

Learning the Languages of Nostalgia  
in Modern and Contemporary Literature

Tasha Marie Buttler

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Reading Committee:

Carolyn Allen, Chair

Katherine Cummings

Mark Patterson

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## Abstract

### Learning the Languages of Nostalgia in Modern and Contemporary Literature

Tasha M. Buttler

Chair of Supervisory Committee:  
Professor Carolyn Allen  
Department of English

This dissertation builds upon recent discourses on nostalgia that focus on the generative potential of a sustained melancholic stance and position the past as resource for the future. My particular interest is in the potential for de-subjectification out of regulatory regimes, as outlined in the work of Judith Butler, particularly in *The Psychic Life of Power*. This text has allowed me to develop a robust theory about accumulated experiences of love and loss that are central to the formation of “character” that repeats or disrupts patterns of social relation. I differentiate between politicized nostalgia and experiential nostalgia, suggesting that the latter can make use of inevitable experiences of loss by initiating and sustaining a melancholic agency. I use various literary texts and memoirs to identify how the thwarting of melancholia can lead to nostalgia’s obverse: the desire to return suffering, or what Czech author Milan Kundera calls *litost*. These instances of thwarted grieving are positioned against a set of characters in the work of Virginia Woolf, Eva Hoffman, and Clarice Lispector who allow themselves to honor their experiential nostalgia rather than reverting to politicized nostalgia that repeats representations and clichés associated with empire. Often these characters’ grievances are undirected or misdirected criticisms of social politics and cultural inheritances that perpetuate gendered, racialized, and class identities, or even nationalistic practices that have led to loss and suffering.

This study further examines the psychic economics associated with exile since, arguably, cultural inheritances are more readily perceived by those who have greater “vantage points.” In most cases, exiles must re-negotiate words, gestures, and subjectivities, and may be able to see naturalized practices with heightened sensitivity in her or his choices to repeat new social practices or to modify them, pushing the limits of cultural intelligibilities. Although all of the characters in this study struggle to represent the psychic maneuvers associated with loss of something beloved, ironically, most of these novels suggest that these dynamics are inadequately representable in language. My final argument is that the nascent subjectivities that emerge out of the characters’ and authors’ experiential nostalgia, and the texts that strive to account for these experiences, are of consequence for more than just the transformed individuals. The final novel used in this study, Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star*, manipulates the instruments available to narrate genesis (language) to break orders of repetition, to recodify language, and to unsettle the reader, inviting us to experience the radical alterity of another’s psyche and develop affective possibilities for new moral epistemologies spoken through the fragmented languages of nostalgia.

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## **Introduction: Representing the Psyche**

Recent discussions on nostalgia provide a forum to explore increasingly important questions about how individuals represent their versions of history. These discussions, both theoretical and literary, provide nuanced explorations of human motivation and the role of language in understanding the psyche and how it can be represented. Ultimately they point to the distinctions we make in academia and in popular discourses about the epistemological separations between private and public discourses. “Nostalgia” provides a particularly compelling term of inquiry, because the word itself cannot be made to stand for a single perspective, affect, or operation. Its indeterminacy thus requires the researcher to consider a variety of interpretive possibilities.

Scholars interested in what motivates individuals to represent their histories within certain discursive confines can now make use of recent interdisciplinary work, work that positions affects as indices of social relationships, as ideological practices, or embodied thoughts, rather than as descriptions for concretized psychosocial states.<sup>1</sup> My work on nostalgia builds on recent studies of affect that question the cultural politics of emotions.<sup>2</sup> In the West<sup>3</sup> the psychic processes that are part of the sadness of separation or loss (referred to in much of the psychoanalytic literature as melancholia), have been traditionally regarded in popular literature with skepticism. Even academics have critiqued melancholic processes for their potential to distort the power of reason or to prevent individuals from becoming fully socialized.<sup>4</sup> Nostalgia is also implicated as a mechanism of ideological perpetuation.<sup>5</sup> More nuanced discussions of nostalgia suggest that the affect acts to create and efface the object of desire, rather than honoring that which was once cherished.<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, however, the term “nostalgia” has summoned discourses that focus on the generative potentials of a melancholic stance, one that

values the psychic transformation and community re-building that can attend such states.<sup>7</sup> Eng and Han have applied the framework of “melancholia” to broaden discussions of how the psychic state can create bonds among people, or what they call “an intersubjective psychology” (362). Muñoz has described melancholia as a structure of everyday life that affects those that are marginalized due to race or sexual orientation (74). The question that I ask of each of the texts I draw on in this study is: What is the work that nostalgia accomplishes for the characters, and in the case of autobiographical fiction or memoir, for the authors?

While the original Greek compound of the word “nostalgia” consists of the terms *νόστος* (*nóstos*), and *ἄλγος* (*álgos*), that refer to suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return, Judith Butler’s work on melancholia, particularly in *The Psychic Life of Power*, has allowed me to construct a more robust and nuanced theory of nostalgia that contributes to discussions of how accumulated experiences of love and loss are central to the formation of “character,” character that either repeats or disrupts patterns of social relation. This study extends recent theories about the potential of nostalgia to provide ruptures in subjectivity whereby the individual can either emerge with a drive to restore illusions of coherence, or, alternatively, can apprehend<sup>8</sup> the precariousness of all subjectivities and interdependencies with greater hospitality for the psychic processes that are yet to be understood and articulated.

More nuanced understanding of an individual’s psyche, with particular concern for how he or she narrates formative experiences, lends potential for us to apprehend and record much of the life of the mind that is, as of yet, opaque. This, of course, has tremendous implications for social life. Social scientists have historically portrayed humans as subjects that act on choices based on free will and reason, analyses that preclude the role of the emotions in structural inquiries. Nostalgia, like many other disruptive emotions, has long been represented in literature

as a force that limits or stunts socialization or that acts to reinstate gender roles in American families.<sup>9</sup> And yet, nostalgia can be conceived, to borrow one of Alison Jagger's phrases, as an "outlaw emotion." Outlaw emotions are those that are incompatible with dominant values; they "stand in dialectical relation to critical social theory" and can help in developing alternatives to prevailing conceptions of reality by motivating new investigations. Their re-inscription into theory, she argues, can contribute to an eventual reconstruction of our emotional constitution (160-61). Such changes in conceptualization of consciousness and relationships can lead to changes in emergent structures of feeling and civic identities.<sup>10</sup> The way that the word "nostalgia" is defined helps determine the way the affect or process is judged by societies and then either discouraged, honored, or made invisible.

In the work of Czech novelist Milan Kundera, the power of naming is essential to how one views oneself and the world. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, a painful and complex inquiry into the role of nostalgia in his own life and in political, historical processes, he writes of his finally senile father "I was the only one who by talking to him could temporarily transform that nameless infinity into a world of clearly named entities" (160). Naming has the power to describe the previously inapprehensible, but more importantly, to legitimize or to forbid emotional forays. In particular, the role that nostalgia plays in ideological production and consumption, and thus in public acts, is critical to understanding how an individual envisions her or his attachments and civic responsibilities. Similar to Sara Ahmed in her inquiry in *The Promise of Happiness*, I am not particularly focused on the question of what terms we use to define an "emotion," but what the emotion can *do*.<sup>11</sup> As with her complex inquiry into what discourses on happiness mask, perpetuate, and valorize, I am also interested in what nostalgia, as

a mode of disposition, reveals about the narrativizing of attachments and losses and how those narratives can more subtly account for psychic drives.

I examine several texts from writers who have either been exiled from their home countries, or who have been excluded from full participation in civic life, because of their gender or ethnicity. In each case, this marginalization is compounded by a series of traumatic events. The authors whose work I draw on—Virginia Woolf, Milan Kundera, Eva Hoffman, and Clarice Lispector—are all invested in exploring the question: How can the generative dynamics of sustained and labored mourning transform an individual into a complex force of social change?<sup>12</sup> Three of these four authors lived in exile from their native countries. All four experienced not only personal and material losses, but also losses of political ideals. Consequentially, all had to reimagine a world with new meanings and values. Of particular note is that all four authors were also invested in chronicling the histories that they left behind. All were nostalgic for what they lost, while attentive to the need to invent representational modalities that express new ideals and realities.

In my treatment of nostalgia, I differentiate between politicized nostalgia and experiential nostalgia. Politicized nostalgia is a way of internalizing cultural propaganda for one's memories, such that one relies on cultural values and symbols to suggest a possibility of return to a time and place of coherence. Experiential nostalgia, on the other hand, is a reflective honoring of attachments and losses; it can be likened to a sustained melancholic enactment in which the individual makes use of the inevitable experiences of loss.<sup>13</sup> The melancholic inward-turning against oneself, as outlined by Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power*, can allow individuals to identify more subtle sources of their grievances, one of which may be the prohibition against expressing anger toward the lost other or toward the system that prohibits this expression. Often

the melancholic's grievances are undirected or misdirected criticisms of social practices and cultural inheritances that perpetuate gendered, racialized, and class identities, or even nationalistic practices that have led to loss and suffering. These cultural inheritances are more readily perceived by those who have more estranged "vantage points" to look back from in the inward-turning. Arguably a person who has been exiled and must renegotiate words, gestures, and subjectivities may be able to see naturalized practices with heightened sensitivity. Several of the novels in this study assume third-person perspectives in a struggle to narrate the genesis of emergent subjectivities.

The texts of Kundera and Hoffman offer complex portraits that allow me to identify how the thwarting of melancholia can lead to nostalgia's obverse: the desire to return suffering, or what Kundera refers to as *litost*. The works of Woolf, Kundera, and Hoffman all explore psychological forces that lure subjects into (and in some cases repel them from) politicized nostalgia. These authors' critiques of politicized nostalgia argue that some individuals seek certainties, in the illusion of restoration and, thus, repeat representations and clichés associated with empire. I position two characters (one from Kundera's fiction and one from Hoffman's), that obstruct the melancholic processes against a set of characters who allow themselves to honor their experiential nostalgia for something lost. I argue that what obstructs the melancholic processes in the former case is the inability to separate politicized nostalgia for cultural values from experiential nostalgia in which one temporarily loses a sense of psychic coherence. Specifically, I argue that what truncates the generative melancholic process in these characters is the shame of impotence and the unwillingness to take the emerging ego as an object that will, in the loss of the illusion of coherency, acquire new representational modes, new political texts. The obverse of shame, which is pride or dignity, is what prevents the subjects from seeing how

their own psyches are implicated in the social forces that perpetuate the losses. In particular, Hoffman's character, Anzor, in her novel *Appassionata*, allows me to extend my discussion of why the refusal of melancholic transformation that we see in Kundera's characters has increasing social and political implications, due to broader access to tools that instrumentalize revenge.

Adding on to Butler's propositions about the generative potentials of melancholia in *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* and *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, I position the narratives of the novelists to show how the psychic dynamics of loss are made more visible to the self and to others. Furthermore, I suggest that the dynamics of melancholia are more visible in the case of the exile because he or she is forced to renegotiate unwritten social mores, different words, gestures, and subjectivities. The exile, as several of these texts show, is more able than the native-born citizen to perceive the practices of regulatory power, and then to observe her or himself either embodying, rejecting, or manipulating social practices that make individuals recognizable within sociohistoric contexts. In these texts, the exile is also able to make manifest the precariousness of symbolization associated with politicized nostalgia. This study explores a variety of responses in the characters' choices to repeat new social practices, to reject, or modify them, pushing the limits of cultural intelligibilities. Of course, the paradox of the notion of pushing the limits of cultural intelligibility is that there must already be some set of recognizable practices that are repeated in distinctly unrecognizable ways. And while language can be a venue for playing out new cultural re-cognitions, language is also what binds us to the cultural collective. Language then, is the site for either perpetuating epistemological systems or for breaking orders of repetition. As Edward Said argues in "The Mind of Winter: Reflection on Life in Exile," it is difficult to conceptualize and articulate a counter-discourse to address possibilities outside of the naturalized affiliations

and foundations of knowledge, specifically because there is little codified language and context within which to speak. And so, while all of the characters in this study struggle to represent the psychic maneuvers associated with loss of something beloved, ironically, these novels overwhelmingly suggest that these dynamics are inadequately representable in language.

What this study contributes to contemporary discussions of nostalgia are, first, my propositions about the forces that can make nostalgia destructive, as opposed to personally and socially productive (or benign), and, second, my arguments on how emergent subjectivities can be represented without drawing on consensual categories of language that domesticate the foreign and the inalienable. My final argument is that the texts that strive to account for these previously foreign psychic legions are of consequence for more than just the transformed individuals. The highly lyric novels by Woolf and Lispector under discussion in this study use their form as much as their content in their rejection of universals. The language employed by the narrators and by certain of the characters aims to break orders of repetition by the use of indeterminate syntax and grammar. What the lyric voice accomplishes is to draw the reader out of familiar territory, where she or he has depended on universals, to a psychic space where the reader must be willing to forgo common understandings and engage in new ways of apprehending the world. If, as Richard Posner suggests in *Law and Literature*, novels offer no lessons for justice, that they present the reader with moral anarchy (311), perhaps this is a worthwhile exercise.

My interest in nostalgia emerges out of a life-long fascination with individuals who have accommodated deep psychic transformations because of loss and who emerge sensitive and empathetic to the precariousness of subjectivities and of lives. I also confess that my interest has been provoked by the proliferation of discourses on the mandate for positive thinking, referred to

in popular literature as the “science of happiness” (formerly espoused by the religious and politically conservative Norman Vincent Peale and now bolstered by the employment of the term “science”).<sup>14</sup> In a fragmented, highly polarized, and increasingly multicultural world, scientific, religious, and popular discourses that interrogate and promote a “science” of happiness compromise the potential for broader understanding or tolerances between people in three ways. First, as a number of authors have pointed out, the mandate to take the responsibility to have a positive outlook and to spread happiness and goodwill undermines the potential for authentic grief to perform its labor. In addition, if one accepts the responsibility to “be” positive, this acceptance shifts the responsibility away from structural factors that have led to grievable lives.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the mandate to be positive compromises greater understandings between individuals in that the model of positive thinking assumes a rational model of choice. If an individual’s desires, motivations, and choices were simply the result of reasoned calculations, we could more easily predict, and even regulate, the trajectory of our lives and those of others. This would, of course, make negotiations between two individuals, even individuals or constituents that represent the interests of entire nations, a matter of mutual understanding and effective communication about what each wants. What this model fails to account for, as has been pointed out by scholars as diverse as Jonathan Lear and Judith Butler, are the acts that result from what Lear attributes to “motivated irrationality” (4). These acts, or performances, come about almost as if there were a separate entity acting through us. What Butler argues in an interview published as “Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification,” is that there have been long-standing American philosophical traditions that assume for the self an agency that correlates well with the values of American individualism and notions of self-making. What poststructuralists gleaned from Lacan in the 1970s and 1980s is that for the subject there will

always be a lack of self-understanding; we started to see, as Butler suggests in this interview, that the subject might be subject to things other than itself: to drives, to an unconscious, to effects of a language (737-38). As Lear suggests in his introduction to *Freud*, reason alone cannot account for that which motivates humans into acts of fury or compassion. Like Freud, we would do well to consider the mysteries of the human condition. One of the obstacles to increased self-understanding is that we have been encouraged to try to account for human motivation “without remainder,” as if all our drives could be readily understood and communicated to one another (3). A rational model of negotiation assumes that rational conversation about what we want could reveal our values and motivations, that straightforward conversation could reveal the structure of imagination, or what Woolf refers to as the “engravings on the heart,” of another person. The rational model of human motivation does not account for how we are influenced by values that are culturally laden (which may be social fictions), for how our attachments to others drive our actions, nor, as Lear points out, for how the mind is active in keeping its own activity outside of conscious awareness. To understand this “activity,” Lear suggests that we need to more thoroughly discover “the elemental structures of mental activity that dominate one’s life” (49). This study explores a variety of characters’ psychic responses to loss (some of which are largely outside of conscious awareness), to argue that these four literary artists have animated nuanced theories of nostalgia within the framework of melancholia that have not been addressed in psychological theory.

There is evidence in the literature that Woolf was familiar with the contemporary discussions of psychoanalysis. Hoffman also makes various references to Freud’s theories in her memoirs and fiction. In fact, Hoffman quotes directly from Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” in her novel *Apassionata* (101). As Elizabeth Abel points out in *Virginia Woolf and Fictions of*

*Psychoanalysis*, Woolf was familiar with the debates circulating in the 1930s about British psychoanalysis (she met both Freud and Melanie Klein in 1939); but rather than addressing the debates directly, her fiction acts, as Abel says, to “de-authorize” some of the propositions (xvi). While Abel is particularly concerned with how Woolf challenges the Oedipal narrative, Abel’s work also elucidates how Woolf’s fiction was engaged with larger topics of contemporary British psychoanalysis. The present study engages current psychoanalytic theory, not to evade materialist or historical critiques, but to examine the responses of individuals to material and ideological power relations that displace and disenfranchise them. I read the texts in this study with an eye toward how the theories they construct about melancholia contribute to discussions of nostalgia.

Chapter One of this study compares the labor that attends nostalgia in several novels of Milan Kundera to that which is foregrounded by Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* (or *TTL*). Kundera provides characters and narrators who are unable to allow melancholia to run its course, placing them within easy reach of the seduction of politicized nostalgia. His characters fight against but are unable to resist the temptations of symbolization. They are motivated by culturally laden values such as male pride and superiority. Pride and dignity are what prevent the subjects in several of these texts from seeing how their own psyches are implicated in the social forces that perpetuate the losses. The reason I draw on Kundera’s work in Chapter One is that virtually every one of his novels grapples with the deceptions of symbolization, both the politicized and the erotic. There is a psychological seduction of symbols that prevents his characters (if not always his intrusive narrators) from knowing what it is that one loves in the love and, therefore, what one has lost in the loss. I have positioned a reading of Kundera’s novels against that of Woolf’s *TTL* in order to argue that Woolf’s characters show more potential for living

nostalgically because, in the event of loss, they do not turn with violence against the part of the self that has loved and lost, but instead turn against the self in a struggle to apprehend new subjectivities. Lily, James, and Cam struggle fiercely against repetition, so that their histories of domestic or social tyranny will not be so easily perpetuated. Lily, in particular, struggles because she apprehends Mrs. Ramsay in a way that is unrepresentable by the available fashions of painting. She cannot represent her image of Mrs. Ramsay until she allows the process of melancholia to undo her. Lily breaks representational conventions (or repetitions) by composing a medium to communicate her desire for, and grief over, the death of a beloved, using modalities formed during the process of mourning.

Both Kundera and Woolf are keenly aware that part of what the psyche finds desirable is tied up with cultural values. These values shape our views of what we see as beautiful, honorable, reverent, and proper. Both authors are attentive to the conflicting relations among beauty, honor, and empire. Both grapple with the notion of choice, that is, of the freedom not to repeat “meaning” carried over, in what Kundera refers to as arch-illusions. Both seem to be asking how one can live inside history with all the attendant weight, shame, and misrepresentation, without romanticizing history or memory. More importantly, perhaps, these novelists make manifest the extreme difficulties of speaking (or otherwise representing) outside of historically-situated regimes of truth. Both make visible some of the ideological machinery that is set into motion by the psyche’s affective association with nostalgia. To discuss these texts I use the term “nostalgia” as if it were unpacked for the psychic processes that it is conventionally positioned against (in this case, processes like “willed forgetfulness”), and suggest that willed forgetfulness, in effect, is what makes nostalgic living possible. This is not to

suggest that nostalgia *is* willed forgetfulness but, rather, that to live inside of history without politicized illusions requires an un-remembering, a re-symbolization.

In Chapter Two I use Eva Hoffman's novel and memoirs to compare two versions of the exile's response to loss. In *Appassionata*, the character Anzor thwarts the melancholic process, turning self-reprimand into hatred for the persecutor and a burning desire for revenge. Anzor does not allow melancholia to run its course because, in the self-reflexive turn toward the self, he is unable to divest himself of the cultural inheritances inherent in male pride, dignity, and honor. Hoffman's text shows that the thwarting of melancholic processes that prevents self-reflexivity is increasingly dangerous because of the availability of weapons of mass destruction. Hoffman counter-positions this male character with another figure who has lost her native country, her parents, her brother, and her lover, and who withstands the psychic upheaval of melancholia until she learns to articulate grievances against violence; she then begins her first original composition that emerges from the fire of the pain she has undergone. I further argue that Hoffman uses her own compositions, her memoirs, to document stages of the melancholic process that the author herself has undergone and which have taught her to question her positions and to respect alterity. She also makes visible how subjugating practices are domesticated and what costs are associated with living outside of consensual communities. While my discussion of how the character of Isabel allows melancholia to undo her sense of coherence to the point that she becomes highly reflexive and is able to represent her nostalgia for all that has been lost, Isabel also provides a particularly compelling extension of Hoffman's propositions in her memoirs. The character shares many of the same histories with the author including exile and even training as a classical pianist, Isabel's profession. The memoirs of Hoffman provide particularly valuable texts for me

to extend my argument on how exile can be viewed as the public counterpart to the melancholic turn toward the self, since the immigrant looks at him or herself in counter-distinction to others.

In Chapter Three I use the novels of Clarice Lispector to outline how the cultural consensus, that is, that which is regulated by written and unwritten regulatory mechanisms, is perpetuated by language. In *The Passion According to G.H.*, the character G.H. strives arduously to reshape language to describe the psychic transformation she has become undone by, in her experience of horror and pain. Likewise, Martim of *The Apple in the Dark* rejects language that will make a “man” or a “hero” out of him, until he feels that he has risked the life of his ego in order to emerge new. At that point he engages in dialogue that does not align itself with beauty or even the effort to become comprehensible. His new performative text initiates a hospitable economy of exchange and allows him to experience love. Nostalgia in these texts is not for something left behind, but instead, for something that never existed. The characters cannot really be said to be exiles, since they never had a native place. Lispector’s characters try to express in language that which they are nostalgic for, but what they are missing is beyond symbolization. Finally, I argue that Lispector, herself an exile living forever outside of community, uses *The Hour of the Star* to break orders of repetition, to recodify language, and to unsettle the reader so that we might experience the radical alterity of another’s psyche and develop affective possibilities for new moral epistemologies spoken through the fragmented languages of nostalgia.

## Chapter One

### Virginia Woolf and Milan Kundera: Deceptions of Symbolization

Narratives that offer accounts of loss of community, through deaths of family members and other loved ones, or through exile from a homeland, also offer portraits of mourning processes and critiques of other naturalized social practices that constitute belonging and exclusion. This chapter uses selected novels of Milan Kundera and Virginia Woolf to extend current psychological theories on nostalgia using the vocabulary for, and propositions on, melancholia as originally articulated by Sigmund Freud and later developed by Judith Butler. Ultimately I am interested in what the characters in these novels say about the political potential of nostalgia and mourning. Both Kundera and Woolf are deeply invested in theorizing, and otherwise grappling with, the problematics of identifying the trajectory of desire, including attachments to things that have been lost. Ultimately, what I have asked of the texts used in Chapter One is how the characters have failed at, or been successful at, representing something loved and lost in ways that do not reproduce the symbols of empire and *eros* that have masked and simplified the terms of the loss. For Kundera, to represent history without falling into political cliché requires the intervention of a narrator. His characters are not able to do it. Woolf, in *To the Lighthouse (TTL)*, is interested in how a subject must reject consolatory fictions that perpetuate romanticized ideals which are not her own, so that she can devise orders of expression that forge new alliances and communities. In these novels, the articulation of what has been loved and lost requires a character or narrator to break away from representational convention. For Woolf this means that women must learn how to apprehend the self and others using untried

orders of representation.

To look at Kundera's postulations about how the subject must preserve experiential history if s/he is to make visible the psychic economics of subjugation, and Woolf's articulated hopes for what artists can do to represent loss, I employ the term nostalgia. I use the word to explore what these characters do to record how they can "know" and thereby love and "remember," or honor, another. For Kundera the primary object of affection and loss is his homeland. His male characters lose and retaliate and turn this anger against themselves, but then very quickly divert their grievances into petty acts of cruelty. They do not live through a melancholic process that would allow them to develop self-reflexivity.

In *Ignorance*, Kundera lays out the trajectory of his characters' desires for a messy if impossible recuperation and representation of their histories by having his narrator trace the etymological history of the word nostalgia. As Svetlana Boym outlines in *The Future of Nostalgia*, the term *nostalgia* still echoes with the memory of pain, or yearning, for return to a lost home. *Algia*, or longing, she says, "is what we share," yet *nostos*, the return home, is what divides us. Nostalgia, she says, "is the promise to rebuild the ideal home that lies at the core of many powerful ideologies of today" (xv-xvi). Whether the pain is part of the longing, or part of the more fearfully imagined return remains unclear in most of the writers foregrounded in this study. What is not unclear is that, whether referring to a historically framed psychosomatic malady or not, in narrative "nostalgia" has been connected to notions of loss and some sort of recovery.

Certain languages attribute to the concept of nostalgia a yearning for home, however, in others, particularly Portuguese (*saudade*), Spanish (*añoranza*), Catalan (*enyorar*), German (*Sehnsucht*), Polish ( *tęsknota*), and Czech (both *styska* and *litosť*), nostalgia does not carry the

false promise of idyllic recovery. In *Ignorance* Kundera suggests that the English “homesickness,” German “*Heimweh*,” and Dutch “*heimwee*” “reduces that great notion to just its spatial element” (5). On the other hand, the Portuguese word for longing, *saudade*, calls up affective connections to a presence, rather than an absence. It carries some of the weight, perhaps, of the loss involved in ocean-faring colonization and of an idealization of the grandeur of the past, loss of lives to unknown natural forces, even ritualized practices of articulating loss through the deep and harrowing music of *fado*. *Saudade* is often referred to, in music, literature, and quotidian usage, as if it were a lover. It also points, in a Baudelairian sense, toward what-could-have-been. The experience is sufficient unto itself. Likewise, in Polish, the word *tesknota*, recalls, for the exiled Polish writer, Eva Hoffman, a “welling up of absence,” it is a “*pregnancy* without the possibility of birth” (*Lost in Translation* 115). Characterizations of nostalgia vary across cultures. Anthropologist Catherine Lutz describes the “concept” that the Micronesian island people, the Ifaluk, have which they call *fago* as compassion/love/sadness (119). The Czech *styska* implies “I yearn for you,” says Kundera (*Ignorance* 6). On the other hand, *litost*, he says in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, implies grief, sympathy, remorse and indefinable longing, along with the desire for revenge. It is always “accompanied by a pathetic hypocrisy to sustain its fiction” (168). In Kundera’s characters, what passion enables is that the hypocrisy goes unacknowledged, though never by the narrator. Before looking at what “home” nostalgia might be seeking, this chapter first examines the psychological dynamics inherent in privatized loss and, subsequently, how the process of mourning relates to the political.

What is at issue in the words that we use and associate with loss and yearning, I suggest, is the breadth of our imagination for the work that these words can perform. If something is considered a loss, it is because it has originally been invested with desire or because it enables

other desires. If whatever has been lost is seen to no longer inhabit, and is something which has no further intercourse with the subject, if it has left the subject abandoned, then the need to do utterly without or to call up a connection is imperative. If loss is absolute, then attachment to the object is futile. Grief or mourning under these conditions would be desire without the possibility of fulfillment. But people do grieve. What labor grief performs was one of the questions that interested European philosophers and physicians at least as early as the 1700s.<sup>16</sup> Questions about the role of the “passions” and of mourning were avidly explored by early-twentieth-century psychoanalysts, and more recently, applied for various aims by thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and David Eng, among others.<sup>17</sup> Characterizations of “nostalgia” have gained currency, and there is considerable debate about whether the “emotion” of nostalgia is socially retroversive or whether nostalgia can awaken the subject to the subtleties of how individuals develop stories of subject-formation. While recent discourses on nostalgia are abundant, the aim of this study is not to provide a historical overview but to examine what nostalgia can do.<sup>18</sup>

What I am arguing in this chapter is that if our questions about the role nostalgia plays in our lives opens further investigations into our personal and social identification practices-- whether intimate or ideological—that is perhaps enough. What this study presupposes, in part, is that some of the most nuanced psychoanalytic portraits of human motivation are created by artists that then turn the theater on “us,” as Woolf’s director of the play does in *Between the Acts*. If we have nothing else to learn from human history, as Woolf suggests in *Three Guineas*, it is that the scientists, the politicians, the deans, the ministers, and the chroniclers can only know, and only propagate, parts of history. The full study of human psychology and drive is certainly

not confined to the “sciences.” The artists who struggle with emerging modes of representation make visible portraits of human motivation that other chroniclers can only partially account for.

Milan Kundera’s novels, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *Ignorance*, and *Immortality*, as well as Virginia Woolf’s *TTL*, essentially redraw political and revered images, in order to offer readers a way to imagine what politicized nostalgia masks. These novels position a rethinking of desire, interdependency, representation, the claims of language, and social belonging. The characters under discussion here first model what it looks like to be under the sway of politicized, even romanticized, nostalgia. Some of them then turn, with harrowing intimate struggle, to try to elucidate possibilities for loving, grieving, and expressing that call for, and model, a different set of social ethics than those under which they have been living.

To explore how a character is first subjected to, and then reacts to, symbols that hail a nationalism that does not fit with her or his own civic ethics, I draw on Judith Butler’s political account of the formation of the subject as she applies a Foucauldian analysis to Freud’s work on melancholia. My purpose is neither to enumerate nor to resolve the contemporary and sometimes contradictory applications of this term. Rather I propose to provide an account of what discussions about melancholia, mourning, and nostalgia enable.<sup>19</sup>

For the term nostalgia to be interrogated for its transformative potential, certain conventions have to be in place. There are applications that warrant clear distinctions between the uses of the terms nostalgia and melancholia. I treat nostalgia, for the purposes of this discussion, as if it were one of the possible affective responses to the loss of a foundational bearing. Nostalgia, in this study, refers to affects and practices that sustain melancholic ego transformation.<sup>20</sup> I employ the term to refer to desire that exceeds a drive to represent or return to an originary scene. Both Sigmund Freud and later Julia Kristeva have characterized melancholia

in terms of many of the same symptoms as those used by eighteenth-century physicians and philosophers to characterize nostalgia.<sup>21</sup> Freud, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” begins with some of the defining features of melancholia and draws these definitions out several times in the essay. The distinguishing features are “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (243). There are instances in this chapter where I conflate terms, treating nostalgia as if it were melancholia. Ultimately I am interested in identifying nostalgic practices that offer possibilities for social action and interaction beyond self-reflection.

The discussion in this chapter moves away from conventional uses of the word nostalgia. Nostalgia, as I use it, represents a power that is constitutive of the psychic dialectics of subject formation. I use it to convey an excess of ambivalent longing that seeks an object to support it, to dress it up for public consumption, in order to mourn—not so much its loss, as its attachment to that loss; by extension, I connect it to the ability to experience and recognize loss in and through others, without appropriating or universalizing those affects in others but as a surprising guest that one cannot fully apprehend and yet still welcomes without reason. The work of nostalgia can release us from cultural and even epistemological assumptions about others so necessary in eras of political strife, not so much to “understand” another but to acknowledge how our own attachments are formed in opposition.

## The Subject of Judith Butler

The theoretical texts out of which my study emerges are Butler's *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (1987), *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997), *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning* (2004), *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), and *Frames Of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2010). All of these works advance her claims concerning the relationship between subjugation, subjectivity, and the ability to formulate social critique. In these texts she argues that loss is fundamental in the struggle to give an account of oneself, and to give (a necessarily incoherent) account of unspeakable grievances. This argument is made more explicit in *Conversations with Judith Butler* (2008), in which she indicates that she will try to "translate" her philosophical structure of thinking while still finding sites of intersection with the interviewers so that she can give an account of her work that makes possible a "different kind of thought" (1). She tells us she is interested in events of dispossession, and in what is "given" when one gives an account. *Conversations* is a series of responses and applications, some of which are referred to as "exilic, extraterritorial, and unhoused" (145). The conversations are staged as performativities and "rehearsals on the threshold of intelligibility" (217). In effect, like a novelist who uses form to emphasize content, Butler is modeling her philosophical structures of thinking in this text, much as she does in the film documentary *Philosophical Encounters of the Third Kind*.

In *Psychic Life*, Butler proposes that we must learn to acknowledge our primary vulnerabilities to the other, this other on which our psychic development depends. She takes her interest in Freud to more public spheres in both *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*. In *Precarious Life* Butler argues for the political potential of grief, even though the public sphere is made up of the visible and authoritative, and also, in part, of that which cannot be said or shown. What can be said or shown, she argues, is made up of consensus. The articulation of hegemony—or the cultural consensus

on what is authoritative— is produced in part through a rhetorical agreement on “what certain terms will mean, how they can be used, and what lines of solidarity are implicitly drawn for this use” (4). Butler draws on contemporary political examples imposed by and propagated in the media, such as “acts of violence,” “justice,” or even “public declarations of war.” Her ultimate project in this later book, however, is to ask us point-blank what work it would require to forge new ties of identification and to re-imagine a human community where common epistemological and cultural grounds cannot be assumed (38). *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* shoots straight toward the claim that if we have anything to understand or say about rights of protection or entitlements to life or liberty, we must invite a new “bodily ontology” that demands a rethinking of vulnerability, interdependency, desire, the claims of language, and social belonging (2). She argues that we need new models of cultural translation that demand yielding, disorientation, and loss, and, ultimately, new ways of using languages. This call for new ways of using languages is also what Virginia Woolf advocates in *A Room of One’s Own*, and what she imagines coming from, what she refers to in *Three Guineas* as The Outsider’s Society. Close analysis of Butler’s work allows me to understand how Kundera’s and Woolf’s characters memorialize loss in order to forge new modes of representation. These authors offer memorials or commemorations without allowing their characters to perform consolatory acts that reinstate the politicized values (such as nationalism) that have caused the original losses.

To explicate Butler’s arguments in order to explore how they play out in literary texts, it is useful to look briefly at Freud’s terms and propositions as they have been translated into English. Freud’s work, as it developed, then corrected or contradicted itself, was concerned with a drive that he called ego-libido as distinct, though inexplicable from, object-libido.

What Freud proposes in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) is that the dynamics of the ego-libido are most accessible to analytic study when they become object-libido, that

is, when there is something that the ego-libido can concentrate upon, whether this concentration is prolonged or multi-positional over time. That is, we can understand what drives the individual if we look at how she or he affiliates with and dissociates from objects to which she or he is attached—emotionally or ideologically. Object-cathexis and withdrawal make up what Freud metaphorically refers to initially as an individual’s “reservoir” and, later, as the *id*. What is of note here is the way he poses something which was once loved, and later perceived as absence or loss, as a *presence* that involves an endless series of substitutions, a substitutive schema. Freud and later psychoanalysts such as Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, who have been interested in the psychic economics of loss, describe a perceived presence in the subject after “incorporation” whereby one effectively denies the loss by taking in or embodying a trace of the lost object.<sup>22</sup>

“On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1914) marks the beginning of Freud’s topographical mapping of the psyche in which a series of substitutions, as a response to loss of the “original” narcissism, prompts the child to “construct” an “ideal ego” (94). Freud argues that “a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed” (76-77). He argues that we can understand human motivation by looking at how the individual affiliates and dissociates from objects to which s/he is attached—emotionally or ideologically. The ego, defined in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), is a “precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes” (29). Thus begins primary narcissism, the stage in which libido is invested in the ego, whereby the individual forms attachments to others and develops a self-image governed in part by the experiences of these attachments and loss of attachments (75).

Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” written a year after “On Narcissism,” is a text which emerges, perhaps in part, as an extension of nineteenth-century struggles over ways of relating to the past. It also expresses, it seems, part of the crisis of the Jewish community in Viennese society at the

turn of the century, thoroughly documented in American cultural historian Carl E. Schorske's *Fin-de-siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. Freud uses his essay as a forum to articulate and further develop his thinking on the psychic economics of pain that result from the loss of a desired object. Melancholia is described here as a process in which object loss becomes ego loss: "If the love for an object—a love which cannot be given up—takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then hate comes into the operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (251). In his formulation, for the melancholic individual<sup>23</sup> to move outside of narcissistic identification with the object that is lost (or perceived to be lost), to the affect of longing, then to the part of the self that is attached to the longing, the thing that will be addressed and reproached, the thing that ultimately comes to be the libidinal object, must be the ego. The ego becomes the site of narcissistic identification—in effect, *the love* becomes the beloved—and, by extension in this universal movement, the site of reprimand.<sup>24</sup>

To develop my discussion of nostalgia, I will draw on Butler's reading of Freud's thinking on melancholia. In this section I am interested in the texts of hers that focus on the role of loss in developing self-reflexivity and formulating social critiques. This will allow me to describe how Kundera and Woolf have already anticipated the difficulties and the potentials of mourning practices that do not offer substitutive consolatory fictions but instead push the limits of cultural intelligibility.

Much of Butler's work explores how the loss of an object that has been invested with meaning enacts the subject into the ability to delineate what those meanings are attached to and why they are so difficult to account for. For Butler, subjection provides the trajectory of the subject's desire. In *Psychic Life* she explicitly uses the term "subject" as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation, a site to reproduce intelligibility (10). She builds on Freud's use of the term *ego*, as distinct from *id*, by insisting that the process of incorporation must be interrogated to

distinguish the psychic topography it assumes (19). For Butler then, the subject is the effect of psychic processes on which its constitution depends. Her discussion of how the subject is enacted through melancholic processes is crucial to my discussion of nostalgia in each of the fictional texts.

In *Psychic Life* Butler argues for developing a theory of power that doesn't look at power as something pressing from the outside but rather as something that helps form the subject in submission and provides the trajectory of the subject's desire: power is what we depend on for our existence, she postulates. She takes up Nietzsche's idea, advanced in *The Genealogy of Morals*, of the turning back on oneself, the recognition, so to speak, that repression and regulation form conscience and bad conscience, and that bad conscience is essential to the formation and continuity of the subject.<sup>25</sup> As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, in order to locate how subjectivity is formed, Butler also works closely with Freud's description of identification, outlined in "Mourning and Melancholia," in which the love for the lost beloved has been withdrawn into the ego, so the psychic energy *turns toward the self* with a vengeance and "hate comes into the operation."<sup>26</sup>

But, asks Butler, if *the turning* is what enacts the subject into being, there is a paradox of referentiality: Who does the turning? (15). We must refer to what does not yet exist. The question she then takes up is this: How is the subject enacted into existence? In the chapter "Psychic Inceptions: Melancholy, Ambivalence, Rage" she employs Freud's descriptions of melancholia as an account of how psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another.<sup>27</sup> She argues that his theories offer insights into how the boundaries of the social are instituted and maintained. She uses the term "melancholia" to examine that which forms the constitutive and tenuous basis of being (23). Her primary question in this text is, I think, Is there a way that identifications that become central to the formation of gender are produced through melancholic identification? (135). My own inquiries are directed to an examination of the larger role of melancholia as it structures or animates the desire to

shelter the other, even though the other is “lost,” and to further explore, as Butler describes, how one might be transformed in the sheltering.

As Freud suggested in “Mourning and Melancholia,” the pain of loss is neutralized by the subject by substituting another object, whether that object be a beloved, an ideal, or a work of art.<sup>28</sup> Butler imagines that that substitutive “work of art” might be a nascent political text that represents what was lost in the loss, something previously foreclosed to consciousness. The reason I find Butler’s work so useful in my examination of how the novelists in this study structure what I argue are similar questions, is that her questions about subjection and agency are not speculative. She wants to know, if a subject’s response to subjection provides the trajectory of desire, is there a way to imagine political agency that can do more than reiterate the conditions of subordination? (30). Further, what happens when a foreclosure of love becomes a condition of possibility for social existence? What I propose in this chapter is that the melancholic maneuvers that are set into motion by a foreclosure of love (or the relinquishing of attachment to any other symbol of coherency), is what, in Butler’s words, “makes possible an epistemological encounter with alterity,” (*Psychic Life* 194), that, if not rejected, can heighten the subject’s awareness of the precariousness of all subjectivities and all lives. To live nostalgically, then, is to allow this ongoing transformation.

Under the psychic maneuvers so far outlined in this chapter in *Psychic Life*, melancholia would be, as Butler rightly argues, the loss of the social world (179-80). If she were to stop here, her work would remain descriptive. And so she ventures: “Yet certain socially identifiable features of the melancholic, including communicativeness, suggest that melancholia is not an asocial psychic state” (180). Instead, through incorporation, melancholia withdraws into the psyche a configuration of the social world—the ego thus becomes a “polity” and conscience is one of its “major institutions” (181). The melancholic, she argues, would have *said something* if he or she could, but did not. This is in part

what she refers to as ungrievable losses. But why are they ungrievable? What made them unspeakable? Partially, because of the fact that in childhood, to desire the conditions of one's subordination was required in order to persist as oneself, that is, to survive. *The primary vulnerability to the other comes from the desire for existence* (20 emphasis mine). And to persist in one's own being is to be given over to social terms that are never fully one's own.

Subordination experienced in childhood continues in adulthood, in part, through regulatory power. Regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination, she asserts, by producing and exploiting the demand for continuity, visibility, and place. But like Foucault, Butler argues for a definition of power that treats power as a verb rather than a noun. Agency, she argues, may well consist in opposing and transforming the social terms by which this agency itself is spawned (29).

The loss of ideals that Freud refers to, which can incite melancholia, is social in nature. The psychic economics of loss can allow the emerging subject to identify what it has idealized and thus to develop a social critique of those ideals that may not be one's own. Melancholia, according to Freud, involves a violence of conscience directed at the self. But, Butler asks, what fuels the violence of conscience directed at self? She emerges with a proposition that supports her argument that melancholia *enacts* the subject not only into being, but into further recognizing a point of potential action, even if delayed: "Indeed we might well ask whether the situation in which the ego, as it were, is berated by the ideal is not the inversion of a prior situation in which the ego would, if it could, have berated the ideal" (185). She develops this argument more explicitly by suggesting that, in melancholia, one does not only shelter the lost object but is transformed in the sheltering—producing and strengthening the conscience, leading to moral reflexivity, which is one of the characteristics Freud attributed to the melancholic. Finally, Butler argues, survival requires redirecting rage against the lost other, "raging against the dead in order to not join them" (193). This initial surge of violence

directed at the self, the “turning” on the ego in the event of loss, is one of the primary subjects that I address in this chapter as I outline the differences between how Kundera and Woolf allow their characters to internalize and memorialize losses. These characters begin to apprehend their attachments outside of common ideals, to that which is still foreign. In their grief, they demonstrate what an epistemological encounter with alterity might look like.<sup>29</sup>

To give respectful consideration to the utility of “epistemological encounters with alterity,” it is productive to grapple with the following question posed by Butler: can existence be risked “in order to expose and open to transformation the hold of social power on the conditions of life’s persistence?” (28). But then we might ask what might it mean *to risk* one’s existence? In the chapter “Refused Identifications” Butler says that perhaps only by risking the *incoherence* of identity is connection possible (149).<sup>30</sup> How, then, does the coherence of one’s “identity” relate to the political? Identity depends on social recognition, on visibility, says Butler. What she argues is that—since, according to Freud’s theories, the self-reproaches are actually reproaches intended for a loved one, which have been shifted away from him or her onto the patient’s ego—the unconscious target of that critique is the social system that values certain losses and forecloses others. What is lost cannot be grieved because it cannot be recognized as loss, because what was lost never had any entitlement to existence. The unspeakability of the losses is directed at self, when it might more fruitfully be directed at social institutions and practices that don’t allow the losses to be recognized as something that counts. Effectively, in loss the ego is impoverished compared to the ideal. But, as Butler asks, from where does the ideal emerge? And do such ideals retain the trace of social regulation and normativity? Should not we ask, she ventures, whether the ego that is berated should not have berated the ideal instead? (185). These are questions that I will trace throughout this study in my readings of the novels

of Milan Kundera, Virginia Woolf, Eva Hoffman, and Clarice Lispector to show how, in these narratives, it is indeed the ideal that the impoverished ego learns how to berate.

### Politicized versus Experiential Nostalgia in the Work of Milan Kundera

Kundera's work is pivotal for this study because it grapples with how structured representations of history, and idealized memories of erotic attachments, come to mean something or another for characters and for a nation. This section addresses how it is that Kundera's characters risk the coherence of identity, and what it is that forms the basis of their encounters with a part of themselves, which they have yet to recognize or articulate. Several of his novels provide examples of characters who, in the event of loss, turn on themselves with a vengeance. More importantly for this study, by exploring how his characters affectively attach and detach themselves to ideals, we can discern Kundera's direct critiques of the cultural-political regimes of "truth." Several of the male characters direct their rage against themselves and then divert this rage to a woman. In these characters there is very little self-reflexivity that could allow them to honor their own histories. So the narrator steps in. He directs his grievances against the structured campaigns of idealization that cannot bear the weight of history. In *TBLF* he speaks for Czech émigrés: "those who have emigrated (one hundred twenty thousand people) and those who were reduced to silence and driven from their jobs (half a million people)," and who are "disappearing like a procession moving away into the fog, invisible and forgotten" (33). Experiential nostalgia, for Kundera's narrators and characters, is almost impossible to bear, and yet he says that without an emotional attachment to history we are consigned to the present, which is "that invisible point, that nothing, moving slowly toward death" (86), or worse, to the future, "an apathetic void of interest to no one (*TBLF* 22). Kundera, it seems, is asking for the possibility for his characters to live in the material realities of history, without idealization, but with non-politicized

nostalgia and grief. What is of particular interest to me about Kundera's propositions is that he clearly does not draw distinctions between an individual's psychological and political motivations: "The metaphysics of man is the same in the private sphere as in the public" (*TBLF* 34). What drives the individual, according to Kundera, are psychological needs, whether the issues are private or public in nature.

What *is* nostalgia for Kundera, then? In *Ignorance*, his latest book of fiction, as we have seen, Kundera traces the etymological connotations of the word nostalgia as it is used in various languages, finally arriving at one of its translations, in Catalan: *enyorar* or ignorance. He says that nostalgia, from this point of view, implies a being unaware of something, or not being able to experience something because of missed opportunities. Given its history in European medical and literary discourse as well as Kundera's own battery of previous uses of the term "nostalgia" in earlier novels, this particular designation of the terms is something that makes the reader pause: he must be referring to the erasure of actual historical details that result from the nostalgic romanticizing of history, which could result in "ignorance." But the first section of the novel implies that what we are perhaps "ignorant" of is the way words are used while we are not watching them. He traces the Greek origins of the word to indicate that nostalgia is "suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return" (5). Tracing his use of this word through several of his novels, what the reader comes to understand is that nostalgia, for many of his characters, is a shuffling of these very terms—the result being that there is an unappeased yearning to return suffering. This desire to inflict suffering arises because the pain that his characters mete out is their response to their own suffering and inabilities but also because the impossibility of return to a time and place must be compensated for by the intensity of yearning.

The line that opens the novel is "What are you still doing here?" (3). It is a question that plagues the entire narrative. One of the subsequent responses is, "You mean this isn't my home

anymore?”(3). In this story, politicized nostalgia is framed by the contested desire for what Kundera refers to in *Ignorance* as the “Great Return.”<sup>31</sup> The Great Return is animated by images from books, films, memory, ancestral memory, the family homestead, forgotten footprints, filial guilt, destiny, and Odysseus (4-5). Nostalgia presents his characters with the problem of how to bear the weight and details of experiential history without reproducing idealized images. Exile from home also provides them with the opportunities to create a narrative to explain who they are. Since, as I have been arguing, the personal is often influenced by culturally laden values that serve political purposes, it can be difficult to differentiate between politicized nostalgia (longing for a sense of coherency such as nationalism), and experiential nostalgia. However, in creating a narrative to explain what one has lost, the subject has the opportunity to draw on new tools, rather than grasping for idealized images.

Many of Kundera’s characters have been subjected to forces beyond their control and forced into exile. Not unlike Judith Butler’s texts, Kundera, in *Ignorance*, suggests that self-reflexivity comes from oppressive external powers; exile for one character is “an allusion of misfortune” (23). The self-reflexivity leads to greater sense of agency in his novels. Referring to Irena’s self-reflexivity, owing to her emigration, the narrator asserts, “the implacable forces of history that had attacked her freedom had set her free” (23). Part of this development comes, according to the narrator, from the position of the mysterious stranger who is away from home and, like Odysseus, asked to give an account: “Who are you? Where do you come from? Tell us!” (35). But, how does one speak of where one “came from”? How can this response be framed? In *Psychic Life*, Butler argues that the subject can refer to its own genesis only by taking the third-person perspective on itself, by dispossessing its own perspective in the act of narrating its genesis. But how? A power exerted even in opposition, she points out quite rightly, is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject (11). No continuity can be assumed between what makes power possible and the kinds of possibilities that power assumes (12).

Instead, taking on power or agency may involve resistance that makes the recuperation possible. What is of interest for this discussion of Kundera's novels, as I argue, is how that power takes the form of *litost* (a word for which he offers no succinct translation but which, lost in nostalgia, implies the desire for revenge). It is a resistance that ultimately limits most of Kundera's male characters, because of the problem of the return that necessitates a violent turning on self.

The problem with "the Great Return" is that, if there is a return, it is as an exile more displaced and dispossessed than had the exiled person stayed in a foreign land (5). What this gestures toward is the self in a foreign land in search of what it attaches to and rejects. The foreigner stands in a no-man's land, in a time of the inalienable, where one must risk the incoherence of being, despite the shame. The narrator asks, "Would an Odyssey even be conceivable today? What if Odysseus had returned to Ithaca that morning and the old olive tree had been felled and he recognized nothing around him—could he have heard the music of some 'Great Return'?" (54). How does one recognize the chords of a Great Return? What we learn in *Ignorance* is that those chords are indecipherable for the exile who has returned home. In *Ignorance*, upon Josef's return to Prague, twenty years after emigrating, he asks a young boy for directions. He is met with a blank stare. He articulates more slowly. The directions he receives are barely intelligible. His native language has become for him "an unknown language whose every word he understood" (55). For Kundera the person in exile is forced to confront the fact that there are no natural languages or even social practices, only inherited ways of representing and negotiating relations with others.

Most of Kundera's fiction invokes nostalgic discourses on both the very personal as well as the historical-political levels. His narratives, with their almost erotic attention to Czech history and culture, work against historical amnesia. They preserve figures, objects, and events (the Czech poet, Jan Skácel; the Viennese musician, Arnold Schönberg; Kundera's often-referred-to father; Klement

Gottwald, the former President of Czechoslovakia; the executed anti-communist Czech member of Parliament, Milada Králová; Hermann Kafka's shop sign with a picture of a jackdaw on it; the betrayal by French poet Paul Éluard; as well as such violent events as the German invasion of Bohemia, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the assassination of Allende, the war in the Sinai desert, or a bloody massacre in Bangladesh) that he considers crucial to collective memory. His writing is a project against the fashioning of idealized history, or history-building that he refers to as "organized forgetting." In Kundera's work the danger of nostalgia is that it allows nationalistic propaganda to shape political views and versions of idyllic history. His writing acts against idealized or politicized nostalgia, in that it struggles to break down fashioned ideograms, fashioned memories. Yet, it could also be described as highly nostalgic, in that it literally transforms political events and personal memory into literary history and is always alluding to opportunities that are being lost, such as the opportunity to have further questioned Kundera's father about the older man's life.

*TBLF* is essentially a move against the erasure of history, which Kundera attributes to former Czech president Gustav Husak, as much as it is a movement against the narrator's sense of loss of his father. There is, however, an almost insurmountable problem with "political" nostalgia in Kundera's fictions. There is the politicized, culturally propagated nostalgia, and then there is the history of his country—written by him in his novels, referencing other literary artists, critiquing political images, and recording intimate details of place. His work presents for us the problematics of the deceptions of symbolization both in the historicizing of the political, (which is propagated by the Communist Party, and now chronicled by him) and in the historicizing (or "memorializing) of the personal, which can only be separated from politicized nostalgia when the subject is able to apprehend which desires and attachments have been under the sway of abstract illusions. It is useful at this point to first work with what Kundera has to say about politicized nostalgia.

Kundera repeatedly argues in several of his novels and in his essays that politicized nostalgia, which ultimately becomes cultural in that it is taken up and propagated in music, kitsch, advertising, journalism, and even personal gestures, displaces the public focus away from everything that humans find difficult. Political nostalgia, which he refers to as idyllic, offers a reductive view of the world, facilitating totalitarianisms, in which all answers are given in advance and preclude any questions. Unexamined nostalgia is “history without guilt,” he purports; it is the great hero of history. It perpetuates what his narrator in *Immortality* refers to as “arch-illusions” (4).

In his novels political history is reduced to totalitarian illusions, except for the political histories which are preserved—by the narrator. To revisit this past recorded by the Communist party, he argues, is to go to a place that never existed and certainly never can be. This place will never draw on the weight of historical citation. Worse yet, for his characters, the return home forces them to confront histories of helpless adolescences of shame. This shame and impotence is part of experiential nostalgia, which he wants his characters to preserve as problematic histories. Yet they cannot. The losses suffered by his characters in both *TBLF* and *Ignorance* demand a scene of revenge or a fight against the remorse of forgetting, in which there will be no victors, no recovery, nothing other than the enactment of the crime (on) itself. The characters are denied the labor of grief so that they do not have to turn back on themselves and glimpse themselves, as one character is described in *TBLF*, “lacking in physical exercise and friends and spent under the constant gaze of his mother’s overfond eye” (166-67). The psychic process described in “Mourning and Melancholia,” whereby, after loss, the ego turns back on itself,” and “takes refuge in narcissistic identification, employs hate for the operation, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering” (Freud 251), describes exactly what many of Kundera’s male characters perform, even in the most petty of losses.

The force that prevents these characters from living nostalgically, that is, of facing loss by taking the love for the object in as an identification, lies in the psychic maneuver described by Freud and later Butler as the turning back which enacts the subject into being. This is because his male characters are excessively burdened with memories that recall the remorse and self-disgust that they felt for themselves in their younger years. In the section of *TBLF* titled “What is *Litost*?” the narrator again attempts to describe this remorse. It is an infinite, indefinable longing, a “state of torment created by the sudden sight of one’s own misery” (167).<sup>32</sup> According to the narrator, it is what one feels when love becomes a permanent source of great torment, at the stage when the illusion of absolute identity (in the eyes of the beloved) vanishes. It works, according to the narrator, like a two-stroke engine: “torment is followed by the desire for revenge,” the goal of the tormented is to make the beloved look as miserable as oneself (168). In other words, part of *litost* is what happens affectively when the illusion of one’s own grandeur falls away in the eye of the beloved.

Why, we may ask, do the characters feel so miserable about themselves? It is because in the loss of bearing that they feel in a melancholic maneuver, when they look back self-reflexively on themselves, they cannot bear the image of their weak adolescent selves. In *TBLF*, set in Prague, the first character we meet (other than the political figures described in an edited photograph), is Mirek. He is driven with a desire to “slash the painting portraying his youth” (28). Mirek is obsessed with retrieving the love letters he sent to Zdena twenty years earlier because he is ashamed of her ugliness, and his affair with her will be revealed if the letters come into the wrong hands. He realizes that he was with her, in part, because he had felt unworthy of anyone “better than a Zdena. That weakness, that deprivation—not the fact that the letters would soon be used in court to show that he had spoken against Russia—was the secret he was hiding” (18).

Later in the novel a young man is described as overwhelmed by *litost*, again characterized by humiliation, resentment, exposure, despair, bitterness, inadequacy, immaturity, spite, and desire for revenge by destroying the self, he says. A man possessed by it takes his revenge through his own annihilation. His desire for revenge results, in part, out of a series of “rebellions against the stronger” (207). It is no accident, we are told, that the notion of *litost* originates in Bohemia where there were successive rebellions and glorious defeats that led to the ruin of the very people who had initiated the rebellions (207). Some of the characters have lost their jobs, their spouses, their homeland, and are consequently possessed by *litost*. Other cases that inspire *litost* involve petty humiliations. In the example of the young man swimming with his girlfriend, Krystina, the impetus is merely falling behind his female companion while swimming across a river.

What becomes apparent as a pattern in each of these novels is that, for the male characters, the main problem with the ability to recognize or articulate the grievances that have brought about the sense of loss, as I argue, is that of shame. I distinguish the characters’ gender not to suggest that it is *because* they are male; however, in the novels under consideration, this display of *litost* is not seen in any of Kundera’s female characters.

An illustrative and tragic example of *litost* is Josef. In *Ignorance*, Josef, faced with the sight from his car of a communist flag hanging from his family’s upper story window, starts the ignition, and though he could have gone on as a veterinarian “peacefully treating cows here,” (68) he walks out of his life, never looking back. Josef is described, ironically, as lacking in desire and affection; he is forsaken and detached. The narrator says he is suffering from “nostalgic insufficiency,” later revised by the narrator’s “diagnosis” as “masochistic distortion of memory” (74). Josef is unable to bear either the history of his country or his memories of personal losses. What prevents him from bearing the weight of history? Afraid to look back on adolescence—as a “torturer-accountant” when

he inflicted incremental suffering on a young girl, only to accept the perverse self-gratification of offering her consolation, or when he was beaten up by a kid that was “weaker,” or when he had spoken ill of God—Josef considers himself cowardly and suffers from shame. The adult self reflexively refers to his desire to “annihilate the little snot” (his adolescent self) and, as an adult, considers himself guilty of emigration and desertion. We are told that “his memory detested him” (75) and he looked back as seldom as possible. His past consists of “recollections bound to the country he no longer lived in” (76) (since all he remembers are situations that make him displeased with himself). As Kundera says, “such is the law of masochistic memory: as segments of their lives melt into oblivion, men slough off whatever they dislike, and feel lighter, freer” (76). What Josef cannot live with is the shame involved in his losses. Because the narrator describes in such morose detail the process of self-degradation and hatred inherent in the mourning of losses, the ability to look back into personal history seems untenable. Kundera refers to this as “internal exile.”

In *The Art of the Novel* Kundera explains the desire to erase personal history more concisely, “man has always harbored a desire to rewrite his own biography, to change the past, to wipe out tracks, both his own and others” (130). This desire to erase his history is what Josef suffers from, because, as we are told in *The Art of the Novel*, while “forgetting is absolute injustice, it is absolute solace, at the same time” (130). The need for his characters to wipe out their own tracks, however, demonstrates their profound lack of self-empathy and forgiveness, because, as Kundera argues here, humans are always entering a life phase for which they are entirely unequipped and about which they know nothing. He concludes that, in that sense, a person’s world is the planet of inexperience (133). And so while many of his characters, particularly Tomas in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, engage in hurtful and denigrating social relations, histories that might be better forgotten or “erased,” the narrator of that novel indicates that this is the tragedy of human life: the first

rehearsal of life is life itself (8). In one sense Kundera seems to be arguing that life stages are so discrete that whatever lessons we might have learned from previous experiences cannot apply to future choices. In *Unbearable Lightness* he questions whether people are capable of “maturity” (224).

While Kundera’s male characters are stunted by their abilities to honor experiential history due to embarrassment of their adolescent vulnerabilities, the narrator of *TBLF* does not hesitate to sympathize with Tamina’s self-reproaches and her drive to preserve the pain and mystery of her dead husband.<sup>33</sup> The narrator seems capable of self-reflexivity, self-critique, and even the ability to withstand regret and shame. He says, “I understand Tamina’s self-reproaches. When Papa died, I did the same. I could not forgive myself for asking him about so little, for knowing so little about him, for allowing myself to lack him” (225). And then he adds, “Tamina lacked the infinitude of her love, I lacked Papa. . . . We ponder the infinitude of the stars but are unconcerned about the infinitude our papa has within him” (226-27). Finally he says “There is nothing more unbearable than lacking the being we loved . . .” (227). This honoring of the pain of loss is a shift in focus from his male characters’ petty adolescent insecurities to the narrator’s own sympathizing through his female character. Tamina allows him to express regret, mystery, and lack of experiential nostalgia. It is not easy to discern what entity has made this empathy possible. Perhaps he is suggesting that his ability to draw a female character that can withstand pain and shame in order to memorialize her loss is a space that provides the narrator with an opportunity for confession. And so while the reader can identify the culturally inherited values that prevent melancholia from doing its work (pride and superiority), the narrator models for his characters what it might look like to admit one’s pain and helplessness in the event of loss.

The final section of *TBLF* draws connections between eroticism and nationalism. The section is as politically poignant as it is erotically disturbing. When the character of Jan is asked in the

last section, what if “women” want to change the rules of the game such that they are not objectified, so that they don’t plead ‘no’ when in the throes of orgasm? “What if that eternal repetition nauseates them? What if they want to invent other images and another game?” he responds to his questions with another disturbing response: what if the desire of the male “depends on precisely those stupid images and on them alone?” (289). Neither the narrator nor the characters, at this point, make explicit how eroticism is associated with nationalism for an illusionary state. The author leaves this to the reader. This is the juncture in a Kundera novel; a rare and tentative instance of a character not knowing, and a narrator not interjecting, that gestures toward a possibility for new forms of readerly interpretation. The implied argument that Kundera seems to be making here is that what individuals perceive to be instinctual desires are tied up in images that have conditioned those desires. The desire of the man for the woman is tied to cultural inheritances. The desire of the citizen for the state is tied up in images of paternal control obfuscated by illusions of self-governance. While individuals may think they want to change the stupid images, the rules of the game, they are conditioned by eternal repetitions.

*TBLF* grapples with “history,” loss, and nostalgia; accordingly, Jan is seized, on the penultimate page, by one last great yearning, “a desire to go back again. Back to that boy. Back to man’s beginnings, to his own beginnings, to love’s beginnings. He desired desire” (311). This act of Kundera’s is extremely generous at this point: for his character to yearn for the arousal of eroticism, of symbolization, of meaning, of “innocence.” Almost all of Kundera’s texts are structured as diatribes against the dangers of yearning for innocence, since the yearnings are so easily co-opted and colonized by political forces. Because of this danger, then, Kundera’s generosity with Jan is short-lived. As soon as Jan tries to explain his vision, it is mistranslated and taken up as kitsch pronouncements by the other characters; even his close friend Edwige decides Jan is referring to the Greek myth of Daphnis and Chloe. The novel shows characters trying to reach some place from which they can narrate their

authentic experiences. All in vain. Kundera's characters ask us to consider whether (male) desire is dependent on outmoded and reductive images; we can, accordingly, suppose he is suggesting that nationalism is also a desire based on arch-illusions. The difficulties that the characters have with narrating their desires outside of "stupid images" is that they have no new language with which to speak, and thus are dragged back to myth and cliché. Their nostalgia has no language with which to speak. Arguably, Kundera's characters do not learn to articulate their particular experiences of love and loss, because he will not allow them to face the chasm of unknowability where adolescent shame may be in hiding. Kundera protects his characters from melancholy by injecting them with *litost*, thereby channeling their grief into a desire for revenge. *TBLF* is a cautionary tale about the problems of memorializing history given the psychological seduction of politicized and eroticized symbols such as flags, anthems, altered photographs, and images of domination.

Kundera repeatedly refers to "the terminal paradox." What the terminal paradox in all of his work is, I believe, is that the subject, by forgetting, is consigning his or her participation in history to oblivion; but, conversely, by remembering, s/he is prone to either romanticizing history and memory or having to face the shameful burden of his or her adolescent past, a past that cannot be accommodated hospitably by the internalized critical agency. For Kundera's narrator, the greatest paradox of all, I think, is that none of it matters anyway—as he says "history happens" and the "future is an apathetic void of interest to no one" (*TBLF* 22). This existential indifference indicates, on a political level his own impotence of not being able to affect any of the fate of his beloved country, in fact fleeing in its time of transition, though metaphorically speaking, he, like his narrator of *Ignorance*, could have "peacefully remained treating cows" (68). And yet Kundera's repeated nostalgic discourses, as tribute to a history that he witnessed, fights against that impotence and acts to develop an authority of its own despite the inconsistencies. His novels have allowed me to locate the obstacles

that certain subjects have with nostalgia: to hold onto history we must be able to acknowledge what that history is made up of, and part of what our histories are comprised of are moments of regret and shame. Self-reflexive, experiential nostalgia requires that one gives admission to ambiguity and incomprehensibility as new subjectivities emerge.

Not *What* to Send to the Lighthouse, but *How*?

Both Kundera and Woolf are concerned with what makes up authority, what determines the limits of cultural intelligibility, and what forces operate to create the individual that can oppose social terms that are not of his or her choosing. Both grapple with how the power to make choices, or agency, is generated through loss by transforming the social terms by which agency is spawned, as circuitous as the process may be. Both have suffered loss and trauma due, in the first case, to idealized political propaganda leading to Kundera's ambivalent support of the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia and his subsequent exile. In the case of Woolf, the loss is partly due to early death of family members and partly to Great Britain's involvement in the first and (prelude to the) second world wars. Both writers are also interested in how authority relates to ideals of beauty, honor, and empire. Woolf uses some of her writing as a theater to challenge psychological theories<sup>34</sup> and domestic practices that held sway during the time of writing, since, as she persuasively argues in *Three Guineas*, women must help to crush the Fascist or the Nazi "in our own country before we ask her to help us crush him abroad" (53). This requires first that women have the material and psychological freedom to write with integrity. Woolf herself becomes the woman writer that she is looking for on the bookshelves of the British Museum and in the streets of London, as described in *A Room of One's Own*, where she asks "Where shall I find that elaborate study of the psychology of women by a woman?" (78). What she finds in the streets of London is "the accumulation of unrecorded life" (89). Part of what is yet to be recorded,

Woolf explains in “On Being Ill” is “[t]hose great wars which the body wages with the mind a slave to it, in the solitude of the bedroom against the assault of fever or the oncome of melancholia” (5). One’s confrontation with pain, Woolf argues, is not accessible through the conventions of language. For the sufferer there is “nothing ready made for him. He is forced to coin words himself, and taking his pain in one hand, and a lump of pure sound in the other (as perhaps the people of Babel did in the beginning), so to crush them together that a brand new word in the end drops out” (7). In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” she speculates that writers have to find new ways of using words, syntax, and grammar because “the convention of writing [has] cease[d] to be a means of communication between writer and reader, and become instead an obstacle and an impediment . . . [t]o telling the truth” (334-35). The present chapter uses *To the Lighthouse* to elaborate her views outlined in “On Being Ill” about that which emerges in the great battles between the body and the mind in the event of melancholia, including new ways of representing the sensation of pain due to illness or melancholia. My discussion focuses on how a subject learns to apprehend truths that are not recognizable within the traditional conventions of language or other media of representation.

My analysis of how Kundera’s characters react to loss, substantiates, for the most part, Freud’s early theories about how a person afflicted with melancholia turns on the self with a deluge of self-reproaches. Kundera’s male characters, in the event of loss, look back on themselves as victims or weaklings, and in their shame, do not continue to view themselves as objects undergoing self-reflexive transformation. Rather, his male characters experience *litost*: they are fueled with the desire for revenge.

In contrast, Woolf’s *TTL* challenges the universality of Freud’s theories of melancholia. Rather than the subject turning-back-on-self, “abusing [the self], debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering” (251), as Freud describes in “Mourning and

Melancholia,” the turning back in *TTL* is a turning toward the self, however, the psychic process is one that does not recall shame. Rather than turning toward the self with a vengeance, the subject not-yet-formed enacts itself into being by opposing and transforming the social terms by which it itself is spawned. Thus, the psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another. The emerging subject demands of the self new ways of apprehending and representing the other. This chapter investigates how one of Woolf’s characters, Lily Briscoe, performs what Woolf is asking of female artists in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*: that they develop new representational tools to address their experiences of emerging consciousness of material and historical conditions.<sup>35</sup> In this inquiry, however, I suggest that Woolf herself may not have adequately accounted for the value of subjection in forming an emergent subject with the ability to take and make an account of herself, in that Woolf envisions “the thing itself” as something essential rather than something formed in opposition. As such, I would like to position a discussion of what Woolf might be referring to by the thing itself against Judith Butler’s theories of an emergent subject that forms “agency” in opposition to subjection.<sup>36</sup>

In *A Room of One’s Own* Woolf lays out her argument that women novelists of the nineteenth century created a structure out of “a mind which was slightly pulled from the straight, and made to alter its clear vision in deference to external authority” (74). The nineteenth-century female novelist, Woolf says, expresses sentiments in opposition to criticism: “She was thinking of something other than the thing itself” (74). In other words, the female writer was under the burden of writing not only accepted and romanticized versions of her world but also of trying to prove wrong what Woolf describes as “the bishops and the deans, the doctors and the professors, the patriarchs and the pedagogues all shouting warning and advice. You can’t do this and you shan’t do that!” (93). She asks

of the female writers who will emerge that they avoid falling prey to constructing their narratives in opposition to this admonition. She wants us to keep our eye on the thing itself.

Woolf does, however, acknowledge desires and perceptions that can be formed in opposition. In “A Sketch of the Past” she explains that because her father did not rebuke her or forbid her to fish, she was not compelled to react against his authority, and that she could decide on her own that she did not like fishing, though the “thrill and the tug—had been beyond words” (116). Her desire fades, “leaving no grudge” (116). Clearly Woolf is acknowledging the extent to which both desires and grievances can be shaped in reaction to subjection.<sup>37</sup>

How a character reacts when subjected to external forces is a common preoccupation in the work of both Kundera and Woolf. Another compelling similarity is the recurring question of how one can divest one’s own views from the associations of politicized and romanticized nostalgia. Woolf asks her characters to un-translate symbols, and their attendant meaning, in order to free these artists and their public from cultural values and practices associated with empire. *TTL* suggests that one’s experience of the other, including one’s reaction to loss of another, can be apprehended in an emerging process of interpretation that does not just repeat or assimilate, but rather summons and even perhaps prefers to misrepresent in order to get closer to the thing itself. The character who is arguably granted the greatest power to break from conventionality, Lily, is asked to live “helter skelter, hand to mouth” (54), so that she can represent perceived essences outside of traditional associations such as mother-child reverences or feminine beauty. In effect the regulatory power that Lily is working against is the representational tradition which produces and exploits the demand on individuals for continuity, visibility, and consensus. Lily chooses, like Kundera, to live in a sort of self-imposed exile. Hers is a flight from and against tradition that provides her with the need to react: to put into form a narrative to explain that which she most loves. Her work acts to undermine the politicized nostalgia that

propagates reductive views of the world, facilitating totalitarianisms in which answers are rhetorically and culturally framed and preclude any questions.

*TTL* challenges Victorian traditions of representation both in content and in form. Lily's representation of her nostalgia for Mrs. Ramsay is threatened with incomprehensibility or lack of authority. Lily, however, is not concerned about authority or even comprehensibility. Lily's conscious disregard for the authority of tradition can be compared to Woolf's own narrative strategies, which both Anna Snaith and Melba Cuddy-Keane describe as wobbling.<sup>38</sup> Even the learned editorial writer of *The Nation*, H. W. Massingham, misses Woolf's "turn & turn about" technique that she uses to mock the logic of his published complaint that the cruel trade in egret feathers is due to women's demand for them. In *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere*, Cuddy-Keane points out that many readers also miss the undermining of Woolf's central premises that she performs in her own work in essays like "On Not Knowing Greek" (142-43). Woolf has pitted herself up against the problem that any agent of change is up against: how to usurp authority without using the same tools that have kept the authority in place, and thus serving only to reinstate the same authority with a different name. This problem will be further outlined in Chapter Two in my discussion of how an exilic writer questions naturalized authorities, including those associated with the belief in the transparency of language. The problems associated with fashioning new narrative tools to represent emergent truths are taken up in the final chapter, in an examination of the work of Clarice Lispector.

Woolf's narrative style introduces a break in narrative tradition by removing the authority of the omniscient narrator and inviting competing interpretations of action and characters' thoughts. In Chapter Three I return to a discussion of the implications of Woolf's narrative strategy, however, in the present chapter I am interested in comparing how Woolf's characters in *TTL* and Kundera's

characters in the novels so far discussed, react to loss in order to outline what these authors suggest it takes to be able to live nostalgically, despite the psychic upheavals.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Lily all have very different strategies for lending order to the emotional chaos resulting from terrible losses, compared to Kundera's characters. The characters in *TTL* could not be more different than those in Kundera's *TBLF*. There are notable similarities, however, both in terms of their struggles to survive under social conditions that are the result of national upheavals, and more particularly, in the internal struggles of some of the male characters. Like Kundera's male characters, many of Woolf's male characters suffer from terrific insecurity and are driven to make amends to their sense of self by encroaching on women in order to gain their sympathy. Kundera's male characters are cruel both to themselves and to women. In *TTL* this imposing on women to bolster the ego is particularly evident in Mr. Ramsay, and when the narrative point of view shifts to him, Charles Tansley. Both put pressure on the women and children to bolster their egos, to save them from their isolating search for what the men perceive to be the thing itself. In search of their truths, and their need to be relieved from their isolation and egoism, neither of these men is able to partake of the intimate community assembled around them. Ironically, the novel suggests that they are more concerned with other people's perception of their search than with what the search itself unfolds. The tragedy is that their strategies for gaining sympathy and admiration isolate them from those whose sympathy and admiration they desire. However, there is no clear judgment indicated. Mr. Ramsay draws on his recitation of dead poets to help him through, which in all possibility, may serve him as well as the unity that Mrs. Ramsay creates in her daily art of bringing-together. What is distinctly different about Woolf's male characters, as opposed to Kundera's, is that in the event of loss, they certainly do not turn to self-recrimination, at least not from what is shown

through narrative point of view. There is also no evidence of this recrimination from the other characters' observations.

Woolf reports in "A Sketch" that her own father, while struggling with the death of his wife, Julia, was explosive, violent, and brutal, and that "he had entrenched himself away from all truth" (107). Because of this, whole tracts of his sensibility atrophied; he had no conception of himself or other people. He suffered "without possibility of communication" (126). This portrait of her father parallels that of Mr. Ramsay in that in both cases, after the loss of his wife, the man has little conception of himself or other people; rather than allowing melancholia to undo his rigid sense of self and open him up to new ways of expressing his grief, he closes himself off and seeks intimacy only by demanding it.

In *TTL* Mr. Ramsay is plagued with the terror of loss, yet we do not see how he deals internally with the loss of his sons or his wife. What can be said about his response is limited to what the narrator has chosen to show, and the narrator has chosen not to presume to entirely know the psyche of another. This choice, perhaps, is indicative of Woolf's own skepticism about how much we can know about another, even those closest to us, a point she makes in "A Sketch." How little, she warns, "we know even about brothers and sisters—" (68). In part, her project in this novel is to admonish that we must not presume to know the inner workings of another. What we do see of Mr. Ramsay is his beseeching Lily for sympathy. Likewise, Woolf allows the reader to sense that Mrs. Ramsay has unspoken losses that terrorize her, although nothing is made explicit in the plotline. From the first section we know that she lives in terror of loss but we do not see her after her sons die in war; we do not see her suffer particular losses. Part of her loss might be the terror of the war and the sure-to-be impending losses of life—even of her own sons. Her coping mechanism is to create an art form by bringing a sense of connection to the various guests with their own disparate experiences. The

narrative focus, after Mrs. Ramsay's death, is on Lily, and to a lesser extent on the Ramsay's children, James and Cam. My discussion below traces coping mechanisms of these three characters in order to extend Freud's theories on melancholia and develop my discussion of nostalgia. I am proposing an alternative to the subject who turns against the self in shame and fury, and instead goes on to become undone in ways that provide new tools for taking and making an account.<sup>39</sup> I suggest that Woolf uses Lily, James and Cam to offer a complex inquiry into the role of repetitions that neither turn toward consolatory fictions nor consign the past to the past. These three characters explore how they can best apprehend truth and represent their visions to another. Woolf positions the children of the Ramsays to ignominiously repeat, but to do so with an unconscious urge to change. They repeat erroneously.

Woolf acknowledges how hard it is to apprehend "truth" and to write what one has fixed one's imagination upon, or even to record one's own experiences. In "A Sketch" she questions, "why it is so difficult to give an account of the person to whom things happen" (69). *TTL* is a study both of "knowing" and of showing that which one knows. In essence *TTL* asks what nostalgia is and how it can be represented without political or otherwise symbolic romance. Woolf foregrounds the almost impossible task of the translator. Part of this task, as Walter Benjamin suggests in "The Task of the Translator" (quoting Rudolf Pannwitz), is to allow one's own "language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue." The translator must expand and deepen his own language by means of the foreign (81). To draw an analogy, *TTL* suggests that the responsibility of the artistic translator, in fact, of the subject-in-relation, is to acknowledge and become undone by the alterity and the foreignness of another, or in Lily's case, to suffer the shock of that which is yet to emerge. The artist does this by destabilizing her own relation to the image itself; the novelist guides us through this by destabilizing our relation with the text. Woolf does this first by showing us how Lily's ability to make an account emerges through her grief. She also invites the reader to apprehend ideas about gender, nature, even

the divine outside of the commonplace. This opening of imaginative possibilities is one of the most political and material moves that Woolf claims art can concern itself with.

Much recent criticism has focused on Woolf's treatment of the political,<sup>40</sup> in particular, that which falls under the rhetoric of empire. I want to extend this inquiry by focusing on how politicized nostalgia relates to the perpetuation of systems of domination in *To the Lighthouse*. In particular I outline what Woolf implies about how the subject might represent histories in ways that do not refuse the undoing, or the negation, of melancholia.<sup>41</sup> *TTL* acts both to enlarge the historical European concept of nostalgia and to provide a critique, by portraying subjective conditions that make it difficult to know what one "has" in a beloved, or an ideal, or a homeland, and then by pointing to the regressive functions implied in this having. Without a doubt, *TTL* grapples with the post-World War I terror, the shock-and-awe incomprehension of Europeans. *TTL* effects a cobbled narrative describing how one might explore a fragmented, proposed transcendental theory of unity to provide a critique of organizing metaphors of knowledge, including beauty, love, and the desire of humans to "share" knowledge.

Loss and nostalgia are portrayed by Kundera, as I have shown, as forces that drive the characters (including the narrators) either to memorialize those losses through reductive politicized associations or to reject the processes of mourning that create possibilities to direct social critique toward social practices that foreclose those losses. During the modernist European era another way of dealing with loss was represented by certain female authors whose characters, as Carolyn Allen argues, construct an erotics out of loss "that critiques Freud's influential writings on narcissism and desire" (21). Arguably, Woolf is one of these authors. Part of what this erotics does is to erase conventional notions of the distinctions between the public and the private spheres. In *TTL* Lily is driven to represent her private vision using images that do not evoke conventional (public)

associations. What she is doing is turning her private act into a public struggle against history. The literary criticism that seeks to make distinction between Woolf as an author confined to “private illuminations”<sup>42</sup> instead of one who is deeply engaged with the political, has perhaps not sufficiently accounted for what it takes to make an act *recognizably* political.

One of the most politically astute moves of *TTL* suggests that loved ones are as fundamentally unknowable as they are available for apprehension and inter-subjectivity. Even one’s own mind and “heart” are unknowable, yet love still flourishes. The novel’s opening page gives us an immediate mistranslation—one of the most primal and eroticized—in all of post-Renaissance literature: the child and mother in Victorian bliss. Young James takes his mother’s words, “Yes, OF COURSE, if it’s fine tomorrow,” to mean that the expedition he anticipates is “bound” to “take place” (7). What a grand opening of contradictions of understanding, of placements of words that intend to indicate movement and time (or immobility), with those of space! The outrageousness of this complexity is almost unnoticeable, almost conventional. Yet the narrative points immediately outward to the reader, teaching us how to read the mystery of what will come. The author is already signaling to us that the apprehension of another’s text will require a letting go, and an opening of cognitive or sensual accommodations.

One of the overriding problematics of nostalgia is how one apprehends his or her own history, even before that history can be represented to another. Reflective nostalgia requires one to think through what one has lost in the loss, prompting questions about how we know anything and what our perceptions are influenced by. *TTL* provides a study in perception, one in which we cannot always attribute a particular point of view to a character, nor at times can we tell whether the description is a character’s perception, utterance, or involuntary, almost unacknowledged, thought. Many of the observations are qualified by the words or phrases “seemingly” or “as if.” This is a

narrator who risks describing the material outside of a particular character's perception but recedes always into a character's point of view. On the first page young James is described as looking forward to the expedition "for years and years it seemed" (7). In this opening scene, he "endows" the picture of the refrigerator from the Army and Navy catalogue with "heavenly bliss," (7) the description of which anticipates the contradictions and complicities inherent in empire, comfort, beauty, and the divine. Even in this most subtle critique the narrative structure leads the reader to feel that young James's perception of comfort, order, and possibility relates to that which is described by all the subordinate clauses that make up the long sentence comprising his mother's characterization of his experience:

Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand, since to such even in earliest childhood any turn of the wheel of sensation has the power to crystalize and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests, James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the picture of the refrigerator, as his mother spoke, with heavenly bliss.

(7)

This passage is tersely followed by the phrase "It was fringed with joy" (7). We don't know what the "it" is, nor whom the joy is associated with, though the next sentence seems to come from the point of view of James as he registers sensations around him. This sentence switches midway to describe how James "appeared," signaling that there must be an outside point of view. The reader is not asked to trust either the narrator, or his mother's description of his thought processes, though James never clearly utters anything throughout the whole novel until in the final scene, where he began saying to himself, exactly as his father had said it, "[w]e are driving before a gale—we must sink" recalling his father's repeated recitation (206). The reader has almost no information to draw any conclusion about

James. Woolf has not provided a definitive version for us; she invites us to imagine and then challenge our own interpretations.

*TTL* foregrounds the limits of interpretation and how much one can know another or any bit of truth. We are told on this first page that little James, at six years old has his “private code, his secret language” (7). Yet he appears, even to his mother (or to the narrator), as an “image of stark and uncompromising severity,” even as he is described in the same clause as “impeccable, candid, and pure” (7). If this novel foregrounds the exigent and complex dynamics of interpretation, it also questions whether there is the possibility of unfiltered perception, or “truth.” The second scene, however, introduces the reader to characters who definitively decide what truth is. No adventure is bound to take place because, as Charles Tansley, one of Mr. Ramsay’s colleagues points out, the wind is definitively in from the west. The narrator seems collusive – one of the beauties of Woolf’s work. What Mr. Ramsay says “was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact” (8). Not only is Mr. Ramsay incapable of untruth, but whatever anyone says that contradicts his notion of truth (there will be no going to the Lighthouse) is a “lie.” According Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay, in effect, “told lies” (34). Although the reader is given every reason to believe that Mr. Ramsay is telling the truth, his “truths” are speculations and seem irrelevant to the larger dynamics of the community.

Presumably, the process of ascertaining truth is tied into the precision of how accurately language can be tied to those things to which it refers. The narrative foregrounds the messiness of conventional phrases and even sacred concepts that must be referred to despite their idiosyncratic overflow: concepts such as love, or beauty, or empire, or “the lord.” Woolf allows the reader to question conventional phrases through her characters’ examined usages. Mrs. Ramsay criticizes herself by realizing she uses phrases like “waves as high as mountains,” and she becomes more

specific when Mr. Tansley corrects her after she asks if he's "drenched to the skin." No, he answers, he's a bit damp.

Very early in the novel the difficulties of translating from the idea of an object to a referent become compounded. This is seen in a suggestion, just prior, that Mr. Tansley irritates the children because everything he says is designed to "reflect himself" (12). The narrator then warns the reader that all this distinguishing by Mr. Ramsay and his students of philosophy adds to the already real differences between people. Real differences "are enough, quite enough" (12), we are told. To extend the notion of how complicated it is to interpret another's word and gestures, the narrator says that, the eyes of another guest, Mr. Carmichael reflect, it seems, the objects within their view but "give no inkling to the inner thoughts or emotion" (13). In other words, what one is able to see in another's eyes may be little more than a reflection of the self.

While Woolf, or her narrator, foregrounds the uncertainty between what can be observed and what can be "known" and then described, there is, nonetheless, reassurance provided to the reader that one character can indeed intuit very closely what another is feeling. This reassurance is offered not by way of description but through narrative point of view. Though Mr. Carmichael seems to reflect the outside world, with "his yellow cat's eyes ajar," (13) someone, whether it be Mrs. Ramsay, the narrator, or the children, can nevertheless feel his somnolence, his "benevolent lethargy of well-wishing" (14). The ambiguity in the limits of point of view of both characters and narrator foregrounds questions about how we can ever know the truth.

Though the novel explores and poses problems associated with what truth is and how we can know it, it also gestures toward, hovers, and circles around "the thing itself." This concept can be traced through much of Woolf's fiction, essays, and memoirs. In *TTL* this is what Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley are presumably studying ("subject and object and the nature of reality," as Andrew

explains) (26) and, perhaps surprisingly, it is also what Lily attempts to apprehend: “the thing itself before it has been made anything” (196). She also imagines that in the chambers of the mind and heart there might be “tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public” (54). Presumably the sacred inscriptions spell out the thing itself, or as Woolf describes in *Three Guineas*, something “written up in letters of fire or gold” (9). Other characters in *TTL* are accorded moments of perceiving the thing itself. Prue sees her mother after the dinner party at the top of the stairs and thinks “that’s my mother” (118). She wants Minta to see her, Paul Rayley to look at her. “That is the thing itself, she felt” (118).

Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley aim to approach truth through their studies. Lily aims to capture Mrs. Ramsay’s essence by translating a vision. Mrs. Ramsay finds herself in the company of the essence of life while she reads a sonnet, “And there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here—the sonnet” (123). Ironically, though she is witness at this moment to one of life’s essences, she is being witnessed by her husband and totally misread. As she reads he gazes at her, wondering if she understood what she was reading; he speculates: “Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful” (123). So while the great philosopher is penetrating to the truth of things (he has arrived already at R.), he cannot see the truth that lies just in front of him. Inexplicably, though the Ramsays begin to approach each other in “a shadow, a thing folding them in” which threatened to seal them off again until he reproves her and she or the narrator surmises “the marriage will turn out alright” (125). Though she will not tell him she loves him, “yet he knew” (126). This scene is the last time we see Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay together in a moment of intimacy.

Three years before the publication of *TTL*, Woolf had been working on a draft of “Character in Fiction” to be delivered to the Cambridge Heretics Society in May 1924. In this essay

she proposes that novelists must be charged with discovering or uncovering the essence of “character, life, humanity” (514). Parts of the manuscript derive from “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” published in July of that year. In one version, along with her sketched-in revisions, provided in Appendix III of *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three*, she argues that novelists “differ from the rest of the world” in that they do not cease to be interested in the nuances of human psychology. This “character mongering,” as she calls it, leads them to look not only at the conditions of life but “*at life itself*” (512 emphasis mine). The problem becomes, then, that “one is left facing one’s subject without any method of conveying it to the reader” (513). This is partly ameliorated by the public, which is “always with one;” this, however, poses perhaps more danger than not, since the public is suggestible and docile; it would likely believe it, if told that “[a]ll women have tails and all men humps” (513). Though character “blows at us from every corner, so fresh, so strong,” she claims that novelists “cannot yet describe it . . . or tell the truth about it” (514). She charges the Georgians with setting out to accomplish what the Edwardians failed to do: to convey the essence of Mrs. Brown. In short, the thing itself cannot be found in Whitaker’s Table of Precedency, referenced in “The Mark on the Wall,” and *Three Guineas*. The project of conveying the essence of another person is what Lily is trying to do. She is struggling to represent her nostalgia but has no ready-made tools at hand that will convey her vision.

Arguably one of the preoccupations of the “biographical novel,” *Orlando*, is how to convey not only the essence of Mrs. Brown but also the essence of nature and of society. To describe “the shade of green precisely he looked (and here he showed more audacity than most) at the thing itself, which happened to be a laurel bush growing beneath his window” (17). Overcome by the thing, Orlando “could write no more” (17). *Orlando* seems to continue the philosophical questions Woolf had foregrounded in *TTL*, in Andrew’s description of his father’s work as a study of “subject and

object and the nature of reality,” that is, the study of how objects *are*, regardless of people’s perceptions of them: “Think of a kitchen table, then . . .when you’re not there” (26). *Orlando* allows Woolf to further explore and question George Berkeley’s theories on immaterialism (who a character in the story has just read for the tenth time) (258). Berkeley proposed that familiar objects like tables are ideas that the viewer perceives, but which do not exist outside of perception.<sup>43</sup> In *Orlando* Woolf asks how the poet can divest him or herself from the constraints of truth and apprehend something material. In *Orlando* this materiality is described as “the thing itself—a voice answering a voice” (325). The poet and novelist are always after that fast-flying, ever-elusive goose. How the poet Orlando is able to perceive suddenly the single wild goose comes after an arduous process of summoning and receiving, first the more than two thousand selves that make up the self, many of whom have no ready-names, and then the beloved. She does this by breaking up the established names, reassigning fragments of names, and finally listens in silence (314). This process describes the melancholic maneuvers that Orlando undergoes in order to apprehend that which was just outside of consciousness or perception.

There are also intimations of some unnamable, essential element in *Mrs. Dalloway*. We are told that one of the tensions is that people are “feeling the impossibility of reaching the center which, mystically evaded them” (281). It is hard to figure out what this center contains, or what it looks like. Perhaps it is what was glimpsed in an illumination, “a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed” (32).

More specifically, perhaps, in “A Sketch,” written between 1939 and 1940, Woolf describes her belief in “some real thing behind appearances” (72) and asserts that “behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern” (72). For Woolf, the task of the author as translator is to reveal this pattern to others and to bring all of humanity into “the whole world [which] is a work of art” (72). Artists can

express how humans are part of the work of art because “we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself” (72). To understand human motivation, as Woolf argues, writers must always be in search of the essence of Mrs. Brown.

In *TTL* Mrs. Ramsay asks at least five times, “But what does one send to the Lighthouse?” If poets of genius can transfer the essence of the thing to readers, they have sent something of value to the Lighthouse. This is no easy task. To give a truthful account of London society can be done only by those “who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it—the poets and the novelists can be trusted to do it, for this is one of the cases where truth does not exist. Nothing exists. The whole thing is a miasma—a mirage” (*Orlando* 192). And yet, there is something of a burning urgency in Woolf’s work to translate (or transmit) that which has been hidden for millennia behind a cotton wool.

But how can the artist best set out to translate the thing itself, the urgency of which is to understand facets of human nature that have yet to be recorded and compiled in the British library? How can we understand the human mind, so crucial to understanding personal and political decisions, when the human mind, according to Woolf, is that mysterious organ “about which nothing is known, though we depend on it so completely?” (*Room* 97). In *A Room of One’s Own* Woolf outlines some suggestions for how authors can translate the “humming noise” of lucid human perception (12). The utmost condition to do this must emerge out of “freedom to think of things in themselves” (39). This freedom spawns “integrity” to speak the “truth,” but not in opposition to an outside force that shapes one’s need to articulate personal grievances in deference to external authority (72-74). This integrity should be able to convince readers that what they had not previously believed, yes, really is this other way. The ability to convince, of course, brings us full circle to the problem with the public’s facile adoption of the belief that men really do have humps and women tails. Unconcerned with the public, the artist who is free will not cloud her vision by “thinking of something other than the thing itself”

(74). Free artists must “hold fast to that thing as they saw it without shrinking” (74). They do this by “summoning, beckoning and getting together” to look beneath the depths (93). The work that the artist performs, in turn, requires that the reception of these insights “perform[s] a curious couching operation on the senses” of the reader (110). But rather than dreaming of influencing others’ perceptions, the task of the artist, Woolf seems to urge, is to “[t]hink of things in themselves” (111). Presumably, this is what Lily Briscoe does.

In the last section of *TTL*, Lily’s utter frustration in not being able to translate the thing itself drives her straight to asking: What if she and Carmichael got up, “now on the lawn” and demanded an explanation; why was life so short, why so inexplicable? If one “said it with violence, as two fully equipped human beings from whom nothing should be hid might speak, then beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return” (183). The irony, of course, is that answers to the mysteries of life can be demanded no more than one can demand intimacy between individuals, and no matter how “equipped” one may be, much of our psychic life is occluded from the subject itself, not to mention between subjectivities. This particular quotation also alludes to how difficult it is to speak that which is hidden. It shows Lily in a moment of weakness. She seems to be giving up on her own project to apprehend and represent a vision that is unique to her. She seems to be suggesting that if she would only strive hard enough (like Mr. Ramsay does with his work), she could fill empty flourishes with a shape. And so Lily fights. “She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she tried to think of Mrs. Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture. Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything” (196). What this means is that Lily wants to observe Mr. Ramsay’s table when no one is looking at it. Early on we learn that Lily finds it

difficult to think of Mr. Ramsay's work, as described by his son Andrew, as how objects are in the world regardless of people's perceptions of them: "Think of a kitchen table, then...when you're not there" (26). Lily feels that this "seeing of angular essences" (a mark of the finest minds, the narrator interjects) reduces lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver" (27). Yet the drive to see things without a seer, that is to "be" objective, is, arguably what Lily seems to demand from her own studies. While Lily may represent the character who will break away from convention, both through her "experiments" and her art, she in fact seeks to get as close to her vision as possible. In this way she is not unlike Mr. Ramsay. Perhaps she can get as close as R.

Yet Lily knows that this seeking after a lucid way of seeing and then representing is perhaps too subjective. At one point she says that one way of knowing people is to know the outline, not the detail (198). And although she is satisfied with just accounting for the outline of Carmichael in her mind, Lily wants a lucid vision of Mrs. Ramsay in order to represent her love and her nostalgia; she wants to get in Mrs. Ramsay's hive (198-201). But what is the point, she asks, since "[h]alf one's notions of other people were, after all, grotesque. They served private purposes of one's own" (200). Lily demands out of her work the task of breaking up the largely unconscious associations between one's perception and one's grotesque ideologies. Presumably the ability to apprehend the distance between perception and ideology might come from a "gift" for fathoming the truth. The passages that indicate that Lily has this gift makes it difficult for the reader to tell whether truth delights in Lily's swoop and fall of spirit, or whether Lily's gift to fall upon the spirit of truth delights others: "Her simplicity fathomed what clever people falsified. Her singleness of mind made her drop plumb like a stone, alight exact as a bird, gave her, naturally, this swoop and fall of the spirit upon truth which delighted, eased, sustained—falsely perhaps" (32). What we learn about Lily from this passage is that she can intuit or "fathom" what has been falsified, falsely, perhaps.

The other character that may have a gift for truth is the philosopher, Mr. Ramsay.<sup>44</sup> He is the character who acts most certain of his sense of the truth, even of what the weather will be like tomorrow. Mr. Ramsay seems to base his authority in part on instruments for measuring, like the falling barometer, which over many years of repeated observation have indicated that one can expect X when Y is observed. When Mr. Ramsay steps away from the domestic scene and returns to his revelry, he resumes his verbal repetition (uttered now not less than six times in the first twenty-nine pages), “Someone had blundered” (36). Woolf at this point seems to be positioning the reader to ask what the role of repetition is in this novel. In fact, the problematics of repetition is central to her concerns, for, as she says in *Three Guineas*, “It seems as if there were no progress in the human race, but only repetition” (66). Breaking repetition is so crucial to this discourse that it is implicated in its potential to prevent war. Specifically, she calls on women not to join in, not to repeat. In *TTL* various characters are looking to repeat and then build on what has come before, in order to establish universal truths that can be applied or repeated across time and space. Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley are looking for an ultimate truth, which they probably conceive of as the thing itself, not yet revealed. What is distinct about Lily’s search for truth and the search for truth by Mr. Ramsay and Tansley is that Lily does not suppose her experiments or representations should be universalized, or repeatable.

The question of repetition is central to Woolf’s larger argument. *TTL* makes the implicit argument that women can contribute more fully to new domestic relations if they do not repeat male practices or female practices that bolster male egos. Women must risk alienation in order to nurture their own individual visions. Women artists must forego the vanity of praise by their peers, fathers, and husbands and prefer rejection or incomprehensibility in their representational modes. The question that looms large for any artist is how she or he can communicate with others using terms or modalities that are recognizable by their communities, yet that break with patterns and conventions. Woolf

foregrounds breaks in continuity on various levels in this novel. In *TTL* the most obvious break is the discontinuity of time structured by the three sections. Section two, “Time Passes,” is such a rupture from section one that it is difficult to follow the plotline. The midsection announces sudden death and prepares us for a haunting by “certain airs.” The trauma that is alluded to as Mr. Ramsay gropes in the dark hallway with outstretched arms after his wife has died, the loss of vitality that overcomes Augustus Carmichael, and the melancholia that Lily suffers at the death of Mrs. Ramsay introduce further ruptures in repetition. Melancholia itself can be thought of, rather than a drive to repeat or be repeatedly privy to the objects of one’s desires, as a splitting of the ego precipitated by the realization that the illusion of incorporation will only be so satisfying. In melancholia, the ego turns on itself in a deluge of self-reprimand that it narrativizes against the self. The ego also learns to rage against the dead (that which was lost) so as, in Butler’s words, not to join them. The critiques are formulated as complaints that would have been spoken had the subject been able to articulate them previously, but had been unable to. The drive to repeat (arguably a part of incorporation) is revealed as illusory. Repetition is broken.

If the term “nostalgia,” as it has been used for centuries, denotes an urge to return to native conditions, that is, to repeat, then melancholia would be the obverse of nostalgia. As I have outlined in this chapter, while nostalgia *may* carry with it the illusion of a return, it may instead accommodate multi-faceted emotions and critical capacities that do not look to illusions of return. Nostalgia can be viewed as an urge to live with the sense of loss and to accommodate the unpredictable psychic transformations associated with loss. In this sense, nostalgia is also a break in repetition in that the subjectivity of the individual is always transitional and looking to narrativize its genesis. Nostalgia, viewed in this way, is a mode of disposition not unlike “negative capability,” in which the subject is capable of “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and

reason” (277).<sup>45</sup> If the terms “melancholia,” and “nostalgia” can be understood to signify their urges *not to repeat*, they become available for discussion of the transformative effects of emotional practices. In *TTL*, Woolf directs her readers’ attention to the role of repetition in building culture and civilization.

In *TTL* other orders of repetition are referred to directly and suggested by the novel’s narrative structure. Shortly after we learn the truth about why there will be no outing to the Lighthouse and who knows this truth, the repetition in narrative begins. The last section of the novel uses James and Cam, now young adults, to provide a complex portrayal of how inevitable repetition is and yet, to also imply how repetitions might be enacted with variation or repeated erroneously. While the characters repeat phrases throughout, we are also told directly, “one had constantly a sense of repetition—of one thing falling where another had fallen, and so setting up an echo which climbed in the air and made it full of vibrations” (202). In the opening of the novel we also have seen “the same dreary waves breaking week after week, and then a dreadful storm coming, and the windows covered with spray, and the birds dashed against the lamp, and the whole place rocking, and not be able to put your nose out of doors for fear of being swept into the sea?” (9). By the third time that we read “Someone has blundered,” Mrs. Ramsay is thinking that the phrase had been said melodiously, almost like a question. She speculates that it is almost as if Mr. Ramsay were searching for a phrase, for a new mood “but having only this [mood] at hand, used it, cracked though it was (36). Here, the reader is presented with the possibility that language may repeat without specifically signifying. Later we are told “one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them” (162). This suggests that repetitions, particularly those that occur through language, are so unconscious that individuals may be repeating without even choosing to do so.

The second phrase that is repeated throughout the novel is “stormed at with shot and shell.” The first time we see it, it is heard by Mrs. Ramsay and Lily (29). The second time, it is presumably in the mind of Mr. Ramsay; later in the narrative, but also concurrent to their hearing it, the phrase is repeated as “Stormed at *by* shot and shell, boldly we rode and well . . .” (34). It is hard to tell whether both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily misheard the same thing, or whether Mr. Ramsay assumes he is saying one thing, when it is actually a variation of the many times he has repeated it in the novel. He also repeats the phrase “flashed through the valley of death” (34), and “ridden through the valley of death” (35). Mr. Ramsay is clearly portrayed as a character who is experiencing a major historical event through the words of another man. Of course, part of the lure of the poem is in its repetition, but it is also in the ambiguity of Tennyson’s narrative voice. Since we have so little access to Mr. Ramsay’s mind, we do not know what he thinks of the harrowing poem (he recalls the fact that someone had blundered, but also that “boldly we rode and well” (34)). All we do know is that he is given over to repetition throughout the novel. Mr. Ramsay is repeating something throughout the entire novel and the reader is given no clue as to what he thinks about this poetic narrative that occupies much of his mind. Slightly later in the novel Mrs. Ramsay also finds herself repeating simple phrases in her mind as comfort to her children. After a couple of repetitions her mind adds to them, seemingly without volition, the phrase “We are in the hands of the Lord” (66). Who had said that?, she asks herself. “She had been trapped into saying something she did not mean” (66). In both cases Woolf seems to propose that repetition can assume a life of its own. The propensity of the characters to repeat without critical thought can be understood in light of Kundera’s assertion in *Immortality* that gestures use us more than we use them. In the case of the Ramsays it seems that the phrases are using them more than these individuals are actively using phrases toward a particular end.

The novel provides specific critiques of repetition in at least three ways. First, *TTL* suggests that repetitions permit us to use outmoded, inherited language that does not account for what the phrases intend to convey. Second, repetitions perpetuate gender roles that stifle our perception of “the thing itself,” and, third and most significantly, they set humankind up to repeat historical events in which “[s]omeone has blundered.”

Lily is the character who will break repetition. She is struggling against a regulatory power that demands continuity, visibility, and consensus. Lily chooses not to reproduce patent images that lure audiences with the seduction of beauty towards some presumed universal symbolic. In addition, like the female writer that Woolf is calling for in *A Room of One's Own*, Lily will not pander to the seductions of vanity, reputation, or even income. Her refusal to paint like other popular artists of the times puts her in a sort of self-imposed exile. Her as-of-yet unrepresentable nostalgia puts into form a narrative to explain that which she most loves, and how she loves it. It does not need to be fully transmissible or comprehensible. What matters to her is the labor of seeking a unique vision, and then the empathy to explain that vision, without expectation.

Lily will not represent her vision of Mrs. Ramsay and James drawing on fashionable or consensual media of representation that only repeats outmoded emotion. Rather she wants new tools to convey her vision. Early on, Lily finds herself “struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage to say: ‘But this is what I see; this is what I see,’ and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her” (22). Instead she feels compelled to throw herself at Mrs. Ramsay’s knee and say something, “—but what could one say to her?” Whatever she longs to say is “absurd, it was impossible” (23). Lily resigns herself at that moment, instead, to say something more conventional to William Bankes: “Suddenly it gets cold” (23). This pronouncement is followed by visions that are not easy to understand, describing a break in

the hedge that is “guarded by red-hot pokers like brasiers of clear burning coal . . .” (23). While we cannot attach clear meaning to what is being described, the red hot pokers become more familiar to the reader as we encounter them repeatedly and in context as flowers that grow close to the hedge.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the increasing familiarity of a strange phrase indicates that repetition allows us to domesticate that which we cannot even envision. Lily’s struggles to represent the subjectivities that emerge during melancholia extend Freud’s theories on that subject. She is looking for alternative processes available to the subject, who turns against the self in shame and fury. Rather than repeat fashionable practices, Lily, through a sustained melancholic process, comes up with new tools for taking and making an account. According to Woolf’s description of Lily’s final stroke, this account need not be a representation that is easily understood by her community.

Lily provides a direct critique of repeated language that does not serve to communicate that which the speaker is after. At one point Lily longs to go directly to Mr. Carmichael and say not one thing, but everything. But “no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low” (181). She asks, “For how could one express in words these emotions of the body?” (181). But before we are tempted to criticize the inadequacy of particular words, the argument is made that it is not the tools that are to blame but how one uses them: language can do more than we ask of it. This is suggested by James when he conjures up an image (or memory?) of seeing a “waggon crush ignorantly and innocently, some one’s foot . . . But the wheel was innocent” (188). James, first commenting that one just sat and watched it, later wonders, “In what garden did all this happen?” (188). Woolf seems to be suggesting that it is not the words, as such, that are problematic, but the way they are employed, which is without originality.

And so while Lily struggles to find words and images that render what she sees, what she intends, Woolf moves on to suggest that perhaps imprecise language protects the privacy of others. Perhaps, she suggests, language is used imprecisely because people want it to miss its mark. Language that does not too keenly seek its mark can bestow on others a sanctuary of privacy. Mrs. Ramsay, we are told, shares her terrors, her “look at life” (62), neither with her children nor her husband. What she “has with her husband” she will not name even to herself (63). Woolf seems to be implying that the fact that language often misses its mark means that the privacy of one’s soul can be protected.

While some language in the narrative is intentionally imprecise, fragmented, and frustrated, and some of the dialogue is outmoded and conventional, there is also intentional narrator fallibility which gestures toward the limits of knowing another. In *TTL* there are characters who repeat, characters who struggle to break away from repetition with a good amount of success, and characters who struggle not to repeat with very little success. Mr. Ramsay is the character who repeats most often and is arguably the most tyrannical.<sup>47</sup> Mr. Bankes neither repeats, nor does he presume to know, objects without subjects. As he thinks about how complicated it would be to just think of Mrs. Ramsay as a woman, he admits, “He did not know. He did not know” (33). Also unlike Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley, William Bankes doesn’t fish for opportunities to assert himself or make the conversation reflect himself; he is “entirely free from all such vanity” (109). Significantly, Mr. Bankes also encourages a break from repetition, in that he takes seriously Lily’s attempt to render a mother-and-child image in such a way that it is neither realistic nor “reverent,” and he furthermore does not expect to protect women or be pitied and pouted over by them. In contrast to Mr. Ramsay, neither William Bankes nor Lily repeat phrases. They are arguably the least presumptuous of the novel’s characters; they do not assume that their perceptions of their own individual truths are universally applicable. They also know that others’ ways of expressing themselves do not warrant repetition in

their own uses of language. Lily Briscoe and William Bankes are also less worried about fallibility and, accordingly, more hospitable to others. It is important to note in this novel which characters repeat fashionable and outworn phrases (particularly phrases that recall the patriotic), and which characters modify repetitions. *TTL* suggests that characters who repeat (Mr. Ramsay, Charles Tansley), and those who erroneously repeat (Cam and James), will perpetuate domestic tyrannies, even while they are fighting against external tyrannies. The tyrannies are perpetuated even though the characters show moments of sympathy to the person who they will act harshly toward. The characters who do not repeat (Lily and William Bankes) exhibit curiosity to know others' viewpoints and, thereby, to live with the ambiguity of nostalgia that seeks no ready consolation.

The characters who repeat the least are those that are the most predisposed to entertain various perspectives. The other "character" who displays openness to multiple interpretations is the narrator. Perhaps, more interesting than a narrator who misjudges the characters is one who declines to translate for the reader the belief systems of a character. We see this in the description of Jasper, when he feels rebuked by adults for shooting at birds, but explains that his mother does not understand the fun of shooting birds. The narrator follows up his thought process with what is either a thought on Jasper's part, or a narrative description that shooting birds is acceptable because "they do not feel" (84). The narrator never presumes to know what is in the mind of a character without suggesting the potential for epistemological fallibility.

If one of Woolf's major critiques of repetition is that it allows certain of her characters to rely on imprecise language that prevents them from being able to spell out the sacred inscriptions, conventionally repeated language would seem to be fairly benevolent, even if ineffective. Not so. Her second critique of repetition in this novel is that repetitive language patterns perpetuate gender roles. Mr. Ramsay uses language to assert what he presumes to be universal truths about the weather and to

belittle the rationality of Mrs. Ramsay, who simply wants to question him. Likewise, he is able to force James and Cam to submit to his wishes. He also cajoles Minta. He even uses the building blocks of language, the alphabet, to imagine the stopping point of his genius—he would never get beyond Q. Language is what provides Mrs. Ramsay the tools to deliver what her husband wants: submission and cooing sympathy.

Lily is the only character who seeks some sort of repetition (that is, she wants to produce the thing itself that others can apprehend), but who will not rely on patterns that have been used throughout the ages and which suggest things that she does not intend. Lily gradually develops her vision struggling with new ways of communication. Lily loves and honors Mrs. Ramsay, yet she rejects parts of what Mrs. Ramsay will perpetuate in her “hosting.” Lily’s inquiries into Mrs. Ramsay’s soul are limited. Her longing to know Mrs. Ramsay is a longing for intimacy. Lily reworks the possibilities for intimacy by limiting her urge to “enter the beehive” of Mrs. Ramsay’s soul. Lily does not seek epistemological certainty; she seeks intimacy that respects privacy and mystery. Her art will not strive to make Mrs. Ramsay transparent, as is evident in Lily’s refusal to imitate contemporary artistic genres such as those popularized by “Mr. Paunceforte.” The narrator tells us that Lily “would not have considered it honest to tamper with the bright violet and the staring white, since she saw them like that, fashionable though it was, since Mr. Paunceforte’s visit, to see everything pale, elegant, semi-transparent” (22). Though she struggles to show Mr. Bankes how she sees things, it is difficult because the mind wants to rely on repetition. Thus, in the act of Lily painting we see that

It was in that moment’s flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself—struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say “But this is what I see; this is what I see,” and to

clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her. (22-23)

Just as in her painting she resists using symbols or representations that are laden with a thousand associations which the mind is involuntarily driven toward, Lily's daily choices also resist bowing down to conventional gender expectations. In the first section of the novel she feels the pressure of Charles Tansley sitting opposite her at the dinner table, wanting her to provide him with a forum to assert himself. We are told that

There is a code of behavior, she knew, whose seventeenth article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behooves the woman, whatever her own occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself; as indeed it is their duty, she reflected in her old maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the Tube were to burst into flames. (93)

However, Lily questions why she should help him to "relieve himself" (93). In the final section of the novel she is solicited by Mr. Ramsay to provide pity and sympathy. And yet she asks, "But why repeat this over and over?" (153). Finally, she realizes it is easier and quicker to imitate her sex, deliver what is expected of her, so she can get on with her own work:

Surely she could imitate from recollection the glow, the rhapsody, the self-surrender, she had seen on so many women's faces (on Mrs. Ramsay's, for instance) when on some occasion like this they blazed up—she could remember the look on Mrs. Ramsay's face—into a rapture of sympathy, of delight in the reward they had, which, though the reason escaped her, evidently conferred on them, the most supreme bliss of which human nature was capable. (154)

Lily assumes there must be a reason (though it escapes her) for women to delight so in the rewards conferred on them in exchange for providing sympathy. She is not able to. She is stuck. She feels the

threat of being swept away in Mr. Ramsay's flood of grief and insatiable hunger for sympathy (155). So she fumbles and mutters until she follows his gaze toward his boot: "What beautiful boots!" she exclaims. And there she had it. She seems to meet him halfway. For "[t]hey had reached, she felt, a sunny island where peace dwelt, sanity reigned and the sun for ever shone, the blessed island of good boots" (157).

What, however, could be so painful about following along with convention? Is it just that Lily feels a need, much like Tansley, to assert herself? No. What drives Lily's sense of larger possibilities is what convention shuts down. This, then, is Woolf's third critique of repetition; rather than continuing to "blunder," perhaps new intimacies can be forged. In the first scene, when Lily asks herself about why she and Tansley needed to perform these absurd roles, she ponders, "How would it be, she thought, if neither of us did these things?" (93). She follows through with the experiment of not-performing until Mrs. Ramsay silently begs her with the desperate thought, "I am drowning, my dear, in seas of fire" (94), referring to her attempt to handle the negotiations required to allow the young men to assert themselves. So Lily "had to renounce the experiment—what happens if one is not nice to the young man there—and be nice" (94). What does it mean for Lily, then, to "be nice"? And why does Lily want to perpetuate an experiment at the dinner table, and arguably throughout that does not offer "protection" or the conventional satisfaction of gender expectation to men? The novel shows us on one or more occasions what the costs are. The first is—the utter futility of "protecting" another—which echoes Woolf's question about the futility of "helping" her grief-stricken father in "A Sketch" (94). Lily understands, "There was no helping Mr. Ramsay on the journey he was going" (158). The second, higher cost of renouncing the experiment is alluded to when Lily asks in the first section, "What haven't I paid to get it for you? She had not been sincere" (95). What this means is that, by renouncing her experiment, Lily "would never know [Tansley]. He would never know her."

(95). Not only would they not know each other, they would learn less about themselves, for as Woolf claims in “A Sketch” that her father, indeed the entire family, would have been better off had her mother Julia “left him to walk alone” (114) rather than creating a sympathy-demanding dependence on others. In the novel’s final section, Lily longs to go to Mr. Carmichael and talk about Mrs. Ramsay, about whether there was no safety, no guide, no shelter, whether for older people it was the same: life is just startling, unexpected, unknown (183). She longs for communion. She wonders if perhaps she and Carmichael spoke with raw emotions, unshorn words, they could reach the thing itself. Could they ease the pain of loss? What if both people got up, “here, now on the lawn and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, as two fully equipped human beings from whom nothing should be hid might speak, then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return” (183). Perhaps, instead of being “nice,” if they could speak with violence, unhide that which could be shown, could something be summoned? Could this moment of communion replace the sensation of loss? What Lily seems to be asking is whether two people who are suffering a deep loss might be capable of making visible that presence of absence, whether two people could invent new ways of representing their nostalgia. Perhaps this violent exposition would create new intimacies.

Ultimately *TTL* suggests that if Lily compromises her experiments to reach her own unique vision, she shuts down the exploration of intimate knowledge (144). Conventionally, communities rely on language to understand one another more fully. Language, purportedly, acts to unite people. In this text, however, Woolf positions language as if it were a rough set of semi-consensual agreements that can be utilized for the purposes of making decisions while, nonetheless, each individual understands that s/he is forsaking his or her most nuanced thoughts and propositions, as well as a complex

understanding of another. The truisms of language impose a felt sense of order, the narrator tells us, “So, when there is a strife of tongues, at some meeting, the chairman, to obtain unity, suggests that every one shall speak in French. Perhaps it is bad French; French may not contain the words that express the speaker’s thoughts; nevertheless speaking French imposes some order, some uniformity” (92). Even the more sensitive characters in *TTL* fall into soporific insincerity as when, at the dinner table, William Bankes answers Mrs. Ramsay in the same “language” that is the consensual polite, whereas Mr. Tansley, “who had no knowledge of this language, even spoke thus in words of one syllable, at once suspect[s] their insincerity” (92). Ironically, it is Tansley that is portrayed as cut off from human warmth, and Bankes the more sympathetic and revered.

The question for the text, then, might be: How can one person honor her or his own vision of another without making that other person out to be representative of something symbolic? That is, how can a person create a nostalgic representation that is not composed of simplified, or glorified, or outmoded images? And alternatively, what happens when one of the summer guests uses methods amenable to others’ more facile understanding to seek understanding and communion? Woolf provides a critique of what kind of “comm-unity” this sort of easy translation or repetition engenders. Early in the novel Mr. Ramsay sees his wife and son

as one raises one’s eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified, and satisfied, so without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem. . . .” (36-37)

The narrator is suggesting that Mr. Ramsay is content with seeing his illusion of them. He is eased of the burden of the frightful foreignness of their inner beings.

When Mrs. Ramsay finds herself involuntarily uttering phrases that lie around like abandoned weapons, she feels “trapped” into saying things she doesn’t mean. She describes absurdities such as “we are in the hands of the Lord” as one of the little phrases “lying in her mind” (66), a phrase which involuntarily lifts up. On the other hand, to be vigilant about the phrases that one otherwise allows to be employed willy-nilly, to be purposeful about how one represents one’s vision, urging one’s own “exemption from the universal law (53), leaves Lily feeling like she lives “helter skelter, hand to mouth” (54).

Speaking or painting something easily understood by others in order to engender closer community is problematic because even though representations are often viewed as transparent, direct, and precise, what *TTL* shows is that the world itself is complex, contradictory, and precarious: one in which “frail barks founder” (8) and where there is a “fear of being swept into sea” (9). Even Cam, as she grows older and heads on a trip to the Lighthouse with her brother and father, feels that her father, “shabby and simple,” was “leading them on a great expedition where, for all she knew, they would be drowned” (208). Thus, to be able to represent these conditions, and the human emotion that responds to such precariousness, requires a highly nuanced receiving, interpreting, and representational translation.

Beyond representing precarious conditions, under which one strives to understand another and to represent one’s self, lies the question of what can be done to address the threatening conditions themselves. The only force that temporarily shores up the characters against the terror and isolation is communion. This is what Mrs. Ramsay and Lily work to create. This is why they strive so unendingly to offer intimate visions of themselves. Perhaps Mr. Ramsay wonders whether the terror of destruction and suffering are evaded or postponed by the ability of men who ride bold and well. But the bold riding is implicated in the destruction.

Despite the inaccessibility of people's deepest wishes, despite the brutish acts between husband and wife, father and son, men imposing their wills on women who are pressured to submit, despite the urge to repeat old patterns that do not engender unity—the novel proposes that there is unity: precarious, violently tender intersubjectivity and empathy. Mr. Ramsay often can read his wife's thoughts, and she, his. Other characters share intimacies. Mr. Bankes and Lily are every evening “drawn by some need” to view the slip of ocean where they share a vision of the effects of the sea on the body, and on the emotion (23). He even understands her explanation of the portrait of mother and child, although she does very little to explain it, and despite the fact that its representations are abstract, at best (“no one could tell it for a human shape”) (55). Indeed, Lily achieves momentary unity with Mr. Bankes when she tries to explain her picture to him. The surprising intimacy that she feels in their exchange has her “crediting the world with a power she had not suspected—that one could walk away down that long gallery not alone anymore but arm in arm with somebody” (57). This is a generous moment of Virginia Woolf. Perhaps no intimacy has ever preceded this hospitable communion.

One might ask why Lily is the character most drawn to represent her nostalgia for Mrs. Ramsay to the others. There are several instances of characters who presumably harbor deep affection for another. There are even instances when characters share an uncanny intersubjectivity. *TTL* offers us quiet scenes of communion. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay experience a particularly notable scene as the narrator describes them reading (each on their own) but sharing the same room, the same activity, coming together “through the crepuscular walls of their intimacy, for they were drawing together, involuntarily” (125). This scene, which ends the first section of the novel where all the characters are together, positions a very intimate gesture. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay temporarily share a small space that they created, one, which can accommodate misperceptions. This last time that we see them together is

in a scene of implied intimacy where Mr. Ramsay fundamentally misreads Mrs. Ramsay. Yet there is an unspecified emotion that the narrator respects between the two of them.

Another instance where we see characters who share visions (although not necessarily a perception of unity), is when James and Cam see Mr. Ramsay's book cover at separate times. In both instances the cover is described as mottled "like a plover's egg" (186, 195). In the instance when James sees his father reading, and the book cover is described this way, it is not clear whether this is James's description or the narrator's. What matters, however, is that of all the descriptions one could imagine to describe a book cover, for Cam and James (or the narrator) to have both arrived at the same simile suggests how much language structures the imagination. The repetition also suggests that Cam and James (or the narrator) share a vision. So perhaps it is because Lily is driven to represent her nostalgia outside of language that she succeeds in ways the others cannot. Lily has already questioned the limits of language for its ability to structure one's apprehension of another

Of all the characters in the novel Lily and Mrs. Ramsay seem to share the most intimate intersubjectivity. Lily imagines that in the chambers of Mrs. Ramsay's mind and heart there might be "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public" (54). So the narrator asks, "What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those sacred chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored?" (54). The description of how one can know another might be suspect. "Cunning" might imply penetrability.

Lily, however, does not desire knowledge of Mrs. Ramsay, but unity.<sup>48</sup> She knows that she will never know the inscriptions or "anything that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee" (54).

She realizes that one can never know one thing or another about people but only “haunt” the hives. This insight comes when Lily translates her seeing of Mrs. Ramsay into the figure of a dome, a triangular purple shape (55).<sup>49</sup> Lily has figured out how to represent her nostalgia for Mrs. Ramsay without using outmoded tools, or what Woolf refers to in *Three Guineas* as “the fashionable and hideous jargon of the moment” (137). Upon seeing Lily’s picture, Mr. Bankes, in an effort to understand Mrs. Ramsay and James as something more universally recognizable, asks Lily if her representation of them is meant to recall “objects of universal veneration”; however, Lily indicates that there are other senses in which one might reverence them [James and Mrs. Ramsay], if in fact, a picture must be a tribute (56). The section of the novel that describes what people can and cannot know of sacred inscriptions makes it hard for the reader to discern what the subject is, or what the object is. Yet, the sense of powerful, ephemeral connection is indisputable.

If the novel suggests that developing new tools to express unique visions invites greater communion between characters, the communion that is possible, and that infuses the characters momentarily with love, is problematic. *TTL* warns against shortcuts to another’s “sacred tablets,” shortcuts in the form of conventional language that recall the sacred using symbols of empire, or beauty, or love. Lily is occasionally tempted to take these perceptual shortcuts. She is tempted to view the particular through universalized symbols. At one point, when she is strolling with Mr. Bankes, she momentarily sees the Ramsays as symbolical, as representative of marriage. This lasts only until the illusion is dispelled and they become just two people watching children throwing balls. Or as the narrator explains, “after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became as they met them, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches (75). What this scene suggests is that each individual, even the artist, is tempted to “see” others’ lives as representative of some larger pattern. What the novel suggests, however, is that these

shortcuts in which we try to generalize, or put people into old categories, prevent us from seeing the uniqueness of each individual, and worse, seeing people as symbolical of some larger institution gives more credence to institutions rather than to the variations that may be conceived of when we view more closely the particulars.

Along with the lure of seeing individuals as representative of something other than what they might, at that time be, is the threat of being swayed by, and thus, “bamboozled” by “beauty” (228). In this novel we can think of revered institutions such as “marriage” as embracing a sort of beauty. But Mrs. Ramsay’s own beauty is seductive to several of the characters. For Lily, the lure of beauty threatens to infuse what she desires to see with unadulterated perception with half-truth histories, conventions, emotional reactions, thus diverting her ability to think, feel, and represent her own experiences. Early on, when Lily (or the narrator), penetrates the sanctuary of Mrs. Ramsay’s mind to discover something unnamable the question is posed: “Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge? Was it, once more, the deceptiveness of beauty, so that all one’s perceptions, half-way to truth were tangled in a golden mesh?” (53-54). Lily is interested in experiencing the thing itself and so for her, “[b]eauty had its penalty—it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life—froze it. One forgot the little agitations; the flush, the pallor, some queer distortion, some light or shadow, which made the face unrecognizable for a moment and yet added a quality one saw for ever after” (181).

What, then, is the role of, or the threat of beauty, other than to lure? To what does it lure? To love, perhaps? Often in this narrative the word “love” is offered as a cliché or an abomination, particularly when Lily is describing romantic notions and practices between a man and a woman. Then it is “the stupidest and most barbaric of human emotions (104) and “tedious, puerile, and inhumane” (105). There is another kind of love that is highly revered by Lily. It is a love that does not try to possess its object, such as when she imagines that which Mr. Bankes has for Mrs. Ramsay, “love that

never attempted to clutch its object; but, like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human grain. So it was indeed” (77). Though Lily has disdained reverence of the symbolical, this awe that she reserves for Mrs. Ramsay and extends to “some substance . . . unfathomably deep” into which had “spilled so many lives . . . some common feeling which held the whole” allows her to feel that “Love had a thousand shapes” (195). In effect, Lily is trying to uncover or take apart metaphors that can contain the mystery and awe she feels. Lily is both attempting to resist being swayed by the beauty of the symbolic, and to create a new beauty that represents a new definition of love, one that is uniquely her own.

Arguably, Lily’s project is to represent through her work that which she loves. She imagines that, as William Bankes examines her work, with his unexpected generosity, he sees the residue of her thirty-three years, “the deposit of each day’s living, mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown” (84). For Lily, this kind of intimacy is “helpful . . . exalting” (78). Lily wonders what art there is in love—how one could become one with the object one adored: “Could the body achieve it, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart?” (82). *TTL* shows Lily wanting to decipher the inscriptions of Mrs. Ramsay’s heart, longing to enter the beehive. However, there stands the problem of translating what those “inscriptions” are.

What Lily embodies instead is an urge to develop perspectives to account for, translate, and create connection without repetition or assimilation. Lily wants to honor her nostalgia for Mrs. Ramsay but without allowing her visions to be influenced by others’ ideas of Mrs. Ramsay. For Lily, developing a new art is “an exacting form of intercourse” (162). Lily concedes that creating a native art “roused one to perpetual combat, challenged one to a fight in which one was bound to be worsted” (162). It is easier to flow along with images and words that one repeats “without being aware any

longer who originally spoke them”? (162). But Woolf is asking Lily to bear the risk of alienation from community. For Lily to break from subjugating domestic practices, she must learn to use her own voice, to paint using her own stylistics so that she can experience terms of intimacy not based on being nice or being widely “understood” but, rather, on respect for another’s vision.<sup>50</sup>

Cam and James are also working through their own efforts to not-repeat. This is best illustrated in the last scene with James, Cam, Mr. Ramsay, Macalister, and his boy. En route to the Lighthouse, Cam and James, who is described as “the lawgiver” (171), repeatedly and silently assert that they want to resist tyranny to the death. *TTL* foregrounds the near-futility of this project, however. In a nuanced and astute move, Woolf has James, in his project to resist tyranny, attempting to reestablish a tyranny, an authority, over Cam, in order to “fight tyranny” (166) and the authority of his father (168). Cam feels pressured into silence by her brother, just as James accuses his father of “cutting off people’s right to speak” (187). James comes back to the desire to strike his father to the heart in the end of the expedition as he did when the narrative started. But he doesn’t want to kill the old man; rather, he wants to kill “the thing that descended on him—without his knowing it perhaps” (187). He wants to reject the emotion that provokes him to such extremes, while he himself is bound up in silence. He wants to speak for himself, but does not have the tools. We never learn anything about James as an adult, not even his feelings for his mother. His only dialogue in the entire novel is spoken in half-utterances to himself. In fact, the first words that are uttered by him are those that have been repeated throughout the novel by his father, words which are themselves repetitions of another man, years ago. The words come to him as he contemplates that the lighthouse is a stark tower on a bare rock, not nice and sweet like the old ladies back home on the lawn thought of it. He then looks at his father in the boat and thinks, “They shared that knowledge. ‘We are driving before a gale—we must sink,’ he began saying to himself, half aloud, exactly as his father had said it” (206). Although

James wants to kill off the part of his father who he is becoming, he has no new language to cultivate or articulate other subjectivities. James has aligned himself with his masculine role model and is doomed to repeat his father, although throughout the entire first section of the novel, he resents his father to the point of wanting to stab him with the fire-poker.

Cam, likewise, out on the boat, engaged in her own experiment to resist the tyranny of her father, also murmurs to herself her father's words "'We perished, each alone,' for her father's words broke and broke again in her mind" (170). What is astonishing now is that her repetition and her silence and submission to her father and brother lead her to mis-see others. She looks back toward the shore at that moment and sees that people "have no suffering there" (173). In this scene we see that, if indeed, as we have been forewarned by Mr. Ramsay time and time again, "someone has blundered," perhaps it is each character who, like James, "[t]urning back among the many leaves which the past had folded in him, peering into the heart of that forest where light and shade so checker each other that all shape is distorted" harbors motivations and perceptions out of which "one blunders" (188). What the novel is asking us to do is that which James learns just before landing: to acknowledge that what he sees as the Lighthouse, the tower stark and straight, black and white, with windows, with washing spread on rocks, is only one vision of the Lighthouse. For "the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too" (189). This suggests that James's long-held (and unexpressed) nostalgia for his mother, perhaps tied up with his memory of the day he was cutting out pictures from the catalogue as he sat by her side, is one view of her. But there are many other truths about his mother as well that can be seen by looking from various angles. However, if individuals are so highly subject to the comforts of repetition, various angles and perspectives are not summoned, recognized, or validated.

What helps James to see that there is the Lighthouse in his memory, and there now is the Lighthouse just before him, but one that is slightly different, is nostalgia: his desire borne of longing to love and hold-in-memory. There is also his desire not to perpetuate that which has hurt him and those whom he has loved. And yet we do not see James acquiring a self-reflexive disposition or ability to articulate his processes of mourning.

I have argued that Kundera's characters make visible the psychological reasons why some people are unable to bear the weight of experiential nostalgia. They are unable to because of shame that permits them to take themselves as an object. Accordingly, these characters prefer the more facile politicized nostalgia, and thus repeat history by perpetuating symbols and clichés. In contrast, Lily does not allow shortcuts to help her translate her vision. Instead, in her mourning and her struggle to represent her reverence of, and love for, Mrs. Ramsay, she performs what Butler suggests in *Psychic Life*: rather than turning toward the self with a vengeance, the subject enacts itself into being by opposing and transforming the social terms by which it itself is spawned. Lily's psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another, in that what she is capable of apprehending in her own psyche is what she needs to translate to her larger community. It is also the community that provides a need to narrativize her vision; thus these two domains are produced in relation to one another. Lily will not repeat the terms that have subordinated her, previous to her attaining her vision. As I have argued, it is not only Lily who does not reproduce the terms that subordinate her. James and Cam, although they fall into patterns of tyranny against which they are rebelling, do repeat, but they repeat erroneously. Woolf is arguing that repetition, particularly in media of representation such as speech or painting, is inevitable but that small flaws in repetition can change patterns. After all, Lily's struggle to develop her vision of Mrs. Ramsay using artistic techniques that were unconventional at the time, has not brought about a great change in even the small community assembled at the cottage.

Lily's great success lies in her struggle to honor her nostalgia for Mrs. Ramsay without seeing her as she has been seen by others: the Victorian angel of the house. Her success is in her capacity to make that felt absence present, to actually summon Mrs. Ramsay. Finally, Lily is successful at allowing herself to be transformed in her melancholia to the extent that she is able to articulate a vision, foreign and emergent, for the benefit of others. She offers an image that confirms the unknowability of each individual and does not expect to be so easily understood.

The character of Lily has allowed me to challenge Freud's theories on melancholia that presuppose that a subject turns on the self with violent self-reprimand, bringing hate into the operation. Instead, in the internalization of loss, Lily (to borrow Butler's words) has been transformed in the sheltering (*Psychic Life* 180). Lily's reaction to loss differs from both Freud's theories on melancholia and Kundera's depictions of the operation, as seen in his male characters, in two important ways. First, although she is undone by Mrs. Ramsay's death, even ten years later there is no violent surge of aggression either toward the ego or toward the other. She does allow the pain, perhaps, to undo her but is not moved toward hatred or shame. Secondly, the incorporation of her love is efficacious, that is, it is available for voluntary or involuntary summoning. Lily translates her memories of Mrs. Ramsay into a representation that does not repeat artistic conventions of the time. This is her way of incorporating and identifying with her love and her loss. What *TTL* suggests is that social transformation comes, not only by overt critique of structures of oppression, but perhaps more lastingly, by altering the conventions by which we imagine and represent others.

In some ways Lily enacts what psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva proposes about mourning processes for women. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva argues that melancholia is not so much a condition to treat, as it is a discourse whose language should be learned. If melancholia is an incapacity to move from a necessary pre-linguistic experience of object loss toward a primary identification with a

communal schema, then this is what Lily accomplishes by representing her unnamable loss in a vision that she can share with a larger community. She creates out of her struggle a compensatory signifier of identification. What she has “substituted” for the beloved, as it were, is a nostalgia that is not only able to “summon” Mrs. Ramsay, but is also able to “articulate,” or generate, a text that shows her own experience of her friend. Lily uses her representational art to lend voice to her anguishes. She accomplishes what Kristeva calls a “triumph over sadness” by reviving or reassembling dead languages, dead images in such a way as to “arrive at a live meaning in the bond with others” (24). The representation acts, not so much to negate or neutralize her nostalgia, as to enable the transference of affective experience into a mode of representation. This arranging of affect into a structure-of-transference is melancholia’s or nostalgia’s ultimate triumph—it is what invigorates the individual to strive for a greater sense of personal wholeness, and perhaps even tolerance for the struggles of others. Through this transference, or ability to enter into live bonds with others, loss and nostalgia become generative both for the individual and her society. Freud suggests in “Mourning and Melancholia” that when the work of mourning is complete, the ego is free. The melancholic working through the process of self-accusations and self-reprimands “has a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic” (246). In Woolf’s work, this eye for truth is looking for “the thing itself.”

Lily’s struggle with loss puts her in a position to liberate herself through creativity that expands the limits of representation. Lily *is* finally successful in doing this, but in contrast to the means which Kristeva suggests, she does not seem overly burdened by her enduring emotional ties, nor does her representation of the lost object efface or deny the radical otherness of Mrs. Ramsay. The abstract mother-child image does not express irreverence, she tells William Bankes.<sup>51</sup> Lily has done what Woolf’s colleague, Mark Gertler, has argued that the painter can do much better than the writer— for painting “always deals with Mr. and Mrs. Brown” (“A Sketch” 85). Woolf has trumped

him by offering up a vision of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, arguably not “inferior” or more “vulgar” than a painting (“A Sketch” 85). She further suggests that she is able to do this partly because “if there is any good in all the mutilation that comes from suffering,” it is that it sensitizes (117). This sensitization allowed Woolf to ponder whether the gods were taking her seriously by giving her a job that another could not have delivered as well, which put her “in relation to the force that had respected me sufficiently to make me feel what was real” (118). This seems to imply that Woolf had been “given” a job to represent for others that which she can more readily apprehend due to the mutilations of suffering and the heightened sensitivity that results.

Arguably, *TTL* is itself a nascent political text that emerges out of Woolf’s nostalgia for her parents and her speculation about what remains after death. The text, particularly in “Time Passes,” strives to describe forces that remain long after life has passed, and that have not been adequately characterized. After Mrs. Ramsay dies, after Prue dies in childbirth, and Andrew along with twenty to thirty young men dies in an explosion in France, there is still something that remains. It is alluded to throughout the narrative. Lily clearly learns, in utter despair, to summon something that remains, however, only after she allows Mrs. Ramsay to be part of ordinary experience, on the level with the chair and the table. Then Mrs. Ramsay comes to her: “There she sat” (310). Otherwise the elusive “it” takes on the character of “all sorts of little things.” Whatever the thing or series of things could be, it is described in indefinite terms alternating between “nothing” (129), “the profusion of darkness” (129), “certain airs” (130), “some random light...with its pale footfall” (130), “winter” (131), “divine goodness” (131), “loveliness” (133), “stillness” (133), “clammy sea airs” (133), and “Spring” (135). This, or these “character(s)” sometimes also referred to as “it,” indicates that there is a coherence in things, something immune from change, which shines out in the face of the spectral. This still space that lies about the heart of things—“This would remain” (163)—though while remaining it becomes

“already the past” (173). What Woolf suggests, however, is that this messy intellectual faith, born of terror and desire, is available only in glimpses. Humans have no access to it, perhaps because “should any sleeper, fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude,” finds that he is ultimately mistaken. For “no image with semblance of serving and divining promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul” (199). The glimpses of unarticulated metaphysical possibilities are not available through meditation or reason, but come unbidden out of a sustained melancholic process.

Her speculation on why this “divine goodness, existing, single and distinct, in the hare erect, the wave falling, the boat rocking is not accessible to the light of human reason” is answered in the clause, “which, did we deserve them, should be ours always” (199). The text leaves unanswered the questions of what “we” would be able to do to “deserve” them. Or perhaps it suggests that we have deserved them, although divine goodness is not accessible through human reason. This proposition leads the reader to one of the most subtle yet persevering questions of the text: what is Woolf suggesting about a force that could serve as judge of this deserving? And more relevant to this inquiry: if divine goodness is not accessible through human reason, does Woolf suggest it is accessible via other channels or other labor? Of significance for this study is the question as to how nostalgia contributes to the ability of the goodness to be represented in a public memorial.

When *TTL* addresses itself to processes that suggest the mysterious unknown, the language breaks down and the syntax makes it virtually impossible to discern who or where the subject is. For example, during the dinner party Mrs. Ramsay is suddenly filled with a sense of security, joy, a notion that everything seems possible, that everything seems right. She is solemn and observes that this invisible element seemed to hold them all safe together: “It partook . . . of eternity . . .” she feels (107). The security comes to those who question what the universe is made of; the answer they receive,

however, (while perhaps, lending a sense of safety), is not able to be characterized using language, such that: “[t]he mystic, the visionary, walking the beach on a fine night, stirring a puddle, looking at a stone, asking themselves ‘What am I,’ ‘What is this?’ had suddenly an answer vouchsafed them: (they could not say what it was) so that they were warm in the frost and had comfort in the desert” (135). The closest that Woolf comes to naming the force or element that holds things together is “a force working” that keeps the scales from tipping (143). It is not entirely clear whether Woolf is proposing that there is a force external to humans and nature, or whether the force is nothing other than the human drive to name some force so that they will feel secure. In the human’s scattered fragments of vision within, Woolf’s narrator says,

it was impossible to resist the strange intimation which every gull, every flower, tree, man and woman, and the white earth itself seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules; or to resist the extraordinary stimulus to range hither and thither in search of some absolute good, some crystal of intensity, remote from the known pleasures and familiar virtues, something alien to the processes of domestic life, single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand, which would render the possessor secure. (136)

What is significant here is that Woolf implies that it is almost impossible not to believe in some alien force or thing that orders and bestows happiness, and that it’s almost impossible to not want to go about in search for an absolute that would transform the searcher into someone secure. Arguably, if there were an alien force declared by every gull, flower, man and woman, this would be one of the most valuable things to be able to apprehend and represent.

Woolf is suggesting that part of the task of the translator (the artist, the mystic) is to apprehend the alien force and to re-present it by shaping media of expression that so far have been unable to account for any of the essences. Although both Lily and Mrs. Ramsay are shown to be

limited in the apprehensions of such essences or dynamics, they are both momentarily filled with a sense of solemnity and a feeling that everything is right that comes from translating their visions into art. We also see this in Woolf's novel *Orlando*, when Orlando feels deep satisfaction with her secret transaction, where her poetry becomes "the thing itself—a voice answering a voice" (325). In both *Orlando* and *TTL* the representations (a poem and a painting), are "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one" (*TTL* 161); these remnants make of the moment something permanent (249). It is not clear whether Woolf would suggest that her own nostalgic representations of what remains are characterizations of the thing itself or *are* the thing itself. Artists, according to Woolf, can express how humans are part of a greater work of art because "we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself" ("A Sketch" 72).

Woolf suggests in *TTL* that the grievance that results from unspeakable loss, a grievance that could, perhaps, be productively directed at the social sphere, can instead be advanced through daily practices. These are practices that Mrs. Ramsay uses to bring people together and that Lily uses to experiment with altering human exchanges at the dinner table. They are also small practices that she attempts to forge to represent her vision. Her characters part ways with Freud's theories on primary narcissism and object-love, (described in "On Narcissism: An Introduction" 75) in that this early work describes a psychically closed system whereby object-love is always constitutive of the developing self, implying an ongoing process of assimilation. If the incorporation, which could be viewed as assimilation, denies the radical alterity of the other, it in effect preserves the other as ideal rather than as inalienable. This early version of Freud's theory of mourning leaves little room for awe, for apprehensions that cannot make a vitally incomprehensible other into a restored part of ourselves projected onto the other.

Arguably, Mrs. Ramsay is the character in *TTL* most able to practice her native art while welcoming the differences of others. If Lily is forming new ways of representing her vision in response to Mr. Tansley's admonition that "women can't write, women can't paint" (and against the Mr. Pauncefortes of the time), Mrs. Ramsay, then, is the character most able to accomplish that which Woolf has asked of women artists in *A Room of One's Own*: that they not be "pulled from the straight, and made to alter [their] clear vision in deference to external authority" (74). Mrs. Ramsay even provides Lily with a room of her own in which to paint and a community to explain her representations against and to. Mrs. Ramsay does not seem to be working to prove wrong the institutional authorities. Mrs. Ramsay doesn't work to translate the thing itself to others, but rather brings characters together to create moments of the thing, moments of being, moments of experiencing unity and communion with others, even for a fleeting moment. In the very last scene that we see her, she is fundamentally misread by her husband. We do not know that she knows this, however; she does not look at him with contempt for his domestication of his image of her. Mrs. Ramsay knows that one can never entirely know another. Her desire, her art, is to provide a dynamic, a forum, an opportunity that will allow people and things to merge, flow, create, but not assimilate (86). She is an artist in this way. And since repeatedly the reader's view is directed by the actual artist, (when Lily looks out to sea, the scene then switches to the characters at sea) (166), we as readers are directed by the novelist to consider "this scrawl, not of that actual picture, perhaps, but of what it attempted, that it 'remained for ever'" (183). This is what Mrs. Ramsay does, and is, in effect, what Woolf's text does: brings things and people together "making of the moment something permanent" (165).<sup>52</sup> Perhaps, after all it is not *what* to send to the Lighthouse, but *how*?

If one of Woolf's ongoing projects was to explore how humans can perceive reality and represent their unique visions without repeating cultural inheritances indiscriminately, this was so that

people might more intimately know the other, and thus contribute differently to building a community that values freedom, peace, privacy, and beauty, rather than decorum, hierarchy, presumption, and dominance.

As this chapter has demonstrated, this process for apprehending and representing one's instincts and desires is what emerges out of the melancholic process. Lily's ability to "translate" her nostalgia for what Mrs. Ramsay represents to her emerges with great difficulty as she battles her grief and honors her emergent powers of representation. Her powers are so strong in the end that she is able to actually summon Mrs. Ramsay's presence: "Mrs. Ramsay—it was part of her perfect goodness—sat there quite simply in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat" (205). In the end of the novel Lily has, not only her unique vision and representation of Mrs. Ramsay, and not only a sudden uncanny intimacy with Mr. Carmichael, Lily has what she has desired all along—the ability to commemorate and communicate on her own terms.

## Chapter Two

### Exit into History: Eva Hoffman on Exile and Hospitality

"The ocean is not really the ocean until you are out of your depth."

Milan Kundera

The previous chapter foregrounded the relationship between nostalgia, representation, and perpetuation of patterns of domination. I used Judith Butler's work on melancholia to broaden the generative possibilities that Freud outlines in "Mourning and Melancholia" by suggesting what limits Kundera's characters and pointing out how Woolf's Lily chooses not to remain at the level of self-reprimand, without further reflexive labor. Lily allows the grief of loss to undo her to the point that, in the melancholic turn against the self, she continues laboring until she has developed new ways of living nostalgically, of representing that which she has valued and lost, outside of idealizations of universality. Lily does not want her work to be easily understood, that is, complicit with idealized values. She wants to invent new representational possibilities so as to be able to translate her own vision of "the thing itself." By the end of the novel, Lily has developed new ways of accounting for her love and her loss. Woolf's concept remains problematic in light of her discussions on how one might apprehend some elemental force or thing. In several of her texts she imagines the artist's ability to perceive the thing itself by alighting on truth itself. In *A Room of One's Own* she outlines some suggestions for how authors can translate the "humming noise" of lucid human perception (12). The primary condition for translating this perception must emerge out of "freedom to think of things in themselves" (39). In this particular case (and in her extended argument in this text), her

references to “the thing itself” seem to be alluding to something that exists outside of its own genesis.

However, in many of the instances where she is at pains to describe how this freedom is developed, she seems to acknowledge that the ability to perceive and represent emerges out of the melancholic maneuvers of turning against oneself, as both Freud and later Butler suggest. Woolf herself argues that she has begun to outline in her “own voice” something that allows her to speak against the current of literary criticism (*Writer’s Diary* 46). Although she calls for women to write, not in reaction to “You can’t do this and you shan’t do that!” (*ROO* 93), she gives us the artist, Lily, who is working against the regulatory power of a representational tradition which produces and exploits the demand for continuity, visibility, and consensus, such as in the sacred mother-child image referred to by Mr. Bankes. Lily chooses to live in a sort of self-imposed exile that provides her with the need to react: to put into form a narrative to explain that which she most loves. Her grief and her self-imposed exile provide her with the means to do what she most strove for: to create “the thing itself before it has been made anything” (196).

As I have argued, in her mourning and her struggle to represent her grief, Lily performs the psychic maneuvers that Butler describes in *The Psychic Life of Power*: in the turning toward the self with a vengeance, the subject enacts itself into being by opposing and transforming the social terms by which it itself has come into being. Lily’s psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another. Through the internalization of her loss, which she begins by sheltering the lost object, she is transformed in the sheltering, or as Butler describes this maneuver, “producing and strengthening the conscience, leading to moral reflexivity” (180-81). In Lily’s particular case this means she can approach her own vision of Mrs. Ramsay and represent that vision on her own terms.

In three of Woolf's other texts she addresses how the artist may be able to perceive that which has not yet been made visible to her or him. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf implies that the task of the author as translator is to reveal a hidden pattern to others and bring all of humanity into "the whole world [which] is a work of art" (72). Woolf explains that she receives tokens of some real thing behind appearances through an emotional shock or blow. She then writes the token into existence in order to be able to ameliorate the pain (72). In Woolf's *Orlando*, the poet Orlando is only able to perceive suddenly some elemental thing after a melancholic process of summoning and receiving the more than two thousand selves that make up the self, many of whom have no ready-names (*Orlando* 314).

What Woolf directly argues in *Three Guineas* is that the freedom for women to think of things in themselves can come from accounting for their position as "outsiders" She suggests that these outsiders can help experiment with new modes and words to help expose how traditions are perpetuated through representational modes. Part of what those traditions conceal are regulatory mechanisms that govern social practices. Woolf indicates that the forces that women, in particular, are subjected to both from the Fascist threat abroad and the domestic tyrant at home, are impalpable and, thus we must use different methods and words to "discover what are the unwritten laws; that is the private laws that should regulate certain instincts, passions, mental and physical desires" (184). Arguably, the ability to reveal social forces that regulate instincts and desires are formed in opposition to the Fascist threat.

Women have been able to apprehend these unwritten laws, Woolf argues, because they have been outsiders. Being an outsider positions the subject to look back on the self as an emerging subjectivity formed in reaction to forces of subjection, and thus to identify more clearly the forces of subjection and the unwritten rules of silence surrounding subjection. Forces

that may seem impalpable to a socialized member of a society are not always naturalized for an outsider. Indeed, the ability to sense and articulate practices that subjugate certain sectors of the population while privileging others is often what makes a foreigner feel out of place. For Woolf, outsiders can contribute to social critique and new interpersonal practices by virtue of “a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those differences” (113). An outsider’s view can help make palpable the naturalized forces that conceal regulatory practices of subjection.

Once these terms of subjection are more clearly understood, the individual is more able to apprehend that which is paraded as cultural consensus, and in some cases to reject idealizations of universality. The ability to represent those idealizations as idealizations, rather than natural truths, provides advantages to outsiders whether they are marginalized within the society by particularities of gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, or citizenship. In many cases outsiders will try to seek privileges (or become “insiders”) by mimicking unwritten rules. Eva Hoffman, the author whose work I foreground in this chapter, is perceived as an outsider due to particularities of citizenship, language, and ethnicity. In her new country, however, she seeks ties of identification, not that create a sense of belonging by mimicking unwritten rules, but instead by developing social and political practices that uphold the kinds of community she chooses to participate in. She also seeks community with other exiles.

Narratives of exiles are extremely useful for making visible that which is taken for granted by natives. These narratives often question naturalized structures, institutions, traditions, and identifications that are conceived of as foundational, originary, or predictable. Exile can provide a vantage point from which to record apprehensions and impressions about what circumscribes the center. The loss of foundation that one experiences in exile, the regarding of

oneself as an object in contradistinction to social norms is, in effect, the public counterpart of the melancholic maneuver whereby the subject turns back on itself, inaugurating itself into being. The exilic experience positions a series of encounters of the self with unwritten laws and allows one to take note of how subjects—including one’s own—embody, adjust to, or reject practices of regulatory power. The previous chapter outlined Butler’s argument in *Psychic Life of Power* that this self-reflexive turning back toward oneself is part of the development of conscience: a subject becomes an object for itself. It can see itself that way only by taking the third person perspective on itself, not so much by dispossessing itself of its inherited perspective but by *acknowledging* that perspectives are inherited, constructed, and, therefore, to a more limited extent, deconstructable. The acknowledgement that one’s subjectivity is always under construction is part of the development of conscience.

A rich array of scholarship argues for the importance of thinking of exile and concomitant assimilation practices or resistances for their power to refigure social institutions and practices.<sup>53</sup> This chapter draws on Svetlana Boym’s distinctions between restorative and reflective nostalgia to develop my arguments about how Eva Hoffman’s memoirs, and her novel, *Appassionata*, provide examples of exilic characters that are able to apprehend regulatory mechanisms and articulate nascent political texts as a result of their emergent subjectivities.

As with the terms “nostalgia” and “melancholia,” it is useful at this point to indicate how I am using the term “exile” to describe the positions of the authors and characters foregrounded in this chapter. Exile refers to the sum of historical conditions to describe material, cultural, affective, and symbolic dislocations. The problem with the terms that may be employed to describe these personal and material losses—dispossession, dislocation, disorientation, dislodgment, disempowerment, marginalization, colonization, and even exile—to some extent

presuppose an originary state, or a natural center out of which one has fallen.<sup>54</sup> Alienation provides a useful reference though it may preclude material dispossession. The bulk of this chapter uses the memoirs and a novel of Eva Hoffman to discuss an exile that is founded on material, affective, and linguistic dislocations but that is compounded by other personalized losses such as that of death or profound betrayal of a beloved. Her texts allow me to examine how the melancholic maneuvers described in the previous chapter can be more broadly applied to the public sphere in terms of how the social is constituted by the personal.

My discussion does not distinguish among exiles, expatriates, or stateless persons, because, while the material distinctions are significant, all of these must negotiate, to varying degrees, new patterns of behavior and speech. To be exiled from a native place is to be removed from membership of a group defined by ideals, practices, privileges, and social conventions. The notion of the collective, as it is constituted in part by the juridical, implies that there are rightful inheritors and participants in this collective, some of whom are responsible for marginalizing those who do not belong. The extent to which an exile can transfer or establish a position of power and privilege is dependent on how well s/he can mimic the practices of those in power in the new environment. This, for most situations, requires substantive material resources and usually, the prior experience of having performed the authoritative role in another context. It also requires performing the new social practices in such a way as to be recognizably part of the cultural collective. History, of course, is replete with examples of peoples who were not able to participate or benefit from ideals and privileges in their own home country. In effect, the subjects who have lived on the peripheries of power and privilege because of class, race, economic power, gender, sexual orientation, age, or religious affiliations may be living as internal exiles in their own country. As exiles, these individuals may actually enjoy greater participation in a civil

society where they do not have the rights of citizenship. This is to say, I am not positioning exile as a force that *necessarily* results in a reflective psyche that is able to articulate naturalized and unwritten laws about what constitutes the cultural consensus. I am interested in how some exiles *can* formulate a narrative to explain subjugating forces to themselves and to others that ends up positioning a critique of naturalized practices. In the case of Hoffman's novel this critique is transformative; however, it is, arguably, productively transformative for one character and destructively transformative for another. The final chapter of this study, then, positions several characters from three novels of Clarice Lispector that have not been exiled from any ordinary state; they have perpetually lived outside of any material privilege or native home. These novels show the cost of seeking belonging to a society whose norms they do not ascribe to.

The previous chapter has allowed me to structure an argument about how separation from something loved, extricated from the idealization of the beloved person or "homeland," can be born and represented as history, without nostalgic fictions such as that of a natural collective consensus, and without the violence against self, outlined in Freud's early work, and seen in Kundera's male characters.<sup>55</sup> Kundera's novels portray collective history, collective memory, or collective ideals as dangerous nostalgic kitsch. The collective is so disparaged and repugnant to the narrators there is almost no communion or connection between any of the characters. In *To the Lighthouse* the reader can discern the outlines of two collective realms. One of those is represented by the artist Mr. Paunceforte, whose work reaffirms the conventional. This realm includes the philosophers and published poets who acknowledge the greatness of each other's minds and projects. Then there is the collective that is glimpsed at or felt in very fleeting moments of inter-subjectivity, when two characters share apprehensions or interpretations of events. This collective is fragile and can never be verified by a stable point of view. The quiet

sense of intimacy that comes with this perceived sharing of perception is, as I pointed out in Chapter One, often grossly in violation of what the other character is experiencing, as in the case of our last glimpse of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay together. While she is experiencing sublimity through her reading of poetry, he looks at her and questions whether she understands what she was reading: “Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful” (123). This text offers a glaring critique of how what we often believe to be a collective is nothing more than a fiction of comfort and belonging. Hoffman’s texts expose the dangers of pretending that our ideals and values and perceptions are part of a consensual collective. In her memoirs she is shown to hold her peers responsible for making choices that question their unexamined values.<sup>56</sup>

The previous chapter also showed instances where characters choose not to reinforce patterns of tyranny, and yet, patterns of speech and behavior are repeated, if erroneously, to shore up those conventions. In *Three Guineas* Woolf positions the outsider to experiment with practices that encourage contrasting values. She looks to the newspaper for reports of models currently being experimented with and suggests that an outsider may boldly refuse to participate in practices that undermine her values (such as knitting socks for soldiers). She may form new organizations with different rules and accolades (such as women’s sport leagues with no cups and awards); and finally, she may practice passivity by absenting herself from institutions that support competition, hierarchy, and blind obedience (117). Woolf also provides the example of a man who, free from “the infantile fixation” of the need to dominate and subjugate, provided his daughter in 1848 with 300 pounds a year allowance, with which she started an “outsider’s school” open to different sexes, classes, and creeds (136). She cites histories of nineteenth-century women who expressed deep desire for “Justice, Equality, Liberty”—who wanted “like Antigone, not to break the laws, but to find the law” (138). These are all examples of outsiders

who, able to apprehend that the fictional collective supports ideals and practices to which the outsider does not ascribe, make choices to not participate in the collective. The prerequisite to making these choices is to be able to apprehend the values of the cultural collective.

Before turning to the memoirists and novelist under discussion in this chapter it is useful to briefly refer back again to the theory against which I will position their work. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler's primary question is: "How are we formed within social life, and at what cost?" (136). Citing Adorno's work in *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, she outlines his suggestion that during various epochs of massive displacement people are no longer able to idealize the collective ethos (that is, nationalism) because it is no longer credible (4). It is during these displacements that moral questions arise in the displaced. This is also when the subject, moving out of the cultural collective, as Lily struggles to do, is groping with ways of apprehending and representing emergent subjectivities. She becomes a stranger to the cultural collective. Those who are in a position to exercise regulatory power may then instrumentalize violence to maintain appearances of collectivity (5). Violence in ethics for Adorno, then, is defined in the context of claims about universality, which ignore the individual and have no substantial reality for human beings (19). Butler extends Adorno's discussion by critiquing claims of universality as unresponsive to cultural particularities, which continue to fail in their resistance to undergo a reformulation of themselves, in response to the social and cultural conditions they include (6).

If we are then to envision, as Butler has asked of us, the work required to forge new ties of identification (outside of nationalism) and to re-imagine a human community where common epistemological and cultural grounds cannot be assumed, where are we to look? The way to construct a response would begin with questioning, first of all, the utility of this kind of "human

community,” and secondly, interrogating what constitutes “common epistemological and cultural grounds.” Part of the cultural collective is made legible by public memorials including statues, paintings, music, memoir, fiction, rituals, and public performances. This is what Lily wants to leave behind: a memorial of her experience of Mrs. Ramsay. It is these memorials that can become nascent political texts that offer challenges to the fictions of the communal. Arguably, this is the role of art.

The narratives in this chapter suggest that the art that is offered by these exiles becomes part of social theory. Exile provides a conceptual grid for viewing the narrating “I” in contradistinction to a set of naturalized social norms. This situates characters into a narrative of “who am I in relation to others,” a narrative that emerges as a deliberating subject coming into being, (to use Judith Butler’s terms in *Giving an Account of One’s Self*). In Milan Kundera’s novel *Ignorance*, the narrator describes Irena’s reflexivity owing to her emigration, “The implacable forces of history that had attacked her freedom had set her free” (23). Part of this development comes, according to the narrator, from the position of the mysterious stranger who, away from home and like Odysseus, is asked to give an account: “Who are you? Where do you come from? Tell us!” (35).

As Butler has suggested in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, when the “I” seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will soon find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed when the “I” seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist” (7-8). In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler argues that the subject can refer to its own genesis only by taking the third-person perspective on itself, by dispossessing its own perspective in the act of narrating its genesis. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* she claims that the scene of address becomes a site of primary

ethical relations and the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in dialogue where no common ground can be assumed (21). The exile must constitute a narrative of “who am I and what ethics governs my rights and responsibilities?” Exile, then, perhaps becomes the inaugural experience of ethics, not before the law, but against the law.

This chapter uses the essays, memoirs, and fiction of Hoffman to argue four interrelated propositions: (1) That exiles, in a public counterpart to the melancholic maneuver whereby the subject turns back on itself, viewing itself as an object, has a vantage point to perceive practices of regulatory power, and then to observe itself either embodying, rejecting, or manipulating naturalized practices that make individuals recognizable within socio-historic contexts. The novel employed in this study presents two exilic characters who display two very distinct psychic reactions to exile and loss. This divergence in reaction allows me to further consider what influences a subject’s psychic trajectory in response to loss. (2) That the experience of exile can provide a method for developing contrasting lexical, affective, and imaginative possibilities. (3) That because of the psychic transformation involved in loss, *compounded by* possibilities for using these lexical, affective, and imaginative contrasts, the experience of exile can open up new modalities of representation whereby the subject can both articulate social critiques of regulatory power and resist claims of universality. Hoffman also makes visible how subjugating practices are domesticated. (4) Finally, that if we look to the generative forces of melancholia beyond what they can offer the individual, we may be able to account more fully for our interdependencies and mutual vulnerabilities, and thereby apprehend and oppose the conditions that make some lives more vulnerable, and some more grievable.

In *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* Edward Said suggests that the vantage point of exilic writers allows them to perceive and then dislodge traditional authority in favor of more fractious identities and fractious works. What this viewpoint implies is that people who have experienced loss, not only of some integral attachment, but also of their native, cultural bearings, are more able to discern that which makes up authority. These fractious works, Said suggests, have allowed more readers access to other structures of feeling, attitude, and reference, in fact, to other ways of dealing with loss, tragedy, attachments, and nostalgia. One might then question: other ways than what? His impressive body of work has laid conceptual groundwork for how and why the various authorities who write, interpret, and animate “history” have reduced the unknowability of other cultures, in fact, of other individuals, to reductive, knowable stereotypes.<sup>57</sup> What seems to be unaddressed in Said’s characterization of exile in the essay “Reflections on Exile” is what he calls “an unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home...,” or of exile as “[a] condition legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people” (175). These are, arguably, insufficiently examined assumptions of the norms of social existence, including the notions of “dignity” or even entitlement. His formulation of exile not only circumscribes those whose experience counts as exilic, it also suggests that the only thing one might be exiled from is a past experience of tradition, family, and place, back to which one longs to return, when, in fact the terms that perpetuate, even define tradition, family, and nation are often complicit in creating the ideals and practices that exile minority and female figures.<sup>58</sup>

Despite his problematic assumption that exiles have native places that offer rights and dignity, his reflections on the possibilities of exile to trouble subjectivities adds credence to Butler’s proposal that the psychic maneuvers of loss can result in an emergent sense of agency

and a new ethics of responsibility. In the introduction to *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* Said indicates that if the exile can resist the temptation of facile terms of ultimacy, of refashioning the new subjectivities to fit the old, there is greater possibility for accommodating, and not appropriating that which is unknown: “I have found that the greatest difficulty to be overcome is the temptation to counter-conversion, the wish to find a new system, territory or allegiance to replace the lost one, to think in terms of panaceas and new, more complete visions that simply do away with the complexity, difference and contradiction” (xxxiii). The critical task for the exile, he says, is to remain skeptical, to resist the jargon of specialization, the blandishments of power, and the quietism of non-involvement.<sup>59</sup> The exile who learns to accommodate a fractured identity, acknowledging its subjectivity to be emergent, one who does not seek a “homeland” in terms of ultimacy or certainty, turns to the self for possible responses, and then looks to how that self is implicated in the social idealizations, is very different from the exile who turns toward a substitutive “homeland” of certainty in ideology.

Before addressing the body of work of Polish exile Eva Hoffman, whose novel, *Appassionata*, provides illustrations of characters who pursue these two separate avenues, I draw on the recent work of Svetlana Boym, comparative literature professor and Russian émigré, for her useful distinctions between two nostalgic modalities. Particularly relevant to my project are her compelling and articulate arguments for the constitutive power of nostalgia, and the fact that she provides a codified language to interrogate what influences radically divergent reactions to the experience of exile. In *The Future of Nostalgia* Boym looks to nostalgia’s power to recall and construct cultural and experiential memory. Her project is to identify how nostalgia is expressed in the public sphere and to explore the implications of living nostalgically both for the individual and the individual in relation. Drawing on examples of public memorials and architecture, she

explores the perceived gap that exiles feel between identity and resemblance, or what could be thought of as the fictional consensus.

In her Introduction to *The Future of Nostalgia* Boym moves to distinguish conservative versions of nostalgia, which she refers to as “restorative nostalgia,” from what she sees as the ethically and politically fruitful. As compared to restorative nostalgia, which “attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home,” (xviii), “reflective nostalgia” does not aim to reconstruct a coherent “home” but uses irony, even parody, to comment on the absurdity of the original.<sup>60</sup> Reflective nostalgia, further, performs the labor of grief. Boym then refers to a strain of critical thinking which she calls “off-modern.” The term can be applied, she argues, to people who came from “eccentric positions, (i.e. those often considered marginal or provincial with respect to the cultural mainstream, from Eastern Europe to Latin America), as well as for many displaced people from all over the world” (xvii). The “off-modern,” as she describes it, potentially allows a “detour from the deterministic narrative of twentieth century history” (xvii).

Her book draws on personal experiences as an émigré from Russia and as a researcher who inquires and observes how nostalgia is presently constituted in the lives of many Europeans. Her definitions of nostalgia, like the emotional practice itself, are multi-faceted and virtually uncontainable. The myriad definitions of nostalgia that she conjures up point to the dynamics of excess itself. Nostalgia is characterized as “rebellion against the modern idea of time” (xv), reflection, longing, estrangement, and affection (xvi). It is an ache of temporal or spatial distance which seduces rather than convinces. It heightens one’s sensitivity to the dilemmas of life and to moral freedom. Nostalgia is “a romance with one’s own fantasy,” a yearning for connection through collective memory. It is a phantom pregnancy, a welling-up of absence, and the “I long, therefore I am” all over the world (13). The descriptors point not only to the variety of affect and

illusion, but also to something perceived as more of a presence than an absence. This is one of the central arguments that I would like to make and that is supported by the texts in this study: that nostalgia, historically conceived of as an illness, as a lack, can be reconceived as a presence. Arguably the presence is the emergent subjectivity, the heightened sensibility that provokes the subject to ask what to do with such a presence.

The exile's relationship with nostalgia is crucial for how he or she views the present and the future. Restorative nostalgics, Boym says, harbor the dream that to return to a place or time would restore the exile to his or her sense of self. Reflective nostalgia (stressing the word *reflection*), "suggests new flexibility, not the establishment of stasis" (49). The interpretation of the exile on her or his world can be ironic and humorous. It is both a longing and a form of critical thinking that are not opposed to one another. Reflective nostalgics are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance. Reflective nostalgia, Boym suggests, "has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness" (50). The modern (reflective) nostalgic realizes that "the goal of the odyssey is a rendez-vous with oneself" (50). For her, "nostalgia remains an intermediary between collective and individual memory" (54). What this means is that her acknowledgement of her heightened psychic sensitivity and awareness, of what she remembers and carries, helps her mediate between that which is experiential nostalgia and that which is political propaganda or larger fictions of the collective consensus.

Boym suggests that, for exiles to make material of their harrowed lives, they might embrace some sort of hybridized nostalgia: one that neither caters to the hypermodern urge to forget the past, nor harbors an uncritical, anti-modern identification with that past. This nostalgic practice, she says, is not a postmodern stance that is willing to reinstate the past, but only "within quotation marks." She points to Baudelaire's description of modernity as "the transitory, the

fugitive, the contingent, the half of art of which the other half is eternal and the immutable” (qtd. in Boym 19), and then locates a type of nostalgia that Kundera seems to allude to after he has accepted the fear of his own weakness and the sadness of loss—nostalgia for what could have been. As Boym notes, “Intoxicated by transience, nostalgic for tradition, the poet laments what could have been” (21). For Baudelaire, who mourns the “vanished forest of correspondences,” she suggests that “present and new are connected to openness and unpredictability, not to the teleology of progress” (23). What concerns her, however, is not the inner space of the individual psyche, but “the interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance” (41). Her project is not so much focused on how the individual might embody or “fix” nostalgia so much as on how conceptions of nostalgia are expressed in the public sphere as seen in examples of restored artwork, European cityscapes, and memorials.

Boym is concerned with how what we construct (memorials, testimonials, art) indicates both what we value in the past, but more importantly, how we envision a future. Her analysis of cityscapes extends Fredric Jameson’s critique of postmodern architecture and raises questions about how public spaces in Europe, the United States, and the former Soviet Union are emblematic of the drive to obliterate history alongside the contradictory urge to romanticize the past. What is noteworthy, in terms of the influence of cityscape on nostalgic stances, is Jameson’s assertion that we have built structures that we don’t yet know how we can expect to be influenced by, referred to as perceptual equipment for yet unimaginable dimensions (39). There is a depthlessness, he says, in architecture (the Wells Fargo Court in Los Angeles—a surface which seems to be “unsupported by any volume”), in literary criticism (12), in paintings where there is a loss of unique, personal and distinctive brush strokes (15), and, indeed, in the liberation from anxiety and “from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a

self present to do the feeling” (15). The postmodern artistic “pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of glossy mirage” (21). It is a “symptom of the waning of historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way” (21). What is crucial, Jameson contends, is that this skeptical, non-committal, (if artistic), approach to history renders us increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experiences. Echoing Kundera, Jameson contends that, in short, there is a “crisis in historicity” (22). What he finally suggests about built space, however, is the reverse of what we might expect—that the art, rather than reflecting the philosophical or artistic preoccupations of individuals or communities, instead, has evolved (or “mutated”) faster than the evolution of the subject. The new built space stands as “an imperative to grow new organs” (39). So while Jameson seems to be arguing that our public architecture is indicative of our contradictory desire to both obliterate history and to restore antiquity, he is actually arguing that there is something in the art of architecture that is asking us to confront the ambiguity of our present in order to grow for our futures.

To challenge this proposition, Boym first goes on to compare restorative nostalgia to the efforts of art restoration projects. She suggests that while the nostalgic may want to look back to the past, she or he does not want the past to display any signs of aging. The past must remain young, virginal, unravaged by the onset of age. The problem for the restorative nostalgic that this expectation implies is that s/he is looking to go back to a place in time, but without that place showing any of the effects of time. This awkward position is what Kundera’s protagonist in *Ignorance* finds himself in: he returns to a country whose language has changed so much that he cannot understand the youth on the street. This suggests that the problem with restorative nostalgia is that it is a drive toward something that does not exist.

Acknowledging the futility of this fiction, she then builds on her discussion of cityscape to develop a metaphor for porosity. She begins with the physical. Porosity is the spatial metaphor that Boym uses to describe divergent temporal dimensions embedded in space: architecture constructed during different eras that stands together. Porosity is particularly visible, she suggests, in cities in transition. She draws on metaphors of architecture to describe the psyche of a reflective nostalgic, one who is open to contradictions and influences. Porosity in space is then used to refer to the gaps between identity and resemblance that the exile feels. For the exile, to already accept oneself as different from a background of others in which one views oneself almost from a third-person perspective is to recognize the gaps in identity. She says "Reflective nostalgics are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance. . . . This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future" (50). Essentially what she is arguing is that "porosity" is a perceived or felt space in-between, that this porosity allows fragments of perception, of meaning, and of memory to reside ambiguously side-by-side without the urgent drive toward reconciliation or ultimacy. What this implies, is first of all, that reflective nostalgics have developed the ability to see themselves from the point of view of others, that is, they can at times view themselves as objects. Secondly, nostalgics, separated from naturalized identities, or universal assumptions about what is common, are driven to explain how their histories and practices differ from those of community members around them. Thirdly, to be receptive to the influence of others, to adapt new ways, to incorporate experiences of love and then to have to grieve the loss of those attachments means that reflective nostalgics undergo melancholic maneuvers repeatedly.

*The Future of Nostalgia* is more than a discourse supported by a series of examples. It provides an exemplary theater where contradictions can reside side-by-side. In its definitions, its examples, and in its play, the writing is an enactment of excesses. The longing, the pride, and the

collective shame that Boym displays for Russia and the former Eastern Bloc countries impart to the reader a sense of what it might look like, what it might feel like, to carry conflicting sensations of longing, loss, full emptiness, pride, reverence, and awe. In her narrative, the verb tenses sit at odds with the nouns they act on and provide a glimpse into how one might carry the present into the past and back again: “Now, all were nostalgic for the potentials of *perestroika*, for that opening was created in August 1991 and was never fully explored” (71). We start with the word “now,” go immediately to past tense “were,” to discuss what will happen in the future, created by something in the past. Throughout, there is a sense of something that is not empty, not full, but reaching, growing, borne out of longing that belongs neither to the past or entirely to the future. Boym suggests a posture toward nostalgia that embraces a recognition of the irresolvability of the yearning. She begs the question of whether the nostalgic (or any person) is best served by imagining that he or she can find the “true” signifier to identify the loss and thus be compensated. Although Boym leaves unchallenged a host of assumptions about natural homes when she speaks for “the Eastern attitude,” “our intuition,” “displaced or marginalized individuals,” the time of “our childhoods,” “our dreams,” (xix), her delineation of what one might do with nostalgia, nonetheless, provides useful discursive labor on the value of rethinking the terms exile and nostalgia.<sup>61</sup>

It is perhaps characteristic of artists who have lived through massive displacements to chronicle not only those historical events but also the psychic maneuvers that the displaced must negotiate. Kundera chronicles historical events prior to, during, and after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. These include intimate detailing of how characters deal with loss of their homeland and of abstractions that matter most, such as nationalism. His accounts also provide nuanced psychological portraits of more intimate losses, such as when the narrators (sometimes

named Kundera) step in to recount shame involved by not having stood up for ideals or for not being more present with his father. Edward Said suggests that deep losses can be generative of more fractious identities whereby we learn to separate the sacrality of word from meaning and to accommodate radically different points of view so as to live hospitably with those who are very different from us. Said insists that language is a major tool that we must employ to introduce plural meanings into the heart of darkneses that we cannot yet know—that we must resist the complacencies to domesticate the unfamiliar by giving it old names. Similarly, Boym looks to what work reflective or “off-modern” nostalgia can do for the individual and thereby for larger communities. What the work of nostalgia can do is to offer a rendezvous with oneself, she suggests.

Because of the massive displacements associated with Soviet takeovers in Eastern Europe after WWII, and particularly because of the narrative that framed the ideological drive to repress factions and to support a history that erased history, several Eastern European writers have emerged to preserve an alternate version of “history.” We have seen Kundera’s unfaltering, rigorous, and poetic chronicling of the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia. Polish-born Eva Hoffman has likewise provided several chronicles of displacement experienced by people in several Eastern European countries, focusing two of those books on the experiences of Poles. She is particularly interested in how exiles negotiate the loss of home and of stable identity in *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language*; *Exit into History: A Journey Through the New Eastern Europe*; *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews*; and *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust*. She has also published numerous articles or book chapters on the subject of loss and belonging. In addition,

she has two novels that both explore loss of origin and psychic maneuvers associated with nostalgia, or what she refers to in Polish as *tęsknota*.

Hoffman is a Polish-born Jew who immigrated to Canada from Poland in 1959 at the age of thirteen with her parents and sister. Her mother speaks Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Russian, Ukrainian, and English. Hoffman moved to the US to attend college, earning a PhD in English at Harvard. She taught literature and creative writing at various universities and served as the senior editor at the *New York Times*. She regularly writes and lectures on issues of exile, memory, Polish-Jewish relations, politics, and culture. In her 1993 book *Exit into History* Hoffman notes that the area covering what is now Poland has for the last ten centuries been subject to perennial “invasion, colonization, great-power bargaining, partitioning, and sheer conquest” (xi). In *Shtetl*, where she grapples with the difficult history of conflict between Polish Jews and non-Jewish Poles, she indicates that her aim is to “complicate and historicize this picture” (5). The years just prior to WWII, the years of war and the years afterwards were particularly horrendous for Poland. In addition to the widespread extermination of Jews in that country, she points out that Poland lost three million non-Jewish citizens during the war (248). It was a particularly troubled history due to the betrayal that Jews felt by their fellow Poles, and the sense of indignation or guilt expressed by the non-Jewish Poles who were impotent to help rescue Jews from persecution. Both groups “confront each other with two sets of memories. In the confrontation, both have felt that their moral truth has been violated” (248). Like Kundera, in *Exit into History* Hoffman is interested in the psychological implications of having to “raise a hand at a meeting to approve someone’s destruction, or to leave it at one’s side . . . whether to inform on a neighbor, sign a dangerous petition, stand by silently during an anti-Semitic campaign, or risk imprisonment by protest” (xv).<sup>62</sup> Each of her texts grapples with the psychic implications of

intense personal loss and displacement from one's homeland, betrayal, and guilt. The two texts of hers that are of most interest to me for how they contribute to the transformative potentials of nostalgia are *Lost in Translation*, which devotes more of its pages to Hoffman's own experiences as an exile, and her novel *Appassionata*, arguably a synthesis of her theoretical ideas on loss and melancholia. The novel is particularly productive for my discussion for its depictions of how two exiles can react very differently to loss.

*Lost in Translation* is a chronicling of the post-war Polish history experienced by her family and a description of how their emigration shaped her developing psyche. It is a meditation on nostalgia. Because of the extreme suffering her parents went through as Jews in flight from persecution in Poland, Hoffman describes them as "divested of religious faith," and with "little respect for law, politics, ideology" (16). Like Kundera, Hoffman feels that it is her job to remember and to chronicle the details of the home she left behind. She writes, "My mother wants me to know what happened, and I keep every detail of what she tells me in my memory like black beads. It's a matter of honor to remember, like affirming one's Jewishness" (24). In *Lost in Translation* she equates culture shock with trauma (268) and confesses, "I am pregnant with the images of Poland, pregnant and sick. It is nostalgia" (115). The largest presence she can recognize in her life is "the welling up of absence, of what I have lost. This pregnancy is also a phantom pain" (115). *Tęsknota*, she says, directs her vision inward. Exile, she claims, forces an immediate loss of the innocence of an inherited, unquestioned morality. The concomitant psychic negotiations in a new country make the immigrant into a sort of homegrown existentialist. Exile "gives you an Archimedean leverage from which to see the world" (275). She refers at least ten times to a process of triangulation, presumably alluding metaphorically to the process of determining the unknown location of something by measuring angles to it from known points.

Her position as exile is compounded by the fact that as Jews, her family lived almost as exiles within their own home country, while for a long time the Poles themselves were also living in internal exile under Soviet occupation. The accumulated displacements from an unquestioned identity contribute to what Hoffman refers to in *Appassionata* as porosity.

When Hoffman's family immigrated to Vancouver, Canada, they took on new first names that were more easily pronounced for the English speaker. This distancing even from their childhood names she says, "make[s] us strangers to ourselves" (105). As a result, during childhood, she "fell out of the net of meaning" (151). At a formative age Hoffman was forced to question what relationship words have to stable meanings and what relationships clichés have to the cultural consensus. She asks: "What has happened to me in this new world? I can't translate the verbal blur into my mind's eye. I don't comprehend what's in front of me. I don't really exist" (108). As an adult looking back on this time when she was trying to develop new attachments, she says she was most frustrated with language when it should clearly allow what language is purported to do: facilitate communication and open small spaces of common understanding. Instead what she finds is that "[t]he very places where language is at its most conventional, where it should be most taken for granted, are the places where I feel the prick of artifice" (106). Referring to her teenage years, she says that she began to feel a Saussurian disjuncture: the problem with learning a new language is that "the signifier has become severed from the signified. "The words I learn," she writes, "now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue" (106). Because there are few naturalized associations, she is forced to question what the words actually do stand in for. The new words do not evoke one stable referent. Bent on discovering some immutable stability she struggles on, telling us, "I try laboriously to translate not from English to Polish but from the word back to its

source” (107). The new words, however, couldn’t find anything to hook onto: “they come from a part of my brain in which labels may be manufactured but which has no connection to my instincts, quick reactions, knowledge” (108). This is the beginning of Hoffman’s transformation into a hypercritical observer of what makes up the unquestioned collective. Part of her lifelong preoccupation is how to use language in new ways, in order to more accurately reflect individual experiences.

*Lost in Translation* is divided into three sections: “Paradise,” “Exile,” and “The New World.” In the section “Exile” Hoffman articulates the profound shock of what perhaps many exiles apprehend, but whose consequences or possibilities are not well accounted for. Exile forces one to acknowledge that one’s modalities of apprehension, one’s truths are only one piece of a larger truth. Quite simply she tells us: “Until now Poland has covered an area in my head coeval with the dimensions of reality” (132). When that which is taken as natural must be shifted, the exile becomes ungrounded. Of this loss of bearing Hoffman writes, “the reference points inside my head are beginning to do a flickering dance. I suppose this is the most palpable meaning of displacement. I have been dislocated from my own center of the world. There is no longer a straight axis anchoring my imagination; it begins to oscillate, and I rotate around it unsteadily (132). Her narrative points out how exile compounds the confusion and disorientation of loss, exacerbating the sense of separation from “self.”

One of the first things that the young Eva notices as strange, that to her Canadian peers seems natural, is gender relations. She suffers from the inability to assimilate and find common ground with her peers. She is baffled by the gender roles that she observes and is encouraged to develop. Throughout *Lost in Translation* she grapples with the “indigenous rules of intersexual behavior” (178). Because, as she writes, “each culture shapes both genders to be recognizable to

each other in their difference,” she claims she does not know how to change herself “into a new erotic valence” (189). In another memoir of hers, *Exit into History*, she identifies factors that lead to gender roles differences between Poles and Canadians. Polish women, she asserts, never went through the cult of domesticity and suburban isolation (81). Under Communism women were expected to work and they reached high levels of authority. Her acquaintances and interlocutors in Poland “hardly seem to understand the concept of female weakness” (81). In terms of cultural values, there seems to be less of a division between “male” and “female” virtues, she says. “Female valor, intelligence, and strength of personality are as highly prized as their male versions” (81). Because of this, we see in *Lost in Translation*, the young Eva struggling with how to make sense of her peers’ coquettish ways. As a thirteen-year-old she must decide either to assimilate practices that seem degrading to her, or remain marked as an exile.

Resistance is her first weapon. She eventually gives way and practices mimicking. She says that she stops wanting and begins to just “be nice” to her friends and to sympathize with the problems of the good life (136). She develops the ability to empathize with values that are not her own. Quickly enough she realizes she is wrong to have assumed that her peers, living in comfortable houses, are not also beset by their own individual traumas. Once she gains the trust of her peers and is invited into their homes, she realizes she has judged other people not only harshly, but inaccurately. Her family continually grapples with the question: How does one judge? This question becomes immediately relevant, as her eleven-year-old sister has taken to trying to assimilate by shaving her legs, walking barefoot on the streets, and wearing black clothes and make-up. When Eva and her mother try to determine whether Alina is running around with friends from good families, they find that their old categories of judgment don’t apply. Alina’s friends come from wealth but have no manners. Eva, defending her parents, and

feeling as if everything is all mixed up, unleashes her fury on young Alina. At that moment she realizes: “[M]y convictions, of which I’ve been so certain, can actually hurt my sister (144). What she decides to do is observe more carefully, looking for stabilizing references, cues for what motivates and regulates the people in *The New World*. Her goal for herself, she asserts, is to be a “fully realized human being” (137).

In February of 2005, in an interview with Robert Birnbaum published in *Identity Theory*, an online literary magazine, Hoffman observed, “I think every immigrant becomes a kind of amateur anthropologist—you do notice things about the culture or the world that you come into that people who grow up in it, who are very embedded in it, simply don't notice” (1). Hoffman suggests that living in a new country, in a new language, where one must learn to read cultural gestures to make oneself recognizable, forces oneself to decipher unwritten rules governing social behavior, not only in the new land, but also in the homeland, where such regulatory mechanisms were taken for granted. As an exile-become-immigrant she is more able to perceive the practices of regulatory power, and then to observe herself either embodying, rejecting, or manipulating the social practices that most of her native peers take for granted.

Both her non-fiction lyricism and her novel *Appassionata* (which I discuss at length below) make the argument that “in our highly ideological times, even nostalgia has its politics” (115). One of the examples she uses is that of class as it relates to power. As a child in Poland Hoffman was encouraged to associate with aristocratic families. Lineage, she says, bestows a sense of solidity, “it implies a moral uprightness and the dignity of not having to prove yourself” (44). This is arguably a luxury that none should be able to afford. The class-linked notion that she admits she transfers from Poland is that belonging to a “better” class of people is absolutely dependent on speaking a “better” language. In the new world the ability to be highly articulate in

the native tongue helps overcome the stigma of marginality (123). In Canada, Hoffman becomes obsessed with language. She says “If I can take in enough, then maybe I can incorporate the language, make it part of my psyche and my body (216). She says that others’ “voices enter me; by assuming them I gradually make them mine. I am being remade, fragment by fragment, like a patchwork quilt; there are more colors in the world than I ever knew” (220). She is assimilating, as it were, not only the voices of others, but also her own contradictory voices. Even though she understands the need to live with ambiguities that cannot be easily categorized, still, she says “furious conflicts continue to rage within my head. The opposing voices become mine” (207). This ability to welcome the ambiguities without an immediate drive toward reductive resolution is, arguably, what allows her to permit melancholia to do all of its work. In *Exit into History* she claims that the Polish and Jewish parts of her history, her identity, refuse either to separate or to reconcile (101). It drives her to further narration about the complexities of history and of the psyche.

Hoffman, like Woolf, grapples with how various representational media can help us, first to apprehend truth and beauty, and then to translate it into a text for others. For both authors, being able to apprehend and express truth and beauty helps us to understand what motivates people to violence or compassion. If that medium for Hoffman is writing, then she insists that her language must be perpetually remade to account for that which she has not yet been able to apprehend. Part of the refashioning of language comes by imitating or repeating that which she values in others. In her novel, *Appassionata*, the protagonist is concerned with how music can also reveal “truths.” Hoffman tells us in *Lost in Translation* that to develop the ability of her language to express truth and beauty she begins by adopting speech patterns of those people whose nuances of thought and speech she respects. Referring to her long-time friend she says

“I’ve assimilated the tenor of her mind and the accents of her speech, and sometimes, I recognize the phrases I’ve used in her conversation. It’s difficult to tell the truth to another person. The self is a complicated mechanism, and to speak it forth honestly requires not only sincerity but the agility to catch insight on the wing and the artistry to give it accurate words” (279). Much like Woolf, Hoffman is looking for that certitude of translation: to be able to catch truth and find the medium to pass it on. She works at this by her crafting of language, by her close observation of body language, and through her music. She wants: “a language that will express what the face knows, a calm and simple language” (212). To this end she tries to discover what grids or values underlie the words themselves.

Close examination of what words can mean turns out not only to be a useful skill in college, but also provides a growing vocabulary to understand her own psyche and the motivations of others, she suggests. She says that the “geometries of my own perceptions have become as naked to me as the exposed girders of a building before the actual building hides them” (180). She also begins to search out and identify what she calls “symbolic patterns” of American identity, tropes that explain what motivates the individual (182). She also finds that being an outsider lends her perceptual skills highly valued for New Criticism since, she argues, it is “an alienated way of reading meant for people who are aliens in the country of literature” (183). She notices what is often invisible to her fellow students (183).

One of the distinct benefits that she claims to have acquired by virtue of her outsider status is the ability to apprehend cultural hypocrisies, and what parades as cultural consensus hidden in language. She writes, “I sniff out cultural clichés like a hound on the scent of hostile quarry” (203). People may pretend to have liberal beliefs, she observes, but really they are an unadventurous lot who don’t dare to sidestep bourgeois conventions (133). Again she reiterates

the advantages of an oblique vision—for one thing, one learns to turn anger and frustration and incomprehensibility into argument. Her penchant for argument, rather than alienating her, offers her peers the chance to get to know what she stands for, and allows her to challenge her peers' unexamined inheritances. Argument, she notes, puts two people with very different views into conversation. She recounts one of her first thorough-going conversations with her college roommate: "Lizzy, it turns out, holds beliefs that seem self-evident to her and that run smack counter to truths that seem equally obvious to me" (175). She becomes obsessed with efforts to cross "the far spaces" that separate one person's imagination from another's (187). In particular, she realizes that two peoples' ideas of love are so different from each other's, and that her own idea of love is different from what she had thought (188). About her first lover she says, "We explain ourselves like texts. We learn to read each other as one learns to decipher hieroglyphs. But we never meet in that quick flash of recognition" (190). She does not presume to know what he means by "I love you," nor anything about how accurately she can translate what his words refer to.

Often she finds that her American friends' response to her hyper-vigilant attempt to attach meaning to words, without presuming to know the other, is met with "After all, we're just having a conversation. They don't want to question every sentence they speak, and they don't need to" (204). Or her friends, in an effort to defend themselves, will insist that that they are allowed their own interpretations of the world: "That's called theory" they tell her; she retorts "That's called not thinking, as far as I can see" (206). She doesn't attribute her "vigilante-ism" of language, compared to her friends' relatively careless and uncritical use of it, to individual personality types, and certainly not to levels of intelligence, but rather to the forces of naturalization and complacency that come with not having to question. Of her American friends

she says, “they share so many assumptions that are quite invisible to them, precisely because they’re shared” (210). She is at pains to indicate the consequences of assumptions that her educated and influential friends and associates make about the most fundamental notions of human beauty, propriety, human transactions, beliefs, and practices, which she says lie just below the stratum of political opinion and overt ideology. These occluded assumptions shape domestic and political action. She feels she must very carefully and with great empathy translate herself to others and be very careful to translate what others want to say to her. In her historical memoir, *After Such Knowledge*, which is about psycho-social repercussions of the Holocaust for survivors and perpetrators, Hoffman goes so far as to confess that she does not know what associations she evokes in her German acquaintances: sensations of guilt, humiliation, sadism, or impulses toward reparative compassion. She cannot know, she says, and further contends that she has no right to inquire. She states that it is her civilized obligation to take her interlocutors at the level of ostensible utterance and intention (129). It is here where we can see the trajectory of reflective nostalgia and what kind of subjectivity it has engendered. Hoffman goes from the melancholic maneuvers of first trying to preserve the loss of her homeland and of inherited ideals by preserving her Polishness, at the cost of belonging; she begins to turn back on herself, seeing herself as a stranger to her self, and increasingly directs her vision inwards to question her own values. In the process, she learns that her judgments against others have consequences, and so she makes the decision to be the kind of person she wants to be: she must remain open to not-understanding others and to accept ambiguity. Ultimately, what all this results in, other than an empathetic subject, is a text, or series of texts, that expresses her own emergent truths.

There are introspective, self-critical pauses in her memoir, *Lost in Translation*, when the author asks, “what imp of the perverse insists that I provide my friends with these corrective

views?” (214). “Why can’t I take things lightly,” she asks. “Why do I have to be a Savonarola of daily life?” (216). Without her providing a response to these questions it becomes clear what Hoffman is after: vital connection. Both in her non-fiction and in her novels the protagonist is seeking deep human connection through an almost mathematically structured pursuit of precise language, through music, and through dedicated trial-and-error friendships. What happens in Eva Hoffman’s mind when she does not seek to receive with empathy, to respect, and to carefully translate herself? She tells us about one such instance although she does not attribute the event to her lack of vigilance. She receives notice in the mail about the suicide of her childhood love and best friend, Marek. With an eye always for the corrective she says “I’m ashamed that in my illusion of knowing him so well, I failed to know him better” (230). And so she redirects her self-reflexivity increasingly inward.

To better see what lies “inward,” Hoffman adopts a second-person point of view, addressing herself as “you.” She turns her self-critical dialogue in her head into a performance that provides her with a vantage point to be able to see herself more as an object of study. In the middle of *Lost in Translation*, without warning, she begins to address herself in second-person narrative: “If you had stayed there your hair would have been straight, and you would have worn a barrette on one side” (119). She follows up this dialogue with her self with, “And you prefer her, the Cracow Ewa” (120). As a teenager she finds that when she writes of her life in English (and even when she thinks in English) she is unable to use the word “I.” She is driven instead to the pronoun “you” (121). Later in the memoir she stages a conversation between the Polish thinking Ewa, referred to as “you,” and the English speaking Eva referred to as “I,” during which she reproaches her Polish self: Why should I listen to you? You don’t necessarily know the truth about me just because you speak in that language. Just because you come from deeper within

(199). There are several sections where Hoffman stages dialogues with herself addressed in second-person point of view, apparently with the intention of testing her own perceptions and owning both competing voices. The American Eva tells the Polish Ewa “I am as real as you now” (231). When questioned by an old Polish friend about whether she is glad that her family left Poland she ventures that had she remained in her native Poland she would have had a “peculiar version of a life, and living within the confines of the first-person singular” (241). Seeing herself from a vantage point, as an emergent subjectivity based, perhaps, in small part on conscious choices, seeing herself almost-as-if another person, allows her to write her life. Exile, loss, nostalgia, displacement, anger, skepticism, self-reprimand, and finally, the ability to articulate grievances all allow her to view herself as a personage. In this narrative of genesis she stands in contrast to her mother, who Hoffman says is “not someone who tells herself her own biography” (270).

For the exile one of the most long-lasting questions is: Is there a chance of return, and if so who will I be in the supposedly native land?” Although Hoffman refers to Milan Kundera several times in *Lost in Translation*, her return to her native land is very different from the returns depicted in Kundera’s protagonists. Both in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and in *Ignorance*, Kundera’s characters go back to Czechoslovakia and find everything changed. Their native language sounds foreign to them. In contrast, in *Lost in Translation* Hoffman reports going back to Poland where her long-time friend says, “So this is how we live.... Nothing ever changes” (234). Hoffman herself remarks that her native city “remains remarkably unchanged” (238). For her the impossible return is not so much to a country as to a phase of innocence and certainty. About the possibility for this return she says, “No, there’s no returning to the point of origin, no regaining any childhood unity” (273). Hoffman is not alienated by the massive

changes that have taken place in Poland, including the Soviet end rule. She implies that leaving childhood innocence is about never-belonging. What this means is that she does not *expect* to belong to a place or time that is unchanging.

What does Hoffman do about the sense of fragmentation and alienation experienced by outsiders who retain a deep questioning nostalgia, and yet have no particular place or time that they yearn to return to, but who are left with the feeling still of a great presence of an absence? Coming back to her first home in North America, Vancouver, Canada, years later, she looks upon a familiar landscape and feels so utterly unfamiliar, so changed have her feelings for her own life become. “It’s enough to make a Berkeleyan of you, this mercurial changeability of all reality under pressure of the soul” (151), she observes. While the experience of exile and marginalization has upended the material of her psyche, she ultimately shapes herself into a recognizable cultural category: a professional New York woman (170). What she does with the welling up sensation of absence is to create her identity as if it were a project with political implications. As she notes in *Exit into History*, political oppression can lead to personal repression (259). In all of her texts what Hoffman shows is also the flip side of this: that personal oppression can lead to political expression.

Hoffman’s oeuvre is directed, much like Edward Said’s,<sup>63</sup> toward grappling with how we can personally develop an ethics directed toward individual and collective Others. Like Kundera, in *After Such Knowledge* Hoffman acknowledges how much public positions on morality are shaped by ideological forces (135). Examining, and changing, one’s ideology can be felt as a deep loss. Hoffman refers to the loss that a survivor of displacement might experience in having to surrender “martyrological memories” (141). Giving up former conceptions of “history” is often experienced by the exile as a “betrayal, a deferred disloyalty to what has become a

sacrosanct version of the past” (141), she says. Essentially questioning one’s ideology can lead to a voluntary giving up of one’s coherent sense of history.

There are moments when Hoffman yearns to feel disconnected from history, to “breathe a Nabokovian air,” the “world of utterly individual sensibility, untrampled by history, or horrid intrusions of social circumstance” (197). How trite, Hoffman confesses in *Lost in Translation*, “and tedious, in contrast, to see oneself as a creature formed by historic events and defined by sociological categories” (198). Hoffman off-handedly claims, without conviction or belief, that of all the responses to the condition of exile, Nabokov’s “is surely the most triumphant, the least marred by rage, or inferiority, or aspiration” (198). Nabokov is, in this sense, the writer that Virginia Woolf was calling for, who could write with a mind not pulled to the side by reaction to oppressive forces or to accusations of inferiority. This is not Hoffman’s calling, however. Hers is to develop a highly sensitized skepticism in reaction to the historical forces of oppression that she brings to her writing. Part of what she does do, then, instead of disconnecting herself from history and social circumstance, is to assimilate by developing an articulate and nuanced command of her new language. Partially she honors the ambiguity of moral reflection. Partially she communes with other Polish exiles in New York. She turns her pain and emergent subjectivity into art, both musical and verbal. And finally, she allows the pain of loss and melancholia to open her up to tenderness “for everything that is always to be lost—a tenderness for each of our moments, for others and for the world” (*LiT* 274). This tenderness for everything that is lost, including one’s former convictions and allegiances, is what allows her and her character in *Appassionata* to move beyond self-recrimination, unlike Kundera’s characters.

Perhaps from the experience of being so swiftly misjudged in her new country and of seeing how her family came to assume the place allotted to them, as marginalized refugees,

Hoffman seems to understand the urgent need not to presume fundamental things about another person. “There are shapes of sensibility,” she ventures, “incommensurate with each other, topographies of experience one cannot guess from within one’s own limited experience” (205). She learns to open a space of not-knowing to let another person speak. She allows not only her language but her sense of self to be powerfully affected by the foreign.

In the essay, “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin makes a case for the urgency to allow our language to be re-worked by foreign texts. Benjamin draws on Rudolf Pannwitz’s suggestion in *Die Krisis de Europäischen Kultur* for how we can best honor the freedom of linguistic flux. He quotes Pannwitz:

Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works. The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. (80-81)

Hoffman has put great pressure on her own languages to accept each other and be moved by one another. She also does this in her relationships. Hoffman is porous in the sense that Boym uses the word: there are gaps between her various senses of self that do not seek a totalizing effect, that do not seek the illusion of coherence. She is also porous in the sense that she is able to readily absorb language patterns of others. She says that she allows her translations of languages to go both ways and to modify each other: “When I speak Polish now it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head. Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilizes it. Each language makes the other relative” (273). She uses the word “translation” to

refer to the process of going from one linguistic register to another, but also to stand for a larger process of representing oneself to the world. She says, “[Y]ou can’t transport human meanings whole from one culture to another any more than you can transliterate a text” (175). For instance, she says, there is no common word for “self-sufficiency” in Polish (177). She later describes psychoanalytic therapy as “translation therapy . . . a way of explaining myself to myself” (271). What her resistance to form facile judgments about others shows is that she does not expect transparency or psychic consistency from herself or from others. Her translation therapy is the beginning of her always-developing language that she uses to approach others so as to cultivate a capacity to love that grows out of repeated exchanges. While she never suggests that she ever develops a language to understand any of her lovers or her former husband, she does intimate toward the end of *Lost in Translation* that, in her more than twenty-year friendship with Miriam, she has developed, what she calls nuanced triangulations, that allow them both to detect each others’ truths (278). They have over time, she says, “forged a language in common. We keep describing the flow of experience to each other with the impetus to truth, and thus we keep creating new maps and tapestries of a shared reality” (279).

By the end of *Lost in Translation* Hoffman is learning the names of the flowers in the Cambridge garden: “They are the flowers, these particular flowers in this Cambridge garden. For now, there are no Platonic azaleas, no Polish hyacinths against which these are compared. The language of this is sufficient. I am here now” (280). Referring back to her the books in the first section, “Paradise,” Hoffman ventures that to love the world we must retain the capacity for attachment, the possibility of our childish, absurd affections, the energy of desire to always return to the world. Draw on our ignorant love, the original heat and hunger for the forms of the

world, for the here and now (75). In a somewhat ironic twist, her translation therapy involves giving up the need to translate.

While Hoffman makes the case that she cultivates a resistance to translate the lives of others, she does not resist the urge to translate her views of history. Since the publication of *Lost in Translation* in 1989, Hoffman has published a book at regular intervals of about one every four years. *After Such Knowledge* came out in 2004. In it Hoffman says that it was during her writing of *Lost in Translation* that she realized that the grief and trauma that she had inherited from her parents, that haunted her entire life, coupled with the grief of personal loss, had been an inchoate, obscure knowledge and a powerful theme and influence in her life. She says, “Until then, it had not occurred to me that I was in effect a receptacle of a historical legacy, or that its burden had a significance and weight that needed to be acknowledged” (x). She becomes interested in the kinds of knowledge the holocaust bequeathed to its victims and its perpetrators. She indicates that most scholarly works on trauma, the holocaust in particular, emphasize either the psychocultural or the sociopolitical aspects of the problem. Hoffman is interested in bringing these two aspects together under the roof of one book (xii). Though this is the first time she outright declares that this is her scholarly interest, arguably this is what she had been doing in *Lost in Translation*, and what she continues to do in *Exit into History*, and in *Shtetl*: that is, discussing the implications of how personal psychic responses to loss affect the sociopolitical.

In *After Such Knowledge* Hoffman investigates whether her early experiences with suffering created “an unconscious, or preconscious, ethics, and that in this system, just as war was the ground of being, so pain was the ground of personhood” (13). She refers to these apprehensions as “the molecular elements of my early world” (34). She is concerned with how people come to “understand” meanings passed on as acute suffering, grief, and loss, before they

are able to discern anything but physical and affective sensations. Ultimately, what Hoffman argues in this text, as well as in each of her other texts, is very much what Butler argues in *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Subjects of Desire*: “If we perceive pain as an ingredient of the human condition and believe that its action in our lives enlarges rather than diminishes us, then we can perhaps experience through it a strengthening of our own humanity, and of solidarity with the humanity of others” (*Psychic Life* 49). Like Butler, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Hoffman is also aware that in order to account for the role pain plays in our lives “clinical insight and vocabulary” are not “translatable into ‘ordinary’ perceptions” (*ASK* 56). New kinds of knowledge and vocabulary are needed for these kinds of recognitions, for as Hoffman argues, “recognition is the salutary balm most needed by those who have been targets of brutality and injustice” (57). The ability to recognize and communicate the transformative role of pain from loss is for Hoffman a hopeful fact of human nature, for it suggests that we are more profoundly and palpably connected than we have yet acknowledged (60). What is impressive to me about Hoffman’s work is that she does not merely theorize and speculate. She provides examples of how she herself is implicated: where she has judged too rapidly, and alternatively, where she has exercised empathy in the face of extremely difficult situations. In an example where she indicates that she first feels indignation, she looks, instead, to what the exercise of empathy can do for her own psyche. Hoffman is asked to review on television Sabine Reichel’s *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* She asks herself whether she can pity a little Sabine for her childhood of material deprivation that led her father to cooperate with minor Nazi war crimes. She decides: Yes I can. First of all both women lived under “a distinctly patriarchal ethos.” She says that some people inherit a “tainted and abhorrent history” and that “if I failed to admit this, I thought, I would be guilty of a willful failure of the imagination, or rather a dogmatic refusal to alter my

ideas in the light of what I could newly imagine” (118). Hoffman is perpetually, if not obsessively, questioning whether she has the right to judge or empathize, and what that empathy can do for her own emerging imagination. The question that this might raise for the reader is: What influences whether someone who has undergone deep loss becomes empathetic or driven by the desire for revenge?

Hoffman certainly acknowledges that persecution, pain, and mourning are neither essential conditions, nor a guarantee of any kind of moral purity. What the texts so far discussed suggest is that the psychic maneuvers involved in melancholia do not necessarily mean that the subject will emerge with new faculties of self-reflexiveness, empathy, and abilities to critique socio-political systems that multiply losses: “Even those sinned against are capable of greatly sinning,” she says (99). She also states that some who have suffered great losses are by no means ennobled by their pain. Instead they become “callous or embittered, as well as haunted, frightened, and depressed” (189). Persecution, she says, “is not a character-improving process, and collective suffering cannot assure collective merit” (189). She cites the example of Art Spiegelman’s memoirs in which he characterizes his parents as severely damaged and severely damaging. What she does venture is that, for those who have experienced great loss, meaning can remain arrested and fixed at the point of trauma, or the loss can be transformed into new sets of relations with the world. Her main point is that how we translate psychic information into information about the world matters for more than ourselves. In order for new subjectivities and vocabularies to become part of ethics, she argues, we need to extricate morality from the messy undergrowth of feeling and internal conflict (105). This is what she does before reviewing Sabina Reichel’s work on television. She makes a conscious, moral choice, extricated from her initial indignation.

Directly after citing the example of Spiegelman's parents, she comes back to "Mourning, after all, is at the very root of much human knowledge—of morality, vulnerability, the need for human connection. It is at the root, perhaps, of the reparative urge, the desire to protect our altogether perishable world, to redress some of its harshness and bring to it some healing and consolation" (190). To begin to understand the potentials of mourning, she suggests, we must begin with language. This is where she loops straight back to her projects as a young adult described in *Lost in Translation*, to get her peers to think about their phrases and to articulate what they actually mean to say. She does this several times in *After Such Knowledge* by clarifying what she means by a commonly used word such as memory: she corrects her use of the word and replaces it with "retrospective reflection" (197). This careful reconsideration of vocabulary is evident in all her memoirs. She is also careful when referring to what is commonly called Eastern Europe and the Balkans. She urges that semantic distinctions need to be developed, for instance, to describe the future of Eastern Europe: "We have no ready names, no precedents for this experiment taking place" (xvi). Describing several varieties of Polish anti-Semitism, she indicates that what is viewed as new anti-Semitism "is really a camouflage for anti-democratic feelings, for the resistance to openness, and uncertainty and pluralism—for the fear of change" (102). What may look like semantic distinctions, she notes, become tools to mask more virulent motivations and eroding of civil rights. What is called Polish anti-Semitism, she suggests, is "a reversion to an old language to name unnamable new problems [ . . . ] the language of anti-Semitism is convenient for this purpose" (103). What Hoffman is suggesting is that, if we intend to use language for any serious analysis of social change, we need to rethink outmoded phrases. We must allow new subjectivities and new historical conditions to be described using fresh terms.

Hoffman goes on to suggest that language is often used to mask harsh realities, providing a final example in which language is harboring the history of destructive impulses. She notes that in her travels in Hungary, the word “schizophrenia” keeps coming up in conversations. In response to her questions, a Hungarian sociologist offers, “It’s that twenty years of our past are acquiring a different coloring. We have to rethink everything we did, and I’m not sure . . . well, I’m not sure where I stood. You see, we all lied to ourselves so much” (205). He admits that he, like others, continually stopped himself from knowing certain things even before he knew them. He said Hungarians lost track of what was compromising and what was not. He is implying that by masking harsh realities in vague language, individuals can actually keep themselves from “knowing” what would otherwise be more obvious. This suggestion goes all the way back to how Hoffman is arguing in her first memoir: that for us to “know” things we need to develop more nuanced ways of approaching them through language. This, of course, is also what Woolf is arguing in *A Room of One’s Own*. Hoffman, like Edward Said, arranges many of her metaphors around music, and argues (using the same vocabulary that he does) that we have a “contrapuntal challenge” (106). Similarly, they both suggest in much of their work that the categories we rely on in language must be dismantled so that we can learn to listen to our own psychic maneuvers and those of others who are very foreign to us.

In *Shtetl*, published in 1997, Hoffman uses the history of the Polish-Jewish experiment for what she refers to as more ambiguous ends: to suggest “the possibilities and pitfalls of multicultural relations; about situations in which prejudices can be contained, and circumstances in which collective feelings turn ugly, about political stimuli that lead to eruptions of violence, and factors that may restrain hostility” (255). Likewise, in her novel *Appassionata* she questions why some people, in the event of unbearable loss, develop the self-reflexiveness and ability to

articulate grievances that they themselves can be implicated in, while others who have been hurt, continue to hurt others. She is also interested in how society can recognize restraints that must be instituted in order to contain the consequences of those destructive impulses.

In Chapter One I argued that the fear of shame prevents most of Kundera's characters from allowing melancholia to perform transformative work on the psyche. What has remained unexamined so far, in this current chapter, are the factors that influence whether melancholia will lead to self-reflexivity, denial, or an urge to retaliate against perceived or real perpetrators of violence. What is particularly compelling about Hoffman's descriptions, confessions, and ambitions in her non-fiction is what she subsequently does with what she calls her childish, absurd affections, the energy of desire, her hunger for form, in her fiction.

Hoffman's *Appassionata*, published in 2009, is not a narrative that reduces or consigns the exile ever toward the path of certainty, nor toward self-reflexivity. As I have argued, Kundera's male characters, in the event of loss, turn against themselves in self-reprimand, and cannot forgive themselves for their perceived weaknesses. I have shown how Woolf uses Lily to challenge Freud's purportedly universal psychic maneuver. In *Appassionata* Hoffman presents us with two exiled characters who make very different choices as they are increasingly undone by loss. She offers suggestions for what influences those divergent actions. If we are to look to the potentially generative effects of a sustained melancholic stance, that is, of reflective nostalgia, an account must be made for the many instances where loss leads to either a futile drive to restore that which is lost, or a destructive drive to avenge those responsible for losses. *Appassionata* is the story of two main characters. Both have been exiled from their countries; both remain in exile with little of what could be called a home. Both have experienced unbearable loss of a beloved through death. The characters provide complex portrayals of two

distinct and competing possibilities that lure the exile. The first is to incorporate the lost love for the homeland and for ideals of belonging that are framed by nationalism and entitlement and, in the turn against self, to fall back on moral certainties against the offender, and direct the violence toward destruction of self and others. The second follows a similar trajectory in that the love for something lost is incorporated, but in the turn against the self, the subject takes itself as its new object. What is crucial about *Appassionata* is the speculation on what it takes for one grieving person to take one course of action versus the other.

The *New York Times* review of *Appassionata* by novelist Sylvia Brownrigg emphasizes a central question in the text: Is it better to be rational and detached on political matters or driven by pure passion — even if that passion is hatred? Neither of the characters, however, is rational or detached, and the review leaves unanswered the question of the source of the passion. The reviewer does suggest that one of the main characters, Isabel, is a woman who “can fully make herself into a brilliant musician only when she learns to transform tragedy into art,” (1) but leaves untouched the question of what factors influenced the other exilic character, Anzor, to use his “passion” toward destructive means. In *Appassionata* the attraction that Isabel feels for Anzor complicates the notion that the melancholia that results from exile can produce self-reflexivity. What she may be seeking from Anzor is certainty in his decisiveness and totalitarian views. What this suggests is that while reflective nostalgia has the potential to transform the psyche in ways that lead to self-examination and more hospitable social practices, there is always the lure of the stable “home” of certainty.

The novel opens with an imperative to look: “See her there, among the perpetual crowd, moving through check-in, security control, departure lounge” (1). We first see Isabel not through her point of view, but rather, through the eyes of one observer among many. A pianist who

travels to concert halls all over the world, she is, at the time of our introduction, scheduled to play in European cities including Sophia, Berlin, Brussels, Warsaw, Budapest, Prague, and others. It is notable that the author asks us to imagine a story in which there is not one main character. The author uses the same imperative mood to ask us to observe the second main character: “See him there, in his not completely clean T-shirt and two days stubble, pacing up and down his small room as if it were a cage” (62). The narrator provides some details of what can be seen in the man, followed by the comment that “What you cannot see is that he carries in his mind the long history of his country, a history so bitter and so violent that only new violence, he knows, can do it justice” (62). Two things are worth noting in the directive to see this man. The first is that, rather than representing his need for retributive violence as objective or naturalized, the narrator observes his behaviors and confines any of his affect or beliefs to “he knows.” The second thing that we are asked to “see” is that his fury, his fierceness, his violence are described as concomitant with his “anger, his impotence, his sad, sad ache” (63). The narrator is asking us to look at him, while keeping in mind that his beliefs are distinct from those of the narratorial stance. The narrator is also asking us to consider how pain, impotence, and anger can lead to violence rather than reflexivity.

Anzor is driven by rational and irrational desires to avenge his country of Chechnya for Russian strangulation and brutality. But the reader might well ask why Anzor does not seek to bring about change through diplomatic channels. As in *Lost in Translation*, in *Appassionata* Hoffman seems to be suggesting that people are most impassioned, creative, and effective when they are resisting oppression, and that those forces of resistance must be palpable. In part, what Anzor suffers from is what Hoffman’s father, who in *Lost in Translation* is described as anxious and afraid, also suffered from. Of her father she asks: What is he afraid of, “he who was

apparently fearless in the face of literally deadly dangers?” (*LiT* 128). Her conclusion: “It is, I think, the lack of danger. Without an enemy whom he can outsmart, without a hokum law at which he can thumb his nose, he is left at a loss” (128). She then asserts the need for a technique to “manage and control your own force, because there is no one else to do it for you” (128). In her father’s flight from oppression he had to respond to the conditions of existence rather than question them (129).

The suggestion that individuals learn to resist and articulate grievances against forces to which they are subjugated makes the argument about the generative potentials of melancholia that have been sustained throughout this study. This suggestion also challenges Woolf’s notion that the artist must be free to think of things in themselves by alighting on truth rather than by reacting to the deans who admonish that women cannot do this or that.

The driving creative force that prompts individuals to react to channels of subjugation is taken up in the novel in a conversation between Isabel and an editor who explains to her how those that have freed themselves from oppressive forces have become complacent and apathetic: “That’s the problem for all of us grizzled revolutionaries,” he tells her, “We have won. We don’t want to admit it, but that’s our problem. The terrible stuff, that’s elsewhere. We got ourselves our welfare state and our equal rights and spa vacations if we’re a little stressed, and let’s face it, that doesn’t leave us in a position from which to hurl grenades, does it?” (173). What Hoffman is suggesting is that “passion” becomes creative or generative when it has something palpable to resist. Hoffman builds on this line of enquiry throughout the novel by referring to the published journal of Isabel’s former piano teacher who is convinced that musical logic only emerges after a struggle (108). In his journal he quotes Igor Stravinsky: “In art as in everything else, one can build only upon a resisting foundation: whatever constantly gives way to pressure, constantly

renders movement impossible . . . Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength” (246).

The novel asks us to consider whether the artist is able to apprehend something innate (which I have been referring to as “the thing itself” throughout much of this discussion), or whether the ability to apprehend and represent emerges out of a melancholic struggle. In this novel, Anzor is driven to resist the forces of brutality and oppression only by resisting palpable enemies so as to feel vindicated.

Much of the novel is about resistance. It is also about the lure of beauty to eroticize and mystify. The title of the novel takes its name from Beethoven’s “Piano Sonata #23.” Hoffman may also be referring to the composition that Isabel begins to create after a long process of suffering, about which the narrator comments “It [the work] will be her ‘Appassionata’” (261). The title is also, presumably, an allusion to a notable historical example of the potential for art to distract from totalitarianisms. In his 1924 book *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*, Georg Lukács quotes Gorky, who had recorded Lenin’s words spoken after he listened to Beethoven’s “Appassionata” sonata: “I know the Appassionata inside out and yet I am willing to listen to it every day. It is wonderful, ethereal music. On hearing it I proudly, maybe somewhat naively, think: See! people are able to produce such marvels! . . . in spite of the abominable hell they are living in.” This utterance was later recorded to include what has been translated into English as “If I keep listening to [“Appassionata”] I won’t be able to finish the Revolution” (1). This is what almost happens to Anzor. As he listens to Isabel play the piece, we see him thinking, “Must do whatever it takes, more machine guns, yes more power, the power of it, the passion, Lenin loved the ‘Appassionata’” (188). Later on, listening to the same piece, he feels the lure of beauty that could almost sidetrack him from his mission of channeling his hatred toward destructive ends: “the music it is undoing me”—after which he immediately transfers his notion

of beauty to his “comrades brothers long nights in the mountains, the stone towers, severe, beautiful / violence tenderness all intertwined / I wanted to embrace the world, shout, love the flame within leaping / . . . No. No music. Ruthlessness” (189). Anzor is almost lured away from his hatred and violence by the beauty of the music so he immediately transfers that emotional reaction to fuel his longing to embrace the beauty of his “Idea” for retribution.

Like both Kundera’s works and Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Hoffman asks us to question the role of beauty in our lives. In all three of these authors’ work, beauty has the power to lure one toward simple lines, appealing form, sometimes at the expense of more nuanced apprehensions. In *Appassionata* Anzor rejects all beauty except the simplistic beauty of his Ideas about revenge, while Isabel rejects beauty so long as she feels it will console her rather than let her heal fully and slowly. Only when she trusts that she has undergone the full trajectory of a harrowing psychic process does she open herself up again to the lure of beauty.

Although both characters are undergoing private processes of melancholic grieving, and although both are also in exile from their land of origin, they are propelled along different psychic paths. In *Exit into History* Hoffman interviews a man who is from a part of Poland that had been under Russian occupation until WWI. He explains that the Russian occupations were always the worst. Perhaps this is one reason Hoffman chose to grapple with the felt consequences of another Russian occupation, that of Chechnya, and to allow Anzor such destructive rage. Driven by his rage and injured pride, he seeks moral certitude. In the vocabulary of Svetlana Boym, he is a restorative nostalgic yearning for a return to an origin, to moral certainty. He repeatedly demonstrates his position of certainty. During their stay in one city, Isabel and Anzor come upon a demonstration where the protestors are shouting in Dutch and in a language that is foreign to her. She is unsure as to what “side” the protestors are on.

Anzor, on the other hand, is described as being completely sure. He issues “another statement in C major” though “she resists the four-square simplicity, then yields to it . . . . By comparison with him, she is vague, uncertain, dispersed, as is everyone she knows. He takes her hand reassuringly, and she feels herself coming into focus, as if the scattered feelings of her inchoate thoughts were being gathered by a strong magnetic force” (106). Later, Isabel witnesses Anzor talking with his three colleagues and comments to herself that they are a quartet, acting in concert. She describes the energy running through them “till they are all encompassed in the thing itself, a piece of music or a common task” (118). Anzor is later described by one of his own friends as a “purist” and “incandescent with conviction” (240). Isabel’s choices to resist facile judgment and to withstand moral ambiguity, in effect, to live “hand-to-mouth,” can, no doubt, feel exhausting and inchoate. Nonetheless, she will not be lured by the simplicity inherent in surety.

While initially Isabel is attracted to Anzor’s moral certainty, this unexamined righteousness is what allows him to betray her, and what prevents him from questioning his own part in the larger violence. In one of the first sections in which Isabel starts to convince herself that the problem with the motivation to hurt another after one has been hurt is not because the psyche is complex and illusive, but rather that the world is very uncomplicated. She says that Anzor and his buddies are possessed of a “few Ideas, bestriding the world like ancient beasts, like clumsy mastodons” (242). She begins to see him as possessing a clarity of vision, not because that vision is clear, but rather because he is unwilling to question the terms of his vision; he is unwilling to live with his pain and fury until it can acquire more robust methods of critical analysis. The critique of his moral certainty does not, however, leave Isabel unscathed, because despite her ability to question the consequences of her own actions, and to nurture ethical

conditions of hospitality, she acknowledges that she has been seeking certainty by borrowing Anzor's. As Isabel's best friend says, quoting Sylvia Plath, "Every woman adores a fascist, is that it?" (223). While Isabel permits herself the luxury of moral self-reflexiveness, in effect, she is passing off the responsibility of having a totalitarian view by borrowing that certainty, if only for a while.

As opposed to the moral certainty of Anzor, Isabel is described several times as either porous or permeable: "She is permeable, that is her flaw and her advantage . . . It is how she experiences the world, how she lets music enter" (107). It is her flaw because she is receptive and readily influenced. It is her advantage because she is receptive, that is, she allows herself to be transformed by her experiences. The characteristic of porosity, an important metaphor and self-description in Hoffman's memoirs, is also applied to Isabel. Isabel describes herself as incorporating all of these three: music, her grief for her dead brother, and her love for Anzor. The first time the reader is directed to Isabel's "porosity" is in discussion of her music. Isabel refers repeatedly to her notion that she has incorporated music. Referring to Chopin's "Nocturne" she says that her body has physically incorporated it: "It is in her body, *in corpore*," she follows up (213). Undoubtedly, she says "The pathways of her brain have been altered by this somehow. The "Nocturnes" gesture of wistful tenderness has attached itself to her inner cells" (213).

The second most significant instance of Isabel incorporating something, and surrendering herself to the experiences of others, is during her childhood with her young brother. The narrator describes a scene in which the two children had just been expelled from the house, where the mother, everywhere, no matter what country or house, "turned away from her small son with a casual, careless cruelty . . . Isabel can still feel Kolya's tiny, listless hand in hers, holding on as they walked along a narrow whitish path, between fields of enormous sunflowers" (101). Isabel

thinks back to her mother's "sensuous, deprived body and her aggrieved, indifferent face" and thinks (quoting Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia"), "The shadow of the object falls upon the ego" (101). The narrator, revisiting childhood scenes of pain, is gesturing toward how the severing of a libidinal attachment to something integral (Kolya's pain and her own pain from his early death) became, for her, ego loss. But this older Isabel then reflects that in that childhood epoch, there "was no ego. Not yet. There was only silky childish skin and a defenseless porousness of soul. She was permeable, everything entered in, Kolya's sad little face and helpless blue eyes, the transparency of the light, and the sunflowers' heated menace. She might as well have been drinking in Kolya's hurt" (101). What is evident so far is that Isabel is almost limitless in her empathy for her brother, and that she also has no barriers that keep her from receiving the violence and the tenderness and the complexity of the music she hears. Her deep attachment to the love for her brother makes the need to separate from this love, after his death, particularly grueling. Throughout the story we see that her love for Kolya remains with her, although his presence in her life is always rife with pain. The experiential nostalgia that she preserves is what finally gives her the courage to emerge transformed, after the betrayal by Anzor. It is just as she re-calls Kolya, in the end, that she feels the beginning of her first composition emerging in her consciousness.

The third thing that Isabel has incorporated is her acute sense of grief at the loss of Anzor. She confesses that "she feels connected to him, literally connected as if by a web of tendrils, except this is more intermingled and more dangerous. It is as if a part of her has been poured into him, and part of him is now within her; so that a tearing away would inflict a wound" (183). At this stage of grieving she perceives that he is not a separate "he" anymore but rather a part of who she "is"; furthermore to deny the part of herself that is he would be to inflict a wound

on herself. Through Isabel we can witness the ambivalent melancholic struggle. First she tries to pull away from him, then, she tries to expel her love, while holding on to what he taught her—the intrinsic value of hatred: “She begins to feel the onset of a different anger, turning on Anzor with a bitter sense of betrayal. She must expel his body from her body, where it has taken residence; must reject his words from her mind. She must hate as it is right to hate” (204). We then see her beginning to repeat his phrases “continuing in his voice, and add[ing] for him” (229). Her need to move away from the love she has incorporated first inspires hatred. But as she allows the grief to undo her, she begins to honor how much she has absorbed from him, how much she has been transformed by her love and her loss.

Throughout these texts Hoffman suggests that to be porous means allowing experience to enter and transform the psyche without having to find immediate resolve. Porosity allows one to incorporate one’s love for another and to remain open to the transformation of mourning. Isabel is also vulnerable. This heightens her sensitivity to the precariousness of others’ lives. She has been abandoned as a child by her mother, but worse, has seen the effects of abandonment and indifference on her mother and her brother. Isabel tells us that she learns surrender through pain, through “the basso profundo acceptance of suffering, the promise that we experience ourselves most wholly in giving ourselves up” (132). In *Appassionata* surrender allows for greater receptivity to experience, to the role of others in the characters’ lives. Interestingly enough, it is not only Isabel that is porous, but the text itself. The work is intertextually derivative in that it incorporates bits of texts that form the intellectual milieu out of which the character and narrator were formed.

Outside of character description there are many porous and derivative instances in the text. It summons, honors, and extends cultural references. In some cases the text refers directly to

European cultural masterpieces, sometimes quoting texts directly and at other times modifying the phrase as it has been passed down. The narrator refers to composers (including Schumann, Chopin, Beethoven, Bach, Liszt, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Mikhail *Glinka*, Modest Mussorgsky, Schubert, Brahms, Mozart, Schnabel, and Philip Glass), and other “artists” such as da Vinci, Michelangelo, Nietzsche, Kundera, Freud, Byron, Lenin, Trollope, Proust, Gertrude Stein, and Flaubert. She references the films *Jules and Jim*, *Chinatown*, and *Easy Rider*. She also uses untranslated words from languages, including German, Latin, Italian, Russian, and French, and the story takes place in more than 15 countries. The fact that the text is so intertextual indicates how it is not only Isabel who is valuing her own porosity, but the author who is showing us how much we can be influenced by others, how deeply interconnected our lives can be.

It is notable, however, that each of the influences that is absorbed, is in some way modified. One of the first literary references that the narrator modifies is the biblical “O death, where is thy sting?” from Corinthians 15:55, which in this text becomes, first, “Beauty, where is thy sting?” (211), and, later, “Beauty, where is thy power?” (214). Thematically, the plot seems to challenge what T.S. Eliot lamented: that men had become hollow, unable to bring their intentions to fruition. In *Appassionata*, Hoffman suggests that the shadow that falls is, perhaps, preferable to the alternative, where no shadow falls between the intention and the act. In the case of Anzor, he is free to put his Ideas into horrifying effect (214). After Anzor and his comrades blow up the concert hall she is performing in, she is beset by months of existential nausea. In physical nausea and existential despair about the spiritual death of humanity, Isabel recalls Kierkegaard’s work (presumably “The Sickness unto Death”) outlining the despair that emerges relative to the distance between our perception of our finite actions and some higher purpose. She describes that, through Anzor, she has taken in “A sickness unto death,” (215). In her self-

beratement, however, she changes William Carlos Williams' "no ideas but in things" to "no ideas but in music," indicating how naïve she had been all these years, having believed in the transformative power of music (217). Later on, her friend and ex-lover (presumably quoting Sylvia Plath), berates her with the question: "Every woman adores a fascist, is that it?" (223). Twice in the novel Isabel refers to Orpheus' song after he emerges from the underworld (226). Instead of death being "the great evener," the narrator modifies it: lethargy becomes the great evener, "reducing everyone to desultory indifference" (227). Finally, another of Isabel's friends refers to Gertrude Stein's "there's no there there" (256). What all these references do for the text is to indicate how many particular historical, intellectual, and artistic foundations it emerges from, but then rather than just repeating them, it modifies them, presumably much like Isabel interprets the musical pieces she plays. This is what she gropes with in her own psychic transformation: how to build on to what she already honors while allowing parts of herself to be remade.

The porosity of the text and of the character, Isabel, is one of the most important factors that influences how she is undone by grief, and how she emerges after the melancholic maneuvers described by Freud in Chapter One of this study. Before outlining how their exilic processes support what Said, and Boym suggest about possible psychic negotiations as they result from exile, and before examining the two characters' differing reactions to loss and exile, it's useful to review their particular conditions of loss to make clear what the characters have been exiled from.

Anzor is living in exile from Chechnya. Many of his family members, friends, and other fellow Chechens have been tortured and murdered. He is living in exile, traveling to various European countries, under the guise of initiating diplomatic relations. He rents a hovel in London

but dismisses it with a swatting gesture: “It’s just a temporary place . . . . It’s not mine. It’s not how I really live. Or how I choose to live” (176). Anzor is overcome with rage and hatred for the Russians who invade and pillage his country’s villages. He has substituted his sense of loss of his homeland into a self-destructive and destroying hatred. He tells Isabel: “I hate . . . but in my hate is my love . . . . I hate because of everything I love. Because of how . . . strongly I love” (157). Anzor is formulating plans for revenge.

Though it is not clear what country Isabel’s family originally came from, we learn that they are living in exile in Provence, and later, in South America, and that there is an ugly fight over which her parents divorce. Her young brother Kolya is utterly abandoned by the mother, and little Isabel absorbs his pain as if she were drinking it in, she says. Isabel sees her brother die, as a very young man, of an accidental overdose. Kolya repeatedly returns to her

from some place where he is always present, just below the surface, within her inner cells. Now it is his childish, still perfect face she sees, as their mother shooed them out of the house, pushed the out against Kolya’s pleading eyes. A whitewashed farmhouse in Provence. It must have been Provence, that was where Lena brought them to stay with a group of Argentinian, ebulliently cheerful even in their exile. That was in Lena’s peripatetic stage. (101)

Before we see anything about Isabel’s adult life, including her loss of Anzor, we know that the character has been grappling with the pain of exile, parental divorce, and deeply felt empathy for a brother she cannot protect. Moreover, it is unclear whether Isabel even has a home anywhere. Most of the story takes place in various European cities. There are references to Isabel’s music lessons in the US, and to a former home she shared with Peter in New York. But

she does not seem to have a home, since she asks Peter, when he offers to pick her up at the New York City airport, if she can use her old piano room in his house.

What I am interested in is what Isabel's psychic responses to loss can contribute to the possibilities outlined so far in Chapter One, (that is, we see a contemporary example of a subject who is transformed by mourning to the point that she finally articulates her own original composition, and learns to fight). This text provides much more than just another fictional example of the theoretical possibilities for nostalgia. What *Appassionata* contributes to my discussions of the generative potential of sustained nostalgia is an illustration of a subject who is not productively transformed by loss. The example in this text points to the potential consequences of not allowing melancholia to do its work. In Chapter One we saw Kundera's characters, who, owing to shame, were not able to develop self-reflexivity. The desire for revenge, however, was confined to a wish to slap an ex-girlfriend, or to remain in shame. *Appassionata* develops the implications of the desire for revenge in much more drastic, (and perhaps, increasingly realistic) ways. Isabel and Anzor have very different reactions to loss and Hoffman seems to be asking what these differences can be attributable to. To understand their distinctive reactions to loss, it's important to account for their differing personality traits or emotional tendencies. Part of what we can learn about Isabel is through her own observations about herself. She has told us repeatedly that she is porous and that she is permeable. In a discussion of power she indicates that part of her power comes from her ability to be undone: "If she loses her ability to be undone, she'll lose her strength, she's sure of it . . . . That's her source, that's where her kind of power begins, in her willingness to register the tremors inside herself and give them voice" (168-69). This ability to absorb and become undone is how she turns music into powerful art, but in her personal life, she has not yet demonstrated that she is able to give

voice to other “tremors inside herself.” Isabel allows herself to withstand all the psychic processes of melancholia and to honor her nostalgia for her lost mother, lost brother, and lost sense of individual psychic coherence.

Anzor, on the other hand, resists any temptation to be undone, even by music. Midway through the novel, after we have seen him meet Isabel in many of the cities where she performs, and after they develop an intense love affair, he suddenly indicates that he will not be able to see her again, that he has a mission that will prevent them from seeing one another. The final thing she knows of him is that on the last chord of the Chopin Scherzo she is playing in a Barcelona concert hall there is a furious explosion and she sees one of his comrades walking away from the destruction. He and his comrades have presumably been planning on creating havoc and destruction in a broadly advertised event attended by wealthy European elites. The concert hall of a world-famous pianist is a good target; the bombing will bring attention to their cause. Isabel is overcome with the pain of loss and betrayal. She indicates “she must expel his body from her body where it has taken residence; must reject his words from her mind” (204). Her loss is abruptly followed by extended and bitter self-critique where she indicates that “her disappointment begins, gnawingly, to turn on herself. She has been her own biggest blind spot, and she peers into the void left by Anzor, trying to discern what it is she has failed to see, or so badly misunderstood” (197). In her relentless self-beratement she indicates that “she does not deserve the protection of a home” (205). She wants to punish herself. “This is what she really wants to do, administer her own punishment to herself in her monastic cell” (215). Punishment for what? Isabel asks herself. For her need to believe in Anzor, in something beyond the banal surface of things, for wanting beauty (216). Isabel turns her grievances, first toward her lost libidinal object, and eventually toward something larger than herself; her grievances become a

critique of society. This novel shows the protagonist moving out of the place of self-abnegation, where Kundera's protagonists remain. Isabel allows the stages of grief to undo her while she can learn new ways of accounting for why certain losses are ungrievable. Like Lily, she is trying to develop new forms of expression that do not conjure up conventional associations. She is trying to make an account of social forces that make some losses invisible.

Isabel's critique begins by implicating "her Barcelona minder" who, after the explosion, shuttles her off to a "Green Room" and exhibits such control that she wants to shout at him that "so much control at such a moment is indecent, that it is immoral. They should all be screaming in rage and protest" (199). Isabel develops the capacity to turn her incorporated loss from (1) rage against the loss of the man she loves and wants to protect from himself (and hopes will also protect her from the tenacious ephemeral reality of loss, where certainty of belief acts as a tonic to the moral and physical ambiguity of exile), to (2) rage against herself for not seeing enough, to (3) rage against her Barcelona minder who exhibits control in the face of revolutionary acts, to (4) rage against the newscaster who refers to Anzor and his comrades as "resistance fighters" but is corrected by a Russian ambassador invited to comment on the situation who clarifies that these are "terrorists, pure and simple" (210). What we see here is accelerated and definite psychic movement through the stages of grief to a point where the author forms a critique, both of apathy, and of using language to manipulate the public's views on which bodies matter.

Isabel goes into retreat to try to grapple with her pain and to nurture her awareness of how language is manipulated to lend value to certain sectors while dismissing others. One day she turns on the TV and becomes outraged at a news report about an African strongman whose militia purportedly massacred a village, but who, when interviewed, makes the most pat statements such as "Our government does not condone acts of random violence" (208). When

pressed by the anchorman repeatedly to acknowledge the links between his troops and the ongoing massacres and rapes in surrounding villages, the strongman triumphantly replies that the evidence is unreliable. The anchorman then cuts off with “Sorry, we have to stop there . . . Thank you for being with us” to which Isabel reacts with fury and nausea. “You cannot say ‘Thank you for being with us’ to someone proclaiming murderous lies in your face. You cannot do this without some basic order being overturned” (209). She has very rapidly come to understand that linguistic conventions mask and perpetuate violence against the marginalized. The critique that she herself is able to both apprehend and then put words to is what she wants others to begin also to voice. Isabel looks at her face in the mirror and thinks, “The interviewer should have raised his voice on her behalf. On everyone’s behalf. He should have shouted with rage, banged his fist on the table. He should have called the strongman a bastard and a criminal, to his face, so she could see it crumple” (209).

At this turning point in the novel we begin to see the word “honor” used to describe something other than the meaning Anzor had taught her, applying it to his fellow countrymen. Reflecting on this newscast, Isabel objects that one cannot remain civil while being lied to complacently by a mass murderer on television without all honor breaking down “throwing the word bitterly back at Anzor” (210). “Honor” has so far been used by Anzor to describe male pride and that which leads men to war. Rather than reject the concept as a whole, she appropriates the word to stand for what she believes it should stand for. Although she has not yet been able to shout for herself, she is recognizing the regulative discourses that make horrendous tragedy ungrievable, even unrecognizable, depending which group of people the losses are sustained by.

In her description of how an account is made, of and from, an emerging consciousness, Butler describes psychic processes that can explain much of what Isabel experiences. Butler begins by reading Nietzsche on bad consciousness from *Genealogy of Morals*. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* she first reiterates his argument that we become conscious of ourselves, and can then narrate ourselves, only after certain injuries have been inflicted. There is a part of the self, that when injured or betrayed, will begin to act as an advocate for the injured self, seeking to find the cause of the suffering. There is also a part of the self that will look to mete out a just punishment to the one responsible for the injury. Thus, the subject is asked (by herself) to find the cause and take responsibility for the punishment. This forces a narrative, a giving an account of oneself. The problem with this, she suggests, is that the system that seduces us into believing that we are interpellated as beings accountable to a system of justice and punishment is instituted over time at great cost to instinct. She quotes Nietzsche, saying that this process whereby a subject comes into being in a response to a judicial system, rather than through instinct, meant that people became “reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, coordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their ‘consciousness,’ their weakest and most fallible organ!” (*GM* 84). The subject in defense, then owns up to the deed, or locates the cause elsewhere (*GAO* 11). According to Nietzsche, this follows only after an accusation by someone in a position to deal out punishment. Butler is interested in accounting for subjectivity that arises in response to other pressures or instigations.

What if—Butler asks—that person in power carries other valences besides fear? There may be desire to know and understand, desire to explain and narrate not related to fear or punishment (12). Arguably, this is the case for both Woolf’s Lily, and for Isabel. Giving an account accepts the possibility that the self has causal agency, even if the self may not have been

the cause of the suffering in question (12). Interestingly, Anzor may provide a better illustration of what Nietzsche is arguing than what Butler argues. Butler critiques Nietzsche's account for assuming that aggression is more primary than generosity and that justice emerges as a revenge ethic (13). Perhaps it would be wholly unrealistic to expect a sense of generosity, even to the self, to emerge out of Anzor's experiences of being brutalized.

Isabel, on the other hand, is safe from any ongoing instances of brutality. She has had longer to grapple with the loss of her homeland, her mother, and her brother. Her freshest wound is Anzor's betrayal, and that is not something that requires on-going action to prevent from happening again. So perhaps it is that she has the luxury of a sustained (if painful) melancholic stance. What this discussion about the urge toward justice that either turns toward revenge or generosity points out is that the question of how the subject reacts to loss may be less gender-influenced than my argument has, perhaps, implied.

And yet, Isabel is at pains to try to identify her own part in the betrayal. She is also trying to develop a more nuanced position on those who commit violence. She is at the point of critically interrogating the regulatory mechanisms of the social world and has not yet found her point of collaboration, or what level of responsibility she can assume in it. She asks herself why she had not earlier understood that "she too is part of the grand historical museum?" (211).

After the explosion in Barcelona she is increasingly set upon by waves of nausea and vertigo. She is still unsure about who or what to direct her hatred toward. She wonders if it is Anzor, his fanatic leader, or the power itself that she should hate. In another wave of nausea Isabel tries to develop some criteria for how she can judge movements against oppression for their constructive versus destructive consequences. Her distinctions emerge at first rather simply:

- Do they kill only others, or also their own?

- Do they kill only those who have done them harm, or anyone who is conveniently in range?
- Do they kill for reasons of state, or of statelessness?
- Do they kill for any reason at all or just for the hell of it?
- Do they kill to provoke or retaliate?
- Do they kill because they have too much power or not enough of it? (216)

This dialogue with herself is an extension of Hoffman's repeated questions in *After Such Knowledge* concerning the differences between activism, resistance fighting, imperialism, brutality, protectionism, and revenge. Here Hoffman goes so far to assert that in order to learn from the past "it is important to distinguish wild revenge from just retaliation" (133). As usual, her method for doing so involves forcing language to account for the complexities. Even the language we use to discuss affect, she points out, leaves little room for nuanced emotional complexity. Relating a tale of a Jew who had been informed on by a fellow Pole, she says that she understands his rage and yet "I cannot help but feel, his pure anger leaves out too much" (134).

Thus, in *Appassionata*, Isabel develops more nuanced characterizations of the source of her anger and hurt, and what she can learn from the betrayal. She circles back again to berate her former sense of finite action. She says that instead of the life she has led, applying her distinctions to the differences between crescendos that ascend into triumph versus those that signal resolution, she should have been distinguishing between massacres and acts of war (216). The narrative description of her self-critique continues: "She has spent her time examining the demi-quavers of her own perceptions." Yet she judges herself to be incapable of making an

account of violence: “She has nothing with which to answer the guerilla, or the terrorist. Or herself” (217). And so she hides away in stillness, allowing her body to instruct her.

Isolated in Marseilles, Isabel is finally found by a friend. He asks if she is depressed. No, not the right diagnosis. She cannot tell him what she believes, “that she is having a crisis of meaning” (219). As she allows herself to become psychically undone she describes herself as detached from her ego (219). She later acknowledges that she does not bear a sense of guilt but rather accepts her culpability. Culpable. She feels a sense of relief at having found the right word, “to have pronounced the right sentence on herself” (223). In accepting this word for herself she is also accepting the associated notion of free-will. She is accepting that, although she can see what she could have done differently, she can also see what she can choose to do now. Isabel remains dedicated to completing the cycles of her grieving process. She wants to continue to “sort things out in a place where laws don’t count, which is untouchable by regulations. Where she’ll know things she cannot yet tell even herself” (223).

Finally there comes the point in Isabel’s grieving where she does not just demand that another person speak out against injustices for her and for everyone else, but does this herself: “Stop it!” she yells at two men who have begun a fight on the street. Her utterance has enough authority that they do stop (227). She muses that “she has learned something about violence, apparently” (227). This authority has come about through the entire process of grieving. She describes the transformation as a violation, so deeply has it moved her. But, she asks, what is violated? The horizons of her world, she ventures (228).

When Isabel finally learns to articulate that which she would not have been able to account for before her grieving, she returns to the sense of her porosity. It is her porosity that allows her to feel nostalgia for all the losses she has endured. Her nostalgia opens her up again as

she sees a woman on the shoreline with a billowing mauve scarf. The scarf brings Kolya's presence back to her. She feels pity for herself, and for the precariousness of lives, for the first time since her anger. About the grueling melancholic process she suddenly confesses, "it is so hard to traverse our trajectories the whole way . . . so much easier to hurtle toward oblivion" (249). What she comes to feel is that there is so thin a line between making meaning and destroying human flesh, there is a "hair's breadth difference, the thinnest line, a quaver between one turn of the soul and another," and yet the line must never be crossed (250). Now that she perceives that there is something that separates the greatest intentions from the most evil of feats and can articulate this to herself, she allows meaning to return to her, "It is upon her again, the return of meaning" (250). While Isabel ponders that there is only hair's breadth difference that separates productive nostalgia from destructive nostalgia, the novel does not seem to suggest as much.

Part of what *Appassionata* does is to make clear distinctions about the factors that influence the melancholic processes. It is notable that even though both characters in the novel have undergone tremendous loss, three additional things differentiate Isabel's grieving process from Anzor's. The first is that he seeks destruction and revenge and thus does not allow the melancholic process to undo him so that he can emerge with new ways of articulating grievances. Isabel, on the other hand, honors the grieving process until she is brought to feel mercy: "Here's mercy which comes after anger, here's tenderness which transforms rage. Here is human force, contained in patterns so intricate and at the same time pure that they intimate a knowledge yet unknown" (260).

Secondly, there is the role that male honor, dignity, and pride play in retaliative impulses in this novel. For Anzor the notion of dignity is entangled with the history of violence. Anzor

continuously refers to the role of honor, pride, dignity, and respect that drives him. He and his father (who on one occasion killed Anzor's own dog in front of him) have their honor, their dignity. About his father Anzor says, "His pride is who he is" (123).

While his histories of violence are, for the most part a consequence of the forced displacement his people have suffered under the Russians, most of what he knows how to articulate is focused on either his "injured pride" or on histories of intimate violence. After listening to his father's stories of brutality—" [t]hose scenes in the peasant hut with everyone beating each other, all the time. Men beating women, women beating children. The stronger beating the weaker, and the weaker taking it as their due. Everyone sleeping in the same bed and beating each other" (120), he goes on to describe what the narrator refers to as "the history of cruelty . . . the intimate history of violence" (120). The notion of pride is ambiguous in this story, though. During one of Isabel's concerts, an audience member intuits that the pianist feels pride in her performance, but that her pride is intimately intertwined with tenderness (189). Needless to say, pride is not intertwined with tenderness for Anzor.

Finally, what Isabel identifies as the additional factor that contributes to Anzor's destructive drive is the availability of instruments that allow one to fulfill destructive impulses and that are increasingly available to aggrieved groups of people. There is no shadow that falls between the intention and the act for Anzor. After the explosion in Barcelona where Isabel and her audience were the targets of Anzor's group, she tries to think back to what forces and turns of feeling have brought Anzor to the point of self-destruction, to the point of violence, and she reasons that it is not so much "who he is" but rather that "it is the instruments he uses, and the bloody conviction powering them that matter" (212-13). The problem with the retaliative impulse, the narrator points out, is that in centuries past, men would beat each other up at bars.

Now they can gather armies, purchase weapons, and trigger detonating devices remotely. Before the wide availability of these instruments, she speculates, he might have kicked in the door, or gotten drunk at the local pub. Without the instruments Anzor might have raised his fist violently at the football match (242). What Hoffman is pointing out is that, in the face of horrendous loss, if the individual is not able to let melancholia do its work, the implications are much more dangerous to the rest of society than they have been in centuries past. The narrator tells us that,

honor can explode a thousand bodies, that is how much force it has. She can measure the force of hate, now that she knows what it feels like. She knows what it can do if it's accompanied by the right instruments. Accompanied, augmented. The guns, the explosive devices, the bombs: fury squared. Her own instrument, her precious struggle to make it yield beauty . . . rendered null and void. (211)

At this point Isabel realizes that he is just an instrument of simple, crude Ideas. "The unique person is over" she proclaims (213). Injured pride combined with "horrifying certainties" is what becomes "wrongness itself" (213). If the unique person is over, that is, if individuals will not be subject as much to their own psychic development, so much as to other pressures *en masse*, this certainly limits the ability for melancholic transformation.

And yet, if Isabel has doubts about the power of the individual to be a site of political change, Hoffman does not. So she continues to work on Isabel, who continues to try to understand how her grief leaves her undone, porous, malleable, in search of mercy, while other peoples' histories of violence lead to the desire for revenge. The novel refers to African strongmen and their militia massacring villages and raping village women, to images of famine, child soldiers with machetes, babies dying of AIDS, resistance fighters, mangled bodies, scattered limbs, the swagger of Serbia's henchmen (217). The betrayal and the loss of ideals, the

loss of her lover, propels Isabel first into anger directed at the lost object, but finally aimed toward massive social injustices. And so while the novel outlines the limitations of the melancholic process, for one character, it also points to the importance of the ability for individuals to be able to develop, not universal rules, but more nuanced guidelines by which to judge histories of violence.

Perhaps ironically, as Isabel senses that she is returning to the net of meaning, she is catapulted into thoughts about whether it is a god that bestows certain individuals with genius to apprehend the truth, individuals who are capable of translating truth through beauty. She is groping for how to give form to her emerging feeling. This time, however, she is less concerned with the precision of her skill as a performer as she is with the potential to give a new structure to rage and yearning until they become eloquent with meaning, molding human forces until they are no longer brutal (250). This is her answer to Anzor about what individuals can do in reaction to brutality. Long after he is gone, Isabel remains in dialogue with him, always rising to his challenges about this issue.

After she can articulate her emergent accounts she finds herself in the realm of porosity once again. She is overcome with tenderness uncurling toward arbitrary objects (251). She feels that “something has accumulated in her nomadic life,” memories, motifs, “an intimation of a sound coming both from within and from somewhere else. It’s nothing she has heard before, and it summons her attention” (253). She doesn’t identify it immediately but senses that it is the beginning of a composition.

The metaphor of porosity is as central to the work of Hoffman as it is to that of Boym. In *The Future of Nostalgia* Boym uses cityscape to develop a discussion of porosity in terms of divergent structures that are built up at different time periods and inhabit a space over time.

Porosity is particularly visible in cities in transition. Cityscape allows her to refer to variant emergent structures that occupy the same space, and to the residents who accommodate this non-uniformity. As a metaphor cityscape refers to the psyche of a reflective nostalgic, one who is open to contradictions and influences, one who accommodates the gaps between identity and resemblance. Like the exiled characters in the work of Kundera, Boym also claims that this defamiliarization, in which memory and meaning reside ambiguously side-by-side, drives exiles to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future (Boym 50). Similarly for Hoffman, porosity develops through a series of displacements. Porosity is an important metaphor and self-description in Hoffman's memoirs as it is in her fiction. Isabel is repeatedly described as porous or permeable, and the narrator tells us that that is her flaw and her advantage; her porosity makes her receptive. She is described as having incorporated music, her love for her dead brother, and her love for Anzor. She goes so far as to suggest that the pathways of Isabel's brain have been altered by her incorporations (213). What she has lost remains within her as a perceived presence. What is distinct about Hoffman's and Boym's postulations about the psyche of the exile that differ from Kundera's is that the former foreground the notion that the exile becomes porous, allowing experience (including the experience of mourning) to enter and transform the psyche without having to find immediate resolve. This openness to transformation heightens the exile's sensitivity to the precariousness of others' lives. As I have pointed out, the intertextuality of *Appassionata* is itself an example of how influenced one's life can be by others. It is Isabel's porosity that allows her to feel nostalgia for all the losses she has endured. As I have argued, Kundera's characters (with the possible exception of Tamina), cannot bear the fear and risk of shame and incoherence of identity that mourning instantiates. Interestingly, the character of Anzor is also prevented from the transformations of mourning. What each of these texts

suggests is that the ability to be transformed by accumulated experiences of love and loss (what Hoffman and Boym refer to as porosity) is what ultimately heightens the individual's apprehension of the precariousness of all subjectivities and all lives. The metaphor of porosity is employed repeatedly both by Boym and Hoffman, but we can also see Woolf, in her autobiographical writing, referring to what arguably represents a similar psychic capacity. Woolf refers to her "shock-receiving capacity" as that which allows her to be a writer ("A Sketch" 72). She indicates that is this encounter with some horror, some strange intuition that she feels driven to explain "a token of some real thing behind appearances" ("A Sketch" 72).

Like Woolf's Lily, Isabel comes out of her struggle with a vision that is yet to be comprehensible. Isabel wants to give homage to the world, then, not for its goodness but for its "Being; to give voice to it in all its permutations" (254). What she commits herself to is creating representations from her new vision "Whatever she gives forth from now on, it will be from within" (260). She doesn't know how "the aural pressures within her will range themselves into intelligible formations . . . It will be her 'Appassionata'" (261). She vows to use herself for what has passed and is passing through her. "That is what will make it new. A difficult beauty is being born, she thinks, with a kind of wonder" (262). Isabel says that her new composition will make use of the "multilayered condensed information that is pressing upon her, from within and without" (264). Like Woolf's Lily, Isabel is now able to apprehend a vision that is pressing upon her. She is able to represent her nostalgia for all that she has lost, the traces of which haunt her still.

The final point worth considering with regard to what is suggested by the ability to choose one action over another is the role of performance. Performance suggests that one is acting out a role that is not part of a perceived identity. Performance can give voice to what feels

like alien subjectivities pressing on one from within and without. Part of what Hoffman seems to be asking is how we might develop our abilities to react to loss by performing that which is unknown and still pressing from within. At another point in the story Anzor is explaining to Isabel how Europeans look at people from more marginalized positions as noble savages. He says, so we try to perform for them to prove we are civilized. A Russian poet interjects to ask him “But sometimes it’s nice to perform, no? I mean, isn’t it more fun than always having this one *identity*?” (77). This is what Anzor is arguably not able to move into. Though Anzor can perform before those more powerful and “civilized” than he, he is not able to perform his grief in any way other than brute gut-reactions. Isabel allows herself to be so moved by the experience of grief that she in essence performs the acts of grieving, struggles to attach to the lost love, anger, self-debasement, confusion, and finally arrives at an affect that had previously meant nothing to her: mercy. She allows her body to perform its stages of grief. She does not cling with bloody revenge to Ideals but allows herself to become undone and remade. Isabel can perform and be undone by her own grief, since she has performed the grief, joy, and ambivalence of other composers.

But performing adrenaline-filled and highly practiced interpretations of music already written by the greatest composers and performing new glimpses of identity are distinctly different. Isabel increasingly describes a sense of groundlessness, nausea, loss of gravity. The black and white keys of the piano come to look like levers of some antique machine. None of the notes link up. What is this angular piece of furniture in front of her and how has it structured meaning for her, she starts to ask. Music becomes for her an activity from a Dadaist manual. Rather than structuring human meaning and conveying universal emotion, she considers the piano now to be the “instrument of the petite bourgeoisie, which she used to think held the

cosmos in its innards” (205). She learns that artistic precision and grace must count for something, but that repeating other people’s passions has not let her emerge as an individual artist.

Part of Isabel’s crisis of meaning comes when she tries to explain how musical structure can transfer the highest of human values and achievements: enlightenment, forgiveness, mercy, acknowledgement of suffering. This is what she translates for her audiences. Her ideal is stated as follows: “No liberty but in structure—Even if the aim of the structure is the abolition of the structure. But we have tried that too. We have come to the end of abolitions. Where, then, can we go next? What forms can we begin to liberate sounds with that will express new meanings” (154). It is notable that the author chooses the verb “liberate” rather than “invent” or “create.” Isabel reminds herself what her piano teacher taught her: that the task of the pure pianist is to “be a medium, a mediator between the divine, the eternal and the people” (221). To this end the piano teacher keeps distilling his own compositions striving for absolute purity (221). Isabel recalls Orpheus’ song after he emerges from the underworld specifically for its ability to show precisely what he had seen (226). It is as if the thing itself were there waiting to be channeled or made visible. To do this Isabel thinks she must begin by trying to “Smash it all up and start from the beginning, from the ground up, from the smithy of the soul” (162). She doesn’t know exactly where to speak from or where to go so she ventures something about the role of musicians and the medium they work with. Music is described as “this beautiful vocabulary of the soul” (90). She and her friend Larry get into a conversation, essentially about whether music is a channeling of something greater or whether it is something pleasing put together by an artist. Isabel argues that a Schubert piece is driven by something more than a sum of its parts, something “unifying” she suggests. Her friend Larry disagrees: “You know that these pieces are made. Constructed.

Composed. That the impression of unity is an illusion. The whole notion of a work of art is an illusion” (140). But music has the ability to capture something “essential,” she ventures (140). For her music is violence and rage already transmuted into beauty” (163). And so she questions whether she has been deceiving herself all along by thinking that performing tenors of grief and beauty matter. She wonders if she were misled by the promise of music as Emma was once misled by her cheap romances . . . Was she misled by the intimations of beauty, truth, love? She read *Madame Bovary* in one of her literature courses, she tells us, where Emma’s yearnings were taken apart sentence by sentence and shown to be cheap illusions, sentimental and paper-thin. Surely she should know better. She comes after. She has read *Madame Bovary*; surely she cannot *be* Madame Bovary (196). Isabel is putting pressure on her life work to examine whether it offers her a diversion from things that matter most, or whether the music accounts for what matters most. Hoffman seems to be grappling with a critique of the lure of beauty in which she cannot stand fully on any side.

Late in the novel, after her isolation and prolonged process of self-beratement, she hears a piece of Brahms’s Third Symphony and, startled again into pain, feels “she does not want such beauty to exist in the world. Let there be no more beauty. Let there be no more love” (217). “Let there be no false consolation” (218). She rejects all consolation until she begins to intuit that she has not been duped by either believing in the power of suffering or in the power of translating her art. They have transformed her to the point of feeling mercy, and she has performed them so that others can be moved by those same affects. “Here’s mercy,” she says, “which comes after anger, here’s tenderness which transforms rage. Here is human force, contained in patterns so intricate and at the same time pure that they intimate a knowledge yet unknown” (260).

The end of the novel takes us back to where we started, to “see her there” in an airport, but this time the narrative point of view moves to her eyes. Her gaze is described as “less intuned”; it is directed more at her surroundings, with a different alertness (263). At this point we move into her point of view as Isabel becomes a subject rather than an object. The novel ends indicating that she prepares for the next stage.

Hoffman’s work, particularly in *After Such Knowledge*, and explored in *Appassionata*, problematizes my discussion of the generative potentials of melancholia, particularly as it is encountered in exile, while it also probes the question of how to harness certain forces and constrain others. Each of the authors so far discussed in this study has argued vehemently for the need to avoid politicized nostalgia. Each has also made a substantive argument for the generative effects of experiential nostalgia. What is notable about each of the texts under discussion is that they suggest that experiential nostalgia can offer the subject a means of vital and authentic engagement in social critique. That is, experiential nostalgia becomes generative of the ability of the individual to empathize with others and to articulate grievances that he or she would not have been able to fully account for prior to the labor of mourning. Hoffman asks what role we can play in empathizing with the pain of others, not so much for the benefit of those in pain, but as a vehicle to expand our own empathetic capacities. She is attentive to the dangers of developing an empathy that can come across to one that is suffering as a pat illusion or mastery of comprehension. Listening to a man’s story about his experiences in Rwanda she feels the welling up of rage and the desire to console, even compensate. This is followed by immediate shame. “Who knows what vicarious impulses my sympathy holds in relation to this distant disaster?” she asks (159). She is not quite sure what to do with her reparative urge. And yet three pages later she asserts without ambiguity that we should not focus on horror, but rather, perform the labor of

remembering and mourning assisted by sympathy and understanding (162). *After Such Knowledge* takes this proposition one step further. If we can, through our own processes of mourning, develop greater empathy for the pain of others, the ability to speak for the oppressed and brutalized may be more significant than our ability to account for our own grievances, because when we account for the injustices to the other, we may have fewer emotional ambivalences. This, she suggests, allows us to react to the pain of others more genuinely since the events do not carry the baggage of one's own associations (179). This would arguably be more of a political act rather than the grueling labor of psychic transformation that loss precipitates. Of course, these empathies are not mutually exclusive. At the same time, she argues, it is important that we do not presume to know another's experiences. She refers to this acknowledgement of the distance that we stand from events as "moral esthetics" (180).

Sympathy, however, for Hoffman is not exclusively a position that one takes for a period of time. The sadness and pain she felt for her parents she describes as an "embodied internal presence" (181). In referring to the story of an old man who contacted her to tell his story as a Holocaust survivor, she describes the man's need for his story to become part of "our collective cultural DNA" (186). This is the same Hoffman who described nostalgia as a pregnancy, "a welling up of absence," in *Lost in Translation*. Hoffman incorporates the experiences of others to the point that they give birth to other potential affects and practices. She describes these transformative experiences as if they had topological life, that is, as if they were part of dyadic materialization.

Hoffman makes a compelling case for the role that experiencing the pain of others can play in social change. Persons who experience loss are able to relate to that loss *from* memory, she says. Those in pain "take the veracity of that faculty, the correspondence of recall to real

experience, for granted” (188). Those who are grappling with and formulating narratives about the pain of others, on the other hand, are often *about* the process of memory-making rather than about the memories themselves. These narratives foreground the uncertainties of recollection and, therefore, can say more about the psychic processes involved in pain.<sup>64</sup>

## Chapter Three

### Uncommon Encounters with Common Readers In the Works of Clarice Lispector

In previous chapters this study has put together the rich discussions developed by Butler, Kundera, Woolf, and Hoffman on the potential for nostalgia to precipitate a subjectivity that is both self-reflexive and able to develop a critique of the social norms that alienate individuals from the values they learn to articulate because of the self-reflexivity. I have used Freud's work on melancholia to develop the narrative framework for nostalgia. As I wrote in the introduction, there has been a concerted effort in the US to avoid discussions of pain and internal strife; we have been overdosed by a barrage of prescriptions for "positive thinking" rather than asking ourselves what kinds of intelligibilities could possibly arise by allowing pain and nostalgia to do their work.

Both Kundera and Edward Said suggest that unexamined nostalgia (or in the words of Svetlana Boym "restorative" nostalgia) can lure subjects into reductionist categories and representational modalities that reduce the idea of what has been lost into a simplified set of characteristics. What we've seen in Kundera's characters is that, although they are undone by loss and profound experiential nostalgia because of shame or fear of impotence, they limit the generative process of reflection and thus the ability to develop a critique of social norms. Similarly, what limits Hoffman's character, Anzor, is his inability to examine the role of inheritances, such as those associated with "pride," "dignity," and "honor" (and their obverse, shame). What fuels his drive toward revenge, Hoffman argues, is the ready availability of weapons of mass destruction that allow him to carry out his perceived need for vengeance. This is not the case for Isabel, nor is it the case for Woolf's Lily. Both allow themselves to be

completely undone by melancholia and longing for what was, until there is an internal reorganization, or what is described by Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* as a psychic transformation that “makes possible the conscious representation of melancholia” (176). This ability to “become” undone makes room for the characters to allow melancholia to keep doing its work, which for Isabel was detailed and prolonged; what the labor of melancholia produces is a moral reflexivity and a “possibility for the representation of psychic life.” Because Isabel and Lily (and Hoffman herself as memoirist) have allowed, in Butler’s words, “the ego to emerge as an object for consciousness,” (177) because they have allowed the ambivalence that threatens one’s sense of coherence, each is able to develop a “voice” that, although first directed as complaints against oneself, eventually becomes, to again borrow Butler’s words, a “nascent political text” (184).

The compromised sense of coherence that is experienced during the melancholic process is such that, according to Butler’s reading of Freud, “the ego risks its life in its failure to live up to the standards encoded in the ego-ideal” (188). But in order to survive, the ego must learn to “rage against the dead in order not to join them” (193). Ultimately what melancholia offers, as Butler argues, is an “epistemological encounter with alterity” (194). While the characters of Lily and Isabel can perhaps be said to have developed new modes of representation that emerged by encountering and struggling with a melancholic process that is foreign and unnamable, this is much more clearly the case for a number of Clarice Lispector’s characters. If Lily’s representational mode is painting, and Isabel’s is musical composition, Lispector’s characters’ obsession with the limits of and possibilities for representation is, without exception, focused on language. This is the case for most of her characters, but in particular for Macabéa, of *The Hour of the Star*; Martim, of *The Apple in the Dark*; and G.H., of *The Passion According to G.H.*

Both Martim and G.H. have experienced a deep sense of loss; however, the nostalgia that Martim feels for the illusion of belonging, and that G.H. has for a beloved and for a previously coherent sense of self, is not an illusion of return. Neither do these characters seek consolation by memorializing their losses. What they are both driven to do is to question language's role in allowing them each to have been part of a community, at cost to their sense of authenticity, and then to try to unmake what adorns language, so as to get as close as possible to their individual perceptions of what is of value to each of them. In neither case do they attempt to reduce what has been lost to a set of romanticized or politicized categories of comprehension. In fact, they turn toward mystery and incomprehension for more sensitized apprehension.

As Said argues, the problem with modalities of representation is that the desire to represent others is often infused with, or fueled by, the desire for power in which we impose classifications of the inalienable into false hierarchies over others (which we call "knowledge"). This knowledge-making project often does not account for alterities. Arguably, the drive to articulate what emerges as an encounter with and struggle with alterity is the project of Lispector's entire *oeuvre*. While some of the dialogue in her novels shows characters using language as a tool to facilitate the impositions of authority over others, language, she shows, is also the tool that can play with and ultimately reject and even overturn perceptual hierarchies. Lispector's work strives to go way beyond even the notions of hierarchy. Woolf, Kundera, and Hoffman each question what drives humans toward appropriation and destruction, and what nascent subjectivities emerge out of melancholic processes that teach us to represent loss and to formulate social critiques. What Butler argues is that the melancholic process can teach us to tolerate more ambiguity and thus to respect the alterity in our own psyches and in others. As I argue, the cultivation of ambiguity and the respect for that which is yet unknown in their

psyches, and forever so in the psyches of others, is what Lispector uses the characters of G.H. and Martim to show.

This chapter extends the previous discussion in two ways. First, it addresses exile from the point of view of characters who cannot be described as exiled from a center, since they never had tools or inheritances that made them part of a center.<sup>65</sup> This is where Said's description of exile in his essay "Reflections on Exile" becomes problematic; in fact, it becomes emblematic of the problem of discussions of exile. The exilic experience Said describes in this essay is "an unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home..." (173). Chapter Two positioned exile as the public counterpart of melancholia, in that one who has been exiled experiences not only the loss of something loved but also loss of an ideal. The psychic maneuvers to accommodate the loss are, by their nature, more public, in that one must negotiate new cultural cues. In Chapter Two we saw three figures of exile who, in addition to loss of homeland, each incurred the devastating personal loss of a beloved. Isabel and her family had been exiled from her homeland as a young child. She lost her brother to death. Anzor was on the run from persecution in his native Chechnya. Much of his family and many friends had been killed. Eva Hoffman, as a young girl, managed to leave persecution in Poland. The death of her closest childhood friend left her marked. Isabel, Anzor, and Eva Hoffman herself are each clear instances of melancholic maneuvering and of exile. Hoffman's *Appassionata* has been particularly instrumental for discussion of exile and nostalgia because of the contrast it offers between the two characters Isabel and Anzor. Isabel goes through all of the psychic movements described by Butler's reading of Freud and emerges with a voice that is more able to critique the violence around her, as well as more able to represent her own visions of what she has lost. Anzor, because of his fear of shame, thwarts the process and resorts instead to violence.

While Hoffman's works have allowed me to look at how subjects respond to exile as a rupture, something that brings about a profound sense of loss, I still have continued to view exile primarily as an experience of an expulsion that forces one out of a true home. But there are many marginalized people who experience a great rift between their sense of identity and a national state of belonging. These people, living on the margins of society, cannot claim to have been expelled from any "true home." The secondary description of exile that Said uses in the same essay is perhaps more fitting for the marginalized characters that I will discuss in this chapter. Exile, he says, is "a condition legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people" (175). This is the definition of exile that I will employ for discussion in the present chapter. We cannot unproblematically assert that the characters of G.H., Martim, and Macabéa have been "exiled" from a native place unless, in the case of the two former characters, that native place is a consensual community held together by the illusive cohesion of language and its attendant social values. The second way that this chapter extends my discussions so far on melancholia, nostalgia, and exile is to look at Lispector's ultimate project in her final novel: to exile the reader from the complacencies of conventional narrative.

This chapter will draw on three of Lispector's novels: *The Apple in the Dark*, *The Passion According to G.H.*, and *The Hour of the Star*, to examine how the melancholic process that comes about as the result of a loss of a beloved, or of an ideal, positions what Butler refers to in *Psychic Life* as an epistemological encounter with alterity (194).<sup>66</sup> For Lispector (and arguably for Woolf as she describes in "On Being Ill") alterity is that which is incomprehensible, inalienable, radically other; it is that which we have no recourse to through language. I locate what the costs are of that encounter, and finally make an argument for the kind of "nascent political text" that emerges from the processes of encountering the inalienable and struggling to

articulate or otherwise present it. Lispector's work not only points out how marginalized subjects are disconnected from the language of consensus but also portrays individuals who reject what are, for them, false social contracts. The characters move into self-reflexive alienation and, finally, decide how to either remake language or remain alienated. Lispector, like Woolf, is interested not only in characters that remake themselves out of the generative potentials of loss, but also in how an author's use of language can displace the reader, thereby engaging the reader in a performance of questioning and accepting the foreign. Arguably, both Woolf and Lispector are looking to denude and recreate language for their own mission, which is to touch "the thing itself." The challenge they both know they are up against is how to make a text out of something newly encountered (often characterized as pre-linguistic) without domesticating (or inscribing) their experience of it.

This chapter will circle back to what Woolf refers to in several of her texts as "the thing itself" and point out the many instances where Lispector uses this exact same phrase ("*a propria coisa*").<sup>67</sup> As with my discussion of Woolf, I will try to elucidate what Lispector's works suggest is the role of the writer in making the thing manifest. With Lispector this analysis is rather difficult because of her refusal to domesticate the inalienable, even to use language to represent it. The narrator of *The Passion According to G.H.* continually tells the reader that she cannot describe the reality she is encountering. And so while several of Woolf's and Lispector's novels are produced out of an urge to make the invisible more visible, the refusal to do so with conviction could arguably be the first step toward more hospitable social and political relations, since the narrator does not assume that there is a language common to every reader.

As I have pointed out in Chapter One, even though early criticism of Woolf suggests that her novels avoided the large, impending political questions of the day, and even though both

Leonard Woolf and Quentin Bell, her biographer and nephew, have suggested that she was a non-political person that drew away from larger social issues, many of her later critics, particularly Karen Levenbeck, argue that Woolf was obliquely addressing the motivations for, and the consequences of war. This chapter argues much of Lispector's work also addresses the social and political injustices of her time by involving the reader in questioning the role of language in supporting or challenging what parades as the consensual. Aside from Lispector's *crônicas*, her last "novel" *The Hour of the Star* has been described by literary critics Earl Fitz and Hélène Cixous as her most overtly political. It is certainly not the plot that one could describe as political. What is political about the novel is that it draws the reader into questioning what we assume about others, how we represent what we know, and how we are all implicated in language uses that marginalize some norms of existence and privilege others.

This chapter proceeds by looking first at how the characters in *Apple in the Dark* and *The Passion According to G.H.* are exiled (or exile themselves) from language, thereby questioning a naturalized relationship with language. Both texts position an encounter with extreme incomprehensibility. The present discussion of Lispector's characters' rejection of the authority inherent in language will then take up the question of what costs the characters have to bear for this resistance or inability to participate in the cultural collective, and what potentials this living hand-to-mouth offers them to live hospitably. The final section of the chapter uses *The Hour of the Star* to argue that Lispector employs this text to invite the reader into an intimate and performative space in which we allow ourselves to be exiled from the conventions of language. This last novel urges us to join the author in a space of alterity, where neither she, nor we, can anticipate the outcomes.

In literary and philosophical discussions of alterity the author is often at odds to provide some explanation for why she or he is in a position to be able to address the topic. Discursive convention usually requires the speaking subject to establish the authority to speak. The ability to speak on that which is radically alien to the conscious self would presuppose the ability to apprehend that which is not commonly a part of the cultural collective, or that which is not readily available to conscious thought. As I have argued in the previous two chapters, this ability to see one's own self in relation to social norms, and the ability to articulate a nascent political text that describes what have previously been unwritten (and often unquestioned) rules of the social world, is part of what the subject learns in the melancholic process.

To develop a discussion of alterity in this chapter, I would like to begin with the question: Who is Clarice Lispector? Context provides some framework. Lispector often uses the phrase "life eats life" in her fictional and non-fictional writing. She draws extensively, although not citationally, on the European philosophers and artists who provide her theoretical groundwork. Most of her novels and short stories are described as existentialist by her translators and by literary critics,<sup>68</sup> in the sense that the stories often depict a person trapped in a point of history where choices seem absurd and meaningless. *The Hour of the Star*, *Apple in the Dark*, and *The Passion According to G.H.*, foreground and respect the ignorance and even the error in the main characters, with awkward and disturbing candor. Neither the characters nor the narrators trust their abilities to rationally interpret their own experiences. The characters in all three novels could be described as extremely unbecoming in their struggles to become. In all three novels the characters are questioning the constitutive and exclusionary mechanisms of language. If we were to use the definitions of poststructuralism that Butler employs in her introduction to *Feminists Theorize the Political*, "a field of critical practices that cannot be totalized and that, therefore,

interrogate the formative and exclusionary power of discourse in the construction of sexual difference” (xiii), or more generally, operations by which any position is established, then I would characterize Lispector’s philosophical fiction as poststructuralist, rather than existentialist, in its endeavors.<sup>69</sup> Even the words that Butler chooses to show how one is positioned in relation to the law are central to Lispector’s vocabulary: “subject,” “experience,” “reality,” agency,” “materiality of bodies” (xiv). What is interesting about Butler’s analysis of what is at stake in how language is used, is her question about whether terms such as postmodernism or poststructuralism become sites for all sorts of fears about the diffusion of power and the loss of cognitive mastery (xv). The question about the loss of cognitive mastery is one that invites critiques of narrative mastery and authority. In the case of Butler’s work, her narrative structure and rhetoric has invited particularly vitriolic attacks of purposeful obscurity. The question about cognitive mastery as it relates to narrative structure really is one of how intimately content is tied to form. The question that Butler raises in the introduction, (in order to respond to it), is: How does an analysis of the exclusionary and constitutive practices of language usage lead us to deal with real bodies, and what kinds of retheorizations of violence and coercion are possible? (xvi)<sup>70</sup> This question is what University of Chicago philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, has asked of Butler’s work, as outlined in the introduction to this study. It is also a central question that both Woolf and Hoffman have addressed in their writing about the political role of literature.

Clarice Lispector, a so-to-speak montage of languages herself, seems always to be trying to work in a space between all languages and none. As an infant born in the Ukraine, she was first exposed to Russian. Her parents had just fled from Russia, under the 1917 revolution that had persecuted Jews, among others. Her parents also spoke some Yiddish. Benjamin Moser, in his biography of Lispector, *Why This World?*, indicates that, in addition, her family spoke

Hebrew at home. At a very young age she arrived in the northeastern state of Alagoas, Brazil, which was to become her homeland. Both of her parents and all but one of her sisters changed their names.<sup>71</sup> Chaya thus became Clarice. They then moved to the state of Recife. Because of the subservitude they felt under the cousins they had “visited,” the father felt the need to move. After her mother’s death, when Clarice was nine, and the moving to Recife which was not prosperous, her father moved all the daughters to Rio de Janeiro, which was to be Clarice’s intellectual home. Clarice’s native language became Portuguese. Through the trauma the family had suffered, (first in persecution and exile which included the gang-rape of her mother by Russian troops leading to her paralysis and early death due to complications with syphilis), to the displacement in a foreign country, name changes, poverty, and the death of her parents, Lispector emerged with a desire to be a witness and a victim subject to her own scrutiny. In a televised interview on “Panorama Especial” in 1977, the year of her death, Lispector indicates that her adolescence was chaotic, intense, and totally outside of reality. Perhaps this is what led her to reach for ways of describing realities that are not recognizable within the current modes of language usages. Moser explains that people began referring to Lispector, after her literary successes and famed need for isolation, as a *monstre sacré*, “a person whose combination of genius and oddity placed her somehow outside of human society” (312). She even bore an accent that many believed came from a language she could have spoken earlier, but, as another one of her biographers, Nádia Battella Gotlib, explains in an interview on “Panorama Especial” Lispector claimed that the strange accent was actually due to a physical defect that she never had surgically remedied because it would involve a lot of pain to “cure.” Gotlib, in her biography of Lispector says that Lispector was “in a constant state of exile—she came from exile, lived in exile and leaned toward exile” (“Ser ou não ser” 317).

After attending law school and establishing herself as a writer, Lispector married a Brazilian of social standing and lived in several countries, learning French, English, and Italian. She translated several works from English to Portuguese. All of her novels, short stories, and children's books were written in Portuguese. While living in the US, she divorced her husband and returned to Brazil with her two sons.

Most of the critical reception that Lispector's work has received is centered on her existential and poststructuralist themes including the terror of meaninglessness, human patterns of evasion, and the need to make choices and take responsibility.<sup>72</sup> On a less abstract level her work is thematically and structurally concerned with centers of authority, trust in the body, the illusive nature of happiness, being alone in the world, the utter failure of human language, and in rare cases, the possibilities of love and silence to supersede the failure of language.

What separates Lispector's fictional work from that of European existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre, for instance, is that her work is more concerned with *the consequences* of rejecting authorities, and the possibilities for living more authentically.<sup>73</sup> The other major difference is that most of the scenes take place in Brazil and portray uniquely Brazilian circumstances. While it is well known that Hélène Cixous was taken aback by Lispector's writing and has written and lectured on its modality as *écriture féminine*, it is important to understand what Lispector's work means for Latin American literature. While a characterization of Brazilian literature, and more importantly, of the opportunity that this Brazilian literature offers to the English speaker is beyond the scope of this study, some contextualization is useful in order to understand the magnitude of her project. The modern social context in which Lispector was writing furthermore has a bearing on the thematic structure of her work, most especially on her last novel. This chapter will conclude by positioning the question: How does

Lispector's writing perform what Woolf was calling for in future female writers, writing that can act to expose or reveal that about which literature has been mostly silent, principally, the inner portrait of Woolf's character, Mrs. Brown?

Samuel Putnam, an American scholar best known for his translations of literary texts from romance languages, laments in *Marvelous Journey*, a well-documented and celebratory overview of Brazilian literature, the combination of circumstance that has kept North Americans from enjoying the spiritual and sensory fruits of Brazilian literature. Brazilian writers such as Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira, Euclides da Cunha, Lima Barreto, and later, Graciliano Ramos, Clarice Lispector, and João Guimarães Rosa acquired the highest of reputations in Europe and South America on the basis of their shocking new *modernismo*, which began in the 1920s. Lispector's first novel, *Close to the Wild Heart*, was published in 1943, not long after the publication of three novels by Brazilian novelists that offered searing political indictments of poverty and the difficulties of rural life.<sup>74</sup> By the 1960s and 1970s, Brazilian art in general (literature, theater, painting, and song) became a primary medium of revolt against a repressive military government in power from 1964 to 1985. As Marting suggests, Lispector's first novel focuses on angst instead of injustice, and on the confines of marriage rather than the causes of poverty (xxv). Rather than sharing any common ground with Brazilian literature of the time, Lispector's first novel was more comparable to the newly emergent female tradition of Mansfield or Woolf (xxv), the latter of which Lispector claims she never read (xxvi).

It is not only the themes and styles that emerged out of this modernist Brazilian experiment that are of note, but also the fact that many of its finest innovators were female, unlike the case in other Latin American (Spanish) literature. Nãomi Lindstrom, a literary critic interested in sociological and Jewish themes, notes in *Women's Voices in Latin American*

*Literature* that "Brazil presents an impressive case of the full incorporation of women in to literary life," providing such examples of major novelists and poets as Lispector, Nérida Piñon, Cecília Meireles, Lygia Fagundes Telles, and Rachael de Queiroz. She makes comparison to the *nueva narrativa* of Spanish America where the most highly visible members are male (4). Earl Fitz, one of the leading US scholars on Lispector, suggests that her novels have had as much influence on the way narrative would be written afterward in Brazil as Jorge Borges' *Ficciones* had on Spanish American narrative, more generally.

Nelson Vieira, a long-time native Brazilian scholar, describes Lispector's work in his chapter "Lispector's Jewish Universe: Passion in Search of Narrative Identity" as a burning quest for ontological knowledge through writing. Lispector, he asserts, presents an intriguing combination of the European philosopher and the Latin American woman novelist (87). Or as Cixous has fantasized in *Reading With Clarice Lispector*:

If Kafka were a woman; if Rilke were a Brazilian Jewish woman born in the Ukraine; if Rimbaud had been a mother, if he had reached his 50s; if Heidegger had been able to stop being German, if he had written the *Novel of the Earth* [. . .] [i]t's in this ambiance that Clarice Lispector writes. There, where the most demanding works breathe, she advances. There, further ahead, where the philosopher loses his breath, she continues, still further, beyond all knowledge. (1)

The somewhat parodic characterization of Lispector and the ambiance in which she writes points to the difficulty that critics have of placing, or even describing, her themes.

The *oeuvre* of Lispector is concerned with the lived manifestations and consequences of gender and power structures, particularly as the dynamics are instituted and perpetuated through language. I would argue that a central question of most of her work is: How do we

know anything, and what can we know of the possibilities of social interactions that have not been constructed yet through language. Like Woolf, she is also concerned with how one can translate new visions without burdening or adorning the descriptions? What she is interested in “knowing,” it seems, is how to understand one’s own psyche, and how to form connections with others that language prevents us from doing. The visions she is interested in translating involve both what it might look like to apprehend others outside of the clichés of language and how to portray the social injustices of her time. She is, foremost, interested in how language supports or challenges ever-changing roles that individuals play within structures of power. In addition, like Woolf and Hoffman, Lispector aims to reshape language, not so that it can more realistically describe truths (in particular, truths that emerge within her characters as they struggle to go beyond the confines of language), but in order to evoke emotions in the reader that develop those individual truths. This chapter will first look at what G.H., of *The Passion According to G.H.*, and Martim, of *The Apple in the Dark*, learn by exiling themselves from language and its accretions, and what degree of success they have with communicating that evolving “knowledge” with other characters (including the reader). In their struggles to represent (portrayed by the narrator in strange vocabulary and unconventional syntax) they both anticipate their inability to return to society. I am interested in what possibilities these characters develop (to use Butler’s words) for the representation of psychic life, and what their nascent political texts look like. I then direct the object of Lispector’s text to her ultimate character: the reader.

A discussion of how language is used to interrogate and to disrupt conventions associated with language usage is problematic when the language of the original texts is not in the language used to interrogate the texts themselves. Lispector’s use of the Portuguese

language is highly unconventional. In *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector* Fitz argues that it is virtually impossible to imagine how she could have cultivated the themes she was investigating without meticulously cultivating a particular kind of syntax, one that produces in the mind of the reader semantic ambivalence, ambiguity, and fluidity. Fitz quotes a review of her work that suggests that Lispector employs syntax, not so much to show how a character comes to apprehend and discuss reality, but that syntax for her “can change reality even while creating it” (Fitz 59). Reacting against what critics have called her “verbal magic,” and incantory style of writing, Lispector says that her style demonstrated only a humble quest: “As I write, I become conscious of things I knew all the time without being aware that I knew them” (qtd. in Fitz 60). Because the word choices and syntax are unsettling, it would take a very astute and highly mimetic translation to be able to perform the same labor that her own constructions do. All of her translators are aware of their responsibilities. For the purposes of this chapter I indicate which English translations I use (for most of her works there has been only one), and when I feel that the English does not convey what the Portuguese can, I translate the phrases myself and indicate the page number of the original Portuguese.

### **How Does One “Know”?**

In Lispector's work we are faced with the notion that translation of experience is difficult in any language. In *The Stream of Life*, an early novel, Lispector's narrator asks how we are to translate the silence of our real encounter. In *The Hour of the Star* the narrator confesses that he does not want to decorate words. Instead, he invokes words to describe a pattern of sounds, transfused with shadows, written from his body. Rather than decorating the words, he "attempt[s]

to extract gold from charcoal" (16).<sup>75</sup> The question, of course, would then be: What is it that the narrator is translating out of? How does he know? The narrator offers, "I am amazed at my own perception of the truth. Can it be that it's my painful task to perceive in the flesh truths that no one wants to face?" (56). But to perceive something in the flesh is one thing. To represent those truths to another requires a reliable medium of transmission. Those truths, the narrator tell us, "I write with my body" (16), because "what I will write is already written in me" (20). What this suggests is that rather than fathoming "truth" through reason or meditation, there are ways of perceiving truth through the body, and that those truths the body knows how to write since it has been "written on" before through experience. These truths, he tells us, are often avoided because they are difficult.

What does this novel offer in terms of how others might know things? Lispector often employs the impersonal "*se sabe*" (*Hora* 39)<sup>76</sup> to indicate a sense of knowing rather than the more personally confined "I know" or "he knows." Even ignorant, little Macabéa is given the power of knowing outside of reason: "Through music she divined perhaps that there were other ways of feeling; that there were more delicate forms of existence, with even a certain luxury of soul" (*Hora* 51). The music has allowed Macabéa to "divine" something. Likewise, the fortuneteller that we meet at the end of the story also has the power to know things about Macabéa's past and about the future. While the predictions are ridiculous in one sense, in a more metaphysical sense they are fitting, and in terms of facts, the clairvoyant does accurately predict Macabéa's future. As foretold, she does meet a gringo with a Mercedes Benz, except that their encounter involves a hit-and-run accident. The fortuneteller had predicted that a young girl would be struck down by a car, but the prediction was made for the young girl who had left her

parlor just prior to Macabéa being admitted. Throughout, the text raises questions of how the body and the mind know things.

How a person can know anything about the mysteries or the banalities of life and death are a preoccupation of Lispector's. Repeatedly, her narrators ask themselves how they know anything. In Moser's biography of her, there is a chapter called "The Thing Itself." The chapter lists instances of the phrase found throughout many of her texts, including in *A Breath of Life*, and in *Near to the Wild Heart*, where the narrator tells us that "[v]ision consists of capturing the symbol of the thing in the thing itself" (qtd. in Moser 354). This phrase appears in many of her novels. *A Breath of Life*, a book of fragments published after Lispector's death, is replete with images of flashes of intuition. The narrator tells us that "it so happens that the essence of the thing is sometimes in the flash" (355). *A Breath of Life* refers to one of Lispector's oldest themes: the process of animating the inanimate by infusing it with a breath of life. About her own life, Lispector says she would have it titled, "In search of the thing itself" (Moser 267). The Lispector novels discussed in this chapter show what it takes for a character to "know" anything. In all three novels discussed in this chapter a character has flashes of deep insight that come about through encounters with pain. The flashes of insight in *The Apple in the Dark* come only after the protagonist has succeeded in stripping his routine thinking from the habits of conventional language, and then in encounters with something not easily translatable. The process is described as prolonged, but begins as a "throb" which leads to "that obscure encounter with meaning" (122). In *The Passion According to G.H.* these insights come about through a protracted and self-reflexive encounter with horror, memory, and suffering. In *The Hour of the Star* the flashes of insight mixed with bodily attentiveness to the moment come in moments of pain, even if they are brought on by sudden joy, since joy is an alien emotion for the protagonist.

Similarly, Woolf explains for her reader how flashes of insight come about to her, described in “A Sketch” as “a sudden violent shock” (71) in which she discovers, not only her powerlessness, but also that these exceptional moments came with horror; “they seemed dominant; myself passive” (72). Lispector, however, refuses to discuss her writing with anyone and so we are left to read her propositions only through her fiction. Both Lispector and Woolf present characters who are finally able to perceive and then represent something ineffable as a result of prolonged suffering.

*The Passion According to G.H.* (from here on referred to as *The Passion*), is primarily concerned with how one comes away with an emergent sense of knowing, when faced with the most base, horrifying, and painful experiences. The narrator tells us that only when she has divested herself of human language and its accompanying morality “would [she] not be transcending and remain in the thing itself” (78). The vocabulary that Lispector develops to hover close to the thing itself is varied: “inexpressive,” “neutral,” “tasteless,” which she can only apprehend through: “loss,” “non-groundedness,” “ignorance,” “disillusion,” “forgetting,” “being forsaken,” “disorder,” “a disencounter,” or “love.” But to describe any “thing itself” fails. All she succeeds in describing is her vision of a mute triangle.

*The Passion* opens with a narrator that ponders how one transmits experience to another. She admits to “naming without knowing its name” (11) in order to “translate the unknown into a language that I don’t know, and not even understand what the signals amount to” (13). What she does feel is that she is destined to receive; the world is “bristling with antennas, and here I am receiving the signal. I’ll be able to do only a phonetic translation” (14). While G.H. is recounting an experience that brought her close to perceiving some elemental force, she is only able to translate the experience using words that are associated with sounds but do not specifically refer.

In the first section of the story we see a woman who has entered a back room of her own house that had been occupied by a recently fired maid. She is first confronted with writing on the wall (drawings) that depicts a series of people who the narrator takes to represent herself. She experiences a sense of rupture in stepping outside of her own vision of herself to see how an outsider has depicted her. In her moving about the room, she comes upon and squashes a huge cockroach. As G.H. consciously withstands the horrors of facing the smashed cockroach she documents what happens to her in her progressing “disorganization” of self and tries to “translate it into terms that would be more like ours, into human terms” (60). Though she is not able to find exact words for her experience, she does not founder because “the thing part, God-matter” was too strong and was waiting to reclaim me” (61-62). It is difficult to distinguish what senses the narrator uses to perceive the thing itself. Sometimes she refers to vision, other times to listening: “If I listen attentively to objects, something of those objects will come forth and be imparted to me that will then in turn be given back to the objects” (19). But listening does not describe either, if listening implies sound. As she tells us a few pages later, “I was continually receiving that silent signal” (27). Neither does Lispector seem to be referring to her narrators’ interpretation of experiences. In fact, in one passage she makes it quite clear that it is the world which is providing the text, and, that it is not hers to interpret: “To be honest about true authorship, I cite the world, I have repeatedly cited it since it was neither me nor mine” (23). Yes, the thing itself remains ineffable. She confesses, “See how I still cannot touch those primary laboratory elements” (59). So she desists from naming, “I knew that when I didn’t call things salty or sweet, sad or happy or painful, or even use subtler shadings—only then would I not be transcending anymore and I would be staying within the thing itself” (78). The question remains, of course: How to transmit, how to write a novel about the ineffable? So she continues in her struggle,

“Maybe I’ll find another name, so much crueler right from the outset, so much more the thing itself. Or maybe I won’t find one. Is love when you don’t give a name to things’ identity?” (79). At this point she begins to realize that naming does violence and may indeed be the opposite of love. And anyway, she tells us, “The thing can never really be touched. The vital core is a finger pointing toward it—and what is pointed to enlivens like a milligram of radium in the tranquil darkness. Then the wet crickets start to be heard” (131). By allowing herself to become undone by what I will point out has been a significant loss for G.H., and by undergoing the ambivalence that threatens her sense of coherence, she is more able to perceive something outside of the facile constructions of language. In Lispector’s words, she apprehends the thing itself.

### **Loss Provides no Rupture from Lack**

Before outlining an argument for what G.H. has to give up and what she gains through the process of rejecting language, that is, the process of approaching the thing itself, I would first like to look at *The Hour of the Star* for what could be described as exile, what the melancholic maneuvers may or may not be, and what role language plays in preventing subjectivity from emerging. The main character of Lispector’s last novel *The Hour of the Star*, Macabéa, can in no way be described as an exile; she never has belonged to any community. She comes from the northeast of Brazil, but she did not belong there. She barely belongs to herself. Macabéa is a poor orphan with no inheritances, no sense of home, so poor that she is described as hardly possessing a body. She is a poor, skinny, dirty, tubercular, wholly unselfconscious girl. The girl has almost no voice in the narrative, nor is offered a point of view that is distinct from the narrator’s, perhaps reflecting the realities of her condition. As we are told by the narrator, (after indicating that she is his fictional creation), “Yes, I adore Macabéa, my darling Maca. I adore her ugliness

and her total anonymity for she belongs to no one" (68). Macabéa is only revealed through the mind of Rodrigo S.M., this narrator. He is obliged now by his conscience, he says, to tell a story that he witnessed on the face of this girl in the market.

What is of interest for this study is that this is the first time that we have encountered a character who is not exiled but is so marginalized that she will not even have the luxury of melancholia. Macabéa is portrayed as someone with no ego whatsoever. Perhaps she is portrayed as essentially devoid of subjectivity because there has been no rupture from a state of perceived-having (or libidinal attachment) to a state of loss. She is essentially without desire, frustration, or self-awareness. And although her narrator (or her author), tries to provide for her, neither can.

Macabéa is denied even the luxury of suffering although she tries to mortify her senses. In an allusion to a work that influenced her early writing (as evidenced in the title of her first book *Near to the Wild Heart*, a line from Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*), Lispector makes reference to willful mortification of the senses so that Macabéa might become herself through suffering: "Occasionally she wandered into the more fashionable quarters of the city and stood gazing at shop windows displaying glittering jewels and luxurious garments in satin and silk—just to mortify the senses" (34). Like Steven, who, repenting his sins, decides to mortify his senses, Macabéa toward the end of the story experiences a kind of anti-epiphany. The *claritas* that Steven visualizes illuminates not what he is, but what he is not (namely, a priest). Likewise, Macabéa, through an anti-epiphany which is, ironically, her first moment of self-awareness within her social context, learns all that she has not been. She learns this through the fortuneteller who has described to her how awful her life must be: "Macabéa turned pale: it had never occurred to her that her life was so awful" (75). Macabéa, it could be argued, had never developed an ego, nor had she

developed the ability to see social norms that have kept her in such a state of poverty. As it turns out, we do not see if Macabéa's anti-epiphany leads to any greater awareness, for she is killed just afterwards.

What this text can contribute to the discussion of the potential of melancholia and exile to precipitate reflexivity is the reverse of how the discussion has been framed so far. Rather than looking at characters who, either partially or fully, develop the abilities to form social critiques as an extension of melancholic maneuvers, *The Hour of the Star* gives us a character who has not "experienced" loss, because loss provides no rupture from lack. And as Butler questions in *Psychic Life*, if, following loss and identification the psychic energy *turns toward the self* with a vengeance which results in an enactment of the subject, who does the turning? (15). Macabéa, who has not formed strong attachments to anything and therefore has "experienced" little loss, by these terms could not have enacted any subject into being. Her narrator is trying to provide opportunities for her to become aware of her self and the world around her. Macabéa, after getting a job as a typist (typing words that look so messy they are illegible), begins questioning things many people leave unquestioned, like what electronic means, what mimesis means, what a Count is. She feels a few moments even of bliss. She was learning to love the world, to build small attachments, repeatedly signaled in the text by the word "bang" in parenthesis. On the advice of her buxom and licentious workmate, Gloria, however, (who obviously knew how to get what she wanted), Macabéa decides to emulate her and seek knowledge about herself in a thirty-minute session with a fortuneteller, Madame Carlota. She is told that she has had a devastating and pathetic life, but that fortune and romance are just around the corner. Macabéa's sudden change, whereby she looks at her life through the eyes of others, and then adopts a view of her future wholly

unattainable and superficial, is her Fall from grace. Upon leaving the fortuneteller's parlor, she steps into the street and is killed by a Mercedes Benz. Macabéa is not punished for seeking knowledge. She is killed because she readily adopts another person's vision of her life. This is, arguably, the obverse of sustaining melancholic maneuvers. Instead of going through the pain of developing an ego and a conscience, Macabéa envisions herself according to others' facile categories, categories that are outside of her life possibilities. If there is something to learn about subjectivity from this text it is this: if we want to learn about ourselves and our role in the greater social domain, we should not look for facile answers, nor should we look to others to describe our visions for us.

Many of Lispector's stories feature a narrator that is often willing to step in and take control of the protagonists' voice. The metatextual elements of *The Hour of the Star* make this process less subtle than in many of her short stories (for example "Amor"). Lispector sketches a narrator who is benevolent, well-meaning, and more capable of articulating representation than the ridiculous, struggling, illogical protagonist. Sometimes the protagonist must struggle not only against the well-established competence of the narrator, but also against well-meaning family members or peers who want to keep the struggling character in her or his role, for everyone's sake. Often the reader is caught between not knowing which manner is best for the protagonist and even wanting to protect the protagonist from her or his own awkward process of change.<sup>77</sup> Frequently, the protagonist will mask her turmoil and allow others to characterize it by terms that are denigrating yet recognizable, as compared to the incomprehensibility of the reality of her inner turmoil. Characters who struggle to free themselves from conventional roles do not come out seeming heroic, but often ridiculous. Many times the autonomy that they have achieved is not recognized by others. The inability of the protagonist with a new vision to represent either

the geometry of it or the basis for it leads to the dimming of that vision. In other instances the crime, if there is one, is the failure of one person to perceive the other as anything other than an extension of himself.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps this is one reason Macabéa's narrator refused to save her.

Perhaps it was even a measure of generosity to leave her be.

*The Hour of the Star* is one of Lispector's few novels to depict an individual in a social world. Her other novels are intensely subjective with little social interaction. Because, as Fitz points out, the ultimate drama and pathos of Lispector's characters "arise from the fact that while they may gain a voice through self-inquisition, they often fail to find anyone able or willing to respond to their signals. Thus, in Lispector's hard, uncompromising world, it is not enough to establish a linguistically secure sense of personal identity and self-awareness. One must also be lucky, and there is no guarantee a similarly free and responsive person will be found" ("Discourse" 431). While other characters, particularly in *Apple in the Dark*, and even more so, *The Passion* do not need narrators to help them develop a sense of self or a way to communicate that sense, and they succeed in apprehending "truths" outside of language, they have a lot less to negotiate in terms of the social world. In other words, even though *The Hour of the Star* features a character interacting in a social world, the novel seems to suggest that there is very little social world worth saving the character for. The paradox of all of Lispector's work is that even as one develops a keen sense of self and of forces that silence, oppress, and ridicule the subject, language is not sufficient to express those apprehensions and thus, the individual remains alienated.

To analyze what Lispector is suggesting about how language shapes one's potential to communicate one's evolving truths to oneself or especially to others, it's important to look both at how the struggle to reshape vocabulary and syntax can provide the character with new ways of

apprehending the self, but also at how that sense of self will operate in the social world. Before looking at what the author does with narrative strategy in order to displace readerly expectation, I will examine how *The Apple in the Dark* and *The Passion* describe the struggle that the characters have with language. I will then make an argument for what that struggle leaves them with.

### **Exile From Language**

In *The Apple in the Dark* the main character, Martim, is in flight for some act of which the reader is never quite sure. He is not ready to condemn himself for his act by applying linguistic categories he did not invent. His truth, he says, must emerge out of his own voice. Thus, the protagonist is described as going on strike against being a person (80). He becomes unable to articulate any plan to remain outside of personhood, or to recompose himself so that he can operate in a community:

His obscure task would have been easier if he had allowed himself the use of words that had already been created. But his reconstruction had to begin with his own words because words were the voice of a man . . . . The moment he accepted alien words he would automatically be accepting the word "crime" and he would become nothing but a common criminal in flight. It was still too early for him to give himself a name—and give a name to what he wanted. (134)

Martim never articulates exactly what his task is, but he continually refers to what he is rejecting, which is other people's view of him, and others' circumscriptions of his possibilities. What he wants to reach with language is similar to what he "reaches" through sensation. The novel opens with a difficult image for the reader: "This tale begins in March on a night as dark as

a night can get when a person is asleep” (3). This is followed by a measure of how “time passes,” as made manifest by the moon passing across the sky. This is followed by another reference that intertwines time with space: “Then later on, much deeper into the night, the moon too disappeared.” The original Portuguese juxtaposes the terms more closely as “*profundamente tarde*” or deeply late. The reader is left unsure if the author is pointing out how language allows us to think in terms of metaphor such that the difference between time and space is naturalized, and then wonders about what else has disappeared along with the moon.

The first view of human activity points to ways we can distinguish one thing as separate from another. Our view is directed to images of flower beds, whose order one might perceive from a balcony, but that, the narrator tells us, would not be discovered at the level of the beds. This points our attention to how one knows or apprehends anything and then translates it into thought. There are several devices that Lispector uses to move us out of comfortable categories of unquestioned comprehension. These strategies will be discussed in further detail in the discussion of the narrative devices that Lispector employs. It is important to note that these devices or strategies are not confined to more common narrative disturbances or innovations such as genre blending, shifting point of view, or use of an unreliable narrator. What her treatment of language does in these texts is to rework the language in the service of naming what has, perhaps in the view of Lispector, not been approached accurately and gracefully enough. She does this not by searching for the most precise words but by both forcing the reader to rethink how common words are used, and also by employing syntax that requires mental labor to try to identify which adjectives are modifying which nouns or pronouns, and to whom agency can be attributed based on the conjugation of verbs. In many cases we realize that the agency we normally attribute by the facile use of verbs and pronouns either falsely attributes agency or side-

steps the issue with the use of passive verb construction. Arguably, to disrupt these assumptions facilitates a broader consideration of recognitions and intelligibilities.

In the opening passages of *The Apple in the Dark* so far discussed, the only agency that is apparent is in that of the moon that passes and disappears, trees that have reached the limits of their destinies, and flowerbeds whose order is concentrating to achieve symmetry (3). The first person we are introduced to is Martim, who had been sleeping, and who then “next” had been standing on a balcony “uselessly obedient” (3). Obedient to what is unclear, as is whether “next” refers to time or space.

The first piece of narrative that is marked as dialogue, by the use of quotation marks, is a thought that begins as a sound, moves into an idea that is perceived as a soft warning, during which his “body thought” . . . “So, me then” (5). Now that the narrative has been directed to the man, we learn what the subject of all the rest of the 356 pages will be, the reorganization of Martim and the world: “Then things began to get reorganized, beginning with him” (7). Martim’s reasoning so far is described by the narrator as something that had been reached “with the malleability an invertebrate uses to become smaller in order to slip away” (8). The second instance clearly marked as dialogue comes fairly late in the first section. Again Martim’s thought “Today must be Sunday” (18). It is described as “a matter of his first clear thought” since having fled the hotel where we saw the garden. He does not know what to do with the thought, so he scratches himself voraciously without ceasing to walk. He decides that this first actual thought is not something in relation to a day of the week but is “an indirect testimony to himself” (18). Because of the intrusive “thought” of a Sunday, which seems to seek a stable referent, he is embarrassed to recognize the “need to understand from which he has still not freed himself” (18). The first actual spoken words come after a moment of ecstasy, of feeling drunk by a response to

the thrill of the sun: “That’s it, yes!” he says aloud and without meaning” (21). He repeats the words again and again “convinced he was referring to something” (21). He finally directs his dialogue to something, to a lone bird that he has captured and is holding blindly in his hand and says “I can’t say anything else,” followed by his explanation to the sun “I have lost the speech of other people” (23). He sits solemnly on a rock but keeps the bird clutched in his hands. He begins his flight away from others who might persecute him with a simple intention of walking in a straight line, and does not know if intuition will bring him, instead, in circles. This dialogue with himself shows the extent to which he is allowing common utterances to attain some distance from the referents to which they are conventionally attached. Nonetheless, Martim still suspects that his walking away from a center using his intuition may not bring him to a different point, but may, in fact, bring him full circle to the place he set out from. Martim is allowing his need for inherited meaning to dissolve. He begins by using words detached from their ordinary referents. He is not certain that this will get him to a particular point; in fact, the exercise may bring him circling back to where he began.

Martim proceeds by letting his intuition guide him through the dark. He finds it prudent to “communicate with his situation by means of touch” (12). After walking, dozing, and then waking in the brush, he moves his fingers along the ground and finds a promising sign which he did not understand, but which he approves of (12). When he opens his eyes he finds his sense of touch has deceived him. He had been holding back brush from his face for the duration of sleep, and yet, when he awakens he finds that “it was not a case of brush-land, as he had imagined from the branch that had stuck him in the face. He had just happened to fall asleep beside one of the rare bushes in all that open country” (13). So while much of Lispector’s work suggests that part of how we come to “know” things is through feeling, this particular instance shows her reader

that she is also asking us not to reduce her argument to this one modality of apprehension. What this passage shows is that often when an individual is feeling that the whole landscape is made up of what happens to be sticking in his or her face at that time, it may be just a singular expression that does not make up a whole. In other words, we should be extremely careful in universalizing the particular, even (or maybe especially) when it comes to sensation.

Martim waits to see if some unspecified amount of time, or some undefined danger, might help him divest himself of what is weighing upon him and what kept him captive in his world (17). To his immense displeasure he finds himself among old habits: “[H]e remembered in his body what a man thinking is like. A man thinking was that thing which, when it saw something yellow, would say with dazzling *élan*, ‘Something not blue’” (25). He has fallen into habits of thinking that identify one thing by excluding the possibilities of other shades that might insinuate their radiance on the thing being classified. Lispector seems to be critiquing the use of language that relies rather heavily on identifying an object, or even a thought, by classifying it in terms of what it is not, that is, by locating what makes it different from other objects, rather than seeking to approach the object on its own terms.

But how is it that her characters fall out of conventions of thinking and “knowing” in order to more closely apprehend that which I am calling (and Lispector herself has called) the thing itself? A characteristic trajectory in her works involves someone committing something base, a “crime,” and then going on to relieve her or himself of the responsibility of having committed the most “base” of crimes, whether the crime is trying to kill out of jealousy (as in *The Apple in the Dark*), or in eating the oozing white paste of a cockroach one has pinched in between doors (as in the case of *The Passion*). Elsewhere, particularly in her short stories, dazzling, inarticulate insight comes about through an encounter with something fairly common,

yet something that the protagonist is encountering for the first time, whether it be a blind man, a poor man with a deep, open wound, or a rhinoceros in a zoo. In the case of *The Apple in the Dark* it is through Martim's "act," which he goes to great extents to explain to himself. He emerges out of his act by an enormous psychic effort to let each object make itself manifest on its own terms, without relying on the distinctions that superficially distinguish it from another.

According to Fitz in "A Discourse of Silence," Lispector points out the "deceptive linkages between language and human consciousness [and] our ability to know what we are doing when we use words to discard or create identities for ourselves" (435). This is the driving theme of *The Apple in the Dark*. It is not so much the creating of an identity which is of interest to Lispector, but rather the steps that precede that process. Presumably, to create any kind of identity, there must be some level of comprehension about self and others. This is a problem for Martim. He says that "a person will even imitate comprehension—comprehension which would never have been invented except for the speech of others and words" (26). Although he remains befuddled he does not remain deceived, nor does he remain in a void. What he asserts instead is that "not understanding had suddenly given him the whole world" (27). What kind of world it is that he feels a part of is still unclear, as is what he will do with that world. He tries to feel an emotion normally associated with the word "crime" since, he says, that is what language expected of him: horror with crime, but he is unable to conjure up that ancient speech (27).

The effort to move out of the cultural consensus of language leads Martim to contemplate his frustration and his isolation from others in his community, that is, from those who did not seek to explore what it means to be a person or what they understand in the things they judge to be good or evil. Martim concludes:

with great interest and the essential lack of respect which is what makes a person imitate, I have only imitated intelligence. And along with him millions of men were copying with great effort the idea of what it was to be a man, along with him thousands of women were copying with great care the idea of what it was to be a woman, and along with him hundreds of people with good will were copying with superhuman effort the very face and idea of existence with the anguished concentration with which acts of good or evil are imitated, the daily fear of committing an act that is true, and therefore incomparable, and therefore inimitable, and therefore disconcerting.” (26)

This is why Martim is astonished at his “act.” Although he tells us that a person will imitate comprehension, he quickly follows that up with: “But there was still disobedience” (26). This disobedience is what others will refer to as his crime. For him, however, it was the “power of a gesture,” one that “reaches beyond us,” that “had suddenly given him a world so free that he was stunned at his victory” (29). What his act does for him is to allow him to separate his own sense of morality from that of others. He describes this process by explaining that with the single act he had made the enemies he had always wanted to have—other people. He refuses to go back to being his former self, he says, because if he returned to that former self “he would be obliged to become his own enemy” (28). What he realizes at this moment is that his act allows him to refuse to collaborate with other people or with himself. This is his first experience of freeing himself from the sway of imitation.

At this point in the novel we have not been told what it is about “imitation” or collaboration that is so problematic for Martim. What we discover through the narrative at this point (although it is unclear whether Martim discovers this) is that when he starts to explain “the peaceful nightmare of his deviation” to himself, he finds that each individual face has failed him

(30). As he tries to pinpoint the perversion, he is sidetracked, and then recalls that his father had always changed the subject, that even when the older man was dying he shifted his face to one side to look away. This is when the reader can finally get some grasp of what Martim is raging against: the inability of humans to face the difficult and yet inherent facets of life; he is raging against the distractions and excuses and inaccurate naming that allow us to avoid the painful and even the joyous. By misnaming or turning our face away, we are shunning the thing itself, and by extension, shutting down possibilities for deeper intimacies. This is Lispector's argument in this novel. What exile from community has allowed Martim is to move away from a false consensual collective, a collective that does not require that language interrogate what it suggests. Exile has allowed Martim to be nostalgic for something that has not yet been: an unmediated relationship with the world of things. Before Martim jumps to name, he wants to apprehend closely. Once he discovers something for himself, he very carefully sets about figuring out how to hold it in his mind, without altering his relationship with it. Likewise, when Lispector tells us, in *The Hour of the Star*, that perhaps God created a rhinoceros so that he could see what one looks like, we are now told "Martim was creating truth so that he could see it" (32). He comes to realize that he will be forced to invent what he wanted to have. The rest of the novel is essentially about Martim divesting himself of others' language, stripping his cognitive processes of the habits of "ancient speech," and starting again to approach things, beginning with the inorganic: stones, moving then to the organic: rats, then cows, and finally to himself and other people.

But the problem with this process of restructuring form is that we live in a world of forms that are employed in every encounter, indeed with every thought. Martim finds that there is nothing preventing others from dragging him back to convention simply by speaking to him. There is a fantastic absence of impediments to prevent people from speaking in the most evasive

of ways. He tells us that stones from everywhere brought the latest news—“all sitting the assemblage of innocence” (35). The narrator goes on to explain that there was a period when the world was as smooth as the skin on a fruit. There was no time limit that urged one to bite the fruit but slowly “heroism was being born” (35). The discourse on what led individuals to reach from undelineated survival toward heroism is followed by the most painful and obscured of narratives of indicating a movement from darkness, toward enlightenment, romanticism, and cynicism, and how much we needed them all:

People ran into each other in the dark; every light confused and blinded them, and truth was good only for one day. Then all our troubles arrived at a solution. We were lost among the solutions that had preceded us at every step. In just a few seconds an idea would become original; when we saw a photograph with light and shadows paving stones that were wet with rain, we would exclaim, tired and unanimously, This is very original.  
(35)

People had been earnestly searching for “solutions” (to what?). Meanwhile power became great, hands intelligent, and everybody became a tyrant (35). In his effort to identify a trajectory of human “development” (to try to figure out where language started to diverge from deeper truths that it avoids and misnames), Martim suddenly realizes that he has already implicated himself in the abuses of language in three ways. First, he recognizes that his thirst was stirring him like an ideal with all its attendant symbolism. Then he confesses that his improvised audience is not a cultured one (the stones) and so he was taking advantage of it as one does with one’s inferior. Lastly, he acknowledges that he was so pleased with the trajectory of his narrative about human progress that he had sold himself to a phrase that had more beauty than truth to it (35-36). Without intention, his words had gone beyond what he wanted to say. In other words, Martim, by

the fact that he could put together narratives that appeal to the senses, had acquired power over those who had less facility with words and less vanity. While striving to reach truth, he satisfies himself instead with beauty. Ironically, the argument for how language inhibits authentic communication has been beautifully made in language. Although the protagonist argues that beauty has the power to distract people from the truth, his use of beautiful phrases is the tool he uses to try to sway others to “see” his version of the truth. To use Kundera’s terms, Martim has fallen under the sway of politicized and erotized nostalgia, which keeps him at a distance from his own truths.

The argument for how truth is obscured by ideals of beauty and valor is developed in the second section of the novel. This section is preceded by the first section called “How a Man is Made.” If we follow the progression of how a man is made throughout the entire section, it is thus:

- (1) Man becomes impatient, and looks upon a world that is ready to be hunted (90).
- (2) He begins to feel himself superior to the plants.
- (3) He becomes proud of his impatience and rationalizes his anxiety; he is “growing” (90).
- (4) The man would sometimes grab the land like a person who owned land” (91).
- (5) When he thinks to himself that “extinct animals are legion” he begins to make up figures for how long ago animals that are extinct died off and begins “scratching on the ground,” or calculating (91).
- (6) The man had a sense beyond that of a rat, and one more “by which he verified what was happening—thought” (91).
- (7) Man, out of restlessness and unhappiness searches for an ideal (92).

(8) Man wants more than just a feeling: “with a new and unexpected hunger he wanted to give it a name this time” (116).

(9) Out of his riding astride a horse, which gave him height, and fright, and a determination, and a longer vision, he accepted his role to give a name to that defenseless, though audacious, thing. (117)

The language becomes so contradictory and ambiguous that the reader cannot tell what the audacious thing is. Martim then makes “use of the first fruits of the difficulty [. . .] which means that, that man had made himself” (117). The reader is left to wonder if the difficulty is in figuring out to what referents the words in his narrative relate and how the logic has gained an appeal. We are told then, that since man had created himself, he had come to need much more than he was (121).

What this development outlines is a progression that is initiated out of restlessness and translated into the urge to dominate, which is then called growth, which becomes calculable, and named as being something to aspire toward (an ideal), and, finally, ends with a man who has made himself but is now alone. In part, this “progression” is Lispector’s attempt to speculate about what came between an individual’s perception of something, and his or her articulation of it: namely, the desire for hierarchical power. The progression also points out how easily the urge for power and domination can be masked behind “ideals.” The consequences of the ability to dominate, while others cannot quite pinpoint the source of the power, ultimately leaves the subject without intimacy, she suggests. When Martim realizes that, since he is a man, he will need to express himself, he begins to need other people. But for what? The exposition is not so simple. To express himself, he ventures, “perhaps he would have to overpower Vitória; now that he was a man again, she had become a woman” (120). Out of nowhere, or what he calls

“recklessness,” he is overcome with another sensation or ideal: to be good. This ideal, however, is quickly replaced by the grandeur of assuming the victories of “mankind,” such that Martim can even be able to say “the greatest moment of my life is when Napoleon’s troops marched into Paris” (121). For what mattered was not whether he had done it, but that the gesture had been made. What Lispector is suggesting here is that individuals feel themselves so much a part of humankind, so much a part of collective history and progress that they assume that this history of progress is something they can claim as a part of their own growth. A man, however, picks up where the rest of humanity left off and thereby claims that he belongs to himself (121). That, according to Lispector, is how a man is born. While Martim has exiled himself from community, and while he is laboring through sustained melancholic maneuvers of developing self-reflexivity, and critiques of what language allows to be the collective consensus, he has not yet come up with a way of representing his critiques and insights to another. He has undergone much of the melancholic maneuver but still has nothing yet brought to consciousness that he can articulate. Lispector then points toward an individual’s drive to communicate that which s/he is just learning to apprehend.

By the second section of the novel, entitled “The Birth of the Hero,” Martim is very happy with himself for having reconstructed himself as a man. However, he feels inconsolable because he would never get his reward. He then feels the need to communicate with somebody, perhaps suggesting that part of what some people desire in “communication” is not so much connection or sharing of ideas and techniques, as it is admiration. We are then told that Martim begins to feel joy because he is experiencing lack, for “when a man is hungry he gets happy” (126). The narrative veers then toward Martim’s interactions with another female on the farm that he has

wandered onto. The problem that Martim faces now in his restlessness is: “what does a man do?” (131). To become a hero, these are the steps that the novel suggests:

- (1) One must judge oneself. To determine whether he is innocent or guilty he must resort to recalling whether his mother’s love was unconditional and whether his father’s ghost would hold out his hand to him (132). This raises the question of what criteria we typically use to judge.
- (2) He would therefore judge himself “using the speech of other people” (132). Of course to do this he would have to accept that he had committed a crime so he was prepared to resort to farce. He figures out how to ignore the feeling of mystification. His reason allows him to assert that he had not committed any useless crime; it was, rather, an act that destroyed one life in order to rebuild life on his own terms. He becomes proud of his crime.
- (3) He then knows how to make use of his pride: “From the rebuilding of the world within himself he would proceed to the rebuilding of a city” (140). To do this, his delicate task was “being objective” (141). Because the recasting of language into terms that allow him to praise his crime must not be perceived by the self as a deception, he reminds himself that he is afraid of occluding his instinct and becoming intelligent. So he conjures up a great need to hear a child cry, one that he could protect and comfort. The fact is, the narrator tells us, that he feels the need for giving “which is the form an unskilled person uses to ask for something” (142). What has happened is that his hunger has been transformed through his intelligence into a perceived need to protect. This is how a hero is born.

But Lispector's narrator interjects to comment: "Growth is full of tricks and self-derision and fraud; only a few people have the requisite dishonesty not to be nauseated," so that "with the fierceness of self-preservation Martim could no longer permit himself the luxury of decency or interrupt himself with sincerity" (143). As Martim imagines himself a hero through discursive obfuscation, he is lured further and further away from "decency" and "sincerity."

This is the point at which Martim reaches the stage that all of Kundera's male characters come to in their psychic growth. Arguably, this is also where Kundera's characters stop themselves: out of fear of the shame of impotence, out of an inability to ask for something, out of a sense that, to be a hero, or to have dignity, they must preserve a comprehensive sense of self, they allow themselves the luxury of insincerity. Martim does not want to preserve that "self" that has been shaped by the cultural consensus that values heroic action, empty pride, unquestioning belief in the politicized and eroticized. And while Kundera's narrators make it clear that politicized and eroticized nostalgia is treacherous for the honoring of memory, his characters are unable to divest themselves of the forces that the narrators are critiquing. So Martim pushes himself further toward a "painful approach" with the "difficulty of someone who is never going to arrive" (116) and yet drawing on the fruits of that difficulty until he feels that "[f]or the first time he was present when something that was happening was happening" (118). He experiences his knowledge "first hand." Martim watches himself being lured by the beauty of logical thought but always catches himself. Martim can shield himself from the falsities of cultural consensus by observing himself respond to loss and to what he himself experiences first-hand.

It is at this point in my discussion of *The Apple in the Dark* that I would like to come back to the central question of this entire study: What are the generative potentials of psychic pain that result from loss and a desire to hold on to the feeling for the object? I will look at pain

in the role of the development of both Martim and of Lispector's character G.H. in *The Passion*. I will subsequently outline an argument for what these processes of psychic transformation do for Martim and for G.H. and then, finally, explore what the unsettling of narrative convention in Lispector's texts does for the reader. The problem that we will be confronting is that if, as I have been suggesting, melancholia involves labor that ultimately results in an ability to articulate new visions and critiques of the forces of subjugation, neither Martim nor G.H. fit this model. They claim to become *less* able to articulate any sort of account or any social critique. However, since they will not use other people's language they go in an almost desperate quest to somehow otherwise account for their visions. The quest further undoes them.

The psychic pain that Martim suffers is less apparent than that of G.H. It is certainly less than that of Kundera's characters, of Woolf's Lily, or of Hoffman's Anzor, and Isabel. Very little is made explicit about Martim's loss. We know that the domestic and social world from which he has "liberated" himself is made up of people whom he does not particularly respect, because they imitate comprehension and choose evasion over inquiry. He feels alienated, impotent, and at odds with himself. He does not make explicit any particular attachment to his wife. What we can glean from his narrative is that there is one particular loss that he has suffered: the love of his father.

My discussion of loss outlined in this study so far would be problematic if I were to define loss only in the way that Said refers to exile: as the loss of a native place, something that once existed and of which one is now deprived. In the discussion of exile in *The Hour of the Star*, I argued that Macabéa cannot be said to be exiled because she never belonged to any native home. Similarly, Martim's loss of the father results from what-could-have-been but never was. It is the loss of an ideal. Macabéa is exiled from any possibility of attaining an ideal. This is

problematic in the material sense in that she is living on the edge of survival, in poverty, misery, and disease. It does not seem to be as much of a problem for her psychically, since she lives outside (exiled, as it were) from the lure and influence of the ideal of being a part of a center. Martim, on the other hand, understands he has been taught to imitate intelligence, so as to be a part of that ideal of belonging. But he decides to exile himself from that which connects him to others: language. At this point the reader might ask: Has Martim sustained some great loss that has propelled him through melancholic maneuvers that have allowed him to take himself as an object? I suggest he has, although the object of his loss is obscure. In his musings Martim refers to his father twice, first to tell us that in death his father turned away from him. “Try to imagine a person,” he tells us, “who did not have the courage to reject himself. Therefore he needed an act which would make others reject him, and he himself would not be able to live with himself after that” (30). At this point the reader can presume that Martim is either referring to himself, or to “man” in general. But then the narrator describes Martim’s reaction to what he has just said: “The man laughed with parched lips at the way he had used the trick of hiding himself behind the name of some other person, which had seemed very good to him at the moment, a stroke of genius” (31). At this point the reader could ask: Who is hiding behind whom? The original Portuguese does not make explicit that Martim used the trick to hide *himself*. A more accurate translation is that the man laughed at the use of a trick to hide oneself behind the title of another person (*ao usar o truque de se mascara sob o título de outra pessoa*, 45). It is not clear whether he is referring to his own lack of courage to reject himself or his father’s lack. All we know is that someone feels that it is clever to use a trick of hiding oneself behind the title of another person. Martim follows up his inner dialogue by saying he felt satisfied at being able again to trick someone. Since he is the only one privy to his thoughts, it must be he himself who he is

tricking, but about what we still do not know. What is clear is that his father judged him (or would judge him) harshly. We know this because in the section “The Birth of a Hero,” when Martim decides he must begin to judge himself, he says he must be innocent or guilty. He asks whether his mother would love him without understanding him, whether the ghost of his father would hold out his hand to him. Now, he says, he would judge himself using the speech of others. And so he would have to judge himself guilty, he says, trembling, still covered with wounds (132). Of course to do this he would have to accept that he had committed a crime, so he was prepared to resort to farce, by creating a narrative about the necessity of killing off one life in order to rebuild another. It could be argued that the rejection by and then death of both the father and the mother is what initiated Martim’s sense of loss, and in the turning against self, he is unable to preserve his nostalgia for them without having to compromise his sense of self. He toys with the temptation to return to the life of imitation to avoid the pain, but ultimately decides to continue to let himself be undone and to confront a vast alterity in order to remake himself.

### **G.H. and Martim: Transformed in the Sheltering**

Before questioning what generative effects ultimately arise from this process for Martim, I will focus on what kind of psychic pain initiated the transformation for G.H., in order to keep consistent a discussion of how loss can bring about a greater capacity to remake oneself and to honor that which has been lost. *The Passion* may or may not be about honoring something that is lost, as much as it clearly is about allowing what the narrator in *The Passion* refers to a “consubstantiation” that can accommodate new visions about that which was lost.

In the case of this story the protagonist is faced with a horror that she herself has initiated. The narrative begins, however, with her looking back on the event and questioning how she can

go back and forth between the ungrounded subjectivity and the person that must function in society. This conundrum is what we would have followed Martim through, had we kept him in our vision, after he is led away to jail. G.H. tells us that she has always been afraid of passion; she is afraid of suffering and attachment and crucifixion and love, because “a world wholly alive has a Hellish power” (14). The opening section of the book locates her looking back on the “disorganization, the dehumanization” of the day before and, significantly, able to apprehend and approach it once again in order to relate her tale. She then begins to describe her state of being, just before encountering the event that precipitated a rupture, in terms similar to those Martim uses to describe how he recognized his farce when confronting the death of his father: lips parched from thirst. Martim’s farce at that time points to how the beauty of rationalization, of well-constructed words can allow the rational human to mystify the pain that lies behind what one is not prepared to face. Martim is not yet ready to face his father’s rejection. He is not ready to judge himself by his father’s terms, i.e., “using the speech of other people” (132). So he decides that he has not committed a crime. It is not a useless crime, that is.

Like Martim, G.H. alludes to how people think of, or refer to, her and finally, also like Martim, she refers to an “enforced objectivity” of struggling with something that was other than herself (18). Like Martim who feels judged under the speech of his parents, G.H. refers to her lack of self-pardon. Perhaps she senses the same obstacle that Kundera’s characters come up against, unpardonable shame, and lack of hospitality for the awkward, emergent self. She provokes in the reader a more extreme sense of facing something horrible, of facing that which the body cannot sustain, of a total breakdown in meaning. Like Macabéa, G.H. vomits at her sense of total abjection.

The first thing that creates a sense of abjection for the protagonist is to see indecipherable drawing on the interior wall of her own house that someone else has left there. She questions whether this means that the inscriber has judged her severely or not. Does the writing on the wall indicate that someone hates her? Or does it indicate that she herself has been the source of hatred? She begins to feel “the first signs of collapse of subterranean limestone caves that were falling in under the weight of stratified archeological layers” (36). It is then that she comes face-to-face with an ancient cockroach. Not only is she terrified of this one horror, but wonders how many more there can be that may appear in her house. Rather than face the horror, she first chooses to hide from the roach by closing her eyes. She then is overcome with the definitive need to liberate herself by way of a base and violent act: she desires to kill, she says. With that she commits her act and slams the door on it cutting it mostly in half while it continues to writhe and ooze. This sight causes a further breakdown in meaning for G.H.

So far we have seen the parallels between Martim and G.H. in their psychic preparation for something that will be transformative. They have both committed an act of violence against some form of life. The ways that they describe their dehumanization or deheroification are different, however, as are the respective transformations, themselves. What G.H. seeks and comes close to is a depersonalization that she describes as the “loss of everything that can be lost, while still being” (168). She wants to remove everything from her identity that makes her recognizable or visible to others in some intelligible category. She refers to depersonalization as “the great objectification of oneself” (168). This, we can assume, allows her to take herself as an object of re-creation. But depersonalization in Lispector’s texts never comes about by will or meditation. It is always precipitated by an event, usually something that inspires horror. The protagonist reluctantly chooses to face the pain. She will not try to console herself away from it.

She tells us that “[t]ranscendence is a transgression. But staying within what there is, that forces me not to be afraid” (74). Allowing the pain to do its work is not about facing one’s fears, however. She elaborates: “To transcend pain is the highest cruelty” (148). And again: “Transcending is a way out” (77). By the use of this phrase we can presume she is alluding to a loss of opportunity for self-transformation. Instead she is in search of “the courage to have another morality, so empty that I don’t understand it myself and it frightens me” (148). When she looks back on the transformation that was precipitated by the pain, she refers to the loss as if it were a third leg that positioned her so she could find herself “without even having to look” (4). She takes this opportunity not to “find herself” but to become undone and recollected by looking into rather than evading the agony. And yet, she tells us that setting off without the third leg is like waking up in a stranger’s house. She confesses that she will have to take care not to let another third one grow back surreptitiously like a weed, “and then call that protective leg a ‘truth’” (6). Like Lispector, we can ask why it takes horror or pain or violence to initiate the kind of “consubstantiation” that the protagonist has allowed. The author has G.H. ask herself, “Was that the way the most powerful things happened? Would something always, always have to be apparently dead for the really living to happen?” (159). Oddly enough, Lispector has already had another protagonist, in “The Misfortunes of Sophia,” provide the very answer. Here the child narrator tells us that “Life being born was so much more bloody than dying [. . .] what I had seen was capable of blinding the inquisitive” (23).

And yet there is something about the narrative of *The Passion* that indicates that G.H. is still being evasive and is substituting the horror of the cockroach for the pain of loss, specifically of a beloved. It is not until late in the narrative that the reader can get any sense of a particular loss, and the references to a man are always interjected without preemption. She is evasive in

telling us exactly what was lost or why it was lost, but she indicates that it was all too fine for her human foot, so instead “I sought beauty” (149). Midway through the novel, when G.H. is entertaining the thought of the greatest horror of all, tasting the cockroach, she suddenly interjects: “I had tasted a man’s eyes with my mouth and could tell he was crying by the saltiness” (69). She goes back to the cockroach but a few pages later indicates,

“Oh, but whom could I go to for help, if you too,” I then thought in the direction of a man who once was mine, “if you too won’t be able to help me now. For, like me, you tried to transcend life, and thus you got beyond it. But I’m not going to be able to do that anymore, I’m going to have to know, and I’ll have to go on without you, even though I have tried to ask you for help.” (74)

Again she returns to the cockroach, and then suddenly says, “I remember you, when I kissed your man-face, slowly, slowly kissed it and when the moment came to kiss your eyes—I remember that then I tasted the salt in my mouth and that the tear salt in your eyes was my love for you” (81). Allowing the pain from the loss of the man to run through her provides the freedom for her to allow more deeply hidden (if unnamable) pain to emerge and pass through her.

In this case one memory of loss grasps hold of another, deeper pain of loss. After indicating that she thought of the cockroach as female “since whatever is caved in at the middle must be female” (85), she indicates that she needs to be received. She then calls out, “Mother, I have taken a life and there are no arms to receive me now” (86). She follows this by reflecting that it is “as if saying the word ‘Mother’ had released a thick white part in me,” which is then followed by a violent attack of vomiting, then relief, fresh and cool, and then no more fear, not even fright (86).

A reading that suggests that the protagonist has been propelled into what she calls “inner metamorphosis” due not exclusively to the horror of facing the oozing cockroach, but as an event that triggered her having to face the pain of loss of specific individuals in her life, would be easy to miss. Because she calls on an “unnamed presence” (presumably the reader) and because she resorts to prayer, including the word “amen” when calling to her mother, it is easy to confuse the referents. But close attention to what the narrator is confessing, even if evasively, allows me to compare how her loss, her melancholia, and her exile from community, apprehend and yet vary from that which thwarts the melancholic process in Kundera’s characters. G.H., Martim, Woolf’s Lily, and Hoffman’s Isabel all allow themselves to be undone and transformed by loss such that they are able to articulate new visions, to form social critiques, and to become more hospitable to alterity. We have already seen how Martim and G.H. describe their respective process of dehumanization, and I would like to now turn to G.H.’s description of the melancholic process that has undone her. Finally, I will outline what the transformation offers both G.H. and Martim.

When the narrator of *The Passion* first questions how one transmits experience to another, the experience that she is referring to is that of facing a psychically disruptive horror. She describes this as a “disorganization.” The narrator quickly admits that the use of this term implies a prior organization. She does not want to be grounded and prefers to lose herself, because finding herself is “the lie that I live on” (4). She prefers disillusion, which is the “fear of no longer fitting into a system” (5). She fears her new outlook won’t make sense. But to try to make sense for another person would keep her in a system that she aspires to look beyond (7). Her new ignorance has become sacred for her (8). There is a deferral and substituting of terms that she tries to employ to describe the formless movement she has undergone. The narrator keeps switching terms to describe her dehumanization; she admits to “naming without knowing

its name” (11), in order to “translate the unknown into a language that I don’t know, and not even understand what the signals amount to” (13). Like Martim, G.H. indicates that language separates her from living matter, since language is law and order, and she desires to loosen herself from the law “even though [she} suspected that [she] would be going into the inferno of living matter” (51). To approach the object of living matter (before anything has been made of it) the narrator then backs out of the commitment to this phrase and tries substitutions. She tells us “I am close to seeing the core of life” (52), which she later calls “living neutrality” (90), and then “the plasma of God” (92), or “prehuman divine life,” and a “singeing newness” (93), coming around to tell us that she “came, orgiastically, to taste the taste of the things’ identity” (95). She struggles between her desperate quest for the right words and the demand for silence. Ironically, in a novel, what we learn from its author is that: “It is through the foundering of the voice that one hears for the first time one’s own silence and that of others and of things, and accepts it as a possible language . . . where pain isn’t something that happens to us but what we are” (169). In the foundering, in the inability to name that which G.H. is trying to describe, the reader is urged to accommodate the narrator’s inability to name that which she is most urgently trying to describe. What matters for G.H. is that psychic matter is shifting. According to her “there is a profound alchemy taking place inside of me, and it was forged in the fire of Hell. And that gives me the greater right: the right to err” (140). G.H. is the narrator that Woolf, perhaps, would have welcomed had she been able to live longer and continue to write. As I will argue, the inability to name is not a failure of cognitive or narrative mastery, but rather, a ploy to provoke the reader to question the stability of language and to experience the freedom in erring. Both Martim and G.H. have removed themselves from the politicizing and eroticizing sway of language such that their nostalgia for that which has been lost is their own experience, as far removed from cultural

construction as is possible. They are both working with how to make language express emergent truths, and are willing to err over and over until the text seems true to them. The larger implication is that the reader is experiencing this play as well.

At the point in *The Passion* when the narrator argues that she has the right to err, she has also implicated the reader who either is “holding her hand” or standing at a distance in skepticism. That reader might ask: If a narrator is taking advantage of being able to err and is unable to translate her own experience in the course of telling her tale, what gives her the authority to speak—and what kind of narrative can we expect? Of course, this question just puts the reader in dialogue with herself. Who gives *anyone* the authority? Lispector can almost hear our questioning. The narrator responds: “But why me? But why *not* me? If it hadn’t been me, I wouldn’t have known, and since it was me, I found out—that’s all there is to it, nothing more. What was it that had called me: madness or reality?” (62). The last question seems to be irrelevant to her. What she believes is that her calling is to be a witness: “does the truth have no witness? is to be not to know? If a person doesn’t look and doesn’t see, does the truth still exist?” (85). What she may be suggesting is that it is not the ability to precisely name that matters, but rather the desperate quest in the search. More important than a description of the thing, perhaps, is a description of how individuals go about disrobing themselves in order to be exposed most closely to what they are beholding. What matters, after all, is contact. A name is nothing but a filler. As G.H. tells us, “it is I who should keep myself from giving the things a name. A name is an accretion and it inhibits contact with the thing. The name of the thing is an interval for the thing” (133). And just as she has earlier told us that transcendence is a transgression, the highest cruelty, she confesses that to not carry out her unknown law, her process of unknowing, is to commit original sin against life (89). It is rather difficult to identify one solid position or point

that is being advocated here. In fact, if this discussion were to rely on the premises laid out so far—that confrontation with pain and horror or facing that which compromises our sense of integrity opens up possibilities for self-reflexivity and the articulation of a “nascent political text”—Lispector’s *oeuvre* would repudiate this argument. After G.H. and Martim face their losses, they claim to become *less* able to articulate any sort of account or any social critique. But the reader sees that by divesting themselves of the authority to use language in consensual ways, these characters are urgently driven to account for their new subjectivities. What they seem to suggest is that it is the questioning and the desire for authentic representation that further undoes them. It is in this separation from what we could consider a native place (the cultural collective that uses language as its modality of recognition) that these characters remain in exile until they are able to apprehend the ineffable thing itself and come back into community with that bodily knowledge. As several of Lispector’s narrators tell us, they write with their bodies.

In interviews and in her newspaper articles and features (called *crônicas*), Lispector confesses first of all that she wants to do something about the horrible injustices of the world, but that all she can do is write. She also says that she is writing as if she is trying to save somebody’s life: probably her own, she says. So she takes G.H. through this horror of facing the most revolting fire of Hell. It is not enough that the protagonist apprehends God’s plasma, as she calls it; Lispector wants G.H.’s struggles to awaken the consciousness of others. G.H. says, “if you can find out through me. . . then learn from this one who has had to be laid completely bare and lose all her suitcases with the engraved initials” (107).

But what can we say finally comes from this experiment in “dehumanization”? I suggest that G.H. learns two things that Lispector would like to share with the reader. The first is that grace is not something that one must strive for, nor is it given, or awarded: “I know that now: the

state of grace is inherent” (139). And because it is inherent it does not ask of us to plan projects of self-improvement or good will. Hope is a deferral. She wants to divest herself of all hope in favor of just the sensation of being alive, and yet she confesses that “abandoning all that hurts like separating from a yet-unborn child” (140).

The second thing G.H. learns is to open up toward closer contact with others. And so, while G.H. chronicles the horror and the psychic transformation, she is not singularly interested in self-enrichment. She, like many of Lispector’s characters including Martim, Macabéa, and Lori in *An Apprenticeship, or the Book of Delights*, seeks that transformation of emergent subjectivity in order to connect more authentically with others. And, as is typical of Lispector, theme is not part of content, but rather form. Most of *The Passion* is narrated from the first person singular point of view. We know very little about G.H.’s life, her family, or her community. She confesses that her testimony to what has happened to her could be made easier if she pretended to write for someone. She then says she will be able to accept the notion that she has lost herself only if she can imagine that someone is holding her hand (9). This is followed by “I need to hold this hand of yours” (10). So she tells us “I am inventing your presence” (11). She calls out early in the narrative for someone to take her hand. Midway through the novel she is referring either to the reader whose imaginary hand she is holding, or to some other person as “my precious,” which repeats itself throughout the rest of the narrative as “my love” and “love of mine”(59, 66, 71, 95, 138). She is summoning a community. Although she has a few times referred to herself in the third person as G.H., the point of view has remained, for the most part, in first person singular. As she becomes undone she includes someone else more closely in her memory of experience when she tells us, “Only because of the cockroach do I know that all that the two of us had before was already love. What had to happen was for the cockroach to hurt me

like someone pulling out my fingernails—and then I couldn't stand the torture any longer and confessed, and now I am telling it all" (107). At that point she says that the two of them were always afraid of her solemnity, and that they hid what they knew. This is followed by a confession which emerges out of her vision of primordial cockroaches:

in the light of the two cockroaches' love, there came to me a memory of a true love that I once had and didn't know I had—for love was then what I understood from a word. But there is something that must be said, that must be said. But there is something that must be said. I am going to tell you what I have never told you before, maybe that's what's missing: to have told [. . .] I am going to tell you now that I love you I know that I have said that before and it was true when I said it then as well, but only now am I really saying it. I need to say it before I . . . Oh but it is the cockroach that is going to die, not me! I don't need this condemned person's letter from a cell. (108-09)

The narrative is confused in its attempts to distinguish between particular losses, and even between the horrors of facing the death of the cockroach and the protagonist's own imagined imminent death. This is not a loss of cognitive or narrative mastery by the author. The narrative confusion attempts to translate the experiences of fear of loss that lead to the greater fear of death. G.H. then goes on to describe what precipitated the separation: the lovers thought that when nothing was happening that they were empty and tranquil, that love had ended; they called it a lack of love. But instead she sees now that the love was a huge flower opening up, all full of itself (112). The inability to name that which was between them resulted in their misapprehensions of their experiences.

It is clear from each of these confessions that G.H. is struggling with the remorse and pain of the loss of a beloved. Misnaming precipitated part of that loss. It is also clear that there

have been distinct events of loss that have propelled her into her consubstantiation, and that the alchemy produced by pain was prompted by the cockroach, but is not wholly attributable to the horror of the roach or the act of having killed it. She describes the metaphorical descent into Hell thus: “I ate life and was eaten by life. I understood that my kingdom is of this world. And I understood it through the Hellish side of me. For within myself I saw what Hell is like” (112). Having been able to face her worst fear, having allowed herself to become undone in her sense of morality and comprehension, she is able to offer a space for loving others, for connection. She is also able to nostalgically carry the beauty and remorse for a wasted love affair without negating it. Her increased need for community that emerges out of self-reflexivity is not something that G.H. makes explicit, but it is discernible by the increased use of first person plural in the late part of the narrative: “it had to be our great security, just as desiring our father or our mother is so inevitable that it has to have been our only basis” (138). She is speaking of herself as part of a community of humankind. For, she tells us, we are each “made out of that plasma” (139) and “we are always saved” (139). Rather than wanting a vision of some essential thing or even to know her own desires and fears she now looks wider: “let me understand us...because we put ourselves at risk” (140). The perceived boundaries between herself and others are becoming more porous. What she comes to feel is that our helplessness and vulnerability are universal. She speculates, “It’s as if the future stopped emerging and we can do nothing about it, we are deficient” (140). By the last paragraph of the novel she tells us that what she has learned is

The world interdepended with me—that was the confidence I had reached: the world interdepended with me, and I am not understanding what I say, never! never again shall I understand what I say. For how will I be able to speak without the word lying for me?

how will I be able to speak except timidly, like this: life is itself for me. Life is itself for me, and I don't understand what I am saying. And, therefore, I adore.... (173)

Her last revelation is that people need one another but cannot continue to lie through language. And that moving out of language allows her to feel that life is a state of grace offering itself to her. Life is. And this revelation can only be spoken of with the greatest care, timidly, without understanding, in order to love. Referring to the dark night of St. John of the Cross's testament "The Dark Night of the Soul," in which his soul detaches itself from worldly aspirations and associations, Lispector's narrator interjects to tell us that when the saint reaches his own salvation, "the great vastness itself, thousands of people are enlarged by his vastness and live on it, and he loves others just as much as he loves his own terrible vastness, he loves his opening-out with lack of pity for himself" (162). And while G.H., more isolationist than saint who will reach thousands of people, is able to reside in the terrible vastness, it is Lispector herself who will reach the thousands of people.

The paradox of G.H.'s revelation is that we have already seen Martim get to this point, and then castigate himself for allowing the beauty of his phrases to stand in for "truths." He is not able to use his truths with anyone other than Vitoria. He turns himself over to the authorities and resigns himself to making a new composition in prison. In Lispector's work an individual is deeply transformed through suffering, and while Lispector makes the argument that a keener use of language can lead to deeper intimacies, most of her protagonists do not show themselves in dialogue with others. Few of Lispector's characters experience love or connection or community. G.H., toward the end of the narrative, does not know what she will do to be able to shelter and reveal what she calls this "primary life" (156). She also realizes at that point that the hand she has been holding, while it has provided comfort to her in her journey, has acted to guide another

through the journey. But she also realizes: "I am trying to save you, but I cannot. For redemption lies in the thing itself" (157). So she cannot do for others what she has done for herself, but can only relate to her readers what it took for one individual to "approach . . . the divine? the real?" (161). But through her own journey she divines that living itself brings about a great good, that living one's own vastness is a gift to others and that nonhumaness is the radiating center of a neutral love in radio waves (165). She stops herself once more and asks whether her simple glory would be made into just another accretion, into another beauty that masks the horror of the neutral thing itself? Will she try to make herself recognizable by others, thereby making herself superficially recognizable to herself?

How will she avoid the lure of convention, of ideals, heroics, the need for recognition? After her descent into pain and self-torment she claims, "But now I have a morality that dispenses with beauty. I shall have to bid a nostalgic good-bye to beauty. Beauty was a soft enticement to me, it was the way I, weak and respectful, adorned the thing to be able to bear its core. But now my world is the world of the thing that before I would have called ugly or monotonous.... I would have called it violent before (149-150). This is another paradox of Lispector's work. She wants to dispense with the lure of heroics which includes the ability to convince others that what one is professing is aesthetically pleasing in the beauty of its logic, in its potential to affect readers as music does. If a writer does not adorn the subject, how will the reader follow? I suggest that Lispector is asking us to witness her fragmented and un-alluring struggle with language, to allow her, as Woolf would have it, "the freedom to think of things in themselves."

Before looking at what kind of communion is possible after one rids one's mind and social practices of the "accretions of language," it is useful to refer back to what it is that an

individual who has allowed him or herself to become undone by pain, fear, and melancholia can offer. In Lispector's texts that person who undergoes suffering and rejects the communal consensus becomes alienated. She or he becomes an outsider, perhaps comparable to the Outsider that Woolf describes in *Three Guineas*: someone who "by the means that a different sex, a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those differences have placed within our reach" (113). The Outsiders begin by experimenting through not-repeating the "fashionable and hideous jargon of the moment" (137). New words and methods must be found, she argues (143) to "discover what are the unwritten laws; that is the private laws that should regulate certain instincts, passions, mental and physical desires" (184).

If one of Woolf's ongoing projects was to explore how humans can perceive reality and represent their unique visions without repeating cultural inheritances indiscriminately, the aim was that people might more intimately know the other, and thus contribute differently to building a community that values freedom, peace, privacy, and beauty, rather than decorum, hierarchy, presumption, and dominance. How a woman can perceive realities that represent her unique vision is what Lispector is trying to discover. Both writers equivocate when it comes to how one apprehends one's own unique vision of what Woolf calls in *A Room of One's Own* a lucid human perception. This is what Lily achieves in the end of *To the Lighthouse*. This is what Lispector's many protagonists are in search of, although at pains to translate. What we see in both Woolf's Lily and Lispector's Martim and G.H. is that they are transformed by their urges to translate authentic experience. This study has used Butler's discussion of melancholia in *The Psychic Life of Power* that describes the psychic maneuver whereby the subject, turning toward the self with a vengeance, enacts itself into being by opposing and transforming the social terms by which it itself is spawned. By first sheltering the lost object, Lily, Martim, and G.H. have been

transformed in the sheltering, or, as Butler describes, “producing and strengthening the conscience, leading to moral reflexivity” (180-81). Both Woolf and Lispector outline the conditions that provide a subject with the ability to translate the “humming noise” of lucid human perception (12). The utmost condition to do this, according to Woolf, and arguably Lispector, is the “freedom to think of things in themselves” (*Room of One’s Own* 39).

In *The Passion* we witness a protagonist who has allowed herself to experience an unsettling loss of sense of coherence, a loss of self. Her problem remains: how to use an unrecognizable, foreign sense of self to commune with others. In *The Passion* there is no dialogue with others that could indicate what kind of person G.H. will be in relation. *The Apple in the Dark*, however, does give us a few scenes whereby we can witness how a depersonalized individual communicates with another.

Martim, who is arguably the main character in *The Apple in the Dark*, is alone, much like G.H., in his quest to divest himself from the superficial recognitions of other people, including those of his father and mother and the juridical community he lives in. *The Apple in the Dark* is an evolutionary look at what makes the individual feel like a part of evolution or progress, and then how these inherited individual and communal values propel that sense of individual progress. Earlier I indicated that Martim does not specifically locate what it is about the community he belonged to that has inspired such derision, but that he continually refers to what he is rejecting: imitation. I also described his desire to free himself from the constraints, contradictions, and falsities of his domestic and social world. Before examining how *The Apple in the Dark* presents us with one of Lispector’s foremost instances of a character that is able to transform himself and still invite communion, I would like to address one of the social pressures that Martim is revolting against and which prevents communion.

As critic Antonio Ladeira points out in “Patriarchal Violence and Brazilian Masculinities in Clarice Lispector’s *A Maça no Escuro*,” Lispector’s work has long been analyzed for its existentialist themes, and more recently, for its problematizing of the relationship of language to meaning. Few critics, however, have addressed issues of national identity, in particular the role of gender relations in Brazil to which Lispector calls our attention. Ladeira’s claim is that the representations of masculinity in *The Apple in the Dark* “are presented and denounced as violent obligations which are destructive to both characters [Martim and Vitoria], although the characters themselves do not seem to acknowledge the gendered dimension of their sufferings” (691). Martim leaves the city, where the narrator says that sacrifices are expected both of unhappily powerful men, and unhappy, oppressed women. According to Ladeira, Vitoria’s farm is a “no man’s land where gender subversion and inversion could offer liberating new possibilities for all” (694). Each of the three main characters is offered new possibilities for shaping their erotic valences. Ermelinda, Vitoria’s cousin, becomes the pursuer. She uses Martim to develop a text that exposes her heightened preoccupations with death, as well as to discover what it feels like to temporarily acquire the company of a man. Vitoria develops the most intimate and exposed testimony of her past, and of her perceived gifts, and fears. She also learns the art of dialogue. Martim is happy to have someone else make decisions for an entire estate such that he neither feels oppressed, nor feels the need to oppress.

The problem in *The Apple in the Dark* with how men are required to imitate the masculine is that there are contradictory demands. On one hand, Ladeira notes, a man who is betrayed by a woman is expected by all of society to uphold his honor and punish the woman for her breach of fidelity. The punishment should be severe and public since the destruction of his honor is public. On the other hand, the law, written by men, prohibits the use of violence to

punish the offender. Society has upheld contradictory gender roles for men without acknowledging anywhere the inconsistencies.

After Martim commits his “act” he flees the clutches of the law. What he first sees as a foundational act that would set him free, ends up ironically being nothing but an imitation of what is expected of him as a man. His act of freedom is also what would land him in prison. What does free him from the trajectory of “how a man is made” and “the birth of a hero” is that he enters a space where he can choose not to play a masculine role. Martim’s response to Vitoria’s masculinized role as overseer, employer, and autocrat is a feeling of relief at his ability not to have to exercise power. He accepts Vitoria’s authority and is relieved at having to play neither victim nor oppressor. Ladeira claims that Martim rejoices in the fact that, on the farm, the self-destructive masculine duties are not being enforced (Ladeira 696). Vitoria, on the other hand, is surprised to find that her sensation of power was so great that she felt it to be uncomfortable and useless. While Ladeira claims that Martim’s recently acquired “femininity” empowers him, he suggests that Vitoria’s falsely liberating masculinity “weakens” her (697). In contrast, what I argue in this next section is that by both characters countering what we have conventionally thought of as “gendered” strengths (in this case a man becoming feminized, and a woman, masculinized) and owing to their suffering and their struggles to reject a coherent sense of self, they are able to reach a place of communion unlike any other characters in the work of Lispector. What Martim realizes at the end of the novel is that the only thing that will redeem him from the guilt of imitation is to learn how to love the world in a new way, and to love others on his own terms. He goes so far as to speculate that a new way of loving could even change all of men, even if it takes centuries. This is also what G.H. learns; however, we do not see her taking that lesson out into the world.

*The Apple in the Dark* includes one of the only instances of a Lispector character successfully communicating with another after they have dehumanized themselves. While Lori, of *An Apprenticeship, or the Book of Delights*, learns that she can only surrender to love after she has surrendered completely to her own undoing and emergent becoming, we can only guess at what her relationship with her lover looks like because the narrator describes it. The dialogue between Lori and her lover are not as violently un-presupposing as the dialogue between Martim and Vitoria. The level of deep communion between these two characters in *The Apple in the Dark* is unsurpassed in Lispector's work. The intimacy is evident in the dialogue between Martim and Vitoria. Their conversation is the first and only instance in all of Lispector's work that shows two people taking each other on their own terms and not trying to "understand" each other. Martim provides a dialogic space for Vitoria to describe herself, to find what she was not able to do when she went to the island to find herself after her father's death. This is arguably the most hopeful of all moments in Lispector's work. In much of her work dialogue is used to show how one character consistently misunderstands and oppresses another. As Fitz points out, in most of her stories Lispector shows in dialogue how spoken language represents essentially the lowest common denominator of human linguistic interaction. Character after character, as he suggests "succumb[s] to truncation as intellectually valid human beings" ("Discourse" 427-28).

While this is the case for most of Lispector's female protagonists, this is not the case for Martim, who is fleeing conventions that require him to act according to masculinized norms. Martim's emerging sense of self, a self that Ladeira has characterized as "feminized," is able to find a community that will support it. His ability to reflect, to act, and to enter into dialogue with others comes out of a hard-won struggle. To divest himself of masculinized roles he must divest himself of language. He then builds a non-masculine-acting self by stepping very cautiously in his use of

language. His voice is described by the narrator as sweet and of little virility (*A Maça* 316). And yet it is not a feminized voice that assumes a subordinate position. Instead it opens a deep sense of communion with his interlocutor.

In one of the first scenes of dialogue between Martim and Vitoria, she is astounded at his way of speaking. Though he has said very little so far she feels as if he has dared to pervert some “sacred accepted law that man did not show himself clearly [. . .] There he was, completely on the surface and completely exposed” (60). She thinks then that the only recognizable boundary between them is the final barrier that the body makes. Deep into the novel, after Martim has had months of practice with his new way of being in the world, Vitoria is impelled to engage him in conversation. She is terrified and excited to realize that, after all, she had not been talking to herself, that she was not alone. She says that at that moment everything around her feels infected with the possibility of her becoming real (271). She is thrilled by the possibility that he could understand her and not understand her at the same time “as if that was the only way it could have been” (272). She describes herself as initiated into the delights of conversation and describes their exchange like addicts who recognize each other and see themselves in each other. Vitoria feels that she knows him deeply. The word “intimacy” is then employed in her mind repeatedly. Though she assures us that in her conversation she does not know to what she is referring and neither does he, “but if it were not that way, how poor our mutual understanding would be, our comprehension made with words that are lost, and words that have no meaning” (279).

Lispector is again pointing to the notion that if individuals withstand the harrowing experiences of grief and the letting go of the pretenses of community inherent in language, that characters can reach deeper levels of intimacy. These encounters may not necessarily count as “understandings.” At this point in the dialogue (and in the plot), Vitoria no longer feels herself to be

that deeply untransmissible thing. Instead she is described as so sincere that the veins on her neck were bulging from the effort of telling the truth. And while it may seem that what we have seen so far is not Martim using his emerging capacity to communicate his new mode of being, but rather, the witnessing of what it could be like to offer another a space to speak. Vitoria, who feels apprehended by the intimacy that she experiences in the conversation that relies on his questioning of her and engaging her, speaks her story for the first time to anyone. Martim never steps in to appropriate or truncate her voice. He feels when she is talking that, from now on, he wants things that are equal to each other, not different from each other (283). In their conversation both is asking the other “Who are you?” without grasping for an answer.

What the dialogue between Martim and Vitoria shows is that if the subject is able to divest her or himself of facile categories, of inherited values, of assumptions of knowing, before receiving another’s alien confession, there are unimaginable opportunities for intimacy. When we finally see Martim engage in the dialogue by means other than listening, that is, in his responses to her confessions, he is described as intimate and sensual. He suggests to her that there are techniques for asking that invite more authentic responses, because receiving a direct request frightens people, although they are itching to give something. “In conversation,” he tells her, “one wrong step, and suddenly a walking man looks like a monkey!” (291). He is described subsequently as emotional, as letting himself go in a kind of generalized love (305). At that point she feels so well understood that it feels obscene to her. She then realizes that it is her responsibility to invent what truths will be hers. She realizes “everything is yours if you have the courage—” (306). But Vitoria is afraid of beauty and of charity; she says to herself that it’s too late to learn how to be loved, so she turns away from him and responds to herself with “No.” Martim does not turn away. He finds instead that “he was loving himself for the first time, which meant that he was ready to love others, to love us, who are

given ourselves as a sample of what the world is capable of; and himself, who had just proved it” (317). He reaches the apple in the dark and recognizes it with fingers that love had made clumsy. He no longer needs language to tell him what an apple is. Even if it is in the dark.

What Cixous points out about Lispector’s characters in *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, is that they go beyond socially and culturally legitimate spaces, but they are ever concerned about being received back into community. Martim has created a small community. While Cixous begins by arguing that Martim, realizing he will never be understood, allows himself to be interpreted and reduced according to reductive logic (and while Cixous goes so far as to state that *The Apple in the Dark* is a tragic book in that it “represents, in Lispector’s writing project, a lesser stage than that of *The Passion According to G.H.*”), she undermines her argument when she begins to suggest that Martim is not Adam: “he is full of Eve” (77). Martim has undone himself to the extent that he can become another; he welcomes the feminine. Because of Martim and Vitoria’s abilities to reverse gender roles and to find intimacy that lies outside of “understanding,” I cannot imagine this novel to be tragic in any way. Cixous aptly notes that Vitoria cannot take the great leap, but Martim will. She again tries to insist that *The Apple in the Dark* is not as “triumphant” as *The Passion*. But one wonders why she is trying to convince herself or us that this is the case when a few pages later she begins to describe how Vitoria and Martim learn how to let themselves be absorbed without destroying the other; they learn how to risk oneself to the other. There follows what Cixous refers to as a “dance in space that inscribes proximity and distance” (82), finally arriving at Cixous’ description of “perfect communication” between the man and the woman. Close to the end of her discussion of *The Apple in the Dark*, Cixous declares that in dialogue “Vitoria and Martim make love incessantly. They do not stop. It happens in every possible way, with slight displacements” (96). If this is not a triumphant moment in Lispector’s work, I don’t know what could be. What this scene

shows is that, even though characters must divest themselves of all that make up “identity” in order to approach individual truths that, if communicated, can lead to intimacies, there are slight possibilities for communion. This is her only work that convincingly makes this argument.

Several critics, including Cixous, have suggested a teleological development of characters in Lispector’s work. Joana of *Close to the Wild Heart* (Lispector’s first published novel) and the characters of her short stories are “evolving” through their Joycean epiphanies. Cixous argues that *The Apple in the Dark* presents a lesser stage than *The Passion*: “which was written at a later date” (63). If we were to assume that Lispector’s characters represent Lispector’s own spiritual development in relation to the world and others, we would then assume that her last published novel would represent some sort of height or development of form, or theme, or character. If, in her novel published then five years after *The Passion* had Lori of *An Apprenticeship, or the Book of Delights* (published five years after *The Passion*), who is in a solitary pursuit of self-awareness and authenticity before surrendering herself to her lover, we might assume that Lispector is creating characters that do not need to suffer alienation from community as a penalty for stepping out of socially ascribed bounds of recognition. Perhaps her final text, *The Hour of the Star*, which features the most marginalized, deprived, entirely un-self-aware protagonist, who is penalized with death for seeking knowledge about herself, written as Lispector herself was dying *is* a hopeful text. I suggest this is one of her finest examples of her faith in the ability of the word to bring something into being.

### **Remaking Language: The Hospitality of Nostalgia**

This final section examines how Lispector frees language from conventional syntax, grammar, and word-choice in order to open a porous space wherein the reader can imagine a wider range of possible meaning. I circle back to Woolf and Butler’s similar investment in such a project to

suggest that each of these authors understands that language is a placeholder for imaginative possibility and a medium for more hospitable relations to others.

*The Hour of the Star* is noteworthy for its use of language on three levels. There is the language of the main character, Macabéa (including her dialogue with others); the language that the fictional narrator (also a character in the novel) is struggling with so as to be able to represent a character who he says keeps escaping him, that is, to reveal the processes of fictionalization; and finally, there is the narrative structure of the narration itself. As I have previously noted, the dialogue in much of Lispector's fiction points to the inadequacy of communication through language. This is particularly true of Lispector's short stories, and of this novel. In Lispector's work, one of the primary indicators of the characters' sense of autonomy and power in a social context is the voice and the facility with using language. As pointed out by Naomi Lindstrom, the phenomenon of a woman being able to maintain and nourish a newly established sense of autonomy, which can be evidenced by others in her use of voice, is a theme that is often explored by feminist writers of the twentieth century. Early attempts at articulation are often ridiculous and painful. In many cases, if the voice finds no support from the social context, or if it is challenged by more dominant, familiar patterns, it may disappear, and the individual returns to former patterns of social discourse (31).

In *The Hour of the Star* dialogue is alternatively employed by the protagonist to question the nature of things, and by the secondary characters to subjugate others. In contrast to the dialogue between Vitoria and Martim, the dialogue in *The Hour of the Star* points to the futility of communicating anything of substance. It is utterly frustrating, degrading, and communicates nothing for the characters.

If Lispector is concerned with how an individual learns to apprehend the lucid humming of human perception that best represents her or his own individual vision, a vision that comes

from the freedom to think of things in themselves; if she is concerned with how that vision can lead to human connection, *The Hour of the Star* is a tragic last work. The main character, Macabéa, is essentially devoid of form or meaning. She conforms to patterns of female discourse and displays social characteristics that are meant to show her abject marginalization. The dialogue she initiates in the story reveals her feeble, though significant, attempts to question what we might consider "truths" about the world. With the first character we see her speaking to, Olímpico de Jesus Moreira Chaves (a name he makes up as he is speaking), she indicates that she does not understand his name, or what is inside her own name.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, the other characters use language to negotiate their relative position with her. She always accepts the subordinate position that she is woven into by their use of language. She makes unconscious, fleeting attempts to extend discussion to something beyond power-play by introducing new words that she hears on the radio such as "mimetism," or by reporting interesting historical facts that she hears but does not understand. According to literary critic Maria Barbosa, the female voice in *The Hour of the Star* is "penalized for the complexity of its discourse within a narrative tradition" (120). The complexity is actually very simple, yet it challenges simple thinking. Each time she asks the meanings of words she hears on the radio (which although they often go unquestioned, are very little understood by most of the characters), she is set back into a lower position by a dominating force, whether it be with Olímpico; Gloria, her boss; or even by Madame Carlota, the clairvoyant. She accepts the trap of language as her fate and as a part of the incomprehensibility of life. It is not a resignation accompanied by anger, however, but one that is absolute, because she does not even understand that she is being dominated. And so, perhaps it is not absolute. She takes language at its face value and does not enter into the power-play except to make way for those who are using it to force their will. Note her guilelessness in dialogue:

--Look, Macabéa...

--Look where?

--God Almighty. Not "look" meaning to see, but "look" meaning I want you to listen! Are you listening to me?

--Every word, every single word!

--How can you be listening to every word, dear God, if I haven't said anything so far! (54)

He is using the word “look” to mean “listen” and yet chastises her for not knowing that she should understand a word the way he is (mis)using it.

Although there are fleeting moments where she begins to question her place in the world and the place of words, she is immediately forced down by “rational forces.” When Macabéa asks Olímpico what the word algebra means, he responds with, “To know about that is a thing for faggots, for men who have turned into women. Excuse me for having said faggot, because that’s not a word for proper girls” (*Hora* 50). She asks what electronic means. He says he knows but doesn’t want to say. What does culture mean? she asks. He becomes aggravated and says, “culture is culture,” and then accuses her of putting him up against the wall.

The narrator, Rodrigo S.M. also questions his own relationship with language by indicating that he is obliged to tell the story of a poor Northeastern girl, whose face he saw at the market, but he does not want to “adorn” the words he uses or go to any pains to illicit sympathy. The language that we see both Macabéa and Rodrigo S.M. struggling with is foregrounded in the plot. This struggle with language is a common theme in Lispector’s work, although in the case of *The Hour of the Star* it is arguably more parodic. To remain at that level of critique for Lispector would be redundant. Her final novel is not just about the injustices of those who are marginalized and how language

perpetuates domination, nor is it written solely to make explicit the more particular and ethically problematic processes of fictionalization of another. In this novel she turns her attention away from portrayals of how her characters exile themselves from conventional language usage in order to try to apprehend the world and other people with greater contact, greater intimacy, toward how her unsettling use of language in narration can affect her readers, possibly opening a fictional space of intimacy between readers and between author and reader. To do this she must have access to affective and imaginative structures. She must find a way to make her reader more porous, or to take advantage of that porosity, so that they will believe in her project.

In the interview I previously alluded to with Butler (2000), she addresses the need for writers to access different affective and imaginative structures by using difficult language and discomforting grammatical order. Butler credits the Frankfurt School with showing her how language plays an important role in shaping and altering what we perceive to be our common or "natural" understanding of social and political realities. She provides several examples of writers who do this, including Theodor Adorno, who argued that nothing radical could come of common sense and wrote sentences that made his readers pause and reflect on the power of language to shape the world. She also notes that in the works of both Hegel and Heidegger, the difficulty of the language was in some ways "essential to the philosophical views that were being expressed" (728). Finally, she refers to Herbert Marcuse, who once described the way philosophers who champion common sense scold those who propagate a more radical perspective: "The intellectual is called on the carpet. . . . Don't you conceal something? You talk a language which is suspect. You don't talk like the rest of us, like the man in the street, but rather like a foreigner who does not belong here. We have to cut you down to size, expose your tricks, purge you." The accused then responds that "if what he says could be said in terms of ordinary language he would probably have done so in the first place." Understanding what

the critical intellectual has to say, Marcuse goes on, “presupposes the collapse and invalidation of precisely that universe of discourse and behavior into which you want to translate it” (728).

What is implied in the argument that language should be straight-forward and common is that the use of obscure, difficult, or fragmented language is done so for the purposes of obfuscation. The argument is that complex syntax and vocabulary are used by some outsider to exclude accessibility by normal and decent human beings. The parody in the quotation acts to show us the absurdity in assuming that a variant use of language implies some sly maneuver, designed to trick or conceal. What Butler, Adorno, Marcuse, Woolf, and Lispector are arguing is that language must be tampered with if it has any use in representing emergent philosophies or even banal experiences that are not yet captured in the consensus that is language.

This argument ultimately implies that language must be remade from its roots: in its vocabulary, and in its syntaxes that attribute agency to indefinable subjects. What Adorno, Butler, Woolf, and Lispector all point to is the need for language to transform our ability to represent new consciousnesses, new moralities. Perhaps they each argue that the languages that will need to be employed may feel inaccessible in its vocabulary or in syntax. In the interview, Butler (in part responding to Martha Nussbaum’s vitriolic accusations in “The Professor of Parody,” that Butler’s language should be more accessible so that we can validate its claims), goes on to address the role of grammar: “What concerns me is that the critical relation to ordinary grammar has been lost in this call for radical accessibility.... [T]here is a lot in ordinary language and in received grammar that constrains our thinking . . . . I’m not sure we’re going to be able to struggle effectively against those constraints or work within them in a productive way unless we see the ways in which grammar is both producing and constraining our sense of what the world is (“Changing the Subject” 732-33).

What Butler suggests we can gain by freeing our language usage from the constraints of ordinary language and received grammars is the possibility of some newness, of the world opening up “through messing with grammar as it has been received.” This playing with language, or repeating language patterns erroneously, can lead to discovering new ways of apprehending and representing the world. To interrogate our assumptions, particularly at the level of language, which is what we use to formulate the interrogations themselves, is to consider new meanings in new contexts. As she warns, however, such a stance means learning to “live in the anxiety of that questioning without closing it down too quickly” (728). Like Adorno, who warns in *Minima Moralia* that it is our responsibility to no longer be housed, Butler argues that it is our social responsibility to accept the fact that “there is no common language anymore” (729). To think through every utterance is a painful process, she says, and not everybody wants to undergo it (734).

None of Lispector’s characters thinks of themselves as critical intellectuals, and yet their mission is to get as close to gestures of truth as they can, given their limitations, and at the tremendous cost of belonging to a community. They move out of a community of discourse and behavior so as to translate something radical that cannot come out of common sense. The narrator of *The Passion* tells us: “What an abyss between the word and what it sought to do, what an abyss between the word love and the love that does not even have a human sense—because—because love is living matter. Is love living matter?” (59). She also later reminds us that “[p]ain isn’t the true name of what people call pain” (109). It is in the consideration of giving up much of what we take for granted in language, words and phrases such as “love,” or “death,” or “mimesis,” or “this concept reflects,” that I would like to discuss Lispector’s use of narrative devices as they relate to my argument. My final argument is that Lispector’s last novel, *The Hour of the Star*, if read in the vein that Woolf anticipated in her description of a “common reader,” exiles us from the comforts of

conventional language usage, while at the same time, creating a ritual between author and reader that opens up a fictional space of intimacy.

The first strategy that Lispector uses to problematize narrative convention in *The Hour of the Star* is in her blending of genres and conceptual categories that invite us to believe that many genres are indistinguishable from others. Secondly, she uses highly estranged vocabulary in pursuit of naming the ineffable. Thirdly, Lispector enacts the textual effacement of boundaries among author, narrator, and “you.” The reader is never invited to approach too near or to imagine a story that is not being created by a fictional narrator. She then employs a radically subjective narrative point of view that makes use of equivocation, ambivalence and contradictions of language, as an example of the strangeness of one mind. Her use of dialogue in the novel clearly shows that dialogue is, in many instances, not used for communion but rather for imposing hierarchies, and finally, Lispector rejects most conventions of grammar and syntax to demonstrate that agency must be reconsidered.

If there were only one thing that could be accurately said about Lispector’s work it would be that her narrative structure is indivisible from her content. The form of the writing is meant to do the work that we expect from plot in conventional novels. There are several boundaries that her work acts to transcend or to cross over. The first is the category of literary genre. All of her works are difficult to categorize in terms of genre. They include: parables, fairy tales, sketches, prose poems, meditations, interior monologue, newspaper *crônicas*, novels, short story collections, and children's literature; however, any one story is usually a blend of two or more of these “genres.” She uses autobiography to question the self-sufficiency of fiction, and fiction to mask and disrupt the autobiographical narration. The narrators in her texts step outside of the formal characterization of genre and place their characters into their own autobiographical fictions that speak across lines of gender, race, and class. The other categories that Lispector’s

work exceeds are highbrow literature and popular story. Her stories blend philosophical exploration of spirituality and post-structuralist puzzles with realistic elements of popular culture. In “Bruxaria and Espiritismo: Popular Culture and Popular Religion in Contemporary Brazilian Fiction,” critic Nelson Vieira proposes that Lispector's stories engage with popular culture by offering a recognizable portrayal of the lives of the majority of the urban population in a nonjudgmental and realistic way. Vieira notes that in this dialogue with popular culture, Lispector valorizes diverse multiform modes of living outside of highbrow culture, by writing these stories into the literary canon. She creates a story in which persons from the lowest social classes can recognize their own situations and their own humanity.<sup>80</sup> In many of her stories Lispector portrays situations that beg for miraculous or magical cures, hence the role of the often-depicted clairvoyants, priests, mothers-of-saints, and other mediums as healers. In dramatizing popular representations, struggles, and voices, she, in effect, sets up a resistance to ideological and cultural imperialisms not by reversing a power hierarchy, Vieira notes, but instead by revealing the ambiguities and the voices that transcend distinct social boundaries (189). In the case of *The Hour of the Star*, I would not say that popular voices are revealed (since Macabéa uses her voice to little end), but rather that Lispector has attempted to get as close to a poverty-stricken, silenced voice as she possibly can. The effect of the blurring of divisions between genres, and between highbrow and popular literature, is to suggest that the divisions are more tenuous than we might have previously thought; that the divisions are our own fictions. What this may suggest to the reader is that there are other divisions by which we live that are just as traversable. Perhaps our own lives are not so easily separated from the fates of Macabéas.

Another notable effacement of division between categories, or positioning of different elements side by side, is in the contrast between the casual singsong Northeasterner’s dialect, and

the urbane *carioca*. For example, the narrator recounts a story that he heard as a boy, of an old man who is carried across the river by a young man. Upon arriving on the other side the younger says to the older—ok, you can get off now. Oh no! Not that old line, chides the older. It's so good to be assembled like I am that I'll nevermore climb out of you (*Hora* 22).<sup>81</sup> Or, speaking of the poor, the narrator says, “it's true, these nice, little people want all that's left over; joe blow dreams with a hunger for everything” (*Hora* 35).<sup>82</sup> In an almost hilarious play on the possibilities of language, when Olímpico asks her: are you listening to me! she answers using the word “everything” in the diminutive “*Tudinho, tudinho*” *ela falou* (*Hora* 54). It is interesting to contrast this playful slang used by the characters with the language that the narrator sometimes employs, perhaps to garnish a sense of authority, by his use of arcane, formal tenses, “*nunca recebera presentes*,” that feel like a future tense of the past rather than what we understood them to be, a more formal usage of past tense synthetic pluperfect, a direct successor of the Latin pluperfect.<sup>83</sup>

Lispector is blending parts of the social world that are normally more discrete. She does this in order to open imaginative possibilities, perhaps so that Macabéa and the reader have less resistance between them. Macabéa is not “in exile” because she was expelled from a native country. She is in exile because she is not welcome into the world of the reader.

The final example of boundary crossing that I would like to point to in *The Hour of the Star* is Lispector’s drawing on mystical references and multiple traditions. In mystical movements of the modern era, practitioners are not necessarily confined by one religion but draw on aspects from several. Unlike most other religious rituals, in mysticism there is, perhaps, a less defined center of conceptual authority. Revelations are often visited upon receptive hosts. In general terms, mystics are more concerned with the living of religion and the value of experience

rather than with dogma. In *The Mystic Fable* Michel de Certeau describes a modern form of mysticism which develops as the response of groups that have been marginalized. Their beliefs reflect an apprehension of selfhood, society, culture, and relationship with God often experienced as absence. Certeau points out that even the language of the early modern mystic reflects this marginality, in flexible syntax and inventive phrasing intended to pass over linguistic limits (174). This way of using language is in the service of trying to represent the unrepresentable.

In the various strains of literary criticism on Lispector's work, the most consistently identified thematic concerns her quest to represent the unrepresentable. The problem of representation is arguably compounded by an author who is not necessarily looking for words but for "no-words." In her novel *Água Viva* the protagonist tells us,

so writing is a way for whom has a word like a bait (or lure): a word fishing for that which is not a word. When that no-word—the between the lines—bites the bait, something is written (or wrote itself). Once the between the lines is hooked, one can with relief throw the word out. But that is where the analogy ceases: the no-word at biting the bait incorporated her. What saves then is to write unthinkingly. (21 translation mine)<sup>84</sup>

While this description is in part an explanation of the writing process for the author (suggesting that the words themselves are in search of deferred meanings that are waiting to be hooked), it also tells us something about how she chooses words to attract other words. In a perhaps more coherent way of explaining this process, Guimarães Rosa, another Brazilian author deeply invested in reshaping language, suggests that Lispector liberates her words from their standard or correct meanings (qtd. in Fitz 36). We have seen this effort to move outside of conventional uses of words in my previous discussion of G.H.'s attempts to name the ineffable with words like the

“neutral,” or “tastelessness.” I have noted also that she uses the word “consubstantiation” to describe how one might more readily become written on by the approach to the ineffable. In *The Hour of the Star* one of the most looming ineffables is death. In this text Lispector writes a narrator that will help his character (and we might venture, his author), dissolve the phenomenological distinctions between Life and Death. He tries to deconstruct for her the strict conceptual differences between one imagined realm and the other, but ultimately he is unable to protect either his character or his author from early death.

*The Hour of the Star* is structured then, not as an exposition, but as an extended question into the unknown. To translate the unknown using common words removes that which is mysterious and assigns a knowable set of characteristics. So Lispector uses made-up words such as "*o desconheço*" (12) (the me-not-knowing, or the I-know-not) or "*esse não-saber*" (this not-to know). Another example of an odd use of language is the opening word of the dedication. It opens with the word "*pois*" (in Author's Dedication), loosely translated as "so." A superfluous word. In the dedication the author tells the reader that the story is an unfinished book because "*the falta a resposta*" ("it is missing the answer," mistranslated into English as "it offers no answer") (8). The narrator tells us that he writes because he has "captured the spirit of the language" (17). In fact, like the *modernista* poets of the 1920s who attempted to isolate national traits, Lispector exhibits facility in the use of an “authentic Brazilian language, far removed from, and more fluid and fast-evolving than the European Portuguese.”<sup>85</sup> The unknowableness of Macabéa's language is what is used to characterize her state of innocence. An understanding of her innocence and ignorance are fundamental to a complete reading of the ending of *The Hour of the Star*.

What Lispector relies on more heavily than the accuracy of using the right word to describe what, arguably, has no “right word,” however, is narrative style.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the most consistent and noticeable element in Lispector’s narrative technique is that the writing feels radically subjective. The search for something, as of yet unknown, is presumably a radically subjective pursuit. *The Hour of the Star*, *The Apple in the Dark*, and *The Passion According to G.H.* are invested with conscious designs of equivocation, ambivalence and contradictions of language in order to show the constructive nature of language.

The point of view in *The Hour of the Star* suggests that there are limits to peering into the mind of another. Even for a narrator. The reader is provided with the ability, in a limited sense, to enter the minds of the narrator Rodrigo, the main character Macabéa, her workmate Gloria, and even the doctor that she visits. The limits of understanding for the reader and for the narrator, however, are significant. The narrator even tells us it is important that Macabéa is also limited in her ability to see him. He explains about his character, "It must be said that the girl was not conscious of my presence. Were it otherwise she would have someone to pray for and that would mean salvation. But I am fully conscious of her presence" (32-3). So there are limits to her knowing, but there are also limits to the narrator’s: "Did she feel she had nothing to live for? I have no way of knowing, but I think not" (32). Ironically the narrator tells us, "No one can enter another's heart" (64), after he has just entered another person's mind and goes on to enter others', like the doctor's. While Lispector seems at times to characterize one person’s perception as something that can enter into the minds of others, she is clearly drawing limits to those powers. The limits to omniscience are something that we have seen in the narrative point of view of both *To the Lighthouse* and *Appassionata*. The discussion in the conclusion of this study will

return to this topic to address the implications of these limits for each of these authors, as well as how these limits can contribute to a discussion of an ethics of hospitality.

What differentiates Lispector's work from other stylistically innovative Brazilian fiction is not so much the neologisms and re-creation of (with) words, nor her use of narrative point of view, but, as her translator of *Apple in the Dark*, Gregory Rabassa, describes in the "Introduction" to the English version, rather it is her radical departures of syntactical structure in defiance of norms of language usage (iv).<sup>87</sup> These devices break the linearity of argument and introduce disturbances of written convention and thus recognitions. Brazilian literary scholar Marta Peixoto, in *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector*, describes the writer's language as an "original, often strange language, dense with paradoxes, unusual phrases and abstract formulations that tease and elude the rational intelligence . . . syntactical contortions and strange juxtapositions, creating semantic pressures that unsettle the meaning of words and concepts" (xii). Engaging and yet eluding rational intelligence is what Lispector herself once indicated was her quest: specifically, to develop an intelligence that could apprehend her nonintelligence (qtd. in Cixous 58). Lispector's work consistently questions the authority of reason and is a quest to forge connections with truths that reason cannot fathom or represent. Lispector is searching for what is absent, what it means to not be humanized, to express a different libidinal economy, which Verena Andermatt Conley, in her introduction to Cixous's *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, refers to as an encounter with another, be it a body, a text, a social dilemma, or a moment of passion—that leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most social life (vii). Lispector seeks to introduce these disturbances by reordering sentence structure that challenges the conventions of how we make sense of things.

For Lispector, as Cixous sees it, this undoing of hierarchies through syntactic disturbance is most successfully accomplished by the effacement of particularizing identity, which results in an opening of limitless perspective and an undoing of the frame of common or representable human experience. The marginalized subject tries to redeem him or herself by engaging in a living relation with the new language structure and the resultant awkward experience of it. Cixous contrasts this to traditional over-elaborate constructions, readings, and masteries of language and form that, she argues, often hide simple truths.

Lispector's unsettling use of language in the *The Hour of the Star* is her primary tool to provoke the reader. Hers is not conventional Portuguese either in syntactical construction, vocabulary, or tone. Rather than developing a basis of authority, the departures from the expected allow her narrative to reside in a space between authority and unreality in which the reader must tread lightly along with her characters, in a place where there are few referents. Take for instance the grammar. There are a number of techniques that Lispector employs that deliberately destabilize formal conventions and reader expectations, in order to create an interstice of alternate representational possibilities. The first that I will address is what Cixous refers to as transgrammaticalization or degrammatilization that displaces the reader's sense of order (4). In the improvisation of logic, Cixous suggests that authors can make an effort to be transgrammatical, or transgressive, not because they despise grammar, but because "we do not have to obey it absolutely" (4).

What we see in Lispector's use of grammar is that time is not parsed off in ways we normally expect. Lispector creates confusion in the reader's sense of duration and agency. The first sentence uses the straightforward preterit verb tense "began" to declare how the universe began. She uses the next few sentences to describe how there is no edge, no beginning because

before the beginning there was a pre-history to a pre-history. She declares then that the universe never began: past tense to describe something that did not happen. She then repeatedly uses imperfect indicative verb tense of “was”, "*havia*,” (there is no exact equivalent in English) that implies a sense of continuity, an on-going action in the past. She ends this repetition with the use of past tense "*houve*" (usually employed to distinguish an action of limited duration in the past at the time of speaking). The verb tense that represents limited duration is preceded by the word "always" ("*Sempre houve*"). She continues warping her narrative through boundaries of time by alternating between the present tense "*não sei*" ("I don't know"), the imperative "*não se engane*" ("don't be fooled"), the subjunctive "*enquanto eu tiver...*" ("as long as I have"), to the future "*continuarei*" (I will continue"), back to the infinitive "*como começar*" (how to begin"). She readily uses the infinitive tense—the root verb before it has been personalized by conjugation, "To think is an act. To feel is a fact" or "*não esquecer...*" instead of the more commonly employed imperative tense "*não esqueça*" or, as translated into English, "we must never forget" (8). The verb tenses provoke a distorted sense of time perception in the reader.

In general, the conjugations are also less committal, not always assigned to a particular individual, but impersonal, like "*sabe-se*," similar in English to "one knows." Or there is an odd reversion of the reflexive use of the verb, where instead of denoting action on the predictable subject, it switches to another "*pois se vivo com ela*" "so one/I live with herself" (*Hora 21*). It becomes difficult for the reader to fully understand to whom the verbs are attributable and how long anything has gone on.

The sentence construction, furthermore, often indicates a falsified lack of agency. For example, Macabéa's boss tells her, "*A despedida pode não ser para já, é capaz até de demorar um pouco*" or loosely translated, "The dismissal can be not for just yet, it's capable even to wait a

bit" (*Hora* 25). The goodbye or dismissal is the one that is capable? Later Macabéa tells herself, "*Valeu-se de uma mentira*" (*Hora* 41), translated as: "So she had recourse to a lie." The use of the verb *valer* ("to be worth") acts to displace agency because the construction implies something not particularly of one's choice.

Often, it is hard to tell what part of one sentence relates to the sentence that follows it. Sentences break away from their endings, hang suspended, and then flow into the next thought: "To think is an act. To feel is a fact. The two together—it is I who write what I am writing" (*Hora* 11). Or they break off abruptly, and begin anew "*É visão da iminência de.*" translated out of its fragmentation by the use of multiple periods to indicate connection with the next phrase, "It is a vision of the imminence of ... of what?" (12). The original puts a period right up against something that will be described as "the immensity of.". Of course we (and she) will ask the immensity of what, but the period indicates a refusal to go on. A refusal to name.

Likewise, Lispector's placement of adjectives makes it difficult to discern what is being modified, the object or the subject: "*O azucar ela botou muito para aproveitar,*" translatable here as, "The sugar she put in so much (or a lot) in order to enjoy" (*Hora* 54). It cannot be unquestioningly assumed that she put in so much sugar, as opposed to putting in sugar so much to enjoy. There is unrelenting ambiguity. The narrator tells us that his character barely has a body that would be worth selling, but says it in a way that implies that she barely has a hold on her body: "*Mal tem corpo para vender,*" or "She badly has a body to sell" (*Hora* 54). We don't know whether she badly has a sense of possession of her body or whether she has a body in a rather bad state, or both. The latter is the more automatic denotation, the former the more troubling. In some cases the verbs function as nouns and there are no subjects, making everything in the utterance the subject. Subject pronouns are often dropped and we get three verbs in a short

sentence with no pronoun to attach them to: "*Gostava era de ver sangue*" (Hora 46). It cannot be assumed, in this case, that Olímpico is the only subject implied who likes to see blood.

In her unconventional use of grammar and syntax Lispector is allowing her mind to express itself unformatted by the cognitive architecture of syntactical convention. In effect, she is writing a language rather than being written by it. In her new configurations she finds more freedom for faith in her own intellectual and emotional maneuvers. She offers an alternative space for the reader to re-envision human ideas, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors through the medium of narrative art.

So far we have seen that Lispector's unconventional use of grammar invites us to become confused between delineations, beginning with those between what we think of as past, present, and future. The narrator suggests that there is no edge to time ("prehistory of prehistory") (11) and tells us, "Just as I am writing at the same time as I'm being read" (12). In addition, space provides immaterial constraint: "I shall one day assume the form of a molecule" (13). All of this, I suggest, is to prepare the reader for the most difficult effacement of division so far developed in any of her work. Which brings me back to a question I posed earlier: What might be the ultimate project of her last published novel?

I suggest that the project of *The Hour of the Star* is to recall Vitoria's "No," into a final "Yes;" it is to provide a body for speculation about the horizons between life and death, between author and narrator (or one who knows something and one who tries to write that something), and more mysteriously, perhaps, it is to trouble our sense of the borders that divide "you" and "me." She prepares us early for this, first, by indicating under the "Author's Dedication" that the dedication was really written by Clarice Lispector; but in the dedication Lispector says she dedicates herself to the color ruby very scarlet of her blood of a man in full age, domesticated in

English translation as "I dedicate it to the deep crimson of my blood as someone in his prime" (7). She goes on to repeatedly blur the separation between the implied author, the male narrator, the protagonist, and, finally, "you." There is, further, little distinction made between "me" and "you": "This me that is you, for I cannot bear to simply be me" (8), or between the singular and plural "you," adding to a collective sensation.

In addition, the author blurs the distinction between the author, the character, and the narrator by asking the audience to take part in the narrator's death rites, just after the character has died (while the author herself is dying). The other separation that Lispector seems to want us to reconsider is the division between our own fates and that of an impoverished girl in Rio. Arguably Lispector is invested in dissolving distinctions and creating connections across time and space.

Lispector opens *The Hour of the Star* with "Everything in the world began with a yes. One molecule said yes to another and life was born" (11).<sup>88</sup> The last word in the story is also "yes". What lies between the first and last affirmation is a performative struggle of how to make language avow and challenge the narrator's and the character's emerging intuitions, with the ultimate goal of communicating their distinctly individual respective visions. By repeatedly asking the reader, "What would you do?" Lispector is asking us to become involved in the story of the poor girl from Alagoas, Brazil. She is asking us to look closely at Macabéa's lot in life and to help complete the narrative about her. Despite the protagonist's utter poverty, she has faith. Lispector tells us "The one thing she has was faith. In what? In You?" (25). Lispector is calling for a transubstantiation (or what she earlier called a consubstantiation) that depends on the reader's participation. Drawing from the knowledge of her body, using the medium of the narrator's struggle with language, and allowing the reader to see into the crafting of a fiction,

Lispector proposes a semiotic circle of procreation. She wants Macabéa's story to be written on our bodies. The process perhaps bases its faith in a religious spiritualism, borrowing from Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, *espiritualismo*, alchemy, mysticism, and *bruxaria*.<sup>89</sup> More than any of her other stories, *The Hour of the Star* is a testament to Lispector's firm belief in the power of language to matter. I suggest that *The Hour of the Star* reaches toward the dual purposes of writing an act of freedom for the character, the narrator, and the author, while drawing the reader into recognition of the power of language to change his or her own perception of language's possibilities and failures. *The Hour of the Star* is a thin letter packet, *poste restante*, waiting for you, the addressee. Like Martim, who needed to destroy one life in order to rebuild a new one, Lispector is breaking down the conventional coherence of her narrative so that the reader is put in a position of having both to question and to imagine what it might mean to be human.

A philosophy that questions what "man" is begins by questioning what is not the case. Existentialist philosophers and writers, in particular Jean Paul Sartre, have posited that the defining feature of the human imagination lies in the ability to detach ourselves from our immediate experiences and imagine what is not the case. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre claims that it is a conscious choice to live one's life "authentically" and in a unified fashion, or not—this is the fundamental freedom of our lives. He also argues in *What is Literature* that man has a choice to be committed or not. Being committed means bringing about change which initiates an "evolution" that raises disturbing questions and initiates anxiety (x). This is what Martim and G.H. are struggling with, and what Lispector seems to be struggling with as a writer: to imagine or to touch upon that which has not yet been visible, that which is not yet the case, that which is not yet "reality."

In *The Hour of the Star* Macabéa is just beginning to imagine the precepts of any kind of reality. She is a shapeless accident of nature. She is surrounded by conditions and events that are, for the most part, meaningless to her. Like the main character of Sartre's book, *Nausea*, Roquentin, Macabéa also experiences nausea in the face of what Roquentin calls the "total gratuity and absurd contingency of the universe." She also, like Roquentin (and like Stravinsky, acknowledged in Lispector's dedication, who proposed that music's sole function is to institute an order in things) finds respite from chaos in music. She weeps for the first time in her life when she hears Caruso's "Una Furtiva Lacrima" because it "had been the only really beautiful thing" (51) in her life and because "it helped her to perceive that there were other ways of feeling, other forms of existence" (51). Music is comforting to these characters because it lies beyond the world of accidental existence and nothing can touch it or disarrange it. Roquentin points out that even if the music sheets were shredded, the record broken, the song would still remain. The solution to chaos, if there is one, then is an aesthetic one. Roquentin first looks to the ordering potential of music and then to that of story. The text can be burned, shredded, or lost, he says, but the story will exist in the consciousness of she who hears it, even once. The composing of a song or a story creates a stimulus, a fixity, and a force that opens up new realities. Which leads me to the final point of Sartre's that is relevant to this discussion: the notion that a certain kind of reader is anticipated, is included within the very act of writing itself. The anticipation that some "evolutionary" change will be initiated in a reader, a change that raises disturbing questions and initiates anxiety, moves the literary into what might be better viewed as an utterance or a social action. For Lispector music (and painting) is more able to approach the thing itself only because there is less "accretion" than there is in language. But although she tried her hand at both, she always came back to writing to try to approach that which has yet to be named. What *The Hour*

*of the Star* makes apparent, more than any other of her texts, is her faith in the written word to cross boundaries and matter in the lives of others. The novel is more than an effort to apprehend something ineffable; it provides Lispector with a body through which to scream about injustices while questioning the medium of transmission between knowledge and craft.

In *The Hour of the Star*, the narrator ponders his craft and allows the reader to share the experience of creating Macabéa's future. Critic Lisa Daidone makes an analogy between writing a story by the arrangement of words to composing a symphony by the setting of notes—the order must be just right for the listener to be moved. Lispector's novels, short stories, and miniature narratives employ a form of inscription that lets the effects of reading sift through the reader in a manner simulating our somewhat fragmented experience of life. We don't ask of music that the plot be clear. Daidone suggests that even an author does not need to understand what she writes. The understanding comes from the reader who carries his or her own sense of authority in a creative partnership of interpretation. The writing and the reading join forces in the creation of reality (192).

But how will Macabéa initiate this dialectic? How will her voice transmit anything when she herself does not even perceive the need for it, or even the tragedy of her own story? The answer is that someone does perceive her tragedy. And he will perform an utterance on her behalf. Where does this Northeasterner, Rodrigo S. M., derive his authority? To reveal Macabéa, Rodrigo will become a site of original creativity. He begins by claiming to have knowledge from the body, which he has translated to words that are not decorated. Since he writes with his body, there is less chance for mistranslation from the body to the word. He wants his words to be able to feed the character's hunger, but perhaps, more to the point, our hunger. To nourish he avoids touching them lest "the girl's bread, that bread would turn to gold—and the girl (she is nineteen

years old) the girl would be unable to bite into it and consequently die of hunger" (15). There begins a metaphorical process of transubstantiation as his body turns knowledge into words, which become phrases, which he utters to the reader in an effort to make the story come alive across time and space.

The first character transformation that we see as a result of the power of the word is Macabéa; she comes to “exist” in the narrator’s world, in the author’s world, and indeed, in the reader’s world. As a writer, the narrator claims that he is recreating himself as a writer in the process of creating a fiction. He is also, of course, giving life to a character. The overlaps are staggering. The narrator tells the reader, "Of one thing I am certain: this narrative will combine with something delicate: the creation of a whole human being who is as much alive as I am. I have taken care of her because my power is simply to reveal her presence so that you may recognize her on the street, moving ever so cautiously because of her quivering frailty" (19).

*The Hour of the Star* seems to work out a small space for the girl from Alagoas to inhabit. It even provides the girl with an acknowledgement of her right to scream. The girl from Alagoas and the worldly writer come together here to scream not only for themselves, but to address what critics have long and relentlessly complained about in Lispector's work—her unwillingness to directly address social problems. *The Hour of the Star* makes numerous references to guilt for not having done anything directly to help the victims of poverty, shame, and oppression. The narrator asks, “but why should I feel guilty? Why should I try to relieve myself of the burden of not having done anything concrete to help the girl? This girl—I see that I have finally started telling my story—this girl who slept in cheap cotton underwear with faint but rather suspicious blood stains" (23). The narrator tells us that even Macabéa's officemate, Gloria, realizes the futility of trying to help out Macabéa: "Macabéa's situation worried her but there was little she

could do to improve matters." The narrator then swears, "I swear that nothing can be done for her. Believe me I would help her if I could" (34). Finally the narrator loses patience and in a raging anger, which he describes as fit to smash dishes and break windows, he asks— how he can avenge himself, or compensate himself. Where? he screams, is a bit of fiber? No, only sweetness and obedience from her can he expect ("*Cadê um pouco de fibra? Não, ela é doce e obediente*") (*Hora* 26). His resignation finally extends beyond self: "How can one disguise the simple fact that the entire world is somewhat sad and lonely?" (40). Critic Regina Dalcastagné ends her essay "*Contas a prestar: O intelectual e a massa em 'A hora da estrela,' de Clarice Lispector,*" by saying that *The Hour of the Star* is a book that exposes wounds and embarrassments, that speaks of miseries and mistakes without hiding social, political, or artistic incompetencies, and without making everything equilibrate in the end (96). It is not reductionist in its portrayal of pain, or of life. What Lispector is doing in this final text is writing for her life and for her transition into death: to speak out not only for the fictional Macabéas but for the Macabéa of her own mother, who died with no one who could help her.

Exploring the development of characters and themes in Lispector's *oeuvre*, Marta Peixoto notes Lispector's broadening social consciousness:

The forces of oppression and the violence of their action and reaction, are no longer directed against or located mainly in women's hearts and bodies, but are mapped in the multiple social and narrative sites. The term "violence" is, then, intended to point to the extent to which Lispector became an acute and unsparing observer of even the subtlest and least conspicuous forms that violence can take, and, as her work progressed, an increasingly aware witness to the interconnection between private and public kinds of violence, including the complex ways in which they implicate writers and readers. (102)

*The Hour of the Star* also asks the reader to serve as witness to both the violence of the streets and to the violence or rupture of death.

So far I have argued that in her last novel Lispector is not so much interested in character development internal to the novel, but rather in character development external to it, that is, she has turned her attention on the author and the reader. Her project in this novel is two-fold. She wants us to be changed by her disruptions and her desperate attempts to approach the thing itself, but she also wants to be changed by us. In fact, she has made it requisite that we at least choose or not choose to take the death rites seriously. In some of her past writings, quite explicitly in *The Passion*, she asks for a Dante-esque guide to take her through the circles of Hell, ultimately to reemerge consubstantiated. In this last novel she doesn't ask us to come along with her to the depths of Hell, as she previously has. Instead she says that she has faith. "In what? In you" (25). She asks us to be her witness.

Lispector uses the body of this text as a bequest or a cataloguing of that which has been taken up by her life and that which will be left behind in an emotional and spiritual economy of exchange. She dedicates her narrative to, among others, the tempest of Beethoven, the vibrations of Bach's neutral colors, Chopin, Stravinsky, to "*Death and Transfiguration*, in which Richard Strauss predicts my fate" (7-8), and to other composers and prophets who make her explode into herself. The Author's Dedication is written as if it were a translation of her last rites/rights. Indeed, the word "rights" is used repeatedly throughout the text. Between the lines of this thin text is Lispector's scream for the loss of her own life and for all the voiceless persons she has seen who don't know how to scream. It is a story of trampled innocence (as Lispector claims in her last interview), a warning against seeking knowledge about one's own fate through others, as it is an autobiographical manual for confronting death. It is a request for us to see Macabéa, as

much as it strives to cultivate imaginative possibilities in the reader, in order to disrupt conventional uses of language that have naturalized and domesticated very complex matters of life and death.

But who can help Macabéa or Lispector to construct a future that lies just around the corner? Who will take her through her last rites? In the dedication the author writes that it is not to be forgotten that the structure of the atom is not visible, though it is known: "I am aware of the existence of many things I have never seen. And you too. One cannot prove the existence of what is most real but the thing is to believe. To believe weeping" (*Hora* 8). Before the novel even "begins" the reader is reminded that many things are possible even though they have not been made visible to us.

The narrator will help us help his author by proposing that space and time can be traversed. Rodrigo, in his construction of a character, grapples with boundaries of time and space—"Before being born was she an idea? Before being born was she dead?" (27)—in order to offer (if unsuccessfully) a suggestion of what death will look like that can be understood through the body. There is, we are told, "an inflexible geometry [that] vibrates behind everything" (82). Rodrigo fumbles in the dark to try and deconstruct the unstable pillars of time and space to offer a physical comprehension of death. He is obsessed with death and admits, "To be frank, I am terrified of that dark hole and its depraved inhabitants" (30). Finally he reaches to dissolve the sharp delineation between death and life: "If she were no longer herself this signified a loss that was counted as a gain. Just as there was sentence of death, the fortune teller had decreed a sentence of life" (79). He imagines for her a re-incarnation: "Today, she thought, today is the dawn of my existence: I am born" (80).

In the end we are told, "To be frank, I am holding the destiny of her in my hands and yet I am powerless to invent any freedom: I follow a secret, fatal line" (20). Being unable to prevent his character's death, he begins the story by softening the boundaries of an ethereal and transient "life"; he imagines the constructs of "death" and writes with fluidity and circularity between the edges of time and space. He acknowledges her misfortunes and even his character's death as his betrayal of her: "*Et tu Brute?*" Her fate is greater than his power as a writer. Although he fails his character, he does not fail his author.

He performs death rites. First she must repent and be forgiven: "Not quite knowing what she had to repent of, the girl from the Northeast repented of everything" (37). The narrator returns to address unrequited guilt, "But who am I to judge the guilty? The worst part is that I need to forgive them. It is essential to arrive at an absolute zero so that we can indifferently come to love or not to love the offender who kills us" (81). The reader is also asked to bear witness to whatever redemption can be concocted. Arguably, in this text there is no redemption. Perhaps, Macabéa's absurd and impotent struggle can only be redeemed by the moments of bliss that are unique to her. Like Katherine Mansfield, the author with whom Lispector identified most closely as a young woman, Lispector also dulls the distinction between what an individual might perceive as bliss and the mundane. She refers to these moments as a "*gloriazinha em viver*" or tiny, precious glories of living (*Hora* 27). In *The Hour of the Star* there are few such moments and they are difficult to recognize because they are so small: "One day Macabéa enjoyed a moment of ecstasy. It happened in front of a tree that was so enormous that she could not put her arms around its trunk. Yet despite her ecstasy, she did not abide with God. She prayed with total indifference. True. Yet that mysterious God of others sometimes bestowed on her a state of grace. Bliss, bliss, bliss. Her soul almost took flight" (63). These instances are what the first

English language translator of *The Hour of the Star*, Giovanni Ponteiro, refers to in the introduction as Lispector's nurturing of the seeds of spiritual growth in Macabéa's soul. Are we being asked if moments of bliss are redemption?

Whether there is redemption or not, one must die. The narrator then asks someone to take part in the death rites. But before this request he goes back to what the author calls, in the Dedication, her nostalgia (“*saudade*”) for her time as a poor Northeastern girl. Before participating even fictionally in anyone’s death rites the reader might want to know: Who is this person? We hesitate. Who is Clarice Lispector and why should this novel matter to me or to Macabéa? Is it too late for her narrator to talk about the "unremarkable adventures of a girl living in a hostile city. A girl who should have stayed in the backwoods of Alagoas wearing a cotton dress and avoiding the typewriter..." (15)? Is it too late to talk about the (presumably other) girl, whose mother, Marietta Lispector, dies before she is nine, who graduates from law school and works for forty years as a journalist and creative writer, dying just one day before her fifty-seventh birthday? For Lispector it was not too late to invent a writer who would confess about his protagonist, "What I wanted to say was that despite everything, she belonged to a resistant and stubborn race of dwarfs that would one day vindicate the right to scream" (79). The word "rights" is the subject of one of the thirteen titles that the author offers as choices for titles: "O Direito de Gritar" or "The Right to Scream." This title is the one that Lispector signed her name below, though it is not the official title of the book.

The author goes to great lengths to scream for something or someone. Speaking through the narrator, Lispector screams for the girl from Alagoas, "Now I only wish to possess what might have been but never was" (21). (The original Portuguese ends with "wish to possess what *I* might have been but wasn't," or *E agora só queria ter o que eu tivesse sido e não fui*, 21.) When

we are told, early in the novel, the tale of the old man who wants to be carried on and on by the young boy who takes him across the river, perhaps Lispector is acknowledging the young Lispector from Alagoas. Twice we are told by the narrator that the girl from Alagoas lacks a way to arrange or adapt herself (24). But life begets life and this girl manages. Perhaps, she finds a likely candidate to carry her around: a competent, worldly journalist and author. *The Hour of the Star* contains numerous references to this young girl who is always calling from somewhere inside the narrator. The narrator confesses, "I have a restless character on my hands who escapes me at every turn and expects me to retrieve her" (22). Later he tells us that "the girl embodies a truth I was anxious to avoid" (39). In fact he extends his implication of non-disclosure by admitting, "The fact that I am not her strikes me as a cowardly escape" (38). But Lispector herself is not choosing "A Discreet Exit through the Backdoor," the last of her proposed titles for this novel. *The Hour of the Star* provides a space for the girl from Alagoas, someone to scream for her, and a body of work that invites the reader to participate in the story that, because of the reader's participation, may or may not be delimited to segments of time or space. The author dares us to participate in making the Word into Deed.

If Word becomes Deed, there must be something that will change as a result of that word; maybe even some surface inscribed that previously was unwritten. The missing link in this utopian transubstantiation, is a new state of consciousness, which could be as small as a reader who questions how the particular applications of a word feed into larger ideologies, or how perplexing syntax forces the reader to rethink naturalized assumptions of agency and epistemology.

At this point we might ask what "transubstantiation" or "consubstantiation" could possibly mean, anyway. Have we presumed to know the possibilities circumscribed by one of

these terms? Using the terms so far employed in this study: has the strange use of vocabulary or syntax, the lack of definition between characters, “exiled” us as readers such that we are any more open to providing what the author in her dedication called a missing response?

There is an indiscernible point during which Lispector’s philosophy in this text draws on “faith” in alchemy, consubstantiation, or a deep belief in reader response. She pursues something that is greater than the elements that compose it, where the creator is ever present in the creation. The word is made flesh by an act of faith, absorbed by the reader like bread, inscribed on the “body,” passed from human experience through human experience. In the process of reading, the reader, alone with her or his readings finds Macabéa “presently adrift, like a door swinging in a never-ending breeze” (82). Which is to say: in this last testament to writing, to the ephemerality of life, to how lives have bearing on each other and how people are connected, Lispector is suggesting that once we have experienced the psychic movement that can come from an exilic experience with a text, we are changed in what we are able to look for and, perhaps, articulate.

In the beginning of this chapter I argued that in terms of plot, what Lispector is doing in this novel is rewriting the biblical Fall. Macabéa, a virgin, lives in a state of unknowingness and total absence of self-awareness. Since, like Eve, Macabéa has never been in a state of maternal bliss from which to fall, since she has never had a “native place” she cannot be said to be in exile. According to all social measures and all psychological referents, Macabéa is nothing. And yet, she tries to begin to form herself. Little Macabéa listens to the radio. She is like Martim from *The Apple in the Dark*, who starts to question the terms of what it means to be a human, but Macabéa is without a logical foundation for this inquiry. She, unlike him, has no role models to show her how inquiries proceed. Instead her questions are haphazard: What do names pronounced on the radio mean? What is behind words like “*elgebra*,” “*mimesis*,” “*ephemeris*,”

and “Count”? What do people’s names attribute or accrete to the owners? These are her beginning questions as she starts to seek knowledge. Little Macabéa is counseled by her more guileful workmate, Gloria, to seek greater wisdom by paying someone who will tell her her future. The text perhaps asks us to question how reduced our fates might be if we seek out our destinies through other’s comforting words. The other component to the Fall is that Macabéa now begins to view her own destiny in terms of material possessions that are way beyond any possibility of her tubercular existence. Macabéa never had a “garden” out of which she could be exiled, but she was trying to work her way into community through the building blocks of language. Had she persisted in gaining belonging on her own, perhaps she would have built a meager community. But she listens to the advice of another and seeks a shortcut to gaining knowledge.

Macabéa is not punished for seeking knowledge. She is killed because she readily adopts another person’s vision of her life. She does that too soon after she begins to question the most basic things like what is behind a name. Perhaps Lispector is even suggesting that the Fall comes about because of the division that was so early established between man and woman, whereby woman was excluded from naming and contributing fully to the shaping of human consciousness through language, letters, and public service. In several of Lispector’s novels, however, the man suffers equally for the history of categorically separating one thing from another, one person’s fate from another’s. Lispector’s rewriting of the biblical Fall suggests that everyone is paying the price because women have been excluded from contributing to all that naming entails.

In Chapter One I argued that Kundera’s characters enact Freud’s descriptions of melancholia and that they never develop the self-reflexivity that could emerge from the psychic maneuvers, because of their fear of shame and impotence. The characters struggle against

politicized and eroticized nostalgia but are ultimately under the sway of cultural values that do not allow them to withstand ego transformation. In contrast, Woolf's Lily challenges Freud's theories of melancholia in that there is no violent turning against the self in a deluge of reprimands and recriminations. Her summoning of Mrs. Ramsay is efficacious. She honors her experiential nostalgia and is able to represent it using new representational strategies. Likewise, Hoffman's character Isabel honors her egregious losses and, in the end, comes out with her first original composition. Lispector's characters also do not fall under the sway of politicized or eroticized nostalgia because they forego all sense of community or, in the case of Macabéa, never were exposed to the cultural values that influence one's perception.

Of all of the various projects of these four authors, the two that are most strikingly similar are those of Woolf and Lispector. Lispector shares with Woolf a doubt that language can adequately express human perceptions, a sense of existential alienation, and even a fear of madness. Lispector builds onto Woolf's project to apprehend primary unnamed forces and to translate them using altered syntax, point-of-view, and, in some cases, vocabulary. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf writes that women must write in gendered sentence structure—that is, develop a feminine syntax—and that “the book has somehow to be adapted to the body” (101). The “Judith Shakespeare” to come, Woolf tells us, will draw “her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners” (149). She also tells us that books continue each other, “in spite of our habit of judging them separately” (84). Lispector, a voracious reader, had a rich array of feminine role models, and her projects have built on those of Woolf's.

The overlaps between Woolf and Lispector are haunting. Like Woolf, Lispector also foregrounds the processes of narration, often undercutting narratorial authority. The texts of both writers demand of their readers an active, participating mind, readers who are not looking to be

lulled by authoritarian discourses, but will labor through questions of what it means to not be able to so easily assign particular agency or discrete time segments to verbs. Both authors emphasize the need to give up reductive terms to categorize unknowable forces. Unfortunately, in one of Woolf's major novels, *Mrs. Dalloway*, the temptation to speak outside of the fringes of the consensual, indeed, the drive to articulate "the centre" only emerges from, or leads to, madness. Septimus is arguably the character in all of Woolf's fiction that is most sensitive to mystery and the horror of the consequences of rationalized choices, like those that lead to WWI. He knows that life is "signaling" to him, although, not indeed in actual words. He struggles to read the language of the world, to receive its intention to provide him with "beauty, more beauty!" (31), and yet he is pressured by society (personified in the character of Dr. Holmes), to convert. He prefers to sacrifice his life than convert to ready proportions.

In Lispector's *The Passion*, G.H. also believes that life is signaling to her and that she is able to apprehend some elemental force, yet she acknowledges that she will be unable to convey through language the message she receives. Both Woolf and Lispector are interested in that which has yet to be adequately named, such as the physical and psychic processes of pain and melancholia, which Woolf makes explicit in "On Being Ill." Lispector, like Woolf, is interested in how remaking language can lead to deeper capacities to know a person, that is, to deeper intimacies, by individuals relinquishing their complacent assumptions about the other that remain unquestioned and unarticulated. We see this drive to remake language in order to reach greater intimacy in the profound and unassuming dialogue between Martim and Vitoria in *Apple in the Dark*, as well as in Macabéa's desire to question simple terms that, had she met with another inquisitive person, could have led to profound questions about existence. Lispector, like Woolf, is interested in how language influences our views on something entirely mysterious and

unknowable, like death.<sup>90</sup> As Maria DiBattista points out, in *Mrs. Dalloway* “death seems to complete rather than disrupt a life whose inner dynamic has been one of dispersing and projecting the self out of the body that houses but cannot contain it” (35). She argues that, for Woolf “self-dispersal is both the augury of immortality and the antidote for anxiety” (36). This could also be said for Lispector. Both Woolf and Lispector, in several of their novels, portray death not as the ultimate separation from life, but as a unity with something vital. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf’s narrator comments on Septimus’s thought, “[T]here was an embrace in death” (88). It is not only death that these two writers portray as a unifying force. Both refer to invisible networks or forces that unite in life, and afterwards, their primary example being the conversations, indeed, impalpable conversations that continue between author and reader. Both authors imagine some realm of collective life that exists beyond language, even beyond life. We see this in Woolf’s story “The Fascination of the Pool” in which passers-by drop their thoughts into the water, and the thoughts, freed from the impediments of the body float about freely, friendly, and communicative in the common pool (226). Woolf leaves unanswered where in time or space this “pool” might be located.

Both Woolf and Lispector are grappling with a way of expressing the possibility that encounters with others form the psychic material of the subject in ways we have yet to apprehend or articulate. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf proposes what she calls a transcendental theory in which part of the self attaches itself to and completes other selves, and remains haunting spaces and times. Clarissa feels herself a part of everything and seeks out elements that complete her: barns, trees, people, such that the unseen part of her and us might survive, attached to other elements or people, forces that haunt certain places, even after death: “perhaps—perhaps” (167-68). Clarissa also tells us that she survived, Peter survived and they lived on in each other (10). Minow-

Pinkney argues that in Woolf's writing there is no clear boundary between the self and other (61). This proposition that the body does not contain all of one's life, that we inhabit others, is similar to Lispector's use of the term consubstantiation, which describes how the self incorporates and becomes a host in encounters with other forces. Perhaps Lispector's characterization of life-eating-life, and Woolf's notion of people completing others, is what Woolf refers to in *Mrs. Dalloway* when, after Septimus takes his life and Clarissa feels the plunge, she says, "A thing there was that mattered" (280). Both authors are suggesting that encounters with others come to matter. Part of what an engaged reader encounters is the self in relation to the alterity of the text.

J. Hillis Miller calls attention to the "irreducible otherness" of Woolf's work. He argues that the labor of engaging with that work provides the potential to bring cultural values or meaning into existence due to the "performative use of language" that "exceeds the referential or mimetic dimension" (qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 121). In other words, Miller suggests that through the participation between writer and reader, cultural values or new meanings can actually be brought into existence, or in the words of Cuddy-Keane "Woolf's sentence enacts its own meaning, requiring its thought to be completed in the associative caverns of the reader's mind" (123). Cuddy-Keane then uses the word "assimilated" to suggest the mode by which reading materializes into the reader's unconscious (124). Quoting Isobel Armstrong, she later uses the term "identification" to describe how the text engages the reader in a relation or encounter with what is other than self (126). Cuddy-Keane indicates that relational engagement between text and reader demands a willingness to displace one's own thinking in order to be brought into the presence of another (127). She refers to this as "dialogic relation," "dialogic negotiation," and finally, "dialogic discourse" (134-35). Woolf's speculates in *Mrs. Dalloway* about people

existing dispersed in space and time. “A Sketch of the Past” questions whether things that have been felt with intensity can exist independent of our minds, (67) and suggests that the faculty of “instinct” proves that Virginia Stephan “was born many thousands of years ago” (69). In letters and essays Woolf refers to writers who have lived before but in whose poetry there remains certain proof that “this poet is alive and kicking” (qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 122). Woolf goes so far as to suggest that the writer might “lay an egg in the reader’s mind from which springs the thing itself” (*CE* II:301). Presumably in this instance “the thing itself” becomes more visible after a blow or a shock that transforms the reader, much as Woolf describes in “A Sketch.” Likewise, Lispector’s texts present the reader with an irreducible otherness, what Adam Shellhorse refers to as Lispector’s avant-garde premise of providing the reader with an experimental mode of “*autoconhecimento*” or self-reflexivity.<sup>91</sup>

Part of the way that these authors imagine that there will be communion between reader and writer is through a method of writing compared to fishing. This chapter quoted Lispector on how she indicated that she uses a word like a bait to find the closer no-word. In *A Room of One’s Own* Woolf indicates that the way her thoughts find words is through patient fishing: “Thought—to call it by a prouder name than it deserved—had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift it and sink it, until—you know the little tug—the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one’s line... (5). In this case Woolf’s bait is a thought (for lack of a better word) that fishes out an idea. Both authors are suggesting that the words we have are inadequate to mystical experiences that lie beyond the domain of common knowledge. In *The Passion* Lispector tells us that this fumbling for the no-word, this release of narratorial authority is what brings about the foundering of the voice in which one hears for the first time one’s own silence and that of others,

and accepts it as the possible language (169). Both Woolf and Lispector are interested in dissolving the boundaries between knowing and not knowing and holding the often awkward possibilities in a relation of “negative capability” (to refer back to John Keat’s phrase). The works of Woolf and Lispector teach the reader how to consider what language has not prepared us to look for, to become more hospitable to the mysteries of other people and other elements of life. They do this, in part, through their writing styles that displace authority and ask us to participate in questioning our relations with how humans know things and how we use our emergent apprehensions to learn to love the world, even if it must come through death.

This study opened with the role of particular affects in the formation of subjectivities that can articulate grievances. I have used theory, memoir, and other fiction to argue that the psychic economies of loss can aid in developing more astute self-reflexive processes and new representational modes. In the fictional texts, Woolf’s Lily and Hoffman’s Isabel provide ideal examples of characters that let melancholia undo their sense of coherence such that they can honor and represent their nostalgia. Kundera’s characters, on the other hand, are limited by their inability to accept the radical alterity of an emerging subjectivity.

Beyond a discussion of what character can or cannot do, I’ve argued that Woolf and Lispector present the reader with irreducible otherness, positioning an encounter that shocks the reader out of a sense of communal consensus. Art, in these cases, is not for art’s sake; Woolf and Lispector are interested in portraying that which has not yet had shape or voice. They are interested in new formations of political agency in the reader. Butler provides an explanation of how emergent subjectivities that are in dialogue with other emergent subjectivities challenge the languages of consensus and thus create new social and political realities. Part of what Butler is interested in (that extends far beyond one marginalized and silenced group) is people that may

feel that the available language for their sexuality is inadequate (Olsen and Worsham 755). The language of consensus carries value judgments that privilege some and marginalize others. Butler points out in “Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification,” that there are words that are used so injuriously that subjects avoid them when conceiving of their own identities. In *Frames of War* she further lays out an argument for how certain schemes of conceptualization that rely on normalized phrases orchestrate what we admit as reality (xx-xxi). What does it mean if yesterday’s “terrorists” become tomorrow’s “freedom fighters”? (158). Can someone who belongs to Hamas be described as a civilian, and if not, can we tell from an aerial view or even within Gaza whether someone is or is not Hamas? (xxiii). Her ultimate question is: “What would it take not only to apprehend the precarious character of lives lost in war, but to have that apprehension coincide with an ethical and political opposition to the losses war entails?” (13). American media consumers have little ability to empathize with the precarious lives of people who are trying to develop boundaries that resist the “reasoning” to annihilate “them.” What this study has pointed out is that there is an urgent need to think of how we use language and to acknowledge how we are complicit in conventional uses of language that mask certain values that support systems of oppression.

In the interview with Olsen and Worsham, Butler asserts her project to reclaim language. She reclaims uses of language in a multiplicity of ways. She recounts a story of a kid who leaned out of a window one day and asked, "Are you a lesbian?" What the kid wanted to know, she postulates, is, “[A]re you this strange thing that might threaten the world as I know it and can you stand up to owning it?” (59). When she says "Yes, I am a lesbian," she says that the power of her interrogator was lost. She took the term to describe that which she values and will claim. She says that she replays the term; she reiterates it. She goes so far as to imagine that she and the

kid were together, in their encounter, remaking language together. She claims the language on the street, on the street that she experiences, and asks him to negotiate with her. Neither will know how the encounter comes to matter for the other. What Butler wants to interrogate through each dialectic encounter is: What is possible that I have not yet been able to account for or even imagine? (763). Those possibilities are made manifest by breaking through conventional expectations of the authority of language to describe rather than to construct reality. Those possibilities, Butler suggests, are hidden within everyday grammar, everyday language, as taken-for-granted notions. So she challenges us:

[W]e feel that we know the answers. We know what family is, we know what desire is, we know what a human subject is, we know what speech is, we know what is comprehensible, we know its limits. And I think that this feeling of certainty leads to a terrible parochialism. Taking for granted one's own linguistic horizon as the ultimate linguistic horizon leads to an enormous parochialism and keeps us from being open to radical difference and from undergoing the discomfort and the anxiety of realizing that the scheme of intelligibility on which we rely fundamentally is not adequate, is not common, and closes us off from the possibility of understanding others and ourselves in a more fundamentally capacious way. (764-65)

Ultimately, this study builds on Butler's interest in the relationship of loss to politics, since loss is what occasions melancholia, and melancholia can lead to the bodily realization that all subjectivities, all lives are precarious. As further affects or modes of disposition are questioned, we can begin to look toward how our civic identities can be reshaped to account for the motivated irrationalities of our psyches and those of others'. Each of the authors in this study

offers an acknowledgement of the vulnerabilities and interdependencies that can lead, by the violence of our encounters, to a hospitality of nostalgia.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See Hochschild, 1983; Lutz, 1988; Jaggar, 1989; Sedgwick and Frank, 1995; Berlant,

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of social relations between one who suffers and community members who are witness to that suffering, see Berlant's edited volume on compassion. She questions that term for what it says about the ethics of privilege in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> The categorizations of "West" and "non-Western" are erroneous. Nussbaum, in *Upheavals of Thought*, describes an anthropologist's observation that the Balinese believe sad feelings are dangerous to one's health. American psychology professor Nolen-Hoeksema, who describes the focusing on grief as excessive rumination, corroborates this notion, Nussbaum observes.

<sup>4</sup> Over the past thirty years there has been extensive discussion of "nostalgia" in academic literature. In a review of several novels for their treatment of nostalgia, Stineback looks for how the characters "concentrate on the individual's recognition of and reaction to history as an irresistible, ongoing process of loss and disappointment" (14). Nostalgia, he asserts, is an "antagonist" for the characters in these novels, as it prevents them from becoming fully socialized.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart addresses objects of nostalgia as they relate to ideological perpetuation: "[A]ll souvenirs are souvenirs of a nature which has been invented by ideology" (150). She argues that collecting is an attempt to contain and simplify the other through classification, where "desire is ordered, arranged, and manipulated, not fathomless" (163). Nostalgia, for Stewart, then, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent; that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived

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experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality (23).

Here we again see nostalgia represented or outlined in negative terms, as a tool of state propaganda easily fashioned into symbol.

<sup>6</sup> Huffer dismisses nostalgia for its tendency to create and efface the object of desire (3). She advocates a shift from nostalgia to “ethics,” which she “define[s] as moral reflection on the quality of our social interactions” (134). Her analysis, however, focuses only on the effacing tendencies of nostalgia and provides no structural inquiry into the transformative possibilities of critical self-reflexivity.

<sup>7</sup> Davis, in *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, defines nostalgia as a “deeply social emotion.” His project is one of “tracking down the sources of nostalgic experience in group life and determining what general relevance and meaning nostalgia has for our present life and, somewhat more abstractly, what consequences it has for society as a whole” (vii). He proposes “almost anything from our past can emerge as an object of nostalgia, provided that we can somehow view it in a pleasant light” (viii). Davis distinguishes among simple nostalgia (in which unexamined beliefs are masked), “reflexive” nostalgia that “prompts an analysis of one’s experiences,” and “interpretive” nostalgia, in which the subject not only “attempt[s] to understand the past in connection to who she has become in the present, but she also reflects upon the very significance of the occurrence of nostalgic recollections” (25).

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this study I use the term “apprehension” in the manner outlined by Butler in *Frames of War*, that is, as a term that can imply “marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition. If it is a form of knowing, it is bound up with sensing and perceiving, but in ways that are not always—or not yet—conceptual forms of knowledge” (5).

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<sup>9</sup> Stephanie Coontz addresses the role of nostalgia in perpetuating gender expectations and roles within the American family.

<sup>10</sup> For a rich series of essays on the role of affect in social movements see Jasper's article.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmed is interested in what values "happiness" masks (2), and how the individuals who do not fit the "happiness profile," are regarded by some enthusiasts as threatening to the social well-being. The face of happiness, Ahmed argues, looks rather like the face of privilege (11). She is concerned with the notion that happiness is to be found through certain kinds of living and in certain kinds of families, wherein the world is not perceived as alien (11). She provides a genealogy for some contemporary discourses in "positive psychology," as well as an historical background of the utilitarian injunction to maximize happiness. The latter, she argues, provides a technology for promoting nationalities (123), and for sites of failure to reproduce or mimic the colonizer (129). One of her main arguments throughout the text is that happiness is "still used as a technology of citizenship," (133). She also argues that the obverse of happiness is assumed to be "unhappiness," the "un" denoting an absence of a presence. This is what my study argues stridently against with regard to melancholia and nostalgia. Like Ehrenreich, Ahmed suggests that the pursuit of happiness leads us to "take cover" from pain, to not name the causes of pain, in hopes of protecting ourselves and others (83). Like Ehrenreich she also argues that this taking cover is to "avoid what might threaten the world as it is" (83). Refusing to take cover, she argues, is a form of political struggle (84).

<sup>12</sup> Freud describes mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 243). Melancholia elicits similar reaction; however, the

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reaction is compounded by “painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (243).

<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this study I use the term “melancholia” as defined by Freud in “Mourning and Melancholia.” He, however, cautions that “[m]elancholia, whose definition fluctuates even in descriptive psychiatry, takes on various clinical forms” (243). He further indicates that he will drop all claims to general validity for his conclusions. He refers to melancholia as a “reaction,” a “disturbance,” a “frame of mind,” an “attitude,” and a “mood,” all on the same page (244). He further goes on to describe “people who are [not] melancholic” (246); refers to the “development” of melancholia, and the falling “ill of the disease” (247). He goes to lengths to distinguish melancholia from mourning but repeatedly indicates that they often appear the same and that the melancholia borrows some of its features from mourning (250).

<sup>14</sup> Psychologist Martin Seligman has seven published books on the subject of learned optimism. His research was went so far as to use aversion therapy to try to change gay men's sexual orientation. The happiness industry has flourished in recent years with articles on the science of happiness appearing in *The Atlantic*, *Time*, and *Scientific American*, among various other journals and magazines. There are currently at least fifteen TED talks available for viewing on the topic. The discourses range widely across the latest frontiers of neuroscience and neuropsychology to explain how happiness is fostered in our brains and what biological purpose it serves (and how we can control our negative feelings and emotions). In 2010 the University of Kansas sponsored a symposium on “The Science of Happiness,” during which the keynote speaker (from the Harvard psychology department), argued that psychologists need to build

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bridges between the ivory tower and Main Street, so as to unite academic rigor with the accessibility of popular psychology books. According to Craig Lambert of *Harvard Magazine*, in addition to these developments, the Gallup Organization founded the Gallup Positive Psychology Institute to sponsor scholarly work in the field of positive psychology. The Positive Psychology Center now lists and hosts conferences in countries all over the world. There are, in addition, more than 200 college courses taught on the topic across the United States.

<sup>15</sup>As social critic Barbara Ehrenreich points out in *Bright-Sided*, the mandate to positive thinking is even practiced in the medical field. She recounts her experiences with cancer in which she was told that a positive attitude is essential to recovery. After all, a study reported that 60% of women who had been treated for the disease attributed their survival to positive thinking (33). What Ehrenreich's ultimate critique of this movement is, however, is that it is framed and driven by people and corporations and publishing houses that stand to make money off the movement. More significantly, the blame that individuals might assume for their unhappy economic circumstances, in a spiraling recession, displaces the responsibility for structural inequities. Positive thinking turns a blind eye to impending national and personal disasters.

<sup>16</sup>Burke describes grief as a process that enables one to temporarily substitute imminent pain for pleasure. The person who grieves "suffers his passion to grow upon him; he indulges it, he loves it." Moreover, the griever finds pleasure in returning to the loss (37).

<sup>17</sup>Early theories of the emotions purported to explain patterns of experience as if they were universal physiological responses from within. (See, for example, James, 1890; McDougall, 1908; Cannon 1927; Bull, 1951). This research was challenged by (among others) anthropologist, Michelle Rosaldo, who in *Culture Theory* argues that "[f]eelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organized by stories that we both

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enact and tell. They are structured by our forms of understanding (143). Theories of affect have, more recently, gained considerable attention in academia, and in popular discourses.

<sup>18</sup> Rubenstein, in *Home Matters*, addresses nostalgia from the perspective of how it is experienced and represented in women's fiction. The "presence of absence" she describes refers to the sense of loss that occupies "a palpable emotional space" (5). She differentiates this from "cultural mourning," which is "an individual's response to the loss of something with collective or communal associations: a way of life, a cultural homeland, from which she or he feels severed or exiled, whether voluntarily or involuntarily" (5). She argues "in contrast to the conventional view of homesickness and nostalgia as sentimental if not also psychologically repressive modes of feeling, both may have compensatory and even liberating dimensions within the frame of narrative" (6). In *Home Matters*, and in her earlier essay "Fixing the Past: Yearning and Nostalgia in Woolf and Lessing" Rubenstein furthermore plays with the concept of fixing, as both an effort to make stable in place or time, and an effort to recover. She suggests that nostalgic yearning contributes to a sense of self. Nonetheless, her depictions of "myth countries" imply an ability to return, if not to home, then to a "concentrated truth," or to "memory traces of home [that] are inevitably linked with those of mother" (*Home Matters* 24). She points primarily to the role of narrative to "fix" painful loss and persisting yearning. Nostalgia is the imagination's attempt to override, neutralize, or cancel loss. What is noteworthy here is that nostalgia is being viewed as an attempt to cancel loss, rather than (as conventionally conceived) as an obsessive prolonging of loss.

<sup>19</sup> In *Psychic Life*, Butler describes melancholia as a process by which an original external object is lost, or an ideal object is lost, and the refusal to break the attachment to such an object or ideal leads to the withdrawal of the object into the ego, the replacement of the object by

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the ego, and the setting up of an inner world in which a critical agency is split off from the ego and proceeds to take the ego as its object. The ego absorbs both love and rage for unsaid, unaccounted for things. It has substituted itself for the world in which it dwells (179).

<sup>20</sup> Freud's definition of mourning enables me to address nostalgia as if it were an affective consequence of a particular loss, that is, a loss of country, language, cultural references, or other foundational bearing.

<sup>21</sup> Kristeva provides a historical overview of the rhetorical and conceptual applications of the term "melancholia" (*Black Sun* 6-8), which has been used historically to refer variously to the Aristotelian *ethos* of the philosopher, the Christian sin of sadness, a mystical ascesis, a medical illness, a "perpetual anguish of the soul," or a process by which an object-cathexis is replaced by an identification. Kristeva uses the term "the abject" to refer to the violence of mourning for an "object" that has always already been lost (15).

<sup>22</sup> Abraham and Torok refer to the fantasy of incorporation that simulates profound psychic transformation as if by magic: something symbolic is taken in or "swallowed" as if it were literal rather than figurative (*The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*).

<sup>23</sup> Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia" defines a melancholic individual as one who experiences painful dejection, cessation of interest in externals, loss of capacity to love, lowering of self-regard, expectation of punishment, a diminution of self-regard, and an impoverishment of ego (244).

<sup>24</sup> Clewall points to Sachs's contention that, historically, one of the consolatory substitute objects has been not another person but a cultural fiction or symbolic compensation, such as divine transcendence or aesthetic immortality gained by creating memorializing works of art.

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<sup>25</sup> I refer to Nietzsche, both because Butler in *Psychic Life* refers to his postulates in her discussions of how the ideal, or the conscience, is formed, and because Kundera explicitly draws on Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return in both *Ignorance* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

<sup>26</sup> Butler discusses where and how Freud changed his thinking on mourning. By *The Ego and the Id*, published six years after "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud postulates that mourning often leads to an alteration of the ego due to a setting up of the object inside the ego, as it occurs in melancholia. This identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects—the ego becomes a sort of store-house for abandoned object-cathexes and contains the history of those object choices (*The Ego and the Id* 29). Character, Butler suggests in *Psychic Life of Power*, can then be imagined as a sedimentation of objects loved and lost, "the archeological remainder of unresolved grief" (*Psychic Life* 133). The correction that Freud makes to his earlier argument is that he now postulates that there is no final breaking of the attachment. Identification is a psychic form of preserving the object. The lost object, Butler explains, continues to "haunt and inhabit" the ego as one of its constituent identifications (134). The persistence of the ghost of the lost object allows for its loss in the world because there will be no complete loss.

<sup>27</sup> Like Butler, Eng and Han insist that melancholia and politics are coterminous activities. The melancholic leaves history open for continual re-negotiation. That is, unlike mourning in which the past is declared resolved, finished, and dead, in melancholia the past remains steadfastly alive in the present. By refusing loss and by engaging in the labor of grieving, melancholia constitutes an ongoing and open relationship with the silence of the past—bringing its fleeting ghosts and specters into the present.

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<sup>28</sup> This analysis parallels Kristeva's description of melancholia as an inability to move from a pre-linguistic experience of object loss toward a primary identification with a communal schema due to a lack of a compensatory signifier of identification (*Black Sun* 71). Without a bent for melancholia there is no psyche, and more importantly no modification of signifying bonds (10). Depression arises when the individual is not able to find or experience the substitution as adequate (5). She suggests that depression is a discourse with a language to be learned, rather than strictly a pathology to be treated. If the unspeakable grief arising from loss could be acknowledged by the community and publicly mourned, this would provide a compensatory signifier, transitioning the melancholic toward a communal schema that feels communal. The ability of the potentially depressive person to "arrive at a live meaning in the bond with others" makes triumph over sadness possible (24).

<sup>29</sup> Clewell raises the relevant question of how much of melancholia depends on denial of the radical otherness of the other in translation from mother to form, in the very effort to represent and memorialize the other.

<sup>30</sup> Clewell proposes that in the melancholic's perception of dissolution, brought on by the foreclosure of love, the loss "threatens to shatter the mourner's imaginary psychic integrity," because acknowledging the loss and letting go of the love would "force the grieving subject to recognize the full extent of what has been lost, namely, an irrecoverable attribute of the self, necessary to the mourner's sense of coherent identity" (47).

<sup>31</sup> The references to the Great Return in *Ignorance* parallel and yet diverge from references to the "eternal return," in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, in which Kundera grapples with Nietzsche's concept of experience reoccurring *ad finitum*.

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<sup>32</sup> Asher's translation of *TBLF*, which I am using for quotations, is a translation from the French translation into English (and which Kundera refers to as the definitive translation). It does not use the phrase "indefinable longing" and omits "a state of torment created by the sudden sight of one's own misery" (167) that Heim, the first translator, employed to try to translate *litost*.

<sup>33</sup> Kundera's novels are notable in that they treat the male characters very differently from female characters. In *TBLF* what makes it difficult for Tamina to look back is her remorse *for* forgetting. She "watches her [self] forgetting" (224). The advice given to her by a character is this, "Forget your forgetting" (224). Yet Tamina knows that her sadness is engaged with one person. She tries to assert, in silence, that her husband, who is dead, "was still alive in that sadness, he was merely lost and she must go search for him. Search the whole world for him! Yes, yes! At last she knew" (229). The narrator decides, "she is going to fight" (240). She does this first by voluntarily taking part in the games and adopting the language of the children on the island. She is tormented because, on the island, she does not belong to the children's world. Her ploys and tactics are her attempt to try to play along; however, they keep her from memory. She is eventually crushed by an "unbearable absence of weight . . . the weight of lightness" (259). Tamina leaves the island she did not belong to, but has no idea what to move toward. All she has is a desire to live. The sections about Tamina suggest that she, unlike Josef, is not ashamed of her past, or that if she is ashamed, she can abide by it. She makes choices about how to recover her own history. Tamina alienates herself, exposes herself, admits her weaknesses, and finally swims off into the unknown, away from games and languages of others that thwarted her nostalgia. Tamina overcomes the debilitation of shame.

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<sup>34</sup> This is obvious in her recurrent use of contemporary psychoanalytic terms such as “infantile fixation” and “castration complex,” described by Freud in 1910 and 1908, respectively.

<sup>35</sup> In *Mrs. Dalloway*, we see a character who has developed some tools to communicate his experience of, and anguish over, the historical conditions of war. The narrator tells us that Septimus has determined that there should be a testimony, an attempt to communicate (88). The tools of language, however, do not make for ready communication with others; Septimus remains isolated in his pain. He will not be remade into a readily recognizable version of a proportionate human being, however. As Brower argues, Septimus chooses suicide rather than having his life forcibly remade by one of the “compellers,” Dr. Holmes (58).

<sup>36</sup> For the purposes of my discussion of Woolf I do not go into Husserl’s maxim of phenomenology *'Zurück zu den Sachen selbst'* or 'back to things themselves' outlined in *Logical Investigations* and made popular among European philosophical circles in 1900.

<sup>37</sup> Minow-Pinkney argues that "Woolf's writing effects a denial of the unified subject" and that the writing style denotes the difficult problems of women's writing itself, since what must be constructed as subjectivity is "at the same time the mode of the subject in writing the novel" (82). It is a tricky game to enter the symbolic while representing female experience in a way that is denied by the symbolic. Her argument proceeds by a close reading of the novelistic techniques, including discussion of represented speech which suspends "the location of the subject between character and author," writing made porous by the tunneling process, verb tense usage, and transcendence of narrative linearity which "loosens the relations of subject and object" and disrupts the logical relations by syntactic order (59). In order for a woman to free herself from ego-identity so as to be able to speak feminine experience ,she must insubstantiate

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and distrust "reality." In summary, the problem Minow-Pinkney imagines for the woman author interested in representing female experience is "to assert female specificity as difference and to open a space for difference in this masculine structure of society" (70). Woolf, she contends, does this by employing several techniques including the portrayal of the "old woman's song that escape[s] the lexical and syntactic grids of the symbolic order" (73). Likewise, Septimus, who, in his falling out of the symbolic order, in his non-alignment with masculine values, in his falling into "insanity" is "the thetic subject dissolved into the semiotic *chora* it had formerly so severely repressed" (79). Septimus "vicariously represents the risk of a total rejection of patriarchal law, and perishes" (80). *Mrs. Dalloway* allows us to feel the cost to each of the characters, though the cost is distinct for each.

<sup>38</sup> See Snaith in her introduction to *Palgrave Advances In Virginia Woolf Studies* and Cuddy Keane's chapter in that same volume entitled "Narratological Approaches."

<sup>39</sup> For a compelling psychoanalytical reading of Woolf that suggests readings of female subject formation that are crafted simultaneous to Freud's theories, see Abel in *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. For a discussion of the parallels between Woolf's 1920s novels and the narratives Melanie Klein that were developing simultaneously, see Laura Marcus.

<sup>40</sup> See Dymond's "Virginia Woolf Scholarship from 1991 to 2003: A Selected Bibliography."

<sup>41</sup> A number of authors, including Clewell and Bennett Smith, have argued persuasively that several of Woolf's texts, including *To the Lighthouse*, describe a transition from social grief practices to psychological therapies that describe a post-Freudian form of grief work. Both authors argue that Woolf was rejecting nineteenth-century modes of grief as emotionally oppressive, and suggest that *To the Lighthouse* provides a positive model for grief work.

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According to Smith, Lily is able to produce “a respectful depiction of Mrs. Ramsay as an abstract shape which expresses her grief without clothing it in the hated Victorian conventions. Lily is a modernist in both art and mourning; she wants to express ‘the thing itself before it has been made anything’” (327). Smith suggests that both the Ramsays and Lily are shown doing grief work, in that “both a work of art and artful work [sailing] allow grief to be expressed and worked through” (327).

<sup>42</sup>Critics such as David Daiches and Quentin Bell have cast Woolf as an author inherently private in content, divorced from politics and the public realm, and divorced from the real world, respectively. Snaith, in *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*, cites even Leonard Woolf in his autobiography as saying that “Virginia was the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition” (14). Snaith lists Woolf’s civic engagements in politics and briefly outlines the arguments of critics such as Alex Zwerdling, and Jane Marcus, who see Woolf’s work as militantly feminist.

<sup>43</sup> See Turbayne. *Berkeley: critical and interpretive essays*.

<sup>44</sup> Newman describes Mr. Ramsay in *TTL* as a much more sympathetic character than generally allowed. She argues that his disappointment in encountering the limitations of the mind is the same frustration that Woolf herself wrestled with (84).

<sup>45</sup> John Keats used the term “negative capability” in a letter to his brothers (Qtd in Li, ix). The mode of apprehension is initiated with an encounter that inspires terror, fear, pain, horror, or trauma and leads to a rupture in the subject’s ability to account for him or herself using the faculty of reason. For an astute discussion of how the romantic sublime, which Edmund Burke describes as operating in a manner analogous to terror (36), brings about three stages of psychic

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pain and transformation, and how those stages are manifest in the work of Emily Dickenson, see Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime*.

<sup>46</sup> In a 1924 lecture, Roger Fry suggests that art "calls up residual traces left on the spirit by the different emotions of life, without however recalling the actual experiences, so that we get an echo of the emotion without the limitation and particular direction which it had in experience" (Qtd. in intro. *To the Lighthouse*, Hussey, ix).

<sup>47</sup> Mr. Ramsay repeats the phrases such as "stormed at with shot and shell," "someone had blundered," "through the valley of death," "who shall blame him?," and "we perished each alone," several times in the novel.

<sup>48</sup> In *Mrs. Dalloway* the narrator addresses characters who are beset by the problems of aloneness and separateness and has Clarissa asking, quite frankly, whether religion or love solved that separateness. According to James Naremore, this is the central problem that Mrs. Woolf tries to deal with in all of her fiction (102).

<sup>49</sup> In "All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway*" Miller proposes that in Woolf's work "one person often sees spontaneously into the mind of another and knows with the same sort of knowledge he has of his own subjectivity what is going on there" (116). The examples he uses to support his assertion are all from *Mrs. Dalloway*. *To the Lighthouse* does not, in my reading, support this. Miller seems ambivalent about his own statement too, for in the very next paragraph he indicates that the proper model of relations among minds in *Mrs. Dalloway* is perfect transparency between the minds of the characters to the narrator, but of only "modified translucency" between the minds of one character and another (117).

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<sup>50</sup> In *A Writer's Diary*, Woolf indicates that at age 40 she has found out how to say something in her own voice, that she no longer felt influenced by anticipated reactions to her work (46).

<sup>51</sup> Abel argues in *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* that the “story disclosed through Lily’s paintings highlights the pre-linguistic experience of the mother. In painting, Lily seeks a mode of representation outside of the father’s symbolic universe” (47). My reading of the text suggests, in contrast, that the painting struggles to represent experience outside of the symbolically conventional, but should not be reduced to align so closely with Klein’s object-relations theory.

<sup>52</sup> Miller makes the argument in “Virginia Woolf’s All Souls’ Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway*” that in *Mrs. Dalloway* (and in other of Woolf’s writings, such as diary entries) she is proposing that “communication cannot be attained in life” and instead (quoting Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* 281) that “death was an attempt to communicate,” to bring final unity (Miller 122). He goes on to suggest (what I have argued in this chapter) that what ultimately brings communion is the text. Although Clarissa’s party is over and all the characters “move toward death,” what will not die is the moment of communion, and all other moments of the novel that the narrator rescues permanently from death (124). Miller refers to Woolf’s statement in *A Writer’s Diary* that indicates that her writing brings about a “synthesis” of her being (*WD* 208) and how the creative power at once “brings the whole universe to order” (*WD* 220). The novel itself, Miller says, is “a constructive action which gathers unconnected elements into a solidly existing object, something which belongs to the everyday world of other physical things” and designates the absence of things named from the everyday world “and their existence within the place out of place which is the space of literature” (126).

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<sup>53</sup> See Martin and Mohanty for an excellent analysis of Pratt's useful discussion of what it means to feel "safe" at home, what the rhetorical constructions exclude, and what work we must all do on our own.

See Kaplan for a discussion of political coalitions based on material histories rather than mystifications. She addresses the questions of how we can deconstruct the privileges of race, class, and gender supremacy and rearticulate identities and alliances.

See Gopinath for an analysis of how queer representations and practices can "queer" new ways of belonging that do not reinstate patriarchal values in diasporic communities. Her argument is that the analytical frame of diaspora allows for a reconsideration of the traditionally hierarchical relation between diaspora and nation. She analyzes rhetorical constructions of diaspora positioned as an impoverished imitation of originary national culture. The rendering of "woman" is a ground upon which male nationalist ideologies take shape, and "lesbian" prohibits such reinstatements (9). Her project then is remaking the space of home from within.

See Braziel and Mannur for a critique of metaphysical-geographical foundations of home, identity, and exile, cultural constructions of identity and social constructions of ethnicity. Identities, they argue, remain haunted by an uncertain relation to origin and place (10).

See Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* for a discussion of nation as a system of cultural significations, as a representation of social life, which acts to emphasize the instability of knowledge. He refers to the *unheimlich*, the terror of the space or race of the other (2).

See Ong for an analysis of her empirical work with Cambodian immigrants to explore what key cultural values, codes, and rules are being internalized and contested in the process of learning to belong. These include: self-remaking, property ownership, rational subjectivity, and practicing

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being a flexible *homo economicus*. Her brilliant intervention is to suggest that “self refashioning” ends up perpetuating patriarchal practices.

See also Probyn on singularity and identities that capture some of the ways individuals can move in between categories of specificity (9).

<sup>54</sup> As Mohanty argues in “Under Western Eyes,” the term “colonization” has been used to describe the expropriation of experiences and struggles of marginalized people by hegemonic movements. Regardless of the problematics of its application as a descriptor, the term usually refers to a system of structural domination and a discursive suppression of the heterogeneity of subjects.

<sup>55</sup> Butler’s argument in *Giving an Account of Oneself* about the psychic moves that instantiate the subjectivity responsible for agency varies from those of Nietzsche’s, Freud’s, and Kundera’s. She says that in *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche argues that we become accountable through fear and terror and that, for him, aggression is more primary than generosity and that justice emerges as a revenge ethic (13). Butler says Nietzsche fails to understand other interlocutory conditions in which one would be called to or would desire to give an account of oneself (14). She confesses: “In *The Psychic Life of Power*, “I perhaps too quickly accepted this punitive scene of inauguration of the subject” (15). She goes on to say that if one were to read Nietzsche alongside Freud’s *Civilization and Discontents* and “Totem and Taboo,” one would arrive at a grim view of morality and conclude that conduct that seeks to follow norms of prescriptive value is motivated less by the desire to do good than by a terrorized fear of punishment and its injurious effects (17).

<sup>56</sup> Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* grapples extensively with choice and the ambivalence that his characters have to face by not having known the full consequences of

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their choices. The narrator uses the story of Oedipus to suggest that even if one commits a heinous crime in ignorance, he still then has the choice of then inflicting punishment on himself, such as putting his eyes out.

<sup>57</sup> Said's introduction to *Orientalism* makes a compelling argument for the political investments of Western scholarship and media in domesticating the mysterious "Orient." Although his Foucauldian analysis has enabled further discourses, his analysis in *Orientalism* remains troubled by his notion that there is a pure Orient outside of interpretation.

<sup>58</sup> As Foucault suggests, "Knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true'" (27). Hall takes up Foucault to adumbrate sites of social life where these strategies or "microphysics" of power exert their effect by posing as knowledge (40).

<sup>59</sup> What is repeatedly pointed out in narratives of exile published in edited anthologies such as *Letters of Transit* (Aciman, Andre), *Altogether Elsewhere* (Robinson, Mark), *Exile in Literature* (Lagos-Pope, Maria Ines.), and *The Literature of Emigration and Exile* (Whitlark, James and Wendell Aycock), is that belief in purity, in origin, or in sacrality becomes almost impossible after one is forced to live out-of-context, that is, in exile. When the exile has to exchange a set of ideological, cultural, and affective referents for others, referents that not only may work as well, but that offer new possibilities for seeing and performing in the private and social spheres, he or she comes to understand that words only gesture. In *Letters of Transit* Hoffman and others argue that until one learns another language, language seems to have the aura of sacrality, the words seem to name the things they point toward. We even think and speak as if our language has an ontological reality inseparable from a single system of representation.

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Once these foundational referents are not only translated but relinquished, the family, the language, the truth is no longer the “order of things” (49). Exile becomes a process for developing contrasting structures in one’s head: lexical, syntactical, social, and psychological. In some cases this mitigates the need to “orientalize.” Admittedly, in other cases, exile exacerbates the drive to entrench one’s self more firmly in notions of purity, origin, righteousness, and tradition. This has been the critique of traditional notions of nostalgia in academia.

<sup>60</sup> Kristeva in *Black Sun* also suggests that the artifice of parody names abjection while incorporating and exceeding it.

<sup>61</sup> Her generalizations are not confined to class but extend to East-West orientations. “Unlike the Western pragmatic transactional relationship of the idea of ‘Europe,’ the ‘Eastern’ attitude used to be more romantic: the relationship with Europe was conceived as a love affair with all its possible variations—from unrequited love to autoeroticism. Not euros but eros dominated the metaphors for the East-West exchange” (*The Future of Nostalgia* xix). The irony is that she makes sweeping generalizations herself while critiquing the tendency of universalist nostalgic discourses.

<sup>62</sup> In her travels through the former Czechoslovakia, Hoffman notes that a year and a half after the Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia is in the throes “not of forgetfulness, but of something like obsessive remembering, a fixation on the injuries and injustices of the past” (*Exit into History* 175). Most conversations, she notes, circle back to “the list,” those who have betrayed or informed on their neighbors. And yet, listening to each individual story, she comes away with nuances and complexities that allow her own interpretation of history to resist demonization.

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<sup>63</sup> In some ways an essay that positions Said and Hoffman into one discussion is at extreme odds with itself. They both describe processes by which one group of people characterize another group in a vacuum of experiential knowledge, characterizations that become projections, and are not tested against realities, and therefore face no pressure to “moderate the language in which one speaks on this subject” (Hoffman, *ASK* 139). They both employ the musical term “contrapuntal” to describe the possibilities for very different peoples to cohabitate and produce something, not harmonious, but integral. However, Said and Hoffman arguably have very different affective and even ideological positions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. While Hoffman asserts that according to certain interpretations Israel is the arena in which post-holocaust history is played out, that its aggressions are a sort of “compensatory symptom,” (247) she admits to feeling aggrieved when Israel’s “existence is threatened” (248). She indicates that she feels “the rise of objection when the Holocaust is blamed for current Israeli policies, or the failure of that country to become a *saintly* state (italics mine, 251). Throughout the last section of the book she continually refers to anti-Semitism, rather than the arguably more accurate anti-Zionism, or anti-Israeli sentiments. Without adequate support she asserts that many members of the Arab and Muslim world consider “Jews to be the archenemy” (261) rather than using the arguably more precise phrase “Israeli foreign policies” rather than Jews. Concomitantly, she also admits to being baffled about the critique of American imperialism and neo-imperialism following 9/11. She characterizes these critiques as irrational, followed up by “This is not to discount the realities of American power, or to suggest that its uses are always altruistic, or to ignore the demoralizing disparities of wealth between the developed and underdeveloped world, or the lessons that the world’s mightiest nation does need to learn” (258). This characterization not only *does* seem to discount this, but more problematically, in a text

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fundamentally concerned with how to understand and constrain violence and suffering, the weight of this consideration seems paramount.

<sup>64</sup> This is one of the foremost accomplishments of Duras who, in chronicling her own loss and melancholic maneuvers in texts such as *The Lover* and *The War*, foregrounds the problematics of memory.

<sup>65</sup> Eng and Kazanjian are interested in the productive reactions to loss that configure absence as a potential presence. Mourning, they suggest, establishes an active and open relationship to history. They engage Benjamin's phrase "historical materialism" to describe a creative psychic process of developing alternate empathies (1). In their essay, Eng and Han essay explain the condition they are interrogating which they call racial melancholia. Melancholia, they argue, should be viewed as a depathologized structure of feeling (344). They are interested in racial melancholia as an intersubjective psychology across generations of immigrants to the US (354).

<sup>66</sup> By "alterity" I am referring to an aspect of the self, others, and even forces of nature that are conceptually and linguistically incomprehensible. Alterity implies radical otherness. In *Psychic Life* Butler's discussion of encounters with alterity refers to a subject, who in the throes of grief is "implicated in a loss of autonomy that is mandated by linguistic and social life" (196). She argues that by "absorbing the other as oneself" the ego is released from its melancholic foreclosure of the social" (196). The "trace" of the other (or in her words, of "alterity") need not be a specific dyadic pair but may refer to an ideal, or a country. In addition, she tells us, an ideal may be lost because it becomes unspeakable. Persisting in one's own alterity means that one is always vulnerable to terms and classifications that one never made, terms that institute a primary subordination, against which the subject emerges against itself in order to be for itself (28).

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<sup>67</sup> Fitz, in *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector*, refers to Lispector's quest for the *matéria prima* of life (13).

<sup>68</sup> Fitz, in *Sexuality and Being*, notes that Lispector's work invites discussion from a variety of approaches, prominent among which are the existential, the phenomenological, the mystical, and the feminist, but goes on to list work that engages structuralism and reception theory (2).

<sup>69</sup> For a thorough discussion of Lispector's work within the context of poststructuralism and the semiotics of being, see Fitz's *Sexuality*.

<sup>70</sup> The question of how poststructural analysis can lead to, or divert attention away from real women's real problems was taken up as a critique of Butler's work by Nussbaum in "The Professor of Parody."

<sup>71</sup> Lispector's father Pinkhas became Pedro. Her mother, Mani, became Marieta. Her sister, Leah, became Elisa, and Chaya, became Clarice. Only her sister Tania kept her name, since it was common enough in the new country (Moser 42).

<sup>72</sup> A thorough review of Lispector's work that has been published in the US, Europe, and Latin America extending up until 1993 was compiled and edited by Diane Marting and published as *Clarice Lispector, A Bio-Bibliography*.

<sup>73</sup> Lispector has indicated that she first encountered the work of Sartre in 1946 (Marting xxvi).

<sup>74</sup> *O Quinze* by Rachel de Quieroz, *Casa Grande e Senzala*, by Gilberto Freyre, and *Vidas Secas*, by Graciliano Ramos.

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<sup>75</sup> Textual citations from *The Hour of the Star* shown in quotation marks are from Pontiero's English translation. Where text is cited without use of quotation marks, I have translated the Portuguese for the purposes of this essay.

<sup>76</sup> When the original Portuguese is cited I indicate the page number from the untranslated novel *A hora da estrela*.

<sup>77</sup> See Lindstrom's chapter on "Clarice Lispector: Articulating Women's Experience" for a developed, insightful discussion of this phenomenon in the short stories.

<sup>78</sup> Wheeler provides a revealing description of this process in "The Chicken" and "The Crime of the Mathematics Professor."

<sup>79</sup> Her question prompts the reader to ponder the connection between Macabéa and the Jewish Maccabees who led a struggle from 176 BC to 161 BC. In the Apocryphal books 1 and 2 of the Maccabees, the prophets warned the rulers and the populace about the impending expulsion and persecution that would occur.

<sup>80</sup> Vieira does not, of course, imply that Lispector's fiction crosses social boundaries in that people of all classes will read it, but rather in its depictions of popular rituals and practices it crosses class boundaries.

<sup>81</sup> The original Portuguese is "*ah, essa não! É tão bom estar aqui montado como estou que nunca mais vou sair de você*" (*Hora* 22).

<sup>82</sup> The original Portuguese is "*essa gatinha quer todo o resto, o zé povinho sonha com fome de tudo*" (*Hora* 35).

<sup>83</sup> Earl Fitz, professor of Portuguese at Vanderbilt, personal communication. May 10, 2003.

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<sup>84</sup> The original Portuguese is “*Então escrever é o modo de quem tem a palavra como isca: a palavra pescando ou que não é palavra. Quando essa não-palavra—a entrelinha—morde a isca, alguma coisa se escreveu. Uma vez que se pescou a entrelinha, poder-se-ia com alívio jogar a palavra fora. Mas aí cessa a analogia: a não-palavra, ao morder a isca, incorporou-a. O que salva então é escrever distraidamente*” (*Água Viva* 21).

<sup>85</sup> Earl Fitz, personal communication. May 10, 2003.

<sup>86</sup> The translator of *The Passion*, Ronald Sousa, also points to the genre bending between literature and philosophy that this narrative performs. The narrative is replete with repetitions that contain additions and deletions, performing, in effect, a process by which language can be pressured to change. Sousa points to the inconsistency in punctuation practice, juxtaposition of diction styles including phrases that are non-Portuguese, fictitious allusions, inconsistent use of terminology, violations of traditional grammar and syntax, and verbal-conceptual ambiguities (viii). To frustrate conventional expectations further, Lispector, much like Kundera, has substantially revised the copyright-dated first edition without acknowledging that this was done (ix). To translate the narrative, Sousa admits he domesticated it and has paraphrased for words he could find no translation for. The English version, he admits, is more expository than the original. He asks us to imagine more language chaos.

<sup>87</sup> Virginia Woolf was also trying out a refashioning of words to allow new ones to emerge. In *Mrs. Dalloway* there are nonsense syllables that emerge from the old woman’s song. In *Between the Acts*, there are, likewise, phonetic sounds detached from signifiers. As Morris Beja points out in “Text and Counter-Text: Trying to Recover Mrs. Dalloway,” Woolf has, on several occasions, used the word “vagulous,” which was later cited in the Oxford English dictionary as wayward, citing that it has only appeared in the writings of Virginia Woolf (135).

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<sup>88</sup> For this discussion I use Ponteiro's original English translation rather than the new translation by Moser.

<sup>89</sup> The root of *bruxaria* is *bruxa*, meaning witch. Lispector has often been referred to as a witch by critics, fellow writers, book reviewers, and Cixous, in *Reading with Clarice Lispector*. Clarice Lispector herself makes fun of the designation in her last interview recorded by *Panorama Cultural*.

<sup>90</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway* refers to an unseen part of us that spreads wide and might survive, recovered, or attached to various persons, even haunting certain places after death (232). In this novel she also refers to Clarissa's feeling that she felt herself as a part of other elements, part of everywhere, ubiquitous (232). This ubiquitous part of a self that can spread and attach to other places and people is also a subject of her short piece "Street Haunting: A London Adventure." As Maria DiBattista points out in "Mrs. Dalloway: Virginia Woolf's Memento Mori," "death seems to complete rather than disrupt a life whose inner dynamic has been one of dispersing and projecting the self out of the body that houses but cannot contain it" (35).

<sup>91</sup> Adam Shellhorse, professor of Spanish and Portuguese Studies, Temple University, personal communication. September 18, 2012.

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