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Richard Powers's the Echo Maker and the Trauma of Survival

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RICHARD POWERS'S *THE ECHO MAKER* AND THE TRAUMA OF SURVIVAL

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ABSTRACT

In this study, Cathy Caruth's innovative description of trauma as a crisis of survival in works such as "Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud" and *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) is applied to the story of Mark Schluter's traumatic experience in Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker* (2006). Theoretically, Caruth's description owes much to Freud's classic accounts of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In particular, Caruth capitalizes in on Freud's reference to the experience of awakening from traumatic unconsciousness as an "another fright" in the second section of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 11). For Caruth, the content of this second fright is the unwitting continuance of life in the face of near death experience. The narrative of Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker* originates in such a second fright experience. Brought close to death through a violent truck accident in the novel's introduction, Mark Schluter awakens later in the novel into a life that he no longer recognizes as his own. In particular, Capgras syndrome, a neurological condition brought on by the crash, makes it impossible for him to recognize his sister Karin as kin. Mark eventually regains recognition of his sister but tellingly only after a secondary traumatic experience involving an unsuccessful suicide attempt. In the novel's fourth section, Powers refers to Mark after his secondary trauma as "Mark Three" (Powers 414). Building upon this suggestion, this study separates *The Echo Maker*'s Mark character into three distinct parts in light of his two most notably traumatic experiences: the crash and the suicide attempt. Using Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* as a structural guide, this

thesis serializes Mark Schluter character in an attempt to better understand the traumatic content of his experiences before and after these traumatic experiences. Using Caruth's description of trauma as a crisis of survival, this study characterizes this content as Mark's inability to conceptualize his own survival. Mark's passage through a series of selves constitutes implicitly a repetition of the incomprehensibility of Mark's initial survival of the crash. Paradoxically, these repetitions bring with them other incomprehensible circumstances and so only further complicate the incomprehensibility of the original event as opposed to leading to greater understanding. Powers's novel therefore involves the depiction of trauma as a force that writes its own history only through the further displacement of the traumatic subject from the original traumatic event. Although at the novel's conclusion Mark Three appears to have recovered from Capgras syndrome, this thesis suggests in agreement with Herman and Vervaeck in "Capturing Capgras: The Echo Maker by Richard Powers" (2009) that Powers's denial of an internal focalization for Mark Three in the novel's final section casts a shadow of uncertainty over the actuality of Mark's recovery. Instead, traumatic experience in the novel's final section merely shifts its locus, finding a new home in the lives of Dr. Weber, Mark's consulting neurologist, and Barbara Gillespie, Mark's attending nurse. In *The Echo Maker*, trauma can only resolve itself through repetition, demonstrating at the heart of trauma's reiterative process a paradoxically social trajectory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Criticism on Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker* (2006) is still in the midst of a developmental process. Of the six essays published to date, three of the six focus almost exclusively on narratological issues. These studies include Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck's "Capturing Capgras: *The Echo Maker* by Richard Powers," Julienne van Loon's "What is the Self?: Subjectivity and Narrative Progression in Richard Powers' *The Echo Maker*," and Charles B. Harris's "The Story of the Self: *The Echo Maker* and Neurological Realism." Herman and Vervaeck's article "Capturing Capgras" first appeared in a 2009 issue of the literary magazine *Style*, which featured several articles by European scholars on narratological innovations in recent pieces of American fiction. As a piece of criticism, "Capturing Capgras," is astonishing in its depth and scope. In its diligent cataloguing of the various focalizations used "by Richard Powers" in the construction of *The Echo Maker*'s narrative, Herman and Vervaeck draw on poststructuralist criticism, cognitive narratology, and literary trauma theory. This article's fundamental assertion is that the narratological structure of *The Echo Maker* simulates the neurological operation of Capgras syndrome, a recognition disorder the novel's main

character, Mark Schluter, suffers from as the result of a traumatic injury. van Loon's article "What is the Self" was published in the International Journal of the Humanities just shortly after the publication of the novel. In this article, van Loon explores the relationship between the novel's realist narrative marked by a linear flow of time and stable character constructions and its poststructuralist interpretation of consciousness as a story consciousness tells about itself. Much of van Loon's analysis paves the way for the subsequent narratologically focused essays on the novel, but her conclusion that "relative consistency is crucial to narrative progression," does not seem to do justice to the alterity of *The Echo Maker*'s claims about consciousness nor to Mark Schluter's "destablizing" experience of the Capgras delusion (24, 19). Harris's article "The Story of the Self" is a highly informative read. It appeared recently in the 2008 book-length publication, *Intersections: Essay on Richard Powers*. In its first half, Harris eloquently summarizes the phenomenological features of Capgras consciousness and links them to findings of popular neuroscientific authors who may have informed Powers's composition of the character Dr. Gerald Weber. This effort intends to expand the notion of Dr. Gerald Weber's inspiration beyond the singular figure most essays link him to: Dr. Oliver Sacks. In its second half, Harris tries to adapt the Jamesian notion of "psychological realism" to emerging trends in fiction of which Powers's *The Echo Maker* is the best American example (242). For Harris, a group of writers, Richard Powers and Ian McEwan foremost among their ranks, has become interested in narrating fictions from the perspective of neurological disorders that affect characters rather than from the perspective of characters with neurological disorders. In Harris's essay, this effort constitutes a new type of realism which he describes as "neurological realism" (243). Only from such a perspective, Harris

concludes, can Powers possibly harmonize the realistic and poststructuralist elements of his fiction in *The Echo Maker*. Here, Harris's work emerges as a clear response to van Loon's essay, "What is the Self?"

The other three articles that have been published on Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker* are on a range of topics. The first, "Echos, Doubles, and Delusions: Capgras Syndrome in Science and Literature" by Douwe Draaisma, also appeared in the same issue of *Style* as Herman and Vervaeck's "Capturing Capgras." In this article, Draaisma also shows an interest in narratological issues but here from the perspective of the history of the study of Capgras syndrome. Draaisma convincingly argues that Powers "stylizes" the dichotomy between romantic and classical science in an effort to analyze the ethical nature of different modes of scientific discourse in contemporary medical practice. This essay exemplifies a trend in the recent criticism on *The Echo Maker* to focus on Capgras syndrome itself, making use of it as powerful theoretical instrument. The second article, "Afterthoughts on *The Echo Maker*" by Joseph Tabbi, also appeared in the *Intersections* volume in 2008. In it, Tabbi speaks out against the emotional and realist content in Powers's recent fictions, longing for the pure intellectual jolt of Powers's earlier efforts. The third article, "To Find the Soul, it is Necessary to Lose it: Neuroscience, Disability, and the Epigraph to *The Echo Maker*" by Jenell Johnson, also appeared in the *Intersection* volume. In it, Johnson highlights as do several of *The Echo Maker*'s commentators the actual context the novel's epithet in A. R. Luria's original essay (Johnson 217). In an essay on Vygotsky, Luria, a relatively famous psychologist and social scientist, speaks of the necessity of forgoing trivial individualistic concerns for the sake of the "objective forms of social life" (217). In Johnson's interpretation, this quote

highlights to the way Mark's Capgras finds its rearticulation in the lives of his doctor and loved ones and in the broader social contexts of the novel: the second war in Iraq and the impending environmental crisis of the Platte River. Somewhat surprisingly, no scholar as of yet has done a full analysis of the various social networks in the novel in relation to the novel's insistent portrayal of the flock as superior form of social intelligence and of trauma as a sort of shared experience between broken individuals.

The explicit goal of this thesis lies in its analysis of Mark Schluter's accident and its consequences through the lens of recent literary trauma theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's. As should now be evident, this goal constitutes somewhat of a significant departure from the existing critical tradition on *The Echo Maker*, which focuses almost exclusively on Capgras syndrome as neurological as opposed to a traumatic disorder. Of all the previous studies, Herman and Vervaeck's "Capturing Capgras" has been most influential in development of this thesis, particularly its discussion of the traumatic features of the novel's narratology. Admittedly, the theoretical section of this analysis, which precedes its literary analysis, is somewhat daunting in its length and critical scope, but the close affinity between classical trauma theory and recent literary trauma theory necessitates the inclusion of extensive analysis of both recent and classic work on the literary implications of trauma. The theoretical section will focus on Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Cathy Caruth's "Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud," *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), and "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence and Survival," and Peggy Phelan's "Converging Glances: A Response to Cathy Caruth's 'Parting Words'." Caruth's assertion that the essence of traumatic experience stems from the incomprehensibility of

survival will serve as a focal point in this theoretical presentation. Through the course of the study's theoretical presentation, a complex web of associations, definitions, and metaphors will be gathered for later use in the literary analysis. For example, Freud's serialization of Moses in *Moses and Monotheism* will come back into play in the literary analysis. Around the notion of historical betrayal and trauma, Freud is forced to separate the single notion of Moses, "the liberator and law-giver," into two distinct entities: "the first Moses," the Moses murdered, and "the second Moses," the Moses returned (17). In the literary analysis, a similar technique will be utilized when referring to the novel's main character, Mark Schluter, who exists in three separate forms in the novel as a consequence of the impact of two distinct traumatic occurrences: "Mark One" referring to Mark before the crash, the memory that haunts Mark's sister, "Mark Two" referring to Mark in between crash and suicide attempt, the Capgras sufferer, and "Mark Three" referring to Mark after the suicide attempt, the Mark that might be cured. This serialization of Mark, albeit somewhat laborious, is nonetheless fundamental to this thesis as a method of conveying the truly deconstructive value of traumatic experience as Freud prefigured it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Caruth confirmed it in *Unclaimed Experience* and the several articles that built up to this text. For Freud, the traumatic return revealed the existence of a death drive within the drive of life. For Caruth, Freud's "second fright" involves the trauma of awakening into survival ("Traumatic Departures" 34). Taken together, life becomes a continuous traumatic return as birth itself constitutes a sort of traumatic awakening. It should be noted at the outset of this thesis that very little time will be spent analyzing Mark's Capgras syndrome as a neurological disorder as much work has already been published on this aspect of the condition. The basic starting

point for this thesis lies in the traumatic erasure of Mark's memory as a consequence of his crash. In this context, Mark's anosognosia, his inability to recognize the disordered nature of his mind, emerges as the most significant of his neurological symptoms in relation to his traumatic experience. Only briefly at the conclusion of this thesis will a few words be said regarding the traumatic dymanics of Capgras syndrome's neurological operation in tandem with Peggy Phelan's presentation of the optics of trauma in "Converging Glances," a response to Caruth's "Parting Words."

In a 2007 interview with Jill Owens, Richard Powers lapses into narratological theory when describing the narrator of *The Echo Maker*. In his characterization of the novel's narrator "a close limited third-person focalization," "a hybridized inside/outside voice," a narrator who participates "in the consciousness of the protagonist," Powers reveals his knowledge of narratological theory and his implicit use of it when formulating a recent novel (<http://www.powells.com/interviews/richardpowers.html>). In a separate 2007 interview with Jean-Yves Pellegrin, Powers again consciously uses terms from narratological theory to characterize the novel's "narrative of the self" (5). For Powers, the novel can only know "the world through situated, focalized, shared, distributed, reciprocal processes" called "focalizers," rendering the "factual litanies" of his fictions subtle "portraits of their focalizers" (6). In "Capturing Capgras: *The Echo Maker* by Richard Powers," Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck describe *The Echo Maker*'s narrator as "extradiegetic, heterodigetic, and almost completely invisible" (412). As a focalization, its narrator describes everything that happens in the narrative and yet is not a character in the novel's action. At the beginning of each of the novel's five sections, the narrator focalization is at its most external. Here, Powers includes "factual litanies" regarding the

life and mythology surrounding the Sandhill cranes. In what remainder of the novel, the narrator focalization is much closer to the individual thoughts of selected characters (Pellegrin 6). The result of this internal shift to individual minds Herman and Vervaeck describe as the novel's internal focalizations. Karin, Mark, Dr. Weber, and Barbara each receive distinct internal focalizations within the larger external narrator focalization. Karin is the subject of the narrator's first internal focalization in the novel. In section one, she acts as the mediating source of all the early description of Mark's trauma and his initial steps towards recovery. As Herman and Vervaeck point out, the Karin focalization thereby becomes the source of the five short discourses in section one where Mark's preconscious and pre-articulate experience finds its own peculiar articulation. In section two, the internal focalizations on Mark and Dr. Weber begin in serial fashion. As the novel progresses, the shifts between internal focalizations occur with greater rapidity and frequency between Karin, Mark, and Dr. Weber. In Herman and Vervaeck's essay, this "alternation of embedded narratives" is said to resemble "the network of brain synapses transmitting all sorts of information" (418, 419). According to the tenets of cognitive narratology, a type of criticism which both Herman and Vervaeck practice, texts create likenesses of the mental processes of their "characters" through their narratological constructions. In fourth section of the novel, Barbara receives brief attention as an internal focalization, just long enough to inspire sympathy for her near-novel length dissimulation regarding her involvement in Mark's accident. Later in this section, Mark receives his final internal focalization before fading out into unconsciousness and then back into a medicinally modified state of mind in section five. Significantly, Powers does not give Mark another focalization in the novel's fifth and final section. Herman and

Vervaeck interpret this omission as subtle indication that Mark may not have recovered from Capgras by the novel's conclusion (416). Perhaps, Mark's acceptance of his sister in the final section only indicates acceptance of her Capgras altered visage as something he can love.

In an interview with Alec Michod, Powers explains that in *The Echo Maker* "brain science launched the book's plot events, proved material causes, and shaped the characters' conscious understanding of their crises. But neurology is just the start of those narratives that collide against each other in the larger narrative arc" (<http://www.believemag. Com/issues/200702/?read=interview_powers>). In "The Story of Self," Harris interprets this quote as Powers's attempt to re-focalize criticism not on the particularities of Mark's neurology but on what Antonio Damasio calls "the feeling of what happens" in the novel (Damasio in Harris 230). In this thesis, trauma constitutes "the feeling of what happens" in the novel. In *The Echo Maker*, several narratives regarding Mark's traumatic history collide denying each individual narrative absolute claim on "what happens" in Mark Schluter's traumatic experience (Harris 230). Conceptually, the novel originates in the traumatic rupture of Mark's consciousness during his nearly fatal truck accident. In the absence of Mark's traumatic history as a stable and recognizable object of knowledge inside the novel's several overlapping narratives, supplementary narratives arise to fill in Mark's historical erasure. Through these supplementations, Powers weaves a tapestry-like representation of Mark's lost history, which ultimately only serves to cover up the original erasure. As supplements, these replacement narratives have their most logical source not in the actual occurrence of Mark's traumatic collision but in the immediate emotional reactions of those persons

given internal focalizations in the novel and those persons who have vested interested in a particular representation of Mark's lost history. As emotional echoes of Mark's original traumatic experience, they come to signify the experience itself as it becomes increasingly difficult to separate history from one's emotional reaction to it. As the novel develops, these emotional reactions come to focus on Mark's Capgras syndrome and its emotional consequences, but this shift should be contextualized within the original traumatic dynamics of Mark's crash and its immediate emotional impact. In that context, Mark's Capgras and the reactions of others to his illness exist within the traumatic trajectory of the original emotional reaction to his close encounter with death and his unexpected recovery from his original accident. In this fashion, this thesis hopes to focus more closely on the storm that precedes the storm, Mark's Capgras syndrome, meaning his initial exposure to traumatic experience.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Most theorists involved in the literary trauma theory movement trace the theoretical origins of the movement back to Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Cathy Caruth in her articles "Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud" and "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence and Survival" and in her book-length treatise *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* is no exception to this trend. As Caruth insinuates at the close of "Traumatic Departures," her psychoanalytical and poststructuralist theory of survival represents a sort of survival of Freudian psychoanalysis in contemporary critical context. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is primarily a consideration of a peculiar type of dream, the traumatic nightmare, which Freud has difficulty fitting into his preexisting *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Through the traumatic nightmare, the traumatic subject returns to a simulation of his or her original experience with trauma. In Freud's estimation, this type of dream, a dream that returns its dreamer to a state of pain, "astonishes people far too little" (11). In his writings prior to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud characterized the psyche as dominated by the pleasure principle and life drive. In this context, the primary function of dreams was wish-fulfillment, the psychic attainment of things inaccessible in waking life. But in the

traumatic return of such nightmares, the psyche is "obliged to repeat repressed material," the contents of its lost traumatic history, an experience which often hits the psyche with an traumatic force equal to the force of the original experience of trauma (19). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as the titled implies, this particular conundrum, that of a pain-filled dream, forced Freud to theorize a separate drive in addition to the life drive and the pleasure principle. Through careful, metapsychological reconstruction of the origins of consciousness in the fourth section of the text, Freud linked the origins of the death drive to the origination of life in birth. In the first moments of life, consciousness, conceptualized as a barrier or "shield," arises as a form of protection for the life drive, conceptualized as defenseless to external stimuli or "excitations" (30, 26). In this model, the express purpose of consciousness is to return the psyche to a less excited state. In a passage Caruth returns to frequently, Freud characterizes the origins of the death drive in the following way:

> The attributes of life were at some time awoken in inanimate matter by the
> action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception…The tension
> which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance
> endeavored to cancel out itself. In this way the first drive came into being;
> the drive to return to the inanimate state. (Freud in Caruth, "Traumatic
> Departures" 34)

This having been said, Freud proceeds in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to use the death drive to effect a re-conceptualization of the nature of trauma. In psychoanalytical explanations prior to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* including Freud's own work on hysteria and Oedipal complex, trauma was considered the direct consequence of shocking

stimuli. And yet in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, now given the existence of a death

drive, another explanation for trauma becomes possible. In it, Freud argues in direct

contradiction to the inherited tradition that trauma is only an indirect response to

shocking stimuli. More properly, trauma occurs as a psychic reaction to the mind's own

inherent temporal limitations. Citing the example of accident trauma, Freud draws

attention to the accident victim's state of mental unpreparedness just prior to the accident.

When the accident occurs, it happens suddenly. In this context, the psyche has no time to

prepare itself for the sudden impact of the accident. For Freud, the psyche's reaction to

the suddenness of the accident is a "fright," meaning a state of fear not due to anticipation

of some harm but due to the sudden occurrence of that harm (Freud 11). Trauma's source

is not the accident, but the fright it experiences as a consequence. In the moment of

traumatic impact, the psyche suddenly goes unconscious for a short stretch of time. In

reflection of Freud's death drive, the psyche experiences a kind of short-term death

during the moment of impact in order to protect itself from the suddenness of traumatic

stimuli. Unfortunately, this process, primarily its unconsciousness, inhibits the psyche's

ability to record memories regarding the traumatic occurrence. Once awake, the accident

victim, whose experiences Freud takes to be emblematic of all forms of traumatic

neuroses, "walks away from the accident apparently unharmed," but remembers little to

nothing regarding the impact of trauma (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 6). This full

experience from sudden occurrence to awakening from unconscious Freud characterizes

as the beginning of the traumatic cycle in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which finds its

culmination in the form of repetitive nightmares. In these nightmares, the traumatic

subject re-experiences a simulation of the original accident. For Freud, such a dream

constitutes the psyche's attempt to master a conscious breach in its own experience of time and history. And yet, as Freud indicates throughout *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, such dreams often strike with re-traumatizing force. In this context, the traumatic return becomes a way of life for the trauma victim.

In Caruth's 1995 essay "Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud," she extends Freud's consideration of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to include the "enigma of survival" (29) As a poststructuralist exploration of the implications of Freud's trauma theory, Caruth's works attend to what Ruth Leys calls in *Trauma: A Genealogy* calls an "aporetic shift" in Freud's late writings on trauma and develops this aspect in light of the psychoanalytical and critical insights of Lacan and de Man. In her presentation of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in "Traumatic Departures," Caruth focuses on two particular aspects of Freud's trauma theory: first, his assertion that accident victims are "more concerned" in their waking lives "with *not* thinking" about "memories of their accident" (12) and second, his construction of trauma as a double fright. In its original context, Freud's assertion about "*not* thinking" simply refers to the daytime struggle that some trauma victims experience when trying to avoid thought about the traumatic return, but for Caruth, this assertion constitutes an opening for her own theoretical conception of trauma. In her poststructuralist context, this "*not* thinking" is taken as a reference to the "*missing* of the experience of trauma" as an object of consciousness (32). In this interpretative gesture, Caruth brings the epistemological crisis implied in Freud's analysis of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to the forefront of her own analysis of trauma. The epistemological aspect of Freud's theory is perfected by Caruth in her analysis of his insistence that trauma involves a double fright. In Freud, the

traumatic nightmare is described as a second or "another fright," although the nature of that fright is not sufficiently explained (11). In "Traumatic Departure," Caruth capitalizes on this theoretical opening. In her interpretation, the traumatic nightmare is experienced in the following fashion. Inside the dream, the trauma victim experiences a first fright when encountering the lost history of a missed traumatic experience. This first fright causes the trauma victim to awaken prior to full comprehension of his or her own survival of the missed traumatic experience repeated inside the dream. Once awake, the trauma victim experiences a second fright, but this time, the fright's source is the continuance of life in the waking world. In this context, the trauma induced by the second fright, which often is as shocking and painful as the original experience of trauma, is a trauma in relation to the "very incomprehensibility of one's own survival" (34). For Caruth, the entire process of traumatic return from first fright to second fright constitutes the repetition of the original experience of trauma, which Freud depicts at the heart of the repetition compulsion. Waking from the dream, the trauma victim experiences the continuance of life despite the lack of conscious comprehension of that continuance in exact replication of the dynamics of the original trauma where the trauma victim in Freud's characterization "walks away from the accident apparently unharmed" (*Unclaimed Experience* 6). In Caruth's analysis:

> If "fright" is the term by which Freud defines the traumatic effect of not
> having been prepared in time, then the trauma of the nightmare does not
> simply consist in the experience *within* the dream, but in the *experience of*
> *waking from it*. It is the experience of *waking into consciousness* that,
> peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of the trauma. And as such it is

not only the dream that surprises consciousness but, indeed, the *waking itself* that constitutes the surprise: the fact not only of the dream but of having passed beyond it. What is enigmatically suggested, that is, is that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death, but in *Having survived precisely, without knowing it*. What one returns to, in the flashback, is not the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival. Repetition, in other words, is no simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died, but more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one's own survival*. ("Traumatic Departures" 34)

In this context, the literal force of the traumatic return is an effect of the jeopardy the dreamer feels in its midst, while the traumatic force of traumatic return is an effect of the dreamer's awakening from the dream. In the divide between these two aspects, Caruth characterizes the trauma victim as losing a claim on "one's own survival" (34). As Caruth assumes with Freud that the repetitions of traumatic return are inescapable, this lack of a claim on "one's own survival" becomes a constitutional experience for the trauma victim in the posttraumatic setting. In chapter three of *Unclaimed Experience*, "Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Moses and Monotheism*)", a modification of her 1995 essay of nearly the same name, Caruth returns to Freud's characterization of birth as traumatic experience in chapter four of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in an effort to draw more general conclusions from the above. In her analysis, birth indeed involves an incomprehensible awakening into life, thereby making birth a kind of trauma of survival. On the basis of this analogy, Caruth effects a

translation in both the original and the re-published versions of "Traumatic Departures"

that history is in fact a history of trauma. In both these versions, Freud's *Moses and*

Monotheism serves a demonstration for this process of translation.

Moses and Monotheism in its final publication form in 1939 is a composite of two

periods of composition and two distinct periods in Freud's own personal history. The first

two sections were published by Freud in 1937 under Nazi occupation in Vienna: 'Moses

an Egyptian," and "If Moses was an Egyptian." Appearing in Freud's magazine *Imago*,

these works emerged largely stripped of psychoanalytical content in an effort by Freud to

avoid further Nazi persecution of psychoanalysts. In these essays, Freud makes his

assertion, echoing the biblical scholar Ernst Sellin, that two Moses figures exist behind

the Torah's presentation of a single figure (37). In an essentially psychoanalytical

gesture, Freud searches beneath the textual surface of the Torah for repressed and/or

marginalized voices. Finding trace elements of a pro-Egyptian tradition within the

priestly account, Freud uses this pro-Egyptian voice to construct a counter-conception of

the Hebrew exodus. In this counter-conception, Freud asserts that "the first Moses" was

an "Egyptian aristocrat" (18). As a follower of Akhenaton's monotheism, the first Moses

brought monotheism to the Hebrew slaves, for whom he felt great sympathy. Once

Akhenaton died, the first Moses used that opportunity to liberate the Hebrew slaves from

bondage. Once freed, the Hebrews turned on the first Moses and murdered him. In this

process, the Hebrews stratified into two factions: one pro-Egyptian and another pro-

Semitic. At this juncture, Freud begins to refer to the Hebrews as "Jews" in his two

essays (24-25). Ostensibly, this name shift reflects a fundamental shift in Hebrew identity

with trauma as its source. Over the next two generations, the Jews wandered in search of

Canaan. During this time, the murder of Moses and the pro-Egyptian faction sunk deep into the historical imagination of the Jewish collective mind. While camped near the volcano Mr. Sinai, a second monotheist entered Hebrew/Jewish history. In the priestly tradition, this second figure is appropriately named "Moses." In Freud's account, he was more properly named as "the second Moses," the Moses that emerges as a traumatic return. In bringing a monotheistic law to an essentially lawless people, the second Moses was considered a redeemer (41). His actions breathed life into a listless people, the wandering Jews, and in so doing gave definite form to their inherited tradition. In the essays, Freud briefly speculates how the repressed trauma becomes the source of the Jewish sense of chosenness by Yahweh, but constrained by his environment Freud measures his words carefully. In 1938, the Nazis fully occupied Vienna and during this incident, Freud along with some surviving family members took flight into exile. Once situated in London in late 1938, Freud began a process of revision regarding his work on the Egyptian Moses. In 1939, a peculiar volume *Moses and Monotheism* appeared as a result of this process. In it, Freud repeats verbatim his first two essays published in *Imago*, followed by a lengthy third section which includes a "Summary and Recapitulation" section, extensive repetition of the material found in the first two essays, and detailed discussion of the psychoanalytical implications of those two essays. In the "Summary and Recapitulation" section, Freud intimates a connection between the repetitions in his publication and the traumatic return characterized in his account of the exodus. In Caruth's "Traumatic Departures" and *Unclaimed Experience*, this intimation becomes highly significant. In the psychoanalytical analysis of the exodus, Freud focuses particularly on the notion of "latency" (*Moses and Monotheism* 80). In his interpretation,

the chosenness of God is an effect of the latent return of a historical betrayal in the form of a second Moses-like figure. Freud describes this process as the shift from history to tradition. In this context, the history of Hebrew violence lives on through Jewish devotion to Yahweh. In Freud's development of these themes, he quite naturally turns to the Oedipal account and imposes its dynamics upon the dynamics of Hebrew/Jewish history. In this conception, the murder of Moses constitutes the murder of the father. Initially, the murder is repressed, but eventually it must return. When it returns, a second traumatic experience arises. In the context of the ancillary crisis, the need for a father is re-experienced and usually results in a forced attachment to anything remotely father-like in the immediate vicinity.

In Caruth's analysis of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* in "Traumatic Departures" and *Unclaimed Experience*, she superimposes the dynamics of traumatic experience that Freud discovered in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* onto Freud's account of Jewish history in *Moses and Monotheism* and the publication history of *Moses and Monotheism*. Although Freud is very hesitant in *Moses and Monotheism* to make any claims regarding group psychology, Caruth effects this transition in "Traumatic Departures" through reference to the deconstructive power of traumatic experience. For Caruth, trauma involves a kind of dispossession of self. In the moment of trauma, the self fractionalizes; a part of the self survives trauma while another part stays forever stuck in the throes of traumatic experience. In the return, the surviving self and the traumatize self overlap momentarily. The experience of the return Caruth describes as a crisis of traumatic proportions, a crisis regarding "one's own survival" because inside "one's own survival" exists the continued trauma of someone else (34). All of this begs the question

of "who" really survives trauma in its initial occurrence. In this crisis of reference and identity, Caruth characterizes the beginning of one's personal history as the continuation of the traumatic history of someone else. In her superimposition of the dynamics of traumatic experience upon Freud's history of the Jews in *Moses and Monotheism*, Caruth further explores this characterization. When the Hebrews murdered the first Moses, they established the historical precondition for their later national identity as Jews as Yahweh's chosen people. For Caruth, the burial of the first Moses's body signifies the burial of the historical record deep in the collective consciousness of the Jews. When after two generations the repressed content of that history returns, it hits with a traumatic force as violent and sudden as did the initial act of betrayal. In Caruth's analysis, the violence of this force corresponds to Jewish literalism with respects to the Mosaic law. Devotion to the law thereby expresses guilt and responsibility for a trauma beyond the comprehension of Jewish identity in posttraumatic form. In this process, the Jews become fused to their own history through the shadow proceedings of the temple, where the historical betrayal is reenacted cyclically as a reminder of once forfeited allegiance to monotheism. In Rabbinical Judaism, the betrayal is reenacted through the cyclical returns and departures of biblical commentary, a fact George Steiner elucidates in *Real Presences* (1991). In Caruth, it is essential that trauma within historical context constitutes a continual and inescapable return to violent origins, rendering history as a history of trauma. In Caruth's description, "Freud's understanding of survival will only be fully grasped, I think, when we come to understand how it is through the peculiar and paradoxical complexity of survival that the theory of individual trauma contains within it the core of the trauma of a larger history" (Traumatic Departures 39). In a continued

effort to illustrate this point, Caruth turns to the publication history of *Moses and Monotheism*. In her estimation, the repetitions in the text constitute Freud's own inability to escape of the traumatic context of his late exile in life. In the "Summary and Recapitulation" section, Freud describes the first two sections of what would become *Moses and Monotheism* as an "unlaid ghost" that "tormented me" relentlessly (Freud 103). In Caruth's analysis, this reference also corresponds to the daughter Freud lost just a few years prior to the composition of the initial two essays. Caruth concludes her analysis by invoking the paradox that Freud considered the aim of his exile "to die in freedom" (Freud in Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 23)

In a more recent essay, "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival," Caruth further explores the paradoxical freedom of death. In this essay, she returns to Freud's description of the Fort/da game in the second chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in preparation for her analysis (9). In the game, the child sits on a cot and plays with a spool of thread. At the edge of the bed exists a curtain, which hides the fall of the spool when thrown by the child off the bed. The child, holding onto the thread, is able to recoil the spool at will. The child makes two different sets of sounds when throwing the spool away—"o-o-o"—and when returning it to his fold—"a-a-a." Through the help of the child's mother, Freud's dead daughter Sophie, Freud is able to attribute meaning to these sounds. "O-o-o" corresponds to the German word "fort" (gone)," while "a-a-a" corresponds to the German word "da" (here) (13-14). For Freud, this game signifies the operation of the death drive in the conscious life of the child. In an attempt to master the pain of its mother's departure, the child repeats this experience as a game and derives joy from both throwing the spool and recoiling it. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud

uses the child's joy after departure to posit the existence of a separate game within the departure and return structure of the Fort/da game. This game Freud simply describes as "a game of departure," before moving onto another topic (15). In "Parting Words," Caruth focuses exclusively on the separateness of this game. In her interpretation, sound "o-o-o" represents a definitively "creative act" and a "new conceptual language of the life drive" (Section 7, "Freud's Game"). For the child, this sound signifies the mother's departure and is as such a sound of mourning, but also according to Caruth it functions as "a parting word" to the mother (Section 6, "Parting Words"). Its proclamation—Caruth implicitly relies on Searle's notion of the speech act—effects the departure of the child into life, a life no longer uniquely its own. According to Caruth, language in the context of traumatic experience possesses a strangely trans-historical value. As a witness to the past, language also functions as a departure into an unknown future. In "Converging Glances: A Response to Cathy Caruth's 'Parting Words'," Peggy Phelan shifts Caruth's analysis of the Fort/da game into the optical dimension. In her analysis, the "fort" and "da" proclamations correspond to visual acts and kinesthetic movements. "Fort" corresponds to the act of throwing the spool beyond the visual field. As an offset to the trauma involved in this lost vision, the child holds onto the thread. Through this connection, the child extends its vision beyond the visual field. In Phelan's analysis, the thread allows the child to develop solid object formations in the absence of visual stimuli. Through this process, the child begins to imagine the mother in the absence of her physical presence. In this sense, the spool represents not only the extended vision of the child, but the reciprocated vision of the absent mother. When the child recoils the spool through use of thread, this object formation is confirmed as the return of the actual

mother confirms the formation of the imagined mother. In this context, the creative act of the Fort/da game lies its formation of an image of the child by the child from a perspective of departed mother. What Caruth in "Traumatic Departures" and *Unclaimed Experience* characterizes a historical trajectory of trauma, the translation of history into a history of trauma, Phelan interestingly refers to as the social trajectory of trauma as trauma, at least in the aspect of the Fort/da game, appears to possess the power to project the child into a form of vision no longer uniquely its own (Section 5, "Drawing a line from Gone to Here"). Phelan's remarks have obvious significance to Mark Schluter's Capgras experience in *The Echo Maker*, a curious form of optical and emotional dispossession with wide-reaching social consequences in the immediate circle of his family, friends, and caretakers.

CHAPTER III

LITERARY ANALYSIS

In *The Echo Maker*'s multi-narrative construction, no particular narrative has unique or exclusive claim on the representation of Mark Schluter's traumatic history. In "Capturing Capgras: *The Echo Maker* by Richard Powers," Herman and Vervaeck insist that "the novel confronts various worlds and embedded narratives without offering an integrated (meta)narrative that might help the reader in deciding whose focalization is reliable and unreliable" (418). For Herman and Vervaeck:

> The alternation of embedded narratives is not a sequence of clearly
>
> separated mental worlds…The vertical, double embedding of the
>
> narratives and the horizontal contamination of embedded narratives,
>
> suggest that the characters' mental worlds have lost their center and their
>
> limits. (419)

Within this context, it becomes possible to describe *The Echo Maker* as a traumatic narrative. For although its individual focalizations speak to the nature of Mark's traumatic experience, that experience exists somewhere beyond the comprehension of the novel's collection of individual focalizations. As a result, trauma is best approximated by the novel's insistent "alternation of embedded narratives," its repetition of the psychic

disparity at the heart of Mark's traumatic experience (419). In the story of the novel, Mark's traumatic experiences justify this narratological definition of his trauma as an "alternation of embedded narratives" as he ultimately experiences his own life and trauma from three distinct perspectives in the novel. As highlighted by Herman and Vervaeck, Powers uses the serialization of Mark Schluter to separate his traumatic experience into three distinct historical periods (420). Referring to Mark just after his suicide attempt as "Mark Three," Mark prior to the crash becomes "Mark One" and Mark in between the crash and the suicide attempt becomes "Mark Two" (Powers 414). In this literary analysis, Mark Schluter will be referred to as "Mark One," "Mark Two," and "Mark Three" in light of these historical distinctions. In congruence with Caruth's theory, this interpretative gesture intends to denote the multiple selves at work in Mark Schluter's story of trauma. Additionally, it intends to capture the way in which Mark's trauma hinges on the incomprehensibility of his own survival and his inability to claim his life as uniquely his own. In the trajectory of Mark's story, trauma opens itself into both a historical and social dimension. Mark's cyclical returns, foreshadowed by the movements of the Sandhill cranes, signify a fragility at the center of life which Freud himself defined as a kind of death. Within this context, Powers's open-ended conclusion to the novel—the absence of Mark's own internal focalization in its fifth section— becomes more comprehensible. As the novel concludes, Mark's life continues as an open question beyond the claim of any particular of his numerous survivals and any individual interpretation of the novel.

Mark One, Mark prior to his accident, is most recognizable in the novel as a memory in the Karin Schluter focalization. This carefree, risk-taking, affable young man ,

Mark One takes on a life of his own after the accident inside Karin's memory. As Mark

Two's condition worsens, Karin recalls a more rarified and idealized version of her

brother. In the novel's first survival paradox, Mark One's vitality as a memory exists in

an inverse relationship to Mark Two's morbidity as a patient in the hospital. Mark One is

stronger, wittier, more caring as Mark Two sinks deeper into unconsciousness emerging

after a coma in a much altered form in comparison to the Mark One memory. While in

the hospital in recovery, Mark Two experiences traumatic repetitions in the form of

nightmares and waking bouts of intense violence. These experiences interestingly

coincide with the aphasia Mark Two experiences right after awakening from his trauma-

induced coma. Karin stays with Mark Two during these episodes although she hardly

recognizes her brother in his possessed state. During one particularly severe episode,

Karin discovers that reading to Mark Two has a soothing effect upon his traumatic

repetitions. Like in Bruno Bettelheim's classic Freudian analysis of fairy tales and their

use with small children "Cinderella: A Story of Sibling Rivalry and Oedipal Conflicts,"

the spoken word imposes an element of order on the traumatic chaos of Mark's internal

process. In this context, Powers fashions a unique discourse in *The Echo Maker* to fit

Mark Two's traumatic experience as he rises from unconsciousness through aphasia and

cognitive inability into the return of both his cognitive and linguistic capacities. Probably

the most innovative feature of the text, this discourse is used by Powers to characterize

Mark Two's traumatic experience, which exists ultimately beyond words. In Herman and

Vervaeck's essay, "Capturing Capgras," the narratological structure of this discourse

emphasizes its paradoxical relationship to the experiences it purports to describe. As a

component of the Karin internal focalization in section one of the novel, this discourse

suggests the overlapping of Mark Two and Karin's vision in the context of trauma. But as a highly poetic piece of literature, this discourse suggests the presence of the poetic narrator, who so eloquently describes the movements of crane life in the introductions to each of the novel's five sections. In the context of this analysis, these overlapping claims open up the possibility of a "new conceptual language of the life drive" within Mark Two's traumatic discourse (Caruth, "Parting Words," Section 7). Unsurprisingly, given the paradoxical nature of trauma, this new conceptual language returns cyclically to death as a signifier for the incomprehensible aspect of Mark Two's survival. In this reading of Mark Two's traumatic discourse, its author will simply be referred to as "the poet."

The language in the first part of Mark Two's traumatic discourse is hesitant and enigmatic. In a constant stream of images and metaphors, the poet behind Mark Two's traumatic discourses breathes life into his dying form paradoxically through an infusion of words that cannot be his. The first part draws attention to the severity of Mark Two's pain described as "flock of fiery cinders" immediately after the accident (Powers 10). When Mark Two's pain "thins, then always water." In the context of the discourse, water symbolizes a complete return to the natural, which in Mark Two's experience is a state of blissful unconsciousness. When the "pure terror" of the pain's return overwhelms Mark Two, the poet calls to him: "Come with. Try death" (10). For Mark Two, death signifies a release from the incomprehensibility of his own survival. When eventually unconsciousness returns, it comes to Mark Two as a kind of death. "Water that is nothing but into nothing falls" (11). Here, the first part ends weaving a primal association between wordlessness, nature, the state of traumatic unconsciousness, and death. In the second part of Mark's traumatic discourse, the poet returns to a childhood trauma of

26

Mark One. In it, Mark One is drowning. His father is teaching him to swim. His father reaches into the water, "stiff hand pressing down his head until all bubbles stop" (19). As Mark One dies, Mark Two seems to awaken into his hospital room, "a room full of machines." He can hear and understand the words flying around the room, but "time flaps about, wings broken" distorting the content of these messages. "*Be patient*" is at once an injunction and a description of his present status as a hospital patient (19). Upon Mark's awakening into hospital life, the poet's language becomes more sentential and comprehensible. Ironically, in this context, Mark Two would apparently give his life to say just three words: "*I didn't mean*" (20). In these words imagined in the context of the discourse, the disparate strands of Mark Two coalesce in a provisional "I." But this provisional "I" dissipates after another round of intense pain. "Words change to flying things as they hit the air" (20). At the beginning of the third part of Mark's traumatic discourse, "a rising comes that isn't always death" (32). At this juncture, Mark Two "solidifies" as an object of language and as an idea inside the chaos of traumatic experience (32). "Ideas hit him, or he hits them" (33). As "a game always, scores pouring in, as standings change," Mark Two's traumatic experience approximates the Fort/da game. His idea of himself operates as a kind of spool-like object to which Mark Two can now return to even after the most jarring bouts of pain. Despite the apparent hopefulness of this gesture, the poet continues to describe "time is just a yardstick for pain" (33). In this context of the object formation of self, Mark Two's thoughts turn away from himself and towards "someone else" (34). In the conclusion of part three, the poet refers to "something else he is supposed to remember. Something else to save someone. Desperate message. But maybe no more than *this*" (34). In this progression, Mark Two's trauma

takes a turn towards the social just as he comes to grips with the traumatic erasure of his own memory. Significantly, the poet signifies this erasure, an essential aspect of the incomprehensibility of Mark Two's survival, through the use of a series of pronouns. In the final two phrases of part three, Mark Two turns back to an earlier struggle to speak, completing his earlier "*I didn't mean*" with "*this*" (20, 34). For Mark Two, the inability to speak "*this*" continues to signify the limbo-like quality of his traumatic existence. Not dead defined as a kind of absolute silence but not living defined as the ability to speak, Mark Two exists with his thoughts which rely on the operation of another for their full articulation. In part four of his traumatic discourse, Mark Two sinks into a death-like state. "First he's nowhere, then he's not" (41). Then suddenly, he awakens into a dream in which he has become a massive beached whale. Immobile, a spectacle, Mark Two the whale accumulates a large audience over time. In the language of the poet, Mark Two feels that his audience is awaiting his death. In this context, Mark Two wishes for his own death. "He wants death, if he wants anything" (42). Significantly for Mark Two, the incomprehensibility of his survival is coupled with a passionate suicidal tendency. "His parts come back to him, so slowly he can't know" (42). Mark Two's death coincides with the coalescence of his conception of his own body. Speech still denies Mark Two access into the word of the living. Then finally, "belching, birthing words" return (43). "Lucky," "pretty," "good"—Mark Two's first words are platitudes, assurances to his public that he is all right. Physical "mending brings him back, to the smear of thoughts and words" (43). Here, the poet speaks to the returned vitality of Mark's experience of thought and the spoken word. In the fifth and final part, Mark Two becomes imprisoned inside the word of language. The poet depicts as a kind of exile from the natural words and implicitly

traumatic experience. Mark Two can now only imagine what birds say, whereas in the previous part of the discourse "all things talk" (43). Struggling with this paradox, Mark Two's traumatic discourse concludes with the proclamation that "what happened to him is a thing even living things won't say" (50). This proclamation suggests that a language does exist for the articulation of traumatic experience, but that people refuse this language as it entails as close encounter with or repetition of death. Tragically in the novel, Mark's search for this "new conceptual language" drives him eventually to attempt suicide, a literal attempt to return to death.

Upon awakening fully into language late in the novel's first section, Mark Two reveals the presence of extensive neurological damage resulting from his traumatic injuries when telling his sister Karin: "My sister? You think you're my sister?" (59). Diagnosed by his primary neurologist Dr. Hayes as "Capgras syndrome," Mark Two recognizes his sister but does not feel an attachment to that recognition (60). Without the proper emotional feedback, Mark Two dispossesses his visual contact with his sister. What is most striking about this condition is its specificity. Mark Two does not dispossess all his visual stimuli but only the visages of his dearest loved ones. In the context of at least Mark Two's experience of the syndrome, a pre-recognition seems to take place prior to the operation of either his vision or emotion, a pre-recognition that stages the Capgras collision between vision and lack of emotion. In the novel, Dr. Hayes cannot offer any definitive explanation for the specificity of Mark Two's delusions; Dr. Gerald Weber, Mark Two's consulting neurologist, a character based on the real-life cognitive neurologist Dr. Oliver Sacks, can only explain this feature by describing all experiences of consciousness as a Capgras-like experiences. From the perspective of

Phelan's analysis of the optics of trauma, Mark Two has never lost sight with his sister, but he has lost contact with the emotional thread. Mark Two's Capgras syndrome highlights the imaginary element of vision even when the visual object is clearly in sight. In the context of this analysis, Mark Two's continuity or loss of sight is a lesser importance in comparison to the traumatic divide between Mark One and Mark Two. Through the erasure of traumatic experience, all of Mark One's visions and cognitions regarding the accident have been lost. In this vacuum, Mark Two, now fully able to speak, attempts to recall his lost optical and cognitive experiences. When Mark does misrecognize, it functions as reminder and repetition of the primary inability to recognize any of the particularities surrounding his traumatic experience. In this analysis, this reminder and repetition is most simply illustrated by his anosognosia, his ability to recognize his neurological dysfunction. Mark Two clearly suffers from Capgras syndrome, but he himself is not aware of this syndrome's existence. In this sense, Mark Two is resistant to other persons' characterizations of his mind-state. Immune toward criticism, Mark Two proceeds along his traumatic course toward literal repetition of his initial trauma. Mark Two's anosognosia therefore serves as a powerful symbol for inner dynamics of Mark's "period of incubation," the latency period between the initial collision and the traumatic return. In his disease, he remains unconscious of its presence, which only leads to the worsening of his condition and its escalation towards a suicide attempt. In his traumatic experience, Mark Two remains unconscious of the act of his own survival, which spirals out in the novel's central three sections into an obsessive search for that traumatic content. In the context of this search, Mark Two comes

eventually to believe that he died on the night of the crash, and in light of this belief comes to effect his own traumatic return.

Once Mark Two has regained speech, Karin gives him a mysterious note she found in his hospital room the day after his accident. This mysterious note, composed in a "spidery, ethereal…immigrant scrawl," announces:

> I am No One
>
> But Tonight on North Line Road
>
> God lead me to you
>
> so You could Live
>
> and bring back someone else. (10)

In the novel's central sections, Mark Two searches for this note's author in hopes of securing the complete narrative of his traumatic survival. This search is comprised of three stages. First, Mark Two visits local churches; then, he canvasses door-to-door; finally, he has his story broadcast by a local investigative journalism team. As Mark Two fails to find the note's author in each stage of the search, this search as whole constitutes a three-staged repetition of the enigma of Mark Two's traumatic survival. Mark Two's cyclical returns to the note restage the traumatic incomprehension of Mark Two's trauma in its original occurrence. In the process, Powers comes to characterize Mark Two's life as a continuation of Mark One's traumatic disappearance. Failure to understand the origins of the note signifies Mark Two's failure to understand the connection between his traumatic present and pre-traumatic past—between the death he cannot remember escaping and the survival he therefore cannot comprehend. During Mark Two's search, his neurological condition clearly worsens, expanding to include both Fregoli's syndrome

and Cotard's delusion. Fregoli's syndrome has Mark Two morphing several faces into a collective face, the visage of his childhood friend Danny Reigel. Cotard's more shockingly inspires Mark Two's belief that he in fact died on the night of the crash. Of all of Mark Two's disorders, Cotard's delusion functions best as a representation of the crisis surrounding survival in context of trauma. Presented in the novel as part a rational conclusion and as part a irrational emotion, Cotard's delusion allows Mark Two to explain his traumatic experience not only in terms of Mark One's disappearance but also in terms of Mark Two's gradual disintegration into the incomprehensibility of traumatic survival. In Mark Two's final moments, the alterity of his posttraumatic experiences impinges on his consciousness to such a degree that suicide is his only viable option for escape. Depicted as a kind of final interpretative act, Mark Two's suicide attempt confirms his late reading of the note's "No One" as a reference to himself. In this fashion, Powers stakes Mark Two's survival on the interpretation of the mysterious note, and yet here Mark Two arrives at a definitive interpretation of that note, whose content can only be realized in the absence of survival, the literal death of the traumatic subject. Luckily for Mark Two, his sister finds him dying in his trailer and rushes him again to the hospital. Passing into unconscious, doctors restore his vitality and in turn pump him full of an anti-psychotic agent, olazapine, which promises to alleviate the Capgras syndrome. Through the process of this literal traumatic repetition, Mark Two passes away and a third instantiation of Mark, "Mark Three" emerges (414).

The Echo Maker's structure as a quest narrative can be likened to a ring. In the novel's first section, Mark lacks a personal focalization; his experiences only through the third-person poet focalization. Then again, in the novel's fifth and final section, Mark

Three is denied a personal focalization. What is gathered regarding his recovery in the fifth part comes second hand, portraying his survival in an imagined form as dependent upon a perspective no longer uniquely his own. In a touching scene between sister and brother, Mark Three either recaptures Mark One's ability to recognize his sister, or his Capgras symptoms diminish to the extent that he now accept "Kopy Karin" in the place of his sister. In the first interpretation of this scene, Mark Two's suicidal decision becomes the essential precondition for the repetition of Mark One's recognition of Karin in the experience of Mark Three. In the second interpretation, Mark Three's acceptance entails a kind of suppression of his former affection for the original Karin. Through this displacement of that former feeling, Mark Three opens himself up to the possibility of finding a new sister and a new life. In either case, Mark Three's life or survival emerges as a consequence of Mark Two's latest encounter with trauma. As a sort of continuation of Mark Two's traumatic experience, Mark Three's life functions as a testimony to the disappearance of Mark Two while acting as a "parting word" between Mark Two and Mark Three. As both a witness to and the culmination of Mark Two's disappearance, Mark Three emerges as signifier within a "new conceptual language of the life drive" (Caruth, "Parting Words," Section 7). In his final instantiation, Mark is freed from the emotional isolation of Mark Two, and in this context comes to realize that his traumatic survival includes the lives of others. In the mystery of the interlocked vision of sister and brother at the beginning of the novel's fifth section, something happens in the novel that its various focalizations cannot fully account for. Some form of recognition takes place that would not have been possible apart from the novel's several occasions of trauma. By

withholding full comprehension of this mystery, Powers subtly initiates the reader into an incomprehensible element of Mark Three's survival.

In the novel's most surprising gesture, section five reveals Mark Two to be the author of the mysterious note. In the scrawling and desperate hand of a dying man, Mark Two wrote the note to a mysterious visitor to his hospital room just hours after his crash. This visitor, Barbara Gillespie, was the woman, "the white blur," Mark One swerved to miss on the highway, causing his accident. Barbara simply came to see if Mark had survived the crash, but finding him awake the two communicated: Barbara through now long forgotten words and Mark through the mysterious note. In the fifth section, Barbara comes to Mark Three and tells him this story. Reading the note in this context, Mark's trauma becomes a sacrifice for the sake of another's survival. Mark One dies so that Barbara can live. As Barbara surreptitiously acts as Mark Two's health attendant through out the novel's central sections, she "bring back someone else," signifying Mark Two in his traumatically altered form (Powers 10). In this fashion, Mark One dies so that Barbara can live and bring back Mark Two. During their concluding dialogue, Barbara also reveals that on the night of the crash, she was drunk and in the middle of the highway, hoping to get hit by an unsuspecting vehicle. In this fashion, Mark Two's suicide attempt becomes a repetition of Barbara's initial suicide attempt at the beginning of the novel. In the overlapping trajectories of their lives, a social component of traumatic experience emerges, but this component functions in *The Echo Maker* by the principle of mutual exclusion. Both Mark and Barbara have experienced the trauma of suicide, the trauma of life turning against life, rendering their society a function of the death drive. In their separate and yet conjoined attempts to return an inanimate state, Mark and Barbara create

a social bond. But significantly in the novel's final part, this connection results in a state of mutual alienation. Mark, disgusted by Barbara's dissimulations, turns inside to Karin in hopes of an honest society. Barbara, in the wake of Mark's recognition of her prevaricating nature, fades out into the novel's background.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In the 2007 essay "Freud, Faulker, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Memory," Greg Forter argues adamantly a particular representation of the history of trauma in Freud's psychoanalytical theory in constrast to the representation of that history by the major propenents of literary trauma theory considered in this thesis. In Forter's historical reconstruction, Freud in his later works turned his back on the social and sexual construction of trauma developed in works like *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) for a more structural consideration of trauma presented in works like *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism* as a result of birth and the repetitive and inescapable cycles of history. Forter, like many contemporary critics of Freud, considers Freud's late movement away from the social implications of trauma as a movement with "its roots…born in ambivalence and nurtured by fear" (261). In further explanation of this point, Forter argues:

> The possibilities for historical and political understanding promised by the
> "first" theory of trauma give rise to an acutely painful knowledge of the
> investigator's implication in the structures of domination and social

36

violence that he or she uncovers. In Freud's case, that knowledge

concerned the misogyny and femiphobia lodged at the heart of his own

masculinity: he escaped it in part by developing and ambivalently

embracing his second theory of trauma—a theory that absolved him of

historical guilt by tracing all human misery (including that caused by

misogyny and femiphobia) to a non-historical or *structural* cause, namely,

the psychoanalytical reaction of original sin called the death drive. (261)

In Forter's opinion, Cathy Caruth's work participates in a similar movement away from

the social or historical construction of trauma and towards the structural consideration of

trauma by linking the origins of trauma to the unrepeatable episode of birth in chapter

three of *Unclaimed Experience.* "The conflations in her work can be speculatively read as

an effort to keep herself from knowing that there *is* a difference between perpetrator (or

collaborator) and victim…In this sense, her choice of the punctual model over the earlier,

more historically supple theory of trauma extends the sequence of self-protective gestures

begun by Freud and continued in Faulkner" (281). In essence, Forter sees a conflict

between Caruth's commitment to the history of trauma in light of the apparently

structural trajectory of her "punctual model." Although it is understandable that Forter

should level these claims against Freud and Caruth given the stakes of the current

theoretical discourse, a brief reexamination of the content of Freud's late trauma theory

and Caruth's response to that trauma theory should offer some immediate perspective on

the matter. First, Freud's late thought on the nature of trauma was tremendously diverse

in constrast to Forter's presentation of that same period in his article. As Leys points out

in *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Freud's late writings, meaning his work from the 1920's and

1930's, contain many twists and turns, shifts in perspective and opinions, resulting in her

characterization of them as a form of "aporetic" literature (25). Texts like *Beyond the*

Pleasure Principle and *Moses and Monotheism* gesture towards several different possible

systemizations of trauma as they follow contradictory paths to these works' several

conclusions. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud introduces the death drive as a

hypothetical and meta-psychological reaction to his earlier social/Oedipal theory of

trauma. In the first section of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud admits that he cannot

explain the traumatic nightmare in light of what he already knows about human

psychology and so motions towards the death drive hypothesis for the sake of furthering

an intellectual argument. Critics tend to forget that Freud's writings during this period

were experimental—that they simultaneously describe, theorize, and hypothesize.

Notably, in his writings in the years immediately following the publication of *Beyond the*

Pleasure Principle, the death drive plays little to no role in Freud's analysis of trauma,

indicating a different set of experimental variables at work. In *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and*

Anxieties (1926), Freud once again conceptualizes trauma as an accident of experience

and as a consequence of sexual and social development. In *Moses and Monotheism*,

Freud is most obviously concerned with the history of trauma in the context of the return

of the repressed father as was already indicated earlier in this study. In her own reading

of *Moses and Monotheism* in *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth gives the finishing touches

to her own conception of trauma theory in light of Freud's predominantly sexual and

social reading of Jewish exodus. In Caruth's conception, trauma is the result of a breach

in both the social and structural narratives of the self—a "breach in the mind's experience

of time, self, and world" (Caruth 4). In her analysis of the dynamics of trauma in articles

like "Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud" and "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence and Survival" Caruth intimates that the individual subject to trauma loses the ability to claim life as a unique possession, an insight with definite social consequence as explored late in chapter three of this thesis and by Phelan in "Converging Glances: A Response to Cathy Caruth's 'Parting Words'." Indeed, the overarching goal of *Unclaimed Experience* as accentuated by Caruth in its introduction and first chapter is to act as a sort of apologia for the ethical and political significance and responsibility of poststructuralist theory. The claim that Caruth avoids issues of politics and ethics related to the deconstructive aspect of her trauma theory looks over this central element of her text. Along the sidelines of these various theoretical controversies, Powers's *The Echo Maker* stands out as a voice of moderation. As Mark Schluter's several selves deconstruct, his experiences with trauma become existentially and socially contagious. In reiteration of Mark's personal deconstruction, Karin and Dr. Weber soon find themselves lost in their own quasi-traumatic experiences regarding issues of identity, self worth, and social responsibility. In the novel, Powers reinforces this narrative shift from the psychological to the social implications of trauma by contextualizing the deconstructive theoretical aspect of this shift within a thorough-going environmental take on the nature and consequences of individual traumatic experience. In a memorable moment near the end of *The Echo Maker*, Powers creates a vision of the earth after humanity's extinction:

> The yearling crane's past flows into the now of all living things.
>
> Something in its brain learns this river, a word sixty million years older
>
> than speech, older even than this flat water. This word will carry when the
>
> river is gone. When the surface of the earth is parched and spoiled, when

life is pressed down to near-nothing, this word will start its slow return.

Extinction is short; migration is long. Nature and its maps will use the

worst that man can throw at it. The outcome of owls will orchestrate the

night, millions of years after people work their own end. Nothing will miss

us. Hawks' offspring will circle above the overgrown fields. Skimmers

and plovers and sandpipers will nest in the thousand girdered islands of

Manhattan. Cranes or something like them will trace rivers again. When

all else goes, birds will find water. (Powers 443)

In this depiction, nature acts as a counterweight to the individual pyschological experiences with trauma catalogued in the novel's several narratives and narrative perspectives. In *The Echo Maker*, personal trauma logically precedes the collective realization that the Earth itself is a kind of traumatic body like Mark Schluter's broken physical form at the introduction of the novel. With Luria, Powers looks to a mode of existence beyond the confines and limitations of the individual soul in pursuit of some measure of survival.

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