

WORKS OF MOURNING: FRANCOPHONE WOMEN'S
POSTCOLONIAL FICTIONS OF TRAUMA AND LOSS

by

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This dissertation project seeks to connect the thematic concerns of Francophone women's post-colonial fiction to broader issues of breaking cycles of violence and resisting the negative effects of globalization. An important part of the study will be a discussion of the historical trend towards the mechanization of nature to account for an ideology of domination that the West has exported to its colonies. Borrowing especially from Carolyn Merchant and the Frankfurt School of critical theorists but also from feminist object relations theorist Jessica Benjamin, I trace masculine culture's will to mastery over a weaker other to a primal fear of chaotic nature and the omnipotent Mother.

Violence that is currently directed at nature, women and children, and that is a central theme in the narratives I consider, has a long history. Colonization in all its forms stands out as the main characteristic of this history that will continue to repeat itself if left unexamined. My project demonstrates how these particular post-colonial novels engage with the past in such a way as to diffuse the internal mechanism of abusive

power. There are two principle components of this engagement: one is the bringing-to-light of a buried history, personal and collective, that Western, masculine culture strives to repress. The other is the creation of an aesthetic that offers a means to mourn a traumatic past, thereby initiating a process of emotional and social healing. Both phenomena serve as political resistance to a hegemonic system based on denial of loss.

In these novels I refer to this aesthetic of mourning as a “feminine symbolic of loss” to distinguish it from a traditional male canon of melancholy literature which instead capitalizes on loss for its own advancement. Their representations of oft-tabooed subjects attest to a refusal to comply with the cultural mandate of silence, driving a wedge into that mechanism of power that perpetuates itself by the disavowal and repression of loss.

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PREFACE

Works of Mourning: Francophone Women's Postcolonial Fictions of Trauma and Loss

Where the wound had been given, there must
the cure be found, if anywhere.
—Jane Austen, *Emma*

This study of representations of loss in women's post-colonial fiction of the French-speaking diaspora posits reconnection with repressed, painful memories and their narration as a cathartic and therefore transformative act, one that not only brings healing to the fictional characters in question but potentially acts as a catalyst within societies for a collective movement to recover and confront buried traumatic memory. Through close textual analysis of the fiction of four women authors from post-colonial, French-speaking societies (Guadeloupe, Cameroun, Quebec, and Lebanon), this dissertation project will demonstrate that within their narratives and by way of writing about loss, these writers suggest a way out of the blind cycle of repetition that results from repressing past trauma and early memories of vulnerability. I will argue that despite their disparate geographical contexts, their disclosure of loss (and violence) constitutes what I call a virtual feminist coalition, with political implications.

In contrast to a long tradition of melancholy discourses and literature whose hallmark is perpetual deferment of loss (a loss that refuses to be mourned, as in Freud's articulation of melancholy), these post-colonial fictions instead provide a means to

healing by addressing topics that are often taboo in masculinist culture and providing a model for grieving. A “melancholy ideology” that functions on the condition that loss be disavowed also underlies a certain economic model in which a sense of lack is never satisfied. However, rather than participate in a system of denial--which in romantic literary practices translates into the sublimation of loss into bucolic landscapes and, in modern consumer practices, equates to uncontrolled spending--these writers decry and mourn both cultural and personal trauma and loss. In particular, I will consider their means of representing child sexual abuse, narcissistic wounds and incest, rape and other acts of violence towards women, and the pain of grieving itself.

Love and loss--two poles between which all of humanity is fated to drift--are elemental ingredients for all of life's dramas. Through a history, both individual and collective, of fearful denial of those aspects of life which are most threatening or cause us the most pain, we bury even the memory of loss at great cost to ourselves and our environment. This protective wall of denial and repression obstructs our vision in the present and diminishes our capacity to give and receive love, our greatest need and desire. As long as individuals and societies remain cut off from such large parts of who they are, only partial engagement with the surrounding environment is possible. Generally, this unconscious effort to repress produces paranoia (the ever-present threat of that painful content rising to consciousness) and thus there is a turning inward out of fear of the outside. It is this great sense of lack generated by disavowed loss, I will argue, that fuels abusive and exploitative relationships of all types and on many levels, not the least of which is humans' relationship with nature.

To elucidate my use of the term “loss,” I begin by discussing Carolyn Merchant’s thesis that a primal fear of annihilation caused a gradual shift in Western modes of thought--from the conception of the universe as a living organism to that of nature as a machine. Merchant maintains that the forms of instrumental reason that evolved in the historical drive to mastery over nature--to eliminate its threatening unpredictability--has led to the accelerating degradation of nature and loss of quality of life. I expand the discussion of loss to include the German critical theorists Horkeimer and Adorno’s view that the culturally mandated alienation from nature did not spare human affect. Incalculable and variable as they are, emotions are intractable to the mechanistic, rational model that has prevailed since the Enlightenment and were thus banished to an underground, distorted existence. For these and other theorists of the Frankfurt School, setting such rigid limits on Western systems of thought out of fear of unpredictability (chaotic nature) has resulted in the impoverishment of lived experience and the creation of an economic model that enforces its law of sameness on a global scale.

For the Frankfurt School as well as in many feminist theories, the construction of Western male subjectivity and Western civilization itself (based on that masculine model) requires the repression of the past. This “past” implies the collective repressed memory of an imagined immediate relationship to nature and the male subject’s early emotional bond to his mother which he must repress in order to become gendered as “masculine”--in both cases it alludes to something that is forfeited in the forging of masculine identity and culture. This something-left-behind, a past marked by the subject’s vulnerability and a longing for a supposed undifferentiated state, is tabooed

knowledge for the subject of Western civilization and therefore must be repressed at all costs. Herbert Marcuse, also of the Frankfurt School, argues that the strong ambivalence that accompanies the initial experience of repression can lead to a spiral of violence proportionate to the degree of that repression. For the Frankfurt School and feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, this need to dominate those parts of the self construed as “weak” or “feminine,” as well as the extreme vigilance required against their return, together translate into an ideology of domination. Both schools of thought advocate a recuperation and reassessment of this buried past to break the cycle of violence.

Gender is central to the discussion of loss. Merchant and the Frankfurt School identify the historical conflation of women and nature and the perceived threat of these to autonomy (especially as they converge in the image of the omnipotent Mother) to account for the male subject’s need to both control nature and distance himself from his mother. While Jessica Benjamin’s feminist articulation of object relations theory does not fully address the Western subject’s estranged relationship with nature, she does underline the importance of the relationship with primary caretakers in perpetuating gender polarity and systems of dominance. She blames rigid gender roles for relations of domination, consonant with the theories of the Frankfurt School. Alice Miller’s discussion of early childhood trauma and Jennifer Freyd’s theories on repressed traumatic memory offer compelling arguments about the primacy of those earliest relationships in forming subjectivity, and how cycles of abuse are fueled by repression of childhood wounds of betrayal.

In an effort to historicize the concept of melancholy in discursive practices and through a simultaneous critical re-reading of Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia," I consider the coterminous ideas of the "gendering of melancholia"¹ and "melancholy gender"² as complementary articulations of the problem of social constructions of gender. In both cases a passionate relationship with the mother is at stake. In the novels themselves, this primary loss mandated by patriarchal culture structures an "archeology of losses" on many levels. By bringing to the level of their writing the issue of normative gender construction, which demands both identification with the mother and a repudiation of what she represents in masculinist culture, this mourning of the maternal constitutes what I refer to as a "feminine symbolic of loss" to denote its resistance to a hegemonic symbolic based on denial of lack.

The role of love in these novels powerfully accomplishes the dissolution of paranoid boundaries between self and Other, including national or racial Other. The barriers that the politics of identity strive to erect are overwhelmed by relationships of identification with the Other. One of my primary tasks in the dissertation is to shed light on the roles of *relationship* in these works, between self and other, personal and collective histories, past and present.

My introductory chapters lay the theoretical groundwork for the entire project. The first chapter, "Historicizing Loss: Domination and its Legacy," maps a history of the

¹Coined by Juliana Schiesari in her text of the same name, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

²A concept discussed in a chapter with this title in Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford UP, 1997).

death of nature to account, in part, for the pervasive and ever-expanding loss of quality of life in the West (ie. the dialectical relationship between the destruction of our natural environment and the impoverishment of the self). In Chapter Two, “A Critical Look at the History of Mourning and Melancholy and Their Relation to Gender and Power,” I expand the discussion of how relations of power and domination are reproduced to focus on the social construction of gender. This section delves further into the question of how the primary relationship with the mother comes to form melancholy gendered subjects as well as the role of this first relationship in perpetuating certain power structures. Contemporary theoretical work on buried childhood trauma also informs my consideration of the role of subjection to primary caretakers in forming subject/object relations in adult life.

Each subsequent chapter undertakes the textual analysis of one or two novels in view of a certain aspect of the relationship between loss and recovery. Chapters Three and Four, “The Tempestuous Aesthetic of Gisèle Pineau” and “Trauma and Repression in Calixthe Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*,” focus on novels whose central themes are incest and childhood sexual abuse; they treat these themes in relation to a broader problem of violence. In both novels, repression of trauma and recovered memory play a central role in the final transformation of the characters.

Chapter Five, “Odyssey to the Origins of Melancholy” explores the process of repression and recuperation of the past in Louise Dupré’s novel *La memoria* and considers the phenomena of mourning and fiction-writing as related and co-productive means of healing from a painful past. This novel, too, deals specifically with early childhood narcissistic wounds that take courage to remember and grieve. Chapter Six, “The War on Women and Nature and the Politics of Violence: Writing Traumatic History

in Etel Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose*," addresses the issues of repression and recovery on at least two levels within a narrative of war: the protagonist's exploration of personal memories of a past relationship with her executioner and the cultural memory of her murder that is recovered and narrated as historiographic fiction--itself a potential salve to an open collective wound.

My conclusion emphasizes the characteristic that links these texts: the fact that rather than accept the cyclical pattern of self and collective alienation and abuse as ineluctable, the authors explore interpersonal dynamics and engage with personal and collective histories in such revolutionary ways as to offer a model that would break the blind cycle of repetition, allowing in its stead transformative healing and political resistance.

Although in some ways this study could perhaps as easily have been about Latin-American or Spanish Caribbean post-colonial fiction by women, or women's fiction of the Portuguese ex-colonies--or any other place that at one time lost its autonomy to a conquering people--I have, of necessity, limited my scope to francophone authors. The French were main actors on the global stage during the period of colonization. Although less powerful today than a century ago, and not nearly as ubiquitous as American imperialism is today, France's legacy as a colonizer remains. When planting a European flag in foreign soil, the French sowed the seeds for future globalization in their colonies. Indeed, I will argue that the colonization of these countries did not end with the advent of 'post-colonial' studies. A capitalist drive economy is fast transforming the globe into a network of competing markets, rendering obsolete any notion of autonomous nation-states. Free trade zones stand to replace what were once national borders.

Unlike the political projects of many of their male counterparts or the nation-building fictions that belong to the literary canons, these women writers articulate subjectivity in a radically different manner. Promoting national pride and defining a national identity is much less of a preoccupation for most of these authors than questioning the ideologies behind such projects--the nexus of which seems to be related to a structuring of identity that is based upon the repression of "the feminine." I think that, on the contrary, many of these women writers deconstruct these master narratives, the nationalist discourses, in order to expose the oppressive ideologies that fuel them.³

³In *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, Vol. 1*, Silvio Torres-Saillant makes the following reference to Illeana Rodriguez on the subject: "A recent study by Illeana Rodriguez on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and nation examined Caribbean fiction to find a 'denationalization of the representation of women' in the texts studied. She concludes that women's 'consciousness of the negation of a feeling of nationality' is a 'consequence of their exclusion as subjects of law in liberal republics,' and of their realization that construction of the nation is 'a series of male acts.'" (London; Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Pub., 1992) 73.

CHAPTER ONE

Historicizing Loss: Domination and its Legacy

Men pay for the increase of their power
with alienation from that over which they
exercise their power.

--Horkheimer and Adorno

Numerous schools of critical thought have grappled with the effects of structures of domination, charting their course through early infancy and interpersonal relationships to their widespread manifestation at the socio-historical level. A pervasive sense of loss seems to fuel much of this theoretical inquiry, and the realization that somewhere along the road to modernity something critical was left behind. What must today be recognized is that the push towards progress has become a mad rush to establish “free trade” relations--with their attendant cultural and economic hegemony--across the globe. This fatal trajectory is leaving a trail of destruction in its wake of human lives and of the natural environment. This chapter will look at Western history with an aim to understand how the ideologies and practices that have led to the death of nature have also led to this ever-expanding loss of quality of life across cultures. A critical view of history also brings into view the story of the Western modern--or postmodern--ego, whose drive to mastery has fashioned self/other relationships with nature and among people according to a model of domination. We might understand this ideological model

as “melancholy,” I argue, since it sustains and perpetuates itself on all levels by a categorical denial--and at the same and incorporation--of loss.

In drawing the link between psychic structures of domination, their symbolization in discursive practices and their physical manifestations, this analysis simultaneously questions the thesis that Dominick LaCapra sought to establish in *Writing History*, *Writing Trauma*: namely that “transhistorical or structural trauma” and “historical trauma” must be distinguished as separate phenomena, in the same way that he insists that “absence” must not be confused or conflated with “loss”.⁴ LaCapra’s warning against a tendency to conflate all of history and culture with trauma--or transhistorical loss--is meant to underscore the political and ethical importance of attributing agency and responsibility to the perpetrators of crimes against humanity, which might otherwise be lost in those sweeping generalizations. Likewise, he argues that equating “the human condition” with constitutive lack--as in Lacanian theory--may obstruct the process of working through trauma by its victims by instead promoting a melancholic fatalism. While I understand and agree with this view that there is an inherent danger in considering human existence as fundamentally traumatic and, like him, I am critical of those discourses, my study seeks nonetheless to establish the *connections* between trauma, absence, and loss by tracing a specific trajectory in the history of domination. My view is that it is precisely by historicizing loss across time that we can begin to account for--and come to terms with--history’s traumatic events.

⁴Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore: London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001.

The principle idea is that “structural lack,” rather than constituting *a priori* human nature, will in fact be shown to be a psychic structure that has developed at critical moments in history and as a result, has shaped social, political and economic reality according to its inner dynamic. The grounding of lack in this transhistorical formulation, rather than advocating melancholic denial in a flight to a nostalgic metaphysics of absence (of “absolute foundations” or an unmediated relationship with nature), will seek to restore agency to the individual and invite the possibility of resistance through an understanding of the dynamics of power.⁵

Feminist philosopher and ecologist Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature*, critically examines the transformations in politics, economics and systems of thought in Western European history, with an emphasis on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in light of the dynamic relationship inherent between human culture and the natural environment--a project she identifies as an “ecosystem model of historical change”(42). Based on this dialectical model, Merchant reconstructs history by restoring nature’s role as subject in a reciprocal relationship with humans involving interrelated systems of cause and effect. Working within this holistic framework, Merchant attributes these changes in modern Western culture to a gradual but radical shift in the conception of

⁵In psychoanalytical terms, we understand the violent trajectory of the Western ego that drives the capitalist impetus to be a result of a primary frustration, the radical alienation of the subject from all that has been culturally projected on to women--that is, the realm of affect--in the process of individuation that demands separation from the mother. This splitting off and repression of the subject’s own feelings, therefore, produces a fundamental sense of *lack* that compels one to try to recuperate that lost paradise, the lost sense of wholeness, symbolically--in the accumulation of commodities by which one seeks to fill the internal void or longing. This would account for the process of *infinite regress* that determines our relationship to these object substitutions--as they can never replace what has been originally lost: one’s desire will “vagabond” or drift from one object to the next in an endless search of its ever-elusive gratification.

nature as a living, intelligent organism and nurturing mother to a mechanistic model that held nature to be merely inanimate, dead matter--epitomized in the metaphor of the machine. While both the organic and mechanistic world views have existed concurrently, even to this day, it is the latter that finally came to predominate during the course of the Scientific Revolution and continues to structure our lives, taking its toll on nature and our social reality.

Merchant meticulously historicizes the ways in which women and nature have been conflated as ideologically determined social constructions, based on the ancient biological assumption that women are "closer" to nature and thus have been culturally represented as immanence or inert matter, while the male principle has been associated with creative activity and spirit. She sees this as a model that has easily lent itself to capitalism's restructuring of women and nature into resources to be exploited in our modern world. Once nature ceased to be alive and sensitive, Merchant argues compellingly, this mechanical world view sanctioned relations of domination and violence. The imagery and descriptive statements employed within this mechanistic framework coincided with--indeed, seemed to *generate*--exploitative cultural norms and social ideologies.

Merchant begins her study by establishing the historical, biologically-determined basis for the widespread cultural association of woman and nature; she documents this conflation in philosophical and scientific discourses --from the female soul of the world in Plato's *Timaeus* and the "feminine" principle of inert, passive matter in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* to Francis Bacon's articulation of nature in the seventeenth century as a

“witch” or a “whore” whose secrets must be wrested from her by force. Merchant gives a comprehensive overview of the various forms of organic theories of the cosmos that prevailed until the mechanistic model superceded them in the seventeenth century. Rather than consider them separately, I will highlight those features that Merchant considers to have influenced and been incorporated in this latter model.

In the predominant imagery of the organic theories that associated the earth, nature and the cosmos as *female*, we can identify two dominant and opposite trends: while one of these constellations of metaphors represents nature as a nurturing mother provider in a world viewed as divinely structured and orderly, the second group of conceptual images derives from a principle of feminine unpredictability and chaos. It is of central importance to Merchant’s thesis to understand the process by which this second view of nature--as threatening, unruly and prone to violent “mood swings” in the form of violent storms and other natural catastrophes--developed into the ideology of power and domination underlying the mechanistic philosophy. As she demonstrates, this shift in imagery to a mechanistic framework was necessitated by changes in cultural values and economic and scientific practices--changes that accelerated considerably with the advent and rapid expansion of market capitalism and its modes of production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the marked negative impact of this on the natural environment. While the image of the earth as a living organism had functioned as a normative constraint on violating or exploiting nature--the “nurturing mother”--the

machine metaphor actually sanctioned the domination of organic nature in the name of “progress.”

Whereas Roman and Renaissance philosophers had condemned mining practices, for example, as unethically violent acts against the nurturing and sensitive mother earth, commercial mining and other more rigorous technological innovations called for new conceptual systems that were not laden with the same ethical implications and prohibitions on exploiting nature. By replacing the metaphors “womb” and “bosom” to denote the earth’s depths and its bounty of precious metals with that of an unfeeling machine, or inanimate matter, the mining industry could proceed to disrupt and pollute the environment unimpeded by a guilty conscience--legitimated by the belief inherent in mechanistic philosophy that nature’s resources are ours to exploit.

Likewise, Bacon’s proposed political program in his *New Atlantic* sought to rationalize and thereby palliate aggressive manipulation of nature under the auspices of Science and universal human “progress.” By advocating the elimination of ethical strictures on direct experiments with nature, Bacon’s ideas ended up contributing to the unrestrained exploitation and depletion of the earth’s natural resources, and this “progress” tended to benefit the already socially and economically privileged by Bacon’s substitution of a patriarchal and societal hierarchy for that of a female and cosmic one. His doctrine of humankind’s absolute dominion over nature has its roots in an earlier formulation of the same premise. As alluded to earlier, Merchant draws historical connections between seemingly disparate world views to provide an explanation of how the once predominant organic theory of the vital female cosmos, via a process of

assimilation, came to be superceded by its antithesis--nature as a mathematically coherent ensemble of predictable laws that are applied to and that act upon dead matter.

Merchant argues that within the Baconian program we can recognize precepts from the Renaissance's Neoplatonic practice of natural magic. The natural magician believed he was manipulating the spiritual forces contained within material objects. Although the natural philosophers (Agrippa, Della Porta, among others) held that the world consisted of a tripartite communion of matter, spirit and soul, they believed, as would Bacon, that matter itself was secondary, passive and inert--a prison to the *animus*. The critical difference is that nature, although divided conceptually into these three components, was still considered a vital and sensitive organism. Bacon effectively disenchanting nature of any lingering animistic properties, leaving only inert mass controlled by external processes. It is not difficult to see how easily the figure of the magician gave way to that of the scientist--both manipulators of the "secrets" of nature for human benefit. It is also worth noting, as Merchant does, the similarity in power structures that reserved the rights to knowledge and technology and any gains made thereby to the privileged upper echelon of society.

The social milieu within which Bacon lived and wrote his scientific treatises directly influenced the language he chose to express his views on nature. Namely, the "controversy over women" and the witch trials, which emerged in reaction to the changing social values brought about by the Reformation--and in particular the issue of women's role and status within the social order--shaped Bacon's metaphorical descriptions of humanity's relationship to nature. He writes of the investigation of

nature's "secrets" in terms of an "inquisition," which extracts answers by means of torture. In this continued use of the female gender to describe nature, and the corresponding social practice of associating women with nature, Merchant identifies an implicit and mutually reinforcing sanction of relations of domination and exploitation: whether comparing unruly yet passive Nature to the female sex or unpredictable, fickle women to an albeit passive Nature, it provides a pretext for assigning them both an inferior status.

Again, Merchant identifies the concern with *order* to be the fundamental preoccupation of the seventeenth century, occasioned by the lingering psychic and social effects of the Reformation and the "discovery" not only of new worlds but of the infinite expanse of space in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. An urgent need was felt to reestablish the sense of security that the old world order, with its cosmic and social hierarchies, had provided. The mechanistic framework provided this security against the perceived chaos. However, by re-articulating nature as *dead* in its discursive forms, mechanism also concomitantly effected the death of nature in reality as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Merchant names Mersenne, Gassendi and Descartes as the primary thinkers responsible for developing the mechanical theories that eventually came to shape the West. All three were obsessed with the issue of certainty, with ascertaining Truth. Descartes, for one, influenced by the mathematical underpinnings in Plato's theories and the primacy of divine Reason, ultimately came to articulate a theory founded on mathematical logic as a means of understanding the world and humans' place within it.

This radical gesture, implying the reduction of everything material to its abstract quantifiability in mathematical equations, laid the epistemological grounds for the interment of the body in quantitative discursive practices and within modern social institutions. Concomitantly, the intellect came to dominate within these practices and institutions. In one of the final chapters of *The Death of Nature*, Merchant mentions feminists' philosophical response to Descartes' work in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Although in this work she does not elaborate on the modern ramifications of this Cartesian mind/body dualism *specifically* but rather considers it within its more general historical context, the problem will be taken up again later by feminists such as Susan Bordo and countless others as central to the issue of women's historical and current political oppression.⁶

Thomas Hobbes, a friend and acquaintance of both Descartes and Francis Bacon, shared their mechanistic philosophy and further developed the machine metaphor's use by first applying it to explain human sensation and finally, by extension, to a model for the rational regulation of society. His *Leviathan* postulated a set of rules by which the disorder inherent in the individual citizen's human nature and society in general would be brought under control, analogous to the ways in which the ordering of individual parts would ensure the smooth functioning of a machine. It was Hobbes especially who indicted human passion as dangerous--viewing affect as a threat to the rational operation of the machine. The belief that competition for resources--or a competitive spirit based

⁶See for example Susan Bordo's *The Flight to Objectivity* which explores how this mind/body dualism came to be the foundation of Cartesian rationalism's reconstruction of knowledge.

on fear--underlies all human social interaction founded the basis for the Hobbesian model of social organization. He advocated concentrating power in the hands of the state, or a sovereign "father" figure, effectively furthering the disintegration of a more integrative world view. His ideas, developed during a period when commercial capitalism and its market economy were beginning to create these very conditions by defining social relations along these same lines, fully reflects its ideology of domination and power.

Throughout her study, Merchant alludes to the concurrent development or dialectical co-occurrence of systems of thought based on the mastery of nature and capitalism. She chronicles the evolution of social practices--political, economic and discursive--throughout early modern European history that led to the world's mechanization and facilitated (post-) modern global capitalism, illustrating by example the shift from production for the purpose of subsistence to capitalist modes of production for profit. In addition to citing technological innovations in mining practices, Merchant highlights the advances in agricultural technology that occasioned the transformation of an agrarian economy based on peasant control of the land to a market-based economy that produced specialized goods for trade. Greater yields produced surplus and increased profit, widening the gap between capitalist landholders and the wage-laborers. Again, Merchant contextualizes this economic transition in light of the dialectical relationship between human activity and nature--showing how the changes in the natural environment and people's experience of it as mediated accelerated the exploitation of resources by

undermining the organic model.⁷ She understands the machine metaphor to have developed as a result of humans' gradual alienation from nature, and in general to be a symbol of technology's power not only to dominate and exploit nature but to organize human life in such a way as to meet the demands of commercial capitalism by maximizing productivity and profit through control. Again, this mechanically rational world catalyzed capitalism's systematic expansion and exploitation of human and natural resources, banishing the world of unpredictable and disruptive human affect to an ever deeper subterranean existence.

It is especially this last idea that Adorno and Horkheimer take up and elaborate in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: their project involves an excavation of this buried European history of the passions and an analysis of the psycho-social effects of this repression in Western modern society. Just as Merchant recognizes the imperative to account for a glaring absence --the ecological perspective--in traditional history, Adorno and Horkheimer also call for a new interpretation of history based on the recognition of a related foreclosure. They articulate this view thus: "Europe has two histories: a well-known, written history and an underground history. The latter consists in the fate of the human instincts and passions which are displaced and distorted by civilization"(231). Like Merchant, their inquiry leads them to search out the causes of the death of nature, but as the previous lines imply, theirs is more of a social critique with a psychoanalytical focus. Similar to Merchant, they articulate this history in terms of a dialectic. Rather

⁷Teresa Brennan makes this point as well: that the more we alter the physical environment, the more we come to view nature as ours to exploit (170). See especially the last chapter of *History after Lacan*.

than view nature and culture as a dichotomy, the Frankfurt School, like Merchant, assigns each a primary role in a dynamic interdependent and causal relationship. Likewise, both proceed from the assumption that the past, present and future are dialectically linked. In this way, history is not reified as a dead, distant and decathected object of intellectual inquiry but rather engaged in a vital, pathos-charged exchange with the here and now.

There are multiple points of overlap and contiguity between Merchant's *The Death of Nature* and Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Underlying all of these is the recognition by Merchant and the Frankfurt School of the emergence and final hegemony of instrumental reason as the source of suffering. They understand the ideology of power and domination fundamental to the mechanistic world view as originating in the fear of nature, and both identify the uncontrolled growth of capitalism as the ever-evolving outcome of this ideology. The Frankfurt School, however, will foreground the social dimensions of our historical alienation from nature, especially with respect to modern social psychosis and violence.

Like Merchant, the Frankfurt School recognizes the disenchantment of nature--or the expulsion of animism in all its forms--as the critical turning point on the road to the mechanization of the world. While in ancient and Renaissance practices of magic, the manipulator of magic (ie. the animistic properties perceived within objects) still had an immediate--being mimetic--relationship with the object, in modern science the object is a mere interchangeable specimen or representative of a homogeneous, abstract type. In other words, the multiplicity of features unique to the object become the basis for the

shaman or the magician's mimetic manipulation, or control by an engaged imitation, while for the scientist any specificity is subsumed under the systematic uniformity of a universal category (10-11). Adorno and Horkheimer see in this distancing from the object, by relegating it to a set of rules of probability and formulas, the Enlightenment's reactionary ban on animism. An object devoid of spiritual properties is much more easily amenable to the rigors of systematization, a point that Merchant effectively illustrated as well. The Enlightenment stigmatizes any association of nature with subjective human qualities as vestiges of fear-driven animistic projections of demons and spirits. Chaotic nature is no longer to be feared but subjected rather to the closed system of formal logic. Like Merchant, Adorno and Horkheimer point to Plato as an original guilty party in institutionalizing the primacy of numbers in a Western subject's understanding of the world.

On a same par with Merchant's *Death of Nature*, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* takes issue with Francis Bacon's scientific method and the exploitative mentality that it fostered. Central to both studies is a critical re-evaluation of the ideology of power and domination of nature and other human beings that has been allowed to masquerade as "progress." Progressive enlightenment was intended to propel Western civilization out of the dark ages toward an age of reason. However, Adorno maintains that without self-reflective questioning of its method, Enlightenment thinking leads to the very barbarism that it was meant to overcome.

Adorno and Horkheimer identify the "principle of fatal necessity" or "immanence" as the basis for both mythology and the Enlightenment(11-12). The Enlightenment

sought to extricate human thought from the relentless cycle of repetition of the same. However, by its insistence on defining reality in terms of mathematics, it in fact imprisoned human experience in precisely this sort of tautology--since the answer to any mathematical equation is predetermined by its laws. The Enlightenment claims as its own the old adage that "there is nothing new under the sun" to bring everything under the helm of its control:

because all pieces in the meaningless game have been played, and all the great thoughts have already been thought, and because all possible discoveries can be construed in advance and all men are decided on adaptation as a means to self-preservation (12).

By applying the rules of formal logic, based on the consensual assumption of "objectivity" and thereby implying that every factor is neutral or value-free, all of life's diversity--including our ideas of right and wrong/justice and criminality--is reduced to a dull abstraction of sameness: "What was different is equalized"(12). Adorno and Horkheimer maintain that the setting of such rigid limits in our systems of thought has led to the impoverishment of all lived experience. The law of conformity comes to define our very existence.

While Merchant focuses especially on the ways in which the machine metaphor has come to determine our exploitative relationship to nature, she does draw a direct link between the mastery of nature and the loss in quality of life in modern society (291). However, Adorno and Horkheimer work from the notion that ideas themselves, reflective thought itself, fell victim to the Enlightenment's radical leveling of all value hierarchies

under the law of equivalence--which they attribute to the ritualized mechanization of thought:

Thinking objectifies itself to become an automatic, self-activating process; an impersonation of the machine that it produces itself so that ultimately the machine can replace it (25).

The relevance of this to a feminist critique of modern-day cybernetics and of its disembodied thought is an issue worthy of discussion. May it suffice to mention it for now in view of the complete alienation from society and from oneself that the Frankfurt School predicted would occur with this reification of thought.⁸

Subjected to the rigors of the Enlightenment apparatus, metaphysics is expelled for bearing the traces of animism--given that any adherence to an idea, a concept or belief was considered superstition, mere "chimeras of the mind," suspiciously reminiscent of a transcendental subjectivity that had been replaced with the automatic functioning of the machine. With the desuetude of thought and therefore of ethics, domination was given free reign in the form of capitalist expansion and exploitation. The machine of instrumental reason spares no one, however, of its obliterating process of abstraction. Capitalists and wage-laborers alike come to recognize themselves as things in this picture that assigns meaning only in terms of reductive numerical abstractions. If worth is based on one's yearly salary, or by determining an employee's value relative to the company's profit margin--or any such equation based on quantifiable determinants--

⁸See for example N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Post Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago; London: UP Chicago, 1999.

what happens to that person's spirit?⁹ Merchant alludes to this self-estrangement as well in the following passage:

One of the most serious human problems brought about by industrial capitalism has been the psychological alienation caused by a person's daily labor for wages in a business or industry owned by another individual who reaps both money and a higher standard of living as a result (87).

The sense of alienation that results from the implementation of instrumental reason in all our social practices and institutions stems from this reduction of the human being to numbers: labor power, hourly wages, yearly salary, the total sum of one's capital, etc.

To view the problem of alienation from a wider angle, one which would encompass within its scope its historical development, its psychological and its social dimensions, requires taking a step back--or at least a shift in perspective at this point. Horkeimer and Adorno elucidate the problem by means of an analysis of Homer's *Odyssey* in which Odysseus' epic voyage serves as an extended allegory not only of progress and civilization but of the construction of male subjectivity in European civilization. Accordingly, the authors consider the *Odyssey* as offering "testimony of the mutual implication of enlightenment and myth"(46). Odysseus strives to leave behind the mythical past, represented in the narrative as the monsters and goddesses on the far-off, misty islands, in order to forge a path to civilization. One by one, Odysseus must confront these phantoms and negotiate a means to continue his journey. It is this very

⁹It is this issue that engages one in the dialectics of the Frankfurt School's reasoning: although materialist, they seem to allow that without at least formally positing the existence of some kind of spirit or soul in humans (and Nature), there is no barrier to stop instrumental reason from ravaging the earth and all of its life forms.

negotiation that Horkeimer and Adorno identify as enlightenment thinking; Odysseus must use his wit to outsmart the mythologized forces of nature, against which his physical strength is clearly no match. The confrontations with mythic figures represent “dangerous temptations removing the self from its logical course”(47). In distinguishing between Odysseus and a categorical “self” in this way, Horkeimer and Adorno emphasize the universal psychological significance of the journey; it is that of the ego’s individuation or the construction of identity. Hence, they understand the Homeric epic voyage as an allegory of the Western male ego’s emergence from pre-history, and invite us to find in the interpretation of this process the key to understanding the violence of Western “civilization.”

The construction of male subjectivity, then, requires as its foundations the repression of the past. Again, by “past” we can understand both our collective history as a civilization and the psychic history of the individual in patriarchal culture. Both imply a willful forgetting of early memories of vulnerability and unfixed boundaries--that something that is left behind in the forging of masculine identity.¹⁰ This something-left-behind, our past, is tabooed knowledge for the subject of Western civilization. Horkeimer and Adorno seem to imply a conflation of nature, death and the Mother as implicit in this taboo and foreclosure of the past. All three connote an undifferentiated state that is anathema to the male subject of patriarchy, who has paid with his own alienation and his alienation from the world the cost of forging an identity from that prior

¹⁰It would seem that Adorno and Horkeimer’s interpretation of Western civilization implies these two processes are interdependent. In Jessica Benjamin’s *The Bonds of Love*, this link is explicit and her thesis proceeds from this premise.

state. In other words, not only is he split off from his own affect, but this decaethesis of the Other implies the loss of a sensuous, mutual relationship with nature and the Mother and by extension with any person or thing outside of the self. This is the human sacrifice made to the fetish of instrumental reason for the disavowal or dispossession of the past.

On the other hand, in addition to the terror of dissolution that demands a certain history's repression (a reminder of dependence and vulnerability), there is a promise of plenitude--a memory of a prior state of happiness implicit in the banned knowledge:

The dread of losing the self and of abrogating together with the self the barrier between oneself and other life, the fear of death and destruction, is intimately associated with a promise of happiness which threatened civilization in every moment (33).

Adorno and Horkheimer discuss at length the ways in which both the mythic terror of regression to the chaos of nature and the desire for a return to an imagined, prior state of bliss is mediated and exploited as a function of capitalist modes of production.¹¹ They consider this tension to illuminate the inner mechanism of the dialectic of Enlightenment: the desire for utopia that demands autonomy for all individuals yet necessitates their reification in the process of implementing instrumental reason as the means of eradicating uncertainty (ie. enslavement to nature at large).

Western civilization is built upon an ideology of domination, and modern, post-industrial capitalism is the logical outcome of the machine metaphor that came to

¹¹The Sirens figure in Horkheimer and Adorno's interpretation of the Odyssey as the alluring voice of the past that Odysseus mediates through cunning means. By having himself bound to the ship's mast, he can enjoy the Sirens' song but is safe from the impulse to render himself to them in abandonment to the memory of a prior utopia. Horkheimer and Adorno consider this mediation of remembered/repressed bliss in the episode of the Sirens to be an allegory of bourgeois art as it serves this same function. I will maintain later in this essay that this is also the function of the male canon of melancholy literature, of what Juliana Schiesari refers to as a "rhetoric of loss."

predominate in discursive practices. As a result, the mediation of all affect--of fear and desire--and of sensuous pleasure, is required for the effective functioning of the capitalist machine (29-30). It is for this reason that bourgeois "maturity" demands that we leave the past behind. In this way, all energy for labor is fueled by the repression of the desire for the Mother--who represents an image of bliss and the promise of fulfillment, neither of which can ever reach its goal. Like Odysseus' men, the modern individual accepts the rule of delayed gratification and the necessity of work as fate--the tool of Enlightenment and its underlying ideology of domination. In this model of repressed desire, of sacrifice and renunciation, Horkeimer and Adorno recognize an internal stimulus of capitalist expansion.¹²

This alienation from one's own affect, then, is an outcome of the dialectic of Enlightenment and as we have seen has social, economic and ecological repercussions. The Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse in particular, develops the idea that the strong ambivalence that accompanies the experience of the repressed content can lead to a spiral of violence proportionate to the degree of that repression. The rigid armor of identity that the ego has had to construct against the perceived threat of dissolution into the Other is forged at the expense of any passionate engagement with "the outside." The very binarism "inside/outside" is one more manifestation of this identity thinking and

¹²Again, this resonates with Merchant's thesis, as she understands capitalism's unchecked growth to be nature's nemesis.

constitutes the basis of relations of domination--originating in an archaic fear of the "outside":

The distance between the subject and the object, a presupposition of abstraction, is grounded in the distance from the thing itself which the master achieved through the mastered (Horkeimer and Adorno 13).

Fear drives the self-preservation model, fear of annihilation, and fuels the dialectic of enlightenment as does the promise of plenitude, its counterpart. In the gesture of distancing ourselves and objectifying nature and others by the mediation of the machine metaphor, we have created a dead world. The mirror in which we must contemplate ourselves--nature as a disaffected void--reflects back to us that abstract emptiness that we have projected onto it. If nature is nothing but dead matter, then we also are nothing.

Herbert Marcuse, in *Eros and Civilization*, concurs with the idea postulated by Horkeimer and Adorno that capitalism is driven to a great extent by the repression of desire, of affect. He develops the idea, already evoked in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that in mass culture or a "bourgeois commodity economy" people voluntarily submit to the system due to their internalization of its philosophy- -but with some modifications to the earlier theory. Horkeimer and Adorno attribute the subjugated masses' tractability to this practice of their own objectification to a sense of futility regarding the principle of immanence, of fate, that the rulers invoke to insure their compliance:

In their eyes, their reduction to mere objects of administered life, which performs every sector of modern existence including language and perception, represents objective necessity, against which they believe there is nothing they can do (38).

Along the same lines, Marcuse states the conditions for voluntary subjugation in the quasi-Freudian terms of a cultural superego: “No philosophy, no theory can undo the democratic introjection of the masters into their subjects”(xv). As he states in the preface to this work, written some ten years after its first publication, it is this freely-given acquiescence that frustrates his vision of revolution and Utopia. As commercial capitalism spiraled across the globe in the course of that decade, Marcuse recognized the insidious efficacy of commodity fetishism in placating the masses:

When, in the more or less affluent societies, productivity has reached a level at which the masses participate in its benefits, and at which the opposition is effectively and democratically “contained,” then the conflict between master and slave is also effectively contained (xv).

Since witnessing the explosion of neo-colonialism, Marcuse looks to what we have come to call the “South”—or those countries which have not yet entirely capitulated to capital’s reign—as an external source of productive revolt. At “home,” he expects that the affectively disenfranchised will rebel at the loss of quality of life—quality that is not defined in material terms. His choice of tropes in articulating the terms of the ideological warfare is consonant with Merchant’s: it’s “the body against the *machine*” (xvii, my emphasis).

More than a mere trope in a rhetorical articulation of dominant ideology, the body is the actual site of revolution in Marcuse’s treatise (as it is in Merchant, albeit more often than not conflated with organic nature as a whole). To unearth and expose the ban on the body and its passions, that foreclosure that constitutes the foundation of Western culture, is the starting point in a backwards move of “progress.” Due to the recognition

that “intensified progress seems to be bound up with intensified unfreedom”(4), or in the words of Horkeimer and Adorno “the curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression”(36), Marcuse charts a course for the future in terms of a “reversal in the direction of progress”(xiv), or a return to what was left behind:

the new direction of progress would depend completely on the opportunity to activate repressed or arrested organic, biological needs (xv).

Marcuse later modified this view of the release of repressed Eros as a panacea for all social ills to account for the need to organize politically as well. Nevertheless, the exhortation to love--to cultivate a tactile, immediate, and even passionate engagement with nature, with the Object or Other based on reciprocity and mutual understanding--stands as a powerful antidote to automation and alienation.

For the Frankfurt School in general, liberation from the fate of blind repetition or the relentless cycle of violence requires a recognition of our dialectical relationship with our past--both our collective history and that of the individual. To reconcile with this past is to acknowledge the repression of a prior state of dependence, of an unmediated relationship with nature, and in so doing the self's contingency or transitoriness in the present is also acknowledged. That is to say, the repression of fear that drives the self-preservation impulse is effectively dismantled and along with it the omnipotent ego's drive to mastery over the object. In its stead, the Frankfurt School calls for a “sensuous rationality,” Reason that is embodied, non-violent, empathetic and therefore does not engage in the politics of identity --the paranoid mapping of knowledge and people.

Adorno, especially, inveighs against what he calls “identity thinking” as the cause of much of the suffering throughout history. The politics of identity have to do with power, for the will to identify is ultimately a will to power:

In thought, men distance themselves from nature in order thus imaginatively to present it to themselves --but only in order to determine how it is to be dominated (39).

Whether it be the thrust of the Ego to assert mastery over the Other, or the construction of rigid systems of thought to interpret reality and their violent application in the social and natural world, identity thinking leads to violence. Wars of interpretation result by purporting to have a monopoly on Truth, as in the production of a discourse that legitimates itself on the basis of delegitimizing another’s. This also amounts to a means of objectifying the Other in its production of that Other as a negative image. In Western cultures, it is white European male subjectivity that has the prerogative of identity.

In sum, Merchant and the Frankfurt School both locate the source of European culture’s current problems in the historical imperative of irrepressible progress for the advancement of humankind and the mechanization of the world that evolved in the course of the drive to mastery over nature. Both schools of thought blame these modes of domination for the exponentially accelerating devastation of nature and degradation of human life and experience. However, as stated earlier, there is what may seem a slight difference of perspective in their respective theories of this ideology of domination and its effects: for Merchant, the emphasis appears to be on how this ideology in all its forms affects women and nature today. The Frankfurt School seems to focus more on the repercussions of our alienation from nature as manifested in mass culture and

psychology. In any event, their studies and conclusions are mutually reinforcing. What both Merchant and the Frankfurt School seem to indicate in their theses, but neither states explicitly, is that the historical fear of nature can be linked to the fear of the “pre-oedipal” experience of the omnipotent Mother.¹³ Adorno’s critique of the dialectic of enlightenment is that the subject’s primary identification with the Mother gets re-routed through the Father, thus effecting a separation from Nature which leads to violence and psychosis on a societal level. Jessica Benjamin, in *The Bonds of Love*, explores precisely this psychological dimension of the problem of domination and its agency, instrumental reason, in view of the subject’s first social bond with the Mother. Object relations theory developed in response to the accepted Freudian--and predominantly mechanistic--view of the human being as “a monadic energy system”(17) in favor of a conception of humans as socially interdependent--the idea that subjecthood is fundamentally determined by our interpersonal relationships with others. In these differing formulations of the self we can recognize yet another recasting of the age-old mechanistic/organic antagonism.

Benjamin begins by analyzing the process by which the individual comes to perceive of him/herself as separate from the world. In lieu of the more traditional psychoanalytical views that articulate this as a unidirectional process of the infant’s absolute differentiation from the mother, Benjamin embraces the more holistic concept of mother and child engaged in a reciprocal relationship in which each recognizes the other as a subject. She establishes the conditions for mutual recognition of mother and

¹³Teresa Brennan locates the Frankfurt School’s main weakness in this omission of the mother’s role in the formation of male identity and its relation to patriarchal culture’s relationship with nature (23). But as mentioned, I think this connection is implied.

child as contingent upon the phenomenon of intersubjectivity, a conscious dynamic of emotional reciprocity, in which both mother and infant are simultaneously aware of their connectedness to and their separateness from the other. This offers an alternative to the classic dualism of associating the mother either with infinite bliss (Freud's "limitless narcissism") or engulfing womb. In both latter cases she figures only as the object against which the subject forges an identity. Intersubjectivity and the idea of mutual recognition articulates a model for relationships based on equality and compassion in adult life, since from the beginning the mother is considered to be a subject in her own right.

The problem of domination arises when the process of individuation goes awry and mutual recognition gives way to a desire for omnipotence, absolute control over the Other, on either the child or the mother's part.¹⁴

The vulnerability of a masculinity that is forged in the crucible of femininity, the "great task" of separation that is so seldom completed, lays the groundwork for the later objectification of women. The mother stands as the prototype of the undifferentiated object. She serves men as their other, their counterpart, the side of themselves they repress (77).

Viewed in the broader terms of cultural theory, Benjamin understands the rational discourse that feeds capitalism as gendered according to this model:

I will argue that the principle of rationality which social theorists since Weber have seen as the hallmark of modernity--the rationality

¹⁴Teresa Brennan develops a similar theory in the idea of a foundational fantasy, a term she borrows from Melanie Klein to denote the infant's drive to omnipotence, as the basis for the paranoid positioning in the subject/object split. However, Brennan will part company with Benjamin on the issue of how to avert this catastrophe.

that reduces the social world to objects of exchange, calculation, and control--is in fact a male rationality (184).

For Benjamin, it is the "Western" masculine subject's narcissistic inability to recognize the Other that accounts for much of the violence throughout Western history and which, if left to run its course, will ultimately lead to the annihilation of life on the planet.

According to object relations theory--Freudian in origin--there comes a stage in development when the male infant must sever the primary bond with his mother in order to identify with the father, who represents autonomy/independence (Benjamin 134-135). He must then maintain a strict defense against any tendency to want to return to that prior state of intimacy and dependency on the mother. This mode of individuation and forging of male identity, again, is based on the Freudian Oedipal model which generally assumes a male subject. It is Jessica Benjamin's belief that this model has been culturally learned and unconsciously reproduced throughout Western history. This early failure to mutually recognize the other impedes the ability to form relationships based on equality later in life as well, and in extreme cases it may develop into a drive to annihilate the other.

What I see as unique to Benjamin's theory is her location of relations of domination in the institutionalization of gender polarity. Unlike Freud and Hegel who consider the problem of omnipotence to be inevitable, Benjamin postulates that if men were to subsume nurturing roles that had been relegated to women and therefore devalued, then the politics of identity would no longer have a foothold--there would no longer be a negatively coded opposite, the devalued object against which to structure idealized masculine identity. As a result, women would enjoy the same social and

economic status as men in society. Furthermore, if work requiring nurturing skills were to gain in status with the participation of more men, the rigid definition of “masculinity” as radical and rugged separateness may no longer hold sway, and would instead give way to compassion and empathic identification.

At the risk of oversimplifying what is in fact a complex theory, my understanding of this is that to change women’s inferior social status would involve a redistribution of traditionally gendered tasks. As stated in the above example, Benjamin suggests that if men were to share equally in work that has traditionally been women’s and therefore unappreciated and underpaid--mainly that of nurturing and care-taking (such as in child-rearing and caring for the old and sick)--there would no longer be any grounds for this devaluation and negative association.¹⁵ As a result, the classic model of male individuation and identification, the “Oedipus complex,” would undergo radical changes. If there were a way to eradicate the binary social constructions of femaleness as “irrational oneness” and maleness as “rational autonomy” as articulated in the Oedipal theory, then rather than defining himself against a radically opposite Other, the male subject could share more positive traits with his female counterpart. He would no longer feel compelled to reject and distance himself from his primary object or first “Other,” his mother, in the project of becoming “a man” as defined by Western culture. Instead, he could maintain a sensuous and empathetic bond and identification with the mother (and

¹⁵Popular culture presents countless examples of this phenomenon where crossing the gender lines of traditionally assigned tasks creates a comically absurd effect--proof that the stigmas are still in place (ie. in the past two decades, movies such as “Mrs. Doubtfire”, “Mr. Mom”, “Daddy Daycare” and in particular, Ben Stiller’s character--“Gay Focher”-- in “Meet the Parents”--who is reluctant to admit to a male rival that he works as a nurse. When it is revealed, the other’s reaction is first disbelief at the absurdity of the notion, then condescending back-patting).

the tenderness that more often than not defines that relationship), which would constitute the foundations for all of his relationships with the outside world.

This theory has come under criticism. For her part, Teresa Brennan does not agree with the premise that a maternal/paternal dualism constitutes the origins of gender polarity--or the idea that strict segregation of mothering (ie. nurturing) and fathering (ie. autonomy) roles are the primary cause of subsequent divisions of labor along the gender lines and hence the devaluation of what is considered "women's work." In fact, Brennan seems to consider this the weakest aspect of Benjamin's theory that "equal parenting will bring about social change":

Equal parenting will not solve the generation of inequality between the sexes, let alone between races and classes, unless the equal parents have equivalent social power (58).

Although I fully agree with her that social equality must accompany gender equality, I do not think it necessarily must precede it. I think she is missing the deeper implications of Benjamin's theory by momentarily ignoring what she herself recognizes as the dialectical relationship between social practice and ideological constructions--and by adhering rather to the familiar patriarchal and dichotomous dictum that posits that the personal cannot be political. She seems to deny the possibility that if the (traditionally "male") public sphere were to allow for emotions and nurturing, and women no longer confined themselves to the private sphere as culturally-dictated guardians of some spiritual and affective haven, this could effect a transformation in not only gender relations but, as indicated, all social relations and power imbalance in general. As a consequence of the change in social practices, the ideology itself sustaining gender polarity and domination

would undergo a gradual, transformative shift. I would venture to add that given this new model of relations based on mutual recognition and empathy, as a species we might also become more connected with our natural environment.

On the other hand, it is Brennan rather than Benjamin who integrates the phenomenon of women and nature's historical conflation into the wider issue of domination. Ironically, Benjamin does not consider the full implications of this association of woman (ie. mother) with nature, which would significantly lend credence to her theory that if men were to share in tasks involving nurturing--if "mothering" were not the exclusive prerogative of women--it may be possible to create a more livable social environment. Instead, Benjamin ignores the importance of the role of nature in this question of domination, overlooking the fact that "women's work," generally associated with tender affect, is devalued precisely due to its status of being "closer" to nature. She dismisses the issue of our relationship with nature--apparently as too irrelevant a topic for a serious intellectual study or possibly too demeaning to consider, which once again attests to its status as tabooed knowledge (80). To her credit, she does note in passing the work of Evelyn Keller that "shows how gender frames the relationship between mind and nature"(189). Unfortunately, this particular model of object relations is downplayed by Benjamin by the exclusive privileging of the dynamic of the mother/infant dyad.

To return to the issue of gender roles, we might refer here also to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "habitus," as elaborated in N. Katherine Hayle's *How We Became Post-Human*, for an understanding of how the practice--the physical activity--of nurturing

and caring for children may potentially transform male subjectivity and therefore eventually the status quo:

The habitus, which is learned, perpetuated, and changed through embodied practices, should not be thought of as a collection of rules but as a series of dispositions and inclinations that are both subject to circumstances and durable enough to pass down through generations. The habitus is conveyed through the orientation and movement of the body as it traverses cultural spaces and experiences the temporal rhythms (...) *Living in these spaces and participating in their organization form the body in characteristic ways, which in turn provides a matrix of permutations for thought and action.* (202-203, my italics)

This suggests the possibility that men's "hard wiring" may be subject to a process of re-routing that, due to a shift in gendered labor practices over time, might change masculine "nature."¹⁶ This idea reinforces Brennan's own proposal of a model of subjectivity based on the "logic of nature" which recognizes the interdependence of all living beings and the dynamic, bi-directional interchange with the environment we inhabit--a connectedness facilitated by what she calls an "intersubjective economy of energy"(109).¹⁷

While she concurs with Benjamin that the mother's role is viewed as passive and culturally devalued as a result of "an *ineluctable* logic" originating in the infant's fantasy of omnipotence, Brennan's analysis of the history of the dominant Western ego stops somewhat short of elaborating a viable alternative to its master-slave dialectic. Instead, she seems to subscribe rather wholeheartedly to the Lacanian notion that not only gender

¹⁶ Absurd as it may seem, taking this to its logical conclusion, changing nappies and wiping boogers may possibly constitute political action.

¹⁷ Brennan's "mindful connected physicalism"(87) and "fleshly logic"(109) remind one also of Horkeimer and Adorno's "sensuous reason" that they propose as an alternative to the "self-dominant intellect" which "separates from sensuous experience in order to subjugate it"(Dialectic 36) .

but identity proper is firmly rooted in a “visual, imaginary recognition” of sexual difference due to the symbolic power of the phallus as transcendental signifier (52).

At the same time, we can infer--from her elliptical reference to the possibility of seeing beyond the limitations imposed on logic--that she, like Benjamin, is looking for a means to circumvent the process by which subjectivity is founded on the negation, passification or objectification of the other:

If the grounding of an image sets the limits on logic, if it is a barrier to logic rather than coeval with it, then by implication the shaped, those whose identities are not founded on the aggressive passification of others, are more likely to see and think past that barrier (73).

In her terminology, the “shaped” refers to those who occupy the object position with respect to a more powerful subject. Based on her formulation of the problem, as yet it is unclear how these “shaped” individuals--ostensibly non-white, economically underprivileged women more often than not--will avoid the conundrum of non-exploitative subjectivity:

they can only express what they see if they have an anchor that enables them to express it--or rather, two anchors, one being a means for identification in a cultural tradition, and the second being a grounding for self-image. Finding the first anchor is complicated by the fact that they are to some inevitable degree identified with the dominant culture. Finding the second anchor in a non-exploitative way would entail exploring the complicated concept of co-operation. And yes, these other anchors will in turn constitute new points of closure or blind spots, new ellipses whose filling in would call differently anchored identities into question. But to seek other anchors is also to gain some understanding of the present standpoint (73).

In *The Ticklish Subject*, Slavoj Žižek considers a similar take on the problem in his discussion of Jacques-Alain Miller’s theory which posits sexual difference as a

determining factor in an individual's level of success in breaking out of the cyclical pattern of immanence. That is to say, for Miller, women (ie. the "shaped," using Brennan's terminology) are more likely to escape the circularity of the drive to found one's subjectivity on a "phantasmic" notion of the other as the "image of death" that must be repressed, a process leading to psychic dissociation and an endless cycle of negative displacements.

Underlying this theory is the assumption that women have less at stake culturally--less to lose in terms of identity--in becoming conscious of the subjection to a more powerful Other that grounds subjectivity and that they (as all subjects) had to repress:¹⁸

women are not so fully identified with their fantasy, 'not all' of their being is caught in it; this is why, for them, it is easier to acquire a distance towards fantasy, to traverse it; while men, as a rule, come up against a condensed phantasmic kernel, a "fundamental symptom," the basic formula of *jouissance* that they are unable to renounce, so that all they can do is accept it as an imposed necessity (294).

It seems Zizek's take on this theory would imply that if one is already occupying the cultural position of the "shaped" passive object, to borrow again Brennan's terms, then it is not such a great leap downwards for the female subject to allow herself recognition of early passionate attachments--including those marked by traumatic experiences --as

¹⁸Lacan (and Zizek) will refer obliquely to this *prise de conscience* of identity's fragile foundations as a 'traversal' of the subject's "fundamental fantasy." The implication in using the term "fantasy" in this context is that any traumatic early memory is restricted to the imagination, rather than being related to actual events that may occur between parents and children. The choice of terms amounts to a polemical stance in alignment with Freud's renunciation of the "seduction theory," which was based on a decision to discard his patients stories of abuse as lies or "fantasy"--leading, significantly, to Freud's theory of "drive." Alice Miller, however, maintains that Freud himself did not intend his theories of infantile sexuality and of the Oedipus complex to invalidate his earlier theories on the reality of sexual abuse (See Alice Miller's *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, 41-42.).

forming subjectivity under conditions of radical subjection.¹⁹ In other words, she is already inscribed in the patriarchal symbolic as the “Alien Thing,” culturally associated with an internal dark continent at the core of being:²⁰

It is here that sexual difference is to be taken into account: perhaps a woman is more able to endure this identification of the core of one’s being with the Evil Thing (305).

Men, on the other hand, might associate the identification with the object of subjection with a socio-symbolic death, and therefore will be more inclined to remain caught within the melancholic loop of reflexivity (denial of subjection). Žizek concludes along with Miller: “(...) ‘traversing the fantasy’ is conceived as feminine, and ‘identification with the symptom’ as masculine”(305). For this reason as well men may be more susceptible to fatalism--to accept the complex(ed) pain-as-pleasure of *jouissance* as an “imposed necessity” rather than to rattle the foundations of male subjectivity by considering what lies beneath the psychical fantasy. In Chapter Two, I will consider this distinction in terms of gendered means of coming to terms with loss (ie. mourning/melancholy).

Žizek bases his analysis of subjectivity on a discussion of the distinction between desire and the death drive with respect to *jouissance*--concepts which he ultimately links up again. What interests me here especially is the role of sexual difference in this configuration: the way in which desire somehow becomes gender-inflected as “feminine” and drive as “masculine” at the same time that desire is a “hysterical” response to

¹⁹This is a theory that I explore in depth in Chapter Two in a discussion of Judith Butler’s *Psychic Life of Power*.

²⁰For a striking example of this, see the mindless B-flic “Dude, Where’s My Car?” in which the ultimate Evil Other, the horror of the male imaginary, is a gargantuan, overly-sexed ethnic woman from outer space.

jouissance while drive is associated with “perversion.” The underlying difference between the two modes rests on differing degrees of certainty: the pervert clings tenaciously to a false belief that he *knows* what he is (for the Other) while the hysterical subject “incessantly questions” her position:

the pervert precludes the Unconscious because he *knows* the answer (to what brings *jouissance* to the Other); he has no doubts about it; his position is unshakeable; while the hysteric doubts—that is, her position is that of an eternal and constitutive (self-)questioning: What does the Other want from me? What am I for the Other?... (248)

In this description of different subjective modalities, loosely (but undeniably) associated with gender, in Zizek’s notion of the hysteric we might recognize ideas which resonate with Brennan’s earlier discussion of the potential of the passive, “shaped” object to see beyond the limits imposed on logic by the objectifying (male) fantasy. Brennan’s postulate, again, is that this identity, given that “it is not founded on the aggressive passification of others,” might support a process of constant calling into question of “differently anchored” identities --rather than striving to secure and maintain a fixed, immobilizing self-image as the dominant subject (as with Zizek’s “pervert” who “knows”).²¹

With a nod to Jessica Benjamin and in an effort to fill in what she considers to be the gaps in equal parenting theories, Brennan offers a model of self-other relationships which recognizes the need for a symbolic that does not privilege one person or group over another. She uses the example of a same-sex relationship between women to

²¹This idea also brings to mind Horkeimer and Adorno’s solution to the problem of enlightenment thinking which proposes a model of thought based on self-reflexivity, an incessant calling into question of itself.

demonstrate that a master-slave dialectic may potentially be operative in *any* relationship, in which case it will only be equal

if both move beyond the squabble over who grounds whose self-image, and into a situation where they are both able to turn outwards, and perceive a reality beyond themselves. Of course, this can only be done if ‘both’ are grounded in a social cultural linguistic tradition in which they are recognized, and which extends beyond the two of them (58).

While I agree with Brennan’s premise, again I will argue with Jessica Benjamin that even the symbolic may potentially undergo dramatic structural changes by implementing new social practices that break down the gender divisions and thereby undermine the master/slave dialectic--practices which require recognition of humanity’s vulnerable origins. A paradigm shift does not happen without due cause, without a catalyst.

The characterization of *jouissance* in theories of subjectivity, its related “deadly loop” of desire and drive, hysteria and perversion (Zizek 291) and their relation to the “death drive,” all merit a closer look. Zizek, Lacan, Freud and even the Frankfurt School seem committed to some variant of these notions as constitutive of human existence, which in my view amounts to an aporia in theory that is itself akin to a traumatic “symptom” or “kernel.” This phenomenon brings to mind LaCapra’s likening of certain forms of criticism, including forms of deconstruction, to a “traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma” and as a way of “keeping faith with trauma in a manner that leads to a compulsive preoccupation with aporia, and endless melancholic, impossible mourning, and a resistance to working through”(23). Zizek himself alludes to this tendency towards a fateful acceptance of humanity’s lot--to suffer

endlessly the impossibility of escaping “drive” and its elusive counterpart, *jouissance*--in his caricature of Wagnerian heroes, of which he writes:

at some time in the past they have committed some unspeakable evil deed, so that they are condemned to pay for it not by death, but by being condemned to a life of eternal suffering, of helplessly wandering around, unable to fulfil their symbolic function (292).

Rather than the death drive simply indicating a longing to die, he says, it is meant to refer to a state of being plagued by a nagging threat of immortality, the impossibility of death--a state in which one fears “the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain” (292). Marcuse as well identifies a link between the death instinct and melancholia--as its most extreme form--and does this in similar terms; he cites a pervasive sense of guilt in which the “normal” ego is awash, referring to an “inner-directed destructiveness” underlying the “fatal dialectic of civilization”(53-54).²²

Chapter Two will expand on this discussion of melancholy and its relation to the history of domination. This subsequent section will continue to work from the premise that individual histories and collective, cultural histories are dialectically related, and that therefore so is the repression of both. In these terms, the melancholic’s impoverishment of the self (as articulated by Freud) will be understood to parallel the

²²Jean-Francois Lyotard, in *The Differend*, and later Jacques Derrida, in *The Work of Mourning*--which refers to that earlier work--address a similar notion of impossible mourning of an impossible death, of the death that is “worse than death” (*Differend* 101; *Work of Mourning* 222-239). Derrida evokes the terror implicit in the realization that “God is Dead” and likens this to the unconditionalness of death that haunts the living (notes p223).

loss of quality of life, the legacy of the Enlightenment's radical leveling of all values to the law of equivalence.

To conclude this section of the study, I find that in having assembled the respective theories of Merchant, the Frankfurt School, Benjamin, Brennan and Zizek via this critical *rapprochement*, the tensions between them have pushed their lacunae or blind spots to the surface. While all are seeking a means to conceptualize subject/object relations that does not rely on modes of domination, they do not agree on how to achieve this. It seems that they acknowledge that a new psychic model of relating to the other must arise out of a recognition of that other as independent and subjective, allowing for empathic identification and interaction that is based on mutual reciprocity. However, the cultural role of the mother, of nature, and of institutionalized gender in forming and sustaining exploitative relationships--and the relevance of their situatedness in discursive practices/the symbolic--remains to be resolved in this discussion. One thing that is clear is that in a quest to understand and find a solution to the problem of domination, a reconceptualization of the subject-object relationship--one that finds a balance between absolute oneness and absolute differentiation--is paramount.²³

Although the discourses I have studied here are based on Western modes of experience, they all appear to point to the process of globalization as the logical course of capital's unlimited expansion. That is to say, the Western, rational, omnipotent ego that emerged from the seventeenth century has become a consumption machine in the twenty-first--set on automatic to incorporate everything outside it in the form of commodities. It

²³ See Jessica Benjamin (48-49; 190-191).

is the confrontation with this process of neo-colonization, in all of its dimensions, that I will have occasion to explore in the novels of Francophone women writers of the Diaspora. By writing from the negative space of the enlightened ego's radical Other, the former *non-identity* of this female subject comes to light and reshapes itself as it would like to be understood--thus plausibly presenting a way around or beyond the impasse of its reification.

CHAPTER TWO

A Critical Look at the History of Mourning and Melancholy and Their Relation to Gender and Power

Will we ever be capable of understanding what happens to the hatred we felt in childhood if we shut ourselves off from our immediate historical past?

–Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*

What does it all mean at the end of a twentieth century whose intellectual energies have been long directed toward debunking every conceivable mythology? What has been lost that now requires such a wide-ranging work of mourning? Has not the debunking of myths left behind a sense of the loss of something that may have once (even delusionally) given meaning and plenitude to life? Are we mourning, then, what we have strived so hard to rid ourselves of? If so, what does this mean?

–Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholy*

Addressing the issue of melancholy in literature is not a simple task. Indeed, prior even to bringing literature into the question, one must acknowledge that the concept of “melancholy” itself is fraught with ambiguity, due not only to its broad definitions across cultures and centuries but to what contemporary feminists have identified as its gendered nature. In the history of western Europe, melancholy appears as a constant cultural reference and preoccupation at least since Aristotle’s treatise on the subject.²⁴

²⁴I am referring here to his “Brilliance and Melancholy” which figures in Jennifer Radden’s anthology and historical account of the melancholy tradition in writing, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000).

Over the ages, the concept has found its way into and infused various fields of thought--philosophical, religious, scientific, medical, and more recently feminist and psychoanalytic--changing its shape and etiology continuously along the way.²⁵ While this richly heterogeneous tradition of writing about melancholy offers us an illuminating glimpse into the past and the emergence of the Western subject, for the purpose of this study, I will for the most part focus on the evolution of a more contemporary idea of melancholy in its more modern articulations, including that of “depression”--dating from the publication in 1917 of Freud’s widely read and foundational essay on the subject, “Mourning and Melancholia.” This being said, I will nevertheless briefly take into consideration a specific trajectory of these transformations, providing a cursory glance at melancholy’s history in discursive practices before its articulation(s) in the twentieth century. As part of this reflective return to the past, I will revisit the “cradle” of western civilization, early Athens, to examine how the rhetoric of the funeral oration might also shed light on the political implications of both mourning and melancholy as social practices.

In a continued discussion of the Western ego (or Cartesian *cogito*), I will identify melancholy as both cause and symptom of culturally-constructed masculine subjectivity and, by extension, of the external manifestation of that subject’s ambivalent internal structure: post-industrial, consumer-driven society --which I consider to be “the political

²⁵It would be worthwhile and highly engaging to document the history of this transformation in melancholy’s representation in an in-depth study similar to the one that Carolyn Merchant undertakes in *The Death of Nature*. In fact, what she calls the “controlling imagery” in the historical representations of nature seems to parallel the depictions of melancholy as a witch, an old hag, or a female monster such as in Robert Burton’s reference to a Hydra-like “many-headed beast.” In any event, melancholy is almost always represented as a “feminine” threat to male reason or rationality.

consequences of ungrievable loss.”²⁶ Underlying both phenomena is a drive to repress “feminine” nature (ie. vulnerability) which, in empirical terms, translates to a capitalist drive economy and the world it has fashioned based on this repression.

It would be useful to keep in mind Carolyn Merchant and the Frankfurt School’s mutually reinforcing theses that historicize and discuss the gradual transformation in discursive practices--fueled by an emerging European subject’s drive to mastery --that culminates in the application of a mechanistic model of instrumental reason to every sphere of our lives. In recent history this aggressive force, the result of a primary repression, has taken on the form of a global drive of limitless expansion and production, enacting a heavy toll on nature and with little regard for human life. I have argued that the Frankfurt School’s calling for a recuperation of the repressed past can be understood on two levels: repression of collective traumatic memory in Western civilization (vulnerability and dependence on Nature) and repression of the individual’s memory of early vulnerability and dependence on primary caretakers. In the first chapter, I drew a parallel between a collective history of fear of and drive to mastery over Nature and the individual’s fear of the omnipotent mother of the pre-oedipal stage, elaborated in feminist object relations theory, in order to begin to lay the grounds for an understanding of how relations of domination are produced and perpetuated.

In view of the dialectical and historical relationship between discourse and empirical reality established in Carolyn Merchant’s study, it is worth taking into account

²⁶I borrow the phrase from Judith Butler’s *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 144. However, I do not entirely share her theory that posits mandatory heterosexuality as the sole “ungrievable loss.”

the reconceptualization of melancholy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in terms of the development of the “cognitive” and “affective” models of interpretation that came to predominate in modern scientific discourses:

Two legacies from earlier eras acquired new significance when wedded to the nascent science of early psychiatry, and together they encouraged a division of the brain and mental functioning into broad categories, including those concerned with cognition and those concerned with affection. One was *the legacy from faculty psychology* and later phrenology, in which functional divisions had been reified and concretized. Affection, or the affective faculty, corresponded to a localized part of the brain. Damage to or disease of that part of the brain accounted for diseases of the passions or the affective faculty. A second but related legacy was a strong set of *associations* growing out of the earlier, eighteenth-century distinction between reason and passion. These associations served to further polarize the mental functions of thinking or cognition, on the one hand, and feeling or affection, on the other (Radden 25).

Out of the Cartesian legacy of conceptualizing the human subject as divided into separate and contradictory parts --the mind and the body, reason and passion--evolved a similar dichotomy as a means of explaining melancholy.

By the time the medical field of psychiatry emerged in the nineteenth century, this division had crystallized into psychological faculties defined as either “of the intellect” or “of the affections, emotions or passions, or the pathological powers and states”--leading to a fundamental internal rift in the psychiatric institution (Radden 20-26).²⁷ Contrary to what one might expect, this polarization of the brain and its functions

²⁷I consider the repercussions of this split throughout this study, as they apply to Freudian and “Neo-Freudian Revisionist” schools of psychoanalysis, as just one example. (I am thinking in particular of Ferenczi’s methodology based on the intersubjectivity of analyst and analysand in a clinical setting and the polemic with Freud, an argument still going on today.)

into “cognitive” and “affective” faculties led to a growing emphasis on the affective symptoms of melancholy and the respective downplaying or minimization of the cognitive “delusional” aspects of mental disease in the early nineteenth century. Earlier views that had associated melancholia with “fixed,” “false” or “delusional” beliefs--considered “cognitive defects”--were replaced by an exclusive focus on its affective features (Radden 26). As discussed in Chapter One, human emotion came to be associated with uncontrollable, unpredictable nature, and therefore was relegated to an underground existence, strictly regulated by culture and its institutions. Later in this chapter I will consider the wider implications of this emphasis, and the possible motives behind the psychiatric institution’s move, within Freudian theory and clinical analysis, to discount patients’ verbalized accounts of their personal suffering as “fantasy.”²⁸

Another heritage of the modern scientific method developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a shift from a broader study of melancholy in which metaphysical, cultural, and “humoral” as well as physiological explanations often coalesced, to a narrower approach that privileged etiological interpretations based on outwardly visible, physical and therefore *measurable* symptoms --exemplified in Kraepelin’s highly influential treatise, *Textbook of Psychiatry* (1887). Kraepelin sought to ground psychiatry in the natural sciences, and, following Francis Bacon’s example, imposed the scientific method indiscriminately to discover and classify what he deemed

²⁸I attribute Freud’s later decision to discount the personal testimony of his patients as “wish fantasies” to this trend of discounting the cognitive element of the disturbing mental images and scenarios that those suffering from affective disorders complain of. (As well as Miller on this subject, see Marcuse, Ch. 7 and 8 on phantasy and the reality principle or reason)

to be the purely organic causes of mental disorder. Concomitantly, all mental disorder--that had prior to the late nineteenth century been sometimes more, sometimes less associated with "unreason"--gradually came to be understood in strictly physical terms (ie. such as the result of lesions in the brain), effectively "taming" or neutralizing its subversive potential.

Again, Carolyn Merchant and the Frankfurt School view these scientific discourses and their instrumental reason as having evolved via a will to power over nature, and as Herbert Marcuse has indicated, "This struggle begins with the perpetual internal conquest of the "lower" faculties of the individual: his sensuous and appetitive faculties."²⁹ The psychic compulsion to domination which begins with the mastery of one's own body and emotions is the *sine qua non* of the "ordering, classifying, mastering reason" of medical discourses which seek to conquer and contain their object.³⁰ In this light we understand Foucault's insistence that since the eighteenth century, the injunction to speak about sex *ad infinitum* stands as proof that sex has not been "repressed" per se, as is generally believed, but rather subject to "a more devious and discreet form of power."³¹ In this study I posit the proliferation of discourses on sexuality *and* melancholy--the obsessive drive to classify, quantify and compartmentalize them in their most infinitesimal manifestations--as serving specifically as a powerfully effective

²⁹Marcuse 110.

³⁰Marcuse 111.

³¹Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

smoke-screen to keep the most threatening and therefore most forbidden of all repressed content, early childhood trauma, indefinitely obfuscated.³²

Also citing Foucault, Jennifer Radden attributes this process of the “medicalization of madness,” to the development and expansion of “institutionalized medicine, together with an increasingly confident materialism and physiological psychology.”³³ Treating madness had become a highly profitable business--a veritable monopoly--by the end of the nineteenth century. Yet again, this brings to mind the Frankfurt School’s critique of the Enlightenment; they underscore the means by which the flight to cold, calculating objectivity ultimately fostered an economic model that capitalizes on every aspect of human existence. Affect itself does not escape the commodification process, which creates an industry of the treatment of mental illness replete with an extensive array of pharmaceutical products marketed to the masses.

This medicalization of mental disorders also reinforces Carolyn Merchant’s thesis that links the ascendancy of instrumental reason over more organic philosophies to a historical conflation of woman and nature: that is to say, any dimension of “disorder”--connoting the obverse of “order”--has culturally been associated with women and nature, leading to their strategically codified inscription in philosophical and scientific discursive practices as a means of their rational containment. Whether considered “unreason” or a “disorder,” in a gendered system of binarisms melancholy and especially

³²As Freud refers to the loquacious nature of the melancholic in his essay, this prolix character of melancholy might be understood on a cultural level as well as that which produces these discourses, symptomatic of mass neurosis.

³³Radden 21.

its modern equivalent, depression, came to carry the stigma of (“feminine”) weakness in an unforgiving and competitive market economy.³⁴ Along with the institutionalization of medicine and the birth of the asylum developed the coldly-detached, scientific practice of photographing mental patients as illustrations of “clinical cases.” In one way or another, the vulnerable space that melancholy’s sufferers occupy has been cordoned off in an objectifying move, and those within contained with psychotropic drugs.

While over the centuries melancholy was, in a similar fashion to nature, often represented discursively and iconographically as a woman due to its association with disorder, it was melancholy’s close cousin hysteria which came to be distinctly gendered as female in the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century via a process Foucault has called the “hysterization of woman” in medical discourses.³⁵ The cause of hysteria was considered to be linked to the womb as well as to a weaker physical and moral constitution. Related nervous disorders, such as melancholia, eventually came to be gendered almost exclusively as feminine afflictions by the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century due to their association with the concept of idleness--a state generally attributed to women in bourgeois society--and once again to the supposed relation of female biology to women’s “nervous states.” Women’s reproductive cycles and the uterus itself were considered to be the cause of their

³⁴Radden 42.

³⁵Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 12, 153.

“natural” vulnerability or proneness to mental disorders--melancholy and hysteria ranking highest among them.³⁶

In the nineteenth-century the eminent French specialist of hysteria, Jean-Martin Charcot, focused on the ovaries rather than the womb as the source of the trouble. He deemed the uterus to be a “hysterogenic region,” since it had long been proven that it did not in fact travel about the body wreaking havoc, as had once been believed.³⁷

Furthermore, although still considering hysteria a physical illness, Charcot claimed to identify its cause as some sort of defect--either hereditary or the result of trauma--in the central nervous system. Nevertheless, it was generally believed that both women and children naturally suffered excessive sensibility or “affectibility”--a sensitivity of the nerves that was the hallmark of hysteria--while men’s “natural firmness” was likened to that of a machine.³⁸ Subsequently Freud, who had studied under Charcot, redefined the terms in which to speak of hysteria, pointing to the repression of traumatic childhood memories as the primary cause of hysterical symptoms.

Foucault situates hysteria in the context of the history of both sexuality and madness, while his discussion of melancholy is limited to his work on the history of madness. What I consider to be insufficiently explored in his analysis of the role of repression in these histories is how both sexuality (the body) and melancholy (painful

³⁶Whether there is a valid reason for considering “melancholia” and “hysteria” as separate empirical phenomena is debatable in my view, and especially dubious given their conflation in Freud’s own theories of each when the patients are women.

³⁷Elaine Showalter, *Histories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).

³⁸Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 149. Foucault quotes from Thomas Sydenham’s eighteenth-century treatise, *Médecine pratique*.

affect) are codified in scientific practices as a result of their shared association with the “unreason” of nature. This parallel codification--based on the cultural imperative of mastery over nature --informs the social conditioning affecting women and children’s bodies and subjectivity.³⁹ It is especially important to give this relationship more critical attention given Foucault’s identification of the body of the child, in addition to women’s sexuality, as a “‘local center’ of power-knowledge.”⁴⁰

Whereas Carolyn Merchant and the Frankfurt School foreground the transformation from an organic to a mechanistic model of understanding the cosmos to account for the destructive force of such systems of “power-knowledge,” Foucault instead closes the door on such an approach to understanding the fatal trajectory which has led from instrumental reason to global capitalism:

It would serve no purpose here to dwell on the rupture that occurred then in the pattern of scientific discourse and on the manner in which the twofold problematic of life and man disrupted and redistributed the order of the classical episteme. [...] There is no need either to lay further stress on the proliferation of political technologies that ensued, investing the body, health, modes of subsistence and habitation, living conditions, the whole space of existence (History of Sexuality, 143-144, my emphasis).

³⁹While in *Madness and Civilization* (21, 77) he does elaborate on the likening of the insane to beasts and refers to Sade’s treatment of Nature in the conclusion of that same text, in *The History of Sexuality* (105) he remarks: “Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover.” He stops short of looking below the “great surface network” of sexuality’s historical constructedness to ask why the body (as nature) has been historically subjected to this intense manipulation by social powers. What, for example, gave rise to the “few major strategies of knowledge and power” that purport to explain the body’s subjugation? (105-106) He does go into the issue briefly, but does not elaborate (143), and this is where Butler picks up the slack (where Foucault leaves off). Butler asks “how and why does this power get reproduced?”

⁴⁰Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 98. Foucault implies a connection in his acknowledgment that the discourse on sex is an integral part of a “multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions”(33).

While he acknowledges that “modern man” and his political strategies have placed all of life in danger of extinction, his reluctance to delve deeper into the matter of domination’s roots or origins leaves us yet again with a sort of melancholy aporia in his theory.

Instead, it is Judith Butler who will pick up the issue where Foucault has left it. Yet we will see that even Butler neglects the historical relationship with nature in the question of the reproduction of power in favor of an exclusive analysis of parent-child relationships.

In my view, the historical disavowal of an interdependence with nature must be considered to parallel the repression of the early memory of subjection to a primary other--forming a dialectical relationship resulting in alienated subjects who long for some imagined primordial bliss of absolute oneness, and all that that entails.⁴¹ Focusing exclusively on one or the other aspect leaves out at least half of the picture.

In a cultural process of incorporation and foreclosure analogous to the psychological one which the melancholic subject undergoes to maintain the psychic bond to the primary other (mother) and thereby deny its lack, some argue that the body and affect--associated with “nature”--have been thoroughly brought under the reins of culture’s regulating machinery. The Frankfurt School contends that every bodily and emotional experience has become subject to an intense filtering process which mediates the “raw material” of these experiences, thus neutralizing their danger to the status quo

⁴¹Dominick LaCapra warns that when absence--of “ultimate metaphysical foundations” becomes a melancholy fixation (ie. “loss”), “one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community”(46). In his discussion of repressed traumatic memory, LaCapra elides this issue of grand scale repression (on a cultural level) of nature and affect, which, I argue, has led to the historical traumatic events which he contends must be considered on a case by case basis. While this may appear a conundrum, in fact it amounts again to the importance of thinking dialectically--considering two “causes” at once that mutually create and reinforce each other.

and creating consumers lacking and therefore hungry for “authentic” feeling--to whom the culture machine markets its watered-down “experiences.” To be surprised by joy or to rage against the machine, we must be safely detached from political reality and instead live vicariously through the formulaic experiences of screen characters and the commercialized ranting of rock stars.⁴² These standardized or “pre-digested” emotions leave consumers still wanting, and thus they are forever seeking novelty in the most recent products culture proffers.

The body, and particularly the female body, is equally exploited and “standardized” in the public sphere, *domesticated* on the screen and in print--another result of these cultural associations that symbolically link the female body to nature’s contingency (and thus lack of control). One might also note here the frightening proliferation of the global trade in child pornography that has been facilitated by the internet.⁴³ Again, to the melancholy subject of patriarchy, the memory of our own radical subjection to our first caretaker in childhood must be repressed by the ego to maintain the illusion of autonomy. However, in accordance with Foucault’s observation above, the burgeoning of the underground child pornography industry and global networking of pedophiles may attest to children’s subjection to “a more discreet form of power.”

⁴²For a discussion of this process of standardization of experience, see Theodor Adorno’s *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991). Also, “Sting” of the dis-banded rockers “The Police” has been quoted by journalist Gerri Hirshey as saying that he “fell pretty deeply into AA: Alienation and Anger. This can be hard on the loved ones, but I suppose history has proven it’s often quite saleable.” (*Parade Magazine*, August 10, 2003) 5. Interestingly, Plato’s *Menexenus* suggests that the State creates culture as an *institution* to maintain the status quo, and sponsors distractions (eg. “contests in athletics and horse-racing and music of every kind”) to take the place of excessive mourning for the casualties of war. (p379 of the 1989 edition)

⁴³There is a plethora of recent literature on both of these topics.

Regarding the mainstream, popular culture's role is to facilitate and sustain the process of repression by producing images and role models as "ideals" with whom we identify and through whom we remain attached to a static present moment rather than reflecting too deeply on our past or future. Immersed as most people are in popular culture-- indeed, *inundated* by it--their "autonomy" ends up translating as a "choice" between brand-names and TV shows. All conflict is effectively mediated (ie. produced, defined and resolved) within the boundaries established by normative culture. Mass culture creates and is sustained by lack, in other words. By extension, the trend to "modernization" itself precluded recognition of our interdependence with nature. As a result of the unconscious acting-out of this double repression, women and children-- closely associated in culture with the body and emotion (ie. nature)--have been re-inscribed as object of scientific inquiry and too often, object of consumption, in the domain of discourse.

According to a fairly recent anthropological study, during the period of the European Enlightenment the notion of affect came to connote a constellation of adjectives and qualities associated with the feminine and, it would seem, with nature and children, among which figured: "the private," "the domestic," "estrangement," "irrationality," "unintended and uncontrolled action," "danger and vulnerability," and "physicality."⁴⁴ These associations represent a realm of experience which threatens to fall outside of the visible realm of the "panopticon," Foucault's term for visual mechanisms of social control which seek to regulate power and knowledge. Thus, we

⁴⁴Radden 27.

again understand why both women and children--in their perceived proximity to unruly nature--have become the objects of intense regulation via their inscription in discourses on sexuality and affective disorders. That is to say, we recognize a growing imperative, especially since the Age of Reason, to confine and control them within rigid systems of endless classification and compartmentalization.

Although strictly speaking it was not always the case, the gendering of *depression* as female in the cultural imagination came to predominate by the twentieth century due, in part, to the overwhelming prevalence of women sufferers.⁴⁵ In a wider sense melancholy, on the other hand, had been historically linked to male genius, intellectual refinement or reflection and creativity--contrary to its depiction in the iconography as a woman (who, besides being associated with chaotic nature, symbolized sensitivity). Melancholy retained some of these romantic connotations long after the term fell into disuse in clinical circles. Elaborating on this process of stratification of the two conditions--depression and melancholia--according to gender, Juliana Schiesari in *The Gendering of Melancholia* (1992), undertakes a feminist critique of the discourses on melancholy, focusing particularly on melancholy literature of the Italian Renaissance. She begins by identifying a cultural distinction between melancholy, whose positive attributes are associated with masculinity, and depression which is more generally considered a feminine ailment; she attributes this distinction to the over-valorization of "melancholy" in writing traditions throughout history and the prosaic connotations of "depression" in more recent discourses on the subject.

⁴⁵Radden 39.

According to Schiesari, this demarcation along gender lines can be understood to delineate a border between discourses characterized by either a male “rhetoric of loss” marked by sublimation (and therefore *sublation*) of suffering or a female pathos-infused expression of grieving.⁴⁶ In the former instance, she attributes the vast outpouring of literature on melancholy by celebrated male authors, especially since the Renaissance, to what she considers to be the “historically legitimated” expression of cultural malaise and of a sense of ineffable loss brought on by the ever-alienating effects of what was touted as progress.⁴⁷ In other words, she distinguishes a double impetus in this writing: on the one hand she points to the melancholic trope of sensitivity as the manifestation of a “desire for transcendence” from an alienated and disenchanting world; on the other hand, implicit in the display of loss, she identifies what she deems to be the narcissistic goal of the male subject who aspires to the privileged position and prestige that the masculine melancholic tradition has been assigned within Western literary, philosophical, and artistic canons.⁴⁸

⁴⁶On the “cultural role” of sublimation Freud writes, “Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural evolution; this it is that makes it possible for the higher mental operations, science, artistic, ideological activities, to play such an important part in civilized life. If one were to yield to a first impression, one would be tempted to say that sublimation is *a fate which has been forced upon the instincts by culture alone*”(*Civilization and its Discontents*, 42-43, my emphasis). And again, “Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men’s business; it confronts them with ever harder tasks, compels them to sublimations of instinct *which women are not easily able to achieve*”(CD 50).

⁴⁷Schiesari cites several examples of anthologies on melancholia dedicated to male writers in comparison to the relative paucity of the same type of study for women writers (4).

⁴⁸Schiesari writes that “...melancholia is itself a discourse that superimposes a transcendental lack over women’s losses by devaluing or ‘depressing’ this feminine work and by re-encoding or inflating male loss as the sign of genius and moral sense, as the very signifier of cultural superiority”(62).

Carolyn Merchant illustrates this hierarchical distinction as well in reference to the attitudes and beliefs of those participating in the witch trials of the sixteenth century. A French prosecutor in the trials, Jean Bodin, sought to discredit the witches' advocates by refuting their claim that women were naturally prone to a melancholic disposition--thought by some medical "experts" to account for the disturbing dreams and hyper-emotionality that rendered those women suspect in the public eye. Those defending the accused made reference to the writing of physician Johann Weyer, among others. For example, his medical treatise *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563) attributed "witches" unusual behavior and uncontrolled emotions to their "natural" fragility and vulnerability--characteristics which explained their susceptibility to melancholy. Also having recourse to essentialist explanations, Bodin countered that women--who were "naturally cold and wet" while "melancholy was the result of excess heat and dryness"--were incapable of suffering from a true melancholic disposition:

It is...gross ignorance to attribute melancholic sickness to women, which suit them as little as do the praiseworthy effects of a temperate melancholic humor, which makes a man wise, serious or contemplative. ...All these qualities are as little compatible with woman as fire is with water. So abandon the fanatical error of those who make women into melancholics. (Quoted by Merchant 142)

The historical implications of cultural trauma in this gendering of melancholy are explicit in the example of the witch trials, a period of genocide lasting two hundred years and extending across Europe, with women as its primary victims. As discussed, we can trace certain transhistorical traumas, in a broad sense, to the transhistorical "absence" or lack of women and nature in melancholy rhetoric. That is to say, the victimization of

women and the devastation of the natural environment--the physical repression of both--follow from the unconscious repression of "feminine nature." I am arguing that this repression on both levels translates to what Dominick LaCapra is calling both "absence" and "loss." However, I believe that LaCapra has left out a fundamental element--gender--in his discussion. Therefore his injunction against conflating absence with loss, viewed in this light, might be found to be groundless--expressed by Schiesari in the following:

If melancholia is the privileged intuition of a nameless and transcendental "what" that has been lost, it also appears concomitant with a denial of the "what" that is explicitly represented as lost in the ritual of mourning. As I also argue, the politics of this hierarchy between mourning and melancholia are not without motivation and consequences (131).

On the other hand, one may argue that LaCapra is generally thinking along the same lines as Juliana Schiesari, albeit using different terminology and without bringing gender into the matter, for Schiesari also inveighs against what she refers to as a "discourse of melancholy" that seems akin to what LaCapra calls "narrativized absence"(49). By the same token, Schiesari delineates crucial differences between a sort of transcendental melancholy (roughly equivalent to LaCapra's "absence of originary foundations"--or "transhistorical trauma") and "real" historical losses. Unlike LaCapra, however, she relates both types of loss to gender.

Again, similar to LaCapra's "melancholic feedback loop,"(21) she criticizes the privileging of a sublime, fatalistic pathos in writing about loss that inhibits the actual working through of trauma (in the grief process). However, while Schiesari, like LaCapra, considers narcissistic, nostalgic fixation on absence a means of avoidance in

confronting real social conditions, her analysis focuses specifically on the negative effects *on women* of this mode of denial. I would agree that the history of melancholia is unarguably one of repression (of nature and “the feminine”)--and that it is a mistake to ignore the fundamental role that gender plays within it. Schiesari makes this point and states her position succinctly in the following:

the persistence of a gender imbalance in the ways melancholy is discussed from Aristotle to Freud, from Ficino to Benjamin, or from Burton to Kristeva, testifies to a *transhistorical* oppression of women’s loss in Western phallogentrism that exceeds any neo-historicist insistence on the particularity of a single historical moment (17).

We might do well to reconsider LaCapra’s thesis--the insistence on considering the specificity of traumatic historical events to the relative exclusion of an understanding of their relation to each other--in view of the place gender occupies in the history of domination. In addition, I would find it necessary to rearticulate the argument to include not only the death of nature in this wider view of loss--how a more tactile, compassionate relationship with nature and sense of being connected corresponds to a loss of connectedness with one’s own emotions and with others--but how this alienation gets reproduced and reinforced within family dynamics. This is a loss which might figure in what has in some contexts been called “constitutive lack,” ultimately affecting both sexes in crucial and fundamental ways.⁴⁹

⁴⁹I will in fact argue against an interpretation of “constitutive lack” a *trauma* which founds all subjectivity. I will instead contend that “constitutive lack” thus conceived is a historical and thus politically-motivated notion--as well as the “melancholic” mode of subjectivity which is supposedly equally inevitable--to which there exist alternatives, such as those suggested in the work of Teresa Brennan and other feminist critics. (One such alternative is an “intersubjective” mode of subjectivity, another is Kaja Silverman’s idea of “heteropathic identification”) I realize that Freudian Lacan (and by extension Butler), view constitutive lack as a melancholic turn from the object inwards without which there can be no subject, but I disagree with the degree to which it is experienced as traumatic and must constitute a loss.

Schiesari has recourse to Freud's classic essay on mourning and melancholia to substantiate her claim that in Western culture melancholy has historically been considered a positive male attribute, referring to his description of the (what she identifies as male) melancholic subject, whose psychic "structure of dominance and disempowerment" functions as the sustaining foundations of this rhetoric of loss (9). She explains this characterization by way of associating the devalued, vilified and critically-judged lost object of Freud's melancholic subject with "woman in classic phallocentrism"--stating that once this object has been incorporated, by making a display of suffering over the loss, the male melancholic can in fact *profit* by its sublimation in language (9).⁵⁰ At the same time, she argues, this "capitalization of lack" is accomplished by a corresponding devaluation or even *denial* of women's social and symbolic disenfranchisement as well as by the appropriation in discourse of what in cultural practices has traditionally been women's role: ritual grieving (9-13). In other words, for Schiesari this "melancholic" aesthetic tradition transforms mourning into a solitary practice that is inscribed and thereby safely confined to a discourse that meanwhile can only be written on the condition that women's historical losses remain disavowed.⁵¹

⁵⁰Jessica Benjamin states: "The vulnerability of a masculinity that is forged in the crucible of femininity, the 'great task' of separation that is so seldom completed, lays the groundwork for the later objectification of women. The mother stands as the prototype of the undifferentiated object. She serves men as their other, their counterpart, the side of themselves they repress." (*The Bonds of Love*, 77)

⁵¹A point Schiesari does not elaborate on is how this melancholy economy of "loss that is converted into gain" translates into broader economic terms, a point I will develop in the latter part of this study in its relation to *neo-colonialism* and global capitalism.

While it may not be readily apparent how loss might be converted into gain in writing, and particularly at women's expense, as Schiesari suggests, she is not the only one to suggest this potential to exploit another's loss and reap some reward for it in literary circles. Notably, Jacques Derrida has been quoted as expressing guilt for publishing "Circumfession"--an account of his dying mother's final days in which he puts on public display "her last breaths and, still worse, for purposes that some might judge to be literary."⁵² In some respects, this confession of guilt fits Freud's description of the melancholic (as opposed to the mourner) who, in a heightened sense of moral conscience suffers a "lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings."⁵³ Derrida was also hesitant to allow a collection of his eulogies to be published--*The Work of Mourning* (2001)--due to similar concerns about profiting from and reaping narcissistic gain from what might appear to be a serial--and therefore rhetorical and insincere--rendering of mourning in his published writings.

Indeed, the notion of a "politics of mourning" is elicited in that work, denoting in part the uncomfortable conjoining of the singularity of the event of a loved one's death and the repetition that inevitably renders the public--*qua* published--eulogy a sort of betrayal of that uniqueness. In his memorial essay on Jean-François Lyotard, Derrida alludes to Lyotard's discussion of "the political dimensions of the funeral oration," which

⁵²Quoted by the editors of *The Work of Mourning: Jacques Derrida*, Chicago; London: Chicago UP, 2001.

⁵³Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 165. In fact, Derrida himself refers to himself as "melancholic" in his introduction to the piece on Jean-François Lyotard.

draws on Plato's *Menexenus* (in Lyotard's *The Differend*). While I will not specifically consider Lyotard's work on the topic in any depth in this study, Plato's *Menexenus*--a foundational text in the history of Western civilization--merits careful consideration. Based on their own understanding of *Menexenus*, Derrida's editors will suggest that politics originated in mourning, a hypothesis which intersects in crucial and fundamental ways with my own thesis regarding the political motivations behind melancholy:

Since Plato's *Menexenus*, or since the funeral oration of Pericles that Plato parodies in this dialogue, politics is related to, or founded on, mourning. In the Athenian context, for example, it is related to a rhetoric of mourning that tries to complete or even foreclose mourning by lifting death up, sublating it in the fulfillment and glory of the "beautiful death." (*The Work of Mourning*, 19)⁵⁴

Their description of the "rhetoric of mourning" which prescribes foreclosure of grief via a process of sublation easily lends itself to a definition of melancholy. For this reason, and given Plato's influence on Western epistemology, *Menexenus* merits a closer look. Plato's *Menexenus* illuminates Schiesari's thesis above and provides insight into the history of melancholy in the West. It also sheds light on how a "politics" or "rhetoric" of mourning informs the construction of male subjectivity.

The form of *Menexenus* is complex. It begins and ends with a brief dialogue between Socrates and a fellow Athenian, Menexenus, between which figures a speech within a speech within a speech. Socrates and Menexenus discuss the subject of an upcoming funeral ceremony for which the Council Chamber is seeking an orator.

⁵⁴His editors also quote Jacques Derrida himself (from *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford University Press, 1993, 61-62) on this issue: "In an economic, elliptic, hence dogmatic way, I would say that there is no politics without an organization of the time and space of mourning [...]" 19.

Socrates' manner becomes conspicuously obsequious upon learning that the young, upwardly mobile Menexenus may well be on the board to choose an orator for the coveted position, for funerals provided an auspicious occasion to publically display one's epideictic prowess. In sum, Socrates capitalizes on the propitious opportunity that the chance meeting with Menexenus presents to recite an *epitaphois* (ie. funeral oration), prepared by his teacher of rhetoric, Aspasia, despite his apparent reservations about appropriating what should be her due claim to fame: "But possibly my teacher will be vexed with me if I publish abroad her speech" (*Menexenus*, 335). We also learn from Socrates in the dialogue (and elsewhere, in contemporaneous texts) that the most-oft referenced and recited funeral oration of that period, Pericles' *Epitaphia*, had been authored by Aspasia as well, while not officially credited to her.⁵⁵

Thus Socrates recites the speech in the first person, in Aspasia's "voice," which midway switches registers to purport to speak for the dead men in question--those who had recently died in battle. The speech is at once sententious and absurdly exaggerated--appealing to the pride and narcissism of its interlocutors while extolling the virtues and exploits of Athenians throughout history. The identities of the recently deceased collide with those of the more distant past in a general eulogy to Athen's "heroes." Throughout, the oration exhorts its audience to forego "debasing themselves" with excessive "mourning and lamenting" over the dead in favor of a stoic, and public, formal ceremony to honor the heroism of the men who died defending the State--their City of Athens.

⁵⁵See Mary Ellen Waithe's *A History of Women Philosophers. Volume 1/600BC-500AD*. (Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic Publisher's, 1987) "Aspasia of Miletus," 75-80.

Indeed, the orator invokes the law which ordains its citizens to limit their grief to a controlled “public lamentation for the dead.” He makes repeated reference to “shame” to signal the stigma and social ostracism that would befall any man so “cowardly” or “unmanly” as to mourn the loss of a beloved son or father. Instead, the funerary rhetoric serves to galvanize the repressed affect to forge a proto-national, or socio-political identity--calling on citizens to take pride in their “unadulterated” blood as Athenians and at the same time to despise and strive to protect their country against the “barbarians.”⁵⁶

This call-to-arms manipulates the banished emotion by inscribing the notion of tenderness into its political rhetoric: the State (alternately evoked as the “country” or “the City”) is a tender “Mother” who will “nurture” and bestow “ample care” upon her citizens from whom she in turn expects protection (377).⁵⁷ Furthermore, in the ritual repetition of this tribute to the dead, the funeral oration provides the occasion for the State to inculcate its own myth of origins --employing this maternal metaphor and positing birth as an analogy to claim superiority over other races and boast a calculated control over Nature:

during the period in which the whole earth was putting forth and producing animals of every kind, wild and tame, our country showed herself barren and void of wild animals, but chose for herself and gave birth to man, who surpasses all other animals in intelligence and alone of animals regards justice and the gods. And we have a signal proof

⁵⁶This is a discourse to be echoed in the twentieth century in the fascist writing of Gimenez-Caballero (*Genio de España*) and to be compared to Laurencia’s speech in Lope de Vega’s *Fuente Ovejuna* (seventeenth century). Like Socrates in this speech, Laurencia will also refer to the threat of the “Amazons” as the “eternal threat of the globe.” These and other foundational texts in the formation of the nation-state of Spain also appeal to notions of motherhood, bastards, purity of blood, etc.

⁵⁷Also in this same context, “For a polity is a thing that nurtures men, good men when it is noble, bad men when it is base”(345).

of this statement in that this land of ours has given birth to the forefathers both of these men and of ourselves (343).

Underlying the satire of this short piece attributed to Plato, the blatant gender politics are a crucial element of its complexity and shed light on the nature of politics in general.

The series of references to the country as “Mother” symbolically usurp the biological role of mothers to political ends:

Now our land, which is also our mother, furnishes to the full this proof of having brought forth men; for, of all the lands that then existed, she was the first and the only one to produce human nourishment, namely the grain of wheat and barley, whereby the race of mankind is most richly and well nourished, inasmuch as she herself is the true mother of this creature. And proofs such as this one ought to accept more readily on behalf of a country than on behalf of a woman; for it is not the country that imitates the woman but the woman the country (345).

While it may at first seem that Nature is ascribed agency in this description, the scarce allusions to “land” quickly get buried under the weight of the numerous loaded references to “country,” “State” and “polity” as the nurturing “Mother” in this and the following passages (meant to preclude the need for Mama). Meanwhile, actual women seem to have no place or useful role in this country.

Critics have noted the absence of women in this political speech as well as the absent Other of other races; however they often overlook the most fascinating aspect of this dialogue: the speech is attributed to a woman, “Aspasia,” who herself is the “quintessential other” of Athenian society.⁵⁸ She is a foreigner (or *metic*--a resident alien), a highly sexualized woman and mother of an illegitimate child at a period when

⁵⁸Madeleine M. Henry, *Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and Her Biographical Tradition*. (New York; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995).

claims to autochthony alone determined eligibility for citizenship. She is also an anomaly in this historical context, as she was both a respected teacher of rhetoric--thereby a member of an intellectual elite welcome in high society--and reputed to be a harlot. Aspasian critic Madeleine M. Henry observes that in this funeral speech, oft-recited throughout the centuries as foundational to the creation of civic identity in the West, women

make up an essential component of the Other, but that the Other is here in fact, figured as a woman who speaks in order to define the Civic Self. A real woman is erased and a constructed woman, "known" to us all but not described, speaks in her place. The Other's presence at such a central point in the composition and delivery of the epitaphois is a way of making absence present and presence, that is, relevance and validity, absent.⁵⁹

We might understand the constructedness of the civic self in the history of Western civilization, then, to be based on the "absence"--via melancholy incorporation and appropriation--of woman and nature. At the same time, the exploitation and manipulation of woman's knowledge and nature's "secrets" amount to a loss which is converted into gain by the Western melancholy subject.

The fact that Aspasia is credited with this speech also seems to be at the crux of the polemic that has historically plagued theorists and Plato's historians regarding the text's authenticity.⁶⁰ There is also ambiguity regarding the issue of authorship within the text, suggesting a *mise-en abyme*: Socrates' will receive credit for the funeral oration--

⁵⁹Henry 37.

⁶⁰See for example Gerard Ledger, *Recounting Plato: A Computer Analysis of Plato's Style*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 163-164; Edmund Bloedow, "Aspasia and the 'Mystery' of *Menexenus*," (Weiner Studien, 1975) : n.F.9 32-48; or J.A. Shawyer's introduction to *The Menexenus of Plato*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906) p.x. See also *A History of Women Philosophers, Volume I/600BC-500AD*, 76-77.

even though he admits it was written by Aspasia, his woman teacher. Likewise, in history Plato will similarly be credited with the writing of *Menexenus*--although doubts remain as to who the real author is. Aspasia, meanwhile, "left no written works of her own."⁶¹ If we consider the possibility that the epitaphs of *Menexenus* may have in fact been authored by Aspasia, this reading would further support Juliana Schiesari's argument that women's historical losses are eclipsed by a male *rhetoric* of loss.

Menexenus also sheds light on other related, central problems. As noted, motherhood becomes the primary trope in this speech--alluding to the biological function as well as the nurturing role of mothers to promulgate an ideal of statehood and patriotism. The mother's breast figures metonymically in the description of the role of the State in caring for its citizens:

For every creature that brings forth possesses a suitable supply of nourishment for its offspring; and by this test it is manifest also whether a woman be truly a mother or no, *if she possesses no founts of nourishment for her child.* (343, my emphasis)

It is tempting to see in the symbolism a primary frustration. This imagery brings to mind Melanie Klein's theory of the "bad breast" as a negative *imago* which haunts the psyche of the radically dependent infant/emerging subject.⁶² An underlying fear of vulnerability,

⁶¹See *Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and her biographical tradition*, 3. There is also an allusion in the text of *Menexenus* suggesting that Aspasia wrote this speech as well as Pericle's--composing both at the same time.

⁶²"Klein thought that the baby's original love object was the mother's breast endowed with all kinds of meaning which went far beyond that of a mammary gland producing milk. Klein found that phantasies of the breast included the breast as a source of all life, love and hope, of babies and good things, of comfort, peace and serenity. She found phantasies of the baby getting inside it or taking it in and fusing with it in a blissful state. However, she also found phantasies of being eaten up by it, torn apart or threatened by it; of the breast being damaged or dangerously bad, inside or outside the baby" (Segal, 41).

therefore, which would explain the absolute injunction against weakness and “cowardice,” might also be detected in the dead heroes’ exhortation to those gathered to hear their speech to be “manly fathers of us men.”

In this light, what I think is most critical in this discussion of melancholy is that, rather than view the “critically judged lost object” simply as “woman” in patriarchy as in Schiesari’s rendering of Freud’s essay, one take into account other possible referents that might together constitute loss, and thus provide for a more complex understanding of melancholy’s relevance to a critique of global capitalism. It is especially on this point--the idea that a foreclosure of innate, human vulnerability might constitute part of the loss--that Carolyn Merchant and the Frankfurt School’s discussion of the death of nature, Jessica Benjamin’s object relations theory, Alice Miller’s theory of repressed childhood trauma and Judith Butler’s theories of subjection can lend more depth to this study of melancholy--while the theoretical *point-de-repère* is still Freud.

Due to the complexity of the psychic phenomenon in all of its gendered variations, Freud’s analysis of melancholy is rife with contradictions that in the end he admits to leaving unresolved. Yet if we forego the urge to find a unified or totalizing theory of melancholy’s cause and etiology, there is much to be gleaned from his essay. While he himself ultimately comes to a different conclusion, Freud nevertheless suggests that melancholy, unlike mourning, may consist of a neurotic and narcissistic mourning for a lost part of the self--an unconscious loss “of an ideal kind”--that one displaces onto a lost object, with the result that one does not consciously know what it is *exactly* that one is mourning:

From the analogy with grief we should have to conclude that the loss suffered by the melancholiac is that of an object; according to what he says *the loss is one in himself* ("Mourning and Melancholia," 168, my emphasis).

Rather than consider culture's role in debasing and vilifying those human emotions linked to vulnerability that the subject of patriarchy must banish or "send into exile," Freud interprets the melancholic's self-condemnation as a circuitous path of his/her ambivalent feelings that originate in the self who feels wounded, get directed onto the lost love-object and then finally get displaced back on to the ego.⁶³

If one listens patiently to the many and various self-accusations of the melancholic, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, some person whom the patient loves, has loved or should love. This conjecture is confirmed every time one examines the facts. So we get the key to the clinical picture--by perceiving that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted on to the patient's own ego (169).

Rather than choose between one explanation or the other, I will opt to sustain both hypotheses to allow that the loss might be one of the self (ie. foreclosure of "the feminine": vulnerability, sensitive affectivity, etc.) or of an ideal(-ized) relationship with a love object, or of both kinds at once.

Melancholy differs from grief in that--while it may be triggered by the actual loss of an object--it is related to a loss within oneself of which one is not conscious. In addition to this difference between melancholy and mourning is the heightening of moral

⁶³Judith Butler will discuss at length the problematic logic of this construction. How, she asks, can the self turn back on itself to compensate for the loss if that self does not yet exist, since it is constituted by the loss? See especially Chapter 6 of *The Psychic Life of Power*.

conscience; this “dissatisfaction with the self on moral grounds” is viewed by Freud to be “by far the most outstanding feature” of melancholy (169). Freud likens this fall in self-esteem occasioned by loss to the formation of conscience in the constitution of the ego:

We see how in this condition one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, looks upon it as an object (168).

This description, in which--Butler demonstrates --Freud takes the melancholic subject as the ego’s norm/ normative subjectivity, highlights an intra-psychic scenario of domination. While Freud will allude to this critical faculty as the “conscience,” and later, in *The Ego and the Id*, will refer to it as the “super-ego,” we can nevertheless distinguish the cultural mandate to repress not only “the feminine,” but, I will argue, all of those human qualities and affections which are intractable to a masculinist agenda of power over nature. Butler appears to suggest that if infants were not required to repudiate their intimate bond with their mother, the ego would no longer need to turn back upon itself and create a superego that constantly berates it. This would forego the need for a certain type of ego--a melancholy one --that must dominate the other it has lost (168). There would no longer be a need to guard against the return of the repressed, the surfacing of this internalized other that haunts and troubles the ego’s rigidly protected gender boundaries. In this light we again understand gender as a construction that functions to maintain power relations, the dominant ideology.

Yet the problem is even more complex than this. Freud seems to identify the roots of melancholy in early childhood --in the process of identification and formation of the ego--indicating that adult melancholia effects a regression to this primary narcissistic

stage. Without ever referring to the child, however, Freud instead insinuates that the “ego,” once its object-choice has been made, is in some way injured or disappointed by its love-object. In the case of the child, the love-object is of course a parent or primary caretaker, and the trauma or wound inflicted--as Alice Miller will later reiterate in her elaboration of an entire theory--may not necessarily be physical or sexual in nature:

The occasions giving rise to melancholia for the most part extend beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being wounded, hurt, neglected, out of favour, or disappointed, which can import opposite feelings of love and hate into a relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence. This conflict of ambivalence, the origin of which lies now more in actual experience, now more in constitution, must not be neglected among the conditioning factors in melancholia (172).

The key factor in identifying this process as one that originally took place between a child and a primary caretaker is precisely the narcissistic identification with the object that takes the place of the actual acting-out of ambivalence upon the object, necessitated by the fact that the child is dependent on the love-object for survival.⁶⁴ Therefore the hatred gets re-routed and directed at the child’s own ego, which accounts for the self-beratement. This same structure of relationships gets repeated throughout adulthood as well and on many levels, but it is the original occurrence of subjection on which, Judith Butler argues, the rest are modeled.

Butler equally draws a parallel between Freud’s articulation of the conscience as “one of the major institutions of the ego” and the purpose this psychic institution serves

⁶⁴This might also account for the adult melancholic’s alleged “dread of poverty” (“Mourning and Melancholia,” 173)--rooted in early fears of threatened security and fears of abandonment.

in the broader socio-political context--indicating a dialectical relationship between the psychic and social domains. Freud's use of "institution" as a metaphor, she says:

suggests not only that conscience is instituted, produced, and maintained within the larger polity and its organization, but that the ego and its various parts are accessible through a metaphorical language that attributes a social content and structure to these presumably psychic phenomena (178).

We might recognize in this account of conscience and its relation to the polity Socrates' speech in *Menexenus*, which functioned to create and maintain the psychic and social boundaries of the civic self and the polity: it berated and condemned any of its citizens who might let their emotional defenses down and give way to grief, and at the same time it appealed to their narcissism and desire to belong and to be cared for by assigning legitimate identity to those "pure" Athenians whom the State, a "nurturing Mother," would love and protect. Butler again links this process to Freud's articulation of melancholy:

the account of melancholy is an account of how psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another. As such, melancholy offers potential insight into how the boundaries of the social are instituted and maintained, not only at the expense of psychic life, but through binding psychic life into forms of melancholic ambivalence (167-8).

Butler is not alone in identifying the link between psychic and social structures with respect to melancholy. In *Melancholy and Society* (1992), German sociologist Wolf LePenies had also delineated this dialectical relationship. Furthermore, he gives the issue a historical slant by pointing to Robert Burton's own attempts in the seventeenth century to address the problem of the melancholy individual by eradicating melancholia on a societal level:

as early as in Burton's plan to rid the country of melancholy as a means of combating the melancholy in the individual, we find a sense of the interlinking of sociological and psychological categories, of social and psychic structures. We must hope that the relationship between the categories will become clear in our time as well: there is nothing to justify limiting our approaches to an analysis of homologous structures in the present. Rather, the historically posited problem of melancholy provides insights into how a "formal coincidence" of this type can be highly fruitful (130).

While he brings the issue of class into his discussion of melancholy, what LePenies does not address in his study is the role of gender.⁶⁵

While Schiesari does concede that loss or lack of being, as defined by Lacan, may be experienced by men and women alike, it is the *political economy* of the discourse of lack--the Symbolic Order, as it were--that she criticizes as being weighted on the side of men:

True, all of us have felt the loss that comes from separation from the mother, but *not all* of us receive the same social accreditation for that loss. All of us assume this loss as a lack in our being that constitutes our being, but *not all* of us are *said to be* lacking, and not all of us are said to be lacking *in the same way*, or to the same degree (29-30, emphasis in the original).

This articulation identifies a common and confusing conflation of what I consider two variants of "constitutive lack" (albeit perhaps related). Schiesari refers to loss, on the one hand, as the biological weaning process required of individuation and the subject's entry into language ("separation from the mother")--a process that both sexes must undergo. But she identifies on the other a culturally produced lack that is the result of the West's ban on nature and "the feminine"(the lack of the feminine within the

⁶⁵LePenies links melancholy to aristocratic boredom and bourgeois idleness and considers capitalism to have dispelled most of the problem, so that today it is more likely the intelligentsia who suffer from melancholia.

phallogocentric symbolic).⁶⁶ What I find particularly important here is to allow for the possibility that what some tout as structural or constitutive loss may in the end be a political red herring for masking the status quo. The status quo entails not only male privilege but by extension the imperative to keep painful and unruly affect safely at bay. In other words, if there is widespread melancholy on a socio-cultural level, it does not automatically follow from there that it is due to “constitutive lack” resulting from the weaning process (ie. loss of the primary object). I am arguing, with Schiesari, that there are widespread losses that are the result of outdated cultural attitudes and modes of social behaviors that are in dire need of revision.

Butler compares Freud’s theory on mourning and melancholy to those articulated in his later essay, *The Ego and the Id*. While in the older theory he viewed the melancholic as a specific case of neurosis involving an unspecified object, Freud later came to explicitly identify the primary lost love-object of *all women in general* as the *maternal* one--that at a very young age the infant-child had to both repudiate and identify with in a process of gender identity formation, which explains the *unconscious* nature of the loss as well as the creation of what Butler calls “melancholy gender.”⁶⁷ Butler will also refer to “gender melancholy”(140) and “constitutive melancholia”(23) to denote the foreclosure of original homosexual passionate attachments (ie. an infant’s affective

⁶⁶True, both sexes occupy different, hierarchical positions with respect to this lack--women *are* the lack--if we are speaking in terms of the (ideally masculinized) Symbolic Order. As discussed above, Schiesari centers her argument on the social privileging of masculine melancholy discourses in contrast to a relative under-representation and devaluation of women’s writing.

⁶⁷If the primary characteristic of melancholy is a disavowal of loss, then for Butler, the woman melancholic *par excellence* is the strictly heterosexual one, who is the most adamant in this disavowal of having *ever* had a passionate attachment to another woman (ie. her own mother, the primary love object).

bonding with the parent of the same sex) that both sexes must accomplish in order to occupy the site of a certain normative heterosexual subjectivity.

Butler employs the term “refused identification” elliptically to refer, it would seem, to either the male homosexual who refuses to identify with his father--who desires a female love object--or the heterosexual man who repudiates identification with the feminine in order to become a “man” in imitation of his (unconsciously desired) father. The case of the drag queen exemplifies this ambiguity. The drag queen’s refusal to repudiate “femininity” translates to an incorporation of the disavowed loss, which is then acted out in a performance of feminine gender (which, Butler reminds us, is always already a performance). As she also reminds us, not all drag performers are homosexual. Butler does not elaborate on this process for women and in fact, it is difficult to conceptualize an equivalent--given the different relationship of women to the culturally repressed “feminine.” Kristeva will refer rather to a “failed identification” which refers both to a woman’s failure to satisfy her narcissism via identification with/within the symbolic order and her refusal to switch her love object from female to male (ie. to give up her mother as love object), which is the cause of this failure.⁶⁸

Butler’s thesis, which formulates the construction of “melancholy gender,” does not sufficiently address the particular difficulties which confront women in the process of identification. Kaja Silverman and Julia Kristeva will go further to develop theories

⁶⁸As a solution to problematic female subjectivity, Kristeva writes “The ‘primary identification’ with the ‘father in individual prehistory’ would be the means, the link that might enable one to become reconciled with the loss of the Thing.” (Quoted by Radden, 339).

addressing the depressive economy that structures female subjectivity.⁶⁹ They postulate, to borrow Schiesari's words, "the necessarily depressed psychological makeup of women in a patriarchal society that requires them to renounce a mother with whom they must also identify"(17). Kristeva posits what she calls a universal "matricidal impulse" that ensues from the separation from and loss of the primary object, one's mother. Apparently, this follows logically from the drive to separation from the mother in the process of individuation that occasions the loss.⁷⁰ She considers this ambivalence towards the mother to complicate the forming of female subjectivity. Unlike a man, a woman cannot as unproblematically define herself against her mother, as in "I am not *that*," and hence position herself in the masculine symbolic as the possessor of the phallus that structures it. Rather, women *are* what they are enjoined to hate, leading to an introjection of ambivalence and consequently, depression and melancholia. This original ambivalence towards the mother is evident in some of the post-colonial fictions that I consider in later chapters, in which close analysis of the troubled relationships between mothers and daughters sheds light on the origins of melancholy.⁷¹

⁶⁹Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1984). Schiesari writes extensively on this work and on Kristeva's *Black Sun*.

⁷⁰I consider there to be a confusing conflation in her work of ambivalence towards the biological mother caused by necessary loss/separation and cultural ambivalence towards women (ie. associated with Mother Nature) who represent an imagined lost utopia or prior bliss. While this conflation is probably intentional, I consider it important to distinguish between the two phenomena so as to address the mutually-reinforcing effects of social conditioning in each case.

⁷¹Laurie Vickroy's study, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (University of Virginia Press, 2002), further problematizes this relationship in view of the socio-cultural effects of colonialism.

I have two critiques to level at Butler's essay on "Melancholy Gender": one is that she does not seem to address the gender bias operative in Freud's account of melancholy and therefore reproduces and reinforces some of its alienating effects. This is indicative in the title of her study, for "melancholy gender" in fact refers to the cultural construction of gender in general terms. Likewise, Freud did not distinguish between the different means men and women are culturally assigned to deal with loss, which I think accounts for much of the ambiguity and many of the contradictions in his analysis of the etiology and manifestations/symptomatology of melancholy. Butler foregoes a consideration of the gender-determined ways men and women relate to loss, be it homosexual or heterosexual. Rather, her discussion focuses mainly on the male (gay or straight) subject in Western culture and more often than not, she presents male subjectivity as a process that democratically parallels that of women (gay or straight):

The straight man becomes (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he "never" loved and "never" grieved; the straight woman becomes the woman she "never" loved and "never" grieved (147).

One must acknowledge that the paternal signifier or Law of the Father--with which men identify to compensate for their loss of a passionate attachment (to *both* primary objects, I would posit) --is not as readily accessible to women. This alone is quite a significant difference considering men's privileged relationship to the symbolic order and the narcissistic cultural mirroring that women are denied or *lack*, relatively speaking.⁷²

⁷²Juliana Schiesari writes on the subject: "The narcissistic basis for differentiation is consonant with an implicit masculinizing of the neurosis as well as with its disassociation from the stereotypically feminine conditions of mourning and hysteria" (17).

What is maybe more relevant to this particular study is her question “can all separation and loss be traced back to that structuring loss of the other sex by which we emerge as this sexed being in the world?”(165). I think Butler has already answered the question in her discussion of subjection. She has elaborated the ways in which children’s subjectivities develop in *necessary subordination*, and necessarily form bonds of love with those to whom they are subjected. This opens up the question of what may be contained in that loss, and allows for the possibility, already introduced in Freud’s essay, that a part of the self--a more ideal self and more ideal relationship to others --may be implicit in that loss, hence the common sense of “impoverishment of the ego” and the self-berating tendency on the part of the melancholic. Freud himself writes later of a sort of “archeology of losses” that constructs the subject, but obscures the issue with the dogma of the Oedipal Theory as an ersatz or theoretical red-herring for the original loss.⁷³

The reference to the child appears in the introduction to Butler’s text, and I consider the description she provides of child-parent power relations to illuminate her entire thesis on how certain forms of power are reproduced, internally and externally:

if the child is to persist in a psychic and social sense, there must be dependency and the formation of attachment: there is no possibility of not loving, where love is bound up with the requirements for life. The child does not know to what he/she attaches; yet the infant as well as the child must attach in order to persist in and as itself. No subject can emerge without this attachment, formed in dependency but no subject, in the course of its formation, can ever afford fully to “see” it. This attachment in its primary forms must both come to be and be denied, its coming to be must consist in its partial denial, for the subject to emerge (8).

⁷³See Butler’s discussion of Freud’s *The Ego and the Id*, 133.

Like Freud, Butler for the most part elides the issue of the adult abuse of power over children in the question of melancholy subjectivity. While she does allude to the child as being “vulnerable to subordination and exploitation,” and in one instance does refer specifically to child sexual abuse, she refrains from developing the possibility of actual (and prevalent) abuse of this power to exploit--to the exclusive privileging instead of abstract philosophical discussions of power.

Imagine, in the following quotation from Butler, that implicit in the term “love” we were to read not only that original same-sex bond of affection (as in daughter-for-mother or son-for-father), but possibly the incestuous acting-out of illicit desire (as in parent-child sexual relations of some sort, actual or perceived by the child):⁷⁴

If this love is from the start out of the question, then it cannot happen, and if it does, it certainly did not. If it does, it happens only under the official sign of its prohibition and disavowal. When certain kinds of losses are compelled by a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions, we might expect a culturally prevalent form of melancholia, one which signals the internalization of the ungrieved and ungrievable homosexual cathexis.⁷⁵ And where there is no public recognition or discourse through which such a loss might be named and mourned, then melancholy takes on cultural dimensions of contemporary consequence (139).

We might therefore recognize melancholy as the result of a double repression: a physically intimate relationship with the mother before ego boundaries were established and respected, and early psychic trauma caused by what the child experienced as a transgression of his/her integrity. Viewed from this angle, melancholy would assume

⁷⁴For Miller, inappropriate touching--meaning the adult is communicating to the child his/her sense of breaking a taboo and feeling deeply guilty about it--can constitute sexual abuse. Of course, not all sensual touching is abuse. On the contrary, it is the prohibition on touching *in general* that has *sexualized* it.

⁷⁵I would also read here “childhood trauma.”

monumental proportions of cultural significance when considered in light of Freud's theory that civilization itself is built upon the prohibition of incest (the suppression of this "instinctual gratification"). Indeed, this hypothesis is especially troubling considering Foucault's reflection that the prohibition itself paradoxically functions as "an inciting and multiplying mechanism"--transforming the family, since the eighteenth-century, into a "hotbed of constant sexual excitement".⁷⁶ Furthermore, Freud himself had originally referred to his essay entitled "The Aetiology of Hysteria"--an exposé meant to disclose the truth of childhood sexual abuse and the urgent need for psychoanalysis to address it--as "a solution to a more than thousand-year-old problem, a 'source of the Nile'!"⁷⁷(Masson, 9).

It is in terms of power politics and gender that I would like to take another look at Freud's essay on "Mourning and Melancholia" in order to consider their role in his writing on melancholia. At the same time, I will consider these issues in view of Freud's retraction of his earlier essay "The Aetiology of Hysteria"(1896), or what is more commonly referred to as his "Seduction Theory." While Swiss psychologist Alice Miller, like Freud, believes that narcissistic psychological trauma underlies all neurosis,

⁷⁶*History of Sexuality* 46, 109. For Foucault, adult-child sexual relationships would seem to be a fact of nature, as evident in the indignation that underlies his anecdote of the "simple-minded" adult who is jailed for having "obtained a few caresses from a little girl". In his view the event, rather than constitute an abuse of power, is "an everyday occurrence" and involves "inconsequential bucolic pleasures". And in a gesture mirroring Freud's (who in articulating the theory of 'infantile sexuality' in his Oedipal Theory shifts the focus and responsibility from the parent to the child), Foucault refers to *all* adults as innocent and *all* children as the 'sexually precocious' instigators in referring to such incidents as "timeless gestures, these barely furtive pleasures between *simple-minded adults* and *alert children*"(p.32, my emphasis) This may explain why Butler distances herself nearly completely from this part of Foucault's theory on the reproduction of power.

⁷⁷Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*. (Toronto: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1982) 9.

rather than espouse his post-seduction theory of libidinal drives and infantile sexuality (the Oedipus Complex and its drive conflict) as the root cause of a primary neurosis, she agrees with his previous theory that this trauma is originally caused by actual, real, external events that, unable to be articulated, must then be repressed. Contrary to Freud's original theory that all childhood abuse is of a sexual nature, however, Miller considers any "severe narcissistic traumatizations" (which can include intense humiliation, physical and emotional mistreatment or neglect as well as sexual abuse) to constitute the repressed content (300-301).

As discussed, Freud's articulation of melancholia and mourning, which purports to "shed light on the nature of melancholia," is in fact cryptic and self-admittedly inconclusive. Freud is not the first theorist of melancholy to complain of its frustratingly elusive definition, and in the tradition of his cultural and ideological predecessors, he treats the subject of melancholia as more of a "typology to be classified rather than as a condition to be specified" (Schiesari 35). I wonder, along with Schiesari, if this "rhetoric of loss" that structures Freud's account does not itself participate in that culturally legitimated melancholic economy, rooted in an *ideology* of melancholy that functions *on the condition that loss be disavowed*. In terms of a symbolic of loss, could we not see in his cryptic "explanations" of mourning and melancholia an obscurant recodification of that loss and refusal to avow it--as rather symptomatic of its culturally mandated repression? This seems especially plausible given Freud's *foreclosure* of further investigation near the end of the essay with the mention of that ubiquitous open *wound* that characterizes his study of melancholia:

The conflict in the ego, which in melancholia is substituted for the struggle surging round the object, must act like a painful wound which calls out the unusually strong anti-cathexes. Here again, however, *it will be well to call a halt and postpone further investigations* into mania until we have gained some insight into the economic conditions, first, of bodily pain, and then of the mental pain which is its analogue. For we know already that, owing to the interdependence of the complicated problems of the mind, *we are forced to break off every investigation* at some point until such time as the results of another attempt elsewhere can *come to its aid* (179, my emphasis).

Freud's cry for help sounds suspiciously like a call for reinforcement troupes in a battle against an invisible enemy. Who and where is the agent that "forces" the silencing of this inquiry? In light of Freud's own theories on the exigencies of communal existence elaborated in *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Totem and Taboo*, one might find an answer in his own biography as famously documented by Jeffrey Moussaief Masson. Masson writes that when Freud first publically presented his findings to his colleagues in 1896, he was painfully humiliated and silenced by the board of the Society for Psychiatry for the scandal implicit in articulating this "Seduction Theory." The event was chaired by Count Richard von Krafft-Ebing, head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University in Vienna, who essentially accused Freud of lying or of suffering from delusions-- and therefore of having written a "scientific fairy tale."⁷⁸ The effects of this profoundly humiliating trauma caused him to write the following in a personal letter to his friend and fatherly mentor William Fleiss, "I felt as though I were despised and universally shunned" and "I am as isolated as you could wish me to be: the word has been given out

⁷⁸Masson quotes from a letter Freud wrote to Fleiss after the experience: "A lecture on the aetiology of hysteria at the Psychiatric Society met with an icy reception from the asses, and from Krafft-Ebing the strange comment: It sounds like a scientific fairy tale [Es klingt wie ein wissenschaftliches Märchen.]" (9).

to abandon me, and a void is forming around me”(134). Freud had violated a deeply-entrenched taboo in speaking about incest, and as he writes in *Totem and Taboo*, “The violation of a taboo makes the offender himself taboo”(20).

We could posit Freud’s entire literary-psychoanalytical corpus as exemplary of a melancholic discourse, a sublimated form of mourning the lost object, which in this instance is an ideal, such as an *ideal self* (ie. the *truth*--that of his own experience and intuition with respect to the formulation of the “Seduction Theory” which he was forced to consider a fantasy, a “scientific fairy tale.”) I would not be surprised to find that every one of his texts bears witness to a narcissistic open wound that repeats its themes indefinitely in sublimated form. Considering Miller’s idea that “unacknowledged trauma is like a wound that never heals over and may start to bleed again at any time,”(184) the open wound metaphor that Freud employs may attest to his own repressed trauma.⁷⁹

In the following chapters, I will look at how repressed trauma manifests itself in writing in the fictional works of women authors from the French-speaking diaspora. I will continue to compare different ways of dealing with loss and to consider the role of gender in the process. Eschewing the reductive move that would identify a metaphysical, pure, original essence of “the feminine,” I will instead consider how the deployment of the socially constructed categories “woman” and “the feminine” and their

⁷⁹The question whether psychoanalysis could have emerged had Freud retained his earlier belief that the memories of his patients were real, not fantasies, is hardly peripheral to the practice of psychoanalysis (and perhaps to the practice of psychotherapy in general, since most therapies are based, openly or implicitly, on Freudian theory). Psychoanalysts, beginning with Freud himself, agree that the abandonment of the seduction theory was *the central stimulus* to Freud’s later discoveries. (Masson 188, my emphasis). I believe that this “central stimulus” is the equivalent of the open wound that gets repeated ad infinitum in Freud’s recasting of his theories on the construction of the subject.

institutionalization have similar repercussions across cultures. Likewise, rejecting the notion that all women categorically belong to an oppressed class within historically patriarchal cultures does not preclude recognizing commonalities in individual Francophone women's lived experience--given, for example, the female subject's relationship to language/the Symbolic--and common ground in terms of a shared political stance. Most importantly, I recognize a common political choice not only in the subject matter these women choose to write about but in their style of writing (ie. "a feminine symbolic"), and hence an affinity among these writers grounded in politics.

CHAPTER THREE

The Tempestuous Aesthetic of Gisèle Pineau: The Beast as Figure of the Cyclone and of Incest in *L'espérance-macadam*

Writing fiction unarguably provides a medium for coming to terms with difficult emotions and painful memories. To what extent that expression is a *conscience* working through is a matter of debate, and varies from author to author, text to text.⁸⁰ However, it certainly appears that giving symbolic form to grief and loss can help to allay emotional pain. Another angle of representation of loss that I am interested in exploring--in the context of fiction's political and ethical implications --regards the socio-cultural role of reading trauma narratives. Among the questions I ask is how crucial narrative technique and style is in determining the success of the translation of trauma, and in turn how effectively readers identify with the characters' pain. Finally, my inquiry examines the possibility that the transmission of traumatic history, real or fictional, may serve as a catalyst for recuperating and initiating a process of healing from a traumatic past on both a personal and a collective level.

⁸⁰Pamela Broker, in *The Grief Taboo in American Literature* (New York; London: New York University Press, 1996), considers works of Melville, Twain and Hemingway as examples of sublimated grief that is indirectly expressed. Indeed, she sees this repressed grief as *fixed or frozen* in their fiction.

While my primary concern is to highlight the common political ground shared by the Francophone women authors of my study, this chapter on the aesthetics of the Guadeloupian author Gisèle Pineau's powerful novel *L'espérance-macadam* also considers the dynamic ways in which the thematic content *and* geographical context infuse and shape the narrative's form. The Caribbean region's distinct history, geography and current socioeconomic status have lent themselves to a richly diverse body of literatures which, while heterogeneous, nonetheless share traumatic undercurrents. Centuries of influx and migrations of culturally and ethnically diverse groups, the driving force of the economies historically based on plantation models, have shaped the cultural complexity and turbulence that characterize the Caribbean. The specter of slavery, political instability, environmentally devastating agricultural practices and economic dependency continue to impose a heavy burden on these cultures.

Critics have distinguished several literary trends in Caribbean literature since its colonial beginnings before the twentieth century. Much of this theory looks at the changing relationship within the writing between these authors and the complex history of the Caribbean region, reflected in literary movements and narrative style as well as in a gradual preoccupation with memory to recuperate and heal from the past. In particular, a revisitation of childhood--viewed as both a cultural and psychic inheritance--has increasingly become a preferred vehicle for an entire culture's self-questioning.

In a study of predominantly male Anglophone Caribbean writers who published during the 1960s, Amon Saba Saakana writes (in 1987) that "the crisis of the Caribbean writer is his inability to understand the intricacies of history." He criticizes a tendency to

flee from a critical examination of the history of slavery and colonization in the region, and a resistance to confront the “the demons of psychological colonialism” that haunted this earlier generation of Caribbean writers.⁸¹ Generally speaking, colonized intellectuals eschewed both their African roots and their white Creole slaveholder progenitors, looking rather to escape Caribbean society’s ills by adherence to the internalized and idealized European status quo, and often by migration to the European continent.

Saakana sees this writing as detached from its socio-political and cultural context:

Instead, the writer falls into the imperial cry of personal and private hurt, personalising a collective experience of holocaust. There is nothing anonymous about memory or filial love: they are visible products of history. To escape this reality is to suffer from a psychic trauma which recoils in fear and subordination (15).

For Saakana, this literature is marked by a refusal to remember and confront a violent past and conflicted ancestral origins. He posits the traumatic literature of the Caribbean of this period as the result of a divided Caribbean self: the product of the colonial education system which inculcated colonial, capitalist values and a love for and identification with white Europe while at the same time attempting to erase traditional, local culture --thereby alienating the Caribbean colonial subject from his/her own history and geographical environment.

Recent criticism on Francophone Caribbean literature, particularly that of Guadeloupe and Martinique, has in broad terms traced its development from French-centered tendencies (ie. relative fidelity to French literary and political ideals), to a

⁸¹“Forever suppressed, the demons of psychological colonialism are never exiated.” Amon Saba Saakana, *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature, Vol. I* (London: Karnak House, 1987) 15.

reactionary trend of mythologizing African roots (*négritude*), to a somewhat postmodern deconstruction of cultural identity and espousal of historical and regional indeterminacy and inter-relatedness--that at the same time celebrates creoleness (*créolité* and *antillanité*). Within the past two decades, a new women's writing has emerged that brings together many of the earlier themes and concerns, albeit casting them in a new light that foregrounds the role of gender. Even more significantly, this fiction seems to be developing a strategy of representing trauma and loss that encourages confrontation with painful emotions.

Critic Marie-Denise Shelton has noted a "preoccupation with the inner self and with psychology" in the work of many Francophone Caribbean women writers whose female protagonists' struggles with self-loathing and alienation epitomize the internal conflicts of Caribbean selfhood inherited from a colonial past.⁸² Women of African descent in the Caribbean suffer the worst effects of the phenomenon of social and psychic fragmentation common to the archipelago--the schism in Caribbean societies (ie. the "divided self") resulting from inculcated colonial, elitist values. Colonial education created a divisive mentality --apparent still today --that holds local folk culture in low regard and considers any perceived connectedness to the island a sign of backwardness (ie. passivity and dependence on colonial powers). Certainly, the authors and proponents of the *créolité* movement have done much to counter this attitude; however the mere fact

⁸²See Marie-Denise Shelton, "A New Cry: From the 1960s to the 1980s" in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, Vol. 1*. (London; Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Pub., 1992) 429.

that the movement exists--and that many of its avatars reside in Europe or North America--attests to the issue's relevance.

If racist Antillean social structures are rooted in an inherited ideology of domination, one which views as inferior a people's perceived proximity to nature (ie. native or savage barbarism as the antithesis of European civilization), then it stands to reason that women--historically conflated with nature--bear the brunt of these hierarchical structures. The relationship of dependence on the colonial powers, an exploitative relationship which--while changing modes superficially--remains fairly intact today, aggravates the already vexed issue of identity in the Caribbean. Indeed, far from attaining the masculinized ideal of autonomy, Martinique and Guadeloupe have been feminized in the French imagination since the seventeenth century. While prior to the revolution of 1789 she was vilified, the *mulatresse* (mixed-blood woman) or sensuous *doudou* came to symbolize the islands in a somewhat ambiguous way, both in terms of her alluring exoticism and her status as property of the white slave master :

the doudou would in turn create a collective image of the islands, by metonymic associations. Now it would be the islands themselves that would be seen in terms of a totally mystifying feminization and subordination.⁸³

Perhaps because a national identity is so fragile and tenuous in the islands of the archipelago, the fight to forge and protect this identity requires stricter sanctions against the feminine, against what is construed as weak and especially un-masculine. Wherever masculine identity feels threatened there is bound to be heightened violence enacted

⁸³See Régis Antoine, "The Caribbean in Metropolitan French Writing," in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, Vol I* (London; Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Pub., 1992).

against women and nature--such as can be seen in the behavior of the emotionally brittle/fragile macho who feels compelled to protect his "honor" and "virility" (or feeling of potency) by simultaneously beating and confining his wife.

This phenomenon underscores the relevance of personal narratives in illuminating the history of colonization, neo-colonization and global capitalism, as the latter often develop parallel to personal histories of abuse. That is to say, one can see how repression on a collective level translates to repression on an interpersonal level. Critics have noted Caribbean women writers' use of orality and autobiography to de-center colonial literary traditions and linear, male-centered discourses. Most importantly in the context of this study, through the creative use of creole, oral and folk history, multiple narrative voices, non-linear narratives and elements of magic, some of these women authors undertake a project of collective memory through their personal narratives, and begin to heal the wounds of history.⁸⁴

Given the traumatic cross-currents that traverse and connect the central themes of Pineau's novel *L'espérance-macadam*--cyclical patterns of violence wrought by tropical cyclones and incest--part of this discussion will again take up the issue of what a feminine symbolic of loss may consist of and whether Pineau's treatment of trauma and loss is consistent with this theory. Broadly speaking, I have argued that this symbolic, rather than being fueled by *structural lack* as in Jacques Lacan's more famous *Symbolic*,

⁸⁴See *The Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, Culture*. (Edited by Gertrud Aub-Buscher and Beverly Ormerod Noakes. Kingston, Jamaica: The University Press of the West Indies, 2003).

models itself instead on the curative process of mourning.⁸⁵ That is to say, this other symbolic indicates an alternative to an ethos (of being) which posits existence as fundamentally traumatic. In Pineau's representations of devastating loss, one of the questions I pose is whether the author provides evidence in her fiction of the historical conditions that occasion the traumatic events suffered by her characters. Furthermore, what means do the characters employ to deal with their losses? And how successful are they in overcoming the psychological impasses resulting from trauma?

Dominick LaCapra, who has written extensively on historiographic depictions of the Holocaust, also rejects the idea of constitutive lack as a precondition for the subject's coming-into-being. I agree with his insistence on distinguishing between loss (which is grounded in history) and absence (which amounts to a nostalgic yearning for "absolute foundations" or "undivided origins"). In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2002), LaCapra presents a theory of representing loss predicated on the notion of "working through" trauma, which resonates with what I am calling a feminine symbolic of loss. He champions a means of writing about trauma that succeeds in eliciting an empathic response without seducing the reader into full and unproblematic identification with trauma's victims:

The study of traumatic events poses especially difficult problems in representation and writing both for the researcher and for any dialogic exchange with the past which acknowledges the claims it makes on people and relates it to the present and future. Being responsive to the traumatic experiences of others, notably of victims, implies not the appropriation of their experience but what I would call *empathic*

⁸⁵Lacan's "Symbolic" holds that all speech is predicated on the loss of the mother and the emerging subject's desire to recuperate her by way of representation.

unsettlement, which should have stylistic effects or, more broadly, effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or rules of method (41, my emphasis).

While this phenomenon of “empathic unsettlement” may be meant to refer to the experience of the author or historiographer when recounting a traumatic event, it nonetheless extends to the effect on the reader of traumatic narratives. What is of particular interest here is the emphasis LaCapra places on a particular style of writing about trauma which favors a dialogic exchange with history from a place of empathy. This is akin to what I want to call a feminine symbolic of loss, which also entails a dialogue and coming-to-terms with a painful past through written representation of trauma.

Despite the predominance of the theme of loss in *L'espérance-macadam*, this novel does not fit within the parameters of what might be deemed a *melancholy* aesthetic. Instead, I find that “tempestuous” more accurately conveys the relation between the novel’s stylistic features, its central dramas, and its geographical context--the Caribbean. Another reason “tempestuous” is more appropriate is that it distinguishes the novel’s politically and socially engaged Caribbean-feminist aesthetic from the celebrated European (and predominantly male) canon of melancholy literature. Again, according to Juliana Schiesari, the hallmark of the latter is perpetual *denial* of loss by its sublimation in romantic descriptions of serene, bucolic landscapes or esoteric and cryptic meta-languages.⁸⁶ Within the field of psychoanalysis, melancholia denotes a state of stagnant or static sorrow that holds its sufferers captive. While Pineau’s text initially

⁸⁶As elaborated in *The Gendering of Melancholia*, discussed at length in Chapter 2.

presents numerous examples and cases of this type of pathology, it ultimately breaks away from both the literary and psychoanalytic models in radical ways. I will consider how this tempestuous aesthetic stirs up and unearths the sedimented past, both personal and collective, functioning as political resistance to an ethos of silence and denial.

The figure of the Cyclone in the narrative plays myriad roles. While evoking the ever-present threat of violent hurricanes on the island, at the same time it functions metaphorically to allude to the devastating effects of a capitalist drive economy that spirals out of control. Caribbean literary critic Carole Boyce Davies has noted the spiritual and cultural void left by the frenzied rush to accumulate the most recent products and commodities on the global market:

The greatest threat to Caribbean life at this time comes from a denial of the spiritual/intuitive/emotional strengths which have developed to sustain culture in the past. This denial takes the form of adherence to materialism, of attraction to the world of fast foods, video recorders, cars, multi-channel television stations, and attendant attitudes of more concern for the superficial and literal than the deeper meaning of social tradition.⁸⁷

Within her novel, Pineau alludes to the avid consumption and careless disposal of modern appliances, the relative disinterest in helping one's neighbor and the minimal value placed on human life, providing a glimpse into the more sordid underground reality of neo-colonialism in Guadeloupe. Cut off from each other and from their past, the alienated victims of this cultural disaster suffer turbulent social relations in their village community of Savane.

⁸⁷ Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1990) 16.

The renowned Martinican writer Aimé Césaire has also had recourse to regionally specific cataclysmic natural forces (ie. volcanoes, hurricanes and earthquakes) as a source of metaphors that evoke both the violence of colonization and the powers of regenerative transformation.⁸⁸ Pineau will evoke the violent “sauvagerie” of the cyclone to depict male rage and the unpredictability of violent emotions that lead a male character, Renélien, to beat his wife. Implied is an indictment of the French colonial civilizing mission which preached passive “civility” and refinement of one’s emotions, or rather their suppression, which we deduce has led to his explosive outburst. When his wife Zouzou, whom he has tried in vain to “educate,” burns his meal yet again, Renélien can no longer contain his rage: his French education gives way to his “native passion” and he “regresses” to using creole:

“An fen, sakré bourèl! Ban mwen manjé an mwen on fwa!” En abondonnant le français dont il s’était juré de toujours user envers son épouse légitime, Renélien retrouvait du même coup ses façons de vieux Nègre sans éducation ni sentiments (147).

The irony and hypocrisy implied in this last statement are trenchant. We hear the internalized voice of the French maître (school master) who denigrates and shames his students of African descent. Renélien’s tirade having turned into an onslaught of kicks and blows, he is forced to reflect, after losing his wife, on this previously occulted side of himself:

Il en venait toujours à s’interroger sur la sauvagerie, redoutait les forces inconnues qui l’habitaient, les pensées qui prenaient forme,

⁸⁸See Randolph Hezekiah’s discussion of Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* in “Martinique and Guadeloupe: Time and Space,” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, V.1* (London; Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Pub., 1992) 380-381.

pouvaient le dominer à n'importe quel moment et le pousser à commettre l'irréparable. Depuis qu'il avait laissé sa sauvagerie tomber sur Zouzou, il regardait le genre humain avec d'autres yeux. Supposait des forces en grand combat en dedans de chaque être. Il attendait toujours l'imprévisible et vivait dans le doute (149).

Pineau compares the mysterious workings of the unconscious, and the inherent danger in ignoring and masking the underlying signs of conflict, to the cataclysmic forces of nature:

Comme la terre pouvait être secouée de tremblements, les cyclones chavirer les montagnes, la mer emporter la vie, il savait qu'en deçà des façades, belles figures et douces paroles, il y avait des éléments enragés, endormis, prêts à se soulever (149).

The author often reminds us of this connection between nature and the unconscious and its emotions, and the nefarious effects of the social and cultural mandates requiring their damming-up and repression.

The Cyclone as metaphor also serves to signal the protagonist's emotional life, in which we recognize the signs of an impending storm:

Avant ce dimanche, je serrais dans mon âme un lot de peurs, visions éparses, mémoire bancale. Toujours la voix de ma maman s'élevait pour couvrir d'autres sons qui perçaient fond en moi. Elle racontait comment, pour ses huit ans, le Cyclone de 1928 avait démembré la Guadeloupe, m'avait jeté cette poutre au beau mitan du ventre. Avec l'âge, les bêtises de l'esprit toujours en voyage, je me trouvais le plus souvent le front et les yeux plissés pour faire revenir cette nuit de grand vent qui avait doucement poussé ma maman Séraphine dans une variété de folie pas encore dénoncée, cette nuit de meurtrissure. Sans montrer leurs visages, des souvenirs fous dans le temps jadis remontaient au fur et à mesure, m'assaillaient rageusement. Feuilles et tôle sifflantes traçaient dans la noirceur d'un cyclone. Voiles, linges en pagaille tournoyaient. Vents-tourbillons montés. Raz de marée. Pieds-coco tombés. Cris et pluies empilés...(9-10).

As often happens in the community of Savane, the truth of the past and the troubling reminders and disturbing emotions that accompany it are swept under a blanket of lies and half truths. However, the efforts to suppress the memories fail, and instead the psychic pressure to remember builds.

In Freud's early essay, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) he defines melancholy as a neurotic refusal to grieve in order to remain indefinitely attached to what was lost. Without mourning, which requires acknowledging the loss, the process of healing is thwarted. *Éliette*, the novel's main protagonist and narrator, is unarguably a melancholy figure. She is a childless and lonely widow in her sixties when the narration of *L'espérance-macadam* begins. As *Éliette* gloomily narrates the fragments of her past--marked by a series of tragedies --the reader is able to gradually piece together a fairly coherent portrait of this notably morose character. Yet there is an important element missing in the picture: typical of melancholic personalities, it gradually becomes apparent that *Éliette* is holding on to one important piece of her personal history -- refusing or unable to give it up for examination.

The role of denial--of repressing painful memories--is pivotal to the novel's innerdynamic. Psychologist Jennifer Freyd explains this phenomenon of "forgetting" past trauma, whether physical or emotional, as a survival mechanism. However, without a conscious working through of the repressed pain, she argues, buried memories fester like unhealed wounds or worse, lead to violent and compulsive acting-out in cyclical

patterns of abuse.⁸⁹ In *L'espérance-macadam*, Pineau employs the figure of the cyclone to represent the cyclical nature of certain types of violence--such as those originating in repression and denial of traumatic events. Éliette's fragmented memories are of the Cyclone of '28. When another major cyclone hits the island in the present, it unleashes a chain of tragic events--that echo and bring back past tragic events. As a child, Éliette had undergone two particularly traumatic experiences that she subsequently repressed: when she was eight years old, the raging waters unleashed by the Cyclone of '28 had engulfed not only her village, but Éliette's memory. Therefore in the present, buried beneath layers of denial and more recent tragedies would lie the haunting memory of her father's murderous rape.

Occurring within one day of each other, both past traumas had condensed in a vague fragment of memory. Éliette's mother, herself traumatized by the succession of events to the point of permanent hysteria, had encouraged Éliette to forget the sexual abuse and had manipulated her daughter's hazy memories to these ends. To facilitate the process of denial, her mother's recounting of the coinciding events had often eclipsed the rape's occurrence by constant allusions to "the passing of the Beast" to refer instead to the experience of the Cyclone, as in the following passage:

Ma fi, Éliette, tu n'as plus souvenance du passage de la Bête parce que--c'est ce que je crois--ta mémoire n'a pas pu tenir ce démon-là enfermé dans ta petite cabeche. C'est la miséricorde du Ciel qui fait si tout s'est effacé. Grande miséricorde, oui...Miserere mei, Deus! La Bête t'est passé dessus comme si elle était venue pour toi seulement. Éliette, c'est vérité (128).

⁸⁹See *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse* (Cambridge; London: Harvard UP, 1996).

Thus the Cyclone as “the Beast” becomes the central trope in Éliette’s memories and in the narrative, and superimposes itself on the violent scene of rape by her father. In Éliette’s imagination, the phallic image of a “planche” or “pouître”—that gradually takes on human features—reappears as part of this psychic scene. Éliette’s mother—again, unwilling or emotionally unable to disclose the truth—explains to her that this beam is “the Beast” that had ripped her open below the waist, nearly killing her, when the house was suddenly and violently flooded during the Cyclone.

For Éliette, the ebb and flow of memory over her lifetime brings with it recurrent and ever-more distinct images of “the Beast.” The process takes a lifetime, yet each flashback brings her back to that same moment in time, a phenomenon which, as one critic notes, again finds its expression in the figure of the cyclone:

The eye of the hurricane may be taken to symbolize the hole or void through which one may move from the world of space and time into spacelessness and timelessness.⁹⁰

Indeed, Éliette does conceive of her loss of memory in these terms:

Éliette gardait toujours le sentiment d’un manque en suspens, comme si, sans parvenir à le percer jamais, toutes ses questions tournaient en vain dans la périphérie de l’œil du Cyclone (126).

Finally the hazy images will take on human features as the original memories break through the encoded layers of repression.

In the novel’s very first passages, there is a conflation of the traumatic childhood memories of “the Cyclone of ‘28” and the disasters in the present as another major

⁹⁰Randolph Hezekiah, “Martinique and Guadeloupe: Time and Space,” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, V.1* (London; Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Pub., 1992) 381.

cyclone hits Savane and another story of incest begins to unfold. Frenzied, powerful winds and torrents of rain again engulf the community of Savane, stirring up its sedimented past and forcefully fusing it with the current dramas of the villagers. As the hurricane gains in momentum, Éliette peers out from the safety of her hut, and is surprised and disturbed to see the police coming to arrest her next-door neighbor, Rosan. Éliette soon learns that his adolescent daughter, Angela, has accused him of systematic rape. Having repressed her own traumatic memories of incest, Éliette is at first paralyzed by shock and denial.

The etiology of the term “cyclone” indicates a cycle or cyclical pattern (a “revolving circle”). As stated earlier, the presence of the cyclone makes itself felt on numerous levels. The text’s structure emulates its cataclysmic effects; the cyclone seems to wreak havoc even on the syntax, scattering meaning and fragments of narrative. Éliette, describing the scene of devastation left by the recent cyclone in the opening lines of the novel, leaves out the subject in each of her enunciations:

Restait rien de bon. Que des immondices. Y avait pas même une planche debout, une tôle en place. Vestiges de cases. Souvenirs de chemins qui perçaient Savane. Y avait plus ni ramage ni plumage aux bras cassés des arbres tombés à genoux. Mais quelques bagages pendus au ciel. Un matelas au bout d’un poteau miraculé, droit, parmi tous les autres tordus, décapités, jetés à terre (9).

This omission or “decapitation” of the subject, and the cutting to pieces of the syntax, reinforces the impression of fundamental loss. The traumatic memories of “the Cyclone” of her childhood overlap or conflate with the present disaster in these first passages, and if read simultaneously as possible allegory for a psychic state, it might also indicate that

self-berating characteristic of the melancholic that Freud identifies--stemming from a deep sense of worthlessness and loss of self-respect--as well as the concurrent "loss of a more ideal kind" ("Mourning and Melancholia,"166).

An "impoverishment of the ego," a lowering of her self-esteem, could be understood either to be *projected onto* or *to parallel* her descriptions of her world that has become "poor and empty" since the passing of the Cyclone (MM,167):

Que des immondices... Le Cyclone avait tout écrasé et piétiné. Y avait rien de bon à ramasser. Rien qui mérite un rapiéçage. Fallait pelleter tout ça et avec, dans le même ballant, les secrets, la honte, la mauvaiseté de Savane. Fallait tout balayer et enterrer. Y avait sûrement moyen de remettre debout le paradis qui marchait dans les rêves de Joab. Replanter des fleurs et des arbustes, des cases-félicité. Ouvrir le ciel aux oiseaux disparus. Curer le fond de la rivière. Tracer des routes neuves. Ramasser les vieilles cuisinières, les ventilos aux pales cassées et les tambours percés des machines à laver. Fallait désamarrer la peine, éteindre les cris qui résonnaient dans le silence qu'avaient déposé les grands vents du Cyclone. Pas désespérer, se répéta Éliette.

Tout avait commencé avec ce dimanche déboulé...(10)

Imbedded in this melancholic description of the loss of an ideal, a dream of paradise, is an allusion to the effects of neo-colonialism--integrated almost seamlessly in the reference to the dilapidated and abandoned objects left by colonialism and its imported capitalistic values: the old stoves, the broken fans and the disemboweled washing machines that the townspeople systematically throw into a dry riverbed. Pineau's juxtaposition of the devastated landscape and Éliette's depressed mental state makes the point that by treating the natural environment as dead matter rather than viewing ourselves in a reciprocal relationship with it, we are creating a stale physical and emotional void around us. The more we despoil and exploit the environment, the less

life there is on this “outside” within which to seek our reflection. Or rather, the “cemetery” of defunct appliances reflects the death culture that values profit over care of human beings. We might understand Éliette’s melancholy both as a consequence of her perception of the increasing alienation from and devastation of the environment and her social alienation. Images such as these--melancholy landscapes of abandoned objects -- recur frequently.

Likewise, the cyclone’s cyclical occurrence and its gyratory or spiraling motion finds its parallel in both the cyclical pattern of incest in the text and the ever-returning descriptions of scenes of tragedy around which the narrator’s memories revolve, symptomatic of a melancholy disposition. The threat of recurring violence, of both natural and human disaster, is omnipresent in the narrative. Éliette’s memories and sense of shame are interlinked with those that haunt her community: in her flashbacks, a desperate young mother throws a baby to its death over a bridge, a jealous husband hacks his wife to death with a machete, an abandoned child is roped to a fence, a disenchanted wife and her lover murder her husband and hang him from a mango tree--and all the while the air grows dense and heavy, threatening to crack, as the town’s crimes amass. Drawn in to her morose psyche as to the eye of a storm, these scenes of loss and abjection accumulate and condense over her entire life.

Homi Bhabha, in his essay “Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt,” refers to the melancholic’s discourse in terms of its characteristic “narrative metonymy,” and its “repetition of the piecemeal, outside the sentence, bit by bit.” True to this

description, Éliette's narration will constantly recall those images of domestic violence in fragmented form, as in the following passage permeated by sadness:

Toujours la peine voulait venir à sa rencontre au mitan des rires gras et des coups portés au tambour-ka. Tant de souffrances tout à l'entour... Du sang répandu dans les herbes du chemin. Une langue bleue tirée d'entre les fleurs du pied-mango. Des yeux gris amarrés au bout d'une corde. Un petit corps démantibulé au bas du pont des Nèfles. Une Hortense débitée par le sabre. Et ces enfants partis dans la montagne et jamais revenus. Et combien d'autres faits raides à évoquer...

Ce dimanche-là avait tout mis sens dessus dessous, maté ses certitudes.
(11,my emphasis)

Each loss experienced in the present triggers a chain of painful memories, attesting to a sort of "archeology" of loss.

To return to the idea of what might constitute a feminine symbolic of loss, what I find particularly striking and unusual in these descriptions is that what is presented as Éliette's "memories" seem to be *collective* as much as they are *individual*--they represent the shameful past of the entire village of Savane that refuses to "remember" and openly declare and condemn the crimes committed within it. The village itself takes on a sort of "personality" as a passive yet deeply implicated protagonist. It is constantly evoked in negative terms: a "traître sournois," "menteur," "assassin," "criminel," "lache," etc. A similar effect of this style is to downplay and diffuse the role of the individual subject--in contrast to the otherwise masterful Western ego that, in its own personal narrative, orders and defines all that it encounters from the privileged position of "I." In Éliette's story there is a frequent (con)fusion of subjectivities in the recounting of these contiguous stories as "memories."

When “Glawdys,” the product of a gang rape and abandoned by her mother, throws her own baby girl to her death over a bridge, the town is quick to indict her as a murderer--and just as quick to forget their own role in Glawdys’ soul murder. It is only Éliette who remembers and acknowledges the collective responsibility and guilt in bringing about the tragedy. She is haunted by her conscience, wondering what might have happened if she had intervened in Glawdy’s life to break the cycle of abuse and neglect by those entrusted to care for her. Instead, everyone, including Éliette, had pretended not to notice the abuse and later, ten years after the social worker had taken Glawdys away, Éliette *is* the town’s conscience:

En vérité, personne ne cherchait guère à raviver son souvenir. Et ceux qui, par mégarde, jetaient son nom, *comme une bombe d’encre sur des paroles bien alignées dessus une page blanche*, comprenaient vite, au silence qui s’ensuivait, qu’il fallait déposer d’autres mots, *tuer cette histoire* qui, avec le temps, bouleversait même les plus scélérats. Éliette songeait toujours à l’enfant de manière douloureuse. Le temps ne l’avait jamais aidé à oublier les yeux gris, les jappements, les chairs bleues mordues par la corde, sa lâcheté à elle tellement criarde et qui lui faisait honte (67, my emphasis).

The writing metaphors which allude to the public broaching of a tabooed subject hint at a *mise-en-abîme*: this novel itself can be read as the “bombe d’encre” (*ink bomb*) that explodes that orderly discourse that would contain and bury its forbidden truth (in endless codification and *recodification*)--that ideally masculine Symbolic that can only exist on the condition that this other symbolic remain the hidden corpse under its foundations. The public eruption of outrage is most likely indicative of the entire village’s own thwarted mourning process, of what Judith Butler has called “the social foreclosure of grief” of “unspeakable and unrepresentable losses.” Likewise the

villagers' cries of bloody murder may be what she understands as the related phenomenon of a "heightening of conscience" in its sudden and violent manifestation.⁹¹

The narrator perceives this social 'body' to be painfully alienated from itself, each part isolated in paranoid fear of the others.⁹² Their hatred boils just beneath the surface of their thin social veneer:

Souires et bonjours-bonsoirs ne se troquaient pas ici-là d'une manière machinale. Les yeux parlaient toujours avant la bouche, campés dans *une méfiance fondamentale*. Les paroles volaient haut. Chacun semblait en attente de quelque mépris pour tourner en flammes et incendier d'injures toutes les âmes de l'univers. Ils voulaient le respect, *se seraient battus à mort* pour ce seul mot...Respect! (54, my emphasis)

This fight to the death, which has its roots in a "fundamental distrust" of self and other, has been a theme central to innumerable philosophical and political discussions and debates for centuries. In a contemporary context, the Martinican Franz Fanon considers the question primarily in terms of race, and advocates violence as a means to avenge the humiliation suffered by blacks as a result of slavery and colonization--violence as the most effective means to regain dignity and self-respect. It would seem that Alice Miller, on the other hand, might understand even Fanon's call to arms in terms of a cycle of abuse that begins in the patriarchal family and is acted out repeatedly throughout history.

⁹¹Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 183. In a future study I will develop the idea of conscience and morality as the internalized guilt of both the abusive parent and the abuses of power in the social and political sphere. Fanon, for example, (as well as Foucault) writes of the colonizer's "morality" as a tool to keep the colonized repressed, as a means to deter the impulse for vengeance (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 44). Since a body of people, like a child, is bound to feel ambivalence and aggression, this way of thinking about conscience, in the sense that it can be manipulated by those in power, rings true. I think Freud, Foucault and Butler would be helpful in this discussion. (Foucault especially on the death penalty--manifestation of that "heightened" and hysterical public conscience) (See also Homi Bhaba, "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt" in *Cultural Studies*, 64-64.)

⁹²This image of the people as a body turned against itself brings to mind those theories of Hobbes on the same subject elaborated in *Leviathan*.

In this case of Caribbean societies, this would translate on a socio-historical level as an abusive colonial social structure that is perpetuated within neo-colonial social practices and attitudes.

In many instances, Pineau's text seems to indicate this estranged condition of her Guadeloupien characters as a modern one, the legacy of colonization, slavery and later, capitalism, that demanded the constant uprooting and transplantation of peoples--thereby destroying the indigenous, more communal infrastructures and regrouping people in shanty towns:

Et une multitude peupla soudain Savane. Ils arrivaient de partout, barraient des morceaux de terre, plantaient des cases immondes... Gens jetés de tous les côtés de Gaudeloupe. Familles débarquées sans paroles qui serraient jusqu'à leurs noms (33).

These multitudes of "zombis des temps nouveaux" are hit by a tide of Caribbean immigration:

Et puis d'autres nations arrivèrent des pays anglais et espagnols de la Mer Caraïbe (33-34).

Subsequently, the land and nature--previously believed to be inhabited by a host of spirits --fall victim to each settler family claiming rights to its own plot of land:

Aux premiers jours, il posèrent leurs cases entre les arbres, marquèrent des territoires là où la nature n'avait rien à planter ni récolter. Mais quand la terre vint à manquer, ils brandirent leurs sabres pour donner à grands coups dans les frangipaniers, les fromagers et les pieds d'ilangs-ilangs.(33)

In view of Carolyn Merchant's study, it is worth noting that the description of phallic violence acted out on nature applies the same terminology when this violence is acted out on the women in the novel. "Hortense," the battered wife, is also literally hacked up,

dismembered, with a “sabre” by her jealous husband who is bent on controlling her every move--and her breasts perversely displayed in public on a bed of banana leaves.

Also integrated into Eliette’s own story is that of her close friend and neighbor, Rosetta. As part of Rosetta’s story that unfolds from the present into the past, we learn that her well- respected and seemingly “normal” husband, Rosan, had sexually abused their sixteen year old daughter, Angela, from the time she was eight. Pineau’s complex portrait of Rosan reveals his own history of victimization, both within the family and within society. A colonial legacy of values that places personal advancement over the common good structures his life in such a way that he is often alienated, from the community and from his own family. In an effort to understand him, Rosetta thinks back on Rosan’s life--remembering the sacrifices he had been forced to make to support his wife and family. Replacing a more traditional and communal system, the colonial infrastructure required that he endlessly count his pennies to afford the iron, sheet metal and cement needed to build his family a house. Not a soul appears to help him with the project:

Rosan s’est sacrifié pour agrandir la case. Compter les sous. Recompter. Mettre l’argent de côté. Serrer fers, tôles, ciment. Et personne n’est venu lui donner un temps. Il était seul avec ses deux mains, à battre le mortier et monter les parpaings. Seul, entrepreneur, maçon, charpentier...(80).

This image of institutionalized isolation in adult life finds its parallel in Rosan’s childhood. Disowned by his own parents--literally abandoned like the discarded appliances that the villagers dump in the river bed --he in turn considers his own daughters his property, to be used and dispensed with as he pleases:

Rosan lui racontait qu'il en était ainsi, partout. Sous tous les toits de tôle de Savane, derrière les planches, dans la noirceur des cases de Ravine-Guinee et d'ailleurs, y avait des pères qui cherchaient la lumière entre les cuisses de leurs enfants. Personne n'en parlait jamais, mais c'était ni une faute ni un péché. Il lui disait *qu'il avait le droit* de la chevaucher comme une jeune monture, parce qu'elle était sa création. Il promettait un drame si jamais elle causait de leur secret. Ses yeux roulaient fous. [...] Et il lui dit que le tour de Rita viendrait aussi, *qu'il avait le droit, tous les droits...*(226, my emphasis).

This proprietary attitude towards one's children has been deeply entrenched in Western culture at least since Roman times, according to both Foucault and Alice Miller. On this subject, Miller writes that "the tendency for adults to use their children as best they can to meet all their needs is so widespread and so taken for granted in world history that most people do not refer to this form of sexual abuse as perversion; it is simply one of the many ways adults exercise power over their children"(Miller 116). Foucault refers to the notion of "*patria potestas*"--that ancient "right" of Roman fathers to their children's and their slaves' bodies, the power of life or death over them--as having survived in more discreet form throughout the centuries (Foucault 135).⁹³ More than likely, Freud himself had witnessed the worst consequences of this inheritance when viewing the mutilated bodies of children at the Paris morgue while studying under the tutelage of Charcot (celebrated physician of 'hysteria' in adults and children) in 1885 (Masson 14-15; Foucault 112). Around the same time, and contemporaneous with Freud's articulation of "the Seduction Theory," France passed legislation (in 1889 and again in 1898) to protect

⁹³Not surprisingly, however, he elides the issue of how this attitude has been maintained in the modern patriarchal family to privilege instead a discussion of how it is manifest in historical institutions of power, such as the monarchy. I would also consider how this attitude translated to colonial practices and plays out in the political sphere in general.

children from this ancient unwritten law that gave parents absolute sovereignty over their children's bodies (Foucault 130). If we are to believe Foucault, the prohibition on incest has only served to heighten the incidence of its occurrence.

Consonant with Foucault's (and Butler's) theory that the prohibition on what has sometimes been called "polymorphous perversity" (ie. any form of sexuality that is not culturally legitimated) necessarily leads to its proliferation, Alice Miller writes:

In a letter to Wilhelm Fleiss dated September 21, 1897, Freud gives the reasons that led him to renounce his trauma (ie. "Seduction") theory. He refers to the "realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, in every case of which the same thing applied though it was hardly credible that perverted acts against children were so general. (Perversion would have to be immeasurably more frequent than hysteria, as the illness can only arise where the events have accumulated and one of the factors which weaken defense is present.)" [*The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, 215-16] cited by Miller, 115-116}

Freud was compelled to publically retract his theory in 1904, aware that not to do so would mean the end of psychoanalysis and hence, his personal claim to fame.⁹⁴ Not only did Freud turn these women's losses into narcissistic individual gain, therefore, but he did so by *denying the truth* of those losses.

Éliette's sense of complicity in the crimes of her community troubles her greatly. Yet until she has the courage to confront the truth of her own victimization, she is unprepared to come to the aid of others in need. Since, for children dependent on their abusers, the fact of abuse must be repressed for the sake of survival, Éliette has learned to deny and ward off all knowledge or emotions that might trigger memory of that abuse.

⁹⁴On this subject Anna Freud writes: "Keeping up the seduction theory would mean to abandon the Oedipus complex, and with it the whole importance of phantasy life, conscious or unconscious phantasy. In fact, I think there would have been no psychoanalysis afterwards." (Masson 113)

This repression leads to *an impoverishment of the personality*--a sense of shame and a loss of vitality that manifests itself in depression. Catching a glimpse of Glawdys -- victim and pariah of Savane --from her window, Éliette again recalls the violent scenes she has witnessed throughout her life. They flash across the screen of her psyche, filling her with a shame that seems both personal and collective:

Alors, toutes ses lachetés amassées comme des immondices dans le grand dépotoir qu'elle serrait en sa mémoire--et que le souvenir venait parfois gratter, fouiller, récupérer--l'empuantit tout entière. Les yeux gris ne cessaient de la toiser de haut en bas et elle restait là, figée dans la honte, les deux bras en croix cloués à la fenêtre grande ouverte sur la nuit. Lachetés, oui. Peurs. Dérobades, aussi. Tremblades, cacades et reculades. Elle revit la langue bleue de Marius, pendu dans le pied-mango de Sidonise, et puis le bébé aux yeux verts d'espérance dans son panier à pain, l'autre démantibulé dans le bras de la mort au bas du pont des nèfles. La créature grise au bout de sa corde. La petite marchande orgueilleuse veillant ses trois pyramides de cristophines pourries. Encore une fois, elle revit Hortense, la malheureuse aux trois cent soixante-cinq cicatrices...(105)

This deep sense of shame, cowardice and guilt that attaches to the memories, according to Freud, is the effect of the harshly critical super-ego, that self-debasing mechanism of internalized guilt. Freud describes these symptoms of the melancholic in the following manner:

The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out (MM, 167).

In psychoanalytic terms, Freud would have us understand the melancholic's "fall in esteem" as symptomatic of an inability to grieve, as distinguished from the work of mourning. Éliette again berates herself as cowardly and weak in the following:

Éliette avait huit ans. Le Cyclone l'avait rendue ainsi, lache, indifférente, faible et molle. Elle avait gardé quelques rares souvenirs des événements. Avec le temps...Non, en vérité, Éliette ne se souvenait de rien (125).

Homi Bhabha (again in his essay "Post-colonial Authority and Post-modern Guilt") views the self-deprecating tendency of the melancholy colonial subject--the "displaying of its own weeping wounds"--as part of a strategy of revolt:

The melancholic discourse, Freud says, is a plaint in the old-fashioned sense; the insistent self-exposure and the repetition of loss must not be taken at face value for its apparent victimage and passivity.

He quotes Freud directly to add: "The melancholic are not ashamed and do not hide themselves, since everything derogatory they say about themselves is at bottom said about somebody else (1917)." In effect, Bhabha considers the exhibition of the melancholic's open wounds to amount to a guilt-provoking "eyesore to the colonizer" (65). The parallel to draw here between parent and child, colonizer and colonized, invites a reassessment of the limits of traumatic Caribbean literature that remains caught in a melancholic loop of reflexivity, and thus indefinitely defers the process of mourning.

Unable to connect with *any* intense feelings, Éliette's psyche is a low pressure zone--she is emotionally detached and depressed. Above and around her, the winds and the clouds gather and condense--her own psychic contents are under pressure. When the conditions are right, the sky is rent open and her tears are liberated. The passing of another major cyclone recreates the context of the original trauma, and she is finally able to confront it and weep. Only when she has finally accepted the truth of her past can she reestablish a connection with the lost part of herself, her long-buried affect, and mourn.

When Angela comes running to her for help, Éliette's first inclination is to encourage Angela to forget the abuse, just as her own mother had advised her. After all, she rationalizes, Rosan is a "good man"--a caring father and an upstanding figure in the community. Pineau depicts a familiar scenario. When to face a disturbing truth may entail dismantling a whole system built on denial, remaining silent offers an easy way out. If we turn to Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*--and Freud's work in *Totem and Taboo*--to examine how patriarchal civilization works according to a system of alliances, we begin to understand the cultural *necessity* of Éliette's foreclosure and silencing of the incest and how an entire community becomes complicitous in hiding its crimes. When Rosan, her neighbor, is accused of sexually abusing his daughter Angela, Éliette muses that again a crime is allowed to play itself out without anyone intervening to help the victim:

Et combien de fois elle avait vérifié que les gens se comprenaient seulement dans la complicité, face la loi et ses gendarmes questionneurs. À ces moments-là, personne n'avait jamais rien entendu, que la pluie sur les tôles. Chacun, refermé sur soi, devenait oudain aveugle et bègue, innocent en tous sens (162).

We might also understand this tacit compliance with power, the willingness to deny the collective loss and passively accept the ban on public mourning, as an obedient behavior fostered in the family under conditions of compulsory subjection.⁹⁵ Children in too many instances have little protection against parents who wield power unfairly against them, and thus grow into adults who are predisposed not to confront or question external

⁹⁵Because our bonds of love are originally formed in a context of obligatory subordination to (parental) law, in order to survive, children *must* form a "libidinal" attachment.

authority. It is this same necessary obedience that compels Angela to yield to her father's threats and keep the abuse a secret during the eight years that he rapes her. When she is sixteen and no longer dependant on her parents for survival, she has the courage to run away and denounce her father.

Although her mother Rosetta was generally very caring and supportive, when as a small child Angela unwittingly disclosed to Rosan her mother's secret visits with her friend "Beloved"--a friendship he had prohibited--she beat her daughter to "teach her to keep quiet" so as to keep the peace in the household. Éliette, also, had been compelled to silence her memory of incest, which finally resurfaces some sixty years after the trauma. Yet despite the traumatic incident's status as tabooed knowledge and the prohibition on disclosure, her body had stubbornly signaled the truth by its symptoms: in slowed rhythm, in loss of speech, and her infertility. Alice Miller writes of this phenomenon, of what we could call the body's "truth instinct," in the following passage:

The truth of our childhood is stored up in our body, and although we can repress it, we can never alter it. Our intellect can be deceived, our feelings manipulated, our perceptions confused, and our body tricked with medication. But someday the body will present its bill, for it is as incorruptible as a child who, still whole in spirit, will accept no compromises or excuses, and it will not stop tormenting us until we stop evading the truth (318).

The cryptic bodily memories and the constellation of recurring fragmented mental images haunt her, asking to be decoded and brought to light.

When Angela comes to take shelter with Éliette, both from her mother's beatings and from the impending cyclone, she recounts her own story of incest. Éliette's first impulse is to encourage Angela to forget. Her personal stake in wanting Angela to deny

her experience is clear: it would enable her to keep her own painful affect safely buried.

Yet her body suddenly finds a language in which to resist the cultural mandate of denial:

Elle-même, Éliette, pouvait pas oublier. Et elle demandait à Angela d'oublier... Ces mots lui avaient presque écorché la bouche. Personne n'oubliait jamais. Même s'il n'y avait pas trace de cicatrices sur son ventre. Même si une autre mémoire lui avait rapporté tous les souvenirs qu'elle amassait pour s'étourdir les jours de solitude et louer Dieu de l'avoir laissée réchapper vive de ce cyclone tant raide. Mon Dieu, même si la mort la prenait sans tarder, *une part d'elle-même, étouffée et profonde, se souviendrait du Passage de la Bête sur son corps, dans son ventre*. Elle en eut soudain conscience, si violemment qu'elle dût chercher un siège, s'asseoir (218-219, my emphasis).

As she listens to Angela's story against the howling winds outside, Éliette's own traumatic memories of the Cyclone of '28 suddenly surface, this time revealing a clear image of her father's beastly face as he is raping her. The original memories finally begin to break through the encoded layers:

Une pouître vivante qui avait un visage, des yeux, des dents longues, des narines toutes frémissantes de rage. Elle avait huit ans...(219)

Aware of the immense risks in remembering, Éliette undergoes an internal struggle between continued denial and facing her fears once and for all. She senses the proximity of her own buried truth, brewing just beneath the surface, while listening to and caring for Angela:

Éliette rassembla ses jupes et s'arracha de la berceuse. Il lui faudrait braver toutes ses peurs, marcher d'un pas ferme et chasser en son âme la fillette effarouchée qui n'avait jamais grandi, tremblait dans sa culotte et pouvait pas supporter longtemps le regard des gens sur son corps. Éliette avait beau se répéter qu'elle était maintenant une vieille femme qui en avait vu des mille et cents, il y avait toutes ces peurs accumulées en elle qui la serraient dans la noirceur des couloirs de son enfance. *Avec son histoire*, Angela avait allumée des torches qui voulaient animer

la pouître assassinée d'un visage terrifique. Le Passage de La Bête...
(231, my emphasis)

Although she at first struggles to repress the memories and to stifle the feelings of terror and grief that accompany them, she ultimately allows the emotion to overcome her.

By recuperating the buried emotion of her own past, Éliette dispels the cloud of denial that had blinded her to the suffering in her community. As the only member of that community to listen to and believe Angela's story, Éliette becomes an important ally to the child and will encourage her to work through rather than deny and repress the trauma--despite social pressure to do so. By thus breaking the silent pact of denial, and in particular, by allowing herself to feel her own repressed grief, Éliette creates a significant rupture in a broader cycle of abuse. Pineau helps us to see this cycle in a number of ways: Angela's decision to denounce her father came only after eight years of silence; she realized that if she were to remain silent, her father would soon begin abusing her younger sister. Also, in a revelation that complicates the story of abuse, Éliette discovers that Rosan, the rapist, is her own younger brother. Hence we can infer that they share a history of abuse at the hands of the parents, which sheds light on Rosan's otherwise uncharacteristic violent behavior.

This passage, in which listening to Angela's story awakens Éliette to her own tragic past, illuminates Éliette's query earlier in the narrative, "Qui saurait ranimer le temps mort? Soixante années écoulées dans l'aveuglement"(219). It seems to point to the importance of disclosure, of *telling the story* of abuse that a certain culturally "legitimate" melancholy discourse would otherwise seek to silence by its own loquacity.

It is upon hearing Angela's story and identifying with her on an emotional level that Éliette's memories are triggered and finally represent themselves to her in a more coherent and complete form. The memories bring a tidal wave of pent-up emotion. This awakening is significant on a number of levels. After a lifetime of fearful avoidance and withdrawal, she is finally able to reconnect not only with her own emotions but with her community. Just as Angela makes the choice to speak out about the abuse in order to save her younger sister from the same fate, the novel itself may act as a catalyst, inspiring others to tell their own stories and thus to break cycles of abuse.

When Éliette seeks affirmation that what she has discovered through her memories represents the truth of what happened to her, she goes to her ailing godmother, "Anoncia." Despite her close kinship ties with Éliette's father, Anoncia transgresses the patriarchal law of silence and confirms Éliette's intuitions and memories by denouncing her own brother. With the avowal of the losses they have both suffered as a result of the secret, both women who had been tormented by its repression will now be able to mourn and begin come to terms with and heal from the abuse. The expression of grief brings about reconciliation with those parts split-off from the self, thereby bringing about at least one rupture in the cycle of repetition. Although cyclones are bound to return no matter what "les grands savants de France" may concoct to try to control nature, her godmother Anoncia tells Éliette, we can at least "announce" them so that the damage is not so great. Anoncia insinuates that each Cyclone that hits may in fact be the same one that returns each time--evoking the notion of a cycle of immanence. Yet the narrative has indicated a way out of the human cycle of disaster and historical catastrophe by

elevating to the level of its *organizing principle* the need for reconciliation with one's past via the recuperation of buried painful memories.⁹⁶ For this reason, Éliette's godmother Anoncia comes closest to defining the feminine symbolic of loss inherent in this novel's "tempestuous" Caribbean-feminist aesthetic:

Eliette, ma fille, tu connais déjà toute l'histoire. Laisse aller ce cyclone et comprends que la vie n'est pas une rumination éternelle. Il y aura d'autres cyclones, quantités. Et personne peut rien contre ça, même les plus grands savants de France. Personne pourra les barrer. Seulement les annoncer. Et il faudra bien rester par en bas et puis se relever, rebâtir, panser les plaies, regarder pour demain l'espérance et replanter toujours, l'estomac accoré par la faim. Si le Bon Dieu pouvait me donner une seule rallonge de vie, je ne serais pas engeôlée ici-dans à mettre du ti-bois pour garder vif le feu de ma douleur. Je sortirais dessous les amarres de la honte, dessous la peur et ses lacs infinis (297).

This message of strength and hope is also an invocation to confront and mourn loss without succumbing to the fear of emotional pain that keeps it alive indefinitely, propelling one into a perpetual state of melancholy. It speaks of cultivating an indomitable spirit that, in the face of present tragedy, persists in believing in and working towards creating a better future.

Finally, I would again distinguish between the politics of melancholy and the politics of mourning in defining a feminine symbolic of loss. Homi Bhabha expresses the political dimensions of a melancholy symbolic space thus:

This narrative speaks from the elision between the synchronous symbol of loss and its non-referential, fragmented, phantasmatic narratives. It says: All these bits and pieces in which my history is fragmented, my culture piecemeal, my identifications phantasmatic and displaced; these splittings of wounds of my body are also a form of revolt. And they

⁹⁶One might recognize in this passage the imperative of the Frankfurt School to reconcile with history-- individual and collective.

speaking a terrible truth. In their ellipses and silences they dismantle your authority: the vanity of your mimetic narratives and your monumental history; the metaphoric emblems in which you inscribe The Great Book of Life. My revolt is to face the Life of literature and history with the scraps and fragments that constitute its double, which is living as surviving, meaning as melancholia (66).

While this approaches a feminine symbolic of loss by challenging the authority of culturally "legitimate" discourses, bringing to light the loss on which they are built, it does not go far enough in articulating a means of healing. Bhabha's symbolic space of revolt does not extend beyond the confines of melancholy and its festering wounds.

Functioning according to a "different economy," a feminine symbolic allows for the disclosure of certain cultural taboos in its themes --of which mourning, considered by Freud to be "women's work" in that it is the unsublimated expression of painful affect, figures predominantly. Ungrieved loss has political consequences: the strong ambivalence that accompanies the experience of repressed affect can lead to a spiral of violence proportionate to the degree of the repression. To reestablish a passionate attachment to others and cultivate an emotional awareness of what we personally experienced as trauma and had to repress in order to survive is, in my view, a powerful means of political resistance to an ideology based on denial. While one cannot intervene in the cyclical nature of cyclones, we can prevent social patterns of abuse from repeating themselves by remembering and grieving our losses, thereby breaking the cycle of the repetition compulsion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Trauma and Repression in *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*

(...) through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to reveal there its non-sense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages itself with the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without an answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.

--Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

Mais où se tient, pour nous, l'imaginaire et la symbolique de la vie intra-utérine et du premier corps-à-corps avec la mère? Dans quelle nuit, quelle folie, sont-ils laissés?

--Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et parentés*

Parallel to developments in women's writing in the Caribbean, women in francophone Africa have contributed in ever increasing numbers to its literary production. Particularly within the past few decades, their works have reached wider international audiences--giving voice to and shedding light on the plight of women in cultures which have historically tended to silence them. One woman's voice which has arguably commanded the greatest attention in global literary circles since the late 1980s has been that of Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala. A controversial figure among traditional and feminist African critics alike, Beyala invariably takes as the subject

matter of her fiction the most tabooed subjects in the African societies that she depicts. Unapologetically, she delves into issues that many would prefer left alone, digging up unseemly truths and posing nagging questions. Another hallmark of her writing is the unconventional emphasis in her stories on the autonomy of the individual as opposed to his/her place within the collectivity. For this reason Beyala has been accused by many of her African sisters of subscribing to a more Eurocentric and imperialist notion of feminism, rather than siding with those who prefer a feminist vision more in line with traditional African values.

In either case, Beyala has taken a stand against any form of repression--be it the silencing of uncomfortable truths or the unwritten law that dictates that the individual must defer to the group and to the common good at all costs and forego any claim to personal happiness that may appear in conflict with that goal. Her texts call into question received notions of social duty, such as those of the good citizen or the obedient daughter. Her writing unsettles not only conventions of social behavior but also narrative conventions. Similar to that of Gisèle Pineau, Beyala's prose is often disjointed and perhaps even more "chaotic"--reflecting, as social critique, the absurdity and the chaos of the environment she is describing. Unlike Pineau, however, Beyala's fictional working through of trauma will not go beyond a representation of what we might consider the post-traumatic "acting out" of trauma's effects.

The story of *Tu T'appelleras Tanga* begins in a prison cell in an unnamed sub-Saharan African country in the fictitious town of Iningué. Tanga and her cell-mate, a French-Jewish expatriate named Anna-Claude, are guilty of crimes against the authority

of the state. On the surface, neither woman's crime seems to merit the punishment: Anna-Claude is guilty of disrupting the peace, Tanga of involvement--or perhaps simply guilt by association--with a band of counterfeiters. What comes to light as the two prisoners, Tanga and Anna-Claude, recount to each other the circumstances leading to their arrest is that their transgressions run much deeper: each woman's rebellion against the patriarchal status quo amounts to an attack on the foundations of repressive civilization itself. It seems that the ultimate treason, of which each is guilty, is to have broken a mandate on silence. Both women have dared to speak out, on behalf of child victims, against the tacitly authorized abuse of power.

Drawing on Tanga and Anna-Claude's personal testimonies, I will consider the many levels on which this novel engages with power structures. In the process, I intend to unearth and expose to critical view the subterranean scaffolding connecting relations of domination: those that play out via political institutions and those that structure the parent-child relationship. To aid in delineating the link between the different levels of power relations, I will borrow from Judith Butler's theoretical model in her recent study *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997), as well as from Alice Miller's earlier study *Thou Shalt Not be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child* (1984). Both theories posit the early and formative bonds with primary caretakers as fundamental to the production of citizens who submit to the violence of a repressive state authority. For Butler as well as others who espouse Freudian theory, repression is at issue from the earliest moments of subject formation. If we accept the postulate that all subjects are formed under conditions of radical subjection, and that bonds of passionate attachment

are formed out of necessity to those on whom one is fundamentally dependent as an infant, it is not difficult to imagine how this structure of subordination comes to be replicated in certain social institutions in adult life. Since knowledge of this primary subjection is blocked from conscious memory, subordination to a more powerful other may very well feel “natural” and necessary to survival later in life.

Consonant with Freudian theory, all of the novel’s civic and social relations appear to function by means of some degree of repression, of which I identify three types. On a psychic level this entails an unconscious process of self-censorship or a filtering-out of memories of traumatic experiences from the conscious. Setting aside for the moment Freud’s notion of “primal repression” (the repressed desire for sexual relations with one’s father or mother)⁹⁷ as well as what Dominick LaCapra refers to as “structural loss” (early separation trauma),⁹⁸ I focus instead on repression proper of “historical trauma”--that is to say, the willful “forgetting” of memories of traumatic events that otherwise pose a threat to the ego’s sense of safety. Secondly, repression takes the form of externally imposed ignorance; there are instances in the novel of the withholding of information by a person or entity from an individual or a collective group in order to wield power over the latter. Finally, as in the case of the brutal police raids

⁹⁷Hall, Calvin. *A Primer of Freudian Psychology*, New York: The New American Library, 1979 (1954), 85.

⁹⁸La Capra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore; London: The John Hopkins UP, 2001.

and the beatings Tanga's mother inflicts upon her, repression takes a blatantly physical and violent form.⁹⁹

Butler highlights the political ramifications of the role of parent-child relationships in fashioning subjects who are conditioned to obey the social regulating authorities that govern them. She argues that the original relationship of dependency leads adults to accept a governing rule of law without questioning the motives of the authorities who wield it:

Although the dependency of the child is not *political* subordination in any usual sense, the formation of primary passion in dependency renders the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation, a topic that has become a preoccupation of recent political discourse. Moreover, this situation of primary dependency conditions the political formation and regulation of subjects and *becomes the means* of their subjection. (Butler 7, my emphasis)

If the fundamental dependency and mandatory subjection to one's parents or primary caretakers conditions one's being-in-the-world, fashions one's subjectivity, then would not this conditioning be prone to manipulation in later life? both Butler and Miller ask. If a child's very existence depends on forming a passionate bond with the caretaker regardless of the quality of that care, this psychic structure of subjection to power formed in early childhood may well find its equivalent in adults' amenability to external social structures invested with power. These institutions or entities are equally capable of exploiting this implicit sense of dependency and blind trust under the guise of creating conditions of security.

⁹⁹In his preface to *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse also qualifies his use of the terms "repression" and "repressive" to indicate "both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, constraint, and suppression" (8).

In a similar vein, Frankfurt theorist Herbert Marcuse underscores the declining authority of the biological father of the family and posits its gradual transference to the power of political institutions. Given the sense of fundamental dependency on these, there is a general reluctance to question or contest the exercising of this authority--even when basic human rights are at stake.

The father, restrained in the family and in his individual biological authority, is resurrected, far more powerful, in the administration which preserves the life of society, and in the laws which preserve the administration. These final and most sublime incarnations of the father cannot be overcome "symbolically," by emancipation: there is no freedom from administration and its laws because they appear as the ultimate guarantors of liberty. The revolt against them would be the supreme crime again--this time not against the despot-animal who forbids gratification but against the wise order which secures goods and services for the progressive satisfaction of human needs. Rebellion now appears as the crime against the whole of human society and therefore as beyond reward and beyond redemption (Marcuse 92-93).

Viewed in this light, Tanga and Anna-Claude's rebellion against the state's authority takes on added significance. Furthermore, Tanga's tragic fate fits into this schema whereby her individual actions to change the status quo appear largely futile unless she finds support within her community. Rather than offer a convenient solution to the problems she raises and a harmonious conclusion to Tanga's tragic story, Beyala leaves the burning questions open like unhealed wounds. She leaves the reader to infer that it would take large-scale consciousness-raising to counter the repressive operation that squelches such questioning. This is why the telling of Tanga's story is so important: although the "talking cure" may not lead to her own healing, Tanga's story does represent a break in the cycle of repression.

Marcuse also sheds light on what may appear as the absurd, illogical or outrageous quality to the narration of repressed trauma, which marks Tanga's speech as she remembers and recounts her past:

The psychoanalytic liberation of memory explodes the rationality of the repressed individual. As cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth that reason denies. Regression assumes a progressive function. The rediscovered past yields critical standards which are tabooed by the present (Marcuse 19).

As discussed earlier, Marcuse and other critics of the Frankfurt School view recuperation of the past not only as an essential element for understanding the present, but equally importantly, they posit this restoration of tabooed memory as the "vehicle for future liberation" (Marcuse 19).

Within the larger framework of relations of domination, my study focuses on the traumatic psychological effects caused by a betrayal of trust--especially those occasioned by the breaching of crucial, unwritten social contracts. Most significant of these and central to Beyala's novel is the one which stipulates parents will do all in their power to protect their children from harm and provide for their needs. Not to be discounted, however, is the correlation between the parent-child relationship and the social contract between the governing power and its citizens.

My approach to reading *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* looks at the role of buried childhood trauma in the perpetuation of cyclical patterns of abusive power--not only in individual families but in the wider, public sphere of entire communities. My use of the term childhood "trauma" is closest to the one used by Alice Miller, who argues against a

narrow definition that isolates experiences of violent physical or sexual abuse from more insidious and ubiquitous forms of abuse such as the narcissistic trauma of humiliation, rejection and emotional neglect of a child by his or her parents or other caregivers.¹⁰⁰ In *Betrayal Trauma: the Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse*, Jennifer Freyd has identified the breaching of a fundamental social contract, such as the one which binds children in a relationship of trust to their parents and other adult caretakers in positions of authority, as one of the most damaging forms of betrayal and one that has long-term effects.

The Tanga we come to know as she recounts her life to her cell-mate is certainly downtrodden. Whether or not she moves beyond her state of “melancholy” is a question I will return to. Her narrative--a string of losses dating to early childhood--stands as an indictment against a socio-economic system that perpetuates neglectful and abusive parenting. The novel’s vivid and forceful (sometimes violently graphic) portrayals of dispossessed street urchins and Tanga’s own story of forced exile from her parents’ home (when she refuses to continue working as a prostitute to support them), demonstrate that a society which learns to value the accumulation of wealth over the welfare of its children sacrifices its own future to the fetish of capital--or, the idea that “Life Is Profit”.¹⁰¹

As discussed at length in earlier chapters, I believe this urge or compulsion to accumulate is akin to a drive to incorporate and assimilate the outside, constituting the inner-dynamic of global-capitalist expansion. The paranoid positioning of the masculine,

¹⁰⁰ I adopt Miller’s definition rather than that of Dominick LaCapra since I am concerned mainly with childhood trauma.

¹⁰¹ Arundhati Roy defines globalization as this one single idea in *Power Politics*, 31.

Western, Cartesian ego compels it to defend imaginary boundaries against an outside other who threatens to evoke the memory of early vulnerability--or, in some cases, repressed trauma --inside.¹⁰² The immense effort to repress raw emotion connected to early childhood wounds is a preoccupation throughout life. To protect oneself against emotional vulnerability, this defensive stance results in an attempt to construct an impenetrable ego armor. Contrary to this masculine model of subjectivity which demands complete autonomy and bans the expression of grief, Tanga invites Anna-Claude to literally inhabit her as she transmits her story and pain to her:

entre en moi. Mon secret s'illuminera. Mais auparavant, il faut que la Blanche en toi meure. Donne-moi la main, désormais tu seras moi. Tu auras dix-sept saisons, tu seras noire, tu t'appelleras Tanga. Viens Tanga, donne-moi la main, donne.(18)

The two women hold hands as Tanga, without speaking, passes her story on to Anna-Claude transcutaneously. The radical nature of this gesture flies in the face of centuries of enlightenment thinking, which maintains strict boundaries between subject and object. Beyala's privileging of the body as a medium of communication, and especially the fluidity of identity implied in this exhortation to literally put oneself in the other's place, presents an alternative to a conception of human relations with each other and with the world based on a model of domination. In *History after Lacan*, Teresa Brennan makes reference to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as another example of a "revolutionary" text that rejects the idea of humans as closed systems or self-contained entities, and instead

¹⁰² Again, I would distinguish here between "historical trauma" and "structural trauma," as the latter concept is problematic and not particularly useful to this study.

explores the notion of an energetic force that connects individuals.¹⁰³ Likewise, by the end of the narrative we understand Tanga's weakened and moribund physical state as the result of a series of moral injustices she has suffered, rather than caused by some identifiable biological illness or physical injury. Brennan calls for recognition of the dynamic interchange between what we imagine as the "inside" and the "outside," advocating a holistic and dialectical approach to understanding human social relationships with respect to the environment:

The social actually gets into the flesh, and unless we take account of this, we cannot account for the extent to which socio-historical realities affect us psychically, and how we in turn act in ways that produce and reinforce them (cf. Freund 1988 and Frank 1990). We also need to address the problem of how we come to experience ourselves as contained entities, contained in terms of energies and affects.

All the prejudices of Western thought since the Renaissance reinforce this notion. To allow that my feelings physically enter you, or yours me, to think that we both had the same thought at the same time because it is literally in the air, is to think in a way that really puts the subject in question (10).

There is more than one instance of this means of communicating thoughts outside of the speech act in Beyala's novel, further suggesting the idea that the individual's imagined boundaries are permeable and subject to the fluid and mobile nature of energy.

Another such example of this phenomenon occurs when Anna-Claude finds herself alone with the prison warden. Unable to physically defend herself against him, her heightened powers of perception enable her to read his mind. This scene is also significant in that it addresses the issue of pain and the subsequent acting out of violence

¹⁰³Brennan compares this new version of the connecting force in nature to older, similar beliefs expressed in pantheism, Romanticism, and Spinoza's *Naturphilosophie*. (*History after Lacan*, 81)

dictated by the repetition compulsion. The prison warden, a policeman whose public duty is to protect the citizens under his watch, instead takes advantage of his position of power and rapes the defenseless Anna-Claude when she refuses to cooperate with his interrogation. Resisting complete subjugation, she refuses to give him the information he asks for. Instead, Anna-Claude throws her assailant off-guard with her elliptical allusion to another language, or what one might interpret as a subversive, quasi-Kristevan semiotic:

J'apprends le langage de l'amour. Il n'a pas de mots. Tu ne peux pas l'enchaîner comme le chien de ta mère (187).

Either by a stroke of intuition or, less likely, pure luck, Anna-Claude has somehow reached the warden's inner thoughts and momentarily broken through the fortress of his paranoid ego with these words. She has touched on a childhood trauma buried within: "Il la regarde, l'effroi dans les yeux. Tout son être se canalise dans ce regard. Un sanglot monte de sa gorge"(187). Evidently, she has tapped a deep source of sadness and pain in the man occasioned by the loss of his mother. When he subsequently lashes out at her in blind anger, the underlying reasons for his erratic behavior are clear to Anna-Claude: "Elle comprend qu'il souffre et qu'il veut faire souffrir"(187).

While the text does not reveal the exact nature of the warden's loss, in a broad sense, an unacknowledged sense of loss may be due in part to an unbearable and profound disappointment in one's abusive parents, that is to say a painful lack of an idealized relationship with them. For my purposes and for the sake of clarity, "loss" refers to the buried memory of trauma. Whether the loss is occasioned by physical, sexual or

emotional abuse, or a lesser narcissistic trauma to the child's ego, its repression functions to perpetuate patterns of abuse- -either in producing a compulsive will to dominate or a will to be subjected. The refusal to acknowledge and mourn this deep-seated trauma fuels the repetition compulsion: blind to the cause of suffering, one remains caught in a cycle of abuse. By extension the avowal of the loss, a process facilitated through the retelling of the story of abuse and completed by the cathartic re-experiencing of the buried pain, offers a way out of the cycle of violence--offers a way of coming to terms with the traumatic memory.

Throughout her narrative, Tanga mourns not only her own lost innocence (the childhood she never had), but also that of all African children dispossessed of their childhood: "...tous ces enfants qui naissent adultes et qui ne sauront jamais mesurer la sévérité de leur destin, ces enfants veufs de leur enfance"(76). Like so many others in the town of Iningué, from an early age she is forced to play the role of parent to her parents, obligated by custom to provide for their needs--never met by their own parents--even if it means selling her body:

moi la femme-fille soumise aux rites de l'enfant-parent de ses parents puisqu'il convient de commercer la chair pour les nourrir, toujours les nourrir à cause du souffle de vie qu'ils m'ont donné...(34)

This serves as yet another example of the cyclical nature of certain types of abuse that can become integrated into an entire social system, whereby they appear "natural" and disconnected from historical conditions. Beyala implies that if parents are not allowed to live their childhood free of an adult's concerns and responsibilities, they in turn will raise their own children according to this same model. They do not develop beyond the stage

of childish dependance and need--and instead continue to search to fill that need well into adulthood. As a result, their own children become their caretakers, and so the pattern repeats itself indefinitely.

As another manifestation of this proprietary attitude towards children and the subjection of their bodies to their parents' will, in her discussion of the novel Irène Assiba d'Almeida points to the rite of excision that is forced upon the helpless child Tanga who "must submit to the law without understanding its full implications."¹⁰⁴ Once again, Beyala demonstrates that traditional beliefs and attitudes regarding children end up sanctioning practices leading to their exploitation in a modern, neo-colonial context. Similarly, Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana's study of the role of excision in the novel notes the shift from the customary role of excision to preserve a young woman's virginity until marriage to a means of appropriating her sexuality for economic purposes.¹⁰⁵ Tanga's mother has imposed premature "womanhood" on her eight-year-old daughter to expedite her availability as a source of revenue to the family--through the sale of her body in compulsory prostitution.

Given the traumatic nature of that event--the physical pain and the accompanying sense of shame and confusion that follows the excision--Tanga buries this childhood memory in the depths of her unconscious. It remains there, dormant, until circumstances in her present trigger the memory, bringing to the surface the disturbing images and bodily

¹⁰⁴*Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*, 74- 75.

¹⁰⁵*Littérature féminine francophone d'Afrique noire*, 322-323. In Herzberger-Fofana's opinion, given that children often represent the only means of earning a living in the modernized urban setting, they are at high risk of being sold into prostitution. The traditional view of children as a source of support and security in old age has progressively translated into one that views them as a resource to exploit.

sensations. This bodily memory of past shame linked to the excision arises as Tanga feels a sense of humiliation when confronted in public with a man propositioning her for sex. The familiar sensation sets in motion the chain of memories that transports her back to the scene of that earlier trauma of excision. She remembers her mother's triumphant cry after the bloody operation, the numbness she felt afterwards and the subsequent effort to bury the memories:

Je n'ai pas pleuré. Je n'ai rien dit. J'héritais du sang entre mes jambes. D'un trou entre les cuisses. Seule me restait la loi de l'oubli. Le temps passait, je m'habituais à cette partie de moi qui s'était absentée. Je kidnappais la horde des souvenirs. Je les ficelais. Je les enfonçais dans les tiroirs du temps. Et voilà qu'elle remontait soudain devant Hassan, ouvrait ses tiroirs où se nichaient des montres, des millions de montres qui marquaient chacune les différentes étapes de mon existence (24).

As we saw happen with Pineau's Éliette, an intense experience of shame in the present triggers a series of previously repressed memories. I am inclined to read Tanga's shame as being induced by a commensurate feeling of lack; a lack of love that, in the unconscious, translates to a belief that one is not worthy of a parent's love. Thus this vacuum of unfulfilled desire, this gaping hole resulting in the great longing to be loved by her parents, finds its perfect metaphor in that physical "trou" left bleeding between Tanga's legs that she "inherits"--in a pattern of loss spanning generations.

When Tanga meets Hassan--a man with whom she shares a mutual attraction--she not only reexperiences this shame and humiliation for the first time since the traumatic surgery, the encounter also awakens in her the desire to love and be loved without the intermediary of money. Therefore, to her mother's great displeasure, she makes up her mind to forego the relationship with the older "Monsieur John"--a rich but unattractive

arms dealer whose “gifts” Tanga’s mother had come to rely on. Tanga might unconsciously see in Hassan the figure of her father who never loved her, and to whom she therefore instinctively attaches herself in an effort to finally win that love. However, on a conscious level, he represents for Tanga someone whom she would freely choose to love--rather than another “john” to whom her mother offers her in a sexual transaction. In Lacanian terminology, she may be looking to identify with and gain recognition from a more powerful figure, the “bearer of the phallus,” only to find that he in turn needs her to occupy the space of “passified” in order to secure his (masculine) identity as “passifier.” Therefore she struggles internally--“moi qui n’ai aucun droit, moi l’obéissance”(25)--against the programmed impulse to submit to being defined, “named” and “shaped” by Hassan, the more powerful adult who has identified her as a prostitute and solicited her services.¹⁰⁶ Finally, in an act of rebellion and will to self-definition, she refuses to be denigrated by the objectifying image of “whore” that he would project on her and responds to his proposition with a proud rebuttal: “Je ne suis pas une pute”(25).

To develop further the idea that the shame evoked by her encounter with Hassan may be a vestige of an old narcissistic wound inflicted by her father, one must consider the most damaging assault to a child’s integrity: incest. The detached manner in which Tanga recounts the rape by her father is consonant with Kristeva’s description of the melancholic’s “discours détaché” (61) and is indicative of a reluctance to relive the memory and re-experience the painful affect associated with the memory. Tanga muses

¹⁰⁶I am again borrowing Teresa Brennan’s terms to speak of the dynamic between the “passifier” and the “passified.”

rather off-handedly that no one seemed to notice when her father abused her, just as her own physical or emotional presence (or absence) often went unnoticed by those around her:

je quittai mon corps pour retoucher la vie, elle m'échappait, personne ne le voyait. Ainsi de l'homme mon père, qui plus tard, non content de ramener ses maîtresses chez nous, de les tripoter sous l'oeil dégouté de ma mère, m'écartelera au printemps de mes douze ans, ainsi de cet homme, mon père qui m'engrossera et empoisonera l'enfant, notre enfant, son petit-fils, cet homme ne s'apercevra jamais de ma souffrance et pourtant cette souffrance a duré jusqu'au jour de sa mort, jusqu'au jour de ma mort (50).

This is the only time that Tanga mentions the rape by her father and the murder of their infant that, we can infer, she carried to term. The lack of importance she seems to assign the event parallels her sense of being invisible and insignificant in the adult world, having been deprived of the mirroring and recognition from her parents that children require to build a sense of self. Brennan, in line with Lacan, might see this as a textbook case of the problems that girl children--and the adult women they grow into--may confront in forming a self-image without a "cultural linguistic tradition through which they can identify with each other"(61).

Elsewhere in her narrative, Tanga wonders to whom she would speak of her sadness and suffering and of the pervasive abuse of children like herself, and considers the futility of speaking out to a community shrouded in denial:

Mais qui me croira? Le monde préfère le silence qui recouvre l'épine. Je suis une enfant. Je n'existe pas. Mon âge m'annule. Mon coeur est enraciné dans une forêt de sable (47).

Children, in particular, lack a voice in the society Beyala's novel describes. Tanga's cell-mate, Anna-Claude, is a rare exception in the novel of an adult who cares about the fate of children and youth. She questions the disappearance of several of her university students who were most likely arrested, tortured and killed by the national police for being "subversives"--the kind of repressive action that takes the cultural mandate on silence to another level.

Unlike the other citizens of Iningué, whose fear of reprisal compels them to maintain a complicitous bond of silence, Anna-Claude asks questions:

Puis avaient éclaté les manifestations. Plusieurs de ses étudiants disparurent. Anna-Claude ne comprenait pas, elle interrogeait, certains haussaient les épaules, d'autres se confinaient dans des mimiques d'ignorance, tous se rejoignaient dans la peur (16).

Unable to break through this wall of silent denial with her inquiries, she resorts to parading through the streets with a sign around her neck reading: "Où sont nos enfants? Egorgés par un boucher!" This eccentric behavior leads finally to her arrest and imprisonment as an "élément subversif et incontrôlable"(16). The madness or "non-sense" of her act parallels and at the same time underscores the outrageousness of the students' disappearance and the inaction of the community. While the language with which she answers her own question may be figurative rather than literal, Anna-Claude has articulated the little value placed on the town's children--comparing them to animals gone to slaughter.

Extending this metaphor, Beyala recounts an episode in which Tanga presents herself as a sacrifice at the butcher's. The meaning of this symbolic act is clear: when

Tanga lies down on the butcher block and places her neck under the butcher's knife, she realizes that she has been reduced to a "beast of burden" for her society: shackled by familial obligations and captive of her desire to be loved. She is ready to end her life rather than continue to exist for others as an abject object. However, the "coup de grâce" never arrives. The butcher--armed with his phallic weapon and in possession of the power over life and death--instead hurls insults at the "femme-fillette" (girl-child) who has dared to occupy the literal space of what should be her symbolic position in dominant culture. In doing so, she has troubled the illusion of coherence in the established order of things.

His powerlessness to classify Tanga neatly within the symbolic order either as a "girl" or as a "woman" further aggravates the butcher and incites his rage:

Tu es de ces filles que je déteste, dit-il sourdement. Femme ou enfant?
Tu es de celles qui accouchent la merde. Fous le camp (102).

In light of Kristeva's theories on the abject, we might understand this juxtaposition of the allusion to maternity ("accoucher" = to give birth) and the reference to excrement as being linked to the notion of ambiguity in language. This ambiguity evokes the idea of the abject in that it belongs to the domain of the pre-symbolic--a period prior to individuation that one normally manages to keep repressed within the unconscious. For Kristeva, the mother is guilty in the male imaginary of the sign's degradation and failure, thus reminding the male subject of the fragility of his identity and therefore of his proximity to the abject. The butcher's inability to capture and contain Tanga in language by naming/classifying her may evoke (as an unconscious memory) the impossibility of confining and controlling his mother, the infant's primary object and source of

gratification. The frustration that the ambiguity causes him rekindles this deep-seated rage.

To develop this idea further, the butcher's sudden impulse to prohibit Tanga from leaving and his subsequent attempt at raping her might also attest to an urge to dominate (the mother), a response to frustrated desire which could have originated in infancy. Beyala seems to suggest that the origins of violence against women may lie in the primary relationship with the mother, as a sort of original battle ground buried within the male psyche. Indeed, for Beyala's butcher, Tanga represents "une maman improvisée" ("an improvised mother"). Therefore, the ambivalence of this first relationship resurfaces in his contact with Tanga:

Il m'assaille. Maman douce, si douce. Et la maison, le chien,
la pie au bout du pré. Et l'enfant-boucher (103).

A confusion of subjectivities follows: Tanga's thoughts become the butcher's musings, only to be fused once again with Tanga's own yearnings.¹⁰⁷ It appears they may share similar desires of the most basic sort: from earliest infancy, each seeks a sense of stability and the love of their parents. These desires are evoked in the presence of an other who, by some trait or circumstance that triggers an unconscious memory, comes to embody an unresolved relationship with a primary other. As a drama that both Tanga and the butcher experience in separate and unrelated scenes, this phenomenon serves as a reminder of the fundamental needs and desires that transcend gender. At the same time, the breakdown of

¹⁰⁷Tanga has entertained similar visions of "le café, des cris d'enfants, le chien, la pie au bout du pré"(30).

boundaries in this passage is a pivotal point which allows for a re-assessment and subversion of overly-worn gender stereotypes.

It is the rapist-butcher who begins to cry. Rather than seizing the opportunity to make her escape, Tanga offers calm words of comfort: “Que faire, que faire, sinon ajouter le mot au mot afin de mettre un peu de couleur au noir de la vie”(103). This is likely an allusion to Beyala’s profession as a writer of fiction. A writer can add color to stock, “monochrome” gender identities by restoring their heterogeneity (ie. This male character expresses emotional fragility while Tanga asserts her will to self-realization). In her fiction, she can also avert a violent act--violence that results from damaging, ideologically-based stereotypes such as the one that requires the masculine gender to repress feelings of vulnerability. When the butcher’s tears become hysterical, uncontrollable sobbing, Tanga arms herself with this masculinist discourse to expose the non-sense (and violence) implicit therein: “Un homme, un vrai, ne laisse jamais tomber une larme.” The absurdity of this socio-cultural mandate is manifestly clear in this scene and exposes the hysterical undercurrent of established patriarchal “norms.” The butcher himself protests: “On ne peut devenir un homme sans avoir été un enfant, tu comprends?” He acknowledges the fact that adult maturity requires that one return to and resolve an unfinished past.

However, the butcher’s question goes unanswered. Tanga has left him in search of answers to her own questions, aware that she has escaped losing her own sanity by fleeing what she calls “un lieu de fou”(103). Considering again the allegorical dimensions of this scene, its conclusion would indicate a feminist position regarding women and caretaking:

rather than sacrifice so much of her energy to “mothering” and catering to another’s fears, it suggests that a woman might do well first to understand and heal herself. By facing her own fears and difficult past, she will have made the first step away from the fatal cycle in which the two genders are trapped. For his part, the butcher has also kept a pattern of violence from repeating itself. It is significant that he does not follow through on his impulse to rape Tanga. By allowing himself to connect his feelings of grief to his painful childhood memories, he frees himself from acting-out blindly in a fit of rage.

Tanga recounts a confrontation with the police--well before her arrest for counterfeiting. In childish preconceptions of the police as heroes, we again find a desire to idealize the figure on whom one is conditioned to depend for protection. The image of “le flic” is one of an authority figure who, for Tanga, represents the strength and security lacking in her own life. As happens when a parent destroys this same trust and idealization by acting on incestuous impulses, Tanga’s world is turned upside down when the police abuse their position of power:

Puis, un jour, les flics sont venus. L’univers a basculé. J’ai appris, depuis lors, que dans la nuit chiens et loups se ressemblent (144).

The actual transgression by the police is elided, obfuscated within the lines of the popular dictum warning that an aggressor may be a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Yet, given that this episode occurs during the same year as the rape by her father, perhaps we can read this entire passage as a codified recasting of that other trauma, the incest, to which Tanga accords so little time or attention in her narrative. Her choice of idioms to refer obliquely to some unnamed but traumatic incident with the police (“dans la nuit chiens et loups se

ressemblement”) lends itself to a parallel reading of the father who arrives under the cover of the night as her attacker. This interpretation takes on added significance when considered in light of the observation that “it is fairly common for incest survivors to relegate their terror to phantasmatic projections of nocturnal visitors: the feared intruder may be an alien being or a Nazi soldier. These imaginary perpetrators emerge in response to the overwhelming reality of the father’s violence and his sexual assault.”¹⁰⁸

Likewise the intensity of her reaction to this first encounter with the police, and her subsequent search for answers, appears to be emotional fallout from a much larger explosion, seeming incongruous with the understatement that describes that encounter (in the passage quoted above):

Alors, j’ai cherché ailleurs. J’ai fouiné la terre pour essayer de comprendre. J’ai passé mes journées anniversaires à trouver des mots qui allument, à descendre leurs abîmes, à grimper leurs sommets. Rien. Toujours rien. *Même pas de murs pour arrêter la chaleur* (144-145, my italics).

It is particularly this last line that would seem to fit better in the context of incest, implying that the walls (or lack thereof) of Tanga’s house did not protect her from her father’s lust. There were no boundaries. It is plausible that Tanga is as yet unable to come to terms with the brutal reality of her father’s crime, and must instead project it onto a social body representing an abstract paternal authority.

Sometime later that year, Tanga recounts, the police terrorize the town and mobilize against a mob of children throwing stones, for it is only the town’s children who fight against what their young leader, Tanga’s friend Kamgué, has condemned as

¹⁰⁸Suzette Henke’s reference to Janet Jacobs’ (Henke 128).

“Injustice. Misère. Oppression”(145). When the police murder this sixteen-year-old leader of the rebellion, the adult townspeople are quick to hide their outrage and aversion to the atrocity:

Du bruit de nos cailloux naquirent des silences. Epais. Puants.
Morbides. Les flics sont venus chercher mon ami. Ils l’ont suicidé.
Devant l’horreur certaines gorges s’apprêtaient à vomir leur dégoût,
mais le silence des canons s’engouffra en eux. Les autres, tous les
autres, scellèrent le mot. Pour ne pas être tentés de dire et de voir,
ils jouèrent à l’autruche. Rien vu. Rien entendu. Même pas l’aboïement
fumant des fusils (145).

This thick, oppressive blanket of silence again covers the crimes of the state. The traumatized population “chooses” to bury the violent truth under layers of denial rather than to confront a force so much more powerful than those subjected to it. Jennifer Freyd maintains that forgetting abuse by a trusted authority is a way for the victim to create “information blockage,” for, as she says “to know is to put oneself in danger. Not to know is to align oneself with the caregiver and ensure survival” (4).

The parallel between parenting and governing is even more explicit in the passage in which Tanga and Camilla, another French expatriate, discuss their different views and expectations of government. For Tanga, the government is there to protect--represented especially by the system of Social Security. She fantasizes being a citizen of France, and therefore the protégée of what she imagines to be the ideal government. Significantly, the image that most frequently comes to her mind is that of herself as a baby nestled safely in a “real” cradle, happily sucking on a bottle (128). Camilla, having lived on both sides, understands the function of government as an instrument of control that manages and groups its “undesirables” within its state-run institutions: “Les indésirables, chez vous on

les utilise, chez nous on les enferme, on les parque. (...) Sais-tu ce que c'est qu'un asile psychiatrique, une maison de repos, un centre de correction, un orphelinat?"(128).

We see the cycle of repetition--from parent-child relations to those between governments and citizens--further inscribed in all its complexity in the scene involving Tanga's mother and the governor. Ironically, the governor is coming to town to distribute medals to all mothers for the simple fact of having borne children:

A Iningué, la femme a oublié l'enfant, le geste qui donne l'amour, pour devenir une pondeuse. Elle dit: "L'enfant, c'est la sécurité vieillesse." D'ailleurs le gouverneur en personne médaille les bonnes pondeuses. Service rendu à la patrie (90).

Her mother, just like the child who so desperately desires recognition by her parents, strives to gain the governor's attention and approval. Instead, the official overlooks her, neglecting to mention her name among those who have served the country as mothers. Unable to accept herself thus abandoned, she instead fosters the illusion that he will eventually realize and correct his mistake. Finally, she resorts to writing plaintive letters addressed to "mon très cher Gouverneur bien-aimé" asking contritely for him to rectify the omission and give her the deserved medal. Tanga recalls her mother's childlike simplicity and naïveté: she 'sends' the letters, without an address or a stamp, by tossing them onto the airport runway since "c'est marqué par avion sur l'enveloppe." Having come to terms with her own difficult childhood, it seems Tanga is able to feel some compassion for her mother at the end of her life: she recognizes in her mother's behavior a similar suffering from lack of love that allows Tanga to identify with her:

J'ignorais alors que l'instinct de survie tient de cette exagération dans la plainte, de cette douleur concertée comme une mise en scène afin que la femme se résigne à la mort tout en la niant (94).

She acknowledges a similar sense of futility and powerlessness in her mother's actions stemming from their shared status as alienated and marginalized in a society in which being a woman and being impoverished combine to place them at the bottom of the ladder of power and political agency.

Tanga's third relationship with a man, following her experiences with Monsieur John and Hassan, also occurs within a context of economic inequality: after running away from her parents' house, she is dependant on "Cul-de-jatte" for food and lodging. However, Beyala portrays this relationship in a somewhat more positive light than the others; Tanga is finally able to experience a degree of lover's passion with this man who seeks to please her. Yet the stability of this relationship is also contingent upon Tanga's subjection to her lover's desires, and she is literally constrained from leaving when Cul-de-jatte attaches a rope to her neck. Beyala again uses the analogy of a dog on a leash or of a beast of burden to describe (hyperbolically) and condemn the coercive and abusive nature of the relationships in which women and children often find themselves. The image of a dog on a leash symbolizes a means of control of a weaker and dependent being--control that serves to bolster a man's sense of autonomy. In one of the novel's last scenes, this master/slave dynamic is explicit in a verbal exchange which takes place between Tanga and an old man who fears the imminent death of the dog he has beaten its entire life:

Chemin faisant, il me raconte son chien. Ils se connaissent depuis douze ans. Toujours il l'a battu *pour se donner l'illusion de la vie, pour se retrouver en amont* (196, my emphasis).

In similar scenarios, the text has in many instances indicated the interchangeability of “dog” or “beast” with “woman” or “child”--all scapegoats/victims of a socio-economic system based on ruthless competition, a system which rewards aggression and a lack of compassion for others.

Beyala's criticism of masculine subjectivity seems to include a critique of the men that govern in Africa societies--or perhaps in any patriarchal cultures. Cul-de-jatte's physical disability --the withered leg--may on the one hand symbolize an atrophied emotional capacity, but could, on the other, be a metaphor for the crippling debt that plagues many African nations, creating a general feeling of powerless and dependency on the outside. To compensate for the sense of lack within himself, Cul-de-jatte has fashioned himself as lord and master of his own kingdom--surviving on the fringes of society. His “subjects” are a band of dispossessed street children who look to him for protection and who, in return for his leadership, beg and steal for him. To assure himself and as a constant reminder to others of his symbolic power, Cul-de-jatte's self-portrait dominates the main room of the dwelling he shares with the orphans.

Beyala's criticism takes aim at male narcissism: “Cul-de-jatte's” declaration of love is rather a confession of self-love. Tanga has served as an instrument, a mirror, to reflect what he would like to see in himself. His entreaty that she give him a son is also rooted in self-interest:

Donne-moi un fils, dit-il d'une voix suppliante. J'ai tellement envie de pondre un œuf dans ta chair. *Je me suis tant aimé en t'aimant* qu'il convient de cristalliser. Et puis, j'aurais pu mourir ce soir, j'aurais rien laissé pour perpétuer *mon histoire* (175, my emphasis).

The notion that what a man “loves” in a woman is his own reflection recalls the theories articulated by Luce Irigaray in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. According to Irigaray, sexual difference should in fact be deemed sexual “indifference” given the way women’s sexuality is considered to derive from male sexuality within a phallocratic economy.

The reference to paternal genealogy in this context--Cul-de-jatte’s desire to perpetuate his own story or history ([son] “histoire”)--is significant; most of patriarchal history has been written from a male perspective. Likewise, there were few African women authors of fiction whose stories were published before the latter part of the twentieth century. By contrast, there is a plethora of literature representing African women’s lives written by men. In the same way, Cul-de-jatte would take even her own tragic story from Tanga and claim it as his own:

Je veux t’aimer, toujours, éternellement, dit Cul-de-jatte. *Je te raconterai ta propre histoire, je te décrirai la raideur de ses pentes. Ouvre tes portes* (160, my emphasis)

Although initially tempted by the lure of stability, Tanga ultimately rejects his offer to immortalize her in exchange for the role she would play in his self-aggrandizing personal fantasy. So it is that the only intimate relationship that is based on reciprocity and mutual respect in Beyala’s novel is one that takes place between two women, suggesting that a harmonious heterosexual union may be impossible. Although Tanga’s relationship with Cul-de-jatte may have been less abusive than the one with Hassan or other men, Tanga’s

relationship with Anna-Claude is the only one that avoids attempts at the domination, control and coercion of the other. As Tanga's interlocutor in her reconstruction of her fragmented self through her oral narrative, Anna-Claude "stands in for the (m)other of the early mirror stage" who reflects this coherency and agency back to Tanga.¹⁰⁹

As a further indication of her sense of alienation and disempowerment within a male-dominated culture, Tanga reveals to Cul-de-jatte her deep-seated fear that "la fête commence sans elle"(166). To mark her new path to independence and self-realization, she declares herself free of the stigma of exclusion from the proverbial "men's club." The wistful longing for an invitation to share in its privileges no longer haunts her:

"Aujourd'hui, je ne l'attends plus." With Cul-de-jatte as her interlocutor, the discursive sparring that precedes Tanga and Cul-de-jatte's love-making seems to be Beyala's statement on epistemological differences--different ways of "knowing"--rooted in gender: neither Tanga nor Cul-de-jatte is able or willing to grasp the meaning that the other intends to convey. While in her arguments Tanga looks for any road out of her society's quagmire of suffering, Cul-de-jatte would prefer to leave untouched the well-worn status quo of gender relations: "T'as qu'à trouver la consolation dans les normes au lieu de rêver." Tanga criticizes this masculinist lack of vision: "Vous dites tous ça. Vous légiférez, vous détruisez"(166). Gradually a wall of miscommunication erects itself

¹⁰⁹Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Women's Life-Writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998; xv. Henke is referring to Jacques Lacan's theory of the *corps morcelé* or "body in fragments" that is "re-membered" into a coherent narrative through what she calls "scriptotherapy." While she makes no reference to Beyala's fiction, I consider it to be akin to the other examples of women's life-writing that she explores in this work.

between them, the result of disparate languages that collide and crystallize. Tanga seems to evoke the ghost of Descartes to explain the impasse:

“Vous existez, dis-je mue par un désir de protection. *Vous existez puisque vous sentez.*”

Il hausse les épaules.

“Tu ne sais pas ce que tu dis.

–Pas besoin de se retrouver nez à nez avec le savoir pour le reconnaître.

–Parole de femme.

–Peut-être. N’empêche qu’entre ce qui est et ce qui n’est pas, il y a des pages de vide et de gouffre où peut habiter l’illusion de vivre” (167, my emphasis).

Tanga offers a revision of the Cartesian “Cogito ergo sum” to express, in place of a fundamental mistrust of feeling, the belief that it is feeling that constitutes knowledge and the proof that one exists. Her “parole de femme” subverts, therefore, the basis of Enlightenment thinking, on the grounds that it is instrumental or abstract reason that creates a world of madness.

Her allusion to the “pages of emptiness and abyss” which allow for the creative exploration of alternative means of conceiving the world brings us back to the theme of a feminine symbolic --which one might recognize in Beyala’s writing. Beyala fills the pages of her fiction with a woman’s dream that remains to be fulfilled, a woman who envisions a world in which affect, tenderness and love are no longer liabilities, and one in which children are not forced to assume adult responsibilities. Tanga seems to sense that an understanding of the buried past is crucial to building the future, yet her efforts to unearth it remain tentative and vague:

Derrière mon bandeau, je ferme encore les yeux, creusant l’abîme où serait enterré hier, où seraient enterrées les vérités d’un peuple

englué dans l'exploitation de l'enfant, tandis que le reste de l'humanité s'élançe, radieux, sur le chemin de l'enfant roi (34).

While she decries the foreclosure on the painful past, on both personal and collective histories, she is inclined to bouts of despondency that leave her feeling powerless to change her situation or to make a positive difference within her social milieu:

Dans mon pays, le passé s'est fermé, le futur aussi. L'identité s'est arrêtée à la frontière entre hier et aujourd'hui. J'écris au ciel pour lui demander la recette du rire (144).

Yet Tanga's narration of her past to a sympathetic listener is itself a ritual of mourning that has potential to rupture the cycle of repression: reflecting on her lost childhood and letting the ensuing pain engulf her liberates Tanga from the debilitating effects of their repression. Her buried trauma no longer holds her captive. Once she has re-experienced this buried affect through the telling of her personal history--whose repression had served as a survival mechanism since her childhood--she will be able to leave behind the "les mêmes histoires" and embrace "les épisodes suivants, ceux qui libéreront la femme et enterreront à jamais l'enfance morte"(36).

Tanga's conflicted relationship with her mother--her feeling that her mother has betrayed her--is a prominent factor in determining her narrative's trajectory and its melancholy tone. Similar to the mother-daughter dyad in Pineau's *Esperance-macadam*, Tanga's mother turned a blind eye to her husband's sexual abuse of their daughter, permanently estranging her. The protagonists in both novels suffer from this betrayal of trust and lack of maternal love, and neither is able to establish an intimate bond of trust

until she has consciously allowed this troubled past to reenter and inhabit her present.

Tanga's recovered memories bring with them a tide of emotions:

Le passé m'agresse et tambourine à mes tempes. Je ris, je pleure,
assise à mi-chemin entre moi et moi (176).

Once she has passed through some of the most difficult feelings that she had repressed, she achieves a heightened level of awareness and thus no longer feels compelled to seek out her mother's love and approval at any cost.

Herbert Marcuse's Freudian notion of the "super-ego" would explain the guilt that drives Tanga to punish herself and acquiesce to her mother's punitive and abusive treatment prior to her *prise-de-conscience*. The super-ego, he writes:

originates from the long dependency of the infant on his parents; the parental influence remains the core of the superego. Subsequently, a number of societal and cultural influences are taken in by the superego until it coagulates into the powerful representative of established morality and "what people call the 'higher' things in human life." Now the "external restrictions" which first the parents and then other societal agencies have imposed upon the individual are "introjected" into the ego and become its "conscience"; henceforth, the sense of guilt--the need for punishment generated by the transgressions or by the wish to transgress these restrictions (especially in the Oedipus situation)- permeates the mental life (32).

As discussed earlier, this guilty conscience is manipulated on many levels of society and comprises the bases for the organization and successful functioning of political institutions. Until coming to terms with their past, adults are unconsciously beholden to the patterns of submissive behavior set in early childhood and thus "adherence to a *status quo ante* is implanted in the instinctual structure"(33). As a result, states Marcuse, "civilization has progressed as organized domination"(34).

Tanga's process of working through her painful childhood memories finally effects a break in the cycle of abusive relationships--with her mother and men--that had kept her from forming a bond of love and trust with another person. As a result, she develops a close relationship as surrogate mother of an impoverished and physically disabled orphan "Mala." As this bond gains in strength and stability, she builds the confidence necessary to face her own mother one last time:

J'ai retrouvé le jour et je me suis retrouvée à l'endroit où je m'étais réfugiée avant l'esclandre avec la vieille la mère. J'ai aspiré un bon coup pour ne pas chialer. Je suis revenue à la maison. La vieille la mère s'est jetée à mes pieds. Elle a pleuré. Je ne l'ai pas regardée. J'ai donné mes seins à Mala. Je suis allée retrouver mon fils oublié (177).

As is the nature of this process, it is never really "over" for Tanga. Rather, she will confront the memories continuously:

J'avais l'impression de m'être depouillée de tout ce qui me lestait. Mais j'avoue qu'il m'arrivait encore des sursauts de mémoire et je redevenais Avant, attachée à la pierre de la vieille la mère (172).

While on a psychic level Tanga is now "free," her success at breaking out of the stasis of melancholy is cut short by her tragic death in prison.

Furthermore, by transmitting her personal testimony to Anna-Claude so that it will be told to others, she is exposing the more ominous side of economic "progress" in Africa that its narrow-minded proponents would prefer remain concealed. As a result, she is creating possibilities for a better future:

Mon histoire sera le pain a pétrir pour survivre. Laisse-moi la libérer pour construire le futur (39).

In the telling of her story, Tanga gives voice to countless victims of instrumental reason or the inhumane “logic” of globalism’s unchecked expansion. By linking globalism’s trajectory to the personal tragedy of one African woman’s premature death, Beyala offers a view into the social problems underlying--and which might explain or account for--a society’s tractability to such an economic model fueled by domination and exploitation. The implicit accusation of her society’s abuse of women and children effects a first step on the road to personal and social healing. Tanga breaks the silence that would otherwise bury her story along with her at her death, a story resembling so many others that will never be told. By breaking the mandate on silence imposed on its victims, she creates a rupture in the vicious circle of an old story of domination. Although she sees little hope for her own redemption, Tanga perceives her role as storyteller as potentially bringing about positive change for women and children in her society.

Beyala seems to be calling for a critical reconsideration of parent-child relationships to confront the harsh reality of children’s enslavement to their parents in post-colonial African societies. She wants to heighten awareness of this abuse of children that most would prefer to deny. At the same time, she decries the socioeconomic inequality that beleaguers women in these societies, creating conditions which leave women trapped in abusive relationships, and in turn perpetuate neglectful and abusive parenting. Both Beyala and Pineau have depicted women and children as the virtual sacrifices paid by societies when emulating a neo-colonial, global economy. Both writers

compare these victims to discarded commodities and sacrificial animals that are “slaughtered,” “disemboweled,” and “mutilated”--images that link frenetic consumption and unchecked consumerism with brute violence and repression.

CHAPTER FIVE

Odyssey to the Origins of Melancholy: in Search of a Healing Feminine Genealogy in *La memoria*

Ultimately, all that remains of the Other is the Other's remains; the subject becomes a veritable cemetery of lost, abandoned, and discarded objects. But where, in this newest theorization of identification, does the interminable process of mourning begin?

–Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*

In earlier chapters I have sought to identify the cultural sources of melancholy and to link these to forms of violence both on a large scale and on a personal level. I explored the theory that the ideological shift from an ancient world view of the cosmos as a living organism to a mechanistic view that sanctioned the aggressive manipulation of nature also led to the institutionalization of gender differences. I return to the issue of gender in this chapter to explore in more depth the idea that the melancholy that seems endemic to patriarchal cultures--and what theorists, perhaps most recently Dominick LaCapra, have referred to as primordial “structural loss”--may in fact be a socially-determined cultural phenomenon. Specifically, I will be looking at early childhood memories of mother/daughter relations and the role of this relationship in forming female subjectivity. I aim to shed light on the question of how the mother/daughter dynamic might evolve differently if women were to become conscious of their losses and grieve them through a

process of working through painful memories. I consider the possibility that if formerly unconscious loss is grieved through a process of remembering and resignification (whether in writing or telling the story of loss), women will no longer be compelled to repeat the pattern of passing on an inheritance of self-contempt from one generation to the next, and will thus be able to break the cycle of traumatic identifications.

Suzette Henke has coined the term “scriptotherapy” to refer to what she calls “women’s life-writing” (writing with an autobiographical bent) that allows for a conscious re-assessment of a traumatic past and therefore a reconfiguration of female subjectivity.¹¹⁰ Although none of the novels of my study are explicitly autobiographical, each has a female protagonist who initiates her own healing process once she begins to narrate the events of her past. As models for healing, their stories may serve a social function outside of their fictional context--acting as catalysts to encourage readers to remember and seek to understand their past. I am positing socially-defined and enforced gender identity as a primary factor underlying the repressed conflicts and traumatic conditions that structure melancholic subjectivity.

While depression may be a common theme in women’s literature, and indeed, in women’s lives, Québécoise writer Louise Dupré’s novel takes us on an odyssey, along with her two principal female characters, to the origins of widespread personal and cultural malaise. The two women’s journeys to the past are juxtaposed explicitly. Emma, the narrator, through reflection and writing, connects her own story to those of the women

¹¹⁰See Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998.

in her family history, discovering a pattern of self-renunciation, guilt and silent suffering. Her recently-widowed neighbor, Madame Girard, seeks to travel back in time to the place of ancient history, specifically to Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia--the cradle of Western civilization. Emma draws inspiration for her own quest from Madame Girard, who writes Emma in one of her letters that upon returning from this voyage to the past, she will finally be able to face her husband's death. In what seems a paradoxical formulation, Emma muses that the future, as in Madame Girard's projected vision of herself as healed, may in fact be connected in a vital way to memory, or "la memoria."

In *La memoria*, Emma offers a glimpse of the fragile barrier that separates each subject from non-being. The reader accompanies Emma Villeray on her search for the deep sources of her melancholy, witnessing her descent to the subterranean realm of the buried unconscious and (eventually) the reconstruction of her fractured self that follows. This narrative at times takes the form of an extended love-letter addressed to the lover who has recently abandoned her, and at others the writing more closely resembles thoughts confided to an intimate journal. Throughout, it transcribes the healing process of a profound emotional and ontological wound. The past, present and future intertwine as integral pieces of Emma's memory. Her reconstruction of these memories at the same time serves to repair Emma's fragmented psychic state. The process of committing to paper these reflections on her past functions as a "writing cure": the symbolization of the painful emotions linked to the memories effects a catharsis in Emma, allowing her to remember the trauma without being engulfed by boundless affect. Linked to this idea, fiction-writing itself figures within the novel in a *mise-en-abîme* which underlines the

catalyzing role of creative writing in the construction (and reconstruction) of subjectivity.

Throughout my study I will posit the existence of a “meta-text” inscribed within the margins of the novel--vestiges of an early wound that predates the disappearance of the narrator’s sister Noëlle and her traumatic abandonment by her lover *Jérôme*. This last trauma I consider to be the event that compels Emma to write. A degree of excavation is necessary through layers of text that recount Emma’s sedimented memories. The result is to uncover vestiges in Emma’s narrative of an archaic drama’s *mise-en-scène*--the incomplete process of mourning the maternal object. Not only does this childhood wound affect Emma’s professional life as a writer, it also inhibits her from forming emotional ties with others. The reader comes to understand this mourning of the female subject in broader terms: the personal odyssey that Emma undertakes to cure herself of melancholy takes on mythical proportions. When a series of traumatic events bring her closer to two matronly neighbors, Rosa and Madame Girard, Emma becomes aware of her place within a feminine genealogy that teaches her to face and finally come to term with her own grief.

From its inception, *La memoria* calls into question the boundary between being and non-being when Emma describes the moments between sleep and wakefulness.

Les journées ne commencent jamais de la même manière, tout dépend de quelle façon on ouvre les yeux. Souvent, les paupières sont si lourdes qu’elles arrivent à peine à se décoller. Et on reste engluée dans la nuit, la nuit nébuleuse, la nuit noire, sans odeur de terre ni d’encens, immobile, jusqu’à ce que malgré soi un doigt bouge, puis la main. On prononce le mot *vivante* pour s’installer au milieu des choses. Dire, oui, cette femme qui tourne les yeux vers la fenêtre, c’est bien moi. Dans quelques instants, j’accepterai de me redresser, je poserai les pieds sur le bois verni. De nouveau, je serai debout. Comme s’il s’agissait d’une évidence (15).

Beginning with these first lines, the author problematizes the relation between the body (in its unconscious state) and the mind (in an awakened state). To say “on ouvre les yeux” implies a voluntary act, while to say that one’s eyelids “arrivent à peine à se décoller” emphasizes the body’s recalcitrance: it sometimes seems to have a will of its own.

Furthermore, one might also understand being’s inherent quality of “otherness” as that of the unconscious itself. Emma describes the unconscious at that moment in time when one slowly emerges from the “nuit ténébreuse” in which one remains mired (“on reste engluée”) until by sheer strength of will one opens one’s eyes, almost in spite of oneself. This tenebrous night that describes the unconscious in this passage, albeit smelling neither of earth nor of incense (“sans odeur de terre ni d’encens”), lends itself readily to a comparison with death. The fact that both concepts--death and the unconscious--are evoked in this passage invites a rapprochement. The strangeness of the concept of death is equal to that of the unconscious and its influence over the body--a notion we understand in the phrase: “*malgré soi un doigt bouge, puis la main*” (my emphasis). In the lines that follow, the role of the will comes into play, and its power to move the subject to a conscious act. It is only upon uttering the word “vivante” that Emma leaves this space of nothingness. Thanks to symbolization, therefore--the power of words--she is able to chase away the shadow of death.

According to Freud, the melancholic suffers from a lack of faith. The capacity of the subject to project him/herself into the future--to think and speak in the future tense--presupposes that one’s past has not been overly traumatic; it also assumes a good dose of blind faith. That is to say, one’s behavior and actions in the present depend largely on

what one has already experienced in the past. In order to function, one must believe in the future *a priori*, despite all the unknown variables. It is in this light that I would read Emma's declaration: "*De nouveau, je serai debout. Comme s'il s'agissait d'une évidence.*" Thus in this very first paragraph, I maintain, the enigma of subjectivity--creating itself on the borders of non-being--comes into play. The melancholic, indecisive and perplexed, contemplates this nothingness too closely at times, nearly losing herself within it.

These reflections on the unconscious transport Emma back to her childhood, to a memory of her mother attempting to rouse her sleeping daughter on a school morning. Suddenly, the faraway past inhabits the present when she writes: "Pendant quelques minutes, on a huit ans." Given that this is the first reference to her mother, this anecdote merits a closer look. Emma remembers her mother's voice at precisely that moment mentioned when the question is whether or not to agree to be in the world of the conscious--that is to say, to awake and rise from bed. She remembers having heard the weary-sounding wake-up call of her mother: "Toujours la même phrase, la même intonation. Le même entrain, un peu mécanique" (16). Although the relevance of this detail may not be immediately apparent, its importance becomes clearer by recognizing it as the manner in which the author has chosen to introduce the figure of the mother into her text. Likewise Emma--herself a writer --will later wonder as she is writing her own work of fiction: "Comment faire entrer maman dans mon scénario?"(69). Understood again as a *mise-en-abîme*, this question highlights an author's preoccupation with such

details and thus sheds light on their importance to our understanding of the unfolding drama.

Also worthy of closer analysis is the way in which Emma, as an adult, remembers and recounts this particular memory and how, as a child, she had interpreted and reacted to the monotonous and impersonal tone of her mother's voice when calling to Emma. To qualify her mother's voice as "mechanical-sounding" in this context serves as a first indication that Emma must have felt ignored or abandoned during her childhood. As further evidence that her mother's lack of affection created a sort of ontological or narcissistic wound in Emma, she admits to taking refuge in her imagination on those school mornings --a psychic splitting-off to escape the pain: "*J'inventais une histoire en enfilant mon uniforme bleu et blanc. T'ai-je déjà dit?*"(14, my emphasis).

She has recourse to the same coping mechanism when as an adult her mother comes to visit. The feeling of rejection she feels in her mother's presence, even as an adult, is so hurtful that she slips back into her old self-comforting habit of inventing herself a story:

j'ai entouré ma tasse de mes mains, elles étaient moites
et glacées, peut-être à cause de la boule dure qui remontait
dans ma gorge, j'ai fait semblant d'écouter, *maman parlait*
tandis que je me racontais une vieille histoire...(165, my emphasis)

Given that the creation of fiction allows for absolute control over characters and circumstances, compensating somewhat for the disappointments suffered in the real world, Emma often sublimates her sadness and disappointment in her fictional writing.

She invents characters and events to mediate or modify her life circumstances according to her psychic needs.

On the therapeutic effects of fiction-writing, Julia Kristeva observes: “La création littéraire est cette aventure du corps et des signes qui porte témoignage de l’affect [et qui] possède une efficacité réelle et imaginaire, relevant plus de la catharsis que de l’élaboration, elle est un moyen thérapeutique utilisé dans toutes les sociétés au long des âges.”¹¹¹ She continues:

le déni de la perte porte sur des signifiants susceptibles d’inscrire des traces sémiotiques et de les transpercer pour faire sens dans le sujet pour un autre sujet (56).

Emma’s story interweaves fragments remembered from her past with more recent events in her life, as well as her hopes and plans for the future. Throughout, the fragility of subjectivity comes to the fore. It seems there is always some absence that threatens to tear the fabric of her medium or to interfere with her relationship to the symbolic.

In the present, Emma suffers from the loss of her long-time lover, Jérôme. She often feels imprisoned by her melancholy--the sorrow that results from feeling abandoned--and her constant evocation of past events and rumination over them prevents her from being able to organize her thoughts. As a consequence she is unable to translate them effectively into symbolic language, an ability which her work as a professional translator requires of her:

Je n’arrive pas à terminer mon livre. Depuis ton départ, j’accumule des montagnes de notes, certaines images me

¹¹¹Kristeva, Julia, *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie*, 32.

viennent, mais elles ne trouvent pas leur place dans la phrase, elles se ramassent sur elles-mêmes, elles hoquent (16).

It is only with time that Emma consciously acknowledges the emotional trauma at the origins of her difficulty. In this particular passage, she is only aware that something is obstructing her work. In a heavy gesture of denial, she abruptly changes the subject in order to distance herself from the painful emotional content that threatens to reemerge when thinking of Jérôme:

Mais j'ai un prétexte. J'emmenage. *Faut-il abattre les cloisons entre la cuisine et la salle à manger?* (16, my emphasis).

This melancholic discourse is so convincing in its game of denial that the reader is nearly duped.¹¹² Emma drags a red herring across the page by switching to the banal theme of redecorating her kitchen, nearly leading one off the scent of the hidden emotional injury that is troubling her. More than once Emma has recourse to such theatrical turnabouts, changing course quickly to avoid confrontation with painful thoughts or memories. Yet she has also indicated a nascent *prise-de-conscience* by musing that it may be necessary to tear down some interior (as in “internal” or “unconscious”) protective walls.

Emma's psychic collapse, brought on when she is engulfed by the debilitating emotions occasioned by Jérôme's departure, indicates the deeper roots of this wound. She attempts to piece together the circumstances leading up to their separation to make sense of them, unaware as yet of the earlier injuries that also need healing:

Les émotions, les sentiments, les images, tout cela va et vient comme une marée houleuse, et je risque d'être emportée. Alors

¹¹²One is reminded here of Eliette's similar tactic for avoiding emotional pain in *L'Espérance macadam*.

parfois j'oublie. C'est seulement peu à peu que j'ai réussi à rétablir le fil des événements (22).

In order to carry the emotional weight of the separation with Jérôme, she admits to having to repress and “forget” the event at times. The escape that the melancholic stupor accords- -the denial of a loss that evokes emotions too powerful to handle--is, according to Kristeva, a defense mechanism against insanity and suicide, or against the complete fragmentation of the subject:

la tristesse qui nous submerge, le ralentissement qui nous paralyse sont aussi un rempart--parfois le dernier--contre la folie (53).

Creative writing serves to transcribe this debilitating emotional content that otherwise shackles the melancholic subject. Writing allows Emma a means to overcome or control her sadness to an extent: “une mélancolie écrite n’a sûrement plus grand-chose à voir avec le stupeur asilaire qui porte le même nom”(18). Although this is but a temporary solution- -because a full catharsis requires re-experiencing the affect--it helps Emma to continue to function.

Emma sometimes addresses an interlocutor in her writing using the familiar form, “tu,” which sometimes she directs at Jérôme, her lost love object. At other times she does not specify who this “tu” is that she is addressing. If we are to believe Jacques Lacan, all discourse is predicated on the absence of an object--from which stems the desire to recapture it in the realm of sign and symbol. Perhaps in this “tu” one might find a constellation or composite of all of Emma’s lost love objects: in the first instance her mother, then her sister Noëlle, and finally her lover Jérôme. I am postulating that the trauma she experiences upon losing Jérôme re-opens an older wound; she has still not

grieved the loss of her sister, Noëlle. Behind this last wound is an even more archaic one, a layering effect expressed in the following passage by Kristeva:

la puissance des événements qui suscitent ma dépression est souvent disproportionnée par rapport au désastre qui, brusquement, me submerge. Plus encore, le désenchantement, fût-il cruel, que je subis ici et maintenant semble entrer en résonance, à l'examen, avec des traumatismes anciens dont je m'aperçois je n'ai jamais su faire le deuil (14).

Emma finally recognizes that she has never finished mourning her lost sister Noëlle, who disappeared at the age of seventeen. She also acknowledges, in a somewhat elliptical fashion, the possibility that this open wound may eventually help her to accept her most recent traumatic loss--Jérôme's departure: "Peut-être fallait-il des blessures inguérissables pour arriver à traverser les autres blessures"(40). Taken in the obverse sense, this phrase lends itself to an understanding of the psychoanalytic healing process. That is, it is via a process of transference in a present circumstance--which reconstitutes an earlier traumatic scene (imaginary or otherwise)--that one manages to overcome its negative effects. I consider the following passage in light of this idea.

When Jérôme's work colleague arrives unexpectedly at her door asking Emma if she has any idea what has become of her "husband," Emma recalls a similar scene with the police following the mysterious disappearance of her sister. The pain that this repetition awakens in her is both deep and familiar. She had been asked to force herself to remember any detail that might assist the police in their inquiry. Therefore Emma had to "*entrer dans la fiction*" of Noëlle so as to imagine what might have happened to her, how her sister may have acted that last night that she was seen. This effort once again

effects a *mise-en-abîme*--a fiction within a fiction--of the relationship between writer and character:

Mais bien vite j'ai repris mon rôle à moi, Emma Villeray. Ma vieille histoire s'accroche à mes épaules, je n'ai pas appris à oublier. Oublier. *Je me suis vue*, au milieu d'une scène, en train de saluer, avec Noëlle et cet étranger. Et une femme, dont la silhouette m'apparaissait pour la première fois. La femme de São Paulo (45, my emphasis).

At least two scenes from the past overlap in this passage: Emma envisions herself abandoned, waving good-bye to those she has loved. It is again the night her sister Noëlle disappeared from the dance hall, after dancing with a stranger. The woman from São Paulo also appears in Emma's imagination to fill a gap in the story of Jérôme's unexplained disappearance: he must have left her for another woman.

According to Kristeva, a predominant characteristic of melancholics is a tendency to emotionability and affective demonstrativeness: "L'affect, c'est sa chose" (24). She qualifies this to add that depressive affect serves as a "panoplie perverse," and/or a "source de plaisir ambiguë qui comble le vide"--which might account for the odd sensation of calmness that Emma experiences when remembering. The pain she experiences seems so familiar as to accord her some strange comfort:

Je me suis assise. Autour de moi se désintérait, c'était un autre drame et pourtant une étrange tranquillité baignait les choses. J'étais émue, je ne sais pas pourquoi (45).

For Kristeva, this debilitating sadness stems from an archaic, narcissistic wound in the subject who refuses to lose his/her mother (to renounce a relationship remembered as symbiotic) so as to find her again in language--the domain of signs--through representation. The melancholic subject has failed to grieve this primary relationship, in

other words, and instead remains riveted to his/her sadness and suffering over the loss because it is the only way in which to remain connected to the object:

Cette tristesse est le filtre ultime de l'agressivité, la retenue narcissique de la haine qui ne s'avoue pas, non par simple pudeur morale ou surmoïque, mais parce que *dans la tristesse le moi est encore confondu avec l'autre*, il le porte en soi, il introjecte sa propre projection omnipotente et en jouit. Le chagrin serait ainsi le négatif de l'omnipotence, l'indice premier et primaire que l'autre m'échappe, mais que le moi, cependant, ne s'accepte pas abandonné (75, my emphasis).

Kristeva's analysis sheds light on the central problem at issue in Emma's struggle with melancholy. The overlapping scenes--the worried questioning from Jérôme's colleague and the earlier police interrogation--and the familiarity with the sensation of loss that she seems to relish, invite us to focus on the mother/daughter relationship in this story by signaling earlier traumas, the earliest of which is the perceived emotional abandonment by her mother.

Diana Fuss has qualified the entire process of identification, not only with the mother but with any Other, as intrinsically traumatic:

Trauma, defined as the *withdrawal* of the Other, marks the limit case of a loss that cannot be assimilated. To the extent that identification is always also about what cannot be taken inside, what resists incorporation, identification is only possible traumatically. Trauma is another name for identification, the name we might give to the irrecoverable loss of a sense of human relatedness.¹¹³

However, she seems to agree with Freud in viewing the original trauma as one occasioned by the loss of the maternal object:

¹¹³Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*, New York; London: Routledge, 1995, 39-40.

identification attempts to conjure up an original object by restaging in fantasy the child's infantile relation to the mother, a relation of need and demand based on oral gratification. Like the return of the living dead, the repressed maternal resurfaces to remind us that, when we mourn, it is the impossible return of the lost maternal object that we lament.¹¹⁴

The scenes of the past that Emma obsessively recalls do seem akin to a virtual burial ground of lost love objects for which she is in a process of continuous mourning. Yet I do not think the separation from the mother that individuation requires must necessarily produce melancholic subjects. As I have argued elsewhere, I think there are cultural factors that influence the mother/infant relationship and its role in constructing subjectivity that determine to what degree this experience is "traumatic." A primary factor is the socio-cultural devaluation of the maternal which necessitates repudiation of all that is culturally associated with the maternal by the male subject and a complex and conflicted relationship to the maternal on the part of the female subject, who is expected to identify with the devalued maternal object. Likewise, one must not ignore the mother's own attitudes and behavior with respect to her male and female children--attitudes which are also influenced by internalized cultural values, including a devaluation of women. In Emma's family, her mother's preference for her younger brother François is evident.

When Emma recalls the family photo albums that she used to pore over in search of her mother's image, the memory leads to an awareness of the presence in the photos of her sister and two brothers, with whom she had to share her mother's love:

Ici, un portrait de mariage. Là, maman et moi. Puis papa nous tient toutes les deux, les filles. Et plus tard, Philippe, et François

¹¹⁴Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 38.

qui s'ajoute au tableau, et maman, la tranquillité de sa chair accomplie, heureuse sans doute de ce bonheur simple qui suit le renoncement. Moi, je ne veux pas renoncer (34).

At first, as the only child, Emma enjoys her mother's exclusive love. Then, one by one, the other children arrive to interrupt this bond. Throughout Emma's narrative, she drops hints that this shared love left her unsatisfied. Consequently, one understands her vision of the future in which she once again finds herself alone with her love object, real or imagined:

A onze ans, je rêvais d'une vie d'extase, le soir, au mois de mai, quand je revenais de l'église, la tête encore remuée de cantiques et d'encens. Seule. Sans Noëlle, sans Philippe ni François, le petit François arrivé par surprise, chuchotait maman au téléphone (17).

Despite claiming to prefer being alone--a declaration to which she adds "Moi, je n'aurai pas d'enfants"(17)--she writes: "Au moment de ma mort, je demanderais qu'on inscrive sur mes paupières le mot amour"(18). In other words, one senses an unfulfilled desire for love behind the self-defensive positioning. Perhaps Emma remains tethered to her childhood as a result.

By the same token, as an adult Emma also obsessively recalls memories of her life with Jérôme. In terms of an unsatisfied desire that marks identity, it is noteworthy how her memories overlap and "spill" into the future: the reminiscing over the emotional attachment she had desired with her mother is eclipsed by memories of her large family. These transform themselves into a memory of the exclusive attention she had later received from Jérôme. Significantly, Emma "remembers" the latter in the future tense:

Un jour, j'entrerai dans la maison avec mes jambes et ma peau qui te tournait la tête, tu seras assis sur le canapé, tu m'attendras.

Tu m'embrasseras, le visage, le cou, les seins, en m'enfonçant un peu les ongles dans le dos. Je saurai alors que tu es revenu. (34)

The juxtaposition of the two passages--the memories of her family and the memories of her life with Jérôme--serves as a clue to the origins of her melancholy. The memory of her mother and the love that she sought in the photo albums is followed directly by the memory of her lover who fulfilled this desire for love, indicating the tenacity or long-term effects of childhood's unfulfilled desires.

To continue excavating the sedimented layers of Emma's unconscious, I turn to a scene in which Emma engages in dialogue with her close friend Bénédicte. When Emma confesses to her confidante her powerlessness to overcome her sadness, her friend recognizes in Emma's admission the beginning of the healing process. It is by letting affect infuse one's speech that one effects a catharsis of the pent-up emotion. In other words, the repressed emotion is channeled to the outside, given release, through language. Of particular interest to my study is the passage that follows, in which Emma describes a revealing moment of introspection while having this conversation with Bénédicte:

J'étais seule tout à coup dans ce faux pub anglais. Je fixais sur la carte les cent noms de bières exotiques, *mais mon regard était tourné vers ce point où se trouve l'origine des blessures, les grandes et les petites, et celles qui s'ajouteraient encore, inlassablement* (38, my emphasis).

These lines indicate an emerging *prise-de-conscience* concerning Emma's earliest childhood wounds and at the same time bring this study closer to identifying the nature of melancholy. It is also a scene that closely resembles a passage in Sartre's *La nausée*,

which was originally titled *La mélancolie*.¹¹⁵ Sitting in Café Mably, the lonely protagonist Roquentin's fascinated and terrified gaze is also drawn to and repelled by a glass of foreign beer, one of the first signs that some troubling unconscious content behind it is bubbling to the surface:¹¹⁶

Maintenant, il y a partout des choses comme ce verre de bière, là, sur la table. Quand je le vois, j'ai envie de dire: pouce, je ne joue plus. Je comprends très bien que je suis allé trop loin. Je suppose qu'on ne peut pas "faire sa part" à la solitude. Cela ne veut pas dire que je regarde sous mon lit avant de me coucher, ni que j'appréhende de voir la porte de ma chambre s'ouvrir brusquement au milieu de la nuit. Seulement, tout de même, je suis inquiet: voilà une demie-heure que j'évite de *regarder* ce verre de bière. Je regarde au-dessus, au-dessous, à droite, à gauche: mais *lui* je ne veux pas le voir.¹¹⁷

Like Emma, Roquentin is as yet unaware of what is troubling him, and therefore unable to articulate it and still unwilling to face it:

je sais qu'il y a autre chose. Presque rien. Mais je ne peux plus expliquer ce que je vois. A personne. Voilà: je glisse tout doucement au fond de l'eau, vers la peur.

The circuitous path by which the melancholic arrives at a conscious recognition of the source of her wound is replicated in the stylistic technique of the narrative, effectively imitating a depressed person's discourse. In the following lines, Emma once again

¹¹⁵Sartre's editors insisted he change his title to something more marketable.

¹¹⁶Elsewhere I have noted that what is foreign and exotic is often associated with "the feminine"--banished from or "othered" within the patriarchal status quo. The same would be true of the maternal. Perhaps both protagonists sense that the banished unconscious content is culturally tabooed knowledge. In Roquentin's case it evokes fear of the uncanny--the return of the repressed or the living dead--while for Emma it may simply equate to a vague awareness that her melancholy stems from the repression of the maternal (including its cultural repression).

¹¹⁷Jean-Paul Sartre, *La nausée*, Editions Gallimard, 1938, 23.

represses an overwhelmingly painful truth by having recourse to a dramatic change of topic mid-speech:

Le garçon était reparti. J'allais répondre à Bénédicte qu'on a beau acheter une maison, en repeindre toutes les pièces, on piétine, sur le même carré de terre, sans avancer. Un jour, oui, il faut bien l'admettre. Mais, surprise!, Vincent s'avavançait vers nous, rayonnant, quel beau hasard! (39)

It is especially this gesture to repress that serves as a key to the jealously guarded contents of the unconscious. The resistance to reveal these contents at the level of the text--the apostrophe "il faut l'admettre" that delays the revelation--indicates an unwillingness to acknowledge and mourn a loss.

If one considers Emma's metaphor of the house a sort of "storehouse" of memories that determines one's psychic make-up, this optic allows a similar interpretation of the other metaphors within the description above. The subject, despite making exterior or superficial changes to her identity, finds that her problems are rooted in the foundation of her subjectivity. As a result she spins in circles, stuck in one place, unable to move forward. The construction of subjectivity is hampered, therefore, by her inability to leave the past behind. While Emma tries to be fully engaged in the present, in her intimate relationships with others, the slowly bleeding wounds sap her strength: "Pour moi, le coeur lutte contre une blessure sournoise qui le déchire peu à peu"(67).

Also of note is the repetition of certain phrases and metaphors alluding to a maternal figure in the text. One in particular that appears numerous times and in different contexts evokes the quintessential image of mother and child in their first instances together: that of being cradled, "le bercement." During moments of intense and

debilitating suffering, one needs to be embraced in the arms of another person. This small universe demarcated by the circumference of another's arms encloses one within a primordial security, keeping one safe from fragmentation within the infinite void. When Mme Girard's husband dies, Emma goes to offer her condolences to her neighbor. The other woman's mourning awakens in Emma her own repressed grief:

J'ai presque crié. Est-ce qu'on comprend jamais l'adandon? J'avais ma voix mal accordée [...]. La colère me rattrapait précisément ici, chez cette femme défaite, pourquoi? Je pleurais maintenant, des sanglots violents, je pleurais, tout ce qui ne se nommait pas refluit par les yeux. *Alors Madame Girard s'est approchée et m'a prise dans ses bras. Je suis redevenue une petite fille, je me suis laissé bercer.** Elle a chuchoté, *il faut accepter même si on ne comprend pas.* J'étais blottie contre sa poitrine et elle me vouvoyait. J'ai pensé à maman, à ses bras que, depuis le drame, elle ne savait plus ouvrir que pour ses petits-enfants (70, * my emphasis).

This passage is revealing: if one posits Madame Girard as an ideal, imaginary mother--an idea that will be reinforced throughout the text and to which I will return--this moment of sudden anger that Emma traverses while in Madame Girard's presence represents a stage in her healing occasioned by the process of transference. In psychoanalytic terms, we might understand it as a manifestation of "agressivité contre l'objet perdu" stemming from the frustration at feeling oneself abandoned and wounded by the object of one's grief (an object "imaginé hostile parce que frustrant").¹¹⁸

A similar phenomenon takes place when Emma becomes progressively indignant at the thought that her ex-lover, Jerome, had also abandoned his son. Her indignation turns to rage, producing an enormously cathartic effect that allows Emma to release some

¹¹⁸Kristeva, *Soleil noir*, 20.

of the buried anger through its symbolization via the phantasmagoria of a devastating storm:

Une immense colère m'a submergée. Cela s'est produit brutalement, comme une mer qui déferlerait sur la plage, la ville, le pays, la terre entière, qui [...] saccagerait, dévasterait, détruirait, noierait, *tuerait, tuerait, tuerait, tout en une tuerie sauvage*. Cela s'est produit, un trou noir, dans mon crane, mon coeur, dans mes os, un trou inimaginable où ton cadavre est apparu sur les vagues, bleu et boursoufflé (144, my emphasis).

Rage is the other side of sadness, and upon releasing the pent-up emotion one manages to rid oneself of it--representing a stage in the healing process. Furthermore, by transcribing her murderous rage in writing Emma stops the actual crime from taking place.

I have alluded to the role of Madame Girard as imaginary mother for Emma. Not only Madame Girard but Emma's neighbor Rosa will play the role of surrogate mother to her in several scenes. Once again, Emma employs the image of a mother cradling her infant in the following scene:

Bientôt la voisine appuiera son énorme poitrine sur les barreaux du balcon, puis j'entendrai sa voix chaude, veloutée. *Et je me laisserai bercer*. [...] tous les soirs, la même plainte en espagnol. La tristesse traverse toutes les langues (30, my emphasis).

The reference to the enormous bosom ("l'énorme poitrine") as well as to the warm, velvety voice ("voix chaude, veloutée") of the matron also lends itself to the translation of a meta-text consisting of the unfinished mourning of the maternal object. Both references evoke the intimate relationship between mother and infant. Filtered as they are through the optic of the infant's perception, these characteristics of the woman/mother assume significant proportions--at once comforting and all-enveloping--given the impression of maternal omnipotence that they evoke. For a small child, the sense of security that these

impressions create--generated by the protective figure of the mother--are instrumental to his/her perception of the environment as safe. As an adult, Emma's bouts of melancholy return her to a infantile state.

The numerous examples of these maternal figures and the related terminology attest to their primacy in understanding Emma's melancholy. In another scene in which Emma hears her neighbor singing: one can associate this feminine voice with that of Emma's mother by a metonymic relationship. One again senses Emma's feeling of abandonment by her mother--who prefers her youngest son:

Puis la voisine a commencé à chanter. Sa voix est montée avant même le coucher du soleil, *on aurait dit qu'elle chantait pour François, uniquement pour lui.* [...] *elle l'enveloppait, elle le berçait* (128, my emphasis).

The metonymy functions to evoke the figure of the mother who cradles her infant in her arms. The fact that it is Emma's younger brother whom Emma imagines is occupying the woman's attention, despite Emma's presence, is worthy of note. It is not the only allusion to her mother's preference for François.

These images reappear, again involving this neighbor, in the scene in which Emma learns the news of her sister's death. She undergoes a debilitating emotional crisis that leaves her in a quasi-paralytic state of shock. The grief that she had never allowed herself to feel at her sister's loss suddenly overwhelms her. In this vulnerable state, Emma seems transported to early infancy. This time she seems to enjoy this maternal figure's full attention and care, a fact which she emphatically reiterates:

J'ai crié, si fort que *tous les liens se sont déchirés*, si fort que mon cri a retenti dans l'éternité [...].

On psalmodiait. J'ai ouvert les yeux. *Deux seins énormes étaient penchés au-dessus de moi*, on récitait une prière, on m'épongeait le front, on pleurait. *Une femme endeuillée m'a soulevée dans ses bras puissants, elle m'a transportée dans ma chambre*. Puis elle s'est assise dans la chaise de rotin, à côté du lit, pour me veiller, *noire et immense, elle s'est mise à chanter, de sa voix veloutée, pour moi seule, rien que pour moi*. J'ai reconnu ma voisine. Le lit était chaud, moëlleux, si douillet que *je pourrais dormir là pendant toute ma mort* (184, my emphasis).

This fantasy of a reunion with the mother of infancy and the allusion to death brings us back to the Freudian theory that Kristeva draws on to elaborate her idea of a “pulsion de mort.” According to Freud, the death drive arises from a primary masochism (“masochisme primaire”) --a negative turn toward, or a return to, a prior state (“retour à un état antérieur”). The death drive appears as “une inaptitude biologique et logique à transmettre les énergies et les inscriptions psychiques” and, as a consequence, “[elle] détruirait circulations et liens.”¹¹⁹

Emma, all of the ties that attached her to others having been severed, refers again to her state as to a sort of death: “ce n'était ni le jour ni la nuit, c'était l'origine d'un temps détaché et pourtant vivant, vivant comme la mort.” These references to a *living death* resonate with Kristeva's discussion of the fiction of Marguérite Duras:

Fréquente, permanente même, l'identification est toutefois absolue et inéluctable avec l'objet du deuil. Par la même, le deuil devient impossible et métamorphose l'héroïne en crypte habitée par un cadavre vivant.¹²⁰

In both instances the novels' heroines confuse life and death, and both involve a troubled relationship with the mother as central to the drama.

¹¹⁹Kristeva, *Soleil noir*, 26-27.

¹²⁰Kristeva, *Soleil noir*, 241

The confusion--or implosion--of love and death takes place in the scene in which Emma and her new lover, Vincent, engage in the sexual act for the first time. She borrows from a biblical lexicon to express the phenomenon of the dissolution of ego boundaries in the lover's embrace:

Le lit me reçoit. Ce n'est pas le même lit qu'avec toi. C'est le même lit. Celui de longs clous qu'on enfonce dans la chair, la lente agonie, puis une vie, violente, dévastatrice, qui fait s'envoler très loin les tombeaux (43).

She again has recourse to the allegory of Christ's crucifixion and further develops it in the following:

J'attends la mort, les yeux brouillés de larmes. Viens, fonce-toi en moi (53).

Upon surrendering his life, Christ expects to be reunited with God the Father in death. In this description of the experience of ecstasy, also called "the Passion," I would recognize a desire to be reunited with the Thing (Freud's "*das Ding*" or Kristeva's "*la Chose*")--understood not only as death but also as *Res divina*, or God. This explanation would account for the choice of metaphors. It is certainly not a novel idea to see in the amorous embrace a gesture that seeks a beyond-the-self. According to this notion, one is looking to transcend an alienated and banal existence via the love object who, in this manner, becomes a proxy god. As Ernest Becker writes in *The Denial of Death*:

After all, what is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to the position of God? We want redemption--nothing less. We want to be rid of our faults, of our feelings of nothingness. We want to be justified, to know that our creation has not been in vain.¹²¹

¹²¹Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 167.

Likewise, since Antiquity, Eros and Thanatos have comprised two sides of the same coin. Developing the Christ analogy, Emma later remarks: “Je suis entrée dans le temps de la résurrection”(203), which completes the image of the sexual act between lovers as one of a crucifixion and resurrection.

In her essay “Le mystère oublié des généalogies féminines,” Luce Irigaray traces the problems within intimate relationships as well as among the sexes to a “destruction de la généalogie féminine,” including that of divinity.¹²² She considers modern woman to be cut off not only from a close relationship with her mother but also from the goddesses of Greek mythology, such as Aphrodite. All were eclipsed by the male gods and finally, by the Christian god. My reading of Madame Girard’s odyssey in Greece places her on a quest to rediscover this genealogy --at least in as much as the narrator interprets her journey, which is what concerns this study. Emma identifies with Madame Girard’s quest, with her “odyssey, jusqu’à Babylone, jusqu’à l’origine des langues”(202):

nous cherchons toutes les deux la même chose, ce moment où,
étrangement, les premières lueurs de l’aube arrivent à voiler le noir
des livres.(206)

This double allusion to language and origins- -first to Babylon and then to the dawn that veils the darkness of the written word--suggests a desire to return to the place of the (Kristevan) pre-symbolic, to the mother-infant dyad preceding the subject’s entry into symbolic language.

When Emma receives a letter from Madame Girard, she hides it instinctively, “comme s’il s’agissait d’une lettre d’amour” (130). Her reason for not speaking to the

¹²²In *Le Temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique*. Librairie Générale Française, 1989.

men in her life about it, to Vincent and her brother, is that the letter “était trop près [d’elle].” Therefore she leaves the house to “meet” Madame Girard somewhere where they will not be able to follow, somewhere, in other words, where she will be able to read her letter in peace. Upon her return, the two men were chatting among themselves, comparing stories of their travels to foreign countries. In a separate passage, the narrator had alluded to the idea that traveling--searching for the unknown, the unexperienced--masks a desire to fill the void left by the absence of the mother (180). I would read the following reflections in view of this notion:

Ils m’ont trouvée songeuse, où étais-je donc passée? Toute la journée, *j’avais suivi un fil qui m’avait menée très loin*. Vers une porte qui s’ouvrait sur les deux côtés du temps. Mais je n’aurais pas su comment le dire (132, my emphasis).

In her letter to Emma, Madame Girard had alluded to the “fil d’Ariane” of Greek mythology--a thread that she followed in her imagination through the labyrinth of ruins. In a similar manner, Emma also follows a thread of memories to traverse her past and rediscover her feminine genealogy. Luce Irigaray employs the same metaphors to describe the mythic reunion of the daughter with her mother:

Mère et fille se retrouvent avec bonheur. Demeter demande à Persephone de lui raconter tout ce qui lui est arrivé. Elle lui en fait le récit en commençant par la fin. Elle remonte le temps en quelque sorte, comme doit le faire aujourd’hui toute femme qui tente de retrouver les traces de l’éloignement de sa mère. C’est à cela que devrait lui servir le parcours psychanalytique, à retrouver le fil de son entrée et, si possible, de sa sortie des enfers.¹²³

¹²³Irigaray, *Le Temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique*. Librairie Générale Française, 1989; 118.

Emma's voyage through memory sometimes teeters on the edge of an abyss. Without the life-line that Madame Girard extends to her, Emma may have remained lost in her depression. In some ways, Madame Girard which serves as a model mother for Emma, a model of courage and a challenge against death--qualities lacking in her own mother. Emma therefore identifies with Madame Girard and with her pilgrimage, in order to be able to envision the future. She finally finds her redemption in writing fiction, where she is reunited with what was lost in her "scénario."

Maintenant, je n'appelle plus mes personnages Madame Girard, Monsieur Girard, il n'y a pas que ma voix qui s'efface, toute la réalité. La fiction agrandit son territoire, peu à peu elle m'envahit et je la laisse m'envahir, je ne la combat pas, j'espère quelque chose comme une rédemption.

J'ai imaginé une nouvelle scène. La femme effondrée sur le cercueil de son mari. La femme en pleurs. Et elle se redresse lentement, d'abord la tête, et la poitrine, tout le tronc, puis elle pose les mains sur le corps de son mari, elle prend appui sur le corps froid et elle se lève. Elle se relève. Voilà tout ce que je peux écrire aujourd'hui. Une femme effondrée, mais qui se relève. Une femme qui me précède. Une femme plus courageuse que moi. (168)

Emma identifies with the woman she creates in her fiction, as with Madame Girard, in order to have a model to follow and to project herself into the future. In this way, by building her fiction upon the memories of her past, one understands her following reflection: "Peut-être l'avenir fait-il aussi partie de la mémoire. *De la memoria*" (82). She creates reality according to her vision: "j'invente des scènes que j'aime" et "je vois loin devant moi, je donne des coups de fouet dans la réalité" (79). Emma creates her fiction in a gesture of affirmation that both gives form to and responds to the fear and anxiety haunting her unconscious: "L'histoire se terminerait bien, personne ne meurt d'un

mince filet de sang. Elle nous enseignerait le courage, maman” (78).

The reference to the menstrual cycle and to the girl’s education by her mother elicits the question of a woman’s heritage that male-dominated History has often eclipsed:

L’expression mythique de l’Histoire est plus apparentée aux traditions féminines et matrilinéaires. Dans les mythes concernant les relations mères-filles et les mythes relatifs à la déesse amante et dieux couples, le récit, la mise en scène ou l’interprétation sont plus ou moins masqués, travesti, par la culture patriarcale qui se met en place. Cette culture a effacé --peut-être par ignorance ou inconscience --les traces d’une culture antérieure ou simultanée à elle (Irigaray 113).

The menstrual cycle is one of the marks of difference between the sexes--a difference that presumably constitutes the basis of the ideology that has broken down the bonds between mother and daughter as well as those between the sexes.

Far from proposing as a principle the Freudian idea that it is only through maternity that a woman arrives at full maturity, I nevertheless consider Emma’s resistance to envisioning herself in this role in light of an unfinished mourning process. Emma changes her opinion concerning motherhood and this development marks an important step in her healing process. Soon after learning of her sister’s death, Emma must decide whether or not to accept to raise Noëlle’s daughter. As she envisions her new role, she realizes that by allowing herself to love the child, she will finally break free of her own troubled childhood:

j’ai mon sourire de la photo, *mais ce n’est pas le sourire d’enfant*. Il y a cette ride incrustée entre l’oeil et la tempe, *une réponse qui est venue au moment où je ne l’attendais plus*, un futur tout neuf, des bougies à allumer sur des gâteaux d’anniversaire.

Et cette image de moi, je ne connaissais pas. *Une image de mère* dont je ne suis encore qu’une ombre vague, transporté sur le papier froid (190, my emphasis).

Emma's conscious awakening is a gradual process. The answer that comes to her "au moment où [elle] ne l'attendai[t] plus" is perhaps a vision of herself in the future that builds itself on the past. Little by little, this vision will take the place of her reminiscing. In Emma's words: "La réalité poussait les souvenirs sur les pas des portes" (197). Diana Fuss has described a similar process:

the subject in mourning simply converts the lost love object into an identification, in effect becoming the object that it can no longer have. This becoming is a form of having: mourning prolongs the hallucinatory belief in the existence of the object by giving it a certain shelf life inside the ego. A successful resolution to the process of mourning is finally brought about when this identification takes hold and the subject is free to displace its libidinal energies onto a new object.¹²⁴

When Emma accepts the role of mother to her orphaned niece, one can infer that her libidinal energies will be transferred to the new love object and thus she will be free from the melancholic loop of subjectivity. In effect, she has become the mother that she cannot have.¹²⁵

Finally, in both Emma and Madame Girard's lives I see gender as playing a critical role in their personal tragedies. Emma recognizes a parallel in the deaths of Madame Girard's husband, who commits suicide, and her own father, who dies of a heart attack: for her, both men died of a "broken heart"--unable to mourn and thus to overcome

¹²⁴Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 17.

¹²⁵The same may also be said of Calixthe Beyala's Tanga in *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*: both Emma and Tanga end up adopting an orphaned (for all intents and purposes) child and this constitutes an important step in their healing process.

the melancholic loss from which each suffered. Emma's mother, however, prefers not to see the underlying reasons for her husband's heart failure:

Il avait le coeur usé, fallait-il chercher ailleurs?

Chaque fois que maman prononce *coeur usé*, j'entends *coeur brisé*. Question de vision. Pour maman, la vie bat dans un muscle rouge qui finit par s'essouffler. Pour moi, le coeur lutte contre une blessure surnoise qui le déchire peu à peu. Et rien ne peut le réparer. *Mon mari est mort du coeur*, avait précisé Madame Girard chez le notaire. Elle ne mentait pas, au fond, dans son mensonge.(63)

Emma also comes to understand that her ex-partner Jerome is equally unable to overcome some archaic loss, and is thus caught in a blind cycle of repetition that drives him from one relationship to another. I understand this inability to grieve as the "pathological" melancholy to which Freud refers in his essay. It represents a cultural illness that leads to blind aggression against the unacknowledged object of loss, or at the very least, leads the sufferer to self-destructive behavior. In either case, it amounts to a roadblock to harmonious interaction among people and to the devastation of the environment. Gender is at issue because of culturally-inherited and enforced standards of behavior for the masculine gender, requiring the suppression of emotions of vulnerability- -perhaps most critically that of grief.

An exception to this standard of behavior, Emma's lover Vincent speaks freely with her of the pain of his break-up with an ex-lover, Elena. As a result, he is able to let go of the trauma of separation and to break successfully with the past:

Elena appartenait à une histoire morte, il fallait la laisser reposer en paix (92).

Paradoxically, Emma and Vincent help each other to “lay the past to rest” by allowing each other to express the emotions that arise along with the memories. The narrator’s use of the future tense throughout the scenes with Vincent emphasizes the healing nature of this exchange. Once they have sorted through the chaos of painful memories through their narration, each of them can build a future upon the ruins of the past.

As Emma uncovers and explores her memories of her mother’s preference for her brother, she also comes to suspect that her mother had suffered the same narcissistic wound inflicted by her own mother, Emma’s grandmother. However, her mother keeps her own difficult childhood buried:

Maman est une petite fille déçue? Ce n’est pas à cause de Noëlle, ça vient de très loin, d’un vieux passé que j’ignorerai sans doute toujours (93).

During a rare visit, rather than admit she misses her daughter, her mother clings to platitudes and the pretext that she has simply come to see Emma’s new kitchen:

Il lui fallait un prétexte. Elle n’aurait pas su dire, J’avais envie de te voir toi. Elle ne connaît pas de mots comme ceux-là. Elle s’est exclamée, Tu as une belle cuisine. Parfois elle ne sait plus que des phrase banales.(94)

The lack of an emotional connection between them hurts Emma as an adult as it did as a child. She surmises that her sister Noëlle may have also suffered from the estrangement from their mother, and that the traumatic mother/daughter identification may have led to Noëlle’s departure. Emma discovers that her own mother had also left home at seventeen-Noëlle’s age the year she disappeared. Her mother conjectures that Noëlle’s departure

was likely planned, and acknowledges that her own behavior may have influenced Noëlle's decision to run away.

When a look of horror registers on her mother's face upon seeing that Emma has used her grandmother's fine linen tablecloth for the morning tea, Emma recognizes a sort of tragic genealogy of fear passed from mother to daughter:

On ne sait pas comment se font les liens entre les événements, comment un visage porte en lui un autre visage, une peur une autre peur, une mère sa fille. Dans les yeux de maman, j'ai vu la fragilité de Noëlle, son épouvante devant la pluie, le chien des voisins, le désordre de la chambre. Dans les yeux de maman, j'ai vu la disparition de Noëlle.(94)

Emma and Noëlle's mother had internalized not only her fears but the pain of loss. In this pattern of self-abnegation and the resulting estrangement of the daughter, one begins to understand the alienating effects on the mother/daughter relationship of a society that devalues women, and how this dynamic in turn may predispose women to depression.

Unlike her mother, who is unwilling to work through her own past and who inadvertently passed on this inheritance to her daughters, Emma cures herself of the cultural disease of melancholy. The narration of her story offers a vital alternative to a culturally prevalent means of dealing with loss that only leads to more tragedy. Both Emma and Madame Girard, in their courageous journey into and through the emotional vulnerability of grief, draw strength from the bonds of friendship that they build with each other and with others, as well as from the self-knowledge that they gain. They offer ethical models for overcoming loss and breaking cycles of traumatic repetition, creating hope for cultural transformation and an inhabitable future.

CHAPTER SIX

The War on Women and Nature and the Politics of Violence: Writing Traumatic History in *Sitt Marie Rose*

Through her we know the function of the imaginary primordial enclosure formed by the *imago* of the mother's body; through her we have the cartography, drawn by the children's own hands, of the mother's internal empire, the historical atlas of the intestinal divisions in which the *imago* of the father and brothers (real or virtual), in which the voracious aggression of the subject himself, dispute their deleterious dominance over her sacred regions.

--Lacan , *Ecrits*

In this concluding chapter, I return to the premise elaborated in my introduction to consider how masculine subjectivity is constructed by relegating the feminine to a subterranean existence. In particular I look at how the maternal is vilified, due to its association with nature. Moreover, in this work of fiction by Lebanese author Etel Adnan, I examine how violence that targets women can extend, by a shared association with alterity (ie. a threatening "outside" that must be assimilated), to national "others." In *Sitt Marie Rose*, Adnan looks critically at her culture, and illustrates via her story's male characters a relationship between the psychic imperative to dominate nature/the "feminine" and the drive to dominate Syrians and Palestinians. Finally, in her novel this will to dominate results in the heavily symbolic annihilation of one woman, Marie-Rose, who represents all of these (not only nature and the Other but also the mother) to her

executioners. Adnan juxtaposes descriptions of “peacetime” and “wartime” to draw a parallel between them: we understand that the conditions for war are ever-present in the daily violence perpetrated on nature, children, women and *othered* ethnic and political groups.

While less explicit than in the previous novels studied, the roles that mourning and melancholy play within this narrative are crucial to the unfolding of its drama. Rather than focus on female protagonists whose melancholy limits them in fundamental ways, Adnan places her emphasis on the destructiveness of a society which remains in denial of what it has sacrificed. With the drive to dominate what is considered “weak” in full force, the reader witnesses the progressive degradation of human relationships and the environment which lead to all-out war.

The references to imported Western cars as symbols of wealth and power, and to the endless construction in the city of Beirut, attest to some of the economic and environmental consequences of disavowed loss. Implicit in Adnan’s story is a critique of global capitalism: Buicks, Chevrolets, Volkswagens and Mercedes are wielded as weapons against the poor and the weak. Their size and force are “obscene” when considered against the small, supple bodies of the Syrian laborers working for the fierce Lebanese “entrepreneur” (16). When contemplating her impending death at the hands of militant thugs, Marie-Rose will draw a comparison between cars and the militiamen’s machine guns:

Les voitures avaient précédé les armes meurtrières. Elles étaient conduites avec le même énervement impitoyable. (38)

For the hunters-cum-militiamen in the narrative, cars represent power and efficiency--a tool to dominate women and nature:

Aucun d'eux n'a trouvé auprès d'une femme la sensation de puissance qu'il éprouve auprès des voitures.(9)

Adnan pits the body against the machine. A hunting expedition captured on film ends with “une image de voitures pleines d'oiseaux recouvrant des corps troués et affaissés.” The female narrator muses: “Dans cette chasse-là la Volkswagen a aussi remplacé les chiens, étant absolument tous terrains”(9-10). Throughout the narrative, ownership of technology is the prerogative of the Westernized Christian Lebanese, who consider themselves “plus efficaces en tout donc aussi dans la guerre”(28). Meanwhile, this same female narrator speaks of the relative *disorder* and poverty that characterize the Muslim neighborhoods of Beirut: “Les enclaves musulmanes, elles, ont encore ce désordre de l'Orient”(28). For her, the war against the Muslim Palestinians is in fact a crusade against the poor, the dispossessed, (a “grande croisade contre les pauvres”) out of fear of their reprisal:

Ils bombardent les quartiers déshérités parce qu'ils considèrent que c'est de la vermine et que cette vermine va les manger. Ils se battent pour enrayer la marée de ceux qui ayant tout perdu ou n'ayant jamais rien eu, n'ont plus rien à perdre. (58)

In this conflict, as Marie-Rose notes, religious affiliation may have as much to do with economics as it does a difference in dogma.

The narrator describes the city of Beirut as a “centre de toutes les prostitutions,” where the trees and the earth have been swallowed up by the never-ending construction of cement buildings. As in Horkeimer and Adorno's discussion of the Enlightenment's

reduction of all living beings to mathematical equations, the reader distinguishes the impetus behind this frenetic construction as a drive to stamp a bleak image of sameness across the globe. Thus Beirut's cityscape is a mass of geometrical cubes, "où aucune forme étrangère, que ce soit un arbre ou un espace vide, ne vient rompre le rythme," evoking in the narrator "un sentiment de terreur quasi mystique"(15). This description of Beirut recalls Teresa Brennan's critique of the paranoid Western ego that I discussed in earlier chapters:

the ego can only make the world over in its own image by reducing the lively heterogeneity of living nature and diverse cultural orders to a grey mirror of sameness. And it can only do this by consuming living nature in producing a proliferation of goods and services whose possession becomes the *sine qua non* of the good life.(4)

The danger inherent in following this course could not be more grave:

Of course, if nature is endlessly consumed in the pursuit of a totalizing course, then that course is dangerous for living; it constitutes a danger to one's own survival, as well as that of others. That, approximately, is the technical, legal definition of psychosis.(4)

Adnan's war narrative illustrates the trajectory of this social psychosis. Her multi-layering technique, that links a handful of individuals' interactions to a civil war, is particularly effective in revealing the destructive and wide-ranging consequences of repressing certain emotions, nature and "the feminine."¹²⁶ She problematizes the relationship between personal and collective trauma and loss, using mythological and symbolic references to traumatic national histories that add depth to her own characters'

¹²⁶As discussed in the theoretical chapters, in practical terms I consider these to be synonymous.

stories. All of these come into play within the context of a regional civil war. While the relationships are complex due to this narrative layering, this complexity does not impede the reader's recognition of the connections between personal and collective histories.

Lebanon's cultural specificity notwithstanding, Adnan's novel promotes a world view that looks for common ground among all oppressed peoples even as it focuses on the Arab world. Thus the war torn city of Beirut is "une immense plaie ouverte" whose suffering the narrator compares to that of Berlin, Saigon, Madrid, and Athens. At the same time, she considers the concentration of violence in Beirut to exceed any other city's--given that no individual escapes suffering:

dans ce bain d'acide fumant, pris sous les balles, les roquettes,
les bombes, le napalm ou le phosphore, l'attentat ou l'enlèvement,
tout être ne pouvait que rencontrer son apocalypse personnelle
et définitive. (113-114)

Marie-Rose's story becomes a vehicle for examining the heavy cost of traumatic identifications, the result of strictly codified gender. A rigid masculine identity--built upon the repression of early memories of vulnerability and fluid boundaries--structures the relationships of Adnan's male characters among themselves, with others and with nature. Adnan foregrounds Marie-Rose's role as a mother, thus indicating the source of ambivalence that leads her captors to target her. The novel examines archetypal images of the mother in the Arab collective unconscious that fuel violence. In a similar light, it makes the connection between an adult militiaman's memories of budding adolescent romance and the shame that drives him to exorcize what he judges as his "weakness" by annihilating the woman (Marie-Rose) who evokes these memories of his past.

While it is commonly accepted that violence and abuse that remain unconscious or unavowed provide fodder for a pattern of continued abuse in generation after generation of families, this chapter focuses on the broader cultural implications of this phenomenon. In *Sitt Marie Rose* we see how an entire nation may seek to repress or deny the violent conflicts of its past and present: both are considered threatening to its fragile identity or notion of itself as a coherent and self-contained entity. As long as a nation remains in denial of its interdependence with “the outside” and instead fosters a paranoid illusion of self-sufficiency, that outside is the enemy that must be controlled and mastered. At the same time, the imperative to maintain a coherent self-image or identity also results in a drive to assimilate what is considered different or “outside” the status quo, and to force it to conform to an image of self-sameness. Until the pattern is broken, women, children and nature will continue to be the victims most at risk in this fear-driven model of self-preservation.

Various Freudian and post-Freudian schools of thought view psychic space and physical space as dialectically related. In *Sitt Marie Rose*, it is clear that identity and self-other relations affect the physical environment, and that the environment affects those relations. If the psychic realm of identification is, as Diana Fuss notes in her discussion of Freud, “a tale of interiors and exteriors, boundaries and permutations, transgressions and resistances,” (*Identification Papers* 35) it is not much of a cognitive leap from there to understand how that psychic process of identification might affect how we relate to and structure the physical space in which we encounter others. Teresa Brennan, in her discussion of Lacanian theory, describes the phenomenon of how people come to create

fixed boundaries in physical space based on a psychic need to dominate and control the other. According to this theory,

the objectification of the other depends on establishing a spatial boundary by which the other and the self are fixed. But this fixing of the other leads to the fear that the other will retaliate, which in turn leads to a feeling of spatial constriction. Moreover, the feeling of spatial constriction is related to the physical environment. These changes have physical effects on the psyche, which in turn alter the psychical perception of the environment, and of one's own boundaries. With spatial constriction, one's boundaries are threatened, and the resultant fear increases the need to control the object.(8-9)

Brennan refers to this spatial dialectic as a crucial factor in urbanization, colonization and war. In terms of the process of identification, I understand this objectification of the other and the need to fix the other in space to be an exclusionary practice stemming from what Fuss has called a “desire for possession and appropriation” and a psychic “internalization of the other.”(4) Considering this psychic phenomenon of identification in broader socio-historical terms, we approach an understanding of how a given nation may be compelled to either force assimilation or exclude an entire people or peoples from its borders in a move to wipe them out of existence.

Adnan published her short novel *Sitt Marie Rose* in 1977, just two years after her country had been launched into a protracted and bloody civil war. She situates her narrative briefly before and then during the war in Lebanon's capital city, Beirut, where tensions had long been building between Christians and Muslims. On a historical note, these hostilities had intensified after 1948 with the influx of thousands of Palestinian refugees fleeing persecution in the newly created nation of Israel, flaring into a brief conflict in 1958 and ultimately igniting a civil war. The war broke out in 1975 and raged

for sixteen years, claiming over 60,000 lives in the first two years alone. Even before the civil war reached its apex, between 1975 and 1976, Beirut had virtually divided itself into two cities along lines of religious affiliation--thereby creating a Christian East Beirut and a Muslim West Beirut.

While one might expect issues of mapping, which are often related to conflicts of space and to identity politics, to arise in a story taking place in the conflict-ridden Middle East--and particularly in the war-torn city of Beirut at the time (given its seventeen officially recognized religious and ethnic communities)--the relation of this to gender is not immediately evident. Yet Adnan weaves gender seamlessly into the thematic fabric of her text in such a way as to make this link inextricable from the conflicts of the narrative in both peacetime and wartime, greatly nuancing the question of how wars begin and why they recur. Her text points to early mother/son relationships as the psychic breeding grounds for violence and the will to dominate.

Adnan's narration of the historical occurrence of Lebanon's civil war foregrounds the story of one woman's execution by four Phalangists, or Maronite Christian militiamen. The death of Marie-Rose, the director of a school for deaf-mute children and a social activist for the Palestinian cause, would otherwise most likely be a historical non-event, a mere detail lost in the anonymity of countless civilian deaths.¹²⁷ Adnan's fictional recounting of history does not, however, privilege one version of the events leading up to and including Marie-Rose's murder, such as they might be related by an omniscient narrator or safely contained and ordered by the limits of a conventional

¹²⁷Civilian casualties of the war are estimated at around 150,000.

narrative in the first person. Rather, she couches the event in layers of narrative voices and a blurring of temporal boundaries that resist any pretense to authoritative objectivity or “truth.” As such, the novel is a montage of seemingly disparate parts and points of view, offering myriad subjective interpretations of events.

The formal structure of the novel is divided into two sections, of which the titles are “Temps I : Un Million d’Oiseaux” and “Temps 2: Marie-Rose,” respectively. The second of these sections is further divided into three parts, and each of those into an additional seven--one for each of a total of seven narrating agents. The result is a kaleidoscope effect of interconnected and overlapping time-frames and perspectives that resist any totalizing master narrative.

The novel raises questions pertaining to narrative structure and perspective from the beginning, effecting a sort of *mise-en-abîme* paralleling the author’s own choices in representing Marie-Rose’s story. In the first lines, the unidentified woman narrator becomes involved in the process of making somebody else’s film:

Mounir me téléphone. Il compte faire un film et me demande de lui écrire le scénario. Il veut que ce soit au sujet d’un ouvrier syrien que ses camarades et lui auraient convaincu, au cours d’une de leurs parties de chasse, de venir au Liban. (7)

In the course of the narrator’s search to understand her friend’s vision for this film that seems to revolve around nothing, the reader becomes aware of what is at play in the construction of a narrative, such as authorial intention and ideological agendas or subtexts. Along with the narrator, one wonders what the ultimate purpose of Mounir’s film is, whose voice it represents, and who will benefit from it. Among other

considerations is the issue of perspective: will the Syrian worker tell his own story or will it be recounted by someone else?¹²⁸

The project ultimately falls through when it is clear that the narrator and her friend Mounir's individual points of view on how to structure the scenario conflict to the point of being irreconcilable, despite her initial efforts to understand and work with his vision. While she felt that the Syrian immigrants' plight in Beirut indeed merited attention and that the film should serve to educate the public to this end, Mounir insisted on depicting them in a manner that would satisfy his own narcissistic demands. He presumptuously claims to "know" the Syrian people, and is bent on creating a fiction showing "combien on est heureux dans ces villages syriens, quelle sagesse on y a, quelle intégration aux cycles de la Nature"(15), recalling Gayatri Spivak's poignant quip: "The person who *knows* has all the problems of selfhood. The person who *is known*, somehow seems not to have a problematic self"(66). Likewise, we understand this presumption to "know" Syrians as an attempt at incorporating and assimilating and therefore neutralizing the other as part of the violent, exclusionary politics of identification. At the same time we might recognize a form of regressive nostalgia in Mounir's claim since, as Fuss notes, "every identity claim ("I am *not* another") is based upon an identification ("I desire to be another")"(10).

Mounir's stubborn insistence on representing exclusively his "point of view"-- rather than the actual poverty and inhumane treatment of the Syrian workers by their Lebanese foremen in Beirut-- is conspicuously self-serving. He would prefer to situate

¹²⁸This is to be compared with Cul-de-Jatte's offer to tell Tanga's story for her.

them in Syria in an imaginary state of unadulterated innocence. In his imagined scenario, Mounir fantasizes himself as causing a great sensation when first making contact with what he would like to portray as an uncivilized, indigenous people in their native land as yet untouched by modernized “Westerners”:

Tu vois. Ils sont étonnés. Ils nous admirent. Je me lie d’amitié
avec eux. Et puis, j’y vais plus d’une fois dans ce village syrien.
Chaque fois ils nous reconnaissent, et chaque fois, eux, ils changent.
Ils ne sont plus les mêmes. Ils nous ont vus. (12)

This recognition of him by the other is crucial to Mounir’s identity fantasy as the superior and dominating Subject.¹²⁹ In imagining that he “changes” this pure and innocent other who is closer to nature, he positions himself as active subject or agent and the Syrians as passive objects or recipients of his film’s action, revealing a psychic structure of domination. Moreover, the allusions to a sort of virginal quality in the other serve as an index to an ideology that, while constructing a nostalgic notion of nature as pristine and unspoiled, is at the same time bent on mastering, colonizing and civilizing it. I consider this phenomenon to be on par with the psychological notion, discussed earlier, of “melancholy incorporation” of the elusive other of desire.

Adnan’s female narrator and Mounir, in the course of talking about his film, discuss the hunting images that he would like to appear alongside those of the animal-like Syrians. His idea is to accentuate his power and superiority over both the birds and the Syrians by constant references to the hunters’ guns. Yet at the same time he insists on

¹²⁹ Again, I understand a relationship between “mother” and “other” (m/other), in that the importance of being recognized by and of dominating the other stems from a memory of the primary relationship with the mother--marked by radical vulnerability and dependence.

highlighting the beauty of the Syrian desert, a beauty he claims is indescribable. When Mounir mentions his plans to go hunting in Turkey, he perhaps sheds some light on the source of those apparently conflicting objectives for his film: he betrays an inner lack, an unfulfilled desire that will never reach its goal. When as a result of urbanization and being over-hunted, birds are lacking in Lebanon, Mounir and his fellow hunters look to Syria. Once the numbers drop in Syria, they must again move on to “virgin territory”:

–Vous avez tué beaucoup d’oiseaux?
 –Non, Il y en a plus qu’au Liban mais on peut dire que la Syrie a déjà perdu la faune qu’elle avait. Notre prochain voyage, d’ailleurs, est en Turquie. C’est encore vierge, là-bas, pour les chasseurs. *Il y a tout ce qu’on veut.* (12, my emphasis).¹³⁰

This constitutes the same pattern of melancholy incorporation discussed earlier. Again, the destruction of Nature, in this case the free-flying birds, is a compulsive move to (unsuccessfully) fill the inner lack created by the socially-enforced repression of affect. These “manly” hunters are compelled to kill on the outside what they have stifled (ie. vulnerability) within themselves. The appetite for killing is never satisfied; their desire will wander incessantly in search of its ever-elusive gratification.

Mounir’s camera lens will secure the other’s (the Syrians’) subordinate position in its gaze and maintain it thus according to its own agenda of control and domination. This phenomenon is described by Teresa Brennan:

The look, *le regard*, the way the other is seen, emanates from the spatially oriented aggressiveness by which the passifier seeks to fix the other in place in order to secure recognition. It is the

¹³⁰This search for paradise recalls Baudelaire’s “pays de Cocagne” in the prose poem “L’invitation au voyage.” In my own reading of the poem I also distinguish an endless search for the “feminine”--an unacknowledged loss that is symbolized in this ideal “country” of his fantasy.

aggressive projection of the position it does not want to occupy, and that it fears losing; a positioning founded in its image of itself (59-60).

Regarding the power relation in cinema, Slavoj Žižek posits the male gaze as the controlling agent in the field of vision (*Metastases* 73). At the same time, he argues, although the gaze connotes power, it actually amounts to a *lack* of power in that it emanates from an immobile and passive onlooker, and therefore a conduit of frustrated desire. In view of this need to assert his position of power and cultural superiority via his film project, we can better understand the psychological implications of Mounir's paranoid stance by considering the geopolitical situation in Lebanon in the period preceding the war.

Analogous to Freud's primordial/pre-Oedipal, omnipotent mother, Syria loomed large over Lebanon not only in sheer size and strength, posing a constant threat of incorporation or engulfment, but also due to the fact that Lebanon was struggling to forge an identity for itself as a self-contained state entity--while in reality it was a fast disintegrating and fragmented body of antagonistic parts. Its fragile identity and aspirations to autonomous selfhood were over-shadowed by a menacing and powerful other on the one hand, and secondly, unsettled by an internal chora of warring ethnic and religious factions that threatened to disrupt the construction of a stable Lebanon. As early as 1976, Syrian military forces penetrated into Lebanese territory, called in to force a precarious cease-fire. Since then Syria has progressively taken over the power of the Lebanese government.

Given his identification with the Christian Right, another source of anxiety for Mounir is the presence in Beirut of the Moslem-identified Palestinian refugees. When war erupts, these identities crystalize into “us” and “them,” and the centuries-old rift between Christianity and Islam stakes its territory and claims its victims. In Beirut, the virtual barrier dividing the city into two distinct zones to separate Christians from Moslems, Lebanese from Palestinians, East from West, solidifies into actual barricades. Fear of the stranger, the other in this case being the roaming Palestinian, the one without any fixed national boundaries--represents a threat that feeds the paranoia of the militant, Christian-Lebanese ego. The mere presence of the Palestinians poses a threat, represents a “provocation constante” (63) to the rigid social and physical boundaries erected and so vigilantly maintained by the Christian Right as a barricade against the poor.

The second part of the novel, “Temps 2: Marie-Rose,” affects a shift in time and place, while certain elements remain the same. In the beginning of the novel, we get to know Mounir and his two companions, Tony and Fouad, first as hunters during “peacetime,” and then as militant Christian mercenaries, who make the transition from hunting to fighting a war with ease. At the onset of the fighting, the narrator makes this close correlation between hunting and war explicit when referring to the cramped city-dwellers’ psychotic “besoin de violence” and the “plaisir de tuer”(20). The discourse varies little, and the violence that underlies the killing urge now has free reign and all the justification of a holy crusade. Moreover, the narrator alludes to the hunters’ rifles, that the men point toward the sky, as missile launchers (“lance-fusées”) (8). Although the hunting segment takes place in what would be considered “peacetime,” the allusions to

the hunter or “tueur parfait” who “souffre de ne jamais assez tuer”(8), to the men whose need to feel powerful causes them to prefer an auto rally or a hunting trip to a night spent with their wife, and to the inhumane treatment of the Syrian workers by their Lebanese foremen, betray the mass psychosis and insanity of the status quo before the outbreak of the war.

These three men, along with a Christian priest, hold Marie-Rose hostage at the school where she had taught in East Beirut before re-locating to the Muslim quarter on the West side. She had dared once again to transgress the boundary between the two zones of the city to reach the school. She had assumed, as many women, that her comings and goings would pass unnoticed, since war was a men’s affair: “Elles considèrent la guerre comme un règlement de comptes entre hommes” (19-20). Although raised in Christian East Beirut, where she had worked and maintained her household, Marie-Rose chooses to support the Palestinian (ie. the “enemy”) cause out of a commitment to basic human rights and justice. It appears, however, that her greatest crime is to have “abandoned” her role as mother in order to work for a political cause.

The mechanism by which war reduces its victims to object status in language, dehumanizes and elides them in such obfuscating terms as “collateral damage” and the abstraction of numbers (“le calcul des cadavres”), is especially clear in Tony and Fouad’s narrative voices (20). In these passages, the two men disdainfully refer to Marie-Rose as “une chienne,” not “un être ordinaire” (64). The intense hatred they demonstrate toward her seems to stem from her compromised status; no longer is she a good Christian Lebanese wife and mother. She has, in their view, abandoned not only her husband and

children but the identity she had shared with her captors--that had made her one of them. No longer able to assimilate her, they see her as a threat to their identity. As the moment of her execution draws nearer, the terminology becomes progressively more denigrating: she is a “putain,” (68) and then, “un cafard de plus encombrant la Nature,” a “monstre femelle,” and finally “une punaise” who howled “comme un chien” when they dismembered her body (102).

The politics of identity as a game of power--that adheres to that power by sheer strength, by domination--creates paranoid subjects who can only legitimize their discourse by way of excluding and condemning another's. The paranoid ego's irrational “logic” is clear when expressed by the militant Christian, Tony:

Nous sommes les jeunes du quartier chretien et notre milice est en guerre contre les Palestiniens. Ils sont musulmans. Nous sommes donc en guerre contre l'islam et surtout quand il se met au travers de notre chemin. (44, my emphasis)

As this predatorial mode of thinking is always rooted in fear of the object's revenge, it resorts to the facile explanation that points to nature's law of survival of the fittest to rationalize its barbarism.

Moi je sais que les forts ont raison, que le loup ne demande pas a l'agneau la permission de le manger. C'est son droit de loup.(102)

Tony is the quintessential soldier: he has as much feeling and compassion as an automaton.

In Marie-Rose's observation of her captors, we recognize a description of instrumental reason:

Elle était leur prisonnière à un degré absolu car depuis longtemps les lois morales et juridiques étaient suspendues, la raison elle-même, collectivement, avait sombré.[...] Ils étaient verrouillés dans leur logique, ils étaient imperméables à tout. (82)

She understands that this “logic” is one of domination. Significantly, Marie-Rose refers to the men as “rug merchants,” which serves to draw a parallel between capitalism’s alienating effects on human interactions and those of the war-zone:

–Vous voulez m’échanger? Je ne suis pas un objet. Comment savez-vous que je ne préfère pas mourir que servir de pièce de monnaie à vos transactions? Faut-il que même dans la guerre vous demeuriez marchands de tapis!”(97)

When the men finally attack Marie-Rose, they are both hunters and capitalists in a blending of metaphors:

Ces quatre hommes acharnés sur un oiseau de passage. Ils se sont penchés sur son cas avec, dans le corps, des attitudes de marchands de tapis, des gestes alourdis par l’atavisme, en fin connaisseurs de la marchandise. Elle était, ils se le sont admis, une proie de valeur. (110)

Her value as a hostage is particularly high given her status as an “impudent” women who has dared to enter the realm of politics, the men’s “chasse gardée”(111).

The dynamic that pits these four men against a sole woman--a woman who is not only Christian-identified as they are but also an adolescent love of Mounir--leads us to consider the deeper sources of their ambivalence, as perhaps originating in a pre-verbal space, or what Freud refers to as the pre-Oedipal stage. Lacan has identified a group of specific images or *imagos* of violence acted out on the mother’s body that seem to

represent the repressed instincts of aggression towards this other experienced as omnipotent during the infant stage:

These are images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short, the *imagos* that I have grouped together under the apparently structural term of *imagos of the fragmented body*. (11)

Marie-Rose, who is reduced to “un amas de membres disloqués” (107), is not the only victim to be executed in this manner. In Lacanian terminology, the Palestinians--and Moslems in general--are projected as “bad internal objects” (*Ecrits* 21). That is to say, they embody the negative *imago* of the Mother which has been repressed in the original splitting of the subject’s psyche, and that the paranoid subject fears will retaliate for this repression and the ensuing systematic domination.

Marie-Rose had infuriated her captors by showing no fear. Instead, she countered their bellicose arguments with a discourse of love:

–Et toi, qu’est-ce que tu imagines représenter?
–Je représente l’amour, les voies nouvelles, l’inconnu,
l’aventure. (66)¹³¹

The narrator alludes to the men’s early relationships with their mothers as a repressed memory that unconsciously compels them to strive for power over the mother via the impressive force of their automobiles:

Ce n’est pas la première fois qu’une femme arabe a, devant eux, un courage absolu. Mais leur mémoire est refractaire. Ils admettent plus de vertus à leurs voitures qu’à leurs femmes. (74-75)

¹³¹This passage brings to mind a similar one between Anna-Claude and the prison guard in *Tu t’appelleras Tanga* cited in Chapter 4.

As a consequence of this repressed or disavowed memory of vulnerability, their intolerance of any manifestation of self-will in a woman is absolute:

Mais une femme qui se tient debout et les regarde dans les yeux est un arbre à abattre et ils l'abattent. Elle tombe avec un bruit de bois mort. (75)

In this passage, the parallel between the destruction of women and nature is clear. What complicates the picture is the conscious adoration of mothers:

Ils ne reconnaissent de qualités qu'à leur mère parce qu'ils se souviennent d'un bien-être en elle et autour d'elle qu'ils n'ont jamais quitté si ce n'est pour tuer des oiseaux et d'autres hommes. (75)

One might ask how this sense of “well-being” associated with the mother translates to the killing instinct. The narrator identifies this regressive “amour exclusif de la mère” in all its aggressive and melancholic manifestations and repercussions as the catalyst in the “cycle de violence” leading to war (75).

Marie-Rose recognizes a link between the disavowed bond with the mother--the object of melancholy incorporation--and the ferocious tribalism that pits the men against all “strangers.” She suggests, when confronting her captors, that their idolatrous “amour du clan” and the rigid identity they claim based on that identification stems from that original relationship to the maternal:

Moi je sais qu'il n'y a d'amour vrai que pour celui qui est Etranger. *Quand vous aurez coupé les cordons ombilicaux* qui vous relient entre vous vous deviendrez enfin des hommes et la vie parmi vous aura un sens (105, my emphasis).

In the meantime, fear is the driving force underlying their every action, not the least of which is the fear of not deserving their mother's love, and thus we begin to understand all the more their deep-seated fear of Marie-Rose in this passage:

elle avance sur le terrain de leur imagination comme un océan déchainé. Elle réveille dans leur mémoire la plus ancienne des litanies d'imprécations. L'amour leur apparaît comme une sorte de cannibalisme. Les symboles féminins les déchirent de leurs griffes. (76-77)

Knowing that he psychically dominates his prisoner, Marie-Rose, Mounir "avait retrouvé vis-à-vis d'elle une entière autonomie"(83) which attenuates his fear. Lacan's theory of early formation of subjectivity may shed light on Mounir's unconscious motivations:

The subject is founded by a hallucinatory fantasy in which it conceives itself as the locus of active energy and the environment as passive; its subjectivity is secured by a projection onto the environment, apparently beginning with the mother, which makes her into an object which the subject in fantasy controls.¹³²

Thus, in Mounir's unconscious, Marie-Rose is substituting for the Mother against whom one forges subjectivity. This seems especially apparent in the passage which describes Mounir's constant irritation since the beginning of the war, the old antagonisms of early childhood having been stirred up in the chaos of the war where identities and boundaries are called into question. Feeling his own sense of identity threatened, Mounir grasps at whatever means of control are within his reach:

Devant des cartes, des chiffres, des plans pour la défense de tel immeuble, du bombardement de tel quartier, il retrouvait sa douceur de ton, son calme, son équilibre. Sorti du groupe, ses défauts d'enfant gâté reprenaient le dessus. (83)

¹³² Quoted by Brennan, 11.

Marie-Rose's ritualistic murder by the men is the final enactment of the psychic domination and annihilation of the menacing other.¹³³

While awaiting her death at the hands of her childhood sweetheart, Marie-Rose recalls Mounir's childhood as characterized by the repression of what might be construed as "feminine" and thus weak in him. She recognizes the adolescent fear of not being considered a "man" by his peers: "Il avait peur d'être pris pour un faible"(54). When as an adult his memories of adolescent love resurface, Mounir fears being overtaken by the emotions that accompany them:

Maintenant j'ai peur que la nostalgie qui se lève en moi
ne me donne une raison de me mépriser, n'ajoute une nouvelle
tourmente à mon âme. (62)

The self-hatred that would result from any perceived emotional weakness in himself is telling: Mounir's hyper-criticism and vigilance against affect belies a melancholic refusal to acknowledge loss.

By crossing the physical boundaries dividing the enemy camps to reach her school on the East side and her Palestinian lover on the West side, Marie-Rose had in physical terms engaged in what Diana Fuss has called "the practice of cross-identifications." This practice, Fuss writes, "specifically with the struggle of oppressed social groups, becomes an urgent political imperative whenever the dominant ideology invokes a discourse of natural boundaries to categorize, regulate, and patrol social identities"(8). Rather than look for differences between the Lebanese and the Palestinians in order to justify the fight

¹³³Jessica Benjamin discusses this violence in erotic relationships: "Erotic domination represents an intensification of male anxiety and defense in relation to the mother. The repudiated maternal body persists as the object to be done to and violated, to be separated from, to have power over, to denigrate"(77).

to maintain the barricades and a separate identity, Marie-Rose points out to her captors the history and ethnicity they share. In place of divisive myths about the demonic other and claims to have a corner on the truth, Marie-Rose makes connections, and recognizes the Palestinians as subjects in their own right. Finally, in contrast to the model of the Western ego which entertains delusions of omnipotence and radical separateness from the outside, to which Christian Lebanese like Mounir aspire, Marie-Rose acknowledges the interdependence of all life --“si j’ai pris leur parti, c’est parce que notre survie est liée à la leur” (66).

This war story may represent an antithesis to Plato’s *Menexenus*. Unlike the funeral speech of Plato’s text that preaches emotional restraint in mourning, this text enjoins its readers to grieve. Adnan displays rather than hides the casualties of war. Her novel examines the conditions underlying a war’s development, pointing often to a masculine fear of dissolution. The author implies a causal connection between the culturally-coded relationship of male subjects to the mother and the destructiveness of global capitalism, wars of identity, and the war on women and nature.

Like the other novels in this study, Adnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose* warns of the dangers of the melancholy refusal to grieve loss. In the starkest of terms, Adnan indicates its logical conclusion when acted out on a societal level: war. All of these women authors have presented an alternative to this tragic ending; all four advocate a return to and recuperation of the past in order to begin the process of healing in the present and to break the “cercles d’oppression.”¹³⁴ By refusing to remain in silent denial of violence, the

¹³⁴*Sitt Marie Rose*, 114.

fiction of these women authors undermines an illusion of cohesion. Their novels critically examine the repercussions of instrumental reason, an ideology that would reduce all life to its law of sameness--as manifest in alienating economic modes of production and exchange and the exploitation of the environment. Like the healing effect of exposing festering wounds to air, these writers expose the violence, the trauma and the losses that result from the imposition of a mechanistic mode of being in the world. Even more than this, they offer models of emotional strength and human compassion to bring healing to these wounds.

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