or discourse. "In "active" double-voiced discourse, in contrast, no single position in the text is clearly endorsed or becomes clear at the expenses of others, which enables the reader to consider the rightness of the positions based on the specific details of the narrative" (Cadden 147). Thereby the active double-voiced narrative gives the reader a choice. The reader has to become an active participant in the content of the text and choose for him or herself which point of view they agree with or stand in opposition to. Rather than just telling the reader what they should do or believe in the situation, this narrative technique gives the readers their own autonomy within the confines of a written text.

My argument that didactics become a large part of most young adult literature, especially regarding such a serious topic as sexual trauma is strengthened by Cadden's argument about the narrative structure in *Perks*. Cadden uses Charlie's narrative voice in *Perks* as an example of a novel that uses single-voice narrative but is able to use the narrative to convey double-voiced narrative structure as well: "Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), which also employs a character narrator, manages to provide the reader with access to multiple points of view (though indirectly) and, more important in this case, creates doubt in the reliability of the narrator in order to achieve double-voiced discourse" (Cadden 147). This shows that even though Chbosky is using didactics, through the narrative voice of Charlie, he is also creating doubt in Charlie and creating space for other points of view through Charlie's uncertainty. As Charlie sees new and other perspectives and understands them, so does the readers of his letters. Most of the time, in his letters, Charlie is writing about situations that already have happened. By the time he is writing about them he has had time to consider and rethink his first impression as well as gather information from others about the situation before he writes it down. This also relieves some of the power dynamics of having an adult author writing for an adolescent audience. Chbosky wants to get his pedagogical points across but he also wants the reader to be aware of different, valid, points of view.

This analysis of narrative structures within young adult literature shows that the authors have several choices when it comes to the didactic measures that they want to take in their writing. Authors who want a strong pedagogical message often choose a single-voiced narrative structure, while those who want to teach but also give their readers autonomy choose double-voiced narratives. Cadden argues that even though *Perks* is written from a first-person perspective it is still able to achieve a double-voiced narrative:

A number of equal voices form Charlie as a character, although it is significant that he is never "completed" as a project in identity, as we ourselves resist completion. Charlie (and we) hear the reported speech of other characters, his own uncertain musings about his life, those other characters, and a long list of books in which he is "starting to see a real trend" (63). Charlie's artlessness, combined with his providing the reader with the tools to doubt his perspective, invites the reader to think through the dilemmas Charlie faces with him rather than at his cleverness or wonder which persona is "really" Charlie (Cadden 151).

Here Cadden shows that it is the multitude of opinions that are presented in the novel that makes it double-voiced. There are several factors that make this happen, firstly Charlie's own uncertainty and questions about himself makes the reader question him. Then there is the

sheer multitude of points of view and stories that are told within the novel. These give a diverse answer to the questions that both Charlie and the reader has. By forcing the reader to actively take part in the reading experience Chbosky shows his didactic message and that he wants the reader to think about what they are reading. This also effects the power dynamics that were discussed in regard to *Speak*, through the process of making the readers more active Chbosky also gives them more equality within the adult vs adolescent power structure. When the young readers are asked to make their own decisions about what they read rather than just taking the advice of an adult author, their agency is restored. The double-voiced narrative is made possible because of Charlie's tendency to observe life around him, it is one of Charlie's greatest strengths as well as one of his greatest challenges.

In comparison with Melinda in *Speak*, the character of Charlie as a voice of trauma becomes less clear because of the repression of his traumatic experience. However, Charlie's voice also becomes one that shouts louder, because of the nature of his sexual trauma as well as his gender. "Most young adult novels have featured incest portray a girl as the victim, a reflection of real-world circumstance. However, boys are not immune from such victimization" (Cart 146). Incest is still a very sensitive subject and seldom discussed openly. The novel, thereby, touches on three taboo thematic subjects through Charlie's own story: incest, sexual trauma and suicide. As well as these topics, Charlie also represents trauma and speaks up for victims of trauma by retelling the stories of those around him. The story that stands out most clearly, in regard to sexual trauma is when Charlie is a witness to a girl who is raped:

After a few minutes, the boy pushed the girl's head down, and she started to kiss his penis. She was still crying. Finally, she stopped crying because he put his penis in her mouth, and I don't think you can cry in that position. I had to stop watching at that point because I started to feel sick, but it kept going on, and they kept doing other things, and she kept saying "no." Even when I covered my ears, I could still hear her say that (Chbosky 31).

Even though Charlie doesn't completely understand what he has witnessed, he still shows the reader his own compassion and makes it clear that any form of sex without complete consent is rape (32). This story also shows the complexity of rape. Because the couple in question were, and still are when Charlie retells the story, together (32). Before Charlie becomes fully aware of his own sexual trauma he has both witnessed and testified to someone else's trauma. Charlie finds himself in a similar situation to the girl who is raped, he was also taken advantage of by someone who he loved. However, except for the representation of this rape, the most interesting aspect that this situation brings to the novel is

the fact that Charlie's memories aren't triggered by what he is witnessing. This can be for several reasons, that he doesn't have the emotional comfort needed or that it is his body which triggers the memories, not sight or language, this will be discussed further below.

The didactic purposes of the novel become the strongest when looking at the multitude of adolescent issues that are brought up in the novel. Both in the aforementioned sexual trauma, as well as violent relationships, adolescent experiences with grief, through Patrick's struggles with being accepted for his own sexuality and with his boyfriend's struggles to come out of the closet. By depicting these issues so clearly, and through Charlie's personal involvement in them, Chbosky not only shows these issues, and their complexity, but for most of the issues Charlie's opinion of them often end up seeming more like advice for how to deal with them, either through speaking with adults or leaning on your friends for support.

This leads to further discovery into the act of witnessing. Through his observations, and his role as the teller of these stories, Charlie becomes a witness of trauma, as well as someone looking for a witness to testify his own trauma to. The role of the witness and of testifying is an important act for the victim of trauma to deal with what has happened. Felman argues that the trauma, even after it has occurred, is not realized until the victim confirms the trauma through the act of testifying. For this testimony to happen the survivor of trauma has to be ready to accept what has happened, with all its implications, and be able and ready to talk to someone about it (Felman and Laub 3). At the same time the witness has to be ready to hear the trauma victim's testimony. Through the novel Charlie is both a witness who receives testimony, and a victim looking for someone to give his testimony to.

At the very end of the novel the reader gets to hear about Charlie's commitment to a hospital, a place where he has found someone who is ready to hear his testimony and who teaches him how he can deal with his trauma, as well as talk to those close to him about it (Chbosky 208). Even though Charlie has been in contact with a therapist both before the novel starts and starts seeing one again within the year of the novel, it seems that most of the progress is made by him working on his own emotions and breaking down his walls of repression. However, this does put Charlie's story in contrast to Melinda's in *Speak*, where Melinda struggles to find the words to describe to others what happened to her. Charlie on the other hand, having seen a therapist for a long time, has become used to talking about difficult things with other people, so his challenge is discovering the trauma and the language of that trauma that is hidden within himself. The contrast between these two novels speak to the difference between Charlie and Melinda's traumas. Melinda has one experience of sexual

trauma, making her a Type 1 victim, while Charlie is a Type 2 victim, a child who has suffered abuse several times (Terr 11). This effects the way that the victim reacts to the trauma, as well as their ability to repress what has happened. Someone who has suffered long time abuse, especially at the hands of someone they trust or love, they have developed a psychological defense of completely blocking out the trauma. The betrayal is too much for the young mind to handle, so it gets locked away until the victim is in a better emotional space and the memories are triggered. “Conflict is the key to repression. [...] You may experience a conflict between the utter helplessness you feel during a terrible event and the way you wish to see yourself – as a human and competent. You may also be torn between two images of your parent – as a monster and as a loving adult” (Terr 15).

Where Melinda’s story is about dealing with the immediate consequences of the first year after a traumatic experience, Charlie’s story is about discovering a truth about himself that his own mind has hidden from him. In this way Charlie’s story becomes the voice of repression, showing how a trauma repressed in the mind of the victim will sooner or later break through and make the victim deal with it. As discussed in the earlier chapter, it is the act of breaking through these walls of repression that becomes the focus of Charlie’s recovery in the novel. Throughout the plot the reader learns more about Charlie’s repression, and the way that the trauma he has experienced keeps making its way back into his mind and his life. Because Charlie doesn’t share much information about his traumatic experience with his readers, it is the repression and the subsequent language of trauma that Charlie has to discover that becomes the main source of trauma and the voice that breaks through.

Representation through repression

Many of the ways that trauma has been represented in the novel have already been mentioned. In the following I will go deeper into the trauma that is represented in the novel, the significance of this representation and the connection between this representation and the young adult literature genre. Charlie's repression, and the amount of time it takes for the reader and Charlie to discover what has happened complicates the pedagogical aspect of trauma writing for an adolescent audience. This is because of the amount of analysis that has to go into a reading of the novel. Rather than being able to analyze the situations where symptoms or reactions to sexual trauma happen as they unfold in the novel, the reader has to go back and reevaluate most of the plot after Charlie's veil of repression lifts. However, Chbosky is also able to represent other forms of trauma through Charlie's observation. The representation of Charlie's own trauma happens mainly through the processes that help Charlie get his break-through. These representations of trauma are also the main aspects that make *Perks* such a unique novel, in the way that it mixes both stylistic genre formats, narrative structures, represents multiple forms of trauma and ways of dealing with these. Furthermore, the novel is also critically acclaimed as a novel which genuinely fascinates both adolescents and adults. As a crossover novel it exemplifies ways in which the young adult literature genre is ever changing and bending boundaries.

The novel is not only a good representation of sexual trauma but through the multiplicity of issues and situations that Charlie experiences and observes the novel becomes a representation of teenage life. Through his group of friends Charlie comes in contact with almost everyone of the typical high school stereotypes, as well as those who don't fit into these categories. Where most novels focus mainly on one particular situation, problem or a plot line, *Perks* shows a variety of teenagers in very different life situations. Through his writing Charlie tells the stories of teenagers in many different situations, both those who are close to him and those he's only heard about through others (Matos 23). Through his letters we see Charlie trying to understand these complicated situations as well as others point of view, and experiences. By introducing so many different stories and characters that represent different teenage stereotypes, Chbosky gives the readers other important characters that they can relate to. The story becomes representative not only for the readers that feel like outsiders, like Charlie and some of his friends, but it represents almost all teenagers, and shows that no matter their social standing, all teenagers have their own struggles.

This is best shown through Brad's story. Brad is on the football team, and with that

comes a high social standing as well as many expectations from those around him. Brad is secretly gay, and dating Patrick, which goes against the heteronormative expectations that Brad faces. He faces pressures from his family and his friends, which makes him scared of coming out of the closet (Chbosky 36). The tension and pressure that Brad feels ends up in physical altercations. He gets hit by his father, when his father discovers Brad and Patrick together (147). This causes a homophobic panic in Brad, and he makes fun of Patrick, and it all ends in a physical fight between Patrick and Brad's football friends. That is, until Charlie steps in (150-151). Even though the reader never gets to hear Brad directly, Charlie is able to tell his story without judgment and makes it clear that his situation is very difficult and complicated. Like many other of the characters in the novel Brad's story can lead to a multitude of different observations and discussions. Brad's story is also another way for Chbosky to show his didactic purpose to the reader. By having two gay characters Chbosky is able to portray two very different sides of coming out as an adolescent. Even though we don't get to hear how Patrick came out, it is clear that he is out and accepted by those around him. Patrick thereby becomes a role model for those who are struggling with coming out, while Brad becomes a representation of the trauma that can be connected to the act of coming out. The expectations of masculinity from those around him and the abuse of his father keeps him from being his true self.

The complexity of the novel reaches beyond the narrative and stylistic format. By intertwining so many different characters with important stories Chbosky makes the opportunities for discussions regarding the novel's subject matter multifaceted. However, the main subject matter continues to be the trauma that Charlie has suffered. Even though it is not discussed thoroughly within the novel itself, the discussion comes out through the underlying subtext of Charlie's emotional and social problems. As shown above, Charlie uses writing as a form of therapy, spurred on by his quest to participate in life through social interaction. These techniques start to pick away at Charlie's repression, and the walls that his mind has built up around his trauma slowly but surely start to crumble (Matos 23). It's through this repression that Charlie's story becomes a representation of sexual trauma and the psychological implications of sexual child abuse.

Herman states that:

Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in psychological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory. Moreover, traumatic events may sever these normally integrated functions from one another. The traumatized person may experience intense

emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but without emotion (Herman, 34).

With this statement Herman shows the connection between the trauma that Charlie has suffered and the affects that it has had on his emotional and social development. Charlie's interpretation of the world and people around him often shows the reader how perceptive and smart he is, yet he often questions and has a hard time understanding normal idioms and social constructs (Chbosky 51). This shows that even though Charlie is very smart he hasn't had anybody close to him to show him how the world works in a practical sense. Herman also goes further in dividing the psychological implications of trauma into three main groups, hyperarousal which Melinda represents in *Speak*, intrusion and constriction. Through the changes in his emotional and social development Charlie becomes a representation of intrusion. Constriction will be discussed more in the next chapter in regard to *Diary of a Teenage Girl*.

Along with repression, intrusion becomes the main psychological effect of trauma that is represented in the novel. This is mainly because when writing about or researching the implications of trauma in a child as young as Charlie it is hard to know to what degree the trauma influences the child's social and psychological development. It stands to reason that the trauma has influenced Charlie's development in one way or the other, but specifics are hard to find, especially when looking at one year in the life of a fictional character. However, as Matos points out in his analysis of Charlie's writing and starting to participate in social life and activities, as Charlie is pushed we see him develop further within one year, socially, then he seems to have in the past ten years. Whether or not this is tied up to him being an outsider or to the trauma that he has survived is hard to pinpoint. However, as discussed above, the change that happens within Charlie definitively has an effect on his repression.

The intrusion that comes from Charlie's repression also makes his repression impossible. "Intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment," (Herman, 35). This means that no matter how much a victim's mind tries to protect the victim by blocking out the trauma, it will come back. In Charlie's case this becomes particularly clear at the moment that his memories come back. This happens when Charlie is about to have sex with Sam. This is the first time that he is put in a situation where it is clearly leading up to sex. "She took my hand and slid it under her pants. And I touched her. And I just couldn't believe it. It was like everything made sense. Until she moved her hand under my pants, and she touched me. That's when I stopped her" (Chbosky, 202).

At this moment the pieces click into place for Charlie. His mind starts racing as

memories reappear, and his emotions drain all the color from his face (Chbosky, 203). The trauma comes back as if it is happening for the first time. “At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force” (Herman, 33). Charlie becomes terrified by what he is learning about himself, his brain will not let him acknowledge the full extent of what he is remembering. It is not until later that the memory returns in full: “When I fell asleep, I had this dream. My brother and my sister and I were watching television with my Aunt Helen. Everything was in slow motion. The sound was thick. And she was doing what Sam was doing” (Chbosky, 204). It isn’t until later the following evening, after Sam has left and things have settled that Charlie’s trauma really comes back to him. As Charlie finishes his second to last letter to the reader he is highly emotional and confused, as the realization of what has happened to him starts to settle in. In the epilogue the reader learns that after Charlie finished the last letter he went into a fugue state. His mind could not handle the realization of the trauma, so it shut down.

This does not only reveal Charlie’s trauma and subsequent repression, but it also shows what Charlie’s triggers are. Charlie’s connection to trauma is not necessarily to language or even sight. Charlie is a Type 2 victim, meaning that the abuse that he suffered happened multiple times, thereby enacting the body’s defense mechanism of repression. “Children who go through a number of terrors protect themselves this way. They are able to muster massive defenses against remembering, because this is the only way they can get through a frightening childhood” (Terr 11-12). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Terr also states that in order for the memories to return to the victim, the victim has to be in a better emotional state. Even if Charlie is not aware of it, it is this emotional comfort that he is working towards through his letters and reflections. In her research Terr uses the example of a victim whose memories are triggered by the sight of her daughter, for Charlie it is his body and the way that Sam touches him that triggers his memories. “Memories are often forced out of lockup when states or moods originally connected with the input of the memory are re-created” (Terr 12). For Charlie this mood, unfortunately is when a female that he has a close emotional relationship with touches him in a sexual way. However, this would not have been possible without the emotional relationships that Charlie establishes. The way that Charlie feels about Sam also plays a role in his lifting his repression. Sam is not only Charlie’s best friend but also the only girl he has loved. This connects Sam to Aunt Helen, who was both perpetrator of his trauma and his beloved best friend.

The intrusion that Charlie experiences has roots in the foundation of trauma theory. By

using *Perks* in the classroom, a teacher can teach adolescents about trauma theory as well as emotional development. By connecting Charlie's experiences to theorist like Herman or Cathy Caruth the novel can be a starting point for teaching adolescents about psychoanalytic theory. Charlie's story is also about the emotional growth that many adolescents go through during puberty, both those who have suffered through trauma and those who have not. In her book *Literature in the ashes of History* Cathy Caruth uses Freud's interpretation of the origins of life and trauma. She argues that in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud changes his perspective on psychoanalysis, giving way for trauma as a psychological component in a child's psychological development (Caruth 4). This argument comes forth through Freud's argument centered around the analysis of Freud's grandchild's game of Fort and Da, in which the child mimics his mother's disappearance and return as the inevitable power that death has over life. It is the repetition aspect of the game that fascinates Freud and he connects it to the repetitive dreams that haunt war veterans (4). He further analyses these dreams as a sign of life struggling against the inevitable death (6). Freud's work becomes the foundation for further studies into the psychological effects of trauma. Charlie's story becomes a representation of this repetitious pattern in the novel, as the repression fights to hide the trauma from Charlie and the intrusion of the trauma on his psyche battle within his mind throughout the novel. As shown above this causes Charlie to become overwhelmed with emotions, have blackouts and live as an outsider trying to observe rather than participate in life.

The ways in which the novel can be used in the classroom and outside of it for pedagogical purposes are many. One of the main purposes of the novel is to show the complicated and developing emotional life of Charlie, both as an outsider and as a trauma victim. Charlie's openness about his emotions and the way that it helps him work through his repression, as well as representing the grief he experiences after losing both his aunt and his friend Michael. The novel reaches its audience both through the emotional strength and social development of Charlie as well as through Charlie's retelling of the stories that he sees and hears about. All of these stories have one thing in common. Even though they are very different, they can all have a large impact on the teenager's life. Charlie's experience especially stands out in this. The events that Charlie experiences highly effects his emotional life and is able to change the way that Charlie functions in everyday life, even if he is not aware of it himself. Charlie's story shows the reader that things that happen at such a young age can change us or steer us in a completely different direction. However, in his final letter

Charlie has discovered this about himself, but he has also discovered that he still has his freedom. “So, I guess we are who we are for a lot of reasons. And maybe we’ll never know most of them. But even if we don’t have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there. We can still do things. And we can try to feel okay about them” (Chbosky 211).

Participating in life and text

In contrast to Melinda, Charlie's trauma happens long before he starts writing his letters. He is also a victim of continued abuse over time, a Type 2 victim, who has repressed the memories of what has happened to him. Charlie's journey, thereby, becomes focused around gaining the emotional "comfort" or stability necessary for his repression to lift. Since Charlie's trauma is not revealed until the end of the novel, the symptoms of trauma become much harder for the reader to see than Melinda's symptoms in *Speak*. His trauma is hidden from both himself and the readers, but it has still left its mark and continues to influence Charlie and his behavior. The way that Charlie reacts to social and emotional stimuli is a representation of the traces the trauma has left in him, and thereby his symptoms of trauma. Charlie, like Melinda, is an outsider but this is because of his lack of social skills. Melinda is an outsider because of the trauma, both because of the psychological damages that it causes but also social complications that arose when she tried to report the rape. Charlie on the other hand seems to be left out, not because of his trauma but because of his slightly awkward personality. However, this lack of social skills and proper emotional responses can also be a part of his psychological response to his trauma.

Before the reader is made aware of Charlie's trauma there are also other traumas, both sexual and violent that are portrayed throughout Charlie's story. These examples of traumatic incidents that have happened to others than the protagonist gives the younger readers several characters to learn from, as well as connect with on an emotional level. By using a multitude of relevant and important challenges that many adolescents face at some point, Chbosky is able to connect to almost any reader. From dating issues and discovering one's own sexuality, to traumatic relationships, rape and violent homelives, *Perks* tries to represent as many aspects of adolescent life as possible and succeeds in doing so without losing its main message. Cart suggests that the novel becomes timeless through its "haunting sensibility, and unforgettable protagonist, and an absolutely exquisite narrative voice" (Cart 92).

Just like the reader, Charlie becomes a witness to many traumas and testimonies of trauma through the text, the expectations put on him and the personal relationships that he gains through these experiences help Charlie regain control of his emotions as well as gain the emotional comfort needed for his repression to lift. It is only when this happens that Charlie can testify to his own trauma and let the readers in on the trauma that they have been witnesses to throughout the whole novel.

However, one of the most interesting aspects of young adult literature that is

exemplified in the novel is the narrative structure and the way that it influences the power dynamics. Even though Chbosky's didactic message about trauma is prominent throughout the plot, he also chooses to give the adolescent readers back their autonomy. Rather than just telling them one way to represent, witness or deal with trauma, Chbosky offers them several. He leaves it up to the readers to decide which road seems the best for the other characters in the novel who are also struggling through trauma. Having Charlie observe so many different traumas, and reflect and discuss them, Chbosky is able to show different points of view. These points of view then reflect the possibility that the readers have to choose for themselves which route or opinion makes sense to them. This is an important pedagogical tool, because when dealing with a sensitive issue like this, the last thing a teacher or an author would want to do is offend or hurt an adolescent who might have chosen a different path than the one adults think is the best. The following chapter will analyze and discuss a protagonist who represents an adolescent that clearly makes her own path rather than taking the advice of adults.

Chapter Three: Minnie's Life in Text and Pictures

Phoebe Gloeckner's *Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2002) and *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (1998)

This final chapter will be focusing on a novel which in many ways is completely different from the two discussed in the previous chapters. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* by Phoebe Gloeckner is different from the two others in format, style, medium and didactic function. The narrative is made up of a fifteen-year old's diary entries and illustrations. The narrative style as well as the inspiration of the text influences the genre of the novel. Gloeckner has admitted, that her protagonist Minnie is not only inspired by her but is her. Most of the diary entries and some of the drawings were written and drawn by Gloeckner herself when she was fifteen. "This all happened to me. I feel really totally fucked-up. I don't understand any of this. Let's look at it. Let's not look at it sideways or make it look prettier, but let's look at it for what it is" (Køhlert 125). Even though some of it has had to be changed in order to create a cohesive narrative, the basis of the novel is strongly autobiographical. In Gloeckner's own words: "By reading that book, you're not experiencing what I experienced. You're perhaps experiencing my *interpretation* of it, but you're bringing yourself to it. In that way, I always hesitate to say this is a true story. I'm not attempting in any way to make documentary. You can never represent everything. It's always a selective process" (Køhlert 125).

These few sentences say a lot about the novel. They show that it has a strongly autobiographical inspiration and that Gloeckner is urging her readers to actually look at what happened to her, not only through words but also through her drawings. Almost all of the sexual experiences that Minnie has throughout the course of the novel are also portrayed through graphic and detailed pictures. These pictures force the reader to not only read about what she has been through, but to also look at the image of it. The role of the images, and what they show, in coherence with the written text in the novel will be discussed below. Some of the novel's most crucial events are portrayed more in the pictures than in the actual writing. It is also through Gloeckner's drawings that the readers are able to learn about her/Minnie's past. This, however, happens in a different work. As well as *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, the analysis in the following will also be focused around *A Child's Life*, a collection of some of

Gloeckner's illustrated works.

Through *A Child's Life* the reader is able to understand more about Minnie's trauma, knowledge of her childhood and the choices she makes that lead her down the path she is heading for at the start of *Diary of a Teenage Girl*. The work is a collection of drawings and cartoon strips that Gloeckner has drawn throughout her life and career. This chapter will be focused on the drawings and illustrations that deal with Minnie's childhood. Because the book is a collection of stories, rather than a cohesive narrative, it gives us a look at the events of Minnie/Gloeckner's childhood that have made the biggest impact. *A Child's Life* focuses a lot on different forms of sexual trauma, or traumatic memories that are connected to sex, but it also focuses on violence, bullying and the confusing time of puberty. The dynamic between Minnie's traumatic experiences and her diary entries as well as the illustrations from both *A Child's Life* and *Diary of a Teenage girl* will be in focus throughout the analysis of the text. Because this differs so greatly from the other two novels, I will look at both the positive and negative aspects of this format, both in regard to trauma theory and didactics. Gloeckner's work brings with it a completely different perspective of writing about sexual trauma to a younger audience. This change in perception happens both through her representation of the victim, the traumatic incidents and the role of parents in the novel. These representations can be seen in the medium of the novel as well as in the protagonist herself and her memoirs. Minnie's ambiguous views on sexual trauma, and her own situation as well as the autobiographical aspect brings with it a new pedagogical message. Minnie is abandoned by the adults in her life, so she can not turn to them for help but has to deal with the sexual trauma she experiences on her own. Thereby, the pedagogical message is not for the adolescent readers to seek help from adults but rather to deal with their issues on their own and break free from the people who make their lives worse. Charlie and Melinda's stories are centered around accepting their trauma and moving towards recovery. In many ways this is the focus of Minnie's story as well, however Minnie's journey is focused around her emotional ambiguity to the trauma and her seemingly carelessness towards the situation. Gloeckner's works add another level to my overall analysis of sexual trauma in young adult literature, through its medium and representation of a different reaction to trauma and effect on the victim. This is because of the emotional response that Minnie has to her trauma, she does not only feel hate for her attacker but also love. These feelings are represented in Minnie's writing but since Minnie struggles to admit that she is being traumatized the graphics make sure that readers see how brutal and traumatizing her sexual experiences are.

Minnie has had a very troublesome childhood, and it all comes to a peak in *Diary of a Teenage Girl*. Because of its style being that of a diary, Minnie doesn't tell the readers too much about her childhood, which is why I've chosen to look at *A Child's Life* as well. By using both these works to gather information about Minnie, both her adolescent self in *Diary* as well as the childhood that she has had, it will be possible to have a more thorough analysis of her trauma as well as the events leading up to that trauma. Minnie's traumas, and the way they are portrayed are very complex, because of Minnie's own role in it. When she is fifteen Minnie 'chooses' to start a sexual relationship with her mother's boyfriend, Monroe. Even though Minnie gives consent and even seems to seduce Monroe just as much as he seduces her, it is extremely important to remember that she is only a child while Monroe is a full-grown man (Køhlert, 138). This not only makes their relationship illegal, but the extreme age difference completely shifts the power dynamics between them, and puts her in a victim role, even if she refuses to admit it to herself. These dynamics between them, as well as the subsequent spiraling that leads to Minnie getting raped will be discussed further below. The complexity of Minnie's relationship with the perpetrator of her trauma makes the discussion about trauma surrounding this novel to be quite different from the other two. Where Melinda is clearly terrified of her perpetrator, Minnie seeks out hers. Deep down she knows that it isn't right, which can be seen in her illustrations, but her writing shows her ambiguous emotions towards Monroe. She is looking for love and really wishes that she has found it in the perpetrator of her trauma. The visualization that Gloeckner's drawings adds another level of depth to the representation of trauma. Out of all three novels Gloeckner's work is the one that represents trauma most directly and detailed, this happens both through the illustrations but also through Minnie's own descriptions of her sexual relations. By depicting the trauma and using physical scale to show the male dominance the reader truly understands how small Minnie feels.

The time that the novel is set in also effects both the content of the novel and the way that readers receive it. The two novels that have been discussed before have been set towards the end of the 1990s – early 2000s, which is also when they were published. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* on the other hand is published around the same time as the other two, but the story is set in San Francisco in the 1970s. The time period clearly affects the story, not only in the materialistic objects that are described in the story or Minnie's views, style and opinions, but also the views that society in general had at this time, in regard to sex, drugs and alcohol in the general community and when it comes to adolescents. Adolescents and teenagers, as a

group, were viewed differently at the time that Phoebe/ her alter-ego Minnie grew up. The view of what childhood has, or should be, has changed throughout the ages, and so has the experience of growing up during the 1970s compared to the late 1990s or later. This is mainly through the way that society looks at adolescence and at sexual trauma. Even if the two are rarely spoken about together even now, in the 70's they were rarely spoken about even separated. Even though adolescents still experienced sexual trauma, it was considered a non-issue, too horrible to deal with. At the same time, the age of expected maturity was different. It was expected that people married younger, and the second wave of feminism was still going strong and had not gained full recognition. This changes Minnie's position both as an adolescent and a woman compared to Melinda and Charlie. What does not change is the fact that growing from a child to an adult is an emotionally difficult process (Tribunella, 127). However, one of the main differences that effects the plot of the story between when Minnie grows up in comparison to Charlie and Melinda is the view that society has on sexual trauma.

Even though the field of trauma theory, within psychology or other studies, started mainly with Freud, it did not gain full strength or recognition until the 1970-80s. However, the discussion around trauma was mainly focused on war veterans who came home with emotional scars, even though the feminist movement was working to include sexual and abuse trauma as well (Heman 28). However, society generally had little information about the effects of sexual trauma, especially sexual trauma that involved children or adolescents. This influences Minnie's understanding about what happens to her, the reaction that the people around her have as well as the help she gets. It also influences the didactic aspect of the text. Throughout the other two novels analyzed there have been adults that the protagonists could turn to and trust, however Minnie has no one. Thereby, the didactic message that adolescents can trust adults with their problems is not part of this story. However, Gloeckner chooses a different pedagogical message. Her message does not depend on the protagonists finding a way towards recovery, but rather at trying to show just how gruesome and complicated an incestuous relationship can be for the victim. Minnie's father left her when she was young, and she longs for his love and acceptance, because Monroe is her current father figure she looks to him for love. These emotions of love are similar to Charlie's emotions for his aunt, but Gloeckner portrays them more than Chbosky does. Gloeckner thereby shows a different victim than the other authors. Her story contorts the concept of consent as well as the emotional response that the victim has to the trauma. Even though the other novels are set and published over ten years ago, the readers can more easily recognize themselves in the

community, story and protagonists. This is not to say that readers will not be able to recognize themselves in Minnie and her story, but it is important to point out that the time line can change the impression that many readers get from the story.

When the victim seduces the perpetrator

As discussed above, a typical protagonist in young adult realistic fiction is often an outsider, like Melinda and Charlie. Minnie also finds herself outside of the normal cliques found in any high school. However, unlike both Minnie and Charlie whose lives are centered and mostly lived through and in high school, Minnie barely goes to school and most of her life happens outside of school on the streets of San Francisco. The format of the three novels is also similar. *Speak* is divided into chapters in accordance with Melinda's report cards, Charlie's letters are dated and separated by school breaks, and both novels are confined within a school year. *Diary of a Teenage Girl*, in comparison, starts in the middle of the school year just as she has started a new school and, because of Minnie's lack of participation, barely mentions breaks. Minnie mostly references school as something she does not like, even if she knows that she should. "I hate The Urban School. [...] I don't have any friends there and the teachers barely know who I am. It's an (alternative) school, a rich hippie school" (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 27) Like Melinda and Charlie, Minnie is also an outsider. But while Melinda and Charlie start their first year of school completely alone without friends, Minnie has at least one very close friend. She has been welcomed to school by her classmates, but she is reluctant to get to know them. In contrast to both Melinda and Charlie, her status as an outsider comes not from her peers keeping her outside, but from herself and her inability to connect with the other students. Minnie's reluctance to get to know her new peers, and her judgement towards them is more about her own insecurities than about her peers. Because of her unstable home life and history of moving and changing schools, Minnie would rather keep a distance between herself and those whom she judges as boring or normal.

Minnie's predilection for friends and acquaintances outside of the norm are part of what gets her into such trouble. Most of the people she connects with are either older than her or her same age but with the same knack for getting into trouble. Most of them have had similar or worse upbringings than Minnie, with lack of parental supervision, drug abuse and early sexual relationships, often with older men. Minnie and her friends end up spending most of their time on Polk St., which is depicted as a place full of drug users, sex workers and generally all those who fall outside of society's concept of normal. Because of Minnie's relationship to the street and those who live and work there, she ends up depicting the outsiders of society, not only in high school. Through Minnie's descriptions and drawings of them Gloeckner shows us the underbelly of San Francisco, but she also shows us that some of those who live there are caring and good people- who do not deserve to be judged badly.

Because Minnie is so upfront with her relationship with Monroe, and it is the main focus of her diary, the novel does not have the same aspect of trying to recognize symptoms of trauma as in *Speak* and *Perks of Being a Wallflower*. In these other novels, the authors and the protagonists were often dealing with a trauma that was not made clear from the start, but the effects of the trauma were always clear, making it possible for the reader to understand or guess some of the trauma before the protagonist's actual testimony. Minnie lays it all on the page, in more ways than one, from the very start, beginning her diary with the details of the first time Monroe makes a move on her. Minnie's testimony is different because her trauma is so different from the one discussed in relation to the other two novels. For most of the novel Minnie tries to convince herself that she is in control of what is happening to her and refuses to admit the traumatic aspects of her relationship with Monroe. Rather than accepting the relationship for what it is she tries to make light of it: "There are other fish in the sea, yes, but he's the easiest and the safest" (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 27). Minnie's attitude towards Monroe and their complicated relationship makes for a complicated reading. Her ambivalence towards the trauma that is happening to her, and the way that it is portrayed through words and pictures changes the reader's role. The readers have to ask themselves questions about her reactions to the trauma and the effects that it has on her. How can she not be aware of what she is suffering through and the consequences? Why is it that even after 30 years later, Gloeckner still has a pretty ambivalent relationship to the trauma she has experienced? As she writes in the foreword to her novel:

I'd like to respond to frequent descriptions of this book as being about "trauma" or "the sexuality of the female adolescent." Again, all coyness aside, I must tell you that it is "about" nothing. At the same time, it is "about" everything. It is about being born into certain circumstances, and moving, at some point, toward independent action and consciousness of one's own desires, limitations, and capabilities. [...] It's about life (Gloeckner xvi).

Gloeckner does not want to give power to the trauma expression, and therefore denies that her novel is about trauma. However, she says it is about life, and life, more times than not, is centered around some sort of trauma. Caruth argues that rather than trauma being the language of the dead, it is the language of life fighting against death, thereby life is trauma and trauma is life (Caruth 5).

The instinct of trying to preserve some form of control, when being trapped in an uncontrollable experience, is so strong in Minnie that she also refuses to acknowledge that she has been raped and sold for drugs. "Don't you know what they did? They gave me these'

cause I let them fuck you.' I wasn't upset because I didn't believe her. I know if they had fucked me, I would have woken up" (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 262). While Minnie denies it happening, and the drawing of the incident being completely black, like Minnie's own recollection of the night, it is clearly implied that she was raped. However, in *A Child's Life* there is a whole sequence of pictures that show what happened to her (Gloeckner, *A Child's Life*, 75). The lack of representation or admittance in her diary is not about her not remembering what happened, but rather her trying to forget it. She doesn't ask any questions when she comes to after the black out and refuses to believe it when confronted about it (262). Thereby, the reader's challenge does not lay in recognizing the symptoms of sexual trauma that Minnie portrays in her diary, but in understanding and seeing it, both in text and pictures. We are given the task of witnessing her testimony, as well as trying to understand the events leading up to this year. Both the medium and Minnie's own opinions about her trauma puts different expectations on the reader. This challenge is amplified by the extreme and brutal details that Gloeckner shows in both her writing and her drawings. It is one thing to ask the readers to read a testimony of trauma. It is another to ask them to see the trauma displayed in graphic detail while reading about the emotional scars that it leaves.

Another aspect that has been discussed in regard to the other novels is the tools that the authors have used to show both the protagonists and the readers ways to recover after a sexual trauma. Showing them a way out of the darkness, whether this is through art, writing or drawing/painting, or through speaking to others or general acceptance of the trauma and dealing with the emotional and psychological implications. Minnie misses an adult, or any form of help from the community around here. This is both because of her homelife as well as the time that she lives in. The effects of trauma have just started to be studied at this time, and then in victims or veterans of war. There is no one to help Minnie, or other adolescents, to help her accept the trauma she experiences as well as the psychological effects of it. Minnie does spend some time with a therapist, but by shying away from how severely it is affecting her, or outright lying to him, makes it so that this experience is of little help to her. Even though she tells him about Monroe, he chooses not to intervene (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 221). Throughout the novel Minnie constantly tries to convince herself and those around her that she is in control and wants to keep doing what she is doing. "I think I want to love him, but I don't know if I can trust him. Is a relationship between us two so impossible?" (226). Even the times when they stop seeing each other he always manages to lure her back in.

Many adolescents have a rebellious stage, they start drinking or ditching school. By

doing this, adolescents are trying to break the rules set forth on them by adults, but also acting out against the expectations that society puts on them. These acts are highly connected to the teenager's home and emotional life. This is clearly true for Minnie who grows up in an unstable home, filled with unreliable parental figures who abuse both alcohol and drugs. Both Melinda and Charlie display rebellious behavior as well, through experimenting with drugs and alcohol, however because of their rather calm homelives, at least compared to Minnie, their rebelliousness is more likely to be a reaction to the trauma they have experienced or as attempts to find their places among their peers. Even though Minnie also uses alcohol and copious amounts of drugs, her biggest rebellious act is the sexual relationship that she has with Monroe as well as running away from home for a week, both of which are directly connected to her mother. Only a few weeks after her mother finds out about Minnie's abuse, Minnie spends a full week drunk and in a haze of drugs. "As I figure, there are two whole days I can't remember at all" (Gloeckner 264). Even though this is also connected to the ambiguous emotions that she has about Monroe it is important to note the how closely this behavior is linked to her mother, just like many other teenagers. Michael Cart notes that "the main threats to adolescents' health are the risky behaviors" but it is also the way that adolescents and teenagers define themselves (Cart 129-130). It is also through rebellion against adults and society that many adolescents find their friends and their place in society.

Minnie's rebellion shows not only her ambiguous feelings towards Monroe, or her trying to discover her own identity and sexuality, but it is also a reaction to her relationship with her mother and the example that is set for her. From a very young age Minnie becomes aware of her body as a sexual object, which is made clear to her by her stepfather. The act of sexualizing a young child's body is supported by her mother's own statements and beaten down self-worth, as we can see in "An object-lesson in Bitter Fruit" in *A Child's Life* (Gloeckner, *Child's Life*, 47-53). In these graphics we can see nine-year-old Minnie being questioned by her stepfather about her body, asking her the size of her breasts, making her aware of her body as a sexual object. Both her mother and stepfather have been drinking and laugh at her embarrassment and yell at her when she refuses to answer his inappropriate questions. Gloeckner's work opens up for the possibility of discussing the character of her mother, and why her self-esteem is so low and why she does not take her role as parent seriously. This has been remarked by several critics, but for the purpose of this analysis it is unnecessary. However, it also tells the reader a lot about where Minnie's own self-esteem comes from and the values that she has been taught. Her mother gave birth at a young age and

has been very unlucky in love, this has led to her drinking heavily and putting herself in a submissive position to her husband, both physically and psychologically. Because of her submissiveness she does not interfere when her husband is sexualizing her daughter but chooses to hide away and drown her sorrows (Gloeckner, *Child's Life*, 68). While this is all happening Minnie's, mother seems oblivious to the impact that both she, and the men she brings around, are having on her young daughters.

Growing up around these dynamics changes some of Minnie's actions from acts of a rebellious teenager, to the acts of a child who is simply following the example given to her. The ambiguity of these actions shows the many nuances of teenage behavior, and they are also similar to the psychological reactions that many victims of trauma have. Even though her mother tries to punish or correct Minnie's dangerous behavior, she takes no responsibility for her own. "He [Dr. Wollenberg] says it makes perfect sense that she wanted Monroe to marry me because she believes that then, all responsibility for what has happened would be taken off her shoulders" (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 254). Her inability to see that Minnie is affected by her actions also leads to her directly encouraging Minnie to make choices that end up hurting her. Rather than representing a rebellious teenager and outsider, Gloeckner's work shows Minnie as a teenager who is neglected by her parents and caregivers. This becomes a part of the pedagogical aspect of Gloeckner's work. Like Gillis and Simpson state: "Positive identities are shaped in nonjudgmental spaces where adolescents are encouraged to explore their identity options safely" (Gillis 4). The novel reaches out to readers whom are marginalized, and lack support and representation within the classroom setting. Like Minnie, there are many adolescents who are neglected at home and who lack a nonjudgmental space to explore their identities and figure out who they are. This includes those who are bullied at school and do not feel safe to be themselves. Through her representation of Minnie, Gloeckner shows these adolescent readers that they are not alone and that they can be who they want to be, even if this means being judged. Where the other novels encourage younger readers to seek the guidance of adults, Gloeckner reassures them that if adults let them down then they can find the strength within themselves to get through anything.

Minnie's way to recovery, in the sense that we have seen within the other novels, is grounded in her realizing that the path she is on is not good or meant for her. Because of the neglect she faces at home, the lack of support or follow up from both her school and her therapist, Minnie has to come to this realization on her own. Through Minnie who is all alone, Gloeckner shows how alone most victims of sexual trauma feel they are. When there is not a

support system in place to see the victim and help them, they are, like Minnie, left alone to deal with what has happened. Throughout the novel Minnie tries to find ways to gain back control of her life. She tries to stay away from Monroe, tries quitting drugs and using positive affirmations and letters to try to feel better about herself (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 223). Towards the end of the novel she finds the clarity to be able to find her peace with Monroe, saying mostly good bye to drugs, and decides to apply herself to school and her drawing: - “I suddenly recall something Pascal taught me years ago. I looked Monroe in the eye as I shook his hand firmly, and I thought to myself, *I’m better than you, you son-of-a-bitch*” (291). Rather than having the protagonist starting at the bottom trying to work his or her way through a problem, Gloeckner shows Minnie’s spiraling to rock bottom and then has to decide to work her way up on her own. She has to save herself, because no one else will.

The journey that Minnie goes through has many aspects that can work towards the didactic goal of the narrative. Even though Minnie has to accept her sexual trauma and all of her traumatic experiences on her own, through the medium that she uses to tell her story she is also representing the same form of therapy that Melinda and Charlie do. Melinda used the symbolism of trees as her art therapy, using different art works of trees to represent some of the emotional changes that she herself is going through after being raped. Charlie uses his letters, and the analyzation of other literary texts to improve his understanding of his own emotions. Through discovering his own emotions, he breaks through the walls of repression and discovers the sexual trauma that he experienced when he was young. Both Melinda and Charlie use written therapy and art therapy in an indirect way to deal with the trauma that they have faced. Minnie also uses written therapy and art therapy as a way of dealing with the things that have happened to her. However, she does this in a more direct way than the other two protagonists. Rather than using symbolism, or dealing with emotions first, Minnie writes honestly about her sexual experiences and draws them in a brutal and detailed way: - “He fucked both of us and he came inside of both of us and we jumped around [...] We both sucked his cock and he ate us out and we ate each other out and we all moaned and groaned” (Gloeckner, *Diary of a Teenage Girl*, 149). So even though Minnie is having a hard time admitting to herself that she has had traumatizing experiences, the trauma becomes clear through the way that she draws and writes about it. This also shines a light on the autobiographical aspect of the novel which will be discussed below. The autobiographical aspect can be found, not only in the interviews with Gloeckner, but also in her illustrations, which include a character that looks just like her. In many of the drawing sequences that can

be found in *A Child's Life*, Gloeckner starts them with a self-portrait and most of her characters have the same facial structures as herself. The first panel in “Minnie’s 3rd love or, Nightmare on Polk Street” Gloeckner has included a self-portrait of herself as an adult, drawing (Gloeckner, *Child's Life*, 70). With this Hillary Chute argues that “Gloeckner calls attention to her process of production [...] Gloeckner features the circumstances of production to remind us of the author’s creative and testimonial agency” (Chute 67-68). This coincides with the changes that Gloeckner has had to make to her autobiographical story to create a narrative. These illustrations show that even though the memories and thoughts that have inspired Gloeckner’s work she still uses her agency as an author to create her stories. From a pedagogical point of view, it gives insight into the testimony that is given in many autobiographies regarding sexual trauma, even if Gloeckner tells her story in a brutally detailed and graphic way it is the truth from her perspective. Testimonies might be given that do not coincide with historical facts, but they are still just as true for the testifier because it is their experience and thereby their truth of the event (Laud 62).

Another serious issue that the novel deals with, and which cannot be ignored since it is a novel meant for a younger audience, is the relationship that Minnie has to both drugs and alcohol. She is introduced to both of them at home, and she experiences some sort of pressure to try both. In *A Child's Life* Gloeckner uses pictures to connect Minnie’s early experience with alcohol, with her relationship with Monroe. She feels that the two experiences are weaved together through the visual memories that she has of the situations. “Making the connection between being encouraged to drink the wine and having sex with a man more than twice her age, the words underscore the immaturity of Phoebe’s point of view, as well as the impression both events made on her” (Køhlert 134). The similarity between a child being pressured into two life changing experiences by older men can be found in her writing as well as in her pictures. On the first few pages, as Minnie and Monroe’s relationship turns sexual, we can see how Minnie first thinks it is a game, not realizing the seriousness of what she is saying or doing. “I said I really mean it I really really want you to fuck me. I was laughing, and it seemed ridiculous. I didn’t even know if I was serious but it was a funny game and I was totally drunk” (Gloeckner 6).

Through her journey, both sexual and in relation with drugs and alcohol we can see that parental neglect is a big part of Minnie’s life. Even though her mother is around, she is not present or attentive of what her daughter needs, until it is too late. Gloeckner does not relay much information about her mother, other than her issues with men, alcohol and drugs.

This leads to Minnie's own confusion about men, her own self-worth and her sexuality. The neglect she faces as well as her step father sexualizing her body from a very young age, forces Minnie out of childhood: "so naturalized has the association of loss with maturation – and sexual-gender maturation in particular – become that we have perhaps lost sight of how the staging of the experience of loss operates as the externalization of embodied development itself" (Tribunella 131-132). Tribunella here shows that the sexual attention that Minnie gets at a young age has become so natural that we have forgotten how this becomes part of the loss that children go through on their way to maturity.

Even though Melinda, Minnie and Charlie all have stories of sexual trauma, and use similar ways to deal with the psychological ramifications of this trauma, there is one major factor that really sets the stories apart. Where Melinda and Charlie only have one perpetrator of the sexual assaults, Minnie has several people that rape her and sexually assault her, harass and treat her as a sexual object. Both Monroe and her stepfather, Pascal, are supposed to be her fatherly role models, but they abuse this position and take advantage of a child. Even if there is a great difference between Monroe raping Minnie and Pascal sexualizing her from a very young age they are still robbing her of her childhood. Minnie was also traded for drugs and raped while unconscious. This is not the focal point of *Diary of a Teenage Girl* but is clearly represented in *A Child's Life*. (Gloeckner, *A Child's Life* 75) This rape will be discussed further below, in regard to representations of sexual trauma and the medium she uses to represent this. There are several aspects of the rape that become an interesting representation of sexual trauma, the fact that Minnie will not admit to herself that it happened, its representation through pictures, the psychological and physical ramifications and the context in which it happened.

In many ways Gloeckner's testimony and its didactic function becomes a warning to adolescents. It is important to make clear that Minnie, or any other victim of sexual trauma, is never to blame for the things that happen to her, but by reading her story, we can also see that she has little regard for her own safety and makes reckless decisions with her life that puts her in harms way. She is manipulated by Monroe, but she is also manipulated by Tabitha, who sells Minnie for drugs. Hence, Minnie's perpetrators are multiple, but also of both genders. Minnie's story does as such upsets the ideas that readers have about consent and sex.

The language of pictures

The language of trauma that has been discussed in the previous chapters has been focused around the protagonists need to find the words to describe the trauma that they have experienced. It has also centered around how this language has been used differently within the novels and what the protagonists search for this language can teach the readers about sexual trauma, its victims and the psychological impacts of sexual trauma. The previous novels have used language, or the lack of it in written passages to show the impossibility of the language of trauma. Gloeckner does this as well, but she also complements the written language of trauma by using drawings. Kjøhlert argues that pictures of traumatic incidents are a more adequate medium, which manages to fill the void that language does not always have the words to describe. The theoretical impossibility of writing about trauma becomes less of an impossibility when the victim is able to draw what happened, from her perspective. Even though emotions can be described through words, there are few that are able to, truly, relay the way victims felt at the moment of trauma or the fear that haunts them afterwards. Kjøhlert argues that the picture format makes sense both in regard to the emotions that the author often wants to relay, as well as the power structure of a sexual attack, and the psychological effects of trauma (Kjøhlert 138).

Even though Gloeckner's illustrations add to the representation of trauma and the emotional scars that sexual trauma brings on the victim, her writing helps to show Minnie's ambiguous emotions. At the same time Minnie's writing also includes her reluctance to accept that what has happened to her is actually a trauma. In this way the illustrations and the text complement each other to give the reader the full scope of Minnie's trauma. Rather than the emotional retelling of a teenage girl who has experienced sexual assault, her diary entries are mostly full of misconceptions that she has about her relationship with Monroe as well as all the confusion that she feels. "I am full of worried, nervous, frightened energy. I just don't know. Sometimes I wish I was big and bold" (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 255). Where the text is full of declarations of love for Monroe, the drawings and some of their captions tell a different story.



Figure 1 (*A Child's Life and Other Stories* 73)

In *A Child's Life* there is a sequence of illustrations called *Minnie's 3rd Love*, in which one illustration is of a gigantic Monroe pushing a very small Minnie's head down on his cock while she is drunk and begging him to love her (Gloeckner *A Child's Life*, 73). In this sequence of drawings, and many others, Gloeckner uses the graphic scale and point of view to show the uneven power structure between them. It shows Monroe as a larger man, powering over Minnie, as well as using his physical power over her to force her into doing sexual acts. This shows clearly the unevenness in their "relationship" and makes it clear for any reader, that no matter how much Minnie might say that she is in love with Monroe, he is raping her. "The formal multimodality of the narrative in this way accentuates the thematic conflict between Minnie's feelings of being in control of her sexuality and the fact that she is an adolescent, only a few years out of childhood" (Køhlert 138). Thereby, it is through her pictures that Gloeckner makes her novel into a trauma narrative. The way that Minnie tells her story in her diary, using mature language and writing in detail about sex can make the reader forget the age difference between the two. The pictures help to remind the readers that Minnie is only a child while Monroe is a middle-aged man, leaving the power structure completely

askew. Monroe has a power over Minnie, and he uses this power to take away her freedom and misuse her sexuality to his own advantage.

As mentioned, for Køhlert the drawings that Gloeckner uses to depict Minnie's trauma might be a more suitable medium to represent trauma. He bases this argument in both trauma theory as well as theoretical aspects of graphics. He uses the collection of illustrations named "Fun things to do with little girls" as examples of how the graphic drawings show more coherence to the actual trauma experience that becomes complicated in written form because of the nature of language in the face of trauma. Where the picture can graphically show the reader how gruesome rape is, words cannot fully explain it. However, the problems connected to language in the face of trauma do not disappear when changing the medium to illustrations. This is because the main difficulty that language has is portraying something that is so horrible that the human mind has a hard time accepting it. This remains the same when drawing a sexual trauma. This is connected to the aspect of testifying and listening to a trauma. "The listener to the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma, faces a unique situation. In spite of the presence of ample documents, of searing artifacts and of fragmentary memoirs of anguish, he comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a record that has yet to be made" (Laub 57). By testifying to trauma, the testifier is actually giving life to the trauma, putting it on record. This is extremely difficult for the testifier, but it also puts a pressure on the listener who has to see the testimony for what it is, even in spite of historical facts. This is further complicated by the fact that testimony rarely gives a complete statement, in the sense that it comes from memories that have overwhelmed the victim who is trying to put them together without being able to make complete sense of it all (Felman 5). These aspects of testimony ring true in Gloeckner's work. Both through memories tying together and being drawn in the same sequence as a trauma testimony and through Gloeckner's attempt to testify to the world because the adults at the time abandoned her, she now wants justice.

In the aforementioned sequence, Gloeckner has separated the pictures and put them together in seemingly random order. But as the reader truly looks at the pictures and the text connected to each of them, we see that the pictures are actually put together in the same sequence as Gloeckner or Minnie remembers them. She is connecting her memories of a previous traumatic experience to the trauma of her sexual relationship with Monroe. This happens in the same way that trauma victims often explain their own flashbacks (Herman 37). Herman shows how those with post-traumatic stress disorder have an elevated "baseline"

level of attention that leads to triggers or flashbacks. “They also have an extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event” (Herman 36). The flashbacks often include images, feelings or smells that connect to memories and come back when triggered, and they do not necessarily occur in chronological or even logical order. This can, for example, be seen in *Speak* and the way that Melinda deals with her own flashbacks, that can come even from the smell of an apple. Minnie’s memories therefore become connected as she sees two men, using their size and physical strength to force a child into something they do not want to do (Gloeckner, *Child’s Life*, 67-68). Using the scale of the picture and Minnie’s point of view to show the reader exactly how traumatic this experience was for Minnie is something that becomes impossible for text alone. Art, in the form of paintings, drawings or sculptures has been mentioned earlier as a form of therapy for trauma survivors. In this way both Gloeckner as an author as well as her protagonist use art as therapy by drawing and writing their memories as well as trying to escape from reality.

The drawings and pictures also affect the voice, especially in regard to trauma, and the different ways that Minnie writes about her trauma compared with how her drawings represent the trauma she has been through. By contrasting the text and the content of the drawings in such a blatant way, Gloeckner shows the readers the confusion and ambivalence that Minnie has about the situation. This can also be seen in Minnie’s many other sexual relationships which are depicted in the novel. Minnie tries to make sense out of her sexual trauma by putting herself in situations in which she can relive, in some sense, the trauma by having sex with random men and boys: “Traumatized people often relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions” (Herman 39). By writing about her experiences with Monroe, as well as other men, Minnie is trying to make sense out of her trauma. Minnie writes and speaks about her relationship like something she is proud of, but the use of scale and the rawness of the pictures show how she is being exploited. While Charlie has quite a bit of confusion, both in regard to his trauma and his emotions, once he discovers his trauma, both him and Melinda realize that what they have experienced is wrong and should not have happened. Minnie is so confused and desperate for the love she is missing from home, that she constantly tries to convince herself that this is the relationship she needs.

When looking at the voice and language of trauma in Gloeckner’s novels, the aspect of testimony through trauma narratives becomes an unavoidable theme. The role of testimony

and witnessing has been discussed in relation to Charlie and his letters in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. We saw that his letters worked as a testimony of his own emotional and social struggles, leading up to the discovery of the sexual trauma that he experienced at a young age. Minnie's stories work in a similar way; the role of testimony effects the way that the text is written as well as the expectations that are put on the reader. This is of particular importance in Gloeckner's texts, compared to the others discussed, because so much of her work is based on her own childhood. The categorization of the novel as autobiographical brings with it another set of expectations that are put on the reader and the way they read and experience the text. The readers thereby become witnesses, not just to fictional sexual trauma, but trauma that has actually happened to the author, and the effects of which come through in the text. Gilmore pin-points a lot of the difficulties that both the author and the readers have, when writing or reading an autobiographical work about trauma: "Survivors of trauma are urged to repeatedly testify to their trauma in an effort to create the language that will manifest and contain trauma as well as the witness who will recognize it" (Gilmore 7).

When readers are faced with real trauma, their experience of the text, and the tools they need to understand the text become integral. This is because "autobiography about trauma forces the reader to assume a position of masochism or voyeurism" (Gilmore 22). As Gloeckner herself points out, her novels make the readers look at the trauma that has happened to her, not only through the written part of the novel, but through the pictures. Chute makes clear how the medium of Gloeckner's work confuses the readers as well as implicates them as voyeurs: "We recognize the sensationalism of the event for the child; if we feel implicated in becoming ourselves voyeurs then that does not yet obviate understanding the structures of injustice: instead, it points up exactly how widespread that injustice is, how endemic and culturally threaded" (Chute 79). As Gilmore points out, readers of trauma narratives often become implicated in the trauma they are witnessing and become scared by the voyeuristic feelings that this stirs in them. This feeling is amplified in Gloeckner's work because of the detailed way that she draws Minnie's sexual trauma, as well as the way that the reader becomes both horrified and titillated by the images. Even though the text tells us about Minnie's mental state and her first emotional responses to the trauma, it is the pictures that truly portray it. These factors, as well as the scrutiny that many female authors of traumatic autobiographies meet, can be why Gloeckner is so resistant to classify her novel as an autobiography, as well as a trauma narrative (Gilmore 23).

This might also explain the reaction that Minnie has to her trauma, both at the hands of

Monroe and her other rapist. In the other two novels, both the protagonists, and most of the other characters in the story have used language to describe the trauma, and how horrible it is. While in Gloeckner's work we find a protagonist, who through her drawings show us the horrible truth about her relationship, but her words can lead the readers and herself to believe that she is a fully willing participant. Minnie refuses to look at herself, or let herself be looked at, as a victim or survivor of trauma. By refusing to acknowledge her trauma she is also refusing to become both a victim and a survivor of sexual trauma. This might be because of the way that societies often react to those who claim to have suffered through trauma: "A backlash against reports of abuse now means that the position of (victim), and the sympathy it mobilizes, is more likely to flow toward the accused rather than the accuser" (Gilmore 29). Meaning, that it is even harder for victims of trauma to come forward. Not only is the process highly emotional and hard to bear, but the victims also have to be worried about how everyone around them will react, and if others at all will believe or support them. Therefore, rather than letting herself become- or admit that she is a victim, Minnie buries her feelings. Minnie's status as a victim becomes complicated by the concept of consent in her story. Minnie gives Monroe consent to have sex with her, but since she is not of legal sexual age, is it really hers to give? She thereby becomes a voice for the victims and survivors of sexual trauma who refuse to be defined by the actions of someone else; "Those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed also risk their own credibility. To speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims" (Herman 2).

Visual representation of unspeakable acts

The complexity of Gloeckner's work shines through in how the unique aspects of her work influence all three of the categories that I have analyzed both in this and the other two novels. Gloeckner really does create ground breaking works that portray trauma both from a female perspective but also more brutally, at least graphically, than other works directed at young adult readers. This influences the reader's perception, the critical thinking they can develop from it and the didactic aspect in the representation of trauma. This happens both through the brutal graphics, the representation of psychological effects and victim portrayed. As Chute point out, "through a dialogic interplay of text and image, *Diary* exemplifies the profound horror and yet the profound confusion of sexual trauma: it offers a testimony that cannot be adequately represented in words alone. Its images are complicated by a blurring of pleasure and pain; they register how sexual trauma challenges "rational" ways of knowing" (Chute 74). Hillary Chute here argues for the validity of Gloeckner's work as one that is on the forefront of portraying trauma. Gloeckner claims this place through her talent, but also through the way she structures her illustrations from a female perspective and the way that the impact of sexual trauma can be felt through the illustrations.

Rather than being a distraction from the text or a simple illustration, it uses scale and detailed anatomy to add meaning to Minnie's diary entries. In other words, they make the reader connect with Minnie and her traumatic experiences on a different level. This is because of the scale used in her graphics, especially the scale of the penis in the most traumatic illustrations. A good example of this can be found in *A Child's Life* and a graphic that shows Minnie and her little sister catching their stepfather Pascal while he is masturbating. The picture is brutally graphic in the sense that his penis becomes the center point of the drawing because it is drawn disproportionately large (Chute 71). The scene is seen from behind the girls as they peer through the broken glass window into the bathroom. "In Gloeckner's version, the man's engaged gaze and the active, assaultive presence of his penis, which creates a sharp angle accented by the sharp angles of the broken glass, inverts the scenario: the absence becomes confrontational presence" (Chute 71-72). The scene also includes other phallic images, such as the wash cloth hanging over the sink, which according to Chute "calls attention to the predominance of phallic imagery in everyday life and also, by mirroring the stepfather's genitals with imagery of male organs that are yet flaccid, creates a visual framework that underlines the shockingness of his erection for the child viewers" (72). By calling attention to such details Gloeckner is showing how many trauma scenarios in comics

are often portrayed from the male perspective rather than the female victim (Marshall & Gilmore 109). The male gaze that usually penetrates graphic works of trauma has been turned on its head in Gloeckner's works. She chooses to make her images from the point of view of the victim, both in the literal and emotional sense (Marshall & Gilmore 108).



Figure 2 (*A Child's Life and Other Stories* 28)

By introducing the readers to both *Diary of a Teenage Girl* and *A Child's Life*, they will recognize Minnie by her appearance (Gloeckner changes the names of a her alter-egos) and learn about the most intimate details of Minnie's childhood but also how she views herself and lives, both through her own words as well as visual through representation (Chute 66). *Fun things to do with little girls* and *Minnie's 3rd love* illustrate many of Minnie's sexually traumatic moments. Through this she also chooses to face and realize her trauma that she did not take legal action while she was a teenager (Chute 80).

The victim's narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has

not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. [...] The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to – and heard – is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo* (Laub 57).

This definition of a trauma narrative shows what Gloeckner is trying to do in both *A Child's Life* and *Diary*, by expressing her trauma, and integrating it into an autobiographical trauma narrative. By expressing her trauma Gloeckner is regaining the control that was taken from her as a child.

The illustrations also change the impact that Minnie's trauma has on the reader. By actually seeing the rape happen, from Minnie's own point of view, creates a strong reaction in any reader. Gloeckner's work has “eluded calls for censorship” for its sexually graphic illustrations (Marshall & Leigh 96). It safe to say that Gloeckner's honest, detailed and brutal illustrations that represent Minnie's life and trauma is upsetting to most people. The visual image of an adult man pushing a teenage girl's head down to give him oral pleasure, including text where she is begging for him to love her while all he cares about is sex, makes a strong impression on anyone (Gloeckner *A Child's Life*, 73). Sexual content in young adult literature automatically makes the novel controversial in countries such as the U.S., where all three of the novels I have discussed have been written and published. In a country with such strong opinions about sexual content in literature intended for a younger audience, Gloeckner's work, which includes both written and graphic sexual content is bound to create strong reactions and controversy. This also effects a teacher's will and ability to use such novels in their classrooms, even if they know that adolescents could learn a lot from reading young adult literature about trauma or other powerful social questions: “The reading and discussion engaged in by the inservice teachers show clearly the self-censorship paradox. The teachers demonstrated a keen awareness of the pedagogical importance of the power literature has to engage young people in deliberate questioning, genuine dialogue, and critical reflection, yet their feelings of insecurity pressured them into opting for a less provocative piece” (Freedman, and Johnson 358). This has also been discussed in relation to the other novels that I have analyzed, but Gloeckner's work becomes much more controversial and is thereby not an easy choice for teachers. This controversy comes both from Gloeckner's explicit drawings, but also from the lack of positive adult influence and the way that Minnie feels about her attacker. Even if the readers can learn a great deal form Minnie's story, both about trauma and about literature, this becomes overshadowed by how controversial it is. By

showing that not every child has an adult to turn too Gloeckner goes against the adult perspective, often shown in young adult literature, in which adolescents need the help of adults to fix their problems. The pressures from forces outside of the classroom clearly affects what is taught inside it.

Even though the sexual trauma that happens to Minnie is the center point of the novel, her struggle to accept her trauma is also a representation of the trauma itself. As mentioned, Minnie considers herself a fully willing and equal partner in the relationship she has with Monroe. However, as shown above, no matter how much she tries to block out all her worries, she knows that it is not a relationship she should be having: “It’s hard for me to remember that he doesn’t feel the way I do. I should try to see things the way they are. But I am too often blinded by my attempts to see things as though they were about to become, at any minute, the way I wish they would be” (Gloeckner, *Diary*, 157). As Chute accurately puts it; “Minnie feels that her sanity is contingent on Monroe’s sexual attention, and, when she cannot get it, she has sex with boys her own age, at once exhilarated, fascinated and repulsed by her own sexuality and her sexualization by others” (Chute, 75). Even though Minnie realizes this towards the end of the novel, and ends the relationship, this realization and having to come to terms with the relationship as a trauma are two different things. I see Minnie’s refusal to accept her own sexual trauma not only as her not being able to see the complexity of their relationship but also as a psychological reaction to the sexual trauma that she experiences. This sexual trauma happens both within her relationship with Monroe but also at the hands of other men who take advantage, rape, and in general sexualize the body of a child. Two of Herman’s categorizations of the main psychological reactions to trauma have already been discussed in regard to Charlie and Melinda. In Gloeckner’s novel Minnie becomes a representation of the third. This happens through her reactions of denial and trying to avoid the trauma and the label of victim. Minnie becomes a representation of constriction which “reflects the numbing response of surrender” (Herman 34). This state is usually used to describe those who suffer through a traumatic experience and become frozen, stop fighting back and surrender to what is happening. Even though Minnie’s reaction is slightly different, she still accepts what happens to her without fighting back. Herman describes some reactions as: “These perceptual changes combine with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle” (Herman 42-43). This happens to many trauma victims, and maybe all of them at some point, but the way that Minnie reacts by trying to shut out everything and becoming indifferent to the

choices she makes and where these choices take her is indicative of the long-lasting effects that Herman describes. However, this also becomes a part of showing the ambivalent feelings that Minnie has as well as the type of victim that Gloeckner is portraying in her work.

Both of Gloeckner's novels represent different ways of dealing with trauma in literature. The combination of text and pictures work to complement each other, the text struggles with the language of trauma while the pictures, that clearly and directly depict the trauma, struggle to show the complexity of Minnie's emotions which is shown in the text. Her diary entries show her confusion and how complex her emotions are while the illustrations show the power dynamics and sexual trauma that Minnie both refuses and is not able to put into words. Marshall and Leigh argue that Gloeckner's way of blatantly showing the reader Minnie's sexual trauma, rather than hiding it in the gutters between illustrations or letting it be implied, shows a new and clearer way of representing trauma within the graphic novel genre. Their claim is that the leading tradition in graphic novels have been to leave rape, or other forms of sexual trauma in the space between pictures, to be assumed by the reader. Rather than portraying the actual trauma in the illustrations other artists have set up the picture scene so that the readers are led to understand that the trauma is happening but not seen (Gilmore & Marshall 97). This means putting the trauma in the gutter, both in the figurative and literal sense: "The Gloeckner case makes visible the stakes of representing girls' sexual precarity in ways that expose what the gutter seeks to contain" (Gilmore & Marshall 103). Gloeckner contrastingly puts the sexual trauma in the images, bluntly, graphically and unabashed. They argue that this promotes a feminist reading of Gloeckner's work. That the way she uses scale and anatomically correct illustrations to leave the trauma on the page, out of the gutter, and thereby fights back against the patriarchal point of view that has been used to represent trauma against women for too long (109). By putting the trauma right there in the illustrations and leaving the emotional response to the trauma in the text, Gloeckner opens up for a completely new way of representing sexual trauma, especially towards young women readers of graphic novels: "Her work is not explicit and graphic in relation to the prevalence of sexualized and violent imagery but, rather, in relation to the norm of not representing rape and incest from the girls' perspective" (108).

However, when looking at *Diary of a Teenage Girl* we see that Gloeckner has left some of the trauma that happens to Minnie out of the illustrations. Monroe raping her is represented in many illustrations, but she is also raped by one of Tabitha's drug dealers. This rape is left completely out of the illustrations. These two ways of treating similar traumas that

happen to the same protagonists contradict each other and can be seen as a counter argument to Marshall and Leigh's statement. However, this is where the autobiographical aspect of *Diary of a Teenage Girl* influences the representation. Minnie's struggles to accept that she has been raped by a stranger while she was completely unconscious also represents Gloeckner's own struggles. For most of the novel Minnie convinces herself that her relationship with Monroe is worth all the complicated emotions and confusion she gets from it. Even though she questions the relationship she seems completely unaware of the power structures at play and is in denial of how very wrong their "relationship" is. By the end of the novel she has let go of Monroe and moved on while continuing to deal with the consequences. The rape that happens while she is unconscious is different because she refuses to admit to herself or others what actually has happened; she would rather leave it in the gutter between the illustrations and pretending that nothing happened. However, because it is represented through some of the illustrations in *A Child's Life*, and through Minnie's diary entries I argue that *Diary of a Teenage Girl* is Gloeckner's own way of dealing with and accepting this sexual trauma. Through both the written and graphic aspects of the novel, Gloeckner uses the same therapies that both Minnie, Charlie and Melinda come to represent. However, this depends on what aspects of the novel are actually autobiographical. Because of Gloeckner's resistance to categorize her novel, both as an autobiographical novel as well as its overbearing theme, is about trauma. This resistance makes it difficult to see the actual affects that the trauma has from an autobiographical point of view.

Minnie's perspective and what it can teach us

Through her story and illustrations, Gloeckner's story works to change perceptions of representation of trauma as well as the (classical) victim of trauma. She does this by changing the point of view in her illustrations, showing how the emotional response to sexual trauma can be ambiguous for the victim. Minnie's relation to Monroe makes their sexual affair different to the stories of the other protagonists that I have analyzed. He has been one of her father figures and she becomes reliant on his sexual attention to feel good about herself and feel sane. However, this acts as a high, and only lasts for a little while. When she does not get his attention, or when she thinks about what she has done her emotions start to crash around her, to which her response to it is to do drugs or bury her feelings in meaningless sexual encounters. The behavior that Minnie shows and the emotions that she describes in her diary entries are indicative both of her struggles but not all of them are connected to her trauma. Feeling lost, unloved and confused as her body changes are feelings that most adolescents have as they transition from being children to teenagers. This connects to the didactic message that Gloeckner wants to give through her works. She wants to show those adolescents that are neglected by their caregivers that it is possible for them to break free from their situation and that they have the strength to make their own decisions, but also that they have to be careful and that they are not invincible.

Feeling unloved and lonely, even in the family home is also a common feeling for many teenagers. Minnie's complicated relationship with her mother is in part to blame for her relationship with Monroe, but mostly for Minnie's drug and alcohol problems. Minnie is far from the only adolescent who is exposed to misuse of such substances in her own home or the only one that experiences physical or emotional neglect from their parents. Gloeckner's blunt retelling of how it was to grow up feeling completely alone, both at home and otherwise because of an evolving sexuality that confuses her connects Minnie to many adolescent readers who face the same issues. Even though her story is an autobiography and, as Chute puts it, "a gift to Minnie from her future self," it is also for those who find themselves in similar circumstances (Chute 87). Gloeckner herself does not put great emphasis on the didactic purposes of her work, but as I see it, it still has great didactic value. It does not follow the norm in the sense that it tries to teach adolescent readers what adults think they should do to work through these issues, rather it upsets this power structure as it strives to show adolescent mistakes that can be made and the consequences of these. Minnie's circumstances and her reaction to it, either through acting out both with alcohol, drugs or sexual encounters,

become indicative of the psychological impact that her sexual trauma has on her psyche. It is through this behavior that we can see the effects, just like Melinda's silence or Charlie's social awkwardness. Just as Gloeckner as an adult, rebels against the norms of representing trauma, so does Minnie rebel against socially accepted behaviors in an attempt to find solace from her emotional struggles.

Both Anderson and Chbosky struggle to use language to depict the trauma of their protagonist, and thereby struggle against the conception that language cannot depict trauma in its full impact. Gloeckner, on the other hand, uses both language and graphics to depict the trauma of her youth. Through graphic and text, the trauma narrative clearly shines through, where Minnie is not able to write down how traumatic her sexual experiences are, she draws, and where the graphic cannot put into words her emotional response, she writes in her diary. Previously we have seen Melinda struggle to find her voice, Minnie's voice on the other hand shows a young girl who is desperate for love, but also trying to be strong while looking for it in all the wrong places. Even if the text shows that Minnie struggles with her relationship with Monroe, and often doubts it, she refuses to admit how damaging it is for her psyche. Minnie's attempt at being strong and trying to make it seem like her relationship does not affect her, as it can be seen when she discusses it with her friend, rather shows off the ambiguity of her emotions. At some level the relationship both titillates and repulses her (Chute 74). These conflicting emotions bring forth a new type nuance to the victim represented in the previous novels. Melinda shows clear resistance towards her attacker, during both attacks, while Charlie is too young to realize what is happening to him when he is molested. Minnie contradicts these victim types by being both drawn to her attacker while wanting to escape him.

This representation of ambiguous emotions is mimicked in both the representation of trauma in the novel as well as the impact that it has on the reader. Because the graphic representation of trauma in the novel is so direct and shows all the gruesome sexual and anatomical details of what happens it evokes a strong reaction in the reader. Gloeckner's work has been criticized and called pornographic because of these details, and even been banned entry into France (Chute 77). This is also highly connected to the emotional responses of readers and how the graphic content puts a larger emphasis on the voyeuristic role that readers of trauma narratives often get. The pictures, some of them framed by looking through windows, forces the readers to become voyeurs of a sexual trauma, a trauma that both titillates and appalls them. The reader therefore has to analyze their own reactions to

Gloeckner's work in the same way that they have to analyze Minnie's.

Gloeckner's work and the differences that can be found compared to the other novels analyzed here rounds off my argument because of its new perspective. In the same way that the young adult literature genre is constantly changing and pushing boundaries so is Gloeckner and other authors who try to represent trauma and how detrimental it can be for the victims of it. This knowledge is important to pass on to the younger readers because many of them might already be victims or might encounter victims of trauma at a point in their lives. This reason is why both teaching and speaking about trauma with adolescents is so important. Gloeckner's works testifies to a terrible trauma, and even though this trauma was also testified to when she was young, thereby coming into existence, but the act of testifying is not recognized, and the trauma is ignored. The work she creates as an adult testifies on a larger level and to an unknown witness/reader to regain ownership of the trauma. Even though many critics may chastise Gloeckner's work for being too graphic it is this aspect that makes it so important. Even though the other novels represent trauma, none of them do it as directly as Gloeckner.

Conclusion

Through this thesis I have strived to legitimate the young adult literature genre, both as a genre to be taught in the classroom, but also as a genre that depicts sexual trauma with the seriousness that the subject demands. By using three well known young adult novels, that have also been adapted into movies, I have tried to show the didactic aspects that the authors use, how they coincide with trauma theory and how their representation as a trauma narrative can be used to teach adolescent readers about sexual trauma through critical reading and discussion in the classroom. When writing about prize winning young adult literature novels Cart states that: “These books are not only timely in speaking with relevance to the lives of their contemporary readers but also timeless in the universality to their art and in their ability to expand meaning of the word *excellence* as applied to young adult literature” (Cart 78). I have argued that the novels analyzed in this thesis work in the same way, and work towards giving the genre the accolades that it deserves but does not get, especially among many literary critics.

Throughout the thesis I have shown a handful of critics who have read and analyzed these young adult novels just as they would any other genre, however there are also many who attack these novels and even the genre as a whole. “Attacks on YA book are nothing new. For more than a century there have been vocal parents, teachers, and librarians who have attacked books written specifically for teenagers” (Crowe 146). This quote is taken from an article where Chris Crowe makes clear the problems that young adult literature faces, both from critics outside of the genre as well as the problems within the genre itself. The main concern of those who attack the genre is that the novels are not considered classic, therefore should not be taught in the classroom, and that they corrupt the minds of adolescents, therefore they should not be read (Crowe 146). Much of this is due to the fact that many think the novels that deal with more serious subjects, like the ones that I have dealt with here, should not and do not need to be taught to younger readers. In some sense they are right, there are those readers who are not ready to become witnesses to trauma but, as Crowe points out, “Some kids, however, are mature enough, smart enough, and thoughtful enough to read these classic and YA dark tales and benefit from the experience. It’s up to parents, librarians and English teachers to know books and to steer young readers to the literature” (Crowe 149). However, the steering that Crowe mentions need to happen throughout the reading experience. The sexual trauma dealt with in these novels needs to be discussed while reading

the novels. Hence teaching them in a setting with a teacher to steer them towards understanding the complex emotions that are portrayed and can come from reading them.

To show the connection between the three novels analyzed above and trauma theory I have looked at the way the authors have displayed symptoms of PTSD. The psychological way that the trauma has affected the victim as well as the different solutions that authors have portrayed, which ties together with the authors didactic message. The way that the authors have used language or other mediums too discuss the role of testifying, witnessing and the struggles that language often face when dealing with trauma. Finally, I have looked at how trauma and adolescents are represented. When it comes to representations of trauma I have looked at how directly the authors portray the trauma, whether it be through detailed descriptions or through the eyes of the protagonist or victim.

Out of the three novels it is clear that *Speak* has the clearest didactic message. This happens through Melinda's clearly recognizable symptoms, the way that Anderson chooses to portray these and finally through Melinda finding her own voice and seeking council from an adult. By showing the younger readers that adult council is the best way to deal with a situation, Anderson is steering them in the direction that most adults feel comfortable with. The point still remains that students who read *Speak* as a critical text usually take the lesson of speaking out in the face of injustice, not that turning to adults is the only option (Jackett 104). However, Anderson does not only appeal to the sensibility of adults, put also strives to show a teenager who tries to find her own way to deal with the psychological affects of her trauma experience. Even though Melinda turns to an adult at the end, she does a great deal of recovering over her own before she is able to stand up to her attacker and turn to an adult for continued help. The narrative structure that Anderson chooses gives the reader insight into her protagonist's thoughts, but also show the delicate power dynamics between adult authors of young adult literature and the audience that they are writing for. While the authors need to write in the narrative voice of a teenager they also have to be careful not to impose too many adult opinions on their protagonists. Anderson focuses on representing trauma through the experiences that Melinda has. Flashbacks tell the readers about the actual trauma, but rather than explaining all the gruesome details Anderson chooses to represent the trauma through the thoughts of Melinda as she is being raped, something that is equally as gruesome.

Chbosky's novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is the most well-known of the three and was adapted into a hit movie in 2012. However, in spite of its popularity and acclaim the novel has also been subjected to scrutiny because of its incestuous subject. Even though

Charlie's traumatic experience is not revealed to the readers until the very end of the novel, trauma can be found throughout. By including so many different types of trauma and other issues that adolescents face Chbosky shows his didactic message as well as it gives the readers opportunities to connect to other characters than the protagonist. Charlie's sexual trauma has affected his social and emotional development, which in part makes him an outsider, therefore it might be harder for readers to connect to him than to other characters portrayed in the novel. Charlie uses writing to break down his emotional walls and find the place he needs to be for his repression to lift. This process gives the readers a unique look into the thoughts and emotions of someone who is struggling to fit in and to understand the world and people around them. The reflection of emotional confusion that can be found throughout the narrative can mirror the emotions that many adolescents feel as they strive to find their place in an adult world. Chbosky chooses to mix the bildungsroman with epistolary to highlight the readers position as a witness to Charlie's testimony through his letters and the events described in them. Because of the epistolary format, the readers become witnesses to Charlie's testimony and he puts expectations on them from the very beginning. When it comes to the representation of trauma in the novel Chbosky deals with it directly when it comes to other characters and stories that Charlie describes, but in regard to his own trauma the reader only gets to know what they need to in order to understand that he was subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of his aunt. This makes sense, narratively speaking, because of the emotional trauma that Charlie has been through he is unlikely to disclose all the details to an unknown reader but it can also be a choice made by the author because of how taboo incest is in society. Chbosky's work separates itself from many incest narratives by using a male victim and a female sexual predator.

These two novels are similar in their didactic aspects and the representation of trauma and follow the general opinion that issues such as sexual trauma are too complicated for adolescents to deal with on their own, they there must seek out adults whom they can trust. In the final novel analyzed in this thesis the author has turned these conceptions of adults helping adolescents on its head. Gloeckner's autobiographical work depicts a young girl who is seriously traumatized by her upbringing which leads her to having a sexual relationship with her mother's boyfriend. The adults in Gloeckner's work seem to be working against her protagonist, making her life worse as she continues to struggle with the conflicting emotions about her trauma, her sexuality and her life. Throughout Minnie's stories, both in *Diary of a Teenage Girl* and in *A Child's Life and Other Stories* Gloeckner shows a new way of

representing trauma to adolescent readers. By questioning the established norms through twisting the terms of consent and the ambiguous emotions that her protagonist has towards her attacker Gloeckner gives us a new view of trauma and how truly complicated it can be. Gloeckner also separates herself from the traditional ways of representing trauma by using graphics and a feminist point of view, rather than a patriarchal point of view. She also brings the sexual trauma out of the gutter space between pictures where other artists have put the actual sexual trauma. Gloeckner puts all the details on the page, from the adult man looking leeringly at Minnie, to Monroe raping her or pushing her head down on his penis. She also manipulates the scale to show the power differences between young Minnie and the adult men, as well as emphasizing the size of their genitalia to show the shock value and the impact that it has on a young girl's mind. The way that the narrative represents trauma so directly, while showing the multitude of emotional reactions that the protagonist has to trauma is completely different from the previous two novels, but also different than the norm. Gloeckner stands at the forefront of finding new ways to represent trauma to give justice to the victims of trauma who have lacked proper representation for far too long. Through my analysis I have seen how difficult it is for language to represent the unreal reality of sexual trauma, but in Gloeckner's work I have found that comics might be the most suitable medium. However, even though the illustrated work is able to directly represent the trauma, the text is needed to supply the readers with information about emotional response that Minnie has to her trauma.

As mentioned young adult literature has many critics, but there are also many who argue for the benefits that adolescent readers can get from reading the genre. Specifically, in a classroom setting where they are taught to read these novels critically, like they would with classical literature. The importance of literature is also an important aspect of the novels that I have analyzed, both *Charlie* and *Minnie* are inspired by authors or graphic artists and use this to help them through their trauma. This shows that young adult literature can help younger readers think more critically about what they read, but it also improves their literacy, making it more likely for them to continue reading throughout their lives. The hope is that: "Perhaps literary study can change the way that adolescents relate to others and approach their life experiences" (Tristes, quoting Alsup, 11). This is only one of the positive effects that young adult literature can have on their readers, and through this thesis I have strived to show others. To show how sexual trauma needs to be spoken about with adolescents, and that by reading about it in a literature genre that they can easier connect with makes it easier for them to

understand. Unfortunately, we live in a world where adolescents are often victims of sexual abuse, therefore they need to learn about it and its psychological effects. Tribunella has argued that exposing children to trauma is a part of their maturation, and the findings in my analysis have reached the same conclusion. However, this does sound like a harsh reality check for children or adolescents who have been protected from these issues, but what is more important are the adolescents who have experienced trauma who feel completely alone and need the understanding from their peers. By exposing adolescents to these novels, they can teach them to identify abuse, deal with it or avoid it from happening.

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