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Narratives of Terrorism: Enacting Freud's Two Fundamental Drives in Chris Cleave's *Incendiary* (2005)

Treball de Fi de Grau / BA dissertation

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Abstract

Incendiary (2005) narrates the life of a British woman who decides to write a letter to Osama Bin Laden after the terrorist attack that killed both her husband and her son. Drawing on trauma theory, my dissertation argues that Chris Cleave's novel is an enactment (or a reformulation) of Freud's life (Eros) and death (Thanatos) drives, as the two basic human driving forces seem to struggle in the protagonist's mind throughout her experience of survival after trauma. I argue that even though death (Thanatos) is constantly present in the nightmares and hallucinations the protagonist experiences after the death of her husband and her child, her desire (Eros), reflected in her need to write about her traumatic experience, her sexuality, and her dark sense of humour, is also the force that keeps her afloat in her struggle for survival.

Keywords: Chris Cleave, Incendiary, Trauma, Terrorism, Death drive, Life drive, Desire.

0. Introduction

Departing from Freud's theory of the two fundamental drives and its further development by trauma theorists Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub, the following dissertation will focus on terrorist narratives and, in particular, on the representation of the struggle for survival after a traumatic event. I will analyse Chris Cleave's *Incendiary* (2005) and specifically its protagonist, an unnamed woman who struggles to find a means to overcome her past traumatic experiences after the loss of her husband and son in a suicide bombing. My paper is going to be divided into two main sections; the first one will explore how the death drive (Thanatos), theorized as such by Freud and rediscussed from the perspective of trauma theory, is reflected in the protagonist's struggle with mental disorder, hallucinations and dissociation caused by the traumatic shock of the loss of her family. The second section will analyse how the life drive (Eros), as the manifestation of the character's survival instinct, is reflected in her need to give testimony, in the use of black humour as a coping mechanism and in her sexuality. Nevertheless, before analysing the novel, it is pertinent to contextualize it within research in trauma studies as well as examine the impact that the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have had on literature.

Trauma narratives, as argued by Laurie Vickroy, "attest to the frequency of trauma and its importance as a multicontextual social issue" (2002:2). The representation of an extreme experience and the effects that it has within an individual are the basis that prompt the theoretical framework of trauma studies. Although essentially associated with research about the Holocaust, the key ideas informing the initial development of trauma theory have been largely influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory, specifically his understanding of the compulsive repetition of traumatic events related with violence. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, originally published in 1920, Freud

argues that human existence is based on two drives: the life drive and the death drive, which interact and relate in a complex manner. Freud notices that people who experience a traumatic event—he initially worked with traumatised soldiers returning from World War One—would often re-enact that experience. These behavioural re-enactments, which Freud calls 'compulsion to repeat' aim at gaining the mastery of trauma. In that sense, there is an unconscious desire to die which is tempered by the life instincts (or Eros): "the aim of all life is death" (Freud: 32). Moreover, he argues that "the manifestations of a compulsion to repeat [...] exhibit to a high degree an instinctual character" (Freud: 29) giving further evidence of what Freud calls "death drive" or Thanatos.

This "repetition-compulsion" (Freud: xiv) dominates many of the formulations of literary trauma critics today and has been the subject of study of for several modern trauma scholars such as Cathy Caruth. Focusing on the "belatedness" or "latency" of the traumatic experience, that is on the idea that trauma holds the present captive to an unrepresentable past, Caruth finds "a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival" (Caruth, 1993:24). The return of trauma through disturbing dreams and hallucinations is bewildering since it is, as Caruth describes it, "the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (1996:59). In that sense, trauma does not only consist of having faced death, but of the "incomprehensibility of one's own survival" (Caruth, 1993:25). As we have seen, the idea of the death drive is realised in the compulsion to repeat the original trauma, that is to say in its "latency", and can be accounted for by resorting to the idea that trauma is mostly felt as the difficulty of attesting to our own survival.

Following Caruth's ideas, Dori Laub discusses the uncanny way in which trauma returns in his work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992). In his view, the victims of a traumatic event also face the problem of the

suddenness and lack of closure which make it difficult to understand their new reality. This lack of closure that prevents victims from fully healing further reinforces the idea of the returning destructive thoughts as an evident symptom of the harm caused by trauma. Dori Laub and Susanna Lee (2003) tackle the interconnectivity between posttraumatic symptoms and the death drive. The inability to keep in touch with reality may lead to phenomenology related to PTSD, and "psychosis and neurosis can be read as death instinct derivatives of varying magnitude" (Laub and Lee, 2003: 3).

As regards the life drive, it has been argued that there is an imperative to live rooted in the traumatic events that victims experience (Laub, 1995). There is this peculiar force, the life drive, that motivates the survival of the self in extremely devastating experiences, and which is essentially connected with bearing witness to trauma. As Dori Laub argues, "there is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story" (1995,77). Although there is no cure for traumatic wounds, bearing witness to them might help not only to attest to trauma, but also to recover from it. In fact, Felman and Laub consider that "testimony is the literary [..] mode par excellence of our times, and that our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony" (1992:5). For Caruth, the belated nature of trauma compels the traumatized person to survival not only by finding new modes of bearing witness to it, in this case by writing, but by opening up new opportunities for experience and new ways of understanding (1996).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are known to have shaped and defined the recent history of 'the West' as well as society's way of thinking. The unexpected had happened, and now the world seemed to have become "a new landscape of insecurity, risk and uncertainty" (Seidler, 2013: viii). This tragic event made a significant dent in people not only physically, but also psychologically, and had an equal impact on society and culture in general, particularly on literature through the emergence of the so called

"terrorist narratives". Ever since the 9/11 event, the number of written fictions related to terrorism has only grown. Writers, journalists, and filmmakers have attempted to relate, unfold, or infer on the event itself and on its outcome. Among the novels, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006) and Ken Kalfus's A *Disorder Peculiar to the Count*ry (2006), deserve particular recognition, not only for their "self-consciousness about the inadequacy of words to do justice to the event and trauma that 9/11 was" (Kaplan, 2005:159), but also for a tendency to retreat into the private and the subjective. As a consequence of the traumatic impact of the terrorist attack, writing became "immersed in the domestic sphere, with the unforeseen and "unknowable" assimilated into domestic structures" (Morley, 2011:117). In that sense, the 9/11 terrorist attacks are regarded as a turning point in the literary representation of collective and cultural trauma.

Incendiary (2005), the novel written by Chris Cleave that I will analyse here, is an epistolary first-person novel that portrays the traumatic experience of a nameless working class British woman from the East of London. This unnamed narrator seems to suffer from some kind of preexisting "condition caused by nerves" (Cleave, 2005:12) as a result of past sexual abuses. From a young age she has been victim of several abuses that lead to her anxiety disorder, which she remedies with extramarital sex and promiscuity. These experiences have led her to partake in sexual encounters in order to "provide temporary self-forgetfulness" (Cooke, 2013:173). Early in the novel, she meets journalist Jasper Black, her neighbour, with whom she has several sexual encounters. While she and Jasper are having sex, the TV broadcasts a bombing attack that is taking place at the soccer stadium where her policeman husband and her four-year-old son are watching a game. In a state of shell-shock, she decides to go to the stadium and try to find her family among the carnage, without success. After she realises that they are dead, she

decides to write an enraged letter to Osama Bin Laden, the perpetrator of the terrorist attack. As time goes by, she initiates a relationship with her dead husband's boss, Terence Butcher, and finds out that the bombings could have been avoided. This finding will lead to anger, sorrow, and further trauma, which will even culminate in a suicide attempt.

Her anger and rage are fully portrayed in the letter she writes to Bin Laden. Her writing process, characterised by the need to tell and the urge to deny, depicts seamlessly the impact of trauma in her life as well as her experience of bearing witness to it, "proving that terrorism can indeed affect people psychologically" (Kangah, 2017:102), and that giving testimony is, in Laub's words, "a ceaseless struggle" (1991: 75). Also, desire is going to be a crucial element when analysing the different ways in which survival is achieved. Following modern scholars such as Jennifer Cooke, who stresses the essential value of "human relationality, especially in the aftermath of trauma" (Cooke, 2013: 172), I contend that the sexual relationships and intimacy that the narrator has will be crucial to the narrator's survival. Lastly, humour is also going to be a crucial element to comprehend the narrator's puzzling act of survival. She constantly uses jokes as well as irony to cope with her terrors and to minimize her pain.

1. The Death Drive and its Representation in Cleave's *Incendiary*

In this section, I am going to resort to Freud's theory of the death drive and its reformulation by trauma theorists to analyse the several ways in which Cleave's novel's protagonist exemplifies their postulations, through her compulsion to repeat those contradictory behaviour models, hallucinations, alcohol, and drug abuse. In that sense, following Cathy Caruth, Susanna Lee, and Dori Laub, I will argue that the complexity of survival is partly due to the incomprehensibility of the destructive nature of the traumatic event and the ceaseless attempts to come to terms with it.

Cleave's novel reflects the character's attempts to grasp the traumatic nature of the event by repeating destructive behaviour. The book is divided into four parts—each one named after each of the four seasons—and, as the narration progresses, the narrator's mental health worsens. The unnamed protagonist's mental health is progressively deteriorating as her repetition compulsion, that is the repetition of negative behaviour patterns, dreams, hallucinations, alcohol, and drug abuse, keep growing in number and drawing her into a negative holding pattern.

The first part of the book, 'Spring', already gives us an introduction to the protagonist's feelings and emotions after the death of her "little boy" and her husband when she tells Osama: "I'm going to write you about the emptiness that was left when you took my boy away" (Cleave, 2005: 4). Moreover, it gives us an insight into her life and her past. Her experience with trauma seems to have started before the fatal terrorist attack, as she states that "Ever since I was a young girl I get so anxious" (Cleave: 12). She claims to suffer from a "condition caused by nerves" (12) that can be connected to the fact that her first sexual experience was with her mother's boyfriend at the age of fourteen. We can assume that she was sexually abused by the man who she describes as a "SICK CHILD PREDATOR" (capitals in the original) (13) and that this was her first

traumatic experience that can be associated with her sexual promiscuity (Roller et al, 2009): "Ever since then whenever I get nervous I'll go with anyone as long as they're gentle" (13). Her history of being sexually abused will not end there, as she experiences yet another traumatising sexual experience when drunk Jasper abuses her in the bathroom of a bar: "I gave up struggling. There was no point anymore and I didn't want him to hurt me any worse than he had to" (190).

Her past experiences will condition the way in which she interacts and creates new relationships with people. The protagonist's sexual and emotional life seems to be rooted in these series of complex traumatic events whose "starting point is violence, loss and suffering rather than kindness and affection" (Cooke, 2013:176). This will be important when analysing the narrator's actions and mental responses to the death of her husband and son as the destructive character she seems to acquire throughout the story, which "appears to condone male dominance and violence" (Cooke, 2013:185), hints at the more profound backgrounds of her distress. Although the trauma caused by the death of her husband and child may be seen as the most explicit symbol of her encounter with death, conceiving the protagonist's trauma as caused solely by a single occurrence would imply ignoring "a constellation of life experiences" (Erikson, 1995: 185) that are already present from the moment of the al-Qaida attack at Arsenal's new stadium. Despite her constantly blaming the bombing for her state, Cleave makes it clear that the protagonist's life had been permeated by the presence of death long before the death of her husband and child.

Having seen how trauma is present from an early stage in the protagonist's life, it is important to address how, unfortunately, her distress will only increase as she endures further traumatising episodes. Starting with the most prominent one, the killing of her husband and her son, it is significant how the first notice she gets about the bombing of

the packed soccer stadium will take place during sexual intercourse with Jasper. The fact that she was partaking in adultery while her husband and her kid were being killed will haunt her and create a harsh sentiment of guilt, adding even more distress to her deteriorating mind. This also provides an indication of how the life drive and the death drive have succeeded in blending internally in the story in disturbing contiguity, imposing tensions in the mind of the protagonist that seem to be unsettling and disorganising. After the bombing, the protagonist decides to go to the soccer stadium with the hope of finding her family and bringing them back home. Now, she is going to experience not only the mental trauma of having lost them, but also the physical and emotional pain of having been to where the actual bombing took place: "My elbow got turn ragged and I couldn't breathe [...] My tummy was swelling up from inside [...] Someone stood on my hand. I heard it break" (69). She also witnesses the physical outcome of the bombing as she is surrounded by dead bodies: "The bodies were like islands in a river with the blood all piled up in sticky clots on their uphill sides" (70). The brutal way in which Cleave portrays the outcomes of the terrorist attack can be described, in Avril Horner's words, as "Global Gothic" (2014: 37) since it reflects "a state of collective trauma" that is "endemic to globalised societies" (37). Yet it also involves abandoning the domestic space to provide a "creative response to terrorism," that is to say, "response to a world in which human relationships and nature itself seem threatened by the demands and ravages of corporate capitalism and new technologies" (Horner, 2014: 47). Thus, what follows is a highly brutal and bloody scene full of Gothic elements which "emphasise the human tendency to the irrational and to the death-drive" (Horner: 36). In this sense, "the narrator is faced with a scene of Gothic horror in which piles of bodies are surrounded by body parts and the earth is sticky with blood" (Horner: 42). Thus, not only is she dealing with the death of her family, but also with having seen first-hand the horrors of the bombing.

Freud's compulsive repetition is seen in the protagonist's post-traumatic hallucinations and identity crisis. Even though she does dream about her husband and her son, "I slept and I dreamed of my husband and my boy" (199), these are not as prominent as the hallucinations she suffers. After the terrorist attack, the narrator seems to obsessively hallucinate about her son. The first mention that we find about these repetitive thoughts is when she gets to the hospital after the bombing has taken place and she explains how she cannot stop thinking about her son: "And then it would hit me like right in the guts that he was gone" (93). These thoughts are painful and agonising for her, but there seems to be no solution to her distress. As Young explains, this is "based on the idea that intensely frightening or disturbing experiences could produce memories that are concealed in automatic behaviours, repetitive acts [hallucinations, flashbacks and other intrusive phenomena] over which the affected person exercise[s] no conscious control" (1996: 4). The hallucinations will quickly worsen both in intensity and frequency, as the narrator keeps attempting to grasp her traumatic encounter with the death of her husband and child. The first time that Jasper visits her at the hospital she relates one of her first hallucinations in which she sees how her neighbour's head would look like if it were blown off (95).

The torment she feels gets so difficult to bear that she decides that the only way out of her distress is to end her life. At 3 am, while still being in the hospital, she claims: "I couldn't stand it anymore. [...] so I decided to kill myself" (111). She first opts for overdosing on some pills but when that does not work, she decides to jump off the window. Eventually, she decides to not kill herself. It is here where, even though her deteriorating mind seems to win over her life, she decides to carry on living. Cleave puts forward the perturbing hypothesis that life and death are contained in us, that they both

work silently, and that the narrator is inevitably destined to both aggressive movements towards death and to survival.

When the narrator gets out of the hospital another hallucination takes place. This is going to be the first hallucination in which her son appears, and the way she describes it may even trick the reader into thinking that her son is truly there, as she "has become possessed by the event that traumatised her" (Horner: 41): "I went in the newsagent's and I saw my boy straight away. He had his back to me. He was on his own looking up at the drink fridge" (119). However, this little boy turns out not to be her son, but some other woman's kid. After this incident, she starts seeing her son everywhere: "There I was walking down Lower Marsh Street with my heart thumping and now my poor sweet boy was everywhere. I saw him getting onto buses and going into shops and walking away down the street" (121). As time goes by, her hallucinations reach a point where it seems impossible for her to differentiate between what is real and what is not. Her son seems to cohabit in her real world, and she seems to even conversate with him: "You look lovely Mummy, says my boy" (328). Another example is found at the end of the novel, in the chapter entitled "Winter", in which the narrator contemplates the possibility of killing Petra by burning her, while at the same time speaks to her son as if he was truly there:

> I called to my boy. He had his nose pressed up against the windows gawping at the waves of flame rolling over London so all you could see was the very tops of the tallest towers crumbling in the heat.
>
> - Come on darling come back here with Mummy out of the way.
>
> I held up the Zippo and I put my thumb on the spark wheel. I stayed like that watching Petra cry for a very long time. My boy looked up at me.
>
> - Mummy what are you waiting for? (334)

The boy seems to be physically there for her: "you can hear it in the noise my boy is making right now while he plays. RRRR! RRRR! He says I wish you could hear him Osama" (338). These hallucinations will haunt her already deteriorated mind revealing

how the incomprehensibility of her son's death has taken her to constantly hallucinate about him.

Another critical element in the protagonist's destructive behaviour is Mr Rabbit. Mr Rabbit is the teddy that her boy was holding when he was killed. It was the boy's favourite toy: "My boy slept on his side sucking Mr Rabbit's paws. […] He went everywhere my boy went. Or else there was trouble" (11). However, Jasper is able to recover it from the carnage and gives it back to her mother. Mr Rabbit, who is covered in dried blood, will be the element that reinforces the repetitive images of her dead family. Once she gets a hold of her son's teddy, she does not want to separate from it, it is constantly present in her life— "I was varying Mr Rabbit and 2 bottles of Valium in an Asda carrier bag" (115)—as a visual metaphor of her traumatic experience. Laurike In 't Veld suggests that "[these] metaphors reflect on what it means to be human—or to be dehumanised—during mass violence, while also providing an interaction with some of the more sensitive elements of the genocide narrative, particularly the death of children" (41). As an animal figure, Mr Rabbit's presence works as a powerful reminder of human behaviour:

> How can I not think about it? Please tell me how I can stop thinking about it because that's all I can think of. I can't think about anything else not for one second it's horrible horrible horrible. And I'm so scared all the time. I look at people and I see them blown to bits. Every teaspoon that drops sounds like bombs. I'm too scared to carry on even one more day (102)

This showcases not only how the death drive, the destructive nature awakened after her traumatic experiences, seems to rule the protagonist's existence, but also how the presence of her son's favourite toy keeps reminding her of his absence.

The third part of the book, "Autumn", depicts yet another symptom of her traumatic experiences; an identity crisis. Petra Sutherland, her lover Jasper's partner, is portrayed as a snob journalist that acts in a self-centred way. The two characters, Petra and the narrator, seem to be presented as the opposite sides of the same coin. According to the narrator, Petra belongs to the upperclass, enjoys dressing up, and is overall happy. In a way, Petra is what the narrator aspires to be, that is why when she offers her help of getting her a new look by going shopping, she accepts. They go shopping and it is here where she realises that they both have the same features: "She was so like me especially now we were both dressed classy. It was like we were sisters but you couldn't really tell till we were dressed the same" (227). The disorder and incoherence that prevail in the narrator's life affect her individual sense of identity and meaning, which has been disrupted and fragmented. Following this realisation comes another hallucination; Petra's reflection catches fire and her dead son's voice appears as Petra's: "Her lips started moving but it wasn't Petra's voice that came out it was my boy's. Mummy her lips said help Mummy my hair's on fire it hurts it hurts" (227). This hallucination not only results from her past traumatic experiences, but it can also be read as a warning of what is to come. In the third part of the book, we find out that the narrator's hatred toward Petra has now turned into a process of imitation. The protagonist has somehow lost her identity and is now viewing herself as someone else, as Petra: "I am Petra Sutherland" (239). She tries to dress, act, and think the way Petra would in an attempt to distance herself from her reality. This identity crisis will not last for long as she rejects this change some pages later: "I put her earrings back in the drawer. [...] I scrubbed her face off mine. [...] It was time to put my own life back on" (249-250). The protagonist has tried to distance her life from reality in order to retrieve some normality into her existence, to reconfigure her sense of order and meaningfulness.

2. The Life Drive and its Representation in Cleave's *Incendiary*

Having seen how the death-drive is present in Cleave's novel, in this section I will address how the protagonist's eagerness for survival and the life drive (Eros) are also highly involved in her life after trauma. The narrator's experience of survival goes beyond her re-enactment of the death drive, and desire, as well as her particular use of humour, acquire an important role in her attempt to survival. Moreover, in order to reconcile with her past and overcome her traumatic story, writing will become an essential tool in the narrator's experience of survival as it is through writing that the character attempts to reconfigure a sense of order, meaningfulness and coherent identity.

Laub argues that "the act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*, not relief, but further retraumatization" (Laub, 1992: 67). It might be, in fact, a traumatising experience to recount one's traumatic events but in the case of *Incendiary* it is also used as a coping mechanism to move forwards from them. Thus, the retelling of the past trauma becomes a necessity to survive: the protagonist needs to remember so that she can forget. In *Incendiary,* the narrator states her reasoning behind the letter she writes:

> I'm going to write to you about the emptiness that was left when you took my boy away. I'm going to write so you can look into my empty life and see what a human body really is from the shape of the hole he leaves behind. I want you to feel that hole in your heart and stroke it with your hands and cut your fingers on its sharp edges. I am a mother Osama I just want you to love my son. What could be more natural (4)

Giving testimony might be seen as a way of achieving an "ability to create a cohesive, integrated narrative, of the event" (Laub, 1992: 71) that will lead to coming to terms with the truth that the narrator struggles to find. Thus, she is finding new processes to reclaim

her story and to heal by writing a liberating letter. Even though, for Caruth, trauma escapes representation, telling one's story may be used as a means to "achieve a certain 'working through' for the victim" (Kaplan, 2005:37). As Laub argues, "repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action […] which has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival" (Laub, 1992: 85). In that sense, the narrator is able to survive partly due to her ability to give testimony, as Laub argues: "the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story so that they could survive" (Laub, 1992: 78). Cleave explores the narrator's process of working through trauma and giving testimony, a process that simultaneously makes possible and is made possible by the letter to Osama Bin Laden.

Furthermore, Eros and desire, the great antagonists of the death drive, are factors that have high relevance in Cleave's novel. For the narrator, sex is used as a way of momentarily forgetting about her present issues and mitigating the auto-destructive potential of the death drive. In that sense, her sexuality and desire become the framework for healing and become ever-present elements in even the most destructive phenomena. She describes some of her sexual encounters as something delicate, as when talking about her first sexual encounter with Jasper: "we had sex ever so gentle it felt like everything was flooding out of me it was lovely I cried all the way through it" (26). She is in constant search of warmth, even before the death of her family, and this seems to lead to an amplified desire to live. Cleave portrays a woman who, apart from containment, needs sex to become restored as a woman and to feel desired again.

The narrator even admits that "I may be weak Osama but I am not a slut" (16), as if the idea of having someone give her some kind of affection made her weak-minded.

Despite having been heavily traumatised by a past full of abuses and the death of her family, the narrator seems to be a "paragon of kindness and motherly care" (Cooke, 2013: 178). She is in constant need to look after the people around her: "I'm like a broken juke box the only tune I play is looking after my chaps. Won't you let me play it?" (337). By giving others the affection she so much yearns for, she is achieving some kind of tranquillity and relief. This is exemplified at the end of the novel, when she directly addresses Osama and encourages him to "come out of [his] cave and come to [her]" (337). She is now weak, and can no longer hold any hate in her, so she offers him her affection: "I will comfort you when you have bad dreams in the night. I will cook your tea just the way you like it. I will make our upstairs neighbours wish they'd never been born" (338). After all, her maternal instinct has not disappeared with the death of her son and by acquiring the role of a protective and caring partner she retrieves some normality back into her life.

Moreover, her desire is not only exemplified in her sexuality but also in her affective needs which are portrayed in her relationships as well as in her tenderness and tendency towards protecting and guarding her lovers. The affection that she gets mainly through her relationship with Terence and the beginning of her relationship with Jasper will be the tool that will instigate positive transformation. During her hospital stay, the narrator receives no visits. Her lack of friends or family members is obvious. She is alone. The only person that visits her is Jasper, with whom she has one of the first intimate moments of the novel: "Jasper stood up from the chair and kneeled down by the bed. He laid his head on the covers by my knee" (109). With Jasper she allows herself a "moment of vulnerability and silent interaction" (Cooke, 2013:183). Instead, Terence seems to be the one who awakes tenderness and passion in her. In the beginning, her relationship with Terence does not revolve around sex but seems to go beyond physical attraction, she has

thoughts about them being intimate and close: “I thought about ruffling his hair in the caravan with the sun coming in very bright through the windows and my boy laughing […]. I was so happy. Suddenly I really could see myself with Terence Butcher” (187). There seems to be a glimpse of hope as she “longs for warmth, familiarity and understanding” (Cooke, 2013: 177). Terence is also fond of their relationship as he states that her attraction towards her is not based on sex: “Warmth. That’s what I get with you that I don’t get with Tessa. Basic human warmth. […] I sometimes imagine you and me in bed together, he said. But not having sex. Just talking. […] You ruffle my hair and we smile because we understand one another” (185). For an instance, trauma seems to have been pushed into the background, and normality starts to sink in, temporarily, as she admits to liking him: “Terence. I like you” (198). She even thinks about the pleasure of not being alone while hallucinating about her and Terence blowing up: “Oh god it was so bloody nice to not die alone” (197). Having someone by her side, even in her miserable situation, gives her some light and hope for a better future. In fact, she tells Terence about her future plans: “Oh god Terence oh god we can start again you and me. We can start again like new” (259). The affectionate relationship that they have built is the grounds for the narrator to move on and leave her trauma behind, as her survival seems to expand to new experiences. Nevertheless, this affection disappears once she realises that the death of her family could have been avoided by Terence. In spite of the ending of their relationship, she still has expectations of a better future based on mutual love as she thinks that, after all, “everyone should be allowed a new start” (338). After all the pain there is still faith and hope for a better future: “I know you have a lot of things to get done but you ought to be able to get it done with love that’s my whole point. [...] Love is not surrender Osama love is furious and brave and loud” (338).

Finally, the narrator uses black humour as a way of coping with her mental struggle and of being more resilient, too. As argued by Sarah Christopher: "Black or gallows humour has long been recognised as having therapeutic value" (610). The protagonist's writing style as well as the constant jokes that appear in the novel can be seen as an easy and less painful way of retelling a disturbing story. She utilizes a simple and easy-to-read style of writing that eases the reading of the novel. Also, her writing resembles the narrative technique of the stream of consciousness, which allows the reader to creep into the writer's mind and thoughts, getting a rawer retelling experience. As for her frequent use of comedy, right from the very first page, she resorts to humorous coping mechanisms, especially in her life's worst moments.: "Dear Osama they want you dead or alive so the terror will stop. Well I wouldn't know about that I mean rock n roll didn't stop when Elvis died on the khazi it just got worse" (3). The black humour found in the novel not only gives the reader a respite from the harsh reality of the narrator, but it also helps the narrator deal with her pain. Her multiple humorous comments may at times amuse, disgust, or fascinate readers, but the intended effect is to convey the harrowing nature of terrorism and the insidious effects that trauma has on its victims.

While remembering her husband and how dangerous his work actually was, she decides to add some humour to the sad recount of her past: "When your husband works in bomb disposable you want the whole world to stay that way. Nothing ever happening. Trust me you want a world run by Richard & Judy" (9). Her jokes, though rude and insensitive, exemplify the ease with which she can laugh about her tragic situation, as when she is describing to Obama her TV preferences and refers to the sadistic ways in which terrorists torture and kill their victims: "I know you'd rather watch blindfolded lads having their heads hacked off with knives […] I suppose we have different opinions about telly" (15). Moreover, she also jokes about the harsh reality that surrounds her. After

losing her previous job and her house, she finds a job at Tesco, but admits to being struggling economically: “I can either afford food or booze but not both so it’s true what they say I suppose life is full of choices” (326). Another example of this coping mechanism is seen further into the novel, when she addresses Obama and jokes about the name he would get in his badge if he were to work at Tesco:

> “they’d give you a very nice name badge to pin on your red dungarees with your name printed out on a Dymo tape and your badge would say
> TESCO
> OSAMA
> HERE TO HELP” (325)

In some way, the narrator’s dark humour shows how absurd the situation is. By joking about it, she makes it less threatening. But, as said above, the narrator’s sense of humour in her dark and very challenging moments is more than a coping mechanism, it is a survival mechanism. The narrator’s reliance on black humour also points to trauma and its resistance to be depicted through language. It indirectly alludes to the narrator’s inability to portray war and trauma objectively or coherently.

3. Conclusions and further research

This dissertation has explored the essential elements of terrorist narratives in Chris Cleave’s novel *Incendiary*. The central point has been the intriguing way in which Freud’s basic human driving forces— the death drive (Thanatos) and the life drive (Eros)—seem to struggle in the protagonist’s mind throughout her experience of survival after trauma. Scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Sussanna Lee, and Laurie Vickroy have enabled me to explore the death drive as a tendency towards behavioural re-enactments of trauma and to what today is called PTSD. The death drive has been accounted for as the impossibility of understanding the protagonist’s survival. As for the life drive, the

protagonist's need to give testimony, as well as her sexual desire and dark sense of humour, have been described as new ways of accounting for the experience of survival.

There is, however, a problem that Cleave's novel poses, one in which the need to tell is inhibited by the impossibility of telling. Before the impossibility to represent trauma, the narrator attempts to retrieve the past and situate it with respect to a reality which, in its slipperiness, is yet to be grasped. The letter to Bin Laden emerges as her attempt at giving testimony and as her reaction to a crisis of representation which results from trauma itself.

For further research, it would be interesting to investigate how the intimacies forged by trauma victims are represented in literature. Trauma victims seem to engage in rather puzzling love-hate relationships that often lead to dominance, violence, and revenge. In that sense, upon further investigation, I would like to explore the possibility to pinpoint a form of relationality in which "disruption can inspire transformation (and perhaps even love)" in literature (Cooke, 2013: 182).

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