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Trauma and Storytelling in Michael Chabon's
Moonglow

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CONTENTS

0. Introduction.....	3-5
1. “This is how I heard the story”: The unmeasurable value of fiction in Michael Chabon’s oeuvre.....	6-12
1.1. On Michael Chabon’s literary convictions.....	6-7
1.2. Creating “imaginary homelands”: Meta-escapism by means of Metafiction.....	7-9
1.3. “Do you want me to tell you a story?” : Life as a trauma.....	9-11
1.4. If there is a lie, there must be a truth: Veracity is a matter of perspective.....	11-12
2. Trauma in <i>Moonglow</i>	12-16
3. Conclusion.....	16-17
4. Works Cited.....	18-19

Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century brought about collective anxieties that pointed to the inherent violence of the human being, and with it the feeling that new themes should be introduced in order to represent reality in a better way. The collective feeling of uncertainty regarding the present and the future, as well as the cultural misplacement of the novel, motivated artists to focus their attention on the individual mind. This transition from the objective to the subjective and the rejection of external world, capitalized in what we today call Modernism. Then, Modernism opened the door for Postmodernism. Whereas Modernist literature was characterized by its “commitment to a unified and coherent work of art employing symbol and myth, exhibiting alienation from ordinary life, Postmodernism celebrates incoherence, discontinuity, parody, popular culture and Metafiction” (Collins Dictionary of Literary Terms, 2004, p.265). In order to achieve the new targets proposed by Postmodernism, new fields required to be explored, among them, the field of Trauma Studies. The relationship between literature and psychoanalytic theories on trauma provides a description of life in traumatized terms, thus “reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives that come to represent the story of the trauma” (Tal, 1996, p.6). Works of fiction that struggled to reconcile their authors with a painful past have been crucial in the last one hundred years (Vickroy, 2002, p.2). Trauma Studies’ greatest contribution to literary theory is putting to the fore the effort of making readers access traumatic experience and in elucidating our relationship to memory as well as illuminating the personal and public aspects of trauma (Vickroy, 2002, p.1). The main aim of trauma theory is to help the victim overcome his traumatic anxieties, since the traumatic experiences are so overwhelming that the victim cannot assimilate them in a conscious level (Collado, 2012, p.47). In order to do so, the victim must be able to identify the source of his or her anxieties and once the fragmented and dislocated memories are brought back to the mind, then the victim will be able to decode and make some sense out of them. This process of storytelling or this soliloquy between the traumatized and his buried memories is the pillar upon which new form of narrative centred on trauma withstands.

Narratives about trauma flourished in the 1980s and in the 1990s, and their approach have constantly varied (Vickroy, 2002, p.2). Examples of these narratives include Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992). However, there is one particular characteristic of this kind of narrative, and that is that it is primarily concerned with human-made traumatic situations. Many scholars believe that the most violent event that took place during the last two hundred years was the Holocaust, and for many more of them it represents the greatest tragedy in the history of the world (Tal, 1996, p.26). For scholars such as Kalí Tal, the Universality of the Holocaust must be put into question and should be regarded as a "historical and cultural event on par with other cultural and historical events and therefore undeserving of a capital "H"" (Tal, 1996). Tal goes on suggesting that whenever we talk about the Holocaust we cannot help but to associate it with a set of symbols that reflect the formal codification of that experience; since traumatic events are healed by means of storytelling and narrative, it is inevitable that throughout the process of writing and rewriting, the narrative form, little by little, degenerates into the main focus of attention, taking the place of the Holocaust as referring to those events that occurred in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century (*Worlds of Hurts* 8). During War World II, around six millions of Jews were killed; six millions of stories left unfinished. Taking into account the notion of "Postmemory" coined by Marianne Hirsch (2012), according to which the new generation bears the anxieties and the cultural trauma of those who came before, it is not difficult to understand the great psychological and cultural strain and disturbance, not only of a victim, but of an entire and persecuted culture.

It is within the theoretical framework of trauma studies that this essay will show that Michael Chabon's *Moonglow* (2016) provides a new frame to examine the dilemma over the definition of the Holocaust, as well as the role of the survivor. I believe that one of the realizations of *Moonglow* is not trying necessarily to represent the Holocaust neither as a Universal nor as a Historical event. Instead, it lets the reader to consider the importance and the cultural dimensions of such an event for him or herself. By not dealing with the Holocaust in a direct way, Chabon makes clear not only the impossibility of representing an event that transformed and shaped the paradigm

of our current society; moreover, he reflects on the fragility and vulnerability of his characters' psyche, as well as their impossibility, or perhaps denial to deal with their own experiences and be able to overcome their traumas. From his examination of puberty and teenage life in his first novel *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988), to the exploration of manhood and sexual identity in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000) and establishing an "imaginary homeland" for all the Jews in order to reconcile himself with his Yiddish cultural tradition in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007), Michael Chabon has acquired the status of a writer of universal themes, therefore, this work will be focused on exploring the ways in which conventions used in trauma fiction are effective when it comes to represent the internal conflicts of traumatic memory, which is the new theme that Chabon explores in his latest novel.

1. “This is how I heard the story”: The unmeasurable value of fiction in Michael Chabon’s oeuvre

1.1. On Michael Chabon’s literary convictions

Michael Chabon has on innumerable occasions praised the importance of fiction, not only in literature, but in life in general. That is, the ability that we humans have “to find signs where there are no signs and patrons where there are no patrons” (Chabon, 2019, n.p). I consider that one of the ways in which Chabon makes clear his enthusiasm for fiction is by mixing up different genres in order to make even more evident the inherent and irrefutable value of storytelling, and therefore, of fiction. Chabon concurred with Italian writer Umberto Eco when both described literature as an “honestly dishonest” (Eco, 2019, p.738, Chabon, 2019, n.p) medium, in which the reader is deceived by mutual agreement with the author. However, in order for someone to be deceived, there must be at least a truth behind it. In a recent interview, Chabon undermined the value of a biographical or autobiographical novel by comparing a work of fiction with the attendance to a magic performance (Chabon, 2019, n.p); both the reader and the spectator know that they are going to be deceived, but they agree and they even pay for it. This connection or this feeling of realism with something completely devoid of reality is what has kept the flame of literature alight for so many centuries.

Michael Chabon recalled how restrained he was of his reading of Arthur Conan Doyle, Ray Bradbury, or Jack Vance because their fiction was not considered “serious fiction” (Chabon 2007, p.176). However, Chabon was forged in the field of genre fiction and the passion and values that inspired in him were the sparks that made possible his own and particular quest towards a literature where genre fiction and literary fiction collided. Obviously, there were already authors like Thomas Pynchon or Kurt Vonnegut, whose works drew heavily on genre fiction. In his essay entitled “Imaginary Homelands”, Chabon realizes that the reason why these authors were openly accepted and praised by the critics was mainly because “their writing was often described as transgressive” (Chabon 2008, p.176). And by the time he was starting to familiarize

himself with this idea of transgression, he was also “learning to question everything else (Chabon 2008, p.177), including the story of his own family.

The beginning of *Moonglow* starts off with the sentence “this is how I heard the story” (2016, p.1). There, the narrator implicitly questions himself, or maybe makes himself believe in the veracity of the story that will eventually be told to the reader. Curiously enough, the very end of the novel, more specifically during the acknowledgments, he adopts an enigmatic posture similar to that of the protagonist of the story, when not only makes the reader suspicious of most of the things he or she has read, but he even puts into question the very existence of his wife and fellow author, Ayelet Waldman. This is part of Chabon’s strategy to make the reader unsure about the fictional status of the narrative. Moreover, it shows another very important thing, that is, how the process of memory works. Spanish writer Javier Marías once said in an interview that one of the main features of humans is our perseverance in doubting everything, even our own identity (Marías, 2017, n.p). This is related with the idea of transgression and how it is useful in order to stretch the boundaries of narration to the extremes; for if we do not reach the extremes, how could we tell where the limits stand? This enthusiasm for subversion motivated late experimentations in literature to detach itself from that realist approach of literature consisting on coherent and easy-to-follow narratives. Instead, more and more writers opted for a more artificial attitude, forcing the reader to be aware of the act of reading, reminding him constantly that what he is reading is a mere work of fiction. This self-conscious process of storytelling is called Metafiction, and will be explored more deeply in the following section.

1.2. Creating “imaginary homelands”: Meta-escapism by means of Metafiction

Every book, every reading experience, transports the reader to a different world and a distant reality different from our own. However, some works of fiction offer a stronger immersive experience. They offer the reader the chance to escape “real” reality and get immersed in a fictional reality. Some books contextualize this

process of escapism in order to offer cautionary tales about it. *Infinite Jest* (1997), by David Foster Wallace is, together with Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), one of the most important American novels that came out during the second half of the twentieth century. In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace discusses the dangers of escapism and solipsism, of getting so much absorbed by entertainment that one ends up forgetting about his or her own life. However, there are some narratives that somehow conceptualize the process of escapism while at the same time praise what good can be found in this process.

Moonglow is not Michael Chabon's first attempt in producing a sense of escapism in his novels. Virtually every work published by Chabon in some way or another contributes to fill the gaps in his own life, as Chabon himself declares in "Imaginary Homelands" (2007, p.157-179). His fourth novel, *The Final Solution* (2004), can be understood or read as a trauma narrative, precisely because of the lack of closure, that is, of a "final solution." It illustrates Chabon's struggle with his own identity, as he himself made clear while he was writing from the place he lived: "in exile" (Chabon, 2008, p.157), searching for "a home, a world to call my own" (Chabon, 2008, p.158). It was not until he started working on his next novel, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007) that he finally made peace with his convictions regarding his identity as a Jew and his "complete feeling of ambivalence about a world without Israel (Chabon, 2007, p.13) and become the writer that we all know. Of course, his enthusiasm for genre fiction was already evident in his Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000), but it was not after the publication of *The Yiddish Policemen Union* that he was finally able to "build [him] self a home in [his] imagination as [his] wife and [him] were making a home in the world" (Chabon, 2008, p.178). *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, in turn, can be connected to *Moonglow* in the sense that both novels do not provide escapism only for the sake of their readers, but also for their protagonists. Just like the protagonist of *Moonglow* finds solace by listening to the story of his grandparent's life, so Joseph Kavalier and Samuel Clayton evade from the catastrophe of World War II by delving into the world of comic industry. *Wonder Boys* (1995) reflects Chabon's own feeling of dissatisfaction as "[he] grooved along on [his] lostness" (Chabon, 2008, p.178) when

coming to the writing of a novel, with all its negative implications. And we finally get to *Moonglow*, described beautifully by Harper Collins as “a work of fictional nonfiction, an autobiography wrapped in a novel disguised as a memoir” (2016, n.p). Chabon’s most intimal novel and also the most ambitious one in terms of style, *Moonglow* is a book meant for readers who enjoy the multiplication of stories and fictional worlds. I have already mentioned Thomas Pynchon a few times, and Chabon’s devotion to him clearly becomes evident in this novel, especially in the way the novel is organized. Every chapter in all of Pynchon’s novels can be considered as an independent story, with its own plot and resolution. Both *Moonglow* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* feature tons of stories within stories, converting the reading experiences into a roller-coaster of colossal dimensions. *Moonglow* indeed simulates the working of the human brain, with both its chaos and incongruity, by means of juxtaposition and associations, jumping from one scene or moment to another. Here, *Moonglow* transcends the reader’s capacity to understand in what plane of time he or she is, and what logic can be made out of it.

1.3. “Do you want me to tell you a story?” Life as a trauma

For Dominik LaCapra, the mere condition of trauma results from the realisation of the mortality of the human condition. Structural Trauma is associated with frequent states of anxiety and melancholia, as well as with other, more specific symptoms that also characterize personal and collective traumas, such as a feeling of absence, keeping silent, the appearance of uncontrollable repetitions or tags, nightmares, insomnia, the manifestation of ghostly presences, or states of panic (LaCapra, *Writing History* 76-85 and “Trauma, Absence, Loss” 723-727 in Collado, 2012, p.47). As manifested in the novel, the grandmother’s traumatized condition is the result of the Nazi persecution of her native France during World War II, together with the killing of her parents and herself having been raped by soldier that she keeps associating him, sexually, with a skinned horse. The novel never really gets to fully clarify the sense behind the figure of the horse, and that is precisely the main point of it; that is, to represents the uncontrollable and incongruent ideas that run through the mind of a traumatized person, thus making more evident the feeling of absence and disorientation of the

victim. According to Vickroy, the ability to put oneself in someone else's place and to face "ethical dilemmas analogous to those of trauma survivors" (2002, p.1) helps not necessarily to empathize or to make us confront our own fears, but also, and especially, to understand the complexities of life. Nevertheless, cultural representation of trauma can also produce a counter-effect in which the contact of the reader with disturbing and dreadful matters might make him or her feel comfortable, thus, unable to identify with the accounts of the victim, as he or she uses them as an antidote to their own sorrows. (Vickroy, 2002, p.7). For Vickroy, the reaction of the reader depends on the kind of resolution (if any) that are offered to traumatic circumstances and to what degree of optimism they are offered (2002, p.7).

It is interesting to note how the elements employed in trauma narratives, such as testimonies, memories, symbolism and myth transcend the power of storytelling and somehow "resist the narrativizing," in the sense that "serious trauma writers attempt to guide readers through re-created process of traumatic memory in order that this experience be understood more widely" (Vickroy, 2002, p.7-8). When coming to the depiction of trauma in literature, the traditional understanding of storytelling must definitely be set aside.

The understanding of life in traumatized terms, and more specifically, the approach of literature towards trauma, especially in contemporary post-WWII society, helped readers to make them feel part of the story, to feel engaged with the characters and their social and cultural context. When Michael Chabon decided to set *The Yiddish Policemen Union* in an alternative Jewish homeland called Sitka, he put into question, and subsequently forced to reader in his turn to question the cultural and moral judgement regarding the election of Israel as the definitive "promised land" for all the victims of the Holocaust. The novel represents the anxieties and concerns – and why not, the trauma - of an entire culture hoping for centuries to find a place which they can call their home. *Moonglow* also goes back in time, and with it, the reader accompanies the narrator in his struggle to come to terms with his past in order to make some sense of the present. Throughout the continuous temporal discontinuities featured in the novel, the reader learns that the past can always be

refuted and reinterpreted, highlighting the importance of subjectivity in the art of storytelling and how much historical past can be refuted and reinterpreted.

1.4. If there is a lie, there must be a truth: Veracity is a matter of perspective

As the final point in this first section, and before I proceed with the analysis of *Moonglow*, I would like to focus a little bit on the way the novel obstinately keeps confusing the readers as to whether the accounts inside it are true, half-true, or a complete invention cunningly orchestrated by its author. The effort employed by the reader to try to make some sense out of such a complex and at times incoherent story, goes hand to hand with the narrator's grandfather struggle to relive or recreate his past life. Most of the time, the active role of the reader overlaps with the narration of the grandfather, for he realizes "that trauma cannot be faced alone and that recovery is possible only 'within the context of relationships'" (Herman 133; Felman and Laub 57-58, in Vickroy, 2002, 22). The grandfather becomes aware that this is the only way he can get rid of his angsts, so he initiates a conversational relation to his grandson. Early on in the novel, we are told that the narrator's grandfather passes away by the time "a lot of Germans were busy knocking holes in the Berlin Wall" (Chabon, 2016, p.11), that is, in 1989. However, later on we are informed that the grandfather accidentally fractured his leg "as he was getting up from the toilet one morning in March 1990" (Chabon, 2016, p.47). As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of all these contradictions is to reflect the chaotic and drug-damaged mind of Chabon's grandfather, who stirred by the imminence of death, decides to share his life-story with his grandson. The figure of the grandfather – whose real name is never revealed – illustrates the struggle of a traumatic victim to travel back to the deepest and darkest recesses of his mind in order to reach that event or that situation responsible for all the subsequent troubles in his life. It is a final attempt in trying to find a "final solution" to his apprehensions. As Vickroy indicated, "fundamental to traumatic experience is that the past lingers unresolved, not remembered in a conventional sense, because it is not processed like nontraumatic information, either cognitively or

emotionally” (2002, p.12). But still there is the necessity to try to explain our stories, to make them mean something.

2. Trauma in *Moonglow*

According to Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846), only when you are sure about the denouement of your story you can fully devote yourself to develop it. Chabon extrapolated this theory to develop the character of the grandfather, when at some point in the novel the narrator, and fictional persona of Chabon himself, says that “ninety percent of everything he told me about his life, I heard during its final ten days” (*Moonglow*, 91). It is noteworthy that the starting point of the narration of his life could “hardly [be] qualified as reminiscence” (*Moonglow*, 91). This specific recollection of his past has been triggered by a random event that for some reason prevailed in the memory of the grandfather. At the same time, the fact that the grandfather started his narration bringing to light the figure of his stepdaughter works as a link between him and his grandson. This resonates, or suggests that the relationship between the grandfather and the grandson has not been, up that point, a close one.

There are many references throughout the novel alluding to how ambivalent the grandson felt regarding his relationship with his grandparents, most of the times feeling more comfortable in the company of his grandmother. The fact that “the recollection [of his grandfather] emerged in no discernible order apart from the first, which was also the earliest” (*Moonglow*, 5) is, at the same time, connected with the tendency that we humans have to narrate the story of our lives backwards, that is, a tendency to reconstruct our past, from the present, trying to make some sense out of it, or to look at it from another perspective. It also represents the “disorientations and conflicts of traumatic memory” (Vickroy, 2002, p.3) “for traumatic memory to lose its power as a fragment and symptom and for it to be integrated into memory, a form of narrative reconstruction or reexternalization has to occur” (Felman and Laub p.69 in Vickroy, 2002, p.3). The grandson becomes aware of his therapeutic status when he indulges the act of “defenestration [that was] beginning to emerge in his

autobiography” (Moonglow, 6) and swaps roles with the reader helping his grandfather to reconstruct his life experiences while at the same time satisfying his “narrative appetite” (Moonglow, p.317). As we have seen, for someone whose “current state – which today would likely be diagnosed as post-traumatic shock – “(Moonglow, p.266) the notion of time and order is virtually non-existent, thus, facing “the difficulty of reconstructing a painful past and identity when only bits of memory there and there is no clear path to meaning” (Vickroy, 2002, p.29).

According to Vickroy, writers have created a number of narrative strategies to represent a conflicted or incomplete relation to memory, including textual gaps, repetition, breaks in linear time, shifting viewpoints, and a focus on visual images and affective states (*Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, 2002, p.29). Michael Chabon’s *Moonglow* is no exception, moving of step beyond and extending that “incomplete relation to memory” to the reader, making him or her feel insecure and hesitant about what he or she has just read. When Mike, the narrator of the novel tells us that the “entire photographic record of my life to date” (Moonglow, p.318), one cannot help but to ask himself which date he refers to; whether to 1989, when his grandfather passes away, to the time – the real time – when he was actually in the process of writing the novel, or maybe to another date in between those two. This constant confusion consciously induced to the reader to engage with “personalized, experientially oriented means of narration that highlight the painful ambivalence that characterizes traumatic memory” (Vickroy, 2002, p.3), creates a sense of affinity with the victim, sharing his anguishes from an active position, thus establishing a more solid link between reader and character.

Moonglow’s dealing with trauma goes beyond the mere description or representation of a traumatized individual. It illustrates and “confronts readers with difficult issues such as preoccupation with fears of death, evoked frequently in characters’ obsessions, dreams, and imagery [...] yet there is also considerable focus on changes to the self after undergoing trauma and learning to survive” (Vickroy, 2002, p.27). The grandfather admits in his deathbed that all you have is “a story of things you never started or couldn’t finish. Things you fought with all your heart to build that didn’t last or fought with all your heart to get rid of and they’re still around”

(*Moonglow*, p.241). He also feels ashamed of himself, conceding his life (story) to his grandson, the “emphatic listener”:

You can have it. I’m giving it to you. After I’m gone, write it down. Explain everything. Make it mean something. Use a lot of those fancy metaphors of yours. Put the whole thing in proper chronological order, not like this mishmash I’m making you. Start with the night I was born. March second, 1915. There was a lunar eclipse that night, you know what that is?

“When the earth’s shadow fall across the Moon.”

“Very significant. I’m sure it’s a perfect metaphor for something. Start with that.” (*Moonglow*, p.241)

The title of the novel illustrates the “perfect metaphor” that the author accomplished in honor of his grandfather. In fact, the symbol of the moon is particularly significant throughout the novel since it is the centre around everything else spins. For the grandfather, the moon not only represents an escape and a solution to his problems, it also links or connects him with the most important person in his life, his wife. It was precisely his wife that asked him to take her with him to the moon (*Moonglow*, p.100). However, their mutual interest to flee from this world, “230,000 miles from the stench of history, [where] there was no madness or memory or loss” (*Moonglow*, p.86), was not the only think that made them feel so connected to each other, but the fact that both have been traumatized in the past. The main difference is that while the grandfather somehow managed to finally overcome his traumatic anxieties with the help of his grandson, his wife lost the battle and eventually succumbed to all the anxieties and apprehensions that haunted her pretty much all his life. The wife was a French immigrant that came to the United States during the aftermath of World War II. She already has a four-year old daughter, being actually the mother of the narrator. Having been living in France during World War II damaged her psyche considerably, forcing her to elude talking about the subject at any time, making her voice “throb[bed] with sadness” (*Moonglow*, p.95). According to doctor Medved, she suffered from acute hormonal imbalance, even though his prior diagnosis has been

trauma-induced schizophrenia (*Moonglow*, p.350). Medved reached that conclusion considering “the accounts she gave, of her experiences” (*Moonglow*, p.350), putting into question any kind of sense of coherence or consistency in her narrative. Moreover, the grandfather even started to put into question the existence of the Skinned Horse (*Moonglow*, p.349), asking himself whether the whole story was real “or she had been making the whole thing up” (*Moonglow*, p.349). As a clarification, the figure of the Skinned Horse is what gives his wife most troubles and anxieties throughout the novel, even though nobody knows the source or the meaning of it until the grandfather gets to read the report written by Medved. That moment could be considered the epiphany of the novel, for the most mysterious aspect of the story finally comes to light. Medved affirms that the patient “experienced return of vivid early memory, sight of engorged “skinless” penis with a local SS captain, father of biological son” (*Moonglow*, p.355). At that moment, narrator discovered the reason behind the affliction of his grandmother and decided to keep it from his mother and the rest of the world until he started to research and write this particular memoir (*Moonglow*, p.356).

Now the reader knows why the wife felt so ugly on the inside (*Moonglow*, p.326), because there was a story behind it. Nevertheless, the wife consciously decided to carry her burden in silence, with its own destructive costs such as further victimization, the loss of human connections, and unresolved anguish (Vickroy, 2002, p.4). The wife experienced a gradual “repression to childlike” (Tal, 1996, p.33) making her unable to behave in a proper way. The silence and occultism of her tragic past was the result of the desire of saving the life of her daughter, trying to offer her a better future. This motherly ambition consumed her mental stability and alienated her from everybody, including her own husband. In the end she could not resist anymore, and the love she felt for her family was stronger than the desire to get healed. The only source of relieve was, again, the grandson who played once again the role of the “emphatic listener”. It was no coincidence that the grandson was a little boy when his grandmother approached him with the question “do you want me to tell you a story?” (*Moonglow*, p.23). It was during these moments or episodes that she could be herself and that she could feel at ease in the company of other, “the actress in her came out,

her storytelling was a performance undertaken with ardour and panache" (*Moonglow*, p.24). "Her stories were like moods or fevers: They came over her" (*Moonglow*, p.369). This inclination of the grandmother towards storytelling resonates with Suzette Henke's idea according to which "creating enabling stories and self-concepts, thereby recovering a sense self and agency in the face of devastating loses" (Henke, *Shattered Subjects*, 2000, in Vickroy, 2002, p.8). She finally understood that, in the end, life is a story, and as such, it needs a meaning. She needed a meaning to all her sufferings, to all the sacrifices she made in order to protect those who loved, because "when it came to things that needed to be said, speech was always preferable to silence, but it was of no use at all in the presence of the unspeakable" (*Moonglow*, p.243).

3. Conclusion

Life is made up of infinite stories that have concluded, that are in the process of developing, or that are yet to begin. For this reason, the beginning of *Moonglow* is extremely revelatory. I believe that the power of this novel, apart from its undeniable literary quality, lies in the way it resonates with the readers. It makes them aware of their importance as individuals, as the protagonists of a story that is still in developing, the story of their lives. Being a human being is not an easy task, and *Moonglow* manages to give some clues or some answers to the existential question of what it means, after all, to be a human being. It means falling in love, it means going through the most terrible experience in life, like losing a dear person, it means the desire to protect those we love and the consequences that fall upon us. It also means the desire that we all feel for our lives to mean something. And that is the key element in Chabon's *Moonglow*, the search for a meaning, no matter what that meaning is as long as it is anything else other than the nothingness.

This essay illustrates an attempt to prove the value of studying trauma as well as the inherent power that fiction has in trying to overcome it. In the first sections I have focused on Chabon's literary tradition as well as the metafictional elements used in *Moonglow* in order to produce a sense of reconciliation with the past and with the current situation of its characters. At the same time, I highlighted as much as possible

the intrinsic importance of stories and storytelling that Chabon made evident in his novel. In this case, storytelling is associated with the innate sense of creativity that we humans have in order to interpret our own place in life and in society. Storytelling, creativity, and memory constitute the three main elements that are used as an antidote against trauma since characters of this novel turn their traumatic experiences into artistic creations.

It is interesting to observe how the life of the grandmother is structured around the three strategies that Kalí Tal proposes in order to cope with trauma: mythologization, medicalization, and disappearance (1996, p.6). According to Tal, mythologization is the process of reducing a traumatic event to a set of standard narratives. The enthusiasm of the grandmother for storytelling and her creative response to trauma is very much compatible to this first point suggested by Tal. Also, the conviction of her husband and of the doctors that she suffers from an illness that can be cured and then the subsequent refusal on part of doctor Medved to admit the existence of any kind of trauma. All those strategies cooperate in order to effect what Tal named the “cultural codification of trauma” (1996, p.6). On his behalf, the grandfather was not even aware of the fact that he was suffering from what “today would likely be diagnosed as post-traumatic shock” (*Moonglow*, p.266). The novel is aware that it is virtually impossible for an outsider to know and feel the experience of those who had lived through such a traumatic event as it was the Holocaust. This is one of the reasons why the background story of the grandmother remains a secret during the most part of the novel. Both grandfather and grandmother, wife and husband, tried to make their own living out of their respective pains, to find a reason to live, to find out that after all, there was a meaning for their actions. Unfortunately, none of them managed to make it to the Moon.

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