

PRIMO LEVI: TRAUMATIC MEMORY, LANGUAGE AND WORKING THROUGH

by

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Abstract

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The process of forming a narrative about traumatic events bears some similarity to the psychoanalytic concept of “working through.” Primo Levi was a Holocaust survivor who was able to create multiple narrative accounts of his traumatic experiences. The current study applied psychoanalytic theory to a close reading of selections from Levi’s literary texts in a qualitative analysis. Primo Levi’s multiple trauma narratives, in addition to his fiction, poetry and essays, were examined in order to determine whether forming narratives, in which the trauma is represented directly or in fragments, can successfully “work through” the trauma. Fragments of Levi’s traumatic experience were identified and traced throughout his trauma narratives and later writing in order to demonstrate the nonlinear and repetitive way trauma gains representation in narrative.

The study found that though Levi’s trauma narratives showed signs of evolution, and his position in relation to the traumatic events became more active, emotionally responsive and reflective, there was no sign of resolution to the trauma. The study concluded that “working through” is a concept that does not apply to the process of repair from trauma, which has no endpoint.

The findings suggest that the traditional notion of the trauma narrative, an explicit description of the traumatic events in a single narrative, is itself a defensive construction that

does not contain the full personal meaning or emotional response to the trauma. A new model of trauma narratives is put forth, based on Greenberg's (1998) conception of trauma manifesting in echoes that repeat without end throughout multiple narratives. The ability to vary the symbolic expression of trauma fragments over time, and to convey the emotional experience to the reader of the narrative is all that can be achieved in the narration of trauma. Clinicians working with trauma survivors should not focus on the creation of a single narrative, but trace the appearance and evolution of trauma fragments to discern the idiosyncratic meaning and impact of the trauma on the patient. Clinicians should focus on being a witness to the patient's trauma.

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In loving memory of my grandfather, Naphtali Sklan, his parents, Aaron and Malka, and his sister Hannah.

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Chapter I: Introduction

A commonly stated goal for the clinical treatment of people who have experienced trauma is to help the person put the experience into words. This seemingly basic task of telling the story of what happened sets the person on the path of integrating the memory of the traumatic event with their other memories. Traumatic memories that resist integration cause psychic pain in the various ways they inevitably end up resurfacing: in the form of intrusive flashbacks, somatic ailments, behavioral enactments, dysphoria, guilt or shame. Creating a narrative account of the traumatic event purportedly helps the person to remember and express unpleasant events and emotions they may want to forget, while also gaining a safer distance from the experience by externalizing some of the painful affect into the story. A narrative of the trauma also communicates the experience to other people (therapist, listening audience, or reader) so that these others, in addition to the narrative itself, can help contain the emotions experienced during the events, which enables the person to feel less alone with his/her experience. This process of forming a narrative about traumatic events bears some similarity to the psychoanalytic concept of “working through.” Both are processes that aim at diminishing the distressing effect of traumatic memories.

The clinical concept of “working through” has been described as a necessary process in which conflictual ideas or traumatic events are repeatedly processed, in order for therapeutic change to take place, and for greater degree of integration within the personality to be achieved. Freud first described “working through” as the “arduous” stage of analysis when the patient spends time confronting and becoming more familiar

with his/her resistance to remembering repressed memories before the memory is made conscious (Freud, 1914). Writing a narrative requires repeated engagement with the traumatic memories, and can be an important part of a person's process of working through trauma. What it means to work through trauma has been defined by different measures of increased psychological health: decreased use of primitive defenses, such as splitting and dissociation, a greater capacity to reflect upon and represent the traumatic events using symbolic processes, and a lessened propensity to engage in enactment. Working through trauma may also be indicated by an increased ability to experience new things, and to flexibly focus on different periods from one's past outside the trauma, as well as an orientation and investment in the present and the future. However, it is questionable whether it is appropriate to apply the concept of working through to cases of severe trauma, as opposed to more typical neuroses. It may be that in the case of trauma, the recovery of traumatic memories and transcribing them in language is the first necessary step in a process of working through, or, alternately, it may be all that can be achieved. Working through may be a different process than coming to terms with trauma, or it may be part of a partial process of inducing aspects of the traumatic experience in the other.

Primo Levi was a Holocaust survivor who created multiple narrative accounts of his traumatic experiences in such well-renowned books as *Survival in Auschwitz*, and *The Periodic Table*. His remembrance of the past and creation of narratives to convey his experience to a vast public audience can be seen as exemplary of a psychological process, his attempt to work through trauma. His books, essays, poems and short stories were written at different times over the years since he was liberated from Auschwitz in 1945

until his death in 1987, and most deal either directly or indirectly with his experience in the Holocaust. This dissertation will use his literary texts as data in an exploratory case study in order to generate hypotheses about the ways in which trauma is represented in language over time. Levi's different books will be analyzed as sequential attempts to work through his traumatic experience, whether or not this was his conscious intent. Books written at different times will be used to examine changes and/or consistencies in the way Levi used language to represent trauma. These textual consistencies and changes may reflect different ways in which traumatic memories are recovered and represented over time. Textual changes may also reflect aspects of the psychological process of working through: his changing perspective on, and integration of, the traumatic events, versus constant elements of his personality and enduring consequences of the trauma that did not change. Rather than focus on the objective content in his different narrative accounts (i.e., the "facts"), the current study will analyze the subjective changes in the way he tells his story and the subjective meaning he makes of the events he narrates.

Primo Levi was a gifted writer, clearly capable of forming coherent narratives about his traumatic experience. The current study is centered on Levi's texts for data rather than clinical interviews, or writing samples from a clinical population, because one aim of this study is to explore whether or not the features of trauma narratives can still be observed in narratives that have been worked over and polished in the course of the creative process. Levi's texts are a unique sample because they are a repeated measure (narratives describing a traumatic experience) with an N of one, covering a span of forty years. If features of trauma are discernable in Levi's texts, it is likely they can be identified more easily in clinical narratives that are in rougher form.

Chapter II: Literature Review

What follows is a select review of the literature in topics pertinent to how Levi remembered, processed and represented his traumatic experience in writing. The literature review begins by looking at psychoanalytic and biological theories of how traumatic memories are processed, as a background for conceptualizing how Levi's traumatic memories are represented. Next, the clinical literature on holocaust-related trauma will be examined, looking at the pathological symptoms in Holocaust survivors and their prognosis. Following is a review of experimental studies on trauma narratives with findings that correlate certain linguistic properties of trauma narratives with developing pathology or recovery. Then psychoanalytic theories about art and literature of trauma will be reviewed to outline the psychological functions for the trauma-survivor activated by the creative process. Lastly, the psychoanalytic concept of working through will be reviewed, in preparation for applying the concept to Levi's writing process.

Remembering Trauma: Psychoanalytic and Biological Accounts

General theories of trauma attempt to explain how traumatic memories are processed and managed. Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart (1995) reviewed Janet and Freud's theories of how traumatic memories affect the mind and compared this to modern neuropsychological research on trauma. Janet believed that traumatic (distressing or new) experiences did not fit into the mind's preexisting cognitive schemes, which resulted in the traumatic memory being stored differently than normal memories,

specifically in an altered state of consciousness. Janet thought that traumatic memories did not become stored in narrative form, which is what ordinarily allowed for easy recollection (Janet, 1928). Instead, traumatic memories were either remembered very vividly or were dissociated and unavailable for ordinary recall, in which case they returned in fragments or in behavioral enactments, triggered by circumstances similar to the original experience.

Freud's early work on hysteria could be seen as an application of Janet's ideas on traumatic neurosis to a larger field. Freud's premise was that there is a subconscious where intense affects are stored when registered in an alternate or dissociated state of consciousness. In the experience of traumatic or intensely unpleasant affects, the mind dissociates and splits off the memory of these affects into a separate state of consciousness, the "subconscious," or "unconscious" in Freud's later work. Hysterical symptoms were really the return of repressed psychic states experienced in the past. The symptoms were memories that could not be remembered consciously because the mind dissociated at the time of their occurrence.

Since the traumatic memories and their associated affect were stored separately from everyday memories, a goal of treatment was to integrate the split off traumatic memory into the mind's conscious associative net through psychoanalysis. Freud described the way in which the painful affect ("fright") of traumatic memories is worn away by association with normal memories.

A memory of such a trauma, even if it has not been abreacted,
enters the great complex of associations, it comes alongside other

experiences, which may contradict it, and is subjected to rectification by other ideas. After an accident, for instance, the memory of the danger and the (mitigated) repetition of the fright becomes associated with the memory of what happened afterwards – rescue and the consciousness of present safety...In this way a normal person is able to bring about the disappearance of the accompanying affect through the process of association. (Breuer and Freud, 1893, p.9)

Freud described the process of thought activity as an integration of the trauma into the larger collection of ideas and memories, which naturally attenuates the trauma's influence. The integration of the traumatic event into the larger life story of the individual can be therapeutic, provided that the trauma can reach consciousness in a recognizable and tolerable form.

Freud added to Janet's theories that symptoms had a symbolic relation to their traumatic cause (Breuer and Freud, 1893). The traumatic memories surfaced in the distorted (symbolic) form of symptoms (i.e., somatic ailments or behavioral reenactments) due to the repressive barrier, which prevented the memories from reaching consciousness undisguised. The unique nature of material from repressed memories is that patients repeated it as a present experience, instead of recognizing it as originating in the past (Freud, 1920). What can't be remembered is repeated and acted out; symptoms are the "return of the repressed" (Freud, 1939).

Freud then changed his theory of hysteria that originated in a dissociated experience of actual traumatic events (seduction, incest) to a theory of repressed

libidinally charged ideas or impulses. So the behavioral reenactments of hysteria were no longer conceived of as only a failure to integrate new perceptual data from the external world, but the repression of conflictual (aggressive and sexual) psychic impulses. This shift from the seduction theory to an emphasis on psychic reality and fantasy moved away from traumatic events in external reality, but Freud returned to the study of trauma and dissociation after the First World War and the prevalence of combat neuroses. Freud clarified what he saw as a central connection between trauma and repetition. Freud wrote that the compulsion to repeat symptoms connected to the trauma, such as somatic symptoms or the recurrence of traumatic nightmares, was similar to the repetition in children's play because both were attempts to gain mastery, emotional understanding and a sense of agency (Freud, 1920).

Van der Kolk and van der Hart succinctly describe the repetition of unintegrated traumatic memories:

Thus, both Freud and Janet claimed that the crucial factor that determines the repetition of trauma is the presence of mute, unsymbolized, and unintegrated experiences: 'a sudden and passively endured trauma is relived repeatedly, until a person learns to remember simultaneously the affect and cognition associated with the trauma through access to language' (van der Kolk quoted in van der Kolk and van der Hart, 167).

Many aspects of Janet's and Freud's early ideas on trauma have been borne out by modern neurobiological research. Modern research on memory has shown that the brain

remembers networks of associations and the quality of experience better than specific events (Edelman, 1987). Memories are sorted into schemas and categories of preexisting knowledge, so that new information is more easily learned when it fits into prior knowledge and familiar categories. Memories of actual events are not exact replications of the event; rather memories are constructions of perceptual data, the psychological state of the subject at the moment of recall, and preexisting knowledge (Schacter, 1996). So once a new memory has been assimilated into the mind, it's no longer accessible as a distinct unit; integrated memories become subject to distortions and influence from the network of associations of which it has become a part.

Understanding the distinction between implicit memory and explicit memory can clarify some of the unique features of traumatic memory (Schacter, 1996). Explicit memory can be tested directly and includes memories of past episodes or identifying a previously witnessed stimulus or event. Implicit memory is the equivalent of unconscious or nonconscious memory, when people do not realize they are remembering something they previously learned, including the performance of a motor skill. Implicit memory explains how people can be influenced by information or experiences from the past without consciously remembering them, and it is measured by indirect tests. However, implicit memory is slightly different from the Freudian unconscious because it is not based on conflict or repressed impulses. "Priming" refers to a method used in memory research in which participants are given cues that help them remember a stimulus or piece of information they had previously been exposed to, whether or not they are conscious of the previous exposure. Research studies on priming led to the discovery of implicit memory, including the finding of Warrington and Weiskrantz

(1974), Weiskrantz (1986) and Graf and Schacter (1985). These studies indicated a memory system that could account for cases of prior influence and learning unbeknownst to the subjects. Further studies showed that priming affected perceptual analysis, but it could also nonconsciously affect conceptual learning and semantic memory (Blaxton, 1989; Graf, Shimamura, and Squire, 1985; Hamann, 1990). PET scans showed evidence that implicit memory depended on a different region of the brain than explicit memory; the hippocampus receives increased blood flow during conscious recollection, but PET scans showed decreased hippocampal functioning during visual priming (Schacter, Alpert, et al., 1996). Implicit memory influences people emotionally and socially as well, as demonstrated in studies where social biases and racial stereotypes can be activated in American college students who claimed not to be racially biased (Devine, 1989; Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). The indirect way in which implicit memories can be triggered by certain cues bears similarity to the way in which traumatic memories are remembered (Bower and Sivers, 1998).

Research has consistently found that traumatic memories typical of PTSD symptomatology are different from non-traumatic memories in that they first emerge as somatosensory fragments (visual images, smells, sounds, tactile sensations, and emotional states) and over time the traumatic experience can be put into a verbal narrative (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995; van der Kolk, Burbridge, & Suzuki, 1997; Roe & Schwartz, 1996; Cameron, 1996). Brewin, Dalgleish, and Joseph (1996) assert that the way in which traumatic memories first surface as visual flashbacks and sensory details reflects the operation of the implicit memory system, whereas the eventual transcription of the traumatic memory into a verbal account reflects the explicit memory system.

Brewin et al. (1996) described two formats for traumatic memories: “verbally accessible memory” (VAM) and “situationally accessible memory” (SAM). The VAM system supports verbally accessible autobiographical memories, that can be recalled at will, whereas the SAM system supports intrusive, unbidden flashbacks or dreams of the traumatic event, rich in perceptual and affective detail without cognitive processing. The VAM and SAM system that Brewin et al. use to understand traumatic memories correlates with the explicit and implicit memory systems. Somatosensory fragments of traumatic memories are often triggered by cues in the current environment, similar to the way in which priming operates by activating memories of prior experience that are unavailable for conscious recall.

There are some explanations for how traumatic memories get “stuck” in the mind and also how new experiences can continue to be seen as similar to dangers from the past. Modern research has identified some of the mechanisms that can account for how traumatic memories can fail integrate into the mind’s schemas and remain “frozen.” The hippocampus sorts memories into their proper context in place and time, but is vulnerable to dysfunction during times of stress. Due to hippocampal dysfunction during extreme stress, a traumatic memory can be formed without being placed in its proper context in space or time, so that amnesia for the memory can occur while the fearful affects associated with the memory are remembered (Nadel and Zola Morgan, 1984; Sapolsky et al., 1984). Additionally, traumatic experiences can resist encoding in words and symbols, so that they are remembered in earlier developmental forms of representation (somatosensory or iconic levels of representation), such as somatic sensations or behavioral enactments (Brett and Ostroff, 1985). The retrieval of memories is enhanced

by similarities in contextual stimuli or the somatic state of the person at the time of storage and retrieval (E. Tulving, 1983). So that when a traumatized person is faced with a contemporary stressful situation in which the autonomic nervous system is aroused, flashbacks and nightmares of the original trauma can be triggered. Past threats continually reemerge due to the body's memory as well as the mind's.

A key view of psychoanalytic theories on trauma is that trauma cannot be represented or symbolized in the mind. Either trauma is not registered in awareness at all, or it is registered in unintegrated somatosensory fragments. Laub and Auerhahn (1993) assert that the mind's representation of trauma ranges on a spectrum from unintegrated perceptual or sensory fragments, to transference phenomena (fragments of memory that attach to current situations and relationships and distort current perceptions according to past experiences), to representational memories that can't be used flexibly for imagination or symbolic play, to symbolic forms that can represent multiple meanings in addition to the concrete experience. Laub and Auerhahn's continuum reflects the degree to which traumatic experience can be "known." Degrees of "knowing" trauma, reflects the varying amount of distance between the subject and the traumatic knowledge, the ability to verbally articulate the trauma, and the extent of "encapsulation *versus* integration of the experience and... the degree to which an experiencing 'I' is present as subject" (p. 289). In extreme cases of trauma, defensive operations can result in either splitting of the self, which prevents integration of knowledge and affect with the experiencing self, or fragmentation of the memory, which limits subsequent access to the experience. Laub and Auerhahn contend that these different levels of "knowing" trauma

are not mutually exclusive, and that one person can operate on different levels of knowing at different moments.

Saporta (2003) reviews common psychoanalytic and biological theories on trauma, and how these two approaches can be synthesized. Saporta cites psychological and biological explanations as to why overwhelming traumatic experiences fail to be encoded at a verbal or symbolic level. Psychoanalytic explanations include: the immediacy and intensity of the experience prevents the distance necessary to fully perceive or comprehend the experience in a verbal manner (Laub and Auerhahn, 1993); cultural and narrative accounts fail to structure or explain the meaning of trauma (ibid.); trauma destroys conventional assumptions about ourselves and the world (Janoff-Bullman, 1992). Drawing upon cognitive neurological models by Wilma Bucci (1997) and Marcel Mesulam (1998) that explain how nonverbal, subsymbolic information is transformed into verbal and symbolic forms, Saporta attempts to describe how subsymbolic sensory information is transformed into verbal representations and symbols via the “chunking” function of the hippocampus. Mesulam’s model explains how several “transmodal nodes” such as the hippocampus and entorhinal cortex, Wernicke’s and Broca’s areas and the prefrontal lobes, bind and integrate unimodal sensory information into modality specific association cortexes, such as episodic memory, language, motivation and emotion. These transmodal nodes are responsible for placing memories in context, transforming them into linguistic symbols and allowing memories to interact with other associations from the past, including emotions and goals. Transmodal nodes can be disrupted even temporarily by being blocked or flooded with information, arousal or affect, which then prevents incoming sensory information from being bound and

connected to higher order symbolic processing in various cognitive domains. “The degree to which traumatic experience is organized and elaborated on a symbolic level depends on which transmodal node can access and bind information distributed in the sensory cortex” (Saporta, p.102).

Saporta argues that traumatic experiences can fail to be integrated in consciousness due to a disruption of transmodal nodes, in which case the information is never encoded verbally or symbolically and therefore cannot be represented. Alternatively, experiences can be encoded verbally, but blocked due to conflict or distressing affect, in which case the experience can be represented coherently, but symbolic elaboration or imaginative transformation is blocked (see Anderson and Green, 2001). These two types of faulty integration correspond to a psychoanalytic conflict versus deficit model, in which a deficit is an inability to create or represent information, whereas conflict is where meaning can be generated, but it is disguised (see Killingmo (1989). Patients in therapy need different levels of help depending on which level information is encoded and blocked. Saporta argues that patients with a deficit need to integrate and encode information verbally for the first time, whereas patients with a conflict need to help deciphering and interpreting meaning that is present but hidden or distorted. However, as Laub and Auerhahn (1993) claim that a person can “know trauma” in different degrees along the continuum at different times, it seems likely that patients may need therapeutic help with both conflicts and deficits in their knowledge, rather than the two states being mutually exclusive.

Saporta cites several advantages of encoding traumatic experience into verbal symbols, including restoring subjectivity and the perspective of others that is inherent in

language, which trauma destroys (see Tomasello, 1999); linguistic accounts increase subjective meaning; language use can produce multiple perspectives within a single experience, which can distance and reduce the distressing effect of trauma, as opposed to the overwhelming immediacy of trauma processed at the sensory level.

Trauma disturbs the capacity to self-regulate physiological processes and a basic sense of safety. Saporta argues that the ability to symbolize, which trauma disrupts, is also directly linked to the ability to self-regulate. Symbolization (the ability to verbalize physical and emotional experience) improves affect regulation (Fonagy, 1991), and self-control through internal speech (Barkley 1997, Vygotsky, 1987). Barkley (1997) writes about self-control achieved through representing information to the self, including symbolic representation of time and the ability to organize plans for behavior over time. Saporta argues that the disturbance of time as a consequence of trauma, including problems ordering events in time and envisioning the future (Terr, 1984), is a result of disrupted symbolic processes.

In sum, I submit that by disrupting core physiologic regulation, by disrupting one's capacity to organize perception on a symbolic level, and by disrupting the capacity to access biographical memory, trauma can disrupt the sense of self either at the most basic, core level, or at the higher, biographical level...Both the inability to regulate affect and physiology and the inability to symbolize experience lead to areas of experience that are alien to the self and are experienced as non-self. This can devitalize and restrict the sense of self (Saporta, p.107).

Saporta's review links neurobiological explanations of how trauma disrupts symbolic processes to impairments in self-regulation, both of which culminate in a degraded and truncated experience of one's self.

Marion Oliner (2000) writes about clinical work with trauma patients and the tension between focusing on the individual's personalized response to trauma, which is an inherently psychoanalytic perspective, versus an emphasis on the external reality of the traumatic event. Oliner believes that much current literature on trauma emphasizes the nature of the event as though its meaning were evident outside individual interpretations. She argues that the challenge of treating traumatized individuals is to take both the external event and the personalized elaboration of its meaning into account, without losing sight of either one. She distinguishes between "representations," which she defines as "creative transformations of experience by the mind" compared with "presentations:"

the illusion created by perception and memory of the material world when it is perceived or remembered in the factual, unemotional way that gives the impression of being the mirror to the external world. Basically I believe it is important to distinguish between experiences which provide a screen that defends the individual and those that guarantee a rich and personal relationship to the external world (p.44).

Oliner asserts that the duality of mental life and memory created by trauma, the striking vividness of traumatic memories that appear to remain frozen and do not fade over time in contrast to normal memories, can serve a defensive function. The very precise and realistic quality of the traumatic memory can defend against the individual's awareness that the traumatic memory may be distorted by personalized meaning, conflicts, and structured by unconscious fantasy. The way in which many traumatic memories are commonly described as though they occur in the third person, or divorced from the subject's sense of self, may be influenced by an unconscious fantasy of omnipotence. These same characteristics of traumatic memory can be accounted for by the defense of dissociation, but Oliner looks at the role of fantasy instead; Oliner offers a new perspective based on wish, rather than defense. Oliner believes that infantile omnipotence is a common fantasy operative for trauma survivors, "which enables the victim to be in the traumatizing situation and remain impervious to its impact." Oliner speculates that this omnipotent fantasy of being outside and unaffected by the traumatic experience may result in the memory being recalled in the detached, objective manner of many traumatic memories. However, Oliner's interpretation that trauma survivors unconsciously fantasized their omnipotence may be inaccurate for many individuals, who are left with an enduring sense of helplessness. But Oliner's point that vivid memories of trauma that appear detached from the experiencing subject, can actually bear the imprint of subjective bias and personal distortion is supported by research on emotional memories (Schacter, 1996). Memories of survivors can indeed be factual, but it is an error and often a cultural pressure, Oliner contends, to ignore the transformations in fantasy and unconscious meaning to which all memories are subject.

Laub and Podell (1995) make a similar point in their discussion of art that depicts trauma: “Art of this kind reminds us that documentation and official records, however essential to the historic record and social awareness, often function as screen memories – consciously or unconsciously working to cover up and to resist confrontation with the more inner aspects of the horror of the very atrocities documented” (p.995-996). Laub and Podell look further at this phenomenon as described by the writer and Holocaust survivor, Appelfeld. Appelfeld (1994) observes the same suppression, or defensive screen, operative in personal testimonies of survivors:

If you read the many collections of testimony written about the Holocaust, you will immediately see that they are actually repressions, meant to put events in proper chronological order. They are neither introspection nor anything resembling introspection, but rather the careful weaving together of many external facts in order to veil the inner truth (Appelfeld, p. 14).

These authors contend that ‘factual’ accounts and memories of traumatic events can serve a defensive function that simultaneously conceals inner accounts while attesting to historical accuracy. While the historical account and the ordering of external events may be accurate, the unconscious meaning of the events may be evaded by virtue of the conscious, ‘official,’ elaboration.

The literature of psychoanalytic and biological theories of traumatic memory all describe mental mechanisms or systems that account for how traumatic memory is processed differently than ordinary memories. The processing of traumatic memory

results in fragmentation and deterioration of aspects of both the self and the memories of trauma. Complete conscious recall of traumatic memories is disrupted due to dissociation, different degrees of knowledge in consciousness, disruption of transmodal nodes due to stress, disconnection between verbal and subsymbolic memory systems, or encoding in the implicit memory system rather than the explicit memory system. Additionally, an accurate description of traumatic events may defend against or conceal the subjective experience of the survivor, which may be influenced by unconscious fantasy or personal elaboration.

Holocaust Trauma

I now turn from general theories of trauma to literature on trauma specifically related to the Holocaust. If Primo Levi's writing about the Holocaust bears the imprint of his trauma, it will be useful to relate his individual case study to common clinical symptomatology observed in Holocaust survivors. Without covering the vast literature on the Holocaust, I will discuss a few contrasting clinical perspectives on the specific psychopathology found in Holocaust survivors, looking at the degree to which survivors "recovered" from their trauma or continued to suffer from its aftereffects. Though the current study does not deal with clinical data per se, Levi's writing may illustrate the clinical phenomena of traumatization and processes of adaptation as organizing patterns within his texts (see Methodology section below). Therefore the clinical literature on trauma and Holocaust survivors can inform the psychological processes manifest in Levi's texts.

This review of clinical literature on Holocaust survivors begins with one of the first descriptions of Holocaust survivors as a clinical group with common features. The review then looks at an analysis of 30-year-follow-up interviews with survivors and the impact of aging on this population, which relates to an analysis of Levi's texts over time, including Levi's own process of aging. A dissenting perspective within the literature on survivors will then be discussed, which asserts that Holocaust survivors could recover in the context of an empathic therapeutic relationship. Finally, this review will look at a nonclinical study of repeated narratives of Holocaust survivors that focused on the consistency of the narratives' content across time as an indicator of the narrator's identity.

W.G. Niederland described the cluster of symptoms observed in Holocaust survivors, for which he coined the term "the survivor syndrome." "The syndrome appears to be characterized by the persistence of multiple symptoms among which chronic depressive and anxiety reactions, insomnia, nightmares, personality changes, and far-reaching somatization prevail" (Niederland, 1968, p. 313). The long list of troubling symptoms Niederland detailed included impaired cognition and memory, all-pervasive guilt due to unresolved mourning, an inability to verbalize traumatic events, somatic complaints, ambivalent and tenuous object relations, withdrawal from human contact, and a "living corpse appearance." Niederland felt the "survivor syndrome" covered a host of such severe symptoms that it deserved a special diagnosis separate from standard varieties of "traumatic neurosis." He included a dynamic account of these "orally-regressed personalities:"

The infantile ego, experiencing rage and frustration from unfulfilled oral needs, reacts with a sense of guilt in the face of severe and prolonged oral deprivation, compounded by a total lack of narcissistic supplies, as it was met by the victims in the concentration camp situation. The inevitable later frustrations which the survivor met in the post-liberation phase and continues to meet today, especially in the new countries of refuge, re-evoked the earlier frustration in the camps and thereby the concomitant sense of guilt, leaving him with a feeling of permanent, all-pervasive, unresolved guiltiness and grief (p.315).

As intimated in this description, many of the psychoanalytic accounts of survivors described traumatized people who were stuck in the traumatized state of the past, which continued to infiltrate their current life accompanied by “permanent” feelings of guilt and sadness. The view of survivors was that there was no real recovery or starting over, and life after liberation from the camps was bound to bring frustration. Early analytic accounts of the “survivor syndrome” were fairly bleak in their prognosis, described a poor response to therapy, and entrenched patterns of depression, guilt, poor parenting, and an inevitable transmission of their trauma to their children (Ornstein, 2001).

Krystal’s early writings (1971, 1975, 1978) on interviewing and treating Holocaust survivors included his observations of alexithymia, anhedonia, and poor affect tolerance resulting from massive psychic trauma, which painted a grim view of survivors’ psychopathology similar to Niederland’s. Krystal described the sequelae of “adult catastrophic psychic trauma” that involved a surrendering to a perception of unavoidable danger, and a “freezing” reaction similar to that observed in animals when panicked

(1995, p.80). There is also a numbing reaction described by Stern (1951) as a “catanoid reaction,” which surrenders all initiative and blocks emotions and pain. Finally, a shutting down of the self-observing ego ensues, which includes a diminishment of cognitive processing and memory (Krystal, 1995, p.81). This traumatic process is often continued in the aftereffects of trauma, including continued cognitive constriction, reacting to stressful situations by freezing, general passivity, and phobic reactions to certain memories or affects (p. 82). Poor affect tolerance and alexithymia result in an incapacity to fully grieve or to benefit from psychotherapy because survivors “experience their own emotions as heralds of trauma (p.86). Krystal observed the most common defensive reactions to massive trauma were “repression, denial and psychic splitting,” which deteriorate a person’s feeling of continuity, selfhood and aliveness. Krystal wrote that survivors suffered from a sense of alienation, a fear of their emotions and a disconnection from domains of mental life that previously constituted one’s sense of self.

Laub (1992) also described the compromised sense of self that was common among Holocaust survivors. Laub wrote that the Holocaust was a unique event that produced no witnesses, both in the efforts of the Nazis to conceal any evidence of the Final Solution, but also in the unimaginable horror of the events that could not be comprehended even by those who experienced them. The damage done to survivors’ identity was due to the lack of recognition they experienced as victims.

The historical reality of the Holocaust became, thus, a reality which extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another. But when one cannot turn to a “you” one

cannot say “thou” even to oneself. The Holocaust created in this way a world in which *one could not bear witness to oneself*... This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one’s history is abolished, one’s identity ceases to exist as well. (Laub, 1992, p.82).

Laub’s description of survivor’s depleted sense of personal identity due to a destruction of witnessing or recognition, gives a relational account that compliments Krystal’s account of the self as freezing or shutting down defensively in the face of unavoidable danger. Though Laub contextualizes the inability to witness oneself in the historical conditions of the Holocaust, this is an aftereffect of trauma that is common to survivors of all types of trauma.

Krystal had an opportunity to interview some of the same survivors he had seen previously for a 30-year-follow-up interview for restitution claims. The group of survivors he interviewed were not part of a formal study, but when the policy for restitution benefits changed in 1992, survivors who been receiving benefits were suddenly required to be reevaluated, and were referred to Krystal. Some of the survivors who came to him in the 1990s were the same people he had initially interviewed thirty years ago, which allowed him to observe the specific challenges facing Holocaust survivors dealing with post-traumatic symptoms in addition to the task of re-evaluating one’s life in old age. Krystal interpreted the task of aging through an Ericksonian lens: accepting or rejecting the past results in either integration or despair. Krystal wrote that in addition to the difficulty of remembering the painful past for Holocaust survivors is the

added, almost paradoxical, goal of accepting the Holocaust like all other life events, as “justified by its causes,” and part of one’s personal history. “[S]uch an acceptance is too closely reminiscent of the *submission* to persecution. The process of making peace with one’s self becomes impossible when it is experienced as bringing back the helplessness and the *shame* of the past” (p.83). In ordinary life, one can accept one’s unwanted object representations through projection and externalization, but the need to own all of one’s object representations as one reviews the past in aging, including persecuting objects for Holocaust survivors, makes self-integration a painful and onerous feat (p.87).

Krystal’s observations of survivors at their 30-year follow-up interviews included their widespread complaints, sleep disturbance, psychosomatic illnesses, impoverished descriptions of other people, disappointment in life, difficulty forming a relationship during the interview, and a common negative transference towards Dr. Krystal as “the embodiment of the Judenrat, the Jewish administrative body of the Nazi era that carried out the Nazis’ bidding” (p.94). On the whole, Krystal found that his early predictions of survivors’ aging process coincided with his later findings and formed a sad confirmation of the trend in survivors’ health problems, early deaths (see Eitinger and Strom, 1973), and little pleasure in life. However, he ends noting an exception for those who were amenable to psychotherapy and worked slowly over many years, in addition to those “endowed with literary or artistic talents that permitted them to develop or reconstruct damaged functions” (p.94).

Laub and Auerhahn (1984) contend that survivors of war and genocide never completely work through the aftereffects of atrocity; however, they reinterpret what is commonly seen as a survivor’s ‘pathological mourning’ or inability to let go of the past

as part of a restorative response to trauma. Laub and Auerhahn assert that survivors have experienced irreparable loss and a destruction of good objects, which means that the trauma permeates all memory, past, present and future. In order to restore some balance of good over evil, the survivor replays the past over and over, not out of an inability to move on with life, but due to an effort to reconnect to a good sense of self from before the trauma. In the survivor's life after trauma, aspects of the trauma are continually replayed or projected onto others, but connection to a new object is possible and helps to move past traumatic imagery. Composite images of good and evil are created in an attempt to integrate the trauma within the life history, and restore a connection to good objects.

Anna Ornstein, reviewing the psychoanalytic literature on Holocaust survivors, writes critically that “the survivor syndrome” was an overly pathological description, created to win claims of restitution from the German authorities, but unfortunately it became the prevailing clinical perspective (2001, p.14). Ornstein notes the conspicuous omission of survivors' pre-traumatic lives and personality organization in these psychoanalytic assessments of Holocaust survivors, and she argues that the search for generalization and group characteristics led to the assessment that mass trauma erased any differences between individual survivors. Ornstein cites empirical studies of children of survivors (see Zlotgorski, 1983) and studies of survivors from a nonclinical populations (see Helmreich, 1992) whose findings contradict “the survivor syndrome” by demonstrating the psychological health of second generation survivors and the success of adult survivors in achieving their goals, raising children, and functioning in life. Ornstein asserts that clinical literature on Holocaust survivors pathologized and objectified their

representation because of the difficulty of identifying with the horrific experiences of Holocaust survivors, which prevented empathic understanding.

Ornstein cites several factors that can contribute to the recovery of adult Holocaust survivors, such as the social bond between survivors of a collective trauma as opposed to an individual trauma and the intact nuclear self (with its corresponding values and defensive capacities) of adult victims of trauma as opposed to child victims (Ornstein, 2001, p.17-18). Survivors who did not become helpless used the defense mechanism of disavowal, which protects the individual from external dangers by creating a vertical split in the mind “that permits a reality to be acknowledged while at the same time allowing a belief in a wished-for situation to co-exist” (ibid, p.18). The defense of disavowal created a buffer between the self and external danger that allowed the central self, among the simultaneous and different selves contained within (Kohut, 1985), to remain cohesive and consistent over time. The defense of disavowal is usually thought of as a pathological defense, so it is surprising that Ornstein highlights it as an adaptive defense. However, disavowal may be adaptive in the context of severe trauma, whereas in everyday life or less threatening situations it would create more problems (i.e., with reality testing, or continuity of self). Ornstein argues that contrary to other findings, survivors are capable of integrating the vertical split in the mind and consolidate disavowed memories and affects in the context of an empathic relationship. Ornstein writes that the affectless narratives told by survivors in the beginning of therapy indicates the workings of disavowal, and the need to protect themselves from being retraumatized by their own story, or that the audience hearing the story would not receive it with empathy and recognition (p.19). Reversing Freud’s theory of mourning, that old objects

must be relinquished in order to find new ones, Ornstein believes new relationships must first be formed in order to begin mourning old ones (p.20). The case history with which Ornstein concludes her article illustrates the treatment goal of retracing a sense of continuity from the survivor's pre-traumatic life and family of origin to the adult self they are now.

Schiff, Skillingstead, Archibald, Arasim and Peterson (2006) looked at repeated narratives of Holocaust survivors in a study that bears some similarity to the current study. Schiff et al. looked at eight survivors who gave oral testimonies both in the late 1970s and mid 1990s as part of the oral history archives at the United States Holocaust History Museum and the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. The study compared the matched narratives of eight survivors who told the same story about fifteen years apart to look at consistency and change within the narratives. Of the entire oral narrative, only the "selection narrative" (present in all eight survivors' narratives) was examined for this study, since this is considered the center of most survivor testimonies - the moment of separation from family and friends in being chosen for death or labor upon entering the concentration camp.

It was concluded that in each set of repeated narratives, to a significant extent the content of the story (i.e., the evaluations and complicating actions) was consistent across time. Though the consistency of the narratives implied the accuracy of the events they described, there was no way to verify the assumed connection between the narrative and historical truth. Instead, the authors concluded from the consistency of these repeated narratives the enduring and unchanging quality of identity as reflected in narrative. "Despite changes in time and culture, identity maintains strong continuities with previous

self renditions” (Schiff et al., p.373). There were changes in the narratives, which included some stories being more dramatic or emotional at times than others, but changes largely consisted in the how the story was told or subtle subjective meanings of the story. Influences for changing the story included the situational context and questions of the interviewer, whereas social or cultural factors, such as stories of other survivors and previously told versions of the story promoted consistency. The social pressure of the oral history movement to get the facts right in order to protect the memory of what transpired but so as not to repeat the terrible events of the past is another factor encouraging survivors to tell their story reliably. The authors’ main conclusion was that consistency in repeated narratives was a confirmation of people’s core identity. “It is not the case that we are stuck in our stories or that they cannot be changed over time. But barring a radical shift in identity, our stories must provide us with some notion of continuity with who we were in the past.” This idea of continuity within core identity is similar to Ornstein’s point that survivors were able to hold onto values and their sense of self, despite the dangers and discontinuities surrounding them.

Schiff et al. do not fully consider that consistency in repeated narratives could also indicate that a person *is* “stuck” in their story, as opposed to a sign of healthy continuity. Narrative elements that repeat across multiple tellings may be a sign that the narrator is unable to adopt a new perspective on, or access a different emotional response to, the narrated events. Certain types of repetition, such as exact repetition without any variation, in narrative may be evidence of a prolonged response to the traumatic events of shock or constricted emotional and cognitive understanding. Aside from the question of a narrative’s overt content, when examining the subjective meaning of a story certain

recurring descriptions or themes could indicate unhealthy components of personality and identity, just as they would in a psychotherapy session or a Rorschach record (e.g., a lack of emotional expression, rigid object representations (malevolent descriptions of self with other; depressive or amotivational descriptions of self; descriptions of people that are limited to their physical features with no account of their internal experience)). Traumatic sequelae may also be resistant to change and endure in narrative form regardless of situational or cultural influence. Narratives may help preserve or restore a core self, but similar to projective test data they may also capture enduring patterns of emotional distress.

Trauma Narratives: Correlations Between Trauma Narratives and Recovery or Pathology

There is a body of research (Pennebaker and Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser, 1988; Lewis & Bucher, 1992; Pennebaker, 1993; Pennebaker and Francis, 1996; Pennebaker, 1999) in nonclinical populations that attempts to empirically document the relationship between people writing about traumatic or painful events and their subsequent improvement in physical and mental health. The hypotheses and nature of these studies are in close correspondence with my own topic, and though the findings of this research are encouraging, they appear to be preliminary, have some methodological shortcomings, and warrant further experimental research to corroborate the findings and hypotheses. Pennebaker and his colleagues began by conducting studies with college students who were asked to write about their lives for 15-30 minutes over a

period of 3-5 days. The experimental groups wrote about traumatic events (describing cognition, emotions, or both) and the control group wrote about mundane events or details without emotions (Pennebaker and Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser, 1988). It was hypothesized that writing about previously undisclosed traumatic events would improve physical health because of the energy required to inhibit and repress communicating traumatic experiences. The findings were that writing about trauma produced negative mood and physiological arousal immediately after writing, in contrast to a straightforward model of catharsis (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser, 1988). However, subjects in the trauma-combination and trauma-emotion groups reported decreased physical health problems four months later. Writing about trauma without emotion did not demonstrate subjective distress or physiological arousal immediately after, nor did there appear to be long-term benefits to health. This finding seems to corroborate the early writings of Freud and Breuer who believed that only disclosures integrating both cognitive and emotional experiences would be psychologically beneficial (Pennebaker and Beall, 1986, p. 280). It was also found that subjects with greatest long-term health improvements were those who wrote about events they had not shared with other people before. Several subjects changed their perspective on the traumatic events in the course of writing about it each day (i.e., moving from self-blame to anger at perpetrators). So writing about traumatic experiences can improve physical health and aid in the assimilation of the memory because it becomes more ego-syntonic. After the memory is described and reflected upon, the emotional meaning of it can change to become more acceptable to the self's schemas.

Pennebaker and his colleagues conducted a series of experiments that looked at the linguistic properties of narratives about stressful events using a computer program, the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), which analyzed the percentage of words or phrases in certain categories, including cognitive words, causal and insight words, positive and negative emotions, and unique words (ratio of number of different words used to total word count). They found that increased cognitive processing, the presence of both positive and negative emotions and a decrease in unique words in the narrative about stressful events predicted increased physical health (Pennebaker, 1993; Pennebaker and Francis, 1996). The expression of emotion alone was not enough for the process to work; memories must be worked over cognitively and transformed into language (i.e., nonverbal forms of expression, such as dance, are not as effective) (Lewis & Bucher, 1992; Pennebaker, 1999. p. 1247-1248). Interestingly, subjects who already had a story when they started a study did not show the same success as those who created a new story over the time they were writing (Pennebaker, 1999. p.1249). All of this corroborates that it is the mental activity of applying oneself to story form, or changing one's story, which is both a cognitive and emotional process, that produces psychological and physical health.

However, these studies had several drawbacks, including that the research was not guided by a theory of language (e.g., a concept of the relationship between language and other psychological processes and physical health, or the relationship between trauma and language). The studies also do not explain the mechanisms underlying the findings other than a version of catharsis. This would allow for almost any explanation to be ascribed to

the results. Additionally, many of the measures of health were self-report questionnaires and subject to biases in reporting.

One of Pennebaker's hypotheses for the relationship between health and good narratives is that creating coherent meaning out of traumatic events, apart from making them comprehensible (and therefore compatible), makes them easier to store and ultimately forget (Ibid. p.1248). Good narratives allow people to forget distressing events because when they are told over and over again, to oneself or to others, they shape and distort the memory to become more cohesive and therefore less distressing. Crow and Pennebaker (1997) found some support for this hypothesis in a study where students filled out repeated questionnaires about their thoughts and conversations about the Persian Gulf War while it was ongoing, as well as their levels of distress, worry and anger over it. Students who were most distressed about the Persian Gulf War while it was ongoing, and who talked about it the most, remembered less about it 2 ½ years later. However, this finding could also be explained by research on mood-congruent retrieval (Schacter, 1996). Memories in which the emotional state at the time of encoding is the same as the emotional state at the time of retrieval are easier to recall. People in sad moods are more likely to recall memories in which they were sad, and the same is true for other moods. Current emotional states act as a filter through which the past is seen.

However, there have been studies of trauma narratives in clinical populations that demonstrate unique linguistic properties of trauma narratives in posttraumatic stress disorder, including greater use of death and dying words (Alvarez, Conrad, Zoellner, and Foa, 2001), dominance of sensory/perceptual details (Hellowell and Brewin, 2004), narrative fragmentation and disorganization (Foa et al., 1995; Van Minnen et al., 2002;

Halligan et al., 2003), disrupted temporal context, measured by shifts from past-tense to present-tense verbs (Young 2000; Hellawell and Brewin, 2004), and impoverished references to self (Klein and Janoff-Bulman, 1996). These studies link linguistic features of trauma narratives to cognitive models of PTSD, specifically the disruption of autobiographical memory and the intrusive nature of traumatic memories (Brewin et al., 1996; Brewin and Holmes, 2003). O’Kearney and Perrott’s (2006) meta-review of trauma narrative studies in PTSD affirmed that trauma narratives have unique linguistic features, but that the inconsistency in studies’ use of the term “fragmentation” within the literature on trauma prevent generalized findings. These findings suggest that though there are linguistic patterns associated with PTSD in clinical populations, there is no widely recognized linguistic signature that can be generalized to all trauma narratives, perhaps because trauma cannot be reduced to a single linguistic manifestation.

Other studies of trauma narratives have been based on the hypothesis that narratives told after a traumatic event will have linguistic features that correlate with subsequent psychopathology and adjustment. Amir, Stafford, Freshman & Foa (1998) found that the reading level of rape narratives, determined by a computer program, told by survivors shortly after the assault negatively correlated with severity of PTSD developed later. These results support the idea that developing and organizing an articulate narrative about traumatic experiences is part of the process of recovery. This was also found by Foa, Molnar, & Cashman (1995) in a study that compared first and last narratives of sexual and non-sexual assault victims in exposure therapy, finding that the last narratives were longer, more coherent, and contained more thought processes and emotions than the first narratives. Organization of thoughts was correlated to decreased

depression, and less fragmentation of the narrative was correlated with fewer PTSD symptoms. The ability to form a coherent and organized narrative about trauma can be a sign of recovery from trauma, whereas disorganized and impoverished narratives can correlate with psychopathology and the more immediate aftermath of trauma.

The research literature cited above used quantitative methods for analyzing texts by using computer programs to generate word counts in defined categories, or sum of the occurrence of discrete linguistic features. In contrast, there are also qualitative methods for analyzing narratives that are pertinent to the current study. Baudry (1984) writes about a method of applying psychoanalytic concepts to the study of art and literature. Baudry views the study of the work of art using psychoanalytic principles as a proscribed endeavor because the work of art is different from a person or clinical data. However, he asserts that the application of psychoanalytic theory to the analysis of art is appropriate because a work of art is the expression of mental phenomena.

We make the following assumptions about a work of art. It is a mental product, and, like all mental products, it follows certain basic psychological principles, such as the principle of multiple function. That is, we expect it to be a complicated compromise formation that includes drive derivatives, defenses, aspects of the superego, the repetition compulsion, and some adaptation to reality (p.568).

So viewing art as a mental product subject to the same conditions as an individual mind, the application of psychoanalytic theory to art must still define its specific subject

within the multiple subjects contained within the artwork as well as its production and reception. One level of analysis, which will be applied in the current study, involves treating the literary text as a modified form of free association, used to analyze the psychology of the author. This method is different from treating the text as though it were a dream because the author cannot share his associations; the text is created under conscious, waking control, and the totality of its parts do not necessarily reveal its latent meaning, which implies a true, single meaning beneath its surface. Baudry contends that though knowledge of the artist's personal use of symbols and his intended meanings are informative, they are not necessary to the literary analysis which tries to distinguish between the author's intentions and a wider range of possible meanings attributable to the text (p.565). However, in the absence of the author's personal associations to the dream or responses to the analyst's interpretations, information about the author's personal values and autobiographical details can ground an interpretation of the literary text to meanings that are relevant to the author's life.

Another level of analysis is to treat the text as a "self-contained structure"(p.573), looking at the form, themes and metaphors within the text as analogous to mental phenomena or illustrating certain object relationships. Baudry distinguishes this level of analysis from the previous level because there is no reference to outside data about the author's life; without the support of autobiographical information psychoanalytic interpretations cannot be made about the author per se, but they can be made about patterns that organize the work of art. Baudry adds that the analysis of multiple works by one author can be included in this category to identify common patterns that are unique to a particular author, and he cites Arlow's (1978) study of the author Mishima, which

refrained from connecting primal scene material to Mishima's personal life, despite the role it played as an organizing pattern in his texts.

Both the quantitative research on linguistic features characteristic of trauma narratives and Baudry's method of applied psychoanalysis for art and literature provide complementary guidelines that can both be applied to the present study of Levi's narratives.

Psychodynamic Theories on Trauma's Impact on Symbolization: Art and Trauma

Psychodynamic theories on trauma's negative impact on symbolization, and the psychological functions performed by creating literature and art about trauma will now be discussed. This literature will help to address what psychological functions were served, or unfulfilled, by virtue of Levi's engagement in testimonial and creative writing.

Laub and Podell assert that the core of trauma and the reason it resists representation and communication is the destruction of a basic empathic bond with others. "The wish for life elicits no response from the executioner...the refusal of this most basic human recognition is always at the nidus, the source, of massive psychic trauma" (p.991). Laub and Podell contend that the ruptured connection to an external other leads directly to the destruction of the subject's "internal other," which prevents internal communication with oneself. "Without this internal 'other', there can be no representation" (ibid.).

Laub (2005) further elaborates his theory that trauma prevents symbolization due to the release of death instinct derivatives. He claims that the failure to symbolize

originates in the “terror of the state of objectlessness.” (Laub, 2000, p.315). Older theories of trauma assert that when faced with desolation and fear of objectlessness, the subject of trauma identifies with the aggressor who is the only available object to internalize, resulting in the loss of the good internal object (Kohut 1971; Kirshner, 1994). Laub builds on these theories and articulates what he means by death instinct derivatives:

It is that objectless, hermetically closed, and closed off “deathly deserted universe” that the victim internalizes, and *not* the aggressor’s murderousness and the destructiveness of the “other.” [The perpetrator] concretely carries out the annihilation itself, thus eliminating the “other” and compromising any potential outcome from a dialogue with him, including the process of symbolization itself. When there is no other to communicate with, the context within which symbolization takes place is gone (Laub, 2005, p. 318-319).

So according to Laub, the victim of trauma internalizes his own annihilation that took place in the mind of the perpetrator. The perpetrator must first achieve a state of mind in which he mentally destroys his victim before he is able to carry out his act of violence. It is this mental state of destroyed empathy and connection with which the victim identifies. The death instinct takes hold of the victim in this form of objectlessness, the lack of ties to others, and consequently a failure to symbolize. Of course, not all traumas involve a relationship with a perpetrator, so this theory may not be relevant to all traumas (e.g., due to natural disasters, medical illness, etc.)

In an earlier article, Laub and Podell (1995) write about the special characteristics of “the art of trauma” that achieves a symbolization of trauma, even though traumatic experience often defies knowing and representation. Art can provide the conditions to begin to resurrect and reconnect the ruptured tie to an ‘other’ that exists in every dialogic relationship, including an “internal thou.”

In art and literature a connection can be restored that can oppose and defy the abandonment of listening and communication that characterizes trauma. Art has the ability to revive the enshrouded past of a trauma through a dialogue in the present. In creating a holding, witnessing ‘other’ that confirms the reality of the traumatic event, the artist can provide a structure or presence that counteracts the loss of the internal other, and thus can bestow form on chaos. Through such form the artist can ‘know’ trauma (p.993).

The art of trauma can be effective in representing the feelings of absence or nothingness at the center of the experience of trauma through indirect and dialogical means (for absence cannot be directly represented). “This indirect pointing to past meanings is an essential element in the art of trauma, in which the aim is not to come to an ‘objectively real’ depiction of an event, but to create a protected space wherein the remembrance of the traumatic experience can begin, if only haltingly, to occur” (p.995). The work of art is thus the medium or the context in which deeper internal knowledge of trauma can be discovered, as well as the result or record of this knowledge. The dialogue that art affords is between the artist and his/her memory of the traumatic experience, but

it is also between the artist and the reader (or audience), inviting the reader to engage in his/her own dialogue with the traumatic events (p.993). Thus art and literature restores a dialogic orientation to the artist, which is communicated to the audience; this communication between the artist and audience is predicated on an internal dialogic relation between the artist and an internal other restored by the process of artistic creation.

Ornstein (2006) also reviews healing properties of artistic creativity for survivors of the Holocaust. She cites Rose (1987) who asserted that art and psychoanalysis both reintegrate thought, feelings and perceptions split apart by trauma into different regions of the mind. The passive experience of trauma is recreated actively by forming a work of art, and artistic creation contributes to the ongoing process of sorting out the relationship between inner and outer reality. The creation of art is also a way of restoring the selfobject tie, in which the artist can attempt to recreate in the work of art a lost sense of perfection (see Kohut 1985; Hagman, 2000). Artistic creation also allows the survivor of trauma to gain some distance from unbearable feelings by occupying the role of the detached observer.

Ornstein highlights a specific feature of trauma for Holocaust survivors was their inability to mourn when the people and communities who would have served as emotional supports were destroyed, and in many cases there were no burial places or clear information about how loved ones were lost. Monuments, memorials and museums facilitate mourning in these circumstances by functioning as gravesites and an external site to evoke memories of the dead and traumatic pasts. "Remembering is essential to mourning, without mourning there can be no healing because only mourning offers the

opportunity to accept an unalterable and painful past” (Ornstein, p.405). Art and literature that register losses suffered in the past can serve a memorial function by the creation of an external marker of loss, which aids the process of mourning and working through for both artists and audiences.

Tarnopolsky (2000) applies a Kleinian perspective on normal and pathological mourning to art. Klein saw art as an expression of psychological conflicts and solutions; art and the act of creation is a recreation of good internal objects, which is a form of reparation for feared or fantasized damage done to good internal objects (1929). The depressive position is the model for mourning, in which conflicting emotions (love and hate) are integrated, conflict is experienced with guilt, and guilt leads to acts of reparation. “Loss is overcome by the reinstatement in the inner world of symbolic substitutes of the lost external object, and of part of the self equally felt to be lost because they were attached to the object. The link to artistic creativity is that this recovery is symbolic” (Tanopolsky, p.21). The artist recreates a world symbolically that is based upon external losses, which facilitates the restoration of the artist’s experience of a corresponding lost or damaged internal world. “Art is both a symbolic and concrete expression of the reparative process; not only is something represented, but something *is also made*” (p.22). The very presence and shape of the artistic form contains and therefore helps to resolve the psychic conflict expressed within the work of art (see Segal, 1991).

Ornstein discusses the aversion of both scholars and artists to transforming traumatic suffering into art because it does injustice to the victims by detracting from the experience itself. Ornstein mentions Adorno’s famous objection to art made after

Auschwitz, and his later detraction of this view because it would lead to silence, which was Hitler's goal. The artist who attempts to represent traumatic experience is then faced with the challenging question of how to represent and engage the audience in material that naturally repels and horrifies (p.399). The difficult task for art depicting trauma is to find a way to involve the audience emotionally in painful material, but to a degree that the audience can tolerate rather than rigidly defend against. Ornstein believes that a work of art about trauma succeeds not by protecting the audience, but by filtering the force of the painful emotions conveyed, which then allows the audience to participate actively in their experience of the artwork (ibid.).

Laub and Podell, and Ornstein also discuss the limits of representation and analysis of trauma, and mention the many suicides of artists who dealt with their traumatic experiences, many of them Holocaust survivors, including Primo Levi. "In attempts at representation and repossession through art, one may find only a re-articulation of one's own abysmal emptiness" (Laub and Podell, p.993). In response to many artists' suicides, Ornstein wonders whether the audience of the artwork depicting trauma benefits more than the artist, raising the question of the limitations of art and literature as a medium for working through trauma.

Greenberg (1998) also argues against the possibility of fully working through trauma through creating narratives in her discussion of the structure of trauma narratives. Greenberg asserts that trauma narratives have these three structural features: "temporal delay, fragmentation and survival or hovering between life and death" (p. 325), and discusses a parallel between the characteristics of an acoustic echo, the myth of Echo from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the echoing nature of trauma narratives. Greenberg

asserts that a single narrative description of traumatic events may fail to capture the original event, but the essence of the trauma can be found in the delayed repetition of fragments or echoes of the trauma in multiple descriptions or narratives.

This understanding of the connection between a continually echoing structure and trauma may help to explain why traumatic narratives also compulsively return to the same events. One act of articulating a trauma in a testimony or in a literary account may not fully “work through” the event. Indeed, the trauma may obsessively resurface in repeated versions of the same story or similar literary texts. In literary fiction, autobiographies, and memoirs, certain authors recast similar traumatic events in slightly different forms in their works. Rather than dismiss the echoing versions of such novels or of survivors' stories as merely repetitious, it may prove useful to examine the “echoes” in relation to one another. How do the versions of stories change and what is significant about those departures? How do the many echoes work in the process of hearing both the story and the versions of narration? (Greenberg, p. 342)

Greenberg’s formulation that trauma narratives are structured like echoes shifts the emphasis of their analysis from treating trauma narratives as unitary accounts to identifying and comparing the fragments of the trauma narrative and their repeated iterations across multiple texts. Greenberg also raises the question of whether a single trauma narrative can “work through” the traumatic experience, or whether or not the process of working through requires multiple narratives and many repetitions. One

question raised by Greenberg's argument is whether one can identify positive echoes; can some changes across repetitions signify repair or a more positive perspective on the meaning of the traumatic event. Another question is whether or not there are limitations to working through certain traumas, such as genocide, not just whether art and literature serve as an effective medium or space within which the psychological process of working through can occur. Working through may be better applied to conflict rather than trauma, and another term may be more pertinent to the process of coming to terms with trauma. Greenberg's formulation of the echoing structure of trauma narratives will be the conceptual lens through which I will analyze Levi's texts, which will be discussed further in the Methodology section.

Working Through

“Working through” has been defined in psychoanalysis as a process in which conflictual ideas or traumatic events are repeatedly processed in order for therapeutic change to take place and a greater degree of integration within the personality can be achieved. The clinical necessity of working through and precisely what it entails continues to be debated. Freud (1914) first (briefly) described working through to account for patients' continued propensity to reenact and repeat rather than remember the past even after the analyst made the proper interpretations. “This ‘working through’ of the resistances may in practice amount to an arduous task for the patient and a trial of patience for the analyst. Nevertheless it is the part of the work that effects the greatest changes in the patient” (Freud, 1914, p.166). The effort and trial of patience is due to the

need for repetition in the mind. Freud developed the concept in *The Introductory Lectures* (1916-1917) and *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) to include the resistances of the id, the compulsion to repeat, constitutional factors (i.e., ego deficits), and he eventually linked the conservative tendency of the libido to the death instinct in his observation of soldiers' war neuroses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

The concept of working through has not been well defined or elaborated in psychoanalytic literature since Freud, but it has been compared to mourning (Sollars, 2004), cognitive development and learning (Gedo, 1995), and in the object-relations and relational literature (Aron, 1991) it commonly refers to something *other than insight* that allows the patient to change (i.e., relational, nonverbal factors between the analyst and patient). The common conceptualization of working through that is shared by the authors discussed below is that it involves a gradual replacement of old patterns of thinking and emotional responding with expanded tolerance of emotions and clearer, more flexible, thinking. Working through is also thought to involve greater tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, and a greater degree of verbalization, symbolic representation, and integration of conflicting object-representations.

Gedo (1991, 1995) has argued that repetition and working through serve the development of cognition and the brain. Gedo built upon Levin's (1991) view that repetitive behavior can help overcome difficulties in learning, and applied it to the process of working through in clinical work. Gedo defines the goal of treatment as replacing maladaptive and primitive modes of thinking (affectivity, somatizing) with more mature cognition. This entails a gradual process of changing acquired patterns of thinking and responding, and the creation of new neural networks in the brain. Working

through thus entails improving one's ability to think clearly, by expanding "referential activity" (Bucci, 1993), finding meaning in one's affects and concrete free associations, and replacing affects with words and symbolic representations (Gedo, 1995, p.353).

Using a Piagetian point of view, Tenzer (1984) places working through in a hierarchical progression of stages from "lack of awareness to integrated understanding. These stages are: unconscious behavior; working through; self-observation; and reflective abstraction and integration" (p.423). The stage of working through is a process that allows knowledge to be internalized through ongoing interaction with the environment via a mixture of assimilation and accommodation, which balances the cognitive need for both stability and change. Cognitive imbalances, gaps or contradictions that occur repeatedly create the need for changes in cognitive structures, resulting in either internal or external adjustment of prior expectations. Similar to experimental studies, working through involves repetition, often in multiple contexts, in order for hypotheses to be tested and proved. Tenzer refers to cognitive studies with young children in which they were asked to throw a ball attached to a string into a box (p.428). The children were able to perform the action long before they could describe what they were doing, and they persisted in describing their actions inaccurately, even after experimenters corrected them. The experiment points out that changes in behavior, including speech, often precedes changes in understanding, and repetition is required for new concepts to be grasped. Tolerance for uncertainty and an increase in curiosity is what allowed these children to work through a period in which they experienced cognitive contradictions and then transform them into new understanding.

O'Shaughnessy (1983) writes about working through as a progression in forms of communication within analysis from “somatic event, to concrete representation, to a dream, and ultimately verbal thought” as described by Money-Kyrle (1968).

O'Shaughnessy asserts that the use of words is integral to working through because words require the patient's active engagement and dispel infantile omnipotence because “words rest on a recognition of a gap between impulse and fulfillment, and an acknowledgment of the separateness of subject and object” (p.288).

Greenacre (1956) described working through as the process of overcoming resistances, but also a working towards the recollection of early traumatic memories at the heart of neurosis. Sollars (2004) writes that working through is a process of mourning trauma, which results in relinquishing ties to bad objects and expanding one's self-representation. Old, lost objects are given up by being internalized within the self, so that an internal connection to the old object is maintained.

The previously externalized object, having lost its physical existence, shows itself to have always been (to us) our mental product. In this view the challenge of grieving is not giving up the lost object, but self-integration... The integration of the good and bad objects and more importantly, good and bad self-representations, requires working through (Sollars, p.209).

The mourning and integration of objects requires increased affect tolerance and cognitive expansion to overturn the numbing of affects and constriction of critical thinking after trauma. With a gradual increase in these affective and cognitive processes

in the transference, a different understanding behind painful affects and rigid, self-criticism can develop, producing a new experience of self.

I want to add to this review of the concept working through, Hans Loewald's conceptualization of memorial activity, in order to describe an additional, modified definition of working through, focused on the development of verbal description in the genre of memoir. Memory, according to Loewald, performs such essential activities for the mind, that it is "virtually synonymous with mind itself" (Loewald, 1989, p.149). Memory is a "linking activity" in that it provides continuity between our past, present and expectations for the future. By connecting events, memory creates a context and organization out of disparate and isolated experiences. "Memory, in this broadest sense, is the activity by which, above all, some sort of order and organization and some sense of permanence, as well as of movement and change, come into our world" (p.149). Without memory, the aggregate of internalized knowledge from the past, we would not be able to comprehend the present.

Memorial activity is not the passive reproduction of static traces that have been perceived in the past, for memories of the past continue to engage us in the present. A baby's experience of satisfaction (one of the earliest registrations) leads to a period of quiescence, but this does not mean a cessation of psychic activity. "[I]nteractions with the world continue to reverberate, are reproduced, and thus lay the foundations for the development of an internal world, in the form of memorial processes" (p.156). What is remembered and reproduced internally "is more than a continuation: it is a continuation in which something changes. It increasingly involves a metamorphosis analogous to biological metabolism" (p.162). This is another way to think of "working through."

Working through is the continued process of internalization and psychic restructuralization that follows an external interaction. The process is one of dwelling *actively* on events or experiences. To accommodate the new presence of an external event inside the psyche requires a reorganization of the previous mental structure, which results in the event being thought of in a new context.

Loewald defines two types of remembering, unconscious reenactment and conscious remembering, which is similar to a distinction Freud made, in his paper *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through*. Loewald uses the terms “enactive remembering” and “representational remembering:” enactive remembering is “unconscious, i.e., the individual is not aware that he is reproducing something from the past.” But additionally, there is a timelessness to enactive remembering and a lack of differentiation between the past and the present. The subject does not “distinguish himself as rememberer from the content of his memory” (p.165). Representational remembering on the other hand is conscious; “the mind presents something to itself as its own experience, distinguishing past from present, and himself as the experiencer from what he experienced” (p.165).

To summarize, the characteristics of *enactive* memories are: unconscious; timeless; no differentiation between past and present experience; the rememberer has no awareness that he/she is engaged in the mental act of remembering. In contrast, the characteristics of *representational* memories are: conscious; time is continuous and there is distinction between past, present and future; the rememberer is aware that he/she is mentally presenting a memory to him/herself, and engaged in reflection as opposed to immediate experience.

Therefore, by applying Loewald's principles of memorial activity to the concept of working through, working through would also entail the transformation of enactive memories into representational memories. Working through would involve a transformation of enactive memories that cannot be distinguished from immediate experience into ideas that are the subject of reflection. "Becoming an idea means that the unconscious structure loses its unitary, instinctual, 'single-minded' character and becomes reinserted in to a context of meaning, i.e., into a context of mutually reflecting and related mental elements" (p.170). This is akin to an originally repressed idea becoming part of a conscious web of ideas and associations, or a concrete somatosensory fragment of a traumatic memory becoming meaningful and available for verbal description and symbolic transformation.

This concept of working through may be applicable to my analysis of Primo Levi's writing and the recovery of traumatic memories. Before an analysis of working through is applied to Levi's texts, the question of how his traumatic memories emerge, and the different forms they acquire must first be addressed. After the quality and features of his traumatic memories have been described, then the question of whether or not the concept of working through can be applied to his recovered memories will be raised.

Concepts from the Literature Review Applied to a Textual Analysis

Certain features from research on traumatic memory, art and trauma, holocaust-related trauma, trauma narratives and working through can be applied as guidelines for a

textual analysis of trauma narratives. Features of traumatic memory that may be present in trauma narratives include the separation of cognition and affect in the memory due to splitting and dissociation (Freud, 1920; van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1995), unintegrated perceptual fragments relating to aspects of the trauma (Brewin et. al, 1996; Laub and Auerhahn, 1993), and memories fallen out of spatial or temporal context (Nadel and Zola Morgan, 1984; Saporta, 2003; Terr, 1984). In a textual analysis, these concepts could appear as a separation of descriptions of traumatic events from the expression of emotional experience during these events. Unintegrated perceptual fragments could take the form of physical or sensory descriptions that pertain to traumatic events appearing in passages describing events unrelated to the trauma. Spatial and temporal fragmentation could manifest textually as a narrative told out of sequence, or descriptions that condense and combine details from traumatic events with events taking place in a different place and/or time (e.g., describing a postwar factory using features of a barrack in the Lager). Textual representations of a trauma survivor's self may also show signs consistent with people who have experienced trauma, namely an impoverishment of the experienced self, by virtue of limited access to biographical memory (Saporta, 2003), which could appear as a focus on events surrounding the trauma with little inclusion of biographical data from before or after the trauma. Based on Janoff-Bulman's (1992) work, trauma narratives may also describe a loss of faith in conventional or previously held values. Oliner's (2000) and Appelfeld's (1994) assertion that testimonial memory often conceals a defended, more private meaning of the experienced events, raises the question of whether there are dimensions of trauma narratives that operate as screens, or if there are meanings that are omitted due to unconscious motivations. Alternatively, according to

Saporta (2003) and Bucci (1997), some aspects of the trauma narrative may be ‘missing’ by virtue of never having been transformed from subsymbolic or sensory information to symbolic representations in the mind due to the detrimental impact of stress on the hippocampus at the time of trauma.

The literature on Holocaust-related trauma provide another set of concepts that may be applied to narratives describing the Holocaust. Based on Niedlerland’s (1968) and Krystal’s (1971, 1975, 1978) work, Holocaust narratives may show evidence of the “survivor syndrome,” narrators may be plagued with guilt, have restricted memory of the traumatic events, a prolonged shutting down of the self, longlasting depression and disconnection from people. Repeated Holocaust narratives would likely show no signs of working through the trauma, few direct statements of emotional reactions, and little mention of forming new relationships after the trauma (Niedlerland, 1968; Krystal, 1971, 1975, 1978, 1995). Laub and Auerhahn (1984) would also assert the impossibility of working through the trauma in narratives, in terms of the trauma continually being present in memoirs that cover time periods before and after the trauma. Laub and Auerhahn’s ideas, applied to a textual analysis, would predict the intrusion of traumatic imagery onto objects and times unrelated to the trauma, and also composite images of good and bad objects (i.e., a description of a work colleague after the war, in which callous features of a Kapo from the Lager appear). In contrast to Krystal, Niedlerland, and Laub and Auerhahn, to an extent, Ornstein’s (2001) more positive view of treatment outcomes for Holocaust survivors, when applied to a textual analysis of Holocaust narratives, would suggest that repeated Holocaust narratives could demonstrate signs of successful mourning and the forming of new object relationships. In a succession of

narratives, this could be seen in a shift from focusing on the past and loss in earlier narratives to a greater focus on the present and future, and more contemporary relationships or interests, in later narratives. Ornstein's view would also suggest that texts of Holocaust narratives could display an integration of previously disavowed experiences, and a continuous sense of self could be created in narrative form from before the Holocaust to afterwards. In narrative form, this would appear as an emergence of emotions in repeated narratives, and narratives that include the Holocaust in the larger personal history of the survivor, including time periods before and after the Holocaust.

Consulting the research on trauma narratives in clinical populations, a textual analysis of literary trauma narratives would be expected to reveal similar unique linguistic properties. In passages describing traumatic events, compared to passages describing ordinary events, the following linguistic features would be predicted: greater use of death and dying words (Alvarez et al., 2001), greater use of sensory details (Hellawell and Brewin, 2004), narrative fragmentation and disorganization (Foa et al., 1995; Van Minnen et al., 2002; Halligan et al., 2003), disrupted temporal context, measured by shifts from past-tense to present-tense verbs (Young 2000; Hellawell and Brewin, 2004), and decreased references to self (Klein and Janoff-Bulman, 1996). In the current study, the linguistic features of Levi's texts at different points in time will be examined to see whether they correspond with these experimental findings, or if he demonstrates a unique set of features that could warrant inclusion in future studies about trauma narratives.

Applying the literature on art and trauma to a textual analysis, Laub and Podell's (1995) view would suggest that the creation of multiple trauma narratives would aid in

the recovery of memories and emotional reactions to the trauma that were initially inaccessible because they had not been witnessed. Based on this premise, Laub and Podell might argue that in a sequence of trauma narratives, the later ones would include more detailed descriptions of the traumatic events and greater emotional expression. Ornstein's (2006) point that artists depicting trauma often filter the emotional experience of the trauma is a different view than Pennebaker's experimental studies that propose a model of emotional catharsis as operant and beneficial to people writing about traumatic experiences. In an analysis of literary trauma narratives, it may be difficult to gauge without the author's explicit commentary whether he/she is consciously trying to dilute or soften the expression of emotional experience for the reader. However, in a textual analysis of multiple texts, different passages can be compared based on whether emotion is expressed or withheld, especially in instances when the same events are described in multiple texts. It could be that early narratives have less emotional expression compared to later narratives, due to the writer having greater conscious awareness of traumatic emotions over time, in keeping with Laub and Podell's argument. Alternatively, early trauma narratives may have more primitive and unfiltered emotional expression (emotion that is expressed with physical or sensory descriptions rather than abstract or symbolic expression, or singular as opposed to mixed emotional states), which would progress in later narratives to emotional expression that is more complex, expressed less somatically and with greater abstract and metaphoric language.

Literary Criticism on Levi

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the current study, literary scholarship on Levi's work will be discussed, in addition to pointing out similarities between literary and clinical concepts in the current study. Different aspects of Levi's texts that have been reviewed for literary purposes, such as genre, discourse, the explication of various themes, and the progression of Levi's writing. These will be compared to ways in which his texts will be analyzed for clinical purposes in the current study.

Several critics have written about the role of language and representation in Levi's writing and Holocaust testimony generally. Ferme (2001) wrote about Levi's memoir *Survival in Auschwitz* and analyzed his journey in the camp as a movement that began with the loss of language and humanity and ended with Levi recapturing his own use of language through writing the book. Ferme asserted that the entrance to the camp began with the loss of language and the individual differences between prisoners, which transformed them into mute victims. Levi's survival hinged on his ability to re-appropriate the language of his oppressors, first by following the propaganda signs in the camp for his own benefit, and then by regaining his ability to decode the language of the camp and communicate with others. Gilliland (1992) made a similar point about Levi's re-appropriation of the oppressors' language, but claimed that Levi created a dialogical text that reinstated the possibility of communication between self and other/oppressor and victim that had been foreclosed in the camps. Gilliland argued that Levi's book, especially when it was translated into German, allowed for the recognition of self and other that was destroyed in Auschwitz.

Ferme contended that in Levi's recapturing of his own identity and use of language he was able to inscribe within his narrative the incomprehensible and incommunicable quality of Auschwitz that is central to Holocaust testimony. Both Gilliland and Ferme pointed out the dual quality of language and communication in *Survival in Auschwitz* as both impossible and restorative. Gilliland and Ferme both commented on the importance of Levi including the quality of inexpressibility in his writing, which Levi comments on directly, as a means of translating the inhumanity of Auschwitz, the complete disregard for the other, to the reader. Ferme emphasized that Levi's survival depended on reclaiming the use of language in Auschwitz and afterwards through writing.

Scheiber (2006) came to a similar conclusion about the shortcomings of narratives and symbolization as she explored the themes of chemistry, failed memory and symbolization in *The Periodic Table*. Scheiber argued that Levi created continuity between his past and present, which Auschwitz had disrupted, by using the chemical elements symbolically as a link to tie the different episodes of his life together in his memoir. However, Scheiber claimed that the symbolizing process of the book failed in the chapter "Vanadio" due to the failed analogy between the chemical element and Levi's personal storyline. The instability of the paint in "Vanadio" correlates with the instability of memory and the impossibility of recapturing the past or seeking answers from Germans. In contrast to Levi's successful chemical work, his search for comprehension about his past and Auschwitz is never resolved, and perhaps this is the significance of the imperfect analogy of "Vanadio." Scheiber contends that Levi demonstrated the inability

of narrative to recreate the past, and that this failure of symbolization is an accurate reflection of Holocaust memories, for which there is no closure.

Belpoliti and Gordon (2007) also claimed that Levi communicates the incommunicable in his writing, which they point out is a core feature of Holocaust testimony, and then examined how he achieved this. Belpoliti and Gordon asserted that Levi indirectly expressed the meaning of his experience in Auschwitz by using three personal vocabularies in his writing: animal and anthropological descriptions, the pattern of asymmetry that came from his chemistry background, and an ethical vocabulary. Belpoliti and Gordon posited that these are just some of the examples of vocabularies Levi used in this testimonial and his fiction writing, which capture the imagination of readers in a way that makes genocide comprehensible. In this way, they argue that Levi's writing expands the narrow definition of testimony to include more indirect and creative forms of writing.

Farneti (2006) examined Levi's writing in different genres by discussing Levi's book of short stories, *Storie Naturali*, and how it relates to his earlier testimonial writing. Farneti argued that in Levi's fanciful science fiction stories, he created a world that was turned on its head, in terms of mythical scenarios in which humans and animals merge, humans and machines combine and normative moral boundaries are destroyed. Farneti claimed that in Levi's fiction he depicted a world in which humans lost their sense of rational agency, which is a defining hallmark of humanity. Farneti connects this loss of agency to the conditions in Auschwitz. Farneti claimed that Levi's fiction is not a genre in which he turned away from the Lager to find an escape, as some other critics claimed, but rather his fiction is continuous with themes from his testimonial writing. Farneti

contends that the limitation of rational freedom in Levi's stories is a remnant of his experience in Auschwitz, in which the boundaries between what was human and inhuman were blurred and made indistinct.

Schehr (1989) wrote about Levi's style by focusing on the role of discourse in *The Periodic Table*. Schehr asserted that *The Periodic Table* used the competing and intersecting discourses of science, literature, politics and religion in order to describe Levi's survival in Auschwitz and his becoming a writer. The discourse of science in Levi's writing, which posits objectivity and truth (in addition to the uncertainty principle), is used to usurp the political discourse of Fascism and Nazism, which falsely claimed a position of dominance over other discourses and sole access to absolute knowledge. Schehr discussed how scientific discourse, though usually in opposition to the subjectivity of literary discourse, becomes complimentary with literature in *The Periodic Table* for both are used to subvert the discourse of Fascism. The intersection, competition and translation between these multiple discourses correlates with Levi's own story of survival, in which he had to translate and make use of multiple discourses at work in Auschwitz. Schehr concludes that Levi's ability to rewrite his own story in a hybridized discourse is a productive response to Fascism, which sought to erase all other discourses.

Woolf (2007) examined some of the different objectives that Levi sought to achieve in different periods of his writing throughout his body of work. Woolf discussed Levi's early writing that served a testimonial function, in which he tried to use the objective language of a witness. Levi's writing in *Survival in Aushwitz*, rather than using the personal and imaginative voice common to fiction, is impersonal and observational,

as though he is the presenting judicial evidence on behalf of all the victims of the Holocaust. Woolf contrasts Levi's early testimonial writing to moments in *The Truce* and *The Drowned and the Saved*, in which he loses his restraint and unburdens himself of the horrors he experienced, and induces the feeling of shame in his readers. Ozick (1988) also wrote about the dramatic shift in tone in *The Drowned and the Saved*, which expressed intense anger that Levi had previously withheld.

Some of these topics covered in literary criticism are directly relevant to the qualitative analysis of the current study, and are also dealt with in the previous review of clinical literature on trauma. The question of indirect and inadequate representation in Holocaust testimony, discussed by Ferme (2001), Gilliland (1992) and Scheiber (2006), was treated in the clinical domain in literature on trauma and the impact of trauma on symbolization. Additionally, the qualitative analysis in the current study pursues this theme in the section "Failures of Representation," which examines Levi's commentary on language and representation throughout the body of his work. The qualitative analysis discusses the representation of trauma in Levi's narratives in order to explore the question of whether or not trauma can be worked through in narrative form.

Farneti's (2006) discussion of Levi's short stories raises the question of the relationship between Levi's testimonial writing and his fiction, which is also addressed in the qualitative analysis of the current study by tracing themes in Levi's writing that occur across genres, in order to determine features of his trauma vs. non-trauma-related writing. Belpoliti and Gordon's (2007) description of Levi's vocabularies, particularly animal vocabulary, is relevant to the current study, which traces the theme of animal imagery in his body of work in the qualitative analysis. The current study extends Belpoliti and

Gordon's argument that animal imagery is used to reflect on the destruction and transformation of humans into animals in Auschwitz by looking at Levi's representation of identity and the difficulty for Levi of directly representing his psychological experience of trauma.

Scheiber's (2006) and Schehr's (1989) analysis of *The Periodic Table*, is similar to some of the observations made in the qualitative analysis in the section "Abstraction and Matter." The current study examines not just the analogy between Levi's scientific work and his personal life, but it examines the conflicted and vacillating relationship between the two, due to Levi's defensive processes. Woolf's (2007) and Ozick's (1988) commentary on the emergence of anger and emotion in Levi's later writing, is discussed in the qualitative analysis, particularly in the section "Shame: The Return of Affect." The qualitative analysis seeks not only to identify the changes in emotional expression in Levi's writing, but also to relate these changes to the psychological process of working through trauma in his narratives.

This section has reviewed some of the ways Levi's writing has been explored in the field of literary criticism to acknowledge the literary scholarship on Levi that covers similar topics to the current study and can be bridged to clinical concepts. The themes that the literary criticism address are relevant to the current study in their focus on *how* Levi communicates his experience of Auschwitz in narrative. The qualitative analysis shifts the focus of inquiry by contextualizing the analysis of how Levi tells his story in the clinical literature on traumatic memory, the Holocaust, trauma narratives, and working through.

Chapter III: Methodology

Materials

The works by Primo Levi selected for this analysis include: *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), *The Reawakening* (1963), *The Periodic Table* (1975), *Collected Poems* (1988), *Other People's Trades* (1985), *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), and *A Tranquil Star* (2007). This selection was guided in part by a temporal consideration, in that *Survival in Auschwitz* is Levi's first account of his experience of the Holocaust and *The Drowned and the Saved*, written 40 years later, was his conscious decision to return to writing about Auschwitz and the conclusions he drew from that experience. The comparison between *Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Drowned and the Saved* may demonstrate changes in the texts that relate to this time difference. Textual changes may reflect his ability to integrate the events of the distant past or their unyielding encapsulation within his store of associations. Alternatively, textual changes may demonstrate other changes in his personality, due to aging or other factors that contribute to a changed perspective on the experience after so many years. *A Tranquil Star* is a collection of short stories written from the mid 1940s to the 1980s and *Collected Poems* also contains poems from the mid 1940s through the 1980s, allowing for an analysis of sequence as well as elements that may be shared by multiple texts across time.

Another guiding principle for the selection of works is a qualitative distinction between the works that are more personal, emotional and imaginative (*A Tranquil Star*, *The Periodic Table* and *Collected Poems*) versus more impersonal, testimonial works that

address historical events and sociological themes, more than his personal experience. *Survival in Auschwitz*, *The Reawakening*, and parts of *The Drowned and the Saved* include direct descriptions of the Levi's time in Auschwitz, which will be examined in the qualitative analysis as his trauma narratives. In comparison, Levi's memoir writing in *The Periodic Table* and essay writing in *Other People's Trades* will be examined because they include descriptions of Levi's life before and after Auschwitz. In this way, Levi's writing about the trauma can be compared to his writing that does not focus on the trauma. Additionally, Levi's poetry and fiction in his *Collected Poems* and *A Tranquil Star* will be examined to see if his creative and fiction writing is different from his trauma narratives, or whether there are similar repeated features. By looking at Levi's writing across time and in different mediums, it can be determined if fragments of the trauma can be identified that repeat throughout his works of writing regardless of the genre or subject.

Methodology for the Qualitative Analysis

The current study will be based on a close textual analysis of several of Levi's texts, including his memoirs, short stories and essays. The method of my analysis will apply psychoanalytic clinical theory to literary texts according to methodological principles written about by Francis Baudry (1984). This analysis will focus on Levi's texts as self-contained structures illustrative of mental processes, particularly regarding the experience and processing of trauma. Since much of Levi's writing is memoir, his texts include autobiographical information upon which interpretations of the text may be

based. Additional sources of autobiographical information, and Levi's own perspective on his writing from published interviews will be used to augment interpretations drawn from his texts. Though autobiographical, Levi's writing will be treated as fiction rather than fact due to the inevitable role of unconscious processes and the limitations (and excesses) of subjective perspective in structuring his narratives.

Key to this applied literary analysis is the inclusion of multiple texts by Primo Levi, written in different genres and at different times in his life, which allows for an examination of change and consistency in his writing over time. The nature of Levi's emerging traumatic memories, as well as the concept of working through trauma will be explored both in his works individually and looking at his texts sequentially and collectively. Through a close textual analysis, these works of literature will be used as data, comparing and analyzing the way in which Levi's traumatic experiences are represented in language.

The psychoanalytic literature on trauma tends to focus on the recovery of traumatic memory, with cure seen as almost synonymous with the recreation of the experience in narrative form. However, extending the argument of Laub and Podell (1995) and Appelfeld (1994), it is possible that a narrative description of traumatic events may fail to fully contain the affective experience and the personal meaning that then intrudes in a displaced manner into diverse arenas not ostensibly connected with the trauma. This qualitative analysis of Primo Levi's writing will look at both his trauma narratives as well as his fiction and essay writing that does not focus on his testimony as a Holocaust survivor. By examining Levi's trauma vs. non-trauma-related writing, this

analysis will discern the nature in which his affective experience and the personal meaning of the trauma is represented or excluded in these different domains.

Psychoanalytic theory has conceptualized a relation between trauma and the repetition compulsion (Freud, 1920): features of the trauma are repeated in the mind in an attempt to gain mastery. Therefore, this qualitative analysis will examine repetition within Levi's writing. Following Greenberg's (1998) conceptualization that trauma narratives are structured like echoes, with fragments of the trauma that repeat in multiple narratives, the current qualitative analysis will identify and explore the fragments from Levi's trauma narrative that repeat in his later writing. Throughout Levi's body of work, there are themes that repeatedly occur beginning in his initial writing about Auschwitz: 1) fire and explosions, 2) the boundary between animals and humans, 3) abstraction and matter, and 4) the failure of representation. The dual criteria used for selecting these themes were that they must be both iconic and repetitive. These themes were chosen first by reading Levi's writing and observing that these particular themes repeat throughout his body of work. Additionally, all of these images are iconic of Levi's personal representation of his experience in the Lager. Fire is widely recognized as an iconic image of the Holocaust due to the crematorium ovens in the concentration camps. The word "Holocaust" itself means, "a great or complete devastation or destruction, especially by fire," or "a sacrifice completely consumed by fire; burnt offering." There are other iconic images of the Holocaust that could have been chosen (i.e., trains, barracks, barbed wire, mass graves), but they did not occur as frequently in Levi's writing as the ones selected (Brink, 2000). Though some of the themes here are not widely recognized as iconic of the Holocaust, they are clearly iconic of the Lager for

Levi, given their preponderance in his texts beginning with his initial trauma narrative. These themes appear in writing directly about the Holocaust, but they also appear in later writing about different subject matter (e.g., a boyhood memory; an essay about his work as a chemist). Levi's writing and these recurring themes span different mediums of writing, including testimony, personal memoir, essay, poetry, and short fiction. The repetition of the same themes in different contexts allows us to examine the way themes and images associated with trauma continue to emerge even after they have been successfully remembered and worked into a narrative explicitly about the traumatic events.

Repeated writing about trauma will likely include an aggregate of fragments and traces of the traumatic experience, which, when looked at together, provides a map of how the experience was disavowed and the circuitous ways in which it was remembered. This analysis will construct such a map of Levi's memorial process in his writing, in addition to exploring the limitations of language and its relationship to the treatment of trauma. The analysis will examine how the fragments of Levi's description of trauma repeat elsewhere, how the fragments relate to his initial trauma narrative, and the degree to which these fragments change or evolve in his narratives over time.

Organization of the Qualitative Analysis and Selection of Passages

This analysis will be divided into two major sections that analyze selections of Levi's texts from his trauma narratives and his writing in other genres (fiction, memoir, poetry, essays) not explicitly about the Holocaust. The first major section will cover

passages from his trauma narratives, writing that directly describes his experience in Auschwitz, in order to examine the quality of the language, his affective expression, and to identify images and features that repeat in later writing. Language will be analyzed for qualities of passivity vs. activity, the portrayal of time, the degree to which Levi's emotional experience is expressed or omitted, the amount of sensory detail, and the nature of his identifications with others. The second major section will examine themes from his writing that occur repeatedly (echoes of the trauma) in much of Levi's writing from different time periods and in different genres. The themes discussed are fire and explosions, the boundary between animals and humans, abstraction and matter as well as the failure of representation. This second section will include selections of texts from both his trauma narratives as well as his other writing, including fiction, poetry, and essays, in which the images and themes repeat. This second section will allow for a comparison of trauma-related writing versus non-trauma-related writing.

The first major section has two subsections that cover different aspects of the trauma narratives. The first subsection in trauma narratives examines the impact of the trauma on Levi's identity and his attempt to construct a new identity upon entry to the Lager in *Survival in Auschwitz*. This subsection examines passages from *Survival in Auschwitz* that describe the stripping of Levi's former identity and the way in which he tries to recreate an identity based on his immediate experience in the Lager. I also include a passage about his identity as a chemist from *Other People's Trades* in order to compare the language he uses to portray his professional identity to the way he writes about his identity in Auschwitz. This section examines the impact of the Lager on Levi's

identity both while he was living in the camp and whether it altered his sense of identity in other periods of his life.

The second subsection examines moments in Levi's writing about the camps when he comes into contact with the outside world and the Allied troops, either during air raids, or when the Russians finally liberated the camp. These passages were chosen because these moments repeat in different texts, allowing for a comparison of the same descriptions from different times in Levi's life, in order to demonstrate the evolution and complexity of the trauma narrative. I also selected these moments because they represent a border condition, in which life in the Lager was interrupted, and the possibility of life outside could be considered. While living in the Lager, Levi wrote that it was difficult to recall his former life and it was painful to think about the past. These border moments are exceptional because they were opportunities for reflection, in contrast to the majority of time in the Lager spent in concentrated or frenetic activity. These moments are notable also because they are affectively charged both due to the physical danger during air raids and because contact with the outside signified the potential end of imprisonment. It can be expected that life in captivity would be characterized by despair and a suppression of feeling, but these moments on the border of captivity and freedom are an opportunity to examine a potential shift in consciousness and his emotional responsiveness. The evolution of Levi's expression of shame is examined in this section, charting its expression in *Survival in Auschwitz* and its changed expression in *The Reawakening* and *The Drowned and the Saved*. Levi's writing about the encounter with the outside will be examined in a range of texts over his writing career both for differences and consistencies in his language and its emotional qualities. The central

features of the trauma narrative that remain consistent, and those aspects that evolve over time will be identified at the conclusion of the section.

The second major section covers repeated themes in Levi's writing that I have identified as his signature fragments of the trauma. These themes are 1) fire and explosions, 2) the boundary between humans and animals, 3) abstraction and matter, and 4) the failure of representation. These themes first occur in his trauma narrative and then repeatedly appear as fragments or echoes in his fiction, memoir, and essay writing that is not directly about the Holocaust. The thematic categories for the four fragments are separated for heuristic purposes, but they all relate to each other and there are numerable instances when they overlap. The significance of each theme in relation to Levi's processing of trauma will be discussed, in addition to whether the themes evolve over time.

Operationalized Concepts for the Qualitative Analysis: Working Through and Emotions

Working through.

Based on the literature review of various interpretations of "working through," this concept will be operationalized to apply the concept to the writing of Primo Levi in the following ways:

1. Progressing along the continuum of ways trauma can be represented according to Laub and Auerhahn (1993) would be evidence of working through. The continuum includes the following stages:
 - a) Unintegrated perceptual or sensory fragments
 - b) Transference phenomena (fragments of memory that attach to current situations and relationships and distort current perceptions according to past experiences)
 - c) Representational memories that can't be used flexibly for imagination or symbolic play
 - d) Symbolic forms that can represent multiple meanings in addition to the concrete experience
 - Therefore, repeated sensory fragments of the trauma that become more conscious and are used symbolically in varied ways (applied in new contexts) to convey more complex meaning would be evidence of working through.
 - Repeated somatosensory fragments of the trauma (i.e., unconsciously repeated images and themes that are echoes of the trauma) in Levi's writing that do not evolve over time, in terms of gaining new significance or becoming more conscious symbols of the trauma, would be evidence of a failure to work through. This would be static repetition of unconscious fragments without any change.
2. Transformation of enactive memories to representational memories.

a) Enactive memories would include:

- Passages that appear similar to flashback memories – descriptions in which the narrator seems consumed by the narration of the past event, with no reference to the present or the future.
- Passages of physical or sensory description without explicit statements of cognitive or emotional processing (i.e., “I thought X,” or “I felt Y”), or that seem detached from the narrator’s person (i.e., no use of the first-person or no comment about the narrator’s internal experience of the remembered events).
- Pronoun changes from third-person to first-person, or tense changes from past to present, indicating the immediacy of the memory.
- Moments when phrases in foreign languages are not translated would indicate enactive memory because the disorientation and incomprehension of the past is reproduced without recourse to the present and the possibility of increased understanding (i.e., translating the passage).

b) Representational memories include:

- Memories that acquire greater meaning because they are viewed in the context of other memories or a range of personal associations beyond the immediate memory.
- References within the present episode to literature, art, culture and events outside of the immediate episode.

- An expanded sense of time that includes reference to memories from different points in time. When the narrator makes linkages between memories from different time periods of the narrator's life.
 - Use of metaphor in the descriptions of memories. Including works of fiction within a collection of autobiographical memories (i.e., in *The Periodic Table*) would be instances of representational memory.
3. Increased access to emotional experience during a traumatic memory over time would be evidence of working through (i.e., moving from a memory of an event with no emotional expression to a memory of the same event with added emotional expression).
 4. Working through would also entail an emotional or moral shift, which progresses from a view on the past that admits to a single emotional experience to a view on the past that includes multiple or conflicting emotions connected to the same event.

Emotional expression.

In this analysis, I will be examining emotional expression in the context of Levi's writing, but I will be looking very specifically at the expression of shame or humiliation. In my qualitative analysis of Levi's texts, I will be looking for moments when he identifies himself as a victim and describes his subjective experience of having been

mistreated. This includes direct statements of emotion (“I felt X,” where X includes “shame,” “ashamed,” “embarrassed,” “humiliated,” and other similar emotion words) in addition to the use of adjectives to describe aspects of himself (i.e., “shameful”). Places in Levi’s texts where he directly reflects upon and verbalizes emotions will be contrasted to places where he does not describe his internal experience or identify himself as a victim. His ability to communicate emotion to another person in writing requires that he be able to mentalize and articulate an emotional experience with another person in mind. If the reader is able to recognize a written emotional experience, and feel it in some degree (an “echo,” says Levi), then this indicates Levi’s capacity in these moments to connect to a mental representation of another person, and his sense that the affect could be contained by the object. This analysis will focus on Levi’s mental processes as they are represented by his texts. This will involve attention to what is put into language, and what is left unsaid, which may reflect unconscious, defensive processes. Attention will also be paid to places Levi describes or attributes emotions to others as opposed to himself.

List of works and dates of original publication:

-Titles from the English publications are in brackets

1947 – *Se questo è un uomo* [*If This is a Man/Survival in Auschwitz*]

1963 – *La tregua* [*The Truce/The Reawakening*]

1975 – *Il sistema periodico* [*The Periodic Table*]

1982 – *Se non ora, quando* [*If Not Now, When?*]

1984 – *Collected Poems*

1985 – *L'altrui mestiere* [*Other People's Trades*]

1986 – *Racconti e saggi* [*The Drowned and the Saved*]

2007 – *A Tranquil Star*

Chapter IV: Qualitative Analysis

1) Trauma Narratives

Trauma identity: Tattoo and numbers.

This section will examine Levi's transformation when he enters the Lager as described in *Survival in Auschwitz*. This transformation entailed the loss of his former civilian identity, and his attempt to maintain a sense of identity in the Lager. The prisoners were stripped, literally and figuratively, when they entered the camp. In order to survive one had to adapt to the new environment and attempt to form an identity by new means if one wanted to keep one's sense of self intact. This section aims to identify how Levi coped with conditions in the Lager, the defense mechanisms he employed, and the lasting imprint the trauma had on his sense of self.

Levi's entrance to Auschwitz begins his transformation and his adaptation to life in the Lager as a prisoner. When he arrives at Auschwitz after the train journey he sees some of the other inmates who have already been transformed by the conditions of the camp. The first sight of the prisoners is a shock, and they appear "strange" and "odd;" their posture and movements are "rigid," almost inhuman, similar to zombies, or some other corpse-like version of a man. They were an unknown shadowy entity, a radical otherness, but they clearly communicated a foreboding promise that the same fate awaited the newcomers.

[T]wo groups of strange individuals emerged into the light of the lamps. They walked in squads, in rows of three, with an odd, embarrassed step, head dangling in front, arms rigid. On their heads they wore comic berets and were all dressed in long striped overcoats, which even by night and from a distance looked filthy and in rags...

We looked at each other without a word. It was all incomprehensible and mad, but one thing we had understood. This was the metamorphosis that awaited us. Tomorrow we would be like them. (Levi, 1947, p. 20-21)

Levi's transformation begins with his physical appearance: he changes from wearing civilian clothes to being stripped naked, given the striped prison uniform, and having his head shaved.

When we finish, everyone remains in his own corner and we do not dare lift our eyes to look at one another. There is nowhere to look in a mirror, but our appearance stands in front of us, reflected in a hundred livid faces, in a hundred miserable and sordid puppets. We are transformed into the phantoms glimpsed yesterday evening. (p. 26)

Without a mirror, he is unable to look at himself. This is the beginning of his psychological inability to fully take stock of himself and recognize his own state of being. Here, he uses the faces of the other inmates around him as a proxy for himself, in order to comprehend his own experience. The stripping of clothes and hair was an

assault on personal identity that results in Levi's loss of selfhood and a boundary fusion with the other prisoners. The line immediately before, "we do not dare lift our eyes to look at one another" denotes his defensive use of avoidance, his wish not to see what he knows to be true because it is so humiliating. But avoidance gives way to splitting, which allows for simultaneous disavowal and registration of the distressing sights (as will be discussed in more detail below).

Throughout *Survival in Auschwitz* there are many moments described when he and the other prisoners are stripped naked, both at their arrival, and upon entrance to Ka-be, the sick ward. The stripping of physical attributes leaves the prisoners in a state of vulnerability, and it has a deep psychological effect on the prisoners' identities.

It is not possible to sink lower than this; no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name; and if we want to keep it, we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage somehow so that behind the name something of us, of us as we were, still remains. (p. 26-27)

In the Lager, the prisoners are stripped of everything that signified their former identity. Without their clothes, hair, and name they are totally cut off from the familiar reminders of who they were. Since the prisoners are denied the recognition of others in language, they are socially cut-off as well. To keep their names requires an act of will and

strength, “so that behind the name something of us, of us as we were, still remains.” In fact, it is not the name itself that is difficult to remember – it is what used to be “behind the name” that has been destroyed, and to which it is so challenging to remain connected. The name has been decoupled from the identity. This passage marks the departure of the previous self that has been forcefully stripped and assaulted.

Much of what follows in *Survival in Auschwitz* is the slow process by which Levi attempts to rebuild a sense of identity. Levi uses familiar identity structures, such as nomination, routine procedures and local knowledge, in order to fortify and recapture his lost sense of self but now as a prisoner in an alien setting. The identification number tattooed on Levi’s arm is a significant part of his identity as a prisoner.

Haftling [prisoner]: I have learnt that I am Haftling. My number is 174517; we have been baptized, we will carry the tattoo on our left arm until we die.

The operation was slightly painful and extraordinarily rapid: they placed us all in a row, and one by one, according to the alphabetical order of our names, we filed past a skilful official, armed with a sort of pointed tool with a very short needle. It seems that this is the real, true initiation: only by ‘showing one’s number’ can one get bread and soup. Several days passed, and not a few cuffs and punches, before we became used to showing our number promptly enough not to disorder the daily operation of food-distribution; weeks and months were needed to learn its sound in the German language. And for many days, while the habits of freedom still led me to look for the time on my wristwatch, my new

name ironically appeared instead, a number tattooed in bluish characters under the skin. (p.27-28)

The tattooed numbers were an affront to the prisoners' old identities by branding them like cattle and replacing their names with a number. This new identity as a number was reinforced by its repeated use in the camp. The prisoners had to show their number to get food, and their number was how they were recognized. Levi spent time learning to recognize his number in German, so his reprogramming to recognize his new self was two-fold: both as a number and in a foreign language.

“Ironically” his number appeared instead of his wrist watch “while the habits of freedom” still led him to think of himself by his old name and to check the time. His former identity and his name were linked to a personal connection to time. Captivity and his attempt to form an identity in the Lager coincided with the suspension of civilized time, a time in which past, present and future were connected. Though time was present in the Lager as a rigid and obsessive schedule for the day, it was a measurement of the same events repeating endlessly without a true sense of the future. Time in the Lager did not include a concept of the future as change or the possibility of something different than the present - except in death. Levi loses his former sense of identity, and hence he loses his previous orientation in time, which had allowed his self in the present to have continuity with his past and his anticipation of the future. Trauma creates a disruption in time, leaving only an eternal present, without access to the past or hope for the future (Boulanger, 2002; Stolorow 2003). Time in the Lager is suspended between life and death, which cancels the ordinary progression of time as movement towards the future or

away from the past, leaving an eternally recurring present with no place to go. In the absence of a future and an escape, death was the only orientation to time in the Lager. The tattoo represents this new orientation to time in the Lager by permanently connecting Levi to his foreclosed future.

The prisoners were “baptized” when their numbers were tattooed on their arms; receiving the tattoo was another step in a process of dehumanization and simultaneously the beginning of a personal connection to the number and an elaborate development of its meaning within the camp. The ego’s constant need to create organization and meaning is evident in this transformation of the tattooed numbers into a kind of genealogy and history.

Only much later, and slowly, a few of us learnt something of the funereal science of the numbers of Auschwitz, which epitomize the stages of destruction of European Judaism. To the old hand of the camp, the numbers told everything: the period of entry into the camp, the convoy of which one formed a part, and consequently the nationality. Everyone will treat with respect the numbers from 30,000 to 80,000: there are only a few hundred left and they represented the few survivals from the Polish ghettos. It is as well to watch out in commercial dealings with a 116,000 or a 117,000: they now number only about forty, but they represent the Greeks of Salonica, so take care they do not pull the wool over your eyes. As for the high numbers they carry an essentially comic air about them, like the words ‘freshman’ or ‘conscript’ in ordinary life. The typical high number is a corpulent, docile and stupid fellow: he can be convinced that leather shoes are

distributed at the infirmary to all those with delicate feet, and can be persuaded to run there and leave his bowl of soup ‘in your custody.’ (Levi, 1947, p. 28)

In the absence of belongings, hair, name and language, the prisoners make do with the only identity they are granted: the number tattooed on their arm. As this passage indicates, the numbers were invested with a tremendous amount of meaning. In addition to identifying the time of one’s arrival, and one’s nationality, it also denoted how well acquainted one was with the unspoken rules of the Lager. The many different qualities and subtle variations of identity found in the world outside the Lager were reconstructed within the Lager, and attached to the numbers. The numbers signified these positive attributes. In addition, the “funereal science of the numbers of Auschwitz” signified a negative meaning as well, which was the quantity and geographic variety of European Jews killed in Auschwitz. This negative meaning is a thinly veiled secret, known by most, but not communicated openly. Another inmate informs Levi of this negative meaning in Ka-be:

‘Show me your number: you are 174517. This numbering began eighteen months ago and applies to Auschwitz and the dependent camps. There are now ten thousand of us here at Buna-Monowitz; perhaps thirty thousand between Auschwitz and Birkenau. *Wo sind die Andere?* Where are the others?’

After the stripping of the old identity and its replacement with the tattooed number, the development of Levi’s identity as a prisoner in Auschwitz takes place

through the accrual of new information, procedures, and habits specific to the Lager. “We have a great number of things to learn, but we have learned many already. We already have a certain idea of the topography of the Lager...” (p. 31). “We already know in good part the rules of the camp, which are incredibly complicated. The prohibitions are innumerable...” (p. 33). The matter-of-fact tone in which Levi describes the many rules of the Lager, gives this period of adaptation an eerie quality, as though he is being acclimated to the unspoken but rigidly adhered-to rules of a summer camp. The information and rules he absorbs include: the layout and topography of the Lager, the categories of prisoners, rules about the prison uniform and buttons, making the beds, emptying the latrine bucket, showering, the correct way to procure food, how to acquire a spoon, preferable work shifts, the system of trade between prisoners, and so on. Levi’s absorption of this information is reported to the reader in an automatic, unreflective way. Knowing the procedures of the Lager, much like understanding the tattooed numbers, allows Levi to navigate the chaotic and harsh environment of the Lager.

However, Levi does not fully develop a new identity in the Lager, but he makes a radical break from his former self. After his former identity is assaulted, he makes his best attempt to achieve moments of greater stability. Levi approximates a sense of identity using familiar identity structures to offset the disorientation of having lost his core sense of identity. In the following passage, Levi writes about a glimmer of self-recognition in one of these moments of greater stability, ironically, when he hits “bottom.” At the end of the chapter in which Levi first learns the rules of the Lager he switches to use the first person pronoun, “I,” after using the collective pronoun, “we,” for most of the chapter.

Here I am, then, on the bottom. One learns quickly enough to wipe out the past and the future when one is forced to. A fortnight after my arrival I already had the prescribed hunger, that chronic hunger unknown to free men, which makes one dream at night, and settles in all the limbs on one's body. I have already learnt not to let myself be robbed, and in fact if I find a spoon lying around, a piece of string, a button which I can acquire without danger of punishment, I pocket them and consider them mine by full right. (p.37)

After Levi adapts to the procedures and routines of the Lager, his body transforms and begins to resemble those of the rest of the inmates. The shift to the first person "I" coincides with his following the rules of the camp, the transformation of his body, but also a further dissociation from his former self. This passage marks the emergence of what could be described as the self-state that experienced the trauma, which was dissociated from Levi's former identity. He wipes out consciousness of his past and future, and becomes alienated from his body, so that the "I" who narrates is different from the person Levi was from before the Lager. In the absence of his prior identity and connection to his physical being, he internalized the functions and procedures of an inmate in the Lager, and occupies an empty shell of an identity.

On the back of my feet I already have those numb sores that will not heal.
I push wagons, I work with a shovel, I turn rotten in the rain, I shiver in the wind;
already my own body is no longer mine: my belly is swollen, my limbs

emaciated, my face is thick in the morning, hollow in the evening; some of us have yellow skin, others grey. (p.37)

This physical breakdown is followed by a further transformation in his social identity: Levi decided not to continue meeting with the other Italians. He disconnected himself from the social community that used to hold importance to his former identity; contact with other Italians in the Lager was a way of keeping alive his sense of identity from when he was a free man. Checking in with the other Italians was a type of self-reflection because his countrymen functioned as mirrors for himself. Self-reflection, even when mediated through others, was painful and unwelcome in the Lager. It was better not to “remember and to think” (p. 37), not to maintain contact with one’s former identity after one had become accustomed to being a prisoner in the Lager.

We Italians had decided to meet every Sunday evening in a corner of the Lager, but we stopped it at once, because it was too sad to count our numbers and find fewer each time, and to see each other ever more deformed and more squalid. (p.37)

As Levi became more immersed in the Lager, he lost his connection to previous identity categories and occupied an empty, in-between position as an observer of others. Levi’s detailed description and categorization of his journey and the many types of people around him culminated in the final destination he and the rest of the prisoners would eventually reach. Levi famously named the two categories of prisoners who lived

vs. those who died, “the drowned and the saved.” As Levi gained greater understanding of the Lager, he did not record any sense of renewed understanding of where he fit in to the system he described. Most notable in his descriptions of both the drowned and the saved, is that he does not include himself in either category, and he continues to occupy an unidentified position.

After being thrown into the harsh conditions of the concentration camp, it quickly became clear who could not find a way to secure special privileges and extra food in order to survive. According to Levi, the rations provided in the camp allowed one to live for about three months before starving or being selected for the gas chamber. Levi writes that the term “musselman” refers to “the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection”; they are “the men in decay” (p. 88-89). No one reaches out to help the musselmen once they have reached this state of malnutrition and exhaustion because they are beyond help and only burden those around them.

All the musselmans who finished in the gas chambers have the same story, or more exactly, have no story; they followed the slope down to the bottom, like streams that run down to the sea. On their entry to the camp, through basic incapacity, or by misfortune, or through some banal incident, they are overcome before they can adapt themselves; they are beaten by time, they do not begin to learn German, to disentangle the infernal knot of laws and prohibitions until their body is already in decay, and nothing can save them from selections or from death by exhaustion. Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Musselmanner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous

mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. (p. 90)

According to Levi, to become a musselman, to drown, was to lose one's way on entering the camp. Not only does the musselman lose his former identity, and not only does he die, but in the interim he loses his status as a man. They are "non-men" and they have "no story." They existed in an exceptional state, yet Levi wrote that the majority of prisoners reached this destination. Levi spent a lot of time describing and providing a story for these doomed anonymous creatures, for they clearly haunted him. "They crowd my memory." Levi resurrected this living-dead spectacle by describing the category "musselman," but he did not restore their former identities. They were a wavering, liminal horror, with no identity outside this category that was born and died within the Lager. This category that crowded Levi's memory epitomizes how the traumatic conditions of the Lager destroyed identity before death. It may have been clearer to Levi how to provide a coherent description of the musselman due to their extreme state, but they can exemplify the dehumanizing and de-identifying effect of the Lager on all of the prisoners to varying degrees, including Levi's own loss of identity.

The other possible outcome for prisoners that Levi described was to survive by successfully adapting to the conditions of the Lager. These were "the saved." Prisoners who managed to access a position of privilege within the camp had power that they exerted over those who did not. Levi describes the Jewish prominents as particularly rare within the camp because positions of privilege were typically granted to the non-jews.

“The paths to salvation are many, difficult and improbable” and Levi noted that to attain a position of privilege often involved betraying one’s comrades. He gave four portraits of Jewish prominents in Auschwitz, including a fairly average man always looking for opportunities to earn more bread, including singing and dancing, and who didn’t hesitate to give up his friend to the authorities when it benefited him. There was also a deranged strong man who possessed great physical abilities, which allowed him to thrive and win the admiration of others when faced with forced labor. There was a shrewd businessman who Levi described as a “joyless dominator,” and finally an intelligent, socially skilled man who appeared friendly and seductive, yet was always guarded, distant and scheming. Of this last man, Levi said if given the opportunity he would not wish to see him again.

All the portraits of the “saved” men lack appeal and warmth; their descriptions convey a certain respect combined with faint, or open, disdain. This is a category that was truly an exception to the common fate of Jews in Auschwitz, and the men in these portraits seem to fall outside a certain social norm. For one, these men lacked a common bond that united the other prisoners against the German oppressors, because the saved men prioritized their individual fate over common solidarity. Not surprisingly, the saved prisoners appear emotionally isolated from the rest of the prisoners. But most notably, Levi does not identify himself with this “saved” category, even though he wrote *Survival in Auschwitz* as one of the few survivors. Again he takes his position as an observer, and does not include himself in the categories he describes. This may also be due to the guilt that came with survival, awareness of the other prisoners’ misfortune or envy, which may be part of the negative valence that taints his descriptions of the “saved.” Levi wrote 40 years later in *The Drowned and the Saved*, “The worst survived, that is, the fittest; the

best all died (Levi, 1986, p.82). Another potential obstacle to Levi's identification of himself as saved, is that this category leads to survival and life after the camp. The "saved" category shares a border with liberation and an identity beyond Auschwitz, which was difficult to fully resume. It was difficult to re-embrace a former identity as a civilian, and within his trauma narrative, Levi does not fully leave behind the nullified, in-between identity of the Lager.

There are a few rare moments in *Survival in Auschwitz* when Levi does remember his former identity due to special circumstances that reinforced his memory of his past. One takes place when Levi sits for a chemical examination to be admitted into a specialized work detail of chemists to work in the rubber plant attached to Auschwitz. On his way to take the chemistry exam, Levi's memory of his training and professional work as a chemist comes to life again in his mind. This memory of his professional identity contrasts sharply with his state and surroundings in the Lager, and he momentarily does not know how to place the Kapo, "Alex," who is leading him to the examination. This quote shows the rare instance that Levi makes a clear statement of identity, and it shows how fleeting and small the proclamation appears amidst the rough treatment and the "disgusted" regard he receives from Alex. The passage demonstrates the dissociation between Levi's former identity and his traumatized self-state while in the Lager and the cognitive dissonance Levi experienced identifying himself as a chemist while being treated like a prisoner.

Here is Alex. I am a chemist. What have I to do with this man Alex? He plants his feet in front of me, he roughly adjusts the collar of my jacket, he takes

out my beret and slaps it on my head, then he steps backwards, eyes the result with a disgusted air, and turns his back, muttering: ‘*Was fur ein Muselmann Zugang.*’ What a messy recruit! (Levi, 1947, p.104).

Initially, when Levi identifies himself as a chemist, he cannot see the connection between himself and his current surroundings due to the dissociation of his former identity from the Lager. This is evidence of the defensive use of splitting that allowed Levi to register the events that took place in the Lager, while simultaneously disavowing their impact on his former identity (Levi the chemist). However, while taking the chemistry examination, which was further removed from the everyday context of the Lager, Levi begins to experience himself as a chemist due to the familiar use of his mind recalling his knowledge of chemistry during the examination. He is able to reconnect to his conception of himself as a chemist because he has been provided the opportunity to access and use these parts of his mind from which he had no recourse (due to splitting) in the preceding months when he was treated solely as “a messy recruit.”

In the passage that follows, Levi is able to fully identify himself as a chemist during the examination, in what reads as an experience of reawakening.

I took my degree at Turin in 1941, *summa cum laude* – and while I say it I have the definite sensation of not being believed, of not even believing it myself; it is enough to look at my dirty hands covered with sores, my convict’s trousers encrusted with mud. Yet I am he, the B. Sc. Of Turin, in fact, at this particular moment it is impossible to doubt my identity with him, as my reservoir of

knowledge of organic chemistry, even after so long an inertia, responds at request with unexpected docility. And even more, this sense of lucid elation, this excitement which I feel warm in my veins, I recognize it, it is the fever of examinations, *my* fever, *my* examinations, that spontaneous mobilization of all my logical faculties and all my knowledge, which my friends at university so envied me. (p. 106)

Levi's initial disbelief that he is a chemist with a degree begins with his registration of his rough appearance, which he associates with his identification as a prisoner, i.e., "my dirty hands...my convict's trousers." His identity within the Lager had been reduced to his appearance, the disorderly surface of his body, and he had been blocked from accessing his internal resources. As he regains contact with his inner "reservoir of knowledge" his sense of identity is confirmed again with a new physical sensation, "this excitement which I feel warm in my veins." His restored sense of self coincides with a renewed connection to his body, from which he had been alienated: "*my* fever." Finally he remembers the envious reaction his friends had to his performance in university: the recognition of his identity by others. In this scene, Levi's recollection of his former identity retraces and reverses the exact same steps that lead to his dissociation from his identity upon entering the Lager: loss of internal resources and a focus on his physical being, alienation from his body, disconnection from old social ties. However, this reclaimed sense of identity disappears as soon as the examination is over and he returns to his everyday labor in the Lager. The following chapter begins with a description that returns Levi to a state of physical anguish during labor: "There were six

of us scraping and cleaning the inside of an underground petrol tank... The powder of the rust burnt under our eyelids and coated our throats and mouths with a taste almost like blood” (p. 109).

Another moment in *Survival in Auschwitz* when Levi appears to access his past identity is in the chapter, “The Canto of Ulysses.” Levi is selected by Jean, a prominent prisoner, to accompany him on the privileged and luxurious errand of collecting the ration for lunch, which allows him a break from manual labor. During their long walk, Levi and Jean talk about their homes and the past, and Levi starts to teach Jean Italian. He suddenly starts to remember “The Canto of Ulysses” from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and he tries to translate and teach it to Jean. Though this chapter does not include a direct statement of Levi’s identity, his ability to recall this poem, learned at a time when he was free, allows Levi to transcend the drudgery of the Lager: “For a moment I forget who I am and where I am” (p. 113). Access to knowledge, to the ability to think, in addition to connection to another person, resurrects Levi.

Pikolo begs me to repeat it. How good Pikolo is, he is aware that it is doing me good. Or perhaps it is something more: perhaps, despite the wan translation and the pedestrian, rushed commentary, he has received the message, he has felt that it has to do with him, that it has to do with all men who toil, and with us in particular; and that it has to do with us two, who dare to reason of these things with the poles for the soup on our shoulders. (p. 113-114)

Levi's access to his mental faculties, his daring ability to reason in the midst of the most unreasonable circumstances, maintains his connection to his sense of self: he is an intellectual. To "dare to reason" during forced labor is an act of individual will and freedom that resists imprisonment of the mind. Recalling Dante's verse about Ulysses, another man suffering on a journey away from home, also connects Levi to his present circumstances with a renewed sense of company. Ulysses' journey was also full of torment but it concludes happily, which makes the pain of the journey more tolerable in narrative form. Recalling the lines from Dante connects Levi to Jean, as well as literature and "all men who toil," perhaps lending some hope for how his journey ends. "The Canto of Ulysses" shows the value of Levi's ability to access his intellect to maintain his sense of identity and humanity within the deadening conditions of the Lager.

This analysis has so far explored the impact of the Lager on Levi's former identity, the way he adapted to losing his former sense of self, and moments of contact with his former sense of self. An important part of Levi's identity from before and after Auschwitz, was his professional identity as a chemist. Aside from his identity as a Holocaust survivor, Levi wrote a considerable amount about his training and work as a chemist. The question of what lasting impact his experience in the Lager had on his identity after he was liberated can be explored through places where his writing about chemistry and the Lager intersect – particularly in writing that is not explicitly about the Lager, but in which the lager is invoked. It is clear that Levi used his training and observational habits as a chemist in his perceptions of the Lager. He wrote about the Lager with the eye of the scientist and even thought about it as "pre-eminently a gigantic biological and social experiment" (p.87). But it is also apparent that his experience of the

Lager influenced and shaped his later writing about chemistry. There are certain stark similarities in passages about working as a chemist and his writing about Auschwitz that help illustrate the influence of Auschwitz on his reports of an earlier civilian identity as a chemist.

In the essay, “The Mark of the Chemist” (published 1985), Levi described the rituals and procedures of the chemistry laboratory of his youth, including the different identifying features of the chemist’s uniform, and the social customs specific to this scholastic community. He even described the “curious commerce” that operated amongst students in the lab for glassware with different types of defects. This description duplicates many features of his description of the Lager and the illicit system of trade set up by the prisoners in *Survival in Auschwitz*. This is the deferred action of his traumatic memory from the Lager that is triggered and comes to life again when Levi looks at other areas of his life.

Here Levi explains the origin of “the mark of the chemist,” the scar on the hand of most chemists from his generation. The scar comes from cutting oneself on broken glass when fitting together glass tubes and flasks. Levi’s writing about the chemist’s mark can be compared to his writing about his tattoo many years later, which gives a glimpse of how his direct description of the trauma appears in his later life:

...the glass often broke, and the sharp stump plunged into your hand. It would have been simple, indeed a matter of duty to warn adepts of this small, easily preventable danger: but it is known that in some obscure tribal recess of our nature survives an instinct that impels us to make sure that every initiation be painful, memorable and leave its mark.

(Levi, 1985, p.86-87)

The operation was not very painful and lasted no more than a minute, but it was traumatic. Its symbolic meaning was clear to everyone: this is an indelible mark, you will never leave here; this is the mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to the slaughter, and that is what you have become...It was also a return to barbarism...

At a distance of forty years, my tattoo has become a part of my body. I don't glory in it, but I am not ashamed of it either; I do not display and do not hide it. I show it unwillingly to those who ask out of pure curiosity; readily and with anger to those who say they are incredulous. Often young people ask why I don't have it erased, and this surprises me: why should I? There are not many of us in the world to bear this witness. (Levi, 1986, p. 119-120)

The description of the chemist's scar, which marks him permanently with a sign of his past training and experience, bears an unmistakable similarity to the concentration

camp tattoo. Both marks tell a story about the bearer's past: his rite of passage. The construction of both the chemist's identity and the trauma identity begins with a shattering, a painful experience of destruction. The description of the scar as being preventable save for our natural instinct to make initiations painful, is an attribution of cruelty and aggression to the authorities of his youth that may be displaced from, and colored by, his experience of the authorities in Auschwitz. The "tribal recess of our nature" mirrors the brutish, animalistic quality of the men he observed in Auschwitz. This displacement of his traumatic experience backwards in time to an experience of his youth is an example of deferred action. A memory from before the period of trauma becomes altered by the experience of the later, unrelated trauma. The earlier, innocent memory becomes colored by his traumatic experience due to a similarity or association (scar/tattoo on the arm/hand) that activates the memory of trauma. The experience of Auschwitz sensitized Levi to experiences of bodily harm, and markings on the body that store memories of trauma; presumably it is this sensitization that drew his attention, as a writer and survivor years later, to the scarring of his hand years before the trauma.

The passage about the tattoo shows how Levi's feelings associated with the trauma are very much alive and present in his civilian life forty years after he left Auschwitz. Levi's memories of trauma have remained a part of his identity in a physical way, much the same way he adopted his identity as a prisoner by focusing his attention on his bodily experiences: "my tattoo has become a part of my body." This passage expresses much more affect and uses much stronger language ("slaves are branded," "cattle sent to the slaughter," "barbarism") than the passage about being tattooed quoted earlier from *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947, p.27-28). This passage articulates his personal

feelings about the tattoo's meaning and the attention it draws from other people, which he did not express in *Survival in Auschwitz*. Here is Levi's angry emotional response to other people that was muted and missing at the time of the trauma (i.e., did not get represented in his first trauma narrative). Notably, Levi's phrase, "I am not ashamed of it either," is an articulation of Levi's conscious awareness of shame as a response to his traumatic experiences, even though he denies feeling shame in this passage. Shame is an emotion that is rarely expressed in his initial trauma narrative, as will be discussed in the following section.

Levi's unwillingness to erase the tattoo shows how he holds onto his identity as a prisoner at a time when, ostensibly, he could give it up - as if he could choose to eliminate that aspect of his identity now that it's in the past. Instead, Levi chooses to hold onto his tattoo as a "witness," but at this later stage the witnessing is not just focused outwardly on others, and it is accompanied by great affect. He is no longer removed from the events in the role of witness, and instead he announces his identification with the role of witness. The passage from the "mark of the chemist" is not as affectively charged as this description of his tattoo, but it is clear that the emotional valence of pain and primitivism common to both passages is more directly related to his Auschwitz tattoo than the chemistry labs of his youth. The lens through which Levi views his youth is fogged by the trauma that occurred in the years between.

This section has charted the way Levi's former civilian identity is stripped upon entering the Lager, and his attempt to maintain a semblance of identity within the Lager by adopting identity features as a prisoner. Levi's identity within the Lager was an in-between state in which he was no longer connected to his former civilian identity or old

social ties. Within the Lager he focused his attention on observing others, and the extent to which he reflected upon himself it was an awareness of his body, and rarely his thoughts or internal qualities save for a few exceptional moments. The trauma of the Lager culminated in Levi's absence of emotions, his inability to see himself, an orientation in time without a future, a dissociation of his former sense of self, and an internalization of external structures and procedures. The lasting impact of the trauma on Levi's civilian identity is seen in the operation of deferred action, wherein the traumatic memory is primed and activated when recollecting memories unrelated to the trauma. The trauma infiltrates and colors Levi's memory at large, without consideration to time or place. Which is to say that there was no internal liberation, or life after trauma, because the trauma was not bound in time, but continued to appear and intrude into the present and the past. The next section will examine whether or not there is evidence of the trauma narrative changing over time, comparing later narratives in which Levi wrote about his time in Auschwitz to his initial trauma narrative, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

Contact with the outside: Air raids and liberation.

The rigid frame created by the Lager was broken during moments when Levi came into contact with the outside world, during air raids and at the end of his imprisonment, when the camp was liberated by the Russian army. These are moments in the trauma narrative when the ordinary routines of imprisonment were interrupted and the characteristic emotional numbing may have given way to a new emotional response. In one scene when Levi begins working alongside German women in the rubber plant

attached to Auschwitz, Levi's contact with these civilians outside the Lager gives him a clear outside perspective on the extent of his demoralization. For some of these scenes, however, in gaining contact with the outside, Levi's reflection is primed by access to his earlier identity: a self outside of captivity. As will become clear, these moments did not spur a clear psychological shift from internal captivity and helplessness to liberation, but shifts do occur and will be explored. The passages in this section demonstrate how the initial narrative of the events does not clearly capture the full range of the emotional impact of the traumatic experience. The emotional response is not disclosed in a manner that correlates directly with the events, i.e., liberation does not lead to either joy or despair, but rather a complex mixture and alternation of emotional states, which also evolves over time.

Levi wrote multiple versions of the air raid scene and being liberated by the Russians, and these repeated scenes will be compared in order to identify if the properties of Levi's writing remain consistent across different iterations of the trauma narrative or if there are aspects that change over time. The consistent and enduring qualities of the trauma narrative across time may demonstrate the chief characteristics of trauma narratives, or aspects of the narratives that are most resistant to change. If the trauma narrative changes over time, this may demonstrate how Levi's narrative voice and his relationship to the trauma continue to evolve over time in his repeated attempts to describe these events in his writing career.

In addition to the multiple versions of the air raid and liberation scenes, this section also includes a selection of passages in *Survival in Auschwitz* from the ten days leading up to liberation, when the Germans had left and Levi was still in the Lager with

other sick prisoners. The four passages from “The Story of Ten Days” demonstrate the psychological shifts that occurred when Levi was first freed from the German presence and began to contemplate the end of the Lager. These passages are examined to trace the narrative and psychological shifts that take place once Levi’s captivity comes to an end.

The air raid passages are from *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947) and *The Periodic Table* (1975), the passages leading up to his liberation are from “The Story of Ten Days” in *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), and the scene of liberation by the Russians occurs in passages from *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), *The Reawakening* (1963), and *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986).

Air raids.

Levi describes the same air raid scene while he was in Auschwitz in both *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947) and *The Periodic Table* (1975). Levi never stated that he was describing the exact same memory, but the passages describe the same type of scene, the similarities are striking, and the differences in the descriptions are illuminating. The two descriptions provide an opportunity to compare the differences between the language of his initial trauma narrative (*Survival in Auschwitz*) and its later reworking. The categories of identifications, activity vs. passivity and the portrayal of time will be examined in the two passages.

1) As for us, we were too destroyed to be really afraid. The few who could still judge and feel rightly, drew new strength and hope from the bombardments; those whom hunger had not yet reduced to a definitive inertia often profited from the moments of general panic to undertake doubly rash expeditions...to the factory kitchens or the stores. But the greater number bore the new danger and the new discomforts with unchanged indifference; it was not a conscious resignation, but the opaque torpor of beasts broken in by blows, whom the blows no longer hurt.

Entry to the reinforced shelters was forbidden to us. When the earth began to tremble, we dragged ourselves, stunned and limping, through the corrosive fumes of the smoke bombs to the vast waste areas, sordid and sterile, closed within the

2) The Germans were more frightened than we were by the bombings: we, irrationally, did not fear them because we knew that they were not aimed at us but at our enemies. In the space of a few seconds I found myself alone in the lab, pocketed all the cerium, and went out into the open to join my *Kommando*: the sky already resounded with the rumble of bombers, and from them fell, swaying softly, yellow leaflets which bore atrocious words of derision:

Im Bauch kein Fett,
Acht Uhr ins Bett;
Der Arsch kaum warm,
Fliegeralarm!

Which, translated, ran:

boundary of the Buna; there we lay inert,
piled up on top of each other like dead
men, but still aware of the momentary
pleasure of our bodies resting. We looked
with indifferent eyes at the smoke and
flames breaking out around us: in moments
of quiet, full of the distant menacing roar
that every European knows, we picked
from the ground the stunted chicory leaves
and dandelions, trampled on a hundred
times, and chewed them slowly in silence.
(1947, p.118-119)

No lard in the gut
At eight in the cot;
Soon as the arse is warm
Air-raid alarm!
We were not permitted to enter the air-
raid shelters: we gathered in the vast areas
not yet built up, around the rim of the plant.
As the bombs began to fall, lying on the
frozen mud and the sparse grass I felt the
small rods in my pocket and meditated on
the strangeness of my destiny, of our
destinies as leaves on a branch, and on
human destinies in general. (1975, p.144)

The narrating voice in the first passage is notable for its lack of a clear identity. Levi observes that there are two groups, the few who grew hopeful and undertook “rash expeditions” during the raids, and the “greater number” who were indifferent. Consistent with Levi’s narration in *Survival in Auschwitz*, he carefully observes the qualities of others but does not clearly position himself within the categories he creates. However, he uses the collective pronoun “we” in his description of what appears to be the second group who responded with “unchanged indifference” for he repeats the description when

he writes, “We looked with indifferent eyes.” The identification with the more passive, indifferent group is not explicitly stated, but shown by the fact that the majority of the description focuses on this group. The identification with animals is another feature of this passage in his use of metaphoric language, “beasts broken in by blows” (see Animal Imagery section below). The identification with animals is also present in the animal-like posture of the men in the last image of them chewing dead leaves in silence while they wait for the air raid to stop. The identification with animals used here portrays the inhuman quality of the prisoners and their lack of a response to their chaotic and dangerous environment. The beginning of the passage describes a clear lack of an expectable emotional response (“we were too destroyed to be really afraid”), which is then associated with an animal state of existence (“the opaque torpor of beasts”).

The description of time in the first passage is almost of time standing still. The language of the first passage is languid, and captures the slow, frozen quality of the prisoners. It is a few “moments of quiet” within the eye of the storm, suspended outside of time. The prisoners are passively killing time, enjoying the sensation of resting. Most of the prisoners are not thinking or actively using this time they have to themselves. Time is focused on the present, the experience of a break from pain and labor; there is no conception of the past or that this time may be used to plan or prepare for the future. Looking at the description of the space where the prisoners wait out the air raid (which will be compared to the second passage), the space itself conveys an altered relationship to time. The description, “Vast waste areas, sordid and sterile, closed...” conceives of no possibility for growth or change in the future. The orientation to time in this passage is one with no connection to the future or the possibility of change, which is striking given

that the circumstances of the air raids could conceivably connote radical change and upheaval.

In terms of activity vs. passivity, the first passage acknowledges that a “few” prisoners responded with strength and activity to the air raids, but the passage is clearly devoted to capturing the intense quality of the prisoner’s passivity. The description focuses on the deadness that Levi and others felt, and the passivity they experienced in the face of great danger and heightened panic. The men are described as “dead men;” they are “destroyed,” “stunned and limping,” “inert,” and they look with “indifferent eyes.” This passage is a condensed description of the prisoners’ acting as though they were dead before their death: utterly passive, unthinking, and habituated to mistreatment. The prisoners’ aim to reduce their energy to a minimum is consistent with Freud’s description of the death instinct (Freud, 1920).

Looking now at the second passage, the identifications include his identification with the Allies who were assaulting the Germans with bombs and mocking leaflets. He includes a transcription of the ‘derisive’ verse that fell along with the bombs to intimidate the Germans, embedding into his own text the text of the Allies. His own act of attacking back at the Germans was his daring theft of cerium rods from the lab during the air raid. In contrast to the first passage, here is the emergence of his individual identity with the first pronoun, “I.” Additionally, he identifies himself as part of his group of peers with the phrase, “my *Kommando*,” indicating a greater sense of belonging and less isolation.

The portrayal of time in the second passage is different from the first in that there is a sequence of events in the second passage (steals cerium, rejoins Kommando, leaflets fall, meditation), which expands the time frame of the scene beyond the present. Levi’s

act of meditation on destiny also implies a conception of time as having a past and a future, which are connected. The description of the space where the prisoners lie on the ground waiting is different from the first passage; “we gathered in the vast areas not yet built up” contains an orientation in time with a sense of the future, development and change. Compared to the “vast waste areas, sordid and sterile,” from the first passage, the second passage is not foreclosed to the future, but conceives of the potential for development and growth.

Looking at activity vs. passivity in the second passage, there is much more activity and agency beginning with his theft of the cerium from the lab. In addition, while he lies on the ground he “meditates” on his current predicament and on “destiny.” This scene, in contrast to the first one, contains the action and imagery of this thought. In the first scene the thoughts of the prisoners were extinguished, whereas in the second his agency is mobilized in his theft, but also in his act of reflection. He is no longer merely a body, but an active intellect as well.

However, the passivity does not entirely vanish in the second passage, and his attempt at actively confronting his surroundings ends in a retreat to passivity through intellectualization. Tracing his thoughts from the rods of cerium to “the strangeness of my destiny, of our destinies as leaves on a branch, and on human destinies in general,” this passage follows a movement from the concrete to the increasingly abstract. The metaphoric image of destinies as leaves on a branch replaces the human agent with an anonymous leaf. A leaf is featureless, depersonalized, and the passive recipient of destiny, designated by their random arrangement on the branch. Whereas the passage begins with his agency, stealing the rods of cerium that will secure him enough bread to

survive the rest of his time in the Lager, his act of reflection demonstrates his intellectual response to his situation was to abstract outwards, removing himself from the scene. His last phrase, “on human destinies in general” is a forced attempt to resituate himself within the human realm. His meditation on destiny indicates the effort of mind required to identify himself as human after having lost his identity as a man.

In both air raid passages there is a diminished emotional response, and he begins both passages by saying that he did not feel fear during the air raid. In the first it was because he was so cut off from his emotions that he did not feel anything, due to the defense of dissociation. In the second passage he didn't feel fear because he rationalized “irrationally” that the bombs were aimed at the Germans, not at the prisoners. Without considering the truth of this statement, whether or not he actually had the magical thought that the bombs wouldn't harm him because they weren't aimed at him, he describes his lack of feeling in this moment due to an intellectual operation. While Levi described in the first passage the experience of being dead and numb, this same lack of emotional response, though not as complete, appears in the second passage as the result of thinking and the defense of intellectualization. The quality of deadness that was so central in the first passage is present, combined with his struggle to emerge as a thinking “I,” in moments of the second passage with his use of abstraction. In both these passages, psychologically removing himself from the events by becoming dead and numb is an example of his primary coping mechanism throughout the trauma narratives.

Looking at just the use and position of leaves in the two passages, in the first passage, leaves are stunted and trampled matter that the prisoners chew while lying on the ground. In the second passage the dead leaves are transformed into metaphors in his

mind. Both the metaphor and the chewed pulp serve to soothe and take his mind away from his surroundings. The defensive effort of abstraction, used to remove himself from the emotional impact of his overwhelming environment, is somewhat successful, but it does not allow him to be fully alive. A major shift between the two air raid passages is a movement from a state that is globally defended, dissociated from his emotions and focused on the immediate concrete details to a state that makes use of symbolization and defends through intellectualization.

To summarize the comparison of the two air raid passages, the second passage shows features that are consistent with the first passage, as well as signs of progression and change. Both passages describe a lack of emotional response, Levi's defensive strategy of removing himself and becoming numb to what was happening, and a difficulty in sustaining a clear identity in reaction to the trauma. The progressions evident in the second passage compared to the first is a lack of animal identifications, an increase in personal identity, an increase in activity and attempts at agency, and an expanded sense of time that includes a sense of the past and the future rather than the eternal present. Additionally, the defense mechanisms progress from dissociation in the first passage to intellectualization/abstraction in the second passage.

To gain a further understanding of the characteristics of Levi's trauma narrative, his initial reactions to recognizing he was free from the Germans will be examined.

The beginning of liberation: Surviving death.

The final chapter of *Survival in Auschwitz*, “The Story of Ten Days,” chronicles the ten days after the Germans evacuated the camp with the healthy prisoners, leaving about 800 sick prisoners behind, including Levi. “The Story of Ten Days” describes the remaining prisoners scavenging for food and provisions in order to survive until the Russians arrived and officially liberated the camp. Throughout the chapter there are moments when Levi listened to the sounds of the artillery and the front line of war advancing towards the camp, and then the quiet that followed when the Germans had left. In these moments he slowly and increasingly contemplated his liberation before his narrative returned to the immediate task of survival: securing a stove for warmth, foraging for food, tending to sick and dying prisoners, and removing the dead.

The four passages below are all from “The Story of Ten Days” in *Survival in Auschwitz* and show when the usual state of affairs in the Lager was interrupted, a different consciousness emerges. The passages demonstrate the wavering quality of Levi’s response to liberation, and that his response was a gradual process that included multiple, conflicting emotions and thoughts. These moments demonstrate Levi’s struggle to recognize that the eternal present of the trauma is now over and the challenge of moving his narrative into a new time frame. Here are four passages from “The Story of Ten Days:”

When the broken window was repaired and the stove began to spread its heat, something seemed to relax in everyone, and at that moment Towarowski (a

Franco-Pole of twenty-three, typhus) proposed to the others that each of them offer a slice of bread to us three who had been working. And so it was agreed.

Only a day before a similar event would have been inconceivable. The law of the Lager said: 'eat your own bread, and if you can, that of your neighbour', and left no room for gratitude. It really meant that the Lager was dead.

It was the first human gesture that occurred among us. I believe that that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from Haftlinge to men again. (1947, p.160)

Here, Levi expressed the significance of human relationships, recognition, and gratitude. Generosity and regard for other people was only fully possible once the Germans had left. Generosity and a struggle for survival could not coexist inside the concentration camp universe, where all bonds between people were broken. Levi felt himself begin to become a man again following a compassionate gesture from another person that was a response to Levi's own contribution to benefit others (finding and dragging the stove back to their barrack). This reciprocity and mutual good will are the qualities that constitute a "human" way of being that was destroyed in the Lager. For Levi, this resuscitation of human identity takes place in the context of interaction with fellow prisoners. Liberation creates the capacity to recognize and connect to an object. This passage marks Levi's recognition that he is no longer a prisoner in the Lager and that he has begun to change back into a man. However, this moment of affirming his human status and a new way of living after the Lager does not last long.

21 January. Instead it ended [waves of retreating German forces]. On the dawn of the 21st we saw the plain deserted and lifeless, white as far as the eye could see, lying under the flight of the crows, deathly sad. I would almost have preferred to see something moving again. The Polish civilians had also disappeared, hiding who knows where. Even the wind seemed to have stopped. I wanted only one thing: to stay in bed under my blankets and abandon myself to a complete exhaustion of muscles, nerve and willpower; waiting as indifferently as a dead man for it to end or not to end. (p.163)

This passage shows a much bleaker response to the absence of the Germans. Rather than feeling an infusion of hope and energy, Levi abandoned himself to passivity and a lack of movement. He was used to seeing Germans, and their absence was a shock. “I would almost have preferred to see something moving again,” could mean many things, possibly a desire for the Germans’ presence, but it was a wish to see movement and energy again. When Levi was faced with absence he had no energy of his own to sustain himself, which left him feeling dead. After the Germans left, it was as though the world and all life stopped: “the Polish civilians had also disappeared... Even the wind seemed to have stopped.” Levi was not used to being an agent or having the freedom to pursue his desires. Following the Germans’ departure the only desire that Levi could express was for the external world to resume its activity, and for him to renounce his own actions and initiative. This is another moment when Levi attempted to reduce his experienced stimulation to a minimum, and approached a state close to death. This

submission to exhaustion and indifference is consistent with the way he was viewed by his oppressors; the only aspect of his identity that was recognized by his captors was as a shell of a person, with no worthwhile agency. Therefore, in the absence of the Germans, he assumes the depleted image they had assigned to him in the Lager. By internalizing this downtrodden view of himself, he maintained a connection to his oppressors in their absence. This is exemplary of an identification with the aggressor, in which it is preferable to identify with the aggressor than face the terrifying absence of all objects. The empty plain was not seen as a site of possibility or hope for something new, but rather it appeared “deserted and lifeless...deathly sad.” The one attribution of emotion, “deathly *sad*,” is projected onto the landscape, demonstrating how porous and fluid his personal boundaries were in this state. In contrast to the emotion he attributes to the landscape, his description of his inner state is indifference, exhaustion, and feeling dead – he continued to be cut off from his emotions.

Though he recognized the possibility of the end of his imprisonment he described himself as “waiting as indifferently as a dead man for it to end or not to end.” He did not yet connect himself to time and the ability to influence the future. Time was askew in the Lager because there was no separation between life and death, and ordinarily the anticipation of death (in the future, not in the present) helps to structure one’s sense of being-in-time. The prisoners were neither alive nor dead, but an impossible in-between state. When Levi is returned to the ordinary flow of time and the possibility of a future he remained situated in the time of the Lager. In this passage he continued to have no agency in relation to time, and he remained in the numbed emotional state in between life and death.

24 January. Liberty. The breach in the barbed wire gave us a concrete image of it. To anyone who stopped to think, it signified no more Germans, no more selections, no work, no blows, no roll-calls, and perhaps, later, the return.

But we had to make an effort to convince ourselves of it, and no one had time to enjoy the thought. All around lay destruction and death.

The pile of corpses in front of our window had by now overflowed out of the ditch... (p.169)

The image of the breach in the barbed wire signified liberty and no more Germans, but this image was placed next to the images of corpses and destruction that still surrounded him. The image of a breach in the barbed wire may have signified liberty, but “liberty” was probably a term from Levi’s associative net with no connections to the images in the present scene, and therefore the meaning was difficult to retrieve. To access the signification of liberty required stopping and thinking, to forge a connection to the breach. This intellectual task required effort and energy because it involved undoing a mental split first formed in reaction to the Lager and overwhelming destruction. To register the breach would mean bridging two worlds that the mind had kept apart. Though he can see it, he does not move towards the hole in the fence, so he remains in the role of an observer without really making contact with the world outside him. Knowing on one level that he was free, while being surrounded by overwhelming destruction and death, dramatizes his inability to go back to life from before the Lager.

Outside the great silence continued. The number of ravens had increased considerably and everybody knew why. Only at distant intervals did the dialogue of the artillery wake up.

We all said to each other that the Russians would arrive soon, at once; we all proclaimed it, we were all sure of it, but at bottom nobody believed it. Because one loses the habit of hoping in the Lager, and even of believing in one's own reason. In the Lager it is useless to think, because events happen for the most part in an unforeseeable manner; and it is harmful, because it keeps alive a sensitivity which is a source of pain, and which some providential natural law dulls when suffering passes a certain limit.

Like joy, fear and pain itself, even expectancy can be tiring. Having reached 25 January, with all relations broken already for eight days with that ferocious world that still remained a world, most of us were too exhausted even to wait. (p. 171)

In this passage Levi asserted the clinical wisdom that reason and emotions are dulled in circumstances of trauma because it protects one from experiencing the extent of one's pain. Levi catalogued the accommodations he made to living in the Lager, and how he had to abandon the most human of qualities, hope and reason, in order to stay alive. On reaching the other side, these qualities had not returned. The ability to conjure a mental representation of the Russians in their absence was a faculty that had deteriorated in the Lager due to prolonged deprivation. Instead the prisoners were faced with the immediate presence of ravens, and "everyone knew why." The prisoners

focused on the ravens, an image of death, because this was the encounter they had just survived, and death was what they knew and learned to anticipate with more certainty than life. Waiting and the anticipation of positive outcomes required an inner reserve of memories of satisfied expectations, which the Lager had depleted. There were more physical, tangible and concrete signs of impending death than there were signs of salvation. To attend to signs that the Russians were coming was to activate mental and emotional faculties that were associated with pain and despair in the Lager. Hope had only brought despair in the Lager. This inability to think or foresee events occurring according to expectations is why “that ferocious world...still remained a world;” there was no mental or emotional access to another world outside the Lager.

These passages demonstrate that Levi’s psychological registration of liberation, what it meant to be free of the Germans and to have survived thus far, was strained and ambivalent. Levi’s narrative of survival, during these first moments of realizing he had in fact survived, included both a momentary appreciation of his humanness and a continuation of the deadened state he had assumed while in the Lager. Levi’s observations of his changed environment, immediately after the Germans left, are not representational. Rather, he is able to register the environmental changes and signs of liberty, but he is not able to connect these external signs with his internal store of associations in order to make meaning of them. Levi is unable to reflect upon the signs of liberty as *ideas*. He cannot put them “into a context of mutually reflecting and related mental elements,” to use Loewald’s description of representational memories.

The passages from “The Story of Ten Days” portray this quality of both survival and defeat in the immediate aftermath of imprisonment. When Levi began the part of his

narrative in which he became a survivor and the trauma moved into the past tense, the descriptions swing from embracing life to succumbing to death, and his mental and emotional state continued to be that of a prisoner. Thus, Levi's initial telling of his trauma narrative includes a description of a prolonged experience of the traumatized state, and the narrative structure already begins to veer from a linear unfolding of events and emotional states. Levi's trauma narrative doubles back on itself and repeats the same emotional reactions at different plot points, rather than a more traditional narrative in which an emotional experience builds and advances in tandem with the sequence of events. If we use Greenberg's concept that the structure of the trauma narrative has the delayed and repetitious quality of an echo, then the echo begins in the initial narrative. The trauma narrative's hallmark feature may be the repetition of the emotional reaction to the trauma (here, frozenness and shutting down) without clearly corresponding to the external events. The encounter with death in the Lager repeats and emerges again after the Germans have left the Lager. Even though Levi is still facing life-threatening conditions in terms of scavenging for food and contending with sickness, his narrative first registers the positive change in his circumstances (a return to being human) and then plunges back into an abandonment to death and a lack of feeling. The repeated description of his emotional numbing is an enactive memory because he does not explicitly address this repetition in the narrative, which would indicate conscious awareness and an ability to represent his experience rather than merely repeat it. Without the ability to make a representation of the emotional experience there is no distance from the past, which continues to repeat in the present. In the next section, the echo will be further examined in repeated descriptions of Levi's first encounter with the Russian

soldiers and the feeling of shame, but with the added dimension of change across the multiple versions that Levi wrote.

Shame: The return of affect.

The next section builds on the concept of the echoing nature of the trauma narrative by examining the changing expression of shame in the trauma narrative over time. The passages in this section continue to look at moments when Levi gains contact with the outside world: German women working with Levi in the rubber factory attached to Auschwitz, and his first encounter with the Russian soldiers when they liberated the camp. The expression of shame is inconsistent and evolves over the time these passages were written. The expression of emotion in the trauma narrative is frequently muted or missing, but there are times it is clearly and strongly expressed. The pattern of its shifting presence and absence will be discussed.

Shame: Encounter with the German women.

The first passage is one of the few and powerful expressions of shame from *Survival in Auschwitz*. It is incorrect to state that there was no emotional expression in the initial trauma narrative, as this passage demonstrates. In this passage, Levi had just started to work in the Buna factory as a chemist for his workshift in Auschwitz. In the factory attached to Auschwitz, he came into contact with the German women who worked in the lab – the women were German civilians with ordinary lives outside of the

Lager. While coming into contact with these women and their clear reactions of disgust and avoidance, Levi expressed the shame he felt about his appearance and his odor, and he catalogued his defects that must have been apparent to the German women. Though there are times earlier in *Survival in Auschwitz* when Levi comments on his changed appearance upon becoming a prisoner, this passage is an outburst of shame that was not previously expressed in the trauma narrative with such detail and intense self-criticism.

Faced with the girls of the laboratory, we three feel ourselves sink into the ground from shame and embarrassment. We know what we look like: we see each other and sometimes we happen to see our reflection in a clean window. We are ridiculous and repugnant. Our cranium is bald on Monday, and covered by a short brownish mould by Saturday. We have a swollen and yellow face, marked permanently by the cuts made by the hasty barber, and often by bruises and numbed sores; our neck is long and knobbly, like that of plucked chickens. Our clothes are incredibly dirty, stained by mud, grease and blood...We are full of fleas, and we often scratch ourselves shamelessly; we have to ask permission to go to the latrines with humiliating frequency...

Besides which, we are accustomed to our smell, but the girls are not and never miss a chance of showing it...

To us the girls seem outside this world... They have smooth, rosy skin, beautiful attractive clothes, clean and warm, blond hair, long and well-set; they speak with grace and self-possession... They never speak to us and turn up their

noses when they see us shuffling across the laboratory, squalid and filthy, awkward and insecure in our shoes. (1947, p.142-143)

This passage is the most explicit expression of shame in *Survival in Auschwitz*. The description focuses on the many physical and sensory details that Levi felt were shameful and witnessed by the German women. The physicality of the description was also applied to the German women, who had positive physical attributes (i.e., “smooth, rosy skin”, “clean”) that contrasted greatly with the prisoners, highlighting Levi’s shame. The physicality of the description included the animal identification, “plucked chickens,” a pathetic image, which dehumanized the prisoners. The nature of the shame was felt on a bodily level, and his criticism of himself stopped at the surface of his body and did not include shame that was based on his character, his morality or his actions (other than those related to his body). “We know what we look like... We are ridiculous and repugnant:” Levi’s image is equated with his self-evaluation, “ridiculous and repugnant.” In this passage, Levi’s body stands in for his sense of self; there is no self-knowledge below the surface of his body because his sense of identity has been detached from his internal characteristics as discussed in the previous section. The sense of shame is also described in relation to the German women whose physical perfection, but also their contemptuous reactions to the prisoners, informs their sense of shame. The shame emerges in this passage in such a striking degree, possibly because this is his first contact with civilians who are not a part of the concentration camp (“the girls seem outside this world”), which afforded Levi an objective perspective on the extent of his deterioration. The rejecting way in which the German women perceive Levi’s physical state becomes

internalized as his own assessment of himself. However, Levi's repeated use of the collective pronoun "we" in this passage indicates his identification with the group of prisoners, which is more diffuse than a personal identification with the shameful physical description. The shameful identification is superficial and fused with the other prisoners insofar as it is based on external characteristics, as if he were observing himself from the outside, and it is categorical (the prisoners/jews) rather than connected to his individual identity.

This passage will be used as a baseline to compare to the expression of shame in three other passages that Levi wrote describing his initial encounter with the Russian soldiers who liberated Auschwitz - another setting in which Levi made contact with the outside world. The previous passage about the German women is evidence that there were times in the initial trauma narrative when Levi had access to the emotion of shame in connection to his description of the events. However, in the following three passages, the expression of shame disappears again at the end of *Survival in Auschwitz* and then reemerges in the next two passages describing the same scene, but written years later. The first passage is from the end of *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), the second passage is from *The Reawakening* (1963) and the last passage is from *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986). The last two passages were written many years after the initial trauma narrative, and they reintroduce the feeling of shame into the description. The last two passages also indicate a deeper, more fluent, processing of the experiences from the Lager because he connected the present moment to many other moments; he was able to generalize and abstract. The passage from *The Reawakening* describes the first encounter with the Russian soldiers, which was barely described at the end of *Survival in Auschwitz*. The

last passage is from an essay in *The Drowned and the Saved*, so it functions more as a meditation and summary reflection, as opposed to a narrative account of the moment of liberation. The progression of these three passages shows the increasing return of shame to the trauma narrative over time.

Shame: Encounter with the Russian soldiers.

In the first passage from the end of *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi does not describe the encounter with the Russian soldiers who entered Auschwitz in any detail except for these lines:

The Russians arrived while Charles and I were carrying Somogyi a little distance outside. He was very light. We overturned the stretcher on the grey snow.

Charles took off his beret. I regretted not having a beret. (Levi, 1947, p. 172)

This description is strikingly brief, restrained and lacking in detail. The Russians were not given any personal features. The only communication to the Russian soldiers that registered their presence was, “Charles took off his beret. I regretted not having a beret.” Levi did not describe any personal act of outward communication to the soldiers, but tells us his internal registration with his wish for a beret, so that, one imagines, he too could show the appropriate sign of respect and greeting. Levi’s response was,

characteristically, a wish to retain his decorum in this most appalling of circumstances. The interior experience of this scene is almost entirely lacking. The removal of the beret was a performative action that signaled deference, perhaps an acknowledgment of authority, but not a conscious registration of emotion. Somogyi's corpse was taken outside, but even this is cryptically conveyed. The stretcher is overturned and the snow is grey, but no mention of Somogyi's body except for its lightness. The downward movement of Somogyi's body, that the reader is easily lead to imagine due to its lightness, is paralleled by the removal of Charles' beret. The downward ease of removing a beret accentuates the lightness of the disburdened body. This lightness characterizes the whole tone of this scene, which could have been written with a morbid heaviness but is instead jettisoned without letting the reader feel its weight. The omission of the weight and the emotion in this scene is not a conscious aesthetic decision, but an indication of what could not be articulated consciously.

This passage is a pure description of the external actions that occurred in this scene without any interior description. What is missing in this scene is any emotional or personal reaction of Levi or the Russian soldiers. This was Levi's first encounter with people from outside Auschwitz (the German women in the lab were not entirely outside Auschwitz) who could witness what happened to him, or with whom Levi could share his reactions, but none of this was part of the narrative. The lightness of the narrative at this point in time suggests that something was being omitted because the subject of the scene is obviously emotionally charged: the Russians' confrontation with an unimaginable scene of death and destruction, and potential recognition of what Levi had just survived.

The next passage is from the start of Levi's next book, *The Reawakening*, which was written about 16 years after *Survival in Auschwitz*. The narrative events of *The Reawakening* starts where *Survival in Auschwitz* ends and follows Levi's adventures on his journey home to Italy. Here is his later description of this same initial encounter with the Russian soldiers liberating Auschwitz.

They did not greet us, nor did they smile; they seemed oppressed not only by compassion but by a confused restraint, which sealed their lips and bound their eyes to the funereal scene. It was that shame we knew so well, the shame that drowned us after the selections, and every time we had to watch, or submit to, some outrage: the shame the Germans did not know, that the just man experiences at another man's crime; the feeling of guilt that such a crime should exist, that it should have been introduced irrevocably into the world of things that exist, and that his will for good should have proved too weak or null, and should not have availed in defence.

So for us even the hour of liberty rang out grave and muffled, and filled our souls with joy and yet with a painful sense of pudency, so that we should have liked to wash our consciences and our memories clean from the foulness that lay upon them; and also with anguish, because we felt that this should never happen, that now nothing could ever happen good and pure enough to rub out our past, and that the scars of the outrage would remain within us for ever, and in the memories of those who saw it, and in the places where it occurred and in the stories that we should tell of it. (1963, p. 16)

The mournful tone of this description, in addition to the greater length and amount of details are all quite different from the first passage. Levi was able to ascribe some emotional description to the Russian soldiers and the scene: the Russians were “oppressed,” they had “compassion,” and showed “confused restraint” to the “funereal scene.” For the first time Levi named the emotional state felt by himself and his companions: “shame.” Shame appears to be the repressed content of the first passage that could not be put into words in that earlier draft, and it was instead given a gloss of decorum. The line from the first passage, “I regretted not having a beret,” is a place where the shame was expressed, but in the disguised and utterly reduced form of wishing to appear socially appropriate. In this passage from *The Reawakening*, the same scene is described but with the added expression of emotion.

The major addition in this passage is the attribution of an emotional reaction to the soldiers, versus their featureless appearance in *Survival in Auschwitz*, and Levi’s own emotional reaction of shame, which he believed mirrored the feelings of the soldiers. In the development of this scene, contact with the Russian soldiers, being seen from their perspective, led Levi to describe his own inner state. It is possible that Levi gained access to his own emotional reaction on his own over time, and his narrative version at this point in time coincides with his ability to describe the Russian soldiers’ emotional reaction too. However, in this passage the introduction of shame into the narrative occurs in the context of witnessing: Levi witnessing the soldiers and the soldiers witnessing Levi. In the previous passage, Levi and the soldiers barely recognized each other. Similarly, Levi first described feeling shame when being seen by the German women in

the lab. In Levi's trauma narratives, the expression of shame coincides with witnessing; shame is felt when another person's view of him is recognized.

The shame that Levi added to this passage, however, is described as a recognition of another person's shame. It is the shame a witness feels observing the crimes of the Germans and the fate of other victims selected to go to the gas chambers. Shame is what "the just man experiences at another man's crime." Levi identified the shame that the Germans ought to have felt about their own crimes but did not recognize in themselves. This is an example of Levi's partial identification with the oppressors. What is not fully described, and barely hinted at, is Levi's own feeling of victimhood. Levi wrote that shame was felt "every time we had to watch, or submit to, some outrage." The phrase, "submit to," is the only place Levi identified himself as a victim of oppression, and the rest of the passage is about watching, being a witness to other people's shame. The shame that Levi described in relation to the German women in *Survival in Auschwitz* was clearly attached to the appearance and the perceived status of the prisoners as a group, his fusion with the other prisoners, rather than a recognition that he had been shamefully oppressed by the Germans in the Lager or that the shame should have belonged to the Germans. So the shame described in *The Reawakening* is externalized, made more distant from himself through a rational appraisal of the events and a judgment of moral responsibility.

In *The Reawakening*, Levi indeterminately situated himself on both the inside and the outside of the traumatic events he experienced/witnessed. The doubleness of his position reflects the psychological defense of splitting that allowed him to both register the events as they occurred while simultaneously disavowing their impact on him. In this

passage Levi was able to identify his own feeling of shame upon seeing the Russians' response to him and the Lager, but this act of self-recognition was limited insofar as he identified with the Russians' position of observing atrocity, and not with his own position of having experienced it. Clearly, to see that the Russians felt shame when they saw him was to admit to his own victimhood, but the full extent of this connection was out of reach and disavowed.

In this second passage from *The Reawakening*, Levi's description of shame and guilt is a leap into the psychological realm compared to the first passage, but it is still in the form of the collective "we." This later passage also wanders into a space of permanence and timelessness when Levi regretfully states, "now nothing could ever happen good and pure enough to rub out our past, and that the scars of the outrage would remain within us for ever." The past is incapable of being forgotten or purged – and it cannot be integrated within his identity now. He anticipated his ongoing rendering of the past in the stories he would continue to tell, perhaps intimating the futility of this story telling, insofar as this telling would never erase the scars.

To summarize, the description of meeting the Russian soldiers in *The Reawakening* adds to Levi's previous description from *Survival in Auschwitz* the emotional reaction of shame, experienced by both Levi and the soldiers. The encounter between Levi and the soldiers is described as an encounter in which each party has an emotional reaction of shame, bearing witness to each other. The emergence of shame in this passage is similar to the description of shame when Levi encountered the German women, in that his shame emerged upon being witnessed by others "outside of this world." However, Levi's experience of having been a victim and experiencing his own

shame was still disavowed in this passage from *The Reawakening*, for he only identified with witnessing another person's shame. The shame was still impersonal to him, unintegrated in his description of himself. Another added component in the later passage is the recognition that the "joy" of liberation was tainted by the shame felt remembering the trauma, which he feared would never go away. By naming both the joy and the anguish felt after liberation, Levi was attempting to integrate this contradictory mixture of emotions, neither or which were mentioned in the encounter with the soldiers in *Survival in Auschwitz*.

The following is a passage from Levi's essay "Shame" from *The Drowned and the Saved*, written 23 years after *The Reawakening*, which also describes the feeling of shame in these pointed moments of rest or liberation:

In my opinion, the feeling of shame or guilt that coincided with reacquired freedom was extremely composite: it contained diverse elements, and in diverse proportions for each individual. It must be remembered that each of us, both objectively and subjectively, lived the Lager in his own way.

Coming out of the darkness, one suffered because of the reacquired consciousness of having been diminished. Not by our will, cowardice, or fault, yet nevertheless we had lived for months and years at an animal level: our days had been encumbered from dawn to dusk by hunger, fatigue, cold, fear, and any space for reflection, reasoning, experiencing emotions was wiped out. We endured filth, promiscuity, and destitution, suffering much less than we would have suffered from such things in normal life, because our moral yardstick had

changed. Furthermore, all of us had stolen: in the kitchen, the factory, the camp, in short, “from the others,” from the opposing side, but it was theft nonetheless. Some (few) had fallen so low as to steal bread from their own companions. We had not only forgotten our country and our culture, but also our family, our past, the future we had imagined for ourselves, because, like animals, we were confined to the present moment. Only at rare intervals did we come out of this condition of leveling, during the very few Sundays of rest, the fleeting minutes before falling asleep, or the fury of the air raids, but these were painful moments precisely because they gave us the opportunity to measure our diminishment from the outside.

I believe that it was precisely this turning to look back at the “perilous water” that gave rise to so many suicides after (sometimes immediately after) Liberation. It was in any case a critical moment which coincided with a flood of rethinking and depression. By contrast, all historians of the Lager – and also of the Soviet camps – agree in pointing out that cases of suicide *during* imprisonment were rare. (1986, p.75-76)

This passage is a much more succinct and total summary of the experience of the Lager and the grim conclusion that to be aware of one’s state was to suffer. In the Lager, one lived “at an animal level,” and “any space for reflection, reasoning, experiencing emotions was wiped out.” Connection to time and the future was also disrupted “because, like animals, we were confined to the present moment.” Levi directly described in this late passage the unspoken qualities many of the previous passages

exhibited. Levi is here echoing the point he made earlier in *Survival in Auschwitz* that the state of being cut off from one's inner faculties was adaptive in the context of trauma because it protected one from feeling pain. To emerge from this "condition of leveling... gave us the opportunity to measure our diminishment from the outside." Levi was saying that only after the numbing or "leveling" effects of trauma had subsided was he able to comprehend what he had experienced by viewing himself from an outside perspective. This assertion is concordant with the structure of an echo that occurs belatedly, repeating after the event; there is no complete knowledge of trauma in the moment from an *inside* perspective, but rather it returns in fragments after the fact.

Levi's expression of his emotional reaction to the Lager in his initial trauma narrative was incomplete because it was inconsistent, and varied between moments of emotional expression (i.e., shame in the encounter with the German women) and emotional blockage (i.e., the many moments when Levi writes about the absence of emotions and the first encounter with the Russian soldiers in *Survival in Auschwitz*). The "outside" perspective that allowed Levi to express his emotions is the mirror role that the Russian soldiers played in *The Reawakening* passage, and the German women played in the first passage from *Survival in Auschwitz*. Levi was able to recognize his own shame in the context of being witnessed; he identified with an outside perspective in order to witness himself.

However, a shift in this late passage from *The Drowned and the Saved*, written forty years after his liberation, was that Levi had more access to his internal, subjective experience inside the Lager. This is his recognition of his experience of *personal* shame. This passage invokes a much more harsh and condemning view of his shame and

“diminishment.” “We endured filth, promiscuity, and destitution...our moral yardstick had changed. Furthermore, all of us had stolen...” Though he makes the disclaimer, “Not by our will, cowardice, or fault,” he proceeds to detail the prisoner’s shameful qualities “nevertheless,” which serves to nullify the disclaimer. Whereas the previous passage from *The Reawakening* described shame from the perspective of an outsider witnessing another person’s shame, in this late passage the shame is described as emanating from Levi’s own behavior. This is different from the shame he described in his encounter with the German women because it is now based on his morality, a representation of his internal qualities, not merely on his appearance. Similar to the passage about the German women, Levi returns to identifying himself at the site of trauma as an animal. This condemning voice is another identification with the aggressor in its critical moral judgment of the victim, applied here to himself.

This passage from *The Drowned and the Saved* is also much more detailed, and includes more physical and sensory details than the previous two liberation passages, and this is similar to the passage about the German women. I have selected a number of phrases from the passage that convey a high level of detail and italicized the words that are sensory or evoke a bodily state: “*encumbered* from *dawn* to *dusk* by *hunger*, *fatigue*, *cold*, *fear*,” “endured *filth*, *promiscuity*, and destitution;” “all of us had stolen: in the kitchen, the factory, the camp;” “like *animals*, we were *confined*;” “the *fleeting* minutes before *falling asleep*, or the *fury* of the air raids, but these were *painful* moments;” “a *flood* of rethinking and depression.” The amount of sensory details in this late passage supports the notion that Levi had more access to detailed sensory memories from within the Lager later in his life. Or rather, the act of recollection for Levi when he wrote this

passage from *The Drowned and the Saved* activated memories in his body and physical sensations, as opposed to looking on from a symbolic or detached perspective. The traumatic memory is portrayed with immediacy rather than distance. However, like most of Levi's testimonial writing this is still written in the collective voice, "we," and Levi does not identify his individual or private experience within the group of victims. The personal voice "I" is still disavowed when describing his experience of shame.

The three passages that describe an encounter with the Russian soldiers at liberation show how the last two passages are echoes, in which shame increasingly emerges. Not only does shame become part of Levi's narrative in *The Reawakening*, but in the final echo, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, the shame becomes internalized and attached to himself, rather than an identification with another person's shame. The echoes of trauma in Levi's narratives chart a process of attempting to integrate the shameful affect into his concept of self. The fact that the last passage from *The Drowned and the Saved* included an expression of shame that uses a large number of sensory details, which is similar to the passage about the German women from *Survival in Auschwitz*, shows that in some ways Levi's trauma narrative returns full circle to properties of his initial narrative. A key difference between the two passages is that the last description of shame in *The Drowned and the Saved* is both sensory and connected to a sense of morality and personal responsibility, which suggests that Levi is processing the traumatic memory on multiple levels. This could be evidence of increased referential activity, which Bucci writes about as the goal of higher order information processing that transforms subsymbolic information to symbolic and verbal representations (Bucci, 1993). Levi's passage from *The Drowned and the Saved* includes both a symbolic

representation of his experience in the Lager (he had been diminished morally) and the sensory details which accompanied the experience, upon which his symbolic conclusion may have based.

To summarize this section on border moments or “contact with the outside,” the selected passages show how the trauma narrative evolves, yet also how the trauma narrative repeats itself. Aspects of the trauma echo throughout repeated tellings and even repeat within the initial trauma narrative. The fact that Levi wrote multiple versions of the same scene or descriptions of the same events indicates that he was not finished processing the events in his initial narrative, and that he was working something through as evidenced by the changes in his narrative over time. The trauma narrative evolves in terms of how Levi described his subjective position in relation to the traumatizing events. Over time, he was able to portray himself with increasing agency and personal identity within the trauma narrative. The initial trauma narrative is characterized by extreme passivity, obscured or inconsistent cognizance of his identity, primitive defenses, a predominant lack of emotional expression, particularly shame, and a portrayal of time in the eternal present, without relief in the future. The later trauma narratives are characterized by increasing attempts at agency, a greater sense of his personal identity during the trauma, more sophisticated defenses, and an increasing awareness and integration of shame in the trauma narrative over time.

In the last two liberation passages, written 18 and 41 years after the events themselves, Levi attempted more and more to integrate his emotional experience of shame during the trauma and the impact this had on him, but it was still somewhat

disavowed and described as a collective, not a personal experience. However, in terms of the repeating, echoing features of the trauma narrative, the last trauma narrative in *The Drowned and the Saved* shows a return to animal identifications and the use of increased sensory details, indicative of the traumatized perspective from *Survival in Auschwitz*. The last trauma narrative attempts to integrate the experience of shame within Levi's self, and this coincides with his intensified self-condemnation. The self-condemnation expressed in *The Drowned and the Saved* is an echo of the self-criticism expressed in *Survival in Auschwitz*, but the condemnation is aimed at a fuller sense of self, in which he takes moral responsibility for the shame, as opposed to simply describing a physical reaction.

Though the portrayal of time changes somewhat in the later trauma narratives to include a concept of the future and change (such as in the air raid passage from *The Periodic Table*), there are also passages in the later trauma narratives that suggest time will never bring change or relief to the memory of trauma (i.e., "...the scars of the outrage would remain within us for ever," from *The Reawakening*; and "Coming out of the darkness, one suffered because of the reacquired consciousness of having been diminished," from *The Drowned and the Saved*). In the echoes of trauma that appear throughout Levi's writing about the Lager, time stands still, then starts to flow again, and then returns to a place of disruption and permanence. Time inside the experience of trauma, and as it is represented in portions of Levi's trauma narrative, is limited to the present, while the past and the future are suspended. After liberation, the flow of time starts to move again and suddenly there is access to the future, as well as the past that contains the trauma. The renewed awareness of time after liberation, including the

succession and interrelation of past, present and future, demands that the past trauma be incorporated into an encompassing narrative structure.

Integration of the trauma into a narrative that can link together the past with other episodes is the logical goal of conventional treatments of trauma in order to resituate the person's identity in time (as part of their history). However, this integration raises the question of tolerating the overwhelming affect of the trauma that was previously split off from consciousness, and how the compartmentalized identities of the victim from before and during the trauma can ever integrate.

2) Repeated Themes in Levi's Writing: Fragments of the Trauma

The previous section examined the central features of Levi's trauma narratives, both in terms of the description of the changes Levi underwent in the Lager and the evolution of the trauma narrative in its repeated versions over time. The major shifts that occur in the successive trauma narratives are the changing representation of time, increasing agency and sense of personal identity, use of more sophisticated defenses, and greater integration of negative emotion that was previously warded off. The previous section focused on Levi's trauma narratives, whereas this section will focus on Levi's other writing: fiction, memoir, poetry and essays that do not overtly focus on his experience in Auschwitz.

This next half of the qualitative analysis will trace four themes that first occur in Levi's trauma narratives and then repeatedly occur in his fiction, memoirs, and essays. These themes are iconic of Levi's traumatic experience in Auschwitz, and they have been

selected because of their prevalent repetition throughout Levi's work. Fire and explosions, animal imagery, themes of abstraction and matter, and the failure of representation are the fragments of the trauma that return and repeat throughout Levi's writing. The following will first demonstrate the connection of the fragment to the site of the original trauma and then trace the echoing appearance of the fragments throughout Levi's writing, including his fiction. Each fragment's initial appearance in the trauma narrative will then be compared to the various iterations it has in later writing to see if the images change in different contexts (trauma narrative vs. fiction) and over time. The significance of these particular iconic themes--fire, animals, and abstraction and matter, failure of representation--will also be discussed, in terms of the function they served in Levi's writing, and what it means that these are the fragments that echoed in Levi's mind. Based on theories of learning and working through (Gedo, 1995; Tenzer, 1983), static repetition of the themes without change will serve as evidence that these fragments were resistant to change and they could be residues of the trauma that could not be worked through.

A. Fires and explosions.

Imagery of fire and explosions appear consistently in Levi's writing that is not ostensibly about the Holocaust, in his personal essays, short stories, and sections of his memoir-writing dealing with his teenage years and his professional work after the war. As a chemist, fires and explosions may perhaps be common elements in laboratory work, but the recurrent use of these images as a Holocaust survivor points without much of an

imaginative leap to the crematoriums at Auschwitz. Although this analysis is not meant to decode the exact meanings of Levi's symbols, it is clear that Levi frequently wrote about destructive forces. Due to the frequency with which fires and explosions appear in his writing, they function as emblems of destruction, the meaning of which I argue originates in Auschwitz. This section will begin by examining the appearance of fires in his original trauma narrative, and then chart the appearance of fires and explosions in his later writing.

Fires in Auschwitz.

Levi barely mentions the crematoria in *Survival in Auschwitz*. As an iconic image of the Holocaust, they are significant in their absence and a palpable form of denial. Death was constantly looming in the Lager, which was something Levi described, yet he also described the confusion and ignorance of the prisoners as they first arrived and slowly learned the grim reality of the camp. One could argue, as Levi himself claims, that he merely wrote about what he directly experienced, and therefore he could not have written about the crematoriums and the gas chambers.

I have limited myself strictly to reporting facts of which I had direct experience, excluding those I learned later from books or newspapers. For example, you will note that I have not quoted the numbers of those massacred at Auschwitz, nor have I described details of the gas chambers and the crematories. This is because I did not, in fact, know these data when I was in the camp. I only

learned them afterward, when the whole world learned them. (Afterword to *The Reawakening*, p. 222)

Though Levi did not directly describe the crematoriums in *Survival in Auschwitz*, he described the selections in much greater detail, which were the precursor to the crematoriums, and an event he witnessed. However, given the centrality of fire and explosions in Levi's later writing, his few mentions of the crematoriums are worth examining. Here are the few descriptions of the crematoriums from *Survival in Auschwitz*:

“And it is this refrain that we hear repeated by everyone: you are not at home, this is not a sanatorium, the only exit was by way of the Chimney. (What did it mean? Soon we were all to learn what it meant.)” (p.27).

‘*Du Jude, kaput. Du schnell Krematorium fertig.*’ (You Jew, finished. You soon ready for crematorium.)” (p.49).

“I still have quite confused ideas about this kind of danger. Everybody speaks about it indirectly, by allusions, and when I ask some question they look at me and fall silent.

“Is it true what one hears of selections, of gas, of crematoriums?”

“Crematoriums. The other one, Walter’s neighbour, wakes up startled and sits up: who is talking about the crematorium? What is happening? Cannot a sleeping person be left in peace.?” (p.52).

In these three instances, the crematoriums are described as frequently mentioned but mysterious, they are spoken about in a foreign language, and then Levi describes and demonstrates the way prisoners avoid talking about them directly. Direct, clear knowledge of the crematoriums is not available or shared among the prisoners, and this is enacted in Levi’s writing. Levi is never told in a manner that is meant to impart information, rather the crematoriums are vaguely presented in the first quote, the German speaks with mockery and disgust in the second quote, and in the third quote another prisoner scolds him to avoid the topic. Like Levi, the reader can find the crematoriums through indirect communication, traces and “allusions.” The absence of a direct description of the crematoria, combined with how threatening and anxiety-producing they were in the Lager, could be explained by the defense of dissociation in trauma. The center of the traumatic experience is dissociated, and the survivor claims to have no knowledge of a key feature of the traumatic experience, or that they do not think about it, while there is evidence that they are still haunted by it (i.e., a car crash survivor who claims not to think about the accident but refuses to ride in a car).

Fires in later writing.

The appearance of fires and explosions in Levi's later writing will now be explored. Even though Levi stated that he did not really know about the crematoriums while he was in Auschwitz, it is clear that unconsciously he did think about the crematoriums in his later writing. He repeatedly wrote about fires and explosions, and was drawn to these images in his writing again and again. The relationship between Levi's lack of direct knowledge about the crematoriums in Auschwitz, and the preponderance of fires in his writing, will be explored below.

In a passage from a science fiction story, "The Tranquil Star," about the destruction of a faraway star (originally published in 1978) Levi describes the difficulty of representing this event. He describes the limitations of a human observer's account, situated on a nearby planet. This is an example that overlaps with Levi's focus on the failure of representation, discussed in a following section. This passage is as direct a description of being inside a crematorium as one can imagine, except that Levi displaces the scene of a person being consumed by fire from the Lager to a distant star.

Within a quarter of an hour he would have been forced to seek useless shelter against the intolerable heat – and this we can affirm independently of any hypothesis concerning the size and shape of this observer, provided he was constructed, like us, of molecules and atoms – and in half an hour his testimony, and that of all his fellow-beings, would end. Therefore, to conclude this account, we must base it on other testimony, that of our earthly instruments, for which the

event, in its intrinsic horror, happened in a ‘very’ diluted form, besides being slowed down by the long journey through the realm of light that brought us the news. (2007, p. 160)

Levi’s fictional rendering of the exploding star is a form of testimony about an emotional experience from within the Lager, but he does not describe the facts or external features of the Lager. This story charts a thwarted experience of being so close to, and affected by, fire and death yet being unable to describe it or understand it. Levi’s indirect knowledge of the crematoriums at Auschwitz is given poignant expression in this short story, which describes the difficulty of acquiring knowledge about the exploding star.

The story “The Tranquil Star” questions and problematizes the impact of the exploding star on those who witness it, or know about it. It is clear that the event does have some impact despite its distance. The imagined observer on a nearby planet would be burned alive, and this is known reflexively, “provided he was constructed, like us, of molecules and atoms.” This phrase suggests a sympathetic connection and identification with the observer, yet it takes the form of sharing molecules and atoms, which makes the connection impersonal and generic. This simultaneous identification and undoing of identification with the observer is emblematic of Levi’s equivocal stance towards the impact of this explosion, as well as to people and his own experiences of trauma.

Within the story, the second observer on earth only suspects the star has gone missing by noticing a speck on one photograph that is missing in another. The result of this knowledge is that his family will have to postpone a vacation while he develops more photographs. For the second observer, the knowledge of the star’s death is neither certain

nor meaningful, but it becomes an obsessive concern that leads to the postponement of his vacation – it prevents the taking in of pleasure. Therefore, the relationship between the star’s explosion and the two observers is either one of vital connection, which leads to the death of the first observer, or trivial disconnection and postponed gratification. The story is reminiscent of the question after WWII of who knew about the Holocaust while it was happening, and the view that there was an inadequate or belated response by the German citizens and the Allies to intervene and prevent the genocide of the Jews. “The Tranquil Star” poses the question of how to position oneself in relation to tragedy, so that the knowledge doesn’t consume oneself or become meaningless.

Levi takes different positions in his writing by changing the scale and focus of his own observations, from very far (i.e., stars and planets) to very close (i.e., molecules and atoms), both of which create a barrier between himself and the events by removing the action from the realm of familiar dimensions. Similarly, the first observer’s horrific death is never stated explicitly, but rather “his testimony, and that of all his fellow-beings, would end.” This phrase avoids the end of a life by focusing only on the secondary effect, the end of testimony. Again, Levi changes his focus enough so that the reader knows that the tragic events took place, but from oblique phrases that connote and allude rather than directly describe.

In addition to writing about the difficulty of representing destruction, Levi also wrote about fires and explosions that he described as immediate experiences, as opposed to distant and inaccessible. The images of fire and explosions are charged moments in his writing, which he circles and confronts with the cool, dispassionate tone of the observer. These images and moments have a double nature of immediacy and affective

charge, suggestive of personal significance, and a simultaneous withdrawal and detachment. In the repeated images of fire in his writing he presented various perspectives on the meaning of these fires.

An example of fire as an immediate experience can be found in a passage from the end of the chapter “Hydrogen” in *The Periodic Table*. In the story, Levi describes the chemistry experiment he performed as a young teenager with his friend, who did not believe that Levi’s experiment would work. The explosion in this story is one that Levi wanted to create as proof of his ability to harness powerful forces, but it also showed that he was not really in control.

There was an explosion, small but sharp and angry, the jar burst into splinters (luckily I was holding it level with my chest and not higher), and there remained in my hand, as a sarcastic symbol, the glass ring of the bottom.

We left, discussing what had occurred. My legs were shaking a bit; I experienced retrospective fear and at the same time a kind of foolish pride, at having confirmed a hypothesis and having unleashed a force of nature. It was indeed hydrogen, therefore: the same element that burns in the sun and stars, and from whose condensation the universes are formed in eternal silence. (1975, p.27-28)

This conclusion to the story, the explosion and the “lesson” learned, is loftily phrased as though he had arrived at a grand conclusion, and yet it is anticlimactic.

Though the explosion proved his chemistry experiment had worked, there is no personal

meaning that he draws from this experience. This may be due to the iconic connotation of the explosion, the destructive force of nature, including its connection to the destruction of human life, which he struggles to comprehend. His concluding movement within the story is to try to connect this episode of exploding hydrogen to a celestial story of suns, stars and the formation of universes. He tries to turn from destruction to creation and to connect his individual story of his teenage years to a larger story of the universe and powerful forces. But this conclusion reads like a stretch from the boyish escapade that preceded it. The romantic conclusion is in keeping with Levi's description of his younger self in the story, as someone who had romantic expectations of chemistry as opposed to his very practical friend, whose humble goals and his "capacity to sense his own future and to give it weight and shape" was something Levi envied. In the story, Levi greatly wished to be able to control his own future and to wield powerful forces, which is the opposite of the future that awaited him when he was sent to Auschwitz.

Embedded in the childhood episode of foolish discovery lurks an element of danger and destruction that prefigures and connects him to his time in Auschwitz. He "experienced retrospective fear" in the passage because his experiment may have gotten himself hurt, but Levi, the writer, may have also experienced retrospective fear when he wrote this because he now knew about the fires of Auschwitz from his past, even if his depicted teenage self could not. The meaning of this explosion, similar to the explosions in Auschwitz, is evacuated, leaving only emptiness, a hole where meaning is blocked. The narrative both describes this emptying of meaning (e.g., "the glass ring of the bottom" is "a sarcastic symbol" of incompleteness, absence, and the failure to contain

meaning) and Levi's need to search for greater meaning to defend against this empty space inside his personal narrative.

This passage can be compared with the explosion of the star in "The Tranquil Star," to see how Levi dealt with the meaning of another explosion, written in 1978. The conclusion of this passage is not nearly as confident or confirming as the conclusion of "Hydrogen."

After ten hours, the entire planet was reduced to vapor, along with all the delicate and subtle works that the combined labor of chance and necessity, through innumerable trials and errors, had perhaps created there, and along with all the poets and wise men who had perhaps examined that sky, and had wondered what was the value of so many little lights, and had found no answer. That was the answer. (2007, p.160)

This passage is also a moment where Levi's language becomes poetic and lofty with phrases such as "delicate and subtle works," "labor of chance and necessity," and "all the poets and wise men." Levi adds so many clauses within the long first sentence, which magnifies the sense of what was destroyed, and the length of the unsatisfactory search for answers in the sky. Yet, he concludes that no one who had been observing the stars knew "the value of so many little lights." Not finding an answer is the answer. This enigmatic pronouncement leaves the reader puzzled and left wondering what the answer really is, even though the reader has just been told that it's "no answer." In Levi's

writing, the connection between destruction and meaning is equivocal, and at times he highlights the absence of meaning.

Why does Levi return to fires and explosions so often in his writing, particularly if there is no clear lesson or meaning that he draws from them? The following description of another explosion from the “Potassium” chapter in *The Periodic Table*, provides a potential commentary on the function of these explosions in his writing.

“I took the now empty flask, put it under a faucet and turned on the water. I heard a rapid thump and from the neck of the flask came a flash of flame that was directed at the window that was next to the washbasin and the curtains around it caught fire... the panels of the shutter began to blister and the room was now full of smoke. I managed to push over a chair and tear down the curtains; I threw them on the floor and stomped furiously on them, while the smoke half blinded me and my blood was throbbing violently in my temples.If it is true that there is no greater sorrow than to remember a happy time in a state of misery, it is just as true that calling up a moment of anguish in a tranquil mood, seated quietly at one’s desk, is a source of profound satisfaction.” (1975, p. 59)

The explosion in the “Potassium” chapter is a repetition of the explosion from the “Hydrogen” chapter, occurring earlier in *The Periodic Table*. The “sorrow” and “anguish” of this experience is a repetition and an echo of his chronologically later period of “misery” in Auschwitz, hinted at in the last line of the passage. Recounting this episode of near disaster to his supervisor brought him comfort and parallels his act of

telling his story of surviving the concentration camp to a larger public. The “profound satisfaction” that he feels recalling a “moment of anguish” when he is now safe and “tranquil” could be one of the meanings he made of the fires in his writing: the act of recalling anguish and destruction allowed Levi to feel satisfaction that the time of trauma was behind him, and reassured him of his current safety by comparison.

However, the presentation of fires and explosions in Levi’s writing did not always indicate overcoming a difficult time. Levi also wrote about an explosion with an undisguised connection to the war, written only a few years after his return home, and it introduces self-destruction as one of the meanings of fires and explosions in his writing. The following passage is from the end of the short story “The Death of Marinese,” written in 1949, which is a fictional rendering of Levi’s own capture by the Germans when he was in a partisan resistance group. “The Death of Marinese” is about a few resistance fighters who are captured by Germans and transported on a truck. The story ends with the character Marinese detonating a grenade on a German’s belt, killing himself and some of the Germans. This story is a revised account of what really happened to Levi. He recounted the same truck ride after his capture in the chapter “Gold” in *The Periodic Table*, but in his memoir he regretted not having the courage to reach for a nearby soldier’s grenade. Within the short story, he had the courage to take action:

He filled his lungs to prepare for battle and pulled the cord with all his
might.

Rage was unleashed. A paw struck his shoulder, followed by an avalanche of bodies. But Marinese was able to tear the bomb away from the belt and roll up like a hedgehog, face down, his knees drawn up against his chest, the grenade wedged between his knees, his arms tight around them. The fierce blows of fists, musket butts, and heels rained down on his back; hard hands tried to violate the stronghold of his contracted limbs. But all in vain: it was not enough to overcome the insensitivity to pain and the primordial strength that, for just a few moments, nature grants us in a time of dire need.

For three or four seconds Marinese lay under a pile of bodies writhing in violent battle, every fiber of his being contracted. Then he heard the squeal of the brakes, the truck stopping, and the rushed thuds of men jumping to the ground. At that instant he sensed that the time had come. In a final, perhaps involuntary extension of all his powers, he tried, too late, to free himself of the grenade.

The explosion ripped apart the bodies of four Germans, and his own. Sante was executed by the Germans on the spot. The truck was abandoned, and we captured it the following night. (2007, p. 29-30)

This passage is a striking example of fire used as an image of destruction turned on the self, but also an image of resolution and strength. The explosion that Marinese unleashes in the story is a fantasy of strength and retaliation that combats the passivity of Levi's real life memory of being transported as a prisoner without the courage to fight back. The story sets up the explosion of the grenade following the reaction of the German soldiers, which was an explosion of "rage" and violence. Pulling the cord of the

grenade sets off the lethal antagonism between the Germans and the prisoner, which was presumably already there beneath the surface. In this story the explosion was a response to captivity and afforded the character a form of freedom, albeit through his death. However, the story does not ultimately present the suicidal act as purely heroic, for it ends in another anticlimax, in which the narration simply moves on without addressing or providing some commentary to understand the explosion and the deaths. The narrating voice that ends the story comes from one of Marinese's comrades, but it is a relatively unknown source who does not have a role in the preceding story, which further removes the reader from the explosion.

The description in the story is also highly sensory, filled with the physical struggle of the Germans and Marinese, and contains the animal image of a hedgehog to describe Marinese's self-protective stance. The large amount of sensory details coincides with relatively little reflection or emotional expression, giving the narrated events the quality of overwhelming immediacy – this is followed by the distancing change of perspective in the last paragraph and a deadness in tone. Levi's pattern in this description is of intensity and charge followed by cool detachment. This pattern suggests a type of affect regulation in his texts, in which the intensity of the explosions, what one presumes would coincide with powerful affect (i.e., fear, shock, anger, some reaction to death/loss), is down-regulated by moving away from the event, rather than processing the events or the emotions.

Continuing with the theme of self-destruction and erupting violence, here are two quotes from a short essay "Stable/Unstable" in *Other People's Trades* that echo the sinister quality of the explosion in "The Death of Marinese," but applied to topics outside

of the Holocaust. The essay is about the prevention of “fires in the home,” particularly related to wood, and these quotes show Levi’s vision of fires and explosions moving into everyday life, spreading from their starting place in war and then returning full circle.

“In short, wood is anxious to oxidize, that is, to destroy itself.

“The path to destruction can be very slow, can take place silently, coldly, as in buried wood through the agency of air helped by the bacteria underground; or it can be instantaneous, dramatic, when the impulsion comes from a source of heat. Then there is fire: a rare event in our cities of concrete and glass, but frequent in the past period. Its memory is alive where one still builds with wood” (1985, p.97).

“[A]ll of today’s mankind, condemned and accustomed to living in the world in which everything seems stable and is not, in which awesome energies (I am not speaking only of the nuclear arsenals) sleep a light sleep” (1985, p. 99).

These quotes show a dark and cynical perspective in Levi’s writing about fires. He conveys the tenuous quality of ordinary life, and how erupting forces of destruction can destabilize life and matter without warning. The tendency to self-destruct is attributed to wood, but is clearly reminiscent of the self-destructive impulse captured in “The Death of Marinese.” Dangers from the past have a “memory” that is “alive” in the present, which Levi frequently conveys in his writing about the physical world, rather than the emotional or psychological realm. The repetition of dangerous, startling fires in

his texts is the written trace (echo) of his experience as a passive victim in Auschwitz, which was a position he did not fully articulate in his trauma narratives. Levi's representation of trauma is displaced, from the emotional world into the physical, and from the crematoriums of Auschwitz into a myriad of other fires in his professional and imaginative life.

The displacement of traumatic content onto foreign, unrelated subject matter is a recurring pattern in Levi's writing. Levi moves away from the horror of the destruction at Auschwitz by situating the destruction light years away in a distant galaxy, in chemistry experiments, buried in wood, or in the anticipation of nuclear war. The images of fire proliferate at many other times in his memoir writing outside of Auschwitz and in his fiction, signaling the intrusive quality of these images. Fires and explosions have invaded his consciousness and his memory, and like fires themselves, these images spark and spread. Though the explosions are tense, and sometimes tragic or dangerous moments, they are also islands of energy, tension, and liveliness in his writing. They are affective peaks in a stark, muted landscape, which provide balance, or counterpoint, to his writing. Levi appears to be drawn to these displaced fires and then backs away when he gets too close as a way of modulating his exposure to the memory of trauma that he cannot help but recreate again and again.

Comparing the various meanings or lack thereof that Levi connects to the explosions in his writing, the enigmatic pronouncement in "The Tranquil Star" (i.e., "...had found no answer. That was the answer.") is the most cynical, but it highlights his pattern of resisting the declaration of conventional meaning in response to destruction. In "The Tranquil Star," Levi goes further by staging a deliberate and ironic evacuation of

meaning. The reader is left to guess the significance of this enigma: perhaps Levi is commenting on how destruction has no intrinsic value, or that witnessing destruction does not help comprehend existence. Whereas in the passage from the “Hydrogen” chapter, Levi appeared to connect the explosion to some larger meaning, the false quality of that connection is made explicit in the passage from “The Tranquil Star.” Destruction cannot be comprehended in a conventional way; Levi’s repeated return to fire and explosions is perhaps not an effort aimed at conscious understanding but rather a repetition that builds a sense of mastery of, or habituation to, the unknown.

The language Levi uses to describe explosions and destruction is a mixture of passive, clinical, and unemotive language (i.e., “The path to destruction can be very slow, can take place silently, coldly.”) or it can be more physically immediate and visceral, but disconnected from a reflective or introspective mode (i.e., “I threw them on the floor and stomped furiously on them, while the smoke half blinded me and my blood was throbbing violently in my temples”). With the exception of “The Death of Marinese,” the energy of fire is disconnected from human agency or motivation, similar to a score of ‘small m’ on the Rorschach. ‘Small m’ is scored on the Rorschach for inanimate movement, and it indicates a feeling of being drawn to something without will and being acted upon by forces outside of oneself. Levi’s descriptions of fire that is about to break out at any moment paint a picture of a world that is governed by malevolent forces outside of one’s control. “The Death of Marinese” and the chemistry experiments in *The Periodic Table* dramatize the desire to take control of the destruction, even at the cost of one’s own safety/life. The line, “wood is anxious to oxidize, that is, to destroy itself,” shows how Levi was drawn to self-destruct, and is a statement of the repetition

compulsion in his texts. This is also an example of how Levi personifies and identifies with matter (covered below in the section “Abstraction and Matter”), and it is another example of Levi identifying with the aggressor. As represented in his writing, Levi was drawn to the destructive force of fire, which was connected to the destruction he experienced in Auschwitz, and at times he directed that destruction towards himself. Unconsciously, this internalization of the aggressor provides a sense of agency and control to the helpless experience of the victim. In his written work, Levi is the agent who lights and controls these fires, even when he was recounting experiences when he was not in control. His texts are transitional spaces in which the fires from his past could be set ablaze again but remain contained and filtered in the play between memory, creative imagination, and the intellectual distance of a scientist observing an experiment.

B. The boundary between animals and humans.

This section will discuss the second fragment or iconic image that repeats in Levi’s writing, which is animal imagery. First, Levi’s use of animal imagery in his trauma narrative will be discussed, followed by charting his use of animal imagery in later writing and different genres.

Animal imagery in the Lager.

Levi frequently described the behavior and mannerisms of inmates in the Lager using the imagery of animals. This description is first a critique of the primitive

conditions of the camp and the intent of the Germans to destroy the prisoners' identities as men to transform them into animals with subhuman status. "[P]recisely because the Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts" (1947, p.41). His own perception of people as animal-like occupies three different points of view or identifications in *Survival in Auschwitz*: 1) He identified with an objective observer's perspective: he described and indicted the dehumanizing effect of the Lager's conditions (e.g., see the previous quote). 2) His identification with the German-oppressor point of view: he viewed others with contempt for their loss of dignity.

"Null Achtzen is no longer a man...

...He has not even the rudimentary astuteness of a draught-horse...He made me think of the sledge-dogs in London's books, who slave until the last breath and die on the track." (1947, p.41-42).

3) His own identification with the role of the oppressed victim: he viewed himself as a debased, undignified animal. An example is the inmates' use of the oppressor's language, referring to themselves as animals.

"He does not say it from derision or to sneer, but because this way of eating on our feet, furiously burning our mouths and throats, without time to breathe, really is '*fressen*', the way of eating of animals, and certainly not '*essen*',

the human way of eating, seated in front of a table, religiously. ‘*Fressen*’ is exactly the word, and is used currently among us.” (1947, p. 76)

In Levi’s lexicon, most pronounced in *Survival in Auschwitz*, being an animal is the antithesis of being human. Levi was also a scientist who read and admired Darwin, so he was familiar with the concepts of evolution and our genetic link to our animal-ancestors. “...[S]ince Nature too is conservative, we carry in our coccyx what remains of a vanished tail” (Levi, 1975, p. 150). Scientific knowledge and theory may have served him to intellectualize the horrors he witnessed in the Lager, where men were treated and made to act like animals. By situating the human drama on a larger scale, an evolutionary scale, he distances himself from the trauma by identifying with the human in its earlier (animal) forms – to whom this treatment did not happen, yet for whom this treatment seems more appropriate. Additionally, by viewing the events in the Lager from this longer perspective, the Holocaust and the transformations that happened there, becomes a much smaller event in this expanded field of view, which includes many other transformations throughout time.

Evolutionary theory may have allowed Levi to observe and cognitively assimilate the breakdown between human and animal categories that he witnessed, but it may have also reinforced his identification with the oppressor. His description of people turned into animals suggests his view that our animal origins are still present, waiting to reemerge. The identification is with the Germans who saw the Jews as they “really” were; when they stripped them of their external identities they saw the truth, that they

were animals. Of course this is not something Levi states explicitly, but this unconscious view is enacted in the myriad animal descriptions embedded in his writing.

Animal imagery in later writing.

What is most striking about animal imagery in Levi's writing is its ubiquity. Animal images appear all over the place, in all of the mediums that he wrote. He wrote poems about animals: "The Crow's Song," "The Gulls of Settimo," "Arachne," "Old Mole," "Pearl Oyster," "The Snail," "The Elephant," "The Fly," "The Dromedary," and in the poem "Autobiography," the narrator changes form from a fish to a deer, cicada, tarantula, salamander, scorpion, unicorn, asp and donkey. He wrote these short essays and personal memories about animals in his book *Other People's Trades*: "Butterflies," "Beetles," "Inventing an Animal," "The Leap of a Flea," "Frogs on the Moon," and "The Fear of Spiders." When looking at the sheer variety of animal life employed as images and subjects in his writing as a whole, it appears as though he was making a partial but elaborate inventory of the animal kingdom. This compendium of identifications, similar to his absorption with abstraction and matter in *The Periodic Table* (discussed in the Abstraction and Matter section below), indicates both a preoccupation with animals but also a diffusion of his own identity. In Levi's literary output he made repeated efforts to transcend or escape his human identity, an example of which can be found in his poem, "Autobiography (1984, p.44-45):"

Autobiography

‘Once I was already youth and maid, bush, bird, and mute fish that leaps out of the sea.’

(from a fragment by Empedocles)

I who speak to you am old as the world.
In the darkness of the beginnings
I swarmed through the sea’s blind pits,
Blind myself, but already yearning for light
When I still lay in the rotting depths.
I gulped salt with a thousand tiny throats;
I was a fish, slimy and swift. I eluded snares,
Showed my offspring the crab’s tortuous paths.
Higher than a tower, I outraged the sky;
The mountains trembled at the shock of my passing.
My brute bulk obstructed valleys:
Your rocks still bear today
The incredible impress of my scales.
I sang to the moon the toad’s liquid song,
My constant hunger riddled wood.
An impetuous timid deer, I ran through woods
That are ash today, pleased by my strength.

I was drunken cicada, shrewd dread tarantula,
Salamander, scorpion, unicorn and asp.
I suffered whipping, heat,
Cold, the desperation of the yoke,
The donkey's silent vertigo on the treadmill.
I was a maiden, hesitating in the dance;
Surveyor, I probed the secret of the circle,
The dubious paths of clouds and winds.
I have known tears and laughter and much beauty.
Therefore, don't mock me, men of Agrigento,
If this old body is deeply and strangely marked.

In "Autobiography," the narrator's transformations and identifications with different animals serve to dramatize the extent of what he has seen and experienced. He becomes different animals, as though this poem is a narrative of evolution. Time passes according to a worldly or planetary scale, not the scale of a single life (similar to "The Story of Carbon"), which expands his inventory of life forms, but also what he has lost in the world. "I ran through woods/That are ash today." The word "ash," particularly being used to connote loss, is highly charged and intersects with the language of the Lager and the crematoriums. The expansion of scale is both a defensive avoidance of individual loss, and a more evocative expression of loss on this larger scale. Taking the form of many different animals, the narrator is able to describe their various characteristics, including great size and strength, but most notably the vicissitudes they have suffered in

the struggle of living. “I suffered whipping, heat,/Cold, the desperation of the yoke,/The donkey’s silent vertigo on the treadmill.” He also includes the psychological strain of shyness, from which Levi was personally known to have suffered, in the one human identification in the poem (though he disguises this identification by writing about a woman): “I was a maiden, hesitating in the dance.” Levi highlights the physical aspects of the animal forms he embodies, but in the sole human entry in his autobiography, she hesitates from physical activity and expression. The contrast between human and animal modes of being in the poem highlights the limitation and compartmentalization of human experience, and that physicality is a dimension of living most inhabited by animals.

The poem dramatizes the humiliation of having suffered a catalogue of animal hardship, and the poem begins to express the emotional experience of these animals, including the subjective experience of captivity: “the desperation of the yoke.” By describing each animal only briefly before moving on to the next, he avoids any sustained interior exploration of any individual animal. The shame of the narrator is predicated on how he is perceived by others, (from the outside, the objective point of view) not a conscious shame that he attributes to self-reflection: “Therefore, don’t mock me, men of Agrigento.” The most significant representation of shame and the manifestation of past trauma is expressed on the surface of this fictional body: “this old body is deeply and strangely marked.” This poem presents a connection between human and animal experience, but articulates psychological experience most clearly through animal descriptions, action, and physicality, in which the human form is only partially able to participate.

Animal-traits are used in Levi's writing to describe human situations, expressions and emotional reactions, especially experiences of shame. The humiliation of having to urinate in public is a shame Levi described first experiencing on the train to Auschwitz in *The Drowned and the Saved*:

For everybody...evacuating in public was painful or even impossible: a trauma for which civilization does not prepare us, a deep wound inflicted on human dignity, an aggression which is obscene and ominous, but also the sign of deliberate and gratuitous viciousness. (1986, p. 111)

In his short story, "Buffet Dinner" the protagonist is invited to a dinner party, and only at the end is it revealed that he is a kangaroo. The kangaroo's physical attributes (being unable to climb stairs with his large feet) and bodily needs (urinating in a potted plant) contribute to the emotional experience of shame and alienation. The tone of the story is a strange mixture of a lighthearted comedy of manners, a science fiction story where kangaroos really are invited to human gatherings, combined with the discomfort of feeling vulgar and out of place.

The use of the kangaroo is a mechanism to convey the experience of shame, while also concealing it by presenting it as a surreal comedy. Levi's identification with an animal in this story depicts the relationship between trauma and shame that is experienced and remembered somatically. Traumatic memories that are inaccessible symbolically emerge in sensory and somatic sensations; traumatic mental states are encoded in the body. In Levi's story, they are encoded in the body of a kangaroo.

Another example of animals used to illustrate a shameful human state is in the “Phosphorus” chapter in *The Periodic Table*. In the story Levi has to perform lab experiments with rabbits and he expresses his negative reaction to them:

Rabbits are not attractive animals. They are among the mammals most distant from man, perhaps because their qualities are those of humanity when humiliated and outcast: they are timid, silent, and evasive, and all they know is food and sex. (1975, p. 121)

Animal images, because they are “distant from man” allow Levi to project disavowed or shameful feelings onto them. Animals become the carrier of human emotions and behavior from which Levi wished to gain distance. In this example, Levi wished to gain distance from the humiliation he connected to passivity and bodily needs.

An example of animal imagery used to express negative human emotions is found in the chapter, “Sulfur,” in *The Periodic Table*, where Levi writes about a chemist who is working alone overnight preparing resin. This story is also an example of Levi’s use of fire imagery. At this point in the story, the boiler’s temperature starts to rise too high:

Lanza felt all his hairs standing on end, like the tail of an enraged cat: and he was enraged, in a murderous, wild rage against the kettle, against that ugly, reluctant beast crouched on the fire, which lowed like a bull: red hot, like an enormous hedgehog with its quills standing straight up, so that you do not know

where to touch and seize it and you feel like jumping on it and kicking it to pieces. (1975, p.163)

Lanza's angry emotional state is expressed by comparing him and the kettle, the object of his rage, to animals. The use of animal-imagery here appears to be a form of emotional expression or regulation for states of aggression and tension. Regressive, inhuman associations emerge when aggression is put into words. The chapter "Sulfur" is more of a vignette rather than a story, and it draws upon Levi's own work as a chemist preparing resin after the war. This chapter, though unrelated to Auschwitz in its description of professional chemistry, includes the character, Lanza's, memory of staying up overnight when he was a soldier shooting at planes during World War II, and his association to the smell of sulfur with hell. Lanza also remarks that he wouldn't have been so afraid of the boiler exploding "if it had been during the day or he hadn't been alone" (1975, p.163).

The oddness of this story is that it is disconnected from any larger narrative other than the challenge of operating a boiler that briefly overheats before Lanza manages to reduce the temperature. However, the larger story that "Sulfur" is linked to is the stress and fear associated with the war, and the anxiety related to an experience of being alone, in the dark, when faced with danger. The anxiety in the story is another example of fire and explosions, in that Lanza is afraid he is losing control over the boiler, which threatens to explode, and he has no one to help him. *Survival in Auschwitz* dramatized the way in which the prisoners in the Lager were isolated, unable to trust other people, including each other, and the horror of solitude that culminated in the Musselmen, cut off from

humanity even before their death. Thus, this chapter demonstrates the invasion of Levi's memory and literary creations with memories and associations from Auschwitz. In addition to the most frequent appearance of animals, multiple associations and memory fragments from the war appear in his writing, seemingly unbidden, much like a kangaroo showing up at a dinner party.

In the Chapter "Iron" in *The Periodic Table*, Levi described his friend Sandro who taught him how to climb and camp in the mountains. Levi describes Sandro's dog, who is clearly a creature with whom he identifies:

This was a small yellow mongrel with a downcast expression... as a puppy he had had a mishap with a cat. ...The cat had attacked him, chased him, caught him, and scratched his nose; the dog had been permanently traumatized. He felt dishonored, and so Sandro had made him a cloth ball, explained to him that it was the cat, and every morning presented it to him so that he could take his revenge on it for the insult and regain his canine honor. For the same therapeutic motive, Sandro took him to the mountains, so he could have some fun. (1975, p.43)

This passage shows a different use of animal imagery in Levi's writing, but in all of these citations animal imagery is used to express emotion, and three of them express shame in particular. In the passage about Sandro's dog, the animal's story of traumatization and therapeutic treatment is a direct description of Levi's plight, though not yet realized in the chronology of the current narrative because it takes place before

Auschwitz. This direct description of the dog's traumatization is a displaced version of Levi's own experience, which is not expressed elsewhere in the story. What is more pronounced in the description of the dog is the emotional experience of the traumatization (i.e., "he felt dishonored") and the lasting impact this had. The dog is described while being pulled up the mountain on a rope as, "moaning softly as though he were dreaming (1975, p.44)." The dog is an expression of Levi's vulnerability that he does not directly ascribe to himself, particularly in this chapter, in which he is manifestly focused on his identification with Sandro, and his wish to be a virile man of action. This story can be read as a retroactive resuscitation of Levi's agency and manhood from his years before the war to counteract the experience of extreme passivity and submission while in Auschwitz. The presence of the moaning dog is an image that connects his prewar adventures to the trauma awaiting him.

The contexts of these animal images in writing after *Survival in Auschwitz* may seem to be unrelated to the Holocaust, but many retain a connection to the humiliated identification with the victim/animal that he employed in *Survival in Auschwitz*. Animal imagery is also connected to Auschwitz in their use to describe a loss of composure and dignity, which was also part of Levi's description of prisoners in *Survival in Auschwitz*. It would be reductive to attribute the many instances and different contexts in which he used animal imagery to a single function, identification, or mode of expression, but his prolific use of these images suggests that he could not mitigate the way he saw animals when he looked at humans. This connection between animals and humans, clearly cemented in the Lager, continued to structure the way he saw the world. Devolution was always at work, transforming people backwards through time to their animal origins in

Auschwitz. The boundaries of the human form were shaken, destroyed, and ultimately became more fluid due to the traumatic “offence” Levi witnessed at Auschwitz: “the demolition of a man.” An echo of the original trauma is that the human form has fluid boundaries in Levi’s writing, which is further discussed in the next section.

C. The boundary between human and non-human: Abstraction and matter.

A third iconic fragment, the themes of abstraction and matter, is connected to Levi’s experience of the Lager and echoes throughout his later writing. Abstraction here refers to an intellectual operation that organizes information at a general level, and serves the defensive aim of moving Levi away from emotions and distances him from the details of human experience. The two themes of abstraction and matter are a pair of opposites that complement each other, and function as alternate perspectives, or intellectual positions, that Levi assumed (i.e., looking at the big picture vs. minute details). Levi’s work as a chemist depended on a scientific body of abstract laws and principles that he would repeatedly apply to the material world, and he would often compare his own observations of matter to the abstract principles that guided him. This thematic category of abstraction and matter comes in part from Levi’s scientific training and way of thinking, which was also a lens through which he observed the Lager.

In Levi’s fiction and memoir writing after *Survival in Auschwitz*, the images and themes of abstraction and matter appear frequently, typically in writing about chemistry, but also in his fiction. Given that Levi repeatedly wrote science fiction stories in addition to memoir writing about chemistry, it is clear that he tended to see the world both

professionally and imaginatively through the abstract and the scientific. He imagined worlds that were removed and different than his own, yet connected by common principles or themes. In Levi's more scientific or ecological writing, he frequently wrote about chemical transformations in an industrial setting or in the natural world; these transformations are echoes of the changes and break down of the human form that he witnessed in the Lager, but displaced onto a safer, dissimilar subject. Levi often moved away from descriptions of people to register things (elementary particles) and concepts instead. Levi's tendency to intellectualize, in addition to reflecting his intelligence and academic interests, was a way of defending against emotions that may have been partly characterological (his personality style). Levi's use of abstraction and images of matter in his writing are attempts to distance himself from the details of his trauma.

Abstraction and matter in the Lager.

In this section, the connection between images of abstraction and matter and Levi's experience in the Lager will be explored. A template from the trauma narrative for his preoccupation with the abstract and moving away from the human realm is his evocative description of the numbers tattooed on the prisoners' arms. This was the Nazis' method of dehumanizing the Jews, which was partly to disavow the human massacre they were conducting. Levi's identification with his own number in the Lager was a way for him to disavow the trauma from impacting his personal identity. Abstraction organizes concrete bits of data at a more general level, withdrawing from the details, which allows for meaning that synthesizes larger quantities of data into coherent

wholes. Using the numbers as referents for the network of meaning specific to the Lager, Levi could draw conclusions about an inmate based on the larger categories his tattooed number represented (e.g., nationality, group characteristics, degree of adaptation to the Lager). Levi's ability to observe the Lager as "a gigantic biological and social experiment" in *Survival in Auschwitz* was his use of abstraction as a tool to observe the events at Auschwitz from a position of distance and to comprehend the Lager through an organizing conceptual template. Similarly, the air raid scene from *The Periodic Table*, discussed above, also shows Levi's use of abstraction when he meditated on "destiny as leaves on a branch." His contemplation of his fate in Auschwitz was made more tolerable when organized around the more abstract and less personal image of leaves on a branch.

A more chilling link between matter and the Lager was the Nazi's reduction of human beings to matter in the course of their deaths, and the use of human remains as material for manufacturing. Human hair was used to make textiles. Here, Levi describes the Nazis' use of human ashes:

The human ashes coming from the crematoria, tons daily, were easily recognized as such, because they often contained teeth or vertebrae.

Nevertheless, they were employed for several purposes: as fill for swamp lands, as thermal insulation between the walls of wooden buildings, and as phosphate fertilizer; and especially notable, they were used instead of gravel to cover the paths of the SS village located near the camp, whether out of pure callousness or

because, due to their origins, they were regarded as material to be trampled on, I couldn't say. (1986, p.125)

This ghastly transformation of humans into building material was part of the intense hatred of the Nazis, the insane reaches of thrift and utility, and a measure of denigration. To the Nazis, the Jews were not people, so there was no moral objection to this absurdly profane use of their remains. This was another indicator that the Jews belonged to a nonhuman realm. Levi puts it best:

The cruelty, typical and devoid of apparent purpose but highly symbolic, was extended, precisely because symbolic, to human remains after death: those remains which every civilization, beginning with prehistory, has respected, honored, and sometimes feared. The treatment to which they were subjected in the Lagers was intended to declare that these were not human remains but indifferent brute matter. (1986, p. 124)

This monstrous transformation of humans into “indifferent brute matter” in the Lager is a link that connects Levi's focus on chemical matter in his fiction and memoir writing to the site of his trauma. Levi wrote about the transformation of matter into different forms and states in his writing about chemistry, and he made references to the evolution of animals, which is another form of transformation in his writing. Levi's preoccupation with the transformation of matter is connected to the transformation of the human form that he witnessed in Auschwitz.

Levi viewed the world with a focus on the abstract and the most minuscule elements of matter, and these are both flights away from the world of people. Through writing about abstract principles and matter, Levi created a structure whose contents could be interchanged and displaced, which is the perfect vehicle for metaphoric expression. So Levi could manifestly be writing about the chemical properties of an element and how it changes when it interacts with other elements, but he can simultaneously (unconsciously) be writing about a topic that was more personal and human: loss and death at a level he could tolerate. Where the themes of abstraction and matter occur in his writing, they both defend against and express affect that Levi does not fully express when writing about people or personal events directly.

Abstraction and matter in later writing.

This section will examine the use of abstraction and matter in Levi's fiction and memoir writing, particularly in *The Periodic Table*, to demonstrate how Levi's preoccupation with chemistry was a shift away from, and a response to, the site of trauma. *The Periodic Table* is a memoir, which takes the form of a collection of stories and episodes from Levi's life as a chemist, including some creative fiction. Each story is titled after, and centers on, an element in the periodic table. The stories are organized chronologically, starting with a record of his familial ancestors, his youth as a student of chemistry, the beginning of his professional life leading up to the war, his participation in the resistance and his capture, one chapter in Auschwitz, and his working life after the war. *The Periodic Table* is thus organized around two central themes of his life, which

are intimately intertwined in his life story: his love of chemistry and his survival of Auschwitz. Chemistry provides the structure of Levi's narrative: the headings of the chapters and the ostensible focus of the memoir is Levi's intimate relationship with chemistry and the microscopic world of matter. However, the book's central theme is loss, in terms of the life he had before the war that he could never return to, and the people he knew who died in the war. By using the abstract organizing structure of *The Periodic Table* and focusing on elements of matter, Levi was able to express his sense of loss connected to the Lager, albeit somewhat indirectly.

Abstraction is at the other end of the continuum from matter in terms of Levi's position as an observer in relation to his subject. Similar to the shifting position he occupies as a witness to trauma discussed above (see Fires and Explosions), abstraction removes him from the concrete and the specific, whereas with matter he is so immersed in the details as to miss the larger picture. The theme of abstraction is most notable in the layout of *The Periodic Table*. The orderliness of the book, organized with each chapter titled after an element, refers to the actual Periodic Table created by Mendeleev. Though the chapters of the book do not follow the same order as the elements in the actual Periodic Table, the concept grounds Levi's stories and memoir in a stable edifice of knowledge. By analogizing his memoir to The Periodic Table, Levi suggests that his life, and the events therein, can be read with the same degree of sense and comprehensibility. The obvious irony is that Levi's life narrative includes the Holocaust, which disrupts conventional categories and sense-making, particularly when the details are examined too closely. Levi uses the abstract structure of the Periodic Table in part because it provides him with an inherently organizing tool in which to sort out his extremely dysregulating

life experiences. The Periodic Table is an external structure that helps bind his emotions about Auschwitz by situating them in another context: scientific knowledge and his net of associations to the chemical elements.

The degree to which Levi returns again and again to his time in Auschwitz throughout the different episodes in *The Periodic Table* (i.e., in the form of foreboding, knowing his time was running out, retrospectively understanding earlier life experiences as preparation for Auschwitz), even though he is explicitly mobilizing his attention elsewhere, is evidence of his unconscious preoccupation with the Lager. He coped with his preoccupation by shifting his focus elsewhere: “Since one can’t live on poetry and stories [about Auschwitz], I looked feverishly for work” (Levi, 1975, p. 151). In addition to his work, abstraction is one of the elsewheres he turned to because it removed him from particular details that could remind him of his trauma.

Levi frequently wrote about the relationship and the interactions between the abstract ideal and the particular details (of matter) that are supposed to conform to the ideal. The relationship between the abstract and the particular is frequently used in Levi’s writing to represent aspects of his trauma. There are a number of instances when Levi writes about the failed correspondence between the abstract ideal and his own observations of matter, which at times evokes Fascist propaganda and Levi’s skepticism of fashionable science. An example of propaganda and the lack of correspondence between an ideal and lived reality from the Lager is the famous sign that hung at the gates of Auschwitz, “Work Makes Freedom,” or one of the signs in the latrine, “a louse is your death,” that Levi observed in *Survival in Auschwitz*. Auschwitz was a place that was not as it seemed, and Levi’s attempt to apply conventional wisdom to life in the Lager failed.

As one of the German guards said to Levi after he took away the icicle he was trying to get water from, “There is no why here” (1947, p.29). There was no explanation or answer that could explain the lived reality of the prisoners in the Lager.

An example of the false connection between the abstract concept and the realities of matter appears in the “Phosphorus” chapter in *The Periodic Table*. In “Phosphorus,” Levi writes about working for a Swiss chemist who fervently follows the false ideas of a German chemist to create a cure for diabetes using the element Phosphorus. Levi’s boss orders him to “be the first to translate his ideas to practice” and so Levi performs the experiments with no success (ibid., p.116). Levi suspects that his boss “had let himself be convinced by that fanatical visionary,” whose ideas were consistent with “the environment impregnated with black magic of the Nazi court” (ibid., p.120). In this story, the erroneous convictions of Levi’s boss, under the spell of a “fanatical visionary,” parallels the widespread appeal of Hitler’s fanatical ideas to the German people. Levi focused on the failed translation of abstract ideas into practice in this story, and he connects this failure to a superficial use of data and the pseudoscientific practices of the Nazis.

Another example of abstract ideas that fail to translate into practice occurs in the chapter “Nitrogen” in *The Periodic Table*. Levi is hired by an owner of a cosmetic factory who wants him to produce the chemical alloxan in order to make lipstick. Levi researches alloxan in the library and learns that he can distill it from urea in chicken shit, which he attempts to do. Levi includes a diagram of alloxan’s chemical formula that he found in the library, and he marvels at its symmetry and beauty. He associates his radical proposition to transform chicken shit into lipstick with his time in Auschwitz:

The fact that alloxan, destined to embellish ladies' lips, would come from the excrement of chickens or pythons was a thought which didn't trouble me for a moment. The trade of chemist (fortified, in my case, by the experience of Auschwitz) teaches you to overcome, indeed to ignore, certain revulsions that are neither necessary or congenital: matter is matter, neither noble nor vile, infinitely transformable, and its proximate origin is of no importance whatsoever...

I will go further: far from scandalizing me, the idea of obtaining a cosmetic from excrement, that is *aurum de stercore* ("gold from dung"), amused me and warmed my heart, like a return to the origins...it ennobled, restored and reestablished. That is what nature does: it draws the fern's grace from the putrefaction from the forest floor...(Ibid., p.180-181)

This passage illustrates the strong connection between the transformations of matter in Levi's professional life to his experience in Auschwitz. Levi espoused a philosophy that does not privilege "origins" and viewed all of matter with equal value. This democratic view of matter relates to his time in Auschwitz because he learned to find value in anything due to the scarcity of supplies, or due to his desensitization to the lack of social manners from civilian life in the Lager. Running throughout *The Periodic Table*, abstract ideas are examined and questioned with a moral intonation, which is also a response to the Nazi's use of racist ideals that privileged Aryan origins at the expense of anyone who was different (e.g., the Nazi publication *The Defense of Race*, which Levi addresses in the chapter "Zinc" as another example). This example shows Levi using

matter in his writing as a metaphor to express ideas about humanity, and in particular about the Lager. In the passage above, Levi valorized the transformation of dung into gold because it “restored and reestablished,” which is to say that this transformation resurrects and undoes loss. Levi attempted to fortify this resurrecting transformation of dung by connecting it to a natural process (i.e., “what nature does”), which differs from the man-made destructive transformations in the Lager. The process of transforming matter in the story of “Phosphorus” is a reversal of the destruction and transformation of humans into dead matter in the Lager.

However, when Levi attempts to perform this transformation in his laboratory, he is unsuccessful. Despite following the instructions he researched, his preparation “displayed no tendency to crystallize, as the text declared it should. The shit remained shit” (Ibid., p. 183). Levi’s failure to make this transformation of dung into gold, which worked so well in the abstract, was personally disheartening to him in the story. He concluded the story with this personal lament:

That was not the way to get out of the swamps: by what path would I therefore get out, I the discouraged author of a book which seemed good to me but which nobody read? Best to return among the colorless but safe schemes of inorganic chemistry. (Ibid., p. 183)

In the story, failing to perform this feat of chemical transformation leaves Levi feeling discouraged on multiple levels, revealing that this experiment signified meaning in multiple domains. Levi described himself as “the discouraged author” referring to the

long time it took for *Survival in Auschwitz* to be published by Einaudi (finally published in 1958) to reach a wider reading public and receive any critical acclaim. Levi's feeling that he had personally failed as a writer is another form of failed transformation, from artistic creation to public reception. Levi's response to the failed chemistry experiment was to return to inorganic chemistry, which is to say that he failed in the realm of the living and wanted to return to the realm of the dead. Tied to this story of chemical adventure is Levi's own attempt to resurrect himself and his memory of the dead from Auschwitz through writing - to bring himself to life again through artistic creation in addition to working as a chemist. Here, Levi's attempt to implement an abstract concept in the resurrection of matter shows his efforts to save what was lost and how tenuous the boundaries are between life forms and dead matter.

Levi uses his description of matter to stand in for, and augment, his direct, personal expression of loss and his efforts to reconnect to what was lost in the past. Levi's use of chemical transformation as a metaphor for his own transformation after being freed from the Lager is also present in the chapter, "Chromium," from *The Periodic Table*. "Chromium" is all about the reconstruction of the past, specifically about customs, recipes and mysterious trade rituals, whose origins have been lost, and these are tied directly to Levi's losses in Auschwitz. The chapter centers on Levi's return from Auschwitz and his transition back to work and civilian life. He starts by talking about loss generally: "life is full of customs whose roots can no longer be traced: the color of sugar paper, the buttoning on different sides for men and women, the shape of a gondola's prow," (1975, p. 147). Then Levi makes a very clear expression of loss

directly related to being in Auschwitz, which he did not express in the preceding chapter situated in Auschwitz (“Cerium”).

But I had returned from captivity three months before and was living badly. The things I had seen and suffered were burning inside me; I felt closer to the dead than the living, and felt guilty at being a man, because men had built Auschwitz, and Auschwitz had gulped down millions of human beings, and many of my friends, and a woman who was dear to my heart. (1975, p. 151)

In “Chromium,” Levi first makes a direct expression of personal loss related to Auschwitz and he then turns from this personal loss to dealing with loss in a displaced, sublimated, form in his chemical work. In the material world of his work he can re-find objects that were lost, and find answers to troubling mysteries. The material world is thus an alternate twin to the world of people, in which loss is permanent and explanations cannot always be found.

In “Chromium,” Levi begins to heal and to resurrect himself. He begins to write about his experiences in Auschwitz and feels “purified” and begins to “become a man again.” He meets his wife and falls in love and begins to “look to the future rather than the past.” Then he turns his attention back to his work. This process of Levi’s personal rehabilitation is relatively short and seems cursorily described, but it is echoed in his chemical work with matter, which is the main focus of the chapter. The rest of the chapter covers in great detail his detective work on his chemical assignment to discover why a particular batch of paint varnish had “livered” due to an unknown error. He faced

stacks of solidified, quivering, orange cylinders of paint that could not be used. His task was to discover how the paint came to be solidified and how to return them to their normal liquid state. Levi's sustained concentration on this task of freeing the solidified paint from its state of bondage coincides with his own return from "captivity" to civilian life. He even says in the beginning of the chapter that he "felt closer to the dead than the living." There is a profound identification between Levi and the dead matter that populates *The Periodic Table*. The connection between human life and dead matter is signaled in Levi's description of the solidified paint as "livered" and having the "consistency precisely of the liver or lungs" (1975, p.152). The thousands of livered blocks of paint that Levi first confronts against the factory wall conjure an image of carnage on a scale that cannot help but remind the reader of Auschwitz.

He succeeds in his task by discovering a clerical error in the archived files, and he then adds ammonium chloride to reverse the "livering" process. "Angels and ministers of grace! – the paint was fluid and smooth, completely normal, born again from its ashes like the Phoenix" (1975, p. 158). Levi writes about the chemical transformation of the paint in terms of life and death, resurrection and rebirth, which echoes his own liberation from Auschwitz. Though finding the solution appears miraculous and transformative, the chapter concludes with a return to an irrational state of affairs:

[M]y report went the way of all flesh: but formulas are as holy as prayers, decree-laws, and dead languages, and not an iota in them can be changed. And so my ammonium choride, the twin of a happy love and a liberating book, by now completely useless and probably a bit harmful, is religiously ground into the

chromate anti-rust paint on the shore of that lake, and nobody knows why anymore. (1975, p.159)

Levi's displacement of the human drama of Auschwitz into the drama of matter in his chemical work suffuses *The Periodic Table* with an emotional weight and evocativeness that is felt in his language. At the end of the chapter, his final report that explained the problem "went the way of all flesh," which is to say it disappeared. In the language Levi chose, he repeatedly reinforced that the transformation and loss of things is closely linked to the death of human life and the mortality of flesh. Levi underscores the futility of his actions to change the course of things: his correction (adding ammonium chloride) eventually becomes an erroneous anomaly, reiterating his sense of limitation within the Lager, his inability to save his friend Alberto from death in the previous chapter set in Auschwitz ("Cerium"). The loss of his friend Alberto is not explicitly mentioned in the chapter "Chromium," but Levi's search through the archives to discover and undo the errors of the past continues seamlessly in the register of loss with which he concluded the previous chapter.

The conclusion to the chapter "Chromium," like many of the chapters in *The Periodic Table*, ends with an anti-climax: similar to the failed experiment with Alloxan in "Nitrogen," his missed opportunity for love in "Phosphorus," and the failure of his attempt to start a laboratory with his friend in "Tin," among others. Levi's solution to the puzzle of the livered paint and his corrective addition of ammonium chloride will be forgotten. The cycle of loss is born again. The effect on the reader is not in the satisfaction of discovery, or the meaning of Chromium, but the inevitable decline and

slippage of presence, memory and understanding. Levi creates in the reader a parallel feeling of loss attendant on following the cycles of loss preceded by momentary presence and comprehension that characterizes much of the book. The reader comes to understand the mysterious ingredient of Chromium in the context of it already having been forgotten and misunderstood by the rest of the world. The reader is left feeling the strange burden of knowledge that is already outdated, from another time, and the sense that one is exiled to a place between the past and the present – qualities that are descriptive of mourning and traumatic memory. The stylistic structure of Levi's stories echoes the subject of loss that he wrote about.

Levi's writing frequently described chemical interactions where things went wrong, and people lose control over the matter they are working with. In these instances of failed experiments, the limitation of the chemist's power is linked in Levi's texts to themes of death and mortality. Another example of a failed chemical experiment that links spoiled matter to human death is in the short story "The Molecule's Defiance" (written in 1980). In this short story, matter is described again as deviating from the abstract concept thought to predict its behavior. In the story a chemist prepares a batch of resin in a reactor, and the batch becomes spoiled in what appears to be a strange accident. The theoretical configuration of the resin's molecules is explained, including a hypothetical account of what went wrong: the molecules bonded in an unpredicted sequence and pattern. The description of the spoiled batch of resin is strikingly compared to the death of a human being, and images of human carnage appear in the inorganic realm:

...when a batch spoils it's as if somebody had died: the best remedies come to mind afterward.

A mass of foam was rising, slowly but relentlessly. Coming to the surface were bubbles as big as a man's head but not round: deformed, in all shapes, with the walls striped as if with nerves and veins...(2007, p.153)

This passage shows how Levi identifies inorganic matter with human life forms and human death. In Levi's writing about inorganic chemistry images of human atrocity emerge. Inorganic chemistry is a subject that is as far removed from human emotions as one can go, which indicates a partial attempt at defense, to move away from details of human suffering. Yet the image of "walls striped as if with nerves and veins" is an image of carnage that is intimately human. The images in "The Molecule's Defiance" are a blend of scientific and abstract distance in addition to a visceral destruction and deformation of the human form. This combination of distance and emotionally intense subject matter evokes the concentration camp in both the clinical disregard of the Nazis for the massacre and the ghastly nature of the crimes committed. The manifest subject matter of "The Molecule's Defiance," a spoiled batch of resin, presents as quite removed from the Lager, yet this distance may have created a safer context for Levi to express feelings and ideas associated with the Lager. Here is Levi's conclusion to the story:

The unique "molecule," deformed but gigantic, that is born and dies in your hands is an obscene message and symbol: a symbol of other ugly things

without reversal or remedy that obscure our future, of the prevalence of confusion over order, and of unseemly death over life. (2007, p. 155)

The conclusion is an abstract and symbolic pronouncement of foreboding pessimism, similar to the quoted passage from “Stable/Unstable” above, in which Levi warns about destructive energies threatening to emerge in the world (see Fires and Explosions). The conclusion to “The Molecule’s Defiance” is an even bleaker statement about death and “ugly things without reversal or remedy.” The “obscene message” at the heart of this story is that things fall apart and loss cannot be reconciled. The tone of this story and the way in which the narrator is shaken by the events of the deformed batch of resin is similar to Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) assertion that trauma destroys basic beliefs in the goodness of things, or that the world is a safe place. The power of death over life echoes Levi’s abandonment to death and passivity after the Germans left the Lager in “The Story of Ten Days” in *Survival in Auschwitz*. The dark worldview expressed in the conclusion to “The Molecule’s Defiance” reads as a clear echo of Levi’s earlier response to trauma.

The science fiction story, “Bureau of Vital Statistics,” also shows Levi portraying the interaction between abstract information and minute details, and the protagonist’s struggle to keep emotional distance from death. In the story, the protagonist’s job is to assign the cause of death to people, whose demographic information is given to him on index cards. This scenario raises a clear parable for the Holocaust and the registries created by the Red Cross and other international organizations to keep track of the people who died or disappeared during World War II. The story presents death as an abstraction

by treating it as numbers and statistics, but the protagonist cannot help but feel empathy and concern for the lives of the people he imagines in detail. Similar to “The Molecule’s Defiance” the protagonist is emotionally disturbed by the destruction he encounters in his work when a young and healthy person must inexplicably die – the expected order of things is overthrown. The protagonist loses his composure and ability to coolly do his work and he is transferred to the department assigning the “shape of the noses of newborns.” The movement from death to birth mirrors the conclusion of the “Hydrogen” chapter in *The Periodic Table* discussed above (see Fires and Explosions), and it allows the protagonist to avoid being overwhelmed by the details of death and destruction by focusing on creation instead.

A last example, which highlights the interaction between the themes abstraction and matter, is in the last chapter of *The Periodic Table*, “Carbon.” The final chapter is a fictional story, in which he detaches himself from the particular details of his own existence by closely exploring the details of chemical life in his imagination. Levi observes and animates the most essential atom, carbon, at work in both the world of nature and his own mind. Levi foregrounds this story with its connection to Auschwitz: “To carbon, the element of life, my first literary dream was turned, insistently in an hour and a place when my life was not worth much: yes, I wanted to tell the story of an atom of carbon” (1978, p. 225). This last fictional chapter is the chemical story of the life of an atom, the transformations and vicissitudes it undergoes on its path from limestone to air, leaf, and eventually the brain of the author as it commands the impress of the book’s last period. The story of the carbon atom is the story that maintains all organic life, and Levi ties himself to this narrative, implicating himself in a meta-narrative of cycle and

change. That he ends the story with the act of writing the period that concludes the book is a beautiful dance between word and deed, the conceptual and the literal. Levi takes the most abstract premise for a story, the evolutions of an atom, and animates the concept with the small details of life that are within reach of any reader. The story grounds the abstract in the concrete, and demonstrates with each carbon formation a bridge between these two realms.

The story of a carbon atom can be read as a metaphor for the self as potential, in this brief story that takes place over millions of years. The entities that the carbon atom joins, leading up to the formation of the period at the story's end, are moments of being, but the story is about successive becoming. The life of the carbon atom accrues more meaning with our knowledge of its past, its former identities, which is in some sense all that it has lost. Memory is activated in the space of separation from the object and the experience of loss, but at the same time memory is a form of consolation for the loss, a substitute for the object in its absence (Loewald, p. 148). The story of carbon dramatizes the recurrence of loss in the cycle of becoming, emphasizing the passage and the process in addition to the weigh-stations, the temporary formations, which the carbon assumes. The story as a whole is a representational memory that strives to connect the identities of the atom over time, threading together a coherent organization out of isolated points in time. The narrative poses to the reader the possibility of encountering the self in its different forms – a self that is historical and reflective.

However, this interpretation reads the abstract nature of the story as operating at a higher level of organization, rather than as a defense against the particular. To read the story of carbon as a meta-narrative is to miss that it is also a flight from the ordinary,

humble narrative, which Levi is trying to transcend. Carbon is a fantasy that attempts to defend against loss with an expansive, ultimately limitless, view of time, which includes a new beginning after every death. “[T]he death of atoms, unlike ours, is never irrevocable” (Levi, 1975, p. 231). The carbon atom transforms into both organic and inorganic forms, portraying a fluid boundary between life and death. It is also an illustration of the death drive and the attempt to lower energy to a minimum: the downward trajectory of the atom towards its final resting place in front of the reader’s eyes.

“Such is life,” although rarely is it described in this manner: an inserting itself, a drawing off to its advantage, a parasitizing of the downward course of energy, from its noble solar form to the degraded one of low-temperature heat. In this downward course, which leads to equilibrium and thus death, life draws a bend and nests in it. (1975, p. 230)

The tensions generated within the story of carbon are multiple: between life and death; the abstract journey and the particular forms the atom assumes; organic vs. inorganic forms; loss and renewal; flight and habitation. The story demonstrates a diffusion of identity, similar to his use of animal imagery (see previous section on Animals), and the struggle to assume a single form, particularly a human form. The tension between the abstract and the details of matter in the midst of life, is indicative of Levi’s difficulty finding his place, being at home in his own life in his own time. The story of Carbon is an example of Levi’s writing that strains to compensate for and avoid

feelings of loss and disconnection with a poetic fantasy of grandeur and connectedness. Levi's story is a great attempt to translate the abstract to the particular, to recreate the journey of the carbon atom by showing us, as if magically, the period at its conclusion as proof that his imaginative invention contacts the world off the page. Despite this dazzling feat of literary construction, the sense of failure that Levi incorporates into his poetic creation is evident in his distrust of language and the whole imaginative enterprise of literature. "I will tell just one more story, the most secret, and I will tell it with the humility and the restraint of him who knows from the start that his theme is desperate, his means feeble, and the trade of clothing facts in words is bound by its very nature to fail" (1975, p.232). His own words are of no consolation to him. It may be that he believes in the ideas behind his narrative, but not the healing capacity of communication between people.

To summarize this section, the themes of abstraction and matter are used in Levi's writing to defend and gain distance from the details of his trauma. However, in the stories where these themes occur, details from the trauma invade his imagery and compromise his (unconscious) efforts at avoidance. The expression of his experience of loss, and its lasting impact on his sense of identity, is echoed from *Survival in Auschwitz* and greatly developed in his writing about abstraction and matter.

Levi frequently depicted characters in his stories who were navigating between abstraction and close-up views of matter. His characters are frequently exposed to unsettling details of reality, which disturbs the comfortable distance of an abstract point of view and the belief that everything is going according to plan. Levi wrote about trying to reconcile the contradictions between abstract ideals and what was observed in reality,

sometimes striving to achieve the order promised by abstraction, while at other times distrustful of prevailing ideals. The use of abstract ideas and matter are shifting metaphors within Levi's writing. At times abstract ideas referred to a flight from reality, false ideology, a concept of order, beauty or art; matter conveyed death, details of reality, a mirror of human life or a flight from humanity. A consistent use of these themes in Levi's writing was to reveal a friction or false match between an abstract idea and the reality of matter. This non-correspondence reiterated a response to trauma in terms of disillusionment and a loss of faith in authorities and received knowledge. Traumatic knowledge forces a confrontation with loss; it refuses to fit into previously known categories and resists facile understanding.

Levi often wrote about a yearning for the conceptual beauty of abstraction, even when he wrote about its failure to account for reality. The beautiful and organized structure of *The Periodic Table* is a testament to Levi's effort to make sense of, and apply abstract stabilizing concepts to the death and destruction he had witnessed in his life. The complex message of *The Periodic Table*, and in Levi's writing in general, is that he includes alongside his effort to transform loss and create order out of chaos, "the prevalence of confusion over order, and of unseemly death over life." Levi could express this view clearly in his writing when he averted his gaze from the Lager and focused on scientific ideas and chemical matter instead. The echoes of Levi's traumatization - that he continued to feel dead long after liberation, he could not escape from images of death no matter where he looked, and the failure of logic or explanations to account for what he witnessed in the Lager - surface in his later writing about science fiction and chemistry.

The next section will continue to examine another form of non-correspondence, similar to abstract ideas and the details of reality: reality and its representation in language. The final section will examine the limitations that Levi described in his efforts to record his traumatic experience in language, within a narrative framework. Levi's distrust of language and writing is another echo of his trauma.

D. Failures of representation

As discussed in the literature review, representation of trauma in art and literature is thought to aid the recovery process from trauma by externalizing the trauma, identifying and containing the affect, and providing a safe context for witnessing the trauma. Though Levi skillfully used his writing as a way to communicate his traumatic experience, and despite the beauty of his writing, he also made multiple references to the inadequacy and dysfunction of language throughout his writing career. The final fragment discussed in this section, the failure of representation, examines the failure of communication in the Lager and Levi's observations as a writer about the inability of language to capture his experience in the Lager and elsewhere. This section will chart his initial comments about language and its state of confusion and disrepair in the Lager from *Survival in Auschwitz*, and then compare them to his later comments about language in other contexts. The benefit Levi found from writing will also be discussed.

Failure to communicate in Auschwitz.

Levi's own words speak for themselves about the failure of representation in the Lager. Here is a quote from early in *Survival in Auschwitz*:

The confusion of languages is a fundamental component of the manner of living here: one is surrounded by a perpetual Babel, in which everyone shouts orders and threats in languages never heard before, and woe betide whoever fails to grasp the meaning. No one has time here, no one has patience, no one listens to you... (*Survival in Auschwitz*, p. 38)

One of the challenging and tormenting features of the Lager was the very real inability to communicate with others or to comprehend orders because of the many different languages being spoken. In addition to the language barrier faced by prisoners who did not understand the German or Polish spoken by their captors, there was also the fundamental disregard of the Germans for the prisoners, so it was generally pointless for prisoners to try to speak. This resulted in language losing its previous functionality.

In *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi's narrative incorporates the many languages spoken in the Lager, weaving in phrases of German, Polish, French, Italian and many others into his narrative. The quotation and use of foreign languages in Levi's text is not always translated, but rather the phrases of foreign languages appear and disappear without explanation, creating a hybridized text that recapitulates the polyglot confusion of the Lager. Here are two quotes with translated foreign languages:

'Gerschollen,' he replies cryptically. I shake my head, I have not understood. *'Swollen,'* he makes me understand, blowing out his cheeks and sketching with his hands a monstrous tumefaction of the face and belly. *'Warten bis heute Abend.'* 'Wait until this evening,' I translate word by word. (1947, p. 31).

...to enter the hospital with a diagnosis of *'dicke Füße'* (swollen feet) is extremely dangerous... (1947, p. 35)

The two quotes above show Levi being mindful of the reader when he used foreign language. Levi included his own process of moving from incomprehension to comprehension in the first quote, which the reader is able to experience alongside Levi.

Here are three quotes in which foreign language is left untranslated:

Resnyk drops his head between his shoulders, pulls his beret over his ears and lifts his face up to the low grey sky where the inexorable snow whirls around:

'Si j'avey une chien, je ne le chasse pas dehors.' (1947, p. 70)

Accompanied by the gratitude of all, Templer the benefactor enters the latrine for a few moments and comes out beaming and ready, and amidst the general benevolence prepares to enjoy the fruits of his work:

'Nu, Templer, hast du Platz genug für die Suppe gemacht?' (1947, p. 76)

'Tu es fou de marcher si vite. One a le temps, tu sais.' The ration was collected half a mile away; one had to return with the pot weighing over a hundred pounds supported on the two poles. (1947, p. 111)

Due to Levi's use of translation in some places versus other times when he does not, it appears that the lack of translation is not intentional since he chose to translate the majority of foreign language in *Survival in Auschwitz*. Though the meaning of the untranslated phrases may not be crucial to the story or the central points Levi was making, it creates the same feeling of confusion for the reader that Levi described experiencing in the Lager, which was an integral part of being a prisoner. The places where Levi does not use translation are moments of unconscious repetition of the confusion and incomprehension he experienced in the Lager.

This breakdown of translation in *Survival in Auschwitz* is a literal example of the failure of language that Levi also ascribes to his own creative effort to describe and communicate his traumatic experience of being in the Lager. "Then for the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man" (1947, p. 26). The failure to represent the "offence" of the Germans, and the process of dehumanization to which the prisoners were subjected, was due to the difficulty of translating events into language that had no clear precedent or model. Levi's difficulty of translating his experience and observations into words is a subject that he repeatedly turned to, both in relation to the Lager and in other areas he wrote about.

Failure of words in Levi's later writing.

This next section will chart the echoing theme in Levi's writing of the failure of words to adequately describe the subject of his writing. Levi's concern about the adequacy of linguistic representation in his later writing is an echo of his initial concern putting his traumatic experience into words from *Survival in Auschwitz*. Here are three passages dealing with words that fail to describe:

“Just as our hunger is not that feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say ‘hunger’, we say ‘tiredness’, ‘fear’, ‘pain’, we say ‘winter’ and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes. If the Lagers had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind, with the temperature below freezing, wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one's body nothing but weakness, hunger and knowledge of the end drawing nearer” (1947, p.123).

“This star was very big and very hot, and its weight was enormous: and here a reporter's difficulties begin. We have written ‘very far,’ ‘big, ‘hot,’ ‘enormous’: Australia is very far, an elephant is big and a house is bigger, this morning I had a hot bath, Everest is enormous. It's clear that something in our lexicon isn't working...For a discussion of stars our language is inadequate and

seems laughable, as if someone were trying to plow with a feather. It's a language that was born with us, suitable for describing objects more or less as large and long-lasting as we are; it has our dimensions, it's human. It doesn't go beyond what our senses tell us." (2007, p.156-157).

"If to comprehend is the same as forming an image, we will never form an image of a happening whose scale is a millionth of a millimeter, whose rhythm is a millionth of a second, and whose protagonists are in their essence invisible. Every verbal description must be inadequate, and one will be as good as the next, so let us settle for the following description" (1975, p. 227).

These three quotes share a strikingly similar content about seemingly different subjects (the failure to communicate the experience of suffering in Auschwitz, the dimensions of a star and a molecule). In all of the passages, the inadequacy of words is due to a non-correspondence, either between the speaker and listener or the speaker and the subject he describes. Language is rooted in the physical dimensions of the speaker and a shared set of familiar (culturally expectable) experiences of the linguistic community. Auschwitz shattered the expectable range and dimension of human experience so that its description needs new words. Similarly, the scale and dimensions necessary to comprehend an "enormous" star or a tiny molecule upsets the familiar human dimensions implicit in our words. Comprehension is disrupted due to scale. We can hypothesize that this disruption was experienced and made known to Levi in the

Lager, where the once-familiar experiences of hunger, cold, and fear were hyperbolically transformed into something strange and previously unknown.

The next two quotes continue to dwell on the theme of scale and its relationship to comprehension.

“[C]ompassion itself eludes logic. There is no proportion between the pity we feel and the extent of the pain by which the pity is aroused: a single Anne Frank excites more emotion than the myriads who suffered as she did but whose image has remained in the shadows. Perhaps it is necessary that it can be so. If we had to and were able to suffer the sufferings of everyone, we could not live. Perhaps the dreadful gift of pity for the many is granted only to saints... and to all of us there remains in the best of cases only the sporadic pity addressed to the single individual, the *Mitmensch*, the co-man: the human being of flesh and blood standing before us, within the reach of our providentially myopic senses” (1986, p. 56-57).

“The biggest cause for malaise is, or should be, nuclear fear. Under this aspect, the situation is new in human history: it has never happened, not even distantly, that a single act of will, a single gesture, could lead to the instantaneous destruction of the human species and the probable disappearance within a few weeks of every form of life on Earth.

“The fear is strange and shapeless: it is too vast to be accepted rationally” (“Eclipse of the Prophet”, 1985, p.91).

Levi was preoccupied with the problem of comprehending and representing unimaginably vast horrors. The “nuclear fear” recapitulates his dread of the Holocaust, only even larger in scale. In both quotes, Levi tells us that logic and reason are overcome and of no use in capturing these terrors. Of course Levi frames the very problem of incomprehension with the concept of scale, a very reasonable and logical approach. It seems that his question, in the first quote, is ‘why have so many deaths remained hidden in the shadows’ and, in particular, ‘why can’t I picture what I have witnessed?’ In the first quote Levi begins debating the ability to feel pity and compassion for widespread suffering, but ends with our inability to *perceive* such proportions due to our “myopic senses.” He is describing a disconnect between perception and emotional reaction. His question could be rephrased as, ‘Why can’t I feel what I have witnessed?’ Again and again Levi tries to understand his unclear emotional response, or the strange shapelessness of his emotions, which he cannot connect to his perceptions or reason.

The clear shape of an everyday fear or the pity aroused by a single Anne Frank is easier to comprehend because they reside within the realm of normal life and everyday associations. The story of Anne Frank foregrounds the familiar aspects of a domestic drama about a teenage girl within the larger history of the Holocaust. The combination of the normal and the traumatic in Anne Frank’s story allows the shocking and incomprehensible aspects of the Holocaust to be tolerated and worn away by association with more normal and comprehensible events. Levi struggled to integrate his traumatic memories with more commonplace associations and memories, in order to wear away, and give a reduced shape to, the painful emotions associated with the trauma.

He repeatedly described emotional disparity or ambiguity in relation to events in his writing by meditating on problems of representation and language. His hope was that language, by conjuring a clear mental representation, would translate directly to an emotional response, i.e. “compassion.” Levi encounters multiple stumbling blocks that prevent the direct transmission from perception to feeling in both himself and in the reader: the subject is too vast or too small, our senses can perceive a limited amount or scale, we cannot bear to feel too much, and we lack the right words to describe the event. Levi’s writing attempts to both name and contain his own emotional response to trauma and “excite” the same emotional response in his reader. However, his distrust of language is an expression and repetition of his initial traumatization: the impossibility of tolerating his emotions or putting them into words; the absence of others who would listen and witness his plight. As much as Levi directed his testimony at others so that they might witness what he did, his writing process was clearly for his own benefit too.

In Levi’s essay, “Why Does One Write,” from *Other People’s Trades*, he describes several motivations for writing including entertainment, to educate, for fame, but most notably, “To free oneself from anguish.” He continues:

“Often writing represents the equivalent of a confession or Freud’s couch. I have no objection to the writer driven by conflicts: on the contrary I hope he will be able to free himself from them in this way, as happened to me many years ago. I ask him, however, to make an effort to filter his anguish, not to fling it as it is, rough and raw, into the face of the reader: otherwise he risks infecting others without getting rid of it himself” (1985, p.65-66).

In the view of writing that Levi presents, the text and the imagined reader are both containers for Levi's affective expression and traumatic memories. If only the reader could perceive the same images he did, then they would feel the same emotional response. If other people could feel the same emotions that Levi was struggling to feel, then he would feel some relief at being understood, and feel less isolated with his traumatic memories. Levi used language and his texts to externalize, contain and examine his memories and emotional experience that he could not fully process when the trauma occurred, and which he could not get rid of on his own.

However, Levi's caveat that the writer should "filter his anguish, not to fling it as it is, rough and raw, into the face of the reader" is partly for the sake of the reader but also for the writer. There is ample evidence that Levi made many creative efforts to filter his representation of the trauma by changing his position as a witness in relation to the traumatic events and by averting his gaze from the immediate details of the trauma (e.g., his metaphoric use of matter in *The Periodic Table*, or the shifting focus in "The Tranquil Star"). The benefit of filtering the representation of trauma in writing is that the reader will be able to tolerate it and be a willing witness to the trauma, leaving the writer less isolated. The other benefit to filtering the representation of trauma by transforming it, "not to fling it as it is," is that this aids the writer in "getting rid of it himself." So changing and transforming the details of the trauma into a more tolerable version benefits the writer by allowing him to get rid of the original anguish associated with the traumatic memory. However, this transformation and filtering of the traumatic memory when

represented in writing means that the representation will be inexact and fail to replicate the original memory.

So though Levi distrusted the veracity of language, partly an echo of his own traumatic experience in the Lager of being confused and unable to communicate, and partly due to his own efforts at transforming his traumatic memories, he continued to write despite his critiques of language. Additionally, Levi described some of the positive features of language that he found beneficial.

“Then someone began to talk about auto-combustion and everybody felt reassured, because when one gives a name to something one doesn’t know, one immediately has the impression that one knows it a little better” (1985, p. 98).

Though language may not let us completely know a real object or person, it creates the illusion of comprehending the thing. In this way, words and language are consolatory because we never really know the thing itself. The word emerges in the absence of the thing, and ‘reassures’ us that we know it by reducing the unknown to a single name. Philosophically, Levi is similar to a skeptic: there is no knowledge or truth that is complete or certain. But in addition to Levi’s pessimistic view of knowledge and the limitations of language, he also has a view of narrative that can potentially transcend this limitation of knowing and his sense of disconnection from the world.

The next two quotes are put together for their contrast:

“Today I know that it is a hopeless task to try to dress a man in words, make him live again on the printed page” (1975, p.48).

“Personally, I am satisfied with this book [*If Not Now, When?*], mainly because I had good fun planning and writing it. For the first and only time in my life as a writer, I had the impression (almost a hallucination) that my characters were alive, around me, behind my back, suggesting spontaneously their feats and their dialogues. The year I spent writing was a happy one, and so, whatever the result, for me this was a liberating book.” (interview with Philip Roth, p. 186 at end of *Survival in Auschwitz*)

In the first quote, Levi is writing about his teenage friend Sandro, in *The Periodic Table*, who died in the war. Contrary to the first quotes in this section, despite the proper scale and dimensions of his subject, Levi is saying that language can't satisfactorily describe humans who have died. Language cannot be a substitute for a real person; it cannot magically capture, recreate, or restore, real life. Levi is asserting that language cannot properly express feelings of loss, even though this was a frequent subject of his writing. However, as the second quote suggests, in fiction Levi could create life on the page, a feeling he could not achieve in non-fiction, memoir, or testimony. Language used in the service of fiction, as opposed to memoir or testimony, does not aim to represent a known reality or memory. Fiction seems to have freed Levi from a sense of obligation to the past and his role as witness, which allowed him to enjoy the creative aspect of language. One senses from these two quotes that the ability to connect to objects and life

through language, though constantly refuted by Levi, was something he wished for, and finally experienced when writing fiction.

This next quote is from his fictional story, “The Tranquil Star,” and gives us a sense of what he wanted language in his stories to accomplish.

[W]e can represent [the star] only with a violent effort of the imagination. There is, of course, the slim and elegant language of numbers, the alphabet of the powers of ten; but then this would not be a story in the sense in which this story wants to be a story; that is, a fable that awakens echoes, and in which each of us can perceive distant reflections of himself and of the human race” (2007, p.157).

In this passage, Levi hints at his version of successful communication, which is a correspondence between writer, subject matter and reader. Stories, when functioning properly, awaken similar responses in the reader; the reader feels “reflections of himself,” no matter how strange and distant the subject matter. Verbal communication should connect the speaker and listener to their subject. In “The Tranquil Star,” language represents the star using references to the human body and common physical properties in order to relate the distant, enormous, unimaginably hot star to the human observer. However, the message from this quote is contrasted with the larger arc of the story, in which the events of the exploding star are ultimately incommunicable to the observers in the story (as discussed in *Fire and Explosions*). Levi often strived to communicate ineffable subject matter that is beyond a common threshold of perception, and he did so by describing the limitations of language. Though words fail, according to Levi it is

language and not numbers that can potentially bring us into connection with objects outside of ourselves.

Levi clearly had conflicted views of language, which was consistent with his experience of writing fiction. In fiction, Levi was both satisfied by language in a new way yet he continued to depict the futility and solitude in communication. Levi dramatized in fiction the way his own language felt alien and separate from himself rather than aiding self-expression and self-knowledge. Here are two quotes from his science fiction story, “The Fugitive,” about a man, Pasquale, who writes a poem that becomes “just like a living thing,” sprouts legs, and runs away from him.

[H]e tried to retrieve in memory if not the whole composition at least that first line, that nucleus which had enlightened him, but he couldn't: in fact, he had the precise sensation that he never would. He was different, different from that moment on: he was no longer the same Pasquale, and he never would be again, just as a dead man does not return to life, and you never put your foot in the same river twice. (1979/2007, p.93)

...[H]e tried many times, during the rest of his life, to call to memory the lost text; in fact, at increasingly rare intervals, he wrote other versions of it, but they were increasingly thin, bloodless, and weak. (1979/2007, p.96)

In “The Fugitive,” when Pasquale loses his text he also loses himself. The story dramatizes the creative act as the birth of a completely separate living creature that

depletes the life of the creator. Many of the previous passages in this section have shown Levi's view that language cannot adequately correspond to the real world, whereas in "The Fugitive" Levi depicts the opposite with nightmarish results. Here, the perfect transcription of thoughts literally steps forth into the physical world, but the author feels even more bereft, rather than having gained something. The story also portrays the fleeting nature of memory and thought, and a deep sense of alienation from one's own mind. In his trauma narrative, Levi described how he shut off his thoughts and feelings in response to his brutal surroundings, and here that disconnect occurs again but it has no explicit origin. Rather than memory and writing connecting one to the past, the past becomes sealed off once committed to memory or transcribed in writing. Memory is never the same thing twice. The articulation of the memory is the only memory; the act of recollection is an act of construction, which will be different every time (Stern, 1997). There is no access to "that nucleus which had enlightened him" because that nucleus is evanescent and not a stable, singular thing.

In the story, Pasquale searches for the lost corporeal object (his poem/creature) that is the embodiment of an inner experience (enlightenment) he is trying to recapture. Levi wrote in *The Periodic Table* that "by writing [about the Lager] I found peace for a while and felt myself become a man again" (1975, p. 151). Levi's initial experience of writing about the Lager was one of catharsis and relief because he was able to externalize and express his traumatic experiences; his text served as a container for his affect. However, "The Fugitive" portrays the absence of a containing object. The text itself no longer serves this function, but emulates the alien quality of the traumatic memory that he is trying to contain. In other words, the story of "The Fugitive" is a direct enactment of

Levi's distrust and conflict with language and the disintegrating effect this had on his sense of self: "he was no longer the same Pasquale, and he never would be again, just as a dead man does not return to life." Whereas in Levi's trauma narrative he expresses his view that language does not accurately correspond to the world, it is in his fiction that he connects this distrust to his experience of self: he felt lost, depleted, dead.

This section has discussed Levi's critique of language as unable to describe the world, in addition to his favorable views of language as creative, mitigating the unknown, and a vehicle for catharsis. Levi turned to writing to record his traumatic experiences and resuscitate himself by giving shape to his traumatic emotions and connecting the trauma to more normal associations. However, Levi also found great disappointment in language as a medium of communication and as a means to express loss. While language was initially a medium through which Levi could feel relief from trauma and regain contact with himself, Levi also associated language with the feeling of traumatic loss and alienation that he was trying to escape.

Chapter V: Discussion

This qualitative analysis of Levi's writing sought to explore his representation of trauma in his narratives over time. His representation of trauma was analyzed in the context of psychoanalytic literature on traumatic memory and trauma narratives. The literature suggests that writing about traumatic experiences can aid the recovery process of trauma survivors by connecting dissociated traumatic memories to other associations and memories, reclaiming the traumatic experience as belonging to one's personal identity, providing an experience for the survivor of being witnessed and less alone, regaining a sense of agency, and allowing the affect connected to the trauma to be accessed and contained. However, the literature on Holocaust survivors suggests they have a poor prognosis clinically and there is little recovery from the traumatized state in life following survival (Krystal, 1995). Auerhahn and Laub (1984) contend that Holocaust survivors make attempts to integrate the trauma with pre-traumatic memories and experiences, in order to restore the moral balance from their pretraumatic lives, but the trauma never goes away and continues to imprint past, present and future. Greenberg's (1998) model proposes that a single trauma narrative is insufficient to work through the trauma, and instead she asserts that trauma manifests in narrative form as fragments that repeat in multiple narratives. Given the wealth of literature on the clinical benefits of writing about trauma, as well as important questions about its limitations, a key question that this analysis aimed to address was whether or not Levi's repeated efforts at representing his traumatic experiences in Auschwitz show evidence of working through the trauma or whether the trauma resists integration and continues to intrude in

other areas of Levi's writing (i.e., unrelated topics and his representations of pre-traumatic and post-traumatic memories). The analysis of Levi's trauma narratives also aimed to identify the core features of his trauma narratives that could be applied as guidelines for clinical work with trauma survivors, including measures of progress and limitations of treatment.

Findings from the Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis showed that characteristics of Levi's initial trauma narrative, which correlate with research on the traumatized state (Krystal, 1978; Laub and Auerhahn, 1993; Saporta, 2003), included the following: dissociation of Levi's former identity; a disruption of time leading to an eternal present, without access to the past or the future; a lack of self-reflection (self awareness was limited to the body); and a decrease in representational or symbolic thinking. There was evidence that the trauma narrative evolved over time to include a greater sense of agency, an orientation to time that involved a sense of the future, and use of more sophisticated defenses (abstraction and intellectualization as opposed to denial and dissociation). However, a deadening of feeling persisted to some degree throughout his trauma narratives. These shifts show how Levi's position in relation to his traumatic experience becomes more fluid and reflective (e.g., his reflections on Auschwitz in *The Drowned and the Saved*). Over time, Levi was able to represent his traumatic memories to himself with an expanded awareness and increased emotional responsiveness rather than merely repeating the deadness and constriction of the original experience in his retelling (e.g., the shifts in the

two air raid passages, and the encounter with the Russian soldiers discussed in the section, “Contact with the Outside”).

In his first iteration of the trauma narrative in *Survival in Auschwitz*, the affect was predominantly detached from his direct account of his time in Auschwitz, insofar as his expression of personal thoughts, feelings, and the personal meaning he made of the experience was quite restricted compared to later writing. The affective quality of the language in *Survival in Auschwitz* is most characterized by, and what he explicitly described as, his emotional numbing and the feeling of deadness while he was in the Lager (with the exception of the physical shame he felt with the German women in the lab). The emotional experience that was largely missing (inconsistently present) in the initial trauma narrative was shame and an acknowledgement of being in the role of a victim. These emotional reactions become more accessible and integrated within his sense of self in his later trauma narratives (*The Reawakening* and *The Drowned and the Saved*), although this was accompanied by greater self-condemnation, a return of animal identifications and increased sensory details, indicating an echo of the way shame was initially expressed in *Survival in Auschwitz*.

The affect that was missing or muted in *Survival in Auschwitz* is also displaced and more fully expressed in the more imaginative pieces he wrote (short stories, essays) that do not recount the traumatic events explicitly. For Levi, the ability to bring to life his emotional response to trauma in his writing emerges *elsewhere*, in stories and writing about non-trauma-related subject matter, but linked to the traumatic events by the repetition of key themes associated with the traumatic experience. This correlates with theory about trauma that the affect is separated from the cognitive processing of the

traumatic events (see Breuer and Freud, 1893; Saporta, 2003; van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1995).

Levi's representation of his traumatic experience in Auschwitz corresponds with Greenberg's structural features of trauma narratives, in that there are fragments of the trauma that repeat throughout the body of his work long after they appear in his initial trauma narrative. Specifically, themes of fire and explosions, animal imagery, abstraction and matter, and the failure of representation recur throughout his writing, each of which represents features of Levi's traumatic experience. The repetition of these themes suggests that the initial trauma narrative, regardless of how cohesive and complete the narrative account of the events, was not sufficient to work through the experience of the trauma, for the trauma continued to manifest itself in many more iterations and narratives.

The repeated narrative fragments that were iconic of Levi's experience in the Lager inform us of the way the trauma gained representational form and its psychological legacy. The fact that these fragments continued to repeat to such a degree and with such variation on each theme, demonstrates the intrusive and persistent quality of traumatic memory. The memory of the trauma continues to live on psychically and structure the perception of new experiences and old (pre-traumatic) memories.

Fires and explosions are iconic of a destructive force that Levi was drawn to and compelled to re-experience in diluted forms. The representation of explosions demonstrates a form of affect regulation, in which he could control his exposure to traumatic memories of destruction. By reigniting fires and explosions in his narratives, Levi could safely reenact the feeling of being out of control and at the mercy of powerful

forces, in order to gain a sense of mastery over memories in which he was overwhelmed. Fires and explosions operate similarly to the clash between abstract principles and the reality of (traumatic) matter, for both instances show the destruction of comprehension and the insufficiency of rational understanding. As Levi was clearly a person who relied on intellectualization to engage with the world, to lose his rational comprehension would have exacerbated the experience of losing of control, which he would try to regain in his writing.

If Levi's knowledge of the crematoriums was indirect and incomplete while he was in Auschwitz, then one could argue that the many fires in his writing are an unconscious repetition due to his mind's effort to integrate knowledge that he did not have when he was in Auschwitz. After learning about the crematoriums, Levi's memory of the trauma would have been made more incomplete, which would have compromised his ability to make sense of his traumatic experience. The fires in Levi's later writing could correlate to the different levels of knowing trauma that Laub and Auerhahn (1993) wrote about, where the fires would correspond to somatosensory fragments, or Brewin et al's (1996) situationally-accessible memory (i.e., flashbacks, traumatic dreams). Since Levi fully learned about the crematoriums after his liberation, then the acquisition of this knowledge may have been traumatic in the sense that Freud wrote about "deferred action" (Freud, 1918). The knowledge of a traumatic experience that could not be comprehended at the time (i.e., witnessing the primal scene prior to puberty) becomes (more) traumatic when the experience becomes fully understood later in time. Leaving aside the issue of exactly what Levi knew about the crematoriums, he had ample direct knowledge of destruction and death from his time in Auschwitz, and this knowledge itself

could have been incompletely registered or known due to the way traumatic memories resist encoding in verbal and symbolic memory as a result of dissociation and stress. The fires and explosions in his later writing are echoes of destruction from Auschwitz, and the repetition signals a process of reintegrating the traumatic knowledge with his nontraumatic associations, in order to detoxify the memory of the trauma.

Animal imagery in Levi's writing highlights the disavowal of the emotional experience of shame and suffering, which was displaced into the animal realm. Similar to the fluidity between animal and human forms, the themes of abstraction and matter convey the breakdown of the boundary between human and nonhuman, living and dead. The debasement of the human condition in the Lager was to such an extreme that it no longer fit within Levi's notion of the human, and a new subject was required to express what happened in Auschwitz. The discussion of animal imagery in the field of literary criticism by Belpoliti and Gordon (2007) comes to a similar conclusion, but they do not address the psychological aspect of what it means to identify with animals and the defensive properties this served. The diffusion of identity is central to both animal imagery and abstraction and matter, in which Levi's emotional experience of Auschwitz is displaced onto varied identities and bodies and registered predominantly in physical properties. Levi's explicit narrative account of the war's impact on his own identity, in contrast, is very slim, for he preferred to focus outside of himself. This was likely a feature of his pretraumatic personality style, but it also mirrors his defensive reaction to the Lager, which was to become an observer while his inner awareness was numbed. In an attempt to gain distance from the emotional impact of the trauma, Levi intellectualized, abstracted, or assumed the role of the ecological observer. However, in

his narratives, the details of the trauma reassert themselves in a return of the repressed: imagery of death and carnage in a chemical factory, the shame felt by a kangaroo, or the fearful, moaning dog who cannot forget his own experience of being attacked. The refuge Levi sought in new forms, subjects that were seemingly impersonal and dissimilar to his memories of the Lager, became contaminated by his personal trauma nonetheless.

However, Levi's use of displacement enabled a deeper engagement with, and expression of, his response to the trauma than his initial trauma narrative, and his representations of trauma became more varied and transformed into something new. Comparing Levi's observational stance in *Survival in Auschwitz* to his more imaginative works of fiction and poetry, demonstrates Oliner's (2000) assertion that memories of the trauma bear the trace of both the external reality and the personal, unconscious elaboration of its meaning to the individual. *Survival in Auschwitz* may be a version of the traumatic events that correlates with Oliner's use of the term "presentation," which is a fantasy that a memory can reproduce external reality without the interference of personal or unconscious meaning. Levi's later writing shows more clearly the idiosyncratic, personalized meaning he made of the trauma, yet the initial traces can be found retrospectively in *Survival in Auschwitz*. The story of "Carbon" is a play between loss and resurrection, the struggle to maintain continuity with the past and the equal, if not greater, struggle to form a new bond to the present. It was not just a reiteration of something that he wrote before; it was an imaginative synthesis of themes that relate to his trauma (loss and transformation), his love of chemistry, and a bridge between the timeless and abstract and the concrete present. In "Carbon," Levi transformed a fragment of the trauma into a new work of art.

The failure of representation overlaps with the other three fragments because all of them deal with the destruction of form. The failure of language is a type of dedifferentiation, in which units of meaning lose their integrity and their ability to signify meaning that corresponds to reality. Literary criticism on the impossible nature of representation in Levi's writing as an example of Holocaust testimony (Ferme, 2001; Gilliland, 1992; and Scheiber, 2006) deals with this same theme in another discipline, with an emphasis on the limits of aesthetic representation, and the unique discursive characteristics of testimony. The current study situates the theme of failed representation in the clinical context of trauma's impact on symbolization and the relational component of communication. Levi's meditation on the failure of language in the Lager and in his own use of language as a writer corresponds directly to the trauma – trauma defies symbolic representation. Despite Levi's long career as a writer, he continued to doubt his ability to accurately communicate his traumatic experience to others; this in itself is a repetition of the traumatic state of disconnection from others. He felt that his narratives did not successfully represent reality or loss and therefore could not contain the affect of his traumatic memories. The development of this theme in his short story "The Fugitive," presents the practice of writing as alienating and draining the narrator, rather than providing a sense of personal fulfillment or completion, hence losing its capacity to act as a sublimation.

Levi presents two contrasting models of narrating trauma. One model shows the potential for the evolution of the trauma narrative towards an integration of negative affect within identity and traumatic with non-traumatic memories, and an increased sense of mastery over the trauma. Alternatively, he also presents a model of narrating trauma as

an impossible chase, in which the writer does not achieve integration, but disintegrates; the traumatic memory and its associated negative affect resist integration within identity and overpower the writer, who becomes more cut off from his memory and himself. The two models appear alongside each other in Levi's writing, yet they do not interact and he never discusses or makes a comparison between them. Rather, the competing models are split representations of trauma narratives, and could be explained as products of dissociation. These contrasting models form a paradox – one which can hopefully generate a new understanding of trauma narratives, rather than present an impasse. This paradox mirrors the opposing sides of the literature review and leads to the central questions of the current study on trauma narratives.

Working Through

Can the survivor ever form a new integrated identity that incorporates the traumatic memory and its accompanying affect, or does the traumatic memory and the affect remain frozen, indigestible and resistant to change after liberation? Do the shifts and evolutions of Levi's multiple trauma narratives provide evidence for a process of working through, or do they suggest a failure to move beyond the trauma, while accomplishing as much integration and working through as is possible in a narrative form?

Levi clearly did not fully work through the trauma in his initial trauma narrative because he continued to write evolving versions of the trauma narrative after *Survival in Auschwitz*, and the iconic fragments of the trauma continued to emerge, indicating that

the trauma was never finished finding representation in his narratives. However, there is evidence that he did work through aspects of his trauma in his writing over time. The evolution of the trauma narrative included these signs of working through: movement from passivity to activity, greater sense of identity, increased awareness and integration of negative affect, less primitive defenses, and a portrayal of time to include the past and future. The shift in his representation of shame included the change from physical reaction to moral outrage, which is a progression from enactive to representational memory. His narration shifted to include greater integration of the trauma within his larger personal history, including continuity with periods before and after the trauma, particularly in *The Periodic Table*. Levi's attempts at working through trauma in his writing included the infiltration of the traumatic memory (somatosensory fragments or echoing themes from the trauma) into his pre and post-traumatic memories in addition to his creative writing on other subjects. On the one hand, this appears pathological, indicating the dominance of the trauma in Levi's mind. However, according to Auerhahn and Laub (1984), one can also view this as a process of integrating the traumatic memory with normal memories and associations, in order to resurrect positive values from before the trauma. Levi's body of writing suggests that he was attempting to wear away the trauma by diluting it in his larger store of memories and associations and reconnecting the trauma to more tolerable, comprehensible experiences. This view of the working through process is the one first held by Freud, quoted previously.

A memory of such a trauma, even if it has not been abreacted,
enters the great complex of associations, it comes alongside other

experiences, which may contradict it, and is subjected to rectification by other ideas...In this way a normal person is able to bring about the disappearance of the accompanying affect through the process of association (Breuer and Freud, 1893, p.9).

Hence, the appearance and repetition of iconic fragments alongside normal or everyday memories are attempts at ‘contradicting’ and ‘rectifying’ the trauma by reinstating the dominance of non-trauma-related associations and affects.

Another sign of working through in Levi’s body of writing is that the iconic fragments do not statically repeat without changing, rather the successive appearance of the fragments varied greatly and with increasing symbolic complexity. The short story, “The Tranquil Star,” and the chapter on “Carbon” in *The Periodic Table* are both instances in which Levi wrote about loss and incorporated multiple perspectives within the narratives (i.e., the two observers in the “The Tranquil Star,” and the different formations of matter in “Carbon”) in addition to the omniscient narrator. Both pieces are aware of their own reception by the reader (i.e., the period at the end of “Carbon” connects the reader to the content of the story, and the man in the observatory is a model for the reader’s own observational position in “The Tranquil Star”). Though lacking an objective measure, I can also argue based on my subjective reading experience that these stories are also emotionally evocative and engage the reader’s emotional responses, meaning that Levi was able to successfully communicate and connect to the reader on an emotional level. These stories are highly reflective and situate fragments of the traumatic memory in a representational context.

However, there are features of Levi's representation of trauma that do not get worked through in his writing over time, and aspects of his traumatized state that are never integrated within his identity. The fact that the iconic fragments continued to repeat in Levi's narratives throughout his whole life suggests that the trauma could not be resolved in narrative; it could not be put to rest. The feeling of deadness, the urge to self-destruct, and feeling inhuman (both as an animal and as dead matter) appear throughout Levi's body of work, which points to an inability to move beyond his initial emotional response to trauma, and the sustained loss this entailed to his sense of identity.

In the "Story of Ten Days" from *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi regained the capacity to connect to others, but the motivation to become close to others was not a given after liberation. Levi did not simply regain a communal orientation that he had lost, but rather this capacity was tentatively resumed and then ebbed, alternating with an orientation toward solitude. His persistent critique of language and written communication throughout his career is an echo of his initial trauma: his alienation from others and his inability to be witnessed or understood. Additionally, to qualify the above remarks on "Carbon," the story is also indicative of how avoidant Levi was of object relationships, despite its success as a creative work of fiction and symbolic complexity. "Carbon" shows Levi's detachment from object ties, while he attempts to bridge this gap between himself and others by animating an inanimate piece of dead matter. He picked an atom of carbon because it was a safe subject due to its distance from himself and people, while symbolically and abstractly it shares a vital connection to people as the "element of life." The journey of the carbon atom mimics transformation and liveliness while it concludes with stasis – the period at the end is a motionless record of life and action that took place

in the past tense. The story also includes no personal interaction, and it is a journey undertaken in solitude. In other words, in his narratives he never fully returned to life after the Lager despite attempts to maintain object ties and a feeling of liveliness.

His conflicted and vacillating response to liberation, which continued long after the trauma, was due to having just survived an encounter with death in the Lager; he continued to be immersed in that encounter with death, even though it was now in the past tense. The passages from “The Story of Ten Days” show one of the qualities of trauma narratives described by Greenberg (1998) and Lifton (1995): survival as a “hovering between life and death” (Greenberg, p. 325). Caruth writes about this double quality as well:

Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it? At the core of these stories... is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival. (Caruth, 1996, p. 7).

Levi’s body of work includes many moments in which the encounter with death resurfaces long after liberation, sometimes in the form of emotional deadness or the feeling of overwhelming loss. The anticlimactic endings to many of the chapters in *The Periodic Table*, the despairing conclusion to “The Molecule’s Defiance” (“the prevalence of confusion over order, and of unseemly death over life”) and the cool withdrawal from bursts of destruction in the recurrent fires and explosions, such as “The Death of

Marinese,” are just a few examples of when life submits to feelings of deadness and loss in his writing. Though there are ways in which the emotional impact of the trauma was counteracted by other life experiences and positive associations from his larger life narrative (i.e., memories of successful conquest, friendship, creativity and mastery), there is evidence in his writing that increasing access to the negative emotions associated with the trauma was not balanced or counteracted.

The grim conclusion that Levi reached in 1986, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, was that “rethinking” the past led to many suicides of survivors, and this was published a year before his own suicide. Without making a direct claim about the cause of his suicide, the shift in his writing over the years indicates that towards the end of his life, Levi was increasingly able to access and articulate the affect of his subjective experience of the Lager that had previously been defensively blocked off. The result was a “flood of rethinking and depression,” and it is questionable whether this was an integration of affect that Levi could contain or whether it overwhelmed him (Levi, 1986, p.76).

Krystal’s (1995) thirty-year follow up interviews of Holocaust survivors that showed increased depression and pathology occurring alongside the psychological vicissitudes of aging raise the question of whether changes in Levi’s writing over time reflect a similar process of aging, in addition to traumatic sequelae. This would suggest that Levi’s assessment of his past grew more negative, or that his attempts to integrate his past memories as he grew older became more difficult and problematic. Following this hypothesis, the sequence of changes in his texts over time would reflect a decrease of working through Levi’s past as he became older. There is no definitive conclusion to be reached within the confines of this study about the distinct role of aging as separate from

the long-term impact of trauma, but Krystal's observations support the findings of the current study that traumatic memories resist integration over time. Consistent with a decrease in integration, Levi's short story, "The Fugitive," suggests that his narratives no longer served to contain memory in the way they had "many years ago," which he described in "Why Does One Write." Though it is clear that there were benefits to writing about trauma, the concept of "working through" does not accurately capture the process of responding to trauma expressed in Levi's narratives. The paradox of Levi's contrasting models of narrating trauma reflects the benefits of using writing to express, contain and integrate traumatic memory, but also for him the impossibility of resolving the negative aftereffects of trauma through forming narratives.

A New Model for Trauma and Trauma Narratives

Based on this study, working through may be a psychoanalytic concept more appropriate to describe the process of treating intrapsychic conflict and neurosis, rather than trauma. In severe trauma aspects of the traumatic experience are never resolved. Despite Levi's active cognitive and emotional engagement with the trauma through writing over a period of forty years, the trauma continued to intrusively structure his representation of himself and the world. The process of responding and adapting to severe trauma that is charted in Levi's narratives suggests that there is no endpoint or resolution to the impact of trauma. Therefore, it could be that working through is a psychoanalytic model that is pertinent to a different clinical problem (learning in normal development, mourning loss that is not the result of trauma/violence) or types of

pathology (conflict in neurosis) where an endpoint, though difficult to precisely define, is more possible. The process of repair and adaptation for Holocaust survivors or survivors of severe trauma may share some similar features with working through, but the irresolvable nature of trauma requires a new model that is more congruent with its particular course.

A different model is needed to understand the process of traumatization and its prolonged impact on the survivor's identity, affect regulation and the ability to connect to others. The traditional trauma narrative, in which the events are organized chronologically and put into a single narrative, is an insufficient representation of the trauma because it functions partly as a defensive screen against disavowed personal meaning and emotion. A new model for trauma narratives is based on the failure of representation that forms the core of traumatic experience and an endless return of partial and fragmentary representations of the traumatic experience. A single representation of the trauma is partial and incomplete, whereas a collection of fragments across multiple narratives provides a more accurate, but never fully complete, representation of the emotional impact and meaning of the trauma. Arguably, a collection of scattered fragments across multiple narratives is a real departure from traditional notions of narrative, but this discrepancy highlights how the application of a traditional linear narrative to trauma is a forced and ill-fitting model. This new model does not conceive of an endpoint or resolution to trauma, but assumes at the outset that it is impossible to create closure for a traumatic experience through forming a narrative. The end of a particular narrative never corresponds with the end of trauma.

The findings of the current study support Greenberg's (1998) notion that trauma manifests itself in narrative as a series of echoes, in which fragments of the trauma appear after temporal delays across multiple narratives. Greenberg describes the survivor's narrative as hovering between life and death, both in terms of the evanescent presence of the echo (thinking of the echo as an acoustic phenomenon that is somewhere between presence and absence), and the survivor's narrative continues to involve an encounter with death or permanent loss. This model explicitly argues against working through or a resolution to the representation of trauma.

Auerhahn and Laub's (1984) conception that traumatic memory is repeatedly projected onto old and new memories in an attempt to integrate the trauma and restore pretraumatic values was also supported in the qualitative analysis. One clear example of restoring pretraumatic values is the chapter "Iron" from *The Periodic Table*, in which Levi memorializes hiking with his friend Sandro before he was captured by the Fascists, which gave him a feeling of strength and being a "master of one's destiny" (1975, p.48). Laub and Auerhahn's concept provides an explanation for the saturation of the survivor's memory and ideation with fragments of the trauma. Their explanation has a trajectory towards adaptation to life after the trauma, but it has no endpoint and it is not unidirectional; it includes movements backwards in time towards the trauma and away from new experiences (that are untainted by the trauma).

The findings of the current study also indicate that a new model of trauma narratives should include the evolution of the trauma narrative over time (in terms of agency, expression of affect, defenses and inclusion of time perspective, as discussed above) and the creative evolution of the trauma fragments. The repetition of Levi's

trauma fragments show the possibility for change and increased complexity in the way the fragments are reproduced in novel combinations in order to express emotion or the experience of the trauma in ways that were previously inaccessible. A new model for conceptualizing trauma narratives would measure success in terms of themes related to the trauma that repeat across multiple narratives with increasing variation. In this way the associative net widens as the trauma becomes increasingly integrated with ordinary associations. Ideally, the negative affect connected to the traumatic memory decreases in intensity with the widening associations. However, at least in Levi's case, negative affect never goes away, and it is likely that its intensity will return in times of vulnerability. A new model of trauma must include the limitations of ever completely overcoming trauma.

A key distinction must be made between repetitions of the trauma theme that are positive vs. those that are negative. Negative repetitions would involve no variation or progression from the original trauma, and no tie to any object. Levi's submission to feeling dead in "The Story of Ten Days" is an example of a negative repetition because it is both an exact repetition of the traumatized state in circumstances outside of the trauma, and there is an absence of an object. Although there is variation in "The Molecule's Defiance," there are several components that are repetitions of the trauma without variation, such as the loss of control, the disturbance of the natural order, and the prevailing theme of death. Positive repetitions would include a description of traumatic events in greater detail, or with access to more emotion, such as the encounter with the Russian soldiers in *The Reawakening* and *The Drowned and the Saved*. This would indicate the undoing of dissociation. Positive repetitions would also include an articulation of a new sense of self, such as being more active and in control, which was

seen in the second air raid scene and descriptions of Levi working as a chemist in *The Periodic Table*. The ability to maintain a tie to an object would also be a positive repetition, of which there are few pure examples in Levi's writing. Levi's love of his ancestors in "Argon," friendship with Sandro in "Iron" or his unrequited love for Giulia in "Phosphorus" are three examples. However, Levi's attachment to objects takes place in the past and to people he has lost either due to death or missed opportunities. Levi's attachment to objects is mournful and marked by separation from the object. Nonetheless, in "Argon," "Iron" and "Phosphorus," the emotional connection to objects is expressed, which is an important progression from *Survival in Auschwitz*.

Repair from trauma is a different process from working through because the repetition of the trauma is endless. Levi's repetitions throughout the body of his work are attempts to communicate his experience of the Lager to other people, and this may be the central goal for the trauma narrative: to make someone else feel something of the traumatic experience. To feel understood and not alone with the traumatic memory may be all that can be achieved. These are the humble goals that Levi dreamed of when he was in the Lager, but it took the negative form of a recurrent nightmare of what was beyond his reach. Here, he recounts his dream of the "unlistened-to-story" in *Survival in Auschwitz*:

This is my sister here, with some unidentifiable friend and many other people. They are all listening to me and it is this very story that I am telling...It is an intense pleasure, physical, inexpressible, to be at home, among friendly people and to have so many things to recount: but I cannot help noticing that my listeners

do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent: they speak confusedly of other things among themselves, as if I was not there. My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word.

A desolating grief is now born in me, like certain barely remembered pains of one's early infancy. ...

...and then I remember that it is not a haphazard dream, but that I have dreamed it not once but many times since I arrived here, with hardly any variations of environment or details. I am now quite awake and I remember that I have recounted it to Alberto and that he confided to me, to my amazement, that it is also his dream and the dream of many others, perhaps of everyone. (1947, p.60)

Perhaps Levi wrote throughout his life to get the response he longed for in the dream, but did not get. The pain of trauma is the isolation and disconnection from others, who are unable to provide understanding or consolation. Like the dream, trauma is the feeling of never being able to go home again, to become a stranger to oneself and others, and to never feel the comfort and security one knew in the past. Levi's writing achieves this basic act of emotional communication, and he expresses his suffering in a graceful and carefully modulated form. As he wrote in "Why Does One Write," he does not fling his feelings at the reader, but transforms them into something accessible. A new model of trauma narratives would define progress and repair as developing the ability to evoke an emotional response in the reader. However, based on Levi's negative model of narrating trauma in "The Fugitive," creating a narrative in itself is insufficient to provide the writer a sense of being listened to and understood. Feeling witnessed and getting an

emotional response requires the presence of a real person, which cannot be replaced by a text or the writer's imagined audience.

Clinical Implications

This study indicates that clinicians working with trauma survivors should shift focus away from creating a single "true" trauma narrative. A patient's traditional trauma narrative that describes the traumatic events can never be a complete representation of the trauma as it also serves to defend against personal meaning and emotion, which are disavowed and displaced. Clinicians should attend to fragments of the traumatic experience that repeat over time and themes that uniquely express the meaning of the trauma for the individual, for example, recurrent identifications that act to modify the patient's sense of self. Following the fragments of trauma over time can allow the clinician to see whether they change and if they are used in conjunction with a wider range of associations, a sign of integration.

Applying the findings from the qualitative analysis to clinical material from therapy sessions, the clinician should attend to the same signs of evolution of the trauma narrative in the patient's verbal expression. General signs of repair and adaptation to life after trauma would include: progression over time in the survivor's self-descriptions from passive to active, a shift from primitive to more sophisticated defenses, greater awareness of affect, greater sense of continuity in the survivor's identity from before and after the trauma, and a more fluid sense of time when accessing memories of the trauma. It is likely that patients will repeat the traumatized emotional state in circumstances unrelated

to the trauma, particularly soon after the trauma, and when triggered by cues in the environment that prime memory of the trauma.

The therapist must maintain a sense of hope for the patient that their emotional suffering will decrease, but must not have the unrealistic expectation that the trauma's impact will disappear completely: treatment should be framed around repair and increased tolerance of traumatic memory, not "cure." The therapist must help the patient mourn the loss of his/her sense of self and previous view of the world from before the trauma, while reconstructing a sense of continuity with the pretraumatic identity. Accessing negative affect from the traumatic experience that was previously disavowed may not be possible for every patient, and treatment should not be geared towards the uncovering of painful affect unless the patient has significant ego strengths and a strong working alliance with the therapist. Some patients may successfully decrease the intensity of the emotional charge attached to traumatic memories through exposure and reprocessing of the traumatic memory (e.g., mourning loss, examining unconscious assumptions about the meaning of the trauma for the patient and what kind of possibilities are open to them in life after trauma). Negative affects can be integrated into the patient's sense of self after reliving aspects of the emotional experience in treatment, and gaining reflective awareness of the connection between the experience in treatment and the past traumatic memory. Surviving the act of remembering detoxifies the power of the affect attached to the memory and decreases the phobic power of the traumatic memory. Patients may be overwhelmed not only by the memory of being a victim, but by the intensity of their own aggression, which may have previously been disavowed or turned towards the self. It is common for survivors of trauma to identify with the

aggressor, and treatment may need to focus on helping the patient manage their hatred by finding ways to sublimate anger rather than aggressing against others or punishing the self.

The relationship between the trauma survivor and the therapist is key to recovery. Laub (1991) wrote about the importance of the therapist playing the role of witness to the survivor's testimony, and how the survivor feeling witnessed and accompanied by the therapist while they relive the trauma allows the patient to integrate traumatic memory with greater acceptance. Laub writes about the importance of the therapist witnessing on three levels: the therapist witnesses his/her own experience while listening, s/he witnesses the patient's experience, and the act of witnessing itself must be witnessed (Laub, 1991, p.76). Laub argues that the therapist's awareness of the process of witnessing, the difficulty of telling and listening, the struggle to be present and not avoid the memory, brings continuity from the past trauma to the present. The act of telling the therapist the story of the trauma allows the patient to reconnect to an inner witness and regain a degree of "human relatedness" that had been lost during the trauma. Witnessing does not restore what was lost, but involves a reliving and acknowledgment of loss, with the added dimension of no longer being alone with it (Laub, 1991, p.89).

If the patient does not have the capacity to connect to an object than this would be the focus of treatment: developing trust in the therapeutic relationship, feeling safe, and gaining the ability to express private thoughts and feelings without judgment. If the patient can form a connection to the therapist and communicate the traumatic experience, the therapist must try to demonstrate to the patient his/her understanding of the emotional experience. The success of treatment will likely depend on whether the patient feels that

the therapist can feel what they went through to some degree. The therapist can be thought of as a trauma partner who is brought into the experience of reliving aspects of the trauma in treatment as a participant in the transference and countertransference. In the transference, patients of severe trauma will see the therapist in various roles related to the initial trauma (i.e., perpetrator, victim, or rescuer), which can change at different moments in treatment. Davies and Frawley (1992), writing about adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, asserted that the analyst and patient participate in all of the roles associated with the trauma in a changing “kaleidoscope” of transference and countertransference paradigms at different moments in treatment due to projective identification and counteridentification. The same principle of externalizing the trauma and reliving it in treatment can be expected of all survivors of severe trauma. Many patients will bring their own “dream of the unlistened-to-story” into treatment as a negative transference paradigm that would be an obstacle to forming a connection to the therapist and would require attention. When the therapist is put in such a negative role in the transference, s/he must not resist the projection but eventually interpret the connection between the transference and the patient’s past. It may be necessary to point out discontinuities in the patient’s projections or share the therapist’s different perspective when viewing the same phenomena, in order to increase the patient’s ability to interpret and entertain multiple views on reality. This process of negotiating different points of view between the patient and therapist can be one of the ways the patient learns about unconscious assumptions, but also gains contact with the therapist and their emotional experience.

One aim in the treatment of trauma is to broaden the patient's ability to reflect on aspects of their traumatic past that were previously unavailable for conscious reflection due to dissociation, and to integrate parts of the self that were defensively split off. Stern (1997) provides a view of dissociation that is not just a passive response to being overwhelmed by traumatic experiences that conflict with one's sense of self, but rather as an active process in which certain experiences are restricted from conscious formulation and imaginative elaboration in language (p.87). Experiences that are dissociated remain "unformulated" in order to avoid anxiety. Stern builds on Sullivan's view of identity as a collection of multiple, discontinuous self-states that are organized under the illusion of a unitary identity and he holds that of the many potential aspects of the self, the interpersonal field determines which self-states are free to be fully formulated and expressed consciously (p.147 – 151). Therefore, Stern's view of treatment consists of a space that is a co-created interpersonal field in which previously dissociated, unformulated aspects of self-experience can become consciously elaborated. The analyst looks for rigid repetition, gaps or incongruities in the patient's stories so that previously unquestioned assumptions can be questioned, brought into the light and the patient can formulate a new understanding of himself (p.241). This can include the emotional meanings attached to traumatic memories, or assumptions about one's identity as a result of trauma that were never fully formulated, and therefore could not be understood, challenged or put to rest. Stern's view of unformulated experience may be one way of interpreting Levi's fragments of trauma that repeated throughout his narratives; the fragments, though put into language, remained unformulated according Stern's

description of language that remains “disembodied, unstoried wanderings” and cut off from a sense of self (p.94).

Bromberg (1998) writes about the treatment of trauma and dissociation and applies it to a new theory of selfhood. Bromberg also argues that everyone’s self includes a multiplicity of shifting self-states, and health is the “capacity to feel like one self while being many” (p. 186). Bromberg asserts that dissociation is an adaptive response to trauma that maintains the self’s experience of continuity in the face of intolerable conflict (p. 182). In the treatment of traumatized patients with dissociated self-states, the shift between self-states indicates the inability of the patient to experience intrapsychic conflict between the states, which results in the need for dissociation and the destruction of links between states (p.255). Bromberg writes that the goal treatment for traumatized patients is to enable them to move from the expression of dissociated self-states in unsymbolic forms in the analytic relationship (i.e., enactments in the transference and countertransference) to verbal expression, the ability to reflect on their own mind and to experience conflict between self-states (p.183-185). Bromberg writes that the analytic relationship allows the patient to recognize his multiple self-states that were previously incompatible in a single, ongoing context, which slowly decreases the need for dissociation.

Applying Bromberg’s theory of multiple self-states to the findings from the qualitative analysis, Levi’s dissociated models of narrating trauma can be understood as discontinuous self-states that were incompatible and could not yet speak to each other. Additionally, Levi’s representation of destruction and rage in the form of fires and explosions, can be seen as examples of self-states that were dissociated and appeared in

striking contrast to his dominant narrative of rationality, emotional restraint and the creation of order out of chaos. These components can be understood by the reader or analyst as evidence of incompatible aspects of Levi's self, all of which were responses to trauma. Since he was unable to experience them consciously as conflict, they appear as isolated, dissociated events. The goal of treatment for a traumatized patient would be to first bring the dissociated fragments into awareness, identifying the split off fragments (e.g., aggression, shame, victimhood), in order to create a more continuous experience of wholeness for the patient.

Treatment is a relational process that make use of the therapist's own multiple self-states as the patient recreates the trauma and expresses the dissociated self-states in the transference and countertransference. The patient externalizes the fear, helplessness and all of the emotions associated with the trauma so that the therapist feels some form of the emotions too. The patient's ability to see the therapist's reaction, to witness the therapist's experience of the same traumatic emotions, allows the patient to contact previously dissociated aspects of himself along with some confirmation of not being alone with the trauma. Trauma creates a sense of alienation from others and "exposes 'the unbearable embeddedness of being'" (Stolorow, 1999); it is this sense of estrangement that must be healed in treatment. In treatment, the patient can make contact with another real person, the therapist can become a partner to the patient, in the way an imagined audience or a written text can never fulfill. If the fundamental impact of trauma is an impaired capacity to connect to self and others, the rupture of relational bonds, then treatment must aim to restore this relational orientation in the survivor of trauma.

Treatment of severe trauma must take place in the context of a human relationship with a clinician, which narratives cannot replace.

Reflections on Levi's Suicide

Though the aim of this study was to focus on Levi's narratives, as opposed to Levi the man, in order to draw conclusions about trauma narratives, it is inevitable that aspects of Levi's biography played a role in influencing the interpretation of his texts. As previously stated, biographical information that Levi wrote about in his texts, particularly his memoirs, were taken into account as data to be used in the qualitative analysis. However, Levi's suicide is a key event that took place outside of his texts that must be addressed because it unquestionably had some influence on the way his texts were studied in the qualitative analysis. Levi's suicide cannot be directly connected to his experience in Auschwitz or his ability to work through trauma. His suicide took place forty-two years after he was liberated from Auschwitz, years in which he raised a family and led an accomplished life. Additionally, he had a history of depression and he was experiencing a severe bout of clinical depression leading up to his suicide. It is not possible to make an interpretation about the meaning of Levi's suicide, and certainly not about its cause. But one could argue that there is a clear link between this study's conclusion that his narratives reflect a failure to work through trauma and the fact that he committed suicide.

I do acknowledge that his suicide influenced my reading of his writing insofar as it directed my attention to depressive content and recurring fragments of traumatic

memory - but once I began to look for it, it was abundant and plain to see. This dissertation grew out of an earlier, smaller paper about *The Periodic Table*, in which I argued that there was evidence of working through and Levi's ability to digest and transform traumatic memory into symbolic expression that had evolved from direct experience to reflection and the creation of something new. At first read, Levi's writing conveyed to me a sense of hope and transformation; moving beyond rather than closing off. Though with continued reading and further reflection on a wider selection of his texts, I found Levi's writing had a different affect on me, and I began to pick up on much more depressive content, negative identifications, defensive processes and iterations of the traumatic memory that I was unable to see at first. Which is to say that I believe I did not want to see depressive content in Levi's writing when I began to read him because I wanted to view his writing as evidence of triumph over the final solution and the resilient nature of the human spirit. Initially, my reaction as a reader may have been to identify with Levi's own defenses and disavowal of depressive affect to support my own emotional response to the Holocaust. The development of the current study and the question of working through aimed to draw conclusions that were not one-sided, and could reflect the complexity of Levi's writing and trauma narratives, by identifying the variety of its components. To equate the failure of working through in Levi's writing with his suicide would be to miss the remarkable achievement of Levi's writing as a deep engagement with trauma, and to apply a narrow and linear view to the aftermath of severe trauma.

Limitations of the Present Study and Areas for Future Study

A key limitation to the current study is that it was based on Levi's texts and not clinical data. The conclusions of the study are theoretical and may not be valid when generalized to other trauma survivors or clinical populations. The intent of the study was to examine an accomplished writer who was a trauma survivor because the representation of his trauma was polished and worked on. Therefore, the features of trauma found in Levi's texts may be more evident in clinical populations with patients who have not worked on the representation of trauma. However, it is also possible that Levi's gifts with language and ability to communicate make the findings less applicable to patients who lack the same facility with verbal expression. The results of the present study may also be more pertinent to Holocaust or genocide-related trauma or traumas involving violent perpetrators. The findings may not be valid if applied to victims of different types of trauma or without a clear perpetrator (e.g., natural disasters, medical illness, car accidents), or traumas that are less severe or shorter in duration (e.g., burglary, mugging). Future studies could examine the trauma narratives of survivors who experienced other types of trauma.

Applying the current study on Levi's narratives to clinical work with patients may not be an accurate application because clinical work with a patient and therapist, being two people and not just one, presents a markedly different set of variables. Clinical work with trauma survivors differs from a textual analysis because the therapist can intervene and respond directly to the patient. The therapist can respond to the patient drawing upon their countertransference, as opposed to the reader whose subjective response to a text

cannot be communicated directly to the writer. The relationship between the writer and his/her reading audience is not analogous to the patient-therapist relationship. A patient in therapy is not forming narratives in isolation, but rather is in a dialogue with the therapist, which may affect the way the traumatic memory emerges and gains representational form. Much communication in therapy is nonverbal and includes patterns of interaction between the patient and therapist, so there may be manifestations of trauma in therapy that are not addressed by the present study of trauma narratives.

Empirical studies should be conducted examining multiple trauma narratives over time in clinical populations to determine the validity of the results and their applicability to different clinical populations, which could include survivors of different types of trauma. A qualitative study of transcripts from multiple therapy sessions with a trauma survivor could also be compared to the present study to see whether verbal representations of trauma in a therapy session yield different results.

The qualitative nature of the current study was designed to identify theoretical hypotheses that could then be studied using quantitative methods in order to test the theoretical results empirically. Future studies could be conducted analyzing Primo Levi's texts with computerized word-count programs such as Pennebaker's Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) program or Bucci's Discourse Attribute Analysis Program (DAAP), to determine if similar results are found in terms of changes in cognitive or emotion words across trauma narratives. Similarly the subjective nature of current study's selection of iconic fragments could be tested by tracking "iconic" words throughout Levi's texts with a computer program to identify objectively the pattern of their distribution and context.

Conclusion

Traumatic memory and the impact of trauma on survivors elude direct representation. Fragments of traumatic memory emerge in displaced contexts, out of direct awareness or separate from a description of the traumatic events. The present study aimed to examine Primo Levi's multiple trauma narratives in addition to his fiction, poetry and essays, in order to determine whether forming narratives, in which the trauma is represented directly or in fragments, can successfully "work through" the trauma. Fragments of Levi's traumatic experience were identified and traced throughout his trauma narratives and later writing in order to demonstrate the nonlinear and repetitive way trauma gains representation in narrative. Though his trauma narratives showed signs of evolution and Levi's position in relation to the traumatic events became more active, emotionally responsive and reflective, there was no sign of resolution to the trauma. "Working through" does not apply to the process of repair from trauma, which has no endpoint.

The findings suggest that traditional notion of the trauma narrative, an explicit description of the traumatic events in a single narrative, is itself a defensive construction that does not contain the full personal meaning or emotional response to the trauma. A new model of trauma narratives is put forth, based on Greenberg's conception of trauma manifesting in echoes that repeat without end throughout multiple narratives. The ability to vary the symbolic expression of trauma fragments over time, and to convey the emotional experience to the reader of the narrative is all that can be achieved in the

narration of trauma. Clinicians working with trauma survivors should not focus on the creation of a single narrative, but trace the appearance and evolution of trauma fragments to discern the idiosyncratic meaning and impact of the trauma on the patient. Clinicians should focus on providing the patient with the experience of being witnessed to reverse the feeling of disconnection from self and other.

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