Witnessing from a Distance

Images and Trauma in Anglophone Literature about the Bosnian War

Dina Abazović

UiA University of Agder

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Tell them you saw me.
Tell them . . . You saw me.
– Soldier in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*

Everyone saw / Everyone saw
– Adrian Oktenberg, *The Bosnia Elegies*

I saw... I was an eyewitness.
– Rasim in Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*

Acknowledgements

On 25th of April 1992, my family and I were lined up in front of our house, to be executed. A close encounter with long-bearded men holding their Kalashnikovs was in stark contrast with a bright spring day. My mother was seven months pregnant with my brother. Until that day, I only knew about the war from seeing it on television: first in Croatia, then in Bosnia. My family were saved by pure chance, and after our rescue we headed towards the besieged zone in Sarajevo, where we stayed until the end of the war in 1996. Somehow, we became a part of the news reports that the rest of the world watched on TV. It took several years until I started understanding my own album with "planted pictures", as Ariella Azoulay calls the images engraved through trauma. Not until I moved far away from Bosnia was I able to engage with the troubled lexicon of the war and post-war reality: survivor, victim, perpetrator, trauma, intrusive images, witnessing. This thesis came out of that process.

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Dina Abazović,

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Summary in Norwegian

Bosniakrigen sto i sentrum for den globale medieoppmerksomheten på 1990-tallet og avfødte en mengde litterære reaksjoner. Over 20 år etter krigen er disse forskjellige litterære verkene lite utforsket og sjelden sett i sammenheng med begivenhetene de sprang ut av. Denne avhandlingen tar for seg tre engelskspråklige verk i tre forskjellige sjangre: Sarah Kane's skuespill *Blasted* (1995), Adrian Oktenbergs dikt "In the morning" (fra diktsamlingen *The Bosnia Elegies* 1997), og Joe Saccos dokumentariske tegneserieroman *Safe Area Goražde* (2000). Disse tre arbeidene formidler traumatiske erfaringer på høyst forskjellig vis, og avhandlingen diskuterer hvordan disse verkene bærer distansert vitnesbyrd i litterær form, gjennom et rammeverk av ekfraseforståelse og traumeteori, med kjernebegreper som *ekphrasis*, *trauma*, *image*, *media*, *witnessing*, and *witnessing gap*. Et hovedspørmsål har vært hvorvidt litterære krigsframstillinger fungerer som avstandsskapte vitnesbyrd, og hvordan disse står i forhold til media i sin alminnelighet, samt forholdet mellom invaderende bilder og ekfrastiske bilder. Analysen viser at ekfrase står sentralt i produksjonen av litterære vitnesbyrd, og at disse ekfrasene opptrer forskjellig i ulike sjangre.

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A note on the text

Unless specified otherwise in the text, quotations from Sarah Kane’s drama *Blasted* come from her *Complete Plays*. A reference such as (3: 49) refers to the scene followed by the page number.

TBE will be used interchangeably with *The Bosnia Elegies*. A reference such as (TBE 17) refers to Adrian Oktenberg’s *The Bosnia Elegies*, followed by the page number.

SAG will be used interchangeably with *Safe Area Goražde*. A reference such as (SAG 28) refers to Joe Sacco’s *Safe Area Goražde*, followed by the page number.

1 Introduction

> Witnessing at a distance involves recognizing the unavoidability of mediation while trying to overcome separation.
> (Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 2019: 186)

> [...] a spectator has the power to translate her gaze into action [...]
> (Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008: 144)

A drama student in Birmingham was writing her first play in March 1993; she needed a break and turned on the television to see the news. What awaited her on the screen was an old woman with her arms wide open, screaming and pleading for help. The student was an English playwright, Sarah Kane, and the old woman was a refugee from Srebrenica, a small town in east Bosnia. The encounter between the playwright and the terrorizing war image interrupted her writing and led to a change: seeing the news report spurred her taking the play in a new direction, and what became *Blasted* premiered at Royal Court Theatre in January 1995.

That year, some months later, ethnic cleansing and genocidal killings took place in the same town, Srebrenica. Another refugee, a young woman, survived the genocide, only to take her own life as soon as she arrived in safety. A photograph of this woman hanging from a tree was published in *The Guardian*, the *New York Times*, and the front page of the *Washington Post* on July 15, 1995, four days after it was taken. At this time, an American feminist scholar and poet, Adrian Oktenberg, had recently started writing her first poetry collection – she began in June, and finished in December 1995. This collection, titled *The Bosnia Elegies*, was published in 1997, and it features a poem about the woman "in the refugee camp || hanging from a tree" after the fall of Srebrenica.

As the media reported on the war atrocities and the scope of the massacre in the late summer of 1995, a cartoonist and journalist by vocation, American-Maltese Joe Sacco, decided to go to Bosnia. He arrived there for the first time in September 1995 and travelled four times to a small town in eastern Bosnia, a

UN-designated safe area during the war. Sacco's documentary graphic novel *Safe Area Goražde* was published in 2000.

Although the texts in all of these three cases are different in genre and form, they share a common thread. What connects them is that they are written as reactions to the media reports and images from a specific war; all are English-language – originally written in English – responses to a distant conflict, and the authors of the texts are neither survivors nor descendants of survivors of the Bosnian war. However, their works demonstrate a high degree of social engagement and solidarity from afar. They all thematize war trauma, including descriptions of, or narratives about, terrorizing images. Literature as a medium here plays an important role in the process of witnessing, mediating violence across cultural and geographic borders, and in understanding traumatic experiences. Through verbal representations of visual images of the Bosnian war, the texts by Kane, Oktenberg, and Sacco, bear witness by distance.

The abovementioned literary works can be placed within an existing tradition of witness literature: they are examples of secondary or vicarious witnessing, and as such they are not the first nor the last testimonies to atrocities.[1] Because of this, my hypothesis that the texts under scrutiny bear witness to the Bosnian war may seem self-evident. However, I will demonstrate that mediated witnessing in these texts emerging from the socio-historical and political context of the 1990s, is a complex phenomenon and a unique event in English-language literature. More specifically, I will argue that bearing witness here occurs not only explicitly, through verbal descriptions of images in the

[1] For comparison and clarification of the use of terms: The works of Primo Levi and Paul Celan, respectively, are examples of primary witness: writing from first-hand experience. The work of Art Spiegelman can be situated within the framework of second-generation Holocaust literature and *postmemory* (Hirsch 2012). But Spiegelman's work is different from, for instance, that of Charles Reznikoff or Franz Werfel, which also fall in the category of secondary witnessing. While literary texts by Kane, Oktenberg, and Sacco are parts of processes that take place in mediated form, they are *contemporary* to the atrocities to which they have responded, meaning they have not responded to *memories* of the Bosnian war. Therefore, I will not discuss their texts as examples of, for instance, postmemory. Another type of secondary witnessing is *prosthetic memory* (Landsberg 2004); here the theory argues that the technologies of mass culture make it possible for individuals and groups to acquire memories of events of which they have no lived experience. Although there are some touchpoints between the literary texts under scrutiny and this theory with regard to the effect of exposure to media accounts of trauma, further discussion of this concept exceeds the frames set in this thesis.

The acts of secondary witnessing can provide the last testimonies to atrocities in some cases and emphasizing that these literary texts are "not the first nor the last testimonies" to atrocities is meant specifically in the case of the Bosnian war – not as a universal principle.

text(s), but also tacitly, in the gap that emerges from an interaction between the context, content, and form.

Beyond the critical readings of the chosen literary works, the original contribution of this dissertation stems from how it brings together trauma theory, media images of violence, witnessing, and ekphrasis. I am concerned with the description of the intrusive image as a common point of interest for trauma theory, media, and ekphrasis. Witnessing from a distance through the medium of literature is a result of a complex interplay between these fields and concepts. One of my aims is to understand the nature of the traumatic image – its role in bearing witness, and the ways in which literature can help in acquiring new knowledge about such images. My hypothesis is that witnessing by distance in the aforementioned texts takes place precisely through *ekphrasis* – typically defined as "a verbal representation of a visual representation" (Heffernan 2004: 3) – which can, within these frames, be seen as an act of memory, and a vehicle for creating a literary testimony.

While discussing what it means to bear witness, by whom, from where, and how it is done, I propose that these literary works engage readers aesthetically and ethically, inviting them to reflect upon the pain of others, and that the process of bearing witness significantly occurs *in absentia*. Now, this absence is complex; it operates and manifests itself on several levels. The authors are absent from the sites of traumatic events, and there is an obvious geographic, cultural, and language gap between Bosnia and the countries in which these authors responded to the distant suffering. The different absences and gaps have an effect on audiences and therefore we as readers, although invited to position ourselves as witnesses, should be careful not to draw overhasty conclusions about understanding the war – and especially understanding the trauma of others. This can be illustrated by the following introductory examples from the literary texts: the character of perpetrator designated as "Soldier" in Kane's *Blasted* asks the journalist to "Tell them you saw me. Tell them… You saw me", and the speaker in Oktenberg's poem claims that "Everyone saw / Everyone saw". In the same vein, Rasim, one of Sacco's characters and interviewees in *Safe Area Goražde* says: "I saw… I was an eyewitness". The reiteration of the verbs of seeing, paired with the use of the first person singular (different in the poem), and the omission of the object of seeing (slightly different for Soldier), are intriguing devices that mobilize the reader.

Elsewhere, the reader of Kane's drama will notice that an explosion between scene two and scene three splits the plot in two parts. Soldier has no name and the Bosnian war is not mentioned in the play; however, there is a relationship between the rape in Leeds described in the play, and war rapes in Bosnia. These absences are both formal and textual gaps. In addition, numerous caesurae deployed in Oktenberg's poem are formal, genre-specific gaps, and although caesura is frequently used to refer to "the metrical phenomenon which corresponds to a break in the syntax of the line" (Preminger and Brogan 1993: 159), such pauses can also be "paralinguistic or performative ('rhetorical')" (159), acting as breaks of continuity, signifying absence in the empty space between the words. Relatedly, the deployment of a black-filled, instead of traditional white gutter, evident in the empty space between the panels in Sacco's documentary graphic novel, is a conscious choice: for instance, seen symbolically, the black is an absence of light, representing something tragic and disastrous.

While such absences are not hard to detect, I will explore what happens with and within these spaces during the process of mediation and remediation. The carriers of absence – gap, caesura, and gutter – have a performative dimension. Their performativity points to a need for coining a term for the gaps that are activated by and within the frames of mediation;[2] during and as a consequence of mediation. I propose to name this performative gap *a witnessing gap*.

Various tensions will be at work in the analyses of this thesis: between what is present and what is absent; between the gaps and ekphrases, between the mental and the material realm. Without intending to create rigid dichotomies, I will insist that it is necessary to maintain the tensions between the different spheres. They do not antagonistically move away from each other and exist on

[2] Jonathan Culler makes a conceptual distinction between "frame" and "context". According to him, "the notion of context frequently oversimplifies rather than enriches discussion […]; context is not given but produced" (1988: ix). Since the phenomena criticism deals with are signs and forms with meaning constituted within society, we should try to think not of context but of framing of signs. Culler suggests that "the expression *framing the sign* has several advantages over *context*: it reminds us that framing is something we do; it hints of the frame-up […]; and it eludes the incipient positivism of 'context' by alluding to the semiotic function of framing in art, where the frame is determining, setting off the object or event as art, and yet the frame itself may be nothing tangible, pure articulation" (ix).

the opposite sides of an imaginary axis; instead, the different spheres are in a relation of interplay.

One of the most important questions raised here concerns the role of ekphrasis in mediation and the use of media images of violence as a starting point for creation of literary texts. The argument that the texts bear witness from a distance is directly linked to the problem of mediation, and ekphrasis as its main instrument. The media images have an important role in bridging geographical distance, as well as in genesis of the literary works under scrutiny.

Taking the issues mentioned so far into account, this thesis will address the following questions:

a) *What are the distinctive contributions of different literary genres to witnessing by distance?*

b) *What is the relationship between the intrusive image and the ekphrastic image?*

c) *What is the relationship between the literature of witness and media images?*

These sub-questions will guide me while examining the overarching research question:

What can verbal representations of images of war in literary texts teach us about witnessing by distance?

1.1 Theoretical Framework

To discuss what I see as a complex interaction between trauma, different modes of ekphrasis, images, and how their interplay in its entirety leads to the construction of literary witnessing from a distance, we first need to look at these concepts in their own right, as well as in relation to the landscape of texts analyzed in this thesis. By placing the respective texts not only in dialogue with the theoretical terms, but also with each other, a space will be created where performative aspects of both the texts and the concepts may come to light. In the following pages, I will first discuss the concept of ekphrasis, then the concept of trauma, and subsequently the concept of the image – the latter being addressed both in its own right and as a place of encounter between trauma and ekphrasis.

Then I will discuss the concept of media, witnessing, and lastly – the witnessing gap.

1.1.1 Ekphrasis

Originally a rhetorical term, *ekphrasis* originates from the Greek *ekphrazein* (*ek* – out, *phrassein* – to speak) and means *to describe*; "to speak out, tell" (Scott 1994: 1), "to describe exhaustively" (Robillard and Jongeneel 1998: ix), or in Ruth Webb's words, "[t]o compose an ekphrasis is to tell (*phrazo*) in full (*ek*)" (Webb 1999: 13).[3] From ancient to modern times, the understanding, scope, practice and definition of ekphrasis have undergone many changes. While the term's origins are rhetorical, "the earliest examples come from epic literature" (Scott 1994: 2). As a rhetorical exercise in vivid presentation in ancient Greece, ekphrasis could be a description of anything – of a person, an animal, a place, a battle, a painting or a sculpture (Webb 1999: 8; Koelb 2006: 2). Ekphrasis was not restricted to descriptions of works of art until the mid-twentieth century (Webb 1999: 10). According to Webb, who primarily focuses on classical usage of the term, *enargeia* "is at the heart of ekphrasis"; it is this "quality of vividness [...], its impact on the mind's eye of the listener who must [...] be almost made to see the subject" that is characteristic of ekphrasis (Webb 13). *Enargeia* originates from the Greek *enarges*, which means "visible, palpable, manifest"; "a figure aiming at vivid, lively description", and is not to be confused with *energeia*, which is a "general term referring to the 'energy' or vigor of expression".[4] Some theorists, like Leo Spitzer and W. J. T. Mitchell, see ekphrasis as an independent literary genre, while others, such as Alastair Fowler, look upon it as a subgenre. Ole Karlsen writes that a whole poem can be an ekphrasis, but it is more problematic (and rare) to find a longer prose text, a short story, or a novel, that is ekphrastic in its entirety. Ekphrastic features can be found in epic and dramatic literature, and within lyric poetry we can look upon ekphrasis as a subgenre in its own right – together with other subgenres within this main genre (Karlsen 2003: 14). As has already been made clear, we will not concentrate solely on lyrical ekphrasis in this study, but also on ekphrasis in drama, and in a graphic novel.

[3] American literary critic John Hollander writes *ecphrasis*, while most other scholars write *ekphrasis* (see John Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit*, 1995). For more, see Heffernan, James A.W. *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (1993); Mitchell, W. J. T. *Picture Theory* (1994).

[4] Silva Rhetoricae, "energia": http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/E/energia.htm.

According to James Heffernan, ekphrasis is "the literary representation of visual art" (Heffernan 1993: 1). He also calls ekphrasis "a literary mode". Heffernan's influential definition of ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of a visual representation" (1993: 3) can be considered flexible and inclusive since it does not specify the genre of the verbal, or the kind of visual representation.[5] Still, keeping in mind his aesthetic perspective, whatever the ekphrastic mode, the notion of the *paragone* (Italian for "comparison"), or the paragonal relationship between word and image – a struggle, a contest, a confrontation between them – is central to the term (Cheeke 2008: 20–21). On the one hand, the openness of Heffernan's definition might be useful since in my primary material ekphrasis is not limited to a relationship between a poem and an aesthetic object, for instance a painting. Ekphrasis can also be discussed – as will be demonstrated in this thesis – in the context of a dramatic text and, more experimentally, in the environment of a documentary graphic novel. On the other hand, in this study ekphrasis will demand both a slightly different approach and adjustments to Heffernan's definition because of the kinds of objects to which ekphrasis responds.

Ekphrasis has developed into a device by the means of which we can question, analyze, and verbalize what we see, not only in artworks, but also in today's media landscape. Renate Brosch suggests "a simple definition of ekphrasis that is oriented toward present-day practices: ekphrasis is a literary response to a visual image or visual images" (2018: 227). Although simple, such definition invites a discussion because it refrains from reduction in both of its elements. Ekphrasis is not limited to a certain kind of a literary response or a certain kind of image; Brosch does not say anything about either formal features or iconographic specifications. The entire definition seems to be dependent on the word "response", which is central to Brosch's argument: that ekphrasis "emerges from a mode of articulation and its interaction with an audience – hence, the definition's emphasis on performance and response. [...] It describes a *process* rather than a one-on-one relation, more specifically a *response process* [...]" (emphasis added, 227). My own argument that witnessing by distance occurs through ekphrasis depends on this "processual" nature and performative capacities of ekphrasis, which includes inscribing image in (cultural) memory by assembling the audiences to see and experience the written words.

[5] Mitchell also summarizes ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation", see *Picture Theory* (1994: 152).

Some theorists have kept the first part of Heffernan's definition but elaborated on its second part. An example of this is provided by Claus Clüver, who writes that ekphrasis is "the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system" (1997: 26). Non-visual texts such as dancing and musical compositions can also be covered by this definition, according to Clüver. The concept of ekphrasis may also be extended to descriptions of mental images, processes, and dreams. The representability of these subjective experiences will be a subject of discussion later in the dissertation.

This thesis will establish the connection between traumatic images and ekphrasis. This will be done by exploring the dynamics between the images of traumatic events (whether graphic or mental/intrusive) and their literary representations. To distinguish between ekphrasis proper and other describable entities, John Hollander has coined the term *notional ekphrasis*, which signifies descriptions of imaginary works of art: "The realm of notional ekphrasis is partially extended to include what are virtually notional – ekphrastic poems or passages in literary works which may or may not describe some actual, but totally lost, work of art" (Hollander 1988: 209). The crucial word in Hollander's definition is the term *notional*, which derives from Latin *notionalis*: *notio(n-*), 'relating to a notion or idea'; + *-alis*, '-al'. It can refer to a thing, a relation, an idea; it means 'not existing in reality', 'existing only in thought'; 'imaginary'; 'theoretical, not based on actual experience'; 'assumed to exist'; in special uses, 'imputed, hypothetical; conceived as existing for the purposes of a particular interpretation or theory' (OED). Since some of the verbal representations of visual representations in this thesis have a complex referent (the ekphrastic encounter stretches itself beyond the traditional situation where the 'visual representation' is an actual aesthetic object), there is use for a term which is wide enough to include images that belong to the realm of the mind, and which are, unless described or narrated, invisible. Is it pertinent to limit the term 'notional' to only designate imaginary works of art, or images of art described from memory? This is the place where the application of the concept can be extended. I will now present some premises for that suggestion, while also pointing to conceptual limitations.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag writes: "To catch a death actually happening and embalm it for all time is something only cameras can do" (2003: 53), and Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, after an introduction on the

origin and usage of the word trauma, concludes: "The term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (1996: 3). On one hand there is the authority of a photograph – that is, a graphic image – and on the other the implied obscurity of a mental image. Arguably, when being exposed to trauma, the mind acts like a camera, with the eyes as the lens: in the moment of snap and out-of-body experience during a traumatic event, what has been seen makes such an impact on the mind's eye that the mental image, taken out of context and deeply imprinted, remains frozen in memory – captured as if it actually were a photograph. Of course the mental image is distinguished from a real picture; although one might have a photograph-like image, it will not necessarily be accurate. We are, perhaps, not discussing a proper (graphic) visual representation, but a victim/survivor (or a hero/fictional character in literature) should be able to provide a detailed verbal representation of a traumatic impression – of a mental picture, of *an image*. Building on Pierre Janet, van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and van der Hart describe the psychological processing of trauma and argue that these "traces of the trauma" should be translated "into a personal narrative"; if not, they "continue to intrude as terrifying perceptions".[6] What if, to the contrary, these intrusive images need to be verbalized through description first, before becoming part of a personal narrative? While description and narration overlap and flow into each other in a literary text, this distinction with regard to the psychological (and ekphrastic) process may be useful towards justifying the use of the term *notional* ekphrasis. As Ulrich Baer points out in *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, the theories of trauma developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century

> [...] describe trauma as the puzzlingly accurate imprinting on the mind of an overwhelming reality, an event that results in a deformation of memory yet cannot be attributed solely to the content of an occurrence or to the subject's predisposition to such mnemonic derailment. [...] Just as the photograph 'mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially', as Roland Barthes writes, trauma results from experiences that are registered as 'reality imprints' or, as psychiatrists have phrased it,

[6] "History of Trauma in Psychiatry", Bessel A. van der Kolk, Lars Weisaeth, and Onno van der Hart. In *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (2007: 52).

recorded 'photographically, without integration into a semantic memory' (2005: 8).

There is a link between the experience of trauma, the processing of the traumatic image, and the latter's integration into the personal narrative: the fragment, the image, or "the memory traces of the trauma" first have to be *described* in order to be understood and are only subsequently made part of a coherent narrative. With this in mind I will argue that beyond Hollander's definition, the term notional ekphrasis is a functional concept for covering such verbal representations, a concept that can be seen as a link between ekphrasis proper and descriptions of mental images.[7]

On the other hand, the term has its limitations. Heffernan points out that "[it] is sometimes difficult to say precisely when ekphrasis is notional and when it is not" (Heffernan 1993: 194), and for Mitchell, all ekphrasis could be seen as notional: "[I]n certain sense all ekphrasis is notional, and seeks to create a specific image that is to be found only in the text as its 'resident alien', and is to be found nowhere else" (Mitchell 1994: 157). Despite this, I want to propose that notional ekphrasis is a useful term that can extend to include the verbal representation of strong mental impressions – that is, imaginary entities such as hallucinations, flashbacks, dreams, and traumatic or intrusive images. Although these representations exist only in the text, by using the term *notional* we can distinguish between ekphrasis of a graphic image and ekphrasis of a mental image.

Similarly to Mitchell's argument about all ekphrasis being notional in a sense, Heffernan states that "the *availability* of a painting represented by a poem should make no difference to our experience of the poem, which, like any specimen of notional ekphrasis – is made wholly of words" (Heffernan 7). However, he also points to the difference in how we perceive the poem when the image is available: "[T]he availability of the painting allows us to see how the poem reconstructs it, how the poet's word seeks to gain its mastery over the painter's image" (Heffernan 7). By contrast, it is exactly this we cannot say to be the case for verbal representations of intrusive images – there simply is no physical image available for everyone to see.

[7] For instance, an intrusive image can be seen as a subject of ekphrastic attention, especially of notional ekphrasis. By the means of ekphrasis the image becomes accessible in language.

If we follow Mitchell in his argument that all ekphrasis is notional, this means that because we go through the filter of the mind also when describing a graphic image, the description of a photograph, a painting, or a cathedral is inherently notional – and the term becomes somewhat superfluous. But describing an intrusive image has a greater degree of privacy, and its nature is always mental. The referent, or the object of representation, is not the same in notional ekphrasis and in ekphrasis proper. In notional ekphrasis, the referent is more elusive: it is an event, a flashback, an idea or memory that may or may not be based on reality. For ekphrasis proper, the referent exists in material reality.[8] To be aware of and able to see the differences in ekphrastic practice is "to learn something of what has happened to ekphrasis in our time" (Heffernan 7).

In addition to the term *notional ekphrasis*, the concept of *reverse ekphrasis* will be explored and applied in Chapter 4. In his book *Writing Space*, Jay David Bolter defines the term in the following way: "As [...] seen in digital media and even in print, we get a reverse ekphrasis in which images are given the task of explaining words" (2001: 56). The origin of the word "reverse" is from Latin *reversus*, which means "turned back"; from *re-*, 'back' + *vertere*, 'to turn'. It is used here in the sense to "make (something) the opposite of what it was", "to exchange the position or function of things" (OED). Something is reverse(d) when it is "in the opposite direction or manner from usual"; it is "a complete change of direction or action" (OED).

Several critics have pointed to the social relevance of ekphrasis today, and this is related to the role that images play in our everyday lives. For instance, as Bergmann Loizeaux observes, "if the record of ekphrastic production can be a measure, images are more urgent in the twentieth century than ever before" (2008: 2). The social dynamics of ekphrasis is about the complex relations between images, authors, ekphrastic texts, and their audience. The 'social' is exactly the place where the personal and the political meet (Forché 1993: 31), and W. J. T. Mitchell discusses "ekphrasis as a social practice" (Mitchell 165). With this in mind we can approach the works of authors who responded to the mediated images of war, genocide, and crises – Kane changed the direction of writing her first play, Oktenberg wrote the whole book collection titled *The Bosnia Elegies*, and Sacco travelled to Bosnia to spend time there during the last five months of war and afterwards published several volumes based on these

[8] Mitchell notes that "[i]n ekphrasis, the 'message' or (more precisely) the object of reference is a visual representation" (1994: 159–160).

trips. Their works demonstrate an intense social engagement, or, to use Rothberg's term, they were expressing their solidarity at a distance: "Solidarity here does not mean simple identity of position or cause; it refers instead to attempts to incite change in and from a place that is not immediately connected to the site of conflict, but rather is connected through real social and political mediations" (2019: 151). The multifaceted capacity of ekphrasis – to "create an illusion of presence ... together with an awareness of absence" (Webb 2009: 194), to be a vehicle of mediation which facilitates solidarity and therefore has social relevance, paired with its characteristic of being a processual response – is crucial to my main hypothesis that witnessing by distance takes place through ekphrasis.

1.1.2 Trauma

In this section I will define the term *trauma*, position myself within the critical debate in the field of trauma studies, and discuss the related concepts which will be most relevant for my analysis. The concept of *trauma* has been widely discussed in history, law, ethics, medicine, and literary studies. The complex interaction of these and other fields has led to the development of trauma theory. Literary trauma studies is a field in the humanities which has its own genealogy, separate but in relation to other disciplines; one of its important aspects is its interdisciplinary approach.

The term 'trauma' has a widespread common and clinical use, and in most cases it refers to an "emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis" (OED). The word derives from the ancient Greek, and literally means "wound" (Caruth 3; Luckhurst 2). As the American literary scholar and pioneer of cultural trauma theory, Cathy Caruth, writes, the first uses of the term were "originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body", but later, "particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's texts, the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (1996: 3). It is useful to distinguish between the two most common terminological uses: in medicine, trauma still refers to bodily injury (Luckhurst 3), while in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, it pertains to psychological injury. Today, the predominant connotations of trauma and the adjective 'traumatic' circle around deeply distressing, emotionally disturbing experiences (OED). In medicine, Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as one of the symptoms of trauma, is defined as a condition that "(a)rises as a delayed or protracted response to a stressful event or situation (of either brief or long duration) of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone".[9] PTSD did not exist as an official diagnosis until the publication of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, DSM-III, in 1980.[10]

Trauma is a break in continuity or in reality as one has known it up to the point of the occurrence of the traumatic event.[11] While it initially emerged as a medical and psychiatric concept, it has developed into a category of social discourse of great moral significance. Trauma can manifest itself as a loss of identity; it is linked to repressed memory, but also to hypermnesia; to violent physical symptoms and unexplained behavior (*acting out*); repetitive and haunting nightmares, flashbacks. These reactions are usually triggered and/or manifested, after a period of *latency* or *belatedness*. The experiences of victims, survivors, witnesses, perpetrators, and others who have been affected or implicated by traumatizing events, raise questions of how to address the trauma and violence of the past.

Trauma sometimes seems to be everywhere; the term can be used all too casually to refer to minor setbacks of our daily lives, to the point that it "risks

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[9] World Health Organization's *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD), see ICD-10, version 2016 (available online), "Neurotic, stress-related and somatoform disorders": http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd10/browse/2016/en#/F40-F48

[10] This is important because it tells us about the changing attitude of society towards the display of symptoms of nervous shock and its consequences. The term proved to be enormously successful, bringing medical and political aims together. In fact, the shift in diagnostics has also altered legal discourse, social relations, and the understanding of bodily and mental harm in general terms.

This shift is explored by Roger Luckhurst in his book *The Trauma Question* (2008). Luckhurst provides an excellent genealogy of the concept of trauma, addressing trauma in psychology from 1870 to 1914, discussing trauma and the politics of identity regarding Vietnam, Holocaust and abuse survivors, and exploring trauma in narrative fiction, photography, and cinema.

[11] This sentence can be interpreted to mean different things, depending on who experiences trauma (an individual or a collective; a child or an adult, etc.), and depending on the kind of trauma being experienced. The dividing line between "before"-and "after" is clearer in a case of punctual trauma (or an event-centered model), but even when trauma is a case of insidious, "slow violence" (Nixon) or structural trauma, it is possible to speak of "before and after", and to detect the time before the beginning of a long-term occurrence of trauma. The Bosnian war was a historical occurrence where individuals and collective could experience a range of trauma: within an almost four years long military siege and a long-term trauma, there were numerous punctual traumas, and Bosnian survivors of the war frequently refer to "before and after the war" when talking about the continuum of their lives.

being useless" (Davis and Meretoja 2020: 1). In addition, Lucy Bond and Stef Craps claim that today "trauma is a big business", and that a "thriving trauma industry informs our leisure and consumer choices": complex institutions contributing to memorialization have been turned into tourist attractions, their gift-shops "boasting huge turnovers" (2020: 3). Yet despite trivialization, trauma is real. In this thesis, the term *trauma* is used to signify a wide range of traumatizing events and conditions, such as individual, collective, cultural, insidious, and perpetrator trauma in the literary texts written during, and in the aftermath of, the Bosnian war. More specifically, these traumas respond to genocide, suicide, rape, as well as survival, which means living in the aftermath of disturbing experiences of the war. I will return to a discussion of these concepts later in this section.

The material I am investigating in this thesis is historically specific, related to the period of the 1990s in Bosnia, as well as to the period of foundation of trauma studies. Central contributions to the field in this time period include canonical works of trauma studies by literary critics and theorists Cathy Caruth (1995, 1996), Geoffrey Hartman (1998), and Shoshana Felman, the psychiatrist Dori Laub (Felman and Laub 1992), and the historian Dominic LaCapra (1994, 2001). The theoretical texts that substantially discussed Holocaust material, contributing to a so-called "ethical turn" within poststructuralism, proposed that there was "an imperative need to tell" (Laub 1992: 78) in the crisis of witnessing. They also raised questions concerning the relations between wounds, words, listening, and witnessing (Caruth 1996: 1–9). Many critics have written about the discourse on trauma and the paradigm shift in literary trauma studies. While they were important in establishing this field of studies, Caruth, Felman and Laub have been criticized from different viewpoints, and many different scholars have engaged with their positions, opening productive discussions.[12]

In Caruth's seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), she elaborates on Freud's discussion of the epic *Gerusalemme Liberata* by the Italian poet Tasso, in which the hero, Tancred, kills his beloved Clorinda in a battle (she is disguised as an enemy knight). Later, after her burial, Tancred is fighting in a magic forest, and slashes with his sword at a tall tree; blood streams from the cut, and the voice of Clorinda is heard, complaining that he has wounded her – again. For Freud, this story demonstrates how trauma

[12] See *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, edited by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja. London: Routledge, 2020.

repeats itself against Tancred's own will. Caruth, however, focuses on the *voice* that is released *through the wound*: for her the story represents "the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know" (1996: 3). Caruth suggests that the story can be read as a parable of the unarticulated implications of Freud's theory of trauma, and of the link between literature and theory (1996: 3). Trauma is unspeakable because the extreme experience causes damage to consciousness and language.[13] Caruth's trauma model draws attention to the psychic wound, pointing to a gap between knowing and not knowing, and in suggesting that severity of suffering disrupts the ability to fully understand, articulate, and represent a traumatic experience.

Some of the positions associated with the traditional paradigm of literary trauma theory have attracted various kinds of critique: it has been deemed too literal, or criticized for being unethical or unpolitical. It has also been accused of rejecting historical facts (Leys 2000); of stressing the unspeakability of trauma, which may lead to overlooking the possibility of empathic sharing and to the neglect of those who have an urgent story to tell (Balaev 2014, Buelens et. al. 2014); of reducing a trauma survivor to the role of a victim; of being fixated on melancholia and repetitive acting-out, rather than the healing process of mourning and working-through (LaCapra 2001). My position differs from those of Ruth Leys, Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weilnböck, and Anne Roth, who have been unsparing in their criticism of Caruth and trauma theory.[14] At the same time, though, I agree with LaCapra's suggestion that more attention should be paid to the possibility of "allowing openings to possible futures" (2004: 118), to working-through as a process of "gaining critical distance on [traumatic] experiences and re-contextualizing them in ways that permit a reengagement with ongoing concerns and future possibilities" (2004: 45). Although this thesis will not engage with forms of positive adaptation and positive changes, such as post-traumatic growth, resilience (Luckhurst 2008), and a "positive turn" in memory studies (Rigney 2018) when moving beyond and away from trauma, it will take its bearings from a tangential position. In short, my view is that the

[13] Caruth also incorporates the findings of neurobiology of trauma into her work, with major reference to American psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk and his associates. See for instance Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma" (1995).
[14] For a summary of these criticisms, see Bond and Craps, 2020: 132–136.

process of working-through, and relatedly, healing, can start only *after* recognizing and acknowledging the wound, in its wider frames.

An account of the complex relationship between trauma and witnessing was developed by Caruth in the abovementioned *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), as well as by Felman and Laub in *Testimony* (1992). Felman and Laub argue that the "process of bearing witness [to massive trauma] does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence" (57), and Caruth points to the necessity of listening to the wound (1996: 8). As both of these are metaphorical pronouncements which will be of importance for the analysis in the following chapters, they require a brief explanation as to how they are to be understood within the frames of this thesis. Before proceeding, it is necessary to emphasize that the relationship between culture and trauma is of crucial concern for literary trauma studies, while psychology traditionally has had a greater focus on the traces that a traumatic event left on the individual. The concepts of *absence* and *wound* invite for exploring the interplay between the cultural and the personal.

The concept of the wound as a metaphor can be seen as a common denominator for notions that will be important in this thesis, such as absence, silence, trauma, and gap. Listening to a traumatic wound demands patience, empathy, and an awareness of cultural frames as well as of historical reality aligned with an intellectual openness that does not subscribe to a solitary interpretive framework. One of the main conditions for receiving testimony and bearing witness is engagement on the part of the listener: the emphasis is on listening as an *active process*, rather than on being a passive recipient. Laub, a Holocaust survivor and co-founder of Yale's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, focuses on the role of listener in the testimonial process, and argues that he or she "must listen to and hear the silence" (Felman and Laub 1992: 58), a viewpoint comparable to Caruth's "listening to another's wound" (1996: 8). While the approaches of these central figures seem to echo each other, it should be noted that Laub is concerned with experiences of the Holocaust survivors, while Caruth, with her background in deconstruction, is primarily interested in literary and philosophical texts. Laub suggests that the listener "is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*" (Felman and Laub 1992: 57), and Caruth proposes that "trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of *impossibility*" (emphasis in original, 1995: 10).

The silence of the wound, or the relation between silence and gap, has been a major point of interest for literary scholars, historians, and philosophers alike (Derrida, Blanchot, Deleuze, Ricoeur, Winter). In literature, the position of the reader is key to the process of bearing literary witness. In this medium, it is the literary use of language that can help in communicating, and facilitate in understanding traumatic experiences. From the position of reader as witness, listening to the wound and the silence that inhabits it is the initial stage in the process of understanding the cultural and social dimensions of trauma.

But how can literature bear witness to any kind of trauma if suffering is unrepresentable, as the traditional model from the 1990s suggests? This thesis's affirmation of Caruth's imperative of listening to another's wound and engagement with the positions of Felman and Laub does not imply taking an uncritical view of their poststructuralist philosophy, especially with regard to their arguments which address the limits of language and the unrepresentability of trauma. For instance, a pluralistic model of trauma challenges the Caruthian model; it would suggest that unspeakability is among the myriad of responses to an extreme experience, and not its defining feature.

Scholars from different branches of literary studies give lot of attention to the idea of *experience*; as might be expected, there are limits in theorizing it. Cognitivist scientists claim that "traumatic amnesia is a myth" and that the experiencing subjects may choose to speak (or not to speak) of their traumas, but there is "little evidence that they cannot" (Pederson 2014: 334). These scientists assume that the experiencing subject has immediate, direct sense experience. Other literary scholars, such as Hanna Meretoja, argue against Caruth's claim that "the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs" (Caruth 1995: 8), and posit that "traumatic experience – whether exceptional or pervading the everyday – *is experienced* (and often intensely experienced) as it occurs". Meretoja also asks if this is "not an experience *all the same*" (emphasis added, Meretoja 2020: 28). However, it is difficult to fully agree with the cognitivist critique of Caruth, as well as with Meretoja's more general critique of poststructuralist approaches on this particular point. There surely are several important forms of traumatic experience that contradict Meretoja's claims, and the variety of such experiences should not be neglected. Children, for instance, do not have full capacity to reflect upon and integrate an overwhelming experience at an early age; perpetrators might well be unaware that they are committing a violent or harmful act; performing normality and various defence mechanisms in the face of long-

term trauma also strips away the opportunity for integration and self-understanding. On the one hand, then, the traumatic event may in some cases not be fully experienced as it occurs. On the other hand, though, it can be added that this does not mean that it completely eludes language, both at the time of the experience, and after a period of belatedness. Such a period is often needed for reflection as well as finding the language and attaching meaning to an experience, i.e., creating narrative understanding.

Now I wish to point to the frequently intertwined relation between trauma, media, and images. Media and mediated images, as well as discourse on trauma, have an immense role in contemporary culture, and in the shaping of the political and socio-historical discourses of entire nations. As Davis and Meretoja point out, "even individual traumatic experience is always culturally mediated" (Davis and Meretoja 4). Since DSM has exhaustive criteria for diagnosing PTSD, one of which in particular addresses the closeness to the disruptive event, it is interesting to note that experiencing exposure to traumatic events does not, according to the DSM account, apply "to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work related" (APA 2013: 271). However, as Lucy Bond and Stef Craps point out,

> [s]econdary traumatization may even occur, though, in those reacting only to *representations of trauma*, such as the spectacular footage of 9/11 attacks shown on TV or many trauma novels and films, which [...] not only depict traumatizing events but can also embody and reproduce trauma for the reader or viewer through their form of narration (emphasis added, Bond and Craps 2020: 57).

Literature, ekphrasis, and the study of the different aspects of trauma share a concern with images, whether they are mental, graphic, mediatized, or verbal. In the diagnostic criteria, many of the terms and issues addressed could merit further exploration from a perspective of a literary scholar: this includes the position of victim or witness, transference and representability of traumatic images, the closeness of exposure, the formation of a narrative based on extremely negative experiences, as well as the approach to and the narrative of a collective trauma. Susannah Radstone observes that "within the humanities, trauma studies, as it has been developed to date, might be understood to be practicing a kind of *tertiary* witnessing" (Modlinger and Sontag 2011: 64,

emphasis added). Literature frequently has an important position in the cultural process of bearing witness to atrocities: If victims and survivors form the layer of primary witnessing, we expect to see literature dealing with trauma in the category of secondary witnessing.[15]

By the means of secondary witnessing, trauma reaches into wider circles of the public sphere, where it can be discussed and explored, which eventually may lead to a greater understanding and new knowledge about for instance the Bosnian war's impact on society. This is one of the reasons why investigating literature about this war, written from a perspective of English-speaking authors, may offer a unique insight into the social nature of collective and cultural trauma – transcending an exclusively psychological focus on individual trauma. Kai Erikson helps articulate this distinction, when he explains that individual trauma is "a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defences so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively" (1976: 153). Such individual trauma he distinguishes from collective trauma, which he defines as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (1995: 187). The keyword in the latter definition is *social*. Jeffrey Alexander also argues that traumas can become collective if they are "conceived as wounds to social identity" (2012: 2), but according to him, transforming individual suffering into collective trauma requires cultural and political work (2012: 2–3). Such a claim would appear to not fully cover the case of the Bosnian war: This wound to social identity of the people in Bosnia happened quite rapidly and its formation did not require long-term "cultural work" in the form of rituals, marches, speeches, storytelling, plays and movies, as Alexander suggests (4). Some cultural work was done during the war[16] – most of it, after the war – but there is no doubt that what happened in Bosnia should be considered a traumatic event

[15] See for instance Cassandra Falke's article "The Reader as Witness in Contemporary Global Novels" (2021). Literature offers pathways for giving "testimony" (Hartman 1995) and creating "empathic unsettlement" (LaCapra 2001). Nicole A. Sütterlin suggests that literature can *perform* trauma (2020: 19, emphasis in original). Davis and Meretoja write that "literature has *potential* to deal with trauma" (2020: 6, emphasis added). More on this in the analyses and conclusion of this thesis.

[16] For more on cultural work, mediation and cultural activities in Sarajevo during the war, see: Abazovic, Dina, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo, 1993: Susan Sontag's War production of Samuel Beckett's play*, MA thesis (2015). See also Jestrovic Silvija, *Performance, Space, Utopia: Cities of War, Cities of Exile* (2013). Also relevant is a book of more than thirty testimonies by cultural workers (in Bosnian): Diklic, Davor, *Theater in War Sarajevo 1992–1995* (2004).

experienced by an entire collective: it was "a blow" (Erikson) to the collective identity of a targeted social group.

Both collective and cultural trauma are inseparably linked with society. The discourse on trauma is such an important part of our culture, which may lead some individuals to interpret as "traumatic" experiences that would be given different meanings in other cultural contexts (LaCapra 2001, Kansteiner 2004, Kaplan 2005, Fassin and Rechtman 2009). Also, sociocultural approaches to trauma have argued that several catastrophic events give rise to "cultural traumas" that affect a whole community and may lead to the need to reassess and renarrate collective identities (Eyerman 2001, 2019, Alexander 2012). Alexander writes that "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2004: 1). However, he goes on to argue that "events are not, in and of themselves, traumatic" (8) – instead, they must be *represented* as traumatic. With this, he stresses the constructed nature of cultural trauma. In case of this thesis, the focus will be on the representations of three authors – non-members of the collective that has been subjected to atrocities – who write about the Bosnian war in English, mediating it across geographic, linguistic, and cultural distance to Anglophone audiences. Trauma "may provide the very link between cultures" (Caruth 1995: 11): it is possible that those outside of a collective participate in representing events experienced by another collectivity as traumatic.

Both the temporality of trauma and the variety of its various forms have been subject to critical discussion and differentiation which are relevant to this thesis. On the one hand, trauma refers to an event "outside the range of human experience" (DSM): This can be a *singular* event, an impact, a blow or a shock, and an occurrence that leads to a temporal split of before-and-after. On the other hand, trauma can also emerge as a result of *prolonged* exposure to disturbing experiences. To address the latter kind of long-term exposure to trauma and to challenge the DSM definition, which first and foremost characterizes trauma as "an event outside the range of human experience", Laura Brown has introduced the term "insidious trauma".[17] Insidious trauma refers to "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily

[17] As Laura Brown points out, the concept was initially developed by Maria Root (Brown 107).

well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (Brown 107).

In a feminist analysis, Brown writes about the invisibility of rape trauma due to the private nature of such events. She worked as the therapist of a young woman whose stepfather had sexually abused her for years. The patient sued her stepfather for damages. According to Brown, the woman was suffering from PTSD; "she had all of the symptoms; certainly the incest was traumatic". However, the attorney representing the perpetrator argued that incest and rape of women were not unusual, not "outside the range of human experience" (Brown 101). Here we can see that this normalization of traumatic experience poses a great problem on several levels: for the victim, for society, for the terminological apparatus, and in the judicial system. It is as if rape as an event is presented in an inevitable, Beckettian, 'nothing-to-be-done' fashion:[18] "War and genocide, which are the work of men and male-dominated culture, are *agreed-upon traumas*; so are natural disasters, vehicle crashes, boats sinking in the freezing ocean" (Brown 101, my italics).

The main reasons why it is possible to treat the Bosnian war as an instance of insidious trauma are its duration and the constant, inevitable exposure to atrocities.[19] The verbal-visual portrayal of life during the military siege in Bosnia offered by Sacco's documentary graphic novel *Safe Area Goražde* provides an insightful example; the medium makes possible the simultaneity of perspective, forcing the reader to *sense* (experience), while allowing the time to *make sense* of insidiousness of trauma. In the case of living under a military siege, insidiousness is not only a slow phenomenon; it is also intentional, involving cunning, and directed at certain subjects.

In contrast to a private event such as rape, often known only to the victim and perpetrator (Brown 101), war is a public event, and when rape is employed as a weapon of war, there seems to be a shift from the private to the public sphere regarding the way we observe and reflect upon it as a traumatic event.[20] For instance, as we will see in Chapter 2, in Kane's play *Blasted*, Ian rapes his ex-

[18] "Nothing to be done" is the first line in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, 2006: 11).
[19] Insidious trauma is different from structural trauma or *structural violence* which is linked to social, racial and gender inequalities (Craps 2013, Rothberg 2009), as well as from the concept of *slow violence*, which is particularly linked to climate change (Nixon 2011).
[20] See Inger Skjelsbæk's *The Political Psychology of War Rape. Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2012: 91, 98, 106).

girlfriend Cate in a hotel room without immediately apparent consequences: it is a domestic, 'private' rape, which takes place between the two scenes; the audience does not see it on stage. However, when Soldier's girlfriend is raped by the enemy soldier, he seeks revenge by acting out and repeating the violence. Soldier tells the journalist Ian about the rapes that he committed during the war, including that of a twelve-year-old girl. After this, Soldier rapes the journalist, in an act which takes place before the audience. Soldier is "crying his heart out" (Kane 2001: 49) while raping Ian; the public display of the perpetrator's suffering further complicates our understanding and interpretation of trauma here. Such images of rape are also images of power and powerlessness: even if *Blasted* was criticized in the media in 1995 as presenting gratuitous violence, a critical reading can demonstrate that Kane carefully chose what to show, and what not to show on stage. The image of rape that *Blasted* creates serves political needs of the play.

Another example where the war, rape, and trauma are almost impossible to disentangle will be analyzed in Chapter 3: In Oktenberg's poem "In the morning / after the fall of Srebrenica", a Muslim woman has been raped by Serbs. Her rape has been filmed and the perpetrators broadcast footage of the rape on their national television channel, while changing the identity of the victim by claiming she was a Serb. As a result, the rape of the hanged woman from Srebrenica transcends the private sphere in a twofold manner; rape is used as a weapon of war, and additionally, it is shown on television.

These examples show the challenge of differentiating between the shock impact of trauma and insidious trauma *especially in times of war*.[21] The experiences of rape and war can both have a shock impact, and be insidious, and they can both be discussed in terms of being private and public, individual and collective. While Erikson asserts that collective trauma damages the bonds attaching people together (1995: 187), he also suggests that "trauma can create community" (185). In war, private trauma becomes a matter of public concern, as the example of Oktenberg's poem illustrates. Also, many sudden traumatic experiences may build up over time: if their consequences are not treated, these impacts may contribute to the development of insidious trauma, for an individual or for a collective. Although insidious trauma as a concept is central when designating private, repetitive, continuous traumas that occur over a long period

[21] I am not claiming that it is necessarily difficult to distinguish between the two in all cases.

of time – such as rape in times of peace, as Brown discusses – there seems to be no clear-cut line between the two different kinds of trauma mainly because the *aftermath* is the same.

Those who experience trauma may belong to different ethical categories. Of particular interest is the notion of *perpetrator trauma*. Society at large still struggles with acknowledging that there is such a notion because the concepts of trauma and victimhood seem to be inseparably linked in the consciousness of the vast majority of the population. Traditionally, trauma theory has focused on experiences of victims, but in recent years attention has been redirected to perpetrators of traumatic events (Bond and Craps 2020: 117). The controversial phenomenon of genocide perpetrator trauma has not been previously given much attention in academic literature or considered worthy of concern due to the moral repugnance felt towards the act of perpetration (Anderson 2018: 226). Although literary and cultural studies have been lagging behind disciplines such as history, psychology, and philosophy (Bond and Craps 2020, Mohamed 2015, McGlothlin 2020), several studies thematizing the consciousness of the perpetrator have been published in the wake of post-conflict reconciliations across the world.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for scholars (and audiences) is discomfort when engaging with moral aspects of perpetrator trauma. The term's appearance of abstract unity in relation to the actual diversity of experiences of perpetration might pose another issue. Saira Mohamed's influential article "Of monsters and men: perpetrator trauma and mass atrocity" (2015) argues that trauma as a concept does not only pertain to a psychological disorder and that, furthermore, it has over the years acquired a status of a moral category (2015: 1173). Because of its ethical and moral dimensions, trauma discourse has been "gradually dissociated from the field of medicine and inserted into the social domain to become a platform for political claims", while victimhood and suffering have acquired a "prescriptive, normative function with symbolic, but also material, results" (Sanyal 2015: 184). Erin McGlothlin explains that the experience of perpetrators has fallen out of this normative trauma paradigm (2020: 100). Still, the notion of perpetrator trauma has not been altogether absent in earlier trauma discourse.[22]

[22] See, for instance, Cathy Caruth's analysis of Freud's story of Tancred and Clorinda in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), and Ruth Leys reaction to Caruth's conflation of perpetrator and victim (2000).

The social, cultural, and historical frames of the Bosnian war and the literature engaging with it will affect how these issues are confronted in this thesis. The question of differentiating between a traumatized victim and a traumatized perpetrator is a difficult and crucial topic to address in the context of this specific war. One of the reasons for this is that the majority of Bosnia's Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats see it through opposing lenses twenty-seven years after the war's end. Coexistence without reconciliation is how some describe living under the Dayton Accords in the post-war period.[23] According to Bond and Craps, although it makes sense to argue for the recognition of the phenomenon of perpetrator trauma, "such recognition will effectively be interpreted as making a dubious case for exonerating perpetrators by considering them 'legitimate victims', which amounts to a betrayal of the memory of the real victims" (2020: 120). Abovementioned Saira Mohamed makes clear that the question of responding to mass atrocity is more complex than we may be aware of:

> Acknowledging the reality of perpetrator trauma can improve reconciliation efforts in the aftermath of mass atrocity by exposing the need to rehabilitate perpetrators. As importantly recognizing perpetrator trauma erodes the all-too-common perception of perpetrators as cartoonish monsters by exposing their ordinariness and humanity. The point is not to generate sympathy for a génocidaire. But recognizing him as a person who chose to kill, and who now suffers because of it, can illuminate both the roots of his crimes and the real horror undergirding them – that perpetrators are merely people, and that any other person could do the same (Mohamed, 2015: 1157–1158).

When we step away from the discussion of morality, it might seem obvious that both victims and perpetrators can suffer trauma, and that trauma is a morally neutral psychological category (Bond and Craps 2020: 119). However, this does not mean that we need to approach this problem by eradicating the distinction between the categories of victim and perpetrator. As Rothberg points out: "The categories of victim and perpetrator derive from either legal or a moral discourse,

[23] For more on the Bosnian war and understanding the sociocultural and geopolitical realities, see section 1.2.1 in chapter 1. See also: "Bosnia: coexistence without reconciliation". Le Monde diplomatique, June 2022. Descamps, Philippe and Otasevic, Anja. https://mondediplo.com/2022/06/06bosnia-dayton

but the concept of trauma emerges from a diagnostic realm that lies beyond guilt and innocence and good and evil" (2009: 90). The difference between them is "social, ethical, and political, and even the traumatized perpetrator is not a victim in the pertinent ethical and political sense" (LaCapra 2001: 79).

1.1.3 Image

Because of the relevance of the concept of the *image* for this study, we need to briefly reflect upon its primary meaning and its connotations. Image, from Latin *imago*, originally meant picture, imitation, copy (Frazer 149); something bearing likeness, resemblance, similitude (Mitchell 10). When we use the word, we can mean a wide variety of things: from a picture, "a representation of the external form of a person or thing (in art)" (OED), to a "mental representation or idea" (OED). The term image can also be used to refer to maps, diagrams, dreams, poems, or memories (Mitchell 1986: 9). Further, it could be divided into still (static, as in photography, visual and media studies, graphic art, comics), and moving images (as in a film or a video).

As a literary term, "image" (and "imagery" – that is, images taken collectively) is among one of the most commonly used terms in theory and criticism, but also one with the most variation in meaning.[24] It is sometimes claimed that "mental pictures" are experienced by the reader of a poem (Abrams and Harpham 2012: 169), and similarly, that an image is "a psychological event in the reader's mind" (Preminger and Brogan 1993: 556). Other scholars emphasize that an "image" does not necessarily mean a "mental picture" (Cuddon 1992: 443). We may distinguish between the literal (contrasted with figurative language), the perceptual, and the conceptual image (Cuddon 1992: 443).[25] Furbank has suggested that the term should be dropped because it is vague and contradictory (Preminger and Brogan 1993: 557, 563): "[T]he term tends to blur a distinction [...] between literal and figurative language" (557).

[24] See Frazer 1960: 10, Abrams and Harpham 2012: 169, Mitchell 1986: 9, Preminger and Brogan, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* 1993: 556, Cuddon, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* 1992: 442.

[25] Many images (but by no means all) are conveyed by figurative language, as in metaphor, simile, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, and metonymy. An image may be visual (pertaining to the eye), olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste), abstract (in which case it will appeal to what may be described as the intellect) and kinesthetic (pertaining to the sense of movement and bodily effort) (Cuddon 1992: 443).

Mitchell distributes images into a kind of family tree, and this genealogy is especially useful in terms of providing assistance in the handling of and differentiating between a wide variety of applications of the term. For Mitchell, an image can be graphic (pictures, statues, designs), optical (mirrors, projections), perceptual (sense data, appearances), mental (dreams, memories, ideas), and verbal (metaphors, descriptions) (1986: 10). In these terms, graphic imagery 'belongs' to the art historian, mental imagery to psychology and epistemology, verbal imagery to the literary critic, and so on (Mitchell 1986: 10).

I will draw upon three categories from Mitchell's image family tree: graphic, mental, and verbal images. Although the term "intrusive image" may seem to only further exacerbate the instability of the concept, it will be added to this variety of definitions as a sub-category of a mental image, together with the term "traumatic image", as well as "recurrent or haunting image". The term "intrusive image" comes from the field of psychology and is defined as one of the decisive symptoms for diagnosing post-traumatic stress disorder. The term "traumatic image" could be derived from this since it almost always appears in connection with profound trauma experiences. However, "traumatic image" can also belong to the non-mental realm and signify graphic images with highly disturbing content, and it can also signify the verbally described, ekphrastic images. Related concepts with regard to trauma are also "recurrent" and "haunting image". Here we are moving between psychological and literary uses of these terms.

As Mitchell observes, there have been attempts in psychology and philosophy to discredit the notions of both mental and verbal images (1986: 13). However, there has subsequently been a comeback, and mental imagery once again became a topic of research in psychology "after fifty years of neglect during the heyday of behaviourism" (Ned Block in Mitchell, 1986: 13). "The supposed 'privacy' and 'inaccessibility' of mental images seems to preclude empirical investigation ... but mental imagery has taken on a whole new life in the work of post-behavioral cognitive psychology" (Preminger and Brogan 1993: 558). This is especially interesting and significant for the exploration of intrusive images within literary trauma theory. As Luckhurst writes in *The Trauma Question*, the intrusive image is a deeply embedded, contextualized, and conditioned notion:

> One of the central ways in which contemporary trauma has been conceived is around the symptom of the intrusive or recurrent image, the unbidden flashback that abolishes time and reimmerses you in the visual field of the inaugurating traumatic instant. There is a profound disjunction implied: the visual intrusion recurs because linguistic and memorial machineries completely fail to integrate or process the traumatic image. Perhaps, then, it is in the image that the psychic registration of trauma truly resides (2008: 147).

An important point that should be emphasized here is the *involuntariness* of the intrusion. It is precisely this lack of conscious control over the occurrence and recurrence of an image that makes it so distressing. In *Dreaming by the Book* (1999), which is an exploration of the work of imaginative creation and the art of mental composition, Elaine Scarry points out that "[d]aydreaming originates in the volitional" (32). This means that in contrast to not having control over the images one sees mentally, one is using the power of one's will in a process of visualization. However, as Scarry argues, reading "entails an immense labor of imaginative construction" (37). While the reader can start or stop following the verbal instruction, the images that emerge still surprise and shock us: although we produce the images voluntarily, as the result of reading, the role of volition (and intention) is lowered. Via ekphrasis, this is how intrusive images may appear in literature.

As the following chapters will show, the vivid description of atrocities causes a reader to imagine traumatic acts, something which puts a reader in the position of a witness – while at the same creating a literary testimony.

1.1.4 Media

During the Bosnian war, in the middle of bombardment or sniper fire, it was not uncommon to hear a Sarajevan yelling at the photojournalists: "Are you waiting for a shell to go off so you can photograph some corpses?" (Sontag 2003: 100). The war in Bosnia, and the siege of Sarajevo especially, attracted a lot of media attention. Some of the locals, intellectuals, and poets, reacted adversely and ironically to this; not all of the civil population thought of war photographers as

allies. Western war photographers were even compared with the enemy snipers.[26] Of course the photographs of suffering did not stop the war, but their wide circulation led to an active engagement with the conflict, although from a distance.

At the same time as Susan Sontag was staging a now world-famous war production of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo (between April and July 1993), Sarah Kane was writing *Blasted*. A play that Beckett wrote in the aftermath of the Second World War resonated in more ways than one with the citizens in the besieged Bosnian capital, while audiences in Britain, when *Blasted* premiered a couple of years later at the Royal Court (1995), completely failed to recognize any relation between what they were seeing on stage and what they saw in media reports during the Bosnian war. We can speculate about the various sociocultural complexes as reasons for this, but media and media processes provide one way to explain the inability of audiences to bridge the gap in which they found themselves.

In their seminal study about these processes, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have introduced the concept of "remediation". For Bolter and Grusin, a *medium* is that which remediates; it can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships with other media (65). They define remediation as the "formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms. Along with immediacy and hypermediacy, remediation is one of the three traits of our genealogy of new media" (273). Remediation is, in simple terms, the "mediation of mediation" (55). In media cultures, media have been "commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all" (55).

Linked with this is what Bolter and Grusin call the "double logic of remediation" and its swinging between immediacy and hypermediacy, transparency and opacity. The paradox of mediation lies in the attempt to erase all traces of mediation – in the act of multiplying them (5). In the collection of essays *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (2012), the editors Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney explain that:

[26] For more on war photography in Bosnian war literature, see Stijn Vervaet's "Empathic Vision? War Photography, Ekphrasis, and Memory in Bosnian war Literature", *Terrorizing Images: Trauma and Ekphrasis in Contemporary Literature*. Edited by Charles I. Armstrong and Unni Langås. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020.

> On the one hand, the recycling of existing media is a way of strengthening the new medium's claim to immediacy, of offering an "experience of the real". On the other hand, remediation is an act of hypermediacy that, by multiplying media, potentially reminds the viewer of the presence of a medium and thus generates an "experience of the medium" (see 70f) (4). [...] Just as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics (2012: 4).

This means that no historical document, memorial monument, film, or literary text is possible without mediation. In Grusin's words: "The logic of remediation insists that there was never a past prior to mediation; all mediations are remediations, in that mediation of the real is always a mediation of another mediation" (1999: 18). Some media try to achieve "immediacy" and create the experience of the presence of the past, while others, through "hypermediacy", aim to remind the viewer or reader of the medium, as well as point "to the potential self-reflexivity of all memorial media" (Erll and Rigney 2012: 4).

To return to the example of *Blasted* and one of the possible reasons for audiences not recognizing the link between the media reports at the time and what they saw on stage: Kane removed all the links to the different media and created an "in-yer-face", direct and experiential theatre, which strived to achieve an effect of immediacy. It is ironic that audiences were leaving the Royal Court during the performance because of the shadowy representation of reality, that is "a mediation of another mediation", to echo Grusin, but not until ten years after the first performance did the public view of the play substantially change. Oktenberg and Sacco are different from Kane in how each of their texts acts as a host of different media, and this will be discussed in the following chapters.

In practice, the term *media* is used to cover the broad spectrum of means of mass communication, such as broadcasting, publishing, and the internet. Reporting, especially the photographs and television broadcasting, had great significance during the course of the Balkan conflict. In terms of a mediation process, what was reported, by whom, when and how this reporting occurred, the media and its images are highly relevant for the literary texts that are explored in the following chapters. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag points out

that "[p]ublic attention is steered by the attentions of the media – which means, most decisively, images" (2003: 93). If there is no photographic evidence, there is no atrocity, and war crimes cannot be proven. On the other hand, while Ruigrok, de Ridder, and Scholten in their article on the "News Coverage of the Bosnian War in Dutch Newspapers"[27] agree that images can become icons of a conflict, they assert that covering news is "not only about images". This is, they claim, because "[t]he larger scope of a conflict is found in the content of news articles" (2005: 158). However, we must be reminded of a main principle that determines if a conflict is covered: "[N]o pictures, no serious coverage of a conflict" (Gowing 1996: 81).[28] Still, there is an exception to this rule: most of us have hardly ever seen a photograph of rape, but rapes as war crimes have been covered in the news media. In rape cases, we have no photographic evidence, and Ariella Azoulay asks how it could be possible that the rape camps in Bosnia, which everyone knows about, have left us no images, not even from afar or after the fact (2008: 253).

In *On Photography*, Sontag writes that "[s]trictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph" (1979: 23) and "[o]nly that which *narrates* can make us understand" (emphasis added, 23). In the seventies she also argued that the photographic image has lost its power to enrage and incite, and that our capacity to react has been diminished. More than twenty years later, she seems to reaffirm her position on narrative by claiming that narratives make us understand, but she is more ambivalent about the status of the photograph: she claims that photographs "*haunt* us" (emphasis added, 2003: 80). Here, haunting can be understood as a kind of mobilization and a call for action, which may make us want to better understand the photograph and what is behind it. In *Frames of War* (2010), Judith Butler points to this change in Sontag's line of argumentation: "Whereas earlier she diminished the power of the photograph to that of merely impressing upon us its haunting effects (whereas narrative has the power to make us understand), now it seems that some understanding is to be wrought from this very haunting" (96). Butler questions Sontag's claims about photography while exploring the media's portrayal of armed conflict. Is it really the case that narratives do not haunt, and that photographs fail to make us

[27] In *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (2005).
[28] N. Gowing, "Real-Time TV Coverage from War: Does it Make or Break Government Policy?", in *Bosnia by Television*; Editors James Gow, Richard Paterson, Alison Preston. London: British Film Institute, 1996.

understand? We see that in cases concerning rape, there is typically no photograph as evidence, but that does not make the rape and the discourse around it less haunting. A traumatizing image has a power to convey affect, which could be a path to genuine social engagement and understanding, just as much as a narrative can be haunting. For instance, in the case of ekphrasis in a literary text, the images we *see* are not photographic, and their link to a concrete visual representation (a photograph, in this case) is more often than not, invisible. Ekphrastic images are *verbal*, very often creating independent narratives, which haunt us long after we have read them.

An important distinction between Butler and Sontag is provided by Butler's insistance on the importance of learning to see the frame and understanding how the frame "blinds us to what we see" (100). Through a political mechanism of framing it is decided "whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable" (2010: 38). According to Butler, we need to "consider the way in which suffering is presented to us, and how that presentation affects our responsiveness" (63). How we respond, she argues further, depends on the frames "through which we apprehend or […] fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured" (1). This kind of frame organizes visual experience but does not serve as a mere display of reality; it actively produces meaning and generates knowledge about the subject (2010: xiii, xix, 1, 3). What further complicates the understanding of this subject, and our own positioning in relation to what we see (*and* what we read), is not only *the content* of what is being presented: in this case a traumatizing image, an image of violence, or war photography. There is a tension between content and the frames of (re)presentation of that content, between *what* is shown and *how* it is shown; "the 'how' not only organizes the image, but works to organize our perception and thinking as well" (Butler 2010: 71).

Frederik Tygstrup writes that Sontag's "somewhat oblique political statement" in *Regarding the Pain of Others* "is not a confrontation with violence, but a quest for a position from where to be able to – from where to find the strength to – see and respond to the reality of violence" (2020: 14). To echo Butler, if it is no easy matter to learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see (100), what kind of witness is to be deemed trustworthy and reliable? This question brings another nuance in meaning to what Felman and Laub call a "crisis of witnessing" in *Testimony* (1992). Sontag asks who the "we" is at whom

shock-pictures are aimed (2003: 6). Indeed – who make up the audiences, and who occupy the positions of spectator and witness?

Building on the hypothesis that the media had a major, even decisive impact on the authors of the works that will be analyzed in this dissertation, I will consider how the media were significant for the aesthetic events – the emergence of literary texts about the Bosnian war. In his discussion on a social theory of collective trauma, Jeffrey C. Alexander claims that "mass media are significant, but not *necessary*, in the aesthetic arena" (2012: 20, emphasis added). Media images of violence may not have been necessary, but they were an unavoidable part of the process of remediation for the literary works under scrutiny.

Media coverage played an important role in the Bosnian war both internally (between the belligerents) and internationally (between Bosnia and the rest of the world), and this is reflected in the literary sphere. While my focus in the thesis is primarily on the international presentation of the conflict, one should also consider the interaction between these two kinds of reporting. Internally, the media often helped in spreading propaganda and in bolstering nationalism,[29] something that also influenced international reporting. This is for instance evident in the misleading reporting about the Markale market massacre in Sarajevo, where a myth that the "Bosnian Muslims often shoot themselves to gain sympathy" (Cushman and Meštrović 1996: 27) was created. Cushman and Meštrović explain how "the media dutifully reported the Serb claim that the Bosnian Muslims 'had attacked their own civilian population [...] to arouse international sympathy and drag NATO into war'" (28). This instance in which victims were portrayed as villains will be particularly important for the analysis of Adrian Oktenberg's poetry in chapter three.

The media were continuously reporting on the Bosnian victims, and the war in the Balkans was covered over a long period of time. The atrocities in Bosnia were the major news item in international media, attracting more coverage than the conflicts that were taking place at the same time in Rwanda, Cambodia, Afghanistan, or Kurdistan, to name but a few (Cushman and Meštrović 1996: 10). One of the reasons for such media attention could be that this was the first war on such a scale on European soil since the Second World

[29] See "Introduction" and the volume *Media Discourse and the Yugoslav Conflicts. Representations of the Self and Other*. Edited by Pål Kolstø. This book is a thorough discourse analysis study of how the warring parties presented themselves and the 'other' through mass media in the period before the outbreak and during the conflict, as well as in post-war years.

War, or, as Ruigrok, de Ridder, and Scholten argue, because of "geographical and cultural closeness to the heart of Europe, popular interest in the conflict [due to the] presence of soldiers from numerous countries serving as UN peacekeepers, and the fact that it was about people who could have been us" (2005: 163). Jean Baudrillard called the Bosnian war a "spectral war" (81), and similarly, in a daring statement, Meštrović and Cushman claim that the West had a significant role in this conflict, "the role of voyeur" (3), which can be linked with witnessing and observing the conflict from afar.[30]

Media's use of violent images to produce shocking effects created "compassion fatigue",[31] and turned western audiences into spectators. Cushman and Meštrović have argued that "[t]he West has been a silent witness" (1996: 3). An implication that all media were western is, arguably, ingrained in this statement. Still, western media were seriously reporting about facts under extreme circumstances, and they were anything but silent. The media created popular pressure that influenced political decision-makers,[32] but they also contributed to creating compassion fatigue and, to a lesser degree, to spreading myths.[33]

The geographic, temporal, and aesthetic distances from the socio-historic setting and actual events that Kane, Oktenberg, and Sacco write about in their texts differ from author to author, as does the level of mediation and its effects. As discussed earlier, I use mediation here in Grusin and Bolter's sense (a medium is that which remediates; it is in relationship with another media; oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy). In addition, mediation is used to refer to specific forms of media and the processes of how news was reported. In relation to media and its processes, it is necessary to define another term: *mediatization*. This is important in order to keep the distinction between mediation and mediatization, and because mediatization is linked to wider social and cultural processes: "Mediatization refers to the manner in which a social event, process or practice becomes considered by those participating in it as a

[30] A 'voyeur' is "a person who enjoys seeing the pain or distress of others" (OED).
[31] For more on compassion fatigue and the media, see Susan Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death* (London: Routledge, 1999).
[32] As I will show later in the chapter on Oktenberg, the case of the photograph of the woman who hanged herself in Srebrenica was circulated and eventually shown by the senator Dianne Feinstein, discussed by Al Gore and Bill Clinton, etc.
[33] For more detail on myths and opinions held about the conflict, see Cushman and Meštrović: "This is an age-old conflict", "stopping the war would require too much ground force" (26–28); and Mønnesland in *Handke-debatten* ("Påstander og myter", 669–675).

media phenomenon, and any media organisations involved are aware of themselves as integral to that phenomenon" (O'Loughlin 2013: 192).

O'Loughlin brings an interesting perspective to media and trauma-related objects of analyses by pointing to a paradox when pairing a supposed unspeakability of trauma with media and its role at large. He asks if the silence, emergence of trauma, and working-through is subject to the same digitization and visualization as the "rest of mediatized 21st century life", and if mediatization "as a social fact and inescapable condition" has contributed to trauma (2013: 193). According to O'Loughlin, traumatic experience defies media logics, and mediatization should be incommensurable with trauma (193, 195). This is because trauma leads to "the opposite of public expression", while mediatization transforms social practices into "public, expressive, performing practices" (195).

Mediatizationon as a process is of great importance, given that all three of the authors addressed in this thesis wrote as a response to various kinds of reportage about the crisis in Bosnia. I will discuss the influence of media on the emergence of the texts and the verbal description of images in the following chapters, with a special focus on the dynamics between media and mediated responses and how they contributed to creating a literary witness from a distance in different genres.

All three of the authors addressed in this dissertation wrote as a response to various kinds of reportage. Their texts problematize in one way or another the role of the media in times of war. For instance, Sarah Kane, who responded immediately upon seeing the media reports (as I will show in Chapter 2 in the discussion about the genesis of *Blasted*), removed all specific references to the Bosnian war reports from the text of her play. On the other hand, Adrian Oktenberg (as we will see in Chapter 3), while also engaging indirectly with the conflict, provided explicit references to Bosnia and referred to different media in many of the poems throughout *The Bosnia Elegies*. Neither of these two authors travelled to or had previous personal contact with Bosnia. Unlike them, the third author, Joe Sacco (in focus in Chapter 4), engaged by traveling to and writing in the area, exploring the affected site *in situ*. On the textual level, the link with the media becomes even more prominent: In Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, one of the protagonists is a journalist, and Joe Sacco himself is a journalist by vocation who he draws himself in the documentary graphic novel as a character that is at the same time a journalist and a narrator. In Oktenberg's poem, a rape is "filmed / shown on television [...]".

1.1.5 Witnessing

Although the concept of *witnessing* will be addressed further in the following chapters, it demands articulation here as part of the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis. Since the term will be discussed in dialogue with the context of the respective chapters, the overview given here will not be extensive.

It is important to distinguish between what it means to bear witness in reality, and what such witness means in literature. A witness can be in different positions or acquire different roles. Depending on the register, there are various strategies involved in the process of bearing witness. In addition, contemporary culture mass media may complicate – as well as aid and challenge – the process of witnessing. Carolyn J. Dean writes that "[t]he witness is both someone who testifies about an event, whether a crime or an ordinary occurrence, and a moral figure of extraordinary power. The witnesses' origins are Biblical: bearing false witness, according to the ninth commandment, is a sacrilege" (2020: 111). Thus, at one end of the spectrum there is bearing witness in religious traditions, while at the other end, we have the witness in the court of law (a witness in juridical sense). According to Aleida Assmann, witnessing is

> a religious and secular moral practice, and it establishes knowledge about an event or events. Testimony may be sacred (witness to God), morally neutral (witness to a natural catastrophe), juridical (testimony in court), or moral or ethical (witness to extreme suffering), and it generates moral and factual truths (Assmann 2007, quoted in Dean 2020: 111).

Elaborating on the ethics of memory, the philosopher Avishai Margalit calls both the combat veteran and the Jewish Holocaust survivor *moral witnesses*. He emphasizes the moral role and authority that such witnesses have: "[T]o become a moral witness one has to witness the combination of evil and the suffering it produces: witnessing only evil or only suffering is not enough" (2004: 148). Margalit also makes a distinction between the *political witness*, who tells "it like it was", and the *moral witness*, who tells "it like it felt" (168). Furthermore, in the wake of the Holocaust, witness literature has become a genre in itself, and questions concerning the representation of memory of historical and emotional

wounds, authenticity, authority, etc., are currently being debated. For instance, the French historian Annette Wieviorka points to the issues of sensationalizing and commercializing in the memorialization of Holocaust through Hollywood movies, in which survivors' trauma becomes an object of consumption. In the "era of the witness", she argues, "traumatic memory is in danger of replacing history and distorting it, transforming witness testimony into kitsch" (quoted in Dean 2020: 117). Michael Rothberg stresses the *multidirectional* relationship between Holocaust and postcolonial memories (2009), while warning about the risks of forms of long-distance solidarity such as "adventurism, misunderstanding, appropriation, and ideological rigidity" (2019: 203). In *The Implicated Subject* (2019), Rothberg argues that witnessing extends beyond the dyad of victims and perpetrators.

Another kind of witness, who is neither a primary nor a secondary witness (being in touch with the first generation of trauma survivors) is the *intellectual witness*. Geoffrey Hartman suggests that this witness "has no obligation to take account [of the Shoah]"; but if he does not react after learning what happened, this figure is not different from a spectator in theater, or a passive observer of the event (2006: 2). Thinking with Hartman's concept of intellectual witness, Cassandra Falke suggests that "readers become a kind of witness through reading literature portraying political violence" (1). For Falke, the *reader as witness* is an instance of the intellectual witness. This kind of intellectual witness is a bystander, an outsider who speaks to the outside on behalf of a suffering community – and many scholars have voiced caution about bearing witness on behalf of a community of which one is not a part (Hartman 2006: 2, Fassin 2012: 236, Dean 2017: 632, Falke 3). Discussing Hartman, Falke points out that moral and intellectual stamina should "keep readers from falling into the two pitfalls […] – instrumentalizing pain or sensationalizing it" (Falke 5). This should serve as a reminder that we need to use our power of discrimination at all times. Falke asserts further that

> [t]he singularity of literature makes it possible for *readers to be a kind of humanitarian witness* without necessarily instrumentalizing the stories they read. This is not to say that it is not possible to instrumentalize a work of literature, only to say that the act of reading a work of literature may open up *a new kind of witnessing*, one that is ethically potent without being entangled with the institutional structures that offer

> *humanitarianism as a palliative*, or even justification for political violence (Falke, in press, emphasis added).

The question here is not whether Falke's humanitarian witness diverges from Hartman's intellectual witness, because she argues that reader-as-witness is an instance of the intellectual witness. But how does a work of literature open up a new kind of witnessing? How and why are readers, or reader-as-witness, a kind of humanitarian witness? For Fassin, the humanitarian witness is "not the witness who has experienced the tragedy, but the one who has brought *aid* to its victims" (Fassin 2012: 207, emphasis added). James Dawes argues that journalists and photographers now bear witness in a similar manner.[34] In this sense, the "surrogate voices" (Dawes 2007: 4) all take part in the process of witnessing, act out of their own volition, and are in relations of implication, to use Rothberg's term. How are reading and reporting about political violence *bringing aid*? I will return to this question in my analysis as it is highly relevant for a discussion about mediation and bearing witness by distance.

If we look into the genealogy of the term, we will see that Latin has two words for witness: *testis* and *superstes* (Fassin 2008: 535, Derrida 2005: 72–3, both elaborating on Émile Benveniste). The *testis* is the observer of an event, the one who is present as "the third party", and the one "who can help to resolve the dispute because *he saw* what happened" (Fassin 535, emphasis added). In other words, s/he can serve as the purveyor of evidence or proof and be the objective guarantor of the truth because the person is not directly affected by the experience.[35] The second term, *superstes* (from 'superstō', meaning 'I survive'), signifies the person who experienced the event and who "lives on beyond" what happened. The truth of the superstes is expressed in first person and is therefore "deemed subjective" (Fassin 535). Interestingly, as I will show in my analysis, a testis can also speak in first person, but their position and relation to the event is different. Giorgio Agamben reminds us that "the Greek word for witness is *martus*" (qtd. in Fassin 541), and in Christian use, a martyr is the person who is

[34] James Dawes, *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* (2007).
[35] In Latin, *testis* can mean: 1. testicle, 2. witness. Interestingly, "testis unus, testis nullus" (one witness, no witness) is a principle of law that means that a single witness is not enough to corroborate a story, and it is a problem created when historians have only one source and cannot check the facts. For more, see: https://www.livius.org/articles/theory/testis-unus-testis-nullus/.

killed because of their religious beliefs.[36] In contrast to the survivor or the observer – who speaks in the first or third person – "the martyr bears witness *without speaking*: he testifies through the sacrifice of his life, and after his death through his *image*, reproduced in icons venerated by those who can testify to what he was" (Fassin 541, emphasis added). This witness figure gives up his life to affirm his religious, and by extension, *political* truth, as Fassin suggests (541). Unlike the first two, *testis* and *superstes*, Agamben's witness is not a survivor (116).[37]

There is a clash – or schism – between the personal and political realms of bearing witness, which Carolyn Forché addresses when discussing her notion of *the poetry of witness* (1993: 30–1), a notion to which I will return in more detail later. This concept is applied to poetry written by the poets who have personally endured experiences of extremity. As is the case for Forché's "poetry of witness", Leona Toker's focus is on the experiential, first-hand witnessing that has to include the experience of the author as the *in situ* witness:

> The term *the literature of testimony* can be used in two ways. In its narrower meaning, it connotes an ethical urge on the part of the author – one usually testifies to crimes, atrocities, upheavals. However, the term is often expanded and can therefore be given the formalized meaning of "eyewitness accounts", whether or not the author intended to give evidence for or against specific people or institutions. Memoirs, autobiographies, diaries, notebooks, and letters are genres of the literature of testimony. They are not based on historical documents so much as they constitute them by recording, "documenting", testifying to what their authors have witnessed (Toker 1997: 192).

[36] In addition to *martus*, one other witness figure in the ancient Greece is *histor* ("one who knows; wise one", OED). Compare this to 'history' (Greek *historia*: 'finding out'; 'narrative'), which is derived from *histor*.

[37] An instance of a witness not being a survivor, but still bearing witness will be discussed in chapter three in this thesis. This is an instance of a high degree of mediation: a poem about a photo of a woman who took her own life after surviving genocide. Several questions arise here with regard to mediation; who took the photo (what kind of *frame* is at work, in Butler's sense of the concept); who were the audiences (display, solidarity, framing); who wrote the poem; then – who were the audiences for this kind of poetry; and finally, how does a literary scholar approach the content and context of the poem. Do both a journalist and a poet occupy a position somewhere between bearing humanitarian, moral and intellectual witness? What is the position of a reader of the poem? And how does this poem bear witness, and what kind of witness?

I will expand upon this definition in developing my own understanding of literary testimony in this thesis. Firstly, the genres and examples discussed in the thesis are not part of Toker's genre list as such. Instead of documenting the experiences of the author(s), texts belonging to genres that are usually associated with a much greater degree of aesthetic distancing – such as the play, poem, and documentary graphic novel under scrutiny – typically contain what Toker terms the *factographic*, although to quite different degrees.[38] I suggest that the list of what can be deemed "literature of testimony" can be expanded to include other genres than those mentioned by Toker, but under a slightly different term – literary testimony. In an article in which she examines witness literature in the context of Gulag (Gulag fiction and Gulag memoirs), Lovisa Andén writes that: "Testimonial literature holds a place between tribunal testimony, historical testimony and literary testimony" (2021:199). By referring to Andén's clarification I wish to underline the need to keep the distinction between the different terms.

Secondly, in my texts it is not the author herself (or himself, in Sacco's case) who testifies in the position of eyewitness. In Kane's play *Blasted*, the witness position is complicated by the testimony of a perpetrator, who tells both from the position of eyewitness about the atrocities that his group committed, and about his own trauma – about the atrocities that he himself committed. The position of Soldier changes as he delivers each of these testimonies. Oktenberg's poem also bears witness to witnessing, as its speaker bears witness to an already mediated witness account. In *Safe Area Goražde*, different witness positions overlap throughout the narrative.

Thirdly, and finally in relation to literary testimonies, "[a]n ethical urge on the part of the author" (Toker 192) is reflected in the artistic and social engagement of the authors addressed in this thesis, who all testify to atrocities of the Bosnian war. But witnessing through aesthetic form and content here takes place from *a distance*. In other words, the atrocities to which these authors and their texts bear witness are not directly experienced; as previously mentioned, the authors' experience of the war is *mediated*, and the authors make use of media material in forms of reportage and photography. The witnessing is mediated, *and* factographic. For instance, although Oktenberg emphasizes in

[38] "Factographic" is related to "factography": a movement originating in the Soviet Union, promoting the use of film and photography for documentary purposes by the working class. Source: https://www.wordsense.eu/factographic/.

"Acknowledgments" to *The Bosnia Elegies* that "this book is a work of art, not history or reportage", she creates a documentary aura, precisely through the use of media footage, reportage, and photographs.

1.1.6 Witnessing Gap

The concept of trauma – which, as discussed earlier, refers to a "wound" – can be linked with the concept of a *gap* in the sense of "a break, a hole, or a break of continuity" (OED). Trauma implies "woundedness", which, again, implies the existence of a gap; with this, I allude to the concrete, physical appearance of a wound. In relation to this, the concept of the gap might be related to a Lacanian concept of the "suture" as defined by Jacques-Alain Miller:

> Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse; we shall see that it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in [tenant-lieu]. For while there lacking it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension – the general relation of lack to the structure – of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of [tenant-lieu] (Miller 2012: 93).

As Miller points out, something may be lacking, but it is not entirely absent; this can be also said about a gap. The concept of a gap may often come across as elusive; like trauma, it is a conceptual knot (Luckhurst 2008), and it can be seen as a "fuzzy" category (Fowler 2002). In literary studies, according to Porter Abbott, a gap in narrative is "any kind of opening in the text that is either permanent or requires some degree of filling in order for text to do its work" (2013: 107). The gap in the respective texts that will be analyzed in the coming chapters is not a mere gap in narrative. The gap in the three literary works is inextricably bound with the mediated trauma for which it stands and to which it bears literary witness from a distance, and as such it is different from what Abbott terms an *egregious* gap. For Abbott, egregious gaps are the narrative gaps "that we cannot fill but that, at the same time, require filling in order to complete the narrative" (2013: 112). Interestingly, the word "egregious" is of Latin origin, *egregius*, which means 'illustrious', or 'outstanding', literally 'standing out from the flock' (*ex-* 'out', *greg-* 'flock'). It used to mean 'remarkably good', but the

prevalent sense today, which probably arose from ironical use, is 'outstandingly bad; shocking' (OED). Abbott points out that

> egregious gaps have been handled in many different ways to serve different functions. Yet they share the capacity to call up immense inferential energy. This in turn would appear to confirm the rule that we are so constructed that simply to know of a gap is to try to fill it (2013: 113).

Some of the gaps in the literary texts that will be analyzed in this thesis are: the unknown war in *Blasted*; the identity of the mysterious Soldier; and the witnesses who saw the procession in Oktenberg's poem about the image of the hanged woman. While serving different functions, these examples point to permanent gaps, as Meir Sternberg calls them (1978: 51). Sternberg claims that gaps of this kind can be filled "with some degree of probability" and only through a "close analysis of the text" (51). Here there is a crucial difference between Sternberg and Abbott. Although the egregious gap – which is offered by Abbott as an alternative to Sternberg's concept – presents "an opportunity for the most intense cognitive workout", Abbott's suggestion is to "leave this gap empty" (2013: 114). How the gap is filled – or not – can have consequences for the reading of the entire text. While the term "egregious" can be used to cover the narrative gaps that emerge in traumatic narratives, it is insufficient for marking the trauma-conditioned lacunae in the text's structure. I therefore propose using the term *witnessing gap*. Such gap is influenced and often shaped by processes of mediation and remediation in the public space. There is a generic disctinction between various witnessing gaps: the gap is different every time it appears. The motif of the gap is not just structural; it is also representational, while having spatial or structural articulation.

How to understand this gap in the light of trauma theory and in relation to historical and cultural wounds – what is being left empty and how is that emptiness being manifested? Maurice Blanchot suggests that "[i]f pain (fatigue or affliction) hollows out an *infinite gap* between things, this gap is perhaps what would be most important to bring to expression, all the while leaving it empty" (emphasis added, 1993: 78). The notion of a wound is at the core of trauma theory, and witnessing from a distance implies a certain gap between the witness and what is being witnessed (as I have discussed in sections on "Media" and

"Witnessing"). Both literature and early literary trauma studies keep the wound open, hence the value of returning to Caruth's metaphorical pronouncement of "listening to another's wound", which in case of this thesis is not limited to understanding cases of individual trauma and approaching the literary texts under scrutiny psychoanalytically, but it means making an effort to understand a relation between mediation and a trauma process in these literary texts, as well as the texts' relation to the community of readers who bear witness from a distance.

1.2 Research Context

1.2.1 The Bosnian War

Although the selected texts address events of the past, they have the capacity to influence our understanding and interpretation of the present. Every literary response in times of war can also be considered a political response since there are (at least) two truths, or different views of the conflict in question; it is highly challenging to try to locate a place of neutrality. Contextual knowledge – involving an awareness of the social, political, religious, and historical circumstances of the Bosnian war – is of great significance for this thesis. It exceeds, however, the scope of the thesis to present and discuss the complex political and cultural history of Bosnia in great detail. What follows, therefore, are the most relevant historical highlights.

Despite nationalistic tensions between political parties, and the wars in Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, the beginning of the war in Bosnia in 1992 came as a shock for its citizens. Bosnia was the most multicultural part of former Yugoslavia; its capital stood as a synonym for European values, religious tolerance, secularism, and multi-ethnicity. Sarajevo was characterized as a cosmopolitan city, often said to be at the crossroads between East and West. The country had already undergone a turbulent history: Bosnia was a medieval state until 1377, when Ban Tvrtko was crowned and Bosnia became a kingdom. The religions of the peoples who populated Bosnia then were Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, but there was also a third, independent church in the schism between the eastern and western practices, accused of heresy and dualism by the other two – the Bosnian Church (*Bosanska crkva*). People today – and especially since the war of 1992-96 – still nourish the myth that it was the followers of the Bosnian Church who embraced conversion to Islam when the Ottomans conquered Bosnia in the middle of the 15th century. It is rather that this

"religious heterodoxy", as historian Robert J. Donia writes, may have made South Slavs more receptive to conversion (Donia 2006: 11).

The most prominent communities living closely together in Bosnia were Muslims, Serbs (Orthodox Christians), Croats (Catholics), and Jews. The Bosnian Muslims were not legally recognized as a separate nation[39] until the 1960s (Donia 243), even though they were South Slavs who had inhabited the area "as long as the other Slavic peoples of the Balkans" (Mottahedeh vii) and converted to Islam during the four centuries of Ottoman rule. In her article "Nationality Categories, National Identification and Identity Formation in 'Multinational' Bosnia" (1993), Tone R. Bringa explains the term *nation*, which requires special attention in this context since it shows how complex the notions of identity, nationality, and ethnicity are in Bosnia:

> A key concept within socialist nationality policies is represented by the terms "nation" (*narod* or *nacija* in Serbo-Croat) and "nationality" (*nacionalnost*). Both terms are most commonly translated as "ethnic group" in Western literature. […] [T]his led to some confusion among English speakers since one's nationality is a state assigned status […]. However, there is a hierarchy of nationality categories and the Slav term closest to the idea of "ethnic group" is *narodnost.* From a Marxist viewpoint *narodnosti* are smaller than *narodi*, do not have a working class of their own, and exist only in relation to a larger nation. However, a *narodnost* may gain political recognition as a *narod* as did the Muslims in Bosnia Hercegovina.
>
> (Bringa 1993: 85)

The Bosnian Muslims were among the most secularized Muslim populations in the world, as Noel Malcolm notes in *Bosnia: A Short History* (1996: 221). A survey from 1985 showed that seventeen percent of the Bosnian population were religious practitioners (222). This underlines the absurdity of the destruction during the war, and points to the fact that the aggressors had to construct new monoethnic histories to justify their actions. The new Serb narrative was an ultra-violent attack on the multicultural foundation of the late Yugoslav and the new Bosnian state. Svein Mønnesland points out that the "reason for the war was not

[39] Ideologists and propagators of Greater Serbia, such as Vojislav Šešelj, held the opinion that Bosnian Muslims were not a nationality but a religious group.

religious differences, but classical motives such as control over territory and natural resources, autonomy, access to the sea etc. However, the religious and cultural differences were now used to mobilize the masses" (Mønnesland 2015: 662).

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the greatest armed conflict in Europe since the Second World War, started in March 1992 and lasted until February 1996. The union of Yugoslavia started falling apart politically as early as the 1970s, with the different national parliaments pulling each constituent republic in its own direction. The social-democratic system was slowly decaying, and national awareness returned even stronger as a result of disappointment in the broken Yugoslav dream. After President Marshall Tito's death in 1980, the utopia of equality went to pieces. In the 1980s, the political fragmentation was followed by economic collapse, which provided fertile ground for rising nationalistic policies, with the president of the Republic of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, leading the way. This political and economic turmoil culminated at the beginning of the 1990s when the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia broke apart,[40] with Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia declaring independence, leading to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, respectively.[41]

The Serb nationalists opposed the break-up of the union and their goal was the consolidation and centralization of a Yugoslavia dominated by Serbs. They took control of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), and the attack upon and destruction of Vukovar, a city in eastern Croatia, was a prelude to what would be done later in Bosnia. The Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić was the main instigant of the Bosnian war.[42] He established a political party, SDS (*Srpska demokratska stranka*, the Serb Democratic Party), which exclusively served the interests of ethnic Serbs in Bosnia. Karadžić, who bonded with Serbia's leader

[40] The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was commonly referred to as SFR Yugoslavia, or simply as Yugoslavia (SFRJ).

[41] Bosnia and Herzegovina will be at times be referred to as 'Bosnia'. This is one country, Herzegovina being geographically divided by a mountain and laying mainly in the south. The name 'Herzegovina' originates from the title *herzog*, which means *duke*. The name Bosnia stems from the river Bosna, the country's third-longest; the first mention of the name comes approximately from the 10th century.

Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo – all became independent states. This also led to a split of the linguistic continuum earlier known as Serbo-Croat. Montenegro and Serbia were federated until 2006, when Montenegro gained independence.

[42] See Robert J. Donia, *Radovan Karadžić. Architect of the Bosnian Genocide*; Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia (BBC)*; Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*; Kjell Arild Nilsen, *Milošević i krig og i Haag – en dokumentasjon*.

Milošević during the secret military build-up before the war (Mønnesland 2015: 663), threatened the annihilation of the Bosnian Muslim population if Bosnia continued insisting on its independence from Yugoslavia with these words: "Do not think that you will not take Bosnia and Herzegovina to hell, and the Bosnian Muslim people perhaps to annihilation. Because the Bosnian Muslim people would not be able to defend themselves if there was a war here".[43]

The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia in March 1992. On April 5, 1992, around 100,000 people of all nationalities gathered in front of the Parliament building for an anti-war protest in the capital. Serb snipers started shooting at the crowd, killing six and wounding several more people. The following day, April 6, marks the beginning of attacks, a siege, and an almost four-year-long war. Sarajevo was besieged for 1,425 days,[44] which makes it the longest military siege of a city in the history of modern warfare, longer than the 900-day siege of Leningrad in the Second World War.

The violent conflict hit Bosnia with full force in April 1992 and in the months that followed. At the same time as this was happening in Sarajevo, the Serb forces attacked eastern Bosnia (close to the Serbian borders) and started the brutal campaign of *etničko čišćenje*, ethnic cleansing, "the removal of all unwanted ethnicities from a territory by death or deportation" (Vulliamy 2013: xvii). According to Silber and Little, this "new term entered the international political vocabulary" in May (1996: 244). People were not fleeing the war zones; "they had been driven from their homes on the grounds of their nationality" (Silber and Little 244). The ethnic cleansing of this eastern region included the separation of men and women, where men "were kept in detention and/or killed, while many women also were raped and/or kept in detention" (Skjelsbæk 2012: 116). The Serb forces quickly took over seventy percent of the Bosnian territory. JNA was the fourth-largest military army in Europe, and those attacked were unarmed civilians (the UN imposed an arms embargo on Bosnia). Due to the escalating atrocities, the United Nations Security Council brought a resolution that declared the Srebrenica enclave a safe area in April 1993. A month later, in

[43] "Karadžić o izjavi da ce muslimani nestati." *Youtube*. 16.03.2010. Web. 30.03.2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIrzImkJiOw]

[44] We arrive at this number if we calculate the sum of the days from the beginning of the siege on April 5, 1992, until the official lifting of the siege, February 29, 1996. The Dayton Agreement was signed on December 14, 1995, but the siege lasted until the end of February 1996.

May 1993, another resolution was brought that extended the status of safe zone to five more cities in Bosnia: Sarajevo, Goražde, Žepa, Tuzla, and Bihać. The status of United Nations Safe Area meant that these places were under the protection of UNPROFOR (the United Nations Protection Force).[45]

In addition to Sarajevo, the area of eastern Bosnia and the progress of the conflict in this part of the country, especially in Srebrenica, are central not only to the history of the Bosnian war, but also to this thesis. Two of the three literary texts I will analyze in the forthcoming chapters spring respectively from the beginning and from the end of the tragedy of Srebrenica. The third text is about the safe area of Goražde, but it also addresses Srebrenica and other towns in this eastern territory. The ethnic cleansing and situation in the safe areas culminated in July 1995, when the Serb forces overran the Žepa and Srebrenica enclaves. In one week, thousands of Muslims were driven out of their homes and around 8,000 men and boys were executed and buried in mass graves.[46] The International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia has labelled this event an act of genocide.

The mass executions in Srebrenica (July 1995) and the second Markale market massacre (August 1995) in Sarajevo led to a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) air campaign against the Bosnian Serb Army. After a strategic NATO victory and lengthy negotiations between the main participants from the region, the war ended in a kind of stalemate – with neither a real winner, nor a real loser – by the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in Dayton, Ohio, in December 1995. The State of Bosnia and Herzegovina was internally divided into two parts: the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska. The Dayton Agreement may have ended the war, but it did not lead to an atmosphere of peace. To this day, tensions in the country remain high. The agreement also meant that the refugees and deportees were allowed to return to their homes (ironically, many of those homes were completely destroyed), although territorially they now belonged to another entity, Republika Srpska. In Susan Sontag's words, it was an "unjust peace" (324).

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[45] The mandate of UNPROFOR (created in 1992) was to keep the population alive and to deliver humanitarian aid until the end of the war.

[46] The International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has collected evidence from the exhumation of mass graves that "shows that most of the victims were not killed in combat but in mass executions". The Tribunal has determined that the number of Bosnian men and boys killed in Srebrenica is between 7,000 and 8,000. On the last anniversary (11.07.2018) the number of victims in Srebrenica was 8,372. For details about the Srebrenica case, see: http://www.icty.org/x/file/Outreach/view_from_hague/jit_srebrenica_en.pdf

Although this is one of the most documented conflicts in history, there is still great disagreement regarding its interpretation (Mønnesland 659). For the Serb ultranationalists in parts of the population in Republika Srpska and in the Republic of Serbia, politicians and leaders such as Karadžić, Milošević, and Mladić are celebrated as heroes. For the Bosnians, those same figures are considered the worst aggressors and perpetrators.[47] During the war the Bosnian Serb forces, backed up by the Serb Yugoslav Army and paramilitary units, targeted Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Croat civilians. This resulted in more than 100,000 fatalities from all ethnical backgrounds, tens of thousands of raped women, and more than 2.2 million displaced people.[48]

1.2.2 Criteria for corpus selection

The selection of texts was based on the following criteria: The texts should be originally written in the English language and their central theme should be a specific political conflict – the Bosnian war. In addition, the texts should have a link with visual images – ekphrasis should be present in the texts – and they should be of different genres.

Essentially, different genres open for different viewpoints and this should provide a broader base from which to answer the overarching research question. In this thesis, genres are approached as "a method of dealing with challenges that is faced by a memory culture. In uncommon, difficult, or dangerous circumstances it is especially traditional and strongly conventionalized genres which writers draw upon in order to provide familiar and meaningful patterns of representation for experiences that would otherwise be hard to interpret" (Erll 2011: 148–149). For instance, poetry is traditionally thought of as genre best suited for conveying traumatic experiences – but we also need to observe the possible changes in genre pattern. Alastair Fowler argues that it is a

[47] For instance, Karadžić is called the "Butcher of Bosnia" and "architect and perpetrator of genocide" (Donia 2015: xi). He was indicted by the ICTY for genocide, persecutions, extermination, murder, deportation, crimes against humanity, violence with the main purpose to spread terror among the civilian population, and unlawful attack on civilians, all of which he was prosecuted for in The Hague, Netherlands. Karadžić has been found guilty of genocide in Srebrenica and sentenced to 40 years in jail. See "Case information sheet Radovan Karadžić." *ICTY*. Web. 19. Jul. 2018. [http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/cis/en/cis_karadzic_en.pdf]. Milošević died in prison in 2006, while Mladić was sentenced to life.

[48] See Ed Vulliamy, *The War is Dead, Long Live the War: Bosnia: The Reckoning* (2013); Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (2002); Inger Skjelsbæk. *The Political Psychology of War Rape. Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2012).

misapprehension that genres are permanently established; they are "actually in a continual state of transmutation" and "it is by their modification that individual works convey literary meaning" (2002: 24). Literature transforms existing conventions and shapes them in order to respond to the needs of memory culture. The focus on genre will be twofold in this thesis: I will focus on how respective literary texts challenge generic conventions, and on how ekphrasis as a device manifests itself in different genres.

Another criterion with a crucial role during the selection was the authors' geographical and linguistic distance to the conflict. Lastly, one more criterion was included: The literary response should have occurred during or immediately after the war, i.e., the composition of the literary texts should have begun in the 1990s. Sarah Kane started writing *Blasted* in March 1993, and the play premiered at the Royal Court in January 1995. Adrian Oktenberg wrote *The Bosnia Elegies* between June and December 1995, but the book was not published until 1997. Joe Sacco travelled to Goražde four times between late 1995 and early 1996, and *Safe Area Goražde* was first published in 2000. Kane and Sacco are major figures with strong reputations in their respective fields, and their texts are of high quality. Oktenberg is a lesser-known author. Yet although she does not have a strong reputation, the relevance of her accomplished volume *The Bosnia Elegies* is indisputable: Especially one of the poems in that volume contributes to the topics I am addressing in the context of trauma, media, the use of images, ekphrasis, and witnessing.

1.3 Outline of Chapters

What follows after this introduction are four chapters: Chapter 2 will discuss Sarah Kane's play *Blasted;* Chapter 3 will be a study of Adrian Oktenberg's *The Bosnia Elegies*, with a particular focus on one of her poems, and Chapter 4 will explore Joe Sacco's documentary graphic novel *Safe Area Goražde*. Ultimately, Chapter 5 will offer the conclusion. The concept of a gap will recur in each of the chapters in different ways.

Chapter 2 will argue that Sarah Kane's first play bears witness to the presence of absence. In that chapter I will examine the play's genealogy, discuss the importance of the wider context and the text's different lacunae for understanding the play and, while demonstrating the link between the play's intrusive images and the graphic images from the Bosnian war, offer an analysis

of Soldier' traumatic images and ekphrastic passages central to the aesthetics of the play.

In Chapter 3, the object of analysis will be Adrian Oktenberg's contextually ekphrastic poem "In the morning", which was written as a response to a photograph of a woman who took her own life after the fall of Srebrenica. Of special interest will be the role and the function of *caesura* in bearing witness in this particular poem. Caesura is also a prominent visual or graphic feature of almost all the poems in Oktenberg's *The Bosnia Elegies*, and this chapter will argue that the gap of caesura acquires performative value due to its ekphrastic environment.

The gutter in a graphic novel, as I will show in an analysis of Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* in Chapter 4, has a performative function similar to that of caesura in Chapter 3. Due to a complex relationship between images and their verbal representation in a documentary graphic novel, this chapter will explore the link between the oral testimony, intrusive images, drawing the story, and ekphrasis. Through an experimental approach, the chapter will suggest that survivor's mental images can be a starting point of an ekphrastic process, and of bearing visual-verbal witness.

In Chapter 5 I will summarize the findings of my research. I will use the research questions as a basis for the conclusion. The term *witnessing gap* and its relation with ekphrasis will not be understandable in its full sense until after analysis. In this final chapter I will return to these concepts and explain the link between them in greater detail.

2 Witnessing the Presence of Absence: Sarah Kane's *Blasted*

> Images. [...] the most painful wounds are inflicted more often by what one sees than by what one knows.
> – Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*

> The aesthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination.
> – James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Seen in the light of cultural trauma theory and the workings of the intrusive image as discussed in the introductory chapter, Sarah Kane's play *Blasted* (1995) in its entirety could be explored as an intrusive image from the 1990s, or as a symptom of aesthetic, social, political (and personal) turmoil. This chapter argues that *Blasted* bears witness to a specific socio-historical moment while at the same time standing as a timeless warning, challenging the very act and notion of witnessing. On the one hand, that to which the play arguably bears witness is referentially absent from the play itself. On the other hand, a close reading of the verbally described images of atrocities from an unknown war, which a nameless soldier narrates to a journalist in the play, will uncover an important link that *Blasted* preserves with its frame of reference. Building on these arguments, this chapter will show that the disappearance of the Bosnian war from the final version of the play created an open wound relation between the text and the context, which in addition to the use of violence and blatant language in the play, caused public outcry and widespread rejection of *Blasted* among most of the critics at the time of its first staging. Relating to the research questions, this chapter will explore the relationship between the play and media images, as well as the relationship between the intrusive image and the ekphrastic image.

Although I discuss some of the early responses to the play's opening at the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs, the focus of the analysis is mainly on the play's genesis, the play's text and verbally described intrusive images from the perpetrator's perspective, and its link with the context, rather than on stage production or performance history. Furthermore, the analysis of this modern classic will explore the interplay between genetic criticism and the play's wider context in order to show the link between ekphrasis and witnessing in the play.

The story of *Blasted* started in March 1993. Sarah Kane (1971–1999) was originally writing a play about a man and a woman in a Leeds hotel when she saw on television an old woman from Srebrenica, a town in eastern Bosnia, who was crying and pleading for help. This was only one image from a myriad of reports about shelling, war rapes, and starved people in Bosnia that shocked Europe and the rest of the world in the early 1990s, while at the same turning its viewers, if not into witnesses, then into spectators. Serb ultranationalist forces were ethnically cleansing their alleged homeland of the presence of the non-Serb majority, mostly Muslims, over the course of almost four years. According to Kane, the reports and images of atrocities from Bosnia inspired her to change the direction of the play she was writing at the time. However, in the final version of *Blasted* there is not a single word of reference to Bosnia or any other specific conflict.

Kane was an internationally acclaimed British playwright who wrote a total of five plays in a period of six years before she took her own life at the age of twenty-eight.[49] She was twenty-three years old when she finished writing *Blasted*, which was her first play; it was followed by *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (produced posthumously in 2000). Kane and her oeuvre became representative of *in-yer-face theatre*, together with playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Neilson, and many other writers who emerged in Britain in the 1990s. The term "in-yer-face theatre" was coined by the British theatre critic Aleks Sierz.[50] In-yer-face has been described as experiential theatre due to its extreme desire to bring a direct experience to the audience through shocking images, blatant language, and unsettling representations of violence and sex, creating a sense of immediacy and vividness. "In this way", argues Sierz, "theatre has been an image factory" (Sierz 2001: xiii). In this theatre of sensation the writers persistently challenge social and moral norms by using shock tactics to address unpleasant and frightening issues that are usually avoided in public discourse.

The plot of *Blasted* is in essence as follows: there are three characters – Ian, Cate, and Soldier.[51] Ian, a hard-drinking, 45-year-old journalist (and a former

[49] Kane committed suicide by hanging in February 1999.
[50] For an extensive discussion on the topic, see Chapter 1, "What is in-yer-face theatre?" in Aleks Sierz's seminal work *In-Yer-Face Theatre. British Drama Today* (2001).
[51] This is how Kane refers to Soldier in the character list (with a capital "S", and no definite article – Soldier is treated as a first name). However, in stage directions, both "the" and "S" are present, for instance: "The Soldier picks up the cigarette and puts it in his mouth" (p. 40); "The

undercover government agent) suffering from lung cancer meets up with Cate, a 21-year-old ex-girlfriend who stutters and is prone to epileptic fits when under stress. They meet in a hotel room in Leeds, "so expensive it could be anywhere in the world" (3). Ian wants to have sex with Cate, but she keeps rejecting him. He simulates sex while she is unconscious after a fit, and then rapes her between the end of Scene 1 and the beginning of Scene 2 (the audience does not see the rape on stage). In Scene 2, as a kind of revenge, Cate bites Ian's penis "as hard as she can" (31) during fellatio. These two scenes, which together make up the first half of the play, are about the dynamics between Ian and Cate, the power imbalance of a relationship filled with violence, abuse, racist remarks, and domestic rape. In the second half of the play the situation deteriorates after a nameless Soldier with a sniper's rifle forces his way into the room and disarms Ian. Cate exits into the bathroom and escapes. At the end of Scene 2, Soldier stands on the bed and urinates over the pillows and at this moment "there is a blinding light, and a huge explosion" (39). A mortar shell blasts a huge hole in one of the walls of the hotel room. In Scene 3, Soldier tells Ian about the gruesome acts he has committed in the line of duty for his country (45). Then he rapes Ian while "crying his heart out" (49), puts a revolver up his anus, sucks out, bites off and eats Ian's eyes, in a reenactment of what other soldiers did to Soldier's girlfriend, Col. By the opening of Scene 4, Soldier has blown his own brains out with Ian's revolver. Cate returns with a hurt baby, which dies of starvation, and she buries it under the floor at the beginning of Scene 5. In this last scene, Cate goes to find some food in exchange for selling her body to the soldiers, and Ian is left alone, blind, hungry, and desperate. In a series of *tableaux vivants*, as in a series of traumatic flashbacks, Ian masturbates, strangles himself, defecates and tries to clean it up with a newspaper, laughs hysterically, cries bloody tears, rips up the floor, and eats the baby. He then climbs into the hole in the floor, his head poking out, and dies "with relief" (60). Cate returns with food, "blood seeping from between her legs" (60). Earlier in the play she was disgusted by the eating of meat and Ian smelling of alcohol; now she eats a sausage and washes it down with gin. Cate feeds the deceased but conscious Ian with this food, and he thanks her.

Upon its first reading (or viewing), *Blasted* may leave a range of conflicting thoughts and emotions. The readers may be confused due to the play's form and the contradictory plot details, disoriented and frightened by the

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Soldier grips Ian's head in his hands" (p. 50), etc. For the sake of consistency, I do not use "the" when referring to Soldier.

blast and where the explosion takes us, hurt and disgusted by the graphic descriptions of rape; sad for Cate, irritated at Ian, relieved at the end of the play – or pondering, since they may feel that they lack context. In a word, the reader, as well as the spectator, will most likely become overwhelmed. On the basis of such an experience, the critics condemned the play and the playwright after its first production in 1995. Jack Tinker of *Daily Mail*, for instance, infamously titled his review "This disgusting feast of filth",[52] while other reviews were "more balanced". According to Sierz, "most explained their dislike of *Blasted* in reasonable, if literal terms: the world of the play is incoherent and its message is lost in unrealistic plotting. What confused most critics was Kane's anti-naturalism" (2001: 95–96). *The Guardian*'s theatre critic, Michael Billington, argued that "[t]he reason why the play falls apart, is that there is no sense of external reality – who exactly is meant to be fighting whom out on the streets?"[53] These reactions,[54] and the latter critic's question among them, are significant because they point to a general lack of understanding of the play at the time of its first staging, showing that disgust and revulsion prevailed over reflection and thought. For many contemporary readers, Billington's question may seem counter-intuitive or superfluous when discussing a play, but we need to keep the wider context in mind: British drama is not continental drama. What distinguishes it from the post-Second World War context of continental drama is a much greater emphasis on realism, and the reviewers of *Blasted* "still expected plays to be realistic" (Sierz 2001: 96). On the other hand, as Kane broke the unities of time and space, emphasizing that form and content in *Blasted* are the same, she shoved the unpleasantness of dirty realism right into the faces of her audience, making them into first-hand witnesses of the violence on stage.[55]

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[52] See Tinker, Jack. "This disgusting feast of filth". *Daily Mail*, January 19, 1995.
[53] See Billington, Michael. "The good fairies desert the court's Theatre of the Absurd". *The Guardian*. January 20, 1995.
[54] Some other titles and reactions were: "Awful shock", review by Charles Spencer in *Daily Telegraph*, January 20, 1995; "Random tour in a chamber of horrors", by Nick Curtis in *Evening Standard*, January 19, 1995; "Rape play girl in hiding", *Daily Express*, January 20, 1995. Two critiques of Billington's "insulting dismissal" of Kane's play, and an appreciation of Kane's and Royal Court's courage in bringing *Blasted* to the stage, were published in *The Guardian*; see Bob Vernon, "*Blasted*: a savage play looks beyond indifference to a savage world", January 23, 1995.
[55] The phrase "in-yer-face" is defined as something "blatantly aggressive or provocative, impossible to ignore or avoid". In a small room of Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, which seats 65 people, no audience members were far from the stage and the violence was delivered, quite literally, right into their faces.

This is one of the reasons why in-yer-face theatre is also called experiential theatre. Kane wanted to suggest that the traumatic rupture of war, rape, and extremely graphic violent images that were represented on stage can be very real and that they can happen anywhere at any time: "One [society] is the seed and the other is the tree. [...] [T]he seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peacetime civilisation" (quoted in Sierz 2012: 201–202). With this, Kane tried to demonstrate a thin line between everyday life and the atrocities of which humans are capable, suggesting that there is a connection between public and private violence, and between Bosnia and Britain. Paradoxically, in a tradition that was culturally used to representations of reality, references to atrocities of war reality in another country on stage caused a great stir in the British media. Simulations of violence arguably caused more of a reaction than the actual violent events, as Kane commented in an interview: "The thing that shocks me most is that the media seem to have been more upset by the representation of violence than by violence itself" (Sierz 2001: 97). Despite not being "naturalistic", the play in fact took cues from actual events. In the earlier drafts of the play there were some specific references to who was "fighting whom out on the streets" (to quote Billington), which were removed before the first production, and it therefore might have appeared that the play had no link with reality. In this vein, critic Christopher Innes stated that *Blasted* has "no believable social context" (quoted in Rees 2012: 114), and others, such as visual culture scholar and critic Peter Buse, commented that "it is hard to know what exactly *Blasted* is witnessing" (Buse 2001: 184). I will come back to the witnessing of this play later in this chapter.

The play was written as a reaction to a mediated conflict, and its staging in turn caused reactions in the society of spectators. This chapter will demonstrate the link between the media images of the Bosnian war atrocities, Sarah Kane's writing process while composing *Blasted*, and the challenges of witnessing from a distance in a dramatic form. What frames my close reading of *Blasted* is genetic criticism, the theory of ekphrasis, and the significance of context for reading the text (Felman and Laub 1992: xv). I suggest that the social context is rearticulated in the play's structure and its shocking content, as well as in its traumatized characters.

The specific socio-historical moment includes the war in the Balkans but is not exclusively limited to it – it embraces the political, economic, social, and artistic sensibility of the time, simultaneously stretching itself across geographic

borders and cultures. Although huge holes in buildings were not an uncommon sight in images and news reports from the Bosnian war, there is another event that resonates for *Blasted* in addition to the war in the 1990s. This incident is the IRA bombing of the Grand Hotel, Brighton, in 1984, which was an attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet during a Conservative Party Conference. Critic Helen Iball suggests that *Blasted* can be understood in the context of four key concerns (something that significantly expands the timeframe to cover not only the 1990s as the time when the play was first staged, but which also includes Kane's formative influences): the war in the Balkans, the violence of English football hooligans, in-yer-face theatre, and Kane's growing up as one of "Thatcher's children".[56]

Blasted invites us to contemplate the trauma that violence causes and especially what it means to see (that is, to *witness*) violence on multiple levels. By the means of *enargeia*, the use of vivid, graphic description, the play illuminates the places where the verbally depicted images make the audience visualize the unannounced, distorted face of war. Through Kane's portrayal of violence, the play also makes an important and suggestive statement about the use of rape as a weapon of war. With what might be termed its 'blasted' structure, the play implies that human beings become helpless in the moment of an unpredictable, traumatic event that constitutes a break in reality. After the shock and the muteness that follows, the blast becomes a metaphor for a void, a sudden loss, for something being brutally taken away from us – be it in war, or in everyday life.

I would like to draw attention to what is absent from the play. There is a dynamic between the context and bearing witness to what is not visible in the text, and this dynamic seems contradictory since there cannot be any witnessing without the act of seeing.[57] In the world of the play, to be absent does not necessarily mean to be non-existent. Although it is not my intention to discuss this absence exclusively in terms of unrepresentability in a Caruthian sense, I will turn to Caruth's emphasis in definition of the term *trauma* as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 1996: 3). As I see it, it is precisely the damaged mind that is at center-stage in *Blasted*, rather than "the damaged

[56] For a discussion of these four issues, see Iball 2008: 8–15.

[57] We have to allow for blind people to use the other senses. Persons with disabilities, even those with sensory impairments, may testify as witnesses, provided they can perceive and make known their perceptions to others (blind persons can hear, smell and taste, deaf persons can see).

body", as Ken Urban suggests in his commentary (Urban 2011: 97). In *Blasted*, the physical wounds are the visible consequences of the wounds the mind has endured. A constant tension exists between what is and what is not present in the play, what is named and what is not named, or un-named, as will be discussed in this chapter. This tension arises between ekphrasis and ellipsis; between an excess of violent images and words on the one hand, and their omission on the other; between what is and what is not shown onstage (the rape of Ian vs. the rape of Cate). Caruth suggests that "[t]rauma (...) challenges us to a new kind of listening" (1995: 10). In this sense, the silence in the noise of violence has its own manifestations and a value from which we can learn; therefore, this silence needs to be listened to. There is a link between the aforementioned absence and the silence, between the representation of physical wounds and the places of wounds in the text itself.

Arguably, Kane's first play bears witness to the presence of absence. *Blasted* makes visible that to which it bears witness through notional ekphrasis as a means of conveying the unspeakable and the unrepresentable of the actual trauma. Among the critics, there are different approaches to the aspects of absence and witnessing in the play. For instance, the critic Aleks Sierz writes explicitly about the play's link to the Bosnian war, pinpointing that "there's a gap – a silence – an absence of the dreaded word 'Muslim'" both in Kane's interviews, and in the text of the play, "[a]lthough the play was inspired by massacres in Bosnia (which means Muslim)".[58] On the other extreme, while claiming that it is difficult to understand what *Blasted* is witnessing (Buse 2001: 184), the critic Peter Buse, to whom we will return, does not take into consideration Kane's interviews or the relevance of the sociohistorical context for the play. The audience's and critics' perception and understanding of the play have changed in the aftermath of events such as 9/11 and the London bombings on July 7, 2005; it has become easier to see the connection between real-time war atrocities and the play, or to understand *Blasted* as an allegory of war. While I agree with Sierz's observation that "this absence [of the word 'Muslim'] is much more noticeable" after the terrorist attacks, this is not the absence that I will address in my analysis. By claiming that the play bears witness to "the presence

[58] See more in "Interview with Aleks Sierz, 8 September 2005" (Saunders 2009: 131). For a detailed discussion about the "Muslim Other", see Sierz's article "'Looks like there's a war on': Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, political theatre and the Muslim Other", in *Sarah Kane in context*, ed. by Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders (2010), 45–56.

of absence" – an aporia I borrow from Paul Ricoeur's discussion of "Memory and Imagination" (*Memory, History, Forgetting*, 2004: 10) – I argue that the text guides us towards the subtle and sudden absences that are located in the midst of an excess of words, images, and violence. The absence in *Blasted* is stylistic and compositional, and one can also observe an absence of the protagonists' integrity. To show the present absences and the different ways in which the play bears witness, I will explore two aspects of the play in this chapter: its genealogy, and verbal descriptions of traumatic images. More specifically, I look at lacunae that are created in, and emerge from, the text.

How can we better understand the complex layers of meaning in the play? What is the underlying pretext of *Blasted*? What does the play achieve by blurring the boundary between victim and perpetrator? To answer these questions, I will examine the problem of absence and witnessing in three parts, and then offer a conclusion.

In the first part I will explore what preceded *Blasted* as we read it in the final, published version. This will be done by using the theoretical framework of genetic criticism, which provides methodological tools and concepts for looking into literary works with many drafts and accompanying material, while not neglecting the context. I will then discuss Kane's interviews and show the significance of the media images and news coverage of the Bosnian war for the play, and I will show how these influenced the writing process of *Blasted*. Afterwards I will analyze the play's early drafts.

In the second part, this chapter will discuss the perils of not engaging with the existing context. What will follow in the third part is a close reading of passages from the play, where I will return to specific media images from the Bosnian war and analyze their link with the ekphrastic images in the play; it will be demonstrated how mass mediated testimonies of the victims of the Bosnian war are turned into the testimony of the perpetrator. Lastly, the argument that *Blasted* pays witness to the presence of absence and the problem of perpetrator testimony will be reflected upon in the final segment of this chapter.

2.1 Voiceless Voice and the Genesis of *Blasted*

The most important characteristic of genetic criticism as an interpretive method is its interest in the process of making a literary text. In *Textual Awareness*, Dirk van Hulle explains that "[g]enetic critics focus on the temporal dimension of

writing and regard a work of literature as a process rather than a product" (2009: 2). Louis Hay, who coined the term *critique génétique* in 1979, has underlined the need to "distinguish genetic criticism from traditional philology"; the aim of philology is to establish a text, while genetic criticism tends to destabilize it (van Hulle 2009: 2). In other words, genetic criticism prevents us from giving sole priority to the final version of a text as a product – instead, it looks at what informed the writing in order to open up the text and reconstruct its genesis. Van Hulle argues that the juxtaposition of a published text with the previous versions "gives the reader an idea of what [the text] might have become. Genetic critics study the contingencies of the writing process as research objects in their own right, independent from the publication of a finished product (a 'corrected text')" (2009: 3).

The notion of *avant-texte* (pre-text) was introduced in 1972 by Jean Bellemin-Noël to differentiate the previous versions from the published text (van Hulle 2009: 4). Establishing the chronology of manuscripts and deciphering the different documents is necessary, "both to facilitate one's own work and to make the material more accessible to others" (5). These different acts of interpretation "turn the documents into an interpretable complex of *avant-texte*" (5). Genetic critics are also interested in different kinds of *extratextual material* that play a part in the author's creative process; this documentation often disappears along the way, is completely transformed, or is simply left unused (7). Extratextual information, which is of special interest for this chapter, may include television footage, images, socio-historical context, and so on. According to van Hulle, "incorporation of extratextual material in the avant-texte is [...] a gradual process [...]: the author domesticates certain extratextual elements by appropriating them, but he also gives his text a foreign touch" (7). Typically, these steps are invisible in the final version precisely because the process is gradual and because it involves a great amount of creativity on behalf of the author. Treating extratextual material in this manner (gradual process, domestication, and the addition of heterogeneous materials) produces a new, autonomous text, instead of, for instance, a text with a possible collage effect creating a disjointed series of impressions in which it would be fairly easy to see from where the material originated. By studying relevant notebooks, typescripts, and manuscripts, we can gain deeper insight into the writing process. In genetic criticism, it is considered "more valuable to draw attention to the textual trouble-spots than to produce a restored text" (4).

Distinguishing between the different phases of writing might however prove more difficult than it seems at first sight. There are four phases in Pierre-Marc de Biasi's typology of compositional phases: precompositional, compositional, pre-publishing, and publication. There is also a post-publication phase. Van Hulle adds, however, that these phases are usually not separated in reality (2009: 5). What precedes the first draft, such as different reading notes, marginalia, and plans can be said to belong to the precompositional phase, whereas textualization[59] and structuring belong to the compositional phase (5). Van Hulle suggests that these phases serve as a "general guideline", but he also warns that they often overlap, and one should not be too strict when attempting to bring order to the avant-textes (5). His argument that "[t]he interest in manuscripts is neither biographical, nor psychological" (6) will provide an important guideline to my analysis of Kane's process with *Blasted*. I will, for instance, address relevant interviews, letters, and Kane's accounts of how she started writing her first play primarily with a focus on the author's literary work, and not on her personal life or political views.

The material that inspired and/or informed Sarah Kane's creative process when working on *Blasted* but did not find place in the published text (in its original form, thoroughly transformed, or at all), can be characterized as extratextual material. *Blasted* went through several transformations from the first drafts in March 1993 to its performance in January 1995, publications in 1994[60] and 1996,[61] and final changes in the final publication in *Complete Plays*, 2001.[62] According to Alex Sierz, the play "went through about fifteen drafts" in total (Sierz 2000: 92). I will be focusing on the creation of scenes and on how their conception changed during crucial phases of the writing process. As in most writing processes, there was a significant number of deletions and cuts in order to achieve greater precision and striking theatrical images. In an interview with Sierz, Kane explained that "only three or four lines in the first draft made it to the

[59] When the writing process is divided into many different phases, textualization should be understood as writing with a final, or permanent form of a text in mind.
[60] This version of the play is contained in a volume, *Frontline Intelligence: New Plays for the Nineties*, selected and introduced by Pamela Edwardes.
[61] In this edition Sarah Kane made several small but significant changes to *Blasted*. These included cuts to the dialogue at the end and additions to stage directions indicating the changing seasons (Saunders, 2002: 193).
[62] The editor notes that "[t]his edition of *Blasted*, first reprinted in 2000, incorporates minor revisions made to the original text by Sarah Kane shortly before her death. It should therefore be regarded as the definitive version in all aspects" (*Complete Plays* 2001: 2).

final one", as she wanted her characters to be "articulate and precise" (in Sierz 2000: 101). Some changes may potentially have greater consequences for the reading and comprehension of the play than others, especially when the changes affect the play's clarity.

One example of the abovementioned textual trouble-spots in *Blasted* would be Kane's naming the character of the soldier "Vladek" and specifying his nationality as Serbian in the first drafts of the play. The name was dropped and the nationality removed from the later drafts and the published version of the play. I will return to a discussion about the soldier in more detail later in this chapter.

Omitting a soldier's name and nationality is not the same as omitting a verb or a demonstrative pronoun in an already short sentence, as the following examples show: "This is a Serbian town now" from the first draft was shortened to "This is our town now" in later drafts, and it became only "Our town now" (*Blasted*, 39) in the final version. While both of these actions – the omitting of a soldier's name on the one hand and some syntactic changes on the other – have consequences, they are of a different kind; the former may challenge the way in which the audiences reflect upon a representation of a conflict and its belligerents, while the latter leads to changes in tone, rhythm, and atmosphere in that particular scene. The initially negative reception that *Blasted* received upon its premiere in January 1995 can serve as an indication of how provocative yet misunderstood the play was, and how a majority of critics (and the audience) failed to engage with it in a reflective manner.

It is significant for this analysis to emphasize a turning point in the writing process of Kane's play. At the very beginning, when *Blasted* was only one scene and before it was given its title, Sarah Kane was writing a play "about two people in a hotel room, in which there was a complete power imbalance, which resulted in the older man raping the younger woman" (interview with Rebellato, 1998, published in Sierz 2012: 201). The writing about domestic violence was interrupted one night when Kane turned on her television as a break from writing (Sierz 2012: 201). Srebrenica was under siege and it was on the news; an old Muslim woman was crying for help. This is considered to be a significant turning point in the composition process: what Kane saw on television that night gave her a completely new understanding of what she was writing, and it changed the direction as well as the overall conception of what she would write.

There are several accounts of how the extratextual material – the war reports, and especially that one television image of the old woman from Srebrenica – affected Kane's writing of the play. Here I will look at three, and arguably the most important, instances of such accounts; they are all Sarah Kane's reflections upon the writing of *Blasted.* All of them are from a post-production period: the first example is from an interview with Graham Saunders (June 1995); the second is from a public event where Kane was interviewed by Dan Rebellato (November 1998; this interview was published as an edited transcript), and the third is from a letter to Aleks Sierz (January 1999).

As Derrida writes in "Shibboleth" about Paul Celan's poems, circumcision "takes place only once", "only one time" (2005: 1). The moment when Kane turned on the television, being shocked by the footage from Srebrenica and the image of the old woman, is *unrepeatable*: like circumcision, it occurred only once. However, as I will show in the following pages, Kane refers back to the event of seeing the image on several occasions. While her reflections develop, Kane's referent (the image of the old woman pleading for help) remains the same. In fact, the importance of this image is emphasized by Kane's oral repetitions and the reference to the image in the different interviews (June 1995, November 1998, January 1999). It is therefore significant to know *when* the image of the old woman from Srebrenica affected and triggered the writing of the play, and it is relevant to show the return (or haunting) of the image in the form of Kane's repeated oral and written references. Although a variety of impulses and inspirations lay behind the writing the play, this image is precisely the one to which Kane keeps returning.

The interview with Graham Saunders (made shortly after the first production, on June 12, 1995) is, to my knowledge, the earliest account. In this interview Sarah Kane describes the moment that informed further work on the play:

> The day I started writing it was in 1992[63] when Srebrenica was under siege, and I was getting more and more depressed having been reading about what was happening in Bosnia during the previous two years, and

[63] In a letter to Graham Saunders from July 8, 1995, Sarah Kane thanks him for the transcript of the interview and corrects herself: "The date of the Srebrenica [...] siege was 1993, not 1992 – my error." For more, see *Sarah Kane Archive* (Birmingham University).

> then seeing all this footage on television. And there was a woman who looked directly at the camera, who looked about seventy years old; and her face was lined and grey – she was just crying her eyes out. And she just looked at the camera and said, 'Please, please help us. We don't know what to do, please help us', and I just sat there crying watching it; and it wasn't even so much a sense of helplessness, as just seeing such extreme pain. And I don't think it was conscious, but I think I started to want to write about that pain. That was probably when I had the idea that I wanted a soldier in it (Saunders 2009: 49–50).

I wish to draw attention to the temporal aspect of Kane's narrative: she had been reading about what was happening in Bosnia during the previous years and seeing all the footage on television – these actions stretched across a period of time and they had a lasting effect, leaving their trace and impact on the viewer, who became more and more depressed. Kane was affected and inspired to write by the reports from the crisis in Srebrenica. The war in the Balkans was raging when the conflict in eastern Bosnia escalated during the months of March and April 1993, which resulted in the media being flooded by images and headlines about the atrocities.[64] The news that she saw made a great emotional impression on Kane; the footage gave her an acute sense of current events. She wanted to somehow incorporate this experience and those images into the play she was already writing.

The second time she reflected upon the image and the voice of the old woman from Srebrenica was more than three years later. Although Kane had intuitively sensed the connection between the two societies – between Bosnia and the UK, between rape as a weapon of war and a common rape in a Leeds hotel –

[64] The media reported about the Balkan conflict almost every day; here are some of the headlines from *The Guardian*: O'Kane, Maggie: "No anaesthetic for the pain of Srebrenica" (March 17, 1993); Traynor, Ian: "UN pushes Muslims into accepting Serb exodus" (March 24, 1993); "UN halts aid convoys as Bosnians die in crush" (April 1, 1993); Traynor, Ian, Ian Black and Stephen Bates: "Mass panic as Serb noose tightens on Srebrenica" (April 16, 1993); Pitter, Laura: "Wounded refugees flown from hell" (April 20, 1993); Traynor, Ian: "Witness to Bosnian slaughter" (April 22, 1993); Williams, Shirley: "How the West can stop the holocaust" (*The Observer*, May 9, 1993), etc. Also see Chapter 8 in *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* by Nel Ruigrok, Jan A. de Ridder, Otto Scholten: "News Coverage of the Bosnian War in Dutch Newspapers: Impact and Implications" (2005). The figure on p. 174 in this book shows news coverage about the Bosnian war (January 1993–July 1995); the graph shows reporting peaking in March–April 1993 and in June–July 1995.

from the beginning, this became more clearly formulated in the interview with Dan Rebellato in November 1998:

> And I think with *Blasted*, it was a direct response to the material as it began to happen. I mean, I knew I wanted to write a play about a man and a woman in a hotel room, and that there was a complete power imbalance, which resulted in a rape. And I started writing that and I was writing away and had been doing it for a few days, and I switched on the news one night while I was having a break from writing, and there was a very old woman's face, a woman from Srebrenica, just weeping and weeping and looking into the camera, and saying: "Please, please, help me, help me. We need the UN to come and help us. We need someone to do something." And I was sitting there watching and I thought: "No one's going to do anything. How many times have I seen another old woman crying from another town in Bosnia under siege and no one does anything?" And I thought: "This is absolutely terrible, and I'm writing this ridiculous play about two people in a room - - what does it matter? What's the point of carrying on? So this is what I want to write about and yet somehow this story about this man and woman was still attracting me. And I thought: "So what could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia?" And then suddenly this penny dropped and I thought: "Of course, it's obvious. One is the seed and the other is the tree." And I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peacetime civilisation and I think the wall between so-called civilisation and what happened in central Europe is very, very thin and it can get torn down at any time (in Sierz 2012: 201–202).

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag writes that "non-stop imagery (television, streaming video, movies) is our surround, but when it comes to remembering, the photograph has the deeper bite" (2003: 19). In Kane's case, it seems that a slightly different situation has occurred: she saw television footage of the Srebrenica woman, and that image, although it was a moving one, carved itself in her mind's eye and had, in Sontag's words, a "deeper bite". Like a photograph, it became still within a frame, crying for help at the same time, somehow trapped within the play.

The voice of the woman from Srebrenica is the play's voiceless voice: the mute, yet reigning force, which never appears in the text of the play. Although it is not the sole reason for the creation of the play, seeing this image was a decisive turning point in the writing process. For Kane, the crying woman of Srebrenica almost became a synonym for (and symbol of) the Bosnian war. However, while being absent and unvoiced, through this synecdoche we can feel the woman's presence in Cate's line, "Everyone in town is crying" (*Blasted*, Scene 4, p. 51). As Kane explains in the interview with Rebellato, the play was "a direct response to the material as it began to happen". The triggers to continue writing the play in a new direction, as well as the impulse to bring the soldier into it, were her dilemma, pain, compassion, anger, which she "translated into action".[65]

The following quotation is consistent with the preceding accounts we have looked at, confirming that, as late as 1999, shortly before her suicide, Kane once again acknowledged the importance of the war reports for the play. This is, to my knowledge, the last clarification that Kane gave concerning the writing process of *Blasted*. She expressed her ethical and creative dilemma in a letter to Aleks Sierz as follows:

> At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing [in March 1993] I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said, 'Please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something.' I knew nobody was going to do a thing.[66] Suddenly, I was completely uninterested in the play I was writing. What I wanted to write about was what I'd just seen on television. So my dilemma was: do I abandon my play (even though I'd written one scene I

[65] For Sontag, "[c]ompassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers" (Sontag, 2003: 90). Similar to this is Ariella Azoulay's interest in action and not in "viewer's emotional responses to images of suffering" as she writes in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008). In this vein, although Kane was already writing a play when she saw the crying woman on television, she was a viewer whose emotional response led to further engagement as a playwright. With this in mind, *Blasted* in its final version actively responds to media images of suffering.

[66] In the letter to Sierz (18th January, 1999), Kane continues after this sentence: "*I knew nobody was going to do a thing* – certainly not the British government or the UN, because we'd seen so many other towns in exactly the same critical situation and nothing was done other than UN soldiers standing by as witness to genocide." As we can see in the published version of the letter from which I quote, the letter has been edited and shortened, and this particular sentence is omitted. See *Sarah Kane Archive* (Birmingham University).

> thought was really good) in order to move on to a subject I thought was more pressing? Slowly, it occurred to me that the play I was writing was about this. It was about violence, about rape, and it was about these things happening between people who know each other and ostensibly love each other (Sierz 2001: 101).

Although all of the proffered quotations contain Kane's own descriptions of what happened when she turned on her television set and saw yet another report from the Bosnian war, there are some differences between her first account from 1995, the second from 1998, and the last from 1999. If we compare the different quotes, we can see in Kane's recollections of how she started writing *Blasted* that the old crying woman from Srebrenica was a constant presence throughout the years, as if this image protruded and haunted her ever after. On the other hand, Kane's reflections have become more elaborate and we notice development and maturation in her explanations. From an almost purely emotional response – describing the experience of seeing other people's pain and unconsciously wanting to write about it, as well as wanting a soldier in the play – Kane gradually shifted to describing her own reflection process upon the issue of formal connections between the scene she already had written, with the new ideas, and the play she wanted to write after seeing the footage. *Blasted* was her first play; at the time she was answering to Sierz's questions in writing in January 1999, she was working on what would be her fifth (and final) play.

In what follows, I will bring in more, but also different, paratextual material regarding the play's link to the Bosnian war. When pressed to elaborate upon the meaning of *Blasted*, Kane explains that "the play was about a crisis of living", and asks "how do we continue to live when life becomes so painful, so unbearable?" For her, *Blasted* "really is a hopeful play" because characters "scrape life out of ruins" (Sierz 2001: 106). She says in an interview with Sierz from 1998 that

> there's a famous photograph[67] of a woman in Bosnia hanging by her neck from a tree. That's lack of hope. That's shocking. My play is only a shadowy representation of a reality that's far harder to stomach. It's easier to get upset about their representation than about the reality because it's

[67] For the image of the hanged woman, see page 113 in this thesis.

> easier to do something about a play – ban it, censor it, take away the theatre's subsidy. But what can you do about that woman in the woods? Take away her funding? (Sierz 2001: 106)

Srebrenica was Kane's inspiration for writing *Blasted* and she also keeps pointing to Srebrenica after the production of her first play. However, it is important to keep the timeline straight, because those who know about Kane's *Blasted* and the Bosnian war, specifically the fall of Srebrenica, usually connect this particular image of the hanged woman with the play and think it was the inspiration for the writing, which is incorrect. Even critics have committed this error. For instance, Aleks Sierz writes: "Although the play was inspired by massacres in the Bosnian (Muslim) war, and Kane was moved by the image of a Bosnian (Muslim) woman hanging in the forest, the word 'Muslim' is absent from the play" (2010: 46). It is not all clear what Sierz means here. Kane was moved by the image of the woman hanging in the woods, but *when*? Sierz's claim may be misleading regarding the timeline and which image actually triggered the writing of the play. The image of the hanged woman is from July 1995, taken *after* the fall of Srebrenica, and *after* the premiere of *Blasted*, which was in January 1995. In Kane's next play, *Phaedra's Love*, which premiered in May 1996, Phaedra commits suicide by hanging due to unrequited love. Phaedra's act of hanging herself might conceivably be linked to the Bosnian image. Kane refers back to the image of the hanged woman in the interview in November 1998. With regards to media images and their significance for *Blasted*, the discussion about that particular play is, in a temporal sense, framed by the two images of two different women from Srebrenica: the image before the play is the crying woman from Srebrenica (March 1993), and the image after the play is the image of the hanged woman after the fall of Srebrenica (July 1995).[68]

When it comes to the date considered as crucial for the genesis of *Blasted* (the moment Kane saw Srebrenica footage on television), it seems rather difficult to pinpoint a specific moment when this happened due to the great number of war reports across different television channels in March 1993. In the interview with Rebellato, Kane says that her writing was interrupted after a few days (in Sierz 2012: 201), and in the aforementioned letter to Sierz from January 18,

[68] The photograph of the hanged woman that Kane refers to in 1998 is a starting point for the discussion of Adrian Oktenberg's poem "In the morning / after the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa" in my following chapter, "Gazing at Silence".

1999, she writes “after a few weeks”, while in conversation with Saunders she states that the day she “started writing [...] was in 1992”. However, she corrects herself shortly after the interview, stating that the correct year was 1993. For this reason Graham Saunders notes that “Kane’s accounts of the day she started writing *Blasted* vary in terms of dates, although the impetus of the siege of Srebrenica remains constant” (Saunders 2009: 49). In opposition to Saunders, Ken Urban identifies March 30, 1993, as the concrete date when Kane began writing the play (Urban 2011: 85).

Derrida suggests that “[w]hether one will or not, whether or not one knows it, acknowledges it, or dissembles it, an utterance is always dated” (2005: 13). This is true of the “utterance” that is the voice of the old woman from Srebrenica, but it is also true of each of the utterances when Kane referred to the image of the same woman. Kane refers back to the first – and only – dated utterance (the image from March 1993), commemorating it through repeated utterances in the three interviews. In this sense, the play *Blasted* (in its artistic form) too, could be seen as a complex utterance: of a certain moment in time, and of an artist. One can argue that an individual, unrepeatable *date*, is just as significant for a genetic study of this play as the action of *dating*. To date the writing process is to communicate an underlying message.

From when should we really count the genesis of *Blasted*? Does the material that Kane already had written about the relationship between Ian and Cate belong to the precompositional or to the compositional phase? What does Kane count as her very first draft? Both Urban’s date and Kane’s utterance “the day I started writing...” are worthy of being commented upon with regard to these questions. If everything that “precedes the first draft (reading notes, marginalia, plans, schemes) belongs to the precompositional phase” (van Hulle 2009: 5), then all material prior to the moment Kane considers as the day she started writing the play is precompositional. March 30 could be the day when Kane saw the footage about Srebrenica and the day she got the idea about bringing the soldier into the play. This is the moment when the direction of the play she was already writing (for a few days, or most likely for a few weeks, in March 1993) changed completely, and the material featuring Ian and Cate in the first scene was approached in another way. Although she had the first scene about their relationship written out in great detail, it is part of a precompositional phase, as are the media images from the evening news reports.

While I agree with Saunders that Srebrenica was a constant reference for Kane, I do not think that her accounts of the day she started writing *Blasted* vary much on some issues; if not providing us with a specific date, she is consistent regarding the month, which is March 1993. It is most likely that the first scene featuring the relationship between Ian and Cate was written during March 1993, just before she saw the television report about the woman from Srebrenica pleading for help. In case Kane saw the footage after a few weeks of writing, and the turning point was on March 30, this can be counted as the day that marks the beginning of the play's compositional phase. However, the other way to interpret this sequence of events is that all work on the play, all writing whatsoever, including the first scene with Ian and Cate, was initiated on March 30, in which case she saw the footage after a few days of writing, when the media were flooded by the images from Srebrenica as a result of escalation of the conflict and evacuation of civilians from the enclave. In that case, it becomes more challenging to determine when she saw the crying woman of Srebrenica on television.

Ken Urban notes that the first draft was completed on April 18, 1993, and that it features Vladek, a Serbian soldier (2011: 111). Given the proximity of dates (March 30–April 18), Kane most probably started writing the play earlier in March. The first draft is characterized by an excess of information; Kane refers to it as "[...] dreadful, full of huge dense monologues about the characters' backgrounds, every feeling stated, every thought spoken" (Sierz interview, January 18, 1999; 2001: 101). Then she started the second draft in June 1993. This draft is closer to the play's final version (Urban 2009: 111), and it also features Vladek in its last pages. The excerpt from the second draft was staged at Birmingham University's Allardyce Nicoll Studio Theatre on July 3, 1993, as a component in the completion of Kane's MA degree. Saunders notes that there are two draft versions of the first two scenes from the production at Birmingham University: "[o]ne was the final performance script used for the first two scenes of the play", and the other version, corrected in Kane's handwriting, "was not used in rehearsals" (Saunders 2002: 43).[69] Kane began the third draft of the play

[69] I took photographs of these drafts during a research trip to Birmingham University in May 2017. I initially believed that these were the first and the second draft respectively of the play (the draft not used in rehearsals would in that case be the first draft, and the draft used as the rehearsal script would be the second draft), but upon closer analysis, consulting Urban's timeline, Saunders' clarification, and my own inspection of the manuscripts, I understood that neither of the versions available to me could be the first draft. Firstly, the versions were much

in October 1993 (Urban 112), and here she no longer refers to the soldier as Vladek.[70] Draft four, addressed to Kane's agent, Mel Kenyon, is dated March 1994.[71]

Establishing these dates situates Kane's writing process in a specific historical time and space. In addition, analyzing her interviews shows the playwright's engagement with the armed and political conflict at the time, as well as the impact that the images of war had on her. What follows is an analysis of the early drafts.

One of the most crucial differences between the different versions is that the first drafts of *Blasted* feature "Vladek", a Serbian soldier.[72] In the later drafts and in the final version of the play, however, Kane names the character only as "Soldier", with a capital S. No further specifications regarding Soldier's origin, country, or language are given in the published version (*Complete Plays*, 2001). Here I will focus on the early drafts, specifically the two versions of the second draft (one of them being used as the exam performance script), and take a closer look at what might have been the reason that the soldier was particularly and explicitly identified as Serbian at first, when this change (or depersonalization) from Vladek to Soldier occurred during the writing process, and finally, what the removal of national characteristics means for reading and interpreting the play – what are the consequences of this change? *Blasted* is a controversial play, a pioneering statement of in-yer-face theatre, but also a play in which representations of brutality require a rigorous analytical approach. Judging by the media's scandalized response to the premiere and academic attention that has begun a process of re-evaluation of the play, *Blasted* is not subjected to straightforward interpretation because of its background, its structure, style, and

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too alike (although there are minor changes); secondly, they were closer to the final version (although they feature Vladek); and thirdly, it did not seem that 'every thought, emotion and action' was stated, as Kane described her first draft to Sierz. It is therefore important to note that the examples I use in my analysis come from the two versions of the second draft. These two versions, which are available in the archive at Birmingham University, are not dated.

[70] Urban thanks Simon Kane, Sarah Kane's brother, for "illuminating the various drafts" (2011: 112).

[71] Only parts of the fourth draft are available in the Birmingham University archive: pages 43-63 are missing. The last line on page 43, after the knock-on-the-door exchange between Ian and Soldier is, "He opens the door". What is missing is everything from the entrance of the soldier along with the entire third scene. The fourth scene begins on page 63, and from stage directions we see that soldier has no name: "The SOLDIER lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brain out."

[72] Page 38 in the draft used for rehearsal; page 37 in the draft with Kane's handwritten notes.

characters. Because of this, it can be helpful and illuminating to include the early drafts (two first scenes) in the analysis.

The two versions of the second draft of *Blasted* include the first two scenes of the play (about 45 minutes of performance), written up to the entrance of the soldier, finishing with the blast at the end of Scene 2. From Kane's short, handwritten letter to Peter Wynne-Willson (the director of her exam performance), which was sent together with the script containing the two scenes, we learn that other scenes existed but that it was Kane's choice not to send them. Kane writes:

> Enclosed are the first two scenes, which is the section I would like rehearsed for the performance weekend. I have a complete earlier draft, but I do not enclose the subsequent scenes as they will make little sense to these two, as the female character has completely changed between drafts.[73]

In the same letter she also gives casting directions for Vladek: "Vladek. 24. Serbian looks & accent. I'd prefer him to be very dark, but it's not crucial. He is a soldier, so he should be fairly fit, but he's hungry, so not well-fed." However, this character never appeared on stage for the exam performance. The slots for performances were limited to an hour, and the director explains in his letter: "We didn't perform the last bit of the first part (up to the end of Scene 2) because we didn't want to involve another actor. We finished just before the soldier bursts in." The play was staged up to the moment Ian says "I am a killer" (Urban 2011: 112).

Despite the fact that Soldier never made his appearance on stage as Vladek, his existence in the play's text is relevant here because of the link to the historical context. Let us look at the passages in the drafts where he appears and compare them to the published version where Kane renamed – or unnamed – him as Soldier. In the rehearsal draft, "there is a loud knock at the outer door". Ian opens the hotel room door, and the stage direction reads:

> Outside is a Serbian soldier, **Vladek**, holding a sniper rifle.
> **Ian** attempts to push the door shut and draw his revolver.

[73] See *Sarah Kane Archive*, Birmingham University.

Vladek pushes the door open and takes **Ian's** gun easily.
Vladek The English do not know how to handle a gun. What is that? (p. 38)

Here Vladek asks Ian about the bacon he is holding in his hand. They see each other for the first time. This part is the same in the version corrected in Kane's handwriting (the draft that was not used for the exam performance). However, in the published version, the stage directions and the line after Ian opens the door are as follows:

Outside is a Soldier with a sniper's rifle.
Ian tries to push the door shut and draw his revolver.
The Soldier pushes the door open and takes Ian's gun easily.
The two stand, both surprised, staring at each other.
Eventually.
Soldier What's that? (2: 36)

The first name as well as the nationality stated in the draft version show the soldier to be a part of a particular conflict, belonging to a belligerent side that was presented as the aggressor in the media. In contrast, the published version introduces a perpetrator through the character of Soldier, a foreigner who could be of any nationality. In the early draft, Vladek not only says that Ian does not know how to handle the gun; he comments that "the English" do not know how to handle a gun. As we can see, this whole sentence is cut from the final version. Although minor, this alteration presents us with another example of removing explicitly national characteristics.

In the final version, Ian is cast as a Welshman who has picked up a northern English accent ("**Ian** *is 45, Welsh born but lived in Leeds much of his life and picked up the accent*", Scene 1, p. 3). Ironically, what is kept in the published version is, after the national denominations are taken away, the use of a passport as a symbol of nationality and difference, implying that either Soldier who enquires about it, or Ian, is in the wrong place – or across enemy lines. In the final version, Ian tells Soldier that the passport is in his pocket, and Soldier easily finds the documents:

Soldier Passport.

Ian What for?
Soldier (Looks at him.)
Ian In the jacket.
[...]
The **Soldier** looks in Ian's jacket pockets and takes his keys, wallet and passport. (2: 37–38)

However, in the early drafts, Ian does not have the passport, a fact that opens up for Vladek's harassment. Vladek asks Ian about the passport on several occasions. In the rehearsal version there is this exchange:

Vladek Show me your passport.
Ian I don't have it here.
Vladek Where is it?
Ian This is my country. I don't carry it around.
Vladek You are a resident? (p. 39)

Again, in the last page of the script, Vladek says:

Vladek This is a Serbian town now. Where is your passport?
Ian I haven't got it.
Vladek You are an Englishman, a journalist, staying in a foreign hotel and you do not have a passport?
Ian I
Vladek You have food and money, but no passport. (p. 40)

There are slight differences in the two Birmingham versions after the initial passport inquiry. The draft not used in rehearsals contains further references to the Balkan conflict, and we see that they were gradually removed until they were completely absent. In addition to making Soldier's nationality Serbian and giving him a proper name with national denomination, there is also a mention of Croatia and a claim to territory as if it had been won by the Serbian side:

Vladek English shit. Why did you fuckers recognize Croatia? (Ian is confused.)

Why are you English spineless dogs sniffing Germany's arse?

Ian That was the government. I'm not the government.

Vladek This is a Serbian town now. And you are English shit. (p. 38–39)

By reiterating that Ian is "English shit", Vladek postpones asking about the passport one more time. In the rehearsal draft (the second version of draft two) Vladek is a Serbian soldier, and the line about the town being Serbian is preserved. However, the sentences about Croatia and Germany, present in the first version of draft two, which insinuate that the English are the enemy of Serbia because they recognized Croatia as an independent state at the beginning of the Yugoslav conflict, were cut from the rehearsal draft. In the published version, all of these sentences are removed from the quasi-political dialogue between Ian and Vladek, and Scene 2 ends with Soldier only saying: "Our town now" (2:39), which is followed by "a blinding light, then a huge explosion" (2:39).

The major difference between the two Birmingham drafts is that the version used for rehearsals contains an episode in Scene 2 where Cate performs oral sex on Ian, while in the other version, corrected in Kane's handwriting, that particular episode is omitted. Instead, the dialogue between Ian and Cate is longer, and Ian tells Cate that he is a gunman, that he works for MI5, and that he has shot Irishmen and terrorists (pp. 29–30). The following is the dialogue between Ian and Cate from the version not used in the exam rehearsal:

Cate Have you shot someone? Ian? You have you have.

Ian I think someone's trying to kill me, Cate.

Cate Why did you shoot them?

Ian Someone's trying to kill me.

Cate Have you done a murder?

Ian Fucking hell, Cate, don't you listen? I'm a gunman. I work for MI5. Didn't you ever wonder why I had a gun? [...]

Cate Who have you shot?

Ian Irishmen. Terrorists. (pp. 29–30)

Ian further tells Cate that she is also in danger because she "told the whole fucking school" (p. 31) that her "boyfriend's got a gun" (p. 30), and that he was poisoned by the secret service (p. 31). Cate asks him: "The people you work for did that?", and Ian responds: "I think so." Then Cate says: "You should resign" (p. 31). Similarly to changing the soldier's name and dropping his national characteristics, these more specific features, such as references to MI5 (The Security Service or UK's Military Intelligence, Section 5) and explicit nationality (shooting Irishmen),[74] were also removed and did not reappear in other drafts.

Both the dense dialogue in the non-rehearsal version and the oral sex episode in the rehearsal version stretch across approximately three pages; in the performance script the talking is reduced to a minimum, and Cate's character acts only via stage directions, without spoken lines. In the exam performance version (as in the published text), Cate seduces Ian by touching and caressing, coaxing him into telling her about his work:

> **Cate** (BITES HIS BACK GENTLY)
> **Ian** I think they're trying to kill me. Served my purpose.
> **Cate** (PUSHES HIM ONTO HIS BACK)
> **Ian** Done the jobs they asked. Because I love this land.
> **Cate** (KISSES HIS CHEST)[75]
> **Ian** Stood at stations, listened to conversations and given the nod.
> **Cate** (UNDOES HIS TROUSERS)
> **Ian** Driving jobs. Picking people up, disposing of bodies, the lot.
> **Cate** (BEGINS TO PERFORM ORAL SEX ON IAN)
> (Scene Two, p. 31)[76]

When he is close to orgasm, he tells Cate that "Now / I do / The real job / I / Am / A / Killer", and on the word "killer" he comes. After a dramatic scene and violent exchange where Cate bites Ian's penis when she hears the word "killer", and Ian hits her to persuade her to let go of him, Cate says to Ian: "You should

[74] Arguably, this does not refer just to nationality, but to a completely different conflict.
[75] This stage direction is changed to "*Sucks his nipples*" in the published version (see Kane, *Complete Plays*, 2001: 30).
[76] This is from the rehearsal or exam performance version. When giving references to the different versions, I choose to keep Kane's use of lowercase/uppercase and punctuation for the stage direction in this scene, in this version. She differentiates between the use of lowercase and uppercase in the draft versions. In the published version (p. 30), all stage direction is in minuscule, Italic, and with punctuation (full stops).

resign". As we can see when comparing the two draft versions, this line is the result of different processes. Apart from minor, one-word-per-line changes, adjustments in the dialogue between Ian and Cate, and alterations in the dialogue between Ian and Vladek at the end of Scene 2, the two versions are practically the same. The alterations are made by generally cutting out the national denominations. The first version of the second draft included most of these specifics, some of which were taken away in the performance script, and they are all removed by the third draft.

But if Kane was so diligent with every line and word in the play, including the name of Soldier, how could 'Ian' be just another name? Why is he not named 'Journalist', for instance? The first name 'Ian' is a popular name in the English-speaking world; although a common name, it is not devoid of meaning. Taking a closer look, it seems like anything but randomly chosen: if we compare, for instance, the English suffix *-ian* with the Latin suffix *-ianus*, we find that 'ianus' as a noun in Latin means 'arcade' or 'covered passageway'. It is from this noun that the name of Roman deity, 'Ianus', was derived. In Roman mythology, Ianus was "an ancient Italian deity, guardian of doorways and gates and protector of the state in time of war. He is usually represented with two faces, so that he looks both forwards and backwards" (OED). In the play, Ian functions as the gatekeeper, "the guardian of the doorway" in the traditional sense: he is the Ianus of the hotel room door, and that door is the gate through which the war (Soldier himself) will enter. As both perpetrator and victim, Ian is also "two-faced".

In one of the early drafts, towards the end of scene 2, Cate "picks up her bag and goes into the bathroom, closing the door". This is followed by "a loud knock at the outer door" (p. 37) of their hotel room. If the knocking does not provoke a startled response in Ian, the audience, and the readers, then it nevertheless comes as an unpleasant surprise. Just when it seems that the torturous dynamics between Ian and Cate cannot develop any further and that the play has reached a *cul-de-sac*, we hear a knock on the door. A new kind of tension in action arises at this point, and we sense that this cannot just be room service as on the previous occasion. Let us look at the stage directions and the dialogue between Ian and Vladek in the rehearsal version:

There is a loud knock at the outer door.
Ian draws his gun, goes to the door and listens.

Ian Who is it?

The door is tried from the outside. It is still locked. A foreign voice speaks in its own language.
Ian puts his gun back in the holster and unlocks the door.

Ian (UNDER HIS BREATH) Speak the Queen's fucking English you fucking nigger shit.
He opens the door.
Outside is Serbian soldier, **Vladek**, holding a sniper rifle.
Ian attempts to push the door shut and draw his revolver.
Vladek pushes the door open and takes **Ian's** gun easily.
(Scene Two, pp. 37–38)

When we take into consideration the whole of *Blasted*, we learn that this is one of the crucial turning points in the plot and an important moment in its genesis. Kane introduces a new, uninvited, yet somewhat expected character. If we exclude the possibility of room service, it could have been one of Ian's journalist colleagues, employees, or fellow undercover agents who knew Ian was there. Instead it was a perpetrator. It could be said that this is a 'new' perpetrator. If Ian is the perpetrator at the first two scenes, the roles shift with the entrance of Soldier: Ian now takes the place of a victim, and Soldier is the 'new' perpetrator. From here on, the course of the play changes and, as a result, it can be seen as split in two halves. This split will soon be even more obvious as the play turns at the end of the same scene with an explosion, which formally separates the first two scenes from the last three scenes of the play. In the published text, it is as if the war itself, as an unlisted character, enters the play and the stage thanks to the unnamed Soldier.[77]

It is interesting to compare the first draft and the play's final version in connection with Soldier's appearance. While this episode progresses rather quickly in the first draft, in the final version Ian and Soldier exchange a series of knocks on the door, started by Soldier, which could have been interpreted by Ian (and the audience) as a special code, a way that soldiers in the army could communicate, almost like a game between friends who know what the number of

[77] For more on war as the "unlisted character", see Julia Boll, *The New War Plays: From Kane to Harris* (2013: 38).

knocks should mean. Let us look at this episode in the published version. Cate goes into the bathroom and closes the door. The bath tap is turned on, and then the following stage directions ensue:

> There are *two*[78] loud knocks at the outer door.
> **Ian** draws his gun, goes to the door and listens.
> The door is tried from outside. It is locked.
> There are two more loud knocks.
>
> **Ian**. Who's there?
>
> Silence.
> Then two more loud knocks.
>
> **Ian**. Who's there?
>
> Silence.
> Then two more knocks.
> **Ian** looks at the door.
> Then he knocks twice.
> Silence.
> Then two more knocks from outside.
>
> **Ian** thinks.
> Then he knocks three times.
>
> Silence.
> Three knocks from outside.
>
> Ian knocks once.
> One knock from outside.
>
> **Ian** knocks twice.
> Two knocks.

[78] Emphasis added; compare to only one knock in the first draft.

Ian puts his gun back in the holster and unlocks the door.
Ian (Under his breath.) Speak the Queen's English fucking nigger.

He opens the door.
Outside is a **Soldier** with a sniper's rifle.
Ian tries to push the door shut and draw his revolver.
The Soldier pushes the door open and takes Ian's gun easily.
(Scene Two, pp. 35–36)

The exchange starts carefully and insecurely, but Ian's knocking back, thinking and waiting between the knocks also brings humor and playfulness into this otherwise tense situation where we wonder who could be at the door if not room service. As a result of this peaceful exchange, Ian does not seem alarmed; expanding and lengthening the knocking episode has developed trust between him and Soldier (at least this is the case for Ian, as he does not know it is Soldier who is outside). In the early draft, Ian hears that "a foreign voice speaks in its own language", puts the gun back in the holster and opens the door believing there is no danger since it is probably room service knocking on the door. In the published version, the feeling of safety and putting the gun back in the holster is created by the prolonged knocking, which does not prevent Ian from uttering a racial offence to whoever is knocking – as in the draft version.

Eventually, Ian opens the door and, realizing the danger when he sees Soldier, unsuccessfully tries to shut the door; Soldier, or war itself, enters easily. This image of struggle is the image of fooled Ian (Ianus, Janus) opening the door to the soldier with a rifle: allegorically, the keeper of the gate has let the war in. The opening of the hotel room door in the play's first part is a prelude to the 'opening' of the wall by the means of a blasting explosion, which shifts the play into its second part.

The blasting creates a powerful image, and it is significant as a transition between the parts. The play also bears its title because of this blast. It is therefore interesting to take a closer look at the title's lexical meaning and etymology.[79]

[79] In Greek, blasto- or -blast, a combining form of *blastós* means a "bud", "sprout" (in biology). In this sense we can compare the meaning of 'blast' with Kane's remark about one civilization being "the seed" and the other "the tree": to use the register of biology, the seed of one civilization 'sprouts', or blasts, into the tree of the other.

Isolated as a title, *Blasted* may be an adjective, or a verb in past simple/past participle form. It echoes the title of Edward Bond's play *Saved*, which was an influence on Kane's writing. '*Blasted*' and '*Saved*' are not antonyms, but they certainly stand in opposition to each other. For the contemporary reader, the word 'blasted' can have an initial association with some kind of destruction. But what or who is blasted? As a noun, 'blast' can mean "an explosion or explosive firing"; "a forceful attack or assault"; "a destructive wave of highly compressed air spreading outwards from an explosion", "a violent verbal outburst, as of criticism". As a verb, it means to "blow up or break up (something solid with explosion)"; "produce damage by means of explosion"; "shoot with a gun"; informally, it means to "criticize severely", "to attack, esp. with strong verbal condemnation"; "strike with divine anger", "destroy or ruin".[80] As an adjective, it is "a thing that spoils or damages something". Etymologically, 'blast' comes from Old English 'blæst', which is of Germanic origin, and is related to 'blaze'. In late Middle English, blaze was used in the sense 'blow out on a trumpet', and stems from Middle Low German or Middle Dutch 'blazen', meaning 'to blow'. The meaning of blaze is to present or proclaim (for instance, news) in a prominent, typically sensational manner, which can be brought in connection with the main feature of in-yer-face theatre: shocking and sensational representations are used to address issues in society. On the other hand, it can be linked with the news that Ian never 'proclaims', but withholds, which will be discussed towards the end of this chapter.

2.2 Ignoring the Absence

Like Janus, a witness can be "two-faced". Ignoring is by all means not an antonym to witnessing, but it could be understood as a euphemism for a refusal to bear witness, or refusal to engage with the provided context. Kane says that *Blasted* offended because "it implied a direct link between domestic violence in Britain and civil war in the former Yugoslavia" (Stephenson and Langridge 1997: 130–1). As discussed earlier in this chapter, she also suggests that a rape in Leeds has "[q]uite a lot" to do with mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia.[81] Yet

[80] From *The Dictionary of American Slang*, Barbara Ann Kipfer and Robert L. Chapman, HarperCollins Publishers, 2007.

[81] In the same interview, Kane distinguishes between reactions of the audience and the press, and elaborates on the press outcry: "While the corpse of Yugoslavia was rotting on our

Bosnia, as well as Soldier's name and nationality, are absent from the final text of the play, which does not mean that they are irrelevant to the play's form and content. It is through recognition of this wound relation that the play has with the Bosnian context, that the way in which *Blasted* is bearing witness to the presence of absence comes into view.

The aforementioned critic Peter Buse has thought-provoking observations in his analysis of *Blasted*, with which I wish to enter into a dialogue here.[82] From my perspective the main challenge with his argument is that precisely the play's connection with the Bosnian war is ignored. By intentionally severing this link, one is in danger of denying facts and isolating one's reflections from the real-life context. In this case, the critic does not acknowledge that what Sarah Kane herself expressed about the play's genesis was of great importance for her play, although she removed the concrete reference to Bosnia. Here Buse appears to be following a traditional way of interpreting literary works, perhaps most evident in New Criticism.[83] The rejection of the missing link – the relevance of the Balkan conflict for understanding *Blasted* – might be what leads Buse to claim that "it is hard to know what exactly *Blasted* is witnessing, to start off with" (Buse 2001: 184).

In addition to not bringing the play into dialogue with the context in his general reading of *Blasted*, Buse more specifically proposes that the character of Soldier is only a product of Ian's mind, "phantasm[s] of Ian's memory" (Buse 179). He also emphasizes that trauma in *Blasted* tells the perpetrator's narrative (Buse 180) and that the play "chooses to blur the distinction between perpetrator and victim by giving the soldier an originary trauma" (Buse 178). His own analysis of trauma in *Blasted* is described as "a piece of speculative excavation, a narrative constructed from bits and pieces of information which the play lets fall without ever assembling them in a coherent fashion. It cannot be otherwise with

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doorstep, the press chose to get angry, not about the corpse, but about the cultural event that drew attention to it" (Stephenson and Langridge 1997:131).

[82] In Peter Buse's book *Drama + Theory. Critical approaches to modern British drama* (2001) the critic presents a series of readings, each of which pairs a classic text of theory with a well-known play from the post-war period (Osborne with Lacan, Pinter with Freud, Stoppard with Lyotard etc.), which opens up for new interpretations of both the theoretical texts and the plays. Here I am interested in the final, ninth chapter of this book, titled "Trauma and testimony in *Blasted* – Kane with Felman". The critic uses texts from Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's *Testimony* (1992) to accompany his reading of *Blasted*.

[83] Perhaps the most famous example, which set a precedent for later criticism of works that presuppose biographical or contextual information (that they do not themselves provide) is T. S. Eliot's critique of *Hamlet* ("Hamlet and His Problems" from *The Sacred Wood*, 1919).

trauma, Shoshana Felman would argue" (181). But Felman would also argue in favor of contextualized reading. Felman and Laub write the following in their introduction to *Testimony*:

> In order to gain insight into the significance and impact of the context on the text, the empirical context needs not just to be known, but to be read; to be read in conjunction with, and as part of, the reading of the text. We thus propose to show how the basic and legitimate critical demand for contextualization of the text itself needs to be complemented, simultaneously, by the less familiar and yet necessary work of textualization of the context [...] (Felman and Laub 1992: xv).

Taking the play's context into consideration changes the possibilities for its interpretation. In my view, although its structure is somewhat fragmentary, *Blasted* does not let "pieces of information [...] fall" (Buse 181) without control and coherence.

Buse agrees with the above-quoted *Guardian* reviewer, Michael Billington, who claimed that "'the play falls apart' because 'there is not sense of external reality – who is exactly meant to be fighting whom out on the streets?'" (quoted in Buse 2001: 179).[84] The inclusion of context within the frames of the analysis of the dramatic text affects the reading of both content and form. Seen together, the radical rupture of the play's form, together with the way in which the play midway through introduces a jump into a war zone, do imply a link between content and form. Soldier's entrance at the end of Scene 2 merges the more conventional, naturalistic elements from the first half of the play (Cate and Ian in a hotel room) with the seemingly more abstract, but realism-based elements prominent in the second half (war). Despite the literal blast between Scene 2 and Scene 3, which tears down the hotel room wall, and transports the audience from the social realist aesthetic into the experience of the devastation of war, the play's structure does not collapse. Rather, the suddenness of the explosion and fighting can be seen as evoking the unpredictability and chaos of warfare. For instance, critic Catherine Rees suggests that traditional theatrical structure collapses, and that "Kane rejects the form of realist theatre", but she

[84] Billington later changed his mind about *Blasted* and apologized to Kane; see Simon Hattenstone, "A sad hurrah", *The Guardian*, 1 July 2000. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jul/01/stage

also points out that the play "does remain rooted in realistic situations" (Rees 2012: 116). The implosion of *Blasted* is prevented by reference to actual destruction (context); the use of such elements does not weaken the play, but on the contrary, strengthens it.

It is useful to look at the concepts of witness and witnessing at this point in connection with the question "what *Blasted* is bearing witness to" (Buse 2001: 186). In *Testimony*, Dori Laub recognizes three different levels of witnessing: "[T]he level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself" (Laub 1992: 75). How is witnessing in Laub's terms related to *Blasted*? Taking my cue from Laub's definition, I would suggest that several different levels of witnessing can be observed in relation to the play. Inspired by televised images of actual destruction, Kane writes a play in which the testimony and images of the suffering of others have an important role; she turns mass mediated testimonies of the victims of the Bosnian war into the testimony of the perpetrator. Through notional and fictional images triggered by war reality, Kane creates a play that bears witness to a socio-historical moment of the early 1990s, which was marked by an imperative to bear witness to the process of witnessing itself, be it through media, literature, or in a legal form. Within the world of the play, the fictional witnessing occurs among the characters, and there is also a demand that the media should bear witness (for instance, Soldier gives his testimony to Ian, who is a journalist; therefore, the latter should tell the world).

Blasted is burdened with a context from which it is virtually impossible to escape; it bears witness to the war in Bosnia.[85] While generalizing the violent events by removing the specific names, the play also acts as a form of mediation for the audience to experience shock and pain second-hand and to bear witness to the atrocities from a distance. Through this generalization, Kane manages to lift the play out of the specific conflict and convey a universal message in the form of an implied warning: Imagine if this was *your* society, if *you* were in this position; it could have happened, or the future may bring it – what would *you* do? No society is immune to unexpected catastrophe, or in Kane's words, cited earlier in this thesis: "[T]he seeds of full-scale war can always be found in

[85] We might speculate that Kane's attempt to universalize the meaning of the play, by removing concrete references to the war, can be construed as an attempt to escape this context. I will address such a reading more thoroughly later.

peacetime civilisation" (Sierz 2012: 202). Still, the present absence of the war that triggered Kane's response should not be turned into a bagatelle. In addition to the author, the audience, and the reader, the critic can also bear witness to a play.[86]

In addition, *Blasted* bears witness to a great silence. This claim might come as a surprise, since *Blasted* is anything but a silent play; we rather see it as a profound upheaval, a shock, a blast, with violence that caused enormous media uproar upon its first production. Yet the play pays witness to *what is not there*, to the omission and inability to take meaningful action in the face of trauma. This omission is manifold: it is in connection with what is not stated explicitly in the play and it refers to an absence of action, a lack of response, as well as to the limits of political and military engagement in the Balkans. The silence signifies a break in communication and implies a question about how to relate the unspeakable atrocities committed in the Bosnian war. Along with the blast and the shock, the presence of silence is painful, uncanny, helpless, hopeful and hopeless, accusatory, and pleading; this silence is not a peaceful silence. Here Laub's injunction that the listener "must *listen to and hear the silence*" is relevant (1992: 58).[87]

Buse offers two answers to his question concerning that to which *Blasted* is bearing witness. As I understand, both are related to the expression of violence in modern Britain. Here is the first answer:

> *Blasted* implies that modern Britain is a society where potentially traumatizing events, such as rape and murder, are rendered inconsequential by the constant diet of them provided by the press. In a language at once sensational and habitual the reporting of 'limit events' is

[86] Buse expresses empathy for the critics who saw *Blasted* for the first time: "I am thinking of poor Jack Tinker of the *Daily Mail*. Writing for that paper on 20 January, 1995, what choice did he have but to entitle his notorious review 'The disgusting feast of filth'?" (Buse 189–90). A critic should be able to judge, assess, contextualize, and closely analyze the play; instead, Buse laments that another critic has been exposed to the very object of his profession, because the object under scrutiny includes the representation of violence on stage.

[87] The discussion about the different kinds of silence and its performativity in *Blasted* exceeds the frames of this chapter. Especially interesting among the different kinds of silence is the exchange between Ian and Soldier in Scene 3. Soldier stops in the middle of his sentences, while trying to tell Ian about his girlfriend (*Blasted* 42), when describing the atrocities he committed (*Blasted* 43), when telling Ian what was done to his girlfriend (44), when he told Ian how he broke a woman's neck (46), etc.

> evacuated of any significance and real trauma is buried without a trace (Buse 186).

In this critic's opinion, in a society where the media fails to duly report and reflect upon atrocities such as rape and murder in an appropriate manner, and due to language being emptied of meaning in the face of traumatic events, *Blasted* "makes those events strange by presenting them so graphically and in such an intimate environment" (186). This could provide a link between the play's generalization and its bearing witness to the situation in modern Britain at the time it was first staged. In his more interesting and more questionable second answer, Buse argues that the play "establishes parallels between the sexual and racial politics of the first scene and the civil strife of the rest of the play" (187). At the same time, though, he calls the last four scenes of the play "the scenes that incorporate the 'implausible' civil war" (186). Elaborating this point, he mentions Yugoslavia with reference to the Balkan conflict, proposing that there *might* be a link between *Blasted* and Bosnia – while dismissing it at the same time:

> [...] The second answer [to what *Blasted* is bearing witness to] takes up the notion put forward by many trauma theorists that a traumatic episode cannot, or should not (there is often an element of prescription about this theory), be represented or narrated directly. As has already been pointed out, there is a good deal of displacement at work in *Blasted*, and inevitably, given their closeness to the time of the play's first production, it is *assumed*[88] that the play is in some way or other a reworking of the atrocities committed in Bosnia in the immediate post-Yugoslav era. *To depict those atrocities directly on stage in order to elicit pathos from a British audience would be no doubt trite, or even offensive: an appropriation of the sufferings of another and distant group of people.* To depict them in a displaced fashion – by imagining a similar civil war and its consequences in West Yorkshire – might merit the same opprobrium (emphasis added; Buse 186).

[88] Emphasis added. In response one might ask: *Who* assumes this, a British audience or critics?

There are several problems with Buse's stance here. Firstly, the atrocities are not *directly* shown on stage. Direct references to the actual war and perpetrators have been removed; the play is experiential in order to address unpleasant issues that are usually avoided in public discourse. Secondly, the "sufferings of another and distant group of people" have always been a part of the universe of theatre. Why would not the victims from another society have the right to be represented on the British stage; should they be expelled from West European stages? Thirdly – why are these people 'distant'? And lastly, if the critic acknowledges a link with Bosnia, why is that so opprobrious? In contrast to this ambivalence I would suggest that Kane's "seed-and-tree" metaphor is a valid proposal, which should be taken seriously: What happens in one society may echo and have relevance in another society. As previously mentioned in my theoretical introduction, trauma can create solidarity between different cultures.

Nevertheless, Buse is helpful when he draws attention to the problem of contextualization and its relevance when reading *Blasted*, as he also is when he points to the need for closer attention to trauma from the perpetrator's perspective. In the following section, I will turn to the question of testimony and perpetrator trauma.

2.3 Speaking the Unspeakable: Perpetrator Testimony

Blasted challenges Caruth's claim that trauma is unspeakable, since it provides the audiences and readers with detailed descriptions and haunting images of atrocities. In opposition to the usually expected representation of trauma from a victim's perspective, the uttered 'unspeakabilities' come from the character who is, traditionally, least expected and least likely to relate traumatic and traumatizing experiences – the perpetrator. But has everything been said? In the introduction to this chapter, I argued that a tension arises between what is and what is not there in the play: between an excess of words and their omission. By investigating instances of notional ekphrasis in the text, I will call into question the notion of "the unspeakable and the unimaginable" (Mitchell 2011: 55), and explore the presence of absence (Ricoeur 2004: 10). The passages that create some of the crucial mental images in the play ("Went to a house just outside town", p. 43, and "Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town", p. 50) are uttered by the soldier. In a kind of unwanted confession, or testimony, Soldier tells Ian what he did "[i]n the line of duty",

"[f]or [his] country" (45). My analysis of these passages will have three different aims: I wish to explore (1) the link between the media images and literary witnessing; (2) the link between Soldier's intrusive images and ekphrastic images; and (3) the significance of rhetorical devices, with ekphrasis being among the most important, if not the main, rhetorical instrument in this instance of literary witnessing.

Before I proceed with an analysis of Soldier's testimonies, I will establish a link between the media images and reports from the Bosnian war, and their verbal descriptions in the play. This material is part of the play's compositional phase and its representation is essential to the creation of strong mental imagery when reading the play and hearing the perpetrator utter the words on stage. The link also helps in understanding how relevant the context and certain events have been for the play, and further assists in maintaining a relation with "external reality" (as Billington terms it). An ekphrastic dimension in the sense of Heffernan's definition, "a verbal representation of visual representation" (Heffernan 3) comes to the fore especially in the case of one of the passages, starting with the words "Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs" (p. 50). I will look into what an ekphrastic reading reveals when the perpetrator's testimony (as a description of intrusive images) is related to context. While arguing that "the play is not a direct engagement or commentary on the war itself", Saunders also notes that these two passages were "informed by actual events" (2009:13). What they share is their link to reports about atrocities in Bosnia, but more compelling is how they are different in ekphrastic terms.

Our first example alludes to images of ethnic cleansing and displacement of refugees in UN convoys and trucks that were everywhere in the news, both in photographs and videos:

> Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town. Women threw their babies on board hoping someone would look after them. Crushing each other to death. Insides of people's heads came out of their eyes. Saw a child most of his face blown off, young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out, starving man eating his dead wife's leg.
> (*Blasted* 3: 50)

Before I dwell on the rhetoric and content of this passage, I would like to address its genealogy. There are several possible sources for the events that are verbally represented in this passage. One is a headline in *The Guardian* on April 1, 1993: "UN halts aid convoys as Bosnians die in crush". The captions under the photograph (see images 1 and 2) taken by Miloš Cvetković read: "Fight for life... A Bosnian boy is crushed as desperate refugees cram United Nations trucks leaving besieged Srebrenica yesterday" (p. 1). Another source is ABC News footage shot by the British journalist Tony Birtley. In a news program he described "the sheer panic and the desperation of the people" and how he saw "women throw their babies into the back of trucks [see image 3], [...] hoping that somebody will grab them and take them to safety [...]. It was terrible to witness".[89]

[89] Tony Birtley was reporting from Srebrenica where he was badly wounded in 1993 and in this short video, shot more than two years before the Srebrenica genocide, he describes what he witnessed in March 1993: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dS6zMWPeBew

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was "an international outlaw . . . a dangerous nation".
On Libya, Britain was startled by Mr Christopher's public call this week for an international oil embargo on Colonel Muammar Gadafy's regime. Such a stiffening of the sanctions, designed to force the extradition of two Libyan suspects in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, had been discussed. But Britain sees the move as premature.
British officials yesterday voiced "mild curiosity" — a polite way of expressing annoyance — that Mr Christopher should have called for a oil embargo against Libya, when the US, Britain and France were still working behind closed doors to overcome differences on a Security Council sanctions resolution, that has to be adopted when the present resolution expires in April.
Differences over North Korea are expected to emerge when the Security Council comes to consider within the next few days how to handle Pyongyang's defiance of the International Atomic Energy Authority's request to inspect suspect nuclear sites. The US is eager to threaten North Korea with sanctions. Britain is more concerned to dissuade North Korea from withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
On Hong Kong, Governor Christopher Patten is coming to Washington next month and is expected to urge the continuation of China's most favoured nation trading status with the US, which is being widely opposed in Congress. President Clinton was vociferous in his campaign against Mr Bush's policy of "coddling dictators" in Beijing, and here again the co-ordination of policy between London and Washington could prove difficult.
Vote to enforce fly bans, page 9

Fight for life . . . A Bosnian boy is crushed as desperate refugees cram United Nations trucks leaving besieged Srebrenica yesterday PHOTOGRAPH: MILOS CVETKOVIC

UN halts aid convoys as Bosnians die in crush

Image 1 Ian Traynor, East Europe Correspondent: "Fight for life... A Bosnian boy is crushed as desperate refugees cram United Nations trucks leaving besieged Srebrenica yesterday" (*The Guardian*, April 1, 1993, p. 1). Photograph: Miloš Cvetković.

Image 2 Photograph by Miloš Cvetković

Image 3 Muslim refugees in an overloaded UNHCR truck March 31, 1993 during evacuation from besieged Srebrenica. Photograph by Reuters.

By means of ekphrasis, Kane verbalizes the actual photographic images from Srebrenica through the character of Soldier. Arguably, intrusive visual images evolve into intrusive ekphrastic imagery in Soldier's testimony. In this passage, Soldier is a bystander: he does nothing to prevent or change the terrible situation. In addition, he is a careful observer, and when delivering this testimony, he becomes a witness. Soldier's position as a witness is complicated by the fact that he is also a perpetrator; he is a *testis* (observer of the event, present as the third party) who briefly becomes a *superstes* (the person who experienced the event and who expresses the truth in first person, and is therefore deemed a subjective source). In the world of the play, witnessing takes place through a vivid verbal description of Soldier's mental images. Soldier does not testify to just anybody, but to a journalist, who "should be telling people", "[p]roving it happened" (47). Here Soldier as *superstes*, the person who "lives on beyond" what happened, demands that Ian should act as a *testis*, to be the objective guarantor of the truth. The actual visual representations, the media images of Bosnian war, provided by journalists to the West, informed Kane's creation of a character (Soldier) whose side is responsible for the events captured by the eye of the camera in reality. In the world of the play the same character describes the events that he experienced in the line of duty, which, through verbal images, evoke the events reported by real journalists.

Kane transformed the photographs into the character's mental images. There are two ways in which the ekphrastic moment of this passage can be

explained: if we look at the transfer from reality to the play, the images are transposed into words and this is an instance of ekphrasis of a photograph, a verbal representation of a visual representation. Within the play, though, the situation is different. There, the ekphrasis can be viewed as notional: the verbal descriptions are of Soldier's mental images, descriptions of what he saw with his own eyes, told from memory.

Apart from one broken sentence in which Soldier confesses to the rape of a young girl ("young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out"), the passage is a description of the chaos of war that he witnessed – that is, the suffering of the others that he saw, but did not cause personally. Still, as we understand from the play, 'his side' is the immediate cause of the panic that he vividly describes to Ian. The word 'saw' should be emphasized here since it creates a sense of authenticity in Soldier's account: he speaks in the first person. In the first sentence, Soldier tells Ian about the complete and utter desperation of thousands of refugees who were trying to leave town. Fear and starvation caused indignation, hopelessness, and humiliation. But in opposition to the panic that he depicts, Soldier seems to have an unalarmed, disturbingly neutral tone, which could be understood as a symptom of a traumatic dissociation of emotion.

The verbal image of people "packing into trucks" like animals is a dehumanizing description of people presumably aware that this was their only chance to escape, and who must have been desperately (and savagely) trying to save their own lives. In an act of ethnic cleansing, people are treated as if they are worthless because they belong to another ethnic group. The comparison of people with pigs is not random – it could have been 'cattle' instead of 'pigs'. If we read this sentence as extracted from the actual war context, the people transported were Muslims, and for Muslims it is culturally extremely offensive to be compared with pigs. I will return to the process of dehumanization in this passage shortly.

The first four sentences are uttered with only minor omissions, and they all end with a full stop. Soldier repeats the verb 'saw' two times ('Saw thousands of people...' and 'Saw a child most of his face blown off'). Note that although Soldier speaks in the first person, the first person pronoun "I" is omitted in these two sentences. The entire passage consists of representations of several images, as if Soldier were gazing at a painting where all these atrocities were clustered on one and the same canvas. However, his active participation in the rape of a young girl (which is described in the only sentence in which Soldier is engaged in an

action that is not merely seeing and observing) contextualizes the scene, making the audience understand that the distance between the observed objects and events, on the one hand, and Soldier, on the other, is very slight. He was in close proximity to the things that he saw and did, which are now described as in a series of flashbacks.

The second sentence ('[w]omen threw their babies on board hoping someone would look after them') echoes almost word for word Birtley's description of what happened in Srebrenica. As he explains, the women did it "because separation for them was far better than having their youngsters endure starvation and shells and bullets". The struggle to get on the truck was existential: men had already been taken away or executed, and the lives of these women and their children depended on their own escape. It seems that in order to survive, the refugees 'crushed each other' and women 'threw their babies on board'; all this was done in panic and out of desperation. In some of the images reproduced above, a small boy is literally dragged onto the truck; others are hanging, with their arms sticking out. People are indeed crushing each other.

With the third sentence ('[c]rushing each other to death') the tone turns contemptuous rather than pitiful or compassionate. While uttered in disgust, it is as though Soldier speaks from an understanding that people are capable of killing each other in order to survive when they find themselves in such desperate circumstances. The depiction of panic continues into a hyperbolic image of '[i]nsides of people's heads [that] came out of their eyes'. Contempt is present both in this sentence, and the beginning of the next one: '[s]aw a child most of his face blown off'. The central image is one of faces mutilated beyond the point of recognition. This eradicated, absent face can be a symbol for the anonymous victim, who is difficult to identify. The irreversible absence of a blown-off face is not only depersonalizing, but also utterly dehumanizing. Ironically, dehumanization does not here end with death; it continues even post-mortem.

There are three images in the last sentence: "Saw a child most of his face blown off, young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out, starving man eating his dead wife's leg". Due to this discontinuity or lack of logical progression between the different sentence parts separated by a comma, this sentence can be seen as an example of anacoluthon in notional ekphrasis. Anacoluthon, Greek for 'lacking sequence', can be characteristic of spoken

language or interior thought.[90] In this instance Soldier is verbally describing vivid memories of traumatic events, speaking as he recollects. His testimony becomes less coherent and slightly scattered; he jumps from what he saw, to what he did, to what he saw again: from the blown off child's face, to a rape he committed, and finally, to a man eating his dead wife's leg. Kane puts these images before the eyes of the audience and creates an emotionally disturbing effect by combining *enargeia*, the distinctness and vividness of a description, with *energeia*, which is using words that signify motion and action ("blown off", "fucked", "claw the liquid out", "starving man eating [...] leg").

The town will soon become a ghost town, empty of its inhabitants, which is the sign of a successful ethnic cleansing. This is achieved by the means of trucks: in the actual conflict, they were vehicles of displacement *en masse*, and in an ironical twist, under the pretense of saving lives, they were vehicles of dehumanization. The trucks separated people from their towns, children from their mothers, Muslims from Serbs – and finally, they separated the people from themselves by forcing them to abandon their own dignity in order to survive.

The following passage is, again, a verbal description of Soldier's mental images, of the events in which he was involved. The first striking aspect of the following testimony is its immense *enargeia*, in the sense of a vivid, lively, graphic description of a series of events. Soldier tells Ian:

> Went to a house just outside town. All gone. Apart from a small boy hiding in the corner. One of the others took him outside. Lay him on the ground and shot him through the legs. Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men while I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry, just lay there. Turned her over and –
> Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of –
> Shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles.
> (*Blasted* 3: 43)

This passage has two different aspects, which I want to analyse in turn: (1) a genealogical one, and (2) a rhetorical one. The motifs in this passage are

[90] See "anacoluthon", Silva Rhetoricae, http://rhetoric.byu.edu/.

arguably taken from the media reports about the Bosnian war. The case about the rape of a twelve-year-old girl is to be found in a newspaper report (*Associated Press*, 12 December 1992).[91] The hanging by the testicles resonates with reports of torture from the Omarska concentration camp (a death camp) – a prisoner who was forced to bite off the testicles of another prisoner is the most shocking of examples.[92] This incident was not photographed but it has a graphic quality because of the detailed description in the prisoner's witnessing.[93] Anyone who has heard or read this can create the mental image for themselves.[94]

By recounting his horrors to Ian, Soldier reverses the victim-perpetrator binary roles that most writing on history and trauma took for granted in the 1990s, while clearly echoing media reports at that time – reading this testimony, and hearing it on stage, creates haunting mental imagery. Ian has previously been a perpetrator, but a new role is forced upon him by Soldier: now as a victim, Ian even has to listen to Soldier's detalied, ornamented *narratio* of what has happened. With "Closed my eyes and thought of – ", Soldier refers to his girlfriend Col (compare to Soldier's line "Closed my eyes and think about her. She's –", scene three, page 42), who was brutally murdered, as he will tell Ian at a later point (page 47). This, also, confuses and challenges the roles between a victim and a perpetrator, because in other circumstances an audience would allow themselves to feel empathy – or at least understanding for acting out or repetition compulsion – for someone who has lost their loved one.

Soldier is not only a witness, but also an active participant in the downfall and destruction of an entire family, using sexual violence as a weapon of war.

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[91] "The Serbian fighters who have seized large parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina are being accused of systematic rape against captured Bosniak [Bosnian Muslim] women and girls. In one account, Vazima Visovic, a slender, 12-year-old Bosniak girl, described her ordeal last summer in a Serbian camp for women in Foča, southern Bosnia. 'We were kept there for 27 days and got almost nothing to eat. The Chetniks [Serbian soldiers] beat us, abused us and raped us, including me,' she said, her stony voice sounding agonizingly adult. 'They were coming night and day, always in groups of two or three, and took us to apartments — me, my mother and another woman. One man raped all three of us. … I was always raped by two or three.'" Quoted from Daniszewski, John. "Muslim Women, Girls Said to Been Raped by Serbs". *Associated Press*. December 12, 1992. https://apnews.com/0c7cab5be7f9afe95a44a7529925c0db

[92] See for instance: "At the war crimes tribunal in The Hague, witnesses testified to horrific episodes of torture in Omarska such as when one prisoner was forced to bite off the testicles of another, called Emir Karabasic, while the guards whooped. Satko Mujagic had been the boyfriend of Karabasic's niece." Quoted from Vulliamy, Ed: "Bosnia's victims 20 years on: survivors of a nightmare with no reckoning". *The Guardian*, April 8, 2012. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/08/bosnia-camps-ed-vulliamy

[93] For more, see: http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/91/7199.

[94] Joe Sacco has drawn this based on testimony; see the image in the appendix.

Apart from one sentence where the subject is explicitly stated ("They held the men while I fucked the women"), there is a constant omission of the personal pronoun "I". Still, it is clear from his manner of speaking that this is told in first person. The ellipsis of the subject can be linked with the removal of the name and the desubjectification of Soldier, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The beginning of the first sentence, which also is the beginning of Soldier's entire testimony, is outside the passage ("Three of us – "), and it is at first interrupted by Ian who does not want to hear it ("Don't tell me"). This means that all the soldiers, and not just Soldier, "[w]ent to a small house just outside town". This first interruption is achieved by Ian's remark rather than by means of a dash and is, therefore, not an instance of aposiopesis, as will be the case with the two other dashes in the passage. Aposiopesis, a figure of silence, entails breaking off suddenly in the middle of speaking, usually to portray being overcome with emotion.[95]

Soldier is barely able to speak in full sentences or to find the right words, and the dash ("–") stands for what is unutterable for him. In writing, a dash is usually a marker of an omission or interruption, a pause or a break, in figures such as aposiopesis, or, in the case of a break of meaning, in anacoluthon. In an example of aposiopesis, the Soldier breaks off while describing how he raped the twelve-year-old girl: "Turned her over and – ". Here the dash in the middle of sentence and the abrupt pause in this sentence could be interpreted as signaling emotional avoidance, breakdown, and Soldier's inability to speak. The sentence continues in the next line, and the sense continues with the words "[T]hen she cried". With these words, Soldier is still referring to the girl.

Three different rhetorical figures are at work here. On the one hand, aposiopesis is a sudden break in a sentence due to the speaker's being overcome with emotion, in which the sense of the broken thought in that sentence continues; on the other hand, anacoluthon is an interruption or lack of implied sequence within a sentence, but with a change in sense. "Closed my eyes and thought of – " is an example of anacoluthon, and here the dash works in a different way from the one in the previous example. The dash, apart from breaking off the sentence due to the speaker being overcome with emotion, also breaks the semantic sense; from closing the eyes and thinking of something else (which is not uttered), Soldier jumps to "[s]hot her father in the mouth" in the

[95] Aposiopesis derives from Greek 'aposiopao', which means "to be silent after speaking; observe a deliberate silence". See "aposiopesis", Silva Rhetoricae, http://rhetoric.byu.edu/.

next line. There are no conjunctions in Soldier's testimony, and this omission of conjunctions between clauses – asyndeton – can produce a hurried rhythm or vehement effect. The combination of aposiopesis, asyndeton, and anacoluthon gives forcefulness to Soldier's testimony and results in *energeia*, the energy of expression, in addition to the vivid, graphic description of *enargeia*.

On the page, Soldier's testimony almost looks like a prose poem. Similar to the passage on page 50, it is one of the longest uninterrupted speeches that a character utters in the whole drama. In form it stands out from the rest of the dramatic text and one-liners by resembling a block of text. It is delivered in one go, although the dash can be used to make a pause on stage. Most words in the passage have one or two syllables. This pattern gives a certain regularity to Soldier's words, and together with omissions and determined punctuation this creates a staccato rhythm. As the climax is reached, Soldier exits from this poetic rhythm with a three-syllable word – "testicles" – and a hyperbole in the last sentence: "Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles."

On the level of this passage, we may observe *isocolon*, a kind of *parallelism*.[96] In isocolon, a series of similarly structured elements have the same length, which can be said about the sentences that Soldier narrates.[97] As a figure, parallelism is also blended with other strategies, in this case with the abovementioned asyndeton, a figure of rhythm, to produce a hypnotic, mesmerizing effect on its audience.

Throughout, there is a relation to images. The ekphrasis in the passage reaches all the way to the level of punctuation. Every sentence creates an image, and at the same time demands that the reader fill in the gaps. It is a sequence of images, but also a sequence of events. The images come in quick succession, and both this speed and the call for their visualization are overwhelming. Every full stop in the end of each sentence falls hard. Another way to look at the exchange between the sentences and punctuation in this passage is to think of the sentences as images, and to visualize the full stops as flickers between the images. The punctuation on the page also helps in conveying the grave and sickening tone,

[96] Parallelism is defined as "similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses" (see "parallelism", Silva Rhetoricae, http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/P/parallelism.htm). As a figure of speech, parallelism is a "basic organization mode for discourse, and as such can take place on a large scale (affecting the arrangement of an entire unit of discourse) or a small one" (Silva Rhetoricae, http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/Groupings/of%20Parallelism.htm).

[97] See "isocolon", Silva Rhetoricae, http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/I/isocolon.htm.

with deafening silence that would echo long after the sentence has finished – if there were time. But the next sentence does not wait, it is merciless; sentences are fired right after each other. The stops are as loud and hard as the shots: one that the boy received between the legs, and the other that was fired in the father's mouth.

Violence and sexuality are always intertwined for Kane. Soldier says that there were '[t]hree men and four women' and that the other soldiers held the men while he himself raped the women. The '[y]oungest was twelve', he reports in a matter-of-fact tone, but this is not a woman – it is a twelve-year-old *girl*. The women are marked by rape; for some, it would have been better that they were dead than raped.[98] Compare this with what Cate says to Ian in Scene 2, after he has raped her: "Go on, shoot me. Can't be no worse than what you've done already" (34), and what Soldier said to Ian before he rapes him: "Rather be shot than fucked and shot" (49). The young boy is shot through the legs to make sure he will not produce offspring. The father, the head and protector of the family, is shot in the mouth, which removes his power of speech and the possibility of both protest and testimony. In an act of utter humiliation, brothers are hung by the testicles, and similarly to what was done to the boy, the idea is that the enemy shall not procreate. No death is achieved by simple means. Rather, each execution is cruel and dehumanizing.

In Soldier's testimony, as in the entire drama, there is a simultaneous existence of an excess of information and the avoidance of saying everything. The aim of this particular act of ekphrasis is to describe in as much detail as possible the image in question, or to make it available, vivid for the reader to grasp, even intrusive. At the same time, there is a constant tension between what is there and what is not there: seemingly, the readers are told everything, even more that they able to take in, while at the same time, something has *not* been said, and this lacuna is located after each full stop as Soldier finishes his sentences.

If we return to historical sources, there are photographic images of refugees from Srebrenica being loaded on and transported by trucks, but there are no material images of rape camps or of the gruesome testicle incident described

[98] I make this point based on the analysis of Adrian Oktenberg's poem "In the Morning" (see next chapter in this thesis), in which a raped genocide survivor commits suicide by hanging. We can speculate why a character in this poem, written as a response to a real-life event, chooses to end her life, but it is safe to assume that some of the reasons have to do with shame, guilt, and inability to cope with trauma after being raped.

by the soldier, for which there are only written sources based on testimonies of victims or eyewitnesses. This makes the ekphrasis in the two passages qualitatively (and referentially) different: one is ekphrasis of a photographic image (‘packing into trucks’, p. 50), and the other is ekphrasis of a mental image, an instance of notional ekphrasis (‘Went to a house just outside town’, p. 43). Despite the lack of visual representation in the second case, the verbal representation of the atrocities can be seen as one more locus of absence in the text.

It is interesting to briefly consider the rhetorical role of the addressee, the character to whom Soldier is telling these testimonies. As a journalist, Ian has a profession traditionally considered to have the power to disseminate information. Ian could have been a medium through which wider audience would be reached and informed. This means that a person in his position could expose Soldier’s offences and tell the truth about what Soldier had witnessed. In the play, Ian is a journalist who receives information about war crimes; however, he is also a gatekeeper who lets Soldier into the hotel room. Because of this, a kind of tension or contradiction arises within Ian’s character, since both a journalist and a gatekeeper should adhere to certain ethical standards. Nevertheless, in this case, Ian writes tabloid stories, while working for the government: he “signed the Offical Secrets Act”, “done the jobs they asked”, but has served his purpose and now “they're trying to kill” him (pp. 29–30). Ian has not let Soldier into the room willingly; he was afraid and he tried “to push the door shut” (36). Soldier tells him how his girlfriend Col was killed and asks Ian: ‘Ever seen anything like that? Not even in photos?’ After Ian answers ‘never’, Soldier comments: ‘some journalist, that’s your job’, leaving the audience with a bitter feeling and an ironic comment about a journalist doing a poor job. Soldier has ‘no choice’ in doing the job he does, but Ian ‘should be telling people’ (47). Soldier thus suggests that the journalist should tell the world, write, report on the atrocities – but Ian tells him that ‘no one’s interested’ (47) and that ‘this isn’t a story anyone wants to hear’ (48). Ian’s justification is that he cannot write about Soldier or war because he does not cover foreign affairs due to being a home journalist (48).

Ian’s conviction that ‘no one is interested’ recalls what Kane expressed in the interview while explaining how she decided to write a play: “And I was sitting there watching [TV] and I thought: ‘No one’s going to do anything. How many times have I seen another old woman crying from another town in Bosnia under siege and no one does anything?’” (Sierz 2012: 201). Ian’s disillusionment

about his job as a journalist, as well as the ignorance of the general public and the government in the world of the play evokes Kane's sentiment about the effects of, and responses to, actual war reporting during the Bosnian war.

After describing people packed into trucks, Soldier sucks and bites out Ian's eyes and then kills himself. The only *superstes*, a perpetrator-survivor, commits suicide, and Ian is unreliable as a *testis* without his eyes. In addition to Soldier's traumatic condition and emotional turmoil, the fact that all the details of wrongdoings have been told to a journalist adds to the reasons for Soldier taking his own life. The other perpetrator, who turned into a victim, has fallen "from rapist to a broken man" (Urban 2011: 107) and he becomes impotent as a journalist; his most important means of witnessing is gone. The gatekeeper Ianus – the journalist Ian – not only let in the war, embodied in the character of Soldier, but he has also been withholding information about other people's suffering. Ianus, "the guardian of doorways and gates", is a "person who controls access to something" (OED). In the late 20th century the name came into metaphorical use, referring to individuals who decide whether a given message will be distributed by a mass medium. For Ian, this mass medium in question is that of newspapers. Earlier in the play he was aware of atrocities because he "served [his] purpose" by doing "driving jobs, [p]icking people up, disposing of bodies" (30), and all he reported about were tabloid "stories" (48). He cannot comply with Soldier's request to report the war atrocities and he is blinded as a punishment for "shutting his own (and the public's) eyes" (Sierz 2010: 52, quoting Soncini). Through this symbolism Kane points to the shortcomings of journalism and the absence of international intervention.[99]

Ian and Soldier are both perpetrators and they both act out as a consequence of their traumatic experiences. The second part of *Blasted* can be seen as offering a series of intrusive images. Before the arrival of Soldier, Ian has a startled response and throws himself on the floor when a car backfires outside (28); he served as a secret agent in war and now "they're trying to kill [him]" (30). If, as has been suggested by Buse, Soldier is a product of Ian's mind (Buse 2001: 179), then what comes after the blast could be seen as an instance of notional ekphrasis. Seen from that perspective, the entire Scene 3, isolated in this

[99] Perhaps she could also be pointing to the image of the boy with a big bandage around his head and eyes: "Shrapnel from a mortar had swept away the boys eyes and blinded him", https://www.flickr.com/photos/bosniak_and_jewish_solidarity/4828670317/in/photostream/. There is another possible link with blinding and the eye-sucking: a case where an English football fan did this to an undercover policeman (see Iball 2008: 10).

manner – until Soldier's suicide and Cate's return to the hotel room – is a description of Ian's haunting images and symptoms of his post-traumatic stress disorder, triggered by the explosion. Ian is forced to hear a disturbing testimony; he is raped and blinded by Soldier in a kind of punishment – all of which is much worse than being shot. This can be seen as an instance of embedded notional ekphrasis: Soldier's haunting images are described through testimony *within* Scene 3 (if we interpret the scene as a description of Ian's intrusive image/hallucination).

If we imagine Soldier to be a part of Ian's haunting, intrusive memories, this would entail that Cate does actually not come into any contact with Soldier. She was already in the bathroom in Scene 2, when Soldier first knocked on the hotel room door. In Scene 4, she returns to the room through the bathroom window, and "steps over the Soldier with a glance" (51). Her glance could mean that she is not surprised; in wartime it is common to be surrounded by death. Cate did not react to him as she just came back from the street. She could not know that he committed suicide either – to her he is just another dead soldier. Soldier's existence in the reality of the play may depend on interpreting this stage instruction – and on following what happens with the gun throughout the play.

After her return at the beginning of Scene 4, Ian asks Cate if she can find his gun. She sees the revolver in Soldier's hand (he has blown his own brains out, p. 50), takes it from him, "and fiddles with it", removing the bullets (54). This is the same gun that Cate points at Ian's groin after Ian raped her (26), and that Soldier pushed up Ian's anus after raping him (49). In Scene 4, blinded Ian tries to "end it" (56) – he puts the gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger, but the gun clicks, empty. It clicks *five* times. Ian knows his gun: if Soldier exists in the reality of the play, then Ian counts the bullet that Soldier used to kill himself, plus five more clicks – this would mean that the gun has six chambers, and Ian kept pulling the trigger until he was sure there were no bullets left. On the other hand, if Soldier exists only as a phantasm of Ian's mind,[100] the gun only has five chambers. Ian, after coming round from his psychosis in Scene 3, either does not remember Soldier or remembers him as a hallucination, and he pulls the trigger five times because he knows all five bullets should be in place. The audience does not know how many bullets Cate has removed from the gun. Soldier ends

[100] Another question remains: if Soldier is not real, who has blinded Ian? When Cate asks him: "What's happened with your eyes?" in Scene 4, Ian does not answer the question; he only says he "needs [her] to stay" (52).

his haunted existence by pulling the trigger, and Ian, too, sees dying as a relief. Being alive prolongs the suffering, as Cate says to Ian after the rape: "[S]hoot me. Can't be any worse than what you've done already" (34), and Soldier echoes this before raping Ian when he says: "See. Rather be shot than fucked and shot" (49). The gun can be looked upon as a weapon of mercy. However, the gun without bullets – another instance of a gap in the play – cannot provide any relief.

As demonstrated in this section, Soldier is an ethically charged character. The drama is built up in such a way that by the time Soldier utters his testimony, the audiences, readers and viewers, are made to believe that he has committed violent and punishable acts. What then is the value of his confession to a journalist; what is his motivation to tell what happened? What is the purpose of his speech in a rhetorical sense? His confession has not been uttered as a formal statement in court, to be used as a form of proof judicially, or in church, as an admission of a sin or moral guilt. In a legal context, the value of a confession can be challenged because the law requests cross-checking it with objective facts and other kinds of evidence (for instance, witness testimonies or exhibits). It needs to be validated or judged as true or false, but Soldier's words are not a proof of anything that he has done – Ian cannot know if Soldier is telling the truth. However, generally, a perpetrator is considered more culpable if he does not confess to his crimes. Erin McGlothlin describes how Maximilien Aue (in Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*, 2006) asks the readers "to admit him into the circle of human communication and to listen to the story of 'how it happened'" (2016: 252). While Soldier demands from Ian "to tell [...] you saw me" (48), he does not seem to wish to be admitted into such a circle – he seems to be aware that he has fallen out of it for good. He does not explicitly show signs of guilt, shame, or a demand for forgiveness, but at the same time he misses his murdered girlfriend that he loved very much. He also cries while raping Ian, and says to him, "At home I'm clean. Like it never happened" (48), which shows that he is well aware of the atrocities he has committed. In Kane's words, there is "a great deal of moral manoeuvre in the play and that's probably one of the distressing things" (Saunders 2009: 61). The rhetorical purpose of Soldier's confession is to force the audience to assess their own morality – while horrifying them.

Blasted provides a viewpoint on genocide whereby the perpetrator, and not a victim or survivor, occupies the role of witness. This scenario is often associated with controversial films and novels focusing on those responsible for

extreme violence and suffering (Bond and Craps, 2020: 117). Many narratives of this kind thematize the Holocaust.[101] The fact that Kane created, and staged such a provocative text while the war in Bosnia was still ravaging, was – as has been pointed out above – very unsettling for the public at the time of the first production. Some critics attacked Kane's work and focused on the gory details in the play, rather than on its potential to communicate meaning or anything about the sociohistorical, cultural or artistic context, human nature, or other ethical conundrums in the performance.

As Judith Herman points out, "[i]n order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting" (Herman 1992: 8). If Soldier's confessions come as a shock and a surprise, they do so even more because the audiences expect a perpetrator to promote forgetting. In Soldier's case, confession acquires a testimonial function because of the fact that he *was there* where the atrocities took place; he either *saw* with his own eyes or raped and killed. Although his subject position as a witness is conditioned, a perpetrator has the capacity of telling in *first person*: he is using the first person singular, paired with the verbs of being and seeing. All these are markers of trustworthiness and authenticity. In addition to that he *was there*, Soldier had no choice ("I'm here, got no choice", page 47). He experienced a personal tragedy, and his life as he knew it before he became a soldier has changed permanently ("Bastards killed her, now I'm here. Now I'm here", 3:49). Rhetorically, these lines should have a humanizing effect, but because of his initial confession, the audience find themselves in moral distress. As Soldier's character disintegrates psychologically, he ends up committing suicide and takes his truth with him. However, his suicide might give his confession an additional testimonial function because he turns into a kind of martyr; at least, his actions have certain traits that connote martyrdom. As discussed in the introductory chapter, *martus* or martyr "bears witness *without speaking*: he testifies through the sacrifice of his life" (Fassin 541) and he gives up his life to affirm his truth. Here we have a perpetrator who offers the truth to a journalist who will secure a

[101] See, for instance, *Downfall*, 2004; *The Specialist*, 1999, Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*, 1995; Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*, 2006; and *The Act of Killing* (2012), a documentary film about the Indonesia mass killings. Films or literary texts about the Bosnian war that focus solely on the perpetrator's perspective have not been made to this date, to my knowledge. However, there are some influential and famous films about the Bosnian war that have received international recognition, e.g. *No Man's Land*, 2001; *Grbavica*, 2006; *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, 2020.

legacy of Soldier as a martyr. Finally, Soldier breaks the cycle of "[d]oing to them what they done to us" (scene 3, page 48).

This is the point where the readers of this thesis need to be reminded that all human beings may experience trauma, that trauma is not a moral category which is limited or reserved to the victims of violence (McGlothlin 2020, Bond and Craps 2020, Mohamed 2015, Rothberg 2009, LaCapra 2001). Kane does not glorify the perpetrator's perspective. What the play achieves when the only available account of crimes is the one told from the perpetrator's perspective remains an open question. As contradictory as it may seem, a good actor would open for a possibility of feeling empathy for the perpetrator: On the one hand, a completely ruthless, monstrous human being is committing war crimes and reenacting what had been done to his girlfriend (eating Ian's eyes; raping him), and on the other, this same person lost a loved one, is obviously tormented and traumatized to the point of confessing to the crimes and then committing suicide. This focus on the different aspects of Soldier's experience puts his humanness in perspective, something that further complicates the image of this perpetrator and his trauma. With this powerful and direct, yet nuanced and sensitive message, Kane invites the audience to investigate the profound moral contradictions that accompany all depictions of perpetrator trauma, and to reflect on their own capacity to *acknowledge* it.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that *Blasted* challenges Caruth's claim that trauma is unspeakable, since the readers are provided with detailed descriptions of atrocities and haunting images. However, it has also argued that there is a tension between what is present and what is not present in the play. It has therefore been important to locate and observe these places of absence – to listen to the wound, in Caruth's words. These wounds are most evident in Soldier's testimonies. As detailed as they are, Soldier's testimonies are interrupted by the linguistic sign of the dash, which hides the unspeakable and the unimaginable. The realm of the unspeakable in *Blasted* manifests itself also through other wounds in the play. One such instance is the wounded text. This wound is caused by the blast, the explosive transition between Scene 2 and Scene 3, which creates a gap, a passage between the first and the second halves of the play. Another significant absence in the play is the missing name of Soldier, who is (metaphorically) wounded by

being stripped of his identity. It might also be argued that Kane's removal of the references to the Yugoslav context "wounds" the entire text as a work of art.

The explosion at the end of Scene 2 blasts the hotel room wall in the play (*Blasted* p. 39), tears down the conceptual barrier of the fourth wall, and breaks the division between the private and public spheres. A prelude to the fall of the wall was provided by the knocking episode between Ian and Soldier (pp. 35–36). The journalist (and the gatekeeper) Ian opens the door and lets Soldier in, but through this passage, newly opened by the shocking explosion, the war comes in. Something else that comes through the passage and that is repeated in the text, but in a different form, is rape. The repetition and re-enactment of rape is yet another link between the private sphere of the first part of the play and the public sphere in the play's second part: Ian rapes Cate in Scene 2, and he is raped by Soldier in Scene 3. A domestic rape turns into a weapon of war.[102]

Exploring the genealogy of *Blasted* provides greater insight into the early versions of the play and demonstrates how they differ from the final version. In addition, studying the play's genesis shows the significance and impact of the context on the process of writing the play. There may be different reasons why Soldier was named Vladek and why his nationality was explicitly Serbian in the earlier drafts. It can be said that Kane wanted to point to a specific conflict, but on the other hand, perhaps the extratextual elements were still very new, and unprocessed, something that was reflected in the literary text – as Kane says, writing the play was a direct response to what she saw on television. It was not long between the turning point of her seeing the crying woman of Srebrenica (March 30, 1993), the writing of the early drafts (April–June 1993), and the exam production of the first two scenes (July 3, 1993). The removal of national denominations was gradual, and the first name of the soldier was dropped some time after the exam performance – between the second and the third drafts – since the third draft (October 1993) does not feature Vladek.

That Vladek is renamed Soldier affects how we perceive the play; *Blasted* would most probably be read differently if Soldier were a soldier with a specific name and related to a specific conflict. This effect is connected to how art and reality are related, and how external events are presented in media and on stage; there is usually a big discrepancy between reporting about brutal violence in the media and the representation of (the same) violence in a dramatic performance.

[102] "The logical conclusion of the attitude that produces an isolated rape in England is the rape camps in Bosnia" (Kane in Sierz, 104).

Critics could brush the play aside as speculative violence because *Blasted* was torn away from the conflict that had triggered Kane to write it – yet they were also extremely provoked because Kane was "playing" with other people's pain (Buse 186). Some critics suggest that the removal of specific references, whether Vladek the Serb soldier, or just gin instead of Gordon's gin, "was motivated by a desire to make a more universal statement" (Sierz 55), which would mean that the play could be about any conflict, situated in any time or place, as I suggested earlier in this chapter. It is debatable whether dropping the name and therefore distancing oneself and the play from the socio-historical context in which and because of which it was written contributes to the universalization of the play, or if it politicizes it further, seen in retrospect. Sierz reminds us that "the nagging question remains: how far has Kane's rewriting of her original 'Bosnian play' diluted its politics?" (55). Kane's response to the conflict in Bosnia creates a culturally traumatic event to which media images of war have largely contributed. With her statement that there is a connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia, that "one is a seed and the other one is the tree", Kane links the two societies across Europe together, and points to the possibility of war anywhere, at any time.

The genetic investigation of the draft manuscripts has led to the conclusion that, although seemingly absurd, the play can be read in both ways: it can be about the Bosnian conflict – and while being bound by context, at the same time it can be read as having a more universal meaning. Because it has such a concrete link to the context, as the analysis has confirmed, it becomes possible for the play to open up towards the general meaning, and by doing that, to challenge the common understanding of war. In both cases, the rewriting has consequences for how we interpret the play and it is therefore important not to lose contact with or ignore what prompted Kane's writing of *Blasted*, because this may lead to complete decontextualization.

In an interview, Kane claimed that for her "the job of an artist is someone who asks questions and a politician is someone who pretends to know the answers; [...] a bad artist is someone who's actually a politician" (Saunders 2009: 61). Although Kane did not want her play to have political overtones, it seems that these implications were difficult to avoid. Some critics claim that there is an ethics in the play that is inherently political in nature. Sierz, for instance, argues that "[m]edia images of war had politicised Kane" (49), and that *Blasted* is a political play: "Here is a play that was political in origin, political in content and

political in its effects" (Sierz 45). It is difficult to disagree with this bold statement when the play is discussed on a meta-level, but it is possible that media images of a political conflict can inspire the writing of a play which, in turn, does not have explicitly political content. On the one hand there is a claim that media images of a political conflict politicized Kane (Sierz 49), while on the other there is "an ethical urge on the part of the author" (Toker 192) to bear witness to atrocities, which does not necessarily have to be considered political.[103] The play as an artistic creation is testifying to what its author has witnessed from a distance. We need to be reminded that these media images were *verbally* represented in *Blasted* and that the explicit markers of political discourse, although they acted as decisive stimuli, were removed from the play by its author. In a sense, because it creates an even greater distance from the context, the removal symbolizes the distance (be it geographical or sociocultural) from which the play bears witness.

The genealogical exploration of the play paired with close reading has shown that there is a link between blasting between the scenes, witnessing the presence of absence, and media reporting. To bear witness may sometimes imply attracting attention, in the sense of making something noticeable or visible, as the blasting explosion does in the play. In an archaic sense, to call someone to witness means to appeal or refer to someone or something for confirmation or evidence (OED). If we look at the etymology of the word 'blast' discussed earlier in this chapter, we will recall that among its meanings, which are mostly related to explosion and destruction, is one used in the sense of 'blowing out on a trumpet', which, again, means 'proclaiming (the news) in a prominent, typically sensational manner'. Seen from that perspective, this is what the media achieved with their war reporting: as the title of the play suggests, they blasted the news about atrocities, and metaphorically tore down the wall "between the so-called civilisation and what happened in central Europe" (Kane in Sierz 2012: 202) so that traumatic effects of the Bosnian conflict could be experienced by the viewers in other countries. On the other hand, 'blast' can also mean 'a violent verbal outburst, as of criticism', and informally, it is used in the sense 'to criticize severely'. Emphasizing this strand of meaning, *Blasted* can also be interpreted as a critique of media as "tabloidism which mixes information with entertainment" (Ruigrok, de Ridder, and Scholten 2005: 162).

[103] This difficult and demanding question about *Blasted* being a political play demands a more extensive discussion, which exceeds the frames of this dissertation.

It has been argued in this chapter that exploring the interplay between the genealogy and wider context of the play reveals a link between ekphrasis and witnessing. According to Kane, "[t]he only reason [*Blasted*] is any more devastating than reading a newspaper is that all the boring bits have been cut out" (Sierz 103). Literary creation, or the integration of media images and reports in the body of a play, is a work of independent artistic construction, while at the same time in Kane's play that same literary creation is reality-based. The fictionality of *Blasted* does not remove it from the reported reality, and ekphrasis acts as a guide for the audience, pointing towards a historical reality. Ekphrasis is an invitation to imagine. Due to *enargeia*, a quality of vividness of description that makes the audience see the subject, ekphrasis is also an invitation to see – with one's mind's eye. Since there is, typically, no witnessing without an act of seeing, ekphrasis in Soldier's testimonies is at the heart of literary witnessing in *Blasted.* Testimony requires an answer, a reaction, something that *Blasted* attempted to provoke. No one witnesses for the witness, writes Celan.[104] In *Blasted*, the one who ironically occupies the position of a witness is the perpetrator, Soldier, who witnesses for the absence of his victims' lives.

We cannot claim without being speculative that *Blasted* depicts the mind of a Bosnian war perpetrator. Without the aid of genetic criticism, historical context, media images and secondary sources, the play could be said to delve into testimony, repetition compulsion, and PTSD symptoms of just about any perpetrator. For some, Kane made good artistic choices through careful aesthetic distancing, and by obliterating the direct references to the Bosnian war; this generalization is the play's greatest quality. However, for others, this is its greatest weakness: the play is torn away from context, and audiences therefore do not exactly understand what *Blasted* is bearing witness to. It has been important, in this analysis, to give both of these standpoints their due. By eliminating the specific references but anchoring the play in the initial and original conflict, Kane achieves a fruitful ambiguity and renders it possible to maintain awareness of both views at the same time.

Kane wrote *Blasted* to be performed; the verbal, but also visual and bodily representations of a dramatic text come alive on stage. Theatre provides space for speculation and enhances the experience that the audience may have during a

[104] Paul Celan, "Aschenglorie": Niemand / zeugt für den / Zeugen (l. 24–26). Written in Paris, December 15, 1964. In Celan, Paul: *Die Gedichte. Neue kommentierte Gesamtausgabe in einem Band*, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2018, p. 202.

performance through the use of special effects, scenery, stage design, and the immediate presence of actors who move and talk in the same room as the audience. There is nothing pedagogical in Kane's approach to the audience and in her portrayal of Soldier and Ian; while the readers have at least some time to read the stage directions and consciously pause after the most despicable depictions of murders and rapes, the theatre audience is bombarded and shocked by Soldier's masterful verbal salvo followed by Ian's short replies. Paired with the setting, scenery, and body language of the actors, *Blasted* must have been one of the greatest achievements of in-yer-face theatre.

3 Gazing at Silence: A Poem from Adrian Oktenberg's *The Bosnia Elegies*

up into the silence the green / silence [...]
– e.e. cummings

[...] the Lady in the Tree still haunts me.
– Tim Butcher, *The Telegraph*

Media reports from the Bosnian war, including photographic images, influenced several literary responses beyond the country's geographic and linguistic borders. One such literary response – Sarah Kane's play *Blasted* – was analysed in chapter two. The responses to the atrocities were numerous, but the earliest, mediated, and the most direct (in a temporal sense) were poetic.[105] This chapter will explore *The Bosnia Elegies* (1997), a collection of poetry by an American author, Adrian Oktenberg. In this chapter I will particularly focus on one of Oktenberg's poems, which provides a verbalized depiction of a photograph taken after a town in eastern Bosnia was overrun. I will examine the performative role of caesura in the same poem. The poem's form, the central poetic themes (media, messages, and memory), and the directness of the poet's response act together to

[105] One of the earliest responses was an international anthology, *Klaonica: Poems for Bosnia* (Bloodaxe Books, 1993), published in association with the British newspaper *The Independent* ("klaonica" is Bosnian for "slaughterhouse", "butchery", "abattoir"). The contributors were from Britain, Ireland, North America, and Bosnia. Edited by Ken Smith and Judi Benson, the anthology was made "in a matter of days as an immediate if inadequate response to the suffering in Bosnia" (see the back cover of the book). Some of the poems in the volume were first published in *The Independent*'s series *Bosnia Poems*, and in other places such as *The Guardian Weekend*, *The Irish Review*, *The Observer*, *The New Republic* (Czeslaw Milosz's "Sarajevo"), *Poetry Review*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*. A poem by Joseph Brodsky, "A Bosnia Tune", was published in *The New York Times* as early as November 1992. Worth noting is an ambition to alleviate the suffering by "turning words into money" (*Klaonica* 1993: 1) and the practical, humanitarian character of the anthology. It was made in solidarity with the people of Bosnia and to raise funds for Bosnian relief. All the proceeds from the sale of the book were to be donated to *Feed the Children* and other organizations that could provide food and medicine. Similar to *Klaonica* in its humanitarian character is a booklet published by Rushlight Editions, dedicated to the refugee children of Srebrenica: *The Heart of Europe: Poems for Bosnia* (1998), edited by John Price and Chris Agee, features poetry by Nuala Ni Dhomnaill, Chris Agee, Harry Clifton, and Bernard O'Donoghue. Ni Dhomnaill's poem "Dubh" ("Black"), translated from the Irish by Paul Muldoon and later published in her book of poems *Fifty Minute Mermaid* (2007), is a direct, highly politically charged response to the fall of Srebrenica.

create memorial value in Oktenberg's documentary war poetry. While they do so, witnessing unfolds on different levels: the poet is a witness from afar, her poems (and their caesurae) bear literary witness, while at the same time they invite the reader to do the same and to reflect upon what it means to bear witness. In accordance with the one of my subordinate research questions, this chapter will address the relationship between the literature of witness and media images. Underlying the whole chapter, though, is the overarching research question, viz.: What can verbal representations of images of war in literary texts teach us about witnessing by distance?

In Chapter 2 I demonstrated how Sarah Kane's first play expresses absence and bears witness to a distant conflict through the play's lacunae. In this chapter I will show how witnessing the same conflict occurs in another genre, arguing that Oktenberg's poem performs silence and bears literary witness by means of photographic, contextual, and notional ekphrasis. We will look at how an ekphrastic, elegiac and narrative poem voices trauma and inscribes an absence into its very fibre. As discussed previously, ekphrasis and witnessing stand in close relation with each other: ekphrasis is an invitation to imagine, and therefore an invitation to see, as witnessing cannot take place without an act of seeing. The poem as a technology of memory bears witness from afar by the means of its performativity. Although it disrupts the reading process in a way, this performativity is not merely a device of a visual kind (as in concrete poetry),[106] but it is rooted in a triad of functions that I will explore and ascribe to caesura, ekphrasis, and elegy in this chapter.

To expand on the concept of performativity as I will use it in this chapter, I suggest that the poem performs the silence of the wound by keeping the wound open in the form of caesura. However, caesura cannot and does not exist on its own; it is defined in relation to its surroundings, in a dialogue with its lexical environment. When exploring the notion of caesura, we first need to distinguish between its different meanings and uses. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'caesura' originates from Latin *cæsūra*, which means 'cutting; metrical pause' (from *cædĕre*, 'to cut'). In Greek and Latin prosody, caesura is "[t]he division of a metrical foot between two words, especially in certain recognized places near the middle of the line". In English prosody, it is a "pause or breathing-place about the middle of a metrical line, generally indicated by a

[106] See for instance, Johanna Drucker's "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text" in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, edited by Charles Bernstein (1998).

pause in the sense", also used in a sense of a "formal break or stop; interruption" (764). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* juxtaposes 'caesura' as the metrical phenomenon which corresponds to a break in the syntax of the line, with "other paralinguistic or performative ('rhetorical') pauses, incl. breath-points [and] pauses for rhetorical emphasis, and the slightest pauses subject to variance of speech tempo, [which] are matters of performance *and have nothing to do with metrical design*" (emphasis added, 159). Here I will not discuss the aspect of performativity of caesura in Oktenberg's poetry in terms of acoustic pauses in live performance – i.e., in reading aloud – but we can ask: apart from punctuation marks, such as full-stops and commas, how can a poet create the silence of a pause ("the absence of sound in speech", OED) visually and semantically for the experience of a reader? Is gazing at silence, in this instance, gazing at the articulating power of caesura? If silence is a performative and aesthetic act,[107] and caesura is a means of expressing silence, can caesura be seen and considered as having performative value?

Caesura and elegy stand in close relation in Oktenberg's poetry. Firstly, she deliberately and demonstratively uses caesura as a rhetorical device throughout *The Bosnia Elegies*.[108] For Jacques Derrida, "[e]llipsis and caesura and the cut-off breath [...] designate [...] that which, in the body and in the rhythm of the poem, seems most decisive. A *decision*, as its name indicates, always appears as interruption, it *decides* inasmuch as it is a *cut* that tears" (2005: 70, emphasis added). Oktenberg uses caesura in different positions, and often several times in the same poem. In addition, it is ekphrasis which makes these caesurae more prominent. At first sight, one may venture that there is no clear link between ekphrasis and caesura; I am however going to show the relation between them. Lastly, Oktenberg's poem as a modern elegy resists consolation and instead insists on keeping the wound open;[109] it could be argued that caesura contributes to this 'wounding'.

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[107] See Dessingué, Alexandre, and Jay Winter, "Introduction" (2016: 9) in *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*. Edited by Alexandre Dessingué and Jay Winter.

[108] I use the word 'demonstratively' because Oktenberg's caesura is concerned with commemoration and drawing attention, taking both time and space. Jennifer Richards writes that "|d]emonstrative rhetoric, also known as *display* or *epideictic*, is concerned with the present: its context is usually commemorative occasions and its function is praise or blame" (2008: 182).

[109] For more on modern elegy, see Jahan Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning* (1994). I will come back to Ramazani later in this chapter.

In the following sections, I will first present the mentioned photograph and discuss its relevance for the analysis of the poem. This will prepare the reader for an analysis of the relation and interaction between the image and the poem, which will place them in a wider historical and cultural context, while at the same time inviting the reader to reflect upon Oktenberg's poetic response as a literary event. The chapter will then explore the link between caesura, elegy, the memorial function of poetry, and the position of a witness, before turning to a close reading of the poem.

3.1 The Image and the Poem

At around 5:30 a.m. on the morning of July 11, 1995, Darko Bandić, a freelance Croat photographer working for the Associated Press, took the image in question. This happened in a refugee camp shortly after the fall of the UN-declared safe area Srebrenica, where more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were slaughtered in July 1995 in an act of ethnic cleansing. Women and children were separated from the men and forcibly bussed away, not knowing anything about the fate of their husbands, fathers, and sons. Refugees, too many to be helped with food or shelter, were swarming into makeshift refugee camps. Most of them were in and around the city called Tuzla, about a hundred kilometers away from Srebrenica.

Image 4: Ferida Osmanović hanged herself after the fall of Srebrenica. Photograph by Darko Bandić, Associated Press. Published in *The Guardian* on July 15, 1995.

The photograph shows the body of a young woman hanging from a tree in the woods. There is a certain discrepancy between what we see in the photograph and what we know about the war. When I say "what we know", I refer to the facts about the fall of Srebrenica. It is commonly believed that the evidence of the destruction of war should look like chaos. Usually there are images of bloody and injured people, soldiers, panic, collapsed buildings, smoke, and fire;

however, this image is different. It is not an image that triggers an impulse to turn our heads away immediately: it is an aesthetically pleasing, well-composed, and harmonious image. There is a great contradiction inherent in the photo: it was taken in tremendously difficult circumstances, in the midst of turmoil in the refugee camps, which were overwhelmed by the stream of refugees who were arriving from the ethnically cleansed area of Srebrenica. People were clinging to their lives, nearly starved and completely humiliated, dirty, bussed away *en masse*, all this happening in the full summer heat. Yet despite these circumstances, there is something very calm and peaceful about this image. Most viewers are aware that the woman committed suicide by hanging. We do not see her face, her back is turned to the world, she has all her clothing on – and a long-sleeved sweater, although it is summer. The leaves of the surrounding trees appear to cradle her.

The most startling thing about the image is that it is not clear how the body of the woman is supported. Her head seems to be standing straight and naturally in place. The body is parallel with the tree trunk. It is as if the woman and the tree were facing each other in a mute dialogue. Instead of appearing to be dead, she looks rather peaceful; it is as if she were floating in the air or ascending. A meditative – and unsettling – aura emanates from the photograph. Only the stillness of her figure and the position of her feet remind us that this is an image of death.

Moving on from an aesthetic reading of the image to factual knowledge about it, the investigation of the woman's corpse showed details that cannot be seen with naked eye. Although invisible, the hanged woman's noose was not a rope; it was made of her shawls and a belt braided together.[110] The actions of this woman can be compared to those of a Greek mythical figure, Philomela: as mutilated and mute Philomela wove the story of her own rape into a web (red on white), so Ferida Osmanović wove the belt, the scarf, and the body into a surrounding landscape, as onto a green canvas, turning herself into a still, but "speaking" object.[111] Neither the mythical Philomela nor Osmanović could *speak* about their rapes – one because her tongue was cut off, the other one because she was dead. "Philomela's power to speak [...] is woven into and hence bound up with the power of pictures to speak – to break through the silence in which they,

[110] See Jurich, p. 10.
[111] The woman remained anonymous for six months after her photograph was published; she was finally identified by her children.

like women, are traditionally bound" (Heffernan 49). Although the picture of Ferida Osmanović is an image of death, this does not mean that silence is absolute.

Fox Talbot claimed that photography has a special ability to capture "the injuries of time" (cited in Cheeke 143). In the sense of capturing the injury of a historical moment, the photograph of the young hanged woman from Srebrenica can be interpreted as a symbol of silence in the aftermath of genocide in eastern Bosnia. For theorists like Barthes and Sontag, photography almost always has to do with metaphorical death. As Stephen Cheeke argues, we can also speak of the elegiac nature of a photograph (143). In the case of this particular photograph from July 1995, the death – and the silence – are doubled: the photographed subject was already dead at the time the photograph was taken (the "first" death was literal), and the subject died once again upon being captured within a frame, this time metaphorically, thus augmenting the silence that encompassed the literal death. But silence is impossible; as Maurice Blanchot writes in *The Writing of the Disaster*, "to be silent is still to speak" (1995: 11). The corpse of this young woman speaks in a metaphorical sense, as does her photograph.

Having devoted ourselves, albeit briefly, to a silent image that captured death, we will now shift our attention to an ekphrastic, elegiac poem written in response to this dual, ambiguous silence. Adrian Oktenberg's poem "In the morning" (*The Bosnia Elegies*, p. 17) is a narrative poem that may help readers and viewers understand something about Darko Bandić's photograph. As "Virgil turns the shield of Aeneas into a history of Rome; Dante turns a set of sculpted figures into a story of Trajan and the widow; Byron turns the statue of a dying man into a taut narrative of his dying" (Heffernan 5), Oktenberg turns the image of a hanging woman into a story about a rape in Srebrenica. As I have previously pointed out, Oktenberg manages to preserve the contradiction present in the photographic image. Written as a response to the aforementioned photograph, the poem embodies a sensation of muteness, of mute observation, and an ambiguity: on the one side there is the act of suicide itself, and on the other, there is a horror of choice. The woman who survived the ethnic cleansing is the same woman who chose to end her life. The feelings of that there is "nothing to be done", confusion, helplessness, and the presence of mute witness haunt us and contribute to the eeriness shared by both the image and the poem.

But why did this photo have such an impact at the time it was taken? According to journalist Lorna Martin, who interviewed Ferida Osmanović's

children and joined them on their pilgrimage to Srebrenica a decade after the ethnic cleansing, this photograph "became an icon of betrayal of Srebrenica".[112] Similarly, journalist Joscelyn Jurich writes that the image of Osmanović was "horrifying evidence of inaction and the deadly consequence of prolonged observation without action".[113] For Jurich, as for Martin, this image, together with several others, became an icon of the Bosnian war. Both in 1995 and 2019 the typical viewer knows that we are looking at an *ex post facto* image, taken after the fall of the so-called safe area Srebrenica.

The photograph first appeared on July 15, 1995, in *The Guardian*, the only newspaper in Britain to publish it. The same day it appeared in the *New York Times* and it also made the front page of the *Washington Post*. Vice President Al Gore told President Bill Clinton, pointing to the photo in the latter newspaper, that his 21-year-old daughter asked "about this picture. What am I supposed to tell her? Why is this happening and we're not doing anything? My daughter is surprised the world is allowing this to happen. I am too".[114] Referring to the woman's hanging, Sue Reisinger of the *Miami Herald* wrote that this was "the last rational act in Bosnia".[115] Some days after its publication, the photograph was discussed "at President Clinton's meetings with American and European officials about air strikes against Serbia" (Jurich 10), and senator Dianne Feinstein used it to underline the plight of raped and murdered civilians in Bosnia:

> "For me the turning point was the attack on Srebrenica, that weekend with all the missing people," said Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, who had previously opposed lifting the arms embargo.[116] Recalling the stunning pictures of despair among the Muslim refugees forced to flee

[112] Martin, Lorna. "Truth behind the picture that shocked the world", 17 April 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/17/warcrimes.lornamartin
[113] See, for instance, Jurich's article "Remembering to Remember: Three Photojournalism Icons of the Bosnian War", http://vsw.org/afterimage/2011/07/28/remembering-to-remember-three-photojournalism-icons-of-the-bosnian-war-by-joscelyn-jurich/.
[114] Martin, Lorna. "Truth behind the picture that shocked the world", April 17, 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/17/warcrimes.lornamartin
[115] *Miami Herald*, p. A6, July 26, 1995.
[116] In September 1991 the UN imposed an arms embargo on all the entities of the former Yugoslavia. Since the Serb forces employed the former Yugoslav Army, which was the fourth biggest in Europe and had free access to weapons in Serbia, this embargo was only efficient on one of the belligerent sides – the predominantly Muslim and almost unarmed Bosnians. Still, the embargo was upheld throughout the entire war. See UN Security Council's Resolution: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/713.

> when Bosnian Serbs overran the United Nations "safe area" of Srebrenica, she said: "One image punched through to me: that young woman hanging from a tree. That to me said it all."[117]
>
> (*The New York Times*, July 28, 1995)

But what did the image really say, what did it communicate? Of course, opinions vary about how effective an image can be, in what context (journalistic, political, critical-theoretical, aesthetic) and to what extent it can "speak".[118] As the case of Senator Feinstein's rhetorical demonstration shows, this image did have the power to change something in the political context. However, "[t]his was witnessing of the most impotent sort", as Jurich writes (10) – for the political reaction came too late.

In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag claims that "[s]trictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph" (1979: 23) and "[o]nly that which narrates can make us understand" (23). In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she comments about an image from the Bosnian war (taken by Ron Haviv) where a member of Serb paramilitary is kicking a Muslim woman in the head. John Kifner, the *New York Times* correspondent, wrote that this image tells you "everything you need to know" (Sontag 2003: 80) – expressing a viewpoint similar to Senator Feinstein's about the image of the woman from Srebrenica. Sontag disagrees with Kifner's claim and writes that "of course [the photograph] doesn't tell us everything we need to know" (2003: 80). Although she seems to confirm the point of view she expressed in *On Photography* by saying that "[n]arratives can make us understand", Sontag modifies her position by adding that "photographs do something else: they haunt us" (80).

Although one of the purposes of this chapter is to demonstrate that a photograph, as Sontag points out, does not tell us "everything", we need to remind ourselves that the poem would never have been written if the photograph had not been taken: The haunting of the image had a capacity to mobilize its audiences, which led to an active response to media images of suffering. What does the poem teach us about the connection between text, context, and image?

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[117] Sciolino, Elaine. "Conflict in the Balkans: The Politics; Senate Vote to End Embargo May Prove a Pyrrhic Victory", July 28, 1995. https://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/28/world/conflict-balkans-politics-senate-vote-end-embargo-may-prove-pyrrhic-victory.html?pagewanted=all

[118] See, for instance, Ariella Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography*; Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*; Joscelyn Jurich's article "You Could get Used to It: Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoullay, and Photography's *Sensus Communis*" (afterimage).

What can it tell us about the role of poetry, poet, and reader in times of crisis? To answer these questions we first need to learn about the contextual space of the literary work, and then look at the form and content of the poem itself. The political conflict in the Balkans provides the central socio-historical context for Oktenberg's volume. The wider context includes the landscape and poetics of *The Bosnia Elegies*, the photographic image and the fall of Srebrenica, and not least, the theoretical and intellectual climate in the United States at the time prior to the writing and publishing of the book.[119]

3.2 The Poet as Witness, the Reader as Witness

Adrian Oktenberg (1947–2014, aka Rose Basile) was a poet, literary critic and feminist scholar. She was the author of the acclaimed poetry collection *The Bosnia Elegies* (1997), for which she received the Astraea Emerging Writers Award and a Barbara Deming Award. The book was published by Paris Press, a feminist literary press that Oktenberg founded in 1992 together with her friend, the poet Jan Freeman. Her other collection of poems, *Swimming with Dolphins*, appeared in 2002. At the time of her death she was working on a book project about Elizabeth Bishop.[120] She lived in Northampton, Massachusetts.

The Bosnia Elegies can be seen as an instantaneous response to the reports from the Bosnian war. Oktenberg notes that "[t]he main body of this book was written between June and December 1995. The Dayton peace accords [which brought an end to the war] were signed in December 1995" (TBE 2).[121] Oktenberg ends the acknowledgments section with a disclaimer that "[t]his book is a work of art, not history or reportage". Given the time when the book was published, this is an important statement. Let us assume, for instance, two distinct positions that could be taken by an implied reader of *The Bosnia Elegies*: upon the first encounter with the collection, a reader at the end of the 1990s may have been reminded of numerous war reports from Bosnia at the time, while a

[119] The wider context in terms of theoretical discussions and publications include works such as *Testimony* by Laub and Felman, 1992; Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 1995, Forché's *Poetry of Witness*, 1993. Interestingly, one of Oktenberg's poems from *The Bosnia Elegies* is anthologized in *American War Poetry*, a 2006 anthology edited by Lorrie Goldensohn, placed together with poetic responses to "El Salvador, Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Persian Gulf" (p. 335). Another poem about the Bosnian war in this section is Joseph Brodsky's "Bosnia Tune".

[120] http://www.parispress.org/adrian-oktenberg/

[121] TBE will be used as an abbreviation for *The Bosnia Elegies*.

reader almost thirty years later, in 2023, for whom the Bosnian war is a thing of the past or who approaches the book as a source of information, may be tempted to read the poems in a more historical light. The title already creates expectations; *The Bosnia Elegies* invites the reader to engage with a specific sociohistorical context in a designated geographic area ravaged by war, and we expect that the book will tell us about the sorrowful, gruesome events, which we had the chance to see on television and read about in the newspaper. Although Oktenberg's disclaimer is a useful reminder and provides instruction on how to approach her verse, it is not clear what it means to only read the volume as a work of art, and not as history or reportage. My position is that her work is a valuable poetic document of a specific time and place, which I will discuss later in this section.

The title of Oktenberg's book suggests her poems are elegies for Bosnia. An *elegy* is a lament, usually a short poem, formal in tone, written for a dead person.[122] The origin of the word is from Greek *elegeia*, from *elegos*, which means "a mournful poem". Traditionally, the elegy "frequently includes a movement from expressed sorrow toward consolation",[123] and this is something that cannot be said about Oktenberg's elegies for Bosnia. In his *Poetry of Mourning*, Jahan Ramazani argues that "the modern elegist tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss" (1994: xi), and as this chapter will show, *The Bosnia Elegies* keep the war wound open, as Oktenberg's poetry offers no consolation.

Pastoral elegy has been one of the oldest species of the genre and its period of "postclassical dominance extended from the Renaissance through the 17th century" (Preminger and Brogan 1993: 322). Several conventions of pastoral elegy have informed nonpastoral elegies, such as a procession of mourners, extended use of repetition and refrains, appeals and questioning of witnesses, outbreaks of anger or criticism, use of imagery (such as water, vegetation, sources of light), and emblems of sexual power (drawn from the natural world, depicted as either injured victim or site of renewal).[124] Although Oktenberg's poems do not always classify as purely elegiac, several of her poems have these elements. The different voices and personas present in the poems are

[122] Preminger and Brogan, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, "elegy", p. 322.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

only seemingly private; their acts of reflection usually engage in the work of collective grief, which, again, is characteristic of elegy and important for memorial work.

But for whom were these poems written? For which audience? Oktenberg dedicates the book to "the poets whose words and example made it possible: Eavan Boland, Constantine Cavafy, Tory Dent, Carolyn Forché, Adrienne Rich, Ruth Stone, Walt Whitman – and Jan Freeman / and for the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia in solidarity" (TBE 5).[125] However, her poetry is mainly for an English-speaking audience, or those who had access to and who were affected by the similar media reports as herself.

The work of one of the authors in Oktenberg's dedication stands out in this context and could be considered an important influence for writing of *The Bosnia Elegies*. This author is Carolyn Forché, an American poet, translator, and activist, whose edited volume *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* was published in 1993. The anthology includes poetry from and about different wars, conflicts, and repressions. It covers a timeframe from 1900 until 1991, and therefore does not contain poems about, for instance, the Rwandan or Bosnian wars, which were raging at the time the book appeared.[126] The theme, the title, and the time of publication of Forché's anthology set "an example" that inspired, and – in Oktenberg's words – "made it possible" to create a book of poetry about the Bosnian war.

One of the criteria for including a poet's work in Forché's volume was that the poets in question must have endured conditions of extremity themselves (1993: 30). As mentioned, Oktenberg points out that the poems in TBE were written during the last six months of the Bosnian war, which is also the time when some of the greatest atrocities, such as the fall of Srebrenica, occurred (July

[125] Eavan Boland is an Irish poet, professor and activist who lives and works in the United States. Her work addresses Irish national identity, and the role of women in Irish history.
Tory Dent (1958–2005) was an American poet, art critic, and commentator on the AIDS crisis. Adrienne Rich said on Dent's death: "Dent teaches us that poetry must speak out of extremity" (Mary Rourke in *Los Angeles Times*), a view similar to Forché's argument that extremity "demands new forms [...] of poetic thought" (1993: 42).
Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) was an American poet, essayist and radical feminist. Oktenberg authored several essays on Rich's work. Adrienne Rich probably inspired Rose Basile to take her male pseudonym, Adrian Oktenberg.
Ruth Stone (1915–2011) was an American poet, author, and teacher. It is interesting to note that her poem "Wound" (from *Simplicity*), was published in 1995 by Paris Press.
[126] It took Forché thirteen years to collect and edit poetry by more than 140 poets (Forché 1993: 29).

1995). Although Oktenberg responded directly (in a temporal sense) to the events as they were unfolding – or as fast as information travelled and appeared in the different media – the poet did not experience the extremities of the Bosnian war herself. The poems in *The Bosnia Elegies* would therefore not fulfill the mentioned criterion set by Forché to be called a poetry of witness, because their writer was not a direct, *in situ* witness – all witnessing took place through (and with the help of) various media. Nevertheless, Oktenberg can be called a poet of witness of our time, a time in which information spreads at much greater speed than before, in the age of mass media and immediate reporting.

Although the term is not extensively discussed in *Against Forgetting* (even while it features in the subtitle), it is interesting to read Forché's own reflections upon the use and development of the term "poetry of witness" in her introduction to a companion volume, titled *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500–2001* (coedited with Duncan Wu, 2014).[127] In an essay in *The American Poetry Review* from the summer of 1981, after her return from El Salvador where she worked as a human rights activist, Forché had previously stated: "It is my feeling that the twentieth-century human condition demands a poetry of witness" (qtd. in Forché 2014: 21). In 1983, Czeslaw Milosz published his monograph *The Witness of Poetry*, and, in 2014, Forché notes that "a phrase 'poetry of witness' entered the lexicon of literary terms, regarded skeptically by some as a euphemism for 'political poetry'" (21). Twenty years after the publication of her first anthology, Forché still insists that poetry of witness should avoid "easy categories" such as dividing poems into personal or political: the poetry of witness is not political poetry. It rather belongs to an intermediate, third space that Forché calls "the social" (1993: 31). She also points out that "[w]itness would come to refer much of the time, to the person of the poet [...]. 'Poets of witness' were considered by some to be engaged in writing documentary literature, or poetic reportage, and in the mode of political confessionalism" (Forché 2014: 21). Note that Forché distances herself from "reportage", just as Oktenberg does in her abovementioned disclaimer. The term "poetry of witness" is, according to Forché, complicated by philosophical, religious, linguistic, and psychoanalytic understandings of 'witness', and "it is a mode of reading rather than of writing, of readerly encounter with the literature

[127] "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art", introduction to the 2014 *Poetry of Witness*, pp. 17–26.

of that-which-happened, and its mode is evidentiary rather than representational" (21).

Although I refer to Oktenberg as a poet of witness, her position regarding the Bosnian war is the one of *testis*, the witness as observer, rather than the one of *superstes*, or the witness as survivor. Her position as witness is further complicated because bearing witness occurs from a distance. I will discuss below whether her poetry should be considered as documentary or politically engaged.

Forché's anthology from 1993 opened up a space and provided a framework within which we can situate the creative efforts and poetics of Adrian Oktenberg. *Against Forgetting* was closely succeeded by *The Bosnia Elegies*. Especially important for our discussion about Oktenberg in terms of poetry of witness and poetic form is Forché's argument about extremity and how it "demands new forms or alters older modes of poetic thought" (1993: 42). This will be brought into connection with trauma, fragmentation, and caesura throughout this chapter. Furthermore, it can be said that Oktenberg – the poet as witness, and her poetry – bears witness to an event, and to a visual representation of that event. The poet is showing "an explicit will to bear witness" (Forché 2014: 23). In Forché's words:

> In conditions of extremity (war, suffering, struggle), the witness is *in relation*, and cannot remove him or herself. Relation is proximity, and this closeness subjects the witness to the possibility of being wounded [...]. The witness who writes out of extremity writes his or her wound, as if such writing were making an incision [...]. The form of this language bears the trace of extremity, and may be comprised of fragments: questions, aphorisms, broken passages of lyric prose or poetry, quotations, dialogue, brief and lucid passages that may or may not resemble what previously had been written (Forché 2014: 25).

For Oktenberg and others who creatively wrote about the war from a distance, mediatized images are of utmost significance. The poet as witness keeps this relation and closeness to the visual representations in order to be able to transfer the experience of the wound from one medium to another, from image to poem.

The media were most likely the main source of information for Oktenberg, as well as being one of the major poetic themes in *The Bosnia Elegies*. She did not travel to Bosnia during the war – unlike some other poets who wrote about

the conflict, such as Tony Harrison and Colin Mackay.[128] War reports have influenced and inspired Oktenberg's writing, something which is reflected and evoked in several poems in the volume: "[W]e slap open a newspaper" (10); "the UN reported" (16); "pictures disseminated the whole world knows" (23); "[T]he message / was reported on the evening news" (25); "[U]ntil the French reporter found out / put her on television made her read the diary / into the cameras filmed her [...] the American media made a splash" (28); "and the reporter delicately asks about the intellectuals" (29); "television wars and slaughters" (55), and so forth. Although Oktenberg stated that her book is not history or reportage, as I noted earlier in this chapter, in TBE we see that a poet "has to be 'a bit of a reporting journalist'" (Auden qtd. in Ramazani 2012: 11). The poet may be observed as a journalist here in a sense that she proposes "a different way of telling the news" (11), by remediating the same news that she received through the actual media channels. Oktenberg's poetry can be seen an example of hypermediacy, in which she does not attempt to erase all traces of mediation; she rather reminds the reader of the medium, and thus "generates an experience of the medium" (Erll and Rigney, 2012: 4). When the news are remediated through

[128] What distinguishes these two writers, whose respective responses to the Balkan crisis deserve to be recognized, is that they both travelled to Bosnia, but one was commissioned, while the other one went as a volunteer with an aid convoy. Their contributions are distinct not only from other poetic responses at the time, but also from each other's. Tony Harrison's "Three poems from Bosnia" ("The Cycles of Donji Vakuf", "The Bright Lights of Sarajevo", "Essentials") were commissioned by *The Guardian* newspaper. He was sent to Bosnia in 1995 to write about the war for the front page and his poems on the conflict were published in September 1995, only days after they had been written. They were later published in *Laureate's Block* (2000). Colin Mackay's *Cold Night Lullaby* (1998) is a semi-autobiographical book of 68 poems, "a personal odyssey of pain and suffering", as Raymond Ross writes in the "Introduction" to *Cold Night Lullaby*. Ross claims that the book is "a testament that should be read by everyone from students of theology and philosophy to ideologues and politicians of all orders" (1998: 8), and also that the book is "a document for holocaust studies" (1998: 8). A poet and novelist, Mackay travelled to Bosnia as a humanitarian aid worker. In this book he writes about his journey to Bosnia and his experience of the Bosnian war; in that sense, he is a literary witness, or a poet of witness. Mackay's poems are anything but an easy read, not only because of the graphic, raw descriptions ("the sweet smell / of blood, vegetation and meat-rot", p. 18; "so they tied him to a lamp post / with plastic wire, / hacked his genitals off / and stuffed them in his mouth", p. 37; "We shave in the river. / Corpses float past us", p. 28), but also because of his personal tragedy. Mackay's harrowing story is documented in *Cold Night Lullaby*. He fell in love with Svetlana, a Serbian widow with two small children whose Muslim husband had been killed in combat. The Muslims let Svetlana stay in their village out of respect. One morning Mackay drove to Sarajevo to arrange for passage out of the village – and out of the country – for Svetlana and her children: "When we returned that afternoon, it was a place of corpses" (1998: 9). He found that vengeful Serbs had killed everyone; Svetlana was butchered, her daughter, six years old, dead beside her, and her son gone. "The Serbs [...] had reserved their greatest hatred for the Serbian woman they doubtless regarded as a traitor and a whore", Mackay in "Foreword", *Cold Night Lullaby* (1998: 9).

literature, this affects the durability of the news: in Ezra Pound's famous wording, literature is "news that STAYS news" (Pound 1961: 29).

The critic Marilyn Krysl suggests that Oktenberg's style is one which "accommodates both image, and spare, journalistic *reportage*" (1998: 177). Although they are not simply works of reportage, it could be said that some poems evoke and create the feeling of reportage because of their 'telegram' style.[129] The main stylistic features of these poems – which are the sparse use of words packed with information and the use of caesura – can be linked with the context to which the poems are pointing, and because of which the poems were written. It is war; there is not enough time, the messages we send and receive should be stripped down to essential information, to 'bare life'. By "bare life" I refer here to Agamben's notion of "bare life": the best message you could receive from someone during the war was that your loved ones were alive; these messages were about the *biological fact of life*, not about the life's quality.[130] Therefore the message must be short as, for instance, in a telegram.

Oktenberg's speaker often tells us when, where, and what happened in the very first line of the poems. The reader is also informed about who was involved, as for instance in a poem about genocide in Vukovar:

> In 1991, when Yugoslavia broke up || and ceased to exist (p. 11),

or in a poem about the massacre at Sarajevo's main market:

> It was an open-air market || in full swing || midday February 1994 (p. 24).

When the names of the places in Bosnia are listed, like in "[T]owns we believe and die in || Srebrenica || Žepa || Bihać" (p. 26) – names which sound quite foreign to a non-Slavic ear ("You can't even pronounce their names", p. 40) – the poet supposes that the reader shares the same common knowledge as her. These names are followed by caesurae. Since there is no punctuation, the caesurae in these (and other) poems often function like a 'stop' in a telegram – a natural, syntactic inhalation break, but also necessary for other reasons, such as inviting

[129] I call it 'telegram' style because it reminds me of how people communicated during the war in Bosnia when the telephone lines were cut. This was done with the help of short-wave radio transmissions (amateur radio, also called ham radio, was used in emergency situations and not for commercial broadcasting).
[130] Agamben, G. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [1995] (1998).

the reader to pause for reflection. Interestingly, according to OED (1014), some writers have erroneously associated the term ‘caesura’ with ‘cease’ (in a sense ‘to put a stop to the action’ and ‘cease fire’), most likely because of *caes*-, stem of *caedere*, which means ‘to cut’. Implicitly, the numerous caesurae throughout *The Bosnia Elegies* can also be associated with the mute plea to cease fire, as in a command to cease shooting and fighting; an invitation for armistice, an act that would lead to silence.

Oktenberg’s poetic persona further informs us about the number of victims or refugees as she describes what happened in a besieged city (TBE pp. 32–33), an open-air market (p. 24), a room (p. 30), or in Srebrenica (pages 12, 15, 16, 17). When the focus is on ‘when, where, and what’, we get the feeling of listening to a radio report (which would correspond with what Krysl calls a journalistic style). However, it would be a grave simplification to say that this characterizes the whole book; the intimate, imagistic, and the reflective prevail.

Oxford English Dictionary tells us that a report is “a spoken or written description of an event or situation, especially one intended for publication or broadcasting in the media”, and a document is “a piece of written, printed or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record”. If we take a closer look at these definitions, we can see that although both terms are concerned with information, there is a clear distinction regarding their respective function and modes of delivery. Oktenberg’s work has a close relation to news and reportage, even while (as indicated above) she writes that her book is a work of art, not reportage. However, she does not write that her poems are not documents.

The range of what can be considered a “document” is rather large. Library and information scientist Michael Buckland explains that not all documents are textual, but most commonly, documents are of interest because of text inscribed in them, and document theory is very much concerned with “the material, historical, and cultural contexts of texts” (Buckland 2018). Suzanne Briet, a French documentalist known as “Madame Documentation”, has defined the concept of document as “any concrete or symbolic indication, preserved or recorded, for reconstructing or for proving a phenomenon, whether physical or mental” (Briet 1951: 7; 2006: 9–10, quoted in Buckland 2018: 426). She has also equated document with “organized physical evidence”, and other documentalists have discussed if works of sculpture and museum objects could also be considered documents (Buckland 1997). In library and information science and

documentation science, a document is defined as a fundamental, abstract idea; the word denotes everything that may be represented or memorialized to serve as evidence.[131] Such a broad definition justifies approaching a collection of poetry as a primary document, an object of study, and physical evidence being used by those who study it – for instance, literary scholars, who then may write a secondary document about it.

Oktenberg's volume is a poetic document of a specific time and place. It serves as a record of a poetic process and transformations that work beyond the simple media report-into-poem transfer. *The Bosnia Elegies* is also a document about developing different viewpoints into poetic voices, or a document of what emerged as a reaction to atrocities seen from afar and of positioning oneself in historically challenging times. It is clear that these poems have a documentary and an enlightening value.

The poet warns us that these pieces of information should not be taken for granted; that this *is* poetry and it should not be read as a factual document on what really happened: "Although it refers to actual persons, places and events, descriptions of these have sometimes been combined or altered in other ways. Statements herein, therefore, are not necessarily to be taken as literally true" (Oktenberg, TBE 2). Despite the fact that a reader may learn a great deal from the poems, their nature is not didactic and the collection is not to be approached as a short introduction to the history and political trauma of the Balkan area during the beginning of the nineties. On the other hand, this is not to say that the poems do not have a certain epistemological quality – they give insight into a microcosm of personal loss, and provide an opportunity to empathize with the victims.

For Marita Sturken, "technologies of memory" include the "objects, images, and representations" that not only house memory but also produce it and give it meaning (1997: 9). Elaborating on Sturken's term in her article "Poetry as monument: Jenny Holzer and the memorial poems of 9/11", Moberley Luger argues for poetry's "memorial function" (2015: 183) and suggests that poetry, "as a genre, can be understood as a technology of memory" (183).[132] Oktenberg's poems should be read and interpreted as instances of such a technology of

[131] See Michael Buckland's article "Document Theory" (2018), DOI:10.5771/0943-7444-2018-5-425.

[132] Luger discusses an installation by the conceptual artist Jenny Holzer in which 36 hours of poetry scroll across a large LED screen; she also interprets three poems written on the first anniversary of 9/11 that were excluded from Holzer's installation (183).

memory. It should be pointed out that poetry of trauma written as response to media reports from a distant land can be seen as an example of poetry that houses memory. In addition, let us keep in mind that Oktenberg titled her book *The Bosnia Elegies*, and elegy is, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, essentially tied to memorialization and mourning, processing or working through desperation, the grief of loss, and lack of agency, all while producing and giving meaning to the events that elegiac poems evoke. Although TBE would classify, in Jahan Ramazani's terms, as a collection of elegiac war poems, in a mode of melancholic mourning (1994: xi), and although they contain several conventionally elegiac elements, the sense of urgency in Oktenberg's poems distinguishes them both from conventional elegy and from being solely melancholic. Decisive for this distinction is the presence and role of media for her poetry. There is no time to reflect, mourn, or be pensive under circumstances where one is constantly bombarded with reports about new atrocities – and paradoxically, while they capture and "house" this urgency, *The Bosnia Elegies* become a technology of memory, a document that the readers can reflect upon at a later time. They can be seen as an instrument for the future working-through of grief.

Oktenberg's poetry seldom appears to be written with the aim of providing comfort for the reader. On the contrary, reading the poems in TBE is rather disturbing. As her poetry recalls images and stories that most people want to forget, it participates in documenting and making memories. It aims to disquiet and disharmonize, even "moralize" (Krysl) or, as Ruth Stone indicates, "Oktenberg breaks through the media numbness".[133] This is where the poet's disclaimer becomes important: between reportage and art, within a "wide range of subject matter" (Krysl 1998: 178) – from ethnic cleansing to losing a lover – Oktenberg creates a sentiment of familiarity and closeness to life, while her poems become a site of tension between the personal and the political. Arguably, granting that Oktenberg's book should not be considered as "history or reportage", but rather as a book of art, should not prevent us from acknowledging that it has a documentary value and a memorial function. As Luger writes, "[u]nderstanding poetry as a technology of memory means understanding poems as culturally and politically charged texts that mediate memory not only privately for individuals but also publicly for nations and groups" (2015:184). The primary

[133] See the back cover of *The Bosnia Elegies*.

audience of Oktenberg's *The Bosnia Elegies* is positioned outside the place of atrocity (in this context, outside Bosnia), and the reader's role is one of witness, a *listener* in Caruthian terms. Relevant here is Carolyn Forché's general observation that the poetry of witness "is a call to the *other* (perhaps in both senses, as the other within the poet, and the other whom the text addresses)" (2014: 19).

Although helpless observers, several of Oktenberg's poetic subjects witness that "the messages come in and disappear" (60), they ask questions that nobody is able to answer,[134] they describe the images that the audience have seen but could not explain or put into words, and assure the audience that those who live on will not forget (TBE 58). As Eavan Boland writes, the poems "[...] accept the danger and pain of witness. They seek no peace. And tightly, they allow the reader no peace".[135] The discussion and analysis in the following section will address this seeming contradiction between the objective, composed tone characteristic of witnessing on the one hand, and the disturbing content, or the events and images that we as readers are invited to bear witness to, on the other.

3.3 Capturing the Wound of Time: Gazing at Caesura

The focus of the following analysis will be how the poem "In the morning" (p. 17) becomes a medium of memory and a literary witness as a result of an ekphrastic encounter. Although Oktenberg's poem and the image of the hanging woman are central elements for this analysis, the poem as an object of memory demands an awareness of the process of remediation and of a relationship that it develops not only with the photograph in question, but also with a network consisting of other media. The Bosnian war provides the primary, and the book TBE as a whole the secondary frame that needs to be taken into consideration. While investigating the particularities of photographic ekphrasis, or the relation between 'poem as object–image as object', as my starting point I take Heffernan's argument that "ekphrasis differs from both iconicity and pictorialism because it explicitly represents representation itself" (Heffernan 4). Perhaps more importantly for this specific case, I will be guided by Stephen Cheeke's claim

[134] Some examples of such questions are: "Why is she still alive?" (*The Bosnia Elegies*, p. 15); "What is the fate of the others?" (p. 16); "Where are all these children?" (p. 18); "Who dares to speak of beauty in this war?" (p. 29); "Why do we always say 'this war'?" (p. 38); "What can anyone do?" (p. 55); "Who can count the stoppable horrors?" (p. 60).
[135] See the back cover of *The Bosnia Elegies*.

that "[t]he poem *knows* something or *tells* something that had been held back by the silent image" (Cheeke 6). In this sense, while the poem tells us something about the photograph as an object, it reaches beyond what is exposed to the gaze and creates a specific context for understanding the image, as it at the same time evolves into secondary witnessing. In addition, I will show that a poem in its entirety can be seen as an example of time-contextual ekphrasis, and I will point to an instance of notional ekphrasis in its second part.

It is important to note that a prominent (visual and stylistic) feature of all but one poem in the volume is the presence of caesura.[136] Some of the poems can be brought in relation with each other, creating a sequential narrative, but this is not a consistent rule throughout the book. Such is the relation between the poems on pages 12, 15, 16 and 17 – these poems I call "the Srebrenica cycle": "They took the men of military age" (12), "In the refugee camp" (15), "The thousands who disappeared" (16) and "In the morning" (17).[137] All these poems evoke the genocide. Then there are three poems that thematize "messages" (pages 14, 25, 60). Another example of a narrative link between poems is also "Our room" (30) and "One afternoon" (34); and "I sometimes take out your passport to stare at your picture" (48) together with "It's very much like him" (49). The poem on page 30 is a memory of, we will find out on page 34, a surviving first-person narrator, a female lover. It is also a prelude to a detailed verbal depiction of the second Markale massacre, where the other lover lost his life (page 34).[138] The narrator in the poem "Our room" describes a memory of a destroyed room where the two lovers used to meet; one afternoon they separated only briefly and "forever came so swiftly I –" (1997: 30). As the last line of this poem shows, it ends with a dash (–). The massacre is then described in the poem "One afternoon"; after the narrator has found her lover's name posted on a list of those who died in the crowd, she returns back to their room: "So after a while I went back to our room || not knowing what else to do / where else to go" (1997: 34). In the poems on pages 48 and 49, the female persona remembers her lover and refers to "the afternoon" (49).

[136] The poem that provides an exception – which is on p. 25 of TBE – features the greatest absence ("the message became a ghost message"), and it is the only poem in the book that has no caesura in medial position.
[137] Since the poems have no titles, I refer to them according to their first lines.
[138] The second Markale massacre occurred on 28 August 1995, about 18 months after the first Markale market shelling.

I will now turn to the analysis of the poem “In the morning” (17), the last of four poems that evoke the fall of Srebrenica. Because of the poem’s form, structure, and the role played by caesura, I consider it necessary to present the reader with the whole text before starting the close reading:

In the morning
after the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa
they found the body of the young woman
in the refugee camp hanging from a tree
It was high summer It seemed she had turned to leaves overnight
and how lightly she flew She was weightless now
She had become a spoil of war
They said she was raped at Srebrenica
raped by the Serbs at Srebrenica
on a floodlit bed Her rapes filmed
shown on television in Banja Luka
the voice-over said she was Serb
They said she felt herself spoiled by war
She had gone mad they said
They carried her body through the camp on a stretcher
Everyone saw
Everyone saw

In seventeen lines, Oktenberg creates a poem that could be discussed as both a dramatic poem in at least three scenes, and as a narrative about the image of the hanged woman. The poem stages several events that took place in the past, and the speaker – or the narrator – tells the story retrospectively. The body of a young woman was found hanging from a tree in a refugee camp in the morning after the fall of United Nation’s Safe Areas of Srebrenica and Žepa. It was high summer and the woman looked as if she “had turned to leaves overnight”. The narrator then reflects upon the woman’s seeming lightness and how weightless she is “now”, when she is not alive anymore. She had become a spoil of war and a mysterious “they” said she was raped at Srebrenica by the Serbs. She was raped on a floodlit bed; the rapes were filmed and shown on television in Banja Luka; the voice-over said she was Serb. They said she had gone mad. She was carried through the camp on a stretcher and “[e]veryone saw”.

In other words, the narrator introduces a time: after the fall of Srebrenica, 1995, high summer; a place: a refugee camp; an action and a protagonist: a young woman hanging from a tree. Readers are presented with a possible motive for suicide: because the woman was raped and disgraced by antagonists ("raped by the Serbs at Srebrenica"). From this, we can derive the central motifs of the poem: the genocide in Srebrenica, suicide by hanging, rape, and the way in which the events are framed as a spectacle in the second part of the poem – the act of seeing, and the visual effect of the procession. Here the gaze is directed at a multitude of the poem's objects: at the woman's filmed rape ("Her rapes filmed / shown on television"), at her body "on a stretcher", as well as implicitly at the poem itself ("Everyone saw / Everyone saw"). But is the poem reflecting upon the woman who hanged herself and the tragedy of Srebrenica – or about the photograph of a woman? Or both?

"In the morning" could be seen as an example of photographic ekphrasis – at least in the first seven lines – in which Oktenberg responds to the image of the hanged woman from Srebrenica, which I introduced earlier in this chapter. But as Hans Lund argues, "[t]he ekphrastic genre is [...] not restricted to verbal representations of isolated images only; ekphrastic texts may also imply meetings or relations between two or more images" (174). If we take into consideration that the image of the hanged woman from Srebrenica did not reach western audiences in isolation but was both followed and preceded by numerous other reports and images from the Bosnian war, then Oktenberg's text tells the readers something about a relation between this particular photograph and other striking images from that time. Oktenberg creates a narrative around and about the photograph of the dead woman, placing it into a context of war rape and media reports.[139]

Lund also suggests that "[i]n the ekphrastic world, visual images can be related to each other in quite different ways, both between and within separate texts" (174). The "described or alluded picture" (Lund 176) of a body "hanging from a tree" (TBE 17, second half-line in l. 4) in Oktenberg's poem can be associated with other iconic images of hanging, for instance Goya's "Disasters of War", Plate 36 (1810), and Lawrence Beitler's photograph "Strange Fruit"

[139] In a sense, Oktenberg is both placing the narrative *within*, and extracting the narrative *from* the frame.

(1930).[140] On the one hand, although the victim figures are different, the hanging from a tree is what they have in common. On the other hand, the context of war, the hanged female body in Srebrenica, the act of seeing, the interplay with as well as the explicit reference to media, can be found in other texts. In another poem, "Reassurance", an Irish poet and critic, Bernard O'Donoghue, juxtaposes the image of the young woman from Srebrenica with the image of the burned soldier on the road to Basra from the first Iraq war:

We can have little prospect of salvation:
We who have turned on the sports news,
Leaving the hanged girl from Srebrenica
On the front page, just as before we watched
Without a protest while the skeleton-soldier
Burned by the steering-wheel on the road to Basra

(O'Donoghue, 7–12).

Notwithstanding the differences between the poems, there are similarities between Oktenberg's "young woman" and O'Donoghue's "hanged girl"; "Everyone saw" (Oktenberg) and "we watched" (O'Donoghue).

Oktenberg's poem is not divided into stanzas and there is no distinct metrical scheme – it is written in free verse – but there is an inner structure that is parallel to the poem's ekphrastic images. The poem can be read as having three parts: the seventeen lines are thematically divided into the opening seven lines, the following seven lines of the mid-section, and the closing three lines. Tone shifts occur in the transition between the different parts. There are three distinct lyrical and ekphrastic images that correspond to this inner structure of the poem: a woman hanging from a tree (first seven lines); rape on a floodlit bed (middle seven lines); and a body carried through the camp while everyone is watching (the last three lines). In addition, there are three subtle, subordinate images: the detail of green leaves, like a close-up; indistinct noise/blur on a television screen when rapes were "shown on television", and the faces of the poem's "everyone" in the crowd. "In the morning", "high summer", the tree, leaves, the weightlessness and lightness – all of these could be seen as pastoral elements that create a sense of quietude at the beginning of the poem. The first part of the

[140] Billie Holliday's song bearing the same title, recorded in 1939, was listed as one of top 20 political songs in 2010 (see Smith, Ian in the *New Statesman*).

poem portrays the serenity of nature as a safe haven, a place in where the woman 'ascends' and finds peace.

Although it belongs to what I call 'the Srebrenica cycle' in the first part of the book and the reader should be prepared to encounter a painful representation of events in connection with Srebrenica, the poem is short and comes as a shock within the confines of the volume as a whole. As noted earlier, there is an inherent contradiction common to both the image of the woman and to the poem about the image: horror coexists with an aesthetic, uplifting, and lyrical quality. An unbelievable softness merging with an unbelievable brutality creates a shocking effect. An incredible lightness of death with its invisible weights sends the poem into an abyss from which it speaks about suffocation. We can imagine that this abyss is the blank space of caesura. On a semantic level, suffocation means that something has happened and it is impossible to speak about it. One can suffocate because of shock, surprise, lack of air, or even from an excess of words. Either way, the silence after the shock creates the ambience of isolation, timelessness, and being cut off from a continuum – all of which are characteristic of traumatic events. Blanchot writes that "silence carries us into the proximity of the distant" (1992: 76). Silence creates a space in which the different witnesses meet. How can the poem's narrator, or the reader, testify to this silence?

The hierarchy of the events told in the poem is established by the prominence of the respective ekphrastic images, and not by the chronology of the events. By this, I mean that the first and the most dominant ekphrastic image is the one of the woman hanging, and that this image governs the telling; it requires that the story is told in retrospect, to be 'rewound' (or vicariously, for the reader or viewer to be re-wounded) from this point. The discovery of a woman hanging from a tree is the poem's main event, which opens the composition into the abyss created by silence and leaves the reader in suspense after the first four lines:

> In the morning
> after the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa
> they found the body of the young woman
> in the refugee camp hanging from a tree

These opening four lines create an image of a young woman hanging from a tree in a refugee camp, in the early morning after the fall of Srebrenica. The reader must know what "the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa" implies, as this informs the

further reading and movement through the poem's landscape. Srebrenica has become a synonym for genocide, tragedy, helplessness, mass graves, and exhumation. The solemnity of the word "fall" sets the tone in the second line of the poem and this is already in collision with the lightness that we trust the morning to bring with it in the opening line. Morning should come as a new beginning, a new start, but this is not the case with the first morning after the catastrophe. As Wilfred Owen writes in one of his war poems, "Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh".[141] Like Owen's First World War "dawn", Oktenberg's "morning" in a similar way opens into the wound of the very first morning after an act of ethnic cleansing. The new beginning is false and painful; the new day means facing the nothingness of one's own existence, meeting an absolute end: "morning" becomes mourning. This is the "fall" that takes the reader down in several ways. It implies the fall of towns that have been under siege and on the verge of destruction, where the UN failed to protect the victims and safe areas, but also refers to the fall of a young woman from life.[142] She has fallen from the living while hanging from a tree; tied, but in some way still resisting the final fall. If we tune into the silence of the poem's mo(u)rning, we will not feel its calm, but the hurting silence of a mute "body". The words are clothed in heaviness: the long open vowel of a monosyllabic "fall" in the second line has the same quality as the first syllable of "morning" in the first line – the "fall" drags down the "morning" together with it, and the "body" from the third line joins them, as if the energy of the entire poem is being sent downwards, into the ground, because of the weight of the hanging body.

In Caruth's discussion of "The Falling Body and the Impact of Reference" she points out that Paul de Man's story of a fall is "not just a figurative fall but also of a very literal falling" (1996: 74). Ironically, the noose around the woman's neck – the tool for hanging herself that contributed to her fall from life – is the same instrument preventing her from falling in literal terms; with the help of that which killed her, she is resisting the force of gravity. In fact, she is not only resisting this force – she is conquering the gravity of trauma. By doing so, the falling is "turned into rising" (Caruth 82), and the "hanging from a tree" (l. 4) is turned into an ascension, "up into the silence the green / silence" (Cummings 1991: 529).

[141] From the poem "Mental cases", 1994: 56. The poem was drafted in May 1918.
[142] The "fall" here could also be discussed in theological terms.

The narrator is observant towards the situation as a whole, and also empathetic towards the woman, careful to portray her in a respectful manner, as can be seen in lines five and six. These two lines are in tension with the rest of the poem because of the positive associations that the words “summer”, “leaves”, “lightly”, “flew”, and “weightless” usually evoke. Isolated, these lines would be strikingly mild and paint a pleasant, somewhat sad motif of a person in the woods, perhaps not all carefree and light, but still conveying an airy and soft mood, as if finding a refuge from the summer heat, trying to rest in the shade of green leaves. But the second half of line four – “hanging from a tree” – spills into lines five and six, and we are not able to shake off the uncanny impression that this is death itself, a corpse embedded in the warm and light summer green:

It was high summer It seemed she had turned to leaves overnight
and how lightly she flew She was weightless now

Here the tone is melancholy, juxtaposing summer and morning in their supposed lightness with the weight of the hanging body. The narrator turns away from the nauseating truth and draws the reader’s attention from the death to the green, playful leaves. We are briefly fascinated by seeming and appearance, seeing the aesthetically pleasing composition: mentally, in the image of an ‘ascending’ body; and formally, on the page, as lines five and six are both broken by a caesura. The presence of caesura here contributes to the feeling of airiness and lightness, as if the gentle wind caresses the body, goes through the leaves, and also through the poem’s lines. “How *lightly* she flew” and “she was *weightless* now” (emphases added) in fact mean exactly the opposite: the woman did not fly at all and she was not weightless; the corpse is heavy and limp. Her body is on display, like an object, but she is not suffering any longer – it is the readers and spectators who will soon suffer from the spectacle of this image as it carves itself into the mind’s eye.

When we read that there was a young woman hanging from a tree after the safe areas were overrun, we may wonder: Why? What happened? Was she hanged by others or did she do it herself? Subsequently, the narrator tells us about the events that preceded the hanging. It may seem as if the poetic voice has sensed the need to make things appear better than they actually are in lines five and six, and we will soon see why in the lines to come. The reader is almost lured into the green with the woman, to see the death close-up, elevated only to tumble

down in disbelief. The narrator confuses the reader with this ironic remark in line seven:

She had become a spoil of war

How is a dead woman "a spoil of war"? And for whom? As a fixed expression, "the spoils of war" means "any profit extracted as the result of winning a war or other military activity".[143] In times of war, the death of an enemy implies a gain for the other side, so the woman's death could be interpreted as a profit for the same perpetrator who caused the fall of Srebrenica. This is another important turn or point of sinking downwards in the poem. The line functions as a transition between the poem's first and the second parts. It strikes the reader as a warning, a preparation for the shattering line eight, which both closes the first part and opens up the second part at the same time:

They said she was raped at Srebrenica

Contrary to the positioning of the narrator in the first part of the poem (lines 1–4 observant, solemn; lines 5–6 present, respectful; line 7 ironic), the tone changes again with line 8. To say that this line provides tentative closure means that it could have easily been the poem's last line, its end: the circle of events is closed, we have found out what has happened to the woman. From this point on, the events are narrated in retrospect. Rape is a taboo-inducing event, which, in the poem, could function as providing a motive for the young woman's suicide by hanging – the readers do not *need* to know more. On the other hand, it opens the poem into the wound of its second part by providing an account of the rape.

The narrator's voice does not become less engaged, but it takes a step into a speculative kind of retrospection where the reader learns about the woman's rape only through a murmur, a rumor, of what "they" said. This distancing makes it unreliable, but it does not take away from the emotional charge of the poem. On the contrary – it creates repulsion, disgust, and it challenges us ethically by opening up the possibility for judgment. It takes a stand and points a finger towards a specific perpetrator, reiterating that the woman was raped but this time it says by whom: "raped by the Serbs at Srebrenica" (l. 9).

[143] See "spoil" and "the spoils of war" in OED.

As we learn in line 8 that the woman was raped, the ambiguity (and irony) of her becoming 'a spoil of war' increases: did she first become a spoil of war, and then was raped as such; did rape make (or *mark*) her as a spoil of war, or did she become a gain for the enemy as a dead body – as every dead Muslim in an act of ethnic cleansing might be considered a trophy for the ultranationalist Serbs? By committing suicide, it may seem for a moment that the woman managed to escape being marked as a spoil – through an act of rape as a weapon of war. But then, in death, as she reclaims control over her body, she unwillingly re-establishes the position of a 'spoil of war' as she becomes a figure in a body count. Either way she remains a spoil, and the rape of a civilian points to the enemy's moral fall in the poem.

With lines eight and nine, we enter the second and core part of the poem. These lines have introduced the rape of a woman as a new event – not chronologically new, because it preceded her hanging. The rape is the second main event within the poem (in the first reading, from beginning to end). As it creates a new motif, line 10 brings us more details about the rape:

on a floodlit bed Her rapes filmed

The second lyrical image is the rape on a floodlit bed. I would suggest here that the first part of line ten, together with the caesura, could be thought of as a 'plexus' of the poem: a complex, flashing, and radiating center, with a visual hole of the blank space in the middle of the page. Since 'plexus' is defined as a 'network' or 'system',[144] I suggest that all the caesurae in the poem lead to its plexus, that they are all connected to their center in a systemic way – and the result is a gaping hole.[145] This blankness of the caesura comes after we read that a powerful light was cast upon the bed where the woman was raped. The news about the shocking event is delivered in a dry tone. An expectation is created that we will soon learn more about the woman's fate at the same time as we feel a paradox in the juxtaposing of rape with floodlight. The shock caused by an intense visual stimulation could arguably have two distinct qualities: the light could be *blinding*, but it could also be *illuminating*, both metaphorically and literally. If the light is too sharp, it overwhelms the eyes and we must close them – we will not be able to see clearly, if anything at all. However, the function of

[144] See "plexus" in OED.
[145] See Derrida in "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing" on Celan's *Aschenglorie* (2005: 70).

the floodlight is to provide illumination, to cast light,[146] to help us see better – but in the poem, the light is the tool of the perpetrators. In the poem we expect the rape "on a floodlit bed" to be shown to the readers, but it is the blankness in the following caesura that shows what there is to be seen. There is *nothing* to be seen; this white, open, empty space connotes something invisible, absent, gone, lost, or dead. At the same time, the light increases humiliation, makes the rape in the poem more visible, and more wounding as an act of violence itself.

The only person who can give an account of rape is the person who has been raped, i.e., the victim. An account of such an event would look different from a perpetrator's or an observer's perspective. Here we have the case of a woman who has committed suicide after she was raped, which means that we will never learn what she went through – her story and her testimony have disappeared together with her, fallen into silence. In the poem, the reader is told about the event only through a third person plural, gossip-like voice. Nobody has seen the rape – or any of the rapes, as the noun is in plural form in line ten ("Her rapes filmed"). If we exclude the rapist(s) and the film footage made by the perpetrator(s), other witnesses who would speak in favor of the raped and hanged victim do not exist. In the world of the poem, the only evidence of the event has been made through the eye of the camera. The narrator repeats the words "they said" multiple times: it is only speculated in the poem that this recording exists. The material image of rape is absent, unavailable.[147] Rape is not part of everyday discourse. The details of the gruesome and systematic rapes during the war are exceedingly difficult to digest and great care should be taken in addressing them.[148]

The image of rapes on a floodlit bed exists only in the context and the world of the poem. Since they were "filmed", as "they said", the reader should be

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[146] Derrida, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing": "Light is also knowing, truth, meaning"; "The brightness [of glory] is not only the light of knowing [connaissance], and not necessarily the clarity of knowledge [savoir]" (2005: 69).

[147] "Has Anyone Ever Seen a Photograph of a Rape?" is the title of Chapter 5 in Ariella Azoullay's book*, The Civil Contract of Photography*. In this chapter the author refers to rape camps in Bosnia and asks: "How could it be possible that the rape camps in Bosnia, which everyone knows about, have left us no images, not even such as might have been taken from afar or after the fact?" (2008: 253).

[148] See for instance, Inger Skjelsbæk's book *The Political Psychology of War Rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2013), and some of the cases that were reported about in the media, from 1993: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/bosnia-war-crimes-the-rapes-went-on-day-and-night-robert-fisk-in-mostar-gathers-detailed-evidence-of-1471656.html; and from 2017: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/bosnia-war-rape-survivors-speak-serbian-soldiers-balkans-women-justice-suffering-a7846546.html.

assured that the rapes have, indeed, occurred: there is proof in the form of a recording. Despite numerous written reports and reportage about rape camps during the Bosnian war, the poem does not evoke or refer to an existing visual image of war rape. Due to this, I suggest that the description of rape in this poem can be seen as an example of notional ekphrasis. The reason why the ekphrastic image in the second part of the poem (ll. 8–12) should be identified as notional is that the referent object of this verbal depiction is supposedly television footage, which, again, as the poem's narrator tells us, was shown in Banja Luka; but this material is to be found only *in the text*. The perpetrators (in what functions as a voice-over) confirm that the visual image of multiple rapes exists by using it to say that *they* are the actual victims. In order to increase the trustworthiness of an otherwise speculative narrator's voice in this part of the poem, Oktenberg frames the description as a reference to an existing moving image. That the event reported about in the poem was on television should be interpreted as proof that it happened – and this supposed proof was then manipulated. Credibility is also achieved by *not* describing the details of rape: although someone has seen it, what they have seen is unclear, and the narrator only reports what "they said". Both the gazer (who saw) and the object or image (the rape footage) remain unspecified.

To say that the rapes were filmed "on a floodlit bed" turns into an ironic representation of rape used as a weapon of war. The topic of rape is usually avoided as it is an unspeakable taboo – it is painful, forbidden, hidden from the public eye – but in the poem it was "filmed", supposedly exposed, even floodlit. In terms of visibility and clarity, "floodlit" is the opposite of obscure, but the obscurity of rape overshadows the floodlight – which, perhaps, was used to blind and not to illuminate in the first place. The floodlight in the poem does not expose the crime or reveal anything about the woman's rape. Used by the perpetrators, it only enhances the dark veil and obscurity that surround an act of sexual violence. Let us now look at lines 10, 11, and 12 together:

on a floodlit bed Her rapes filmed
shown on television in Banja Luka
the voice-over said she was Serb

One of the conventions of a nonpastoral elegy is the presence of emblems of sexual power.[149] In this poem such emblems only belong to the rapist, which is highly ironic in an elegiac poem for the victim. Unlike what the reader may expect from an elegy, the poem offers no consolation. The shocking tone of line 10 changes into a sensationalistic tone in line 11. "Sensationalism", especially in journalism, means "presenting stories in a way that is intended to provoke public interest or excitement, at the expense of accuracy" (OED). These lines create an effect of media sensation: the woman was not only raped (l. 8 and 9), but her multiple rapes were filmed (second half-line l. 10) on a floodlit bed (first half l. 10) and then even shown on television (l. 11). Disbelief and a new wave of shock flushes over the reader in line 12: the perpetrator, by the means of the voice-over, suggested to the audience on their national television in Banja Luka, a Serb-governed town, that the raped woman was "Serb". The perpetrators victimize themselves in a simple action of turning around the roles, where the young Muslim woman is abused for the second time: first she was raped, and then shown on television, stripped of both her dignity and her identity. It is difficult to imagine that anyone (a foreign journalist, for instance) but the rapists themselves could create the footage. Here the poem points to how media can be used as means of manipulation and spreading propaganda during war. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag writes:

> To the militant, identity is everything. And all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions. During the fighting between Serbs and Croats at the beginning of the recent Balkan wars, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of a village were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings. Alter the caption, and the children's deaths could be used and reused (2003: 9).

When we read the first twelve lines of the poem it becomes clear that the narrator portrays Serbs as perpetrators and a young, Muslim woman as a victim. The action of raping, filming, and disseminating the material further with the intention of spreading false news could be interpreted if not as a thought-through strategy, then as a cruel form of entertainment – but either way as an act committed with the intention to harm the enemy by using rape as a weapon of

[149] Preminger and Brogan, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, "elegy", p. 322.

war.[150] There were actual instances of filming and then distributing the footage of committed crimes. In *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*, Susie Linfield writes: "The Scorpions, a notorious Serb paramilitary group, filmed themselves as they executed unarmed Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica; the resulting tape was bought by a journalist in an ordinary video store in Sid" (52).[151]

This is also the part of the poem where the use of caesura is visually most prominent. In the first part of the poem, caesura is present in lines 4–7 in a medial position, having a different quality and function there compared to the caesurae of the poem's second part, where caesurae occur also both in initial (lines 11 and 12), and medial (line 11) positions. The caesura slows down the rhythm and contributes to the solemn tone of the first part, but in the second part, paired with the inventory-like reporting about rape, accompanied by a faster pace, it feels as if the half-lines fall, hit, and caesura becomes the place of detonation just as much as a place of catching one's breath when recovering from the shock of the each respective half-line's meaning. We may also use the break for breathing in before having to confront the following, equally unpleasant piece of information. This creates a fearful tone, an expectation of the unpleasant, paralyzing the reader in place – as the woman was immobilized on the "floodlit bed" when raped, the readers become immovable, or immobilized, from learning about the shameful details of the injustice done to the woman.

Oktenberg wants the reader to be aware of caesura's function: its duration – which creates the rhythm (often *staccato*); and its demand for space in form of blanks and holes, which create the visual effect. Carolyn Forché notes that writing and language in the aftermath of extremely painful experiences continue "to bear wounds, *legible in the line breaks*, in constellations of imagery, in ruptures of utterance, in *silences* and fissures of written speech" (2014: 19, emphasis added). We can observe this in Oktenberg's poetry; she preserves wounds in the line breaks and silences of caesura, contributing to the reader's impression of that the narrative is fragmented or broken.

After learning about the woman's rape, trauma, and disgrace, the reader dismisses the possibility that someone else hanged her. The woman had several

[150] In war, women are no longer seen as civilians, but as a means to hurt the enemy, they become "instrumentalized" (see Inger Skjelsbæk's "The political psychology of war rape").
[151] The edited version of the video is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk5xOM7ECwI

motives for suicide, and she chose to end her own life by hanging. However, in lines 13 and 14 the narrator tells us about what preceded such a decision, what supposedly happened *ante mortem* – after the rapes but before the hanging, or – what "they said" about the situation. In fact, the readers are not told about a specific action or event; it is rather suggested to them how the woman 'appeared' to be. Line 13 could suggest that the woman was in a special state, in limbo, which resembles an acute stress response.[152] Let us have a closer look at lines 13 and 14:

They said she felt herself spoiled by war
She had gone mad they said

In line 8, which opens the second part of the poem, "they said" that the woman had become "a spoil of war", and in line 13, towards the end of this second speculative part, "they said" that she felt herself "spoiled by war". We encounter the word "spoil" (usually a plural noun; "spoils") in different forms that have different meanings. The first time, in line 7, it is part of a fixed expression, which could mean, as discussed earlier, that the woman was a trophy after a plunder. But the second time, in line 13, Oktenberg plays upon that expression. Here it is referred to how the woman "felt" after surviving a trauma: "spoiled" as in ruined, diminished, or destroyed; in some contexts, also disfeatured or disfigured. If we choose to read this in conjunction with the claim that "[s]he had gone mad" in the following line, her state of being "spoiled" could be interpreted as a consequence of rape, which has not only spoiled the woman sexually, but has also disturbed her sanity. When a living being is "a spoil of war", it becomes spoiled by war. Although the phrase occurs only twice and in different forms, "spoil of" / "spoiled by" war sounds like a refrain, together with "they said". The repetition of both of these phrases, at the beginning and end of the poem's second part, frames the traumatic core of the poem.

It is not clear from the poem who "they" are, how "they" could have any insight into what the woman "felt" while she was still alive, or what it was that made them "say" that the woman had gone mad. "They" are anonymous.

[152] Acute reactions to stress can involve predominant disturbance of consciousness, emotions, or psychomotor disturbance. The terminology for describing sympotms of traumatic stress in ICD and DSM is somewhat different; ICD-10 has more variety in the diagnoses for traumatic reactions, "with the inclusion of enduring personality changes after catastrophic experience" (Brett 2007:119).

Everything that "they said" was said postmortem, as a kind of justification, or a possible explanation of why the woman chose to end her life. Lines 13 and 14 bring forth yet another fall, which manifests itself in the dialogue between the two lines, between "she felt ... spoiled" and "she had gone mad". Contrary to the previous "falls" in the poem – the fall of Srebrenica, and the fall of woman out of life, both of which refer to a completed action – the emphasis here is rather on the process of falling. The woman's literal fall out of sanity was not instantaneous: it began when she was raped, continued as she suffered the consequences of the trauma, feeling "spoiled", and was prolonged while she was hanging from the tree. In fact, the fall becomes more complex (more metaphorical) and inevitable towards the end of the poem.

If "a spoil of war" at the end of line 7 functions as a transition between the first and the second part of the poem, then "spoiled by war" at the end of line 13 announces the transition between the poem's second and third part. The tone from line 8 to 14 is both dry and speculative, as well as transfixing; the combination of alliteration, consonance, and repetition of whole words, not only sounds, contribute to the effect ("said", "she", "Srebrenica", "Serbs", "rapes", "shown", "television", "voice-over", "Serb", "spoiled", "said", "stretcher"; "flodlit-filmed-felt"; "become-bed-Banja"). With line 14, where "they said" that "she had gone mad", we leave behind the list of atrocities together with the soundscape of the mid-section, and enter the quietude of the poem's last three lines:

> They carried her body through the camp on a stretcher
> Everyone saw
> Everyone saw

These last three lines address the position of witness, observer, or bystander. As in several other poems in *The Bosnia Elegies*, the poem's last section can be seen as an invitation to bear witness by reading the poem. At the end of these poems, the narrator usually poses a rhetorical question ("She wonders why she is here / Why is she still alive?", p. 15; "Who will help her? Who knows?", p. 20) or says something about the gaze. The focus is on seeing and/or saying: "He knows he is free / his eye is on the sparrow / and I know he is watching me" (p. 37); "Let them keep silent / They have nothing to say" (p. 29); "He said nothing" (p. 27);

etc. But what else could it be that "[e]veryone saw"? What did we as readers see? What did the various "they"'s of the poem see?

Here the tone changes, and great silence encompasses the end of the poem. Line 15, together with lines 16 and 17, creates the poem's last image of a body on a stretcher that the mysterious "they" carried though the camp. The line "everyone saw", which the narrator repeats twice without any punctuation, suggests that the event was observed without any other reaction, as if those who saw it became paralyzed because of the disturbing sight. "Everyone saw" in penultimate line could refer to two different kinds of observers inherent to the poem: to other refugees in the camp – children, women, and the elderly, watching how the body of someone who used to be one of them was carried through the camp; and to those who saw the woman's disgrace. However, it is highly likely that this performative act of carrying a dead body through a refugee camp on a stretcher had a much wider audience than those present in the camp. The narrator points to that possibility by reiterating what was recounted in line 16, as if insisting, in line 17, that absolutely *everyone* saw. The tone could also be that of guilt and shame, implying that everyone saw, but did not or could not do anything.

When we include the photographic image taken by Darko Bandić in our analysis, we will see that the lines "[e]veryone saw" also point outside of the poem: to all those who saw the photographic image of a hanged woman, who saw the news about the fall of Srebrenica, to witnesses who saw the rapes, executions, and refugees. "Everyone saw" the rapes in the poem, which were filmed and "shown on television". "Everyone saw" Oktenberg's poem as an object, as well as the images that the poem creates within itself. Those who survived, saw, and they have an imperative to tell; in another poem, Oktenberg writes: "The survivors will remember the victims, the places, the names of the towns / || and tell their children || 'Never forget!'" (TBE, p. 58). Everyone saw that everyone saw – which creates a dense silence at the end of the poem.

The reason for this silence at the end of the poem might be because there is very much 'seeing' and very little 'doing' involved here: the only action taking place is observing, and nothing else. Oktenberg includes *everyone*. This creates an accusatory tone and raises several ethical questions about the role of images in bearing witness, as well as about the difference between a bystander and agent. *Who* saw? *Who* was there? In her intelligent critique of media in the volume, Oktenberg implicitly points to a fact that this is a global media image, created for

an international audience, intended to be disseminated, meaning that she and *we all* are part of audience. Could *we* have done something instead of only watching? Have we *done something* by having seen this image or by having read an ekphrastic poem about it? And is this what it means to bear witness by distance?

Continuing the analysis, "Everyone saw" in lines 16 and 17 arguably has different nuances of meaning. Although the exact same words are written (or uttered), the two lines are non-identical, and the distinction between them becomes clear when they are repeated – especially when they are read aloud. In the voicing of the poem, repetition is never going to be identical. Emphasis can be put on the different elements, which changes the meaning of what is said. Let us consider this example (the stressed word is in bold type):

Everyone **saw**
Everyone saw

or

Everyone saw
Everyone **saw**

When "saw" is emphasized, the importance is given to the act of seeing an object; it is more important that something or someone was seen and exposed, than who saw it. When "[e]veryone" is emphasized, it is more important who has seen the object. Another possibility is to emphasize both words (**Everyone saw** / **Everyone saw**), in which case the lines could signify urgency, anger, pain, a pleading tone, shock, helplessness, or disbelief. If both words of both lines are voiced in a flat, colorless and mechanical, almost absent way (Everyone saw / Everyone saw), it could suggest lethargy and indifference, but also underline pain, sadness, or hopelessness.

The act of seeing in the last two lines is linked with the object of the public gaze in line 15: "They carried her body through the camp on a stretcher". It is worth noting that a *woman's* body is on display in a public procession; she is in the spotlight. During the times of the Roman Empire, women did not have an active role in triumphal processions; it was more common that they were found

in the role of captive or living spoil.[153] As Mary Beard writes, "the triumph [...] re-presented and re-enacted victory" (32). On the other hand, the procession we find as a part of conventions specific to elegies is of a different kind: it is a procession of mourners, as in a funeral procession.[154] Oktenberg's poem establishes an interesting intersection between the triumphal and the elegiac procession. This is, perhaps, most clearly expressed in line 15 ("They carried her body through the camp on a stretcher"), in what at first appears to be a mourning procession for the hanged woman.

Cleopatra's death has been extensively depicted and interpreted in literature and visual arts over the centuries. She committed suicide so that she would not become a part of Octavian's triumphal procession. The woman from Srebrenica was (in Oktenberg's interpretation of her story) raped as a spoil of war, and she hanged herself once she came out of danger. Readers can only speculate whether she took her life due to survivor's guilt (see the poem on p. 15 of TBE; "she saw bodies / hanging from trees", ll. 11–12), or as a response to an overwhelmingly traumatic experience. "She had gone mad they said", as the narrator tells us. Or was the hanging, perhaps, this woman's way of forever taking with her the story of what had been done to her and the shame of that experience? It remains open to interpretation why she took her own life after surviving the fall of Srebrenica, the multiple rapes ("She was raped many times", l. 8, p. 15), and witnessing other family members being killed ("Her brother's throat was slit before her / Her sister in law was raped an killed before her / [...] Her husband is gone" (ll. 6–9, p. 15).[155] The irony is that, although dead, like Cleopatra who killed herself in order to avoid a triumph, the woman from Srebrenica ended up being a part of a procession anyway: "They carried her body through the camp on a stretcher / Everyone saw" (ll. 15–16). Since the woman was in the camp among other refugees, humanitarian workers, and journalists, this means that, conditionally speaking, there were no enemies in her vicinity, at least not those who raped and killed, so this should have been a procession of mourners. But her body was publicly displayed for everyone to see – the

[153] For instance, this was the case with queens and other members of royal families: Arsinoe, Cleopatra's sister, was led in Caesar's triumph; Zenobia, queen of Palmira was led in Aurelian's triumph (See Beard, *The Roman Triumph*).
[154] *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 322.
[155] The journalist Lorna Martin interviewed Ferida Osmanovic's children a decade after their father was killed and the image of their dead mother was shown around the world: "Truth behind the picture that shocked the world", https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/17/warcrimes.lornamartin.

mourning procession turns into a silent triumph of the enemy, achieved by the helping eye of media.

However, this is not the only irony linked to the ambiguity of procession and the woman's body being exposed to the gaze. Before the woman's suicide and this final procession (which cannot really be called an act of mourning, as has been demonstrated), the perpetrators filmed the rapes of the Muslim woman, which, as the poem tells us, were then shown on Serb television in Banja Luka. This can be seen as a triumphal procession of our times, a public display of power: By the means of modern technology, the enemy put their spoils of war on display for the opposing forces (and everyone else watching, locally or internationally) to see, while at the same time spreading propaganda and humiliating the victim by claiming that she was Serb. Although out of the enemies' reach, in the refugee camp, the perpetrator has once again achieved the desired effect of displaying their spoils of war in a triumphal procession thanks to the double role of modern technology. By witnessing and showing the crimes to the world, the gaze of the camera eye has been focused on the body of the woman as an object, which at the same time is a spoil of war – and the media have helped in its display.

Having completed a line-by-line reading of the entire poem, I will now turn once more to the caesura to demonstrate how its relation with the poem's soundscape brings greater vividness and clarity to the ekphrastic images. The rich signification of the caesura was discussed earlier in the chapter: via cognates such as "cut" and "break", we can also interpret it as a blank, silent space, but this space may have performative value. As suggested previously, the caesura performs the silence while being in a dialogue with the verbal structure of the poem, and it does so in several different ways: we can see it in the poem (the physical space of the caesura); we can hear it when voicing the poem (breaks or pauses); and we can see-hear it (in a kind of synesthetic reading). We may notice that the space of the caesura is not merely technical and metric, or visual; it is not hollow either. Its performative quality is representational and symbolic; the caesura also encapsulates the silence.

When reading the poem, we notice an aural, cacophonic contrast to the silence. This *cacophony*, "the use of harsh-sounding words; the quality or fact of being dissonant", occurs as a result of "a high frequency of 's' and 'sh' sounds" (Preminger and Brogan 158). Note that the sharp 's' sound actualizes itself in the environment and context of the poem, and thereby acquires negative

connotations – this does not mean that the sound of all sibilants creates an unpleasant ambience by default.

The frequency of *sigmatism* – repetitive use of the letter 's' (Preminger and Brogan 158) – is at its lowest in the first four lines, where we have the uncanny peace of the morning – there is one solemn 's' in "**S**rebrenica" (also 'c' in Srebrenica, c = ts). It builds up and it is most prominent in the second part, concentrated around the woman's rapes (**s**ummer, weightle**ss**, **s**poil, **S**rebreni**c**a, **S**erb**s**, rape**s**, **sh**own, voi**c**e-over, **sh**e wa**s** **S**erb, **s**aid **sh**e felt her**s**elf **s**poiled); and it fades out in the last part with 's' in the words "**s**tretcher" and "**s**aw" [...] "**s**aw". The deliberate use of 's' alliteration creates an onomatopoeic expression of a dry and unpleasant tone in the poem. Let us look one more time at the second part of the poem (lines 8–14), with special attention to caesura and the sibilants:

> They **s**aid **sh**e wa**s** raped at **S**rebreni**c**a
> raped by the **S**erb**s** at **S**rebreni**c**a
> on a floodlit bed Her rape**s** filmed
> **sh**own on televi**s**ion in Banja Luka
> the voi**c**e-over **s**aid **sh**e wa**s** **S**erb
> They **s**aid **sh**e felt her**s**elf **s**poiled by war
> **Sh**e had gone mad they **s**aid

The repetition brings forth an effect of dissonance, which may represent the friction and shock caused by rape, and the blankness of caesura represents the dissociation into which the woman loses herself: "She had gone mad they said" (l. 14).[156] In a mimetic way, metaphorical "cuts" or "wounds" in the poetic line allude to the infliction of wounds on the woman. If we envision the rape of the woman on a floodlit bed within the poem, we may ask ourselves: what does the woman do when she is raped? What *can* she do? As a reflex, and to protect herself, she can only turn her head away from the floodlight – and she turns her head right into the silence of a caesura: "on a floodlit bed [ ] Her rapes filmed" (l. 10). This caesura is a metaphorical shelter or a safe haven for the raped woman, but it could also be an abyss into which she falls. In my view, due to the cacophonic build-up, and *enargeic* quality of this ekphrastic image (rape

[156] Dissociation is a term taken from Pierre Janet, and it describes the separation of normally related mental processes. It is most often triggered by a traumatic event, leading to the production of various symptoms (Bond and Craps 2020: 144).

on a floodlit bed), this is the caesura with the most performative potential in the entire poem. In relation to this, note that the previously discussed word *enargeia* derives from Greek *argès*, shining light, which means clearness, distinctness or vividness. Caroline van Eck writes that "in the Iliad and Odyssey the word is used to describe *the blinding light* in which the gods appear to mortals, [...] by extension it came to mean putting something before the audience's eyes by "*highlighting* it" (2015: 31, emphasis added). Also relevant here is how the audiences are forced to see the rapes on a "*floodlit* bed"; the epithet *floodlit* appears right before this caesura, making the audiences *gaze* at the caesura, at the same time as they are seeing the ekphrastic image. In a sense, the reader has to be blinded by *enargeia* in order to witness with the mind's eye.

Several poems in *The Bosnia Elegies* stand in a kind of dialogue or relation of correspondence, either as sequels or linked by a place, an event, or a person whom the poems are about. Only two pages earlier in *The Bosnia Elegies* one finds another poem, "In the refugee camp" (p. 15), which seems to be connected with "In the morning" (p. 17). The former provides a further opportunity to gain some insight into the hanged woman's misfortunes, which could, in addition to her own rape, provide the motive or reason for her suicide.

The four lines of the first stanza of "In the refugee camp" (p. 15) introduce a place, a protagonist, and the event: a woman in the refugee camp who writes a diary in a small notebook. The entire poem is written in the third person; the woman is referred to as "she" and we never see her words as she has written them. The reader is instead told about her entries, the shocking, haunting, 'flickering images', which are listed line by line in the second stanza:

> Her brother's throat was slit before her
> Her sister-in-law was raped and killed before her
> She was raped many times
> Her husband is gone
> bussed away with the others
> On the way out of the village, she saw bodies
> hanging from trees

The poem ends with two lines, each of them a reported question: "She wonders why she is here / Why is she still alive?" It is as if the poem documents the event of a narrator in the position of *testis* interacting with the woman: 'somebody' saw

her, talked to her, she showed her writing to that witness. Several motifs are common to these two poems: the place is a refugee camp, there is a female protagonist, multiple rapes, and hanging from tree(s). The word "saw" is present in both poems, paired with an act of witnessing the violent end of life. Looking into the face of death could be an additional linking motive.

It is of course open to speculation, but after reading these two poems together one cannot escape the thought that the woman who wrote in the diary and the woman who hanged herself could be the same woman, and that the entries in the diary (that we do not see but are 'reported' in the poem) could explain why the woman took her own life. By creating a backstory, Oktenberg gives the hanging woman a life beyond the photograph and beyond display. If we choose to link the two poems, we will notice a shift in the protagonist's position. The woman who "saw bodies / hanging from trees" (15) becomes a body "hanging from a tree" (17). There is a shift of both the object and the gazer between these two poems: the woman was "a subject who feels [s]he is becoming an object" for a very short time, while gazing at death of others, only to become a specter, or as Roland Barthes terms it in *Camera Lucida*, "Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person" (2000: 14).

Conclusion

Oktenberg's poems are written for a western audience. "In the morning" contributes to our understanding of the Bosnian war, rape as a weapon of war, and the photograph that became an icon of betrayal of Srebrenica. By the means of ekphrasis the poem also acts as an invitation to reflect upon the role of literature as a cultural medium in the processes of bearing witness and remembering. As an object of memory, the poem verbally captures the injury of a specific time and a specific place; it lends a narrative form to words that are assembled in such a manner that they have an impact on the mind's eye of the reader, which is at the heart of ekphrasis.

This chapter has demonstrated how *The Bosnia Elegies* created new media and memory during and in the aftermath of traumatic events. I have discussed the encounter between words, images, and blank spaces, and explored how a photographic image triggered a creative response that resulted in the writing of a poem; how verse tells a story about an object while remediating a time- and placebound context, and how witnessing has become a part of these processes.

Oktenberg's poem "In the morning" accommodates an image, challenges the conventions of elegy, and makes the frames of ekphrasis more prominent by the employment of her signature caesura and spare, narrative style. The poem does not belong exclusively to only one genre; it combines conventions of elegy with pastoral elements. As the ethnic identity of the raped woman is the premise for the narrative, it could further be considered a poem with political overtones in terms of problematizing identity and ethnicity, war rape, and addressing propaganda: if the woman were not Muslim, she would not have been raped, and consequently, she would not have taken her own life. The poem is victim-focused; although present, the perpetrator does not have a central role.

The poem has been approached and analysed as a narrative poem in order to address in parallel its various traumatic aspects and its beauty of poetic vision. This focus on the story – the narrative, as well as on the poem's aesthetic form – has opened up for a greater understanding of the image of the hanged woman. The analysis has been conducted with the expectation of learning something about what the 'silent' image has to say and to explore the ekphrastic encounter between the photograph and the poem. If, however, the poem were approached as a dramatic one, the analysis could instead have focused around ekphrastic images as flashbacks, which could have been experienced in a vicariously traumatic manner. The blank spaces of caesurae alternate with the images of a woman hanging, of her rape, and of a procession, as in a flickering sequence. As Sontag wrote, and as is now widely known from detailed descriptions of flashbacks as one of the major symptoms of PTSD, such images *haunt* us (Sontag 2003:80, Luckhurst 2008:147).

But again: *who* saw the woman, the image of the woman, the procession, the poem, the suffering of people in a distant land? The question of what has been achieved through this poem in terms of witnessing remains unanswered and open for interpretation. Understanding Oktenberg's poem is dependent upon our ability to see the wound created by trauma, and this wound, captured and preserved in poetry, is more recognizable than in other genres. Sometimes, the wound is so obvious that it might even be overlooked. As loud as the words of the poem may speak, what seems to be louder than them is the silence – the silence of (and within) caesura, the silence of the wound, and the silence of the witness. Paradoxically, it is ekphrasis (whether photographic, elegiac, notional, or contextual) that creates space for this silence to surface and become exposed. It is also because of ekphrasis that the borders of the wound become clearer,

which allows us to both contain it and to hear what the silence may communicate. The silence is not the same as absence; it should rather be considered as a constitutive part of witnessing, and therefore, of remembering.

The poem reflects upon the role of media images of war and their impact on public discourse – but firstly, it reflects upon the genocide in a so-called safe area and the iconic photograph of the hanged woman. It is not an elegy only for this victim, but also for Srebrenica. In the frame of cultural remembrance and cultural trauma, the woman in the poem, while initially being an unidentified individual, also represents an entire collective: all the raped women and the dead of the Bosnian war. By casting a critical eye on the abuse of the victim by the perpetrators and their use of pictures of the victim in propaganda, "In the morning" raises ethical questions about the role of images in bearing witness. Oktenberg is sensitive and intelligently nuances her critique of media, but one can still ask: Does she in some sense become a part of media machine? The poem emphasizes the fact that mass media, in particular visual images, reportage, and reports, can also be part of violence despite serving as evidence, providing a source of information and acting in service of memory. Ironically, while bearing witness to a distant conflict, media can play a part in spreading trauma, depending on who is utilizing them. Media may also contribute to vicarious traumatization. Yet, this poem as medium can be seen as an ekphrastic accomplishment. The poem preserves the image from oblivion, recalling it, rather than just describing it. As a poetic document, it establishes a link between ekphrasis and ethics, and contributes to commemoration.

4 Testimonies in the Gutter: Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*

> "It's very unusual for this kind of art, this comic art, to become testamentary."
> – Michael Silverblatt about *Maus* in a 1992 interview with Art Spiegelman[157]

From the space of caesura in Chapter 3, we move into the space of *the gutter* in this chapter. As has been shown, the caesura in Oktenberg's poem has a performative value. The function and the significance of caesura in her poem "In the morning" exceeds the meaning of a break between the words within the metrical foot or a pause in the middle of a line. The caesura also performs aesthetically, visually; it becomes a metaphorical safe haven or an exit for the raped woman, but also a hole into which she falls or the ether into which she ascends. If the caesura can develop a performative role, the same may be said of the gutter, "a space between the panels" in comics (McCloud 1993: 66).

Comics without the gutter is virtually unimaginable.[158] By definition, the gutter, like the caesura, should be empty (it translates as *blanc* in French[159]) and one does not expect to see or find anything in its space. Beside its special use in the terminology of comics, the gutter is used to refer to "a poor or squalid existence or environment". It is also used in the sense of "a channel at the side of a street for carrying off water; drain" (OED). Comics have been considered the equivalent of the gutter of literature.[160] However, this idea is challenged when reading comics that have war trauma as their main theme. Arguably, elusiveness and invisibility are common for what is happening in the space of the gutter and in the aftermath of a traumatic experience. This chapter will study how non-fiction comics describes, depicts, and captures the process of dealing with the traumatic past. Accordingly, it will explore the link between testimony, ekphrasis, and the gutter in Joe Sacco's documentary graphic novel about the war in Bosnia. Following up on one of the subordinate research questions of this thesis, this chapter will investigate the relationship between the intrusive image and the ekphrastic image. This question will be addressed in a way that casts

[157] Michael Silverblatt, "The Cultural Relief of Art Spiegelman", Tampa Review 5 (Fall 1992): 36.
[158] The term "comics" refers to the comics medium, and here takes the singular verb.
[159] Hillary Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*, 2016: 35.
[160] Here I refer to "comics" in the plural sense; comic strips in general; therefore the verb is in plural, not in singular.

light on the overarching research question: What can verbal representations of images of war in literary texts teach us about witnessing by distance?

Joe Sacco is a Maltese-American cartoonist and journalist. A pioneer of comics journalism, Sacco is one of the most respected comic book artists in the world. His book-length comics are also called documentary graphic novels. His trademarks are war stories and giving voice to the civilian population, as seen in comics about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (*Palestine*, 1996; *Footnotes in Gaza*, 2009), and about the Bosnian war (*Safe Area Goražde*, 2000; *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo*, 2003). As in the previous chapters, the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s is important for understanding the "significance and impact of the context on the text" (Felman and Laub 1992: xv). However, as Felman and Laub write in the foreword to *Testimony*, the context should not just be known – it should be read "in conjunction with, and as part of, the reading of the text" (xv). Sacco's award-winning non-fiction comic *Safe Area Goražde* provides a historical context for the war in Bosnia and tells a story about a UN-designated safe area in eastern Bosnia, the town of Goražde, where the mainly Muslim population was besieged by Serb nationalist forces – *četniks*.[161]

The question of the relationship between comics and the documentary nature of this particular text could be discussed with regards to different approaches to testimony across disciplines, such as history, psychology, art, literature, and various media. What does it mean to bear witness in the medium of comics? When the text is read in conjunction with the context, as Felman and Laub suggest, this complex graphic narrative opens up space for theoretical, ethical, and aesthetic reflection. The graphic narrative has its own grammar, its language consisting of a "hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially" (Chute 2008: 452). How does the context impact the text and its form, and how does the text inscribe the context into its body?

Comics has special means to mobilize the audience and to visualize testimony. I will argue that this is done by processing and preserving the

[161] Bos. *četnik*, Eng. *chetnik*, pronounced /'ʧɛtnɪk/– singular for a Serb ultranationalist. The term originated during the Second World War, designating military forces who allied with the Germans and fought against the partisans and communists. Their leader, Draža Mihajlović, was executed for treason and war crimes in 1946. When the ultranationalist and paramilitary movements resurfaced at the beginning of the 1990s, they identified themselves with the chetniks. Ed Vulliamy finds the term useful to describe "those who subscribe to an ideology, and avoid apportioning blame to all ethnic Serbs – as per 'Nazi' as opposed to 'German'" (Vulliamy 2013: xviii).

testimonies of the Bosnian war survivors and using them to create a narrative in comics form. This chapter considers the use of oral testimonies; their integration and visual-verbal representation in *Safe Area Goražde*. I propose that Joe Sacco's graphic narrative about the Bosnian war bears witness in a way that is unique to the comics medium, and that survivors' testimonies have a central role in his work. If we accept the assumption that mental images of war are created in the minds of survivors, then the question is: what is the process of transposing (or translating?) these images into images on the page? I will come back to this process of 'translation' of images later in the chapter. For Mitchell, the term "'imagetext' designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text", and "'image-text', with a hyphen, designates relations of the visual and verbal" (1994: 89). Since the preservation of testimonies in *Safe Area Goražde* makes use of images, imagetext and image-text – each with their own different origin, quality, processing, understanding, and drawing – as well as their description, the question of an underlying ekphrastic process poses itself.

The concept and mode of ekphrasis has not traditionally been applied to graphic novels. Bearing this in mind: can we talk about ekphrasis in a visual-verbal narrative? Is there anything ekphrastic in what we read or see in *Safe Area Goražde*, or is it an example of a straightforward adaptation? In his text "Ekphrasis and Adaptation", Claus Clüver argues that

> the term adaptation seems best used to cover the process (and its results) of adjusting a specific source text to the requirements and possibilities of another medium in such a way that parts of it are retained and incorporated in the resultant new text (2017: 464).

Clüver tries to make a distinction between adaptation and ekphrasis as "different forms of intermedial transposition involving words" (2017: 463). I will argue that it is more appropriate to discuss the presence of ekphrasis, as complex a phenomenon as it is, in Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, than describing the work as an instance of adaptation. I suggest this because of the presence of a mental, traumatic image and discourse on which the verbal text in the graphic novel is based.

In this chapter I will explore the concepts of notional and reverse ekphrasis and their link with traumatic images within a documentary graphic novel: how ekphrasis actualizes itself, the presence and the complex process of

ekphrasis within the documentary graphic novel, and how it is used to represent the unspeakable. In addition, the testimonies in *Safe Area Goražde* can be linked to the existing "genre of testimony".[162] As Robert Eaglestone writes, "it may be that this genre is the forerunner for a way of understanding a whole range of 'traumatic' literature" (2002: 7).[163] In my analysis I suggest that testimony can be seen as a narrative process linked to ekphrasis – namely, that preservation of testimony in the form of *visual-verbal witnessing*[164] depends on, and unfolds through, an ekphrastic process. In *Disaster Drawn*, Hilary Chute explores how war generates *new forms* of visual-verbal witness (2015: 5, emphasis added). The coinage "visual-verbal" acknowledges that the comics as medium consists of both visual and verbal parts: of drawings on the one hand, and of textual component on the other hand, a combination which creates a unique form of bearing witness. Sacco's text operates as documentary (presenting evidence) and addresses history, witnessing, and testimony.

Finally, comics cannot be separated from the gutter. In the chapters with first-person testimonies, Sacco chooses black, instead of traditional *blanc* gutters. I will explore the link between the black fill of the gutter and the first-person testimony, and consequently the link between this kind of gutter and ekphrasis. By uniting threads of the gutter, testimony, and ekphrasis, this chapter argues that witnessing occurs also in the black space of the gutter.

4.1 Understanding Comics Journalism

Safe Area Goražde is a documentary graphic novel about life in a small, besieged town in eastern Bosnia during the 1992–1996 war. It is a novel about loss, betrayal, hope, humanity, and brutality. Thematically, it covers a wide range of war trauma and how the people of Goražde coped with it. The author, who creates a literary version of himself as a narrator, confronts the readers with

[162] As the Holocaust survivor and novelist Elie Wiesel has stated: "If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the Epistle, the renaissance the Sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony". Quoted from Bond and Craps, *Trauma* (2020: 67).
[163] See "Identification and the Genre of Testimony", in *Immigrants and Minorities*, 21:1–2, 117–140.
[164] See Chute's *Disaster Drawn*, 2016: 2, 4, 5, 7. The works that Chute discusses (by Spiegelman, Sacco, Nakazawa) are rooted in traumatic history and all propose the value of "inventive textual practice" to be able to express trauma ethically – by "inventive textual practice" she refers to the space of the comics page in its entirety – that is, its capacity to work in both words and images; hence the term "visual-verbal witness".

aesthetic representations of space limitation, food deprivation, individual and collective loss, death, rape, lack, and displacement. An important feature of these themes is their repetitiveness throughout the novel – each and every person in Goražde has an individual story to tell, while at the same time they all share an experience of fear, close contact with death, and absence of closure.

Goražde was in a special situation during the conflict years: like other towns in the region, it was under siege – yet different from, for instance, the capital in not being an inferno of media interest. Sarajevo was at an advantage compared to any other area or region in Bosnia regarding media coverage, while Goražde was a somewhat forgotten or neglected issue during negotiations, and at one point was almost sacrificed in exchange for one municipality in Sarajevo. This is also one of the reasons why Sacco's story is important and interesting: it digs into an unexplored, frightening place – the inaccessible, uncelebrated microcosm of Goražde, and provides insight into a zone generally ignored by the media.

Often compared to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Sacco's documentary comics challenges the reader by depicting the chaos of deep wounds, brutal killings, and psychological turmoil, skillfully employing both image and text. The dialogue between them opens for provocative – or rather, for the reader, discomforting – visual and verbal representations of human suffering. Apart from the obvious catastrophe of war and the political conflict in which the story is embedded, Sacco is interested in how the inhabitants of Goražde have survived; as he writes in text boxes across the two-page splash panel at the beginning of the novel: "[...] you are still here... not raped and scattered... not entangled in the limbs of thousands of others at the bottom of the pit. [...] Goražde had lived, and – how?" (SAG 2007: 14–15).[165]

He arrived in Bosnia for the first time in September 1995 and traveled between Sarajevo and the Goražde enclave four times with UN convoys before concluding his trip in February 1996. In practical terms, this means he carried out research in Bosnia for the last five months of the conflict. After that he returned to the Balkans on three more occasions. During his work in Goražde, Sacco lived together with a local family. As part of his creative and journalistic process, he conducted interviews,[166] observed the environment – which included reading

[165] I will be using abbreviation SAG and *Safe Area Goražde* interchangeably.
[166] See, for instance, Amy Kiste Nyberg's article "Comics Journalism: Drawing on Words to Picture the Past in *Safe Area Goražde*". In *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and*

cultural signals, body language, and architecture – and then analysed this material. He also took photographs for reference and kept a daily journal. Apart from officially conducted interviews, Sacco talked with the inhabitants, many of whom were refugees from Foča, Višegrad, and Srebrenica, who had recently lost their homes and family members. As he reports in his reflections on the trip in the preface to a special edition of *Safe Area Goražde* from 2011, all of the people he encountered had tragic stories (SAG 2011: xv). He became quite close friends with several of them, delivering packages of food and clothing items, as well as bringing letters between Sarajevo and Goražde for family members who had not seen each other in over three years. He also brought necessary medicine. As a foreign journalist he had a press pass, and he could go in and out of besieged zones with UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) in armored vehicles, or on humanitarian aid convoys. In the chapter "Blue Road",[167] named after the only accessible road connecting Goražde to Sarajevo, controlled by three different army forces (the peacekeepers, the Serb nationalists, and the Bosnian army) he writes: "They *had* to love me in Goražde. They *had* to want me. I *was* movement" (SAG, 2000: 65). The contrast between movement and the restriction of movement will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Without Edin, one of the main characters in the graphic novel, this story would have been impossible to tell, since Edin also served as Sacco's translator and guide, and it was through his story that Sacco was able to gather, reconstruct, and represent the main stages of war in Bosnia and Goražde. Apart from Edin and his family, Sacco's story includes Riki, a soldier and former student who always starts singing whenever a situation becomes uncomfortable; there are silly girls, drunken men, children, nurses and doctors, a librarian, Nermin, Suada, Emira, Kimeta, Sabina – all of them Bosnian Muslims by name, their stories told in detail – and also one Serb who chose to stay in the city, who said he "didn't want to behave like a nationalist" (SAG 2000: 155). All these characters are portrayed with great care and respect. Through Sacco, who as a mediator tries to let the reader relate to his characters through him, we gain insight into traumatic images that real people had individually experienced. The Drina river, red with

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Methods. Edited by Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan. New York: Routledge, 2011. pp. 116–129. By asking detailed questions and sometimes guiding the interviewees to tell the story as precisely as possible and not to digress or tell "what they want", Sacco shows the readers what living under such circumstances really implies. He demystifies war and draws the story as told by common people.

[167] The Blue Road is so named because the UN soldiers wore blue helmets.

blood, where beheaded bodies had floated, and the city with its ravaged architecture and debris, speak with their silence: they tell a mute story that Sacco heard and depicted in great detail.

Approximately at the same time as Sacco was in Goražde, Caruth's edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* was published. In the introduction to the latter, Caruth states that "trauma [...] challenges us to a new kind of listening" (1995: 10). This points towards exactly what Sacco does out in the field – he listens carefully, extracting and drawing violent images based on personal testimonies he has collected from the witnesses in Goražde. Testimony is of utmost significance to the study of trauma: it is a verbal negotiation between the past and the present, as well as part of a reconciliation process for the victims, survivors, and witnesses, both within themselves and with society. There is no testimony without a listener. The testimonies form a core – a basis – for Sacco's work in SAG. As they conceptually bind the graphic novel together, the preservation of testimonies is the essence of *Safe Area Goražde*.

Since bearing witness in visual-verbal form in *Safe Area Goražde* is highly dependent on listening to and processing the oral testimonies, let us consider the different roles that Sacco performs. One should acknowledge the difference between listening and drawing in terms of emotional engagement. According to Sacco, "journalism is a cold profession", and there is a collision between journalism's convention of third-person voice on the one hand and first-person storytelling on the other. As Lan Dong notes, "Sacco plays multiple roles simultaneously in *Safe Area Goražde*: author, artist, narrator, and journalist".[168] Throughout the process Sacco has to make representational choices while performing these different roles of author, graphic artist, first-person narrator, and journalist or reporter.

Narratology can help clarify Sacco's literary role in relation to the world to which he gives his readers access. To Gérard Genette, the terms "first-person or third-person narrative" seem inadequate. He claims that "[t]he novelist's choice, unlike the narrator's is not between two grammatical forms, but between two narrative postures" (1980: 244). Instead, Genette proposes to distinguish between two types of narrative: *heterodiegetic*, where the narrator is absent from, or positioned outside the story he tells, and *homodiegetic*, if the narrator is also present as a character in the story he tells (1980: 245). While Sacco's character is

[168] Dong, Lan. "Inside and Outside the Frame: Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*" in *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World*. Edited by Daniel Worden, 2015: 41.

a homodiegetic narrator for the most part throughout the novel, Genette's further differentiation of two varieties within this homodiegetic type is relevant for the discussion of the shifts between the different roles that Sacco plays, and especially in the chapters in which his character is the invisible listener, or the receiver of testimonies. One of the varieties of the homodiegetic type is "one where the narrator is the hero of his narrative", and another one is "where he plays only a secondary role, which almost always turns out to be a role as observer and witness" (1980: 245). In this sense, the position of Sacco as narrator in the novel changes a number of times in terms of distance to and presence in the story.

The position and role of a narrator can be related to the ethical issues raised by literature. There are several ethical minefields regarding the use of oral testimonies that are transformed into a literary text.[169] Both in ethical and aesthetic terms, consideration has to be taken concerning the responsibility and position of the author and his representatives in a narrative. One of the issues concerns how literature makes use of oral testimonies, while another concerns the issue of the author presenting a persona of himself as a trustworthy narrator. Some questions and problems that the author encounters – to name but two – are: Which of the terrorizing images and narratives should be presented to the reader? And: How can the reader be confronted without being numbed or vicariously traumatized? Memories and the representation of mental images of another person become additionally loaded when discussed in the context of a political conflict. On the one hand an author may, when making choices about what to show to the reader, become an "authoritative" interpreter. On the other hand, the journalist in the author (if there is one) is concerned with facts, while the artist is concerned with their representation. While focusing on the representation of testimonies, these different roles can inform and challenge each other. One could pose a question whether the author is participating in the re-creation of trauma, or whether these representations would be as accurate and as worthy if Sacco had not traveled and been close to the conflict, the area, and the mentality of people.

Before exploring the link between the gutter and testimonies, it is necessary to briefly reflect upon the structure of *Safe Area Goražde*. Arguably, the structure of Sacco's work communicates something about the traumatic

[169] See Davis, Colin. "Trauma and Ethics: Telling the Other's Story." Modlinger, Martin, and Sonntag, Philipp, eds. *Cultural History and Literary Imagination, Volume 18: Other People's Pain: Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics*. Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2011. Web.

content. Hillary Chute claims that "comics has peculiar connection to expressing trauma" (2016: 33). The form and the medium of the graphic novel do indeed seem to be especially well-suited to addressing traumatic material. Upon entering the space of *Safe Area Goražde* as a literary, as well as a journalistic and documentary achievement, readers become immersed in the details of drawing and telling, and quite quickly risk becoming saturated by the reading experience. The first and most obvious reason for this overwhelming impression is the novel's main theme, the war trauma. The second is the extremely detailed and precise style of drawing, which slows down the reading while demanding more or less simultaneous attention to all aspects of the text, verbal and visual (in the semiotic meaning of reading and interpreting the text). The third reason for feeling overwhelmed is the structure of *Safe Area Goražde*: I would suggest that the structure is 'regularly irregular'.

The structure, on the one hand, may seem rather scattered and chaotic (or simply put, random), and on the other, it is marked by a certain precision. My intention is not to discuss this peculiarity as a binary opposition of chaos vs. order, but rather to explore whether such a seeming clash can tell us something about the challenge of addressing the unspeakable and writing about trauma. Is the underlying trauma reflected in the structure and form? There are fragmentary and retrospective episodes – bits and pieces from the challenging everyday life of Goražd ans intertwine with horrifying war stories. The chapters vary greatly in length (ranging from two to twenty-six pages), which, accompanied with sudden cuts or open frames, gives a staccato quality to the text. However, there is also a certain (suggestive) pattern: the chapters with white and black gutters alternate irregularly. Only eight of thirty-three chapters have completely black gutters, a feature that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The scatteredness of the structure may reflect the chaos of war and PTSD symptoms. The split into so many distinct chapters, each of them with numerous panels of different sizes, with or without frames, mimics the experience of traumatic interruption and puts pressure on the reader. Each new frame is like a small eruption of information, and there is a difference if a page features only two frames (SAG 94), or if it bombards the reader with as many as sixteen frames (SAG 114). In addition, the black gutters at times create the sense of drowning in the space between the panels.

To objectively represent testimonies demands great diligence. Sacco's investment in detail and precision, both in drawing and telling, could be read as

expressing a sense of claustrophobia and imposed lack of space. He shows the readers that this is what living under the siege, in a state of physical and psychological confinement, feels like. The immersion in detail that slows down the narrated time, as well as the pace of reading, indicates the seemingly calm latency period, with its uncanny silence and tension. The precision of the visual representation acts together with the terror (see for example the silent panel on page 80, or eight panels on page 200). This aesthetic experience evokes the sublime; the readers are exposed to an inherent contradiction between pain and awe, characteristic for Sacco's style when drawing overwhelming situations. Whether the comic frame tightens, or the black gutter spills over the frames, the result is the same: the reader is confronted with the inconceivability and the infinity of pain.

Carolyn Forché writes that "the narrative of trauma is itself traumatized and bears witness to extremity" (Forché 1993: 42). While Sacco captures the rupture of the Bosnian war narrative, he also seeks to establish order by offering a detailed representation. By doing this Sacco bears a visual-verbal witness – he "bears witness to extremity". The scatteredness of the structure and the detail of drawing seem to be the two sides of the same coin of this traumatic narrative. In fusion, the aforementioned aspects of Sacco's text – trauma, detail, and structure – produce a highly writerly text.[170] They function in a push-and-pull manner by which readers progress through the graphic novel: We want to proceed with the reading, find out what happened, and thereby exit from the tension of the traumatic situation – be it from the dark, from the battlefield, from starvation, or from boredom ('push') – but we are also immobilized or slowed down and asked to stay, observe, and listen ('pull').

Reading and deciphering a documentary graphic novel demands complex literacy skills; the reader needs time to navigate through this kind of narrative. The following pages will discuss the different registers that can be recognized in

[170] Here I mean "writerly" in Barthes' sense: "The primary evaluation of all texts can come neither from science, for science does not evaluate, not from ideology, for the ideological value of a text (moral, aesthetic, political, alethiological) is a value of representation, not of production (ideology 'reflects', it does not do work). Our evaluation can be linked only to a practice, and this practice is that of writing. On the one hand, there is what it is possible to write, and on the other, what it is no longer possible to write: what is within the practice of the writer and what has left it: which texts would I consent to write (to re-write), to desire, to put forth as a force in this world of mine? What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly*. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (*S/Z*, 1998: 4).

the narrative. Articulating the overall thematic division between registers will also help in making sense of the structure.

Sacco has explained that he deployed two different registers while composing SAG: "There was the historical track that took the reader chronologically through the major incidents of the war. And there was the atmospheric track that was basically my impressions of the people I was meeting, people who had survived something terrible and weren't quite sure that the war was over".[171] In addition to these two "tracks", which Sacco calls historical and atmospheric, I would like to argue for the existence of a third register, which consists solely of testimonies told in the first person. This is a narrative track from which Sacco is absent, or at least more covert in his role as the narrator. On the one hand this register, with its characteristics, protrudes with the demand to be recognized separately, but on the other, testimonies are part of history and in SAG contribute to a better understanding of the war narrative as a whole.

While the events are presented in chronological order in the historical register, from the beginning of war when Edin starts recounting the break-up of Yugoslavia (SAG 2007: 19) until the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (SAG 2007: 212), the atmospheric register places a frame narrative around the historical one: it begins with Sacco arriving (SAG 2007: 1), and ends with his leaving Goražde (SAG 2007: 223). Compared to the objective tone in the historical register, the tone in the atmospheric register is personal. It is not always easy to clearly distinguish between the different representations of Sacco the journalist and reporter, Sacco the narrator, and the author Sacco. An example of the personal tone can be found in the chapter "America Man" (SAG 190–92): after an unpleasant confrontation with F., paired with home-made rakija and dense cigarette smoke, Sacco lets the reader in on his own thoughts and feelings of wanting to escape from Bosnia and "these horrible, disgusting people and their fucking wars and pathetic prospects" (192). Readers also see a panel in which Sacco is resting on a couch in Edin's house, a new, warm home base for his visits contrasting with the "war-zone racket" of a hotel where he used to stay (SAG 33). But even in such a comfortable situation he is working: he has a pen and papers in his lap, and a notebook on a table beside the couch.

Testimonies can have different uses. They can be used for historical (in an archive) or judiciary (before a tribunal) purposes, "governed on the one side by

[171] Sacco in an interview with Gary Groth, "Joe Sacco, Frontline Journalist", in *Safe Area Goražde: The Special Edition*, 2011: 237.

documentary proof and on the other by passing of a judgment" (Ricoeur 2004: 163). As Sacco points out, "all testimony is problematic" and one can be "criticized for using oral testimony".[172] While being part of the historical narrative "track", the testimonies in SAG at the same time stand out from the rest of the documentary graphic novel, as if standing before a metaphorical tribunal of an audience comprised of readers. Witness stories are placed throughout the book, but as pointed out in the introductory part of this chapter, eight such stories differ significantly from the rest. Their most important common feature is that they are depictions of other people's testimonies, often through a reverse ekphrasis where images replace the words. These are complex stories about events that Sacco had not witnessed himself. While Hillary Chute argues that in graphic narrative "historical accuracy is not the opposite of creative invention",[173] Øyvind Vågnes suggests that this is, ethically, "a complicated situation": someone describes the past events to the artist and author; he has to imagine it as he draws it; the readers have to imagine it as they read it.[174] For instance, Sacco neither saw people escaping in panic during the first attack in Goražde (SAG 80), nor witnessed executions of people on the bridge over Drina (SAG 110). Nor did he himself see amputations and medical emergencies in the local hospital that are depicted in his book (SAG 181). His representations are drawn, in these cases, on the basis of survivor and eyewitness accounts. In the words of Amy Kiste Nyberg, "[t]he separation of these stories from the others in SAG signifies their difference – Sacco is emphasizing the fact that these stories are his representations of the events described by his interview subjects" (2011: 126). When united, the three tracks – historical, atmospheric and testimonial – give documentary value to Sacco's graphic narrative.

4.2 The Performative Gutter

As defined earlier in this chapter, the gutter is the blank space, a gap, that stands between and separates the panels in comics. It is in this space between the frames that the process of *closure* occurs. This means that the readers fill in the missing pieces of information as they move from panel to panel; for McCloud, closure is "observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (1993: 63). While there is nothing

[172] Sacco in an interview with Øyvind Vågnes, "Inside the story", 2010: 200.
[173] Hillary Chute, "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative", *PMLA*, Vol. 123, No. 2, 2008: 459.
[174] Vågnes in "Inside the story", 2010: 201.

to be seen between two neighbouring panels, it is here that the reader fills in the meaning. McCloud's claim that "comics is closure" (67) gives a lot of responsibility to the reader, and this is quite similar to how Wolfgang Iser explains the process of communication in literature: "Whenever the reader bridges the gaps", and here it can be added, for our purposes, the gap of the gutter, "communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves" (393).[175] Thinking of what is not there, about the unspeakable and about trauma, it can be said that there is an absence inherent to, or inscribed into, the gutter.

According to Hillary Chute, the gutter is "both a space of stillness – a stoppage in the action, a gap – and a space of movement" (2016: 35). In this sense, it may be argued that the gutter has performative value, and that the gutter in the comics can be compared to a caesura in poetry, in both a prosodic and non-prosodic (visual) way. Some also compare comics with music: a musicologist colleague suggested to Chute that "the gutter could be understood as a breath" (35). Thinking about a comparison between poetry and comics, one might observe how the breath as a pause metamorphoses into a breath as creation. Charles Olson writes that "the breath allows all the speech-force of the language back in" (292). In the context and the environment of comics, this could be understood as if one breathes the meaning into the gutter during the pause, or that the breath could be observed as a vehicle, as a means of moving from panel to panel (equivalent to the movement from line to line in a poem). This breathing should be "distinguished from the hearing" (Olson 290); in comics, hearing would represent each new panel filled with new information, while breathing would occur during the process of closure, in the pause, when the reader bridges the gap of the gutter. While being a stoppage in the action, as Chute suggests, it is also a space of movement where a lot happens in a very short period of time – and in a very limited space.

The panels, which are the outer environment of the gutter, are usually the most decisive factor when readers determine the meaning, since the panels provide new information; the gutter between them can function as an ellipsis. As has been pointed out, the gutter has several performative dimensions. Arguably,

[175] Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction between Text and Reader", in *The Book History Reader* (Routledge 2006, pp. 391–396, eds. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery), p. 393. Published in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 106–119.

changing its inner space in any way also changes its performative potential and influences the meaning-making process: that is, changes in the gutter influence how we perceive information in the panels. So, what happens when the space of the gutter is filled with black? If white gutters are the norm, then it may be argued that black-filled gutters are a choice, functioning as a special code that should signal something to a reader. Charles Acheson suggests that "the black background [...] preconditions readers through the Western cultural connotations of black with death, sorrow, and destruction" (2015: 294–5). Instead of creating a series of dichotomies (white vs. black) and claiming that the readers may breathe, move, pause, observe, and create only in the white gutter whereas they become deprived of these possibilities in the black gutter (where the blackness would signify asphyxiation, paralysis, blindness, and destruction), I will argue that the difference concerns affect: the possibilities of movement, observation and meaning-making are the same, while the mood, tone, and value change – influenced by blackness, which usually has negative connotations. This is not to say that the black-filled gutter does not contribute to a feeling of asphyxiation or fear, but that it has greater performative potential than mere color symbolism.

While being a part of the frame narrative, the episodes with black gutters in *Safe Area Goražde* stand out from the rest of the graphic novel for several reasons: they distinguish themselves visually, their focus is on a witness, and the stories are delivered in direct speech. If present at all, the narrator's voice is objective, presenting in the historical register, sometimes posing questions to interviewees. However, the reader never *sees* the representation of Sacco as a journalist and interviewer in these eight (hi)stories; in that sense, the narrator is absent. But his position does not shift absolutely from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic narrator: the reader is aware of his presence as a receiver of testimony. Although invisible, Sacco's character as an interviewer is the one to whom the story is told, and in Genette's terms he is the narrator of homodiegetic type in which he plays the role "as observer and witness" (1980: 245). In other words, his *function*, to borrow another of Genette's terms, shifts from narrative to testimonial, or to the function of *attestation*;[176] he is a *secondary* witness.

Common to the black-guttered chapters is that each of them opens with a portrait-type panel, and that they all focus on the representation of oral testimonies, told in the first person. The drawing of these chapters is based solely

[176] For more on the different functions of the narrator, see Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, 1980: 255–259.

on the testimony and detail provided by the interviewees, who then become autodiegetic narrators – that is, the protagonists of their own stories. The narration is retrospective: the action is situated in the past, and there is no switching between past and present as in other chapters. The interruptions or narrator's reflections characteristic of the atmospheric track do not occur. The tone in these chapters is formal, solemn, and respectful.

In addition, the maps in *Safe Area Goražde* are drawn only in the chapters with black gutters.[177] Maps in SAG have an important role for understanding the context; according to Edward C. Holland, "the insertion of maps into the narrative is a technique that situates the reader in the story and conditions their interpretation of the story".[178] For instance, the chapter "Brotherhood and Unity" (SAG 18–23) explains the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the position of Goražde and the Drina Valley in eastern Bosnia.[179] This knowledge becomes relevant for the understanding of all the ensuing chapters in the novel because of what readers learn about the historical, cultural, and socio-political situation in Bosnia.[180]

Before focusing on one of the black-guttered chapters, I want to emphasize that discussing these chapters is not the same as detaching individual narratives from the overall context of the graphic novel. My specifying that there are eight chapters with black gutters is not meant to imply that there are eight individual testimonies from eight different persons. The number of people who are interviewed varies from chapter to chapter, and some people, like Edin, appear repeatedly in several of them. Some chapters are divided into two parts, comprising two different individual testimonies. This is the case with the chapter

[177] With one exception: in the chapter "Blue Road"; a small map is drawn on p. 57 to show the road that links Bosnian government-controlled territory with the Goražde enclave. This road was entirely in Serb-held territory, cleansed of Muslims.

[178] Chapter 5: "Mapping Bosnia: Cartographic Representation in Joe Sacco's Graphic Narratives", in *The Comics of Joe Sacco. Journalism in a Visual World*, edited by Daniel Worden, p. 88. Holland also argues: "The interpretation of maps has shifted away from the fixed ontology of maps-as-objects towards an increased engagement with the practice of mapping. While Sacco's work includes maps-as-text – with their traditional demarcation of borders and territories and a bird's-eye view of space – there is also an emergent depiction of space from a grounded perspective. The process of mapping is made possible by the comics medium and Sacco's nuanced and varied representation of space" (Holland 86).

[179] Maps are used for the first time in SAG on pp. 19–20.

[180] In another chapter with black-filled gutters there is an example of a map (SAG 38) being used as a part of "historical interlude" (Holland 86), an explanation of political situation inserted between the testimonies of Dr. Begović and Edin.

"Around Goražde", where part I is about Rasim, and part II is about Munira (SAG 109–119). Another example in which several persons give their respective testimonies is in the chapter "Disintegration" (SAG 36–43), but here there is no clear division between the parts: the chapter opens with the portrait of Dr. Alija Begović (36), continues with Edin (39), and then introduces Bahra (41). Other chapters, such as "The First Attack", represent testimonies of as many as five different people. Four persons are introduced in the first panel (Emina, Rumsa, Ibro, Izet; SAG 78), and the fifth person, Edin, introduced in a portrait-type panel in the first chapter with black gutters (18), is in the second panel (78). All five give their accounts of the first attack on Goražde, representing collective trauma and a polyphony of voices.

According to Kai Erikson, trauma can create community and it has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies: it draws one away from the center of the group space (centrifugal) while at the same time drawing one back (centripetal, towards the center). Erikson defines collective trauma as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. [...] It is [...] a gradual realization that the community no longer exists" (Erikson 1995: 187).[181]

The reader of *Safe Area Goražde* needs to bear in mind that Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs used to belong to the same community, sharing the same "discursive space" (Rothberg 5). The war abruptly damaged this space, putting a great strain on dialogic interactions between the groups. With this in mind, I wish to briefly address Andrés Romero-Jódar's claim that "Sacco's texts can be seen as aggressive representations of a competitive memory, in contrast to a much fairer multidirectional memory" (2017: 73).[182] He uses Rothberg's terms (competitive and multidirectional memory) when writing about *Palestine* and *Footnotes on Gaza* but claims that much of the same can be applied to *Safe Area Goražde* as well. I find it hard to agree with Romero-Jódar's suggestion that

[181] In contrast to this, Bond and Craps write that Eyerman and Alexander prefer the term "cultural trauma" to "collective" or "national" trauma in order to emphasize a process of mediation. For Eyerman and Alexander, "events have to be constructed as such in the public sphere" in order to be regarded as collective or national trauma (Bond and Craps 2020: 101). For Alexander, "[e]vents are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution" (2004: 8); when reinforced in mainstream cultural, political, and media discourses "is traumatic status attributed to an event" (Alexander 2004: 10). In terms of the approach to the social nature of trauma, Erikson's definition from 1995 seems to be more accurate than Eyerman and Alexander's when discussing the Bosnian war.

[182] For more on this, see Romero-Jódar's book *The Trauma Graphic Novel* (2017).

SAG can be seen as an example of an aggressive representation of a competitive memory. Although its main focus is on the testimonies told from the perspective of the Bosnian Muslims, SAG is not only a story about victims and survivors of the Bosnian war. Sacco establishes a narrative in which the readers can get an impression of how complex the socio-political situation was in Goražde, which leads to a balanced impression and depiction of characters who were of the same nationality as the perpetrators.

For instance, the chapter "Disappearance" (SAG 68–70) portrays Edin's interaction with his Serb neighbors after he and his family heard propaganda on Serb radio stations. In this talk with the other side, the two Serb men tell Edin that "all commands are coming from above" and advise him that "it's best if [he and his] family go from here [because] it's dangerous. It's better than staying" (p. 70). As the second panel on p. 69 shows, there is a fence between Edin and the Serb houses: given the dangerous situation, Edin's act of crossing the fence is not only physical, but also symbolic. The point is that Sacco is giving a narrative of both sides, incorporating Serbs and Serb narratives – not just in this chapter with black gutters, but also in a separate chapter titled "The Serbs" (155–159). Other chapters such as "Can you live with the Serbs again?" (160–161) and "Neighbors" (76–77) show that people differentiate between "cetniks" and "Serbs" – that is, nationalists and non-nationalists. This makes an important point about the Bosnian war narrative and memory within the same society. Veljko, the Serb man who stayed in Goražde during the war, also points out that he "didn't behave like a nationalist", and that he had "strained relations with other Serbs because of [his] views" (SAG 155). In the chapter "Around Goražde. Part I", Rasim's life was saved by a Serb woman. Helping a Muslim put her in an extremely dangerous position – she risked her own life by breaking the rules. While the dialogue between the different groups within the same community was vastly damaged, Sacco creates a narrative in which he shows that the interaction between the sides in war was not impossible.

While Romero-Jódar criticizes Sacco's representations of memory, Alexander Dunst[183] is concerned with how Sacco represents the Serbs' attacks. In the black-guttered chapter "The 94 Offensive" (SAG 162–187), a wounded Edin is depicted lying on the ground, alone with a semi-automatic rifle, while a tank only a short distance from him is firing continuously into the town. Dunst refers

[183] For more, see Dunst's article "Sacco with Badiou: On the Political Ontology of Comics" in Worden, Daniel (ed.), *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World* (2015), 168–183.

to panels on pages 174–175 and writes that Sacco's account "of Serbian militia attacks at points resembles the storyboard for a Hollywood war movie" (Dunst 2015: 176). With this comparison and such a biased tone, Dunst is denigrating the scene, stamping it as a commercial cliché used for ideological purposes. At the same time such a comment questions the quality of the testimony, making Edin's story appear untrustworthy.

The last of the black-guttered chapters with representations of testimonies is the chapter "Death and Deliverance" (SAG 196–208). On p. 203 is a panel that can be considered as one of the prime examples of visual-verbal witnessing.[184] The context for this particular panel is the genocide in Srebrenica and the gruesome events that occurred in eastern Bosnia in July 1995. In one of the most striking graphic depictions in the novel, Sacco shows uniformed Serb soldiers executing blindfolded Muslim civilians, lined up on the edge of a newly dug mass grave. Several simultaneous actions are taking place in this image: as the bullet is passing through the body of a man and he is falling on top of other dead bodies, an excavator proceeds with the digging of the enormous grave. At the same time the truck, a vehicle transporting the Muslim men to their deaths, produces new captives to be executed. As the truck is being emptied, the grave is being filled. These two black mouths – one spitting, the other swallowing – balance the image. The walking stick, lying on top of the pile of the executed bodies, provides a hint about the age or condition of a man in the grave. The serenity – even indifference – of nature is juxtaposed with a manifestation of evil: a lone pine stretches itself above the scene, being a silent observer, just as one of the soldiers is sitting on a car watching the carnage.

[184] This panel features on the jacket of Hillary Chute's book *Disaster Drawn* (2016).

Image 5 "It was the largest mass killing in Europe in 50 years" (SAG 203)

"Peace. Part II" (p. 212) is a one-page chapter that does not belong to the previous eight because it is not testimonial, but I reflect upon it here because it has black gutters and because it closes off the historical track. It may be argued that the black gutters signal that this peace is not entirely satisfactory even though the peace settlement is signed. This almost unnoticeable, brief chapter, with a dull, indifferent, and distant tone, seems to be in opposition to its title and expectations of what the peace should bring – this may be why the chapter "Peace" does not have white gutters. But is the end of the war not an unequivocally good thing? The dark fill of the gutters may suggest otherwise.

It would be relevant for the analysis to look at the respective lengths of the black-guttered chapters, the places where they appear in the narrative, and what

comes before and after each of the witnesses' stories. For instance, the effect would not be the same if these eight chapters were all clustered together at the middle or at the end of the graphic novel. Still, they are not the only chapters with harrowing and traumatic stories: take, for example, the chapter "Total War", part I. There, Sacco is watching tapes with a journalist colleague. These are "tapes of unspeakable things... amateur footage of shells coming in, animals split open, children sheared in two by anti-aircraft cannon, legs getting sawn off without anesthetic..." (SAG 120), and in part II of the same chapter, Sacco is watching that footage in the office of Dr. Alija Begović, the director of Goražde hospital (122). The gutters in this chapter are white. Arguably, the visual-verbal witnessing as represented on pages 122 and 123 is a result of Sacco's watching the footage several times and having a conversation with Dr. Begović in a setting that Sacco represents as more informal than in the chapter "The 94 Offensive" (p. 180), where the same doctor is depicted as giving testimony about the situation in the Goražde hospital. In the latter, the gutters are black and the doctor is portrayed alone, *en face*.

This demonstrates that trauma is not the sole reason for filling the gutters with black. Another instance where Sacco shows that traumatic experience is so overwhelming that people are not able to share their stories can be seen on page 106, in the top three panels: together with Edin as a translator, Sacco visited refugees from other towns along the Drina river that had been ethnically cleansed, and the three women from Višegrad and Foča with whom he spoke were all reluctant to share their experiences. The first panel shows the woman turning her head away from the onlookers; we cannot see her facial expression, but the narrator tells the readers that she "didn't want to tell us what happened to her husband in Višegrad" (106). The second panel shows a scared, white-haired woman, who describes what she had seen, "but only to a point"; she has "seen people with their eyes cut out".[185] In the third panel, a woman is "shaking so hard" after she has given an account of her experiences in Foča. In the panel she is frightened, with her eyes wide open, sitting curled in a ball against the wall, holding her knees, looking as small as the child who is depicted standing beside her, comforting her. In contrast to the unspeakableness of terrible war injuries and amputations without anesthetic drugs shown in the hospital panels (122–123) during the talk with Dr. Begović, these three panels on page 106 represent the

[185] This could be linked to Kane's *Blasted* and how the character of Soldier sucked out and ate the eyes of the journalist, Ian.

faces of the unspeakable. In fact, the face of the woman in the first panel is not even visible.

4.3 Testimony in Focus

The numerous challenges of creating a visual-verbal witness can be demonstrated by the example of the chapter titled "Around Goražde. Part I". Sacco is creating the story from an oral testimony, which means that he is drawing another person's memories and traumatic images based predominantly on a verbal account. Sacco removes his own persona from the chapter to allow the story of the eyewitness to take front stage. In this chapter, Sacco's character (as a journalist) interviews a man called Rasim, who is a refugee from Višegrad. This is one of the chapters with only black gutters, which is, as previously discussed, a marker of first-person testimonies in this novel. Rasim witnessed mass executions on the Višegrad bridge. He also survived a beating and escaped death by chance. A Serb neighbor recognized him and helped him (113), bandaged his throat (112), and Rasim managed to leave town on one of the convoy trucks, helped by a Serb woman who put his name on a convoy list (116).

There are several features that make the testimony in this chapter rather persuasive. As early as the first panel, the omniscient narrator specifies the time and the place of the story within an existing historical frame. It is spring 1992, and a map is drawn to show the readers that Višegrad is a small town 30 km from Goražde up the Drina river (109) – the town of Višegrad being the main site of the events.[186] This narrator only appears in the first two panels of the chapter. Crucial to the story and to the witness' credibility is the first-person singular narration, and the claim that Rasim *was there* and that he *saw* with his own eyes what happened. As Ricoeur argues, these characteristics are the specifics of testimony:

> The typical formulation of testimony proceeds from this pairing: I was there. What is attested to is indivisibly the reality of the past thing and the

[186] Višegrad is a town known by Ivo Andrić's Nobel-prize winning novel *The Bridge on the Drina*, as Sacco knew and as the narrator states in a panel on p. 109 in SAG. The bridge (Mehmed Paša Sokolović bridge) was completed in 1577. Andrić was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1961.

> presence of the narrator at the place of its occurrence. And it is the witness who first declares himself to be a witness. He names himself. A triple deictic marks this self-designation: the first-person singular, the past tense of the verb, and the mention of there in relation to here (Ricoeur 163–164).

Ricoeur's triad and the indivisibility of its parts – the first person singular, the past tense of the verb, and the mention of being "there in relation to here" – can be followed throughout the chapter. In Rasim's case, the past tense of the verb is "saw" or "was"; he was watching the executions on the bridge from his window, or he was severely beaten himself, all of which is told in the first person. Another instance that demonstrates the "I was there" pairing is the middle panel on page 115 where Rasim says: "I saw a lot of blood, maybe ten meters around and two centimeters deep... and I saw three pairs of shoes, a man's, a woman's, and a child's, full of blood. And I was walking through the blood".

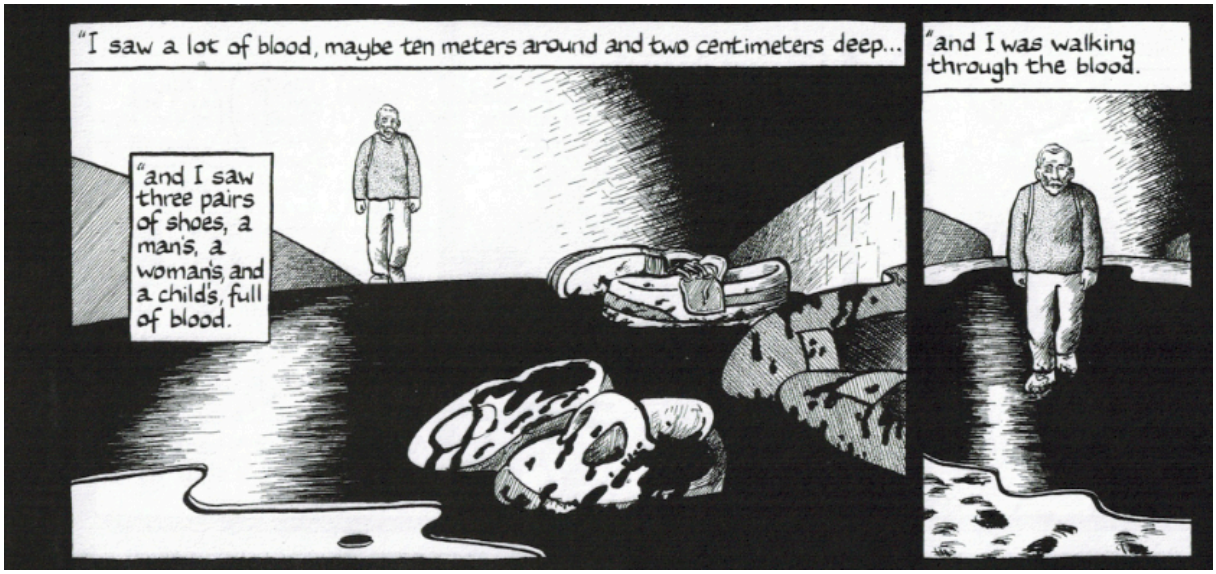

Image 6 Ricoeur's triad and Rasim as autodiegetic narrator (SAG 115).

While we do not see Rasim telling his story because he is absent as narrator from the panel, we can still read his voice in a text box; the narration continues through the use of reported speech. The last panel on the first page of this chapter ends with Rasim looking straight at the reader and uttering the words "I was an eyewitness", which he will repeat several more times when recalling the different events: "I was an eyewitness when Serbs brought Muslims to the bridge on the

Drina and pushed them into the river and shot them" (109). The last panel on the second page of the chapter consists only of Rasim's close-up portrait and a speech bubble with these four words; the panel frames are cutting his shoulders, and the extra space that was present in the other panels disappears. This is also the smallest panel on the page.

The reiteration of the sentence "I was an eyewitness" resonates as a kind of formula that has the function of establishing Rasim as a credible, trustworthy witness:

> All night the Chetniks were taking people, even children, women, and you could hear splashing in the river. Sometimes they shot them, but they preferred to cut their throats. In only three days and three nights I saw 2–300 killed. I was an eyewitness (110).
>
> On June 10 I was an eyewitness when the Chetniks brought two families – both families had three kids – and killed them behind the bridge (111).
>
> And I was an eyewitness when a Chetnik cut off the breast of one of the mothers who was trying to protect her kids (111).

In addition, the way in which Sacco draws the man's portrait is significant because it appears as if Rasim is giving a statement in a court of law: he is portrayed *en face*, against a neutral background with only his portrait in the panel, and with a solemn expression that does not change in any of the six panels in which he is facing the interviewer. His portrait is isolated, as readers do not know what or who else is around him. This setting is reminiscent of an interrogation room, as if Rasim is under the spotlight. The main focus is on his testimony.

Image 7 Rasim witnessed the executions on the bridge: "I was an eyewitness" (SAG 110).

As pointed out previously, Sacco does not draw his persona in any of the panels throughout the chapter, but the readers are aware of his presence as an interviewer and receiver of testimony. By temporarily "hiding" himself, removing one level of mediation and positioning Rasim face-to-face with the reader, Sacco creates an illusion of the reader being a primary recipient of Rasim's testimony. Sacco's voice appears early in the chapter in three panels, when he asks Rasim a few questions: "Were people resisting? Were people screaming?", "Were they tied?", "But did they still kill women and children?" (p. 111). After these questions are answered, the portrait type panels do not appear anymore; from page 112 we do not see Rasim's face while he is talking. Now that a connection is established between the reader and the protagonist, the focus shifts to the telling and showing Rasim's story instead of looking at his face while testifying. This also means that the focus is fully shifted from the present to the past. From this point onward the readers see him as a character in his story, as a part of his own testimony, more precisely as an *autodiegetic* narrator.[187] His narrative position is that of the first person witness; he speaks directly to the readers.

When the witness is introduced at the beginning, the readers are first shown that the man is wearing decent clothing, a knitted sweater and a shirt with

[187] See Genette 1980: 243–257.

a collar, which is contrasted with the long sleeve shirt that will become covered with his blood in the following panels. An interesting detail is how Sacco draws Rasim's teeth: in the opening panel, and other portrait-type panels (six in total, in the first three pages in the chapter), we can see that Rasim lacks some teeth in his lower jaw. The front teeth in his upper jaw are slightly visible underneath the mustache that covers his upper lip in two middle-page panels on p. 111. In the second panel on p. 112, the readers see three chetniks surrounding Rasim. Two of them hold knives to his throat while the third holds Rasim around the arms and shoulders, preventing him from moving. One of the knife blades is bloody, and blood starts trickling from Rasim's neck; from the writing in speech bubbles and the grotesquely drawn face, we understand that one of chetniks yells at Rasim, asking him about his weapons – and Rasim, clearly in desperation and in fear for his life, has his eyes wide open and bares his teeth in a grimace of pain. Sacco carefully draws each tooth. In the next panel, the readers are shown three chetniks from the knees up, kicking Rasim, one of them holding up a picture. We cannot see him, but from the drawing and Rasim's reported speech ("They broke 12 of my teeth and my nose. One of them took a picture from the wall and smashed it over my head", p. 112) we understand that Rasim is on the floor. This is why Sacco draws Rasim without several of his teeth at the beginning of the chapter.

To "bare one's teeth" usually means to display an angry, violent, or threatening reaction to or against something or someone.[188] Teeth can be a symbol of aggressiveness, or fear, or they can be understood as a physical embodiment of identity.[189] In contrast with this, in the aforementioned example, Rasim's teeth are broken and bloodied, "bared" in pain and defenselessness. His Muslim identity is the reason he receives the beating and his broken teeth may symbolize his broken identity. The morning after the incident, at 5 a.m., Rasim leaves his home to cross the bridge to the other side of the Drina river. While crossing, he sees one of the three chetniks who beat him the previous day; this person is crossing the bridge in the opposite direction in a truck, and Rasim is on foot. Ironically, in contrast with Rasim's broken and missing teeth, this chetnik is

[188] "bare your teeth." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 9 Jan. 2019 https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/bare+your+teeth

[189] "The language of teeth: the tooth as a physical embodiment of identity in literature", Keely Celia Laufer, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14790726.2015.1133653?journalCode=rmnw20.

grinning, revealing his teeth in a grotesque smile. The last two panels in the right corner on p. 115 are silent: one pictures a close-up of the smiling chetnik, in a blood-stained shirt, and the other shows Rasim and the truck passing each other, the back of the truck full of bodies.

To demonstrate the complexity of creating a visual-verbal witness and the ekphrastic process as part of it, I wish to draw attention to the three middle panels that focus on the killings on the bridge in Višegrad on p. 110. In the preceding panel Sacco shows Rasim looking through the window. Since Rasim's home was between the two bridges, he could see the events unfolding. He watched what was happening on the bridge as if it were painted on a canvas, or as if the events were a series of film stills. His house window could be seen as a lens, a shield, or a screen between here and there, the last protection before Rasim himself is attacked.

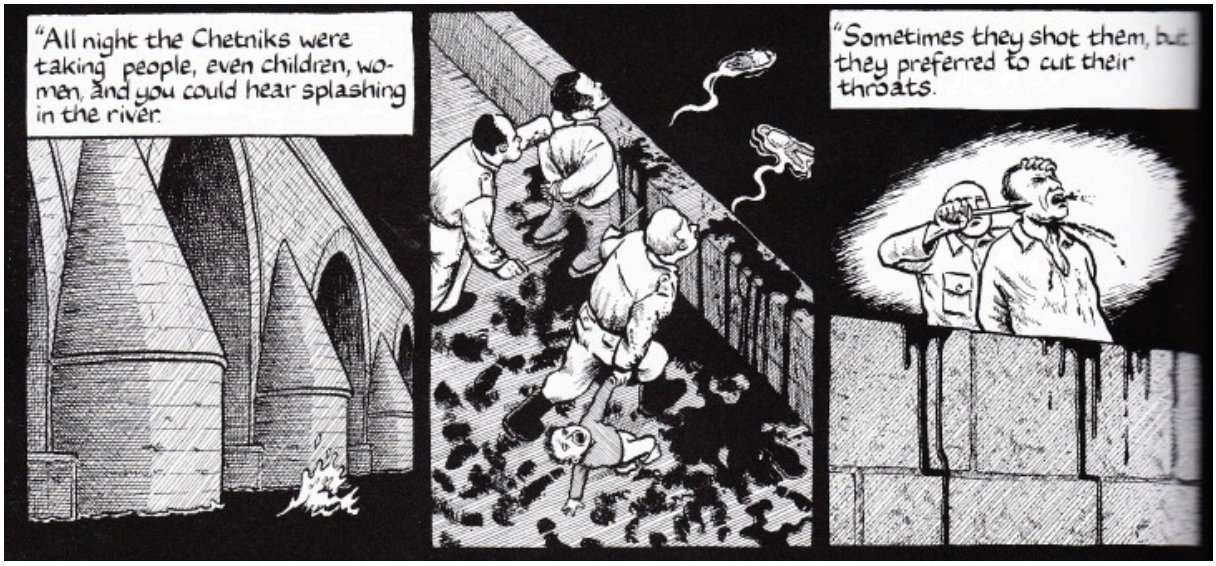

Image 8 The bridge over Drina as the silent witness. The three middle panels (SAG 110).

This bridge over the Drina river is a site of mass execution of Muslims and a mute, witnessing object. In the first panel, the readers become acquainted with the site. We see it from beneath; the splash in the river is juxtaposed with the silence of the bridge. The silent middle panel shows the event from above,[190]

[190] The second, silent panel in the middle of the page, where a man and a child are being dragged to the bridge to be slaughtered, could be seen as an example of "Apollonian view" or view from above; see for instance Holland p. 90. On the use of maps and the different perspectives: "Multidimensionality of the spatial experience is [...] present in Sacco's work,

giving an aerial view of what is happening on the bridge. The last panel is an illuminating, frontal view, a detail: a close-up of a chetnik cutting a man's throat.

If a language of writing in blood existed, the spilled blood of the victims and the bloody footsteps of the executed men, women, and children (as well as the murderers who smeared the blood of the victims on the bridge by walking and bringing more people for execution), could be seen as an instance of ekphrasis in the second panel of the second row, in the middle of the page. Like Philomela's message about her rape woven in red on a white handkerchief, there is a metaphorically unwashable inscription on the bridge: the writing in blood on the white stone of the bridge. Across the river is a bridge connecting the two sides and the river is a metaphor of life. Both the bridge and the river usually have positive connotations,[191] but in these panels, they are black with blood: people are brutally murdered on the bridge and thrown into the river. The bridge is still, and the river is flowing, taking the bodies away.

4.4 Translating Images: The Ekphrastic Process

Rasim's chapter has been discussed by several critics,[192] and questions about authority, ethics, and Sacco's creative process, among others, have been raised. In a public conversation with Sacco at the comics symposium in May 2012,[193] W. J. T. Mitchell uses the example of the story of the Višegrad man and challenges Sacco to explain the steps involved in *drawing the listening*. Mitchell suggests that Sacco is "basically just listening to somebody narrate", that he is "no longer telling the story", but that it is "[s]omebody else [who] does the storytelling" for him (p. 60). He then asks Sacco about this process:

> Amazing. And as he [Rasim] tells the story, you begin to see it, or to draw it, to depict it. I don't know if there is any other medium that can do this

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made possible by the comics medium" (Holland 91). This multidimensionality can be seen in the chapter "Around Goražde".

[191] For instance, Rasim is saved by managing to cross the bridge on p. 115.

[192] See for instance: W. J. T. Mitchell in an interview with Joe Sacco ("Public Conversation", May 19, 2012, Special Issue: Comics and Media, *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2014, 60–61); Øyvind Vågnes, "Inside the story: a conversation with Joe Sacco", *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, December 2010, 194–195; Gary Groth ("Joe Sacco, frontline journalist", interview by Gary Groth from October 2001, *Safe Area Goražde* the special edition, January 2011, pp. 245–247); Charles Acheson, "Expanding the Role of the Gutter in Nonfiction Comics: Forged memories in Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*", 2015, pp. 294–302.

[193] "Comics: Philosophy and Practice" was held at the University of Chicago.

> quite this way. You are a translator of his words into your images, or are they his images? Are you doing that as you listen? Because a lot of what you are doing is not photographing – and you don't sketch live on the spot I take it (p. 61).

Mitchell's question to Sacco – whose images are they and when do they occur – is key to understanding the storytelling process. Another word that he chooses to describe Sacco – "translator" – is also interesting since it signals the focal point of the process. Sacco answers that an image "might come to [his] mind", but that the work in its essence is journalistic, which means that he is trying to get the information from Rasim. While the greatest focus is on Rasim's words and "getting him to tell a story", a problem such as how to draw the bridge occurs later in the creative process.

The war was still going on at the time of Sacco's visit, and it was impossible for him to go to see the bridge; he later found photographs of the bridge in order to draw it accurately.[194] In this instance he did not even take the photographs himself. This also means that he seldom relied on taking pictures as a means of preserving what he saw in order to be able to draw from it at a later point: In *Safe Area Goražde*, photographing seems to be more important for picturing landscapes, debris, or architecture. In his conversation with Joe Sacco, Øyvind Vågnes points out that in *Palestine* we see Sacco photographing in the panels, and Sacco replies that it is because he is mainly photographing when doing his field work – and if it is inappropriate to take out a camera, he does sketches. These sketches are done as visual reminders and for the sake of accuracy.[195] There is, clearly, a difference between drawing an object such as bridge and drawing a scene or a chain of events that happened years ago from memory. What is more important is that the camera cannot go back and depict or capture the past, which is what Sacco does: in several stages, through a slow medium, he depicts the past by drawing verbalized memories that are gradually shaped into testimonies. While the drawing of the bridge has a photographic basis, the scene of the killings "was based on his [Rasim's] description which was confirmed by other accounts and even read [about] elsewhere, where

[194] "Public Conversation: Joe Sacco and W. J. T. Mitchell", May 19, 2012. Introduced by Jim Chandler. *Critical Inquiry*, spring 2014, p. 61.
[195] See "Inside the story: a conversation with Joe Sacco", Vågnes 2010: 200–201.

[others] described the same sort of things" (2014: 61). Sacco describes himself as "a filter":

> I do all I can to be as accurate as I can, but there is no getting around the fact that I'm the one who is translating his experiences into drawing, which by nature is a subjective act. But as much as possible I'm trying to use the information I've been given to depict something, to get to the essential truth of what happened (p. 61).

Note that Sacco calls his process both "translating" and "subjective". Observation, gathering sources, and interviewing are fundamental to the journalist's craft, and Sacco is here the agent of this process, "transforming experience into story".[196] He has an eyewitness who is telling the story, but it is Sacco who translates the story into images. As Mitchell observes, this process becomes a kind of "double translation".[197] If one borrows from the language of translation theory and posits that the term 'source images' can stand for mental images – which in this chapter belong to Rasim – while the term 'target images' designates Sacco's drawings, what are the steps in documenting a testimony in the medium of comics?[198] As discussed in the introductory chapter, what is meant by mental images in this case are the images that are formed as a result of surviving the trauma: traumatic images that are haunting and intrusive in their nature. How do we move from the source image to the target image? This question could also be reformulated as: How is a source image *translated* into a target image?

This is not a simple process of moving from point A to point B in linear fashion. I propose that the survivors' testimonies are preserved during a complex ekphrastic process that includes both notional and reverse ekphrasis. Calling the process an ekphrastic one opens up for reassessing the text-image symbiosis in comics and helps to clarify the different steps of documenting eyewitness testimony in comics form. For any ekphrasis to take place, there has to be an

[196] Amy Kiste Nyberg examines "how comics journalism makes visible the process of storytelling through the use of first-person reporting, focusing on the textual and visual representation [...] of the transformation of experience into story" (2012: 119).
[197] Interview 2014: 61. Mitchell is reminded of the debate surrounding *Schindler's List*, Claud Lanzmann's critique of it and his film *Shoah*, which Lanzmann claims was wholly built around oral interviews.
[198] Translation theory operates with the terms 'source language' and 'target language'. By means of analogy I propose to use the terms 'source image' and 'target image'.

interaction between images and words, a relationship in which they confront each other, and this appears within Sacco's text on several levels.[199] The first antagonism between images and words occurs between mental images and the use of speech or oral testimony in Rasim's attempt to describe his intrusive images to Sacco. An ekphrastic process is therefore initiated when Rasim starts describing the terrible things he has seen and experienced.

According to the definition given in my introduction,[200] this first part of the ekphrastic process – verbalization of traumatic images – can be seen as an instance of notional ekphrasis in the broadest sense of the term. Notional ekphrasis unfolds through Rasim's oral testimony – that is, through verbal description of silent, haunting mental images and flashbacks. Although the source image (which is also an ekphrastic object) is not available for the readers to see, Rasim's traumatic images should not be discarded as a starting point of the ekphrastic process. Heffernan claims that "[w]hat ekphrasis represents in words, [...] must itself be *representational*" (4). With this in mind, and since the description of the eyewitness has a quality of vividness, *enargeia*, and its impact evokes creation of mental imagery for the listener, it may be argued that, although immaterial, the traumatic images of the eyewitness may be approached as representational. For instance, Rasim's description feeds the formation of Sacco's mental images, which in turn inform the drawing.

But what happens after the initial step in the ekphrastic process? Here the question of 'shared' authority in telling a story can be addressed: are these, in the end – in the final representation offered to the readers – Sacco's images, or Rasim's images filtered through Sacco? Is this Rasim's or Sacco's story? Or Rasim's story but Sacco's images? In addition, such images are not pure ideas; they are also woven into discourses. As Mitchell also suggests above, Sacco has to *see* or visualize Rasim's words in his own mind's eye before drawing. Subsequently, the second stage of ekphrasis can move away from the sphere of the invisible and onto paper. As has been demonstrated so far, this process is more complex than adaptation[201] or "intermedial transposition including words" (Clüver 463) because Sacco is not transposing or translating from a specific medium: the ekphrastic object belongs to the mental realm. Besides, the first

[199] This interraction does not have to be paragonal.
[200] See "Ekphrasis" in the introduction to this thesis (pp. 6–12).
[201] "When it designates a process, 'adaptation' may be a genetic term; when it designates the result of that process, 'adaptation' names a special configuration in a new medium that incorporates significant elements of the source medium" (Clüver 2017: 459).

transfer from image to word occurs orally, through Rasim putting his own images into words, which Sacco has to decode or mediate. Sacco is credited with drawing and creating the visual-verbal witness in the form of a documentary graphic novel, and the product of the entire process, which is both visible and readable, can be observed as a result of the interaction between Rasim and Sacco. Compare Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux on ekphrasis:

> To allow the range of working relations, I would like to steer a middle course here and use "collaboration" to designate an exchange between poet and artist in which there is some contact and discussion between the collaborators and in which at least one of the partners creates in response to the other's work (Bergmann Loizeaux 137).

While the relation between Sacco and Rasim is not one between "poet and artist", their exchange is one that in some way is similar, and is between a "journalist and artist", and "victim and survivor". If the "work" and the task of the survivor is to testify, and the response of the graphic artist and journalist is to document, "translate" and create, a sort of relation has been established: Sacco creates "in response" to Rasim's efforts to tell a story. While this is not the kind of collaboration in which both sides are engaged in an artistic sense, the term is relevant as a means of furthering the discussion of ekphrasis in SAG and of pointing to its social relevance. The identification of an exchange between the interviewees and the artist or journalist challenges what is understood as ekphrasis in general, and opens for new insight into and expansion of the term. Bergmann Loizeaux points out that

> [t]he verbal visual collaborative work presents special problems and opportunities for thinking about ekphrasis. It is often not immediately apparent whether a particular collaboration falls under the rubric of 'ekphrasis' (words on images) or 'illustration' (images on words), or something else (2008: 137).

As this chapter demonstrates and as is generally accepted, visual responses to words need not be merely illustrative; "images on words" can be "something else" other than illustration. While Sacco creates images based on Rasim's words, this is not an instance of illustration. Instead, the term *reverse ekphrasis* is

apt to designate this part of the ekphrastic process, in which the artist produces panels only involving visual representation but without a verbal element.

As defined in the introductory chapter, in reverse ekphrasis the images have the task of interpreting words (Bolter 2001: 56).[202] Reverse ekphrasis can be observed as an outcome of the ekphrastic process in SAG, but only in some instances. Namely, if Sacco's *modus operandi* is that the image replaces the words, then the only proper reverse ekphrasis is to be found in the silent panels – such as those on pages 110, 113, 114, and 115.[203] These panels are completely without words, solely informed by and drawn on the basis of the verbal description. To use Bolter's term, Sacco's images "explain" Rasim's words in an act of reverse ekphrasis. This means that ekphrasis has occurred in a manner or direction opposite to the usual one: instead of verbal representation of visuals, it is the words that are made visible in a process of double translation. Although devoid of speech bubbles, the silent panels can be seen as examples of reverse ekphrasis that still bear both visual *and* verbal witness because the drawing is done based on testimonies. These silent panels are Sacco's subjective representations of his interviewee's descriptions, and the words are, therefore, *always an integral part* of the panel.

By being written down, testimony becomes a verbal part of the visual-verbal narrative. The images of the events from the past are made based on the same testimony – they are its visual element. In this visual-verbal configuration it seems that the contest between words and images ceases to exist. Text and image cooperate and function as an indivisible, interdependent unit; when preserving testimonies in Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* the drawn images unite with words and speak jointly. But a new struggle for dominance, a different paragonal relationship can be observed: between this verbal-visual creation on the one hand, and the traumatic or haunting (mental) images on the other. The traumatic image conditions the drawing via oral testimony (Rasim as mediator) and the artist's interpretation (Sacco as mediator), yet without the drawing it would not

[202] This is Jay David Bolter's definition of the term: "As [...] seen in digital media and even in print, we get a reverse ekphrasis in which images are given the task of explaining words" (*Writing Space*, 2001: 56).

[203] For instance, see the silent panels on page 110 (bloody footsteps, two bodies floating in the river); page 114 (top middle: the neighbor helps Rasim escape, they are walking through the forest; first panel middle row: bodies floating in the river; last split panel middle: Rasim leaving his home and walking to the bridge); page 115 (last two panels, one of a smiling chetnik with blood stains on his shirt, the other panel with Rasim and truck passing each other).

have been articulated or given shape. In this sense, the verbal-visual witness is the ekphrasis, the telling in full, speaking out, or voicing of the silent image (of the flashback).

Ekphrasis points to a picture: this testimony had its genesis in a silent, mental image.[204] It also points to a difference in procedure: Sacco did not have a text or a script that he adapted into comics. What we are looking at and what we are reading is a result of responding to a vivid verbal description and narration. The product of this complex process is a visual-verbal configuration, a mixed-media genre, which stems from the existence of an intrusive image.[205]

By calling Rasim's testimony ekphrastic, based on how it describes unavailable, silent images, we achieve an essential differentiation between adaptation and ekphrasis. Ekphrasis is more restrictive than adaptation in the sense that it is "concerned exclusively with describing visual configurations" (Clüver 2017: 464). In adaptation, on the other hand, the verbal medium (by using "verbal" here, Clüver refers to mostly literary texts) can be either source or a target medium (459). Clüver explains that "when a narrative is turned into a play or a movie, or a play into an opera", we speak of adaptation. The same can be said when *stories* are "transposed into comic strips" (463, emphasis added). The distinction between adaptation and ekphrasis in *Safe Area Goražde* lies in this detail – in determining what is considered a story and from which point in the process, or in asking: What is the source medium? In the chapter from SAG under discussion, Sacco does not "transpose" a story in a straightforward manner. Once again, Rasim's "story" (testimony) is a description of nonverbal media – that is, of a visual configuration, i.e., his traumatic images. While the object of verbal representation may be "real or fictive" (these are Clüver's terms, "fictive" here alluding to what John Hollander calls "notional ekphrasis", which is the preferred term in this thesis), it is still being described first (verbally, when giving a testimony), and only subsequently translated into the mixed medium of a documentary graphic novel.

Moving from this theoretical discussion back to the actual situation of Rasim giving his testimony to Sacco, an interesting detail concerning the circumstances of their meeting deserves our attention. While this detail does not

[204] Investigating what preceded the 'product', or the final version of the graphic novel, could be linked to the methodology of genetic criticism.
[205] This sentence does not apply to all comics in general but refers specifically to *Safe Area Goražde* and to similar comics dealing with trauma.

alter the discussion about the ekphrastic process, it may influence the way the audience evaluates Rasim's testimony as a whole. We do not have similar information about the circumstances of any of the other interviews. In a conversation with Mitchell, Sacco says the following about interviewing Rasim:

> I remember interviewing him in a refugee camp. The thing about the interview – I didn't want to put it in there because it would break up the way I established how I would depict the interviews. While he was telling me the stories of people getting their throats cut on the Drina River, he was watching a football game on TV. Like a soccer game on TV. So he had his eyes half on the TV and he was telling this story watching the TV ("Public Conversation: Joe Sacco and W. J. T. Mitchell" 2014: 60–61).

In contrast to this surprising detail, which Sacco revealed in a 2012 public conversation with W. J. T. Mitchell, he explains in an interview with Øyvind Vågnes that "[i]t's not as much that I'm trying to get an effect as I'm showing exactly what I saw" (Vågnes 2010: 195). But he did not draw *exactly* what he saw. Sacco has not included the detail about the television in the story. Why does Sacco choose not to show the readers that Rasim has his eyes fixed on the television? While the author answers this question by explaining that including this detail would break up the way he decided he would present the interviews, both his comment about his memory of encountering Rasim and his exclusion of the situation of watching the television from this chapter open for ambiguities. There are concerns such as: would it change the way we view Rasim if this piece of information were included in the chapter? Now that we are aware of this interesting detail, does it change the way we judge the testimony? Does this evoke compassion for Rasim – or does it render him a less credible witness? A less sympathetic reader might say that Sacco wants to control or even manipulate the audiences' reactions – that is, the possible interpretation of how Rasim's testimony is perceived. Sacco himself observes the peculiarity of the setting by saying that there was a "thing about the interview" with Rasim. This is an interesting statement to reflect upon given the significance of the wider context for analyzing Rasim's testimony.

Sacco remembers that the old man told him about the killings on the bridge at Višegrad "very calmly, almost in a monotonous way" and states that "there is this strange contrast between his [Rasim's] face and the absolute

violence of what he witnessed" (Vågnes 2010: 195). If we turn to a psychological interpretation, considering the scale of trauma that Rasim went through, it is possible that Rasim needs to look at television either as an escape, a distraction from going too deep into his traumatic memories, or as a means of concentration, a device that helps him keep the focus on telling the story. On the other hand, the football game (in the sense of a contest) can be seen as a playful allegory of war.

As a contrast to the process of translating images discussed in the previous pages using the example of Rasim, I will now turn to an instance of an unfulfilled ekphrastic process. In this case, there is an expectation of a verbalization of traumatic images, but a coherent description is missing. The ekphrastic process becomes more unpredictable when instead of the expected oral testimony, the author has to decipher an entirely different material or reaction.

One of the challenges that Sacco presumably encountered is the occurrence of silence in an encounter with the interviewee. Depicted silence offers the readers the possibility to fill in the gap for themselves, but it also allows for muteness to come forth; the absence of the verbal parts in the visual-verbal configuration could signify the inability to speak due to overwhelming pain. But what happens when the utterance of a haunting mental image is not telling a story, when testimony or verbal description is not available, but it is not sheer silence either? Moreover, what happens when the response during the exploration of these images and the attempt to make them accessible is unexpected – as in the form of singing? Is singing, ironically, another form of silence, in the sense of refusing to speak? Or is singing, on the other hand, a form of testimony? Perhaps the availability of the haunting mental image is blocked not by sheer silence, but by singing, which could signal the overwhelming force and magnitude of trauma, as in "acting out" in the aftermath of trauma. Words are present, but they are to a great extent coded: by the choice of a song in the given situation, and by the meaning of the words in the song. Is this breaking of silence a personal coping mechanism, a means of "working through" an ongoing trauma – or is it Sacco's literary device, a kind of comic relief? Or could it be both?

The singing comes from Riki (SAG 24), a soldier who was studying in Sarajevo before the war, one of the most colorful and optimistic characters in *Safe Area Goražde*. A former student, now a soldier on the front line, usually reserved and silent about the horrible things and bloodshed he has seen, Riki

bursts into loud and joyful singing every time a situation gets hopeless or tense throughout the novel, or whenever he is about to go back to the trenches. He has suffered greatly through the war but has kept his optimism about peace and the possibilities in life that are before him. Many people have numbed their pain with alcohol, but Riki has reached into the 'classic rock songbook'[206] and put an enormous effort into studying English, for instance by memorizing the content of Time magazine, word for word, while spending time in the trenches, or asking Sacco to write out the lyrics of a certain song so he can learn it properly.

We will now look at an instance of Riki's singing in which the gruesomeness ahead of him is addressed. He is to return to the frontline. The reader knows nothing about what Riki usually sees on the way there and back home, or what the mental turmoil of being in the trenches during combat or ceasefire looks like. Singing is Riki's preparation. He both distracts and encourages himself. Singing clearly occurs in connection with the trenches. In the following example we see him postponing, as much as possible, his return to the frontline, and this postponement of unpleasantness manifests itself in the increasing performativity and continuous singing:

> He really had to go, he said, but we convinced him to stay for the breakfast... Then he <u>really</u> had to go, but he stayed for dessert too... And then coffee... "And now I must go immediately and prepare myself for the battle-line." By all means, we said, but first a song!
>
> And the curtains opened and thousands cheered and... Riki stumbled and started again, ignoring our laughter... and he encored with Simon and Garfunkel and two U2 numbers before we could get him down the hall... We thought he'd never get to the front. And then we were waving him bye-bye... and he was gone – down a road to a mountain and a bunker... (SAG 102)

By analogy with W. J. T. Mitchell's terms of ekphrastic hope, ekphrastic fear, and ekphrastic indifference, we can view Riki's singing as *ekphrastic expectation*. This is more challenging to interpret for the reader than actual silence or the absence of words. Singing goes beyond detailed description; it is a

[206] Details from SAG 2011: xv, Sacco's reflections.

depiction of a mental state, but it does not give any insight into or information about his memories, images, or premonitions. Singing and playing the guitar for others in pain makes the reader feel entertained, sympathetic, and then uncomfortable and sad – we laugh, first at him, then with him, but it is Riki who is bound to return to the trenches and the frontline, risking his life even on the way there, and he does not know if his time fighting will be spent in the forced silence – the tension while waiting for the sniper and other attacks – or in the deafening noise of the missiles and the sight of human flesh. In other words, Riki *denies* access to his haunting mental images.

There might be different reasons for Riki's behavior. For instance, singing might offer a form of escapism as a natural reaction to traumatic surroundings – perhaps he is too anxious to face up to the horror of the front and the trenches. Finally, in an ironic twist on the title of Sacco's documentary graphic novel, one could pose a question: Does Riki manage to create a kind of 'safe area' for himself by means of "working-through" (Freud 1958: 155)? Riki insists on maintaining interests other than revisiting war experiences and verbalizing his war memories, such as singing and learning song lyrics. In a need to feel safe and protected, Riki chooses music, double-coding (through the act of singing – and the lyrics) his narrative of living in safe area Goražde.

Conclusion

The images that Joe Sacco draws in several chapters in *Safe Area Goražde* are based on oral testimonies. In other words, to present the multifaceted story to the readers, Sacco draws the narrative and the process of telling the story. "[T]he narration of the remembered trauma", writes Ruth Leys, is important because "personal testimony concerning the past is inherently political and collective" (109). The testimonies that the author received were shared by victims and survivors of extremely traumatic events during the Bosnian war, and those giving testimony had to go through a subtle process of reaching into their own painful memories and images. The events addressed are often described in minute detail, which, in return, makes it possible for Sacco to create their representations in comics form. Due to the complex relationship between the different kinds of images and their verbal representation in *Safe Area Goražde*, this chapter chose an experimental approach to the process of drawing narration. I interpreted this

process as an ekphrastic one, suggesting that the haunting mental image should not be excluded as the starting point of this process.

According to Clüver, "adaptation of verbal, mostly literary, texts to the demands of other media" is a frequent phenomenon; for instance, "verbal texts are adapted to plurimedial media such as the theater, the opera, film, radio, television, to comic strips, a mixed-media genre" (2017: 464). In *Safe Area Goražde*, this could have provided a satisfying description of Sacco's artistic procedure if he had received a transcript of the respective testimonies as a finished product and subsequently adapted it directly for his graphic novel. However, as my analysis has demonstrated, the process of visualizing testimonies was more gradual and complex than what is typically the case in adaptation. Discussing testimony as a process in this particular (con)text has entailed closely observing not just how the story unfolds in the medium of comics, but also keeping in mind what is not obvious during the reading – that is, the slow process of creating a coherent narrative based on several different testimonial voices. In addition, the direct engagement of the author as both an artist and mediator is crucial during such a process. What links the notions of ekphrasis and testimony is their representational response to (traumatic) images. A reader also becomes a viewer: both ekphrasis and testimony employ verbal representations to create speaking images that aspire to *enargeia*, or the quality of vividness; the listener or the reader is "almost made to see the subject" (Webb 13).

Eight out of thirty-three chapters in SAG have black instead of the traditionally expected white gutters. In these eight chapters, while describing the images of war and traumatic events, the interviewees deliver their testimonies in the first person. All of these chapters open with a portrait-type panel, as if introducing a person who is a witness in a court of justice. As has been pointed out earlier in this chapter, Charles Acheson notes that black has negative cultural connotations. In the chapter "White Death" (SAG 133–149), in which the gutters are already black, people are walking for many kilometers in "the deep dark" – in the snow-covered woods at night, in search for food. Several die of exhaustion on the way. Interestingly, the panels with the greatest amount of snow are at the same time the darkest in shade. It becomes almost impossible to distinguish the blackness of the gutter from the blackness of snow and deep dark in these silent panels (SAG 140). The blackness of the whole page closes in on the reader, creating a claustrophobic reading space, as if sucking the reader into the darkness

of the middle panel. The flatness of the comics is challenged as the blackness creates an illusion of depth.

While this and other chapters with black fill aptly illustrate Acheson's point, there could be other ways to relate to the blackness of the gutter. Black, for instance, does not only have to be associated with death and sorrow, but it can be seen as comforting, concealing, even providing a hiding place. In comparison with the actual, so-called 'safe area Goražde', which in reality was not safe and where the UN soldiers could not guarantee protection and safety, the black gutter could be seen as the only "safe area", an environment that Sacco creates in the novel for the witnesses to tell their stories. In one sense the entire graphic novel could be a symbolic "safe area"; the performative gutter with its blackness seems to offer a place not only for mourning, but also for the alleviation of pain.

5 Conclusion

This thesis has involved heterogeneity of two different kinds: (1) The heterogeneity of the primary material (a play, a poem, a documentary graphic novel), and (2) the heterogeneity of the theoretical frameworks, where different approaches have been combined. In order to spell out the results of studying the literary texts in question within such theoretical frameworks, this conclusion will return to the research questions that were posed in the introductory chapter, and which have been the main concern of this thesis. Apart from the concepts presented in the introductory chapter – ekphrasis, trauma, image, media, witnessing, and witnessing gap – a key focus has been provided by the related research questions. Not only have these questions guided the course of my research – they will also provide a structure to my conclusion:

a) *What are the distinctive contributions of different literary genres to witnessing by distance?*

b) *What is the relationship between the intrusive image and the ekphrastic image?*

c) *What is the relationship between the literature of witness and media images?*

These three questions have functioned as subquestions that have guided my examination of the overarching research question:

What can verbal representations of images of war in literary texts teach us about witnessing by distance?

a) What are the distinctive contributions of different literary genres to witnessing by distance?

What renders the representation of trauma and the relation to the political and traumatic conflict in the main literary works addressed in this thesis significantly distinct from each other is that they belong to different genres. Ekphrasis has been shown to play a central role in bearing literary witness. Although universal conclusions about ekphrasis cannot be drawn from studying only three generically dissimilar texts, it is safe to claim that ekphrasis performs differently in each of the genres under scrutiny, and it creates imagery in distinct ways. The distinctive contributions of different literary genres to witnessing by distance are

in direct relation to characteristics that distinguish these genres from each other. Each of the genres relies on their specific features (form and content) to employ the ekphrasis as a key rhetorical instrument for witnessing by distance. Genres are constituted by particular conventions of content (themes) and form (structure), and they have either a ritual or an ideological function; however, these conventions are constantly manipulated in order to achieve a desired effect. For instance, poetry has traditionally been thought of as a genre well-suited for conveying traumatic experience, with elegy providing a distinctive mode, or being the sub-genre of choice, to confront the experience of loss and mourning. Typically, an elegy is a song of lamentation for the dead, or a meditative or reflective verse in response to, or facilitating, the process of mourning. As has been discussed earlier in this thesis, Oktenberg's elegy builds a relation with the photographic image, and leaves the readers inconsolable by offering a grim, ekphrastic poem in which caesura becomes an additional signifying element. Still, the reader is encouraged to take an ethical position at the very end of the poem. The dead person's dignity is taken away by the means of exposure and mass-media reproduction, as the last lines of the poem indicate: "Everyone saw". The distinctive contribution of Oktenberg's poem to witnessing by distance lies in the enargeic quality of its ekphrasis, which is achieved through synergy between figures of speech, irony, sound effects such as dissonance, onomatopoeia and sigmatism, repetitions, rhythm, pauses, and the brevity of its lyrical form. The most notable way in which this genre has contributed to performing the gap in this thesis is through its use of caesura.

Whereas the readers of Oktenberg's "In the morning" are invited to contemplate the poem within the silence that enfolds it, Kane's *Blasted* does something else: it shoves the unpleasantness of traumatic realism into the face of her audience. Since the ancient Greeks, theatre has been concerned with the representation of trauma mainly through classic tragic modes. Kane challenges the conventions of drama by breaking the unities of time and space, and draws her audience deeper into the traumatic experience by making them into first-hand witnesses of violence on stage. *Blasted* makes its contribution the *experiential, in-yer-face* theatre of the 1990s precisely with this confrontational style of presenting shocking, realistic material on stage, affecting the audience strongly. The ekphrastic imagery in *Blasted* is built upon mass mediated testimonies of the victims of war, which are turned into the testimony of the perpetrator in the play. Readers – and members of audience – are emotionally mobilized by Soldier's

captivating, ekphrastic monologues. The perpetrator speaks in the first person and delivers his testimonies directly to the audience, in a tortured process of witnessing that is one of the contributions of this drama to witnessing by distance. In addition, the swift exchanges between *energeia* and *enargeia*, along with the combination of other rhetorical figures such as asyndeton, aposiopesis, and anacoluthon, give force to this character's ekphrastic delivery. My analysis especially focused on the rhetoric of Soldier's testimony, and how it set to work a form of notional ekphrasis; however, it must be emphasized that such an expression of notional ekphrasis functions best when delivered on stage. For instance, the protagonist verbalizes his intrusive images to the audience, and has control over rhythm and pace while delivering the speech; the same words would not produce the same effect if remediated to other genres. His ekphrastic monologue is situated within the frames of the play, within a specific setting that involves its own scenery; every line, stage direction, costume, and other details of performance work meticulously together. *Blasted* is a play with great mimetic quality. As my analysis showed, the explosion between scene two and scene three has a highly performative role – and again, the play's bifurcated plot, centred around a kind of lacuna halfway through, both literal and symbolic, can only be achieved in the theatre, and is among the distinctive contributions of this drama to witnessing by distance.

While no single genre can be said to be unequivocally better or more appropriate than the others in the witnessing and conveying of traumatic experience, some comics scholars argue that comics has a special ability to express trauma.[207] The differentiating feature of comics compared to the other genres dealt with in this thesis is first and foremost its multi-semiotic nature; this medium typically uses the power of both verbal and visual grammar. In comparison to the other two literary texts discussed above, the distinctive contributions to witnessing by distance in Sacco's documentary graphic novel *Safe Area Goražde* are: 1) the combination of verbal and visual elements to create meaning and tell the war story; 2) in terms of formal features, the deployment of the gutter as a signifying, performative element corresponding to, but different from, the uses of caesurae and lacunae in the poem and play, respectively; 3) visual representations of the interviewees that are drawings of real people; these representations are a first-hand medium product, and not

[207] Chute 2016: 33.

remediations from photographs, paintings, or media reports; and 4) the way in which Sacco's ekphrastic renderings, including both notional and reverse ekphrases, are based solely on the oral testimonies of the interviewed subjects, on their mental images. Unlike what is the case for poetical ekphrasis, there is no photograph or painting, no concrete, material image from which Sacco's artistic process starts.

There is some similarity between Sacco's graphic novel and Kane's drama in terms of how notional ekphrasis is conveyed to the audience: the characters who deliver their respective testimonies speak in the first person, but the positionality of each character is drastically different: Soldier in *Blasted* is a perpetrator, while Rasim in *Safe Area Goražde* is a victim. Another interesting contrast between these two texts with regard to positionality is the role of the testimonies' addressees: both Sacco's character (in SAG) and Ian (in *Blasted*) are journalists.

It is also significant that the documentary graphic novel invites for contemplation in a different way than poetry does; reading is slowed down and the reader is encouraged to use another set of literacy skills. Some critics might argue that poetry also slows the reading down to an even greater degree, but this is done on a different level and for different reasons: on the one hand, there is density of language and understanding of the interaction between content and form in poetry, and on the other, there is an organic partnership between word and image in graphic novels that may demand a distinctive form of attentiveness from the reader.

b) What is the relationship between the intrusive image and the ekphrastic image?

Typically, both intrusive images and the ekphrastic image possess a strongly enargeic quality, coupled with an emotional charge. However enargeic the ekphrastic image is, though, there will be a gap between it and the intrusive image. This thesis has shown that the ekphrastic image can sometimes be used in a way that preserves such a gap, and sometimes it will openly point to it. On other occasions, this relationship is more ambiguous. The intrusive image resists being integrated into psychic machinery at the same time as it demands to be seen. It functions more like a photograph than a narrative. Ekphrastic images, in which words and images work inseparably, help readers understand the involuntariness of intrusive images. The meeting, and the subsequent

momentum, between the image and the subject experiencing it opens for multiple relations and transformations.

The images of war that have been discussed in this thesis are both physical and psychological, fictional and factual, graphic and mental. To understand traumatic images and their role in bearing witness in literature, we need to be able to access them, discuss and describe them – while being aware of the sociohistorical and cultural frames of both their origin, as well as their recipients. I have argued for expanding of the concept of notional ekphrasis, and for the importance of including mental images as part of the ekphrastic process. Such images are psychological imagos: they constitute the visual content of memory and perception. Dwelling upon mental images may be controversial precisely because of how unavailable such images can be in some cases. A mere description of an image of war is not sufficient for literary witnessing by distance to take place; what is required is a verbal representation in the form of ekphrasis as a genuine confrontation, and then writing *with* the terrorizing image. Traditionally, ekphrasis describes a process of writing while looking *at*, not while being *in* or *with* the image. The intrusive nature of terrorizing image, however, transforms ekphrastic writing because it breaks the viewer's barriers. Due to the involuntariness of the image's intrusion, and the impossibility to ignore it, ekphrasis attempts to burst the frame of such an image. The ekphrastic image rhetorically and representationally acknowledges the distance between itself and the terrorizing image in order to reduce it, which sensitizes the reader to the necessity of emotional and mental engagement if literary witnessing is to take place. Without *enargeic* qualities which make the reader experience and reflect upon what is envisioned with the mind's eye, there cannot be an act of seeing – and without this kind of seeing, the process of witnessing by distance in the medium of literature will be incomplete.

c) What is the relationship between the literature of witness and media images?

If it were not for the wartime media reports and images, the literary texts addressed in this thesis would never have been written. Literature provides a space for digesting such media images, as the understanding of the images changes once they have been remediated into literature. In this process, both a form of rhetorical manoeuvre and a mediation device is necessary. My analyses

have focused on ekphrasis as a central rhetorical instrument for handling images in the process of literary witnessing.

Media images and mediation processes have had a huge impact on the literary texts under scrutiny. The authors of these works have responded to mediated suffering, showing solidarity with people far away. Yet their respective contributions amount to more than merely showing support and siding with the victims of war. Through creative aesthetic acts, they have placed the case of genocide and war in Bosnia on the memory map of the anglophone literary world, raising diverse ethical questions about the role of literature (and art) in times of crisis. At the same time as the texts of Kane, Oktenberg, and Sacco provide narratives about the Bosnian war as a trauma that transgresses the borders of its place of origin and bear witness through an interplay between form, content, and context, these texts also problematize the very notion of what it means to bear witness.

Media images can be used for all sorts of purposes, and while media images from the Bosnian war may have had the detrimental effect of causing traumatic stress, they have also been used to activate public support. There is a difference between passively observing such images, and actively responding to them. Sontag's claim that compassion is an unstable emotion and that it will wither unless it is translated into action, is similar to Ariella Azoulay's interest in action rather than the viewer's emotional responses to images of suffering.[208] To a certain extent, one has an ethical (and/or political) responsibility to frame the images and contextualise them. In this vein, although the image alone is not everything, it plays an important role in verbal arts, and seeing images *activated* Kane, Oktenberg, and Sacco to create literary texts which take part in witnessing by distance. Viewed from this perspective, when these authors responded to mediated suffering of others in their own capacity as intellectual witnesses, they did so within a certain frame. In each of their respective mediated responses, the authors whose literary works were under scrutiny created new, literary frames, and mediated through literature how they saw what they saw. If Butler's mechanism of "framing" determines "whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable" (2010: 38), and if "the frame functions not only as a boundary to the image, but as structuring the image itself" (Butler 2010: 71), we need to ask ourselves, again

[208] Sontag 2003: 90, and Azoulay *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008).

and again: who are we, where are we, what can we do. What is the position in which we find ourselves as members of a wider audience, as literary scholars, as readers, when caught in an interplay between the readable, the visible – and everything beyond: "The one looking is not one, but legion; it is a 'we'".[209] Positionality may raise ethical questions as well as give valuable insights.[210] The purpose of an ongoing discussion about mass-mediated circulation of images of war is to find a position from which it is possible to respond – or to maintain the idea of a space in which media images can be reflected upon: in this case, a position of witness from a distance, in a literary space.

What can verbal representations of images of war in literary texts teach us about witnessing by distance?

In terms of theoretical findings, several key observations can be drawn from the dialogue between the literary texts and the diverse theoretical concepts deployed in this thesis. Trauma is important for my understanding of war and its depiction in the three main literary texts: trauma arguably influences their form and content, as well as their relation to historical events. In the Introduction, I discussed the concept of trauma and pointed to its link with what I called the "gap". Arguably, the relation between these two concepts lies in the sense of absence of closure that they share in their respective meanings – that is, in "a break of continuity" (OED) and in an existence of a "hole" (OED), respectively. A point that I wish to make regarding exceptionality of the gap, is that the gap addressed in the analysed texts is not a mere gap in narrative. This gap is inextricably bound with the trauma for which it stands and to which it bears literary witness; hence my introduction of the term 'witnessing gap'.

The witnessing gap is a general concept, but it is also genre specific. When I say that the witnessing gap is genre specific, I mean that it functions differently in a play from how it operates in a poem or a documentary graphic novel. It can be seen as forming a wound in the text's very fibre, constitutive of

[209] Tygstrup 2020: 25. See Frederik Tygstrup's "De te fabula narratur! Violence and Representation in Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*" (pp. 13–27), in *Terrorizing Images: Trauma and Ekphrasis in Contemporary Culture* (2020), ed. by Charles I. Armstrong and Unni Langås.

[210] For instance, Sacco lived with a Bosnian Muslim family and interviewed subjects of mostly Bosnian Muslim ethnical background (with some exceptions), which to some may make it seem like he is presenting only one side of the war in Bosnia. Kane was moved by a mediated image of a victim of war: of a Bosnian Muslim woman. Oktenberg's poem is about a young woman raped by the Serbs at Srebrenica.

narrative, but more important than to fill it is to leave it empty – to listen to it, to see it – even if this means paying attention to what is not there. While there can be good reasons to fill the gap – among them epistemological reasons, in order to gain new knowledge; and/or cathartic reasons, to attain closure and encourage healing – in my view, it is important to keep it open. This gap is not a gaping wound, but a wound the survival of which acknowledges what happened, so that it will not be forgotten and fade into oblivion. It is a starting point: for any healing process to begin, the wound must first be recognized, and acknowledged. Because of the context, content, and the textual environment, such a structural and formal gap acquires a new function: that of bearing witness. In the texts that have been discussed in this dissertation, important examples of a witnessing gap include: the lacuna created by the explosion between Scenes 2 and 3 in *Blasted*, which splits the plot and leaves a hole in the hotel room wall; the gap between the direct reference to the Bosnian war in the first draft of Kane's play and the erasure of this in the published version; the space of caesura in *The Bosnia Elegies*, and the black-filled gutter in *Safe Area Goražde*. The role of the witnessing gap is to keep the wound open, and it should also be left empty since this emptiness is an integral part of its function. In addition, the witnessing gap is also relevant in relation to the geographical and cultural distance separating the three authors from the Bosnian war trauma.

The respective texts by Kane, Oktenberg, and Sacco demonstrate that there is no question of whether or not trauma can be represented and/or narrated: to different degrees and at different levels, these texts do so, but there will always be a gap between the trauma and its representation, and these literary texts actively preserve such a gap. However, something more has happened in this thesis, in my dealing with these texts. The witnessing gap also acts as an invitation: "The narrative imperative" (Abbott), "the testimonial imperative" (Hartman), and the "imperative to tell" (Laub) become juxtaposed with what may be termed an *imperative to see*. This requires more effort from the readers than reading – or listening – to the testimony. The imperative is rather about seeing what is not immediately (textually) obvious but is *hauntingly* present, even in the form and structure of the literary text. In accordance with this is the engagement of these texts (and their authors) with the image: the graphic image visible to the naked eye, but even more so the revealing of the invisible, the hidden, 'the unspeakableness' of the intrusive, mental image.

Ekphrasis reveals – and frames – the witnessing gap. Because of ekphrasis, the edges of the witnessing gap become clearer and more prominent; ekphrasis guides the reader towards becoming aware of and seeing the gap. As discussed above, this is related to the genre-specific quality of the witnessing gap: each genre employs (a different type of) ekphrasis in a different manner. One feature of notional ekphrasis is, for instance, the use of a first-person narrator, as pointed out in Chapter 2 with regard to the example of Soldier, and in Chapter 4 in relation to the example of Rasim. Whether the ekphrasis of traumatic images is notional, contextual, elegiac, or reverse, employing it places readers in the position of witnesses while helping them reflect upon the aftermath of trauma.

Consequently, the witnessing gap, as well as the ekphrastic process, takes different forms and occurs at different speeds. Here I wish to emphasize the processual nature of ekphrasis – and of witnessing. Compared to a moment of taking a photograph, or to a flickering, brief appearance of an intrusive image, ekphrasis is not of an instant: it takes time to observe, transform, describe, confront, and even enter into dialogue with the images of war.
Seeing such images can lead to "long-distance solidarity",[211] and words are used to preserve the traumatic images in order to remember them, bear witness to them, reflect upon them, and understand them better at a later point – from a distance. Literature in this case has the role of the main mediating agent, being a bridge between different temporal and spatial singularities – between here and there, now and then. Whereas the images are being verbally mediated through the content of the literary text and its ekphrasis, the carriers of absence – lacuna, caesura, and the gutter – mindfully preserve the gap through the texts' form and structure. In this sense, the literary text's formal features have a performative dimension: they serve as a powerful reminder of unbridgeable distance, and of the limitations of witnessing. While attracting attention through their seemingly negative qualities of emptiness, absence, and blackness, the abovementioned witnessing gaps are constructive, since one aspect of their performative function is to promote *seeing* – and, therefore, witnessing.

[211] Rothberg 2019: 26, 151.

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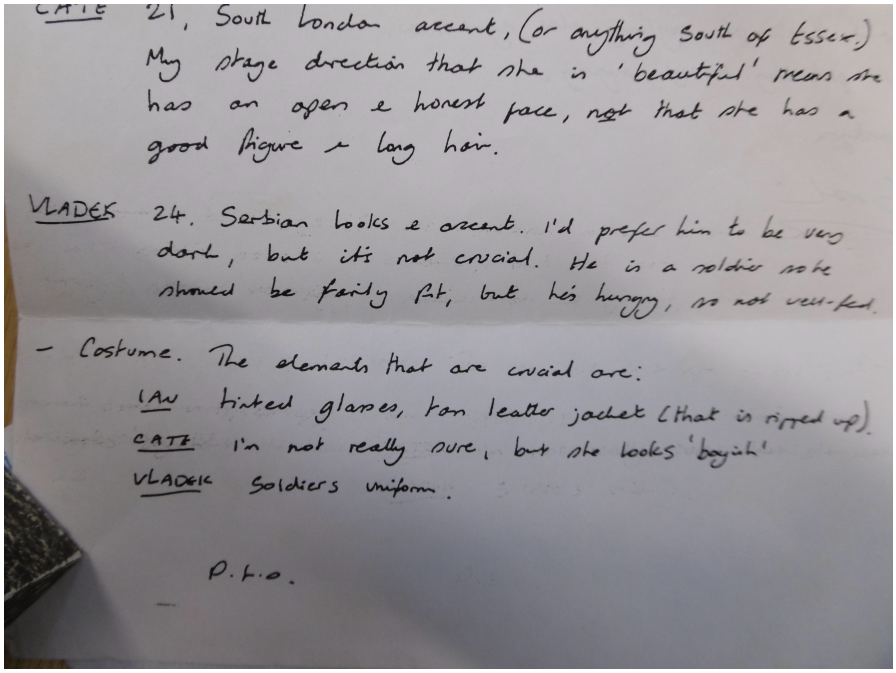
Appendix

From "The War Crimes Trials" by Joe Sacco. Compare this, for instance, with Sarah Kane's *Blasted* ("hanging by the testicles", p. 43).


CATE 21, South London accent, (or anything South of Essex.) My stage direction that she is 'beautiful' means she has an open & honest face, not that she has a good figure & long hair.

VLADEK 24. Serbian looks & accent. I'd prefer him to be very dark, but it's not crucial. He is a soldier so he should be fairly fit, but he's hungry, so not well-fed.

- Costume. The elements that are crucial are:

IAN tinted glasses, tan leather jacket (that is ripped up).

CATE I'm not really sure, but she looks 'boyish'

VLADEK Soldiers uniform.

P.t.o.

Sarah Kane's handwritten letter with instructions. From the *Sarah Kane Archive*, Birmingham University.