Writing Personal Trauma in Young Adult Fiction: Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* and Siobhan Dowd's *Solace of the Road*

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Abstract

In recent decades, the findings of trauma studies have been used in analyzing literary texts depicting trauma. While most critical attention is devoted to so-called historical or collective trauma (such as the Holocaust) and its long-time effects on survivors, there are novels, particularly coming-of-age novels, addressing complex issues of personal trauma. Analyzing Benjamin Zephaniah's Refugee Boy *(2001) and Siobhan Dowd's* Solace of the Road *(2009), this paper centers on personal (individual) trauma such as loss, child abuse and/or abandonment, and on traumatic memory in connection with identity formation of a teenage protagonist. It also deals with the textual means of writing trauma and reflects on the category of young adult literature under which both novels were marketed, arguing why Zephaniah's novel fits the category while Dowd's can be seen as a crossover novel.*

Keywords

Trauma, coming-of-age novel, writing trauma, young adult novel, crossover novel, Benjamin Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, Siobhan Dowd, *Solace of the Road*

Since the late twentieth century, there has been a flourishing of interest in the child as both a biological and social being and as a literary figure. In literary studies, this interest is reflected in the skyrocketing of the amount of articles and books written about literature for children and youth as well as about the literary genre of the Bildungsroman (the coming-of-age novel) depicting the transition from childhood into adulthood.[1] The rising popularity of the coming-of-age novel is paralleled by the emergence in the 1950s and ensuing flourishing of young adult (YA) fiction. As a relatively new category of fiction, YA novels are primarily defined by the age of their protagonists and of their intended readership, i.e. they are written about teenagers for teenagers.[2] In the words of Rachel Falconer, despite their generic and stylistic variety, YA novels share two common features: "the central protagonist […] is between 11 and 19 years of age and the text's addressee, or implied reader, is assumed to be of similar age."[3]

1 For a detailed discussion on the genre of Bildungsroman, see Šárka Bubíková, "The Literary Image of Man in the Process of Becoming: Variations of the Bildungsroman Genre in English and American Literature," *American and British Studies Annual* 4 (2011): 116–130.

2 YA literature is usually seen as sub-category of children's literature (when children's literature is divided by age group), sometimes as a specific category between children's literature and literature for adult readers. For more on the definition see for example *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (New York: Routledge, 1996); Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard, *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) or *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. David Rudd (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). The term young adult is sometimes used as synonymous with teenager (as in *Random House Dictionary* or *Webster's New World College Dictionary*), sometimes it denotes a person in their late teens or early twenties (as in *Cambridge Advanced Young Learner's Dictionary* or *English Oxford Living Dictionary*).

3 Rachel Falconer, "Young adult fiction and the crossover phenomenon," in *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. David Rudd (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 90.

In the short history of YA fiction,[4] two streams seem to be taking turns in popularity among teenage readers – the realistic and the fantastic (often dystopian) novels. With William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) as their predecessor, the popularity of the YA coming-of-age novels shaped into the form of fantasy and/or dystopia peaked around the turn of the millennium – one only needs to mention Louis Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007), Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008–2010), James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009) or Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011). Nevertheless, a majority[5] of the current coming-of-age YA novels is written in a realistic mode situating the maturing protagonist in a contemporary world rendered with high degree of verisimilitude. With J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) as founding texts[6] of realistic YA fiction, these novels address issues previously considered taboo, such as teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, poverty, bullying, and racism. Since the 1970s, the predominant focus on the grittier side of life and the no-longer favorable presentation of authority figures has earned this fiction the label of "new" realism.[7] Childhood studies scholar Christine Wilkie-Stibbs has identified the trend as "provoked partly by new ideologies and changed international and intranational relations, and partly by the examples of innovative writers."[8] The new realism gave "voice and visibility to a range of previously silenced and taboo subjects"[9] and it has, as Barbara Elleman states, "escalated up through the children's book field in increasing proportions ever since [the 1970s]"[10] to such degrees that it is possible for Falconer to claim that "in contemporary YA, violence, death and the apocalypse have become the norm rather than the exception."[11]

Unlike older texts targeted at young readers depicting adult authority figures, in the words of Elizabeth Segel, "as paragons of wisdom and virtue" in order to "drum into little heads" that obedience to authority was "the chief virtue,"[12] new realism often presented adults, namely parents or adults in a position of authority, according to Adele Greenlee, "as the major source of children's problems."[13] Yet the theme of a child abandoned and/or abused, particularly sexually abused, by parents or a parent-like figure, was rarely addressed in YA fiction until the 1990s. In this

4 In my article, I am referring to both British and American novels indiscriminately, i.e. treating them as belonging to the same field of Anglophone fiction.

5 For the currently rising popularity of the realistic see for example Sue Corbett, "Getting Real: Is realistic young adult fiction poised to overturn years of dystopian rule?," *Publishing Weekly*, May 5, 2014, 27–31.

6 Seen as such for example by Carpenter and Prichard in *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, 518–519, or Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction," 87.

7 See for example Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 203–220; Jo Ellen Oliver, "'Old' and 'New' Realism in Adolescent Literature," *Journal of Reading* 21, no. 4 (1978): 335–338.

8 Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child In and Out of the Book* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), ix.

9 Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, ix.

10 Barbara Elleman, "Publishers and Book Publishing in the United States," in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Bernice E. Cullinan and Diane Goetz Person (New York and London: Continuum, 2001), 649.

11 Falconer, "Young adult fiction," 89.

12 Elizabeth Segel, "Realism and Children's Literature: Notes from a Historical Perspective," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1980): 16.

13 Adele Greenlee, "Family Stories," in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Bernice E. Cullinan and Diane Goetz Person (New York and London: Continuum, 2001), 273.

respect, Dorothy Allison's coming-of-age novel *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992)[14] represented a kind of break-through, as it openly addressed the issues of poverty, dysfunctional fractured families, as well as the physical and sexual abuse of children.

Most of the previously silenced and taboo subjects surfacing currently in YA fiction involve some kind of trauma. The term "trauma" shall be used in this article in the meaning established by psychiatrists, i.e. to refer to event (or series of) so extreme that it cannot be properly assimilated and processed by our memory and thus keeps coming back in unbidden recollections.[15] Psychological trauma is therefore an individual experience of an event or an enduring condition that "creates psychological trauma when it overwhelms the individual's ability to cope, and leaves that person fearing death, annihilation, mutilation, or psychosis. […] The circumstances of the event commonly include abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion, and/or loss."[16]As Biata Piątek points out in her book on memory and trauma, there is a difficulty involved in the common usage of the term trauma, namely that it refers both to "an event so extreme that it leaves the subject wounded psychologically, and that psychological wound [itself]" since in fact these cannot truly be separated.[17] An event becomes traumatic precisely because it casts a deep psychological wound, therefore it may be at times confusing that the term can refer both to an event and its result. Another problem involved in the current use of the term trauma is its trivialization, especially in media, where it has become synonymic with stress or hardship of any kind. However, in the following discussion, I limit my usage of the term trauma to events (and their effects) which are truly traumatic (such as physical and sexual abuse or parental abandonment), not just uncomfortable or difficult.

As already mentioned, there are many coming-of-age novels addressing different kinds of trauma the maturing protagonists struggle with. As Piątek states in accordance with critics echoing psychiatric research (such as Soshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Dominic LaCapra), "literary fiction is a particularly well-suited medium for explorations of trauma."[18] The article focuses on the ways Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* (2001) and Siobhan Dowd's *Solace of the Road* (2009) confirm this premise.

Marketed as a YA novel and clearly educational in its purpose, Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* (2001) tells the story of the fourteen-year old boy Alem, Eritrean on the maternal side, Ethiopian on the paternal side, whose life is in danger because of the Eritrean–Ethiopian War which took place between 1998 and 2000. The book opens with two chapters that relate almost identical incidents in the life of Alem's family – soldiers breaking into their house in the middle of a night, dragging his parents outside, shooting around their feet with rifles demanding declarations of their

14 The book is usually marketed as semi-autobiographical novel and although it is sometimes viewed as YA title, its inclusion into the canon of young adult literature is often (especially in US) complicated by censorship issues, for more see Sonja R. Darlington, "Challenging the Canon of Adolescent Literature: Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*," *The ALAN Review* 24, no. 1 (1996): 24–27.

15 See Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

16 Esther Giller, "What is Psychological Trauma?," *Sidran Institute of Traumatic Stress Education and Advocacy*. https://www.sidran.org/resources/for-survivors-and-loved-ones/what-is-psychological-trauma/.

17 Beata Piątek, *History, Memory, Trauma in Contemporary British and Irish Fiction* (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2014), 32.

18 Piątek, *History, Memory, Trauma*, 184.

nationality, refusing the answer that they are African and ordering them to leave the country or die. Although the first of the incidents happens in Ethiopia and the second in Eritrea, they both end with soldiers pointing their rifles at Alem's forehead declaring: "And he is a mongrel."[19]

In this way, the reader gets a clear idea that there is no safe place for the family in either of their countries of origin and that Alem's bi-cultural legacy is a threat to his life in both. In order to protect their child, the father decides to take Alem to Britain. But what begins as a language skills training tourist expedition turns suddenly and for Alem unexpectedly into a desperate struggle for safe and legal existence. Hoping that an unaccompanied child asylum seeker will have a greater chance in the host country, Alem's father abandons his son in a hotel room with only a brief letter of explanation for Alem and instructions for the hotel manager. Shocked, Alem questions the motivation of his parents, wondering whether "they really love him or was this a plan to get rid of him? Would they care so much about his upbringing, his health, his education and then dump him?"[20] He even thinks that his father might have prepared "some kind of rite-of-passage thing, a test of manhood"[21] for him and he is hiding close by to see how Alem scores. In fact, Alem is undergoing an initiation or a rite-of-passage, although it has not been organized by his parents, who are in the same position of helpless victim of powers beyond their control. After Alem is abandoned in a hotel, the novel follows his placement in children's home and later with a foster family and details his struggle to achieve asylum.

When Alem arrives in England, he already has had experience with bullying and beatings in schools both in Eritrea and Ethiopia as well as with police harassment, with soldiers invading and destroying their homes in both countries threatening Alem and his family with annihilation. But entering Britain does not automatically stop the string of unhappy, stressful events both simply because the war in Alem's homeland still ranges on and because his life in the foreign country is not an easy one at all. Interestingly, although Alem already has experienced potentially traumatic events and has lived under threatening and stressful conditions, he does not seem to exhibit signs of trauma. In fact, when he is placed in a children's home, he appears to be the most composed, best behaved and calm boy of all the interns. Many of the boys are excessively aggressive and manipulative, some unnaturally withdrawn and shy. Alem's roommate Stanley suffers from nightmares, during which he screams aloud desperately: "Don't go, Mummy, please don't go, Mummy. When are you coming back? Don't leave me in here all on my own! […] Mummy, it's so dark, Mummy, please come back soon."[22] Sweeney is the main bully in the children's home who even starts a fight when Alem refuses to give him his lunch. After they are pulled apart by staff, Sweeney threatens Alem: "I'll kill you, yu [*sic*] bastard – […] I'll turn yu lights out – you are dead – yu dead meat." Alem looks at Sweeney's bleeding nose and incredulously asks: "You do all this for some chips?"[23] Zaphaniah seems to be clearly contrasting the refugee both with troubled youth and with a juvenile delinquent of the host country to point out that everyone's story is different. Clearly, Alem's abandonment was a selfless act of loving parents, while Stanley was abandoned by

19 Benjamin Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001), 8, 10.

20 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 33.

21 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 33.

22 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 63.

23 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 71.

an uncaring mother unable to perform her parental role. And while Sweeney regularly resorts to violence to gain power and profit, Alem only defended himself.

Utterly unhappy and fearing further attacks of the bully and his friends, Alem decides to run away from the children's home. Luckily he does not end up permanently on the streets, but is returned back to social services, with whose help he is placed into a decent foster family where he awaits the decision about his asylum status all the while studying hard at a local school and gaining admiration from teachers and classmates alike. It is in the foster family circle where Alem receives the news of his mother's violent death. The father then joins Alem in Britain, applying for asylum as well. However, the court turns down the application reasoning that the conflict in their homeland is just "a border disputes" and "not a full-out war" and that there are "millions of Ethiopians and Eritreans who are not affected by the war."[24] Soon, Alem's classmates organize a widely-supported petition to their local MP to reverse the court decision. The case gets local publicity; however, shortly after the march to the town hall with the petition, Alem's father is killed in front of the London office of the East African Solidarity Trust, an organization devoted to promote peace in the region. The story ends with Alem granted asylum in Britain. Although tragic, Alem's story is a success story of assimilation through education.

The novel clearly intended to raise awareness about the complex issue of asylum seekers and the inadequacy of the asylum application system among its young readers. For that purpose, it adopts several literary strategies. It presents a moving story of a boy who is a victim and a survivor. The way he is portrayed makes him almost a role-model refugee – he is educated and longs for education, loves to read and learn new things, has high professional aspirations; he is calm, polite, well-behaved, self-assured and determined. In short, he is presented as a more desirable child that most of his British classmates. Alem's parents are active volunteers of the peace organization EAST and both die as innocent victims of violence. Alem's character is contrasted on several occasions with headings of tabloids railing against illegal immigrants and bogus refugees. Despite all that happens to Alem, he remains composed and reasonable. Or he seems to be so because he is viewed only from the outside and therefore whenever he falls silent, the intensity of his possible inner struggle is not narrated.

During the march, he is asked to speak about his situation. He says: "You see, in my homeland they are fighting over a border, a border that is mainly dust and rock. I really cannot understand why these people are fighting over this border. If there is to be any fighting, we should be having a nonviolent fight to get rid of borders." He ends his speech by saying: "What we really want is a culture of peace! We must raise a new generation of peacemakers."[25] The reactions to such a speech are predictable and they reinforce the reader's impression of the protagonist by linking him to other hero figures. Thus when Alem asks his classmates how the speech sounded, one replies: "It sounded wicked, guy. You were like Martin Luther King or some freedom fighter."[26] Other classmate calls Alem "a revolution man" and compares him to Nelson Mandela.[27]

24 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 231.

25 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 267.

26 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 274.

27 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 278.

Although the character of Alem is idealized to such a degree as not to be psychologically credible, his story, written in an almost documentary manner, appears accurate, perhaps thanks to the fact that Zephaniah was inspired by stories of real refugees and researched his topic profoundly. But despite the novel's seeming documentary realism and research-grounded setting, the novel falls short of truly representing the (often traumatic) experience of most unaccompanied juvenile asylum seekers in Britain.

Perhaps because of the novel's intended audience, the impact of the traumatic events on Alem's psyche is not really rendered, i.e. the story is told in a straightforward and rather simple manner, with a traditional omniscient 3rd person narrator. Focusing on events rather than character, the novel, as Wilkie-Stibbs puts it, "is effective in representing the external conditions of Alem's legal, social, and economic plight" but she also finds "his inner conditions rather unexplored"[28] and therefore labels the novel as "docu-novel", i.e. one "whose priority is to narrate a social circumstance, or which ha[s] a message to tell" and as such, it "carr[ies] little, if any, narration of character interiority."[29] Thus while Zephaniah's rendering of social reality seem very authentic, his way of characterization almost evokes an earlier form of writing for children, one in which characters were "one-dimensional walking object-lessons"[30] and as such his novel cannot provide much of a satisfactory reading experience to adult readers.

Although also marketed as YA title, Siobhan Dowd's *Solace of the Road* (2009) is a novel focalized in the mind of the protagonist, Holly Hogan, a 14–year old girl emotionally scarred by a string of foster care placements and children homes, about ready to turn into a juvenile delinquent (in fact the novel opens with Holly breaking into a car). Things seem to turn for the better for her when she is offered another foster home placement, this time with a well-meaning childless middle class couple. Nevertheless, when Holly receives the news about her new placement, it is accompanied by another piece of news – that her favorite social worker Michael is leaving social service for good and therefore she will not be able (and allowed) to reach him anymore. Thus what momentarily felt like home for Holly will never be the same and she must move on with her life. The entire scene happens in the children home's communal room where Holly watches *Titanic*, a movie both paralleling how terrified Holly is about the new situation and foreshadowing the future course of identity she eventually invents for herself. Although Holly makes it into a safe and well-furnished house, she is convinced that her life can only begin when she runs away to Ireland and finds her biological mother, whom Holly believes to be desperately awaiting her daughter's arrival.

As a character, Holly is well-defined and round, therefore in a way more "real" (more authentic and believable) than Alem in Zephaniah's novel. Holly considers herself worthless and non-lovable, her name seemingly a metaphor of her character. Holly, a symbol of Christmas, although green all year round, has berries only in winter, and since Holly was born in June, she concludes: "I'm a holly with no berries, just the prickles."[31] She does not believe that her foster mother Fiona Aldridge might actually care for her and she concludes that she was taken into Fiona's

28 Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, 35.

29 Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, 12.

30 Segel, "Realism and Children's Literature," 17.

31 Siobhan Dowd, *Solace of the Road* (Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2009), 16.

home because Fiona "was the kind of person who dresses poorer than she is and saves the whales. The kind of person who'd adopt a three-legged dog."[32]

Feeling worthless and guilty for her condition, Holly tries to patent a new identity for herself. She gets inspiration when she finds Fiona's blonde wig, which Fiona had bought to hide her hair loss during chemotherapy. Holly puts it on and feels she has turned into a different person, "three years older than Holly Hogan, dead smart, a real cool glamour girl."[33] With the wig on, Holly adopts a new identity and gives herself a new name – Solace. The next step for her is to find a new place to live. Thus Holly-turned-Solace runs away from her foster parents to hitchhike on the A40 motorway all the way to her dreamland – to Ireland. As Frank Cottrell Boyce in his review for *The Guardian* commented, the wig is "an extraordinarily powerful image – girl on the cusp of adulthood, with this glamorous, sexualised memento mori on her head, strolling off into the valley of the shadow of death via the A40."[34]

The wig is in fact a very complex metaphor; while Fiona used it to hide her condition (i.e. baldness due to chemotherapy) in the eyes of public; Holly uses the wig to hide her true identity from herself. The wig stands for Holly's delusions about her biological mother and the reasons why the two had been separated, and the state of denial Holly is in. Because even if Holly may be able to run away from foster home, she cannot run away from her traumatic childhood. Holly has completely driven significant portions of her childhood out of her memory and remembers only several happy occasions. As Heike Schwartz in her book on multiple personality disorder and its representation in fiction explains, psychological trauma often leads to damage which can manifest itself by the occurrence of two or more distinct identities taking control of an individual's behavior accompanied by inexplicable loss of memory.[35] Holly does not remember her biological mother's abusive behavior, her verbal and physical attacks, her abandoning of Holly in a locked apartment. Whenever a recollection of the traumatic childhood threatens to appear, Holly forces it away, as is the case when she sees Fiona accidentally drop the iron while ironing her husband's shirts: "A drawer in my brain slid open. I froze. […] I slammed the drawer shut. I put the earphones back and turned up the volume, loud."[36]

The extend of abuse Holly was exposed to by her mother is gradually revealed, at first through flashbacks and recollections, eventually through Holly's reliving the trauma in the present as if it was happening to her anew. The literary means of conflating times and disrupting narration chronology parallel the psychological fact that trauma can be experienced in the present rather than be seen as belonging to the past. As Stanislav Kolář points out in his discussion of literary presentation of trauma, it often leads to memory disorder and thus victims "are unable to distinguish between the past and the present, and their mental states are marked by temporal confusion"[37]

32 Dowd, *Solace*, 15.

33 Dowd, *Solace*, 30.

34 Frank Cottrell Boyce, "A Wig and a Prayer," *The Guardian*, March 14, 2009.

35 Heike Schwarz, *Beware of the Other Side(s):Multiple Personality Disorder and Dissociative Identity Disorder in American Fiction* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2013), 25–27, 31.

36 Dowd, *Solace*, 53.

37 Stanislav Kolář, "Introduction," in *Reflections of Trauma in Selected Works of Postwar American and British Literature*, Stanislav Kolář, Zuzana Buráková and Katarína Šandorová (Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2010), 7.

and therefore "the technique of fragmentation has become a very appropriate form of translating traumatic memory into narratives."[38]

Holly's journey to Ireland turns into a journey to her own self, to a better understanding of herself and the world around her. During the journey, her two identities constantly battle within her; while Solace steals clothes, Holly feels guilty, Solace lies and pretends, Holly follows rules, Solace is courageous and strong, Holly feels weak and terrified. Solace is free of past; Holly has to suppress her memory in order to escape the past. The two cannot live in one body and because Holly was the one abused and abandoned, she desires to fully turn into Solace and thus to die as Holly. But in a rare moment when Holly takes control, she manages to call out for help by dialing ChildLine and, although her message confuses Holly's past memories and Solace's present situation, the call adds significantly to Holly's restoration from the outside (i.e. by her foster parents with the help of social services and police). Her inner restoration is a process more difficult and far more painful, yet in a way it parallels the almost detective search her foster parents undergo because Holly, too, must collect (more precisely re-collect) evidence and begin to view it in a new light. It is not until Holly becomes capable of acknowledging and working through the trauma of physical abuse and abandonment she was exposed to as a small child that she finds the strength and courage to be only Holly, i.e. a whole individual and not a split person. By finally facing her past, Holly can move on into her future.

In the climax of the plot, Holly has just relived her mother's final attack which immediately preceded the abandonment, and comes to no longer desire to go to Ireland. She realizes that her ideas about her biological mother were delusions.

> I'd fooled myself how it was all Denny's [Holly's mother's boyfriend] fault and how Mam had to run away from him to Ireland and how she was waiting for me to find her over there. […] The truth was, Mammy burnt my hair, then run away to catch Denny. […] The person she'd been running from wasn't him, but me.[39]

Overwhelmed by the final loss of her mother, Holly leans over the railings of a ferry in a suicide attempt. But the wind blows her wig off: "My own hair rippled over my face, brown and fierce, and Fiona's voice came strong in my head. *My hair grew back, Holly. Only differently*."[40] At this crucial moment, Holly realizes that her hair grew back too after her biological mother had burnt it with a hot iron. Symbolically, she realizes that life can go on, albeit differently, after one survives. Thus although with the fall of the wig into the ocean Solace symbolically drowns (as was foreshadowed in the scene of watching *Titanic*), Holly is restored to live on. "Solace was gone, and Holly Hogan, aged fifteen years and one day, was back."[41]

In fact, there was another time when the wig, by falling off the protagonist's head, almost saved her life. When Solace is on the run, she is picked up at a bar and goes to a man's apartment in the naïve hope that she might get a night's rest there before continuing her journey. When the man starts to make unwanted advances, he accidentally knocks the wig off. At this point Solace

38 Kolář, "Introduction," 13.

39 Dowd, *Solace*, 242.

40 Dowd, *Solace*, 252.

41 Dowd, *Solace*, 253.

turns back into Holly and the man realizes she is much younger and not blonde and throws her out of his place with the explanation: "I only do blonde. […] I don't fancy kids. I'm not a bloody perv. […] Go home to Mummy."[42] Although Holly at first feels that the man's act confirmed what she believes, i.e. that she is only worthy as Solace but not as Holly, the man's refusal opens the floodgate to the dam of Holly's memory and she can no longer ignore it. It allows her to finally see that she is a victim of her biological mother's abuse and not really guilty (or deserving) of her abandonment, that the abandonment was the result of her mother's incapability to love and not of Holly's being unlovable.

Despite marketing the book as YA reading, *Solace of the Road* is a very good example of the so-called crossover novel, i.e. a novel appealing both to teenage readers and adults and "fit[ting] both the criteria for a young-adult and adult title."[43] It also illustrates, as Roman Trušník states, that "the border between young adult and adult titles had been fluid for some time."[44] Thanks to its richness, complexity of plot and depth of characterization, Dowd's novel, unlike Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy*, has the potential to satisfy experienced and demanding readers and no wonder it has become a successful and acclaimed novel both in the field of YA literature and in literature about personal trauma. *Solace of the Road* uses the literary strategy of spatial and temporal fragmentation along with the duality of character to plausibly render the psychological effects of trauma on human psyche. And while it does not avoid the harsh and unhappy side of life, it still shows that, as put forth in one review of the novel, "life, though it is fragile, is not grim at all."[45] In its focus on both the human capacity to harm and to save, it is certainly a welcome shift from the helplessness and nihilism of many late 20th century new realism novels.

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42 Dowd, *Solace*, 115–16.

43 Roman Trušník, "How to Use a Bookworm: Michael Cart's *My Father's Scar* as a Crossover Novel," in *Theories in Practice: Proceedings of the First International Conference on English and American Studies*, ed. Roman Trušník and Katarína Nemčoková (Zlín: Tomas Bata University in Zlín, 2010), 179.

44 Trušník, "How to Use a Bookworm," 178.

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