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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the representation of trauma in Eimear McBride's 2013 novel *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing.* Since its publication, the academic interest in *Girl* has continued to grow, with *Girl* almost exclusively being interpreted in light of the author's apparent modernist and Joycean influence. However, recent scholarship has moved the discussion towards the necessary readings of the novel in the context of contemporary girlhood and representations of trauma. The academic discussion of girlhood and trauma focuses primarily on the social and historical context of the text and, indeed, the workings of the author's stylistic choices; yet I would argue that further discussion is needed on how the narrative, narration, and the narrator works to represent trauma and its effects. This thesis, therefore, argues that the discussion needs to look beyond its apparent connection to modernism and the assessment of the intention of the author in order to analyze how the text is engaging in the representation of trauma. For this to happen, this thesis will concentrate on the workings of the novel's narrative, narration, and its narrator through a theoretically informed close reading and critical assessment of three key scenes from the novel. Literary Trauma Theory will provide the necessary critical framework for the analysis of trauma and its representation. Extensive attention will be given to the narrative by focusing on the narration's focalization, the structure and form of the narrator's language, and some of the keywords within the narrative. Ultimately, this informed analysis shows that not only does the narration reveal what is occurring in the narrative through its representation of trauma and traumatic events, but also that trauma also manifests itself in the very structure and form of the narration.

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1 Introduction

Trauma, traumatic events, and the effects of trauma have been studied and analyzed for years by medical professionals. As a global issue, the study of trauma has also become one of the focal points for the interdisciplinary field of Literary Trauma Theory; wherein scholars started to focus on the representation of trauma both within fictional and non-fictional works. Because the focus within the theory rested on the representation of trauma as opposed to the instigating factor of trauma, scholars started to critically assess how and in what way authors (and people) were able to write about trauma in a way that would accurately emulate the effects of trauma in a narrative's language as it was evident that trauma affected human cognition and memory formation. However, contemporary followers of the theory have also started to move the discussion about the representation of trauma in a new direction where they study the representation of trauma by looking deeper into the process of meaning-making. Furthermore, contemporary literary trauma scholars also highlighted that the ongoing discussion seemed to have forgotten to include some distinct voices, especially those belonging to women. As such, a gap in the academic assessment regarding the representation of trauma has been allowed to develop, something which contemporary literary trauma scholars seek to rectify. In this thesis, I will be critically analyzing the representation of trauma in Eimear McBride's novel *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) by exploring the workings of the novel's narrative, narration, and narrator in representing such trauma. However, I will not be assessing the entire novel but instead offer a critical assessment of three key scenes from parts two, four, and five of the text. This is because McBride has written a thoroughly demanding novel that would be too long to assess in its entirety. In an assessment of the three key scenes, particular attention will be given to how and in what way the novel is actively engaging with trauma both from a level of content and on a level of discourse. To that extent, such analysis requires me to look into what contemporary Literary Trauma theorists are currently discussing regarding trauma and its representation in literature, as it will serve as a theoretical framework for my critical assessment of the representation of trauma within the three key scenes from the novel.

The current discussion of the novel, often abbreviated to just *Girl*, focuses primarily on *Girl*'s narrative and narrator. Here, key scholars highlight McBride's experimental narrative form, its function, and how the narrative engages the reader with its controversial and experimental application of language. However, there is a gap in the ongoing discussion

revolving around *Girl* as it is primarily focused on what the novel is doing instead of how the narrative, narration, and narrator are representing trauma and its effects. Through her traumatized and unnamed narrator, McBride has presented readers with a narrative and a narration that challenges conventional narrative form by blending and obscuring literary boundaries enforced by literary heritage, which controls how a novel's form and language should be presented in order to meet narrative expectations. Instead, McBride's experimental narrative style does something unexpected in its representation of trauma. It gives the impression that the effects of trauma can only be understood if it is relayed in an equally traumatizing way. Could it be possible to claim that the form and structure of the narrative and its narration are as crucial as the novel's content when discussing the representation of trauma? Additionally, could it be true that the language of the narration can emulate the effects of trauma within its very structure, and if so, how does trauma affect the language? Is it possible that the novel, in its representation of trauma, addresses specific contemporary issues that need particular attention, especially within an Irish context?

It is apparent that the novel is relevant as an academic discussion has already established itself amongst a growing community of *Girl* scholars. Still, the novel has not yet gained the traction it deserves. I intend to add to the conversation as there is more to McBride and her novel than first meets the eye, which needs to be recognized by the academic community and my fellow readers. By considering what other key *Girl* scholars have contributed to the discussion about the novel's narrative, narration, and narrator, I seek to move the discussion along by looking for various ways that the text is alluding to a form of trauma representation. By connecting the teachings of Literary Trauma Theory to *Girl* and its narrative, narration, and narrator, it is apparent that there is a need to discuss how and in what way the text itself can represent trauma in its peculiar presentation and form.

In this thesis's first chapter, I will present what others have already contributed to the ongoing discussion regarding the novel. It will provide the reader with a review of what is currently being discussed amongst key *Girl* scholars about the novel's narrative, narration, and narrator. This chapter consists of a comprehensive review of articles written by a variety of *Girl* scholars such as Susan Cahill, Gina Wisker, and Aran Ward Sell, to name a few. It will present critical arguments currently being raised regarding the novel's narrative, narration, and narrator. To that extent, this section will focus on arguments raised about how there has been a shift within Irish authors' approach to representing trauma in their narratives. It will look at arguments about how the reader is subjected to an immersion into the novel and its stream of consciousness style. Furthermore, it will assess why it is essential to have

contextual knowledge about the novel's narrative content and the narration's strong theatrical connection, wherein the language of the narration possesses this ability to allude to something more in its spelling and presentation beyond what it says. It will unveil arguments about the narrative's ability to present a narrator who is trapped in a borderline position between the here and the there. It will also look at arguments regarding the narrator's approach to language and how her control of language can be seen as a reflection of her grasp on what it means to be a woman and her own identity. At the end of the extensive review, this section will look at arguments regarding multiple invasions the narrator is subjected to, both internally and externally, not just because of trauma but also due to other characters in the book. Although the current academic discussion around *Girl* is not focused on the representation of trauma per se, it is vital for my assessment and discussion to possess a general knowledge about what is currently being discussed.

Chapter two is primarily devoted to setting up an additional framework for my discussion regarding trauma and its representation in *Girl*. The first half of this chapter, sections 3.1-3.2., concerns itself with the workings of a narrative, the form of the narration, and the importance of a narrator by embedding the opinions of scholars such as Jonathan Culler, Susana Onega, José Angel García Landa, and H. Porter Abbott respectively. From sections 3.3-3.6, the second half of this chapter will start with a brief introduction to literary trauma theory before moving on to a short assertation of what trauma is. Then it will turn to explore what a key literary trauma scholar such as Joshua Pederson argues about the importance of language and memory for the representation of trauma in a novel's narrative, narration, and narrator. Furthermore, it will also consider what scholars such as Marinella Rodi-Risberg and others claim about the limitations of the theory, with its apparent apprehension to conventions and gender bias, as it can provide insight into why McBride might have chosen a particular narrator to relay the content of the narrative through its peculiar and experimental narration. Literary Trauma Theory has evolved since its inception in the mid-1990s, which can prove to be vital for my critical assessment and discussion of the representation of trauma as trauma and its effects might be actively engaging within a narrative through its narration by its narrator. The important framework Literary Trauma Theory provides for my assessment of the representation of trauma within *Girl* cannot be stressed enough as it leaves room to study trauma and its representation beyond the traumatic event itself.

The third chapter will focus on the analysis of the representation of trauma within McBride's *Girl* and put forward my arguments regarding the representation of trauma in the

novel's narrative, narration, and the narrator. It will contain the analysis of the representation of trauma from three particular scenes from parts two, four, and five of the novel, where extensive focus will be directed towards the narrative, narration, and the narrator. In the assessment, we will focus on the narration's focalization, the structure and form of the narrator's language, and some of the keywords repeated in the narrative. These focal points are relevant for the consideration of the representation of trauma because it is essential to analyze how and in what way trauma affects the focalization and the language both as a present and as a past condition. As for the keywords, we will be analyzing if there is a development or degradation of the structure and form of the words as time pass and after the narrator has been subjected to more trauma. The study will certainly focus on the traumatic events in the narrative overall, but the primary focus is on how and in what way trauma is being represented.

This thesis will conclude with an assessment of the overall findings concerning the representation of trauma within the narrative, narration, and narrator of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. Two very essential points arose as I critically assessed my findings; the novel, it seems, is able to represent trauma both on a level of content and on a level of discourse, something which is very interesting as scholars seemed to center their discussion around one over the other. Through my analysis, it became apparent that one cannot survive without the other. Therefore, they need to possess an equal room in a discussion regarding the representation of trauma in *Girl*'s narrative, narration, and narrator. It became apparent that the representation of trauma can be traced both through the novel's overall content as well as through the Girl's language, as trauma immerses and places itself within the composition of the sentences and the structure of the words. Furthermore, it seems possible to claim that the novel's overhanging context is important to keep in mind while reading. However, on a level of content, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely where the narrative is set as the contextual details are far and in between, almost invisible for the inattentive reader, but they are there. Of course, the study has shown a need to assess the novel's representation of trauma further, but there are limits to what one study such as this one can show alone. However, it can serve as a contribution to the ongoing discussion regarding *Girl*, its narrative, narration, and narrator in its representation of trauma.

1.1 Introducing *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*

Often referred to as a coming-of-age novel, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) follows the life of an unnamed female narrator. The novel starts while the narrator is still confined within the safety of her mother's womb, where she observes life through a thin veil of separation. From there, the reader follows her journey through birth, childhood, adolescence, and early womanhood. On one level, the narrative depicts a rather ordinary life as it displays her interaction with her family, going to school, growing up, and forming friendships. However, the narrative also explores the more insidious sides of life as it is filled with topics that do not correlate to a happy childhood: abandonment, illness, emotional and sexual abuse, and even death.

In *Girl*, the reader is exposed to a narrator living with her authoritative, religious, and pious mother along and an older brother who is, unfortunately, suffering from a brain tumor. The siblings quickly form a seemingly unbreakable bond, supporting one another through their mother's unstable nature. Their father, although present at the beginning of her life, quickly abandons his family without a solid explanation as to why he chooses to do so. After their father leaves, their mother becomes more and more resentful of her life, often blaming her situation on her children. Her inability to face her own shortcomings often results in both physical and emotional abuse directed toward both the girl and the boy. However, because of her brother's gender and illness, the abuse is mainly aimed at the girl. The mother idolizes her son, often giving him clemency if he does not meet her expectations. On the other hand, Girl is repeatedly punished and gas-lighted, even if she excels at school and tries her best to live up to her mother's expectations. Out of this, Girl seems to develop a fragmented view of what it means to be a girl. Her mother often rules with an iron fist, guided mainly by the teaching of the Catholic Church where girls and women should aspire to be pious, devoted, and virginal. Socio-cultural norms also operate in a way that oppresses what it means to be a girl, hindering Girl from coming to terms with her own identity. She knows that she is something other than her brother based on her gender, but what this other is apart from gender is something she cannot fully comprehend.

At a young age, probably around puberty, Girl is sexually assaulted by her uncle in her childhood home. This event furthers her dislocation from her sense of self and identity. It puts her in a vulnerable position where it is possible that a girl can be something other than the image of the Virgin Mary. After this initial event, Girl realizes that she can use her sexuality as a form of power over men, but her approach to sex and sexuality also leads her down a path

of self-destruction. As she gets older, she often engages in anonymous, violent sex spurred on by alcohol as a way to escape both her inner life and circumstances that seem too overwhelming for her comprehension. Whenever Girl tries to break free of her oppressors, something more traumatic happens to her or to someone she loves. This leaves her unable to escape from the vicious cycle of life she is trapped in and destroys any effort she has put into forming her sense of self.

At the end of the novel, her brother's brain tumor reappears, and it is deemed inoperable. For Girl, who can understand the gravity of the situation, the thought of losing her only connection to something good sends her spiraling out of control. She encounters a man who rapes her and ridicules her in the aftermath, while her mother lashes out at her daughter, telling her that she has only herself to blame and that she is selfish. The emotional onslaught Girl experiences prove to be too much for her, and when her brother succumbs to his illness, the Girl implodes. In the end, Girl sees no other escape and decides that the only way for her to be free is to seek out something so pure that she will be able to be with her brother in the afterlife. As such, the novel ends with her apparent suicide.

A Girl is a Half-formed Thing (2013) is the debut novel of Irish novelist Eimear McBride. Although the novel only took six months to compose, McBride struggled to find a publishing house willing to take a chance on her and the experimental novel she wanted to publish. It took nine years before *Girl* found its home at a relatively small publisher known as Galley Beggar Press. The book's first edition was published in 2013, and upon publication, it was met with both bravado and negativity amongst critics and other influential people in the literary world. Critic Anne Enright mused that McBride had produced "an instant classic," while James Wood saw it as "blazingly daring" as it presented a new approach to writing and literary composition (Enright 2013; Wood 2014) as it refrained from using any form of direct character description and the language of the narrative is highly experimental in its form. However, some scholars and critics started to compare McBride's experimental writing style and *Girl* to modernist work. In particular, they claimed that McBride's work was too similar to works composed by the modernist savant James Joyce. This comparison is something that would haunt any debate regarding the novel for the years to come. Despite such comparisons, *Girl* won the inaugural 2013 Goldsmith Prize.

In 2014 the publication rights were acquired by Faber & Faber. After a revamp of the original design, *Girl* proved to be a force to be reckoned with as it went on to win numerous awards, such as the 2014 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction and the Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year. Faber & Faber also published an audiobook the same year in which the author

herself provided her voice for its listeners. Also, in 2015, award-winning director Annie Ryan adapted the novel into a play that was met with raving reviews. Since its publication, the academic interest in *Girl* has continued to grow, and *Girl* has almost exclusively been interpreted in light of the author's apparent modernist and Joycean influence. However, recent scholarship has moved the discussion towards the necessary readings of the novel in the context of contemporary girlhood and representations of trauma.

2 Chapter One: Current Discussion on the Narrative, Narration, and Narrator of *Girl*

The academic interest in Eimear McBride's experimental narrative style, the peculiar narration, and the ambiguous narrator in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing (*2013) is constantly evolving because of an ongoing, interdisciplinary discussion. Fresh perspectives and relevant arguments are constantly being raised by key literary *Girl* scholars and literary critics, who find the book intriguing yet challenging. Literary critic Anne Enright (2013) emphasized that the candid "truth-spilling, uncompromising and brilliant prose" of the novel helped make "everything about it…intense and difficult and hard-won" (Enright). Furthermore, literary critic Paige Reynolds (2014) claims that it "demands a great deal from the reader, due both to its distressing subject matter and its formal difficulty" as it "overtly poaches aspects of its content and form" because of its style (Reynolds). Put simply; *Girl* demands attention from the reader from its first page until its last with regards to its representation of trauma.

2.1 *Girl* and its narrative

Looking to Irish novels published in the twenty-first century, Kathleen Costello-Sullivan is adamant that a shift has occurred within Irish literature. In her opinion, writers have started to integrate the effects of trauma instead of simply describing trauma in their narratives. As an effect, writers are now exhibiting openness to exploration and utilization of different narrative techniques in their attempts to represent and engage with trauma. Additionally, the narrative needs to exude a sense of recovery. According to Costello-Sullivan, if the text is unable to offer a sense of recovery, it is not properly engaging with trauma and its representation. Although the representation of trauma is important, the recovery process should essentially be the essential part of the narrative since the way to overcome trauma is to speak about it, and to speak about it is to embark on a road to recovery. However, the narrative and the recovery process need support from the reader to have an effect in real life. As such, Costello-Sullivan points to the reader, their level of engagement, and their responsibilities as witnesses to another person's trauma. In the introductory section of her collection of essays, *Trauma and Recovery in the Twenty-First-Century Irish Novel* (2018), Costello-Sullivan explores how twenty-first-century authors "infuse trauma into the narrative either by integrating it

structurally or by writing it into characters' embodied selves as the physical markers of trauma," meaning that their attention is no longer on the traumatic event itself, but instead on the form of how it was presented (3). The particular shift exemplified that the way in which the trauma is being represented is just as important as why it is presented. Furthermore, the shift highlighted a missing element in Irish literature. The missing element, according to Costello-Sullivan, was a proper "metanarrative engagement with traumatic representation," which Irish authors had not taken advantage of before (3).

In the upcoming section, we will first turn our attention to Costello-Sullivan's view of recovery, then look at her assertation of the reader, their engagement, and responsibilities before turning our attention to her views of McBride's novel. Lastly, we will look at what Costello-Sullivan says about the importance of overhanging context and content when a novel aspires to speak about issues that affect today's society.

The first key issue Costello-Sullivan points out is the importance of recovery. In her view, twentieth-century Irish authors had forgotten to recognize the intricate and complex process activated in the aftermath of trauma. The same authors, Costello-Sullivan argues, had also refused to go anywhere near topics such as trauma because they were regarded to be ethically dubious. However, twenty-first-century Irish authors did not shy away from such topics as they started to utilize them as a way to spark off a movement "toward also exploring and representing the process of healing and recovery" (3). In doing so, Costello-Sullivan argues that twenty-first-century Irish authors started to bring forwards issues that had been avoided and instead started to interrogate the past to understand present conditions (3). This process is essential, particularly for Ireland and her community, as it could help them move toward a more inclusive, "open and self-reflective society" (2). If some topics are to be ignored, they will keep on living, but if they are confronted, a vital part of the recovery process is set in motion.

The second key thing that affected the shift in how trauma and the recovery process were represented was the author's engagement with the text they were writing. Costello-Sullivan called this shift " a metanarrative engagement" (3). A metanarrative or metafiction, which will be briefly explored in section 3.1., allows authors to experiment with the form of the narrative in their quest for proper representation. This means that "a metanarrative engagement" offers room for the authors to utilize different narrative techniques outside the bond of conventionality, as experimentation can lead to "its own way of creating meaning" (Costello-Sullivan 3; Onega and Landa 30). Instead of describing the event per se, Costello-Sullivan finds it particularly interesting that the metanarrative allowed authors to experiment

with “how literary representation can emulate cathartic testimony, just as it can capture the consequences and costs of personal and social trauma” (21). The closer the narrative and narration are to realism and real life, the easier it will be for the reader to “identify and reflect real social patterns and emotional consequences” of trauma which could lead to a change where the effects of trauma can be overcome both individually and collectively (21). However, authors have to engage and experiment with trauma and its representation for this to happen. Costello-Sullivan clarifies that it is not the traumatic event that is essential for and in the narrative; it is how trauma impacts the presentation of the narrative, the narration, and the narrator, and how it manifests itself in the structure of the narrative and narration. Although it goes by many names, one could argue that Costello-Sullivan’s assertion regarding trauma, its representation, and the recovery process shares similarities with Joshua Pederson’s (2018) “talking cure” (97). It is not just about what is being said but also the way it is being said, how it is presented to the reader, and that trauma comes out from seclusion by being presented to the reader. As Costello-Sullivan points out, “many twenty-first-century trauma novels enact narratively the very process of recovery that they depict” because the author has chosen a device, in this case, a narrator, to convey a story through narrating (5). This allows the speaker or speakers to at least attempt to reclaim, recover, and speak up about the injustice they have been subjected to.

“These works collapse boundaries between structure and content,” Costello-Sullivan explains, insofar that trauma is transformed into “a material object as well as the subject” (5). Trauma narratives, in this regard, offer subtle

> possibilities of redemption, resolution, and some degree of recovery from traumatic experiences by moving beyond expressing and representing trauma to a simultaneous exploration *in narrative practice* of the possibility for recovery. (5)

If a person, fictional or not, has come as far as talking about their trauma, they have already begun a journey filled with the possibility of recovery. Conventionality falls away because the stories and the way they are told might transgress the covenant of what makes a thing conventional.

A further issue Costello-Sullivan addresses in her article revolves around ownership of a narrative and the responsibility of the reader when they are presented with a text. Although it is important that the reader identifies with the narrator and might even identify with his or her story, Costello-Sullivan suggests that readers should refrain from overly identifying with

the narrator and the story they are exposed to. In her opinion, although the trauma that occurs in the narrative might be familiar, it is not the reader's trauma. The trauma and the narrative belong to the narrator and no one else. The reader might learn something from the narrative, but they cannot and should not appropriate the narrator's story. Costello-Sullivan insists that "to imply a direct correlation between the *representation* and the *experience* of trauma or recovery would be irresponsible" (20). Novels can represent trauma and its subsequent recovery in a way that shows how the narrator is able to work through his or her trauma. However, the ownership of the narration, the trauma, and the recovery process must not be appropriated by the reader. A text cannot experience trauma, but it can convey trauma to the reader. Although the reader cannot physically or mentally experience the trauma represented in a text, it can emulate how it affects the victim of the trauma. As such, the reader must understand that there is a difference between the representation of trauma and recovery and the experience of trauma and recovery.

When it comes to McBride's *Girl*, Costello-Sullivan is somewhat hesitant to view the novel as a proper contemporary metanarrative because of its apparent lack of engagement in its representation of trauma and recovery. She explains that it does not meet certain narrative expectations because it does not offer a glimmer of hope for recovery. For Costello-Sullivan, a narrative has to "[offer] a direct representation of trauma but also [go] beyond this representation to emulate a way *through* trauma by engaging with it structurally" (28). In her opinion, *Girl*

> shares … an interest in form and structure, and it certainly models the ways in which language and experience can be bound as well as an interest in the physical manifestations of trauma. (24)

Nevertheless, this is not enough. The narrative, in Costello-Sullivan's opinion, seems to fail because it "falls beyond…because it does not utilize language as a vehicle to recovery" as it only "emulate[s] the broken thought process of trauma" instead of " [emulating] the ways in which narrative can offer affective hope" in its "fractured narrative" (24). This means that Costello-Sullivan focuses more on how the narrative can form a way through the trauma. There has to be a change within the narrative, the narration, or the narrator because, without it, there is no chance for anyone to see beyond the negative. It seems that there always has to be a sense of positivism amongst all the negative, something the narrative of *Girl* is unable to do. Costello-Sullivan further drives her point home by arguing that *Girl* "focuses its energies

on re-creating the dislocations and reverberations of trauma" (24). In short, the novel is too preoccupied with "focusing on capturing trauma" instead of intertwining trauma within the narrative (22). She claims "that it…resonates more with earlier novels that exhibit a trauma-focused sensibility," which lies beyond the scope of her study (24). To this effect, Costello-Sullivan disregards the novel from her study on the premise that it lacks "self-conscious engagement with the process of narrative and recovery" (24). For her, there is no evolvement in either the narrative, the narration, or the narrator; there is no tangible hope for resolution.

Nevertheless, one might argue that Costello-Sullivan forgets to widen her understanding of what the novel is doing by not acknowledging how it is doing it. Indeed, the novel is not meeting Costello-Sullivan's perception of what hope should look like; however, she might be forgetting the complexities behind personal recovery. Key *Girl* scholar Aran Ward Sell (2020) referred to the narrative language as "a breathless flurry of pre-linguistic fragments," which does show some signs of evolvement and it also displays subtle signs of a recovery process (Sell). However, every time the narrator faces more trauma, she has to start the recovery process all over again (Sell). Recovery is not a linear process; it does not guarantee recovery or what Culler referred to as a "resolution" (85). Sell's argument aligns itself more with what scholar Gina Wisker asserts where she finds that the narrative has "no breakthrough" as it "[expresses] ways in which the girl makes and manages or fails" to recover in a society that refuses her the option to recover (Wisker 72, 57).

Lastly, Costello-Sullivan addresses the importance of the incorporation of the overhanging context within the content of a narrative. Having some preexisting knowledge of the context of a text, particularly trauma narrative, could benefit the reader. However, overhanging context is also beneficial for the author as it can be a crucial source of information, especially when authors explore issues of trauma and recovery within their novels. The context in this regard can provide a frame for the content of their texts. To that extent, contemporary Irish novelists seemed to be willing to address trauma, both past, and present, unapologetically in an attempt to "invite critical dialogue about the future," which would, if given the opportunity, lead "toward a more open and self-reflective society" (25, 2). It seems that authors of the twenty-first century possess a willingness to compose stories containing the tales of those who had been silenced and oppressed within an Irish context. This willingness, according to Costello-Sullivan, "provided a means and opportunity to engage with issues of history, memory, and loss," even if it meant that their narratives addressed particular socio-cultural and sociopolitical issues (12). Such narratives could bring forth critical ethical and moral questions which can challenge conventional history, its

narrative, and the way it has been presented to readers. Conventional history sometimes neglects to include certain aspects and perspectives, particularly if it touches on issues such as "superiority, shame, cruelty, and exclusion" because of fear and the silencing of specific groups within a community (2). To that extent, "trauma narratives…can be seen to model the kind of process" both a reader and "a survivor must pursue" to recover the past and to move forwards (19). If past transgressions are not adequately dealt with, they will linger, fester like a tumor, and grow.

It seemed that the Irish society began to see the need to reclaim what had been silenced and repressed to move forward and heal. Costello-Sullivan insists that the shift within contemporary Irish trauma narratives started to move away from inherent beliefs of the past where authors were more concerned with "focusing on capturing trauma" to turn towards focusing on the "act of representation itself and the *curative* power of representation" (22). Although the process might seem a bit perplexing, it is necessary to understand that literature and history, particularly social history, are connected. From a contemporary perspective, it is important to revisit the past to understand present conditions. People's willingness to listen, explore, find new ways of representing trauma, and not be afraid of the consequences helped authors engage with literature, trauma, and recovery differently than before. The metanarrative, in this regard, became an aid to start the process of recovery, accessing memories through active engagement in a text as a route to proper healing.

In Irish literature, especially in Irish coming-of-age novels, the representation of adolescent girls has, for generations, been subjected to limitations because of their gender. Historically, adolescent boys have been the focal point, the main character in such narratives. On the other hand, young girls and women were often assigned a secondary position, often written in as a supporting character or as an antagonist, often surrounded by negative connotations. Susan Cahill, in her article " A Girl is a Half-formed Thing?: Girlhood, Trauma, and Resistance in Post-Tiger Irish Literature" (2017), argues that contemporary novels, such as *Girl,* started to highlight the lack of diversity within the genre in the wake of the economic collapse of the Celtic Tiger during the mid-2000s. In her opinion, this novel thrust forward the issue of female representation by having an unnamed female narrator at the helm. *Girl*, she argues, "forces [the reader] to occupy [the narrator's] consciousness and embodied experience in immediate and immersive ways" because of the narrative's experimental "stream of consciousness style" (161, 159). Furthermore, the narrative effectively subjects the reader to

an “affective immersion” in which the reader, in a sense, exists within the consciousness of the Girl (158). Cahill’s two points about “affective immersion” and “stream of consciousness” are incredibly relevant for my reading of *Girl* as they both offer an alternative way to understand how the narrative is representing trauma (158,159). This means that for the upcoming sections, we will first turn our attention toward what Cahill means by “affective immersion” and then turn to her arguments about the novel’s “stream of consciousness style” (158, 159).

One of Cahill’s profound and significant arguments about *Girl* revolves around the narrative’s and the narration’s structure and form and how it subjects the reader to an “affective immersion” (158). According to her, the immersion forces the reader “to confront and inhabit the embodied experience of” McBride’s narrator, as it “plunges [the reader] directly into the consciousness, or rather, the pre-consciousness of an unnamed teenage” girl forcing the reader in a sense to become her (161, 158). With an “affective immersion,” the reader has to set aside their own emotions because it asks them to consider and understand the emotional state of the girl and the emotional state she is portraying from her perspective (158). This narrative technique can be seen as a “profoundly radical move” as it highlights the necessity to bring forward the presence and voice of a female character as the immersion is forcing the reader to transform and essentially become the girl (161). Furthermore, the immersion highlights and “makes explicit the problematics of representation” surrounding the female gender and, consequently, the narrator’s trauma (161).

Nevertheless, there is an argument raised by scholar and literary critic Paige Reynolds (2014), which goes against Cahill’s idea of the “affective immersion” (Cahill 158). Reynolds argues that even if the reader is immersed and connected to the narrator, McBride’s stylistic choice offers “ a buffer” that should “[provoke] a double consciousness of absorption and impersonality,” effectively distancing the reader from the narrator (Reynolds). In Cahill’s opinion, the narrator and the reader are intimately connected, while in Reynold’s opinion, they are not connected at all. Furthermore, Reynolds claims that McBride’s modernist influence and “form” are applied “to remind us of our alienation and distance from” the narrator since what happens in the novel is not directly physically or emotionally inflicting on the reader (Reynolds). To that extent, Reynolds explains that this barrier, this “armor” as she calls it, serves as “protection from identifying too closely with the protagonist’s abnegation” (Reynolds). What can be seen as an answer to Reynolds’ arguments, Cahill explains that the immersion eradicates any distance between the reader and the narrator since Reynolds’ metaphorical barrier, in Cahill’s opinion, is not there. For Cahill, the immersion of the reader

into the mind of the narrator makes it plain that there is no hiding, no "buffer," as Reynolds suggests (Reynolds). If there were, the barrier would only serve as another obstacle constructed to retain and undermine questions regarding the problematic nature of the visibility of the female gender and their trauma, something that, in Cahill's opinion, McBride is trying to overcome. For Cahill, the direct connection between the narrator and the reader pushes forward a movement where the "representation of girlhood" transforms "from invisible to visible," sidestepping, or rather, trying to break through the hereditary bonds formed by convention in discourses about the female gender in an Irish context (158).

The second key point that Cahill makes refers to the novel's "stream of consciousness style," which also "immerses the reader in a space of language formation that seems to exist before articulation" (159). This is critical as it "focuses explicitly on questions of articulation and representation" of the narrative language (163). According to Cahill, *Girl* and the stream of consciousness narration can be read as an "important intervention against writing away of the adolescent woman" as it highlights the suppressive nature of Irish culture and history, where women were often silenced (161). The use of this narrative mode can help "challenge dominant representations of girls," as it offers readers a direct reflection of the narrator's thoughts, emotions, and limitations through her particular approach and application of language (155). The discourse displays a "broken, staccato" employment of English syntax because it reflects and highlights the narrator's approach to language (160). Cahill furthers her point by asserting that "the narrative of A Girl remains at a fragmented pre-articulate state" because of an apparent lack of "narrative strategies available to" its narrator (160). The development of such strategies, it seems, has been retained by "the patriarchal and stifling climate she grows up in" and interrupted by "snippets of other people's conversations" (160,159). With the direct access to the narrator's thoughts and her application of language because of the "stream of consciousness style," the lack of "narrative strategies" also highlights how different she is and that she is someone who is constantly being denied room to grow and form her own agency (159, 160).

There are challenges to Cahill's view of the key role of *Girl*'s " stream of consciousness style" (159). Scholar Leszek Drong argues that the narrative "offers nothing that 'flows'- there's no 'stream'" because the narrative's "poetic quality, … ironically clashes with the brutality and triviality of some of Girl's …experiences" in its syntactical composition (4). In her article "Between Innovation and Iteration: Post-Joycean Heteroglossia in Eimear McBride's A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing" (2019), Drong argues that the text's "poetic quality" and its "clear stylistic affinities…with modernist writers" is effectively "as

close as McBride's prose gets to the representation of the 'flow' of consciousness" since the narrative's broken language is constantly interposing the 'stream' from continuing on uninterrupted (4). Even if these two scholars disagree in their analysis regarding the use of the stream of consciousness style and its linearity, the narrative does show that it has a continuing 'stream' in its composition because of its realistic quality and approach. As opposed to Drong, Cahill seems to have considered how the "stream of consciousness style" is effectively trying to capture a sense of reality, of realistic representation of a person's cognition and ability to construct sentences (159). The language presented in the narration reflects how thoughts are often just words pieced together instead of being fully formed with a clear linear trajectory which might be something Drong has not considered in her assessment of the stream of consciousness style of the narration.

Cahill identifies the importance of immersion and stream of consciousness because "these texts demand us to inhabit the consciousness of the teenage girl and to experience the effects of her damage in immediate and affective ways," which challenges not only the reader's perception of the text but can also induce further recognition and consideration of the visibility and agency of the female gender not only in Irish literary heritage but also within Irelands socio-cultural legacy (158). Cahill emphasizes that McBride's unapologetic text is "much more brutal and immediate" compared to other texts based on the same narrative style because of its unapologetically raw and realistic style (160). Although she admits that the novel's "narrative is entirely familiar" with familiar Irish themes and plot, there is something about its construction that makes it "astoundingly innovative" (159). Cahill remarks that the narrative does follow a linear construction and time pattern throughout, even if it does not specify "time and place" (159). The narrative instead leaves it up to the reader to interpret and apply their own "narrative competence" to figure out the details that might be missing (Culler 85). Furthermore, it is apparent that because of McBride's experimental use of the "stream of consciousness style" and its "affective immersion" of the reader into the consciousness, such details are unimportant (Cahill 158). In doing so, the representation of a female- and even more importantly- *how this girl* character is represented becomes the focal point of the *Girl*'s narrative.

"The narrative backbone" of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* is solidified through its unapologetic exploration of conventional themes within Irish literature such as "sex, death, family, guilt, and religion…" according to Aran Ward Sell and his 2020 article "Half-Formed

Modernism: Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing"* (Sell). These themes can arguably contribute to circumstances that drive what Culler labeled as the "events/plot" of a novel (86). From a literary perspective, these themes might be regarded as habitual and reoccurring within Irish literature as various Irish authors have explored them for generations. However, since authors such as McBride are still bringing them up in their novels, it seems that they still demand attention because of their pull towards realism. Social taboos, inequality, and trauma have this habit of always finding a way to appear however chronic they might seem. Themes such as these appear because they are still occurring in the real world, in daily life. In a novel such as McBride's *Girl*, these themes are thoroughly explored throughout the novel. To that extent, Sell suggest that the reader, in their reading of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, should possess a general knowledge regarding Irish life, i.e., the novel's overhanging context.

According to Sell, McBride's exploration of specific Irish themes in *Girl*'s narrative can expose irrevocable facts of life, especially for young Irish girls. He emphasizes McBride's narrator, whose experience and reaction to the world highlight that there is a lack of female subjectivity within the Irish community. This absence needs to be addressed because, without subjectivity, a person cannot hold any actual power. To explain why the narrator exudes a lack of subjectivity and power, Sell turns his attention toward certain Irish conventions and intragenerational beliefs that have been around for generations. As such, this section of the literature review will look into Sell's arguments about the context and connection of the novel to the real world. More precisely, it will highlight Sell's arguments regarding subjectivity, the lack of contextual details, and McBride's experimental approach to symbolism in the narrative and narration of her debut novel because it affects how trauma is being represented.

Sell's first key argument revolves around Girl and her subjectivity both within and outside the family. Subjectivity is generally regarded as something that a person is born with; however, in some cultures, subjectivity and questions regarding "subjecthood" are based on the gender the body presents to the world (Sell). This novel introduces, according to Sell, an "eponymous and unnamed Girl" who addresses her older brother (identified as the "you") from the womb of their mother (Sell). The bond between the two siblings becomes paramount for the narrative's plot, as it highlights the partial subjectivity they both possess. Her brother, who is reviled to be sick, "becomes a living parallel for the Girl's own "half-formed" status" because of his "disability (Sell). It is commonly known that tumors, particularly brain tumors such as the one the Girl's brother suffers from, can stump and obstruct a person's mental and physical development. As such, the brother can be considered to be a half-formed being,

although because of his gender, he is still recognized as an autonomous self with actual subjectivity. On the other hand, his younger sister, who does not have a life-threatening illness, is denied autonomy and "subjecthood" because of her gender (Sell). To understand why this happens, Sell argues that the reader has to understand the norms of "the deeply patriarchal Catholic society of late-twentieth-century rural Ireland," whose influence on subjectivity and autonomy was profound (Sell).

As an extension of Sell's argument, we have to briefly turn to another source for more information about the Catholic Church's influence on the Irish community. Religion, particularly Catholicism, seems to be embedded into the core of what it is to be Irish. By looking at a 2011 census, historians Colin Barr and Daithí Ó Corráin (2017) found that "84,2 per cent [of the participants] described themselves as Catholic" (76). Catholicism, they argue, should be considered as a steadfast "integral…aspect of Irish identity" (76). Although the country might seem to have become more liberal in recent years, there are some practices of the Catholic faith with its catechisms, seven sacraments, four virtues, and "the moral law," which are still regarded as pivotal for the Irish community (The Holy See). Religion, it seems, holds a particular position of authority within the community, whether it be consciously acknowledged or unconsciously accepted. This is rather evident in a book such as *Girl*, where religious beliefs seem to supersede reality, especially when it comes to gender and gender roles. Women were, and to some extent still are, regarded as secondary beings in the world. Certain religious scriptures and teachings, such as the creation of Eve, seem to suggest that women are to be regarded as inferior to men since they were created by God *for* the man *of* the man's body (The Holy See). However, it should be noted that there are varying opinions regarding the female origin story, although, as history has proven, women have been regarded as inferior to men. Additionally, the Biblical story of the downfall of man has also served as a reminder of why women are regarded as inferior to men. For centuries women have been vilified because scripture brands Eve responsible for luring the seemingly innocent Adam to go against the word of God and take a bite of the forbidden fruit. In this case, Adam seems to be without free will; he was in a way 'forced' to take a bite of the fruit by Eve, thereby bringing about their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The role of Eve in the downfall of man is imperative for the Catholic Church's view of women: women are temptresses and need guidance from men to stay proper and virtuous. Furthermore, the Catholic Church enhances the dividing role of women through its narrative about Mary Magdalene, the whore, and The Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ. In an Irish context and the context of *Girl*, female

subjectivity is a minefield, according to Sell, as inherent beliefs guide it. Girl herself is not regarded as a fully formed self because of the context surrounding her gender.

Another way to investigate Girl's subjectivity is to look at the form of the narration. According to Sell, this

> jagged stream of consciousness prose combines splinters of plot summary…with a breathless flurry of pre-linguistic fragments, communicating both the content and the nature of the Girl's distress. (Sell)

Other scholars, such as Cahill and Wisker, discussed the use of stream of consciousness in *Girl* by investigating how it affects the reader and how it effectively reveals the narrator's brokenness. Sell argues that the "stream of consciousness" expressed in *Girl* creates a "hybrid style" brought on by a combination of both realism and modernism, where the text is doing two things; it is conveying content, but it is also conveying the essence of the girl, of her subjectivity (Sell). Furthermore, he argues that although "this hybrid, fragmentary style" presents and "connects" particular "feared themes" within Irish literature, it "ruptures the realist meta-language in which they have traditionally been framed" (Sell). The confrontation and representation of taboo subjects, combined with the way they are presented and represented in *Girl*'s discourse, allow "the objects…to assert their subjectivity in a way which requires a constant hermeneutic act by the reader" (Sell). The point is that the reader has to "not only observe, but actively attempt to interpret and understand the Girl's subjectivity" because of different "levels of mediation between the unborn Girl, the text and the reader" (Sell). Although it might seem that the narration should be accepted as a first-person stream of consciousness narration, Sell offers an interesting interpretation of the narration in *Girl*, stating that "McBride's jarring narratological aesthetic makes an indelible first impression" as it disrupts the narration on a "diegetic level," but it also challenges "any comprehensive schema of narrative frames" some scholars would place on *Girl* (Sell).

Attention to context and contextual details, or rather, the lack of them in the narrative, is another point Sell brings up. The narrator's deeply troublesome life is presented through a narrative that withholds any prominent signifiers or clues which can automatically connect the story to a specific place, fictional or not. Sell is therefore adamant that the reader has to pay attention to the minor, almost trivial, details within the text to measure how the content of the novel can offer a reflection and a parallel to real-life situations and places. He points out that it is probably set in "the 1980s or 1990s" because "*Girl* uses pounds as currency," something

that changed in the new millennia when the Euro was introduced (Sell). By close reading the narrative, and actively engaging with it, Sell is able to ascertain that the narrator "cannot have been born after the early 80s" because the Irish pound was still in use "at the Girl's nineteenth birthday" (Sell). Furthermore, he believes that the introduction of consumer goods from America, such as "muffins lattes and ice-tea," places the novel in a time when the import of foreign goods was on the rise (Sell). Other pointers supporting the novel's time aspect can be found in the development and evolution of technology, particularly the evolvement of electronic games "her mentally disabled brother" enjoy (Sell). Through his assessment of the novel's seemingly trivial details, Sell has again reminded readers of the power of content and context. There is arguably no need to specify anything to the reader if they are able to draw out the hidden and indirect clues within the narrative through proper engagement.

In his assertation regarding the novel's content and context, Sell briefly addresses what he deems as "misguided readings of *Girl*" (Sell). In his opinion, scholars such as Gina Wisker (2015) rely on "assumptions" and "anglocentrism," which "[dominates] her reading" (Sell). While Wisker claims that the narrator and her story are situated somewhere in "Ireland and London" (57), Sell argues against such assertation as it just shows that "Wisker fails to interrogate the text" and the minor details within its narrative (Sell). The text's narrator and her narrative never specify any names, nor does it specifically reveal which country or city its narrative is set in. The only evidence that suggests that the narrator is moving between certain places, such as between the home and university, is when the narrative content reveals that the Girl travels by train to reach her desired destination. As an effect, Sell asserts that the "unnamed city is clearly in Ireland…as indicated when Girl makes the journey to and from…by train…, rather than ferry or airplane…" (Sell). An explanation to why Wisker might have overlooked this small detail, Sell explains that it could "stem from a failure to engage with *Girl* on the level of form and reading it with a passivity more appropriate to realism" by assuming that 'everything' has to revolve around a well-known metropolitan city such as London as opposed to other cities in Ireland such as "Dublin" (Sell).

Speaking about the importance of context, McBride's application of symbolism should also be briefly addressed. By inconspicuously inserting various symbols such as water, figures, and birds in *Girl*, McBride has, one could argue, created a dual meaning that speaks to the dualistic nature of Girl's missing subjecthood. The destruction of "the Virgin Mary icon," Sell points out, creates a junction, a parallel reference, where the Mother of Jesus, who is commonly recognized and upheld as pure, virginal, and serene, clashes with Girl and her lack of subjectivity as she is not as pure as the religious figure (Sell). In this respect, the

violent destruction of the icon "prefigures the violent loss of her own virginity and her subsequent self-destructive actions" (Sell). Furthermore, the Virgin Mary statue can also signify and uphold "the symbolic value" of an oppressive environment built on religious and patriarchal doctrine (Sell). The statue of the Mother of Christ is effectively "highlighting that these regressive principles have not disappeared" in an Irish context as they are so tightly knitted into Irish norms, "despite the foundation myth of social progress" during the "Celtic Tiger" period (Sell). By destroying the statue, Girl chooses "to rebel against one strand of the web of taboos which prevent [her] from attaining full subjecthood" as she effectively rejects not only the symbolic value of the statue but also the conformities which have been placed on her due to her gender (Sell). However, the destruction of the statue can also signify her own destruction and the destruction of her subjecthood as the violence she inflicts on the object could be seen as a parallel to the violence and oppression women have suffered for generations.

From Sell's arguments regarding the importance of contextual knowledge, it becomes apparent that the readers have to pay close attention to the narrative's content and the novel's overhanging context to understand what, in his opinion, the narrative is emphasizing. Through subtle references, minor details, and a narrative mode which offers readers insight into the essence of the text's narrator, the narrative is able to highlight and put stress on the Girl's lack of subjectivity and her inability to obtain any form of agency and autonomy. This is interesting as it means that the text can challenge its readers to question why it is so hard for the narrator to obtain any subjectivity, how various factors add to her struggle, and to consider how the female gender has been subjected to centuries of emotional trauma. Although the book is entirely a work of fiction, the content of the narrative still has a solid adherence to real life and real-life situations, according to Sell. By having contextual knowledge, the content of the narrative can stress issues that need to be addressed outside the fictional world. All of Sell's arguments show that the reader has a particular responsibility when interpreting clues given in *Girl*'s narrative. They cannot automatically assume that something takes place somewhere in a city in the real or fictional world without explicit confirmation given in the text to suit their agenda. It would be a disservice to the author's work and, thus, the story itself.

2.2 *Girl* and its narration

A narrative's ability to offer a clear "transformation" of a character or a situation is supposedly one of its main tasks (Culler 85). It is suggested that this expected change is achieved when a character has worked through their initial dilemma and has gained the necessary knowledge that will lead to some sort of "resolution" as their story comes to an end (Culler 85). Key *Girl* scholar Gina Wisker, on the other hand, challenges the apparent necessity and the supposed importance of such conventions by suggesting that the narrator and narration in *Girl* are "caught in a liminal space" whereupon conventional goals of a text might not be possible, or at least, they will be hard to obtain (63). As an explanation as to how this ambiguous space appears and works within the text, Wisker focuses on how the text "pitches us as readers into…" the narrator's mind "through the use of stream of consciousness" style, which intimately reveals that the narrative, narration, and the narrator is caught in a medial place between formation and fractionization (58). In her article, "I Am Not That Girl": Disturbance, Creativity, Play, Echoes, Liminality, Self-Reflection and Stream of Consciousness in Eimear McBride's A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing" (2015), Wisker claims that the narrative of *Girl* effectively challenges and rejects to conform to old linear literary conventions as it instead highlights the importance to discuss an ambiguous space where women, their voices, and their presence are confined to be something different, something other than a man. As such, we will first turn our attention to how the novel is rejecting to conform to conventional narrative expectations and why the Girl is trapped in this borderline space she talks about. Then we will look at how the author's use of particular narrative modes and how the focalization of the narrative also captures the reader in this ambiguous realm. Lastly, we will focus on the novel's language and how it is caught in the "liminal space" (63).

The first key issue that needs to be addressed is Wisker's arguments as to why the narrative of *Girl* refuses to conform to any sort of literary expectations. In her opinion, *Girl* is effectively forgoing "the neat homilies and structuring" a transformative narrative should display as it effectively distancing itself from the possibility of "closure" (60, 61). Instead, the narrative in *Girl* and McBride's narrative strategies explicitly reveals that the narrator is restricted to a constant state of "becoming," which is essentially a "liminal space between half-formed thoughts and expression, a half-formed sense of self, and action" (64, 63). This is particularly evident in the narrator's language application in the narration. However, it is also apparent by way of the content of the narrative as it refuses to give the reader a cheerful ending with what they might have perceived as a proper closure. The narrative, Wisker

claims, balances on a precarious line between "chaos and breakdown," but it is not offering a prominent "breakthrough" (72). It seems as if it is not offering the narrator a chance to escape and evolve. Instead of offering a solution, the narrative is arguably more concerned with exploring "the failings of socially constructed and managed narratives," she claims (57). Furthermore, although some perceive that liminality should represent "a state of change, transience [and] potential transformation," the narrator in *Girl* is effectively denied such "positive opportunities" (67). For Wisker, the narrator is placed

> in transit between childhood, adolescence and adulthood, buffet and driven by the cultural, social, psychological expectations concerning young women- that they be pure and conformist, family-oriented yet also self-reliant….(67)

What she means is that the narrator is constantly restrained to a place of in-between not only because of others but also because of their influence on her sense of self and her own opinion regarding her chances to escape the ambiguous space.

The second key issue Wisker discusses is how the reader is caught in the borderline space alongside the narrator. Although it is not physically possible for the reader to be the narrator, Wisker explains that the reader of the novel is exposed to the ambiguity of the "transient space" through the narration's first-person focalization, and McBride explores with the use of a "stream of consciousness" style (66, 58). To that extent, although the narrative explicitly reveals the "ways in which the girl makes and manages or fails," the focalization and style of the narration drag the reader into Girl's consciousness, keeping the reader confined alongside the Girl in her evanescent space (57). However, narration and narrative's focalization and style manifest and capture the reader in another "liminal space" whilst reading (63). They are not a part of the narrative as it is a fictional work, so they are caught in a space between fictionality and reality, between her and themselves, and between the text and reality. Nonetheless, Wisker points out that the reader moves "into [the narrator's] experiences of liminality," an ambiguous realm where it is revealed that the narrator is "unformed, becoming, caught" (58,57). This particular narrative technique thoroughly reveals Girl's predicament. In its own way, this intimate and explicit connection between the reader and the narrator unveils "the gap between what is felt and begins to form in the mind of the narrator, the girl, and her actions in the shared world" (58). To this effect, Wisker explores the possibility that the reader is subjected to a more intense and realistic connection to the narrator as " her thoughts come unfettered, unmanaged, as they do in our own inner thoughts

but less usually in fiction" (58). The narrator's reality, in a sense, becomes the reader's reality as they are reading. Liminality, in this regard, rejects the confinement of structure, of what it is supposed to do. It becomes ambiguous, revealing that the narrator is restricted to such a degree that it might not be possible for her to escape as it offers personal insight into her troubled reality.

Added to her focus on the workings of the text, Wisker also looks to the language of the narrative and narration in her exploration of the "liminal space" (63). It is apparent from the composition of the language with its fractured syntax that it is an added extension to the intermediate state the narrator is trapped in. For Wisker, it is evident that "language fails this unnamed" adolescent female narrator as "her language is inchoate, her speaking introspective, unshared except with herself" (71, 66). This can arguably be because of the internalized, subjective language that forms the narration. However, it can also be because of the narrator's limited, and at times non-existent, knowledge of syntactical structures and proper grammar. Girl's way of expressing herself, Wisker argues, "makes certain demands on the English language" as she tries to find the way to express the raw, unfiltered emotions, actions, and re-actions culminating in her inner sense of self (68). Her language and her application of language are a constant reflection of Girl's "fragmented and damaged psyche," Wisker explains, where "the melée of feeling and response are created and enacted through the language" (71, 68). As such, "the events come to the reader through a kind of pre-conscious voice, pregnant with full stops and half rhymes…" (68), which reveals that

> the girl's sense of self, ontology and her construction of knowledge and communicated versions of events, epistemology, are in flux, a flux enacted in the inner, outer, punctuated, unpunctuated, formed, free-flowing language. (70)

To that extent, the narrative is "relatively unmanaged" as "events are poured out, without the guidance of the kind of narrative voice" to which readers are accustomed (73). However, for the narrator, this is the only way she knows and is able to communicate. The form of the language "emphasises her lack of plans, direction, trajectory, value, and her inability to make meaning from, learn from, her life" (68). Girl's "internalised language" clashes with conventional language expectations as it "[expresses] the flow of thought before it is publicly articulated," and how its composition reflects how experimental language can be (71). The immersion of the reader into the narrator's consciousness, through a stream of consciousness trajectory, highlights the "innovative expression of becoming" in a raw, natural way,

revealing that for the narrator, language becomes an additional hurdle she cannot overcome, limiting her chances of escaping the "liminal space" she is trapped in (68, 63). This speaks to the unyielding demand *Girl*'s stream of consciousness narrative puts on its readers. This narrative technique gives the reader a direct but subjective representation of a character's cognition without distinguishing markers which would typically assist the reader in separating her voice and her inner thoughts from the projected dialogue. This affects how the reader perceives the novel's setting, its characters, and its content to such an extent that they are forced to scrutinize every single piece of information given in an attempt to distinguish what is really happening and who is actually speaking.

Wisker's assertations and arguments about the "liminal space" are interesting as they can add another layer to our understanding of how trauma is represented in the text (58). Not only does trauma fracture Girl's sense of self and cognition, confiding her mind in this ambiguous realm, but it also captures and confides her language and her means of expression. The composition of the narration's language does display a fluctuation between coherency and incoherency, consistency and inconsistency, which is why it is not unreasonable to agree with Wisker's assessment of this ambiguous space because it is also caught in it.

There are some opinions and arguments regarding the narrative of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* which questions the composition of the narration and draws attention to the author's influence from her background in theater. Scholar Nina White (2018) argues that the composition of *Girl*'s narration aligns it with texts composed and used in the theatrical world as it is apparent that the narration in *Girl* is marked by a "theatrical influence" (565). Scholar Katarzyna Bazarnik (2018), in her assessment of *Girl*'s narration, seems to agree with White's arguments, concurring that "the author's background in drama and theatre" seems to have influenced the narration's oral resonance both in its readability and its construction (Bazarnik 83). Other scholars, such as Wisker, have also briefly assessed the theatricality of McBride's narration, although not as extensively and effectively as White and Bazarnik. However, other scholars do, to an extensive degree, look at how the novel's narration (and McBride's writing style) is heavily influenced by modernism and literary techniques developed during the modernist period. James Joyce has repeatedly been pointed to when key *Girl* scholars and critics have critically assessed the novel's syntactical structure. However, the narration's ambiguous connection to performance language and performance quality had gone unnoticed. Both White and Bazarnik seek to add to the conversation by presenting their ideas that

McBride might have, be it unconsciously or consciously, drawn inspiration from other disciplines outside the realm of literature to relay a disturbing yet significant story. To that extent, this section will briefly explore what White and Bazarnik contribute to the discussion regarding the novel's narration by looking at the workings of the narration from a theatrical perspective. Their arguments and opinions could move the discussion further away from the novel's seemingly modernistic approach. It could mean that there is a possibility that McBride's theatrical background might have influenced the narration of the book through a "performative language" as a way to evoke emotions based on its composition and the way it is relayed on the level of "story/discourse" instead of the level of "events/plot" (White 572; Culler 86).

White builds her arguments regarding the theatricality of the language on the premises of the narration's "thematic resonances… and linguistic and formal similarities" (565) to works written by Sara Kane in her 2018 article "It was like lightning": the theatrical resonances of Sarah Kane in Eimear McBride's A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing." As such, she claims that the language of *Girl* pays more homage to the world of performance theatre due to "its form and style" (574). She claims that such an approach to language knit together "the boundaries of the literary and the theatrical," something that has arguably been overlooked, or simply ignored, by other *Girl* scholars in their discussion regarding the narrative and the narration in *Girl* (574). Furthermore, White's assertion of "McBridean style" includes an in-depth exploration of the syntactical composition of the language (566). Its narration, in her opinion, is effectively mimicking the rules of "performative language," thereby suggesting that we might be inclined to consider that McBride's experimental writing style underlines the performative side of language (566). In other words, White is exploring how the language can convey emotions and real-life actions through its indirect, suggestive, and subjective utterances, which allure the reader's empathy.

The language of the narration immerses the reader into the "thoughts and memories" of the narrator, not the content of the narrative (573). According to White, a unique tension is allowed to unfold in the syntactical composition of the language used in the narration. Although some readers might rationalize that the misspellings and elongated words are composed in a way to muddle proper and explicit meaning, White instead points to how the language reflects a more approachable, realistic means of expression, much like the inner language of a human being. To that extent, the underlying emotional unbalance within the narrator is embedded into her language, and they are expressed within the grammar by combining, or even omitting letters, in the narration. Since the reader is intertwined with the

narrator, “they are intimately witnessing the Girl’s emotional breakdown” in such a way that the language is actively engaging, expressing, and representing the breakdown (566). She goes on to argue that the reader “do not need to see the breakdown physically…instead [they] are given an alternate and no less distressing form of fragmentation in McBridean style” as the narration, and the composition of the language operates on a higher level, performing something with every word and sentence in its structure and form (566).

One way that might make White’s arguments clear regarding the theatricality of the narration is to listen to the novel’s audiobook (McBride 2014). As mentioned before, several scholars have deemed the book to be hard to read and commit to because of its language; however, by listening to McBride, who is narrating, while reading reveals hidden emotional undercurrents within the written language, which arguably transforms the seemingly haphazard language composition into something that needs to be explored as the narration’s vernacular transforms the language of the narration into something that is filled with emotions and performative power. White’s assertion about the narration’s “performative language” therefore suggests that there is an abstruse line between being able to read someone’s story as it is expressed on paper and fully understanding how the same language would sound if it were expressed by someone, for example, an actor/actress, to an audience (572).

Katarzyna Bazarnik furthers on McBride's style by pointing to the narration’s “lexical repetition” (83) in her 2018 article “A Half-Formed Thing, a Fully Formed Style. Repetition in Eimear McBride’s A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing”. To that extent, Bazarnik has simply looked to the narration’s linguistic properties in her exposition. She argues that McBride’s habitual use of punctuation and commas are not haphazardly placed to annoy the reader; instead, they are there to produce something, or rather, capture the essence and highlight the complexities of emotions the protagonist is experiencing “as if to enact dramatic pauses” (83). As such, they force the reader to stop and consider the power of the language and how the language's oral resonance has captured and brought to light the hidden power of the narrator’s vernacular. Emotions cannot be explained; they have to be felt. By considering the effects of stream of consciousness narration and Cahill’s arguments regarding the narrative’s “affective immersion,” the pauses could serve as a reminder that the reader is experiencing the narrator’s life through her cognition and that they have to understand the complexities of her language on her premises, not their own (158).

Additionally, Bazarnik argues that McBride has utilized a “systematic application of rhetorical variants of *conduplicatio*,” the repetition of a word or words, in such a way that it “becomes another strategy to maintain an intensely emotional tone and to impart the sense of

oppression to which the Girl is subjected" (83). In some passages, the narration is comprised of particular "function word[s]" such as "conjunctions, pronouns, and the repeated minimal sentence," whereupon the "repetition [of words] flags the points when [Girl] becomes agitated, perplexed, frightened, or emotionally confused" which "serves to appeal to [the readers] *pathos*" (84, 83). The simplistic language can be seen as a reflection of the narrator's lack of growth and agency, as well as a slight nod to the theatrical world with its simplistic language application. However one would view it, it does not demean the value of the theatrical essence of the narration's language as it is packed full of meaning even if it experiments with itself.

As this section has suggested, the narration's connection to a language that is performing beyond the limitations set by the literary world is strong, yet it has seemingly gone unnoticed by several scholars. By widening our understanding of the power of language and its vernacular performance, certain details which have been overlooked can undoubtedly influence and add to a reader's "narrative competence" (Culler 85) as it goes to show that experimentation with language is sometimes necessary for the process of meaning-making.

2.3 *Girl* and its narrator

The narration of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* is undoubtedly highly experimental in its form, and it highlights the troubled life of its narrator. Someone who has picked up on this is scholar Shadia Abdel-Rahman Téllez in her 2019 article "The Embodied Subjectivity of a Half-Formed Narrator: Sexual Abuse, Language (Un)formation and Melancholic Girlhood in Eimear McBride's A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing." She expands on Wisker's notion of "liminality" (58) by arguing that "the Girl is in a permanent position of liminality," whereupon the narrator's "embodied subjectivity" is called into question (Téllez 3). The narrator, in her opinion, is trapped in a pre-state, a borderline position "between formation and dissolution" (3). Téllez justifies her claim by explaining that it seems that the narrator is unable to escape this borderline position throughout the narrative, signaling that it "is a story about the crisis of identity" (1). Moreover, she claims that it "is a story of unbecoming: unbecoming a girl, unbecoming a woman and unbecoming a lived body," as opposed to the conventional "coming-of-age story" where the primary goal of the narrator is to become an autonomous being (12, 4).

Téllez' assessment of the narrator's identity and identity formation will be explored in the upcoming section. It will also look into how the novel's content, in connection to an Irish context, contributes to retaining the narrator's own sense of identity before looking at points made about the Girl's anonymity and "passive agency" (7). Lastly, this section will explore Téllez' perception of the narrative language in the book and how it contributes to Girl's lack of "embodied subjectivity" (3).

Identity, especially female identity, is one of the novel's most ambiguous topics, according to Téllez. There is an "identity [conflict]" displayed in the narration, which "[highlights Girl's] girlhood…and her position in a male-dominated world" (4). The content of the narrative and the events taking place within the narrative worsen her "crisis of identity" as she is caught in a constant "struggle to define herself, not only as a woman but as an individual" (3). The narrator's grasp on identity and sense of autonomy is defined by other characters and by her connection to those other characters. This can arguably be traced back to the novel's very beginning as the narrator "starts her account when she is still *unformed*" (3). Her impressions are not only based on her thoughts but also on other people to whom she listens. As such, the narration "introduces two different *beings-in-the-world*" (3). Girl is not yet born at the start of the narrative; thereby, she is not physically present in the world, nor has she fully embarked on the road of identity formation, but she is still part of it. Nonetheless, there is one vital part of her identity that Girl is able to form, and that is her identity as a sister, according to Téllez. "The strong bond she has with her older brother" accentuates the notion that Girl's role as a sister "is what defines her" (3, 11). However, Girl's limited sense of identity is destroyed by the novel's end when her brother dies as her connection to him defines her identity.

Various factors contribute to the narrator's predicament regarding her identity. However, the novel's pull toward realism and real-life occurrences is something that Téllez points to in her contribution to the scholarly debate around *Girl*. The contextual attention to Ireland's socio-cultural heritage is often hinted at as a contributing factor to Girl's struggle to form her own identity. The Irish sense of self is seemingly built on socio-cultural norms which should have been eradicated from present-day conditions. The loss or inability to form an autonomous identity can be seen as trauma. Girl exhibits that her socio-cultural surroundings contribute to her lack of identity and subjectivity. There is a level of "anonymity" and "passive agency" that contribute to Girl's sense of subjectivity, which is bound to the overhanging context of the novel (4,7). "Anonymity" and the sense of being anonymous contribute to Girl's grasp of "her gendered corporeality," Téllez argues (4). By

retaining the use of names and secluding the narrator in a realm of anonymity, McBride has utilized a narrative strategy that solidifies the narrator's position in the world because a name is actually a partial identity, however fragile or abstruse it might seem. By denying someone a proper name, which could be seen as an individual characteristic apart from one's gender, one's sense of self can be rocked as they possess no identity in the form of a name. Furthermore, Girl "*learns* that she has a (female) body" only after the doctor proclaims it after birth, but she is never identified by a name (3). "Her identity is defined by her gender," and with gender comes expectations and specific rules which must be followed (4). Other characters solidify this definition by effectively telling her what it is to be a girl (or later, a woman) and what is expected of her as a female. This leaves her without the possibility to commit to a journey "of self-discovery and personal experience" as she is constantly being told what she is and what is expected of her (5). Her "respectful Christian" mother is one of arguably two female role models in the narrative (5). She follows the norms and ethics established by the Catholic Church, expecting that her daughter grows into a pre-established role centered around piety and devotion to Christian doctrine where virginity and the submission of women were vital. Furthermore, in a patriarchal society such as the one in Ireland, men often ruled over the lives of females. Because of this ownership, anyone belonging to the female gender was regarded as objects rather than an autonomous individual, as they belonged in a sense to men. Time and biology effectively end the supreme control the mother and her devotion to the church's teachings have on her girl and her sense of self.

A biological factor contributing to the lessening of the mother's control over her daughter's identity and identity formation, which Téllez highlights as essential, is when the young girl's body reaches a certain biological maturity. "Menstruation," Téllez points out, "is the most important step in the journey to becoming a woman" (5). However, this biological maturity comes with its own set of restrictions for the Girl and her identity formation. When Girl's first period sets in, she moves away from being pure and virginal to become "a 'half-formed thing,' denoting her objectification" where she is caught between here and there, girlhood and womanhood, a "liminal space," you might say (Téllez 5; Whisker 63). She is not a girl anymore because she can become pregnant, but she is not yet a woman because of her age.

On the point of agency and identity, Girl, according to Téllez, is showing ample signs of "passive agency"(7), where she submits to the will of others throughout the content of the novel. This passivity is particularly prominent "by the means of submission in her sexual encounters," where she, in her mind, "is expressing her agency" by allowing men to sleep

with her (7). However, “in most of the sexual intercourses…she holds no power” as she is instead “positioning herself in situations of vulnerability,” which her aggressors exploit, Téllez explains (7). Her feelings are not being considered; she holds no subjectivity; she is only an object that is there to satisfy the men’s needs and wants.

Lastly, Téllez’ assertions regarding the narration’s language should be addressed as it also points to the narrator’s lack of proper subjectivity and agency. At the time of the narrator’s birth, the reader is in the “pre-verbal world” of the narrator, and as such, it “allows the reader to witness the *birth of language* itself” (3). McBride is effectively “manipulating language” to the extent that “language…becomes purely experimental” (3). Téllez attests that “there is no fluidity in the narration, which consists in ungrammatical short fragments about emotionally and physically painful experiences” (5) were

> narrative continuity and alternation between the Girl’s consciousness and others’…reflect in the scarce use of commas, semicolons or colons…contrast with the abrupt use of full stops to express the violent nature of some of her bodily experiences. (4)

Her lack of “embodied subjectivity” (3) is actively engaged with within the language and its composition. The trauma she experiences intrudes and changes the language to a point where the trauma destroys her grasp of the language. According to Téllez, “McBride captures this process of destruction” by “using the most fragmented and unintelligible language to narrate physically and emotionally painful experiences” as she is “playing with the pronunciation…alternating lower- and upper-case letters” (Téllez 7). As such, the language “parallels the fragmentation of embodiment” where its “formation and its destruction” creates what she terms “a liminal language” (7, 11, 12). The language is not fully formed, nor is it completely unintelligible. In Téllez’ opinion, this application of language furthers Girl’s lack of agency, autonomy, and power.

Téllez’ assertions regarding the narrator and her lack of power, agency, and identity are interesting. Although the narrator does have possibilities to form her own identity, such possibilities are often far and in-between as she relies on other people’s convictions and Irish socio-cultural norms to form her sense of self. Nevertheless, the half-formation of the narrator’s identity also comes through in her language as it parallels the struggles she faces when she is facing them and the consequences of the events she has lived through. Everything has an impact on the Girl and her identity, rendering her unable to form an identity.

Primary arguments surrounding the narrator in *Girl* are based on questioning her inability to construct her own sense of autonomy and identity. Cahill and Wisker argued that it is the content of the novel that signifies why she is unable to construct either of the two, which is anchored in the narrative's stream of consciousness narration. Téllez hypothesized that the answer could be found both in the narrative's discourse since its construction, or rather de-construction, reflects the fragmentary nature of both the narrator's language, which signifies her inability to construct a fully formed self, and in its content, mainly if it understood by its overhanging Irish context. Picking up on this, Marshall Lewis Johnson presents his view on the matter by introducing the possible view that McBride has created an "invaded narrator" (430) in his 2020 article "The invaded narrator in Eimear McBride's A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing." For him, an "invaded narrator" is someone who is unable to formulate and define her opinion, thoughts, and sense of self cohesively as an effect of constantly being "invaded by the meaning others forces upon her" (430, 437). By others, Johnson is not simply referring to other characters and the narrative's contextual connotations; he also points to *Girl*'s experimental narration, which "involves [a] puzzling blend of inconsistent narrative styles" in the form of a "first-person stream of consciousness narration and free indirect discourse" (432, 429). This section will look at specific things Johnson highlights as contributing factor which constructs "an invaded narrator" (430). Particular focus will be given to his comments about the composition and structure of the narration, the focalization of the narration, "narrative voice," and the "level of narrative distance" in the narration (430, 437, 438).

One of the things that set Johnson's assertion regarding the narrator apart from other scholars is his observation that the narration within *Girl* is a mixture of "'interior monologue,' a form of stream of consciousness that maintains the first-person pronoun" and "free indirect discourse…filtering a character's voice through the third-person narrator" (430, 429). In his opinion, the narrator's "narration is a blur of her own thoughts, feelings, and speech with the thoughts, feelings, and speech of others, along with her outer environment" (430). "The narrative voice is characterised by an extreme amount of uncertainty" as the "narration in the novel is a strange blend of free indirect discourse and interior monologue" (437, 430). This is an important observation made by Johnson because the narration does not offer readers any signs in which to separate the speakers within the text as the narration carries on uninterrupted. Although the narration might have a particular point of view, the thoughts and the voice of the narrator are often interrupted by "the free indirect discourse of her

environment [which] overtakes her narration frequently" (430). Adding to this, Johnson states that

> stream of consciousness and free indirect discourse blur in a way that disrupts the grammar of the narrator's stream of the narrator's stream of consciousness alone. Fragmentary interruptions from other character's words, feelings, and action break up the narrator's attempt to relate her own experiences. (430)

Johnson raises a valid point when he highlights that the author's narrative technique can create "an invaded narrator" (430). The construction of the narration with the abrupt shift between "stream of consciousness and free indirect discourse" interrupts the control the narrator should have over her own narration, thereby leaving both her and the narration open for invasion (430).

Furthering on his assertion of the lack of signposting, Johnson explains that some "passages" in the novel "refuses to conform to the grammar of either first-person narration or free indirect discourse," although it presents "traits of both" (430,432, 431). There are no visible shifts, no signposting as such, to distinguish Girl's voice from other voices. Oftentimes, the narration's dialogue is so diluted that the reader has to study what they have read in order to differentiate between speakers. However, "the basic grammar is more structured around first-person narration" as it does evade some of the characteristics found in "free indirect discourse" (430, 429). The main difference between the two narrative techniques can be seen in the narration's focalization. The narration clearly has a specific "point of view" because of the presence of the "unnamed narrator," something which is often excluded with the use of "free indirect discourse" (431, 429). Because of this distinction, "it would not be possible to claim that the predominant form is free indirect discourse," although this particular style is present in the narration since it is "… interrupted by alternating forms of grammar and syntax" (432, 430). Although the narration has a specific focalization, the interruption of "the narrative voice" accentuates the narrator's vulnerability to invasion (437). To this extent, Johnson suggests that "her narrative voice is incomplete" and that the invasion of others "[results] in her total disappearance" in their attempts to take over and drown out Girl's "narrative voice" (437).

Lastly, we have to look into how the lack of a proper "level of narrative distance" contributes to the construction of an "invaded narrator" (438, 430). Johnson explains that "no distance exists between events, character's speech, and her [the narrator's] interior monologue

or represented physical state" (438). More often than not, the discourse "does not make it clear who" is speaking, although subtle hints are given in the dialogue in its application and utilization of "personal pronouns" (438). "Her interior voice" fluctuates the more invaded the narrator is, both physically and emotionally (439). This fluctuation is especially evident during the more emotional, violent, and "climactic scene[s]" (438). Her power is effectively eradicated as her voice, her thoughts, and means of expression are taken away from her as "others…force themselves inside her body and her head until she collapses," thereby rendering the invasion complete (439).

There are other contributions to the "invaded narrator" than just the interruption and interjection of other voices in the narration (430). The novel's content and its attention to overhanging contextual details also contribute to the collapse of the autonomous narrator. According to Johnson, Girl is suppressed and invaded by other people, but she is also invaded by suppressing factors led by the narrative's socio-cultural reflection of Irish society's beliefs and morals. This means that many factors contribute to the creation of Johnson's "invaded narrator" (430). However, it is primarily McBride's narrative technique and style choices which render the narrator invaded. The fluctuating voices within the narration effectively ensure that the narrator has no room to escape, keeping her trapped and secluded in a constant flux between being an autonomous being and an invaded entity.

3 Chapter Two: The Narrative, Narration, Narrator, and Trauma Representation

3.1 Narrative and its task

A narrative is commonly recognized as simply a story that can depict non-fictitious and fictitious events. Some texts might be pretty straightforward with simple characters, a pivotal conflict, plot, theme, and setting. In contrast, others, such as the one in *Girl*, might be a bit more challenging where a more critical engagement from the reader is necessary. This section of the theoretical framework focuses on different elements of a narrative, mainly on a level of "events/plot" and "story/discourse, something which scholar Jonathan Culler talks about (86). Furthermore, it also looks into the role of the reader.

One of the key issues with regards to a text is its unity. In order to be considered a cohesive narrative, Jonathan Culler, in his book *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2011), emphasizes and clarifies that a text has to meet certain expectations in terms of "events/plot" and "story/discourse" (86). This is important to acknowledge because of the intricacies of the narrative in *Girl*, as the content of the novel, with its sexual exploitations, sickness, and death, is just as challenging as the way the content is presented through the narrative's discourse. Most importantly, Culler explains that authors do have a wide variety of different narrative techniques and strategies available to them as they write. This is very important to keep in mind because, as an author, McBride has experimented with a variety of techniques in order to form the story she wants to tell.

So, for the text to have unity, it needs to meet certain expectations. "Events/plot" strictly preoccupies itself with what is happening in the text and what is constructed through the "shaping of events" (86). Culler emphasizes the fact that a plot is "independent of any particular language or representational medium" as "plot is what gets shaped by narratives," meaning that the plot can be separated from the teller of the story and stand alone as a narrative strategy applied by the author (85,86).

One of the central themes related to the workings of the narrative which Culler discusses is the evolvement of a plot and a character. There needs to be a sense of "transformation" within the plot and a character that keeps the narrative moving (85). Furthermore, this transformation is inherently fundamental because it can keep the reader engaged while reading (85). Culler states, "we find the association of a development on the level of events within a transformation on the level of theme," which means that there has to

be an initial event or situation that needs to be resolved (85). There has to be a viable and tangible change that has been sparked by an "initial situation," which should be so fundamentally challenging that a character should, over the course of the narrative, show traits of fundamental changes in their perception (85). Simultaneously, the situation in question should also challenge a reader's perception and views of certain issues. Ultimately the issue in question should be resolved adequately at the end of the narrative (85). However, although a narrative might end with a resolved issue that brings with it a transformation for a character, the reader might not agree on the means by which the character has reached that resolution (85). For a narrative such as the one in *Girl*, the reader has to engage with the narrative critically and effectively in order to understand that resolution can come in unexpected forms. It hints that resolution for some might come through a form of escapism such as her death, although it does not mean that the character in question is weak or defeated by her situation. It can also refer to her reclaiming her own independence as she makes what is arguably one of the most challenging choices anyone can make in life: to end it all.

Adding to this working element of the text is the "story/discourse," simply put, the narrative's language and its linguistic composition (86). The verbal material might be presented in a conventional way, although a novel such as *Girl* challenges any preempted notions of conventionality. Experimentation with language is allowed as long as it has a purpose and a meaning behind it. The language composition of *Girl* calls for a focused and critically engaged reader because the language of the narration seems to have a life of its own because of McBride's unconventional use of grammar and approach to meaning-making.

Nevertheless, Culler determines that a proper engagement with a narrative's workings depends on the reader and their "narrative competence" (85). This competence, he claims, includes the ability to recognize and understand the "logic of story" (83). A text, he rationalizes, is constructed by an author and told by or through a narrator but ultimately leaves it up to the reader to interpret and synthesize the information which has been mediated. To this extent, Culler refrains from discriminating between readers of the academic world and what we might term everyday readers, as they all should possess some form of "narrative competence" (85). However, this competence varies from person to person. Interestingly, Culler places a specific focus here upon the reader and their engagement with the text. In other words, Culler is adamant that the reader is placed in a position of power; it is up to them to interpret the ongoing narrative, to make sense of it, and to actively engage with both the discourse and the content of the story. To that extent, Culler explains that the reader should

make an effort in their "attempts to understand the components of narrative and analyses how particular narratives achieve their effects," however ambiguous they might seem (84).

A narrative is thus a story that is being told. However, there are certain factors that one should consider while reading any narrative. A book such as *Girl* is not just operating on a level of "events/plot" but also on a level of "story/discourse" (Culler 86). On one hand, the novel's abstruse language application gives the reader a direct representation of the narrator's struggle, while on the other hand, its foreign composition indirectly hints at the effects of trauma. The book does not directly give the impression that the narrator is able to transform during the course of the narrative fully, but it also does not give the impression that she is not transforming.

Essential to the discussion of narrative, narrator, and narration in *Girl* is Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa's (1996) idea of "contemporary narratology," with a particular focus on two key concepts from the "theories of story and narration" and "theories of self-referentiality and intertextuality" (25,28,30). Primarily, this section will be focusing on what is known as "stream of consciousness" and the workings of "metafiction," as both of these concepts occur in the ongoing scholarly debate surrounding McBride's *Girl* (Onega and Landa 1996; Macey 2001).

The "theories of story and narration," according to Onega and Landa, started to form their roots during the early twentieth century with heavy influence from and by the formalist movement (28). The primary focus of this theory lies in the narrative's structural composition, which is represented through the author's application of different narrative strategies and techniques. Scholars who followed "theories of story and narration" saw the need to interrogate "the intermediary structures of story construction and narration" (28). This would enable them to analyze not only "the time structure of the story," i.e., the linear drive (or representation) of the content of the novel, but also "the study of point of view," "presentational mode," and the "analysis of characters' discourse" (28). To clarify this more precisely, it analyses explicitly how and in what way the author has chosen to convey the story instead of focusing on the overall content of the narrative.

Out of Onega and Landa's discussion about "theories of story and narration," one concept, known as "stream of consciousness," is particularly relevant while exploring *Girl*'s "intermediary structures" as it has become one of the focal points within almost every academic discussion about *Girl*'s experimental narration (28). By exploring the concept of

stream of consciousness, *Girl* scholars have been able to question and interrogate not only the narration's "focalization" but also offer new insight into the power of language and its ability of "showing/telling" in an intimate way (28). Key *Girl* scholars have pointed to this specific literary technique in their articles, arguing that McBride's application of the technique connects the fictional narrative and its discourse to the real world and the novel's reader.

In order to understand what "stream of consciousness" is as a narrative technique, we have to turn to scholar David Macey's (2001) description of the technique (Onega and Landa 28). Macey describes the style as the direct representation of "a character's thought and sense-impression…without conventional dialogue or description" (364). If a narrative is centered around the use of a "stream of consciousness" style, it will almost exclusively be set from a first-person perspective (Onega and Landa 28); Macey 2001). More often than not, a narration that is driven by the first-person point of view effectively gives the reader access to the inner life of the one who narrates. To that extent, the readers should not expect that there will be any distinctive marker or signifier that separates one character's voice from another. Nor should they expect them in general. This is arguably because the reader is situated inside the consciousness of a particular character and thereby exposed to conversations and the world the same way they would be in real life. Furthermore, since the reader is sharing consciousness with the character, in this case, the narrator, sentences will often blur together without a thought of conventional and proper grammatical features such as punctuation and comma marks. One could argue that this is because nobody consistently 'thinks' in complete sentences. It becomes apparent that the language of stream of consciousness is able to mirror the thought process in an unreflective way directly. As such, this literary technique aims to place the reader in a position where they are exposed to a more authentic and realistic representation of the character's inner life, thoughts, and exposure to life and trauma. This is because the reader is, in a way, coexisting with and within the character's consciousness during the experience of trauma in the narrative through the narration.

The second key concept Onega and Landa presents comes from "theories of self-referentiality and intertextuality," bringing attention to the nature of "experimental fiction" such as "reflexive fiction or metafiction" (30). "Metafiction" is defined by Onega and Landa as "fiction which experiments with its own form as a way of creating meaning" (30). It relies on experimentation, and it

> …can be defined as a way of writing, or, more precisely a way of consciously manipulating fictional structures, of playing games with fiction. Metafiction as writing

> should constitute as a specific sub-genre in which the reflexive element is the dominant one. (31)

Key *Girl* scholars have, on several occasions, pointed to the experimental nature of McBride's *Girl.* Aran Ward Sell (2020) raises a key point when he argues that *Girl* is a good example of metafiction because it exhibits certain breaks with what has commonly been perceived as conventional literature (in this case, the coming-of-age narratives). Furthermore, *Girl* scholars highlight that the novel's experimental language and composition set it apart from conventional coming-of-age novels, whose primary goal is to explore the linear growth of a child's mind, their inner life, their actions, and reactions to challenges they meet because it offers a more realistic insight into the human thought process. As an explanation for this, Onega and Landa state that "the tension between reality and mimetic representation is perhaps the best starting-point for discussion of metafiction" because life, as we commonly know, is not based on a linear projection or representation of events, but rather a realistic culmination of ups and downs throughout life (31). Adding to this point, Onega and Landa explain that

> …realism, the mimetic pull, is always counterbalanced by the fictionality of the novel, establishing a characteristic tension between the strategies of fiction and the drive towards realism. (30-31)

A metafictional approach can inspire the writer to engage in "a more self-conscious realism" as a metafiction allows experimentation that combines the workings of reality with fictionality (31). However, such interpretation depends on " the reader's experience of other texts" as "the work is silent about itself and waits for the critic to interpret it" (31-32). As such, a metafictional work might be considered demanding as it demands certain things from the reader, no more so than *Girl* and its representation of trauma.

3.2 Narration and Narrator: Forwarding on the Narrative

Forwarding on from Culler's discussion of narrative, it is necessary to consider the complexities of the narration in *Girl*, which various critics and *Girl* scholars have repeatedly discussed. Several of them seem to agree that McBride has composed a very experimental

narration due to its structure and form. However, their assessment of the narrator and the narrations focalization seem to differ: Marshall Lewis Johnson (2020) claims that the narration of the novel displays a mixture of "interior monologue…that maintains the first-person pronoun" and "free indirect discourse…filtering a character's voice through the third-person narrator" (437-438). Others, such as Gina Wisker (2015) and Susan Cahill (2017), argue that the narration is told through a first-person stream of consciousness style. In this section, we will briefly address the difference between a novel's narration and its narrator, as it is essential to understand how they both might affect the representation of trauma.

Narration is defined as the story's mediated language, otherwise known as a novel's discourse (Culler 87). Because the language in *Girl* and the composition of the narration is so experimental in its presentation and focalization, scholars have differing opinions regarding the narration's effect. Some claim that it is too experimental, to the point where it becomes so hard to read that they lose interest. Others claim that the narration is what is essential to the workings of the text. According to H. Porter Abbott (2021), questions regarding a narrative's narration rise when a reader starts to consider how and in what form language, and discourse, are mediated. The narration serves as a guide for the reader as it tells the reader what is happening in the narrative and what time it is happening, but it does not mean that the narration must be conventional. There is room for experimentation both with the language and the focalization of the narration, which seems to be something the author has taken full advantage of.

The narrator, on the other hand, is "variously described as an instrument" (74). He or she is conveying the narration, which forms the narrative (74); in other words, the narrator is "an instrument, a construction, or a device" that mediates the story (74). While there are several types of narrators, Abbott remarks that the reader has to consider "the narrator's degree of involvement in the story" as well as look to the narration's "focalization" and narrative "voice" to distinguish which narrator the author has used in the narrative (80, 75). In this instance, Girl can arguably be referred to as a "homodiegetic" narrator as she is highly involved in the story as a character (81). Her narration is driven by internalized language and focalization with the use of the first-person singular pronoun 'I.' However, Girl can also be referred to as an autodiegetic narrator as she is also the protagonist of the story. This is important for the discussion of the narrator in *Girl* because Girl is, undoubtedly, the protagonist of her own story, while the other characters are either supporting characters, like her brother, or antagonists, such as her mother and her uncle. Furthermore, it also clarifies that the trauma that is being represented in the narrative is narrated from Girl's perspective.

3.3 Representing Trauma: Literary Trauma Theory

In the mid-1990s, literary trauma theory emerged as a new interdisciplinary field spearheaded by critically acclaimed scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffery Hartman, as well as psychiatrist Dori Laub and historian Dominick LaCapra (Davis and Meretoja 3; Pederson 2018; Kurtz 2018). These scholars connected literature, psychology, and history together to question and critically assess how trauma is represented in literary works through its narrative, narration, and narrator. Particular focus was given to the gravity of the effects of trauma: how and in what way people were able to speak about the trauma they have been through. In their opinion, a particularly traumatic event could affect language, application, and composition. As to why and how trauma affected language, literary trauma scholars looked to memory and memory formation for answers. For them, it became evident that a person's memory, or lack of memory of a traumatic event, put stress on language and its application. Trauma evidently led to a form of blockage that hindered any form of proper memory formation, and it affected how a traumatized individual was able to communicate in its aftermath. Consequently, such individuals were more often than not unable to talk about the trauma they had endured.

In recent years, literary trauma scholars have moved the discussion regarding the representation of trauma in literature further. Now they have started to view trauma as a much more complex process. Although they still look to past literary trauma scholars, they have begun to inspect how trauma affects a person on a deeper level. It seems that trauma narratives have a particular function; they have an essential role in the existential meaning-making process. Also, some highlight that trauma narratives bring to light the necessity for an empathic and ethical engagement from a reader that seems to have been previously ignored. Some scholars have even started to highlight various issues with the theory, claiming that some voices have been forgotten or overlooked to the benefit of overhanging ideological beliefs. Therefore, it is vital that we look at what contemporary scholars and critics have contributed to this cutting-edge and important discussion. Two recent studies, *Trauma and Literature* (2018) and *The Routledge Companion to Trauma and Literature* (2020), demonstrate that there is continued development in the field of Literary Trauma Theory, which goes to show that the discussion regarding trauma and representation has evolved since its inception in the 1990s, which we need to look at to understand why it is important for the field to keep evolving.

3.4 What is trauma?

As this thesis intends to analyze how trauma is represented in McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013), it is vital to understand what trauma is. In the introductory chapter of *The Routledge Companion to Trauma and Literature* (2020), editors Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja point out that "trauma refers to psychological injury, lasting damage done to individuals or communities by tragic events or severe distress" (1). Moreover, John Roger Kurtz, in his introduction of the book *Trauma and Literature* (2018), adds that "we more frequently use the term trauma to describe emotional or psychological injury," which we might argue sets contemporary understanding of trauma apart from its ancient Greek origins (1). In ancient times, trauma was regarded as a wound inflicted on the body which "required medical treatment" (Davis and Meretoja 1). The common understanding of what trauma is has evolved thanks to extensive and groundbreaking psychological research, which highlights the fact that trauma can be much more complex than a superficial and visible wound. Contemporary understanding of trauma is not limiting trauma to just a superficial injury where it only affects the physical body. It expands its understanding of trauma to the extent that trauma can also manifest itself through an incident or event, leading to "a form for mental distress," an unbalance within a person's inner life (Davis and Meretoja 2).

A point to be made about trauma is that it is unpredictable and uncontrollable. For some, it might even be an inescapable fact of life. Psychology Today explains that if a person encounters trauma, the traumatic event can have such an impact on their psychological wellbeing that it "can undermine [their] sense of safety in the world" (Psychology Today). Because of trauma's unpredictable nature, a traumatized individual can develop "a sense that catastrophe could strike at any time," leaving them on high alert at all times, which can have an effect on their daily lives (Psychology Today). Furthermore, Professor Elizabeth Fugate-Whitlock (2018) explains that trauma can be divided into four major groups: "physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual" (1). The significant difference between the four groups is that some are more visible than others; some traumas can be seen on the body as visible wounds, while other traumas 'only' affect a person's cognition. Nevertheless, studies show that trauma in any form can have an effect on an individual's inner life and outlook on life.

There is a difference between the immediate effects of visible trauma and the effects of invisible trauma. It is essential to distinguish between visible trauma, often referred to as physical trauma, and invisible trauma, often acknowledged as psychological trauma. In context with McBride's book, the narrator is exposed to both, and they have a different level

of visibility and effect on the narrator's cognition. In its most straightforward description, physical trauma occurs when an unexpected, often violent event takes place which wounds the physical body. Trauma and traumatic events of this caliber leave a visible wound, often caused by a car crash or a penetrating wound (also known from a medical perspective as penetrating trauma). It is commonly acknowledged in the medical world that people who have suffered any form of physical trauma often develop psychological issues in its aftermath. However, it depends on the severity of the traumatic event and how well it is dealt with after the incident occurred.

Psychological trauma does not visibly present itself as it affects the inner life of its victims. Victims of psychological trauma have often, but not exclusively, been subjected to emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or some form of neglect which can meddle with their ability to overcome and, to that extent, cope with the onslaught of emotions that have been spurred on by the traumatizing event in a rational way. Psychological trauma can affect a person's cognition and emotional stability without the victim being aware of its effects.

Scholar Jayne Leonard (2020) explains that emotional responses might manifest themselves in the wake of trauma. Typical signs of trauma often manifest themselves as "denial, anger, fear, sadness, shame, confusion, depression, guilt, hopelessness and irritability," all of which we meet at certain points in McBride's novel (Leonard). We can arguably claim that trauma is an event experienced by an individual or even a collective group. Furthermore, trauma can be considered bilateral since a traumatic event can affect two things: the mind and the body.

It is essential to acknowledge and understand the implications trauma can have on the human mind, a person's cognition, memory, and memory formation. Scholar Mirela Lăpugean (2015) considers trauma as "an external event that breaks through" the stability of the mind, which distorts the "mechanisms of cognition and awareness." In her opinion, certain incidences "causes the mind to split or dissociate itself from acute psychological trauma," whereby the mind "dissociate[s] itself from the distressful event." Because of this dissociation, "the mind is unable to register the wound it has suffered" (86). As an effect, "the victim is not capable of integrating the traumatic experiences and becomes tormented and haunted by intrusive traumatic memory" (87). Lăpugean's assessment of the implications of trauma, and its effect, aligns itself with what other contemporary Literary Trauma scholars discuss in their assessment of a victim's cognitive ability in the wake of trauma and traumatic events. Trauma muddles with a person's unconscious meaning-making process while

consciously trying to access their memories. It can also tamper with a person's language and how he or she utilizes their language, especially when trying to convey their experience.

Lastly, trauma varies in longevity. Some traumas can happen only once; others drag out over a more extended period of time. In the realm of psychology, three significant categories distinguish between ongoing trauma and isolated trauma. According to Leonard, these categories are named "acute trauma," "chronic trauma," and "complex trauma" (Leonard). One isolated event is regarded as "acute trauma" as it happens only once and not over an extended time period (Leonard). Furthermore, Psychology Today adds that acute trauma "reflects intense distress in the immediate aftermath of a one-time event," often brought on by a "car crash…or the sudden death of a loved one" (Psychology Today). "Chronic trauma," on the other hand, refers to the "repeated and prolonged exposure to highly stressful events" (Leonard). Such repetitive trauma is often evident in "cases of child abuse, bullying, or domestic violence" (Leonard). Victims of chronic trauma often display signs of "monitoring…the environment for the possibility of threat" (Psychology Today). They are constantly on high alert, trying to guard themselves. They often feel that trauma is part of their lives, and they have accepted that traumatic events will happen because they can (Psychology Today). The third category, "complex trauma," is more complicated than the previous two (Leonard). "Complex trauma" entails "exposure to multiple traumatic events," meaning that it is composed of both ongoing trauma and isolated traumatic events (Leonard). Much like "chronic trauma," its victims might feel that "there is no possibility of escape" because there is a "sense of being trapped" (Leonard; Psychology Today). It "can undermine a sense of safety in the world and beget hypervigilance, constant (and exhausting) monitoring of the environment" (Psychology Today).

All of these examples arguably manifest themselves in some way throughout *Girl*. Exposed through the working element of the novel, what Culler pointed out as the "events/plot" (86), the narrative is shaped by particular events, in this case, traumatic events, that form the plot. However, the effect of the traumatic events is revealed through the novel's discourse, making the workings of the language in the text important to pay attention to as it is here the ambiguity and complexities of trauma are explored in *Girl*'s narrative, narration, and narrator.

3.5 Trauma in a Literary Narrative

According to Joshua Pederson, the connection between trauma and literary narrative is deeper than some people realize. He claims that "literature can help us read the wound of trauma" (97). In his groundbreaking article "Trauma and Narrative" (2018), Pederson suggests that the process of mediating, or at least the attempt to mediate the effects of trauma, "can be a crucial tool for recovery" as it merges "wound and word" (97). Effectively, Pederson talks about what is known as a "talking cure," where a traumatized individual attempts to speak about their trauma (97). Pederson highlights specific narrative strategies, especially ones relating to language and language use, that enable authors to experiment with their approach to how trauma is represented in a narrative. Trauma in this regard can manifest itself through both Jonathan Culler's levels of "events/plot" and "story/discourse" (86). Pederson's article clarifies some of the essential arguments relating to a narrative and how trauma is represented in a narrative. He calls for a critical engagement from the reader. For him, the reader must understand how the language, how imagination, and how memory is key for any discussion within literary trauma theory. As such, it is vital to look at how language, imagination, and memory can be considered narrative strategies which, if engaged with and appropriately used, can represent trauma on a level of "story/discourse" as well as "events/plot" (Culler 86).

Language, especially literary language, possesses an exceptional capability in which it "resembles trauma and…it is well suited for communicating" trauma, according to Pederson (100). Although a narrative might explicitly and directly reveal and describe trauma through the level of "events/plot," another way it can indirectly reveal and represent trauma is through its narrative language and the language composition, i.e., through its "story/discourse" (Culler 86). Language is not simply limited to acting as an agent to relay specific action in a narrative; it also "serves as a substitute for action" (Pederson 97). Trauma, in this regard, is embedded, merged, and affects the structure of the language. According to Pederson, language which is too direct, too clinical, so to speak, cannot mediate nor mirror the effects of trauma from a subjective stance (108). As a substitute for the direct, objective representation of trauma, Pederson proposes that the subjective language, a more relaxed approach to language, can offer an authentic insight into a character's cognition and emotional turmoil as such language is able to embed and reflect trauma in its structure. To that extent, the language and the composition of the language someone uses when speaking or writing about their trauma can elude comprehension.

In his assessment of language, Pederson suggests that a language that is actively engaging with trauma creates "the haunted language" (105, 106). Such language utilizes specific narrative techniques such as "ellipsis, indirection…fragmentation and deformation" from the onset and throughout (108). These techniques are arguably applied to replicate a more realistic reflection of a traumatized individual's grasp of the language. Since trauma has this ominous ability to rupture a person's cognition, it can also muddle their means of expression. If the discourse is too descriptive, too precise, language (the word) is not actively engaging with the wound (trauma). To that extent, Pederson asks his readers to understand that language has been, for generations, subordinated to rules that have been artificially constructed and taught to them at school. As such, readers expect written language to act in a certain way since it is there to tell readers what is happening through a normative approach to its composition. However, this approach might undermine any form of realistic and authentic representation of trauma as it can, according to Pederson, only indirectly hint at trauma.

A language that operates outside of normative rules and plays with composition, Pederson argues, participates in the realm of imagination. He calls this the "*imaginative* medium" or "imaginative quality of a narrative" (99). Its main preoccupancy is to offer "insight into…*reality*" by ways of imagination through exploration (99). Language is not explicitly bound to act in a certain way; it is open for experimentation. The imaginative realm offers a buffer where it "allows…access to traumatic experiences" by mimicking realistic means of expression (99). Such exploration pushes back against a conventional expectation of what a narrative and its language should be doing and instead paves the way for questions about why it is doing it the way is. What is perfect for some readers might not be perfect for the ones telling their story. To fully grasp why the language of a narrative is acting the way it is, the readers should remind themselves that they have to engage with their imagination. The narrative of *Girl* sometimes omits information, and it stretches conventional rules of English grammar and syntax. This means that the reader has to imagine what is going on and what the language signifies or omits in its composition and structure.

Adding to his remarks about how trauma marks a narrative's language, Pederson states that memory, specifically a narrator's capability to access and store memories of traumatic events, can affect their language and, as such, the narrative's language. Trauma, according to literary trauma scholar Mirela Lăpugean (2020), distorts the memory formation process as it affects a person's "mechanisms and cognition and awareness" (98). As an effect, the victim's "mind is unable to register the wound it has suffered" because trauma disrupts the process of language formation (86). Pederson suggests that there is a level of inability looming over

memory, which coincides with Lăpugean's assertion regarding the failed memory formation process that must be addressed. Something might be omitted- be it consciously or unconsciously- as "victims do not merely relive or reexperience their trauma"; they have to "retell them too" (104). For Pederson, "traumatic experiences [are] either inaccessible or only indirectly accessible to the individual" because of the distortion of the memory formation process (100). To this extent, Pederson cautions his readers to remember that language instigates the process of memory, of recollection of past events.

As for trauma manifesting itself, tell-tale signs such as "gap or aporia" (104) within a narrative can signify a lack of cognitive ability and signify where memory falls short. The wound taints the language to such an extent that silence might appear instead of words. When reading a narrative filled with gaps or full stops, meaning has to be derived from what has been presented and what is omitted. The reader has to engage with the narrative to make them logically understand the story (Culler 83). In this regard, the reader must understand that the gaps, sometimes mediated through punctuation marks and even silence, can signify something more than simply an end of a sentence. Readers have to question, sometimes imagine, why the gap is there and what purpose it serves as the gaps or stops are muted signifiers that hide amongst the language. This again goes back to Pederson's assessment of the power of imagination. Silence has often been overlooked or simply disregarded to be a symptom of trauma instead of being a choice made by a narrator, Pederson argues. To that extent, he argues that any "efforts to articulate…often result in silence and textual space" as an indicator that memory and language break down and disintegrate the traumatized individual (101). The silence, he reckons, might be a symptom of trauma. However, it can also be a "coping mechanism, a conscious choice deserving…respect" as it does not point to a person's "inability to describe, remember, or integrate, but rather an intentional decision to gather one's strength" (107, 107). In a novel such as *Girl,* gaps are plainly visible. The narrative is filled with punctuation marks and various degrees of sentence length. The narrative moves according to Girl's ability to absorb what is going on. Memory, however fickle it might seem, is an essential aspect of *Girl* not only because of how the novel connects content to context but also because of the narrator's capability to access her memories.

Language and the workings of language become an indisputable argument when reading a narrative marked by trauma. Although the language explains what is going on in the novel on a level of "events/plots," it can also reflect trauma on the level of "story/discourse" (Culler 86). The trauma becomes the language in a sense. It marks it and distorts it. It twists it

the same way it twists a person's cognition and memory. It challenges conventional meaning-making and experiments with its form.

3.6 Issues with Literary Trauma Theory

As with any literary theory, literary trauma theory has its issues. Before we can start our analysis of the representation of trauma within Girl's narrative, narration, and narration, we must look into some of these issues because they can influence our reading of the text. First, we turn to scholar Marinella Rodi-Risberg (2018) and her arguments surrounding the lack of diversity in the scholarship surrounding literary trauma theory, the study of trauma, and its representation before turning to scholars Jennifer Griffiths (2018) and Sharon Marquart (2020) whose arguments revolving the lack of gendered representation also affects how we understand the representation of trauma within a text.

The first key issue we need to discuss regarding issues with literary trauma theory is the bias in the representation of female trauma. Marinella Rodi-Risberg, in her article "Problems in Representing Trauma" (2018), discusses such issues directly and refers to them as problematic because of how trauma has been "conceptualized" and how such conceptualization influences our understanding of what trauma is and how it operates (110). Representation of trauma is problematic. However, it is not problematic at the same time. Rodi-Risberg claims that the problem stems down to authority and power, and the ones who have wielded such authority are men. Overhanging ideological and political beliefs have also influenced which stories and which victims have the right to be heard. In *Girl*, ideologies and beliefs are indeed a contributor to the narrator's trauma and her approach to representing the various forms of trauma she has to endure. Bonds that detain her progress, to her exploration of her sense of self, speak to her lack of proper agency and her lack of autonomy, all of which have been measured in comparison to men for generations.

When it comes to power, Rodi-Risberg is adamant that past literary trauma scholars also gave themselves unlimited control and authority to "determine for whom, when, where and in what circumstances…particular texts" could have value as trauma narratives (115). Additionally, she claims, scholars enforced their stance through a "western bias" where some individuals or groups were left out of the discussion altogether (111). Critics, she argues, "act as gatekeepers at the border of what is acknowledged as trauma" (115). By assigning and

referring to scholars as "gatekeepers," Rodi-Risberg points out that critics have been given too much power, criticizing them because it seems that they had a somewhat outdated view of the circumstances of life (115). Trauma does not discriminate between the sexes, nor does it care which skin color the person it inflicts has. She claims that the power and assumed control literary trauma scholars and critics have given themselves comes through politics and the endorsement of "politicized constructions" (115). Such factors are detrimental to the theory to such an extent that "trauma theory cannot claim ethical purity" because it is "inflected by politics" (115). However, contemporary literary trauma scholars set in motion a change with their perception of the representation of trauma. Instead of letting politics rule what should be, they turned to look at how things actually operated, acknowledging that trauma is something more than what can be controlled and confined to certain expectations. As such, they effectively changed how they approached trauma and its representation, broadening their horizons, so to speak. They called out for a more "affective engagement" from anyone who read a traumatic tale which could lead to an "empathic unsettlement," a challenge to conventional norms (113). At the same time, she warns her readers that they too can fall victim to power.

The approach to understanding trauma, its effects, and its representation are dependent on the reader, the recipient of the narrative. Rodi-Risberg emphasizes that every reader is obligated to approach narratives that depict trauma with caution. Understanding someone else's trauma and the way they have chosen to portray that trauma and its effects call for an "affective engagement" (113). The key idea behind this engagement is "to avoid overidentification" and "appropriation" of what is depicted, what is being relayed in the narrative (113). The reader, Rodi-Risberg claims, has to keep in mind that they are not experiencing the trauma in the same way as the character in question. However, literature can offer insight into "other people's suffering" and the trauma they have experienced (114). With an "affective engagement" with the text, the reader is positioned as a witness to the trauma. Through the engagement, the reader is effectively transformed into someone who can testify and acknowledge that trauma is occurring, but at the same time, they can acknowledge that they do "not share it" (113). However, they might be able to emphasize. Empathy is a strange thing, often confused with sympathy. Whereas sympathy occurs when someone understands something from their own perspective aided by pity, empathy is rooted in actually understanding or at least trying to understand emotions and trauma from someone else's perspective. Therefore, it is key that the reader experiences a kind of "empathic unsettlement" as they read (113). Rodi-Risberg explains the need for this unsettlement by stating that an

> …empathic unsettlement describes the process of texts facilitating a feel for traumatic experiences by working through, putting readers/viewers in an empathic mode that entails critical distance. (113)

This distance entails "that while 'we' cannot understand that which 'we' have not experienced," literature might just highlight and assist "the need to critically analyze the ethical and political implications" of trauma and its representation (114). Suppose the reader fails to properly engage with the text on the premise of what is actually being relayed. In that case, the consequences might be profound as they infuse their own knowledge about trauma onto the victim, disregarding the victim's approach and attempts to represent their trauma.

Adding to this, Rodi-Risberg cautions her audience of the dangers of "complicity" (119). "The representation of trauma is not necessarily intrinsically problematic or limited," she claims, but it can become problematic and limited when trauma meets the reader (122). On a subconscious level, inherited ideological adherence and truths might influence the reader and his or her opinion about a traumatized individual and the representation of trauma, thereby enforcing something onto another. To that extent, those ideologies and beliefs might disregard the validity and devaluation of some specific trauma and their means to express such trauma. In some communities, Rodi-Risberg warns, trauma has become part of their social fabric, their understanding of themselves. Such issues mainly manifest when trauma is depoliticized and universalized, hinting that trauma affects everyone, everywhere (110). In contemporary literary trauma theory, such depoliticization and universalization of trauma become particularly troublesome as it might lead to the conclusion and assumption "that everyone is a victim." Historical trauma, she explains, is linked to "specific events…with particular victims" with a common denominator. On the other hand, structural trauma is explained as "an anxiety-producing condition of possibility…to which all can fall victim" (111). By looking specifically at cultural trauma and female trauma, Rodi-Risberg suggests that "unrecognized suffering of a specific social and cultural group" can be revealed since ideologies and beliefs could have concealed some "causes of trauma" (111). If everyone is considered a victim or that it is possible to become a victim through appropriation, the trauma can lose "its specificity," she claims (111). It rests on hypothetical assumptions instead of facts. It results in a form of silencing that directly affects the value of trauma and the value of what that trauma and its representation can teach us.

The misguided view that not all trauma is essential is another issue addressed by Rodi-Risberg. Trauma experienced by those silenced or placed in the margins, which some would consider "others," such as women, has suffered profusely because of "western bias" (111). Female trauma has been regarded as secondary compared to other traumas, especially traumas related to the plight of male soldiers during and after the war and the Holocaust. Women and their trauma were often compartmentalized, silenced, and disregarded. This places female trauma in a complex and challenging position. Their trauma did not matter, but women, as human beings, were also denied proper autonomy. Rodi-Risberg highlights that contemporary literary trauma theorists seek to rectify this error as they want to "offer insight into the socio-cultural consequences of historical trauma" (112) by including the representation of female trauma as it had seemingly gone unacknowledged in the past. Labels, such as the one engulfing "others," are particularly troublesome as it is rooted and enhanced, according to Rodi-Risberg, by "political and economic structures of oppression" (111, 115).

Girl certainly challenges a reader to question their ethics, their beliefs. It brings up uncomfortable truths, filled with almost unimaginable situations which they have to think about. It challenges certain ideologies and beliefs. Although they might seem outdated from a modern perspective, they can still affect an individual's life and perspective. Confronting such issues might be the first step towards a better, more open, and reflective society.

The representation of female trauma has to meet particular resistance both within the literary world and in society in general. It is commonly acknowledged that the plights of women have been systematically segregated and hushed down both in fiction and in non-fictitious life on the premises of gender. This does not mean that female trauma is less substantial, but it has been regarded as secondary to the plights and trauma encountered by their male counterparts.

Jennifer Griffiths (2018) explains why women have been placed on the back burner, arguing that it has happened because female trauma has always been understood through the eyes and understanding of men. By approaching trauma and its representation from a more feminist point of view, contemporary scholars could rectify past mistakes by encouraging a separation of what long-dead western writers and scholars have said about women, what it is to be women, and how women should act by discouraging a male-oriented and male-dominated understanding of women she argues in her article "Feminist Interventions in Trauma Studies." The trauma women encountered was, and to some extent still is, systematically hushed down as it is, in some cultures, regarded as private and to some degree

personal. Griffiths explains that the body of the female gender is commonly understood as something different from a man (182). In her opinion, women and femininity "is read to conform to a patriarchal narrative that relies on its diminished value" (182, 183). By diminished, she refers to the restrictive norms placed on the female gender from a male point of view that repeatedly kept her segregated as something less than man. It is an artificial construct to keep women under control in a sense. In the context of *Girl*, gendered trauma, especially female trauma, is center stage. It is a narrative about a girl, her trauma, and her perception of life. She is labeled as something different than her brother by a society that has placed a set expectation on her that she has to fulfill. When the narrative and the Girl refuse to conform, it can be seen as a refusal of conformity. She wants to find her own way, her own voice, and as such, her narrative and the representation of trauma are something different, but she is trying to find out for herself why she is different on her own premises.

Sharon Marquart (2020) also assesses that there is a lack of attention to female trauma, their narratives, and women's approach to representing their trauma in literary trauma studies and in writing in general (163). In her opinion, issues regarding gender are not only complex, but they also cast light on issues with identity and identity formation (163). To that extent, Marquart issues a warning that it is pertinent to separate the experiences of women from men because they are not only biologically different but also because female trauma has not been given enough room to be examined and distinguished as a valid experience on its own premises (163, 164). Men have been allowed space to talk about their trauma and their experiences to such a degree that male trauma has become "normative" (164). It is allowed space to breathe. On the other hand, female trauma has been marginalized as it challenges pre-established norms and "conceptual frameworks" that have solidified female identity as an 'otherness' and that their trauma is a form of 'otherness,' something outside the norms (166).

Such issues call forth "the concept of hermeneutical injustice," Marquart claims (168). Injustice, or inequity, she argues, rises to the surface due to the development of proper meaning and conceptional resources which have been developed "from the perspective of dominant social groups," i.e., men, and in an Irish socio-cultural context, religion (168). To that extent, Marquart cautions her readers of the dangers of approaching any trauma narrative on the premises of what they perceive to be true. In the process of meaning-making, she muses that "our collective understanding are not articulated from the perspective of marginalized communities" (169). Instead, it is told from a perspective in which ideologies and beliefs have been authenticated as the truth. This means that the voices of women have been, and still are, marginalized, and their efforts to articulate stumped. In Marquart's

opinion, women "have fewer conceptual resources on hand to articulate" (169). As such, women have to try to form meaning by any means necessary for them to tell their story, even if the process transgresses conventional meaning-making. It is a way to gain "epistemic agency" where women, their voices, and their attempts to vocalize are counted as equally as important as men in the meaning-making process (169).

As a solution to rectify the injustice women have been subjected to in their attempts to articulate and represent trauma, Marquart suggests that readers should approach their narratives through an "egalitarian reading" as it could help to solve the problems by retaining to the concept of "hermeneutical injustice" (168, 169). It entails that the reader has to acknowledge that everyone, however debatable it is, is created equally. Women and their voices should have room to express themselves just as much as their male counterparts. Marquart insists that

> we read and listen to trauma witnesses and help them find their voices when they struggle because we need *them* to help us understand and make sense of traumatic events, not just because they need *us* to help articulate and heal from trauma in the aftermath. (170)

This means that the reader has to accept the form of the narrative just as much as its content. Readers have to approach the narratives with "humility, curiosity and open-mindedness," Marquart proclaims, basically alluding to a level of empathic engagement (169). The reader should be willing to accept what they have been told as sincere by acknowledging and really listening to what the text is telling them, no matter how it is presented, because "survivors need empathic listeners to hear and acknowledge their testimonies" (163). However, if the reader is not engaging from a level of empathy, problems can occur. Some might even find an empathic approach offensive to such an extent that they feel the need to protect and "maintain a sense of safety and control" (163). Such readers might even justify the marginalization of women and take the easy way out, hiding behind inherent truths from the past. Marquart points out that being exposed to the stories of other people's trauma can rock with and instigate a series of "existential questions" which has previously gone unanswered or unacknowledged by readers (163). It is precisely such questions that need to be raised and addressed through being exposed to a marginalized representation of trauma.

Anyone reading or attempting to read narratives of trauma should question themselves and the information they have been given because it is casting light onto "what they do *not*

know," what has been oppressed and unacknowledged (Marquart 163). The reader and their perception of right, wrong, etc., should be challenged as it might induce spiritual and mental growth. Furthermore, the meaning-making process should be questioned; it should be challenged in any way possible. If it is left alone and accepted the way it has always been, marginalized subjects, topics, and traumas will never gain autonomy and valid identity.

4 Chapter Three: Trauma and its Representation in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*

As we can tell by the literature review, an exciting discussion regarding *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* is well underway in the academic community. However, there is not enough attention being explicitly directed at the novel's representation of trauma. To add to the current discussion and exemplify how trauma is represented in the novel's narrative, narration, and narrator, I have chosen some particular scenes from *Girl,* which I will close-read. While I will address the traumatic events taking place in these particular scenes, the focus will continue to be on the representation of trauma within the novel's narrative and narration. Furthermore, ample context will be provided to the reader so they can understand the contextual frame of the scene in question. To that extent, it should be said that the content of the passages can be perceived as graphic and disturbing. Nonetheless, they are essential for the discussion regarding the representation of trauma within *Girl*'s narrative, narration, and narrator because they can show how trauma and its representation can work on a level of content and on a level of discourse. For my upcoming discussion, I have chosen to pay particular attention to how trauma is represented in the narration's focalization, its presentation, and the structure of the language. Furthermore, we will address some keywords repeated in one form or the other within the narrative and narration of these particular scenes. We will look at issues relating to the degradation or development of the language used by the narrator throughout the narrative in these scenes.

4.1 Representation of Trauma in Scene one, Part two

The first key scene we must look at closely is found in part two, chapter three of the novel. In their assessment of the novel's narrative, narration, and narrator, only one scholar, Téllez, brought attention to a fraction of this scene and the one we will assess in section 4.3, while other key *Girl* scholars have not examined this particular scene nor the two upcoming scenes as they have chosen to look to scenes taking place in other parts of the novel. Furthermore, their primary focus has not been specifically on the representation of trauma but more on the overall workings of the narrative. We must turn our attention to this particular scene because it depicts one of the primary causes of trauma for the narrator, namely sexual abuse. From a contextual perspective, especially an Irish one, a 2020 survey conducted by Women's Ais in collaboration with Red C concluded that "1 in 2 young women…had been sexually assaulted" amongst 500 participants "aged 18 to 25 years," wherein "49%" of the participants were women and "51%" reported that the abuse started when they were still under 18 years of age (24,2,20). The survey also revealed that the abuse often started at a young age, and "100%" of the women who were abused were "abused by a man" (17). This scene is also a good reference point as there are contrasts to how trauma is being represented in the language of her narration here and in the upcoming scenes in sections 4.2. and 4.3.

This particular scene takes place in the kitchen of the narrator's home when she is only 13 years old. Through an experimental approach to narration, the reader is exposed to the Girl's first sexual encounter with her uncle as her mother and brother are sleeping in their rooms upstairs, and her feelings about the act through her inner thoughts, her approach to language, and her means of expression. It should be noted that the age of consent for any sexual activity in Ireland is 17, which means that the act is not only incestuous but also illegal (Citizens Information Board). However, even if it is essential that we as readers are aware of such small contextual details, we have an obligation to stay impartial and not infuse our own knowledge regarding the legality of the act onto the narrator and her story because she is not the reader, she is the narrator. To that extent, our attention should be diverted to how trauma is being represented. To be able to do this, we will turn our attention to the narrative and the narration of this particular passage, whereupon we will address its focalization and specific keywords and inspect if there are any tangible signs of trauma within the language itself. Since this is the first scene out of three, there is a point to be made that there might not yet be a strong foundation for the manifestation of trauma within the words themselves. However, trauma is still there, although it might be more tangible within the content of the narrative.

> …Alright now? Yes. He ram that. Oh God. It hurts me take it out. It. My heart thump on top of him and feel it shaking through his back. No. Take me. Take me down under. He is goding goding goding. In his breath. Like a great surprise has taken place. My legs and thighs and ankles. He will have them all of me in this. Done and done to. Doing. I'll do all of this. Dance with the pain of it and I would do later for many bleeding days. Sting and itch. Not from disease. From new stretched and snapped skin. Up inside that will not fit in time. Expand and let him lurch there. I want. And this is what it's like after all. After all I've heard. It hurts me. And kissing choking me. Almost too much of my body taken up. The air squeezed out. The air pushed to the edge. Coming out my eyes. My ears. Too much… I cannot cannot take this. Pain. Scratch him. Pain of it. Keeps clawing at his skin. He does not. Does not know this. He is digging into me and me to him. He's. Push it home as far up. In that tight spot... (McBride 58)

The first key thing for the representation of trauma in this paragraph lies within the narration and its focalization. Key *Girl* scholars have already argued that the focalization of the narration is set through the use of Girl's internalized language and the application of a stream of consciousness style. This is something I concur with as the narration is narrated by a first-person narrator, and the narration is set around Girl's internalized language. However, I would extend their argument by claiming that although the focalization is set through her internalized language, it does not necessarily entail that traditional means of outward expression are not explored in the narration. The effects of the stream of consciousness style and the internalized voice not only expose the reader to her voice and her thought process, but it also exposes the reader to Girl's filtering of other people's voices through her consciousness and her interaction with others. Furthermore, since the narration is a culmination of her inner thoughts and her means of expression, the representation of trauma becomes more explicit, direct, and tangible as readers are granted access and insight into how trauma affects the narrator and her language.

Nonetheless, the only time we can trace any form of outward expression in this scene is when the narrator is verbally interacting with her uncle during the first two lines "…Alright now? Yes…It hurts me take it out…No. Take me…" (58). The first sentence, "Alright now?" (58), belongs to him while the rest belongs to Girl. As we read on, it becomes evident that the scene is entirely centered around the narrator's focalization and that we are presented with an

autodiegetic narrator. Girl is a part of the occurring action. She is also the one who is relaying the narration from her perspective, which means that the language used is a culmination of her particular approach to storytelling and her ability to formulate sentences when the action occurs. This aspect becomes essential for our understanding of the representation of trauma on the level of discourse as we, as readers, have to understand the workings of the language on the premises of the narrator's approach to language. Although the stream of consciousness style and the internalized language expose us as readers to Girl's inner thoughts and experiences through what Cahill calls an immersion, the language- and the focalization of the narration is not set from the reader's perspective; it is set from the Girl's. The reader cannot fully be the Girl; instead, they are witnessing her attempts to formulate language in a way in which she is able to express herself, be it by outward expression or inner thoughts. Furthermore, we cannot fully experience the trauma she is representing through her language because it is not physically affecting us, although it is affecting her. However, the focalization and the language can entice an empathetic bond with the narrator as we are given access to the workings of her thoughts and her way of making sense of the world.

Another exciting factor regarding the focalization is the interruption of other voices within the narration. The first sentence, "alright now?" (58), belongs to her uncle, and it is the only time her voice, thoughts, and narration are interrupted by him, so the focalization stays the same. Although it might seem that he is expressing some form of concern for the well-being of his young niece at the start of this passage, it becomes apparent as the narration moves on that he is more concerned with his own satisfaction than her comfort and pleasure. Beyond the first three lines, there are no explicit indicators that he for a second thinks what he is doing is wrong, something we as readers should know instinctually. Shifting the voice from her to him at the start of the passage indicates that the text asks the reader to consider what is going on. Is he expressing genuine concern, or is the text hinting toward an ambiguous nature of the traumatic event in which predatory behavior hides behind a question of well-being. This particular passage, I would say, represents trauma in the form of childhood molestation where one adult is preying on a much younger victim. Because the uncle shows a form of concern for her well-being, he has transgressed a line in which the girl is actually unaware that she is being subjected to trauma. As such, the representation of trauma is best seen from a level of content. Because we have some context, we as readers understand that this particular event represents trauma in the form of molestation. Interestingly, the representation of trauma from the voices and the focalization of the first three lines in this scene indicates that the girl is unaware that she is being subject to abuse and trauma. Going by her language and her

choice of words within the narration, it becomes evident that she welcomes the experience. Furthermore, from a witness's perspective, the text in regard to the representation of trauma reminds us to ask more questions regarding childhood molestation and abuse since there can be nuances to the trauma in question. Here we have an uncle who shows concern, but he continues with his sexual assault after his niece permits him. It is an ethical problem because the text represents the trauma as something she subconsciously welcomes instead of avoids. Instead of fighting him in the beginning, she actually wants him closer, at least until line eight, when the welcoming feeling evaporates.

The second key issue we need to look at is how this scene displays a strange, almost unfamiliar consensus between Girl and her uncle, at least in the first seven lines of this passage. People commonly believe that there is no consensus between a perpetrator and a victim of sexual abuse, especially if the abuse is to be considered as traumatic. However, it becomes evident that this particular passage explores a cold hard fact that society, in general, would find not only unthinkable but unimaginable: the narrator willingly participates in the sexual act. The optimistic affirmation Girl gives her uncle after he initially stopped moving when he asked her if she was okay is actually indicating that she is welcoming and actively choosing to be an active participant in the act. Furthermore, when she asks him to "take it out" (the 'it' being his penis), he seems to oblige, and he does not start again until she says, "No. Take me" (85). It is a puzzle, as the text is clearly making the reader question things relating to how they view the trauma she is going through by the way she is representing it. Although some readers might be quick to judge the text by what is revealing, they have or at least should have more contextual knowledge from their own lives to evaluate the situation. However, we need to keep in mind that this is her story and her reality, not ours, and in her reality, she willingly welcomes her uncle into her body, and readers have to accept her reality whether they like it or not. By looking at Girl's choice of words, it seems that she is in a realm of curiosity and positive affirmations, at least in the first half of the scene.

Additionally, she seems to enjoy the act and the attention and response her uncle is giving her as she thinks "he is goding goding goding" (58) which means she sees him as a sort of god bestowing upon her unfamiliar pleasure. She thinks that it is "Like a great surprise has taken place" (58), with the words "great surprise" indicating that she sees it as something good as the tone of the sentence exudes positivity. Take, for example, line five, "Dance with the pain of it and I would do later for many bleeding days" (58). However, the side effects of one's first encounter with sex are represented with the use of the words "pain" and "bleeding," by putting those two words together in a sentence with the word "dance" seems to

indicate positivity and a rather odd celebration of the act (58). She glorifies it, enjoys it, and everything else seems insignificant for her feelings in the present. Right here, right now, she is whole. She has, in all honesty, transgressed over the line of childlike curiosity over to the realm of female knowledge which can be seen in lines seven and eight "And this is what it's like after all. After all I've heard" (58). It speaks more to the narrator's adolescent naivety and curiosity regarding sex than to a knowledgeable young woman. From a narrative point of view, this whole scene, the content itself, represents the act that creates trauma. Still, it is the Girl's indirect description and the implicit meaning of her language that represents the degree to which she thinks of the act as traumatizing. Furthermore, the trauma has not really started to form within her language, and as such. However, we as readers are looking at her reality; we have to rely on our own knowledge about the act to understand that this is really traumatizing for a young girl, and it will have consequences later on. Still, even if it seems that the narrator enjoys the act, there is still an auspicious essence of negativity that seeps through her language. Although the narrator is positive to the act, certain words and lines actually exude an abundance of negative connotations: "Done and done to. Doing. I'll do all of this…" (85). For my interpretation of this particular line, there is an ominous and ambiguous binary meaning to her thoughts and her representation of the trauma because of the words "done" and "doing" (85). Although she seems willing to do it all and seemingly understands that her virginity is lost, she explicitly says that it is done to her, not with her, which is very important. It signals her lack of power in the situation. Furthermore, as we can all agree on, any form or variation of the sexual act between humans is not supposed to be something that is done to someone else; it should be done with someone: it should be mutually beneficial. By having her express the act from a perspective where she reckons this is done to her and that she will do whatever she is told or physically guided to do could be a representation of the effects of trauma which leaves its victim powerless.

To further add to my second point, we should continue to look at how Girl's narration juggles the line between pleasure, pain, and the representation of trauma. If we turn our attention to line eight of the scene with her uncle, there is a subtle shift in how the narrator views the sexual act and how trauma starts to affect her cognition.

> …. After all I've heard. *It hurts me*. And kissing choking me. Almost too much of my body taken up. The air squeezed out. The air pushed to the edge. Coming out my eyes. My ears. Too much… I cannot cannot take this. Pain. Scratch him. Pain of it. Keeps

> clawing at his skin. He does not. Does not know this. He is digging into me and me to him. He's. Push it home as far up. In that tight spot. (58; emphasis added)

Before line eight, the most prominent indicators of the hurtful side effects caused by the sexual act is when she says, "It hurts me take it out" (58) and when she thinks about the "new stretched and snapped skin" (58). Yes, it does signal in line one that he "ram[s]" her, but right now, it is more important to focus on how the sentence "it hurts me…" (58) changes its meaning and how the trauma is starting to affect her language rather than focus on what is causing her pain. In a sense, we can argue that before line eight, her language was affected by oxytocin and endorphins, the pleasure hormones which influence the body and the mind during intercourse. Now, the pain of the act is more potent than anything else, and it seems that pain, which is the trauma, is overtaking and affecting her language and her means of expression. In the first line, she indicates that the 'it' is hurting her, while now, she is indicating that the event itself is hurting her, and the following sentences are all made up with indications of what is happening to her. It is all-consuming, and the language becomes frantic. We, as readers, can only imagine the gravity of the situation she is in. However, we cannot experience physically what she is going through; her choice of words has the power to make us sense emotionally and emphatically the trauma she experiences in the language's aesthetic quality.

Although some women would claim that some sense of pain can be part of the act, how the narrator reacts and thinks from line eight effectively eradicates such claims. There is a sense of panic in her words, which shows that trauma is starting to shape her sentences, which was not really that prominent at the start of the passage. We need to go back to line five to really see the difference, where she thinks, "Dance with the pain of it and I would do later for many bleeding days" (58). I would claim that her language in this particular sentence is actually rather poetic and romantic in its composition compared to how it is from line eight "And kissing choking me. Almost too much of my body taken up" (58). The tone of her narration has shifted because her experience of the act turns from positive to negative. There are no apparent misspellings in either of these sentences, but the separation brought by the use of punctuation between "me" and "almost" seems to affect the overall tone of the second example here (85). Since there is no punctuation to be seen in the first line, the tone of the language is perplexingly positive in its appearance compared to the latter. Although the text and thus the sentences of the narration might seem aesthetically pleasing at first because they coincide with how the narrator is feeling without many errors or use of explicit negative

language, this changes when the narrator is overtaken by pain. Just as joy transforms into anguish when she is experiencing pain, her language starts to transform from having an essence of positivism to a sense of desolation as her feelings change during the course of the narration. The tone of the narration from line eight does change as it is apparent that her language changes from the use of metaphors, euphemisms, and poetic resonance to representing the act and what it does to her body through a more dramatic and on-point description of the effects of trauma.

So, there is a change to the aesthetic quality of her narration. That is to say, there is a change to the tone of the narration from positive to negative, which can be traced as she turns from describing the unfamiliar feelings and positive emotions that are conjured up during the intercourse to focusing on the unfamiliar sense of pain described in her language. It should be noted that it is explicitly revealed in the narrative that the Girl knows about sex from reading about it or hearing others talk about it. Still, she is unaware of how traumatic and carnal it is for the virginal body. This is important to note because there is a significant difference between knowing about the act and actually having experience with the act. In line eight, she claims "it hurts me" (58), whereupon it seems that the physical hurt her body is subjected to is breaking through the cloud of oxytocin. By using words such as "choking," "squeezed," "too much," and "cannot" indicates that the act is actually more brutal than what she first realized (58). Furthermore, they also counterbalance how she saw the act at the beginning of the paragraph. First, she willingly gives her body up to him by saying, "take me," but now the physical act is crushing her (58). Secondly, she is now focused on her own breathing as opposed to his, and it is apparent that the force of his entry into her body is making her unable to breathe. Furthermore, the "dance with the pain" turns into being "too much" because the pain she feels is unbearable after the body has first indicated to her that it is in pain (58). Lastly, by realizing that she "cannot," the narrator finally realizes that she is unable to "do" what she thought she could, filling the representation of the act with negativity. Instead of welcoming his presence, she fights against it (58). Her adolescent nativity is effectively eradicated, and the tone of the narration has, as an effect, changed. The words represent trauma by their negative connotation.

Before we move on from the assessment of this particular paragraph, we have to look at the experimental use of specific signifiers such as punctuation marks and some particular keywords, as they can also be used to represent trauma and the effects of trauma. Although there are many of them, the use of punctuation marks in the scene with her uncle is not haphazardly placed, nor do they really disrupt the flow of the language. However, I will claim

that the punctuation marks and the way they are applied in the text indicate that we are intimately experiencing the narrator's thought formation process and her approach to language when trauma occurs. Sometimes her sentences are really short because she has less to say, but they are longer as she needs more time to express herself, be it through thoughts or verbal communication. Furthermore, the sentence length also indicates the difference between inward thoughts and outward expression. In lines one and two, the girl says “yes,” “it hurts me take it out,” “No,” and “take me,” all of which are directed as an outward expression where she is speaking directly to her uncle (58). The rest of the narration within this scene is arguably her way of representing her inner thoughts as her sentence length lengthens. After the initial “yes” and “no,” there are just two other short words that might throw the reader off when they are trying to determine if it is the inner thoughts of the girl or if she is communicating with another character: “Doing” in line five and “He’s” in line 12 (58). Still, they are her inner thoughts since there are no other indicators to think otherwise like it is in lines one and two. She is not answering a question, nor is she instigating further action. I would say that the application and use of punctuation marks are really complex and not as straightforward as they might first seem. They do a lot for the narrative and the narration as well as the narrator. Still, in this passage, their use indicates that the wound has not yet manifested and infused itself thoroughly in her language or her memory. As such, they have yet to become a vital part of the representation of the narrator’s trauma.

There are some specific keywords that the narrator uses in her narration which we need to address because they could be a representation of trauma. Although these particular words do have a set meaning in everyday life, in this text, as an effect of the narrator’s experimental approach to meaning-making, their explicit use might be indicators of a different meaning, or it might even be a representation of trauma. In the first line of the scene with her uncle, the Girl expresses that “He ram that” (58). Most people know that the word ‘ram’ has more than one use. In this instance, it is used to indicate action, and it is used to indicate the degree of the action in question. To ram something means that there is a high degree of force as opposed to ‘push,’ so when the Uncle “ram that” (58), the narration's language actually indicates that what he is doing has a certain degree of force and malevolence behind it. If the narrator had utilized another word from her vocabulary, such as push, the degree of the act might be considered less traumatic as it is, in a way, a relatively soft word compared to ram. By having the narrator use the word “ram” (58), the meaning of the word indicates that the representation of trauma comes through its malevolent connotation. It speaks to the gravity of the situation, revealing that this is not an act of love and passion. Instead, it is an act of lust

and force, and it represents the sexual act as trauma and can also be foreshadowing the effects trauma currently has and will have on her body and her mind.

To further add to my assessment of keywords and their representation of trauma, we have to turn our attention to the latter half of the third sentence in line one, "he ram that," (58) and the repetition of the sentence "it hurts me" (58) found first in the first line "it hurts me take it out" and then again in the eight-line of the scene with her uncle "it hurts me" (58). The keywords that we have to pay particular attention to are "that" and "it" as they both have a binary meaning, and the narrator never specifies what the "that" or the "it" of the sentence is (58). Instead, the text leaves it up to the reader to interpret their meaning. It does not take much imagination for the attentive reader to understand that she is first and foremost referring to her uncle's genitals. The use of "that" in the third sentence in line one and the "it" repeated twice in the following line is the Girl's way of using a language that is less marked by profanity (58). This, of course, could be due to her young age, but also an indicator of the lack of knowledge the Girl possesses of the world and her lack of means to name the object that is causing her pain explicitly. There is an aura of innocence to the words the narrator has chosen, which coincides with her age. Children of that age are undoubtedly shy, so it is almost expected that the text would use such ambiguous language. By claiming that the penis is "that" and "it" also shows that the male genitals are an unfamiliar part of the male body that the girl has never seen or experienced before (58).

However, the words "that" and "it" can also be a signifier of who is being exploited and what is hurting the narrator (58). First and foremost, the narrator's use of the objective word 'that' instead of the subjective 'me' indicates that there is a possibility that she does not view herself as a fully autonomous being. By objectifying herself, she allows her uncle to do whatever he wants because she is only there for his pleasure. The representation of trauma comes through when the girl loses her sense of autonomy and subjectivity, replacing 'me' with 'that.' This is important to remember for our understanding of how trauma is being represented in this passage because it shows that the girl is still very young and innocent. It is not until "it hurts" her that she becomes aware that the penis is not only enjoyable, but it can also actually be synonymous with pain, at least for her (58). Furthermore, the use of the word "it" has a binary and ambiguous meaning. It can both refer to her uncle's body part but it can also refer to the act itself. In the first line, it becomes apparent that she is speaking about the penis and not the act, but in the second line, she is talking about it as the act and the cause that hurts her. This is interesting because it means that single words can have their own way of

representing trauma by way of the process of meaning-making, something that other scholars have not pointed out.

From my assessment of this paragraph, I am tempted to say that the representation of trauma is rather subtle, as it seems that, at this point, it is present more in the narrative's content than in the narrator's language. However, the trauma is still there, although it has not fully incorporated itself into the language. Right now, it seems that Costello-Sullivan has a point when she claims that McBride is more concerned with the telling of the events rather than focusing a way through the events. Still, this point might be susceptible to change as the narrator's language starts to shift in scene two, part four, chapter four.

4.2 Shift within the Representation of Trauma in Scene two, Part four

The second scene we must look at while we are assessing this particular text's representation of trauma within its narrative, narration, and the narrator is found in part four, chapter four of the novel. We must assess this particular scene because it is not only an addition to the trauma she has already endured with her uncle, but this particular scene could also serve as an example of how the continuation of trauma is starting to have a subtle yet detrimental effect on her emotional life as well as her approach to language and her representation of trauma. It should be noted that other Girl scholars or critics have not given this particular scene any attention. Their primary focus has been to look at the workings of the narrative, the way the narration operates, and how the narrator affects the narration as opposed to assessing how and in what way trauma is being represented within the very structure of the narration and how trauma is affecting the language something which we will look at in the upcoming scene. Just like in the previous scene with the uncle and the girl, we will assess the focalization of the narration and keywords and look out for signs that trauma is starting to affect her language in its representation.

During my reading of this second scene, I have discovered that there is a shift in the representation of trauma. It has started to come through in the structure and the composition of the language which forms the narration. Her sentences are shorter, and the words within the sentences are starting to disintegrate. Compared to the scene with her uncle, this one seems more intense because the narrative's presentation is becoming cruder, often intercepted by profanity. The voices are blending more as if she is losing grip on who she is and who they

are, although she attempts to rectify it. These shifts within the language and within the voices of the narration demonstrate a shift in the representation of the trauma experienced by the Girl and that the trauma caused by her uncle's molestation has affected her. However, Girl seems to be unaware of the effects of the traumatic event on her, her view of the world, and sex as the trauma has muddled her cognition, and it has started to bleed into her language. Nevertheless, the representation of trauma within the language starts to become visible to the reader.

Some time has transgressed since the initial scene in part two, chapter three, and the narrator now is at an age where she attends an Irish university or college. Not only is she significantly older in this particular scene, but the trauma of her past has had more time to have a certain effect on her cognition and her approach to dealing with certain uncomfortable truths. The narrative has already revealed that her brother's brain tumor has reappeared and is a threat to his health and life. The girl responds negatively to the news of her brother's imminent health decline and to the possibility that he might die because of his brain tumor. In an attempt to flee from the melancholy of her life and her judgmental and overbearing mother, the narrator decides to venture outside her home. She meets a group of people who welcomes her to join them whereupon one unnamed boy/man seems to be to take a particular interest in Girl.

> He gets me. Hello Missy. By the wrist and it can hurt. Take me to the bushes. They don't care. Ra ra ra. The night's begun someone signs. Shut up. Haven't seen you before. I don't care. I'm here for. Kiss me sloppy. Let him do it. Wet and tongue. Lick the. Squeeze me. Ah fine fuck fine. Something. Different and all that. Sliding. Variety's the spice of life. Go on get on with it. Part your legs missy please. That's all that we can do hey yes. Yes? Spits on hand. Do. Grease himself. You fucking miss. Now. Ffffff. Open wide. There we go now hey. That. There we go. Ah. Sssss that. Come. Go on you fucking. Not. Ah. Something. Fun for everyone. There's it. That's it. Fucking. For a laugh. Ow I say. Ah ha ha ha. All this until blah blah he comes. My head bouncing nod nod on his shoulder. Off the bone.
>
> After. Sore and used up. Is the way. Is the best thing you'd be if you were me. For you'd like that that solid fucking. On the ground. Full of stones like eating after fasts. Pull my knickers up. Tight. Go on rinse yourself he says….Will you fuck off you cunt I say. Well. Seeya fuck you later. No. Fuck you very much. Ha Ha.
>
> (McBride 141)

We will start with an assessment of the focalization and the point of view of this particular scene, as it is harder to differentiate between the voices compared to the scene we looked at before, which included her uncle. The focalization of these two paragraphs in scene two does position the reader inside the narrator's mind through the use of an internalized language. However, her internalized narration is constantly interrupted by other characters and their voices which is the very thing that makes it hard to differentiate between her voice and the voice of other characters. One could argue that the intervention of other voices points to the fact that the narrator has lost some of her power in the narration, as it is no longer centered exclusively around her, her thoughts, and her means of expression. One way to differentiate between the voices of others and the narrator's voice, I would argue, is to look out for the use of the first-person singular pronouns "me," "I," and the possessive adjective "my" as they are all indicators that the sentence in question belongs in one form or the other to Girl (141). When the boy/man's voice interrupts her particular means of expression, he uses the second person singular subjective pronoun "you," or a variation of the word "Missy" and "missy," and his sentences are mostly comprised of questions, requests, or simple statements (141). The best place to see the distinction between voices is during the first line of the first paragraph: "He gets me. Hello Missy. By the wrist and it can hurt" (141). The first sentence is, without a doubt, the narrator's thoughts as she is describing what he is doing to her. As indicated by the word "Missy" (141), the second sentence belongs to the boy/man. However, the last sentence reverts back to the narrator's internalized voice. What is particularly interesting about this short interaction between the two characters is that it is evident that the boy/man is actually interrupting her thought process. If we take out his line, her internalized language still has an ambiguous coherency about it. Although one can claim that the interruption of someone else's voice is expected in everyday conversation, in this case, it can be a foreshadowing of what is to come: another invasion.

Although it might be easy to differentiate between who is speaking when during the first half of the first paragraph in scene two, it arguably starts to become harder to see the distinction between voices after the sixth line of the first paragraph, which means that we need to look at the sentence structure itself and the interaction between characters within the sentence. If we turn our attention to line four in the second paragraph of the second scene, there is a strange ambiguity surrounding the number of speakers "Seeya fuck you later" (141). This ambiguity is essential for the representation of trauma because it can be an indicator of how traumatic the event in question has been for the narrator and how she responds to another person's goodbye. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the speakers also indicates that the sentence

can have several meanings. At first glance, it might seem that the sentence only has one speaker, the boy/man, whose intentions are to see and fuck the Girl again at a later time. However, I would argue that the "fuck you" (141) part of this sentence could belong to the narrator as she is addressing his wish to see her again. Through her response, it is apparent that she has no intention or interest in seeing or interacting with this unnamed person again. Furthermore, she might even take offense when he says "seeya" (141) as it can have a binary meaning. Although, in this case, it should be perceived as an indication that he wants to or will see her again, for her, it can be perceived as an insult because he does not see her at all. Not truly. He is oblivious to the pain he has caused, and he is also oblivious to the emotional turmoil she is caught up in. Again, just like with her uncle, her feelings and her pleasure have been put in a secondary position.

Another thing we need to understand regarding the focalization of the narration is that certain words can disrupt the stream of consciousness flow of the narrative. Although the reader is intimately connected to the narrator through first-person narration, the use of the word "me" (141) pushes, in a way, the reader out of her head and into a position of spectatorship. The event in question is not happening to the reader physically or mentally; it is happening to the narrator. This is important because the narrative and the narration still belong to the narrator and not the reader, even if they are connected through her internalized language. It is also essential because it supports Reynolds' theory regarding the elusive buffer between the narrator and her narration and the reader. The 'me' in this sentence serves as a reminder that the reader is not the narrator; he or she is, in fact, only a reader, a witness to the events. The reader can only witness her trauma and her efforts to represent trauma; they cannot live it for her.

Nonetheless, the examples I have presented so far have one thing in common: they show that there is more interaction between the characters in this scene than there was in the previous one with her uncle. Although the scenes are longer in the book, her uncle only interacts with the narrator once while the boy/man has been given, or rather, he claims more space within her narrative and narration. This means that her control over her narration is starting to break down, which ultimately means that the reader is also losing a sense of control as their power is connected to the narrator. The trauma she has been through and the trauma she is currently living is starting to have a subconscious effect on her cognition and her control over her language, which leaves her vulnerable and her narration vulnerable to invasion and atrophy.

Still, even if the form of the sentences makes it hard to differentiate between speakers, there are places within the narration of scene two where the narrative distinguishes between voices with prominent markers through the use of present indicatives. This is a stark contrast between this scene and the first one as it had no distinguishing markers; there were no 'he says' nor any 'I say' explicitly used in the first scene with her uncle. In the second scene, however, such indicatives do appear: "Ow I say," "Go rinse yourself, he says," "Will you fuck off you cunt I say" (141). It is a peculiar turn within the presentation of the narration, although it seems that the choice to do so is deliberate. Not only does it support the reader in differentiating between speakers, but it also distances the reader from the narrator and the narrative in general. Although the narrative and narration indicate an immersion of the reader into the consciousness of Girl, the use of the indicatives reminds the reader yet again that they are not an active part of the narrative. The indicatives indicate that the narrator (or boy/man) owns the words that are being said, and as such, they do not belong to anyone else. While considering how such indicators can be a supporting agent to the reader in their differentiation of speakers, the indicatives can also support the representation of trauma. More specifically, when we know the owner of the sentences, we can try to emphasize with the recipient's reaction, who is trying to make sense of a part of a conversation and understand their reaction on the premises of how they reply. I do have to admit that this experimental application of indicative is rather odd, and in this instance, such occurrences seem displaced. Nevertheless, it does support the reader in their reading.

The second key thing to look at as we study how trauma is represented is to inspect how trauma has affected her sentences and sentence structure. Let us turn our attention to lines six and seven of the first paragraph. There is an instantaneous and abrupt shift in the narration that is worth inspecting as it is not only representing some form of trauma but it is also representing how quickly her sentences and her words are disintegrating because of the trauma she endures: "Now. Fffff. Open wide. There we go now hey. That. There we go. Ah. Ssss that…" (141). If a reader picks out the sentences that belong to the other voice, "Open wide. There we go now hey…There we go. Ah.", all that they are left with is "Ffff," "that," "Ssss that" which belongs to Girl (141). The only legible word she uses is 'that,' and for me, it seems that the word is an indicator of what causes the trauma. By experimenting with the form of the words (and the language), I would argue that the overall narrative of this particular scene in *Girl* underpins one of Pederson's key arguments: it is not particularly the traumatic event that is essential for the representation of trauma, it is the mediated language. That is to say, how and in what way the narrative finds a way to represent and present trauma

through the narration and the narrator's language. However, it seems that the academic discussion revolving around *Girl* is more focused on the explicit workings of the narrative than on how the narration represents trauma. The language of the narration is one of the most challenging elements of the novel, and it might even be the very thing that puts people off from finishing *Girl*. However, the narration exhibits a remarkable quality that can entice the reader to continue with their reading, especially in this scene where the language of the narration still makes sense in its presentation. It seems that the reader has a particular responsibility to focus on the structure and the form of the narration when they encounter words made up by the repetition of letters as it points to how trauma is altering the Girl's approach to language. As an unstable and disruptive force, trauma tampers with Girl's ability to express herself, so it is not unreasonable to claim that trauma will affect her language. With the use of "fff" (141) and "Ssss" (141), the language of the narration is already starting to break down because of the trauma which is occurring in the present. However, we could also claim that the past trauma has found a way to be absorbed into the narrator's mind, where it has started to affect the very structure and composition of the language in the present. There is no cohesiveness to her words as they are, in fact, not words, just a letter that is repeated.

The third point we need to look at is the change between her level of engagement with the act itself and the changes to her language during this scene compared to the one with her uncle. This is important because both changes can indicate a process wherein the representation of trauma is coming forward in a new form. During the scene with her uncle, the narrator's narration reveals that she is an active participant in the act itself. Furthermore, her language is marked by a particular romanticized and glorified view of the sexual act. To that extent, her language in the first scene is rather poetic in its veneration of her feelings and her means of expression. However, this all changes during the second scene. Here, the narration turns from explicitly focusing on feelings to describing various parts of the act as it unfolds: "Kiss me sloppy. Let him do it. Wet and tongue. Lick the…" (141). There is a pivotal contrast in the aesthetics of her language, where the romanticized language is replaced with the factual and disengaged language. This becomes particularly evident in the second scene, as her narration does not exhibit an aura of poetic quality. It is all cold, hard facts from the first line to the last. There is no "dance with the pain…"; instead, she is "sore and used up" (58,141). Her language has turned away from adolescent naivety over to harsh reality. It seems that she is starting to connect sex with something she has to do to have any real value or even use sex to subject her body to the same pain she experiences mentally. The narrator is physically participating in the act. However, she is no longer emotionally engaged, which is a

stark contrast to scene one, where she is engaging emotionally as well as physically. In scene two, she is just agreeing to do it as it seems that she is more capable of dealing with physical damage than emotional damage. Her disengagement is an exploratory form of a representation of trauma or at least a representation of the effects of trauma as it becomes apparent that she uses sex to hide from the inescapable consequences and effects trauma has on the emotional stability of a human being. Sometimes it is easier to deal with physical pain than it is to deal with emotional pain, and the language that she uses in the second scene is more direct, hence shifting the focus from her inner thoughts to the act itself. As such, the directness of her description of the act shows that trauma is starting to manifest itself in her language and her choice of words as it is shifting away from a poetic and rather uplifting essence toward a more carnal and brutal aesthetic.

As we are nearing the end of the discussion of the representation of trauma in scene two, we have to turn our attention toward a particular keyword that the narrator uses during scenes one and two. It is essential to do so because there is a chance that the narrative, through its narration, is presenting the reader with small but subtle clues which can allude to trauma without explicitly representing trauma to the reader directly. Furthermore, it is also necessary that we look into the narrator's increased use of profanity since she does not use any obscene words in the first scene. This can be substantial for our reading of trauma and understanding of trauma and its effects, as it could be an additional sign that trauma is penetrating her language.

The first keyword that needs our attention is the irregular verb to do. In the second scene between the Girl and the unnamed boy/man, the word 'do' appears in line three, where she thinks, "Let him do it," (141) and then again in the middle of the sixth line in the first paragraph. It is not the first time the narrator uses this irregular verb, and it is not the first time she allows someone else to do something to her. From our reading of the first scene, the word 'do' appears multiple times in various ways, such as "Done and Done to. Doing. I'll do all of this" (58). However, it only appears in one form in the second scene 'do.' If we compare the narrator's use of the word 'do' in the second scene to her use of it in the first scene, there is an apparent passivity to her use of the word and in the overall tone of the sentence. Instead of saying, "I'll do all of this," she accepts that she will "Let him do it" (58, 141). It seems as if she is there physically, but not emotionally, which we have already discussed. However, the word 'do' is essential for the representation of trauma. It represents not only what is being done to her, but it also speaks about her connection to the act she is participating in. In the scene with her uncle, she was present emotionally and physically. Now she is disengaging

from the act itself and, in a way, uses him as much as he is using her. The narrator's memory of the previous act with her uncle in scene one has taught her that she needs to be submissive and succumb to the desire of men. By letting the boy/man "do it" (141) to her body signals that she is a passive participant, but she has made an active choice to succumb and stay passive. No one has forced her to do anything which speaks to a dual agency, whereupon she is passive on one side and then active on the other. The trauma has started to form a wedge between her passivity and her power as there is again an odd consensus between the narrator and the boy/man in scene two. It is a conundrum, but there is a shift in her engagement level with the act that we should acknowledge. Her passivity in the first scene was probably due to her inexperience with men and the conjugal act. However, here she submits to him to do what he wants, the way he wants, without showing any signs of distress during the act apart from the word "Ow" in the ninth line of the first paragraph (141). This could mean that trauma is slowly manifesting itself inside her, and thus it is slowly affecting her language. The text has started to work in a way where it represents present trauma and the memory of past trauma as she willingly accepts what is being done to her. It is almost like a silent whisper, slowly overtaking her mind and sense of self. The more she lets someone else do something to her, the more power trauma claims over her. It is not unreasonable to argue that words such as 'do' have the power not only to convey trauma but it can also be a representation of trauma based on how it is used.

The second keyword which needs to be addressed from this scene is "that" (141) as it has, in a sense, a binary meaning: it can allude to the act itself, but it can also be an indicator of what she referred to as "it" in the scene with her uncle (58). Here, "it" has become "that," which is the boy/man's private body part (58, 141). Furthermore, the trauma she endures clearly affects her means of expression. By using the rather cold and unemotional description of the act, she belittles the encounter as being something less. At the very moment when he starts to invade her body, her language effectively emulates what she feels, both emotionally and physically. By looking at her limited means of expression, I would say that she is not enjoying it at all and that the trauma, the wound, is starting to affect her words and sentence structure. After the sixth line in the first paragraph, where the sexual act actually starts, ample traces could signify that the narrator's sentence structure, particularly when it comes to her inner thoughts, is starting to break down. Compared to the previous scene with her uncle, the sentences in this scene, which are exclusively linked to her thoughts during the act, are evidently shorter and more incohesive than when her uncle was molesting her. In this particular scene, with the boy/man, her sentences vary from only one word to seven words,

while in the previous one, her longest sentence was comprised of 15 words in total: “Dance with the pain of it and I would do later for many bleeding days” (58). I would argue that these are signs of an ambiguous, almost undetectable vulnerability and influence the past trauma has had on her, which is now subconsciously affecting the narrator. The trauma she has already been through is starting to affect her cognition and means of expression. Additionally, her voice seems to display a sense of passivity, and it is certainly filled with more negativity compared to the scene with her uncle. She is no longer filled with adolescent curiosity, and her language's romanticized, poetic, and positive aesthetic is gone. In its place, her language reflects the harsh reality of the situation she finds herself in. It can also become apparent that her subconscious emotions mark her language for the reader.

Another thing we need to turn our attention to is the use of profanity in the second scene. In the first scene with her uncle, there are no swearwords present, but in the second scene, the narrator uses a variation of “fuck” and “fucking” throughout the first and second paragraphs (141). In her narration, it seems that her use of profanity is intimately linked to her particular representation of trauma. There is no sign of the romanticized word lovemaking anywhere in the narrative as she instead uses the word “fuck” and “fucking” (141), or she uses it as a reference to what someone can do. ‘Fuck’ is generally regarded as a curse word, but at this stage of the narrative, it is also used by the narrator as a direct reference to coitus. It is a stark contrast to the first scene as it seems that her vocabulary is expanding, but it is also degrading, as profanity could be a sign of a vocabulary that is not well-rounded. The answer to why she did not use profanity in the first scene could be as easy as she did not know that such words existed at the age of 13, or it could be because the teaching of the Catholic Church had influenced her to call it something different such as “goding” (58). Nonetheless, in the second scene, she uses the words “fuck” or “fucking” a total of six times, and it seems that a pattern is starting to form as she uses the word “fucking” to indicate the sexual act as it is happening. Instead of saying that “He is goding goding goding” (58) like she did with her uncle, she simply states, “That’s it. Fucking” in scene two (141). By replacing the foreign and highly experimental word “goding” (58) with the cold and calculating word “fucking” (141), the narrator has clearly been affected by the sexual act with her uncle on a subconscious level as her choice of words has changed. To that extent, the trauma she has endured (although she might be unaware of it) has affected her language so that “fucking” becomes trauma manifested. The wound is starting to find its place within the words.

Furthermore, the alternative use of the word to describe the act can be seen as a hint to one of the themes within the novel. In the two scenes we have assessed, it is apparent that the

narration explicitly reveals the Girl's thoughts and means of expression during her experience with sex. This means that the narrative is casting light on a particular issue, namely sexual abuse. Although some scholars, such as Sell, point out that the narrative relies on the habitual and conventional use of specific Irish themes such as death, family, and religion, I would add to their assertion by claiming that the theme of the narrative, based on our assessment of the two scenes, is trauma, and trauma in the form of sexual abuse. Costello-Sullivan is rather adamant that it is essential to discuss and put words to events that can be perceived as traumatic to move forward and recover from past transgressions. It seems that the narrative of *Girl* is making an effort to do precisely that, particularly on a level of theme. Although the narrative might not offer a clear and immediate recovery for its narrator, the fact that the text is marked by trauma and its representation means that it highlights issues that should be discussed to move forward in its unrelenting exposure of the narrator's trauma.

4.3 Trauma Manifested in the Present: Scene three, Part five

The third scene we must assess takes place in part five, consisting of only one chapter. We have to assess this particular scene because it becomes evident that trauma is overtaking her language completely. There are two characters present, the narrator and yet another unknown man. Before this particular scene, Girl's brother has just died, and her home is now filled with melancholy and death. She decides to go for a walk, presumably in an attempt to steady herself and make sense of the situation. Along the way, she meets a stranger. After they meet, the situation quickly escalates, whereby the man attacks Girl and rapes her.

> …Doos the fuck the fuckink slatch in me. Scream. Kracks. Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy fucky shoves upo comes ui. Kom shitting ut h mith fking kmg. I'm fking cmin up you. Retch I. Retch I. Dinneradntea I choke mny. Up my. Thrtoat I. He come hecomehe. More. Slash the fuck the rank the sick up me sick up he and sticks his fingers in my mouth. Piull my mth he pull m mouth with him fingers pull the side of my mouth til I no. Stop that fuck and rip. Scin. Stop heeel…

> …Let me air. Soon I'n dead I'm sre. Loose. Ver the aIrWays. Here. mY nose my mOuth I. VOMit. Clear. CleaR. He stopS up gETs. Stands uP. Look. And I breath. And I breath my. I make. You like those feelings do you now. Thanks to your uncle for that like the best fuck I ever had. HoCK SPIT me. Kicks. uPshes me over. With his brown boot foot. WitK the sole of it on my stomik. Ver. Coughing my. Y hard. He. Into the ditch roll in gully to the side. Roll. I roll. For it. He. Turns on the. I. Hear his zip. Thanks for fuck you thanks for that I. hear his walking crunching. Foot foot. Go. Him Away. (McBride 193-194)

As we have done for our assessment of the previous two scenes, our attention should first be directed towards the third scene's focalization and the voices within the narration. It is particularly important in this third scene because the narration in this scene is constructed in a way that makes it particularly difficult to differentiate between speakers, the narrator's inner thoughts, and the character's outward expression. Furthermore, the memory of trauma and the ongoing trauma has overtaken and still exudes significant power over the narrator not only physically but also emotionally, which can be seen in her lack of power over her language and narration. One of the critical aspects of the narration in this scene, as it has been in the previous two, is that it is presented without any distinctive markers which could help the reader to differentiate between the voice of the Girl and the voice of another character, nor is there any character description of any sort. The reader is still exposed to the inner workings of the Girl's mind, thoughts, and experiences through McBride's application of a stream of consciousness style. The only way one can presumably see a shift in voice in this scene compared to the previous scenes (with her uncle and the boy/man) is through a thorough examination of the composition of the narration's sentence structure and the spelling of words.

In the first paragraph of the third scene, a critical eye might be able to discover that two voices are speaking in line three: "…h mith fking kmg. I'm fking cmin up you. Retch I…" although it might be easier to spot the shift in voices in the second paragraph, line three and four: "And I breath my. I make. You like those feelings do you now. Thanks to your uncle for that like the best fuck I ever had" (193-194). When we compare lines three and four of the third scene to line one in the first scene, it is apparent that her uncle only asks her one question, "Alright now?..." (58), and then she replies, "…Yes…" (58). After her response to his question, the narration is entirely centered around her and her thoughts. In the second scene, the boy/man asks her to "Part your legs missy please" (141), but he has also addressed

Girl earlier and continues to do so after he asked this question which means that she is granting him (whether unconsciously or not) room within her narration. To be able to differentiate between speakers in this third scene, there are a couple of things worth noticing that can make it apparent who is speaking. When a sentence belongs to the narrator, whether they are inner thoughts or outward expressions, the words and the sentences are not following a conventional pattern, nor does the composition of the language make any real sense as the spelling of the words is often incorrect. The attentive reader might be able to perceive what words she is trying to use when she says "h mith fking kmg" (193). However, the point here is that her words in this instance represent how the trauma has completely and effectively overtaken her and her language. They are, from a reader's point of view, misspelled and incorrectly used, which certainly sets her narration and her application of language apart from how she was able to formulate herself earlier. For the following sentence, "I'm fking cmin up you" (193), the words are misspelled, but they do make sense when you first read them. This is arguably the other character's voice, and instead of being filled with trauma, it is filled with his lust. The point is, therefore, that the more cohesive the sentences are at this point of the narrative during an intensely emotional scene, the more likely it is to belong to someone else who cannot be claimed during the previous scenes because of the spelling of the words which are used are still equally presented and correctly applied. In the second paragraph, if we take into consideration the cohesiveness of the sentence and the fact that he is addressing her by the use of the words "you" (194) and "your" (194), it further shows that it is not the narrator's voice we are being exposed to (194). As such, I would claim that instead of relying on unconventionality and experimentation when others are speaking, the text reverts to conventional language application to indicate another voice within the narrative. The opposite applies when the narrator's voice breaks through: when Girl speaks, the structure of the sentences changes, showing both fragmentation and incoherency.

Furthermore, the keyword "done" (193) reappears, and again it is hinting to the fact that something is being done to her, not with her. In the first scene with her uncle, I argued that she did display that she wanted to engage in coitus with him "Done and done to. Doing. I'll do all of this", and he stops when she asks him, so she did have a sort of agency (58). In the second scene, the narrator seems indifferent to the act and her own participation, as apparent when she says, "Let him do it," showing a tendency toward a passive agency (141). In this scene, however, her narration reveals, "Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy…" (193). I would argue that this particular sentence reveals that she has no agency, no power in the situation. Her choice has effectively been taken away from her

as he rapes her until "he hye happy" (193). There is no enjoyment for Girl at all, no adolescent curiosity that needs to be satisfied, and she is no longer trying to hide from the emotions that bad news has effectively spurred up inside her; instead, she is caught up in the pain of the current act. Her words are frantic; however, her use of done in this sentence is explicit. It is an accurate representation of how she perceives her own participation and, as such, an accurate representation of why this act should be considered as sexual trauma: it is not done with or to her by choice; it is simply forced upon her, meaning that her agency is effectively eradicated at this point. From a narrative standpoint, there has been a transformation in her character. However, this transformation is not positive at all. Instead of reaching some sacred place of autonomy and agency, Girl has gone from the point of having some form of agency to slowly losing it over the course of the novel until it is completely gone. This is crucial for the understanding of not only the narrator but also the narrative. It is real life manifested in fictional form. McBride has effectively and honestly shown that transformation is not necessarily synonymous with success, and trauma might be the very thing that eradicates a positive transformation.

Another particular characteristic we need to assess from the third scene is how and why the words of the sentences are running together without spaces to separate them: "…Retch I. *Dinneradntea* I choke mny. Up my. Thrtoat I. He come *hecomehe*…" (193; emphasize added). Although it might seem incohesive and strange, the apparent lack of space between "dinneradntea" (Dinner and tea) and "hecomehe" (he come he) reflects the state of mind the Girl is in (193). She is describing what is happening just at the moment it happens without the time to separate the words she is using. It also signifies specifically what is threatening to come out of her and what he is currently doing. Furthermore, the running together of words also shows the intensity of the sexual act, especially since it makes her regurgitate her last meal. As such, for every syllable that is presented to the reader, the trauma is growing stronger; it is breaking down her cognition and, thus, her control over her language. Although Drong argued that there is no visible flow to the language because it is constantly interrupted by punctuation marks or the voices of other characters, there is a strange and ambiguous coherency in the narration, particularly in this passage (Drong 4). By removing the punctuation mark between "Dinneradntea" (McBride 193) and the next word "I" (193) and the necessity of space between the words, I would claim that the narration does flow uninterrupted at certain stages but particularly in this particular part of the third scene. When the use of punctuation marks and the use of space between words reappear, they do so cohesively. Additionally, I would say that at this point of the narrative, the reader should have

become accustomed to the narrator's irregular use of punctuation marks as they occur irregularly throughout the novel. Nonetheless, the run-together words and the lack of punctuation marks the temporality of the scene. She is narrating it as it happens and not in the past, which means that the scene takes place in the present, and she is working out a way to express herself on the premises of present conditions.

One thing that is particularly interesting about the way Girl narrates about trauma is that her narration is marked not only by past conditions but also present conditions. As such, it is essential that we also assess how the narrator is able to formulate a representation of trauma from a present state and not only from memory from the past. In the third scene, her sentences represent trauma as it happens, and the trauma marks her spelling. However, the same happens in scenes one and two. If we turn to look at scene one, there is an indicator that the event is told from a present condition "I cannot take cannot take this" (58). If it were told as a past condition, the text would probably have the narrator think; I could not take could not take it. The use of the word "cannot" indicates present action (58). The same can be claimed if we turn to look at the grammar of scene two, "My head bouncing nod nod on his shoulder"(141) and scene three, "…sticks his fingers in my mouth" (193) where, in my opinion, the use of the present participle "bouncing" (141) and the present tense "sticks" (193) in the narration indicates that the content of the narrative is happening in the present. Still, several Literary Trauma theorists firmly believe that the retelling of trauma relies on a memory of the event. Lăpugean claimed that trauma affects "mechanisms and cognition and awareness," which is true. However, it does not necessarily mean that the effects of trauma can only be observed as a past condition because of its deteriorating effects (98). Pederson, it seems, is rather adamant in his opinion that trauma can only be observed in a person's language if it is conveyed retrospectively when the mind has had time to process the event it has suffered. This might be correct if the focalization indicates that the events are placed somewhere in the past, but since the narration in *Girl* is conveyed from the present, i.e., unreflectively, we cannot exclude the possibility that trauma can be represented just as thoroughly as it occurs. In the narration of *Girl*, the narrator is narrating what she sees and experiences at the precise time she is experiencing them. It all stems down to a matter of opinion, and everyone is entitled to their opinion. However, by considering that a literary narrative can represent trauma in its narration as it is occurring, such deviation can give room for further advancement of the discussion roaming among Literary Trauma theorists.

In the narrative of *Girl*, trauma is not presented as just a memory; it is presented as a present condition that is affecting the narration as it is happening. As such, it is not

unreasonable to claim that a narration can try to represent trauma as it occurs. However, how successful it is seems to depend on how trauma is being relayed. Still, one can claim that the scenes that have been assessed and the action that has taken place, especially scenes one and two, influences the subconsciousness of the narrator, her approach to language, and her approach to representing trauma. Furthermore, her encounter with the men and sex in the two previous scenes has left her with a generally negative view of both. The trauma that has been inflicted has had time to form into a memory in which she can link them both to pain. However, even if those two encounters have had time to become a memory, it is evident from the last scene with the unknown rapist that there is no room, nor time, for proper memory formation, which affects the narration and the narrative. The event is transgressing too quickly for Girl to catch her breath, reflect, recollect, and form a memory of the attack because it is happening now, and it is happening fast. As she is being raped, the traumatic event is so destructive, so intense, that she loses her ability to formulate and express herself, which could be why McBride has chosen to experiment with the form of the language. As the trauma solidifies itself, the language must change, and the change must be drastic. The more intense the trauma is on her body and on her mind, the more experimental the language becomes in its representation of the trauma. If we look at the difference between scenes two and three, it becomes evident that language has clearly changed as the narrator is describing the act:

> Go on you fucking. Not. Ah. Something. Fun for everyone. There's it. That's it. Fucking. For a laugh. Ow I say. Ah ha ha ha. All this until blah blah he comes. My head bouncing nod nod on his shoulder. Off the bone. (141)

> Doos the fuck the fuckink slatch in me. Scream. Kracks. Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy fucky shoves upo comes ui. Kom shitting ut h mith fking kmg. (194).

Although some of the words in the last paragraph can be perceived as misspellings for a reader, for the Girl, they are not. The omittance of letters and the repetition of words can be seen as indicators of her breakdown caused by the invasive nature of the non-consensual attack, as opposed to the consensual one, where the spelling is free from errors. As for the repetition of words, in the first short passage, the word "fucking" is repeated twice, and its spelling remains the same, while in the latter passage, it is repeated five times (141). Furthermore, the word also varies in its presentation and form in the second passage. As

Bazarnik explained, the repetition of a word could indicate that McBride is trying to "maintain an intensely emotional tone" in the narration (83). For me, however, it also solidifies the intensity of the action Girl is subjected to; it speaks volumes about the distress she is currently experiencing. It also signifies how brutal and degrading this sexual encounter really is. In this case, 'fuck' is the apex of her trauma as it is used to describe the act itself. In connection to the narrative, it signifies that she is being sexually abused. In connection to the narration, it signifies how she is being used. Lastly, in connection to the narrator, 'fuck' indicates that she has no joy, no pleasure during the act, and that sex is synonymous with more pain, more distress. Furthermore, because the word is misspelled, it also hints at the intensity of the act. In the first passage presented here, they are simply "fucking," while in the latter, he is "fuck," "fuckinh," "fuk," "fucky," fking," her (141, 193). The words become unintelligible as the intensity reaches its peak, as the trauma completely overtakes her and overtakes her language. The wound is truly manifesting itself in the language, revealing how damaging it truly is. It seems that the text is creating a new use for language in its representation of trauma by experimenting with language. In doing so, the language emulates the process where the trauma breaks down the narrator's cognition. The trauma can also twist the narrator's language to emulate trauma in its structure and form. To that extent, as an addition to Pederson's theory, I would argue that the narration in *Girl* does show how we need to also consider the temporality of the event in question as a representation of trauma. It might be ambiguous to claim so, but for a narration situated in the present where it reflects present action, one needs to question how the impact of trauma affects the representation in the here and now, not in the past. It can affect how a person is able to participate in a "talking cure" (Pederson 97) since Pederson is adamant that the representation of trauma is best described from a retrospective stance. For Girl, she is participating in a "talking cure," but her participation is instantaneous. She conveys trauma as it is happening, letting the trauma bleed out into and overtake her language as the traumatic events are occurring.

As we have seen above, the word 'fuck' can be used to indicate action, and it can, through its spelling, indicate the intensity of the act. In the second paragraph of the last scene, mainly where McBride has applied capital letters and lowercase letters, further evidence can be found that indicates that the language is essentially performing an action that is left unsaid, unexplained, something we have to look into further as it does represent a form of trauma. At this point, it needs to be said that the reader might have to explore the text with a grasp over the workings of semantics as meaning can be derived as much from the meaning of the word as the spelling of them can derive it. Although words are usually used to indicate something

specific, they can also indicate actions and even emotions by their presentation and form. If we look at the last scene again, the word "VOMit" (194) appears in the second paragraph, line two. First and foremost, it signifies that Girl is throwing up. Secondly, it is also indicating action as it happens. Some readers can even imagine the process of throwing up as they read it. By emphasizing the first half of the word with capital letters and reading it aloud, "VOM…" (194) can allude to the unconscious part of throwing up and the latter half being what comes out when we do so. Another indicator where action appears in a sentence can be seen in line four, "HoCK SPIT" (194), where the reader can imagine that Girl is spitting at her assailant.

Words and sentences, as such, can have a direct meaning, but they can also possess an indirect description of the action. As such, there is evidence that points out that the structure and the presentation of the grammar of the narration are essentially resulting in a "performative language" (White 566), a language that is alive, something that White discussed in her article. Although White primarily refers to how the narration has an oral resonance, there is a point to her discussion, especially if we acknowledge Pederson's argument that the language of a narration can act "as a substitute for action" (97). Conventional use of the written language does not possess the peculiar means to perform anything without indicating how something is performed. The unconventional use of capital and lowercase letters in Girl's narration and text possesses a remarkable ability to perform something. In its experimental approach, the author has been able to emulate and infer tonality and even pitch into the written word by playing with capitalization. When we speak, the tonality and pitch of our voice indicate how words should be spoken and hints at how words can change in their presentation when emotions are involved. If we are angry, we might use more force when we speak, and the tone of our voice becomes sterner. When we are happy, positive emotions can affect the performative quality of what we say. Other signifiers that also support our outward expression are usually muted, such as hand gestures, facial expressions, etc. Signifiers that come automatically when we are speaking do not present themselves so easily through the written word, so readers can turn to semantics to understand the meaning of the words as they are presented. The Girl's experimental approach to grammar and syntax allows her to transform the words so that they do, however ambiguous they might seem, signify emotions and action by the way the words are spelled.

It might have gone unnoticed that there are some peculiar spaces in paragraph two in scene three which show a complete deviation from the first two scenes we have already assessed. If we go back and look at lines seven and eight in this third scene, one can see that

the spaces are actually another narrative strategy: "…zip. Thanks for fuck you thanks for that I. hear his walking crunching. Foot foot. Go. Him Away…" (McBride 194). These pauses are not hazardously placed; they are there for a reason. Pederson even indicated in his discussion that such pauses could actually be "an intentional decision" (107) which I agree with. The thing is that the reader has to imagine why they are there and try to figure out what purpose they serve. I would argue that they might be an indicator that Girl is trying to catch her breath, or the spaces can even mean that she goes in and out of consciousness. Such prolongation of pauses might seem puzzling in written discourse, but if the reader considers the effects of such strategically placed pauses and what they can signal, they might be surprised to find that they make sense. Pauses are sometimes used to enforce a condition, they can be abrupt, and they can also enforce something we have said. In my opinion, the pauses the narrator uses here indicate the brutality of the trauma she has endured. It can also signify a choice the Girl has consciously made, although there are no indicators to strengthen this claim.

Abbreviations of words are not uncommon, but the precise misspellings of words are, especially in a published and critically acclaimed novel such as *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. Here the misspellings represent the state of mind the narrator is in while she is trying to convey her story, where she is caught in a maelstrom of emotions and action. As such, the grammatical errors should be forgiven by the empathic reader. Words such as "stomik" and "uPshes" along with "WitK" show that the narrator's grasp of English syntax is not as strong during a traumatic event (McBride 194). It arguably represents how intense the force of trauma is on the mind. The fluctuating use of capital and lowercase letters shows that the text is experimenting with the structure and form of the language in a way to merge the action into the words without having to describe it. The capital letters add, in a way, more force to the word right when something which can be perceived as traumatic happens to the Girl insinuating something which is not described. As such, the language is performing and operating on a higher level in its representation of trauma. It is unexpected, but it is rather significant as it shows that experimentation with language can offer a new way to represent trauma. It reflects more what the narrator can do with language as trauma occurs, that is to say, in the present. Although some literary critics criticize the language of the narration for being too experimental and it only achieves confusion as the readers read, such experimentation is necessary. Trauma cannot be explained; it has to be felt or experienced. With the experimentation with the structure and form of the language, the text is trying to emulate trauma in its presentation. The composition of the narration's language makes people

uncomfortable when they read because it pushes against conventionality. It also pushes against the sentiment that trauma can only be presented as a memory through the use of retrospective language, as the narrator has to utilize whatever tools necessary in order to convey and communicate what she is experiencing at the moment the trauma occurs. In the narrative, the trauma and its representation are not only based on a past condition that can best be presented through the retrospective language; it is also a present condition that is ruled by the unreflective language.

5 Conclusion

From assessing the three scenes from McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, two things become apparent about the novel's representation of trauma. It represents trauma both on a level of content and on a level of discourse. By choosing three different scenes from three different sections of the novel and comparing them, we can better assess how the representation of trauma shifts from one scene to another. Furthermore, the three key scenes demonstrate that the development of the representation of trauma within the novel's narrative and narration intensifies and becomes more transparent as time goes by. It also shows that the representation of trauma needs time to establish itself within the narrator's language as it slowly but surely, overtakes her means of expression and her agency.

From a level of content, the three scenes explore particular traumatic events such as molestation, sexual abuse, and rape that have occurred and are still occurring within an Irish context. It is clear that the text exposes the readers to the life of an Irish girl and her personal encounter with trauma, be it physical, psychological, or a culmination of both. What the text does, in its representation of trauma on a level of content and theme, is cast light on the detrimental effects sexual trauma has had on young girls for generations in Ireland by having an anonymous narrator invite readers into her narrative through a shared consciousness which situates the trauma and its representation, not as a past event but as a present condition. Although some *Girl* critics and scholars claim that the novel just picks up on what could be termed an Irish literary legacy and that the narrative relies on conventional Irish themes, this might not necessarily be the case. By acknowledging that the theme of the scenes we have assessed revolves around trauma and how a person is able to express themselves during a particularly traumatic event, it is apparent that a new theme has emerged: trauma in the form of sexual abuse and the representation of trauma. The text calls for the scrutinization of trauma, particularly when it comes to young women, and the responsibility we as the reader have when faced with another person's story. So, it seems that the workings of the narrative are not just focused on death, family, and religion but also on trauma and the representation of trauma. The overall representation of trauma in the form of sexual abuse in the narrative's content sets out the need to discuss specific issues which undoubtedly need to be discussed more often: sexual abuse, verbal abuse, injustice, molestation, rape, and female agency.

Because such issues have been regarded as taboo, they might be a bit too much for a conventional reader to confront and accept as part of the narrative. To that extent, it seems that the text, in its unconventional composition and presentation, sets out to make readers ask

themselves prominent existential questions about trauma and its effects on young women and girls. The narrative and the narration do not shy away from the darker, more sinister realities of life, nor do they make any excuses to do so. Therefore, the reader must understand that although the representation of trauma within the novel's content is purely fictional, fiction always possesses an ambiguous connection to reality. As readers, we have to acknowledge that the representation of trauma within *Girl* goes beyond the fictional, and it has a more significant impact because of its connection to reality. Fiction gives room to explore the darker and more sinister sides to life and experiment with the representation of trauma by having an ambiguous shield between the reader and the text. The narrative reflects and represents the trauma the fictional character is experiencing. However, it is also challenging the reader to discuss such issues which have been and are currently taking place within the Irish community. Having trauma upfront and center means that the reader cannot escape the reality of the narrator's predicament, and it highlights that readers cannot escape such an ominous theme without confronting it. The text refuses to hide behind conventionality and, as such, expects the reader to do the same.

I do concur in a way with Costello-Sullivan concerning confronting issues in order to move past them. However, after assessing how trauma is represented in the narrative, narration, and the novel's narrator, it seems that it does not suit her assertion because it is not offering any form of recovery. The fact of the matter is that recovery and a precise formula for a recovery process might not be possible, especially if a person is subjected to repetitive trauma. We as readers need to acknowledge that Girl and her particular representation of her trauma depicts a person who is unable to find resolution and a conventional transformation as it is clear that trauma overtakes her and her language little by little until it completely overtakes her in scene three and destroyed her means of clear expression. She is a person who is defeated not only by the circumstances of trauma but also by the effects of trauma. We as readers need to acknowledge and understand that everyone cannot find a resolution that will suit certain expectations which Costello-Sullivan has set. It becomes apparent that instead of conjuring up some form of hypothetical positivism, the narrative of *Girl* reminds its readers, through its representation of trauma and its effects within the narrator's language, that it is possible not to recover at all. Although we might have a sense of hope for some form of justice for the narrator, such notions might be misguided. For some victims of trauma, it is more sensible and realistic to have a narrative, a narration, and a narrator who is not exuding hope but bottomless darkness. This means that the reader actually has a certain responsibility after closing the book; to assess what they have learned from the text's representation of

trauma. If we as readers turn our backs on themes and issues regarded as taboo or unspeakable because their representation is hard to justify means that we are just silently letting such things happen.

It seems that the representation of trauma on the level of content comes through the overall theme of the scene we have assessed. However, trauma is also represented on a level of discourse in the novel's narration, composition, and language. Trauma and the representation of trauma are particularly present in the language of the narrator's narration, especially when she is interacting with others. Although the narrator herself can be regarded as the very symbol of the traumatized female, her narration encompasses what it is to be traumatized, which means that the representation of trauma operates on a binary level within the narration. Not only does the narration reveal what is happening in the narrative, but the trauma also manifests itself in the very structure and form of the narration. Trauma can be soul-destroying as it affects a person's cognition, and trauma has undoubtedly affected the narrator in *Girl*. By using a stream of consciousness style and having the narration guided by an internalized voice, the text is allowed to represent trauma to the reader much more intimately as it depicts not only her thoughts and the fundamental workings of her as a person, but it also allows readers to see how trauma is affecting her. The form of her language engulfs and exhibits the damaging effects of trauma not only at the moment when the traumatic event occurs but also how it affects her language and her as a person after the event has taken place. Although it takes time for the trauma to fully manifest itself within the structure and form of the language, as it has done in scene three, minor signs of trauma can be traced in the language within scenes one and two. This means that the form of the narrator's language within the narration, in its representation of trauma, has the ability to surpass conventional language use because of its experimental form.

The narration is without a doubt experimental and mischievous, and it calls for a critical engagement from the reader as their focus should be drawn away from the explicit content of the narrative and its representation of trauma and over to how the language of the narration is representing trauma in its very composition. This means that the reader has to study what is actually present and presented in the narration by critically assessing the form and structure of the words that make up the narration in their quest for meaning. In essence, to properly assess the representation of trauma within the language, the reader has to rely on the basis of semantics to understand how trauma is being represented in the language. However, this critical engagement is dependent on the reader's ability to see beyond the content of the narrative and their willingness to look at the workings of the language of the narration instead.

As we have assessed some vital keywords, their use, their meaning, and their spellings, it is apparent that words themselves can represent trauma because of their form and structure. When words are misspelled, information is omitted, and sentences shortened or lengthened, the readers have to decipher why such occurrences happen and how they can represent trauma. The form and style of the language within the Girl's narration alter drastically from her first encounter with sex to her last. It becomes evident that the representation of trauma comes through in her language by the increase of what we would consider grammatical errors in scene three. The errors evolve from few and far between because of an increase in trauma being directed at the narrator. However, even if the grammatical errors make the narration hard to read, the readers can still derive vital information from what they have been presented with. The misspellings themselves can exude an ambiguous value in their meaning. The language of the narration becomes trauma manifested through the unification of the trauma with the language because trauma can twist and experiment with the form and style of the language and the words.

The thing that makes what we might read as errors in the language of the text so unique is that these 'errors' are actually a central element of the narrator's language in representing trauma at the particular moment trauma occurs. It is Girl's way of communicating what is being done to her. Her language breaks down because of the effects of trauma, and it represents just that. It represents what she is able to do and what she is unable to do both during and after the traumatic event. The trauma seeps into her language, breaking it down, just as it breaks her mind and body. It might be hard for the reader to decipher what she is trying to say because of missing letters, the random use of punctuation, and the repetition of certain words. However, it represents the trauma taking over, forcing itself into her language. Suppose her voice is interrupted, and the language becomes more coherent. In that case, it usually belongs to another person who is interrupting her thought process. However, the focalization and the experimental form of the words remind the reader that the narration is set around her internalized language. It is her interpretation of what is being said is reflected to the reader. The text certainly exemplifies some peculiar and highly experimental stylistic choices when it comes to its narration. However, it seems that those stylistic choices possess the ability to reflect a more realistic approach to language in the precise moment of trauma.

Nonetheless, there is still some truth to what Reynolds said about the reader being shielded from experiencing the trauma which is being represented in the narrative through its narration. Although they, in a way, share the narrator's consciousness, they are subjected to

the trauma she endures in another form. In my opinion, primarily because of the focalization of the narration, they are placed both outside and inside the narration, a place where they are neither here nor there. This became particularly clear during the first scene when the narrator reminded the reader that this was happening to her and not to them by the use of the objective pronoun me. The reader intimately reads about the trauma and sees how it is being represented, but they cannot feel the trauma. They cannot experience the trauma, but they can witness the trauma in the moment, especially because of the narrator's unreflective narration. As such, Reynolds has a point with her counterarguments against Cahill's immersion of the reader. If one does not stop and question Cahill's assertations, there is a chance that the reader will appropriate the narrative. If we as readers start to overidentify with the Girl because we are supposedly the character, there is no balance between the fictional world and the real world. To that extent, the reader must be careful of stepping over the ambiguous and confusing effects of the stream of consciousness style. There is an invisible boundary between them and Girl, which pushes them out of the narrative and the narration. I would say that the readers have to look at this text through Rodi-Risberg's "affective engagement," although they are part of the narrator's consciousness in some ambiguous way (113).

The representation of trauma within McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* comes through both on a level of content and a level of discourse. Clearly, the narrative represents trauma, and, through our assessment of the three scenes, the narrative is also actualizing the trauma through the narrator and the narration. *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* possesses an extraordinary power in its representation of trauma. It actively engages the reader from the first page until the last through the narrative's unique way of representing trauma and the narration's unique way of actualizing trauma. Although the presentation of the narrative, the narration, and the narrator might be experimental and foreign for us as readers, it is the narrator's narrative, her narration, and her way of representing her trauma.

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