Representation of Trauma in The Night War Series

Kurtović, Iva

Odsjek za anglistiku

Filozofski fakultet

Sveučilište u Zagrebu

DIPLOMSKI RAD

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(smjer književno-kulturološki: engleska književnost i kultura)

Kandidat: Iva Kurtović

Mentor: dr. sc. Vanja Polić Jurković, izv. prof.

Ak. godina: 2021./2022.

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1. Introduction

The Night War is a series of fanworks by praximeter (Zimario). Fanwork is a general term that can be utilised to encompass various forms of fan creativity and participation (be they related to writing, art, creating costumes, etc.) which are by their nature transformative and at times even critical (Hellekson and Busse 3-4) of the source material or "canon" (Busse 101). Fanfiction (also spelled as "fan fiction," often abbreviated to "fanfic" or simply "fic") could, in the simplest of terms, be defined as a fan-created work of fiction based on existing characters and worlds (Thomas 1), or even the lives of real people (Busse 41). Later chapters will engage in a more detailed discussion of some key characteristics of this artistic form as they pertain to *The Night War* series.

To initiate the discussion, suffice it to say that *The Night War* series takes as its canon Marvel's *Captain America* movies, and is predicated on the following premise: during World War Two, James Buchanan "Bucky" Barnes (a secondary character in *Captain America* films and comics) regularly wrote down his thoughts in a series of field journals, which have been preserved and published posthumously by his family as *The Night War: The Wartime Memoirs of a Howling Commando*. The diaries are written from the perspective of an everyman character who is suddenly thrust into the horrors of war (as well as the extraordinary exploits of his super-soldier best friend Steve Rogers) and are presented to the readers as an annotated *60th Anniversary Edition* ("The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition"). Thus, the author creates a fan text that not only deliberately imitates the trappings of actual works of nonfiction (Field 61) but proposes an alternate version of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* in which the character of Bucky Barnes is elevated to a position of considerable historical and cultural importance. Even though the framing device of the annotated journal rests on the image of Bucky as a tragically deceased war hero, the fan readers are approaching the text with the implicit awareness that in the source material Bucky in fact survives and is unwillingly turned into a brainwashed assassin working for the villainous secret society Hydra (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*). This discrepancy

between what is known by the text and by the fan reader is a constant source of tension in the journal.

The series, which the author began posting on the fanfiction website *Archive of Our Own* in June 2017, consists of six works (the aforementioned diary, three newspaper articles, a short story and an audio sequel) and remains unfinished, as praximeter (Zimario) and her collaborator on the audio sequel, quietnight, ceased production mid-way through their project in May 2018 ("The Night War").[1] The author also announced plans for the publication of at least two other works in the series, none of which have thus far come to fruition.

It is important to keep in mind that the information on these plans is widely available in the "Notes" section of the final chapter ("Chapter 22: Afterword"). Likewise, the tags the author chose to assign to the work publicly advertise it not just as *Captain America* fanfiction, but also a specific *kind* of *Captain America* fanfiction – one, for instance, taking place in "World War II", aiming for "Historical Accuracy" that is delivered through characters' "Period Typical Attitudes" ("The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition"). These sorts of extra-textual cues commonly provided by works of fanfiction in "the identifying headers that precede and categorize individual fics" (Derecho 66) align with Gérard Genette's idea of paratext – additional information offered at a story's "threshold", which "offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" (2). Even the fact that the series is unfinished is clearly signalled in the website metadata via a "Complete: No" description – a laconic but crucial piece of paratextual information for prospective readers ("The Night War"). This "work in progress" status, which can in some cases stretch for indefinite lengths of time,

[1] praximeter (Zimario) and quietnight are the pseudonyms of the creators of *The Night War* series. Writing under a pseudonym is the norm in fan communities (Dym and Fiesler np), but that does not automatically mean that these creators are completely anonymised or bereft of any discernible characteristics. Reading through their contributions to *The Night War*'s comment section, a reader can for instance quite easily learn that both praximeter and quietnight are women (hence the use of the female pronouns throughout the text).

is just one important aspect of fanfiction writing culture that impacts the creation and reception (Busse 148) of works such as *The Night War* series. Therefore, one of the aims of this thesis will be to point to the ways in which various characteristics of fanfiction – its inherent intertextuality, the collaborative nature of creation and interpretation of fan texts, its strong propensity for affective engagement – contribute to the creation of a series which invites and necessitates a complex reading. This discussion will, furthermore, ultimately add to an analysis that approaches *The Night War* series from the point of view of trauma studies.

Credited as one of the leading voices of the 1990s trauma theory boom (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 4-5), Caruth's work – informed, among other schools of thought, by psychoanalysis and deconstruction (*Unclaimed Experience* 5) – remains an inevitable point of reference (and matter of contention) among scholars writing on trauma, memory, and their representations in art (Pederson 334). According to Caruth trauma – derived from the Greek word for wound (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 2) – is "the wound of the mind" which marks "the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4-5). Trauma is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (5). Furthermore, it bears noting that in Caruth's model of trauma, the focus is not so much on the originating event (which is, by virtue of being unknowable, automatically divorced from the remainder of the afflicted person's lived experience), but on "the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4, emphasis in the original). Caruth also emphasises the "literality and nonsymbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks" ("Introduction" 5), claiming that "[i]t is this literality and its insistent return which thus constitutes trauma and points toward its enigmatic core: the delay or incompletion in

knowing, or even seeing, and overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event" (emphasis in the original).

As a fictional first-person account of combat experience, *The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition* is seemingly the ideal candidate for a close reading based on Caruth's model of trauma theory. Plagued by nightmares, flashbacks and even moments of dissociation, the narrator of the journal is clearly portrayed as suffering from symptoms commonly associated with PTSD in trauma studies literature (Caruth, "Introduction" 4). As Caruth remarks in the first chapter to her field-defining book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, "[t]he experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him [...] who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our [20th] century." (*Unclaimed Experience* 11). *The Night War* series therefore appears to potentially be the perfect text for the application of Caruth's theory. Not only does the journal depict traumatic symptoms, but the sequels also feature loss of memory as a consequence of trauma – the fan audience encounter Bucky interacting with his journal in 2014 with no recollection of having written it (or even being the person captured therein) in the 1940s ("Find Me (Where the Lovelight Gleams)"). Caruth states that "[c]entral to the very immediacy of this [traumatic] experience [...] is a gap that carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory" ("Introduction" 7). But what if this "gap" is not, as the traditional model of trauma instructs, caused by the "unassimilated nature" of the traumatic event (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4), but by something far more literal? In this instance, the fact that *The Night War* is a series of fanworks based on fantastical source material proves to be instrumental in its interpretation.

Taking into consideration the nature of the source material, the unique circumstances of fan creation and the thematic concerns highlighted in the work itself, this thesis will offer a reading of trauma in *The Night War* beyond the bounds of the traditional model of trauma. In doing so,

the thesis will consider an interpretation based on Caruth, but will also rely on the work of some of her detractors. Critics such as Ruth Leys, Alan Gibbs and Joshua Pederson have, in the years and decades following Caruth's ascent in the field, pointed out several key aspects of her theory which they find lacking, including her insistence on the literality of traumatic symptoms, her focus on a punctual model of trauma and her championing of the unknowability of the traumatic event. These (and other) critiques offered by a more recent wave of trauma theorists are discussed and contextualised in the analysis of *The Night War*.

2. Who is Bucky Barnes? The Centrality of Character and Affect in Fanfiction

The Night War series presents the scholar with certain definitional difficulties, since it exists as several genres at once. It is an alternate history that depicts a world where a character posthumously rises to a position of great cultural prominence and deals with the personal and historical implications of such a legacy. It is a diary novel in which a somewhat unreliable but deeply committed diarist with an obvious love for words uses his journal to try to make sense of his difficult circumstances. (As the diarist in question is also one of this alternate history's Great Men (Hellekson 25), his journal is of course published and accompanied with detailed footnotes.) It is a war novel detailing a conscripted soldier's gradual attrition of spirit, as he goes through great losses and even greater cycles of guilt, homesickness, and constant fear. The audio sequel is a transmedia story (Jenkins 97-98) with a complex temporal and diegetic structure – the fans are listening to an (initially unknown) person in 2014 as he listens to a podcast in which the hosts read and discuss a diary written from 1943 to 1945. But above all else – and uniting these overlapping genres, forms, and temporalities – it is fanfiction about Bucky Barnes.

The fact that praximeter (Zimario) elected to construct such an elaborate fictional universe and intertextually engage multiple literary traditions (Stasi qtd. in Popova 48) so as to tell the backstory of a secondary character from a superhero franchise, is in keeping with fanfiction's tendency to prioritise affective and critical engagement with the "fan object" (Sandvoss 64) over the cultural cachet of the source material itself (Busse 121-122). As Rita Felski pointedly remarks in *Uses of Literature,* texts that belong to the world of mass entertainment can still hold an inexorable sway over their audiences (and over critics, who are, despite their professional detachment, still embodied and feeling readers). "A text's commodity status constitutes one facet of its existence, rather than being an all-determining essence that drains it, like an exceptionally diligent vampire, of all claims to beauty and aesthetic value" (Felski 66). Although originally articulated in the context of rethinking literary criticism's aversion to being "enchanted" by works of art, this sentiment mirrors the way modern fanfiction culture originally sprang from *Star Trek* fanzines in the 1960s (Hellekson and Busse 6) and still retains a penchant for low-brow sci-fi and fantasy "cult" television (Jones 122), film and fiction.

While a large portion of fanfiction stories focus on romantic plots (Busse 113) and "creating complex hypertext where prose intersects with found documents and various media" is considered fairly exceptional (145), *The Night War* series is still demonstrably a part of fanfiction writing culture. Not only is its source material a much-loved fan object – there are currently over 110 000 *Captain America* fanfics on *Archive of Our Own* alone ("Captain America - All Media Types") – but *The Night War* also shares with the rest of its genre the tendency to centralise the role of affect. Therefore, this chapter's title "Who is Bucky Barnes?" should perhaps be expanded into "Who is Bucky Barnes *to the fans*?", because therein lies the crux of the issue. Rather than being interested solely in the source text itself, fanfiction is preoccupied with what the work *means* to those consuming it. As Kristina Busse emphasises,

"[f]an fiction is a literary genre based primarily in affect: love for the source, desire to continue it into different contexts, annoyance with the things it does badly, and pleasure in the friendships and shared desires that circulate in fan communities" (76). The source text is therefore just a piece (albeit the foundational one) of a larger puzzle which consists in equal measure of communal interpretations, fan collaborations, proof-reading, gift-giving, comments and recommendations (Coppa 236).

As the fans become deeply invested in a text and use the medium of fanfiction to explore potentialities and answer their own "what ifs" (Derecho 76), they "endow characters and worlds with emotional life" (Lamerichs 30) and, via their reinterpretations, "extend, question, and reimagine the universe and the development of existing characters" (30). This "extending of characters" is often done by way of inventing or further exploring their pasts. Anna Wilson interprets this fan interest in creating backstories through the lens of "affective hermeneutics", which seeks

> to fill the gaps in canon through attention to the emotional lives of texts themselves. For example, in order to write a character's backstory or a pastfic, a fan writer draws on her understanding of a character, gained through her knowledge of the character's actions, behaviors, and affective expressions. Her imaginative projection of a backstory increases both her and her readers' emotional understanding of the character's canonical actions and further develops empathy and intimacy with the character. (np)

The great attention paid to "developing empathy and intimacy with the character" through the medium of a war journal is an aspect of the series that – just like the paratextual apparatus which explicitly names it a Captain America fanfic – unmistakably situates *The Night War* in the genre of fanfiction. However, *The Night War* also offers incisive metacommentary on fanfiction's habitual centring of affect. After all, what is praximeter (Zimario)'s alternate universe in which

everyone has read and wept over Bucky Barnes's diary, if not a reflection and magnification of the extratextual circumstances of the work's creation and reception – that of a community of fan readers who are all well-versed in, and intensely attached to, the character of Bucky Barnes? The entire premise of *The Night War* series hinges on praximeter (Zimario)'s decision to transform Bucky from a fan-favourite supporting character into an (interdiegetically) genuinely important historical figure. Although his diary is initially the emotional and creative outlet of a relatively unremarkable Brooklyn draftee, his rescue from a POW camp and reunion with best friend Steve Rogers (as well as his subsequent inclusion in the Howling Commandos, an elite seven-person unit lead by Captain America) mark the start of Bucky's fame. His wartime notoriety is further cemented after his family decides to posthumously (or so they assume) publish his diary. Multiple factors – including the journal's connection to the famous Captain America, the text's significance as a first-hand account of "the European Theatre", and the notable skill and artistry with which Bucky captures his thoughts – come together to ensure that the diary is intradiegetically a timeless classic that is (in *The Night War*'s fictional introductory note) described as coming "second perhaps only to Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* or Elie Wiesel's *Night*" ("The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition").

Moreover, by opting to have the primary text of the series be an edition published in 2005 (almost a decade before the plot of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* takes place), praximeter (Zimario) is putting the fan readers in the position of perpetual superior knowledge. While the annotations offer a myriad of clarifications on slang, cultural references and military operations, the fictional editor of *The Night War*'s latest edition could not have been privy to Bucky Barnes's survival and decades-long secret exploitation as the Winter Soldier,[2] which

[2] Even though he was considered KIA after falling off a train in March 1945, due to being non-consensually administered with the super-soldier serum in a POW camp in November 1943, Bucky managed to survive the fall. He was however quickly captured by Hydra, who robbed him of his memories and turned him into the super-assassin known as The Winter Soldier (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*).

was only revealed in 2014 (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*). The extradiegetic (fan) readers' constant awareness of this fact ensures that the *60th Anniversary Edition* is a far more suspenseful and fraught read than the one experienced by the intradiegetic readers.

By making Bucky's diary the centre of this (fan)fictional universe, praximeter (Zimario) offers her readers the ultimate validation. In the Afterword to the *60th Anniversary Edition*, Bucky's sister states, "[w]e published Bucky's journal in its entire unedited form with the simple hope that the rest of the world would know him, and therefore love him, as we do" ("Chapter 22: Afterword"). With these words, the text establishes a world where everyone can find the answer to the question from this chapter's title, and in which such a level of knowledge and emotional attachment is unequivocally presented as positive. However, the series dispels the notion of the fan readers finding any uncomplicated satisfaction or easy answers in what is, as *The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition* underlines, a story of trauma and loss of self— albeit one filtered through the lens of its fantastical source material.

3. Literalized Trauma and Its Limits

In his text "Speculative Fiction, or, Literal Narratology", Brian McHale notes that "sf typically proceeds by taking expressions that in most other contexts would be treated as figurative, and constructing or implying worlds in which those expressions make literal sense" (317). In one of his examples, he discusses how the use of time travel in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* "literalises narratological metaphors of temporal disorder" such as prolepsis and analepsis (McHale 320). The novel's protagonist is "a time-traveling being, endowed with a special power" (320), which ensures that common storytelling devices of returning to a character's past or projecting into his future are *literally* happening to the protagonist, as he gets (beyond his control and volition) "unstuck in time" (320).

A similar analytical model could be applied to the last instalment of the series, *The Night War: An Audio Companion*, where being "a man out of time" – to borrow an expression usually reserved for Captain America himself[3] – is a great source of misery for Bucky Barnes. Struggling with amnesia after being a depersonalised, brainwashed and cryogenically preserved assassin for almost seventy years (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier)*, Bucky tries to hasten his recovery by listening to his (now famous) diary being performed and discussed by his descendants on the (intradiegetic) podcast *The Night War: An Audio Companion*.[4] As the last time he was a person rather than a weapon was in 1945 (and he does not retain any memories of that version of himself), the concept of time travel is understandably a fraught one for Bucky the Listener – although it has no such sinister connotations for Bucky the Diarist. This discrepancy is brilliantly demonstrated in the following passage, where hearing his own idle musings about "Time Machines" (and, implicitly, the idea of being transported in time) provokes a strong emotional response from Bucky as he listens to *An Audio Companion*.

> THE DIARY PRESENTER. I do dream about walking in the door, the reverse of when I left and everyone was so upset. Instead she's making potato pancakes in the kitchen and Dad is smoking on the fire escape, Curly doing her homework by the radio and Jack reading his comics (and not a Marine) and Ted probably fixing something Jack broke and Ma looks up and sees me and I can just imagine the smile on her face. What wouldn't I give to just see her for a little while. I miss her and everything awfully. Imagine if Time Machines were real and I could go back.
>
> [Podcast suddenly cuts off.]

[3] See Waid, Mark. *Captain America: Man Out of Time*.

[4] *An Audio Companion*'s main presenter and performer is Bucky's great-niece Rose Cameron Barnes, the podcast itself being the idea of (and co-hosted by) her teenage daughter Olivia. ("Chapter 1: Episode 1: July, 1943") Other members of the extended Barnes family appear periodically to have discussions or give interviews ("Chapter 3: Episode 3: September 1943").
The sheer number of new characters made it impossible for quietnight to voice all of them, so additional talent was found in the form of quietnight's family members, including her own teenage daughter (voicing Olivia), as well as praximeter (Zimario) herself ("quietnight on Chapter 14").

BUCKY [growing increasingly louder and more agitated]. Fuck you, fuck you, FUCK YOU!

[Sound of objects being thrown around the room. Heavy breathing.] ("Episode 5: December 1943, Part II", 00:01:15-00:02:10)

The image of a frustrated veteran, in pain over memories of an idyllic past (and a past *self*) that he feels disconnected from, could very well belong to a completely realistic work of war fiction. The fact that the veteran in question *does not recall* being in the war because he was violently uprooted from World War Two (by virtue of surviving due to the super-soldier serum and then having his memory continuously wiped by Hydra for decades) is what clearly situates *The Night War* series as a work of speculative fiction. These temporal tensions inherent in the source material and its portrayal of the Winter Soldier are only intensified by the alternate history praximeter (Zimario) constructs around Bucky's diary, as well as her decision to depict him interacting with an audio version of the book. All of these complex and intersecting storytelling choices ultimately contribute to a series of works which represent an intriguing realisation of McHale's concept of literal narrative. While *The Night War* series (unlike *Slaughterhouse-Five*) does not literalize flashbacks and flashforwards by having its protagonist be continuously tossed around in time and space, it is evident that in *An Audio Companion* Bucky is still unmoored in time in a manner reminiscent of McHale's example. However, an avenue McHale does not explore, and which asserts itself as crucial when studying *The Night War*, is the ability of speculative fiction to literalize trauma theory.

Cathy Caruth describes trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are *not fully grasped as they occur*, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (*Unclaimed Experience* 91, emphasis mine). This "complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (3) that she stresses as the crucial element of how trauma is experienced by the mind seems very pertinent in the case of *The Night*

War series. Other than the temporal displacement of its protagonist, the most pressing issue he is faced with in *An Audio Companion* is precisely the lack of knowledge of his traumatic past, which is only compounded by the cultural ubiquity of his war journal. While the idea of a person being violently depersonalized and mindwiped for decades is disturbing in any context, it is especially distressing if the victim happens to be placed in a position where, due to his fame, *everyone* seems to know more about him than he himself does. In her musings on the connection between PTSD and history, Caruth states that "[t]he traumatized carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptoms of a history that they cannot entirely possess" ("Introduction" 5). The combined effects of the source material's disrupted temporality and the focus on (alternate) history in *The Night War* series creates a body of work wherein "impossible history" is perhaps the most apt description of the position that Bucky finds himself in while listening to *An Audio Companion*. However, this literal break in the knowledge of a traumatic past does not only apply to the series' final instalment – it becomes an issue as soon as speculative fiction elements begin invading an otherwise highly realistic war story.

In November 1943, Bucky and the rest of his company suffer a brutal loss at Venafro against Hydra forces, with the survivors ending up in a work camp at Azzano.[5] There, Bucky Barnes is tortured and subjected to medical experimentation. However, neither himself nor the editor of the *60th Anniversary Edition* of his journal are aware of one key aspect of this traumatic experience – namely, the fact that he was dosed with a version of the super-soldier serum.

[5] Unlike the straightforwardly fantastical source material (*Captain America: The First Avenger*), *The Night War*'s historical footnotes depict Hydra as a research subdivision of the SS whose strategic danger to the Allies comes from their advanced weaponry ("Chapter 7: January 1944"). The moral outrage Bucky and the rest of the Howling Commandos feel towards it is prompted by the egregious human experiments that Hydra conducts on civilians and prisoners of war ("Chapter 15: September 1944"). Crucially, within the alternate history established in *The Night War* series, the extent of the supernatural power of Hydra's technology is not widely known prior to the escape of The Winter Soldier.

Although he is a prolific diarist, he rarely and obliquely mentions his POW experience ("Chapter 8: February 1944", "Chapter 10: April 1944"). Throughout the journal, he records many traumatic incidents (further to be discussed in the following chapters), but his experience in the camp is the one where "the force of this experience would appear to arise precisely [...] in the collapse of its understanding" (Caruth, "Introduction" 7). Bucky is not able to fully comprehend the fantastical torture he was subjected to, leading him to suffer from traumatic symptoms which are a literalization – by way of speculative fiction – of Caruth's theory of trauma. One of the most prominent examples illustrating the suitability of Caruth's model occurs in the entry for September 5th, 1944, where Bucky recounts dissociating and attacking two men.

> Well I did not get arrested. No court martial either. [...]
>
> Gabe was waiting for me just him not the others. "If you're going to start a bar fight for no reason, at least let me know ahead of time so somebody's got your back" and I couldn't quite laugh. There are two guys in the hospital because of me. [...]
>
> I do not even know why I threw the first punch. I don't even remember it and I was not drunk. I am letting Gabe think I was drunk because that's easier than saying I think I've gone nuts. One of the guys had round specs and the other guy laughed at something (it was the way he laughed I think?) and suddenly it was like I was outside of my own body and couldn't stop. I was not even angry. ("Chapter 15: September 1944")

A stylistic specificity of the cited passage that immediately captures the critic's attention is its sparse syntax and punctuation. While there exists a plausible intradiegetic explanation for Bucky's peculiar writing style – due to his family's financial difficulties, he dropped out of high school and started working at 15 ("Chapter 6: December 1943") – from a trauma studies point of view, this passage reads as the record of a person recounting "the belated revelations of traumatic incidents" (Gibbs 41) in a numbed state. As for the actual content of the highlighted

quote, the fan reader can (and is meant to) easily read between the lines and decipher that Bucky's violent outburst was caused by being reminded of his torture at the hands of the (bespectacled) Hydra scientist Arnim Zola (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*). To the diarist himself, the fantastical circumstances of his traumatization preclude easily accessible memory and produce traumatic symptoms which correspond to Caruth's model. Another noticeable way Bucky's POW experience fits into this traditional model of trauma are his nightmares of the event, which are literal and precise in nature (Caruth, "Recapturing the past: Introduction" 151). For instance, he often wakes up yelling his name, rank and serial number ("Chapter 14: August 1944") – something he would have had to do repeatedly while in enemy hands (Terkel 473).

However, being unknowingly dosed with the super-soldier serum has further effects on Bucky beyond the unassimilated memory of the medical experimentation. He is constantly hungry, requires less sleep and does not get ill anymore – symptoms which also apply to Steve, the original recipient of the serum, though Bucky does not know to look for any connection between their conditions ("Chapter 10: April 1944"). The mental and physical changes wrought by the serum ultimately work in concert, as they destabilise Bucky's sense of self and the limits of his perception. This is nowhere as visible as in the August 25th, 1944, entry, where he recounts the aftermath of his successful assassination of a high Nazi official in Aachen. After being saved from the work camp and being chosen to be one of the Howling Commandos, Bucky is entrusted with increasingly more daring and dangerous missions, one of which is the assassination in Aachen. As it is a one-man job (and a highly delicate one at that), he is sent there without the company or knowledge of Steve and the rest of the Commandos. Instead, Bucky is accompanied by only a few agents, among them Agent Peggy Carter, who witnesses his spectacularly efficient killing shot.

> She said "well done, soldier," after I took the shot and there were women on the street screaming. Because this wasn't a firefight in fucking Saint-Georges-Eglise. "Well done soldier." Jesus fucking H. I said "that screaming is why I am done after the war" and she said (earnestly perplexed I think) "what screaming?" and I guess we were so far away she couldn't hear it and it was all in my head. It didn't feel in my head. I still can hear it though I guess that means it is in my head. ("Chapter 14: August 1944")

To a fan reader who is aware of his fantastical enhancements, this passage patently reads as Bucky actually hearing the women scream, and in the aftermath being wracked by guilt and growing doubts about his own sanity. To Bucky himself, this is of course far less obvious, leading him to believe that he might be hallucinating. His dejected confusion and the description of a traumatic symptom ("I can still hear it though"), however, do not detract from the main takeaway of the entry – that the injection of the serum marks a rupture in Bucky's ability to have unambiguous knowledge and complete certainty in his own perceptions, leaving the fan readers as the interpreters and arbiters of reality.

There are, however, some ways in which *The Night War* is arguably not an ideal candidate for a Caruthian reading. The preceding discussion has hopefully demonstrated how an analysis in line with Caruth's work can be successfully applied to those parts of the journal which depict traumatic experiences that are directly tied to the story's fantastical elements. Nevertheless, even in these cases, *The Night War*'s status as a work of fanfiction necessitates a constant caveat: 'the fan readers know this *because the canon knows this*, even if the diary does not.' If Caruth's model focuses on the gaps caused by trauma, fanfiction is a challenging genre in which to seek a literary representation of this approach in all its elliptic, distorted, and fragmented glory (Arnold-de-Simine 141) – because for a fan reader seeking a new interpretation of a well-loved text, it could be argued that there are no *true* gaps. Or rather, a work such as *The Night*

War may present its readers with numerous challenging and interesting lacunae, but the fans' familiarity with the source material (or even more specifically, their minute knowledge of a favourite character's characterisation and canon appearances) allows them to easily bridge most of these gaps.

The difficulty of opting for a wholesale application of a Caruthian reading is even more visible in *An Audio Companion*. While the work may depict a traumatised individual trying to re-access his memories, his current state is not the result of wartime traumas not being assimilated into his consciousness, but of a different (though notably, fantastical) trauma – that of being a depersonalised assassin for nearly seven decades. All this context is, of course, immediately accessible to the series' fan audience, with no need for explicit explanations (Busse 58) of a complex structure wherein two different versions of the same character, both of whom are deeply traumatised but for different reasons, interact with the same journal. In fact, the time skip between *60th Anniversary Edition* and *An Audio Companion* is perhaps the most helpful illustration of how unknowability and fan writing do not necessarily mesh well together. In a work of original fiction, jumping from the protagonist's death in 1945 to having the same character listen to a podcast about his wartime journal in 2014 would be an incredible way to induce a sense of disorientation in the audience, creating gaps in their understanding which mirror the disruptions in the protagonist's memory. This kind of trauma narrative would indeed be perfect for a Caruthian reading. But creating that level of uncertainty is arguably not the point of *An Audio Companion* – the fan listeners know exactly what happened to Bucky in the intervening years, be it through their familiarity with *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, or even from reading (many) other works of fanfiction depicting the fate of Bucky Barnes.

It may be that this centrality of character – and his feelings, and how the fans feel about his feelings – is the main reason why a Caruthian reading does not fully suit *The Night War* series. As Laurie Vickroy argues on the appropriate and successful representation of trauma, "[t]rauma

narratives go *beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or character study*. They internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures" (qtd. in Gibbs 29-30, emphasis mine). While *The Night War* series (through Bucky's sparse syntax and minimal punctuation) successfully meets many of these formal requirements, it is still first and foremost about character by its very design. In order to explore the possibility of a trauma narrative that successfully foregrounds character at the expense of the kind of "difficult and disrupted representation" which is usually favoured in trauma studies (Luckhurst "Future Shock" 159), the following chapters will offer an alternative reading of trauma in *The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition*, focusing on the consequences of consciously experienced trauma.

4. "Our Accumulation of Anguish"

The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition consists of twenty-two chapters (twenty-one months of diary entries and an afterword), but there is implicitly another division at play; a before and an after. In the beginning of the sixth episode of their podcast, *An Audio Companion*'s hosts Rose and Olivia reflect on the significance of the chapter of *The Night War* they are about to perform – the one in which Bucky is reunited with Steve, and the Howling Commandos are formed. Rose and Olivia are cognizant of the fact that, as Bucky Barnes is associated primarily with Captain America, many listeners of their podcast (and indeed, the editors of some of *The Night War*'s previous editions) simply do not care as much about Bucky's earlier combat experiences.

> ROSE. Welcome to January 1944, the episode that I think many of our listeners have been waiting for, the true start of the Howling Commandos! Right, Liv?

OLIVIA. Yeah! Um, some of my friends said that their abridged versions of the book actually started with January 1944 instead of July 1943. Cos, you know, that's like, when they start beating up Nazis for real.

ROSE. Didn't you also say that you'd found an audiobook version that left out the earlier months, too?

OLIVIA. They weren't left out completely, just sort of edited. ("Chapter 6: Episode 6: January 1944", 00:00:11-00:00:42)

As the discussion between Rose and Olivia demonstrates, for *The Night War*'s intradiegetic audience the most exciting part of Bucky's war experiences begins after he is rescued from the work camp. This is the point at which Bucky stops being a mere unglamorous infantry sergeant, and instead becomes a member of the newly formed Howling Commandos. Likewise, on the level of the fan text, Bucky's rescue from Azzano by his best-friend-turned-super-soldier Steve Rogers is a pivotal stage of the narrative, as this is the point at which the story starts increasingly focusing on the dynamics between the characters that the readers already know and are here for. The underlying implication of these (textual and hypothetical) reactions is that there exists a hierarchy of Bucky's combat experiences. *The Night War* is a war story, yes, but surely there is an order of importance to be imposed, one in which there is a historically (or emotionally) significant After, and a mere contextual Before? It is interesting to compare these responses to the way that the text itself constructs its watershed moments. Crucially, while Rose and Olivia can name this single, easily identifiable moment of metamorphosis, for Bucky there are several, each changing him in different ways.

Arguably the beginning of these transformations occurs in the very first entry of the journal. "Well it is done. We have seen and survived combat somehow", writes Bucky in what are, intradiegetically, destined to become the opening lines of his world-famous book ("Chapter 1:

July 1943"). These words in a way mark the tone of the entire diary – seeing, surviving, and living to tell the tale (for the time being). In the calm after the storm, he describes his first beach landing – in which he witnessed the senseless death of a fellow soldier who trips and drowns, even though he had been a fisherman in his civilian life – and tries to put into words the incessant noise and adrenaline of the combat zone. "[N]ot only can none of us hear a damn on account of the explosions but I am sitting here my back against the wall of a hangar which we are using to get some rack time and my hand just will not stop shaking. *It only stops shaking to write.*" ("Chapter 1: July 1943", emphasis mine). From the first entry, the act of writing asserts itself as a necessary coping mechanism and a way of exercising a modicum of control over an incredibly chaotic experience (McLoughlin "War and Words" 19-20), even though what Bucky feels compelled to record is often difficult and painful. Walter Hölbling calls this urge to write about war an act of "literary sense-making", as individuals and societies have to find a way to come to terms with the realities of such mass and collective violence (212). This is also, however, the point at which the depiction of trauma unmistakably departs from Caruth's model: in foregrounding the act of directly recounting one's traumatic war experiences, *The Night War* in effect contradicts the view that trauma is only truly felt and known belatedly, through flashbacks and nightmares (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 91).

A good illustration of this comes in the form of one of Bucky's watershed moments – one aligned with, but ultimately completely distinct from, the public perception of the war hero's coming into his own. While the intradiegetic audience and the fan readers eagerly await Bucky's reunion with his best friend and the start of the Howling Commandos' adventures in January 1944, one of his major, life-changing events has already occurred. On December 2nd, after he has been liberated from the work camp and brought safely to convalesce in England, he writes: "It feels like I cannot breathe enough. I keep seeing Harry's face and how surprised he was and

then how terribly scared. If I think about it too much my heart starts going horribly fast in my chest. It is heartbreak I think. I feel like I may never breathe again for this heartbreak." ("Chapter 6: December 1943"). This brief and poignant expression of grief is how the readers first learn that something dire has befallen Harry Miller, Bucky's closest friend in the Army and a staple of the preceding months' diary writing. In contrast to the brevity of the original mention of his fate, the entry for the following day already contains an incredibly detailed description of Harry's final moments.

> This is what happened. [...] I am to lay down covering fire and Harry goes over the top and I am everything still except my trigger. He gets there and I can hear him say "oh God" because I know Rowe and Ed are in pieces and he is running back and there is a shell that explodes. It feels like a man could live his entire life in the time that it takes for the shell to scream in and explode. I think I start running before it even does explode. He is gone so slowly but so terribly fast. [...] He keeps trying to talk but the blood and noise makes it impossible. There is no difference in his hands or my hands from all the blood. Lipsy and Frank are there. Lipsy screams in my face. Get the ammo to Dietz and then he and Adler are back. Harry is still alive. The sky is lit up like day there are so many bombs. Dietz must get the gun going and it doesn't jam even with all of Harry's blood all over the rounds. [...] Get back to Dietz and Harry is dying even though I am trying so hard to keep his guts in. The smell is awful. Even though we are still under fire I cannot look anywhere except his face until his desperate fear flows away with what is left of his blood and he is dead. ("Chapter 6: December 1943")

Witnessing the gruesome death of one of his best friends and being unable to do anything to help him is signalled to be a traumatic event for Bucky, as the pain is so deeply felt and so immediate that even weeks later, he cannot help but recount the experience in the present tense. However, nothing about the battle is unknown or unassimilated. Bucky's writing, though he

recounts the event as if it is happening again as he retells it, is first and foremost a conscious and deliberate attempt at representing what those terrible moments looked, sounded, and felt like. Far from precluding memory and representation, in this case it is made clear that trauma makes details stand out more sharply (Pederson 339). The sort of "textual overflow" in description of traumatic events which is present in this entry corresponds to Joshua Pederson's assertion that, instead of focusing on the gaps in the text (as is the wont of the traditional model), literary theorists should instead "seek out evidence of augmented narrative detail" (339).

But apart from going against the grain when it comes to representation of trauma, *The Night War* also subverts fan community's expectations (Busse 113) of a *Captain America* fanfic. Instead of building the entire story on the foundations of the relationship between Steve and Bucky (be it romantic or platonic) or even on the sense of camaraderie among all the Howling Commandos, the opening chapters of the journal privilege original characters that never appeared in the source material. (A sentiment which carries over to *An Audio Companion*, where Frank Castellano, one of Bucky's friends mentioned in the December 3rd entry, plays an important part.) The centrality of the readers' affective connection with the fan object is not disrupted or negated, but deliberately extended onto other characters, as if compelling the readers to love Bucky's loved ones by proxy. In this way, praximeter (Zimario) manages to successfully flesh out Bucky's initial position as an "everyperson figure" (Balaev 155): a working-class high school dropout ("Chapter 1: July 1943") who misses his family and just wants to go home, among millions of other soldiers desperately wishing the same. As Michelle Balaev emphasises, "[t]he trick of trauma in fiction is that the individual protagonist functions to express a unique personal traumatic experience, yet, the protagonist also functions to represent and convey an event that was experienced by a group of people [...]" (155). The elevated position his journal eventually attains (and that Bucky as a character already holds

with the extradiegetic fan audience) is thus, paradoxically, always accompanied by and contrasted with the fact that he does not perceive himself as any better from other enlisted men. Instead, there is the constant awareness that his continued survival is not the result of him being in any way more deserving or important, but rather of sheer good luck that might run out at any moment – as it did for many of his friends.

The deep pain and survivor's guilt that Bucky feels about this is well encapsulated in the diary entry for August 10th, 1944. In it, almost a year after Venafro and Azzano, Steve asks Bucky to tell him about what happened to Harry. Bucky, unwilling to retell this traumatic memory – but, as has already been established, not unable to do so (Pederson 337-338) – deflects by sharing with Steve the fates of some of his other comrades:

> [H]e finally asked me, "what happened to Harry, pal?" and I didn't answer him but I did tell him about Lipsy, poor Lipsy, who was the most loyal son of a bitch in all of Able Company and who didn't hesitate one bit when I said we were going to try escaping, and got shot in the head for it. And also Lt. Kurlansky who surrendered to save as many of his men as he could and got executed, and stupid, ballsy Sal Rossi, and how he starting[sic.] singing that one night in between shelling, most beautiful & saddest thing I ever heard, only time Rossi was ever serious in all the couple months I knew him. Rossi got blown up by a grenade. I also told Steve about Calvin Glenn, who talked about buying a farm after the war, and all the kids he was going to have after marrying his girl Beatrice, and about Skip Nichols, who could recite from memory almost any poem you asked him to (so long as it was Longfellow, Yeats, Whitman, or Frost), and Warren Dietz, who not for a single fucking second thought of anything except keeping his MG going, anything to cover us for just one minute more, even though the shells were coming down every couple seconds and exploding the trees and still he kept his hands on his gun, face like chalk, one hand firing the other feeding ammo, one of the bravest

> things I ever saw and then he got killed in the camp. After a while I stopped talking my throat was so dry. ("Chapter 14: August 1944")

This passage is a good example of the diary's clear textual insistence on the fact that Bucky Barnes is just one among countless "boys" (Terkel 3) risking and losing their lives on the battlefields of the Western Front. Attempting to separate Bucky's journal into the noteworthy adventures of Captain's America sidekick and the less exciting, optional introductory chapters would therefore be misguided at best, and callous at worst. Instead, by foregrounding the personality quirks, life histories, and ultimately the tragic deaths of Bucky's friends, praximeter (Zimario) further embeds her fanfic in a "mimetic" mode of war writing, one which focuses on a psychologically realistic depiction of "comradeship, courage, cowardice, endurance, the experience of death and danger" (Hölbling 214).

Thoughts of his deceased friends continue appearing in the journal well into Bucky's tenure as a Howling Commando. Significantly, at multiple occasions he writes of the dreams he has about them. While Caruth's model of trauma insists on the absolute "literality" (Caruth, "Introduction" 5) of symptoms such as nightmares, praximeter (Zimario) more often than not opts for precisely the opposite approach, with Bucky having confusing, conflicting, or highly symbolic nightmares ("Chapter 17: November 1944"). In fact, sometimes these dreams are not nightmares at all. Instead, they are simple, happy memories of lost brothers-in-arms, in which "grief and fondness and longing get so mixed together you can't tell them apart" ("Chapter 13: July 1944"). However, as Bucky spends more and more months in combat, the strain on him becomes increasingly visible, spilling over into the dreams he has of his late friends.

> It did not happen like in my dream. I may have to write that a hundred more times. At Venafro Skip was next to me for a while and in the break in the battle I remember him muttering to himself "turning and turning in the widening gyre" at least four times and

> then "Sarge" about three times until I finally opened my eyes and saw that he looked more scared about forgetting the goddamn lines to a poem than he did of the fact that we were getting cut to pieces. "Sarge how does it go?" and I said "I'm not the one who memorized all of Yeats and Whitman Skip" and he said "and Longfellow and Frost" and then a couple minutes later (or maybe an hour—or maybe ten hours—who can keep track of time in hell?) he was killed. In my dream it was just Skip's body (half blown up with his eyes gone and his jaw) — still whispering somehow "sarge sarge sarge" "sarge sarge sarge" and then "turning and turning in the widening gyre—how does it go sarge? How does it go? Sarge help me remember how it goes" and I woke up and barely made it to the toilet. ("Chapter 18: December 1944")

The majority of Bucky's dreams – be they wholesome snapshots of a happier past or terrifying nightmares that turn already difficult memories into something grotesque – are not "*veridical* memories or representations of the traumatic event", nor are his traumatic symptoms "*literal* replicas or repetitions of the trauma" which as such "stand outside representation." (Leys 229, emphasis in the original). Perhaps even more importantly, they do not all point back to a singular moment that is so terrible that it is rendered both unknowable and inescapable in its incessant returns (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 91-92). If the intradiegetic audience eagerly anticipates the start of Bucky's missions with the Howling Commandos as the definitive point which signals the "real" beginning of the war hero's military exploits, then a critic intent on a traditional trauma reading does the equivalent by attempting to locate a single unassimilated event. With the exception of the (already discussed) literalized fantastical trauma, *The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition* cannot easily be moulded to fit this "punctual" (Gibbs 15) model. Rather, it depicts trauma as "slow, gradual and insidious" (15); a combatant's "accumulation of anguish" ("Chapter 13: July 1944").

In his January 15th, 1945 entry, Bucky writes: "[b]ombers have a maximum weight they can fly with, the number and weight of bombs they can carry until it is time to drop them and I wish it was the same for men with all we are carrying I wish somehow I could drop some but instead it adds and adds—" ("Chapter 19: January 1945"). Rather than being haunted by a single trauma (or even by the multiple isolated instances in which he witnessed the deaths of his friends), it is the cumulative effect of suffering, fear and guilt which simply does not end that makes it increasingly difficult for Bucky to function. In this way, praximeter (Zimario) underscores the importance of powerlessness and lack of control as key tenets of trauma (Hunt 11). Although Bucky is an active combatant (and not, for instance, a displaced or brutalised civilian), the extent of his agency is ultimately extremely limited. He has no influence over the broader course of the war or the battles his company is sent to fight (McLoughlin, *Authoring War* 167), and most importantly, he cannot put a stop to the endless death and violence that surround him. What power he has, first as a sergeant and then as the Howling Commandos' famous sniper, is markedly always used in the service of "keeping his men alive" ("Chapter 4: October 1943"). Although seemingly simple and manifestly noble in intent, it is precisely this idea of protection that is priming Bucky for heartbreak which "adds and adds—", for how can you protect *everyone* in the heat of the battle? How can you live with yourself when you ultimately fail? And what does it mean if the means of keeping your loved ones safe is the instrument of someone else's destruction? It is these questions that inform *The Night War*'s exploration of survivor guilt, moral injury, and perpetrator trauma.

5. "Two Souls alas Live within My Breast"

There undoubtedly exists a marked discrepancy in the ways the two principal instalments of *The Night War* series are presented. Apart from the obvious difference in medium between an annotated edition of a celebrated journal and a diegetically complex audio story, significant

contrasts between the two works also include the level of "closeness" – that is, the degree of access to a character's interiority (Currie 22) – to the protagonist. *60th Anniversary Edition* by its very nature provides the (intra- and extra-diegetic) readers with a historically mediated access to the narrator, but the detailed footnotes ensure that the reading experience is contextualised and facilitated to the maximum extent. *An Audio Companion* offers a completely different experience – the fan audience may be granted a unique level of "access" to Bucky's "inner life" (19), but the listening experience itself is full of stops and starts, reflecting Bucky's emotional state and the audience's own lack of control over the way *he* chooses to listen to *An Audio Companion*. For example, while fan listeners can assume that each episode of the podcast begins with the same musical cue and introductory line, they have no way of knowing for sure, as Bucky often fast-forwards the episodes. Where *60th Anniversary Edition* focuses on acquainting the fan readers with the historical circumstances of Bucky's war experiences (and on developing the suspense they feel because of their knowledge of Bucky's future), *An Audio Companion* privileges Bucky's own reactions as a (very special) audience member.

There are nevertheless clear links between the two instalments – the primary one being, of course, the personal and cultural significance of Bucky's war diary. The other major common thread connecting *60th Anniversary Edition* and *An Audio Companion* is the spectre of violence looming over Bucky. Even more specifically, the works in the series are united by the way praximeter (Zimario) focuses on presenting the destabilisation of one's sense of self caused by not merely suffering or witnessing, but enacting violence.

It is evident how this subject matter relates to *An Audio Companion*. As a work which takes place after Bucky has been liberated from Hydra's clutches and begun his rehabilitation from being a brainwashed assassin, *An Audio Companion* follows in the footsteps of many other *Captain America* fanworks – and, when certain subgenres are concerned, fic in general (Linn np) – to ask questions about the effects of violence, non-consensual body modifications and

depersonalisation on a character's identity.[6] In this regard, praximeter (Zimario) is not attempting anything radical or new; fanfiction thrives on writers providing slightly differing versions of same popular motifs and tropes (Busse 113). Where *The Night War* series' examination of the effects of long-term trauma stands out, though, is that it does not position the fate of the Winter Soldier just as the consequence of fantastical torture (as it is in the source material). Instead, praximeter (Zimario) plants the seeds of this decades-long depersonalisation in Bucky's journal, and she does so not by merely depicting him going through the hands of Hydra scientists and being injected with the serum. Rather, she establishes a connection between Bucky's wartime experiences and his post-Winter Soldier recovery by showing how being an accomplished sniper sent Bucky down a path of guilt, loss of agency, and gradual lack of connection to his pre-war self.

In his critique of the traditional outlook on trauma, Gibbs posits that this model, intersecting as it does in significant part with Holocaust studies, understandably sidesteps the matter of perpetrator trauma and focuses on the symptoms and potential for recovery of the victims (18-19). However, he also points out the fact that the development of the clinical construct of PTSD (an inescapable component of much of modern literature in the field) is linked to the advocacy of Vietnam veterans, many of whom suffered precisely because of what they had *done* (Gibbs 18-19). In the case of combatants, "being traumatized does not automatically imply being a victim" (Rodi-Risberg 118), and while much of the hitherto discussed trauma that Bucky suffers from is a result of being a witness, *The Night War* does not shy away from the effect that doling out death has on its protagonist. While Bucky is shaken and disturbed by his combat experiences from the very first entry of the journal, a different sort of unease settles over him after his talents

[6] Archive of Our Own is a fanfiction website that operates by relying on user-created (but site-regulated) tags; some of the popular tags regarding Bucky Barnes and his trauma are "Bucky Barnes Recovering", "Bucky Barnes Needs a Hug", "Hurt Bucky Barnes", "Bucky Barnes has PTSD" and "Bucky Barnes Remembers", most of which have thousands of works attached to them.

as a "sharpshooter" are first noticed and utilised. In September 1943, during the early days of his combat experience, Bucky recounts how his commanding officer chose him for a scouting mission to dismantle an artillery battery because he knew Bucky was the best shot of his company.

> I have killed five men today. I know I have killed before but not like this, always in immediate defense of my men, in service of the objective in combat but this was a patrol that Halliwell tapped me for so I chose Nichols, Delaney, Glenn, and Castellano and the objective was there all right [...]. It had to be quick else it would give away our position and *I said I would do it because none of them have shot a man in cold blood either*. It was the objective and I know that if we were to have been discovered it would have been a firefight [...]. There were 15 men manning the battery and I killed five of them. ("Chapter 3: September 1943", emphasis mine)

It is critical to note that Bucky does not only acquiesce to using his shooting skills to gain greater tactical advantage for his company or to save his comrades from a dangerous skirmish. Rather, he judges the toll an act like that would take on a soldier's sense of morality, and consciously decides to bear the brunt himself. What praximeter (Zimario) manages to convey through these ruminations (Anderson 133) is Bucky's nascent struggle with moral injury. According to Tyler Boudreau, in the context of a combat zone moral injury could be defined as "the damage done to our moral fiber when transgressions occur by our hands, through our orders, or with our connivance. When we accept these transgressions, however pragmatically (for survival, for instance), we sacrifice a piece of our moral integrity." (749). Bucky finds himself in a situation where having this kind of special aptitude for a method of killing is rationalised to be a necessary evil, and moreover a skill which uniquely positions him to spare the other men from having to face the same ethical dilemma. Even though this "better me than others" view is obviously deeply felt, it is also starting him down the path of an emotionally

destructive outlook – one in which he believes that in order to help and protect, he alone is tasked with committing acts of calculated violence.

Even more disturbingly for Bucky, his sniping success is lauded by his peers and superiors, as he gains company-wide notoriety and opportunities for more similar missions in the weeks following the original scouting operation.

> I've thought a lot about it. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it if I'm honest. Because there's enough fellows in my platoon, hell enough fellows in this company who come up and say, say Barnes where'd you get to be such a crack shot? [...]
>
> I had Gene Benson say to me, not impressed like these other bozos, he says to me: "I don't know how you could do it, Barnes. I know it needed to be done, I'm just saying I couldn't've done it."
>
> I think Benson's got the right of it. I killed five men from a hidden position. I think most people would call that what a coward does. It doesn't feel like I'm yellow even though I am afraid all the time, but I don't think being real good at shooting a gun is all that much to be proud of. [...]
>
> Makes me feel sick if I'm honest. But it had to be done, didn't it? It had to be done. That arty was a meat grinder.
>
> Cooper is grinning at me like I've just been dancing with the prettiest dame in [the] entire place and says, *I've got a mission for you, son*, something real special. And what am I supposed to do but follow him and do what they need me to do? ("Chapter 4: October 1943", emphasis mine)

While the discrepancy between the guilt weighing on him and the reactions of most of those surrounding him is something that bothers Bucky, it primes the intradiegetic readers to feel more sympathy for the long-dead war hero, as they are privy to the feelings he is presumably not verbalising to those around him (Currie 19). For the extradiegetic audience this sense of

sympathy is mixed with apprehension, as the idea of Bucky being viewed as a weapon to be strategically utilised by his superiors is eerily reminiscent of what they know of his impending captivity as the Winter Soldier. This is only reinforced in *An Audio Companion*, where Bucky keeps rewinding the line "I've got a mission for you, son" and then has to take a short break from listening to the podcast to compose himself (Chapter 4: Episode 4: October 1943, 00:08:00-00:08:45). Thus, praximeter (Zimario) underscores the connection between what was done to Bucky the conscripted soldier and Bucky the brutal(ised) assassin, and posits that the source of his trauma is not just the (fantastical) "assault from without" (Gibbs 21), but "the result of guilt or shame over a series of acts of increasing intensity or depravity" (169).

A significant disparity between Bucky as depicted in his journal and his later fate at the hands of Hydra, however, is the fact that during the war Bucky at least retains the ability to actually (and acutely) *feel* the consequences of the actions he is driven to. In the aftermath of the mission, Bucky writes an entry in which he focuses on a single victim of his campaign.

> Kid looked like he was maybe 17. Little hairs on his upper lip that had never been shaved in his life. Got him once in the throat and once in the chest. Mission success is what Cooper called it and Halliwell thrilled to pieces like he's the crack shot and not me. Wish he were. Another Jerry dead so what does it matter except that I'm the only reason he's lying there with flies on his face, waiting for us to advance enough that the grave diggers can bury him? It wasn't just him either, there were others but they at least looked older than my god damn kid brother Jack. Delaney said, "I wonder what their names were" and for a second it was like I couldn't breathe and my heart was beating so fast it was like we had just run ten miles. And I heard Rowe say "What do you fucking care? You gonna write a condolence letter to Mr. and Mrs. Kraut?" ("Chapter 4: October 1943")

As Nigel Hunt emphasises in his analysis of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, "[d]ehumanising the enemy is essential to ensure the soldier can perform effectively" (169), but at this point Bucky does not seem fully able to do that. Instead, his entry follows the "synecdochic approach" (McLoughlin, *Authoring War* 67) by singling out just one deceased enemy soldier to convey the impact of the sniping excursion. This paragraph also gestures at the importance of names – something which proves to be increasingly important to Bucky during his combat experience. Kate McLoughlin designates the "name-tallying approach" (or "taliation nominatim") as the opposite to the synecdochic approach (53), but in *The Night War* both are present simultaneously. Bucky keeps an almost obsessive record of every comrade, civilian or partisan's name he is able to learn, growing despondent if someone in his vicinity dies with no one knowing their name or anything about their civilian lives ("Chapter 3: September 1943"). This is in line with McLoughlin's explanation of the name-tallying approach in war writing:

> To appreciate the effects of such name-tallying, it is important to remember that names are more often lost, than made, in war. Soldiers "surrender" their given names on joining the forces, becoming surnames, ranks and serial numbers. The uniformed member of the military is an anonymous social type par excellence. [...]
>
> Taliation nominatim is what arises in response: an intense counter urge to recuperate, catalogue and enunciate lost names. (*Authoring War* 62)

The supreme irony of Bucky being devoted to preserving everyone's name is an additional source of tragedy for the fan audience who know what lies in Bucky's future – being stripped of his own identity and given the moniker the Winter Soldier. The fact that his codename retains the "soldier" sobriquet is especially chilling, since throughout the journal Bucky makes it abundantly clear how much he wants (and needs) to lay down his arms as soon as Allies win.

One of the ways in which *The Night War* utilises the device of the annotated journal is the juxtaposition between the way Bucky initially perceives himself and the weight that is given to his diary through minute annotation and contextualisation. As has already been explored in the preceding discussion, in the opening chapters Bucky is just another conscripted soldier, with his greatest claim to fame (besides his shooting prowess) being the fact that he is such a devoted and overprotective sergeant that his men compose a song about him called "Nanny Barnes" ("Chapter 4: October 1943"). Even filtered through his unreliable narration, it is clear that Bucky is at the very least a highly competent soldier, but in the beginning of the journal he does not construct his identity around this at all.

> Conscription, after all, creates a field of combatants who belong by desire and identification to the civilian world. The vast conscripted armies of modern warfare are replete with men who do not view themselves as belonging, in fundamental ways, to the codes and realities of the military. (Cole 31)

Bucky's position as an ordinary infantry sergeant is even more accentuated in comparison to Steve's (propagandised) mythic status as a laboratory-made Achilles; a "walking talking American flag" ("Chapter 10: April 1944") championing the interventionist cause (Milford 614). Although Bucky does stand out – and begin to develop perpetrator trauma – due to his sniping, while he is embedded in his infantry company, he is just another "citizen-soldier", conscripted temporarily and non-voluntarily (Cole 31), with a life and a future waiting for him should he survive the war. This, however, changes after he joins the newly formed Howling Commandos. As Rose and Olivia comment casually in the January 1945 episode of their podcast, *this* is what the people are here for; the public perception of *Bucky Barnes as a historical figure* starts with the end of his anonymity and the beginning of his short-lived status as a "newsreel fixture" ("Chapter 22: Afterword").

Although the initial reason Bucky becomes famous is his proximity to Captain America, in time he gains notoriety of his own as a sniper. It is the same kind of attention he received after his first scouting mission, only magnified by a tenfold, as he is no longer Able Company's "crack shot", but the Howling Commando's very own dedicated sniper. Gone is the everyman of the opening chapters – suddenly Bucky is being sent on secret assassination missions behind enemy lines or mounting news-worthy sniper offensives. One important factor to take into account is that praximeter (Zimario) does not use this escalation in the excitement and exclusivity of Bucky's adventures to move him in a direction where his representation is more suited to the superhero genre. Reading between the lines, the fan readers can detect that the injection of the super-soldier serum *has* probably impacted his range and reaction time in the field, but this is never represented by the narrator as a welcome improvement. Rather, his skill in killing is what now separates him from the other soldiers, not because he perceives himself to be superior, but precisely for the opposite reason – because he thinks he is losing what good he had in him at the beginning of the war.

Bucky feels this especially severely when comparing himself to Steve. As Mike Milford stresses with regard to the war-era comic book version of the character, "[d]espite the serum's sci-fi magic, the thrust of the story is that Captain America's greatness comes from his willingness to serve and to sacrifice; his motive, not his means, was the key to his greatness" (Milford 619). The narrator of *The Night War* shares this view of his childhood best friend, idealising his pure heart, determination, and fairness – in a February 1945 entry he simply writes "there has never been a better man" ("Chapter 20: February 1945"). After receiving the super-soldier serum, in Bucky's eyes Steve now merely has "an outside that matches the inside" ("Chapter 6: December 1943"): "[t]o look at him most would say his strength and size are what makes him exceptional—the truth is that it's just that his body finally matches his will" ("Chapter 8:

February 1944"). However, in his journal Bucky also expresses the thought that Steve's goodness also translates to him being able to "do" war correctly – unlike himself.

Being a good person – and more crucially, being a good *man* – is very important to Bucky, and this imperative unsurprisingly becomes even more significant in a combat zone. Commenting on the contemporary analyses of American men's responses to the demands of World War Two, Clive Baldwin points out "the divide between an essentialist assumption of a natural masculine predisposition to courage and military aptitude and a recognition that such characteristics may have to be instilled" (87). Courage, protectiveness, doing one's duty – in war writing, these terms are often tied to what are considered natural and inherent components of a correct performance of masculinity (Farrell 4-5). Sarah Cole offers similar insights in her discussion of Homerian heroes, describing them as "imagined superlative men-of-war whose very essence was forged in the crucible of combat. Only war could test and develop what men valued above all else – honor, bravery, masculinity, leadership […]." (25). This mythic(al) perfect embodiment of wartime masculinity is congruent with how Bucky sees Steve, and according to Milford, this reading of Captain America as truly exceptional is supported by his weapon of choice – not a rifle, but a *shield* (614). In contrast, Bucky – who only took up sniping so others would be safer – makes his name not as a protector but as the "skull hunter."

> "Der Schädeljäger" – this is what the krauts are calling me. Heard it from a couple rangers guarding Jerry (what a joke—half of them can't be more than 15—my kid sister could "guard" them) that every time a guy with an M1C walked by they were crossing themselves, and so the rangers who spoke some German asked why and apparently that is it: "Schädeljäger" – it means "skull hunter." Skull Hunter Jesus H. The goddamn Nazis are scared of me. I was with Dum-Dum and Gabe when we heard and Dum-Dum laughed and hit me on the back and I kept thinking about my count I've been keeping

> and how each kraut I dropped had a buddy who found him with a third eye God didn't give him but I did. I know they're fucking krauts and I don't care when it's my men on the line but my whole gut feels like sour milk. This is not what I ever wanted. The idea that my ma's son her "beloved" could become something krauts are crossing themselves over makes me sick. I got away from everyone and cried. What excuse could there be for me—Steve has fought the same war as me but it made him a hero and me a savage. ("Chapter 17: November 1944")

His role as a sniper puts Bucky in the position of having to repeatedly do things that are morally repugnant to him. This in turn forces him to become desensitised to the constant violence and, during his offensive in the brutal Battle of Hürtgen Forest, start transforming his kills into tally marks (the "count he's been keeping") in his diary ("Chapter 17: November 1944"). While this sort of emotional numbing is necessary for his ability to perform his duty (Hunt 169), being faced with the consequences of his sniping successes provokes strong feelings of shame and self-disgust stemming from moral injury (Norman and Maguen np). Though Steve tries to assuage his sense of guilt by saying that his rifle is "a shield too" ("Chapter 17: November 1944"), there remains one inescapable fact – that Bucky Barnes is excellent at killing, and that his continued success in doing it directly correlates with his closest friends' survival. As much as he is tortured in the aftermath of his (wildly successful) sniping missions, the alternative – not being able to take the shot when it is most important – is just as terrifying.

> Dreamed I was in the church tower – a second too late every time – kraut hit the ground just seconds after Gabe and Jim and Dum-Dum, and Harris and Bliss, then Monty and Dernier. All of them perfect head shots even though Harris and Bliss got blown up not shot. Harry there too and Lipsy—Steve next to me like he used to be (like when he was small) not saying anything, just staring at it at all horrified out of his mind and then I

> looked over and he was gone too with a hole straight between his eyes and I was the only one left—everybody even the krauts were dead. ("Chapter 12: June 1944")

This June 25th, 1944, entry perfectly encapsulates how for Bucky, survivor guilt and perpetrator trauma are perpetually mixed. If he manages to land a shot, that means his friends are going to live, and his shame can take a back burner to sheer relief ("Chapter 16: October 1944"). And if he misses – Bucky does not even allow himself to consciously contemplate this thought. "I must never miss", he writes mere days after the nightmare of letting down his friends in battle ("Chapter 12: June 1944"). It is telling that with a role such as sniping, Bucky seemingly has a greater level of control and power in a combat scenario – he can defend the Howling Commandos through a (counter)sniper offensive where he could not have saved Harry from a shelling. However, this comes at the price of a terrible sense of responsibility – to never miss, and to live with yourself having taken the killing shot. Even worse for Bucky's growing sense of moral injury, with every successful shot there comes a dose of satisfaction – at a job well done, at beating the German sniper, at managing to protect his friends. "Two souls alas live within my breast," Bucky writes disconsolately, paraphrasing *Faustus*, "but the good soul is just an echo and the other is a beast" ("Chapter 16: October 1944").

The effect that all this violence and pressure has on Bucky is obvious even from a cursory reading of the journal. The longer he is in combat, the more traumatic are the symptoms he experiences. Common indicators of PTSD such as "re-experiencing, effortful avoidance, emotional numbing and hyperarousal" (Hunt 57) are all on display in different parts of the diary and are further complicated by the weight of embarrassment and shame Bucky feels for struggling as he does. Through his asides about not wanting to see "a quack" ("Chapter 13: July 1944"), praximeter (Zimario) deftly plays off the historical stigma around mental health, which

was further supported by the contemporary military culture's disdain for men who "break down" or "shirk their duty" (Baldwin 80-85).

Even more painfully for Bucky, he begins to feel a sense of disconnect from his pre-war identity, losing the ability to even imagine himself as a well-adjusted civilian again, all the while hating who he is as a combatant. The early months of the journal are filled with optimistic proclamations of "[h]ome by Christmas!" ("Chapter 2: August 1943") – however, when his younger brother Teddy (a freshly deployed paratrooper) expresses the same sentiment in 1944, Bucky can no longer muster the same kind of faith ("Chapter 11: May 1944"). Bucky's disillusionment is contrasted with Teddy's optimism to point to the differences between seasoned soldiers and new recruits. But even more importantly, it demonstrates his growing inability to imagine a future after the war, or a successful reintegration into his family life.

This feeling of having lost himself is frequently contrasted with memories of "the domestic realm as a prelapsarian place of innocence" (Farrell 9). His mother and younger sister Rebecca (in the diary referred to solely by her familial nickname "Curly") are especially cherished and a constant in his thoughts of home ("Chapter 14: August 1944"). But as the things he sees and does grow more and more distressing, he feels less and less like the person who first left Brooklyn, instead perceiving himself as irrevocably tainted. Balaev describes trauma as "a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (150). Writing specifically on war trauma, Hunt offers an even more fitting definition:

> Our identity consists of the beliefs we hold about ourselves, the world and the future. A person may grow up thinking that on the whole people are good, that the world is a safe place and that one is safe in the world. War can change that. Witnessing and taking part in battle, being involved in killing, being captured and perhaps subjected to torture, taking part in being a victim of or witnessing atrocities against other soldiers or against

> civilians, destroying artefacts – all of these can lead to a breakdown in one's belief systems and have an impact on one's identity. The traumatized soldier's positive beliefs about the world break down, and with those beliefs can go everything which the soldier considers important [...]. (10-1)

The Night War's depiction of war trauma closely follows in this description, establishing as one of Bucky's greatest fears (besides losing Steve, failing his friends, and being imprisoned again) the idea that this "beast in a sniper suit" ("Chapter 19: January 1945") is who he will always remain. "I am so afraid I can't go back. I think I can't. It feels like I can't. I can't see how," writes Bucky in an entry in early January 1945 ("Chapter 19: January 1945") – some two months before he falls off a train during a fight with Hydra forces. The intradiegetic audience, reading the explanatory note about his KIA status at the end of the journal's final unfinished entry, are left with a sense of tragedy over the fate of a young man who never got to go home and prove to himself that he was more than his trauma ("Chapter 21: March 1945"). For the extradiegetic readers, there persists a more disquieting realisation – that praximeter (Zimario) deliberately planted the seeds of Bucky's loss of identity in the journal, without even having to rely on the trauma of his POW experience at the hands of Hydra. Instead, she emphasises the lack of agency and sense of remove from one's personhood that results from being placed in a position where one is made to believe that one's sole value lies in the ability to enact violence. Although the subject continues to be explored in *The Night War*'s audio sequel, it is the diary itself that contains the foundation of praximeter (Zimario)'s approach to trauma representation. Through it, she stresses not the unknowability of unassimilated incidents, but the terrible, constant awareness of one's experience, and the pain felt at the necessity of one's own complicity in carnage.

6. Conclusion

The Night War obliges the literary critic analysing the series to constantly juggle multiple approaches. If one wants to focus on the depiction of trauma, then it is necessary to preface the discussion with the way the representation is shaped by the source material and the fan culture around it – and even more importantly, by how the author deliberately diverges from these templates. There is also the matter of the alternate history framing (developed through the found manuscript device), as the analysis must contend not only with the text and how it enforces or subverts canon, but also with the reactions of the intradiegetic audience. These responses, in turn, range from personal feelings of the parties involved (including the very narrator) to the wider cultural legacy that *The Night War* holds as a classic World War Two pseudo-memoir. This element then also brings to the forefront the question of war writing and the specific traumatic experiences connected to combat zones.

In acknowledgement of these caveats, this thesis offered one analysis of the ways in which trauma is handled in *The Night War* series, choosing to focus on several important thematic undercurrents to connect different facets of this complex fan project. A reading in the vein of Cathy Caruth's seminal work is given consideration, but ultimately revised in order to showcase the ways in which the depiction of trauma actually subverts this traditional model and instead focuses on survivor guilt and perpetrator trauma. It is important to note that this does not mean to suggest that a purely Caruthian approach would be out of place. Rather, the context of fan culture, the foregrounding of the act of diary-writing and the thematic insistence on moral injury have pointed this analysis in the direction of an alternative reading, in which more weight was given to a newer wave of trauma scholars such as Alan Gibbs and Nigel Hunt. In fact, one major takeaway of this text is that *The Night War*, in spite *and* because of it being a series of *Captain America* fanfiction, is a collection of works that are complex enough not only to withstand but to necessitate a broad range of readings. The barrier of entry – familiarity with the source

material and communal (affective) interpretation practices – is admittedly a high one, but *The Night War* nevertheless remains an exciting text for future avenues of critical exploration.

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Abstract:

The thesis provides an analysis of the fanfiction series *The Night War* through the lens of trauma studies. The series is based on the premise that during World War Two, Bucky Barnes (a secondary character from Marvel's *Captain America* comics and films) kept a journal which was posthumously published to great acclaim, thus affording the character a level of cultural importance which far surpasses that depicted in the source material. Focusing primarily on *The Night War*'s main instalment – the aforementioned fictional diary of Bucky Barnes – the thesis contextualizes this work within fanfiction writing culture as well as its source material, Marvel's *Captain America* films.

In acknowledgement of her importance to the field, the analysis begins by providing a reading in line with Cathy Caruth's seminal work on trauma. This kind of reading is found to cohere particularly well with *The Night War*'s speculative fiction elements, which are inherent to the fanfiction's source material. However, this approach is ultimately reconsidered and revised so as to include the work of some of Caruth's detractors. Namely, a new generation of scholars such as Alan Gibbs, Joshua Pederson, Michelle Balaev and Nigel Hunt offer critiques of – and alternatives to – Caruth's model of trauma. Their perspectives prove to be instrumental in shaping a reading that is focused on a socially situated and gradual development of war trauma which destabilizes the protagonist's self-image and causes him severe emotional distress. Instead of a trauma model built around a single unassimilated traumatic break in the character's consciousness and memories, *The Night War* series calls for an analysis which takes into account the importance of survivor guilt, perpetrator trauma and moral injury as key factors of a combatant's experience of trauma.

Key words: trauma studies, World War Two, fanfiction, Captain America, war fiction