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Trauma and Power: A Caruthian–Foucauldian Reading of Jelinek's *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*

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Abstract: Elfriede Jelinek's *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* (1980) reconceptualizes trauma as a socio-historical condition, produced and perpetuated by power–knowledge structures rather than experienced solely as personal or psychological suffering. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and Michel Foucault's concept of power–knowledge, this article argues that the novel represents trauma as historically entrenched systems of ideological domination that shape individual and collective identities, cultural narratives and memory. The article offers a critique of postwar Austrian society by exposing how the intricate interplay of power-knowledge generates the discourse of trauma and foreclose meaningful narrative recovery. Through a close textual and discourse-oriented analysis, the article demonstrates how the novel's fragmented structure serves as a significant literary critique, mirroring the unrepresentable nature of trauma and its resistance to forming a coherent narrative, while simultaneously exposing the ideological power-knowledge mechanisms through which unresolved traumatic histories are normalized and reproduced. The novel's depiction of trauma as a socio-cultural product rather than a private experience demonstrates that individual agency is constrained by power structures.

Keywords: Trauma; Power-Knowledge; Dominant Narrative; Unrepresentable; Counter-discourse.

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1. Introduction

In the domain of literary criticism, trauma is increasingly viewed not only as an individual psychological response to overwhelming experience but also as a condition shaped by broader socio-historical forces. Investigating trauma through the power-knowledge nexus offers a critical framework for understanding how the discourse of trauma is produced, regulated, and sustained within specific socio-historical contexts. Elfriede Jelinek's *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* (1980) serves as a strong example for this inquiry; it represents trauma simultaneously as individual psychological suffering, a historically embedded condition within postwar Austrian society, and a crisis of representation that disrupts narrative coherence.

This paper examines the relationship between trauma and power–knowledge in the novel, arguing that trauma is not merely a personal affliction but is created and perpetuated through power relations. It manifests in multiple forms: as a subjective experience lived by individual characters, a collective, historically embedded condition, and a fragmented discourse reflecting trauma's resistance to representation.

The central argument of this study posits that Jelinek's work transcends a mere depiction of trauma as an individualistic experience of horror and suffering; rather, "it encapsulates trauma as an endemic and ongoing state, deeply embedded within the social fabric and historical context" (*Unclaimed* 45). The novel presents trauma not as an isolated incident but as a chronic condition that profoundly shapes and distorts identities, memories, and collective narratives of its characters. Trauma in *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* functions simultaneously on a psychological level, affecting individual subjectivity, and on a historical level, reflecting unresolved social violence and collective repression within postwar Austria. In this sense, trauma exceeds personal experience and operates as a structural condition embedded in social life.

This study contends that the representation of trauma in *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* is actively generated and sustained by systems of power–knowledge. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theorization of power–knowledge, the paper argues that trauma emerges from the ways in which social power produces dominant discourses, regulates memory, and shapes subjectivity. As Foucault theorizes, "power and knowledge are intertwined, where power is based on knowledge and also shapes it" (*Discipline* 183). Within Jelinek's narrative, societal power structures enforce specific discursive frameworks that determine which histories are acknowledged, which forms of violence are normalized, and how traumatic experience is interpreted. These power–knowledge formations do not merely respond to trauma after it occurs; rather, they participate in producing the conditions under which trauma arises and persists.

By bringing Cathy Caruth's trauma theory into dialogue with Foucault's analysis of power–knowledge, this paper argues that trauma in *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* is both psychologically experienced and socially produced. While Caruth emphasizes trauma's resistance to representation and its persistence beyond conscious understanding, Jelinek's narrative extends this insight by revealing how trauma is embedded within historical structures and ideological systems that continually reproduce it. The novel's portrayal of fragmented subjectivity, distorted memory, and repetitive violence reflects not only the psychological effects of trauma but also the social mechanisms that sustain it.

The primary objective of this study is to offer an interdisciplinary critique of *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* by clarifying the structural relationship between trauma and power–knowledge. Through close textual analysis informed by trauma theory and Foucauldian discourse analysis, the paper examines how Jelinek's narrative exposes trauma as a condition produced at the intersection of psychological experience and historical power relations. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to existing scholarship on trauma and its literary representation while engaging more broadly with questions of memory, subject formation, and ideological control.

Through close textual analysis informed by Caruthian trauma theory and Foucauldian power-knowledge, the article first examines trauma as both an individual psychological phenomenon affecting characters' lives and a broader historical event occurring at the intersection of individual suffering and the socio-political landscape of postwar Austria. Secondly, the paper demonstrates how trauma functions as a state-sanctioned discourse, produced and sustained by power structures regulating memory and subjectivity. Thirdly, the study analyzes the novel's disjointed and fragmented structure as a reflection of traumatic experience, which inherently resists coherent narrative representation. Finally, it argues that within this fragmented narrative space, the characters' attempt to reclaim their own voices, forming counter-narratives that challenge the dominant ideological frameworks that shape their lives. In doing so, the study highlights trauma not only as a wound but as a site of both narrative and political resistance.

2. Literature Review

The study of trauma in literature has evolved significantly since its emergence as a distinct field in the 1990s. The initial wave of literary trauma theory, often called the psychoanalytic-poststructural approach, was profoundly influenced by Sigmund Freud, particularly his concepts of delayed action (*Nachträglichkeit*) and repetition compulsion. These ideas were foundational in explaining how a traumatic event, "initially 'unclaimed' by consciousness, is not recalled directly but compulsively re-enacted through flashbacks or fragmented memories" (Freud 119).

Scholars such as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub expanded on this concept in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). They emphasized "the crisis of witnessing and the challenges of bearing witness to an event defying conventional narrative" (58). Later, scholars advocated a broader socio-historical approach, highlighting that trauma is shaped by political and social forces. Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) subsequently became a cornerstone of trauma studies by positing that trauma is not a memory of an event but the event itself, re-experienced in a haunting, fragmented way. This unrepresentable, unclaimed quality, residing beyond the realm of language and conscious memory, became a central tenet of early literary trauma studies.

However, as the field matured, scholars critiqued the narrow focus on trauma's ineffable nature. Roger Luckhurst, in *The Trauma Question* (2008), argues that "this emphasis can unintentionally mystify trauma, turning it into a sacred or transcendent experience that risks isolating it from its social and political origins" (106). This critique paved the way for a pluralistic approach, viewing trauma not as an individual psychological response but as part of multiple narrative responses.

This shift gave rise to the "historical turn" in trauma studies. Scholars like Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) urged engagement with trauma's socio-historical dimensions, emphasizing the necessity to "critique the ahistorical tendencies of early trauma theory, and work through historical catastrophes rather than simply act out their unassimilated effects" (134). In *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Judith Herman considers how collective forces—war, colonialism, and systemic oppression—shape the representation of trauma. She draws parallels between survivors of domestic violence and political terror. She shows that "trauma thrives in contexts of domination and silence" (64), acknowledging that trauma is a political act since social structures often deny it.

Influenced by these broader perspectives, many scholars, including this study, turn to Michel Foucault's concept of power-knowledge to analyze trauma as a socio-historical phenomenon. Foucault's idea that "power produces rather than simply represses" suggests that society's understanding of trauma is itself a form of social control (*History* 203). For instance, the medicalization of trauma can be viewed as a tool of biopower, "a mechanism for regulating populations by focusing on the health and pathology of the individual body disregarding the systematic political body" (Rabinow 36).

Jill Gordon, in her work on historical trauma, explores this link by arguing that dominant historical narratives privilege certain experiences while silencing others. She states, “by sanitizing or ignoring the traumatic past, a society's power structures prevent collective mourning and social transformation” (189). Narratives of trauma are not neutral; they are shaped by prevailing power relations to reinforce existing structures. Dominant narratives seek to “control the interpretation of the past and limit the possibilities for social transformation” (Gordon 34). This broader perspective establishes that “a comprehensive understanding of trauma necessitates a multi-faceted approach transcending purely psychological facets” (Wicke 36).

Elfriede Jelinek's *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* is recognized as ideal ground for such an approach, as it exposes lingering effects of Austria's fascist past alongside patriarchal and capitalist structures. “Her work is deeply rooted in the Austrian tradition of linguistically sophisticated social criticism, with precursors like Karl Kraus and Thomas Bernhard” (Killert 129). Allyson Fiddler argues that Jelinek’s work serves as a “‘rewriting of reality,’ systematically dismantling official histories and myths to reveal the buried truths of Austrian society” (53). Similarly, the 2004 Nobel Prize committee praised her “musical flow of voices and counter-voices which reveal the absurdity of society's clichés and their subjugating power” (“Nobel Prize Press Release”).

Many critics note her critique of consumerism and gender oppression, seeing the violence of her teenage protagonists as “a direct result of the moral vacuum left by a society refusing to confront its history” (Wicke 45). The representation of Austria itself is central for scholars like Matthias Konzett and Dagmar Lorenz. Konzett reads Jelinek's depiction of Austria as a “symptom of the broader West's unaddressed historical trauma” (76), where the refusal to confront the Nazi past fosters a collective psychological illness.

This perspective is complemented by Dagmar Lorenz, who highlights Jelinek's role as a “*Nestbeschmutzer*” (nests-fouler), an intellectual who publicly criticizes their country’s failings (187). Framing Jelinek as a "nests-fouler," Lorenz emphasizes that “Jelinek's unsparing literary project is a deliberate act of resistance against official, sanitized versions of Austrian history” (185). It functions as counter-discourse, directly challenging the power-knowledge apparatus enforcing silence and amnesia.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Trauma, Discourse, and Power

A comprehensive understanding of trauma necessitates a multi-faceted approach transcending purely psychological facets. While Cathy Caruth's trauma theory provides invaluable insights into the subjective experience of trauma, emphasizing its disruptive

impact on individual consciousness and the challenges of its representation, it is crucial to situate this individual experience within broader socio-political context. Michel Foucault's concept of power-knowledge offers a potent framework for analyzing trauma as it is generated, shaped and sustained by prevailing power structures and dominant discourses.

This study argues that Elfriede Jelinek's *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* exists at the precise intersection of these two forces. Unlike previous studies that view Jelinek's work as a mere depiction of suffering, this paper demonstrates that Jelinek exposes how the discourse of trauma is produced, controlled, and resisted within the postwar Austrian power-knowledge apparatus.

The methodological approach of this paper investigates the trajectory between the characters' internal traumatic ruptures and disjointed memory and the resulting fragmented narrative discourse of the novel. By utilizing Caruthian theory to decode the characters' fractured memories and psychological instability, the analysis moves beyond individual pathology to explore how these internal states mirror a larger crisis of representation. Simultaneously, the study employs a Foucauldian lens to uncover the external discursive power regulating and producing these traumatic experiences.

This approach argues that Jelinek's novel exists at the precise intersection of these two forces: the involuntary internal psychological rupture of a traumatic memory that resists representation and the external power-knowledge apparatus creating structured traumatic discourse. Unlike previous studies that view Jelinek's work as a mere depiction of suffering, this paper demonstrates that Jelinek's fragmented narrative is a deliberate formal strategy. It exposes how the discourse of trauma is produced, controlled, and resisted within the postwar Austrian socio-political landscape, transforming the novel into a site of active narrative intervention.

3.2. Caruth: The Psychic Rupture and Crisis of Representation and Witnessing

Caruth, in her seminal work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), posits that trauma is not simply an individual psychological injury but "a profound disruption of the self, a shattering of individual's capacity to integrate experience and construct a coherent narrative of selfhood" (49). Traumatic events, she argues, are so overwhelming that they cannot be fully processed by the mind at the time of their occurrence. This leads to a fragmentation of experience, where the traumatic event remains unprocessed, haunting the individual through intrusive memories, flashbacks, and nightmares.

Caruth emphasizes the unrepresentable nature of trauma, suggesting that the traumatic event, by its very nature, defies linguistic articulation: “trauma is a profound experience that defies straightforward representation and comprehension” (*Literature* 95). The individual struggles to find adequate words to describe the overwhelming and disorienting experience, leading to a sense of linguistic inadequacy and profound isolation. While critics often challenge Caruth’s universalist model for potentially de-historicizing trauma, this study utilizes her insights to show how characters' linguistic inadequacy is the symptom of a deeper historical blockage generated through power mechanisms.

This sense of isolation is not merely a personal experience but a product of the social and political context. Caruth argues that the very structures of language and representation, shaped by societal power dynamics, can impede full articulation of traumatic experience. Thus, “the traumatic experience, is not fully known or integrated into the individual's narrative memory, and its expression often eludes conventional language and narrative forms” (*Unclaimed* 35). According to her, this delayed nature means trauma is essentially a crisis of witnessing, where the victim witnesses the breakdown of their own capacity to grasp the event. This dual impossibility—“the impossibility of fully experiencing the event and of fully articulating it afterward”—(*Explorations* 126) forms the core of Caruth's theory.

3.3. Foucault: Power-Knowledge and the Generation of Trauma

Foucault's power-knowledge provides a central framework for understanding how power structures operate, contending that power and knowledge are mutually constitutive and cannot exist without one another. He argues that “power is exercised through the production of knowledge, and knowledge, in turn, reinforces power structures” (Discipline 287). Foucault challenges the traditional notion of power as a top-down force wielded by sovereign entities, instead viewing it as a pervasive influence permeating all levels of society through a complex network of practices. Knowledge is always situated within the play of power, meaning that what is accepted as truth is the result of specific power relations that determine its acceptance.

As noted by Deleuze, “What makes power hold accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force but that it induces pleasure, forms knowledge and produces discourse” (84). Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), further argues that knowledge is not neutral: “power is not simply a repressive force but is intricately intertwined with production and dissemination of knowledge” (143). This symbiosis suggests that knowledge is not an independent entity but is shaped by prevailing power dynamics.

In the context of trauma, this theoretical foundation implies that the ways in which traumatic experiences are understood, diagnosed, and treated are not merely reflections of objective reality but are created by dominant discourses of power. This notion of the "unrepresentable" aligns closely with Foucauldian notions of discourse and the limitations of language, as power regulates what can and cannot be articulated in public sphere.

Crucially, this paper argues that power structures in Jelinek's novel actively generate the conditions of trauma by enforcing silence and regulating what can be known about the past, particularly regarding historical trauma. This symbiotic relationship between trauma and prevailing power dynamics suggests that trauma—much like knowledge—is not an independent entity or a reflection of subjective reality, but a phenomenon produced and constrained by prevailing power-knowledge apparatus.

While Foucault's institutionalism of knowledge is critiqued for being too abstract, it reveals how power regulates the very boundaries of memory and subjectivity. The power-knowledge nexus is further evident in institutional settings where systems of surveillance produce knowledge that "categorizes, differentiates, and hierarchizes individuals" (History 203). For instance, the medical knowledge used in hospitals classifying patients and diagnosing illnesses serves as a form of control that shapes a patient's identity and behavior. "This medical discourse, while offering potential avenues for healing, can also inadvertently reinforce trauma as an individualistic affliction, obscuring the broader factors contributing to its occurrence" (Wicke 31).

By focusing on individual pathology and suffering, such discourse downplays the role of systemic factors—such as social injustice, economic inequality, and historical repression—in shaping individual experiences of suffering. In Jelinek's work, this mechanism is exposed as a tool of the state to maintain a sanitized version of history by pathologizing fragmented survivors who represent unhealed wounds of the nation's past.

3.4. Trauma as a Site of Narrative Fragmentation and Resistance

In literature, Caruth argues, trauma finds a unique expression because literary narratives can approach the indirectness and fragmentation of traumatic memories: "through figurative language, narrative gaps, and linguistic particularities, literature can transmit the force of a traumatic history in ways that more direct forms of discourse cannot" (*Literature* 68). In Jelinek's novel, the interplay between Caruth's theory and Foucault's framework becomes a tool for structural critique. This paper moves the argument

forward by asserting that the novel's narrative fragmentation is a direct formal consequence of characters' shattered psyches. Because the traumatic experience is inherently unrepresentable and resists the ordered language of power-knowledge, it manifests in the text as gaps, ruptures, and a breakdown of linear storytelling.

This study also argues that Jelinek transforms this fragmentation into a site of active political resistance. The very "unrepresentability" of characters' trauma serves as a refusal to participate in the sanitized, coherent history demanded by postwar Austrian state. Amidst the debris of their fragmented memories, characters' disjointed voices emerge as counter-narrative forces, which do not seek to form a new perfect narrative; instead, characters' very refusal to be whole allows them to challenge the totalizing power of dominant discourse.

4. Analysis

4.1. Unclaimed Experience and Discursive Power: The Witkowski as a Site of Historical Trauma

Elfriede Jelinek's novel transcends the confines of a conventional bildungsroman to become a critique of a society grappling with the enduring legacy of historical trauma. Set against postwar Austria, the novel exposes "the lingering traumas of a nation grappling with its complicity in the horrors of the Nazi regime" (Sorensen 23). This study argues that the trauma depicted is not merely a psychological byproduct of war but is actively generated by power-knowledge structures of the postwar state. By enforcing a "sanitized national history, these structures create the unclaimed experiences" (Caruth 150) that haunt characters. In this context, trauma is not an accident of history but a product of a social fabric that refuses to integrate its past.

The Witkowski family serves as the primary site where Foucault's productive power manifests as domestic and historical trauma. The lives of the teenage protagonists are shaped by power-knowledge apparatus that normalizes violence under the guise of bourgeois order. As Chambers argues, Jelinek highlights the "intricate relationship between individual trauma and societal structures that produce and perpetuate it" (111). The father—a one-legged former SS officer—is not merely a villain but a physical embodiment of "the unaddressed and undigested history of National Socialism" (Tsai 143). Through him, the ideological power of past is inscribed onto the bodies of next generation. This makes the nation's complicity a lived reality, illustrating how "ideology of the past permeates the present" (Kostova 23).

Caruth's theory suggests that traumatic experiences are not "fully processed when they occur but are repeatedly relived" (*Fissure* 8). In the novel, this "reliving" is seen in the senseless, episodic violence of the teenagers. Their inability to escape the National Socialist legacy marks their trauma as an unclaimed experience erupting in the present because it has been suppressed by the dominant national narrative. Jelinek's use of a quote from the Marquis de Sade provides a significant moment regarding this dichotomy: "we are monsters, even if we disguise ourselves as ordinary people. Inwardly we are consumed with wickedness, outwardly we are grammar school pupils" (124).

Here, the "outward" appearance of the grammar school pupil represents the Foucauldian "norm" enforced by society, while the "inward monster" represents the Caruthian trauma that remains unintegrated. The "universally valid norms" (124) are the power structures forcing characters to mask their fractured psyches, thereby ensuring the trauma remains "unclaimed" and perpetually violent.

The structural trauma of the novel is further evidenced by its temporal distortion. The lack of traditional chapter demarcations and the immersion in characters' internal thoughts provide a "deep psychological insight into the impact of historical trauma" (Killert 120). Jelinek captures this haunted present through specific imagery: "each and every full minute bears within it the negation of centuries of lame, broken history" (67).

This "broken history" is not a passive memory but active negation of the present. The "full minute" signifies characters' desperate attempt to exist in the present post-war, yet they are weighed down by the "lame" (stagnant) history of their fathers. This creates a state of internal conflict where identity formation is impossible. As Hanssen notes, the novel is a "stark portrayal of the search for meaning in a society still coming to terms with its dark history" (122). By framing this as a societal failure to confront the past, Jelinek demonstrates that the teenagers' violence is a direct product of an authoritarian power-knowledge system favoring historical amnesia over psychic recovery.

4.2. Narrative Fragmentation

The fragmented narrative and repetitive language of the novel are central to its depiction of trauma, reflecting characters' inability to process their troubled pasts. Jelinek utilizes fragmented storytelling to mirror a disintegrating society where, as Caruth argues, "trauma disrupts the subject's narrative of self and the world" (118). These disruptions manifest as constant interruptions—flashbacks, hallucinations, and intrusive thoughts—preventing the formation of a coherent life account. Employing frequent shifts in time, perspective, and genre, Jelinek conveys a sense of chaos that mirrors characters' disorientation.

The narrative intentionally lacks a single, central voice; instead, it jumps between internal monologues and external observations. When Jelinek writes, “her thoughts are somewhere else entirely, they are with the tram conductor... a twitching twitch at the corner of his mouth” (113), the disjointed chronology mimics the unclaimed nature of experience. As Smith notes, these shifting timelines reflect the “turmoil within characters’ mental states” (120), where internal psychic wound is constantly at odds with external social order. This structural instability forces the reader to experience the same cognitive dissonance felt by protagonists.

This fragmented style is further reinforced by Jelinek's use of syntactic rupture, specifically incomplete sentences and stream-of-consciousness mimicking the linguistic inadequacy Caruth identifies in survivors. When Jelinek writes, “She wants to scream, to tear everything apart, wants to tear everything apart…” (99), the sentence trails off into an ellipsis, forcing the reader to inhabit the silence where language fails. This “trailing off” is a direct manifestation of trauma’s resistance to narrative form.

The text refuses to provide the ordered language required by society, exposing the gap between character's internal pain and their available vocabulary. This is exemplified when the narrator describes characters' movements with a detached, almost mechanical scrutiny: “the person is a sequence of movements, the sequence of movements is a person. The individual is a record of his own performance, which is filed away” (Jelinek 82). This sentence structure—resembling a mathematical or legal definition—strips characters of their humanity and converts their suffering into a data point. As Tsai observes, Jelinek’s “cold clinical tone suggests that the ordered language of the power-knowledge apparatus is ultimately a mask for internal chaos” (76). While characters' speech is fragmented, the narrator's tone remains detached and observational, mirroring a morally bankrupt society that looks upon violence with the indifference of an official report.

The relationship between psychic rupture and power-knowledge is most precisely seen in the passage describing the air-raid shelters: “she remembers the air-raid shelter, the fear, the trembling... but these memories have a peculiar hollowness... They are like stuffed animals from which the life has been removed, leaving only the external form” (67). This “hollowness” represents a Foucauldian crisis of the subject: character’s internal traumatic memory (Caruth’s rupture) is displaced by a dominant social discourse forbidding the expression of wartime fear. The “life” (the raw, traumatic experience) has been eviscerated by a state discourse demanding a clean break from the past. What remains is only the “external form”—the sanitized version of history the characters are forced to inhabit.

The trauma of Nazism also erupts into present through what Chambers describes as a "recurring, unassimilated psychological event" (119). This is most evident in Rainer, whose father's history as an SS officer physically and psychologically dominates the household. Jelinek's prose often blurs the line between the external world and the internal psyche; a scene may be punctuated by sudden parenthetical interjections of his father's violent temper. These "linguistic eruptions show that the past is a shared pathology" (Sorensen 45).

4.3. Repetition, Motifs, and the Disciplinary Gaze

Jelinek's use of repetition, analyzed through Caruth's trauma, emphasizes the obsessive and intrusive nature of traumatic memories. Caruth notes that repetition suggests "the past haunts the present, preventing individuals from fully living in the moment" (93). This haunting is most visible in the Witkowski dinner rituals, functioning as a domestic re-enactment of fascist discipline. For example, the father enforces a silence that the only sound is the mechanical "clattering of cutlery against porcelain" (Jelinek 21), a repetitive noise that underscores family's entrapment. These rituals, "presided over by the authoritarian father, create a palpable sense of claustrophobia" (Gilman 600). These repetitions signify that the family is stuck in a temporal loop where the father's SS past dictates the ordered movements of the present.

This performative repetition extends beyond home into teenagers' aimless wandering and petty violence. Their movements are not a quest for freedom but a "circling of the same drain", mirroring the repetitive nature of unclaimed trauma. Jelinek describes their joyriding and violence as a series of hollow gestures: "They beat the man not because they hate him, but because the movement of the fist requires a target" (Jelinek 104). This specific moment of "petty violence" demonstrates that their aggression is a mechanical repetition of the brutality they witnessed at home. Rather than a meaningful rebellion, their actions are a "senseless choreography" (Lorenz 185) that reflects a society unable to move beyond its violent history.

The narrative is also characterized by recurring motifs illustrating the entrapment of subjects. The car, for instance, is a motif of escape that ironically leads nowhere. Jelinek describes their joyriding as a frantic but empty cycle: "the car eats up the road, but the road is a circle that leads back to the same stale air" (Jelinek 44). The characters' joyriding remains purposeless, leading them back to a vacuum of emptiness and impulsive violence.

The "physical space and its oppressive atmosphere constantly trigger characters' traumatic memories, symbolizing an unhealed past they cannot leave behind" (Lorenz 185). Rather than a sanctuary, the house becomes a "museum of the Third Reich," where every object triggers a psychic rupture. Jelinek emphasizes this through the father's invasive presence: "the father's shadow falls over every piece of furniture, claiming the space for a history that will not die" (Jelinek 52). This forces characters to inhabit a space that is physically present but psychologically stuck in the past, emphasizing the cyclical nature of trauma.

The female body serves as a central site where this trauma and objectification intersect. Jelinek critiques a patriarchal society reducing women to passive objects of desire. This is captured in the narrator's description of female anatomy as mere inventory: "the girl is a collection of surfaces, a geography of skin to be mapped and conquered" (Jelinek 89). Female characters are "frequently objectified and reduced to their physical appearance... presenting women as passive objects of consumption" (Killert 130). This objectification is a direct application of Foucauldian disciplinary power, where the male gaze acts as a surveillance mechanism inscribing trauma onto the body.

Smith highlights that female body becomes "a site of trauma, both physical and psychological" (45). The predatory behavior of male characters "reduces them to their sexual parts" (LaCapra 109), a dynamic transforming the body into a fragmented and incomplete entity. Jelinek depicts this fragmentation through characters' own self-perception: "she feels her limbs as separate weights, things she carries rather than parts of herself" (Jelinek 112). This serves as a metaphor for the trauma that disrupts their ability to construct a coherent narrative of self (Butler 32).

This motif of fragmentation is reinforced by recurring images of mirrors, serving as symbols of characters' distorted sense of self. As Caruth notes, trauma can "disrupt the subject's narrative of self" (46), and Jelinek's mirrors reflect this internal shattering. What characters see in these reflections is often distorted or empty, signifying their "psychological disintegration and inability to form a genuine self" (Butler 69). For example, when Brigitte stares into a mirror, she sees not a person but a detached image: "she looks at her reflection as if she were a piece of meat" (123). This simile underscores her psychological disintegration and internalized dehumanization; she adopts the cold, clinical gaze of the power-knowledge apparatus to view her own body.

Mirrors thus represent the "gaze of the other," reflecting a state of being under constant judgment and objectification that Foucault identifies as control mechanism. This judgment is itself a form of trauma violating the self and denying agency. Characters become acutely aware of how they are perceived, using mirrors as tools of self-punishment as they scrutinize themselves through the same objectifying gaze used by society to control them. Their use of mirrors in "a futile search for identity only reinforces the theme of fragmentation, suggesting that in a society governed by such a disciplinary gaze, the quest for a whole self is ultimately hopeless" (LaCapra 198).

4.4. The Power-Knowledge Nexus and Language of Resistance

The discourse surrounding trauma is subject to dynamics of power-knowledge. How trauma is understood, represented, and treated depends on power structures determining which narratives are validated, marginalized, or silenced. Furthermore, the act of narrating trauma and acceptance of these narratives as knowledge is itself a form of power; "those who have the authority to disseminate knowledge can shape the collective understanding of traumatic experiences" (Rehbein 25).

In Jelinek's novel, the system of power-knowledge is produced primarily within the family unit. Characters' lives are overshadowed by postwar structures, which remain imbued with authoritarian ideology. The patriarch's ideological control illustrates Foucault's idea that "power is omnipresent and is exercised through norms and institutions" (*History* 96). His rule mirrors the oppressive regime of the past which view power as "a pervasive force operating through normalized practices" (Herman 14).

The children, having internalized this ideology, reproduce it in their actions. Their acts of aimless wandering and violence—such as throwing a child into the bushes—are not random pathologies but unconscious re-enactments of power dynamics which disciplined them at home. Here, the Caruthian repetition of trauma becomes a tool of Foucauldian compliance; they become both subjects and agents of the very power that fractured them. Their violence is a "vicious cycle that reflects a society unable to move beyond its brutal history, turning their rebellion into a form of traumatic compliance" (Lorenz 185).

The novel's fragmented narrative reflects these fractured identities, serving as a "critique of the power-knowledge nexus, challenging the reader to question the veracity of what is presented as truth" (Rabinow 33). By disrupting the flow of information, Jelinek mimics how "power structures control the flow of knowledge" (Smith 36). The constant barrage of media messages functions as a linguistic panopticon; Characters are "bombarded by news and advertisements" (Fiddler 38) reflecting a society under constant surveillance.

Jelinek, however, transforms this fragmentation into a site of active political resistance. The very "unrepresentability" of characters' trauma serves as a refusal to participate in the sanitized version of history. Amidst the debris of fragmented memories, characters' disjointed voices emerge as counter-narrative forces. These voices do not seek to form a new, "perfect" story; instead, their refusal to be whole allows them to challenge the totalizing power of dominant discourse. Resistance manifests through a complex struggle to form a counter-discourse.

Jelinek employs parody and satire to challenge dominant narratives: "the novel parodies popular culture to critique how these cultural forms reinforce oppressive norms" (Hauser 331). This is most evident when characters adopt the "ordered" language of philosophy to describe their internal voids. It is seen when fragmented dialogues mimic empty slogans and philosophical clichés. For instance, Rainer's persona as a disciple of Sartre— "I am the master of my own void... a hero of the absurd" (132)—exposes the gap in the state's discursive control.

This intellectual detachment serves as a "survival mechanism—a tragic attempt to use ordered language to survive a disordered reality" (Janssen 72). However, this narrative mechanic demonstrates that his resistance is often trapped within the society's discursive clichés; it manifests as a pathetic, "un-plot-like flailing at a world they cannot truly affect" (Behrmann 540). Characters further satirize empty commercial slogans by discussing violence with the same detached enthusiasm used for consumer goods: "A hit to the head is like a new brand of soda, quick and refreshing" (154). This linguistic mimicry acts as a Foucauldian reversal: by over-identifying with the clinical and commercial language of power, Jelinek exposes its inherent absurdity.

The novel also explores female body as a primary site where traumatic discourse and resistance intersect. The objectification of female body, reinforced by the male gaze and media, is a disciplinary power rendering women passive objects of consumption. However, female characters do not passively accept this role; they transform the body into a site of active physical counter-discourse. By engaging in acts of defiance, subversion, or self-harm, they reclaim agency; "The female body becomes a site of rebellion, where acts of self-inflicted pain or psychological withdrawal" (Braidotti 75) function as a non-verbal rejection of the disciplinary gaze.

Specific acts, such as a character cutting her hair or viewing her reflection "as if she were a piece of meat" (123), serve as a testament to their rejection of the ordered body. By damaging the object that power seeks to observe and control, the subject asserts a traumatic reality the power-knowledge apparatus cannot categorize. Through this self-inflicted pain, characters reclaim ownership over their physical reality, effectively using trauma as a weapon against the disciplinary gaze.

These bodies, depicted as fragmented and incomplete, are not merely metaphors for suffering; they are political testaments to a refusal to be whole or functional subjects for the state's observation. This way, the novel's formal instability and characters' physical ruptures allow them to reclaim their own histories from the structures that seek to silence them. By eschewing traditional forms, "Jelinek's prose functions as the ultimate counter-discourse actively resisting the dominant version of Austrian history" (Lorenz 184).

By deliberately eschewing traditional narrative forms that offer catharsis or redemption, the novel itself, functions as the ultimate counter-discourse. In classical tradition, catharsis provides purification and closure; Jelinek, however, denies the reader this comfort. "The repetitive cycles of violence and the lack of moral resolution prevent the traumatic experience from being filed away" (Hauser 330). This absence of redemption is not a narrative flaw but a structural critique and a deliberate political feature. It argues that a society refusing to work through its Caruthian trauma does not deserve a "redemptive Foucauldian knowledge-set" (Hauser 340). Consequently, suffering remains an ongoing, claustrophobic state because the power-knowledge of the state refuses to validate the victim's memory.

In this context, Jelinek acts as a *Nestbeschmutzer* (nests-fouler), exposing the moral decay and silent complicity hidden beneath a veneer of normalcy. This act of "fouling the nest is a direct challenge to the power-knowledge apparatus authorizing historical amnesia" (Behrmann 526). Ultimately, Jelinek's work remains a site of ongoing discursive struggle. By allowing characters to reclaim their histories through formal instability, she ensures that the ordered lies of the past are constantly interrupted by the visceral, fragmented reality of the present. The lack of redemption also serves as a final testament to the unhealed wounds of a nation.

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that in *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*, trauma is represented as a dual crisis: a private psychological rupture and a state-regulated discourse. By synthesizing Cathy Caruth's theory of unclaimed experience and Michel Foucault's power-knowledge, the analysis clarified the trajectory from internal suffering to external control. The Witkowski family acts as the primary site of this nexus, where the "hollowness" of memories—likened to "stuffed animals" (Jelinek 67)—reveals how the state eviscerates raw, wartime fear to maintain an ordered "external form".

It explained that the novel's linguistic ruptures, repetitive motifs, and temporal distortions are direct symptoms of this historical blockage. The "broken history" (67) prevents the characters from forming a coherent identity, forcing them into a repetitive cycle of violence that is a form of traumatic compliance rather than liberation. These psychological symptoms reflect a society where the ordered language of the state masks internal chaos.

It ultimately and above all illustrated that Jelinek transforms these traumatic symptoms into a site of political resistance. Through the parody of philosophy and the rejection of the ordered body, she challenges the totalizing power of dominant discourse. Her role as a *Nestbeschmutzer* is ultimately cemented by the refusal of catharsis; by denying a redemptive arc, she argues that a society refusing to "work through the trauma the state demands to act out" (LaCapra 34) does not deserve the liberating closure of a whole narrative.

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