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I hereby confirm that this diploma thesis was written by myself. Quotations from secondary sources, as well as any ideas borrowed or paraphrased passages are clearly marked in the text and acknowledged in the bibliography.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THEORY	4
2.1. DEFINITION OF TRAUMA.....	4
2.2. SYMPTOMS AND EFFECTS OF TRAUMA	7
2.2.1. <i>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)</i>	8
2.2.2. <i>Consequences of childhood trauma</i>	11
2.3. TRAUMA FICTION.....	13
2.3.1. <i>Common topics in trauma fiction</i>	17
2.4. ASPECTS OF NARRATOLOGY	19
2.4.1. <i>Unreliable narration</i>	19
2.4.2. <i>First-person narration</i>	22
2.4.3. <i>Young adult narrators</i>	24
3. ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND TECHNIQUES	28
3.1. <i>WE WERE LIARS</i> AND <i>THE SHOCK OF THE FALL</i> – PLOT SYNOPSES.....	28
3.1.1. <i>We Were Liars</i>	28
3.1.2 <i>The Shock of the Fall</i>	29
3.2. BASIC STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS	31
3.3. UNRELIABILITY	34
3.3.1. <i>Unreliability in We Were Liars</i>	34
3.3.2. <i>Unreliability in The Shock of the Fall</i>	37
3.3.3. <i>Misperceptions and hallucinations</i>	39
3.4. FRAGMENTATION	43
3.4.2. <i>Fragmentation in We Were Liars</i>	44
3.4.2. <i>Fragmentation in The Shock of the Fall</i>	45
3.5. DISRUPTED CHRONOLOGY.....	48
3.5.1. <i>Chronological disruptions in the We Were Liars</i>	48
3.5.2. <i>Chronological disruptions in The Shock of the Fall</i>	49
3.6. INTERTEXTUALITY	52
3.6.1. <i>Intertextuality in We Were Liars</i>	52
3.6.1.1. <i>Fairy tales in trauma fiction</i>	52
3.6.1.2. <i>Other intertextual references</i>	60
3.6.2. <i>Intertextuality in The Shock of the Fall</i>	61
3.7. REPETITION	63
3.7.1. <i>Repetition in We Were Liars</i>	63
3.7.2. <i>Repetition in The Shock of the Fall</i>	66
3.7.3. <i>Guilt as a repetitive motif</i>	69
4. CONCLUSION	75
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY	79
6. ABSTRACT	84
7. ZUSAMMENFASSUNG	85
8. CURRICULUM VITAE	87

1. Introduction

*"[T]rauma [...] is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language." (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4)*

As reflected in this quote by Cathy Caruth, psychological trauma is a phenomenon that has wide-reaching consequences. Trauma affects individuals in such a way that it may be impossible to speak about it in a coherent manner, but instead it can manifest itself in a particular use of language or actions. Children are especially affected by psychological trauma, as their cognitive and emotional abilities are not yet fully developed and the traumatic memories may have a lasting influence on their future life. This is also true for adolescents who are faced with trauma, as they are undergoing a developmental phase that can be challenging even without the additional struggle of overcoming a traumatising event.

Considering the influence of trauma on a person's life, it is understandable that it is also a subject often included in fictional literary works as well as in non-fictional writing. Perhaps more than in other genres, empathy is an essential aspect of trauma fiction, because readers can often experience the consequences of trauma through the narration. As trauma victims frequently struggle with speaking about what has happened to them, narration is also severely affected by psychological trauma. According to Judith Herman, trauma narratives are often told "in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines [the narrators'] credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy" (1). Herman further argues that traumatised individuals can only begin their recovery once the truth is revealed (ibid.), and in this sense, they must find a way to transform their memories into coherent narratives. However, this is often hindered by a dissociation of memories, which stands for an inability to recall the traumatic event.

The question of how psychological trauma manifests itself in novels with young adult narrators will be the focus of this diploma thesis. In order to approach answering this research question, the first part will discuss the theoretical background of trauma and trauma fiction, whereas the second part will provide a detailed analysis of two contemporary examples of the trauma novel. In the theoretical part of my thesis, I will look at the definition of trauma and what its physical and psychological symptoms and consequences are for adults, children and adolescents. This overview will show that trauma can manifest itself in fragmented memories and flashbacks, and can cause what has become known as posttraumatic stress disorder, to name only a few of the various consequences. For this, I will focus in particular on the writings of Cathy Caruth, Clemens Hausmann and Lenore C. Terr. To also provide an overview of trauma fiction, I will use Anne Whitehead's influential *Trauma Fiction* to look at some of the key devices that are used within this literary genre and how these affect both the narration and the reading of such stories. A brief literature review on scholarly works about trauma fiction will then show which topics are commonly discussed in this genre. My thesis will later look at how unreliable narration as well as first-person narration impact on literary works and how they are perceived by readers. In addition, with a look towards the novels analysed in this thesis, I will also discuss the use of young adult narrators, as the works discussed are narrated by adolescents who may be seen as highly unreliable due to their young age and limited life experience.

For the analytical part of this thesis, I will discuss two contemporary novels in detail – *We Were Liars* by Emily Lockhart (2014) and *The Shock of the Fall* by Nathan Filer (2013). I chose these books as they treat a similar subject, i.e. the trauma of losing a loved one at a young age, which has specific consequences on the way the stories are told and structured. Narrating their traumata is challenging for both protagonists, as they struggle extensively with recalling their memories and articulating them. Another aspect that makes these novels particularly interesting is the fact that both protagonists do not only struggle with overcoming their traumata, but they must also come to terms with their perceived feelings of guilt due to their involvement in the traumatic events. Moreover, the novels have different target audiences, with Lockhart's novel

belonging to young adult fiction and Filer's to adult fiction, which also influences the narrative style of these works.

Many works in trauma fiction are either autobiographical or are stories set in historical contexts, such as the Holocaust, while this thesis will focus on individual fictionalised traumata. The main aim of this thesis is to find out how the psychological traumata of the protagonists in *We Were Liars* and *The Shock of the Fall* manifest themselves in their narration. To reach this aim, I will question whether the narrators are reliable and how they make use of the typical conventions of trauma fiction – fragmentation, disrupted chronology, intertextuality and repetition. Additionally, I will also discuss how guilt is used as a repetitive device in both novels. Thus, my thesis will show how these literary devices may be seen as expressions of the truth of psychological trauma in the protagonists' narrations.

2. Theory

2.1. Definition of trauma

The Greek word trauma, which can be translated as “wound”, originally referred to bodily injury, but later also came to be understood as a wound that is inflicted upon the mind (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 3). The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition reflects this change in meaning, describing trauma as “[a] psychic injury, [especially] one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed” (np.). Consequently, there is a clear distinction between trauma which refers to a physical injury that originates from the outside and psychological trauma. This thesis will focus on the latter in connection with young adult narrators.

In her writings on psychological trauma, Laurie Vickroy defines it as “a response to events so overwhelmingly intense that they impair normal emotional or cognitive responses and bring lasting psychological disruption” (ix). Trauma can lead to a person feeling helpless and may either activate strong feelings, such as shock, fear or anger, or lead to a state of emotional numbness (see Hausmann 31), amongst a myriad of other effects. However, whether or not a person experiences an event as traumatic depends on their personality, resources available to them and various protective and risk factors (ibid.). Protective factors may be found in an individual’s biography, the social support they receive or comparisons to other people who are in the same situation, amongst other things (see Hausmann 77-83). In contrast, risk factors may be related to the nature of the event, personality traits, reactions during and after the trauma, and the reactions of the people in the affected person’s social networks (see Hausmann 84-85).

In addition to the fact that not everyone perceives an event as traumatic, there are also differences in the types of events that are considered to be traumatic. The DSM-IV¹ classifies those events as traumatic that are connected to a threat to a person’s life or severe physical injuries, or that threaten a person’s physical integrity, combined with feelings of fear or shock (see Hausmann 41). In general, it can be said that war, illness, violence, sexual

¹ American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fourth Edition*. Washington DC: APA, 2000. 427.

abuse, accidents, natural disasters, diseases, or the death/loss of loved ones may all be seen as traumatic events, although not every person will react to them in the same way. This means that trauma generally comes from the outside and that, in some instances, there may be a clear distinction between one or several perpetrators and victims of trauma. In *Unclaimed Experience* (8), Cathy Caruth blurs such clear distinctions between victims and perpetrators, as she suggests that victimhood cannot be allocated to a singular person. Instead, she uses a parable to demonstrate how a person's trauma is connected to the trauma of another; i.e. how trauma, through listening to another person's wound, leads to another individual (ibid.). She explains this by referring to Freud's example of the story of Tancred (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 2), the protagonist of Tasso's epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Tancred unknowingly kills his love Clorinda in a duel as she has disguised herself; in the aftermath of this loss, he goes into a magic forest where he fights an army. As he strikes a tree with his sword, he realises that Clorinda's soul is trapped in the tree and she mourns that he has caused her another wound. Therefore, Clorinda's wound speaking to Tancred shows how his trauma of wounding her is connected to her own of being hurt by her lover (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 8). However, this view is heavily criticised by Ruth Leys, who argues that Caruth's claims would transform perpetrators into victims because they can bear witness to the trauma of others (Leys 297). Although Leys's argumentation is justified, I consider it important to mention this blurred distinction between perpetrators and victims, as the roles are not always entirely clear, which will be shown in this thesis.

Having discussed the general meaning of trauma, I will now turn to the impact it has on a person's psyche, which may not be immediately visible. In 1889, Pierre Janet coined the term *dissociation*, which refers to the process of splitting memories of a traumatic event from the conscious, moving them to the unconscious, and their resurfacing in the form of psychological or physical symptoms (see Hausmann 12). This removal of memories from the conscious happens when they are of such intensity that they cannot stay in the conscious part of the mind that must keep "the level of excitation or feeling within certain limits" (see Garland 15). Different manifestations of dissociation may be: amnesia, where the affected are unable to recall certain things or aspects of the trauma; depersonalisation, which means that persons consider their own

experiences or feelings as not belonging to themselves; derealisation, where things and other people appear unreal, artificial or lifeless; and the feeling of functioning like a machine (see Hausmann 63).

An important theory that is closely linked to this idea of a memory disappearing and resurfacing at a later stage is Sigmund Freud's concept of *latency* (qtd. in Caruth, *Trauma* 7-8). Freud uses this term to describe the specific period which lies between the event itself and the return of the memories, when the effects of a traumatic experience are not visible. To make this concept clearer, Freud describes that a person may walk away from an accident apparently unharmed, but later develop psychological and motor symptoms that must be effects of the shock of the accident. Caruth concludes that this concept explains the temporal structure of historical experiences: trauma is "not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (*Trauma* 8). Consequently, a person may leave the site of the traumatic event through this latency, but this also means a delayed repeated suffering of the event (see Caruth, *Trauma* 10). This repeated suffering can manifest itself in these mental and physical symptoms that Freud describes, but also in the form of intrusions, dreams and flashbacks. As this section is primarily concerned with the definition of trauma, flashbacks and other symptoms will be discussed at a later stage in this thesis, while the notion of latency is also of relevance in the theoretical chapter on trauma fiction.

Without doubt, trauma affects people differently dependent on to their age and maturity, an aspect that needs to be taken into consideration for this thesis. Matthew, the narrator in *The Shock of the Fall*, suffers the loss of his brother at the age of eight, while Cadence, the narrator in *We Were Liars*, is faced with trauma at the age of fifteen. Thus, Matthew clearly encounters trauma during childhood, but Cadence's age makes it more difficult to pinpoint whether she still suffers from childhood trauma, adult trauma, or possibly also 'adolescent trauma'. Lenore C. Terr, who has published influential works in the field of childhood trauma, does not clearly indicate at what age the term 'childhood trauma' is no longer applicable. Therefore, I will consider Cadence a sufferer of childhood trauma, as fifteen is still quite a young age. This makes Terr's definition of childhood trauma (303) as the result of single blow or a series of

events that leaves a child helpless and unable to cope relevant for both novels. Moreover, it should be pointed out that Clemens Hausmann (43) applies Terr's definitions of different types of trauma during childhood to trauma independent of age, which further presents an opportunity to consider her writings relevant for the literary works in question.

Terr categorises trauma during childhood in two groups: Type I trauma that comes in the form of a sudden, unexpected event; and Type II trauma as a long-standing, anticipated ordeal. Type I traumata were defined as classical childhood traumata by Anna Freud in 1969 (qtd. in Terr 308), while Type II trauma often stands for child abuse and is also characterised by repetition. Terr further writes that the origin of childhood trauma comes from the outside, but it may lead to internal changes in a child (303). The protagonists in both novels experience Type I traumata, which means that it is important to discuss not just the most common effects of trauma, but also those that apply to this particular type.

2.2. Symptoms and effects of trauma

Regardless of the type of trauma, its severity or the age of the affected person, the consequences of trauma can be wide-reaching and affect various areas of life. The degree to which a single or repeated traumatic event can impact on a person's life is not restricted to a specific period of time. The consequences can occur in the form of short-term effects, such as the immediate reaction to the trauma, acute psychological symptoms and immediate coping attempts (Hausmann 45). Additionally, long-term effects may occur, such as chronic symptoms and disorders, permanent deficiencies or unconscious repetition of the traumatic event; while the indirect effects of such an event may also affect a person's social networks (family, friends, workplace) and even lead to the trauma being passed on to the next generation (Hausmann 45).

Immediately after a traumatic event, affected persons can experience acute stress reactions, which lead from an initial feeling of numbness to depression, fear, anger, despair, hyper-activity and withdrawal. These feelings disappear within hours after the person has been able to distance him- or herself from the traumatic environment. If psychological stress persists,

however, these feelings may last between 24 and 48 hours. The DSM-IV uses the term acute stress disorder to describe symptoms occurring immediately after traumatic experiences, such as symptoms of dissociation (amongst others, these may be a feeling of numbness, dissociate amnesia, or an inability to show emotional response), re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance and increased arousal or fear. These symptoms usually last at least two days, but no longer than four weeks. (see Hausmann 55-56)

Regarding the long-term consequences, a large variety of mental-health problems or disorders may develop in the aftermath of traumatic events. These can be enduring personality changes after catastrophic experiences, adjustment disorders, anxiety disorders, depression, dissociative disorders and self-harm, somatisation disorders, personality and borderline disorders, as well as eating disorders (Hausmann 60-62). While these mental-health issues may be pre-dominant in the writings about trauma, physical wellbeing may also be severely affected by it. Enduring physical symptoms in the traumatised persons, particularly those with posttraumatic stress disorder, can be headaches, fatigue, or difficulty sleeping (Hausmann 65). This condensed list of psychological and physical symptoms that may occur in the aftermath of traumata shows that the reactions vary greatly depending on the affected person.

2.2.1. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

In the months and weeks after a traumatic event, those affected may develop post-traumatic stress disorder, often referred to as PTSD. The criteria for PTSD, according to the ICD-10² (European Society for Traumatic Stress studies, np.), are:

- a) The affected person was exposed to a single event or a series of events that were so threatening or catastrophic that they would lead to distress in almost every person.
- b) Intrusions that lead to remembrance or reliving of the trauma, such as flashbacks, memories or dreams (see pages 9-11).
- c) Any circumstances that resemble the stressor, i.e. the cause of the stress, are avoided (if possible), a behaviour that was not present before

² International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision (2000)

the traumatic event. This behaviour can range from avoiding thoughts and feelings related to the event to a state of emotional numbness (Luckhurst 1).

d) One of the following groups of symptoms:

1. Partial or complete inability to recall important aspects of the traumatic event³
2. Persistent symptoms of increased sensitivity or arousal, such as difficulties sleeping, difficulties concentrating or hypervigilance

e) These symptoms occur within six months of the traumatic event or the end of a longer stressful period.⁴

The criteria listed under b), c), and d) 2., intrusions, avoidance behaviour and increased arousal, are the main symptoms of PTSD and the combined occurrence of all three allows for the diagnosis of full PTSD (see Hausmann 58). In contrast, a diagnosis of partial PTSD signifies that only two of the three symptoms appear. The findings of Kessler et al. (1995 and 2005) and Breslau et al. (2003) (both qtd. in Hausmann 59) show a comorbidity of 80 to 90 per cent of PTSD with other mental disorders, such as anxiety disorders, depression, alcoholism and substance abuse, or somatisation disorders.

As this symptom is of high relevance for both novels discussed in this thesis, a brief focus on flashbacks – intrusive memories or impressions of the traumatic event that make the affected person re-experience his or her trauma (Hausmann 47) – is necessary. Flashbacks can appear as sensory impressions, feelings or physical reactions that first occurred during the traumatic event itself. Additionally, this re-experiencing of the traumatic event may also happen in the form of recurring dreams or situations that may be seen as a repetition or echo of the event (see Luckhurst 1). One explanation for the occurrence of such intrusions may be that the traumatised person has not fully understood the trauma and its implications and is thus not able to successfully cope with it (see Ehlers and Clark, qtd. in Hausmann 47). This means that the

³ While the ICD-10 regards avoidance and this inability as separate symptoms, Luckhurst (1) and the DSM-IV (Fischer and Riedesser 45) consider this inability to recall the event a form of avoidance behaviour.

⁴ Two additional criteria are listed by the DSM-IV (Fischer and Riedesser 49):

- f) The syndromes last for more than a month.
- g) The disorder also causes suffering in the social and occupational environment of the traumatised person.

memories cannot be processed completely and they remain fragmented and uncontrollable in the person's mind. Such flashbacks may be triggered by a variety of circumstances, for example, the headlights of a car may trigger memories of an accident or the sound of a gunshot may lead a soldier to recall traumatising war experiences. Generally speaking, flashbacks are particularly stressful for those affected and in order to compensate these intrusions, they react with avoidance behaviour, emotional numbness or social withdrawal (Hausmann 57-58).

In their fragmented and uncontrollable form, the memories are dissociated from a person's explicit memory and cannot be recalled consciously (Hausmann 48). In other words, the traumatised person cannot retrieve the memories as a narrative (Van der Kolk, Hopper and Osterman 25). During an intrusive memory, the affected victim may feel, see or hear elements of the traumatic experience, but they cannot be translated into language – a phenomenon that is referred to as “speechless terror” (Van der Kolk, Hopper and Osterman 26). This means that the victim's body feels as if it was being traumatised again, leading to a state of being “out of touch with [one's own] feelings”, a dissociation of the memory and an inability of the victim to “own” what is happening” (ibid.). In order to be able to speak about the trauma, the victim must, therefore, transform these implicit memories into explicit ones. Once this has happened, the memories can be arranged into a coherent, orderly story and integrated into a person's autobiographical memory through the formation of words and their verbalisation (Hausmann 48). As a consequence, the affected person can give a factual re-telling of the event and eventually will be able to accept what has happened (ibid.) While this thesis does not aim at explaining different methods of trauma therapy, I would like to draw attention to the fact that achieving such a re-telling is an important goal in cognitive behavioural therapy for trauma victims. As a therapy goal, this re-telling can either be a full, detailed account of the traumatic experience where the affected person verbalises every aspect of the event, or a so-called confrontation *in sensu*, which means that the event is re-imagined with all its sensory impressions (Hausmann 118). Should the trauma victim interpret the event in a negative or inappropriate way or constantly speculate what would

have happened if things had been done differently, then a full re-telling will not be possible and coping with the trauma will be hindered (Hausmann 49).

2.2.2. Consequences of childhood trauma

After this general overview of the affects of psychological trauma, I will now focus on the way children experience trauma, as they show different reactions than adults. Although they may go through similar traumata at a later stage of their lives, it is essential to take into account that children are still developing their cognitive, social and physical abilities (Shaw 228). In addition to that, they may react differently according to their specific age and developmental stage (Hausmann 39), with some studies even claiming that children and adolescents are more likely to develop PTSD than adults (Fletcher 1996, qtd. in Shaw 228). Van der Kolk argues that “[c]hildhood trauma is particularly significant because uncontrollable, terrifying experiences may have their most profound effects when the central nervous system and cognitive functions have not yet fully matured” (1987, qtd. in Armsworth and Holaday 49). Adolescents, in contrast, often feel more vulnerable and fragile in the aftermath of traumata or fear “a foreshortened future”, although they react similarly to adults, overall (Shaw 231).

As mentioned before, the findings of Lenore C. Terr are relevant for the analysis of both novels. Therefore, her work on the consequences of trauma during childhood should also be discussed. As she does not propose a specific age that applies to the term “child”, I will, consider her findings relevant for anyone under the age of 18, including both children and adolescents.

Terr proposes that the following four characteristics are common to cases of childhood trauma, regardless of the age of the child:

- a) *Visualised or otherwise repeatedly perceived memories*: Reseeing a single event or a series of events is a typical consequence of childhood trauma and such a repeated perception of the traumatic experience may also occur as a tactile, positional, or smell memory (Terr 1985). These memories may appear at times when children are at leisure, for instance, when they are about to fall asleep or when they are bored.

- b) *Repetitive behaviours*: Childhood trauma of both Type I and II may show itself in the way children play or behave and re-enact the traumatic event, although they are usually unaware of these habits.
- c) *Trauma-specific fears*: Traumatized children may try to avoid these specific fears or condition them away by facing the object they fear. These fears also tend to focus on mundane items, for example, the dark, strangers, or being alone.
- d) *Changed attitudes about people, life, and the future*: In contrast to ordinary children, traumatized children may develop a limited perspective on their own future which may result in truisms such as “I live one day at a time”. (Terr 304-308)

In addition to these general characteristics of childhood trauma, Terr also lists features that are indicative of Type I trauma disorders:

- a) *Full, detailed memories*: Terr proposes that previously untraumatized children will be able to recall the traumatic experience fully and in detail, even if some minor details may be factually wrong. Thus, in spite of a possible attempt to suppress these memories, they stay with the child.
- b) *Omens*: In the aftermath of a single, unexpected traumatic event, children may develop a reason or purpose to explain what happened or find a way that it could have been prevented. For example, a boy who has been hit by a car while riding his skateboard may consider his mother’s previous warnings about riding it as an omen. These omens are often established by children who feel intense guilt and are searching for answers to the question, “Why me?”.
- c) *Misperceptions*: Following Type I trauma, children may experience visual hallucinations, misperceptions or illusions that can occur both shortly or a long time after the traumatic event. Terr emphasizes that these distorted perceptions should not be seen as signs of a brain disorder or schizophrenia. (Terr 308-311)

2.3. Trauma fiction

“[I]f trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction?”

(Whitehead 3)

Considering what has been said about trauma so far, it is no surprise that Anne Whitehead poses this question. The overwhelming nature of trauma leaves behind stressed, terrorised victims who are unable to form a coherent narrative of what has happened to them. This inability will consequently also manifest itself in the narrative structure of novels told by traumatised persons. As Kopf writes, psychological trauma distinguishes itself by resisting narrative representation (33). In a literary trauma narrative, the readers may be confronted with the disorienting and conflicting aspects of traumatic memory and are exposed to what Vickroy calls “the dilemma of facing a traumatic past, whether remembered or repressed” (3-4). In psychoanalysis, an important distinction in this context is that between traumatic memory and narrative memory, as described by Pierre Janet in 1919. According to this distinction, traumatic memory is inflexible and repeats the past exactly as it happened (Whitehead 87). In contrast, narrative memory makes it possible to improvise on the past and allows the affected person to give various accounts of the event (ibid.). The transition from traumatic to narrative memory is therefore an important step in the recovery process (ibid.).

Before addressing the narrative characteristics of trauma fiction, I would briefly like to turn to the findings of psychiatrists and therapists: There is a significant dilemma that trauma victims face – they are conflicted by wishing to deny the terrible events, on the one hand, and the desire to verbalise what has happened, on the other hand (Herman 1994, qtd. in Kopf 32). As a consequence of this struggle, they may resort to narration that is so emotional, fragmented and full of contradictions that it makes them appear unreliable. This apparently unreliable and implausible way of telling their story provides them with an escape from the dilemma of wanting to tell the truth and having to remain silent at the same time (ibid.). A similar notion can be found in Herrero and Baelo-Allué, who argue that those affected by trauma “struggle between

the urge to know and the need to deny” (14), which can be linked to Caruth’s argument that “knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma” (*Unclaimed* 4). In literature, both knowing and not knowing are addressed, as it deals with the thematic content of a text, but is also witness to what we cannot name, to “some forgotten wound” (Herrero and Baelo-Allué 14).

One of the most important literary devices connected to trauma fiction is repetition. As already mentioned, traumatic experiences repeat themselves in the form of intrusive memories, flashbacks or dreams, and it is no surprise that similar repetitions can be found in fiction, as they “mimic[...] the effects of trauma“ (Whitehead 86). Repetition in literature, Whitehead argues, is ambivalent (86). On the negative side, it shows what a constant re-experiencing or re-living does to the affected person – the past events remain present and the victim is paralysed (*ibid.*), which can be seen as an application of the aforementioned concept of “speechless terror” to a fictional narrative. In this paralysing sense, repetition can be seen as a form of *acting out*, where the traumatised person feels as if they had gone back to the traumatic event (LaCapra, *History* 21). LaCapra links this concept to Freud’s *melancholia*, a process in which the traumatised self is arrested and must compulsively repeat the past events (*Trauma*, 65-66). However, repetition can also have a cathartic effect on the traumatised self. One concept of catharsis is LaCapra’s *working through*, which is not in opposition to acting out, but rather an additional process. By working through the trauma, the victim can gain distance from the memories and a better sense of what is part of the past and the present (LaCapra, *History* 22). This process is also linked to *mourning*, another Freudian concept, which means that the traumatised person can engage with the trauma and eventually achieve “a reinvestment in [...] life which allows one to begin again” (LaCapra, *Trauma* 66). In this sense, writing about and re-telling the experience allows the traumatised self to gain distance from the memories and work through them. The narration of trauma can consequently be seen as a curative process (LaCapra, *qtd. in* Whitehead 87).

The result of these repetitions is that the chronology and temporality of the narrative are affected. Due to the constant intrusions in various possible forms (dreams, flashbacks, etc.), the story can no longer be told chronologically, as there are constant references to the past. In connection to the question of

temporality, Caruth uses the word *belatedness* to describe how past trauma is confronted, while the present is numbed (*Trauma* 6). This concept is linked to Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* (also called 'deferred action') or *afterwardsness* (Whitehead 5); the latter word first appeared in the works of psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche (Luckhurst 8). *Nachträglichkeit* stands for a delayed revision of memories, experiences and impressions that allows them to be connected to new experiences (Whitehead 6). This concept is a significant shift away from the idea that memories are created chronologically to a view that the past is marked by a non-linear temporality. Moreover, it signifies that a full acknowledgement of the trauma is only possible at a later point in time (Whitehead 6). Until that moment is reached, the narrative cannot be coherent; this is true for both literary works and narratives told by trauma victims in psychotherapy. Due to the fragmented memories that have not been integrated in the explicit memory, the traumatic event cannot be narrativised fully, which results in gaps in the story. So it is not just the fact that the past constantly intrudes on the present that affects the temporal structure of trauma fiction, but also the inability to recall the past and verbalise what has happened.

Tied to the notion of disrupted chronology and temporality is the inclusion of intertextuality in trauma fiction. According to Whitehead, intertextuality is one of the literary techniques which can reflect the symptoms of trauma in a narrative (84). However, she distinguishes between two different types of using a source narrative in fiction:

If the novel closely follows the source text, intertextuality can be used to evoke the sense that a character is following an inescapable trajectory or is caught in repetition compulsion. If the source text is considerably revised, the novelist can highlight trauma as a mode of departure and suggest the possibility of change or progression. (Whitehead 94)

Consequently, the traumatised narrators can only find a way towards healing and recovery when they adapt their use of intertextuality from a rigid copy of the text to an altered retelling of the precursor narrative.

Ronald Granofsky proposes that trauma fiction often makes use of regression, fragmentation and reunification, which are, however, not successive stages but are located "between the trauma itself and the final resolution if such resolution there be" (107). According to him, regression can occur when a traumatised person is overwhelmed by guilt and cannot cope with being responsible for the traumatic event (regardless of whether they truly are

responsible or not), and can lead to a return to a developmental stage marked by less responsibility. Fragmentation can lead to a dichotomous narrative pattern and unconventional narrative use of understanding, time and space, which destabilises the narration and can make the narrator unreliable. Granofsky suggests reunification as the final stage, which can be reached once the traumatised individual has worked through the trauma and is often signified by integrating previously rejected experiences into their world view and reconciling opposites. (Granofsky 107-110)

Not only the narrative structure and style are important when providing an overview on trauma fiction, but also how such stories are perceived by the reader. The trauma described does not only impact on the narrator, but also on the readers – they are forced to witness horrible events and need to consider issues such as the capacity to be evil (Vickroy 18). In addition, they also have to decide whether they are on the side of the victim or the perpetrator (Vickroy 19), although this is of course only possible in narratives that indicate these roles clearly. This notion of siding with one or several characters can also be linked to that of empathy. Trauma fiction may be seen as a genre where empathy is more relevant than in others, as the characters suffer through severely distressing events and their consequences. Vickroy argues that by telling trauma narratives from the point of view of a specific character, the readers experience the same disorientation as the character, allowing them to compare it to their own memory processes (28). Such a comparison may again result in the reader feeling more empathetic towards the traumatised character. Nevertheless, reading trauma fiction is a highly subjective matter, as some readers may struggle with the disrupted chronology and fragmented nature of trauma fiction, which may in turn have a negative impact on their attitude towards the narrator. Therefore, individual readers may be influenced by these characteristics of trauma fiction in different ways and consequently develop varying opinions on the characters. From my point of view, the novels discussed in the analytic part of this thesis evoke strong feelings of empathy in the reader, which is necessary to understand the complex relationship between the protagonists' dual roles as perpetrators and victims (see Fricke 228).

2.3.1. Common topics in trauma fiction

In addition to Anne Whitehead, a range of other scholars have published theoretical works about this genre, which is still emerging (Whitehead 4) but does feature specific characteristics and techniques, some of which I have outlined in the previous section. While some of these scholars centre their writings on fictional works about trauma, others focus on autobiographical writing by authors who have been traumatised themselves. However, it is not within the scope of this brief overview of trauma fiction to determine to what extent this difference affects the discussed literary works. Instead, I will focus on the main similarities and differences of the topics occurring in trauma fiction in order to reach a deeper understanding of how trauma narratives are composed and reflected upon in several important scholarly works.

Martina Kopf's *Trauma und Literatur* proposes that literature can be regarded as a testimony to trauma and focuses on the writings of two African authors, Assia Djebar and Yvonne Vera, about colonialism and its consequences.

In *Literary Aesthetics of Trauma*, Reina van der Wiel discusses the trauma of medical illness and traumatic bereavement, but also the traumatising effect of World War I, in the works of Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson.

Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt* also focuses on the traumatic events of war, particularly the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, sexual violence against women and children and incest. While using these specific traumatic events to explain the relationship between individual trauma and its cultural interpretation, Tal states that the narratives of trauma survivors are always tied to the notion of politics. Particularly relevant for her analysis is the concept of testimony, what it means to individual survivors and a community of survivors and how different audiences may interpret it.

Centring on the ethical aspects of trauma, *Between the Urge to Know and the Need to Deny*, edited by Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué, features articles from international scholars. Herrero and Baelo-Allué themselves suggest that the trauma novel emerged "as a consequence of the shared difficulties that literary authors find when trying to write trauma narratives and represent traumatic experiences" (14). Further focus is put on how gender

and identity relate to traumatic experiences, while another part of this publication connects trauma to other literary genres, such as the gothic, the fairy tale or ghost stories. As in the other works mentioned, some articles in this book deal with the broad topic of war, in particular the Holocaust and the consequences of the 9/11 terror attacks.

Hannes Fricke's *Das hört nicht auf* analyses literary examples under the seven classical categories of psychological trauma according to Fischer and Riedesser: der überwältigende Moment, Vernachlässigung, Krieg, Folter, Flucht und Vertreibung, sexualisierte Gewalt and Täter. The analysed literary works extend across a very broad range including Homer's *Iliad*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or Schlink's *The Reader*. The second part of this book is dedicated to an examination of why people narrate traumatic experiences and why others read them. This question is also prominent in Laurie Vickroy's *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, which provides a detailed analysis of the writings of Marguerite Duras and Toni Morrison. Morrison's work *Beloved* is also discussed in Roger Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question* and in Whitehead's monograph. Both of these books also discuss the works of W.G. Sebald, making Morrison and Sebald two authors who have influenced the genre of trauma fiction to a great extent.

To summarise the aforementioned aspects of trauma fiction, Stukenbrock draws the following conclusion: "Narrative, die Lücken, Kohärenzbrüche und Auffälligkeiten in der raum-zeitlichen Verankerung aufweisen, [gelten] als Indiz für eine nicht abgeschlossene Bewältigung" (76). Furthermore, repetition and intertextuality also play a significant role in this genre. Additionally, it must be pointed out that responding to traumatic events must be done carefully, "in a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story" (Caruth, *Trauma* vii).

Finally, the brief literature review included here shows that war (particularly the Holocaust), politics, and sexual abuse are common themes in trauma fiction. The effect of single, unexpected shocks in fiction are less often discussed, and this thesis aims to analyse how such traumata manifest themselves in the novels at hand.

2.4. Aspects of narratology

In the following section, I will address three issues of narratology that are of relevance for the analysis of *We Were Liars* and *The Shock of the Fall*. These are the aspects of unreliable narration, first-person narration and the effect of young adults in the narrating role.

2.4.1. Unreliable narration

Upon beginning to read a book, readers often expect a narrator that provides them with a reliable account of the events of the story and offers them as much insight as possible. This “presumption of truthfulness” (Lamarque, qtd. in Zipfel 118) describes how readers assume that everything the narrator says is part of the fictional truth. However, not all narrators will meet these expectations and, instead, turn out to be unreliable. Unreliability may stem from a number of reasons and can manifest itself in different ways. In order to approach the issue of unreliability, I would like to turn to James Phelan’s simplified, yet highly useful method of explaining why readers would come to think of a narrator as unreliable. He argues that a narrator has three primary tasks: to report, to interpret and to evaluate (Phelan and Rabinowitz, 34). If only one of these tasks is performed, the narration is restricted, signifying that the author communicates something that the narrator does not know (ibid.). In contrast, if one of the tasks is not performed adequately by a narrator, he or she may be called unreliable (ibid.). Hence, unreliability may be the result of a narrator’s inadequacy or inability to reliably tell the story, for instance, because the narrator is still very young and immature (Allrath 65). Nevertheless, it must also be mentioned that there are of course narrators who know everything but choose to deceive their readers on purpose in order to make the plot more appealing and thrilling for the audience.

The exact meaning of the quite vague concept of *unreliable narration* is a much discussed topic that has been of relevance since Wayne C. Booth first introduced the term in 1961 when he wrote, “I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not” (158-159).

Although all scholars quoted in this section still include Booth's definition in their writings, it has been met with much criticism, of which Ansgar Nünning (*Unreliable*) provides a good overview. Many scholars who have tried to define unreliable narration nominate the implied author as the only acceptable criterion that can be used to measure the reliability of an author (Nünning, *Unreliable* 9). This is considered to be rather irrational by Nünning, as the implied author is a vague concept itself. He concludes that using such an unclear concept does not help to define the similarly vague idea of unreliable narration. Even Booth himself calls his terminology regarding reliability "hopelessly inadequate" (158), which calls for a new and updated definition of unreliable narration.

Rimmon-Keman offers such a definition that does not include the implied author:

A reliable narrator is one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth. An unreliable narrator, on the other hand, is one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect. (*Fiction* 101)

Nünning criticises this definition as being "too nonchalant" (*Synthesis* 37) because it is not made clear whether the reader suspects inaccuracies in the narrator's account of the story or in his or her evaluation and interpretation of events. Contrary to Nünning's criticism, I consider Rimmon-Keman's definition to be useful, as judging whether a narrator is reliable is a highly subjective matter. Suspicions may arise due to a number of reasons. Phelan and Rabinowitz claim that a narrator's inadequacy (see above) can result from a narrator misreporting, misinterpreting or miscalculating or from the narrator underreporting, underreading (or underinterpreting) and underevaluating (34). Thus, the reader may be suspicious either because the narrator distorts the story or falls short of telling it (*ibid.*) In the first three cases, the narrator's version of events must be rejected or replaced by the reader; in the latter, the narrator's account must be supplemented. A concept that is similar to Phelan and Rabinowitz's differentiation between a narrator who misreports, etc. and one who underreports, etc. is the distinction between an untrustworthy and a fallible narrator. According to Olson, an untrustworthy narrator tells inconsistent stories due to "ingrained behavioural traits or some current self-interest" (102), and, therefore, does so intentionally. A fallible narrator, on the other hand, may simply make wrong judgments or be biased in his or her perception, which may

be the case with a child who has limited knowledge or experience (Olson 101). Consequently, such unreliability is “situationally motivated” and this may lead readers to be more accepting of these narrative failings (Olson 102).⁵ Fallibility is also reflected in Ronald Granofsky’s previously mentioned suggestion of fragmentation being a key component of trauma fiction, which causes a destabilised narration and results in an unreliable narrator (see chapter 2.3.).

In his introduction to the topic, Nünning lists several features that are typical for unreliable narration (*Unreliable* 6): the story is told by a first-person narrator who also acts as the protagonist and can be called an overt narrator. This type of narrator frequently makes use of subjective comments, personal statements and interpretations, and often holds monologues about himself or herself because he or she feels the compulsion to do so or is mad (*ibid.*). The most important characteristic is that there is a discrepancy between what the unreliable narrator tries to convey to the fictional addressee and a second version of the story that the narrator is not aware of. This second version can be accessed by the reader through the interpretation of implicit information (Nünning, *Unreliable* 6). Hence, it is linked to the concept of dramatic irony, where readers know things that the characters in a story are unaware of. According to Nünning, unreliable narrators provide readers with implicit information about themselves without meaning to do so (*Synthesis* 38). Therefore, he proposes that, if the notion of the implied author is abandoned, the unreliability of narrators manifests itself by contradicting the norms of the text itself or those of the reader, rather than those of the implied author (*ibid.*). As already mentioned, the evaluation of a narrator’s reliability is always subjective, which is reflected in this concept of the narrator’s norms opposing those of the reader.

A final aspect that should be mentioned is that unreliability is not always a matter of black and white. As Jahn (85) and Nünning (*Unreliable* 13) emphasise, *reliable* and *unreliable* do not necessarily have to be binary opposites and a narrator may not automatically be only one or the other. Instead, there may be varying degrees of unreliability, a narrator may be more reliable at certain times and less at others, or may prove to be reliable only in

⁵ Another interesting approach to unreliability can be found in Lanser’s positioning of narrators on the scales “dissimulation vs. honesty”, “unreliability vs. reliability” and “narrative incompetence vs. narrative skill” (qtd. in Nünning, *Synthesis* 37).

connection to certain aspects of a story (Jahn 85). This notion is also echoed by Phelan who claims that if a narration falls short, it may still be seen as reliable to some degree⁶ (qtd. in Olson 104).

2.4.2. First-person narration

As both novels discussed in the analytical part of this thesis are first-person narrations, this term should also be included in the theoretical part. First-person narration is told from the point of view of a character who speaks of himself or herself as “I” and who is often part of the plot, too. Furthermore, first-person narration is a special type of homodiegetic narration, where the narrator is part of the narrated world (as opposed to heterodiegetic narration, where the narrator is not a character in the story and, thus, not part of this world) (Lahn and Meister 67). This particular version of homodiegetic narration, where the narrator is not just part of the fictional world, but also acts as the protagonist, is called autodiegetic narration (ibid., 69). Phelan uses the term “character narration” for the concept of first-person narration, based on Gérard Genette’s claim that the latter term is not precise enough, as any narrator could potentially speak of himself or herself as “I” (Phelan xi). Although there may be some truth to this claim, I will continue to use the term “first-person narration”.

According to Stanzel, the main difference between a first-person narrator, i.e. an embodied narrator who has a physical presence in the fictional world, and an authorial third-person narrator who does not, is the first-person narrator’s motivation to narrate. This motivation is existential, tied to the experiences the character has made and can be seen as “compulsive, fateful [and] inevitable” (Stanzel 93). Furthermore, when the character has matured and has begun to reflect on his own wrongdoings in the past, the need to narrate may also be the result of a quest for meaning (ibid.).

Another important question when it comes to first-person narration is that of focalisation. When the limits of perception and knowledge are tied to those of a specific character, the narration is internally focalised (Lahn and Meister 108) – the narration can never reveal more than what the character knows (ibid.).

⁶ In contrast to this, he claims that distorted narration “is simply unreliable” (qtd. in Olson 104).

Genette proposes fixed internal focalisation as a sub-category, where the entire narration focuses on a single character, as is the case with first-person narration (qtd. in Lahn and Meister 108).

As Riggan points out, first-person narration is an extremely varied genre that can reach from a narrator writing down his memoirs, to an unidentified, omniscient “I”, to secondary characters in the narrating position and so on (17). The important aspect of first-person narration is that it carries a quality of conviction and realism that is due to the fact that the audience is confronted with an identifiable narrator (Riggan 18-19). A high degree of personalisation and intimacy in the account of the first-person narrator leads to more credibility being granted to this narrator (Riggan 19).

In contrast to this, such personalisation may also negatively impact on the narrator’s credibility. When taking into account the fact that first-person narration is always a person’s subjective account of events and characters, it can be concluded that these narrations are, to a certain degree, unreliable. It is almost impossible for a narrator to produce an objective, unbiased narration in which everything is accurate. Stanzel argues that, because these narrators are part of the story and very much involved in the events, they are limited in both their perception and their knowledge (89). A consequence of these limitations is that the narrators’ account can be seen as valid (and reliable) only to a certain degree (ibid.). This, again, raises the difficult question of whether these narrators are truly unreliable or, following Olson’s terminology, fallible. Mullan claims that autobiographic narration demands of the readers to infer what the narrator cannot or will not tell them (43). However, not telling the readers something is not necessarily a conscious decision on part of the narrator; rather, they might not realise that they are holding things back or be unable to accurately perceive things. As Riggan points out, a narrator may “have missed, forgotten, or misconstrued [sic] certain incidents, words, or motives” (20) and is hence always potentially unreliable. A narrator might, for example, be hindered in his narration by a disorder, as, for example, the protagonist of Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The narrator Christopher has Asperger’s Syndrome, which is the reason for his inability to interpret other people’s emotions and this impedes his perception of his surroundings. He has every intention to be truthful towards his readers, but his disorder makes him a

fallible narrator. For such a narrator, Mullan suggests the term 'inadequate narrator', as this narrator is still trustworthy because he does not intentionally perceive, but rather fails to deliver an accurate narration because he cannot fully comprehend everything (50). Certainly, the concept of Mullan's inadequate narrators also links up with Olson's fallible narrators, as they share this desire not to perceive the readers.

In addition to the unreliability that is naturally present in first-person narration, another factor influences the credibility of the narrators: as there is an inevitable distance between the narrator as narrator and as protagonist, the former will be fallible in his account of the events (Riggan 24-25). These limitations affect older first-person narrators more than younger ones, as their memories are less recent and may have become less detailed, but a limited credibility may be present in the accounts of both groups.

2.4.3. Young adult narrators

The use of young adults as fictional narrators is a subject that has only partially been researched. Literary theory investigating this topic often focuses on these narrators in the context of young adult fiction, but rarely on the young adult as the narrator in adult fiction. This imbalance seems understandable, as it might be easier for young adults to relate to these narrators than it is for adults and they are consequently less frequently used in adult fiction.

Before discussing this literary genre further, the term young adult should be explained as it is not always a clearly defined term. According to the WHO, the definition of the term "young adult" is a young person aged between 10 and 24, which is, of course, a very broad range (UNICEF 78). Young adult fiction is usually aimed at adolescents, who make up a more limited age range. Adolescence, as the WHO defines it, is "the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19" (np.), but the term adolescents is often considered to mean the same thing as young people (UNICEF 78). At the same time, it is very difficult to completely separate adolescents from children, as the following examples show: The online version of the Oxford English Dictionary defines a child as "[a] young person of either sex, [usually] one below the age of puberty" (np.), while the

Cambridge Dictionary uses a broader definition of the child as “a boy or girl from the time of birth until he or she is an adult” (np.). Following these definitions, adolescents may certainly still be referred to as children. While the mentioned definitions are to a certain extent connected to the notions of age and maturity, Julia Kristeva abandons these notions completely. In her essay “The Adolescent Novel”, she claims that adolescence, rather than being tied to a person’s development, is “an open psychic structure” that humans may be faced with at any age (qtd. in Tannert-Smith 396). This may happen when something that has been repressed resurfaces and the person becomes vulnerable. Although Kristeva’s theory is incredibly interesting, it is certainly very unique and stands in sharp contrast to the more common definitions of what it means to be a young adult or an adolescent.

With a look towards literature, the definitions by the WHO and those found in the dictionaries would lead to the question of whether young adult narrators should be seen as child narrators (or, following Kristeva’s theory, perhaps also adult narrators). This notion can also be found in Barth’s claims that the age of a narrator is irrelevant, as the essential aspect is the childlike point of view that differs substantially from that of an adult (28), which also applies to the narration of adolescents. Nevertheless, I will concentrate on the term *young adult narrator*, whom I consider to be aged between ten and 19.

Young adults, regardless of whether they are twelve or eighteen, have not made the experiences that adults have and this can affect how they cope with difficult situations or the way they perceive things. Consequently, fictional works narrated by young adults may be constructed in such a way that the narrators appear naïve or gullible to the reader. Additionally, these narrators often also know less than an adult narrator would, as they might not have finished their education and they have not gained as much life experience. As a consequence of their youth, they may use less elaborate, proficient vocabulary and a more direct writing style than adults. To a certain degree, their lack of knowledge and their naïvety can also impact the young adult narrators’ reliability. Due to their young age, they may interpret and evaluate things incorrectly, although such inaccuracies in narration could of course be seen as fallible rather than unreliable. While unreliability sounds like a rather negative term, it does not necessarily imply that the reader will develop a negative

attitude towards the narrator. On the one hand, the target readers of young adult fiction are certainly able to relate to the experiences of the young adult narrator, as they are going through the same difficult phase of transition. On the other hand, readers of adult fiction are able to relate despite the age gap between themselves and the young adult narrator, as they may have made similar experiences. In their adult position, they may be able to make better sense of what is happening than the young adult narrator. (see Rossiter 1-11)

The genre of young adult narration of course contains themes that are commonly used. The phase of transition from childhood to adulthood is a difficult one that confronts adolescents with many challenges. Puberty brings with it physical and hormonal changes of the body and the adolescents must gradually adjust to these changes. At the same time, they are starting to become more independent, which may possibly affect the relationship to their parents. While they may be trying to free themselves of their parents' control, their friends and potential romantic partners become more and more important. Another challenge they face is that of peer pressure, where they might feel pressured to try both legal and illegal drugs or to engage in risky behaviour. All these issues are common themes in the narration of young adult narrators. (Wells 4)

A characteristic feature of young adult narrators is their use of first-person address, as Elizabeth Schuhmann points out (qtd. in Cadden 146). First-person narration simplifies the author's task of accurately presenting the world view of young adults that is often immature and unchallenged (ibid.). Using an omniscient third-person narrator would arguably make the narration less realistic and relatable. Additionally, first-person narration allows the reader to empathise with the character, which Cadden calls "the ultimate goal of the first-person [young adult] novel" (148). While empathy is defined here as the main goal of young adult fiction, I would argue that it is also a goal when a young adult narrator is used in adult fiction.

Another typical convention of young adult fiction, according to Cadden, is that first-person narration is set up through the protagonist writing his or her story down (148), which is also included in Riggan's overview of the usage of first-person narration, as mentioned before.

Regardless of what the target group of the fictional work is, using a young adult narrator poses a significant challenge for the authors, as they need to find a narrative voice that is authentic. However, Cadden points out that an adult author's attempt to achieve this will always be ironic, as it cannot be truly authentic (146).

Tannert-Smith links the categories of trauma fiction, young adult fiction and first-person narration with the term "young adult trauma fiction". A young adult narrator who has undergone a traumatic experience and whose self consequently changes as PTSD develops is the most essential part of this genre (Tannert-Smith 398). Other features according to Tannert-Smith are: the symptoms of PTSD show itself on a physical and a psychological level, with repetition playing an important role, and talking about and narrating the traumatic experience leads towards recovery (398). Furthermore, based on Whitehead's monograph on trauma fiction, Tannert-Smith argues that narrators of young adult trauma fiction hold back on revealing the traumatic event, use silence in their narrative and include temporal dislocations (400-401). Although the features listed by Tannert-Smith are certainly part of young adult trauma fiction, it is debatable whether it can be called a genre of its own, as none of this applies only to young adult narratives, but rather to all fictional narratives told by traumatised individuals, which is also reflected in Anne Whitehead's writings.

In conclusion, research on literary theory on the three concepts of unreliable narration, first-person narration and young adult narration shows that they are closely linked and often go hand in hand. First-person narration is always potentially unreliable as the narrators may omit certain things without meaning to do so, while young adult narrators often use "I" when narrating and may be unreliable due to their limited experiences. Similarly, empathy links first-person narration and young adult narration, as it plays an important role in both.

3. Analysis: Narrative structure and techniques

Before analysing the books in detail, I will provide brief plot synopses of both novels for better understanding. Following these, I will discuss to what extent the narrators may be called reliable and how psychological trauma manifests itself in their narrations through the use of fragmentation, disrupted chronology, intertextuality and repetition.

3.1. *We Were Liars* and *The Shock of the Fall* – Plot synopses

3.1.1. *We Were Liars*

We Were Liars tells the story of Cadence Sinclair Eastman, a 17-year-old girl who returns to her family's private island, Beechwood Island, for the summer.

The Sinclairs are a wealthy, all-American family; the head of the family is Harris Sinclair, whose wife has passed away. He goes to the island every year with his three daughters, Penny, Carrie and Bess, as well as their children. Cadence is the oldest grandchild, which gives her a special status with her grandfather, and she is one fourth of the Liars – a group made up of herself, her cousins Mirren and Johnny, and Gat, the nephew of Aunt Carrie's partner. After Gat first joins the family when Cadence is eight, the four of them evolve into a tightly-knit group and become known as the Liars since they often cause trouble. Although Gat's Indian heritage is a thorn in her family's side, Cadence falls in love with him and the two have a summer romance whenever they are on the island.

Before she returns to the island in summer seventeen, Cadence explains that she was travelling through Europe with her estranged father the summer before, and that she cannot remember much of summer fifteen. All she remembers is that she nearly drowned – although she is also unable to recall how she ended up in the water –, and that the aunts fought frequently with their father over the family inheritance. As a consequence of her accident, Cadence suffers from migraines, which means that she often misses a few days. The other family members, including the Liars, refuse to tell her about the events of summer fifteen, choosing to follow the doctors' recommendation to let Cadence remember everything for herself.

Due to the continuous fighting in the family, Johnny, Mirren and Gat decide to no longer go to family dinners at Harris's newly restored house Clairmont during summer seventeen, but instead spend their time alone with Cadence at Cuddledown, another family home that is no longer being used.

As Cadence's memories gradually begin to return, a horrifying truth is revealed: during summer fifteen, the Liars became increasingly frustrated with the constant discussions over money and material goods, and decided to destroy what the aunts considered worth fighting for. On a night alone on the island, they set a fire at Clairmont, with the intention of burning "a symbol to the ground" (Lockhart 152). In a terrible twist of fate, Cadence was the only one who managed to escape the fire, while the other Liars perished in the flames. Eventually, Cadence realises that this is what led to her ending up in the water, to Clairmont being rebuilt and to her family suddenly having improved their relationships. Moreover, it is revealed that all her encounters with the Liars throughout summer seventeen were hallucinations and that her friends have, in reality, long been lost.

3.1.2 *The Shock of the Fall*

The Shock of the Fall is narrated by 19-year-old Matthew, who begins his story with a childhood memory of meeting a girl called Annabelle, who is burying her doll, at a holiday park. During their stay, Matthew and his older brother Simon, who has Down syndrome, sneak out in the middle of the night, which tragically ends with Simon dying. At times, Matthew makes allusions to himself having killed his brother or still having to do so, although it is not clear why he would believe that it was him who was responsible for Simon's death.

In the aftermath of his brother's death, his mother decides to home-school him, which means that they spend most of their time together and Matthew loses his friends at school. His mother develops an obsession with her son's health, frequently taking him to the doctor's without any real reason to do so, showing that the loss of her older son drives her into depression and beginning mental health problems. Eventually, a nurse addresses the issue, causing his mother to realise that she might be affecting her son negatively and it is decided that Matthew should return to a regular school. On his first day

back, Matthew meets Jacob, a fellow student who cares for his disabled mother, and the boys form a strong bond when Matthew volunteers to help out. During this time, he begins to show first symptoms – in particular hearing Simon's voice – of a mental illness, which is eventually revealed to be schizophrenia.

At the age of 17, Matthew and Jacob decide to find jobs, move out of their family homes and into a flat together. Although they enjoy living in the flat in the beginning, their friendship becomes strained when Matthew's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and he no longer pays attention to Jacob's concerns, instead appearing to care only about himself. Eventually, Jacob moves out and Matthew lives in the flat on his own, where he begins to write down his story on his grandmother's old typewriter. His condition deteriorates and he is eventually taken to a psychiatric ward, where his days are dull and repetitive. One day, he hallucinates Simon hiding under his bed who is asking him to come and play, a request that Matthew follows by running away and returning to the holiday park. There, he meets Annabelle again and it is finally revealed why Matthew believes that he killed his brother. He scared Simon by showing him Annabelle's doll in the middle of the night, causing his brother to run away and fall down near the cliffs where he hit his head so hard that it cost him his life. Matthew returns to the ward, where, after another hallucination caused by his schizophrenia, his medication is increased and Simon becomes more distant. Eventually, Matthew is discharged from the ward.

In the following months, he visits a day care centre, where he continues writing his story on a computer, and has a social worker, Denise, assigned to him. His parents and his beloved grandmother Nanny Noo support him as much as they can, and are also the ones who convince him to return to the centre and take his medication again after he refuses to do so for a while. The novel ends with Matthew organising a memorial for his beloved brother and explaining that he must end his story here because the ink band of his typewriter is running out and the day care centre is shutting down.

3.2. Basic structural elements

We Were Liars is split up into five different parts – *Welcome*; *Vermont*; *Summer Seventeen*; *Look, a Fire* and *Truth* – which all contain rather short, numbered subchapters. Furthermore, the novel consists not only of these separate parts, but also includes a map of Beechwood Island, as well as a depiction of the Sinclair family tree. These two visual additions precede the narration itself. As the narration includes numerous characters and as it may be slightly confusing to immediately understand which family members belong to one another, such a visual representation of the family tree helps readers to gain an overview. Furthermore, the map of Beechwood Island simplifies the understanding of the geographical layout of the novel's setting.

The text consists almost entirely of first-person narration, with the exception of the fairy tales Cadence tells throughout the novel, which usually have an omniscient third-person narrator. One fairy tale, however, ends with the narrator suddenly addressing the reader directly to ask a question (Lockhart 55). In addition to the fairy tales, first-person narration is also not present at the beginning of Part 5, *Truth*, where the traumatic events are revealed in detail. Instead of Cadence's point of view, the reader is given a very neutral description of events, resembling the reporting style of a newspaper article (Lockhart 201-203). Another distinctive feature of the narrative structure of this novel is that many sentences are short and poignant, which points towards Cadence's young age and shows that she can be seen as a less experienced narrator than an adult narrator.

Concerning the layout of the text, the typeface changes to italics when the fairy tales are included, perhaps to indicate the fact that they are not part of the actual events that surround Cadence's narration, and possibly also to make it easier for the young adult audience to separate them from the frame narrative. Further changes to the typeface are also present in lyrics, which are italicised, and in Cadence's e-mails to the other Liars, where the font is changed to look as if it was computer-written (Lockhart 36-37).

Regarding the surface structure of the narration, *The Shock of the Fall* is much more complex. In contrast to the previous novel, it does not consist of clearly

separable parts, but of chapters of varying length that are not numbered and are given specific titles. The titles of the chapters are often repeated in the narration of the chapter itself, but also in previous or subsequent chapters. For example, in the chapter “a different story” (Filer 51), the title is repeated in the same chapter (54), but it also includes the phrase “a whole new chapter” (53), which is the title given to a later chapter (61).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the narration in Filer’s novel are the changing typefaces. Matthew tells his story partly using a typewriter, but large parts of the story are also written on a computer at the day care centre that he goes to. The typefaces alternate and this results in the chronology of events not being entirely clear upon first reading the novel. However, they allow the reader an insight into Matthew’s state of mind, as the parts written on the typewriter show a more confused narrator. In this sense, the phases where the narration changes to Courier, the font that is typically used for typewriters, may be seen as signs of the disintegration of Matthew’s mind, as he is on his own and refusing his injections. This ties in with Nina Nørgaard’s writings on typography, where she argues that a particular typographical style may be seen as an indexical marker that shows a causal relation (Nørgaard 147). In this case, the use of Courier can be seen as such an indexical marker of Matthew’s deteriorating health. Furthermore, changes are made to the typeface when some words are written in bold or capital letters, for example “**PLEASE STOP READING OVER MY SHOULDER**” (Filer 53). Such changes in the surface structure are referred to as iconic markers which can, amongst other functions, add salience to a text (Nørgaard 150).

However, not only the typefaces make the novel very complex, but also the use of multimodality – the novel contains drawings of things that play a role in Matthew’s narration, a handwritten note from Simon and their father, as well as letters written by Denise, his doctor and Matthew himself. On the one hand, the letters and notes provide the reader with the opportunity to look at the narration from various points of view, instead of only Matthew’s. On the other hand, Nørgaard argues that the inclusion of handwriting can also strengthen the (fictional) authenticity of these characters and their existence (149). As regards the drawings done by Matthew, it should be noted that they become less frequent throughout the course of the novel. I would interpret this as a sign of

Matthew becoming more mature throughout his adolescence, although he still engages in “drawing behaviour”, as he mockingly calls it (Filer 216), at later points in the timeline. The use of multimodality in this novel is, therefore, twofold – the reader can gain distance from the first-person narrator and can also witness the maturing of the protagonist.

Thus, it can be said that *The Shock of the Fall* is an example of a multimodal novel, whereas *We Were Liars* only contains visual images at the beginning of the narration. This may be connected to the different target audiences of the novels, as the narrative structure and layout of Filer’s novel may be better suited to adult readers.

3.3. Unreliability

In both novels, the protagonists provide a flawed account of the events that caused their traumata and their narration can consequently be considered to be slightly unreliable. However, the narrators do not omit information on purpose in order to, for example, create suspense, but the unreliability is rather a manifestation of the fact that both Cadence and Matthew suffer from mental and physical health issues.

3.3.1. Unreliability in *We Were Liars*

In *We Were Liars*, it is quite clear that Cadence's incomplete account of events is caused by her inability to remember what has happened. Like the protagonist herself, the reader must wait for her memory to return to be able to receive a reliable account. Reaching this goal is prevented by Cadence's brain injury due to the traumatic event – which has not been confirmed by her doctors, but seems highly likely (Lockhart 50) – and she explicitly mentions the issue in her narration: "If I Google *traumatic brain injury*, most websites tell me selective amnesia is a consequence. When there's damage to the brain, it's not uncommon for a patient to forget stuff" (Lockhart 48). The problem of Cadence's amnesia is not only that she cannot remember what happened the night Clairmont burned down, but also that she is unable to recall the events, even when her mother repeatedly explains them to her (Lockhart 49). Therefore, Cadence has no choice but to give an incomplete account of the event. Taking into consideration her inability to remember, she should be seen as a fallible narrator rather than an unreliable one, as argued by Greta Olson. To apply the terms established by Phelan (Phelan and Rabinowitz 34), Cadence does not *misreport*, but *underreport* as she does not have access to all the facets of her story and cannot give a correct account. Due to this lack of facts, she also underreads (or underinterprets) and underevaluates the events around her and does not fully grasp what the other characters are saying to her or why they are behaving a certain way. She is understandably frustrated with her flawed memory and decides to write down every memory that resurfaces and all the questions that she needs answers to, hoping that "[m]aybe a picture will emerge

from the pixels” (Lockhart 77), which allows for the conclusion that Cadence truly does want to be a reliable narrator who can give a truthful account of the event.

One example for Cadence’s inability to correctly interpret and evaluate events can be seen when she wonders why the relationship between her mother, Penny, and her aunts, Bess and Carrie, has suddenly improved. After she has just remembered a situation from summer fifteen, where the aunts quarrelled with their father about their inheritance, she observes them happily chatting with each other, noting that “[i]t’s a beautiful night, and we are indeed a beautiful family. I do not know what changed” (Lockhart 99). If she had access to her memories, she would be able to remember that the aunts all went through the trauma of losing – or, in Penny’s case, almost losing – their children and she would possibly be able to understand why they are now more at peace with each other. A character who does not suffer from amnesia might be able to deduce that the traumatic experience led to the aunts’ realisation that material goods are less important than family and that it brought them closer to each other. Cadence, however, falls short of providing a reliable explanation for their behaviour, as her missing memories make it impossible for her to put the pieces of the puzzle together. This example shows very well that Cadence would like to explain to her readers why this change has occurred, but due to her amnesia she is fallible in her reports, interpretations and evaluations.

In contrast to what has been said about Cadence’s reliability so far, there are also instances that may spark some doubt in the reader’s perception of how reliable Cadence would like to be. On the one hand, this is due to her claim that it is likely that there are variations of the reality that she experiences (Lockhart 142-143). In this passage, Cadence wonders whether there are parallel universes where people have different lives and meet different fates. In particular, she wonders whether there might be a variation of reality where she does not survive jumping off a cliff and a funeral is held for her, or one where Johnny is severely injured through this jump. Her apparent belief that such variations might exist could lead the readers to question whether everything she reveals throughout her narration is true or whether she simply narrates a variation of reality that she prefers. Furthermore, there are two other instances towards the beginning of the book that may be seen as indications of

Cadence's intentional holding back on certain information. The first instance can be found at the beginning of Part 1, *Welcome*, where she introduces the Sinclair family. In this first chapter, she explains that none of the Sinclairs are criminals, addicts or failures, provides some basic information about their physical appearances, their attitudes and their beliefs, and explains that they spend their summers on a private island. She concludes this chapter by saying, "Perhaps that is all you need to know" (Lockhart 3), signifying that she does not find it necessary to reveal more information about her family. More important information, for example, that the family was left reeling when their matriarch Tipper died and a bitter rivalry about the inheritance ensued, is only revealed throughout the following parts. Perhaps Cadence does not give away all this information at the beginning of the novel because she does not want to reveal these sad aspects of their life straight away. This attitude is mirrored in the second instance that may make readers scrutinise the narrator's reliability: Cadence remembers that in the aftermath of Granny Tipper's death, her mother warned her not to remind her grandfather of his wife's death. She says to Cadence, "Silence is a protective coating over pain" (Lockhart 29). This sentence reflects the Sinclairs' attitude to never speak about past events that have hurt them and caused them grief, but rather to turn these events into taboo topics that must never be discussed. As much as she does not follow all the beliefs of the Sinclairs, this one was instilled in Cadence's mind to such an extent that she does not mention Tipper or her absentee father again in conversation. Similarly, her choice not to reveal too much information straightaway may also be seen as a reflection of this belief in silence as talking about the fighting in her family would undoubtedly cause pain for everyone involved.

A final aspect that must be mentioned in connection with unreliability is of course the novel's title, *We Were Liars*. While Cadence does provide a good explanation for the name that she, Mirren, Johnny and Gat were given, saying that they often caused trouble on the island (Lockhart 7), it does raise the question of whether she still lies. Taking her belief in variations of reality into account, it may well be that Cadence's narration partly consists of lies and made-up passages, although this is a fact that the readers must accept without ever being able to know for sure whether it is the (fictional) truth or not.

Despite these beliefs in variations of reality and in silence as a protective device against pain, I would still argue that Cadence attempts to be a reliable narrator. Not only does she want to be reliable in her narration, but she is, of course, also in search of the truth for herself, so that she can cope with her trauma. Only through her attempts to remember everything by writing down all her resurfacing memories and all the questions that need to be answered can she finally put together the entire picture. Once it is completed, she can provide the readers with a reliable account and come to terms with the events of summer fifteen.

3.3.2. Unreliability in *The Shock of the Fall*

In contrast to Cadence's attempts to be truthful in her accounts, Matthew's narration allows for him to be considered significantly less reliable. This is in part due to the fact that he is taking medication to subdue the symptoms of his schizophrenia, but is also owing to his decision not to reveal too much about himself. He explicitly mentions this towards the end of the novel, when he asks says, "Nobody in this story has their real name. [...] You don't think I'd just give away my whole life to a stranger?" (Filer 274). Such a statement may lead some readers to question the truthfulness of his entire narration, although I believe that he only lies about the names instead of striving to deceive his audience on a larger scale. Moreover, there are other passages in Matthew's narration that allow for the conclusion that he does at least try to be reliable. At the beginning of the novel, he states that he cannot remember all the details of what happened on the day Simon died (Filer 1), which signifies that he does not intend to supplement the narration with potentially incorrect facts. Instead, he wants to be as reliable as possible by explaining that he cannot recall the situation exactly as it was, which, of course, mirrors Cadence's situation. Additionally, while narrating a childhood anecdote, Matthew says, "I can only describe reality as I know it. I'm doing my best, and I promise to keep trying. Shake on it" (Filer 66), which also supports the belief that he does not wish to deceive anyone. I would also like to mention that both of the quotes mentioned here show that Matthew is consciously writing a story that is intended for an

audience and that he is not just writing for himself as he directly addresses the reader by using the personal pronoun “you”.

Another factor that points towards Matthew’s wish to be a reliable narrator can be found at the beginning of the novel where he talks about the aftermath of his brother’s death and its consequences, saying, “I can’t talk about it yet either. I have one chance to get this right” (Filer 13). This indicates that Matthew does not only want to be reliable in his account for the readers, but perhaps even more so that he wants to do right by Simon, whom he owes a truthful and accurate account of what happened.

However, Matthew’s schizophrenia strongly influences the reliability of his narration, to varying degrees. As mentioned in the theoretical part of unreliable narration, reliability is not always a matter of black and white and a narrator can be more trustworthy at certain times than at others. Undoubtedly, Matthew’s unreliability gradually increases throughout the discernable deterioration of his mental health. The negative effects on his reliability are attributable to the disorganised patterns of his thoughts, a symptom that is frequently associated with schizophrenia (Straube 39). Although these disruptions in thinking are much less severe than in extreme cases of schizophrenia and it is possible to follow Matthew’s thought processes for the most part, they still confuse the reader. One example of this can be found on page 214, where he describes his injections and points out how repetitive his narration is, before suddenly jumping to a description of his day at the care centre; another example is his sudden explanation for writing stories that disrupts his narration of a conversation with an older woman (Filer 240). Even though Matthew mostly narrates the events clearly and understandably, a more reliable narrator may not include such passages.

The hallucinations that Matthew has of his older brother Simon are also connected to his schizophrenia. I would argue that he is well aware of the fact that Simon does not actually exist – unlike Cadence, who believes that the Liars are still alive – but that the hallucinations make him appear less reliable. This can be explained through Nünning’s claim that a narrator is seen as unreliable when his narration does not agree with the reader’s norms, which is the case here. While Matthew gladly accepts the return of his brother, the reader struggles to do the same and begins to doubt the truthfulness of the narration.

3.3.3. Misperceptions and hallucinations

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis, Terr's findings on childhood traumata show that children who have suffered from Type I traumata often experience misperceptions, visual hallucinations or illusions (see page 12). Both Cadence and Matthew experience such misperceptions, although it is not entirely clear in each case whether they are caused by the traumata themselves or by the illnesses that the narrators suffer from.

A large part of Cadence's narration in *We Were Liars* consists of such hallucinations through her interactions with the other Liars. However, these hallucinations are not just visual, but Cadence also interacts with and hears what the other Liars are saying. This leads to another important aspect of trauma fiction that is addressed by Anne Whitehead. Based on Caruth's claims in *Trauma* about trauma narratives being characterised through non-linear sequencing which may be regarded as a haunting effect, Whitehead (6) argues that trauma fiction often contains ghosts. According to her, "the ghosts of those who died too suddenly and violently to be properly mourned, possess those who are seeking to get on with the task of living" (ibid.). Without doubt, the way the Liars appear to Cadence throughout the course of summer seventeen allows for them to be seen as such ghosts. Just as Whitehead argues, they have suffered a sudden and violent death and while the other Sinclair family members were able to attend their funeral, Cadence could not do so due to her injuries and was, thus, unable to properly mourn them. Consequently, their ghosts now haunt her and make it impossible for her to move on, which is also reflected in Cadence saying that she and the other Liars have become ghosts (Lockhart 210). However, the question arises of whether what she sees of the Liars can truly be referred to as *ghosts*⁷. When considering the term, the stereotypical appearance would be that of a disembodied, perhaps even transparent apparition that often cannot touch anything and can walk through

⁷ Speaking from personal experience, I can say that adolescents are more likely to believe that the Liars are ghosts and do not consider them to be hallucinations caused by Cadence's injury. In contrast, adults are, in my opinion, more secure in their conviction that they are hallucinations. The question is also discussed in various online reviews and discussions forums, see, for example, <http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/1862194-what-do-you-think-spoilers> (4 Feb. 2016).

walls. In contrast to this, Cadence perceives the Liars as entirely human and this allows for the conclusion that what she experiences is much more than simply the sighting of ghosts. Moreover, it is not just the Liars whom she sees, but she sees Aunt Carrie in the middle of the night too (Lockhart 78-79 and 137), signifying that she also sees persons who are still alive. Instead of considering these apparitions to be ghosts, they may be regarded as hallucinations, but not just visual ones as Terr proposes, but rather as hallucinations that make Cadence think that Johnny, Mirren and Gat are still alive and well. Taking into account how the trauma affected her and that she has most likely suffered a brain injury, there is little doubt that her hallucinations are triggered by the effects of the trauma. It is not entirely clear, however, whether these misperceptions are caused by the injury itself or by the medicine that she is taking for her migraines. As there is no clear indication that would confirm either theory within Cadence's narration, it is up to the readers to draw their own conclusions.

Interestingly, the hallucinations that Cadence has are only temporary, as the Liars say goodbye to her at the end of the novel. Additionally, there are several instances throughout the novel that can be regarded as warning signs that what Cadence sees is not entirely real. These signs are given by both the other Liars and the protagonist herself. Perhaps the most alarming sign can be found in Part 3, *Summer Seventeen*, when Cadence has just reunited with the Liars and Gat notes that she seems taller. While Mirren responds that they must look different as well, Cadence thinks, "But they don't. They look the same" (Lockhart 69), even noticing that Gat is wearing a T-shirt that is already two years old. Although the Liars must look much younger than Cadence herself, she does not realise that they look exactly as they did in summer fifteen until the end of her narration. Another obvious warning sign is that Cadence never sees the Liars interact with any other family members throughout the course of summer seventeen. Mirren explains to Cadence that she refuses to go to the family meals at New Clairmont because the Sinclairs do not need her to be there and because she just wants to be with the other Liars, to which Johnny and Gat agree (Lockhart 71). Cadence does not think much of it, most likely because she can empathise with their wish to stay away from the other family members whose presence can be overwhelming. As Aunt Bess and Mirren's

younger siblings have left their previous home, Cuddledown, and moved into New Clairmont to stay with grandfather Harris, the Liars decide to claim Cuddledown as their own and spend most of their time there, never visiting any of the other houses. As if suspecting that something is strange about this, Cadence even asks Mirren why she refuses to leave Cuddledown (Lockhart 145), which Mirren justifies by being too ill to go anywhere. Her mother Penny even criticises Cadence for always going down to Cuddledown and leaving behind a lot of waste, but says that they cannot ask the cleaning lady to take care of such a filthy place (Lockhart 184). Cadence's hallucinations are consequently so thoroughly construed that she can often find reasons to explain what she might otherwise find slightly odd.

Although all these things are hints that the Liars may not be real, there are other passages that support Cadence's belief that they are. At the end of Part 2, during summer seventeen, she receives a phone call from Taft, Mirren's little brother, who tells her that he thinks Cuddledown is haunted⁸ (Lockhart 58). Cadence advises him to have Mirren read him a bedtime story to calm him down, unaware that Mirren is no longer alive. When she comes to Beechwood Island the next day, Taft runs up to her and tells her that Mirren did read him a story the night before (Lockhart 65). If any of the adults were around to hear Taft's comment, they might intervene, but as Cadence and Taft are alone in that moment, she has no choice but to believe what he is saying. As the two Sinclair grandchildren are on their own, I would argue that it is almost impossible to tell whether Taft really does say his sister's name, as it might as well have been his mother's name that Cadence misunderstands. It is certainly feasible that he says Bess's name, but his cousin is so caught up in her traumatic memories that she subconsciously replaces it with Mirren's. Another passage that could reveal the truth to Cadence is connected to her nightly sighting of Aunt Carrie (Lockhart 78-79). Carrie asks her whether she has seen Johnny, but as Cadence does not know where he is, she asks Carrie on the next day if she found Johnny in the end (Lockhart 90). Instead of telling her that such a thing would be entirely impossible, Carrie simply says, "I don't know what you're talking about" (ibid.). Once again, due to the probability of the medicine

⁸ Certainly, this notion of a haunted house also echoes Whitehead's concept of ghosts coming back to haunt the living, indicating that Cadence might not be the only member of the Sinclair family beset by the memory of the Liars.

affecting her mind, it is not clear whether Cadence hallucinates the entire nightly encounter with Aunt Carrie or whether it actually happens but she mishears the name that is used. These are only two instances that the Sinclairs could take to explain the events of summer fifteen to Cadence, but they appear to respect the doctors' recommendation to let her remember everything herself without any help (Lockhart 50) and her mother Penny's orders not to address what happened (Lockhart 92).

While these hallucinations sound realistic and are also entirely believable for the reader upon first reading the book, there are other passages that clearly show Cadence's unreliability. At several instances throughout the book, she narrates rather violent encounters in which other persons, such as her father (Lockhart 5) or a witch (77), attempt to kill her or where something entirely unrealistic happens; for example, she hallucinates that her body melts (28). Some of these passages are followed by her mother ordering Cadence to "[b]e normal" (Lockhart 5, 28), which shows how the Sinclairs refuse to admit that something may be wrong in their family. The difference between these hallucinations and the aforementioned ones is that Cadence appears to be clearly aware that they only happen in her head. She immediately returns to reality and resumes her storytelling, which shows that they – in spite of their violence – have no lasting shocking or disorienting effects on her. Moreover, Cadence's narration of her body melting can also be seen as an example of fragmented characterisation, which is a device often used in the trauma novel (Granofsky 113).

In Matthew's case, the hallucinations can more clearly be attributed to his illness. Schizophrenic persons often hear voices (Straube 36) and see things in a very peculiar way, just as Matthew does when he claims that he sees Simon in the atoms around him and in the candles of his birthday cake (see, for example, Filer 149 and 276).

Perhaps the biggest difference to Cadence's hallucinations is that Matthew is completely aware that Simon is not real and that he only exists in his mind. In spite of his young age, Matthew appears to know that it is only him who sees and hears Simon, which he indicates when he talks about hallucinating Simon on the night before what would have been his 13th birthday: "I was

getting better at picturing him in my mind” (Filer 45). The passage shows that the hallucinations are something that Matthew is content with, as they bring him back his older brother, which is also evident in his later escape from the hospital. Instead of worrying about his misperceptions of reality, he gladly accepts them and is happy to reunite with Simon. While the hallucinations may strongly differ from what the reader expects of a “normal” narration, I would argue that empathy plays a large role in how Matthew is perceived. Instead of making him an unreliable narrator that some readers might dislike, Matthew’s desire to see his older brother again is so understandable that the unreliability can easily be forgiven.

Furthermore, in spite of hallucinations being a central symptom of schizophrenia, I would also say that the way Matthew perceives Simon shows that he has not managed to cope with the loss of his beloved older brother. Therefore, the hallucinations can also be attributed to his psychological trauma, as mentioned above in Whitehead’s claim that ghosts of those who died too soon come back to haunt the living (see page 39).

Of course, when considering the question of whether Matthew and Cadence can be seen as reliable narrators, the reader must also consider their age. Both of them are still teenagers, aged 17 and 19, which means that they may be seen as fallible in their narrating due to their limited world knowledge, in addition to their illnesses and traumatic experiences. Finally, it must also be taken into account that the reliability of both characters is affected by the fact that they are first-person narrators who may be unreliable due to their subjective view of the world.

3.4. Fragmentation

Both Matthew and Cadence make extensive use of fragmented narration in their storytelling. As well as being one of Granofksy’s three stages of the trauma novel, Judith Herman proposes that a fragmentation of functions that are normally integrated with each other, such as memory or cognition, may occur as a sign of PTSD (34). Such a disintegration of memory also reflects Janet’s concept of dissociation, as Herman points out (*ibid.*). Additionally, trauma is

marked by a destabilisation of self-protection (ibid.), and this can consequently cause a person's identity to become unstable. Therefore, it is no surprise that fragmentation is used by writers to bring across psychological trauma in fiction. Greenberg argues that fragmentation is often related to traumatic memories and that this results in non-linear narratives (323). As this analysis will show, however, fragmentation is not only present in the traumatic memories of Matthew and Cadence, but is also a general characteristic of their narratives.

3.4.2. Fragmentation in *We Were Liars*

The fragmentation of Cadence's narration largely centres on three topics: her love for Gat, the traumatic event (the night of the fire), and her psychological trauma. Additionally, the narration is also fragmented, for example, when she explains one of her hallucinations (Lockhart 5) or when she speaks about the fighting over the family inheritance (157). Typically, her telling of the story is fragmented through a splitting up of a sentence over several lines, with the individual lines often ending with a comma. Sometimes, Cadence also includes short sentences that only take up one line. On page 15, a good example of such fragments can be seen:

I had kissed an unimportant boy or three by now.
I had lost my dad.
I had come here to this island from a house of tears and
falsehood
and I saw Gat,
and I saw that rose in his hand,
and in that one moment, with the sunlight from the win-
dow shining in on him,
the apples on the kitchen counter,
the smell of wood and ocean in the air,
I did call it love. (Lockhart 15)

As mentioned, Cadence includes many other references to her relationship with Gat and her feelings for him (see Lockhart 24, 26, 73, 86, 130 and 169). This is understandable as she has not only suffered through the loss of her cousins, but also through that of her first love, which is perhaps even more traumatising. Consequently, it is no surprise that her narration often returns to their relationship and that she cannot put her memories into a coherent form.

Similarly, fragments can be seen in the instances where Cadence remembers the traumatic event itself (see Lockhart 31-33, 148, 151-152, 174,

179-181, 191, 198 and 207), as well as when she refers to the physical and the psychological traumata that occur as consequences of this event (see Lockhart 33-34, 222-223). An interesting example of fragmentation related to the traumatic event can be found in Part 3, *Summer Seventeen*. Here, Cadence jumps from a cliff into the sea even though the other Liars ask her not to do it because they think it is too dangerous. She ignores their warnings and describes her resurfacing:

And then I am up again, and breathing.
I'm okay,
my head is okay,
no one needs to cry for me or worry about me.
I am fine,
I am alive.
I swim to shore. (Lockhart 142)

Considering that Cadence almost drowned when she went into the sea to soothe her burns after the fire, this close encounter with drowning can be seen as a re-enactment of the traumatic event. According to Van der Kolk and McFarlane, a common symptom in trauma victims can be a “compulsive reexposure of some traumatised individuals to situations reminiscent of the trauma” (10). This also mirrors the concept of repetition compulsion, where traumatised persons have no choice but to relive the memories (see Caruth, *Unclaimed 2* and *Trauma 10*, and LaCapra, *Trauma 65-66*). Reconsidering what has been said about Cadence’s reliability so far, there is of course no way for the reader to be sure that she truly does jump into the water and risk her own life, as she may just be making it up. Regardless of whether it happens in her imagination or in reality, this passage shows that Cadence is not only caught in a process where she remembers the traumatic event itself, but she also compulsively re-enacts it. Her fragmented narration of the traumatic event, its consequences and the loss of her friends demonstrate how she has become destabilised by her trauma and how the normal system of narrating is affected.

3.4.2. Fragmentation in *The Shock of the Fall*

Similarly to Cadence, Matthew uses fragmented narration that frequently focuses on particular subjects, in his case these are schizophrenia and the traumatic event and its consequences. In Matthew’s narration, the fragments

are even more obvious than in Cadence's because they are not part of the running text, but set apart from it. An example that focuses on the trauma of losing Simon can be found at the beginning of the novel:

I could only make out the edges – night-time, running, the police were there somewhere.

And Simon was dead.

My brother was dead.

I couldn't hold onto any of it though. (Filer 13)

This fragment shows Matthew's struggle with the loss of his brother and there are various other passages connected to the trauma of Simon's death (see Filer 21-22, 91, 265 and 267). Moreover, fragmentation can also be found in the memories of the traumatic event that reappear when he returns to the holiday park, such as two information signs that are displayed there (see Filer 243 and 246). Without doubt, the brief flashbacks to the night Simon died also fragment the narration, although these will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.5.2.

Many of the fragments in Matthew's narration are structured in a fashion similar to the one above, and consist of short, poignant sentences. As mentioned, fragmentation can de-establish systems such as cognition or memory, which can eventually affect a person's identity. This appears to be particularly true for the fragmented references to Matthew's illness that are present in *The Shock of the Fall*. These fragments are often of a rather crude nature (see Filer 62, 100 and 263), signalling Matthew's frustration with his schizophrenia and the way it influences his personality. In contrast to the fragments in Cadence's narration, Matthew's vary in nature: not all of them are full sentences; at times he splits a sentence over several lines, with each word taking up an entire line:

It
more is
than
all the
STARS
in
the entire
UNIVERSE (Filer 71)

Unlike the other fragments that consist of full sentences, these fragmented passages are more disorienting for the readers (see also Filer 21-22, 54 and 227-228). However, while they may have an impact on the intelligibility of the narration, I believe that they also make the narration more interesting and provide an insight into Matthew's thoughts.

Although the topic of repetition will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.7. of this thesis, it is worth mentioning that some of the fragments in Matthew's narration also contain repetitive aspects. In addition to the aforementioned passage, Matthew repeats the phrase "all the stars in the entire universe" in another fragmented sentence at a later part of the novel (Filer 227-228). I would argue that this belief in the stars having power over people is a symptom of his schizophrenia, as many patients believe in such concepts (see Straube 26-35). Furthermore, he also fragments his narration by including the noise of someone knocking on his door (Filer 130), which he repeats on two other occasions (143 and 176). Although these are not sentences that are set apart from the running texts, they are fragmented passages that disrupt Matthew's narration.

To conclude this chapter, I would say that the fragmented elements in the narrations of Matthew and Cadence serve different purposes. In *We Were Liars*, the fragments show how Cadence struggles with her psychological trauma and that she cannot always form a coherent narrative. In contrast, fragments in *The Shock of the Fall* show how illness affects a person's life, whereas trauma seems to be less responsible for the unusual narrative style. Although illness has a larger role in Filer's novel, both Matthew and Cadence can be considered protagonists of illness narratives, which Arthur Kleinman defines as stories told by patients "[...] to give coherence to the distinctive events and long-term course of suffering. The personal narrative[s] do[...] not merely reflect illness experience, but rather contribute[...] to the experience of symptoms and suffering" (Kleinman 49). However, it is interesting to note that they do not fulfil Rimmon-Kennan's claim that "[f]ragmented narratives may become unintelligible and threatening, and hence risk remaining unheeded" (*Illness* 22), which she sees as a common occurrence in illness narratives. Instead, the fragments do not affect the narrations in the novels negatively, but rather make them more interesting and thought-provoking.

3.5. Disrupted chronology

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis, the chronology of a narrative may be affected due to the protagonist having suffered through trauma. The chronological disruptions are caused by the flashbacks to the traumatising event and the resurfacing of memories. When narration is no longer chronological, the reader may experience a feeling of disorientation or confusion, which mirrors the effects psychological trauma has on a person. Ochs and Capps (24) argue that “[c]hronology provides a coherence that is reassuring” and a removal of this reassurance certainly affects the reader.

In a sense, both protagonists have health issues that affect their lives significantly (see also chapter 3.3.3.) – Cadence suffers from post-traumatic headaches, whereas Matthew is schizophrenic. Rimmon-Kenan claims that chronology is often destabilised in illness narratives, which clashes with the reader’s expectations (*Illness* 12). If the anticipated chronology is no longer present, temporal disruptions can be seen as a “traumatic aspect[...] of illness” (ibid.).

3.5.1. Chronological disruptions in the *We Were Liars*

Due to the fact that Cadence’s amnesia causes disorientation and uncertainty for herself, it is no surprise that it also strongly affects the chronology of her narration. Even if she wanted to give a correct chronological account of the events, she would not be able to do so because of her inability to remember. Instead of beginning her narration in her childhood when she first met the other Liars and then continuing her narration in summer fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, she jumps back and forth throughout the years and can only produce a coherent timeline when she has regained her memories. Rather than providing such a chronological account from the early years of her childhood until the age of seventeen, her narration is centred on the trauma itself. Unable to recall the fire, she calls the traumatic event “the accident” (Lockhart 4) at the beginning of the novel, claiming that her story starts prior to it (ibid.). For Cadence, there is only before or after the accident and, thus, her narration constantly returns to her trauma.

A brief look into the first chapters of Part One, *Welcome*, shows how the chronology of the novel is disrupted: in chapter 2, Cadence says that she is almost eighteen, allowing the reader to conclude that the narration begins in summer seventeen; on the same page, her narration jumps back to summer fifteen; in chapter 4, the readers first hear about the summer when she was eight, while chapter 5 immediately advances to when Cadence was fourteen (Lockhart 4-11). It is not until the beginning of Part Three that Cadence consciously focuses on the events of summer seventeen, providing the reader with some more clarity regarding the chronology of the narration. However, the chronological order of the events is still not entirely clear at that point, as Cadence has not regained her memory yet, resulting in the reader only having access to tiny fragments of her memory that must somehow be made into a coherent whole.

A slow progress towards a complete picture of what happened is initiated by the resurfacing of Cadence's memories in the form of flashbacks. Taking the target audience of the novel into consideration, it is noteworthy how Cadence always draws attention to the resurfacing of a memory. Examples for this are the use of the phrase "a[...] memory comes" (Lockhart 110, 116) or simply "A memory" (143). Such indications may help younger readers to orient themselves in the narration and make it easier for them to understand what time Cadence is talking about. This is also made possible by the structuring of the text – the flashbacks are usually contained in separate chapters, making it clear where they begin and end. My opinion that the timeline of the narration is quite simple to understand is also reinforced by the way tenses are used. The narrator always uses the past tense to refer back to what has previously happened, whereas the present tense is used to narrate the events of summer seventeen. Due to this clear separation of past and present, it is easy for the readers to understand the chronology of the novel, despite minor disruptions.

3.5.2. Chronological disruptions in *The Shock of the Fall*

Although he does not suffer from amnesia like Cadence does, it is interesting to note that Matthew's narration proves to be much more confusing. He frequently makes use of jumping between different points in the timeline, which may be

seen as a manifestation of his illness. The chronology becomes dissociated through the constant disruptions and references to earlier or later points on the timeline. Another aspect that contributes to slight disruptions in the reading of the novel are the changing fonts. Although Matthew does make it clear where he is writing each part of his story, the switch between the typefaces does at times make it slightly difficult to see what point on the timeline Matthew is writing about.

Nevertheless, the narration is not always so confusing. Particularly at the beginning of the novel, the events are narrated in a chronological way with few disruptions. Matthew begins his narration on the day Simon died and the subsequent events are told chronologically, apart from minor temporal jumps. An example of such a leap can be found on page 10, when Matthew suddenly interrupts his narration by saying that he must go to his art class at the day care centre. While these instances do disrupt the story slightly, it is, particularly at the beginning of the narration, quite easy to understand what is part of the present and the past.

Later on in the novel, Matthew's attempt to give a chronological account is interrupted more frequently by various other people: he is sent letters by his care-coordinator Denise as well as his doctor (Filer 110, 127, 148 and 174), and Denise also tries to speak to him in person, disrupting his narration. An important aspect of the letters Matthew receives from Denise and the doctor is that they allow the narration's focus to shift. Instead of providing the readers with Matthew's point of view, the focus here is on the perspective of an outsider. Through Dr Clement and Denise's writing, the readers can gain some distance from Matthew's narration and look at the situation from a more objective position. In her analysis of trauma in young adult fiction, Kate Norbury concludes that such outside perspectives can be regarded as the first step towards recovery for the traumatised victim (35). This is due to the fact that these outsiders support the traumatised persons in their recovery and they also serve as reminders for the readers as to how the protagonists' behaviour differs from that of normal persons (*ibid.*). While Norbury focuses her findings on teen fiction, I would argue that Denise's letters provide Matthew's readers with such a reminder of the behaviour of people without mental health issues. Furthermore, their inclusion into the narration also shows that Matthew –

although he ignores the letters – does not completely disregard the people in his environment who want to help him, which may also be interpreted as a small step towards his recovery.

The most obvious and significant disruptions in his narration are his flashbacks to the night Simon died (Filer 49, 74 and 190), as they are completely disconnected from what is happening in the moment that they occur. When the first memory surfaces, it is caused by rain falling on Matthew, and he is reminded of Simon crying in the rain. The second flashback is triggered by the image of the disabled mother of Matthew's classmate Jacob hanging in a sling that makes him remember the doll he showed to Simon. In the third instance, however, the flashback does not appear to be caused by a specific trigger, but it rather occurs when Matthew has nothing to do at the centre. This reflects Terr's findings that intrusive memories of childhood trauma may also appear without a particular cause when the child is at leisure (see chapter 2.2.2). As mentioned before, these flashbacks convey a very sombre feeling that shows the horrors of losing his brother in such a tragic way. The shock and tragedy of Simon's death is further enhanced by the tense used in these flashbacks. When he refers back to his memories, Matthew switches from his usual present tense to the past simple, as most narrators do when they are talking about past events. In contrast, his flashbacks to the traumatic event use the present tense – sometimes in spite of the fact that the surrounding narration uses the past:

I looked deeper, digging a hole with my fingers – as the first drops of rain hit my dressing gown, I was somewhere else: *It's dark, night-time, the air tastes of salt, and Simon is beside me, wiping rain from his cheeks and bleating that he doesn't like it any more, that he doesn't like it and wants to go back.* [...] (Filer 49)

Such a switch to the present tense is typical of narrations that contain flashbacks to traumatic events (Fricke 224). Fricke argues that this is not done in order to make the memory appear more lively, but rather that it demonstrates that the traumatic memories are still at the forefront of the traumatised person's mind and have not been processed like normal memories (ibid.). Moreover, I would argue that the use of the present tense in these flashbacks also conveys the speechless terror of Matthew's memories – he is able to put short fragments of his memory into words, but he cannot reveal the full horror of what has happened until the very end of his narration.

Certainly, the use of disrupted chronology and fragmentation can be somewhat confusing or disorienting upon first reading a trauma narrative, while also making the story more interesting and thought-provoking. Regarding particularly these two aspects of trauma fiction, empathy plays an important role. The destabilising notions of fragmented narration and non-linear temporality allows narrators to give the reader a glimpse of how traumatic experiences shape their world view (Fricke 228). In this sense, the atypical structure of trauma narratives allows readers to empathise with the traumatised protagonists and can be seen as a manifestation of the difficulty of narrating trauma (ibid.).

3.6. Intertextuality

As I have explained in chapter 2.2.1., experiencing a traumatic event often leads to the traumatised person being caught in speechless terror that hinders a full narration. This terror may also affect a character in literature and keep him or her from producing a coherent narration. There is, however, the possibility for a narrator to mirror the symptoms of trauma through the use of intertextuality (Whitehead 84), a literary device that is present in both novels. As the following subchapters will show, Matthew and Cadence use intertextuality to varying degrees and with different outcomes.

3.6.1. Intertextuality in *We Were Liars*

3.6.1.1. Fairy tales in trauma fiction

We Were Liars shows examples of intertextuality in the retellings of texts from a particular literary genre. The novel's protagonist is unable to recall the trauma and cannot find the words to speak about it; at the same time, it is not just the story of the fire she cannot narrate, but she must also find words to speak about the issues present in her family. Cadence chooses to retell the story of her family through a traditional medium – fairy tales. She narrates classic, well-known fairy tales, at times with altered endings, that show similarities to the Sinclair family. At the beginning of Part 2, *Vermont*, Cadence explains how her father gave her Andrew Lang's fairy tale books and she claims that by reading

these, “you hear echoes of one story inside another” (Lockhart 43). It is clear that the fairy tales included in the novel are her own, as she explicitly says, “I have time on my hands, so let me tell you a story. A variation, I am saying, of a story you have heard before” (ibid.). Her own retellings of these classics give her the chance to put herself and her relatives into various scenarios that offer different ways of viewing their story. While some of her fairy tales are quite easy to interpret, others make it more difficult to understand who the characters she refers to are. This agrees with what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan calls the “thematic function” (*Fiction* 93) that embedded narratives can have within a frame narrative. According to this function, there are similarities and contrasts between the frame and inset narratives, examples of which can easily be found in Cadence’s fairy tales. The similarities are often obvious, for example, when she represents her grandfather and his daughters as a king and three princesses. In chapter 3, Cadence even refers to her mother and aunts as “princesses in a fairy tale” (Lockhart 7). Although the fairy tales are not exact replicas of the Sinclair family story, they may be seen as *mise en abyme* (Nelles 312) works, i.e. they are examples of a story-within-a-story that strongly resembles the frame narrative. At the same time, there are also some contrasts between the Sinclair family and the characters in the fairy tales, which will be mentioned in the following section. The use of these fairy tales is an example of intertextuality, which is, as mentioned before, one of the key devices of trauma fiction. According to Peter Hunt’s writings on intertextuality, Cadence imitates the traditional fairy tales, which allows her to “paraphrase [...] and supplant the original” versions (qtd. in Tannert-Smith 402). Not all of her fairy tales are based on specific tales, but rather only make use of the literary conventions of the genre, which is another one of Hunt’s categories of intertextuality (ibid.) Overall, the novel contains seven of these fairy tales, with Part 2 containing two, Part 3 three, and Parts 4 and 5 one each. Throughout the course of the novel, the fairy tales Cadence tells address some of the issues that are present in the Sinclair family and they may also be seen as a slow unravelling of Cadence’s traumatic memories.

The first fairy tale Cadence tells (Lockhart 43-45) is based on *Cap o’ Rushes* by Joseph Jacobs. Jacobs’s version (np.) tells the story of a rich gentleman who

has three daughters whom he asks to describe how much they love him. When the youngest daughter tells him that she loves him as meat loves salt, he banishes her from the house, claiming that she does not love him at all. The girl leaves and finds work at an inn where she becomes a famous cook. She meets a young man whom she falls in love with, and before her wedding meal, she asks the cook not to use any salt for the dishes, as her father is invited to her wedding. This leads to her father trying the food and realising that it was his youngest daughter who loved him the most and he despairs over not knowing where she is. The daughter reveals her true identity and they live happily ever after. Cadence's variation of the story makes the youngest daughter a princess, who is banished from her father's castle after claiming to love him like salt. She becomes a famous cook herself who is asked to prepare the wedding meal for her eldest sister. When the king complains about the lack of salt, she reminds him of banishing his daughter for saying salt was of no value and he realises that the cook is the youngest princess. The older two sisters, who have stayed with their father, are constantly competing with each other and the king decides to give the kingdom to his youngest child. Although she enjoys her father's love at first, she eventually comes to realise that her father is a tyrannical ruler and cannot tell whether she stays with him until the end because "she loves him as meat loves salt" (Lockhart 45) or because she is to inherit the kingdom. Though it is clear that the three sisters in Cadence's fairy tale are her mother Penny and her aunts Carrie and Bess, who are driven apart by their father's tyranny, Cadence does not clearly indicate in the novel who the youngest daughter is. Therefore, the fairy tale may be interpreted as the story of either one of the three Sinclair daughters.

Cadence's second fairy tale (Lockhart 54-55) is an exception to all the tales she includes in her narration, as it does not use any specific fairy tale as a template. Instead, it makes use of classic fairy tale tropes such as a king having three daughters and princesses having to confront a dragon. Her variation tells the story of a king and his three daughters whose kingdom is plagued by a three-headed dragon when the princesses are to be married. When the king promises one of his daughters to the man who can slay the dragon and no one succeeds in doing so, the king decides to send each one of his daughters to ask the dragon for mercy. The dragon ruthlessly kills all of them and the king

survives, filled with regret. At the end of the fairy tale, Cadence wonders whether it was the dragon or the king who killed the princesses. While none of the Sinclair daughters are physically harmed in the novel, I would argue that this fairy tale reflects the psychological trauma of losing a child that they all have to endure, which may in part be blamed on their father's tyrannical rule over the family. Moreover, it is of course also a representation of Harris Sinclair, who loses his grandchildren and, just like the king, must continue his life filled with regret and guilt, even if it was not him who killed the children.

In contrast to the second fairy tale, the third one is inspired by a classic tale – *Thumbelina* by Hans Christian Andersen. A tiny girl called Thumbelina is taken from her home by a toad who hopes that the girl will marry her son, but Thumbelina escapes and eventually meets a tiny prince whom she marries (Andersen np.). In Cadence's third fairy tale (Lockhart 105-106), the youngest out of three princesses gives birth to a child so tiny, she hides her in her pockets. As the tiny child becomes a young woman, she meets a mouse whom she falls in love with, but her family refuse to accept him. In the end, the mouse and the princess leave the palace, get married and live happily ever after. With this fairy tale, Cadence represents an alternate version of reality that she seems to be wishing for – a happy life with Gat. In my opinion, the princess stands for Cadence who is slightly different from the others in the Sinclair family, while the mouse is a representation of Gat, whom the family cannot accept. Furthermore, I would argue that the final sentence of the fairy tale, "If you want to live where people are not afraid of mice, you must give up living in palaces" (Lockhart 106), can be interpreted as a metaphor for Cadence and the Liars burning down Clairmont, the Sinclair family's 'palace'.

The fourth of Cadence's stories is partly based on *Little Thumb* (Perrault np.). In this classic fairy tale, a boy, who was such a tiny baby that he was called Little Thumb, and his brothers are abandoned by their parents because they cannot keep their children due to their extreme poverty. When faced with the danger of being attacked by an ogre, Little Thumb saves his brothers' lives as well as his own twice. He then works as a messenger for the king, which is well paid, and returns home to his joyful family who benefit from his wealth. In Cadence's fairy tale (Lockhart 147-148), a princess gives birth to a mouseling,

which fills the family with shame and disgust. Eventually, he is abandoned by his mother and must make his own way in the world. The tale ends with,

And maybe,
just maybe,
he'd come back one day,
and burn that
fucking
palace
to the ground. (Lockhart 148)

This fairy tale acts as the last chapter of part 3, *Summer Seventeen*, and, thus, leads over to the next part, in which Cadence's traumatic memories return and she recalls the fire at Clairmont. As this is the only fairy tale to end in such a crude style and with Cadence's typical style of splitting a sentence over several lines, this may be seen as part of the moment when the trauma breaks through her unconscious and she can slowly start to remember what happened. In other words, her retelling of the fairy tale serves as a trigger for the gradual resurfacing of her memories.

One of the most famous fairy tales in the world, *Beauty and the Beast* (De Beaumont np.), serves as the template for Cadence's fifth fairy tale (Lockhart 167-168). A merchant offers his three daughters to bring them whatever they require when he returns home from a journey. The youngest and middle daughters ask for expensive clothing and jewels, whereas the eldest daughter only asks for a rose. When he is about to return, he remembers his eldest daughter's request and picks a rose from the garden of a beast, who catches the thief and, in exchange for the flower, demands that the merchant hands over the first of his possessions he sees when he comes home. This happens to be his eldest daughter, whom he sends to live with the beast and, eventually, she falls in love with the creature. In spite of the beast's intelligence and kindness, her father never accepts him as he only ever sees the hideousness of the beast. This fairy tale reflects two of the relationships in the book: on the one hand, that of Carrie and Ed; and on the other hand, that of Cadence and Gat. In both cases, however, the merchant who cannot accept the relationship between these people is represented by Cadence's grandfather Harris.

The sixth fairy tale resembles an even more famous fairy tale, Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*. In Cadence's version (Lockhart 196-198), the other Liars,

Mirren, Johnny and Gat, represent *Sleeping Beauty*, whereas Cadence herself is the evil fairy who curses the others by saying they will die in a fire at the age of sixteen. The evil fairy, and, therefore, Cadence herself, is eventually the one who hands the children the match that strikes the fire. Cadence's trauma manifests itself most obviously in this fairy tale because it demonstrates that she feels responsible for the Liars' deaths. There is certainly a sense of doom in the previous tales, and even a sense of foreshadowing, particularly in the last lines of the third one (as mentioned above). However, the last lines of her variation of *Sleeping Beauty* can be interpreted as the moment she can fully remember what happened and tell the reader about it. Before Cadence tells the fairy tale, she remembers waking up in the hospital in summer fifteen, seeing her mother and grandfather and seeing her hands and feet in bandages because they had been burned in a fire.

In contrast to all the other fairy tales in the novel, the last one (Lockhart 222-224) is told in a different style. Cadence uses the template of a fairy tale to tell the truth about what happened during summer fifteen and the impact these events had on her family. While fairy tales usually do not give specific names of places and sometimes also do without names for the characters, Cadence mentions Cambridge, Boston and Manhattan, as well as the names of the surviving Sinclair children. Additionally, it is less coherent than the other fairy tales, which is partly due to Cadence's typical usage of sentences that are split up over several lines. It is interesting that she claims that what happened to the family adds "[a] mark of mystery" (Lockhart 224) to the Sinclairs and makes them more interesting for outsiders because the way she introduces the family to the reader is also done in a rather mysterious way (see Lockhart 3 and 6-7).

One aspect that should certainly be discussed is the function of these fairy tales in the novel. Bettelheim argues that fairy tales can support children in coping with painful experiences, which is an important process in trauma fiction; additionally, Postman claims that traumatised children can "integrate [evil] without trauma" through the formal structure of fairy tales (both qtd. in Tannert-Smith 403). Similarly, Donald Haase suggests that children can use the fairy tale as an emotional survival strategy and a way of creating meaning (Tannert-Smith 403-404). While Haase applies this notion to children who have been

confronted with violence, I also consider it useful in connection to Cadence's trauma, even though she has not been the victim of physical abuse. In a more general approach to the function of fairy tales that is not connected to trauma fiction, Jack Zipes writes,

The fairy tale becomes a broad arena for presenting and representing our wishes and desires. It frequently takes the form of a mammoth discourse in which we carry on struggles over family, sexuality, gender roles, rituals, values, and socio-political power. (9)

This brief summary of the functions of fairy tales provides some more indication as to why Cadence would choose to tell her stories using this specific genre. They allow her to represent the struggles she is faced with regarding her family, their values and also the power relationships between her relatives and these representations may help her to make sense of everything. This is also connected to Bruno Bettelheim's description of the fairy tale as a genre of simplicity (qtd. in Sellers 11), because Cadence can speak about all these struggles in simplified structures. With regard to Zipes's claim that fairy tales are a representation of wishes and desires, I would argue that this does not hold true in Cadence's fairy tales. As they all end on a quite tragic note, they most likely do not represent the things she wishes for, but rather her weary view of the world and her family, and her acceptance of these situations.

As mentioned above, fairy tales are, according to Bettelheim, a genre of simplicity through which children can learn about the basic predicaments of human life and how these can be dealt with (qtd. in Sellers 11). Susan Sellers agrees with his description of fairy tales, but points out that they do not only address children, as Bettelheim claims, but "they can impact on adult life with all the resonance and force childhood memories produce" (12). I would like to add to this argument by including the meaning fairy tales can have for young adults. Adolescents, who are right in between childhood and adulthood, feel this impact of childhood memories even more than adults and it is, thus, no surprise that Cadence chooses the fairy tale as a medium for telling her family's story. Bettelheim's above mentioned concept of simplicity can be detected in Cadence's fairy tales: all of her fairy tales begin with a king and his three daughters and the plots have very simple structures. Furthermore, she also makes use of the convention of a "clear-cut presentation of a dilemma" (Bettelheim, qtd. in Sellers 11) as she does not elaborate on the setting of the

fairy tales or describe the characters in great detail. Cadence also includes other typical features of the fairy tale (Lahn and Meister 57): she uses the set phrase *Once upon a time*, includes symbolic numbers (*three princesses*) and anthropologises animals, such as the mouse in the third fairy tale. Additionally, Bettelheim (Sellers 11) considers it crucial for characters in fairy tales to be either good or bad, which Lahn and Meister refer to as the “Gut-Böse-Schema” (57), because this makes identification easier for children. While this simplified good/bad characterisation may be present in most of the fairy tales in *We Were Liars*, the last fairy tale about the Sinclair family and the events of summer fifteen puts the characters in less rigid structures and does not necessarily make them either good or bad. This final fairy tale also reflects the reality Cadence lives in rather well, as she herself cannot simply be called “good” or “bad”, but is caught in the grey area in between through her role as both the victim and the perpetrator of the trauma.

Bettelheim also discusses an interesting issue by distinguishing between a myth and a fairy tale, with perhaps the most important difference being that myths usually end in tragedy, whereas fairy tales have happy endings (qtd. in Sellers 11). Following this definition would make every single one of Cadence’s fairy tales a myth, as none of them end on a truly happy note. Although not all of them end with the death of one or several characters, the stories all leave behind broken families and despair. Thus, the way Cadence ends her fairy tales strongly disagrees with the typical structure of the fairy tale, which may, arguably, be seen as a manifestation of her personal struggles and her trauma, as every tale she tells is somehow connected to either the problems she was confronted with while growing up in the Sinclair family or the trauma of losing the other Liars. Furthermore, this notion of mythical stories ending with a tragedy also ties in well with the air of mystery that surrounds Cadence’s descriptions of the Sinclair family.

A final aspect that I would like to include here is a note made by Lockhart herself on her website regarding the textual complexity of *We Were Liars*. She poses the question, “Is the Sinclair family acting of their own free will or are they in some way merely moving through patterns established in fairy tales that existed long before them?” (Lockhart np.). This indicates that Lockhart ascribes another function to the inclusion of the fairy tale genre in the novel – they serve

as templates for the Sinclair family history. I would argue that this is particularly true for the first fairy tale that is based on Jacobs' *Cap O' Rushes*, as Harris implicitly leads his daughters to fighting for his love and the inheritance.

In conclusion, the fairy tales can be seen as a way for Cadence to gradually move closer to the repressed memories, to retell the events preceding the fire, and also to speak about her family in a simplified way. Growing up in a family that is filled with spite and anger over an inheritance is difficult for any person, and perhaps even more so for adolescents who may not entirely understand the issues their relatives' fighting is based on. Therefore, the simple categorisation of people and their actions into 'good' and 'bad' may help Cadence make sense of everything. In addition to that, the fairy tales also allow her to speak about her trauma in an indirect way without her actually having to say out loud what happened during summer fifteen and what role she played in the deaths of Johnny, Mirren and Gat. As Bettelheim suggests, the use of fairy tales helps her to work through the traumatic experiences. Moreover, her altered retellings of the stories support Whitehead's suggestion that healing can take place when the narrator revises the original stories that the intertextual references were based on (94).

3.6.1.2. Other intertextual references

In addition to the fairy tales, Cadence's narration also makes reference to other works. The overall narration is quite obviously based on William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in which the king's three daughters become rivals when their father asks them to declare their love for him in order to decide who will inherit the kingdom. Although Harris does not request such declarations from his daughters, his tyranny leads to fierce competition between them that is similar to that between Lear's daughters. Additionally, Cadence explicitly mentions the play as one of the items for her project to give away something she owns every day. After having read it at school, she explains, "I don't need to read it again" (Lockhart 47). While this could simply mean that she does not consider it necessary to read a book twice, it may also signify that she chooses to avoid a story that is strikingly similar to her own family history. Moreover, it is not just Cadence's frame narrative that allows a comparison to Shakespeare's play, but

certainly also the fairy tale about the princess who claims to love her father like salt. While Lockhart says that Cadence's fairy tale is based on Jacobs' *Cap O'Rushes* (np.), it also shows similarities to the Grimm fairy tales *Die Gänsehirtin am Brunnen* (Grimm and Grimm 320-330) and *Prinzessin Mäusehaut* (Grimm and Grimm 446-448). Although these tales were published after Shakespeare's play was written, earlier versions of this tale were already recorded in France and Italy in the sixteenth century, with the earliest known version, by Geoffrey of Monmouth, dating back to the twelfth century (Belsey 42-43). This demonstrates that the motif of 'love like salt' (Belsey 42) has a long tradition in the genre of fairy tales and folklore. While he abandoned the salt motif in his tragedy, Shakespeare provided perhaps the most elaborate version of the father asking his daughter to explain their love for him. Thus, both the frame narrative and one of the inset narratives in *We Were Liars* may be seen as references to Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Furthermore, the relationship between Cadence and Gat can be interpreted as a reference to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, a comparison that Gat explicitly mentions in the third part of the novel (Lockhart 104). In both stories, the daughter of a rich, white family falls in love with a dark-skinned boy, to which her family objects. However, not just Cadence and Gat can be seen as representations of Brontë's protagonists Catherine and Heathcliff, but also Aunt Carrie and her partner Ed. The love of both couples is doomed from the start as the Sinclair family, particularly the grandparents Tipper and Harris, refuse to accept anyone of a different heritage into the family. A similar storyline is also present in Cadence's third fairy tale about the tiny princess and the mouse who fall in love, even though her family reject him.

3.6.2. Intertextuality in *The Shock of the Fall*

In contrast to Lockhart's novel, *The Shock of the Fall* contains very few intertextual references.

Twice, Matthew's narration refers to the BBC soap opera *EastEnders*, which he used to watch together with his parents and Simon when he was a child. On their first night at home without Simon, Matthew and his parents watch an episode where Simon's favourite character Bianca leaves the show (Filer

17), which can be seen as a metaphor for Simon leaving behind his family. After years of not watching the show, Matthew watches another episode during the time when his hallucinations are becoming more frequent and stronger. In this episode, Bianca returns to the show, which Matthew, claiming that it cannot be a coincidence, interprets as a sign that Simon is trying to communicate with him (Filer 219). As mentioned before, narrations can deal with intertextuality in different ways (see chapter 2.3.). While Cadence revises the source texts and, thus, succeeds in slowly being able to cope with her trauma, Matthew does not include such a reworking of the original. According to Whitehead, this can mean that he “is following an inescapable trajectory or is caught in repetition-compulsion” (94), and I would argue that both theories are true in Matthew’s case. His quest for and the desire to see his older brother again appear to be such inescapable trajectories, although his belief that Simon is sending him a signal through the reappearance of Bianca is also a sign of delusional thinking that is common in schizophrenic patients (Straube 26-35). At the same time, his constant flashbacks to the traumatic event as well as the cyclic nature of his illness point towards Matthew being faced with repetition compulsion.

Another intertextual reference can also be found on page 78, where Simon reads from a *The Lion King* picture book. In the film version of Disney’s *The Lion King*, the lion Mufasa is killed by his brother Scar who throws him into a gorge where he is trampled to death. Of course, Scar intentionally murders his brother in order to become king and he does not show regret for his actions. Nevertheless, Mufasa’s passing away is eerily similar to how Simon dies falling off a cliff after running away from his brother. It is also interesting that, when Simon asks who would take care of him if he lost his parents like the protagonist in *The Lion King*, Matthew promises to always look after him (Filer 79). Failing to keep this promise and being involved in Simon’s death of course lead to feelings of guilt arising in Matthew. In spite of the fact that the way Simon dies mirrors the storyline of the picture book or rather the film, his brother does, to a certain extent, rework the original by making it clear that he would not intentionally hurt him. Although he does include such a revision of the source text, I would argue that it does not help him to depart from the trauma, because he does not make it into a new version, as Cadence does with her fairy tales. Thus, Matthew is arguably not as close to overcoming his trauma as Cadence

is, although this can to a large extent be blamed on his illness and its repetitive nature.

The brevity of this subchapter shows that *The Shock of the Fall* makes much less use of the concept of intertextuality, which can be seen as an indication that it is a less typical example of trauma fiction than Lockhart's novel. There is also a difference in how Matthew and Cadence use intertextuality, as the latter protagonist revises her source texts. The usage of intertextual passages is linked to their psychological trauma in both cases, although in Cadence's narration they are more tied to "the surfacing to consciousness of forgotten or repressed memories", as Whitehead proposes (85).

3.7. Repetition

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis, repetition is a typical feature of trauma fiction. Both narrators, Cadence from *We Were Liars* and Matthew from *The Shock of the Fall*, use repetition extensively throughout their stories. The repetitive elements in both novels are mainly connected to the psychological trauma of the protagonists, but are also tied to other issues, such as mental illness in Matthew's case.

3.7.1. Repetition in We Were Liars

Cadence uses various repetitive devices in her narration; the most obvious one in Emily Lockhart's *We Were Liars* is the inclusion of fairy tales. Throughout the novel, Cadence tells seven fairy tales that are retellings of classic fairy tales, with some of them copying the structure of famous tales, such as *Sleeping Beauty*, while others only borrow typical fairy tale plot devices without being based on a specific story. It is not only the inclusion of the fairy tales that can be seen as a repetitive device, but also the structure of these tales. All of them start with the phrase "Once upon a time, there was a king who had three beautiful daughters", except for one that begins, "Once upon a time, there was a wealthy merchant who had three beautiful daughters" (Lockhart 167). The contents and function of these fairy tales is discussed in more detail in the subchapter on intertextuality in *We Were Liars*.

Another method of repetition that Cadence uses is the description of the other Liars with some key words:

Mirren. She is sugar. She is curiosity and rain. [...]

Johnny. He is bounce. He is effort and snark. [...]

Gat [...] He is contemplation and enthusiasm. Ambition and strong coffee. (Lockhart 64-65)

Almost exactly the same descriptions can also be found in chapters 4 and 7. These descriptions seem to be a sort of anchor that Cadence uses when she thinks of the other Liars, perhaps to remind herself of what made them so special to her. In addition to this function of the descriptions for Cadence, they may also serve the purpose of characterisation, so that the readers can orient themselves and become more familiar with the characters through repetition (Erlebach 11). As *We Were Liars* is a novel for young adults, an orientation such as this may be useful for the younger target group. In connection to the other Liars, Cadence also repeats the words “Gat, my Gat” at several points throughout the novel (Lockhart 15, 62, 65, 85, 129, 179, 212). She does not just lose her cousins, but she loses the first person she ever fell in love with. These continuous references to her relationship with Gat may be seen as manifestations of the traumatic experience of losing such an important person.

Another passage of description, similar to that of the Liars, which Cadence repeats is the introduction to the Sinclair family. The novel begins with “Welcome to the beautiful Sinclair family” (Lockhart 3), which is repeated in chapter 15 (38) and the phrase “the beautiful Sinclair family” is repeated at several points, too (166, 180, 201). Moreover, the phrase is also included in the fairy tale about the Sinclair family at the end of the novel, where Cadence writes that, in spite of the tragedy that happened to the Sinclairs, “[t]hey made a beautiful family. Still” (Lockhart 224). Here, Cadence appears to attempt to convey to her readers what the Sinclair family desires to demonstrate to outsiders – that they are a flawless family of elegance and beauty. No one in this family is allowed to act out; and this wishful thinking is also present in another repetitive structure: Cadence says of her family, “No one is a criminal. No one is an addict. No one is a failure” (3 and 182), which is, of course, not true – Cadence is a criminal for setting the house on fire, she is addicted to pills, and her mother and her aunts are most likely addicted to alcohol, and many of the other family members have failed in some way. These repeated references

to the ideal that the Sinclair family tries to convey to other people shows how much pressure all the children must have felt during their childhood and perhaps even more during their adolescence. Undoubtedly, such pressure must leave a lasting effect on adolescents, and distancing herself from this pretence could arguably also be seen as a traumatic experience Cadence has to suffer through.

Furthermore, Cadence refers to the fire at Clairmont, more specifically the act of setting it ablaze with the other Liars, at several points in the novel. The phrases used in this context are “burn that fucking palace to the ground” (Lockhart 148, 179) and “burn[...] a symbol to the ground” (152). The repeated usage of these phrases can be seen as a strong manifestation of Cadence’s traumatic memory in her narration. She uses it on several different occasions: in her fourth fairy tale, which is the story of a mouseling who is sent away by his human family (Lockhart 147-148); when she realises what happened during summer fifteen (152); and she also says the phrase out loud when she speaks to the other Liars after she remembers setting the fire (179). Therefore, this phrase and remembering the arson are so significant that they are present not just within Cadence’s thoughts, but also show themselves in her actions and in a story within the story. It is an important sign of her memory because it refers to what Erlebach calls “gedankliche[s] und emotionale[s] Zentrum” (4) of the novel, the one thing that, now that she has remembered the events of summer fifteen, her thoughts will always come back to. This notion of the arson being the centre of the story is certainly true, as it had such severe consequences – Mirren, Johnny and Gat’s death, Cadence’s injuries, the loss of her innocence, the destruction of the Sinclair family, and Cadence’s guilt are all triggered by the fire.

A final, significant repetition can be found at the end of the novel, where Cadence introduces herself again by saying,

My full name is Cadence Sinclair Eastman.
I suffer migraines. I do not suffer fools.
I like a twist of meaning.
I endure. (Lockhart 225)

This is a shortened version of Cadence’s introduction in chapter 2 (4). In these few short sentences, Cadence seems to tell her readers what she believes to be most important about herself. She mentions her full name, which shows that

she values being a Sinclair. Also, she mentions her migraines and, thus, refers indirectly to the head injury she obtained during the fire, as it is the reason for her headaches (Lockhart 34). Finally, she also says that she endures, although it is up to the reader to interpret what, or perhaps whom, she endures. In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks writes that repetition is crucial for the narrative as it “bind[s] the various elements of the text together, so that the narrative acts as a coherent whole” (qtd. in Whitehead 121). By beginning her story with an introduction to the Sinclair family and herself, and ending it with a fairy tale-like story about the Sinclairs and repeating this introduction of herself, Cadence succeeds in making her narrative coherent and complete. At the same time, her repeated references to her physical trauma (i.e., her brain injury) seem to indicate that she sees it as an important part of herself that will always be present – although she does not address her psychological trauma, which perhaps means that she finds the physical side of the trauma easier to understand.

3.7.2. Repetition in *The Shock of the Fall*

Unlike Cadence, Matthew appears to be well aware of using repetition in his narration. There is an instance in *The Shock of the Fall*, where, after speaking about receiving his injections, he writes, “Repetitive, aren’t I? I live a Cut & Paste kind of life” (Filer 214). It is only in these two short sentences that Matthew explicitly mentions being repetitive, but it might prompt the reader to question whether he includes these repetitions for a specific reason.

A prominent example of repetition can be found in a phrase that is first used at the beginning of the novel, and then repeated towards the end of the book. After Matthew’s fall at the holiday park, Simon carries him back to the family’s caravan and upon setting his brother down, he says, “Shhh, shhh. It’ll be okay” (Filer 7). This phrase is already repeated on the same page when Matthew ponders how mature his older brother seemed at that moment. In a moment of wishful thinking, he repeats “Shhh, shhh” (Filer 13) when his parents are crying about Simon’s death and pay no attention to their younger son who wishes they would console him. When Matthew has finished writing about his brother’s death and the consequent events (Filer 238-267), he ends this part of

the novel with talking about falling apart in front of Annabelle at the holiday park. Matthew begins to cry and Annabelle is quoted repeating his brother's phrase. Finally, the last sentence is set apart from the rest of the text by arranging it on the bottom right-hand side of the page:

Shhh, shhh.
It'll be okay.
(Filer 267)

An interesting aspect of these repetitions is that the words are not repeated by the same person. The first instance shows the readers how Matthew admired his older brother's maturity and kindness, which is also what leads him to repeat the phrase. In the second instance, I would argue that the wish to be consoled is less connected to his parents, but instead to his brother. It is not really his parent's affection that he desires, but what manifests itself here is Matthew's wish to hear Simon's voice again, and thence for him to be alive. When he is finally able to write about Simon's death and narrate the events of the night his brother died, it is first Annabelle who repeats the phrase and then Matthew himself. However, the final repetition does not clarify whether it is Matthew as the narrator who wants to turn the story into a coherent whole (as is the case with Cadence) or if it is Simon's voice that he hears in his head. Finally, the inclusion of this phrase also echoes Matthew's description of his schizophrenia being like a snake through the reflection of the animal's typical sound in the words "Sssh, shhh" (see page 68).

On three different occasions, Matthew has a flashback to the night of Simon's death. Considering the impact the events of this night had, it is no surprise that Matthew's narrative contains repeated references to it. Although they are flashbacks to three separate moments from the night he died, they all begin with "It's dark, night time, [...]" (Filer 49, 74, 190). The atmosphere that this glum description creates conveys the horror of Matthew's trauma well. Repeating these first words and the repetitive structure of these memories build suspense in the novel, as the readers do not know what exactly has happened until a later point. Consequently, Matthew's narration creates "a pleasurable tension for the reader," which is one of the main functions of repetition, according to Brooks (qtd. in Whitehead 121). Additionally, there is also a repetition of the kisses that Annabelle gives her doll on its forehead and cheek (Filer 3) when Nanny Noo kisses Matthew on his forehead and cheek (109).

While this may of course be regarded as a coincidence, the fact that Matthew explicitly mentions the placement of the kisses may be seen as a manifestation of his trauma.

The reference to getting his injections, or “puncture time”, that I mentioned at the beginning of this section is another phrase that Matthew repeats throughout the novel (Filer 51, 100, 214). Matthew only continuously brings it up as long as he avoids being injected and does not mention the injections again after it has happened (235-236). Thus, one of the issues Matthew repeatedly addresses is having to live with schizophrenia, and these are not the only references that are connected to his illness. Another repetition can be found in his description of schizophrenia as “an illness with the shape and sound of a snake” (Filer 67, 166). This reflects Matthew’s view that his illness is a living, breathing thing that is always with him, as mentioned before. Furthermore, another passage first found early on in the novel (88) is repeated towards the end of the novel, when he writes about the events surrounding his brother’s death (260). In these paragraphs, Matthew provides the readers with an account of the questions he is asked by his doctors about hearing voices, mental illness in his family and substance abuse, amongst other things. Once again, repetition is centred on Matthew’s schizophrenia, but also on his trauma, as he includes being asked about what happened on the night Simon died. This dual centring of Matthew’s thoughts can be seen when his hallucinations of Simon become more frequent and his schizophrenia becomes acute: he meets an old man who pulls Matthew towards himself. Matthew asks the old man whether he is Simon and only receives the answer, “I’m Lost, I’m Lost, I’m Lost” (Filer 169). Matthew turns away, leaves work and encounters a group of young men, one of whom he again believes to be Simon. On just two pages (Filer 169-170), Matthew repeats “I’m Lost, I’m Lost, I’m Lost” three times. These repetitions do not just show Matthew’s struggle of suffering from schizophrenia, but are also reminders of his quest for his older brother.

In conclusion, Cadence repeatedly speaks about setting Clairmont on fire and this can be seen as the mental and emotional centre of her story. In contrast, Matthew’s narration makes it less simple to pinpoint this centre. On the one hand, the passages he repeats often focus on schizophrenia, which is

unsurprising, as the illness has a tremendous influence on his life. On the other hand, he also repeatedly addresses the trauma of Simon's death that he must overcome. As both the illness and the trauma significantly affect Matthew's life, I would argue that the narrative has not one, but two of these mental and emotional centres that his thoughts and narration focus on.

3.7.3. Guilt as a repetitive motif

In a traumatic experience, it is often not entirely clear who the perpetrator is and who the victim. At times, a person may be seen as a representation of both the perpetrating and the victimised figure in a traumatic event, as is the case with Cadence and Matthew. Cadence and the other Liars were the ones who set the fire that eventually cost three of them their lives, while Matthew is the one who scares Simon so much that he runs towards the cliffs and dies after his fall. Consequently, both narrators must not only come to terms with the deaths of their loved ones, but also face their guilt. While guilt can certainly affect persons of any age, children who have survived trauma while others lost their lives have been reported to feel excessively guilty or ashamed (Terr 1984 and Zimrin 1986, qtd. in Armsworth and Holaday 51). Both Matthew and Cadence repeatedly include the aspect of guilt into their narration, and it is such a striking feature that it should be discussed in a separate subchapter of this thesis.

Hannes Fricke addresses the issue of guilt by using the example of the "Gretchentragödie", part of one of the most famous literary works of all time, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*. In *Faust*, the character Margarete kills her own child and is incarcerated, where she produces a retelling of the fairy tale *Von dem Machandelboom* from the point of view of her dead child. She tells the tale to herself and Fricke writes that by doing so, she can re-enact the traumatic event on an inner stage. Moreover, this re-enactment serves to turn the perpetrator, in this case Margarete, into a figure of her memory. Fricke concludes: "Insgesamt kann man Margaretes Märchenerzählung als Versuch verstehen, [...] durch die auf die innere Bühne versetzte Tätererzählung aus dem eigenen Täter-Sein zu dissoziieren" (27). (Fricke 25-27)

By telling her own fairy tales, Cadence produces similar re-enactments of both the traumatic event itself and her psychological trauma. However, as there are so many fairy tales, it is not always clear whether she seeks to dissociate herself from the role of perpetrator the way Margarete does. In her retelling of *Sleeping Beauty*, Cadence represents herself as the evil witch who hands the children the matches to strike the fire that will eventually kill them. In contrast, her version of *Beauty and the Beast*, if interpreted as a representation of the relationship between her and Gat, makes her less of a perpetrator and more of a victim, as she cannot change the fact that her grandfather will never see Gat as human. Putting herself and Gat in this scenario allows the reader to see her more as a victim who may eventually be driven to desperate measures. Interestingly, the last fairy tale, in which Cadence mentions the Sinclair family explicitly, does not mention her role as a perpetrator but only as a survivor of the trauma. Therefore, the fairy tales can be seen as repetitive representation of Cadence's insecurity of her role in the trauma: she appears to be unsure whether she should blame herself or see herself as a victim.

While this confusion is present in Cadence's fairy tales, her frame narrative clarifies that she is plagued by guilt for having survived while the other Liars did not. Her first portrayal of herself as the perpetrator is in the middle of Part Four, *Look, A Fire*, and an interesting aspect of this is that Cadence does not refer to the deaths of the Liars, but to those of the family dogs. Upon remembering that the dogs were locked in a room at Clairmont, she says, "I had killed those dogs" (Lockhart 190). Thus, Cadence does not blame the fire for their deaths, but herself. Before her traumatic memories of the Liars' deaths and her involvement break through, the memory of the dogs dying resurfaces and it appears that she must first come to terms with this guilt and admit it to herself before she can cope with the loss of the others. After she recalls the fire at the beginning of Part Five, *Truth*, Cadence concludes that it was her who killed the other Liars and writes that she feels guilty about being a burden to the family and the reason for their grief (Lockhart 208-209). As mentioned above, the final fairy tale does not portray Cadence as a perpetrator, but it does show her guilt when she speaks about herself and the other surviving Sinclair children, saying, "[...] [t]hey were racked with guilt for being alive, racked with pain in their heads and fear of ghosts, racked with nightmares and strange

compulsions, punishments for being alive when the others were dead” (Lockhart 223).

Although Cadence does not appear to be a particularly religious person, she does mention God in connection to the repeated concept of guilt. In Part 4, she wonders whether there is a variation of reality in which God caused the fire at Clairmont in order to “punish the greedy, the petty, the prejudiced, the normal, the unkind” (Lockhart 175). Again, this repeats Cadence’s belief that she and the other Liars had done something wrong, were guilty of something, and had to be punished by a higher force. However, it is not just the Liars who are punished in this scenario, but rather the entire Sinclair family, as Cadence points out that the survivors of the punishment would have to “learn to love one another again” and to “[b]e a family” (Lockhart 175). Although it is not mentioned what the reason for God’s punishment could have been, Cadence’s description of the guilty persons already lists qualities that are not particularly honourable. At the same time, she also wonders whether, in this split reality, the fire is meant to be punishment or purification (*ibid.*).

Another aspect related to guilt that is repeated at several instances are the symptoms of the deterioration of Mirren’s health during summer seventeen (Lockhart 117, 127, 130 and 139). When the Liars are finally saying goodbye to Cadence once she has regained her memories, Johnny explains that Mirren’s illness is caused by the fact that they must leave Cadence behind (Lockhart 216). I believe that this reflects Caruth’s notion of blurred lines between victims and perpetrators (see chapter 2.1.). Like Tancred hears Clorinda lamenting her wounds, Mirren’s deteriorating health also signifies how her trauma is connected to Cadence’s trauma of being involved in the Liars’ untimely deaths. Thus, hearing about Mirren’s wounds (represented as physical symptoms of an unknown illness) leads to Cadence’s own psychological wounds.

As mentioned in chapter 3.3.3, Cadence also repeatedly includes the retellings of violent hallucinations of her own murder in her narration. I consider these repetitions to be another sign of her feelings of guilt, as they may be seen as indications of a subconscious desire to die. This would, on the one hand, relieve her of her perceived guilt and responsibility for the deaths of the other Liars, and, on the other hand, make her feel less guilty for being the only one who survived the traumatic event. Cadence also repeatedly mentions her

project to give away one of her things every day (Lockhart 45-48, 56, 80, 126 and 138). Eventually, her mother addresses the issue and Cadence argues that her mother also gave away all of her father's things after they separated. She asks her mother, "Why are you allowed to erase my father and I'm not allowed to –", which her mother answers with, "Erase yourself?" (Lockhart 75). Thus, Penny uncovers her daughter's subconscious wish to disappear just as the other Liars did through the repetitive, gradual process of giving away her things.

Finally, I would argue that a very strong sense of guilt is also repeated in the way Cadence summarises the events of the night of the fire at the beginning of Part Five, *Truth* (Lockhart 201-203). Although she does provide a first-person narration of the fire following this part, she seems unable to do so straight away. Instead, her guilt forces her to tell the story of her trauma from a more neutral viewpoint, partly resembling the style of a newspaper article. While this chapter can be seen as a more objective account of the events of summer fifteen, Cadence's voice is still very present. It is also interesting that it is constructed to resemble the language used in newspapers, but contains all the facts that her grandfather wanted to keep from the media (Lockhart 201). Only when Cadence has provided such an apparently objective view can she begin to fully acknowledge her guilt and explain what happened in a more personal way.

An even stronger sense of guilt is present in Matthew's narration. His guilt manifests and repeats itself in a variety of ways. When he lists the side effects of his medication, the last item he mentions is "killing you own brother, again" (Filer 125). This is his first reference to his belief that he is to be blamed for Matthew's death, even though it was only an accident and he did not have any malicious intentions. Before he returns to Ocean Cove, he claims that this is the place "where I abandoned my brother" (Filer 227), and his guilt is what drives him to return to the holiday park. His trauma, his illness and his feelings of guilt are linked together when his doctor is speaking to him and Matthew says about his care plan, "As a small boy I killed my own brother, and now I must kill him again" (Filer 280). He is not only battling his illness with the medication, but taking the medication also means that he will kill Simon again through the suppression of the hallucinations, which re-invokes the feeling of guilt.

In connection to the question of guilt, Matthew repeats another action by returning to the holiday park. I would relate this to Granofsky's stage of regression to an earlier stage in development, where the traumatised victim can be less responsible (108). Of course, Matthew cannot return to his childhood, but his wish to return to the place where he abandoned his brother is his way of going back to a time when he was not guilty. Such a regression is also present in the way Simon communicates with him both in written and spoken form in the hallucinations – he repeatedly asks his younger brother to “come and play” (Filer 168, 241), which Matthew readily agrees to. In this sense, Matthew regresses to a younger version of himself who can go and play with his older brother anytime he wants, unplagued by feelings of guilt and responsibility.

Feelings of guilt are also repeated when he writes about believing that everyone else thinks that Simon would still be alive if it hadn't been for him (Filer 267). Hence, Matthew is convinced that it was only his behaviour that led to his older brother's death. Judith Herman (53-54) claims that guilt can be understood as an attempt to regain control and writes that imagining “that one could have done better may be more tolerable than to face the reality of utter helplessness”, which she connects to Robert Jay Lifton's concept of “survivor guilt”. Connected to this theory, Matthew's guilt and his imagining of having done things differently shows itself in this belief of others blaming him for Simon's death.

Furthermore, I would suggest that Matthew's repetitive references to the night Simon died can also be seen as manifestations of his guilt. These flashbacks demonstrate that he has not yet come to terms with the trauma of losing his brother and with his own role in Simon's tragic death. I would argue that, in the end, Matthew finds a way out of his guilt by arranging a memorial for his brother (see Filer 293-307). Ensuring that the memories of his brother stay alive in the family seems to help him acknowledge that Simon is gone and leave some of the guilt behind.

Both Matthew and Cadence must learn to accept the fact that they were involved in the death of their loved ones and to live without them. It is no surprise that their guilt manifests itself so clearly in their narrations, as the fact that they survived, “in the knowledge that others have met a worse fate, creates

a severe burden of conscience” (Herman 54). In spite of the clearly blurred distinction between perpetrator and victim that is present in both novels, the repetitive signs of feelings of guilt also lead to the reader feeling empathetic towards both protagonists. By finally reaching the point where they can speak about their traumata and face their guilt and responsibility, which Matthew and Cadence learn to do, they can fully develop an understanding of the trauma (Herman 178).

4. Conclusion

Psychological trauma is a captivating subject that is understandably a part of innumerable literary works and it can manifest itself in narrations through specific literary devices. This thesis has demonstrated that novels within this genre can be aimed at readers of different ages, in spite of the complexity of trauma. Although it is a highly subjective matter, these readers often feel empathetic towards the protagonists of such narratives, which allows for a better understanding of the traumata.

In this thesis, I have analysed two contemporary novels that can both be called trauma novels, as the narratives contain particular elements that are typical for the trauma fiction genre. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, trauma narratives are often characterised by emotionality, contradictions and fragmentation, which is evident in both *We Were Liars* and *The Shock of the Fall*. Other key devices in trauma fiction, as established by Anne Whitehead, are used to varying degrees in the literary works of Lockhart and Filer.

I would consider *We Were Liars* to be a literary work that quite clearly can be called a trauma novel. The narration is severely affected and made unreliable by the fact that Cadence suffers from amnesia and cannot recall the traumatic event, which signifies that her memories were dissociated. Therefore, she cannot reliably narrate the events, but should be considered a fallible narrator, as her narrative failings are motivated by her physical and psychological traumata. Another aspect that influences her reliability are her misperceptions and hallucinations of the other Liars throughout the course of summer seventeen, which may be caused by her head injury and her medication, but possibly also by her psychological trauma. Not only the reliability of the narration is affected by the dissociated memories, but also the chronology. Due to the gradual process of Cadence's memories resurfacing at various stages throughout the novel, the chronology is disrupted frequently. However, these flashbacks to the traumatic event are often marked explicitly as memories, which may facilitate the reading for the adolescent target audience.

Lockhart's novel also makes use of fragmentation in the distinctive splitting of one sentence over several lines. These fragments are often linked to the traumata of losing the other Liars and the excessive fighting in the Sinclair family, as well as the loss of Gat. Similarly, many of the repetitions focus on the traumatic event itself, which affects the narration extensively. In addition to that, the repetitions can also be seen as manifestations of feelings of guilt and responsibility.

Finally, the narration elaborately uses intertextual references to fairy tales and other literary works, specifically Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. While the frame narrative also makes intertextual references to fairy tales (see also Lockhart's note on this, mentioned in chapter 3.6.1.1.), intertextuality abounds particularly in Cadence's own fairy tales. By narrating her own variations of the classic fairy tales, she can return to her dissociated memories and find a way to speak about the tragic events of summer fifteen without having to say explicitly what has happened.

In contrast to Lockhart's novel, I would consider Filer's *The Shock of the Fall* a less typical example of a trauma novel, as the prevalent role that schizophrenia has in the narration arguably allows for it to be seen as a more typical representation of an illness narrative instead. It is interesting to note that Filer's novel is constructed in such a way that the reader may be tempted to think that the psychological trauma of losing his brother caused Matthew's schizophrenia. However, research has shown that childhood trauma cannot be seen as the sole reason for schizophrenia (Straube 82)⁹.

Still, it is understandable that Matthew's reliability is affected, considering that he is only nineteen and that he has schizophrenia. His mental illness also influences the reader's perception of Simon's return to Matthew's life, as the hearing of voices and experiencing hallucinations are two of the main symptoms of schizophrenia. Readers may react negatively to an ordinary

⁹ In contrast to this, research conducted in 2012 showed that childhood trauma can cause psychosis and schizophrenia in later life. However, these findings only looked at the consequences of sexual trauma, physical abuse, bullying and growing up in institutional care. Therefore, these findings do not provide any indication that the loss of a sibling may be a cause for schizophrenia. (<http://schizophreniabulletin.oxfordjournals.org/content/38/4/734.full.pdf+html>, 28 Mar. 2016)

narrator suddenly speaking about strange hallucinations, but being aware of Matthew's diagnosis might allow the readers to be more understanding. Nevertheless, I believe that Simon's return is not only linked to his schizophrenia, but also mirrors Whitehead's concept of the ghosts of those who died too soon coming back to haunt the living.

The chronology in this novel is more frequently disrupted than in *We Were Liars*. These disruptions are caused by the numerous temporal jumps between the present where Matthew is writing down his story and previous experiences, ranging back to childhood memories. Additionally, the temporality is undermined by the changing typefaces and the inclusion of letters from other people in the narration, which may be confusing for some readers. The complex temporal structure can be interpreted as a manifestation of both the psychological trauma Matthew is coping with and the confused thought pattern that is a major symptom of schizophrenia.

Compared to Lockhart's novel, only very few instances of intertextuality are included in the novel. This lack of intertextual references in *The Shock of the Fall* contributes to my impression that it is not a typical example of trauma fiction. Unlike in Lockhart's novel, the narration here does not include a revision of the source texts, but rather shows how Matthew is caught in repetition compulsion.

In summary, I would say that although the narration does make use of typical devices of trauma fiction, it must be considered a combination of a trauma novel and an illness narrative. To what degree it represents the latter literary genre could, unfortunately, not be discussed in more detail within this thesis as this would have shifted the focus away from trauma fiction.

I would like to conclude this thesis with a final look at Granofsky's three stages of trauma narratives – fragmentation, regression and reunification – which are all to a certain extent present in the novels analysed.

The stage of regression is more present in *The Shock of the Fall*, as Matthew's hallucinations of Simon allow him to return to a younger version of himself, free of guilt and responsibility. Cadence, in contrast, does not return to any earlier stages of development. Nevertheless, I would argue that in a sense, the people around them cause regression to some extent, as they often treat

Matthew and Cadence like children. Although there is no malicious intent behind their actions, they relieve the protagonists of some responsibility and maturity. This is achieved through the Sinclairs not telling Cadence what happened, while Matthew's family, particularly his mother and grandmother, sometimes treat him as if he were much younger than nineteen.

As mentioned, fragmentation is used extensively in both narrations, which is evident in both the fragmented nature of memories as well as a fragmentation of the texts themselves through particular stylistic separations.

Lastly, both narrations go through Granofksy's phase of reunification, as Cadence and Matthew are able to integrate their traumatic experiences into their mind and speak about it, although Cadence is arguably more successful in doing so. By putting their past experiences into writing and gradually returning to their memories, they finally succeed in turning their traumatic memories into narrative memories, marking the beginning of their recovery. This reinforces LaCapra's claim that writing about and re-telling traumatic events can be a curative process for traumatised individuals. This aspect of healing is also mentioned by Matthew at the end of *The Shock of the Fall*:

Writing about the past is a way of reliving it, a way of seeing it unfold all over again. We place memories on pieces of paper to know they will always exist. But this story has never been a keepsake – it's finding a way to let go. (Filer 306-307)

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6. Abstract

Traumatic experiences may have severe consequences, such as a repression of traumatic memories or an inability to speak about an event. As trauma affects people's lives in significant ways, it has also become a theme commonly included in literature. The main aim of this thesis is to examine how psychological trauma manifests itself in the narration of adolescent narrators in selected works in contemporary young adult and adult fiction. The theoretical part will look at the definition, symptoms and effects of trauma, based on the significant contributions to this field by scholars such as Cathy Caruth. It will also provide an overview of the trauma fiction genre, as well as the literary convention of first-person narration and the use of young adult narrators. Furthermore, the notion of unreliable narration will be discussed as this is particularly relevant in connection with young adult narrators and characters who have faced traumatic experiences. In the analytical part of this thesis, Emily Lockhart's *We Were Liars* (2014) and Nathan Filer's *The Shock of the Fall* (2013) will be examined as contemporary examples of the trauma novel. In both books, the adolescent protagonists' traumatic experiences significantly affect their reliability, as well as their narrative style, which is evident in the use of repetition, disrupted chronology, fragmentation and intertextuality. Narrating their traumata is challenging for them as they struggle extensively with recalling their memories and speaking about them. Additionally, as both protagonists have an active, but not necessarily intentional role in the unfolding of the traumatic events, the analysis in this thesis will demonstrate that guilt plays a decisive factor in the overcoming of their traumata.

7. Zusammenfassung

Traumatische Erfahrungen können schwere Folgen nach sich ziehen, wie zum Beispiel die Unterdrückung der traumatischen Erinnerungen oder die Unfähigkeit, darüber zu sprechen. Angesichts solch prägender Auswirkungen von Trauma auf das Leben eines Menschen wird dieses Thema auch oft in der Literatur behandelt. Das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es, zu untersuchen, wie sich psychologisches Trauma in den Erzählungen jugendlicher Erzähler in ausgewählten literarischen Texten für Erwachsene und Jugendliche zeigt. Der erste Teil beschäftigt sich mit den theoretischen Aspekten von Trauma, basierend auf bedeutenden wissenschaftlichen Beiträgen von Autoren wie Cathy Caruth. Er bietet einen Überblick über Traumaliteratur, die literarische Konvention der Ich-Erzählung und den Gebrauch von jugendlichen Erzählern. Weiters wird der Begriff der unzuverlässigen Erzählung besprochen, da dieser besonders im Zusammenhang mit jugendlichen Erzählern sowie Charakteren, die mit traumatischen Erfahrungen konfrontiert wurden, relevant ist. Im zweiten Teil dieser Diplomarbeit werden Emily Lockharts *We Were Liars* (2014) und Nathan Filers *The Shock of the Fall* (2013) als gegenwärtige Beispiele des Traumaromans analysiert. In beiden Büchern wird die Zuverlässigkeit der jugendlichen Hauptcharaktere durch ihre traumatischen Erfahrungen beeinflusst. Gleichermaßen manifestieren sich die Traumata in der Erzählstruktur, was sich im Gebrauch von Wiederholungen, unterbrochener Chronologie, Fragmentierungen und Intertextualität erkennen lässt. Von ihren Traumata zu erzählen, ist für beide Hauptcharaktere eine Herausforderung, weil es ihnen schwer fällt, sich an die traumatischen Erfahrungen zu erinnern und darüber zu sprechen. Da beide Protagonisten eine aktive, aber nicht beabsichtigte Rolle in den traumatischen Erlebnissen haben, zeigt die Analyse auch, dass Schuld ein bedeutsamer Faktor in der Bewältigung ihrer Traumata ist.

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